

The Canons

Mitcham, South London

Archaeological Monitoring during investigative works

for

Merton Council

December 2017



The Canons (photo 7882)

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Archaeological Monitoring during investigative works: December 2017

Executive Summary

Addyman Archaeology was contracted by Southern Green Ltd. to undertake archaeological monitoring and recording during internal stripping out and investigative works within Canons House, Mitcham, South London. These works were to inform the programme of restoration and improvements to the house and to provide an archaeological record of the historic fabric revealed.

The works included a number of targeted openings in the modern linings for structural reasons. The exposed structure was predominantly of modern date, comprising the ends of modern steel beams. The stairwell contained earlier fabric and structure. As the stairwell was scheduled to be removed more intensive investigations were undertaken in this area. This included extensive opening up and soft-stripping of modern linings and partitions. The exposed multi-phase early stair structure and associated paneling was archaeologically recorded.

1. Introduction

i. General

Addyman Archaeology was contracted by Southern Green Ltd. to undertake a watching brief during some opening up of building fabric at Canons house, Mitcham. This was undertaken to inform the programme of restorations, alterations, and improvements of the building as part of the wider Conservation Plan for the area, comprising the Recreation Ground, Leisure Centre, Park Place and manor house (Simpson and Brown 2017).

The works were undertaken from 21st – 23rd November 2017 and included numerous openings within the building which were to be investigated for structural reasons. In addition extensive opening up was undertaken in the area of the stairwell, including stripping of modern linings and partitions in advance of the removal of the stairwell.

A record of the building recording (*OASIS ID: addyman1-304682*) has been deposited with the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) website hosted by the Archaeological Data Service.

ii. Setting and Geology

Located in the town of Mitcham, within the London Borough of Merton and the Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area, the site known as The Canons encompasses an area of approximately eight hectares, and is roughly centred on NGR TQ 27803 68469. The site, as covered by the current conservation plan, is located to the north of Sutton, to the north-east of Croydon, and to the south-east of Wimbledon; it is bound by the historic route of ‘Cold Blows’ to the north, the A236 and the Mitcham Common to the east, Madeira Road and Cranmer Green to the south, and Cricket Green to the west. The conservation plan area comprises the Canons Recreation Ground and Leisure Centre to the north, the Park Place complex to the south-east, the Grade II* Listed Canons manor house and gardens to the south, and open field to the west (*figure 1*).

The underlying geology is sedimentary bedrock of the London Clay formation. The overlying superficial geology is a mix of sand and gravel of the Hackney Gravel Member to the south-east, and sand and gravel of the Taplow Gravel formation to the west and north.¹

¹ Geological information taken from <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html> - 29/01/16

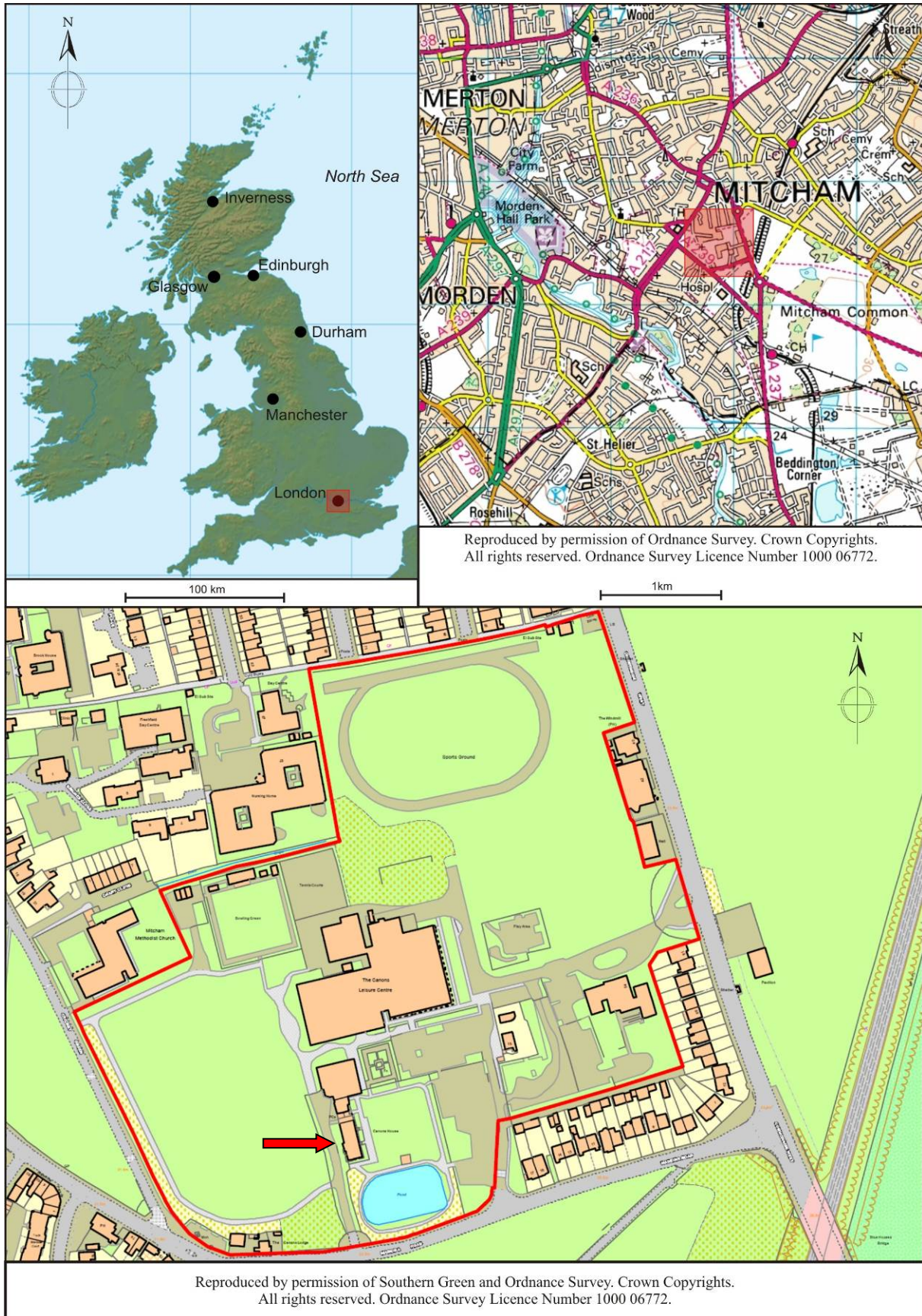


Figure 3 Site Location – The Canons mansion house indicated

2. Building recording

i. General

Within the building numerous small targeted openings were made in the modern linings to investigate the underlying structure for structural reasons. This exposed structure was mostly of modern date and was largely the ends of modern steel beams. Some early structure was seen surviving within the stairwell and as some of this structure was scheduled to be removed more extensive investigations were undertaken in this area with extensive opening up and soft strip of modern linings and partition, this exposing the multi-phase and early stair structure and associated panelling. The photographic records of the works can be found in *Appendix 1*.

ii. Room G.02

Some small areas of opening up were exposed within this room. The 20th century brick blocking of the fireplace was partially exposed in one opening and the ends of the recent steel beams supporting the ceiling were also exposed. Only modern 20th century fabric was exposed.

iii. Room G.04

A small opening was made in the lining covering the central fireplace exposing 20th century brick blocking of the opening (*plate 1*). The ends of a modern steel ceiling joist were also exposed. All of the openings only exposed modern 20th century fabric.



Plate 1 room G.04 brick blocking of fireplace exposed

iv. Room G.05

A small area of plaster on the hard was removed around a visible cracking, exposing the early brickwork of the masonry and cracking in the brickwork (*plate 2*).



Plate 2 room G.05 wall plaster removed around crack

v. Room G.06

The fireplace was exposed by removing a covering panel exposing a glazed brick interior. The interior of the fire was also heavily infilled with debris from the chimney (*plate 3*).



Plate 3 room G.06 fireplace uncovered

The modern board lining was also removed from the wall exposing a historic floral design wallpaper *in situ* (plate 4).



Plate 4 room G.06 floral wallpaper exposed

vi. Room F.01/04 Stairwell

The modern board lining of the first floor stairwell was largely stripped to expose the underlying early structure. This board lining was nailed onto narrow battens which were securely nailed into the wall plaster with large nails (plate 5).



Plate 5 room F.01 stairwell shows exposed panelling on south elevation

On the south elevation this early structure comprised wainscot panelling running up the stairs with a formerly projecting handrail hacked back flush, presumably to fit the latter board lining. Above the panelling was plaster applied directly to the brick; major (apparently historical) cracking runs up the wall through the wall plaster.

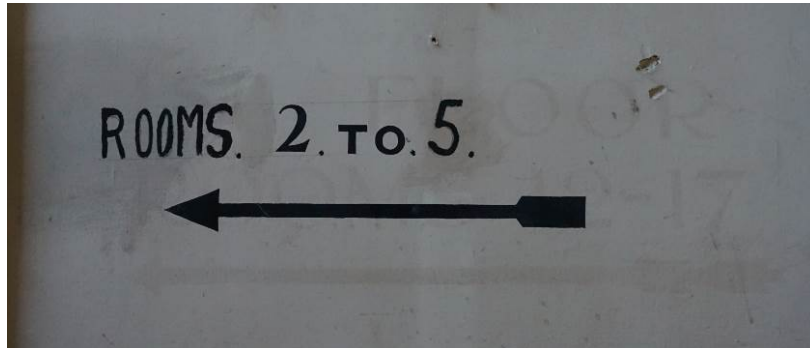


Plate 6 room F.01 painted directions

Also noted on the plaster was some painted directions with an arrow pointing upstairs; this is of two main phases with the earlier painted over and the latter crudely changed (plate 6).



Plate 7 room F.01 elevation showing multi-phase repairs of south elevation



Plate 8 room F.01 stripped elevation showing exposed early structure on north elevation

The wainscot panelling stops at the first floor landing but originally continued. It has been removed from the landing area on the south elevation and the east window elevation in relatively recent times (plates 7 & 8). A strip of wall plaster approximately 1m wide has also been stripped back to the

brickwork up the south elevation against the east wall; latterly the void left by the removed panelling and plaster has been repaired with modern plasters.

This repair has even more recently been re-stripped in a strip about 0.60 m wide up the wall along the east window elevation and then fairly crudely repaired with plasterboard.

The plaster ceiling also shows a 1m wide strip of possibly replaced plasterwork along the eastern window wall, including the removal of cornice throughout the area of repairs. This window wall has also been stripped and relined with modern plasterboard. This relining and repairs are likely to be related to damp issues on the east elevation requiring at least two phases of stripping off lining, drying out and repairs in fairly recent times (works of the later 20th -early 21st century) . The northern elevation shows the same 1m wide stripping. Recent building records should hold records of these works.

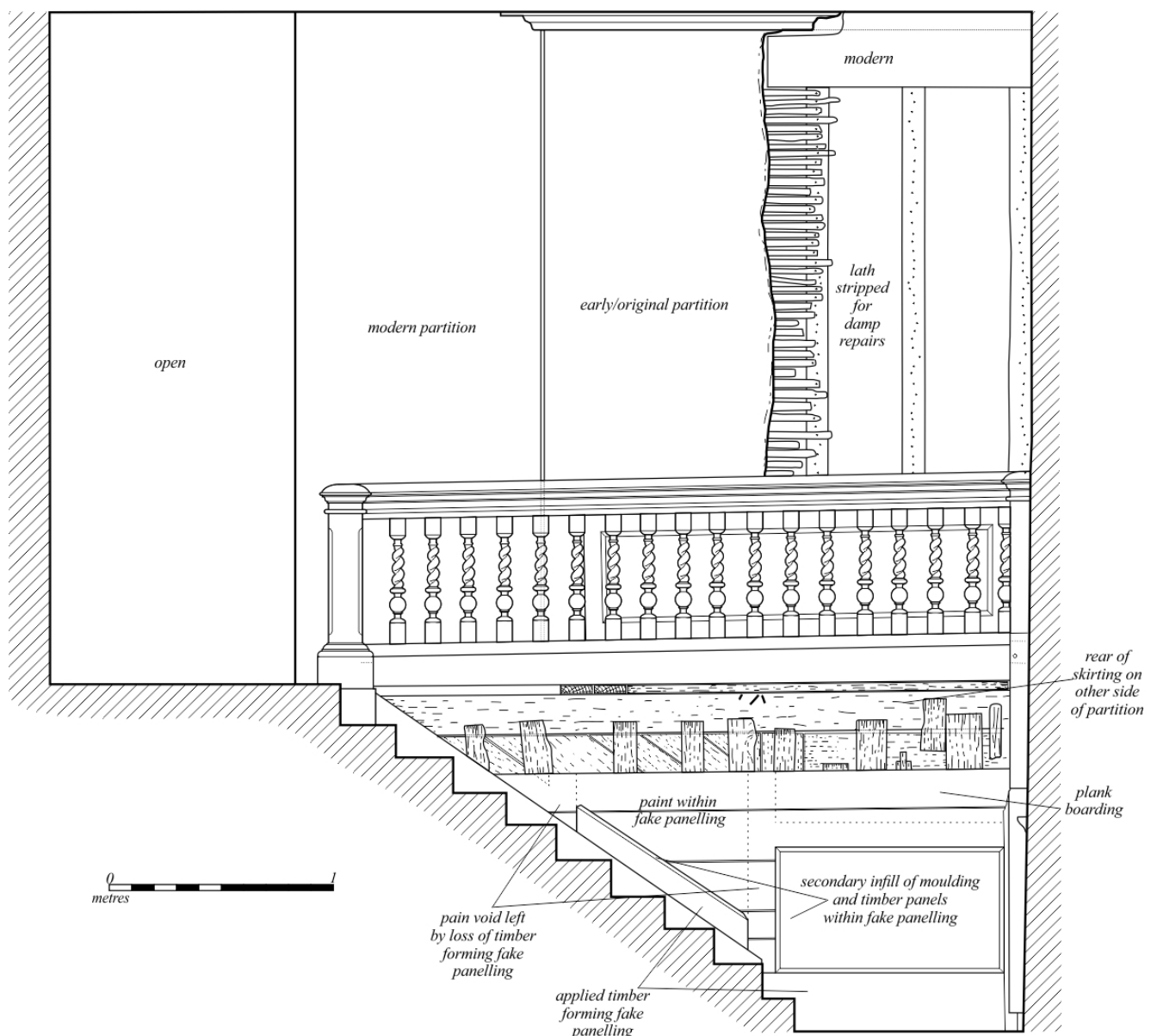


Figure 4 F.01 stairwell exposed panelling on the northern elevation

The modern board lining covering the northern elevation was also stripped exposing the early structure behind (figure 2). Following this a more extensive soft strip of 20th century lining and partition structure was removed to identify the extent of the early structure.

The early wainscot panelling within the stairwell was exposed, though in this area the panelling was partially dismantled, presumably to fit the 20th century lining. A moulded skirting (matching the skirting on the other side of the elevation) to the baluster was also removed at this stage. This revealed the makeup and phasing of the wainscot panelling, which is of at least two (possibly three) main phases.

The basic structure of the panelling is of horizontal square edged boarding; this has possibly had a reddish-brown applied finish or patina (*plate 10*). The rough rear of what is likely to be the boards of the other side of the partition could be partially seen behind these, square edged boards. Interestingly, some of these sat at a steep slope, which was initially thought to perhaps indicate a patterned design in the boarding on the other face. However, it seems this just represents the boarding following the slope of the panelling beneath the stairs below.

Either as part of this phase or probably as a later (phase 2) addition, fake panelling was marked out by applying simple undetailed timber rails or stiles onto the boarding defining square panels. The panels and rails were then at some point painted a light green (*plate 9*); similar green paint can be seen on the stair balusters beneath modern paints.

The boards are sitting at an angle slightly sloping down to the west similar to the floor structure above, which may indicate some historic slumping. This apparent slump of the panelling, with the applied rails and stiles set in contrast neatly horizontally suggests the applied rails and stiles are secondary, perhaps with some time in between the phases.

Latterly (phase 3) a timber moulding was applied around the edges of the rails overlying the green paint. The panels within these new mouldings were infilled with further timber panels applied to the original boarding flush with the top of the rails. The dirt shadow of the applied mouldings on the underlying paint may suggest there was a lag between the moulding being applied and the secondary panel infill.

It is highly probable that the rest of the wainscot panelling within the stairwell has a similar phasing.

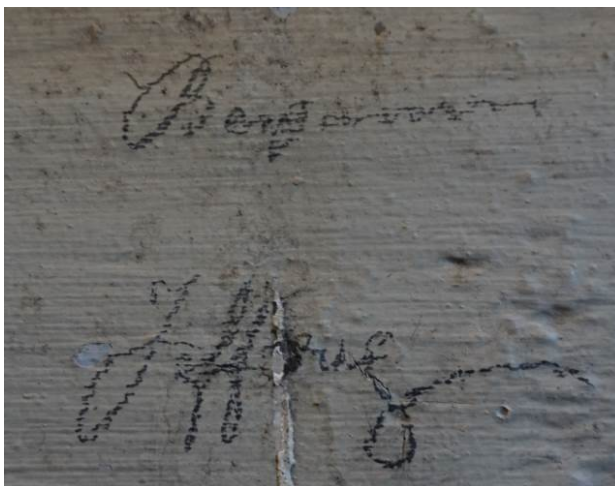


Plate 9 graffiti on early green paint within panel on panelling



Plate 10 panelling detail showing original reddish finish and dirt shadow on paint around lost applied mouldings

The skirting/base rail along the landing on the north elevation seems very deep compared to the panelling elsewhere; this may help explain the extra stair at the base of the upper landing which is currently strangely bowed out at the base of the flight. If this step was original, a wider step sitting at 45° to the skirting/ base rail of the panelling would have originally been the same visible height as elsewhere (*plate 11*).



Plate 11 half landing showing bowed step and deep skirting beyond

The partition between F.01 and F.04 toilets was investigated and much of the later 20th century material removed. The later phases of this were often of poor quality construction. The western third of the partition proved to be a modern stud partition and the lining was stripped back to studs. Noted on the rear of the removed plasterboard was an inscription likely to have been made during the construction of the partition (*plate 12*).



Plate 12 room F.01/F.04 partition graffiti

This pencilled inscription read “WHLDRON BUILDERS, JAN 28 1965, 28^o YEARS OLD” and “TOM, DICK, HARRY, 3 GOOD OLD NAVVIES” with a pick and shovel logo.

This suggests these partitioning works were undertaken in January 1965.

Further graffiti was noted behind the latest lining written on the lath and plaster of the early fabric (*plate 13*). This was “TWO WAYS HEATING, 14-1-1994” and a sketch of some possible plumbing, giving a date for some heating works undertaken January 1994. The latest linings within the toilets overlie this and must postdate 1994.

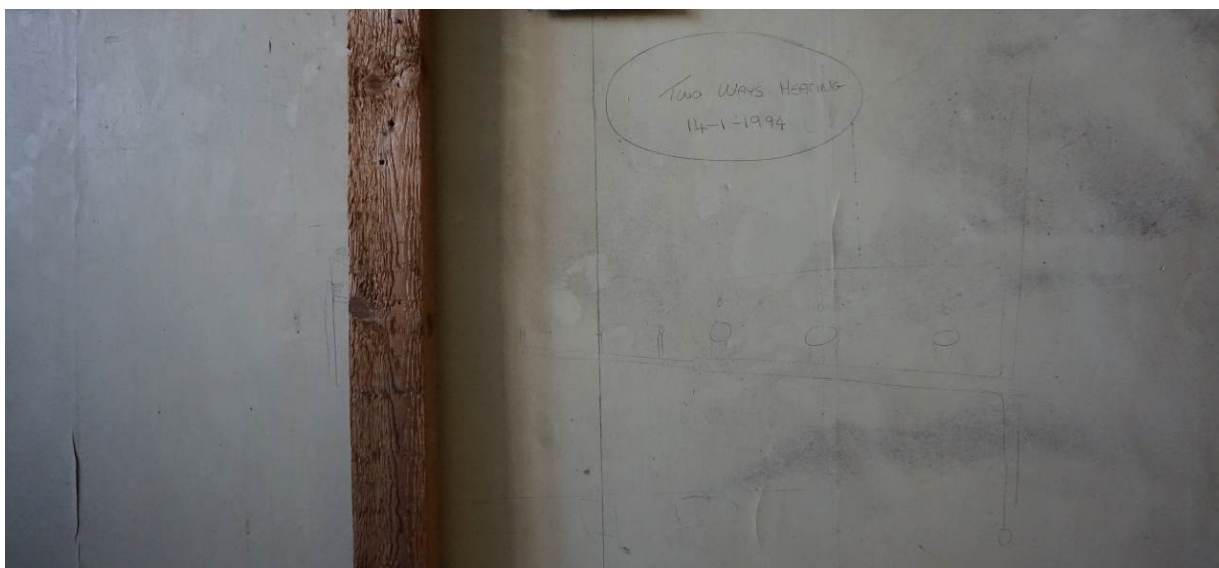


Plate 13 room F.04 graffiti behind modern lining

As in the south and east elevations the lath and plaster of the partition had been stripped back to the stud structure in a 1m wide strip down the east wall and the cornice within the stairwell was lost in this area (*plate 14*). Some evidence for rot can be seen in the ends of the lath exposed in this former opening up showing damp was likely the cause of the opening up and repair.

The stripped area was crudely infilled with plasterboard sheeting and removal of these exposed the original studwork of the elevation and phasing details of the early arrangement.



Plate 14 1st floor partition between stair F.01 and toilets F.04 showing surviving strip of original fabric down the middle with mid-20th C stud partition extension to left and later 20th C repairs to the right pre removal. Note truncated cornice

The surviving early fabric within the partition is of two main phases, the earlier and presumably original is represented by horizontal timber board panelling to the lower wall facing the stairwell. Applied timber rail and stiles forming a single large panel may be secondary as on the panelling below. The panels have been papered over so the original finish is not visible (*plate 15*).



Plate 15 papered over boarded panelling behind baluster

Above this within the stairwell was originally lath and plaster running up to the cornice.

The other side of the partition showed the studs to have been originally visible, fairly well squared and heavily lime washed over. The rough rear of the timber board panelling was also exposed; this had vertical lath directly applied to the timber and plastered over between the studs. The lath and plaster above was likely to have been plastered on both sides of the lath as the line of the plastered face can be seen running up the sides of the studs (*plate 16*).

Latterly the elevation studs were lathed over on the face concealing the early layout of the partition.



Plate 16 rear of partition showing rear of panelling and neat lime washed studs

A small opening up was also made in the ceiling. This removed modern lining to expose the structure above to see if any proof for a suspected stairwell that formerly may have ran through here could be identified (*plate 17*).



Plate 17 room F.04 ceiling investigation shows floor structure

The underside of the flooring above was exposed as well as the floor joists. A major squared beam ran north to south to the west of the opening (bottom of *plate 17*) with joists running east to west from this to the east wall. No definitive evidence for a stairwell was seen and it was not clear what was supporting the north end of the north-south beam; the end may have originally sat on a partition that was removed to form the toilets.

The surround to the door to F.02 showed some reworking. The panelling above the door on the F.02 side was of square panels but on the F.01 side was an arch over the door with curved panels (*plate 18*). Close examination of this showed the curved stiles/rails to be secondary and not centred on the panelling. The panelling surround to the door was also wider than the current door entrance within F.01; the moulded panelling can clearly be seen heading to the west behind the west elevation of F.01 (*plate 19*).

It is possible the west elevation of F.01 has been shifted a few inches to the east but the room on the other side of this partition is lined with early in situ panelling with no obvious evidence of a move. This perhaps if there was a move it was an early one.

vii. Room F.03

Modern hardboard lining was removed from the wall exposing a further elevation of heat damaged early wooden panelling, matching the visible panels (*plate 20*).



Plate 18 room F.01 door to F.02, note secondary arch over door off centre

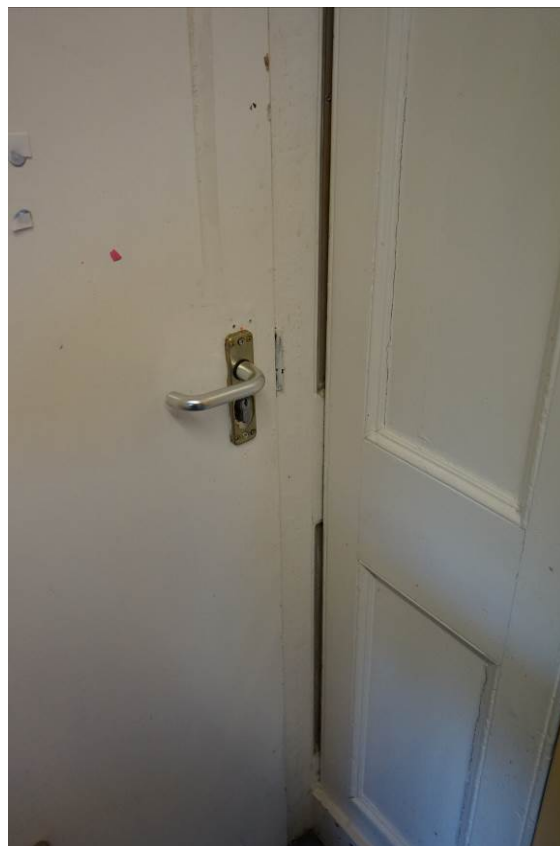


Plate 19 room F.01 door to F.02 detail of moulded panelling round door heading behind western partition



Plate 20 room F.03 early panelling exposed

3. Conclusion

The monitoring of the investigative works at the Canons has been archaeologically recorded and has allowed an insight into some of the development of the fabric of the house, in particular at the stairwell. The works also included numerous other openings within the building which mostly revealed 20th century interventions and structures.

The works in the area of the stairwell and toilets have shown evidence for the earlier fabric of the building, comprising lath and plaster walls and a sequence of panelling and paint finishes in the area. These have shown the development of finishes in the building over time and the requirements for repairs to the building, probably due to problems with damp, which have continued into the 20th and 21st century. This illustrates the history of the maintenance of the building over time, with the modern graffiti providing a glimpse into the more recent renovations that have taken place at the house.

References

Simpson and Brown 2017 *The Canons, Mitcham: Buildings and Structures Conservation Plan*.
Simpson and Brown Architects unpublished report.

Appendix 1: Photographic Contact Sheets



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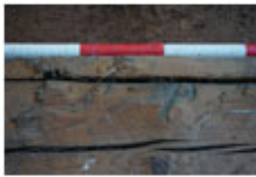
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