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APETHORPE HALL,
APETHORPE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
RECORD OF OPENING UP: VOLUME SIX
HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT

Nick Hill and Kathryn A. Morrison



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SUMMARY

This report contains a record of features revealed by opening up, or otherwise observed, in the course of repair work at Apethorpe Hall in October 2013 and March/April 2014. It focuses on a medieval fireplace in the attic of the former south lodging tower, and several features in the east porch of the Great Hall, including 17th-century panelling, a blocked window and a removed bench.

CONTRIBUTORS

The panelling was recorded by Nick Hill and the other features by Kathryn Morrison.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Unless otherwise attributed, photographs were taken by Pat Payne. The page layout was designed by Martin Jeffs.

ARCHIVE LOCATION

This report will be deposited in the English Heritage Archive, Swindon.

DATE OF INVESTIGATION

1 April 2014.

CONTACT DETAILS

Nick Hill, English Heritage, 44 Derngate, Northampton NN1 1UH

nick.hill@english-heritage.org.uk

Kathryn Morrison, English Heritage, Brooklands, 24 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge, CB2 8BU

kathryn.morrison@english-heritage.org.uk

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
I.1 Apethorpe Hall	1
I.2 The role of English Heritage at Apethorpe Hall	2
I.3 Previously Published Reports	2
AREAS OPENED UP	7
No.1 Fireplace	7
No.2 Fireplace	11
No.3 Window	13
No.4 Bench	15
No.5 Panelling	17

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Apethorpe Hall

Apethorpe Hall (fig 1) is a Grade I listed country house, located in north-east Northamptonshire. The oldest parts of the house, including the Hall, were erected by the courtier Sir Guy Wolston in the late 15th century. Additions were made at various times in the course of the 16th century, and in the early 1560s Sir Walter Mildmay remodelled the house to provide a state suite. This paid off, as Queen Elizabeth I visited in 1566, initiating a long royal association with the property.



Fig 1. Apethorpe Hall: the main courtyard looking north-west towards the Great Hall (left) and gate tower. (DPI10921)

King James I visited Apethorpe on numerous occasions. In 1622, he ordered the new owner, Sir Francis Fane, soon to become the 1st Earl of Westmorland, to extend and refurbish the property. The sequence of fine rooms created by Fane in 1622-24 is located in the south and east ranges. These rooms retain elaborate plasterwork ceilings and carved stone fireplaces; they are of supreme historical, artistic and architectural importance.

Plans to remodel the house as a Palladian palace with two vast domes were prepared around 1740 by the 7th Earl, John Fane, and his architect, Roger Morris. This scheme was never fully implemented, but resulted in some significant additions and alterations. Then, in the mid-19th century, work undertaken by the Stamford architects Bryan and Edward Browning included the erection of a loggia and conservatory against the south front and the rearrangement of the 17th-century loggia in the east range. In 1904, the impoverished Westmorlands sold the estate to Leonard Brassey, who engaged the architect Reginald Blomfield to undertake a great deal of work on the house and gardens. Blomfield's schemes may be considered something of a compromise between restoration and modernisation.

In 1947, Brassey sold the house. It became an approved school, and later a community school. Alterations, mostly reversible, were made to fit the house for this purpose, initially in 1949-50, and later in the mid-1970s. The school closed in 1983.

1.2 The role of English Heritage at Apethorpe Hall

After the closure of the school, Apethorpe Hall was sold, but the new owner lived elsewhere and neglected the property, which was deemed a 'building at risk'. Following the issue of several urgent works notices, the house was subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order in 2004. It was handed over, by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), to English Heritage, which has assumed responsibility for instituting a phased programme of repairs and, ultimately, securing a viable future for the property.

Five separate reports have been published as records of features uncovered in the course of the repair programme since 2006. The present report is the latest in this series. The findings will be brought together in a monograph on Apethorpe Hall, to be published in 2015.

1.3 Recently Uncovered Features

Features uncovered during previous phases of the repair programme have already been published. These are:

Kathryn Morrison, 'Record of Areas Opened up Prior to Phase I Repairs' EH Research Department Report Series no. 30-2006

Claire Martin, 'Record of Opening up, Volume Two', EH Research Department Report Series no. 4-2008

Hannah Waugh, 'Record of Opening up, Volume Three', EH Research Department Report Series no. 79-2009

Nick Hill, 'North Gatehouse Roof', EH Research Report Series no. 17-2013

Nick Hill, 'Opening up, Volume Four', EH Research Report Series no. 18-2013

Nick Hill, 'Dovecote Roof', EH Research Report Series no. 19-2013

Nick Hill, 'Record of Opening up, Volume Five', EH Research Report Series no. 26-2013

Where relevant, individually numbered features are located by reference to room numbers assigned by English Heritage (see annotated floor plans, figs 2-3).

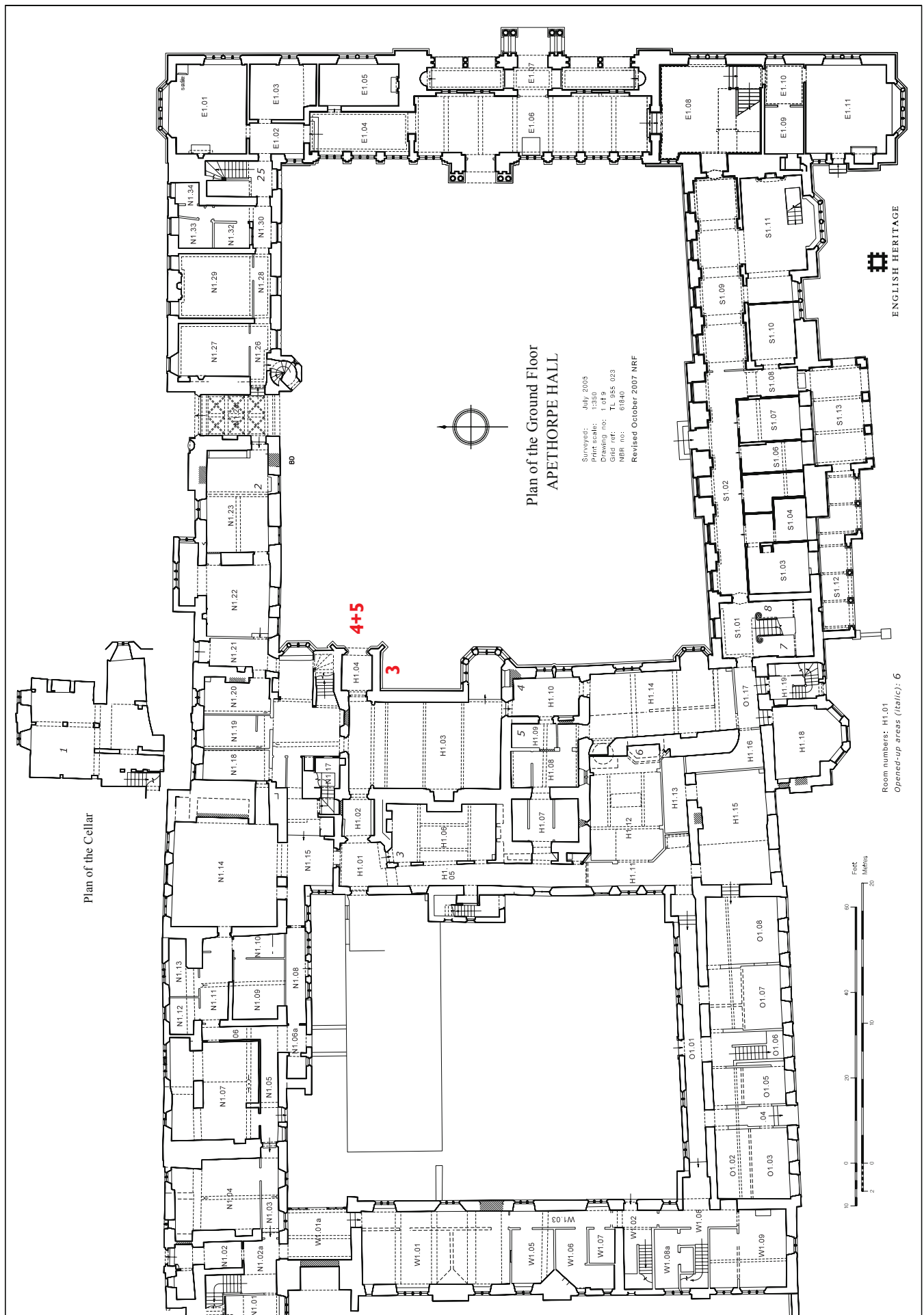


Fig 2. Ground-floor plan, showing the position of the east porch (features 3, 4 and 5).

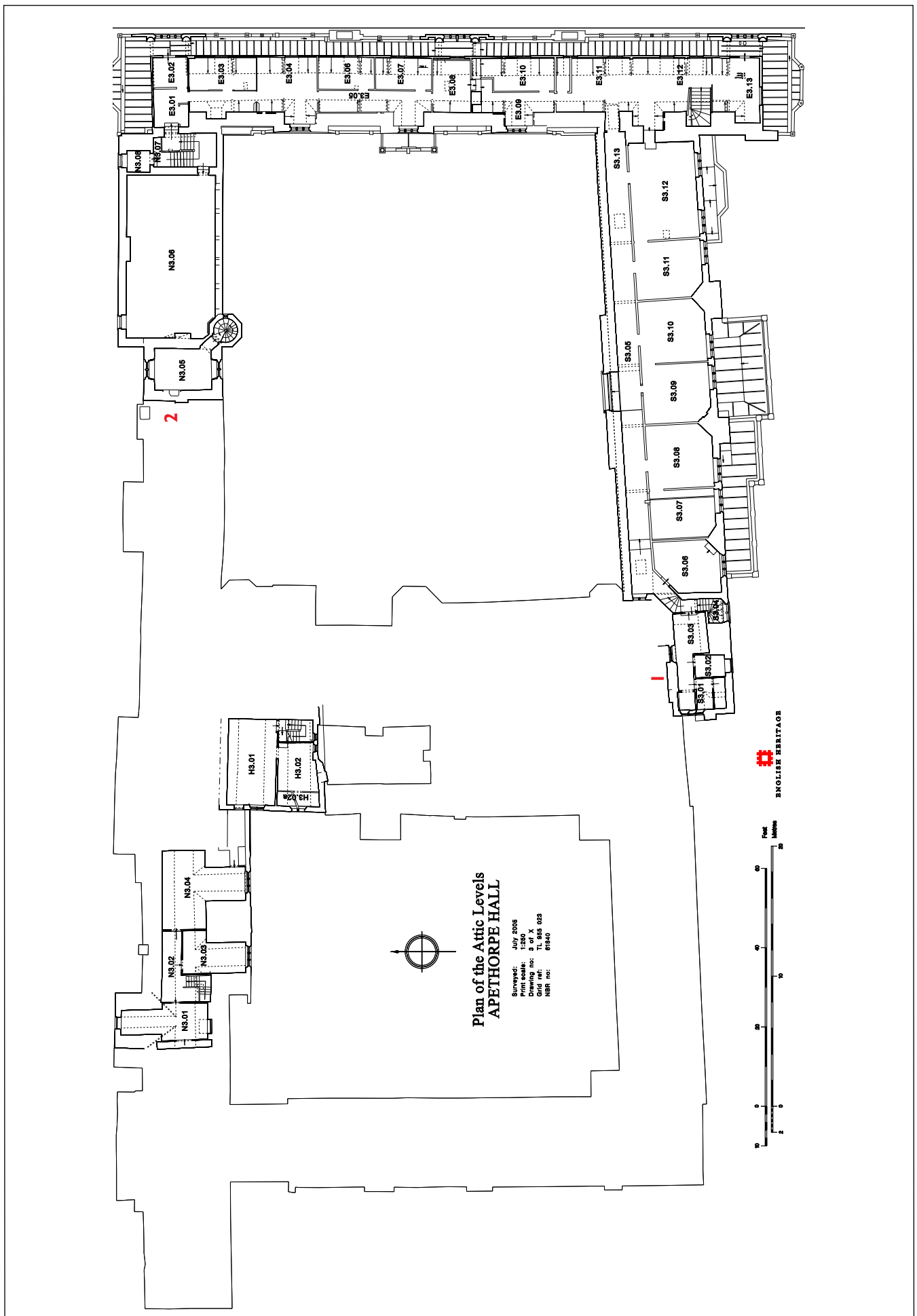


Fig 3. Attic plan, showing the positions of the surviving late 15th-century fireplaces (features 1 and 2).

AREAS OPENED UP

No.1

Feature:

Fireplace

Location:

The north wall of S3.03 (see attic plan, fig 3).

Description:

The two storey and attic block standing at the juncture of the south range and the hall range of Apethorpe Hall originated as a detached building. It was probably a three-storey lodging block or tower, erected in the 1470s by Sir Guy Wolston, the founder of Apethorpe Hall.

By the end of the 15th century, this lodging block had been connected with the cross-wing to the south of the Great Hall by a new two-storey range, containing a parlour and chambers. In the first half of the 16th century, it was remodelled, with a new floor and windows. In the 1560s, the east and south walls were rebuilt, that on the south being aligned with the garden front of Sir Walter Mildmay's new south range, which contained a state suite. At the same time, the upper floor was reduced in height to form an attic. The purpose of this was to create a series of gables at the same level across the new garden front.

Projecting from the surviving north wall of c.1470 is a primary chimney stack, of rubble with ashlar dressings (fig 4). Originally, this probably contained two flues, but an extra flue has been added to the west. In addition, the shaft has been rebuilt above eaves level. It is in a 17th-century style, was probably reconstructed in the early 20th century. A photograph of around 1890 suggests that two separate shafts existed in this position.

Investigation inside the attic room on 9 October 2013 uncovered an in situ fireplace of c.1470, relating to one of the original flues (figs 5 and 6). The quality of the limestone ashlar is much finer than that of the dressed stone used in Wolston's building work for quoins, doorways and windows. The two blocks used for the lintel are different shapes, that on the east being pedimental. The stone was painted white.

The fire opening has a depressed four-centred arch with elongated, faceted spandrels (length: 53cm). Each plinth has a broad plain chamfer topped by a three-sided chamfer stop. This forms a transition to the more complex mouldings of the upper part of the jambs. From outside to inside, these are cut with a plain chamfer, a 90 degree step (or rebate), and a hollow. The plain chamfer is continued to form a rectilinear frame along the top of the fireplace, while the hollow continues around the arch beneath the spandrels.

No masons' marks were found, but the fireplace was incised with graffiti (fig 7). At the thin end of the west spandrel is the initial 'E'. Beneath the same spandrel are the initials 'T N', the form of the N being reversed. Under the east spandrel are at least six scratched crossed Ws, possibly apotropaic marks rather than casual graffiti. The occurrence of a crossed W on such features has been interpreted as an invocation of the Virgin Mary (Virgin of Virgins) by some authors (see Bob Meeson, 'Ritual Marks and Graffiti', *Vernacular Architecture*, 36, 2005, 46), possibly to secure protection for the room or the house.

A modern skirting board runs across the base of the blocked fireplace. The lower part of the west jamb was pecked for plaster to adhere, but the rest is in good condition. The opening has been filled with dark red bricks with white mortar. This infill probably dates from c.1904, when the adjoining attic was remodelled and the bedchamber in this position was carved up to create a lobby, maids' closet, bathroom and water closet. Plans of 1848 and 1858 show a large fire opening here, but it had been reduced in size by 1913. The wall around the fireplace has layers of white, green and yellow paint beneath woodchip paper. The floor covering was not lifted to expose the hearth.

Measurements:

Max. height of fire opening: 128cm

Width of fire opening: 133cm

Height of plinth (to chamfer stop): 64.5cm

Max. overall height: 157.5cm

Overall width: 184cm



Fig 4. The 15th-century chimney stack on north side of former south lodging tower, seen on the side elevation, to the left. (DPI52835)



Fig 5. Fireplace in north wall of S3.03, attic of south range. (DPI61398)



Fig 6. Spandrel detail of fireplace in S3.03. (DPI61395)



Fig 7. Graffiti or apotropaic marks on fireplace in S3.03. (DPI61399)

No.2

Feature:

Fireplace

Location:

West wall of N3.05 (see attic plan, fig 3)

Description:

The fireplace in the west wall of the upper chamber of the north gate tower at Apethorpe Hall has been visible ever since English Heritage assumed responsibility for the house (fig 8). Although it is not a recently uncovered feature, the discovery of a similar, contemporary fireplace (No. 1, above) has prompted its recording for comparative purposes.

The gate tower dates from c.1470, and this fireplace is contemporary with the structure. The stack can be seen inside the roof of the adjoining north range, bearing the outline of a canted medieval ceiling.

As with No. 1, above, the fireplace has a four-centred arch with carved spandrels and is of fine oolitic limestone ashlar coated in white paint. The form of construction is analogous, though in this case both lintel stones are pedimental in form. The width of the fire opening (132cm) is just 1cm shorter than that of No. 1; the height may once have been similar, but is now 110cm. The floor level may well have been raised. More of the wall over the fireplace has been exposed here, revealing a substantial stone relieving arch. A similar feature may survive over No. 1.

At an unknown date, probably in the mid-19th century, the fire opening was reduced to approximately half its original size (from 132cm to 73cm), relined in red brick, and given new stone jambs (20cm wide), positioned inside the medieval jambs. Iron fixings for a contemporary stone lintel can be seen, though this has been removed. The northern half of the original fire opening was, at this time, blocked with large ashlar slabs, similar in quality to the new jambs and perhaps reused from elsewhere on site. A rectangular recess in the plaster floor represents the hearth of the reduced fireplace, and two pairs of holes in the medieval lintel would have housed fixings for an applied fire surround or mantel shelf. Two of the wooden dowels survive. At a later date, the reduced fireplace was itself blocked up, using modern bricks.

The blocking material conceals (and possibly replaces) the original jambs, but the mouldings were evidently simpler than those of No. 1, with a hollow chamfer rising to form a four-centred arch, and a 90 degree step, or rebate, continuing to describe the rectilinear frame, without the addition of a plain chamfer. The spandrels (fig 9) are more deeply carved than those of No. 1. There are no masons' marks or graffiti.

Measurements:

Max. height of fire opening: 110cm

Width of fire opening: 132cm

Overall height: 132.5cm

Overall width: 182.5cm



*Fig 8. Fireplace in west wall of N3.05, upper chamber of gate tower.
(DPI41237)*



Fig 9. Spandrel detail of fireplace in N3.05. (DPI41238)

No.3

Feature:

Window

Location:

South wall of H1.04, east porch to Great Hall (see ground-floor plan, fig 2)

Description:

The two-storey east porch to the Great Hall is a primary feature of Apethorpe Hall, built c.1470 by Sir Guy Wolston (see fig 1). Of coursed rubble with ashlar dressings, it resembles church porches throughout the area. Removal of panelling (see No. 5) on the south wall of the porch on 27 March 2014 revealed the inside of a blocked window (fig 10).

The flat faces of the sill and east and west jambs were revealed, but the upper jambs and head of the window seem to be absent. A slight bulge in the rubble facing may represent the top of the opening: if so, the window opening would have been approximately 129cm in height. Although there is no central mullion, its width suggests that this was originally a two-light window, probably with uncusped arched heads. It may have been similar to a single-light window directly above, lighting the first-floor porch chamber. The removal of some rubble stone from the fill on 1 April 2014 exposed the inner hollow chamfer moulding of the east jamb but no groove for glazing. Unfortunately, the inner face of the corresponding first-floor window is covered, and not available for comparison.

Removal of panelling on the north wall of the porch showed that there was never a similar window on that side. This is similar to the arrangement at Nevile Holt in Leicestershire, explained by the presence of a stair against the porch wall. This may well have been the original arrangement at Apethorpe. A stair in this position would have risen to the chamber above the buttery and pantry, and given access to the chamber over the porch.

Measurements:

Overall width: 112cm

Width of blocked area between jambs: 82cm to 84cm

Width of jambs: 12.5cm to 17cm (ave. 14cm)



Fig 10. Blocked window in south wall of east porch (H1.04) of Great Hall, exposed by removal of panelling. (DPI61405)

No.4

Feature:

Bench

Location:

South wall of HI.04, east porch to Great Hall (see ground-floor plan, fig 2)

Description:

Removal of panelling (see No. 5) on the south wall of the east porch to the Great Hall on 27 March 2014 revealed an ashlar course, 14cm in height, with the top surface 50cm above floor level (fig 11).

Comparison with the west porch of the Great Hall (fig 12) suggests that this was a stone bench, which ran the whole length of this side of the porch. This would have been a primary feature of the porch, as built c.1470.

Removal of panelling on the north wall of the porch did not expose a similar ashlar course, and so there is unlikely to have been a bench on that side.

Measurements:

Height to top of bench: 50cm

Height of bench course: 14cm



Fig 11. Position of bench in south wall of east porch (HI.04) of Great Hall. (K. Morrison)



Fig 12. Surviving bench in west porch. (DP068012)

No.5

Feature:

Panelling

Location:

North, west and south walls of HI.04, east porch to Great Hall (see ground-floor plan, fig 2)

Description:

Oak panelling is fitted to the main south and north internal walls of the porch, with returns onto the west wall, to either side of the central doorway. The panelling is of 'small-square' type, three panels high to the main section, with a narrower top frieze. The panelling was removed for repairs in April 2014, allowing full inspection of both sides.

Both sections of the panelling have five horizontal rails, with vertical stiles at each end and in the internal corner, and intermediate vertical stiles jointed to the rails. Joints are tenoned, with double oak dowels. Although the panelling sections to both walls are generally similar, there are small differences. The north wall panelling (figs 13, 14, 16, 17, 18) has a fine beaded and cavetto moulding to the intermediate stiles. As is normal on Jacobean panelling, the upper edge of all the rails is plain-chamfered, with the moulding of the stiles scribed to this profile, not mitred. On the two lower rows of panels there is also no mitring at the head of the panel, as the rails have an ovolo moulding which runs out, stopping short of the joints. For the third row of panels and the top frieze panels, the heads are mitred, with the bead/cavetto moulding also applied to the underside of the rails (fig 17). The run-out ovolo moulding detail is also applied to the vertical end stiles and the corner post stile. The south wall panelling (figs 15, 19-23) has a different moulding profile to the intermediate stiles, of ovolo and bead profile. Here all the panels have mitred heads except for the bottom row.

The panels are mainly of thin oak (c.7-8mm) in a single section, though some panels are made up of two pieces with a glued joint. The panels are roughly chamfered to the back face, to fit into the grooves (fig 21). Quite a high proportion of the panels have an unusual feature: a drilled horizontal hole, parallel to the face, which has been cut into and partly exposed, some with putty infilling (fig 22). It is evident that the panels were cut down from thicker boards, and that these original boards had dowelled edge-to-edge joints as one would see, for example, on a plank chest of early construction type. In a few cases part of the earlier dowel was still in situ.

Both sections of panelling showed evidence of previous programmes of repair (figs 24 and 25). The south wall had clearly suffered from dampness, and pine strengthening rails had been applied to the rear face, as well as much tar coating to the rear of the panels. The bottom rail to both sections had been replaced, as well as a number of other sections, sometimes in softwood rather than oak. The applied mouldings to the frieze rail and the cornice were oak replacements of late date. Quite a number of the mouldings to

the intermediate stiles had been cut out and replaced, no doubt to facilitate removal and replacement of individual panels.

Nevertheless, close inspection indicated that the great majority of the panelling was original, with typical tool marks of the period to the rear face. The panelling had clearly been constructed with continuous rails and jointing to fit to the dimensions of the porch walls, including the short returns against the doorway. There was no evidence of adaptation or jointing to indicate that it had previously been fitted in any other location.

The panelling thus appears to date from the Jacobean period, and was probably fitted as part of the 1620s programme of works (which included the panelling to the Gallery, as well as a new masonry parapet to the porch). Panelling to the interior of the porch is just visible on the drawing by Bradford Rudge of the east front of the hall range dating from 1846.

Measurements

Height: 187cm

Width to north and south walls: 241cm

Width to north wall west return: 45cm

Width to south wall west return: 31cm



Fig 13. The east porch to the Great Hall, north wall, with panelling in situ. (N. Hill)



Fig 14. The rear side of the dismounted panelling from the north wall, with some tar-coated panels. (N. Hill)



Fig 15. Panelling from the south wall, with added pine rails to rear. (N. Hill)



Fig 16. Detail of lower part of north wall panelling, with fine beaded and cavetto moulding to intermediate stiles, and ovolo scratch-moulding to underside of rail. (N. Hill)



Fig 17. The upper part of the north wall panelling, with mitred joints to the top mouldings of each panel. (N. Hill)



Fig 18. Detail of mitred joint to upper part of north wall panelling. (N. Hill)



Fig 19. Detail of mitred moulding to south wall panelling, with ovolo and bead profile. (N. Hill)



Fig 20. Dismantled section of south wall panelling, with two-piece panel. (N. Hill)



Fig 21. The rear face of the same panel (fig 20), with tar coating and rough chamfering. (N. Hill)



Fig 22. Dismantled section of south wall panelling, with cut-down dowel holes from previous use. (N. Hill)



Fig 23. Detail of the same panel (fig 22), with dowel still in situ. (N. Hill)

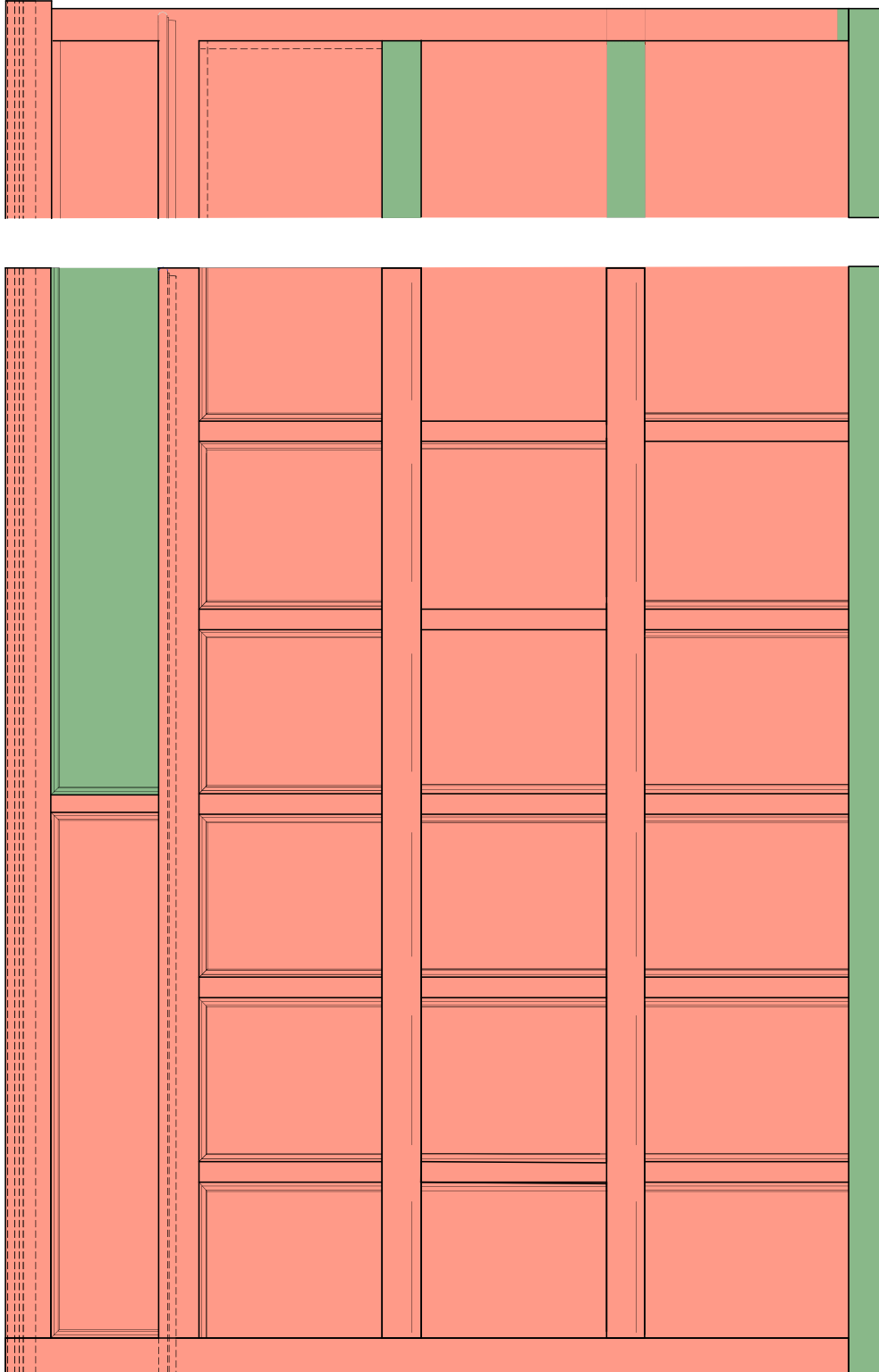


Fig 24. Drawing showing replacement timbers of panelling on the south wall of the porch. (Rodney Melville + Partners)

PRELIMINARY

Scale	1:10 @ A3	Job No	6129
Date	Jul 2014	Dwg No	1520
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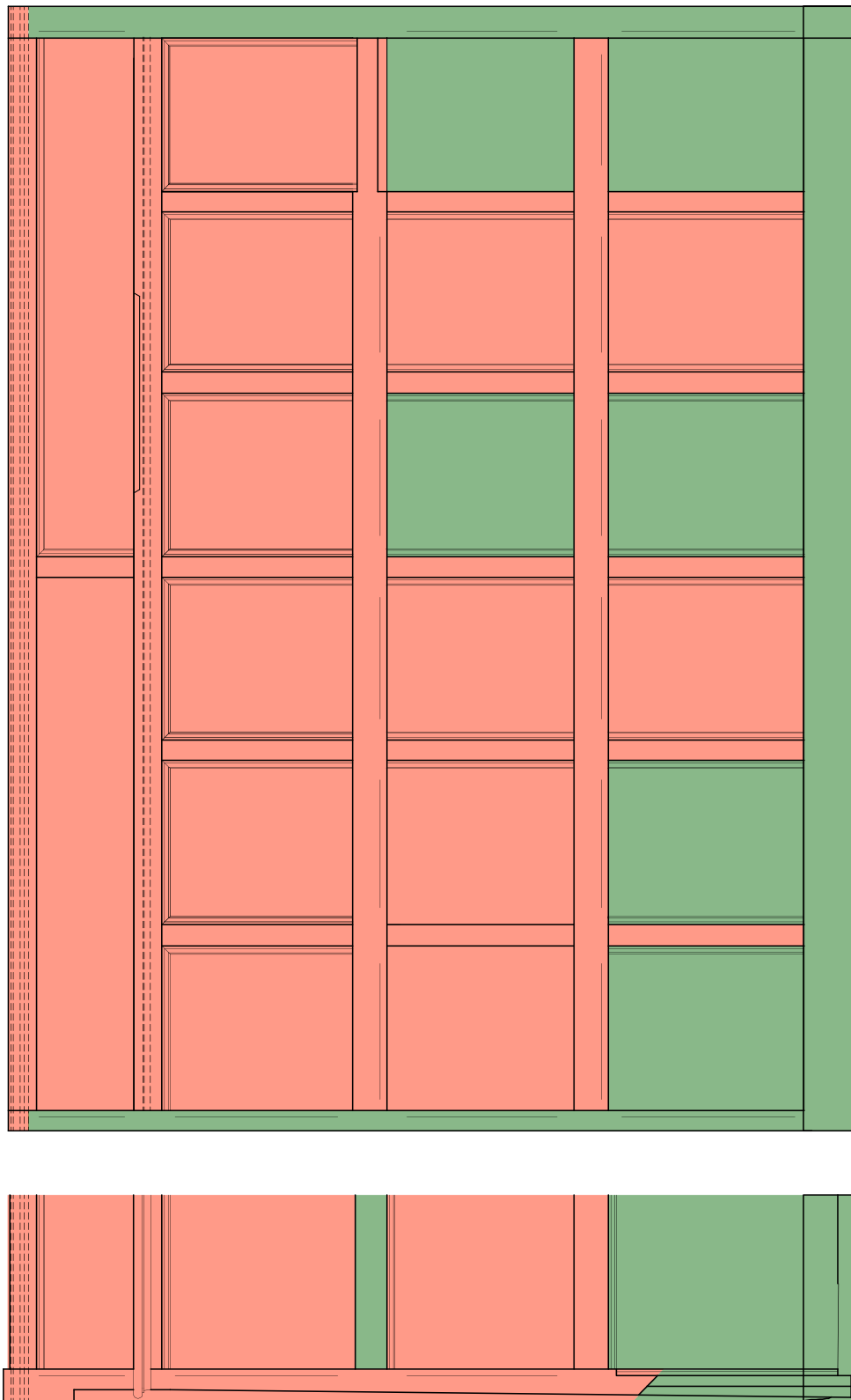
Project Apethorpe Hall
Phase 2 Completion
Drawing Great Hall Porch - H1.04
Hall Range - Oak Panelling (South)
Archaeological Record

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LEAMINGTON SPA
WARWICKSHIRE
CV32 4LJ
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F 01926 451766
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Original 17th century
 Later replacement

Front Elevation

PRELIMINARY

Scale	1:10 @ A3	Job No	6129
Date	Jul 2014	Dwg No	1519
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Project Apethorpe Hall
 Phase 2 Completion
 Drawing Great Hall Porch - H1.04
 Hall Range - Oak Panelling (North)
 Archaeological Record

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Fig 25. Drawing showing replacement timbers of panelling on the north wall of the porch. (Rodney Melville + Partners)



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