



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**Archaeological building recording of the
'ballroom' ceiling, Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville,
Northampton**

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Summary

Beaumont Villa is located on Cliftonville, Northampton and until the mid-20th century was a grand private residence. It was probably during the years 1906-14 that an ornate plaster ceiling and other related plasterwork were added to the existing Drawing Room, subsequently known as the Ballroom. The building was part of Northampton General Hospital during the later 20th century and has been vacant for some years. During recent extensive renovations parts of the plaster ceiling had collapsed, revealing widespread dry-rot on its rear face and IS Heritage were commissioned to record the remainder of the ceiling and put it into an historical context.

Introduction

Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville, Northampton is currently being renovated for new use; it lies on the corner of Cliftonville and Billing Road, just to the east of the historic core of Northampton (Fig 1; NGR: SP 76352 60520). It is Grade II listed and lies within the Billing Road Conservation Area. A ceiling in one of the ground floor rooms of the house, known as 'The Ballroom' has been affected by dry-rot with the consequence that parts of the ornate plaster ceiling collapsed. IS Heritage was commissioned by Clayson Country Homes to produce an illustrated and photographic record of the surviving areas of ceiling and to put the features in context in order meet requirements by Northampton Borough Council's Conservation Officer.



Fig 1: Site location, at the town-centre-side corner of the east-west Billing Road and Cliftonville (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data ©Crown Copyright and database right, 2014.

Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville



Fig 2: Beaumont Villa, looking south-east from the Billing Road



Fig 3: Beaumont Villa, principal (west) front, looking north-east. The Ballroom is closest to the camera (arrowed)

Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville

Historical and architectural background

Beaumont Villa is Grade II listed. The listing description sets out:

Beaumont Villa (formerly listed as "Beaumont"). Circa 1860 by William Hull in Italianate style. Stucco, hipped Welsh slated roof with bracketed cornice. Three storeys, windows mainly sashes, some round headed. Lower east wing has eight panelled door and fanlight in inner surround of rusticated pilasters, archivolt, keyblock, outer surround of pilasters under dentil pediment. West front ground floor colonnade, upper floors three sash windows, those to first floor pedimented with consoles. Beaumont Villa, Sunnyside and Springfield form a group.

Beaumont Villa is also mentioned by Pevsner (Northamptonshire), but who adds little else.

Cliftonville lies just to the east of the medieval town walls of the town, marked by the modern-day alignment of Cheyne Walk and York Road. Even by the mid-19th century there was little development in this part of town beyond Gilesgate. Wood and Law's map of 1847 shows both Billing Road and Cliftonville (Fig 4). However, individual plots appear to have been marked out along Cliftonville and the house known as Springfields was present by this date. The Infirmary, the H-plan building on the left-hand side of Fig 4 and later to become the General Hospital, had been built in 1793.



Fig 4: Wood and Law's 1847 map of Northampton, showing Billing Road and Cliftonville; the future site of Beaumont Villa is starred.

The list description for Beaumont Villa, indicates that it was built c1860 by William Hull as a private residence. However, a reference in the 1854 Post Office Directory suggests that it had actually been built some time before this. However, no further information on dating has been found. Development of the area had begun in around 1845 after the sale of land around Cliftonville by the Northampton Corporation on the understanding that only high class residences should be erected (NBC 2012). By the time of Birdsall's map of 1878, eight houses had been built along Cliftonville.

Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville

The first plan of the villa is that by the Ordnance Survey in the First Edition of their 1:500 series map of Northampton in 1886 (Fig 5). The villa was at its height, although not its greatest extent. It had acquired extensive formal gardens, and the southern side of the house looked out into what appears to be a long, glazed-roof conservatory or verandah (glazing is formulaically cross-hatched).

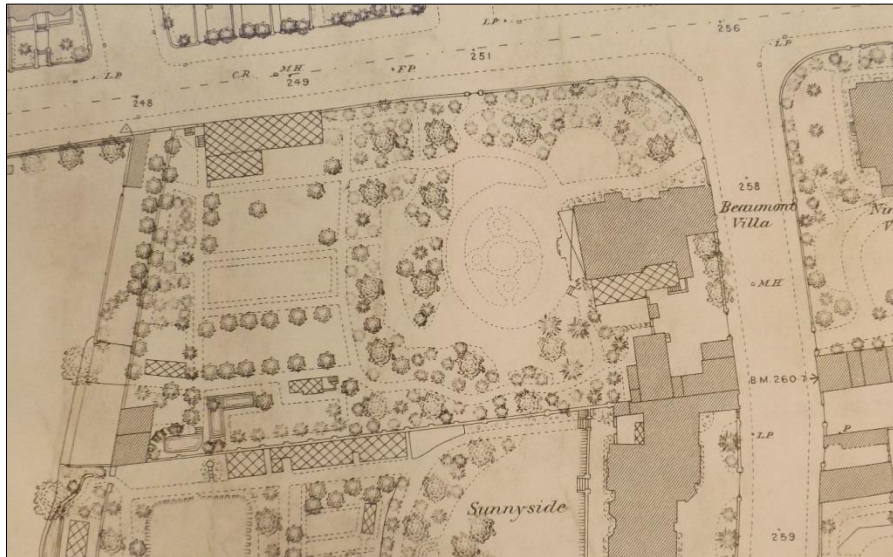


Fig 5: Beaumont Villa and gardens, Ordnance Survey 1:500 scale map of Northampton 1886

Two sets of plans for alterations to Beaumont Villa are held by Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO ref: ZB1095/1-3). Neither set appears to have been carried out nor do they depict much of relevance to the current project other than indicating that the Ballroom was the Drawing Room in 1906 (Fig 6).

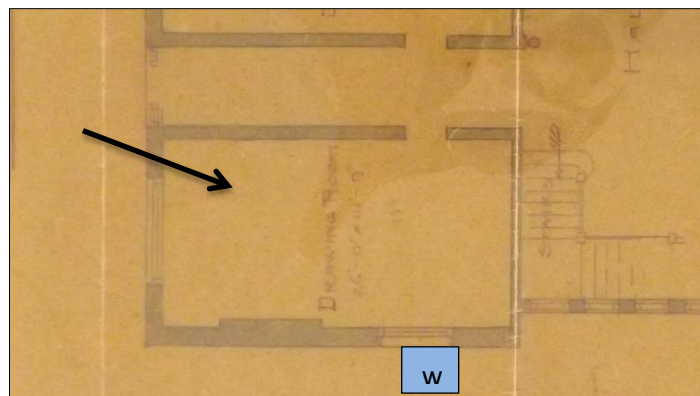


Fig 6: Beaumont Villa as-existing plan 1906; what became the Ballroom is still Drawing Room at this date (arrowed); Note the window (w) where now stands the south doorway integral to the ornate plaster scheme. The French windows too are shown at this date as a simple large casement window. (NRO: ZB 1095/6/3; detail)

Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville

Summary of chronology

1847 The plot is mapped as open; 1851 census – the villa is not apparent.

1851-4 Construction of Beaumont Villa

1854- Samuel Wagstaff Smith, Ironmaster, Beaumont Villa, Billing Road (Post Office Directory 1854)

1860- Constructed by William Hull (*according to listing description, but apparently incorrect*) (or perhaps this was an early re-ordering).

William Hull was also responsible for: (with Alexander) The Corn Exchange (later the Gaumont Cinema, 1850)-also classical and stuccoed; College Street Baptist Chapel (1863); Convent of Notre Dame, Abington Street (1871) (Pevsner and Cherry 1990, 325, 329 & 331).

1876- Mr James Barnard, Beaumont Villa, Billing Road, private residence

1885-1894- William Jeffrey, Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville private residence

1896 - Note from J H Clarke stating that plans to alter Beaumont Villa were put aside after W Jarman was accepted as a tenant without the alterations being required. Architect was Charles Dorman. No plans relating to the Ballroom

1906- Further plans prepared by Charles Dorman & Son for alterations for J H Clarke . These do not appear to have been undertaken either. However, as-existing plans indicate that the Ballroom was the Drawing Room at this date.

1906-1920- George Thomas Hawkins, Beaumont Villa, private residence (This is the Hawkins Boot and Shoe Entrepreneur, whose listed factory building still stands in the Northampton Boot and Shoe Conservation Area).

1940- William Barratt, JP, Beaumont, private residence

-c1971 Mr R.O. Lee, Consultant Surgeon, Northampton General Hospital (Thanks to Sue Longworth of Northampton General Hospital Archives for this information)

c1971- Premises of the Area Health Authority – Beaumont Villa extended

1996- Lambert Smith Hampton, acting on behalf of Anglia and Oxford NHS Executive, marketed Beaumont Villa (for let)

2014 Building renovation by Clayson Country Homes Ltd

Methodology

The Ballroom was photographed to provide detail of the overall views of each wall and a context for the ornate plaster ceiling which it was felt needed to be removed (and could not be saved).

A digital photo-montage was created of the plaster ceiling. This was undertaken using measured-in survey points along its centre-line (at 0 (west end), 1m 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 7.3m (east end)) to allow it

to be better scaled. This was undertaken using both black and white 35mm film (overlapping frames for archive) and digital media (sewn together for reporting purposes). The latter employed both colour and black and white frames.

Where a large piece of ceiling had collapsed, a cross-section of the ground floor ceiling and the two sets of joists above were drawn. This was carried down to show how the ornate cornice was configured.

The room was measured at 1m-height, including diagonals, using a Leica Disto laser-measurer to provide added scale to the frame in which the ceiling was photographed. The same laser-measuring showed that the ceiling height above the floor varied considerably from corner to corner and across the centre, suggesting that continuing adherence to its joists was unpredictable.

Visits to the Northamptonshire Record Office and Northampton Local Studies Library were undertaken in order to check historic maps of the area in general and historic documents relating to Beaumont Villa specifically, as well as any other pertinent documents and local history books, to help date the ceiling, the room and provide context to the building.

The Ballroom

Called 'The Drawing Room' until at least 1906, the ballroom seems to have been differently configured until at least that date. The current ornate scheme post-dates 1906, and the subject, depicting gaiety, plenty and fruitfulness, with ornament redolent of Robert Adam, almost certainly predates the dramatic years of destruction wrought by the First World War. It is therefore, likely to date to the brief period 1906-14, the apogee of Edwardian opulence, and specifically during the ownership of George Thomas Hawkins. While Hawkins owned the prominent boot and shoe business, the premises of which stand to this day, he was also a renowned philanthropist, who personally and single-handedly funded setting up the laboratory for Northampton General Hospital in 1919.

It is clear from an area of plaster removed from the north wall, that the room was once divided into two unequal parts, as indicated by a vertical scar on the wall (Fig 7). Removal of this wall necessitated the propping of a cross-wall above with two steel I-beams, which probably took place before 1906 (when the so-called Drawing Room had already reached its current proportions). These beams would have entailed intervention into the ceiling/floor arrangement to either side, and the adhesion of the later (ballroom) ceiling may have been compromised locally by the bringing together of laths, plaster and steel.



Fig 7: Vertical scar of wall removed before 1906; scale 1m

The room, whether as the Drawing Room (as depicted in 1906) or the Ballroom (from sometime after), measures as follows:

East to west	7.92m
North to south (West end)	4.36m
North to south (East end)	4.19m
North to south (at chimney breast)	4.10m
Diagonal North-west to south-east	8.89m
Diagonal North-east to south-west	8.74m

Ceiling heights (*to 2sf, rounded up*):

Centre	3.01m
North-east corner	3.03m
South-east corner	3.02m
South-west corner	3.02m
North-west corner	3.05m

Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville

The entire room has been given very ornate plaster finishes. The following shows the room generally and the ornate classical door-cases etc which characterise the walls at eye-level (Figs 8-13). The room-layout on the plan of 1906 (above) makes it clear that the entire scheme post-dates that year.



Fig 8: Ballroom, east wall; scale 1m



Fig 9: West end, with French doors. These replaced a window after 1906; scale 1m



Fig 10: The room interior looking north-west; note the ceiling collapse; scale 1m



Fig 11: north doorway (axial corridor beyond); scale 1m



Fig 12: South doorway. In 1906 this was a window, predating the ornate plasterwork; scale 1m



Fig 13: The fastening to the post-1906 French Windows, alluding to Art Nouveau design.

Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville

The ceiling itself comprises two layers of plaster. The first, upper one is a rough base-coat, onto which has been applied a finishing coat of finer grain. This includes the setting of wire armatures for the more ornate and heavy appliqué plaster pieces. However, most other shallow decoration is applied in repeating plaster moulds, (as can be judged from the collapsed section) relying upon their natural adhesion when drying. The two coats together are about an inch thick (25mm).

The whole has been subsequently embellished with a gold paint, with an over-painting of the theme-roundels and corner motifs using slightly garish poster-type paint colours. It is highly likely that the original scheme was simply painted white all over, without further ornament.

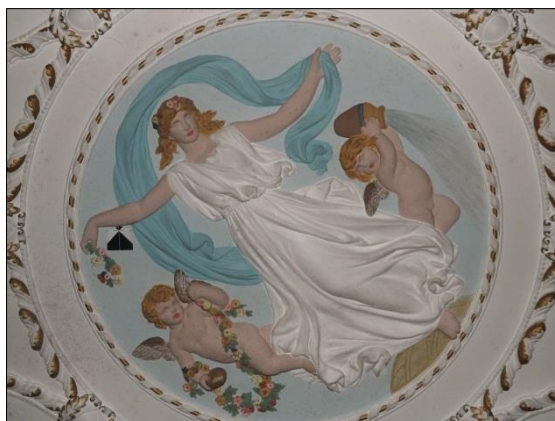


Fig 14: The three roundels which form a centre-line to the ceiling, perhaps signifying plenty and fruitfulness, with an air of risqué sensuality. The polychrome painting is not likely to be original. Elsewhere playful putti (also picked out in polychrome) are used at the corners of the ceiling.

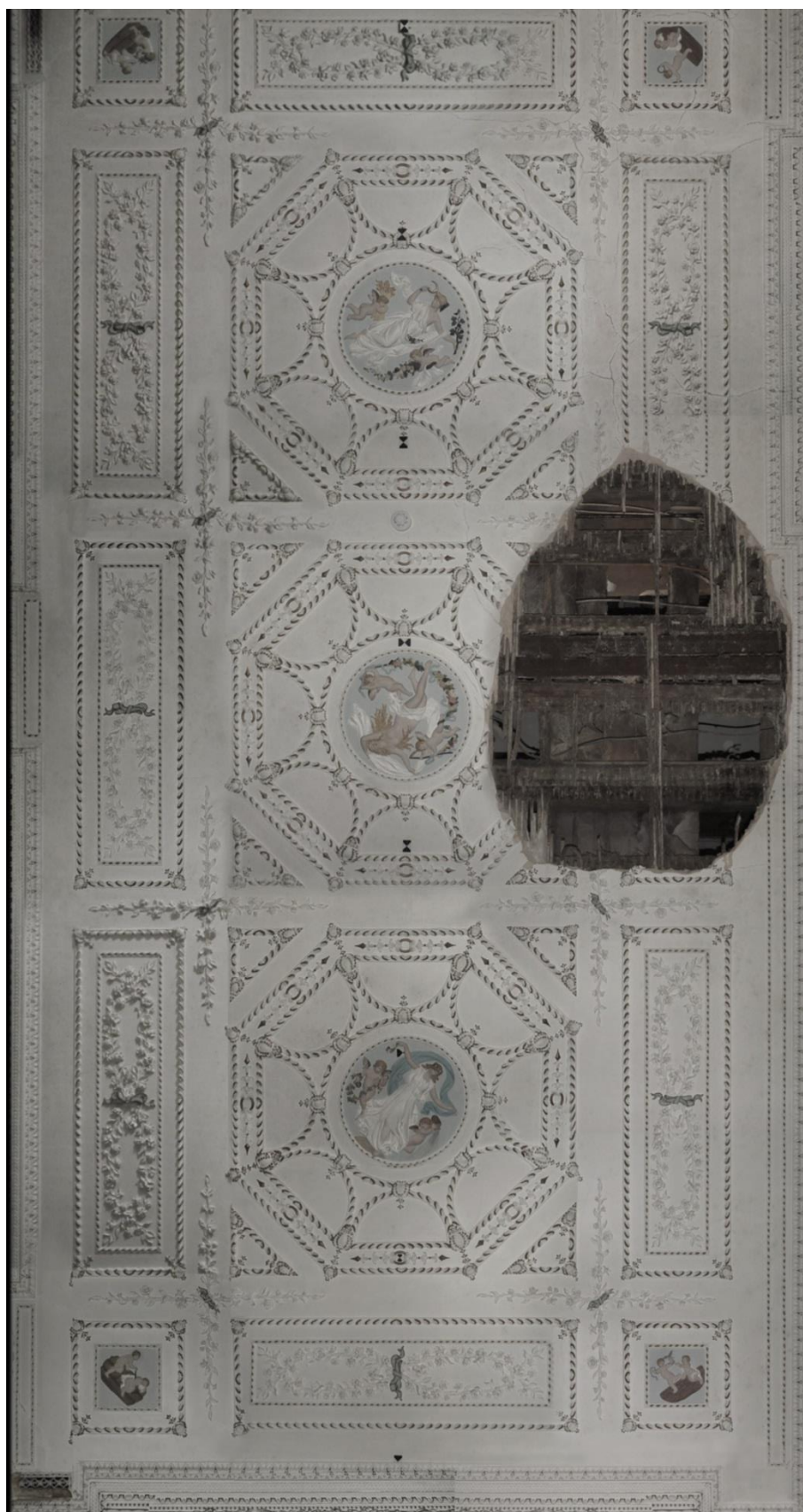


Fig 15: Photo-montage of the ceiling; centre-line survey targets at 0, 1m, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 7.3m; north (the outside wall) is to the left, west (the French Doors) at the foot of the image.

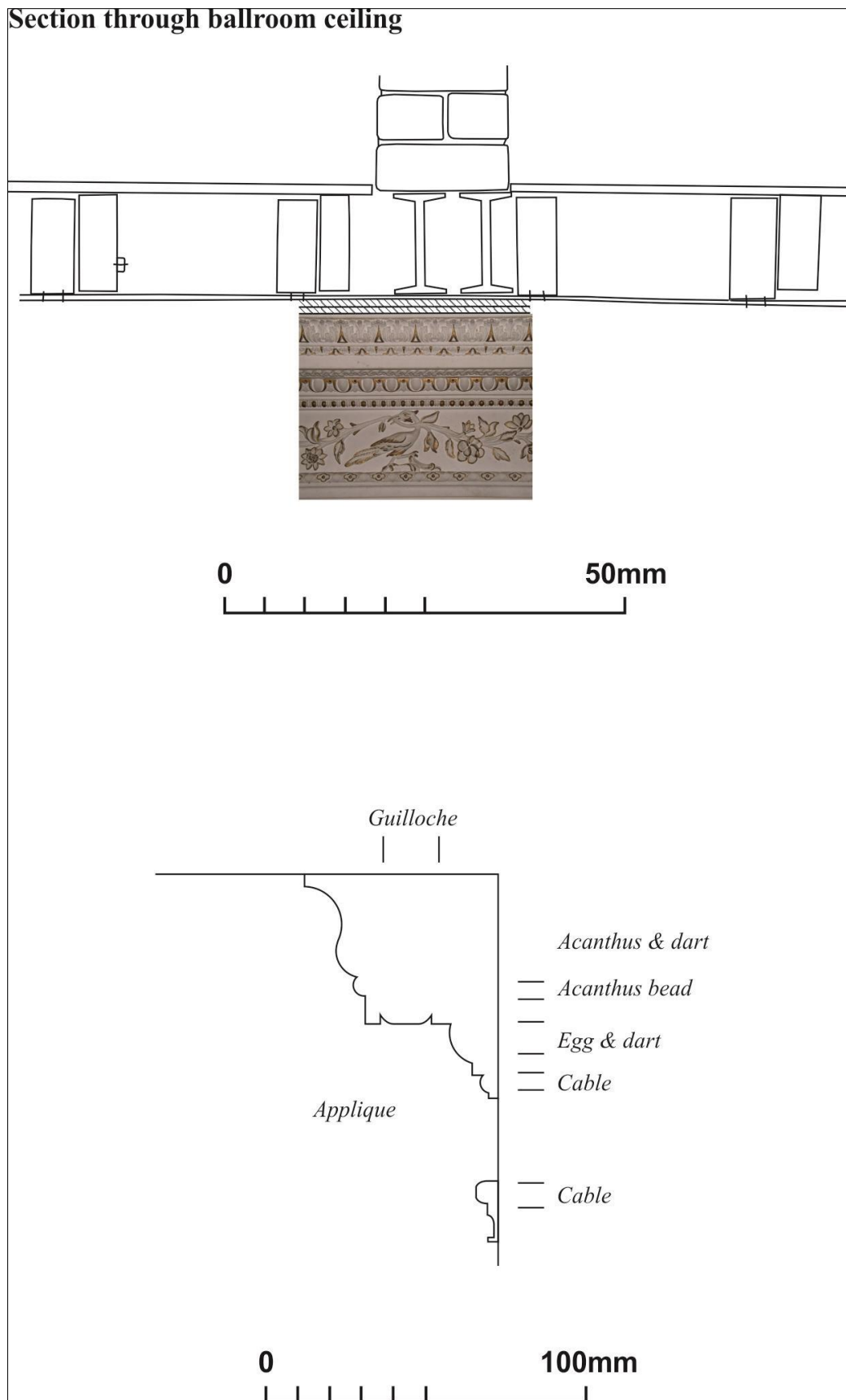


Fig 16: Cross section through the entire ceiling with a section of the cornice superimposed; also cornice cross-section, affixed directly to the plaster.

Beaumont Villa, Cliftonville

The steel I-beams used in the ceiling to support the wall above have already been noted. They can be seen in cross-section in Fig 16. Unlike the timber ceiling joists lying adjacent to either side, these steels incorporated no specific fixing for the ceiling. This might have been acceptable but for the absence of an expected separate floor-joist to one side (for the first floor). This left the floor above flexing onto the ceiling joist with the passage of feet in what was a corridor above. Thus, bereft of the motionless stability they needed, the laths and rigid plasterwork, difficult to affix to the steels above, would have begun to flex, eventually precipitating the collapse of 2014.

Conclusions

Beaumont Villa was built between 1851 and 1854. It was subsequently altered, acquiring a Drawing Room which was planned in 1906. Between that year and (probably) 1914 that room was substantially altered and embellished to create The Ballroom, with an ornate plaster ceiling, cornice and matching door-cases.

In a notable Northampton-historical link, (and a modern one between two separate Conservation Areas in the town), the ceiling was almost certainly created for the villa-owner between 1906 and c1920, Boot and Shoe entrepreneur George Thomas Hawkins, who became a notable benefactor of the nearby Northampton General Hospital after the First World War. Hawkins' former factory also listed, still stands.

The NHS which operates the hospital eventually became the owner of the villa for much of the second half of the 20th century.

Widespread dry-rot has affected the ballroom ceiling, which also appears to have been compromised locally by inserted steels and a flexing floor above. The record set down in this report stands as part of an archive of what has been lost. The Hawkins link, of listed home and listed factory, across two separate Conservation Areas either side of the town centre, is a notable addition to understanding of the town's boot-and-shoe trade and the entrepreneurs who championed it.

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IS Heritage , 3 July 2014