

**Newarke Houses Museum,  
The Newarke, Leicester:  
Assessment of Wall Fabric**

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*For Leicester City Museums*

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Report 2005/063 ©2005

## **Newarke Houses Museum, The Newarke, Leicester: Assessment of Wall Fabric**

### **Introduction**

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) carried out a watching brief at Newarke Houses museum, The Newarke, Leicester on behalf of Leicester City Museums Service on 20.4.2005. This related to the installation of a disabled access lift within the museum and the specific purpose of the watching brief was to assess the fabric and date of a first floor wall within which the possibility of inserting an opening was being considered.

Newarke Houses museum occupies two buildings which are now interlinked: the Chantry House, founded by William Wigston *c.*1511; and Skeffington House, a domestic building of late 16th century date (*c.*1600 according to the listing description) with subsequent additions and alterations. Both are grade II\* listed buildings.

### **Methodology**

The wall in question was the NW (rear) wall of the room at the SW corner of Skeffington House. According to an assessment of the buildings produced by Dr. Paul Courtney this was the original rear wall of the 16th century frontage range of Skeffington House; the range to the rear (NW) of this being an addition of the 17th century.

Sections of plaster were removed from the NW face of the wall by building contractors. Initially two 0.5m x 0.5m areas of plaster were removed, one at either side of the site of the proposed lift opening. Subsequently these were linked forming an area 2.18m wide x 0.5m high. A small area of plaster 0.4m wide x 0.11m high was also removed on the SE face of the wall.

### **Results**

#### *Opening in NW face of the wall*

The plaster removed from the NW wall face was a hair-tempered lime plaster, except for an area that had been patched in more recent gypsum plaster.

The wall fabric exposed was random rubble stonework bonded with lime mortar. Three courses of large, squared sandstone blocks were partially exposed at the SW end of the opening, these being dressed quoins at the external NW corner of the 16th century frontage range. These quoins were partially obscured by large reused Swithland roofing slates that had been set in mortar vertically onto the wall face, possibly to level up the surface before it was plastered.

#### *Opening in the SE face of the wall*

In the small opening on the SE face a coat of modern gypsum plaster overlay an earlier hair-tempered lime plaster with the remains of lime-wash or paint on its surface. This opening again exposed random rubble stonework and comparable rubble stonework was also visible above the first floor ceiling through a loft access hatch at this point. Above the stonework in the roof space 2 inch brickwork, of probable 17th century date, was noted.

## **Discussion**

Removal of plaster from both faces of the first floor wall exposed random rubble stonework. A series of large dressed sandstone blocks exposed on the NW face of the wall were evidently quoins at the external NW corner of the frontage range of Skeffington House. The stonework is likely to be late 16th century in date.

## **Illustrations**

Illustration 1. Location Plan scale 1:1250.

Illustration 2. Outline plan of Newarke Houses Museum showing first floor wall investigated.

Illustration 3. Detail Plan showing position of openings in plasterwork.

Illustration 4. Opening in plaster on NW wall face, note quoin to right of photo scale.

Illustration 5. Opening in SE wall face.

Illustration 6. Rendered stonework above ceiling level on SE wall face, with *c.*17th century brickwork above.

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Illustration 1. Location Plan. Scale 1:1250. Newarke Houses Museum Highlighted.  
Based on Ordnance Survey digital map SK5804 SW.  
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Illustration 2. Outline plan of Newarke Houses Museum showing first floor wall investigated.  
Scale: 1:625. Based on Ordnance Survey digital map SK5804 SW.  
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Illustration 3. Detail Plan showing position of openings in plasterwork. Scale 1:50.



Illustration 4. Opening in plaster on NW wall face, note quoin to right of photo scale.



Illustration 5. Opening in SE wall face.



Illustration 6. Rendered stonework above ceiling level on SE wall face, with *c.* 17th century brickwork above