

An archaeological excavation at St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, Soho Square, City of Westminster

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Introduction

The church of St Patrick's opened on St Patrick's Day 1893. On the eastern side of Soho Square (Fig. 1), the site has undergone considerable alterations since its early development between 1677 and 1691 when it was known as Soho Fields (Fig. 2). The property includes the former site of Carlisle House, which is present on the Ogilby and Morgan map of 1681–2. Its first tenant in 1685 was Edward Howard, the second Earl of Carlisle.¹

Prior to the development of Soho Fields the site comprised open land. It was situated within the Parish of St Anne in St Giles's Field. During the medieval period much of this area belonged to the Master of the Hospital of Burton Saint Lazar in Leicestershire, custodian of the leper hospital of St Giles in the Fields. In 1536 the property was surrendered to Henry VIII for a royal park for the Palace of Whitehall, later part of the Bailiwick of St James. The earliest reference to 'Soho' is c. 1636 in a list of ratepayers in the parish of St Martin-in-the-Fields.²

Evidence pre-dating the post-medieval period remains limited. Few prehistoric or Roman finds are known despite the presence of the former London to Silchester Roman road 200m to the north.³ The Saxon settlement of *Lundenwic* was established in the area around the Strand during the 7th century,⁴ yet the study site remained in the hinterland to the north-west.⁵

This article provides details of an archaeological excavation undertaken in the nave of St Patrick's Catholic Church (PCU 09). These works were required in advance of the construction of a new basement within the existing structure.

Mid-17th-century land use

The earliest archaeological evidence comprised a former agricultural soil

horizon. A shallow drainage gully cut this sequence, which was subsequently sealed by a further layer of agricultural soil. Pottery and clay tobacco pipe provided a deposition date of between 1630 and 1680.

Cartographic evidence suggests the site remained fields until the late 17th century, with Faithorne and Newcourt's map of 1643–47 depicting it as undeveloped. Following its incorporation into the Bailiwick of St James, it was granted to Queen

Henrietta Maria. After the restoration, Henry Jermyn, the Earl of St Albans, was granted Soho Fields and other lands by the Queen and Charles II in 1661 for a term to Michaelmas 1734.⁶

It is possible little agriculture took place in Soho Fields until the land was in the hands of Henry Jermyn. It was described as 'pasture' when transferred to Henry VIII.⁷ The archaeological evidence suggests it was not ploughed until the mid-17th century. The presence of pottery, clay tobacco pipe



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Fig. 1: site location

and animal bone may indicate waste disposal in the area. The size of the cattle bones from these horizons was noteworthy, in that they indicate considerably larger livestock than is the norm for early post-medieval sites. This suggests that larger cattle began to enter the London meat market during this period.⁸

Quarry pits for the mid to late 17th century

Cutting the agricultural sequence was a large quarry pit, probably excavated for brickearth. Measuring 9.14m by 9.92m by 0.78m in depth, it truncated the underlying Lynch Hill Gravels. A northwest to southeast aligned linear cut was at the bottom of the feature. A timber plank *in situ* suggests a structural function, possibly a beam-slot. Its alignment correlated with that of the later structures and the modern layout of Soho Square.

Lining the base of the quarry pit was a strongly-cemented deposit of mortar. Two episodes of pitting with fills with pottery and clay tobacco pipe dated 1660–1710 truncated this surface. It is thought that these features were also excavated for gravel extraction.

Four postholes cut the mortar surface with three aligned on a northwest to southeast axis. The fourth, to the southwest, implied a right-angle return and the delineation of a small

temporary structure. Three separate fills in the quarry pit sealed the postholes and later quarry pits. The finds from the fills provided a deposition date between 1680 and 1700.

Documentary evidence records that one of the northerly areas of Soho Fields was used for brickearth quarrying in 1650.⁹ A later date is suggested by a change in land ownership during the latter part of the 17th century. On the 28th of August 1673 a brewer named Joseph Girle leased 19 acres of Soho Fields from Henry Jermyn and by 1676 had obtained letters granting him the authority to build on the land.¹⁰ Girle appears to have had several occupations beside brewing, one involving supplying builders with bricks.¹¹ It is possible that the quarry pit was excavated during his tenure.

Despite Girle obtaining the rights to develop Soho Fields, he granted the land lease and the letters patent to Richard Frith, a citizen and bricklayer, in 1677. It was under Frith that its early development took place and his need of bricks and building materials may have led to exploitation of the underlying Langley Silts and terrace gravels.

Although the quarry could have been excavated at any point during the mid-late 17th century, it seems more likely to have been done during Frith's time, as suggested by the matching alignments of the beam slot with both



Fig. 2: the church of St Patrick's Soho Square in 2014

Carlisle House and Soho Square. Frith began marking out the street pattern and property plots between 1677 and 1678.¹² The introduction of the mortar surface and posthole arrangement at the base of the quarry implies that the pit not only remained open following the extraction of brickearth, but that a working surface was laid down and that a temporary structure was erected. The subsequent episodes of gravel extraction would also have provided building material prior to the pit eventually being backfilled and Carlisle House erected.

The construction of Carlisle House during the late 17th century (Fig. 3)

Following the backfilling of the quarry pit, a 0.20m thick chalk surface was laid down. This was truncated to the west by a large rectangular cut almost 2m deep, backfilled with rubble. Clay tobacco pipe from this deposit is dated to between 1680 and 1700. Large quantities of building waste material were dumped across the site, raising the ground level by up to 1.04m. The finds from these deposits were contemporary with the backfill of the rectangular pit, suggesting that both events occurred simultaneously.

At the western end of the excavations a rectangular brick-lined cellar was identified. This was truncated by the footings of the church to the north, south and west. It extended

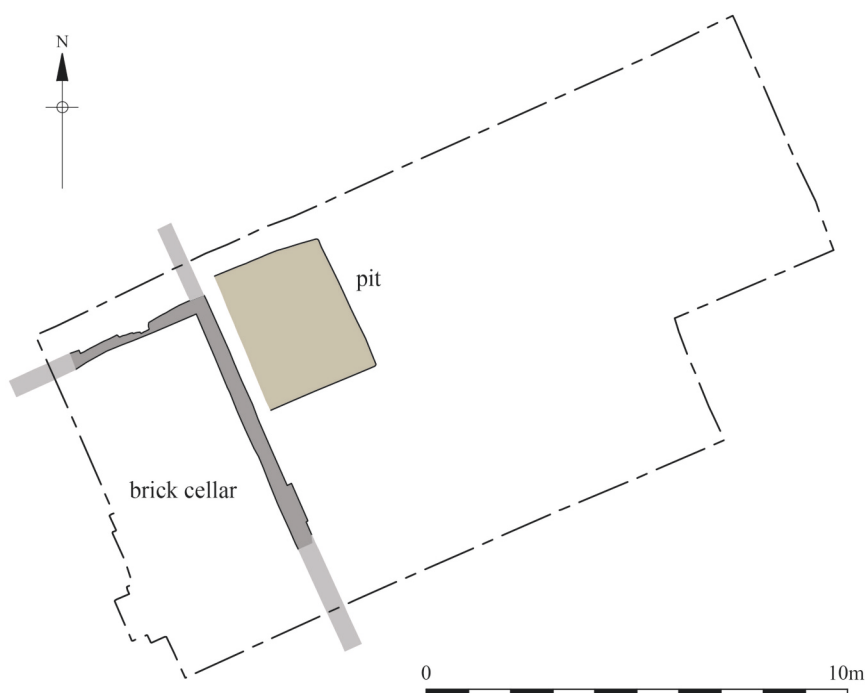


Fig. 3: late-17th-century features associated with Carlisle House

6.44m in length by 3.58m in width. This basement was lined along the eastern edge by a 0.38m wide and 2.39m deep red brick wall with an internal foundation trench continuing for 0.20m into the natural gravel. Post-dating 1664, the bricks used in its construction were arranged in an irregular to Flemish bond set in a firm grey mortar. A further northeast to southwest aligned wall abutted the eastern one and had been modified whilst the cellar was in use. A hatchway within it had been blocked up with bricks almost identical to those used in the original build, suggesting it formed an internal partition. The cellar once extended further north with another room beyond the internal brick division.

The chalk surface is likely to have been a working platform, presumably linked with the construction of Carlisle House. Soho Square is known to have neared completion by 1691.¹³ The first tenant of Carlisle House in 1685 was the second Earl of Carlisle. The Ogilby and Morgan map of 1681–2 shows what may be Carlisle House on the corner of Soho Square.

Richard Frith's development methods involved purchasing land and then mortgaging it to raise capital for building materials, this led to trouble by 1684.¹⁴ Frith and a man named Cadogan Thomas owed Benjamin Hinton, Thomas's mortgagee, £60,000.¹⁵ Hinton himself had gone bankrupt in 1683 and it was Hinton's trustees who were assigned the remainder of Frith and Thomas's rights in Soho Fields. The trustees granted the lease to build Carlisle House to Edward Roydon (a turner), Job Bickerton and William Webb (both carpenters). Their mortgagee was Philip Harman, the son-in-law of Joseph Girle, the original Soho Fields lessee who had died in 1677.

The brick cellar provided the only surviving structural evidence for the mansion. It seems likely that its entrance was located to the west. A blocked hatchway within the internal cellar wall suggests that the structure was divided into rooms.

Alterations to Carlisle House during the early 18th century (Figs. 4 and 5)

During the early 18th century the cellar fell into disuse and was backfilled with

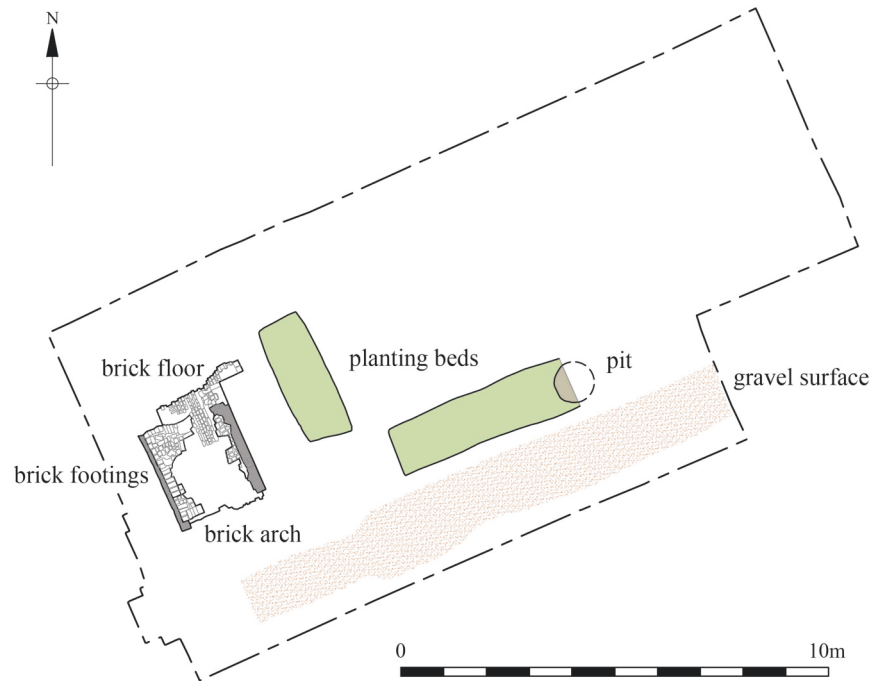


Fig. 4: early-18th-century features (phase 5.1)

demolition debris, including fragments of Carrara marble and Reigate hearth stone. Tobacco pipe from its fill confirmed a deposition date of between 1700 and 1710.

Following the demolition a northwest to southeast aligned rampant brick arch was built on top of the cellar backfill and keyed onto the eastern cellar wall (Fig. 6). This measured 3.26m in length, with the arch haunched on its east and west sides with a rise of 1.10m. It was constructed

of red unfrosted bricks in both rowlock and soldier formations. The haunch had been achieved by the use of tile fragments throughout the structure in order to fan the bricks, with the western side of the arch dipping to a particularly acute angle.

The arch was designed for load bearing reasons, intended to prevent the structure above from slumping into the underlying deposits. The remnants of the building above comprised two parallel brick footings aligned with the

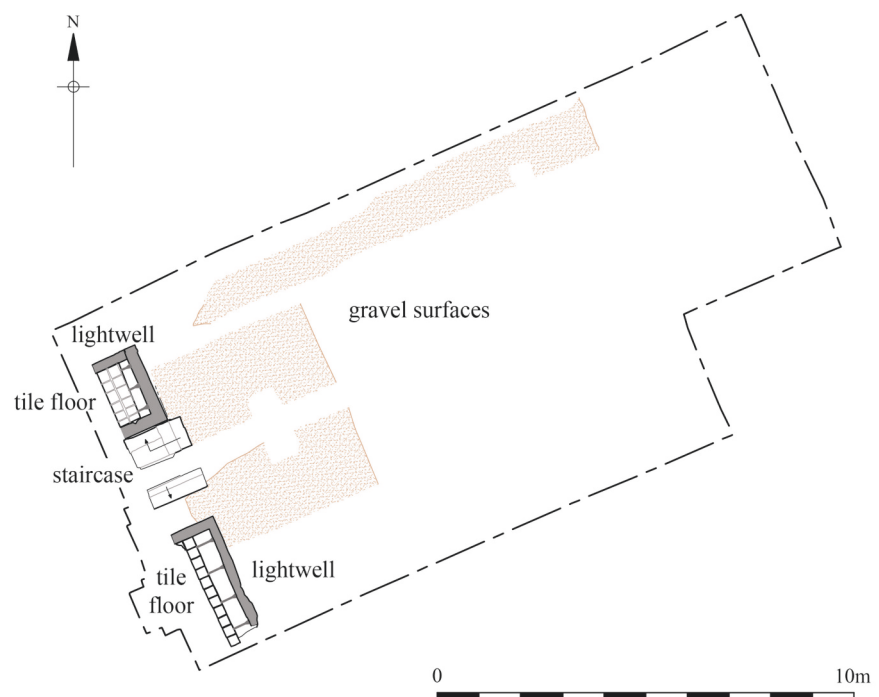


Fig. 5: early-18th-century features (phase 5.2) light-wells

earlier cellar, supporting a brick floor. Significant quantities of grey mortar were used in its construction to level the gap between the crown of the arch, which formed the floor formation level, and the lower arch haunches.

The floor surface formed a paved area to the rear of Carlisle House abutting a gravel yard dating to between 1700 and 1740 in the mansion's garden. New garden features were introduced comprising two rectangular planting beds and a pit. The beds were neatly arranged, one parallel to the new brick yard surface and one perpendicular to it. Cultural material suggests these features were not contemporary. Clay tobacco pipe from the perpendicular trench dated to between 1680 and 1710 whilst the parallel bed material dated to 1730–80.



Fig. 6: early-18th-century brick arched foundation

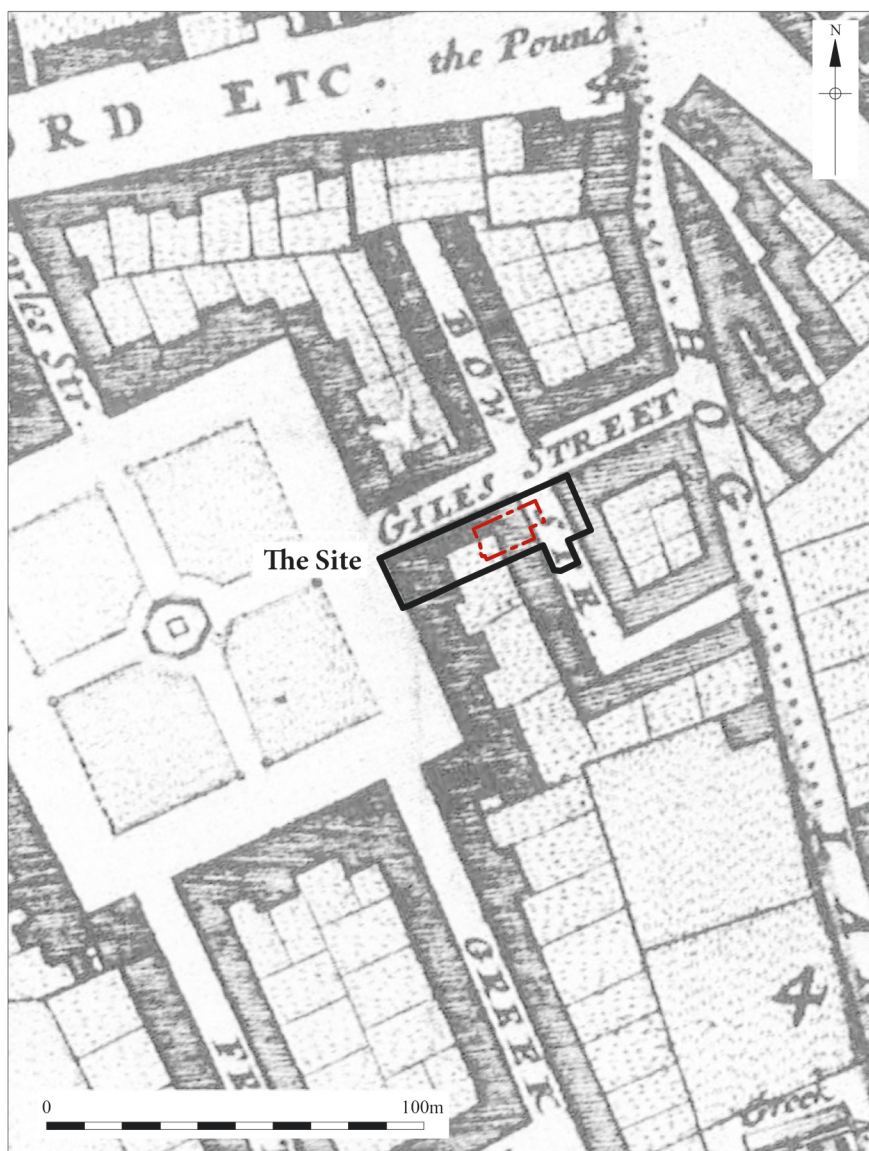


Fig. 7: Ogilby and Morgan 1681–2 map with location of the site and Bow Street

Wing bones from a small raptor, possibly a sparrow-hawk, came from the pit.

The Howard family lived at Carlisle House until 1753.¹⁶ The introduction of a new paved area, gravel yard surface and associated planting beds demonstrate modifications being made to the rear of the property. Cartographic evidence for the 1690¹⁷ to 1746 period¹⁸ shows that by this time a road to the rear of Carlisle House crossing the centre of modern day Sutton Row, named Bow Street on Ogilby and Morgan (1681–2) (Fig. 7) and Faulconbergh Court on Blome's map, had disappeared, creating new open space. Subsequent maps such as Horwood (1819), show part of this new plot incorporated into the property, which would have provided a more substantial garden for Carlisle House.

Early 18th-century alterations

During the first half of the 18th century, the earlier brick floor and garden features were sealed by a deposit of made ground. A new staircase was built over the late-17th-century cellar. Constructed of various materials including Blue Lias limestone, Carrara marble, and tile, it would have provided access to the back of Carlisle House and the rear yard and garden. A new gravel surface abutted the staircase, with its northern segment continuing east, forming a path along the northern edge of the yard. No further associated bedding features

were identified.

At the western end of the excavation two light wells were located cut through the gravel surface. Rectangular in plan both were truncated to the west. The southern example was slightly longer than its northern counterpart. Up to 1.25m deep (Fig. 5), both followed the alignment of Soho Square and had sharply sloping eastern edges as opposed to the exposed northern and southern sides which were vertical. They were lined with bricks which post-dated 1664, and bonded with a white lime mortar. The eastern edges respected the sharp slope of the construction cuts. The base of the northern light well was surfaced with mortar and Flemish floor tiles, whilst the tiles in the southern example had been sealed with a deposit of mortar.

The construction of the Assembly Rooms (Fig. 8)

During the mid-late 18th century both light wells were backfilled with sand including fragments of mortar, ceramic building material, along with Purbeck and Reigate hearth stone.

Cutting both light wells was a construction cut for a substantial northwest to southeast aligned wall. Truncated by the church's footings, it measured 8.26m long, 0.58m wide and was at least 2.34m deep. Its bricks dated to between 1700 and 1850, and were set in a light grey lime mortar. It formed part of the external foundations of a substantial building, abutted to the east by three parallel internal partition walls. Spaced at approximately 2.5m apart these extended up to 14m in length. Pottery from the bedding of the southern wall dates to between 1720 and 1780 whilst the bricks used in its construction dated to between 1700 and 1825. Between the northern and central walls were two stakeholes and a posthole which were aligned with the internal partitions. These may have related to temporary structures erected during the construction of the new building.

These structural elements belonged to Mrs Theresa Cornelys' Assembly Rooms, erected in 1761.¹⁹ Mrs Cornelys (*née* Imer) was born in Vienna in 1723 and described herself as an opera singer, actress and adventuress.²⁰ She

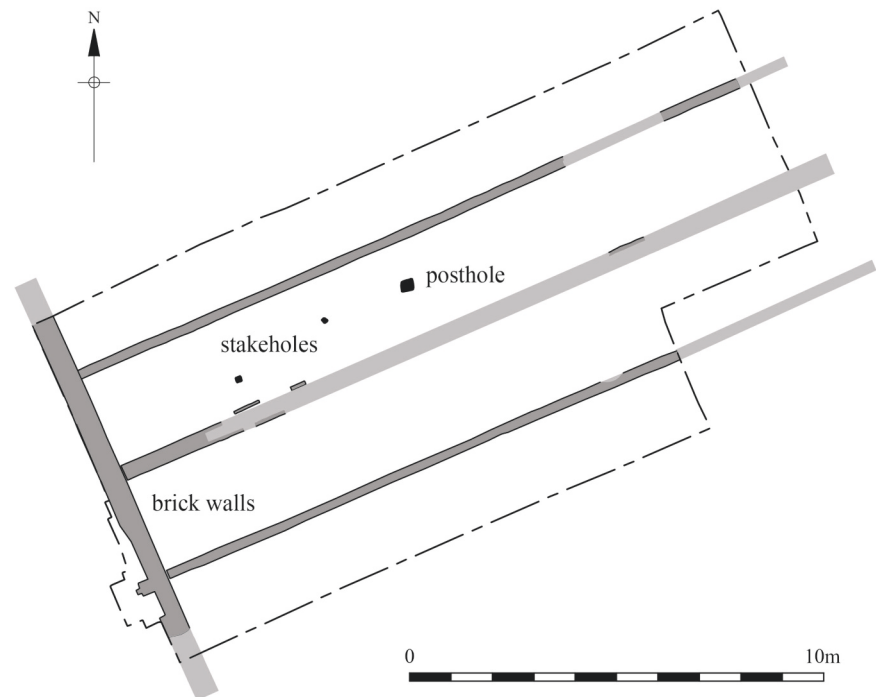


Fig. 8: mid-18th-century modifications: Mrs Theresa Cornelys' Assembly Rooms

came to London in 1759 and put on a series of concerts at the Little Theatre in Haymarket with money from John Fermor, a cleric. The concerts were not successful but Fermor suggested that profits could be made by arranging subscription-based concerts and assemblies within an elegant and large building. By this time, Mrs Cornelys had met Elizabeth Chudleigh (the wife of the Second Duke of Kingston) who provided patronage for the project.²¹

The large reception rooms of Carlisle House offered a perfect setting for Mrs Cornelys' venture. With Fermor acting as her agent she leased the House in 1760 at a cost of £180 per annum and began to use the property for dances, card games, masquerades and operatic concerts. Tickets were sold only to persons of wealth and fashion. Following its initial success, Mrs Cornelys acquired the lease for the house in 1761 and commissioned Samuel Norman, a cabinet-maker of Sutton Street to make modifications. These involved the construction of the Assembly Rooms within the gardens of Carlisle House, on land formerly occupied by buildings fronting onto Sutton Street. At a cost of £1,800 the new structure was three storeys tall. Internally it was splendidly decorated and furnished, with an apse for musicians at one end of the first floor

which was winged with elaborately framed mirrors.²²

The Assembly Rooms and St Patrick's Church

Little evidence was identified for the use of the Assembly Rooms for the late 18th century. On completion they appear initially to have been successful, with noted visitors including Horace Walpole, and musical performances by celebrated musicians such as John Christian Bach, Karl Abel, Stephano Storace and Karl Weichsell. The masquerades were popular and in 1769 a new gallery for dancing and a suite of new rooms were opened. No expense was spared, with £5,000 used on internal alterations between 1767 and 1772.²³

In 1771 Mrs Cornelys staged operatic performances, although these were illegal without Royal Licence and she was subsequently fined £50. This did not deter her, and further concerts were arranged and fines continued to be levied. The presence of rival establishments such as the Pantheon in Oxford Street began to affect the popularity of the Assembly Rooms, and by October 1772 the now bankrupt Mrs Cornelys had been arrested at the suit of her creditors and incarcerated in the King's Bench prison. The lease for Carlisle House was eventually

purchased by the creditors for £10,200 and they continued to use the property for entertainment purposes. By 1784 both Carlisle House and the Assembly Rooms were described in the ratebooks as empty.²⁴

The earliest archaeological evidence for renewed alterations to the Assembly Rooms dates to the 19th century and comprises the remains of two rectangular red brick pier bases on either side of the central partition wall. These post-dated 1840 and were sealed with a mortar floor surface which also covered the three partition walls. A further mortar surface was subsequently laid down.

Alterations were made to the western side of the main foundation wall of the Assembly Rooms. Added onto this footing was a chimney flue made of yellow stock bricks and an associated fireplace complete with hearth and iron firebox. The chimney cheeks on either side of the fireplace were lined with marble, although this material had been covered with claret and blue paint which decorated its entire face (Fig. 9). The mantel directly above the hearth had been removed but a recessed groove provided evidence of its former location.

Considerable changes took place during the late 18th century. In 1791 Carlisle House was demolished, and in 1792 the Assembly Rooms were converted into a Roman Catholic chapel dedicated to St Patrick.²⁵

Following the demolition of Carlisle House, two new properties were erected fronting directly onto Soho Square. Both were complete and occupied by 1794, yet Horwood's map of 1819 depicts a considerable gap between the rear of the northern house and the western wall of the Assembly Rooms. By the time of the Ordnance Survey map of 1869–74 both properties

are shown as abutting the Assembly Rooms, which had been converted into the church. The two houses seem to have been extended between 1819 and 1869, during which period the chimney flue and fireplace were constructed. In 1866 the church acquired the freehold to the two houses and the property expansion may well have taken place following this change in ownership. The northern house acted as the presbytery from 1868 onwards and was demolished in the construction of the new church in 1891, while the southern still stands on Soho Square today.²⁶

Both the converted chapel and the northern Soho Square property were demolished in 1891 in order to make way for the new church, which opened on St Patrick's Day in 1893. The square postholes along the southern edge of the excavation area followed the same alignment as the earlier Assembly Rooms and the modern church. Larger groups of post-pits were also aligned along the same axis, with one group along the northern side of the excavation area and one to the south. All have been interpreted as footings for temporary scaffold structures used in the construction of the church. Residual post-pipes representing the wooden scaffolds were found to be present in several of the pits. A shallow deposit of made ground sealed all.

A WWII bomb extraction crater

A large oval cut was found at the eastern end of the excavation area and represented a bomb extraction pit. St Patrick's Church was hit during an air raid on the 19th of November 1940. The bomb pierced the church roof and buried itself in the nave failing to detonate. Details of the event are listed on a bronze plaque on a pier on the side of the nave next to the location where the bomb was made safe.



Fig. 9: mid-19th-century fireplace

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