

**THE GRAND SPA PUMP ROOM
AVON GORGE HOTEL
CLIFTON
BRISTOL**

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

For

GOLDEN TENT HOTELS LTD


CA PROJECT: 3123
CA REPORT: 10099

JUNE 2010

THE GRAND SPA PUMP ROOM
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CA PROJECT: 3123
CA REPORT: 10099

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date	16 July 2010
issue	01

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SUMMARY

Site Name: Avon Gorge Hotel
Location: Clifton, Bristol
NGR: ST 5664 7294
Type: Historic Building Recording
Date: 20th May 2010
Planning Reference: Bristol City Council 06/00529/F and 06/00533/LA
Location of Archive: To be deposited with Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives

A programme of historic building recording was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology at the ballroom of the Avon Gorge Hotel, Bristol. This was built in 1894 as the Grand Spa Pump Room in conjunction with the Avon Gorge funicular railway. It has had several functions in between, notably as a cinema in the 1920s and then as a dance hall. No major structural changes to the buildings seem to have been made over its lifetime, however. The study was limited to the ceiling and the upper part of the walls above the architrave of the cornice as this was the area of the building at risk. Written, drawn and photographic records of the major ornamental elements of the plasterwork and the extent of their survival were made.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In May 2010 Cotswold Archaeology (CA) carried out a photographic record and building analysis within Level 2 of the English Heritage specification for historic building recording (English Heritage 2006) for Golden Tent Hotels Ltd, at Avon Gorge Hotel, Clifton, Bristol centred on NGR: ST 5670 7290 (Fig. 1). The ballroom of the hotel is listed as The Clifton Spa Pump Room (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 This work was undertaken to satisfy a requirement for a programme of historic building recording made by Guy Bentham-Hill, Conservation Officer, Bristol City Council, in connection with Listed Building Consent 06/00533/LA granted for the restoration of the ballroom, and Planning Consent 06/00529/F granted for the restoration and other works at the hotel. The objective of the work was to clarify the character of the ceiling of the ballroom and the extent of damage it had suffered during repairs carried out under Listed Building Consent.
- 1.3 The work was carried out in accordance with a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (CA 2010), which was submitted to Mr Bentham-Hill and Peter Insole of Bristol City Council Archaeology, and approved in advance of the works by Mr Bentham-Hill. The work followed the *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (IFA 2008), the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991), *Understanding Historic Buildings; A guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage 2006), *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MORPHE): Project Manager's Guide* (EH 2006) and the *Standards for Archaeological Fieldwork in the West of England* (ALGAO).

The site

- 1.4 The site lies on the eastern edge of the Avon Gorge straddling the 62m contour (Fig. 1). The ground slopes to west and south and the building is terraced into the bedrock, here Clifton Down (carboniferous) limestone (BGS 1974)

Background

- 1.5 The site which is the subject of this report is the large, almost detached, ballroom of the Avon Gorge Hotel, Sion Hill, Clifton (Figs 2 and 6).

- 1.6 The building was erected in 1890-4 as the Grand Spa Pump Room to the design of Philip Munro (Foyle 2004, 222), and was supplied with spa water from Hotwells. The building replaced the north end of the terrace of later 18th-century houses along Princes Buildings (Foyle 2004, 222). It was built in a richly decorated Italianate style, with columns inside and out, a central apsed recess on the east and a musicians' gallery in the north end (Figs 3 and 4). It was commissioned by Sir George Newnes (1851-1910), publisher and MP, as part of the development which included the funicular Avon Gorge Railway. The hotel followed four years later, also by Philip Munro (*ibid*). Minor alterations were made then to allow access from the hotel.
- 1.7 The building continued in use until recently but is now empty and in poor condition (Fig. 5). Some of the decorative ceiling features are missing and others damaged. The wooden floor was removed before the re-Listing in 2000

Methodology

- 1.9 The record of the historic buildings was carried out within Level 2, as described in *Understanding Historic Buildings* (English Heritage 2006). The record comprised: general and detailed photographs, annotations and additions to the measured survey of the ballroom prepared by surveyors Walker Ladd, elevations and cross-sections of the main decorative plasterwork on the beams and written notes. Fieldwork was carried out on 20 May 2010.
- 1.10 The buildings were photographed in 35mm black and white and in digital format. These films and copies of the digital images on CD are in the site archive, as are the associated lists and indexes. A site plan was provided by the client and provided the basis of the ceiling plan (Fig. 6). Notes which formed the basis of the written record were completed during the fieldwork. A search through the online catalogues of the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Bristol Record Office revealed no catalogues or lists of later 19th-century ready-made plaster work, or related documents. No further documentary or historical research was carried out as part of the recording exercise. As the building is essentially in its original form (except for minor changes following on from its incorporation into the Hotel in 1898), no phasing or other historical work on the development of the building was appropriate.

- 1.11 The ceiling is divided into 21 compartments by the intersecting beams and these have been labelled for reference on the ceiling plan (Fig 6).
- 1.12 The site archive will be deposited with Bristol's Museums, Galleries and Archives.

2. DESCRIPTION

The Ceiling

- 2.1 The ceiling of the Grand Spa Pump Room is a classical compartmented design, meant to be read as a framework of interconnected beams and joists supporting the enclosed panels (Fig. 4). This results in a ceiling of 21 compartments (Fig. 6). The beams are decorated as extensions of the cornice to the entablature that rings the room (e.g. Fig. 20). This is supported by pilasters, and breaks forward over just-free-standing columns (themselves all made of brick and plaster – Figs 20 and 22). The central compartment (D2) was given a recessed circular panel surrounded by elaborate mouldings, with a central moulded rose (Fig. 4), and the second central compartment from each end (B2 and F2) were given smaller versions of the same motif (Figs 16-18). All the other compartments were given a smaller un-recessed rose of standard design (Fig. 19). The central rose had completely disappeared at the time of the visit and only the southern smaller rose remained.
- 2.2 The order is a rich Corinthian and the decorative plaster details of the entablature are appropriately elaborate, a rich architrave surmounted by a scrolled frieze and an elaborate modillioned cornice with every classical device utilised: dentils, bead and reel, egg and dart, and rich but geometric foliage on the upper and lower cymas (Figs 8, 11 and 21). The elaboration, apart from being to late Victorian taste, was evidently also possible because of the ease of casting and assembling prefabricated elements.
- 2.3 The brackets over the columns to the cornice beams are especially elaborate (Figs 8 and 20), and like the female heads and associated foliage and *rocaillerie* in the spandrels over the windows (Fig. 25) are in typical *Beaux Arts* style.

The structure of the roof

- 2.4 Typically for a late 19th-century design, the structure of the roof bears little relation to the impression given by the finish. It should be noted that the roof structure could only be seen from below in a limited number of areas as the new roof decking had

been completed when the site visit was made and nothing of the structure was visible from above. Nonetheless, it is clear that it is based on six, steel, I-section girders (stiffened with extra riveted plates and flitch plates over joints) spanning east/west across the room. All the timber ceiling and roof joists rest on these girders (and the north and south wall tops), all running north/south and all identical machine sawn 9" x 3" softwood (Fig. 7). The decorated beams that separate the east and west runs of compartments from the central row are completely non-structural, hanging from the cross girders, but not supporting any part of the structure.

- 2.5 Photographs from the 1960s show the central compartment decorated with a large recessed rose. Earlier pictures, seemingly of pre-1922 date, show a large, Liberty's/Arts and Crafts-influenced, light fitting hanging from it, probably from the Edwardian period (Fig. 4). A different light fitting is shown in a photograph dated 1922. The rose was still *in situ* but badly damaged in a photograph taken by the contractors at an early stage in the present project (Fig. 5). None of this was evident when the site was visited but there were the remains of a raised section of timberwork evidently designed to take this large recessed structure and fitting. Two large east/west timbers rested on the girders and two more were set north/south on to these to form a raised square frame into which the rose and light support were presumably set (Figs 9 and 23). This structure was necessary because of the weight of the fittings but perhaps also because of the greater span of this larger central compartment. Something similar may be suspected for the smaller recessed roses in compartments B2 and F2, but these parts of the ceiling structure were not accessible.
- 2.6 The cast plaster work is pre-fabricated in fibrous plaster/plaster of Paris and attached in sections to the girders and beams via a fairly *ad hoc* system of planks, battens and studs (Fig. 9). Internal strengthening webs can be seen every 15 inches (38.1cm) in the cornice sections (Fig. 7), but it appears that the mouldings were made full length for the final position. It seems probable that the pre-fabricated mouldings themselves are made up of standard elements, as for example, the dentils which are clearly set in place separately (and in some instances were separating from their matrix) and the console brackets, whose relationship to the main cornice mouldings is sometimes misaligned; cracks indicate joins. The corner junctions of the section of moulding are also often misaligned. Further evidence of sectional construction comes from the central elements of the ceiling rose in F2, which fell into its constituent parts when it recently fell to the crash decking (Fig.

18). Ceiling plaster was standard lime plaster over laths, and the prefabricated roses attached to it or, in the case of the recessed roses, the beams above.

3. THE CONDITION OF THE PLASTERWORK

- 3.1 Despite the timber floor having been removed, as well as much of the wooden dado panelling (Fig. 5), the decorative detail below the entablature level seemed in good, or at least largely complete, condition, but as agreed in the WSI this part of the building was not further studied. The level of the entablature and above was reached via a scaffolded floor about 1.5m below the soffit of the beams. Access to the ceiling on the north half of the building was impeded by an upper level crash deck, at beam soffit level, which meant the ceiling here could only be seen by peering through gaps in it into an area with almost no lighting. It was impossible to photograph adequately. On the south half the upper deck was missing from rows D, E and F and better observation was possible.
- 3.2 Rain ingress has damaged the plasterwork, causing localised slumping and collapse of the plain ceiling plaster and, it appears, damage to such an extent on some of the frieze and cornice work on the side walls that removal has been necessary (Fig. 24). Significant lengths of decorative corning on the beams have also been removed, but the reason for this is not clear (Fig. 11). However, the replacement of the roof timbers and the installation of the safety crash deck have also caused damage, especially to the consoles over the column capitals (Fig. 22). What still survived in place during the site visit seems (mostly) to be in reasonable condition.
- 3.3 The ceiling of the Pump Room is divided into three north/south rows of seven cells by the plaster-decorated beams. These were numbered east to west one to three, and north to south A to G (Fig. 6). Thus, any cell could be referred to by a co-ordinate such as A1 or G3. This system has been used to organise the following description of the condition of the ceiling, starting in the north-east corner. Unless noted specifically, the plasterwork on the side walls of the cells on the edge of the ceiling, below the cornice (frieze, architrave, columns etc) is in undamaged condition. The decorative soffit of the ceiling beams is missing in all but one case (south beam of F2 (Fig. 20), some fragments survive in D2).

- A1 The corncing on the south of the cell is missing, but elsewhere is intact. The large console brackets over the columns have been broken off to clear the upper level crash decking. Ceiling damaged
- A2 The entablature on the north wall has gone, the central rose is gone and the ceiling damaged. The large console brackets over the columns have been broken off to clear the upper level crash decking.
- A3 The cornice has gone on the south (small amount left), east and north. The rose is intact but the entire ceiling to which it is attached, including laths, is falling away from the joists. The large console brackets over the columns have been broken off to clear the upper level crash decking.
- B1 The rose has gone along with the eastern half of the ceiling and the east cornice has gone.
- B2 The central rose has gone.
- B3 The entablature on wall has been removed to brick and all but the east end of the south cornice has gone. The west cornice is also missing. The rose has gone and the ceiling is falling.
- C1 The west end of the north and south cornices and all the west cornice is missing. The rose and the west side of the ceiling are gone. The large console brackets over the columns have been broken off to clear the upper level crash decking.
- C2 The rose is missing.
- C3 The east cornice is missing, the rose and ceiling are gone and the large console bracket over the column has been broken off to clear the upper level crash decking.

The following three cells form the east/west central row of cells and at each end have a lion head in the swaggery below the architrave (over the entrance and the eastern apse); the central cell was raised 12 inches and housed the large central and recessed rose.

- D1 Lion panel at east end. The west, north and east cornices are all gone and the south cornice is nearly all missing. The ceiling is completely missing, as all the timber joists were replaced..
- D2 The decorative elements of the raised central section are completely gone, the corning to the main beams is largely intact except for the central section of the south cornice and the west end of the south cornice. No ceiling plaster survives. A section of one side of the soffit moulding survives on the east beam.
- D3 This cell is largely intact but there is a hole broken through the corning on the east.
- E1 The moulded head on the keystone of the east wall has been mechanically damaged (the only instance) and the large console bracket over the columns has been broken off to clear the upper level crash decking. The corning has suffered slight damage on south.
- E2 The north cornice and the north end of the east cornice is missing and half the ceiling, but the rose is still there.
- E3 Largely intact, but the architrave over the northern face of the projection of the entablature over the south-west column is missing to brickwork and the large console bracket over the column has been broken off to clear the upper level crash decking.
- F1 Ceiling gone on east, no rose, some damage to cornice at east.
- F2 Largely intact, the central decorative elements of the boss (only ones seen or surviving) were found *ex situ* on the scaffolding decking. Soffit to beam survives on south beam, ceiling damaged/missing in north-east quadrant.
- F3 Largely intact, but architrave and frieze gone over north face of the projection of the entablature over the south-west column, back to brickwork, and the large console bracket over the column has been broken off to clear the upper level crash decking.

- G1 Very badly damaged; cornice and entire entablature on walls gone to brick and woodwork, ceiling collapsing, rose gone. The decorative plasterwork below the entablature is at risk due to poor protection.
- G2 As G1
- G3 As G1 and G2, but column console bracket survives in north-west corner.
- 3.4 The plasterwork was all painted a dark grey blue when visited, with evidence of a blueish-red shadowing in the recesses. The plasterwork in the centre of the recessed roses was painted a similar red and gold. Early photographs show a light, perhaps white, paint finish, with the columns and pilasters in a contrasting painted marble effect. It seems the beams were earlier finished in a darker tone, later painted to match the walls.

4. DISCUSSION

- 4.1 Despite its elaboration and richness, this was a cheap building, built in brick and steel, clad in thin stone veneer externally and off-the-shelf plasterwork internally. It is a classic example of the kind of “false” architectural design: the simple box of brick and steel could have been clad in any of a variety of “styles”. The one chosen is very eclectic indeed. The exterior is a mix of Italian Quattrocento and Neoclassical ideas, the interior a riot of poorly-proportioned and over-blown *Beaux Arts* Baroque. It is nonetheless a grand example of its type and a good representative of an architecture “for the masses”: “Aquam Bibe” above the eastern apse an invitation to leave the richly decorated late Victorian gin-palace and enjoy the equally rich and inviting, but alcohol-free, surroundings of the Pump Room. The listing description (Appendix 1) makes an apt comparison with the designs of Frank Matcham.
- 4.2 The building is in such a poor state now. Structurally it appears sound, or at least not obviously unsound, and the recent work has made it watertight. The stripping of the wooden dado panelling, the removal of the floor and the damage to the ceiling and some of the upper wall plasterwork has affected the character of the building, which is rich and showy or it is nothing. This is also a building which is essentially

interior. As it is set into the slope of the hillside, its exterior consists only of the western façade (ignoring the low panelled blank wall on the east), with views over the Gorge, but not itself easily seen. The value of this building is precisely its rich internal effect. It is a good example of the sort of rich but cheaply-achieved decorative effect which has vanished with the loss of so many of the late 19th and early 20th-century popular interiors, such as music halls and cinemas.

5. CA PROJECT TEAM

5.1 Fieldwork was undertaken by Peter Davenport who also wrote this report. The illustrations were prepared by Jon Bennett. The archive has been compiled by Peter Davenport, and prepared for deposition by Jonathan Hart. The project was managed for CA by Mark Collard.

6. REFERENCES

BGS 1974 *British Geological Survey Sheet 264*

CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2010 *Avon Gorge Hotel (Ballroom) Clifton Bristol: Written Scheme of Investigation for Historic Building Recording*

English Heritage 2006 *Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (English Heritage, Swindon)

Foyle, A. 2004 *Bristol* (Pevsner Architectural Guides) (Yale University Press, London)

APPENDIX A: DCMS LISTING DESCRIPTION

Building Name: THE CLIFTON SPA PUMP ROOM

Parish: BRISTOL
District: BRISTOL
County: BRISTOL
Postcode: BS8LBS Number: 479414
Grade: II
Date Listed: 07/01/2000
Date Delisted:
NGR: ST5664172942

Details:

ST5672NE PRINCES LANE

901-1/13/10078 The Clifton Spa Pump Room

GV

II

Spa/Pump room. Built 1894, designed by Philip Monro for Sir George Newnes, the promoter of the scheme. Bath stone ashlar with a flat bitumen roof. Classical style. Single storey with a three bay Doric pilastrade on either side of the entrance bay, the original entrance portico having been removed. The entrance has caryatids supporting large scroll brackets which carry a broken pediment; this is attached to a rusticated frame with arched keyed head, the key carries up into a scroll in the pediment with the initials GN (Sir George Newnes). Each bay has a 2-light Italianate arched window with a roundel in the arch over arched lights, decorated spandrels and scrolled keystones. All the windows and the door were boarded up at the time of inspection (September 1999). Doric entablature and projecting cornice with acroteria. Roof not visible from this level. The rear elevation at higher level shows only a panelled wall and a flat roof. The interior is richly decorated in the late Victorian theatrical manner of such as Frank Matcham. Single large room approached by a marble staircase from the hotel. Grey marble Corinthian columns (now mostly painted) on panelled wooden plinths, some damaged, stand forward from the walls forming 7 x 3 bays with the centre bay wider on both short and long walls. The south wall has three tall windows on either side of the entrance door. The east wall has two panels flanked by two pedimented doorcases. The north wall has three arched niches with female head keystones on either side of an apsed centrepiece for the spa, this has a semi-circular arch. The west wall has the old entrance to the Clifton Rocks Railway in the corner. Elaborate plaster cornices and decorations to the ceiling beams. Plaster ceiling roses and three vents for gasoliers. All the flooring had been removed at the time of inspection. Cinema projection room at north west end as well as the entrance to the Clifton Rocks Railway, and stair at south east end. History: The Spa, which was fed by a deep bore hole to the Hotwells 70m below, functioned until 1922, the room was then used as a cinema until 1928 and as a ballroom until the 1960's.


References: Historical material supplied by the Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society.

Listing NGR: ST5664372934

APPENDIX B: OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project Name	The Grand Spa Pump Room, Avon Gorge Hotel	
Short description (250 words maximum)	A programme of historic building recording was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology at the ballroom of the Avon Gorge Hotel, Bristol. This was built in 1894 as the Grand Spa Pump Room in conjunction with the Avon Gorge funicular railway. It has had several functions in between, notably as a cinema in the 1920s and then as a dance hall. No major structural changes to the buildings seem to have been made over its lifetime, however. The study was limited to the ceiling and the upper part of the walls above the architrave of the cornice as this was the area of the building at risk. Written, drawn and photographic records of the major ornamental elements of the plasterwork and the extent of their survival were made.	
Project dates	20 May 2010	
Project type	Historic Building Recording	
Previous work (reference to organisation or SMR numbers etc)	Unknown	
Future work	Unknown	
PROJECT LOCATION		
Site Location	Princes Lane, Clifton, Bristol	
Study area (M ² /ha)	450 sq m	
Site co-ordinates (8 Fig Grid Reference)	ST 5670 7290	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Name of organisation	Cotswold Archaeology	
Project Brief originator	Bristol City Council	
Project Design (WSI) originator	Cotswold Archaeology	
Project Manager	Mark Collard	
Project Supervisor	Peter Davenport	
PROJECT ARCHIVES		
	Intended final location of archive (museum/Accession no.)	Content (e.g. pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		n/a
Paper	Bristol City Museum BRSMG 2009/86	Written and drawn records, monochrome photos.
Digital	Bristol City Museum BRSMG 2009/86	Digital photographs
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
CA (Cotswold Archaeology) 2009 <i>The Grand Spa Pump Room, Avon Gorge Hotel, Clifton, Bristol: Historic Building Recording</i> , CA report 09099		



 COTSWOLD ARCHAEOLOGY			
PROJECT TITLE Avon Gorge Hotel, Sion Hill Clifton, Bristol			
FIGURE TITLE Site location plan			
DRAWN BY	SCALE	PROJECT NO.	FIGURE NO.
JB	1:25,000@A4	3123	1

5665

5660



7295

Railway station
(disused)

SION HILL

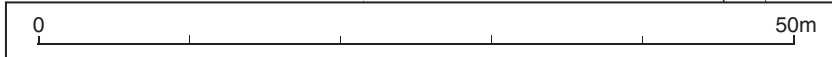
Clifton Rocks Railway
(disused)



PRINCES' LANE

Avon Gorge
Hotel

7290

ST



-  Site
-  Clifton Rocks vernacular railway



COTSWOLD ARCHAEOLOGY

PROJECT TITLE

Avon Gorge Hotel, Sion Hill
Clifton, Bristol

FIGURE TITLE

**The site, showing location of
buildings**

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JB

SCALE

1:500@A4

PROJECT NO.

3123

FIGURE NO.

2



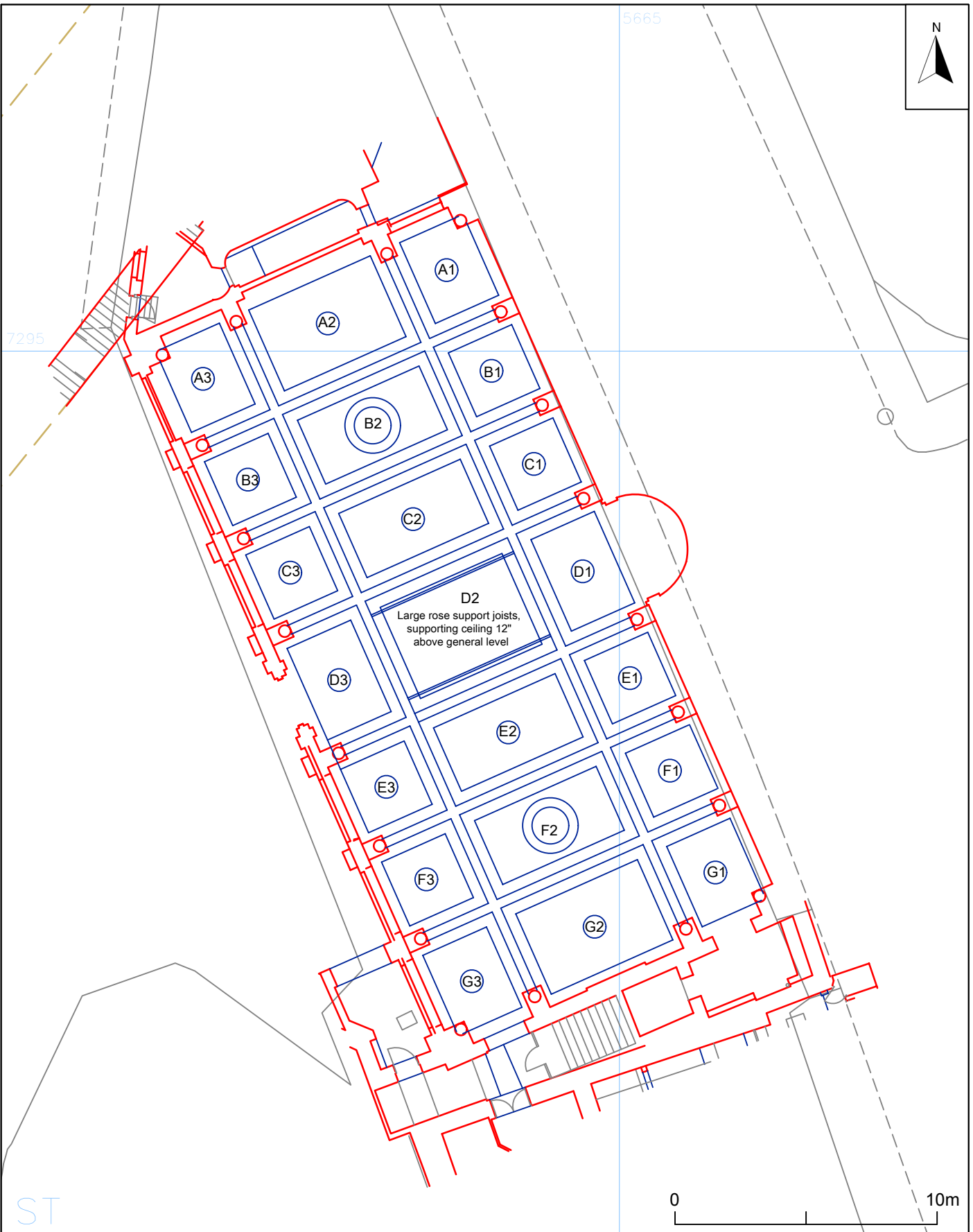
3 The western exterior of the building from a postcard of 1922



4 The interior of the Pump Room before 1922 and conversion to a cinema, looking south



5 The interior just before the erection of the internal scaffolding in early 2010, looking south



ST



- The Former Pump/Ball Rooms
- Ball Room ceiling
- Clifton Rocks vernacular railway

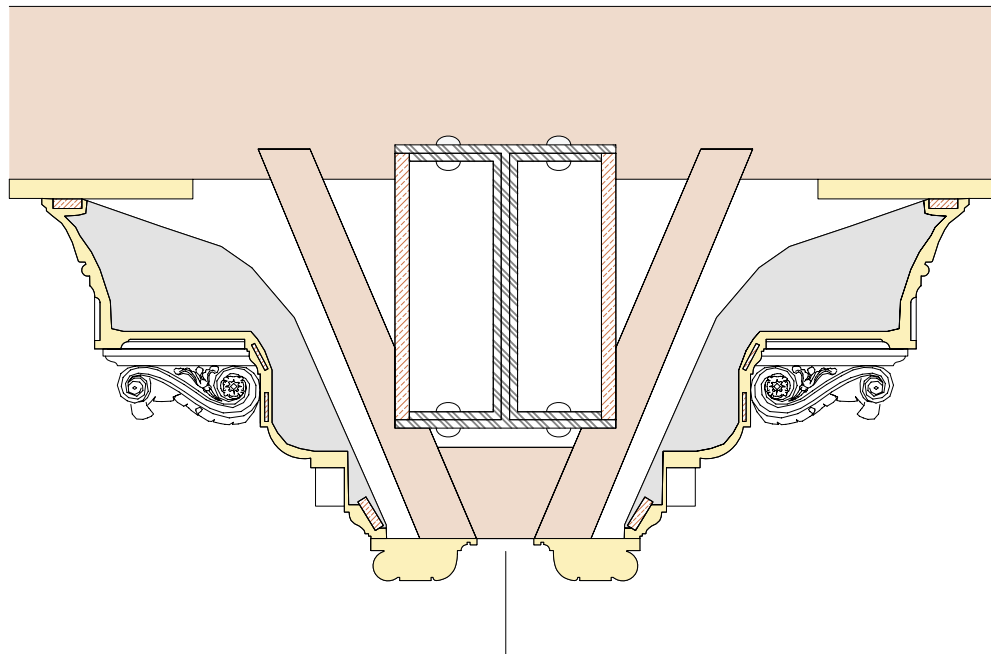


PROJECT TITLE
**Avon Gorge Hotel, Sion Hill
 Clifton, Bristol**

FIGURE TITLE
Ceiling plan with cell numbering






DRAWN BY	SCALE	PROJECT NO.	FIGURE NO.
JB	1:200@A4	3123	6

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detailed profile
not drawn



-  timber (not in section)
-  timber (in section)
-  iron girder
-  plaster (in section)
-  plaster strengthening web



COTSWOLD ARCHAEOLOGY

PROJECT TITLE

Avon Gorge Hotel, Sion Hill
Clifton, Bristol

FIGURE TITLE

**Section of the main ceiling beams
with decorative cladding**

DRAWN BY

JB

SCALE

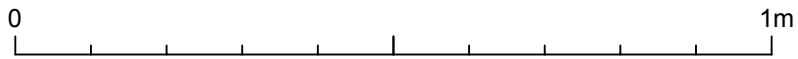
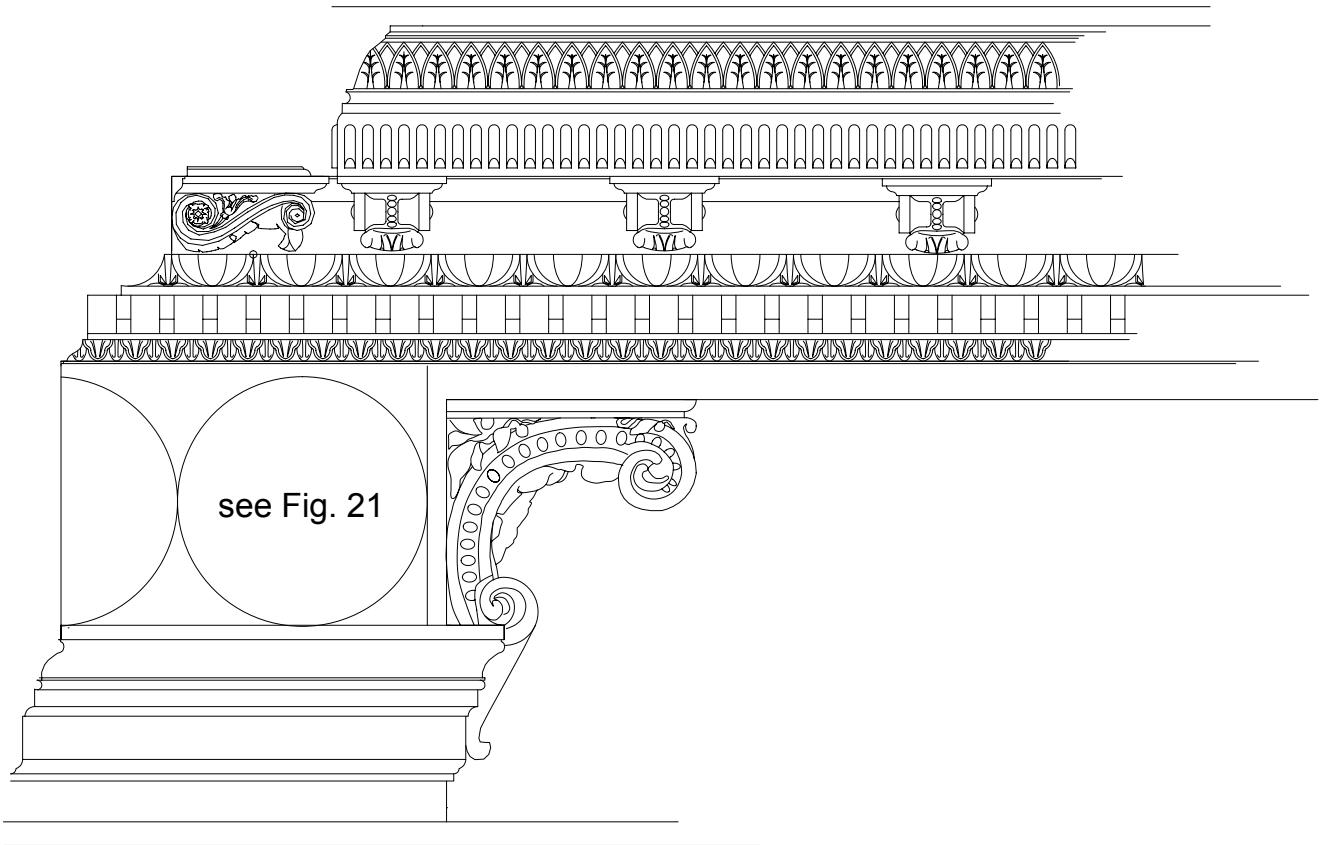
1:10@A4

PROJECT NO.

3123

FIGURE NO.

7



COTSWOLD ARCHAEOLOGY

PROJECT TITLE

Avon Gorge Hotel, Sion Hill
Clifton, Bristol

FIGURE TITLE

**Elevation and profile of main
ceiling beam/wall top**

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JB

SCALE

1:10@A4

PROJECT NO.

3123

FIGURE NO.

8



9 Main roof beam on south side of Cell D2 showing timbers of raised central section on left and attachment of plasterwork, looking east



10 Detail of typical plasterwork attachments



11 Typical length of plasterwork on ceiling beams. Note red paint shadowing. Cell D2, looking south-west



12 Detail of side of console bracket on ceiling beam



13 Detail of end of console bracket on ceiling beam (note prefabricated elements parting at joints)

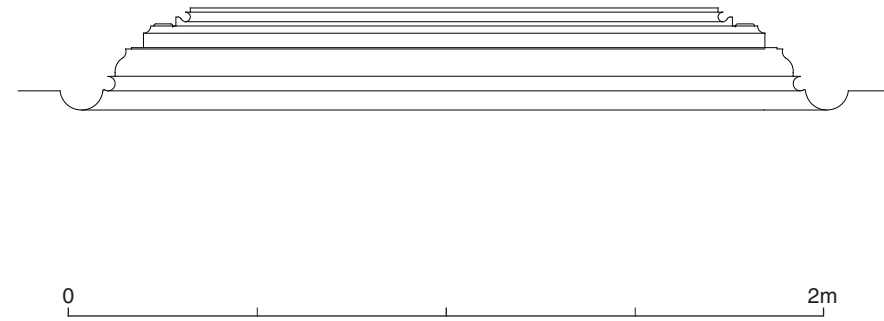


14 Detail of underside of console bracket on ceiling beam



15 Detail of rose between console brackets on ceiling beam

16



17 The mouldings of the rose in ceiling cell F2

16 Profile of surviving rose in ceiling cell F2



18 The centre of the section of the rose in cell F2 reassembled from falled fragments. The total diameter is c.0.76m



19 One of the smaller roses, 0.97m diameter. The boss is covered by a modern light fitting



20 A preserved column-top console and its surviving beam soffit moulding in cell F2/G2. Contrast plasterwork on left and right



21a First of two elements of the running scroll on the frieze (indicated by plain circles on Fig. 8)



21b Second element of the running scroll on the frieze (See 21a)



22 Typical damage to column-top consoles caused by insertion of crash decking



23 The raised ceiling section were the rose was. New joists to left, frame to raised section, rear and right



24 The southern end of the building where the plasterwork is most damaged or, indeed, missing. Cell G1, looking south-east



25 Typical example of the hollow plaster keystone heads and foliage over the windows and matching niches in the east and west sides of the building



COTSWOLD ARCHAEOLOGY

PROJECT TITLE

Avon Gorge Hotel, Sion Hill
Clifton, Bristol

FIGURE TITLE

Photographs

DRAWN BY

JB

SCALE

n/a

PROJECT NO.

3123

FIGURE NO.

25