

The structural history
of
SARAGOSSA HOUSE
13 NEW STREET
HENLEY-ON-THAMES
OXFORDSHIRE



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THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF SARAGOSSA HOUSE, 13 NEW STREET, HENLEY-ON-THAMES

Introduction

Saragossa House is a grade II listed building on the north side of New Street, Henley-on-Thames which has been used for a number of years as offices. Planning consent has recently been granted for its conversion back to domestic occupation. This report was commissioned to fulfil a condition of the Listed Building Consent granted by South Oxfordshire District Council that a detailed historic building record be carried out before works commence. The drawings used as a basis for the survey (Figs 6-7) are those supplied by the architects, Spratley & Woodfield.

Henley is a planned medieval new town which was probably laid out in the 12th century (VCH draft) and New Street is the most northerly of three parallel streets running east towards the river. The town developed in the medieval period as a major shipping point for goods to and from London and in the 18th century it became a centre for malting and coaching. The prosperity this brought is reflected in the numerous Georgian buildings in the town and much of New Street was rebuilt during this period (Sherwood & Pevsner 1974, 644). Saragossa House, dating to the beginning of the century, belongs to the earliest phase of this reconstruction. The first large scale map of the town, the Ordnance Survey 1:500 survey of 1879 (Fig 1), shows the house in its present form with an offset rear wing and a conservatory on the back of the main range; it was then known as Sargasso House. A photograph of New Street c.1900 also shows the building much as it is today (Fig 1).

Description

Exterior (Figs 2, 7)

The house has an imposing street elevation of three tall storeys, defined by a moulded plinth and raised bands at storey height; it is six bays wide with four evenly-spaced sash windows on the upper floors flanked by narrower blind panels at either end. The ground floor has three windows and a door at the north end. The windows have moulded architraves and six-pane sash-lights with narrow glazing bars; the top floor windows have two lights per sash. The door has six fielded panels, a plain rectangular fanlight and an architrave with heavy console brackets supporting a flat canopy. The

façade is stuccoed and lined-out to simulate ashlar; the roof is hipped and slated with deep overhanging bracketed eaves.

The rear (north) elevation of this range is two bays wide with unevenly spaced windows of the same type but with plain architraves on the upper floors. On the ground floor French windows of 19th century type have replaced the original pair; the jamb of the west window is visible as a straight joint. This elevation has exposed brickwork in Flemish bond on the upper floors with the same raised strings between storeys. The ground floor doors formerly led into a conservatory and the extent of the interior is indicated by painted brickwork. Infilling the gap between this range and the older rear wing is a wall in two stages. The ground floor is built of older bricks with modern openings and the first floor is a late 19th or early 20th century bathroom extension with a flat roof.

Running down the western side of the plot at right angles to the frontage there is an older rear wing. It has a lower roofline and is built in two stages; the southern section is two-storeyed and the east elevation is faced in brick which ends in a free-standing stub wall. The gabled return is set back and rendered over a timber frame. On the ground floor there is a 19th century window replacing a door and on the upper floor there is a horizontal sliding sash partly covered by the bathroom extension. The northern part of the range has a lower roof line and a brick east wall with a number of straight joints representing infilled openings and progressive replacement of the timber frame. Both roofs are tiled. At the north end there is a weatherboarded lean-to shed in derelict condition.

Interior

Front wing (Figs 3, 4)

The internal plan is L-shaped and the principal rooms lie to the east of a central hall; to the west, behind the street frontage which is part of a different property, is the staircase and to the rear an older lower wing which extends down the garden. The wide hallway has a boarded dado with a moulded top rail and skirting and a ceiling cornice carried on miniature console brackets. The architraves to the principal rooms are quadrant-moulded and the doors six-panelled with reeded edge-mouldings. A door on the west side of the passage is blocked; it now leads to a separate property. At the

north end of the hall and integrated into the dado panelling scheme is a part-glazed door with a semi-circular fanlight and six-pane sidelights which now leads into a rear lobby. These lights have wide ovolo-moulded glazing bars of early 18th century type.

The two principal reception rooms have been knocked together to form offices and the historic fireplaces have been removed. Both rooms have simple cornice mouldings, the three front windows have shutters and window seats; the rear room has French doors to the garden. The rear hall lobby has a reeded dado moulding, a door to the garden, which replaces a window and a modern door to the kitchen.

The stair hall is at right angles to the entrance hall and the opening is framed by moulded pilasters supporting a cased beam. In the north wall is a door to the kitchen which has a modern surround copying the arched fanlight detail, and under the stairs a door to a cellar. This runs under the eastern part of the house; it has brick and flint walls, a front room with a low joisted ceiling and pavement lights, and a passage with wine bins to the rear. The staircase is of dog-leg type with a half landing and is shallow-pitched with a closed string. It has turned vase-shaped balusters and columnar newels with heavy squared heads, double-width on the half landing. The pine handrail is ramped, matching the dado moulding on the outer wall. There is a dentilled cornice at first floor level and an off-centre top light in the ceiling; this does not look to be original.

On the first floor the front room was originally a single large space which was later subdivided to form a small unheated room at the west end, lit by a single window. This appears to have taken place in the early 19th century; the doors are of simple four-panelled type and the fireplace to the main room has a reeded surround with bull's-eye corner panels. Surviving details from the earlier house include a reset door of three fielded panels and a section of fielded panelling which survives in one of the cupboards flanking the fireplace. This was full-height with low basal and tall upper panels divided by a missing dado moulding.

The smaller room to the rear retains its original three-panelled door and architrave; it has a plain 19th century fireplace and a closet behind the upper stairs lit by one of the rear sash windows. The stairs to the top floor rise off the adjoining inner landing and

resemble the lower staircase, with a closed string, turned vase-shaped balusters and a ramped handrail but no matching dado. The newel posts have square caps and bases linked by four clustered balusters.

On the top floor the original front room has been equally subdivided and the back room is the mirror of the floor below with a second closet. There are some 18th century panelled doors but fireplaces and other finishes are 19th century. The roof has been altered and repaired but predates the 19th century and includes heavy hand-sawn timbers; a large beam, probably the base of an internal valley is partially exposed in the back bedroom. An attic has been created in the separate roof space over the lower stair. This has a raised roofline forming part of the main rear slope and there is the outline of a previous roof on the flanking wall.

Rear wing (Fig 5)

The kitchen has a large blocked fireplace in the north wall and has been extended westwards by c.1.5m in the 19th century; the original transverse ceiling beam stops short of the wall and the end is supported on a post. The window in the extension is of eight-light sash type with shutters on the face of the wall. To either side are full height fitted cupboards and on the south wall an open-fronted dresser board with cabriole legs of 18th century type infilled with later cupboards and shelves.

To the rear is a two bay, originally timber-framed room open to the roof. The south (rear of stack) and west walls are largely flint with brick dressings; there is an added brick flue in the corner and there are limited areas of studwork. The east wall is largely rebuilt in brick of various periods but three principal posts remain from the frame together with a rail and the wall plate. The roof truss is rebuilt; it has a tie beam and collar linked by queen posts. The north wall is studwork flanking a plain brick fireplace with doors leading to a small end room with uneven walls and some remnant framing. A modern stair leads to a self-contained attic with reused purlins and modern windows in the gable wall.

Access to the room over the kitchen is from the first floor landing via an 18th century panelled door. The ceiling joists and central transverse beam are exposed and the latter has stud mortices for a former partition with a door at the west end. There is a

plain 19th century fireplace in the north wall and winder stairs alongside leading to the attic. This is divided into two; a bedroom and an attic space with a raised floor level. The roof timbers are exposed but heavily repaired; a truss has had the collar and a clasped purlin removed and there is a closed frame at the north end.

Structural development (Figs 6, 7)

1 The oldest part of the house is the wing at the rear which now backs onto a separate property. This divides into two units, both originally timber framed; the kitchen which was constructed with two full storeys and the single storey service wing to the rear. Neither has any closely dateable features; the kitchen may be 16th century and the lower range 17th century. Both have undergone piecemeal later alteration and rebuilding, including the creation of a habitable attic over the kitchen where it was necessary to remove the collar from the roof truss. These rooms provided the service accommodation for the rebuilt house to the east.

2 The main part of the house dates to the early 18th century; a date of c.1700 is given by Sherwood and Pevsner and the principal surviving features, such as the staircases are characteristic of the period. This was a high quality new build with a symmetrical brick façade of three tall storeys and a hipped roof. There were two principal rooms on each floor linked by imposing staircases; the lower stair was inserted across the older range to the west and at this time the front room also formed part of the property. Later modernisation has removed most of the interior finishes of this period. The principal survivals are the two staircases, the panelled dado, glazed rear door and ceiling cornice in the entrance hall, and some doors, including the front door. There are also the remains of a kitchen dresser and a section of the panelling to the first floor front room, probably then the drawing room. The street elevation was remodelled in the early 19th century but the basic components, including the steep overhanging roof and the blind end recesses date to this time and can be paralleled elsewhere in the town.

3 The house was modernised in the early 19th century with new sash windows and architraves, doorcase, eaves detail and probably stucco finish. The principal rooms were given new doors and fireplaces and most of the panelling removed. By this time a single-storeyed lobby had infilled the space outside the rear hall door and

the adjoining room was given French doors, replacing the original windows. By the 1880s a conservatory had been built and the front room west of the hall had become part of the adjoining property. In the 20th century assorted modernisation and repair has taken place during the most recent use of the building as office accommodation.

References

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Sherwood, J and Pevsner, N, 1974 *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire*,
Harmondsworth

VCH draft, www.oxfordshirepast.net draft texts of Victoria County History for
Henley, **16**, forthcoming

Appendix – statutory list

NEW STREET 5355 (North Side) No 13 (Saragossa House) SU 7582 1/70 25.1.51. II
GV 2. C19 facade to an earlier house. Stuccoed, with hipped slate roof and bracketed
eaves. 3 storeys, 4 windows and 2 narrow panels on 1st and 2nd floors, all with
moulded architraves. Sashes, all except those of 2nd floor have glazing bars. Doorway
has 6 panelled door and fanlight. Interior has good staircase (N.M.R.) Nos 1 to 33
(odd) form a group with Nos 2 to 76 (even) opposite including the walls associated
with Nos 32 to 38 (even) and No 40

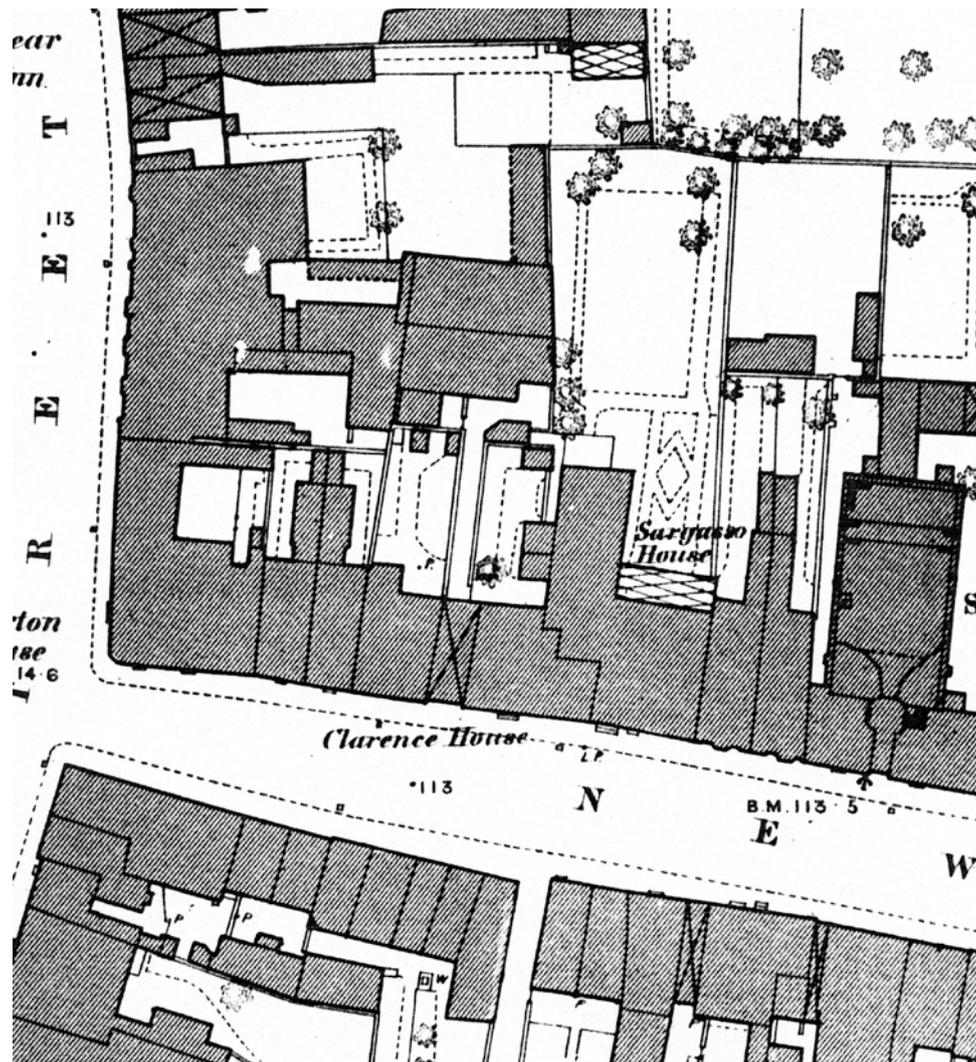


Fig 1

Ordnance Survey map 1879, 1:500: Saragossa House shown with conservatory and formal garden

Photograph of New Street in early 1900s; Saragossa House on left; there has been no significant change since this date



114. New Street before the First World War. On the left, just beyond the white gabled house, is the brick façade of the Henley theatre, now called the Kenton. Built as a theatre in 1805, it was used as a church hall and a school until the 1920s. It is now once more a theatre.



Fig 2 Exteriors

Front elevation (south)

Rear elevation (north) with later infill to right

North elevation of rear wing

Rear wing, east elevation to garden



Saragossa House, 13 New Street, Henley-on-Thames



Fig 3 Interiors – front wing
(clockwise)

Hall looking south; inset blocked door

Hall looking north, with opening to stairs

Principal rooms looking north

Staircase



Saragossa House, 13 New Street, Henley-on-Thames

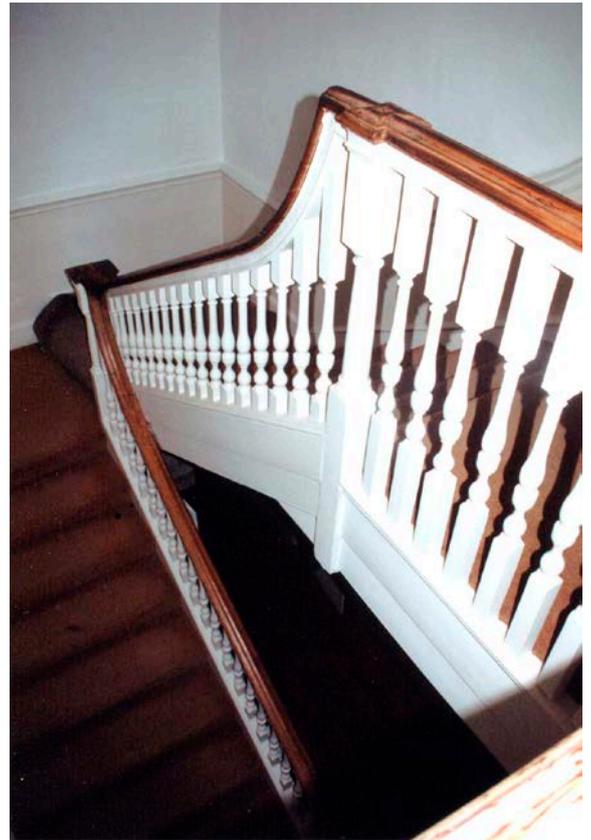


Fig 4 Interiors – front wing
(clockwise)

Staircase landing looking east

Lower stair from landing

First floor front room looking east

Panelling in cupboard by fireplace

Newel post to upper stair



Saragossa House, 13 New Street, Henley-on-Thames



Fig 5 Interiors – rear wing

(clockwise from above)

Kitchen looking west; detail of dresser to left

Attic over kitchen looking north

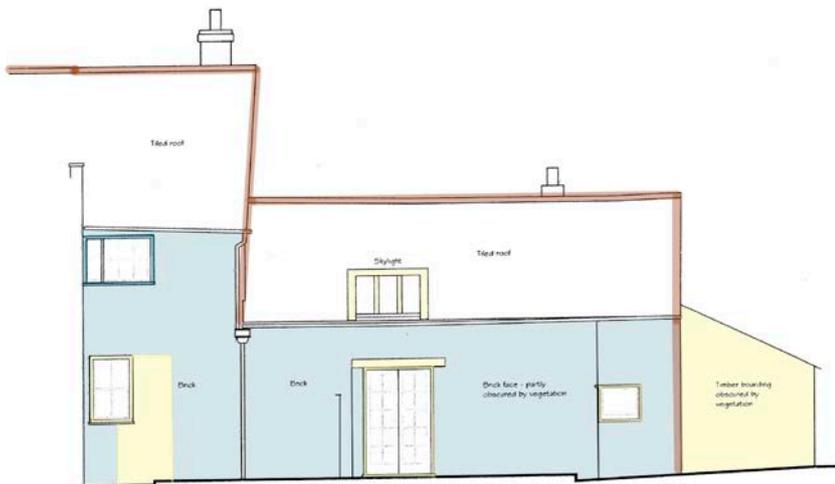
Room over kitchen looking north

Room north of kitchen looking north

Room north of kitchen looking south



Saragossa House, 13 New Street, Henley-on-Thames



- pre 18th century
- 18th century
- 18th or 19th century
- early 19th century
- late 19th/20th century

**Fig 7
Plan & elevations**

(clockwise from above)

South elevation

North elevation

First floor plan

East elevation (rear wing)

