

**JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES**

**ROMEYNS COURT,**

**GREAT MILTON,**

**OXFORDSHIRE:**

**LISTED BUILDING ASSESSMENT**

**MARCH 2004**

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Planning Background**

Permission has been sought from South Oxfordshire District Council for internal and external alterations at Romeyns Court, Great Milton, Oxfordshire.

The Government, through the Department of Culture Media and Sport is responsible for protecting the historic environment. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides specific protection for buildings and areas of special architectural or historic interest. The Department monitors the effectiveness of the controls.

The Secretary of State has a duty under the Act to compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. There are three grades of listing:

- Grade II are of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them
- Grade II\* are particularly important buildings of more than special interest
- Grade I buildings are those of exceptional interest

Romeyns Court has been listed as Grade II.

## **2 Aims of the Investigation**

A number of key areas of concern have been identified for the proposed alterations to the listed building (Hardt, J. 2004). An analysis of the building has been requested to assess the significance of the fabric to be altered in order to provide sufficient information to allow Planning Services at South Oxfordshire District Council to assess the likely impact of the proposals on the special character of the building.

## **3 Strategy**

- 3.1 A study of all available historic maps and plans, together with a documentary search was undertaken at the Public Records Office in Oxford, supplemented by documentary evidence obtained at the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies.
- 3.2 An on-site investigation was carried out to examine the standing building fabric in order to assess the development of the building over time.

## 4 Discussion

It should be noted that the quality of the finish and fittings within the building create problems in the assessment of the survival of original features and fabric. It is only with the stripping out of the finish that a true inspection of the construction and character of the building could be made. The results of this analysis must be considered in the light of these limitations.

### 4.1 The Exterior

The property is one of two prebendal manor houses located in the village of Great Milton, Oxfordshire. The house is situated on Church Road and is set back from the road in its own grounds. The property was originally H-plan with three structural bays: centre and a cross wing at each end, but there is later infilling between the wings. The construction is local limestone rubble with ashlar dressing and there are variations between the construction details on all three structural bays. The house comprises two storeys with attics and there is a cellar below the eastern cross wing. The windows are 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century hung sashes. The roof is hipped and of plain tiles, although the roof over the later infill is of slate.

The first impressions of the building are that of a 17<sup>th</sup> century house with modifications and additions occurring in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the Victoria County History puts the origin of the house in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, citing the occupant as one Robert Edgerley (d. 1551), followed by his widow Agnes and her second husband Sir Thomas Benger who leased the property in 1552. There is no surviving fabric readily attributable to 16<sup>th</sup> century origin, and the above named occupants presumably occupied an earlier building on the same site, superseded by the current H-plan Great House.

The present interior of the building bears little evidence relating to the original form and function of the house, although the location of high status and low status rooms broadly conform to that of a typical H-plan Great House. The attics, particularly that at the 'low end' over the western cross wing, have primarily original roof timbers intact. The roof trusses in the western wing include cambered collars, and there is evidence of re-used timbers in the form of butt purlins: these timbers have carved nail-head decoration and appear at random intervals throughout the roof structure. The eastern wing has a more recent roof structure, the timbers are sawn rather than hewn (the timbers in the central structural bay and the western wing are predominantly hewn), and there is a single butt purlin bearing the carved nail-head décor. This carved member is certainly re-used in that the decoration is on the upper edge of the purlin, rather than the usual visible lower edge, it is also smoke blackened and of a completely different nature to the rest of the members in the eastern cross-wing roof.

### 4.2 The Ground Floor Interior

The sitting room is situated in the western cross wing adjacent to the staircase and the cellar access. The staircase to the upper floors is late 17<sup>th</sup>/early 18<sup>th</sup>

century and is double the width of its equivalent at the lower end of the building.

The study, situated opposite the sitting room, has an inserted bay window that was *in situ* by 1925 (sales catalogue for the property), and is no earlier than 19<sup>th</sup> century in origin.

The central structural bay has been infilled in the 19<sup>th</sup> century causing an extension to the middle portion of the house and a more uniform, rectangular plan. The additional rooms to the ground floor comprise cloakroom and pantry. Access is through a four-centred arch doorway.

The drawing room occupies the space between the wings at the south side of the house. The windows and door into the garden are all contained within a later inserted stone wall that forms the southern wall of the property. Internal arrangements within this room have been altered over time, in that the original southern wall of the H-plan house has been removed.

At the lower end of the house there is the kitchen and dining room. The dining room has three 19<sup>th</sup> century sash windows in the northern wall, in the location of the proposed additional bay window. The proposed alterations in this area would impact upon the original fabric of the building.

Access to the upper floors is to be gained by a narrow 19<sup>th</sup> century inserted staircase. Access to the property from the garden is through a late entrance porch and a doorway located in the centre of the northeastern wall of the cross-wing. The position of the doorway in the cross wing wall is in the original location.

On the left, just inside the doorway a cupboard is located. As part of the proposed alterations, the cupboard is to be removed. The north and western walls are later inserted partitions; the wall to the south appears to be a more substantial stone build; the eastern wall is part of the original H-plan fabric of the house. A substantial part of the eastern wall of the kitchen (and therefore, the original building fabric) has already been knocked out to provide an open plan room arrangement between the kitchen and the breakfast room (housed in the stables). The southern substantial wall of the cupboard appears to be part of the fireplace that would have served the kitchen. This fireplace is further indicated by the location of a substantial chimney stack on the roof in this area. The remnant of the chimney at the back of the cupboard has become redundant due to the extensive alterations that have already taken place in the kitchen.

To the right of the doorway the inserted staircase impedes the flow from the front door to the higher status compartments at the western end of the building.

### 4.3 The First Floor Interior

The dressing room and bathroom adjacent to the master bedroom are subject to proposals for alterations. The master bedroom is situated directly above the sitting room in the cross wing. The adjacent dressing room and bathroom are in the central structural bay and the southern wall is part of the original H-plan. Access between the bedroom and dressing room appears to be within an inserted partition wall, of thinner, less substantial nature than the external walls. It is apparent that much of the fabric in the central structural bay, and the western wing of the house have been altered. The variations in the wall thickness reflect the degree of modification that has already taken place in this area on the ground and first floors.

The cupboards earmarked for removal within the dressing room are modern fittings and it is a late partition wall that separates the dressing room from the bathroom. The fireplace within the bathroom is an example of an early register grate, common from c. 1850, and therefore, not an original feature contemporary with the construction of the building.

On the northern side of the first floor, in the upper level of the crenellated, infilled central structural bay, alterations to the layout and arrangement of the rooms are proposed. At the western end, new access is proposed between bedroom 5 and a proposed inserted bathroom in part of bedroom 4. This new access appears to be within the original wall of the cross wing, and while it comprises part of the original structure, a single doorway only will have a small impact.

The proposed internal arrangements for bedroom 4 comprises the insertion of partition walls that would have little if any, impact on the original building fabric. Where the walls separating the original bedroom 4 and the bathroom are to be removed, again no threat is made to the original build. The proposals for bedroom 3, also only impact upon later inserted partition walls. It is worth bearing in mind that bedroom 4 and the integral bathroom are all housed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century infilled section of the house, and are not part of the original H-plan construction.

### 4.4 The Second Floor Interior

The proposal for the second floor, or attics, is for the removal of the partitions that form the front of a cupboard space adjacent to the stairwell at the northeastern end of the house. The cupboard front is a late contrivance and as such, the removal will not compromise the original fabric of the building. The insertion of partitions in a new location to create a larger space for a bathroom would cause little, if any, impact to the original structure.

The proposal for the raising of the purlin, will involve an alteration to the original roof structure in this section of the house.

#### 4.5 The Utility rooms and Garage

Part of this extension to the original H-plan building was in place by the time of the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1881. The 1849 inclosure map shows this extension as a small addition, perhaps covering the extent of the current breakfast room. Therefore, the majority of the construction of this outbuilding took place between 1849 and 1881, with the garages tacked on at a later date.

The proposals for this building involve the removal of a partition wall in the current boiler room, the creation of access through to the current utility and between the boiler room and current garage. The majority of these alterations have little impact on the original fabric of this part of the property. The proposals to the fenestration of the ancillary building involve blocking two current doorways to create windows in their place. This will obviously impact upon the fabric of the building, but it should be noted that the current doorways are inserted and re-finished with brick where the stonework had been knocked through. The current window is of 20<sup>th</sup> century origin.

### 5 Summary

The alterations proposed for Romeyns Court have minimal effect on the internal arrangements of the property and as a result, the original building fabric. On the ground floor, the removal of the cupboard will impact upon the remaining part of the base of the chimney; the west side is a late inserted partition.

The creation of a bay window in the Dining Room would impact upon the original fabric of the building, although the current windows are of 19<sup>th</sup> century date and therefore not contemporary with the original build. The insertion of a new bay window in this location will provide a symmetrical fenestration to the building.

On the first floor, the majority of the modifications again relate to inserted partition walls where the impact upon the original building would be negligible. The fireplace in the bathroom is 19<sup>th</sup> century in date and therefore is a later modification to the building in itself.

The modifications proposed for the infilled section between the wings on the first floor will alter the 19<sup>th</sup> century modifications to the property, but are limited to inserted walls and partitions of late origin. It is only the creation of the access between bedrooms 4 and 5 that will impact upon the original fabric of the H-plan building but this would be of a minor nature.

The second floor alterations are minimal in that only late panels will be removed and a new partition created in the current cupboard area. Here of course, the creation of roof lights will affect the roof covering but not the original roof structure.

The changes to the stable block will alter the fenestration: it should be noted however, that this part of the property was predominantly late 19<sup>th</sup> century in origin, and the current windows and doors are already a late modification to the original fabric.

## **6 Conclusions**

It is the opinion of John Moore Heritage Services that the majority of the internal alterations pose little threat to the surviving original building fabric of Romeyns Court. The areas where the integrity of the historic building fabric may be impacted upon are the proposed access between bedrooms 4 and 5 on the first floor, the removal of the cupboard on the ground floor and the opening of the wall in the dining room for the insertion of a bay window.

The building has undergone modification over time and the latest proposals can be considered to be part of the alteration of spatial arrangements necessitated by the change lifestyle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century from the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the building was first designed.

## **7 Bibliography**

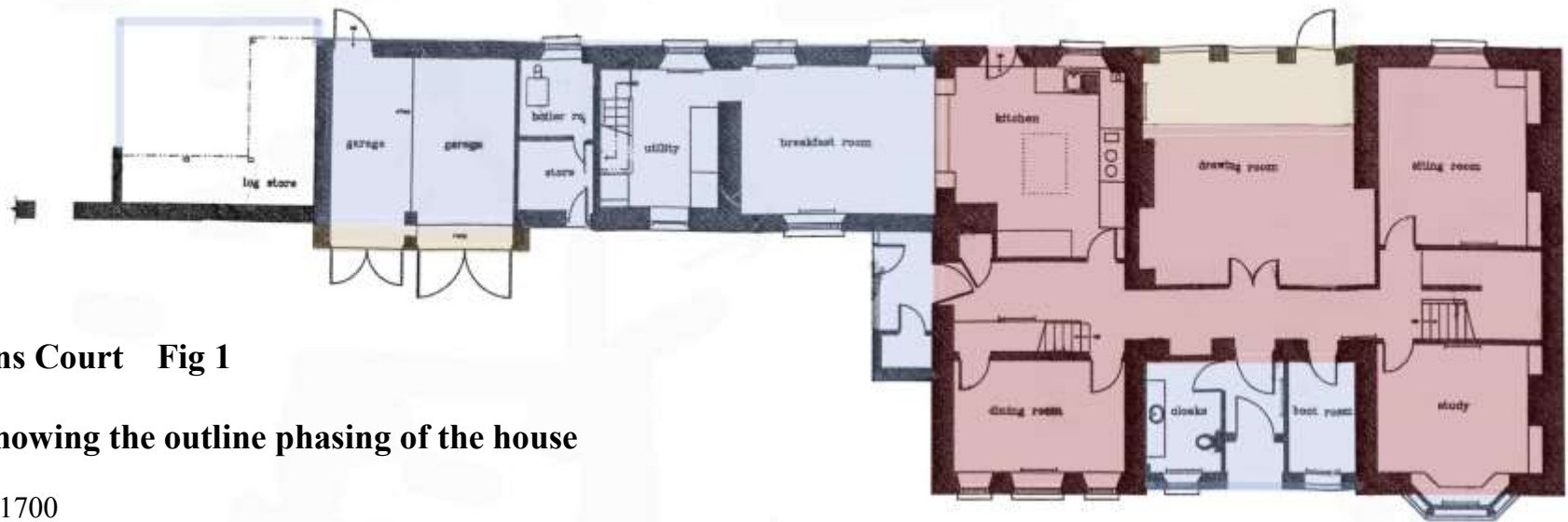
Hardt, J. Letter dated 16<sup>th</sup> February 2004

Jones, M. 1962 *Victoria County History* Vol VII Dorchester and Thame Hundred

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Adkin, Belcher and Bowen 1926 *Romeyns Court Catalogue of Sale*

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**Romeyns Court Fig 1**

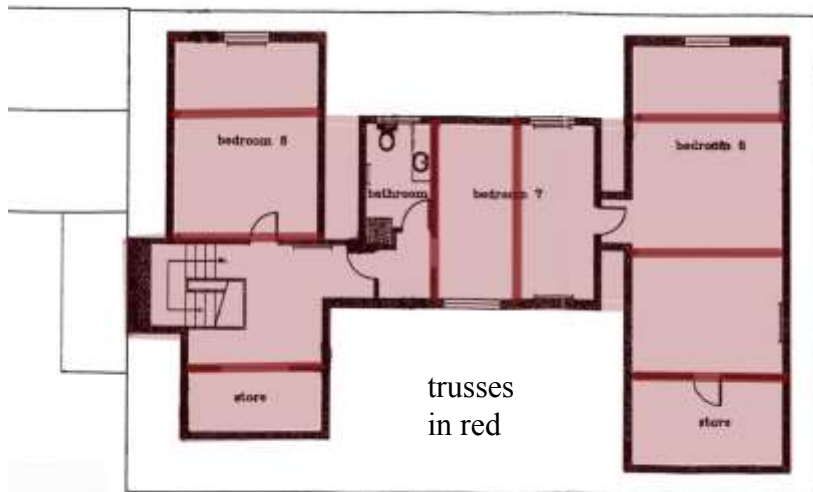
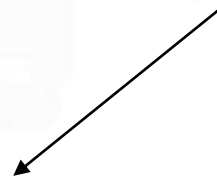
**Plans showing the outline phasing of the house**

- Pink c.1700
- Blue 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Buff late 20<sup>th</sup> century

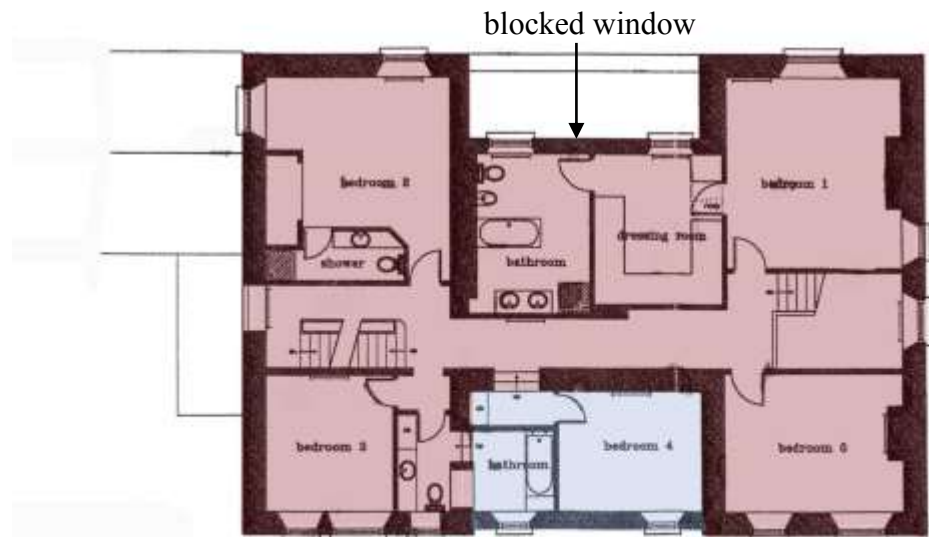
**Ground floor**

**First floor**

**Attic**



trusses  
in red







**Romeyns Court Fig 2**

**Exteriors**

South east elevation showing alterations to windows (blue)

South east elevation

Detail of blocked window

View from the north



- Pink c.1700
- Blue 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Buff late 20<sup>th</sup> century



blocked window



## Romeyns Court Fig 3

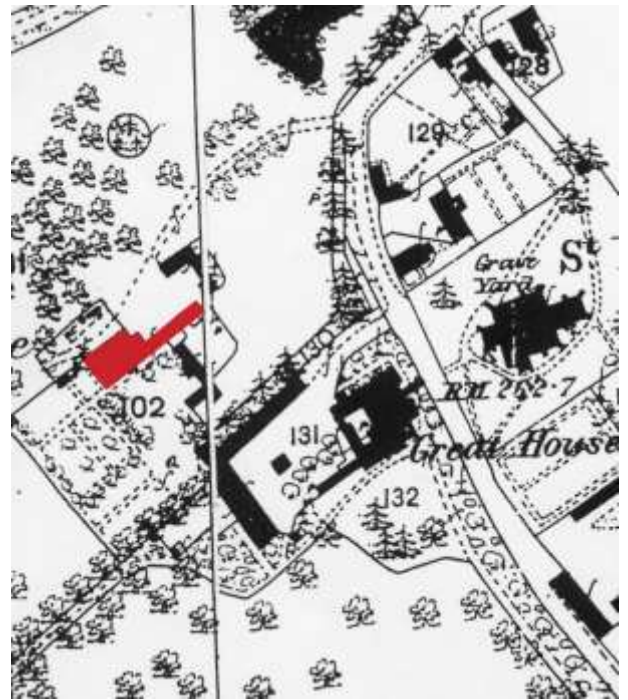
### Outbuildings

First edition Ordnance Survey map 1884. House shown in red with longer range of outbuildings

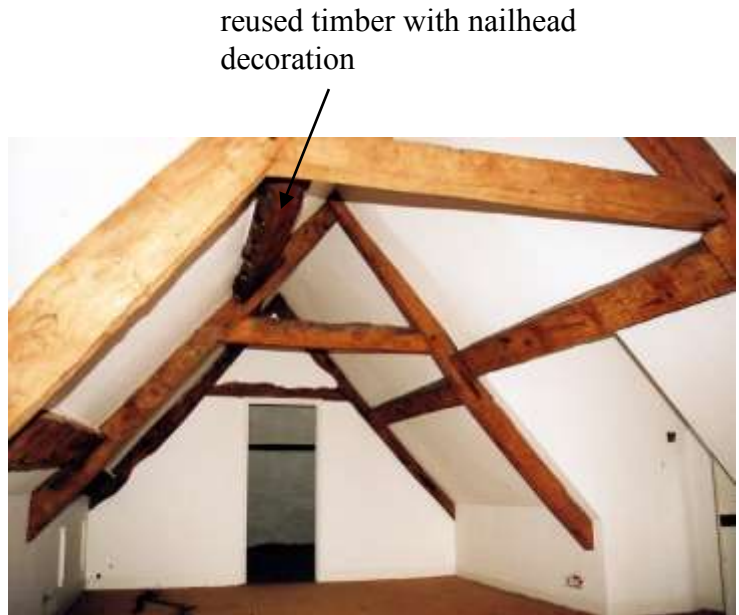
Outbuildings from the north east

Pentice on site of demolished building; foundations in foreground

Kitchen looking into breakfast room through modern opening and demolished chimney breast







**Romeyns Court Fig 4 Interiors**  
(clockwise)

Main stair c.1700

Attic roof, south-west wing

Cornice in study; missing section with modern ceiling plaster

Dressing room to bedroom 1 showing blocked doors and position of previous partition

Cupboard in bedroom 2 replacing chimney breast; original ceiling beams exposed

