

**Radbourne Hall
Radbourne
Derbyshire
SK 28664 35654**

**Recording and Monitoring
of
Alterations to the North Front**

prepared by

*Richard K Morriss & Associates
Bromlow House
Bromlow
Shropshire
SY5 0EA*

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1. Introduction

Radbourne Hall is a Grade I listed building a few miles to the west of Derby. It was built in 1739 for the Pole family, possibly by William Smith the Younger of Warwick, and lies within its own extensive parkland.¹ It has remained a family home and was restored in the mid-20th century when much of the interior was redecorated by John Fowler. Little has changed since and proposals are being made to refurbish it and to upgrade the facilities.

A key element of the proposed changes is the creation of external stairs on the north side of the house to lead up to a central doorway into the saloon on the *piano nobile*. The works retain the existing sashes and remove the brickwork and masonry beneath the sills where a pair of low doors can be inserted and, together with the raising of the lower sash, create the necessary access through the opening.

One of the oddities of the house is the absence of any such steps or doorway on the garden front opposite the main entrance front – which were both typical features of this Palladian style of house by Smith and other contemporary architects.

An analysis of the house and its history accompanied the application, written by the historian Maxwell Craven, who is also an expert on Derbyshire country houses. Citing the evidence of contemporary houses of the same status and style, including those by the Smith family, and the very limited documentary evidence – a plan of 1771 but probably based on an earlier one; a small detail on William Emes plans for the grounds produced in 1790; and an 18th century but undated watercolour of the house – a convincing argument for the steps and doorway was put forward. It was clear that such elements would have been intended, even if they were not built.

In order to further investigate the potential evidence, an archaeological investigation was undertaken in the area where the external steps should have been. This did not encounter any obvious traces of a former external stair below the present ground surface, though the lack of evidence was not conclusive.

As a condition of the planning consent to create a new doorway and external stair in the Palladian manner to match the existing style of the property, this Consultancy undertook a watching brief and photographic record of the opening up of the central window to the saloon.

This was to both provide a degree of ‘preservation by record’ of the existing situation and to further investigate the issue about the assumed intended doorway and the external steps. The work was undertaken in 2019.

¹ A comprehensive history of the house and its development is outlined in Maxwell Craven’s *RADBURNE HALL Derbyshire Statement of Significance*.

2. The House

A detailed analysis of the house, its history and significance is published in the aforementioned *Statement of Significance*. The official listing details for the Grade I property are fairly comprehensive:

Country house. 1739 with c.1865 addition, restored and reduced c.1960. Built for German Pole, probably by William Smith the Younger. Rusticated stone basement, red brick with stone dressings elsewhere. Hipped slate roof with brick ridge stacks hidden by stone coped brick parapets. Plain stone plinth, plain sill band. to top of basement and moulded stone cornice. Two storey plus basement, and seven bays with three central bays advanced. Entrance front has broad flight of stone steps with shaped balusters, across central three bays. To either side the basement has two glazing bar sashes with rusticated voussoirs. Above are six full height glazing bar sashes with alternating segmental and triangular pediments, moulded shouldered surrounds and pulvinated friezes. To centre, double glazed doors in Corinthian doorcase with dentilled segmental pediment and pulvinated frieze. Above again, seven glazing bar sashes in moulded shouldered surrounds. Central bays have triangular pediment over with central achievement of Pole family amidst abundant flower and foliage carving. Park elevation in similar style with advanced central three bays, seven glazing bar sashes on each level, those to ground floor with moulded cornice rather than pediments, and bull's eye window to central pediment. East and west elevations are of three bays with central bays advanced. West elevation has similar disposition and style of windows as main elevation, except for central bay which has a glazed door below rusticated voussoirs to basement, above which is a round window in moulded surround and a large Venetian staircase window. East elevation is plainer without rustication to the basement and with Venetian window to ground floor of central bay. Attached to north corner the remains of a large c1865 addition, now mostly demolished.

The writer Arthur Young described the house in a footnote in his *Farmer's Tour Through the East of England*, published in 1771 as being:

'very beautifully situated on one of the highest grounds in the south parts of Derbyshire; commanding very extensive views.....The house is an excellent living one; remarkably well contrived...'.²

² Young, A, 1771, *Farmer's Tour Through the East of England* Vol.I, 170



Pl.1: Radbourne Hall from the south-west.



Pl.2: The north front of Radbourne House.

3. The Saloon and North Front

The Saloon occupies the middle of the north or rear front of the house, typically behind the entrance Hall – and both rooms being on the main floor, or *piano nobile*, of the house. The north front is a simpler astylar version of the entrance front, with a stone-faced rustic beneath two storeys of fine quality brickwork.

It is of seven bays and the middle three break forward slightly beneath a triangular pediment; these are the three bays occupied by the Saloon. The sills of the windows are formed by the simply moulded top course of the rustic and they have eared moulded surrounds with flat cornices.

Each window opening has recessed sashes – 3x2 panes in the top section and 3x3 below. Internally there are straight-sided full-height recesses with eared timber architraves, dado panels, and panelled shutters.

In his 1771 account of the Hall, Young mentions that the ‘*hall in front opens into saloon or dining room, 35 by 23*’ but does not mention a doorway into that room from the north, or any external steps.

However, a doorway is shown on the plan produced in the book, though its provenance is unknown. It seems likely that the plan would have been copied from the architect’s original ‘platt’, either directly or from a copy, and unlikely to have been the result of a new survey undertaken just for Young’s book.

William Emes’ 1790 plan of the estate and his proposals for the grounds shows the outline plan of the house and on the north side there is a significant central projection far too pronounced to be the present very shallow break-front.

One interpretation of this feature has been taken to be a set of external steps with a landing area. An undated 18th century watercolour of the grounds also seems to show – though in no great detail – external steps on this front but the size of the illustration of the house is very small.

Unfortunately the house is not shown on the tithe map of 1846 and the next detailed plan showing the property is the 1st edition of the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1880; this shows no sign of any steps on the north side of the house.

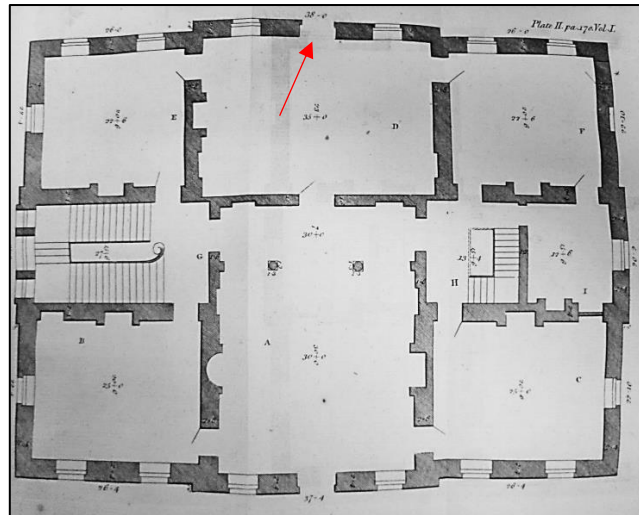


Fig.1: Plan of the *piano nobile* of Radbourne Hall in Young's 1771 *Farmer's Tour Through the East of England*. Note doorway in north front (arrowed).



Fig.2: Extract from William Emes plans for the grounds, of 1790, showing a projection on the north side of the main house.

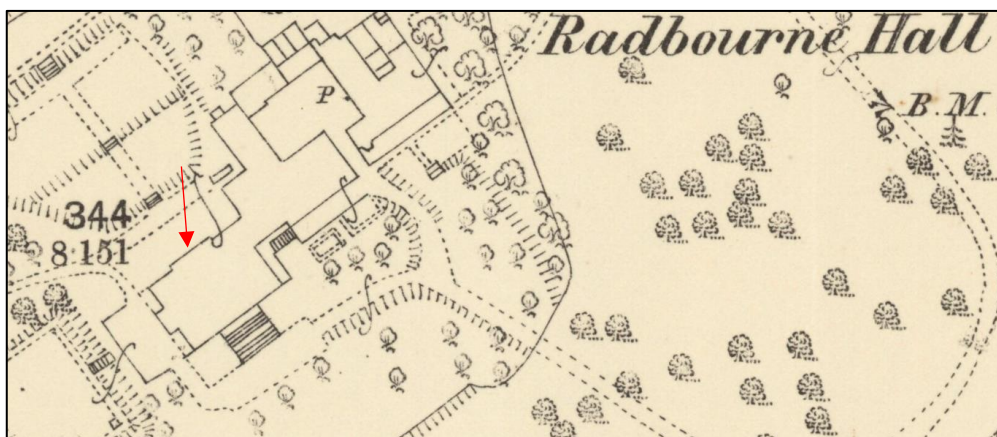


Fig.3: Extract from the 1st edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1880.

4. Recording & Investigation

A detailed record of the central window of the Saloon outside and in was undertaken prior to any works commencing, as was a photographic record – especially of the reveal. Part of the project involved the careful removal of the dado panelling of the window recess within the Saloon, allowing the brickwork to be exposed and then recorded again. The panelling and shutters above dado level were left untouched.

The external brickwork and masonry yielded no clues in regard to phasing. The internal evidence was more interesting. Once the dado panelling was removed it was clear that the flanks of the reveal were of hand-made bricks laid regularly in lime-rich mortar, returning on the inner faces of the adjacent piers.

The section below the window sill was of composite construction – consisting of both masonry and brick. Low down two worked but roughly edged sections of masonry flanked a central section of brick laid on edge. The masonry seems to be the back of the flanking sections of the keystone over the window in the rustic; the keystone itself was evidently thinner, hence the brick backing.

There was a band of roughly worked stone immediately below the windowsill, corresponding to the back of the moulded top course of the *rustic*. In between the two layers with stonework there were four courses of hand-made brick and some minor make up between them and the irregular soffits of the upper stone blocks. This brickwork was the backing to the external ashlar stone course between the top of the keystone in the rustic and its moulded top course forming the windowsill.

Neither the stone blocks nor these courses of brick bonded into the brickwork of the flanks of the reveals, but it was impossible to assess if this was due to the blocking of an original doorway opening or to the practicalities of construction. What is clear is that the reveal has always been panelled; there were no indications of plaster or paint on the exposed brickwork at dado level. Only through investigating one or more of the other window openings on this level would it be possible to ascertain if the details in this opening are different.

5. Discussion

The various investigations – documentary, archaeological and structural – regarding the central opening in the Saloon at Radbourne remain inconclusive. The fact that a doorway was intended in this position – and presumably the necessary steps up to it from ground level – seems to be clear. It would be the usual feature to have in a relatively standard type of Palladian house of this date and status, and the plan produced in Young's 1771 book – and assumed to be based on the original design – is quite clear there was such a doorway. As outlined above, this seems to be supported by the evidence of Emes' 1790 plan and the undated watercolour.

However, there is no suggestion in the exterior of the building to suggest that an external stair has been removed or that the central window to the *piano nobile* is different to the others on either side, or has been converted from a doorway. If a set of external stairs had been completed, there would have been no need for the entire face of the rustic at this point to be neatly ashlar as it is.

Even if the design of such a stair was such that most of the rustic would have been exposed, there would still have been some connection between the stairs and this elevation and, once the stairs had been removed, it would be expected that some evidence of that connection would remain – unless the subsequent ‘making good’ was carried out in a very careful and extensive manner.

One subtle detail is the setting out and cutting of the ashlar course immediately below the top course of the rustic. Beneath each window there is a pair of slightly shorter ashlar blocks, placed immediately above the tripartite key-stones of the rustic windows. In between these pairs the blocks in the course are longer and the paired blocks were a deliberate element of the original design. A pair existed beneath the central window, backed by the brickwork exposed in the dado of the reveal.

The lack of surviving evidence on the external masonry that could have been associated with an external stair was reinforced by the absence of any evidence for such a structure below ground level identified in the trial excavations undertaken by the University of Leicester Archaeology Services in 2017.³

³ Patrick J, 2017, *An Archaeological Field Evaluation on gardens adjacent to the North-west elevation of Radbourne Hall, Radbourne Lane, Radbourne, Derbyshire* (ULAS)

5. Survey Drawings

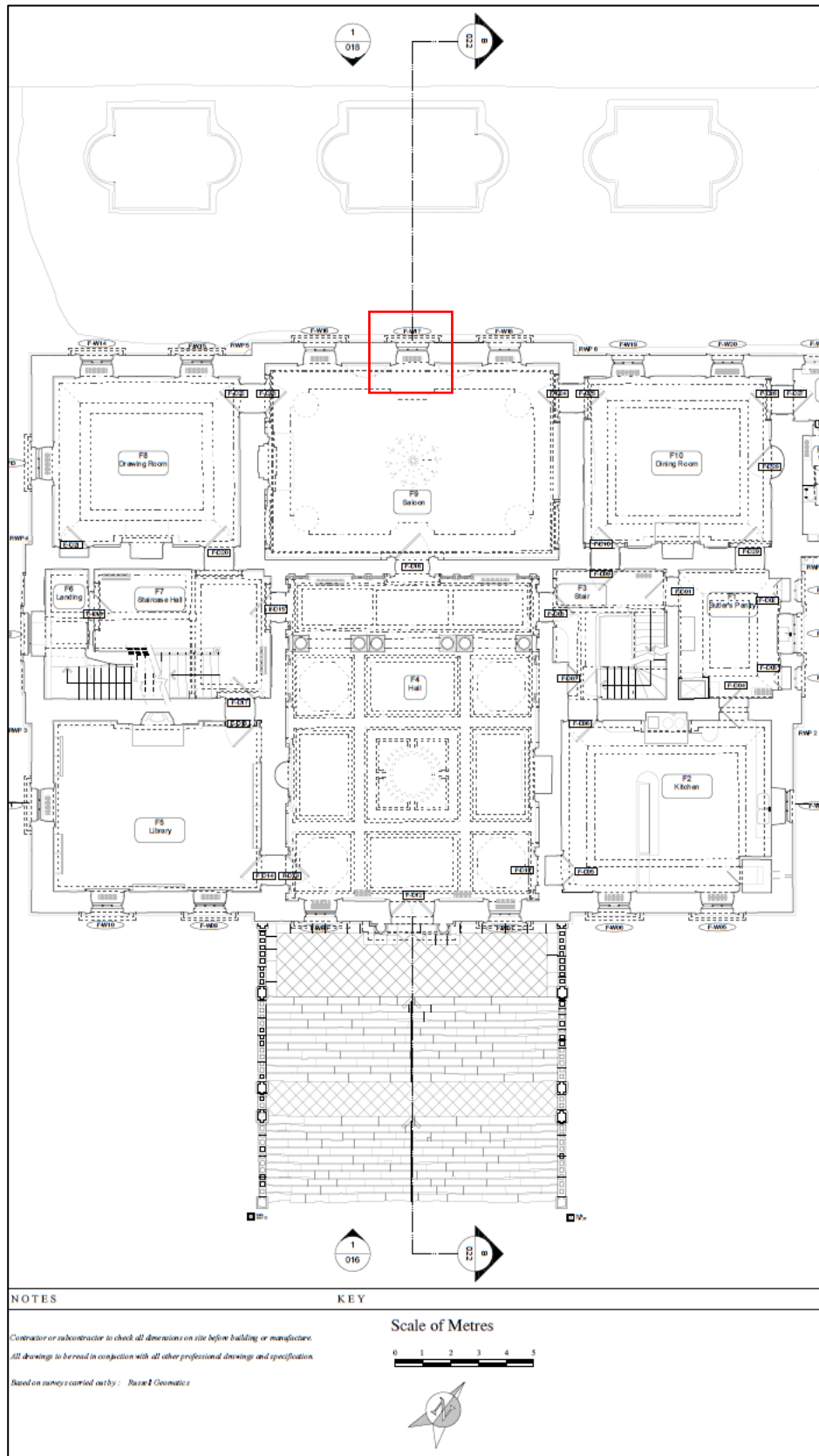


Fig.4: Central section of the *piano nobile* prior to the changes, window outlined.

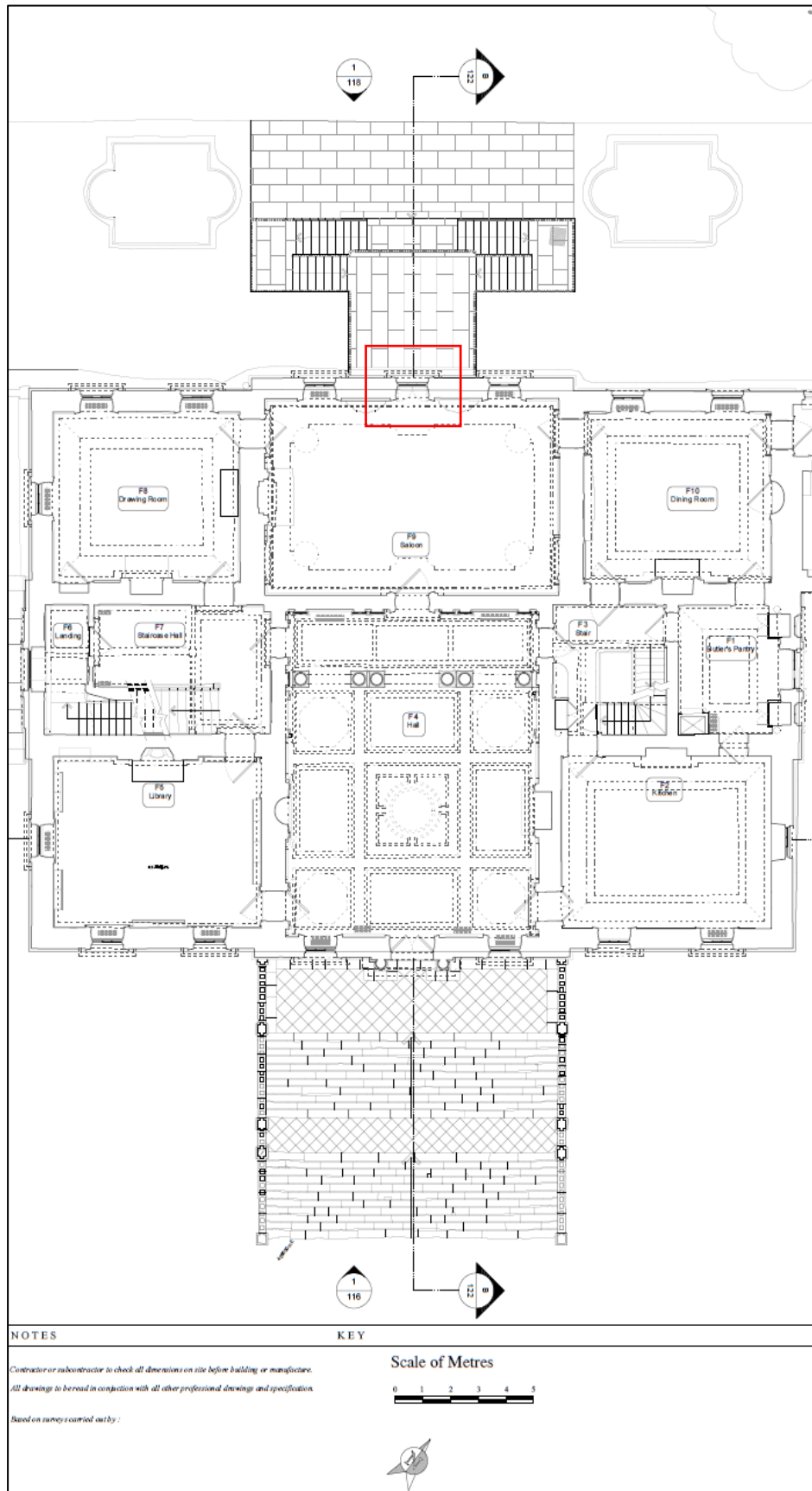


Fig.5: Plan of *piano nobile* as proposed.

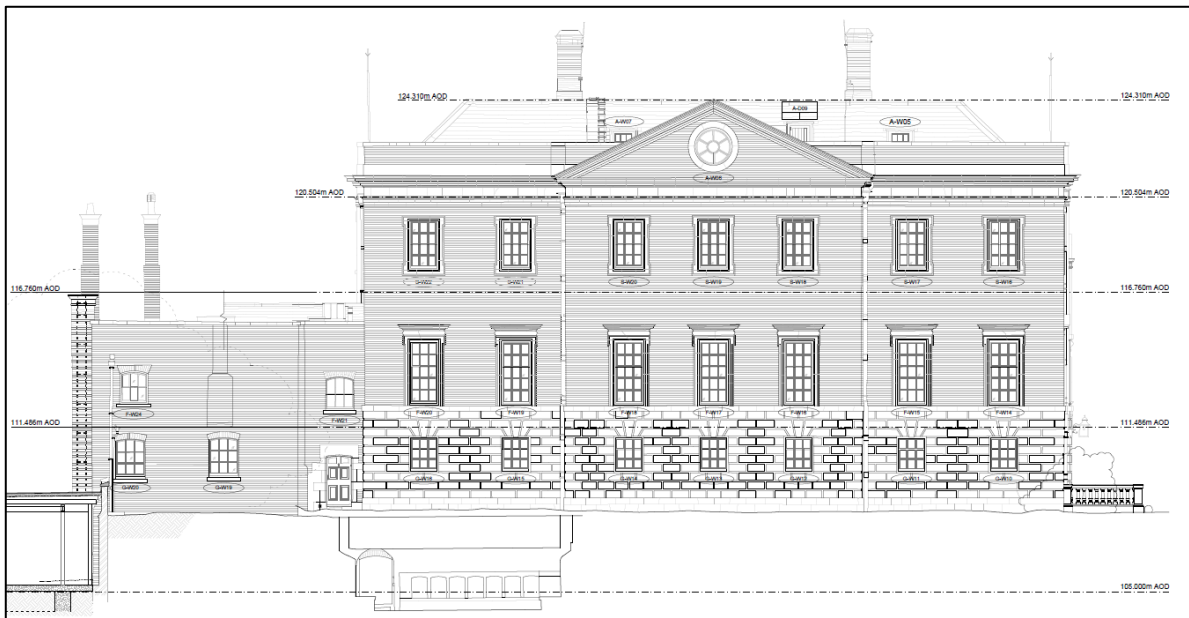


Fig.6: The north front prior to the works.

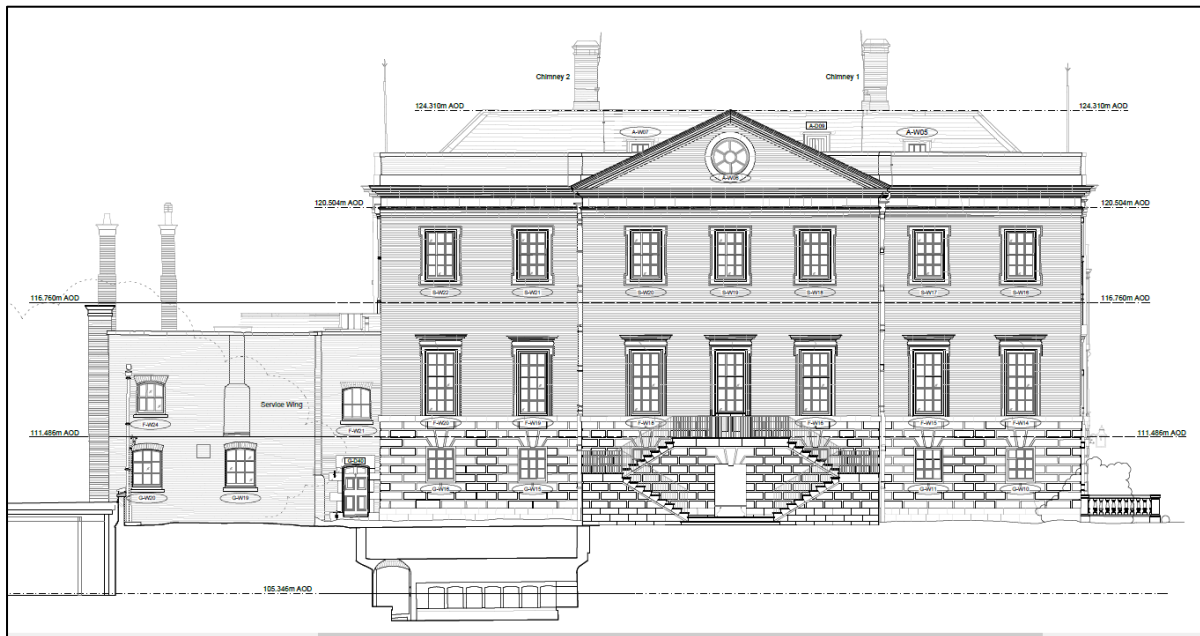


Fig.7: The north front as proposed.

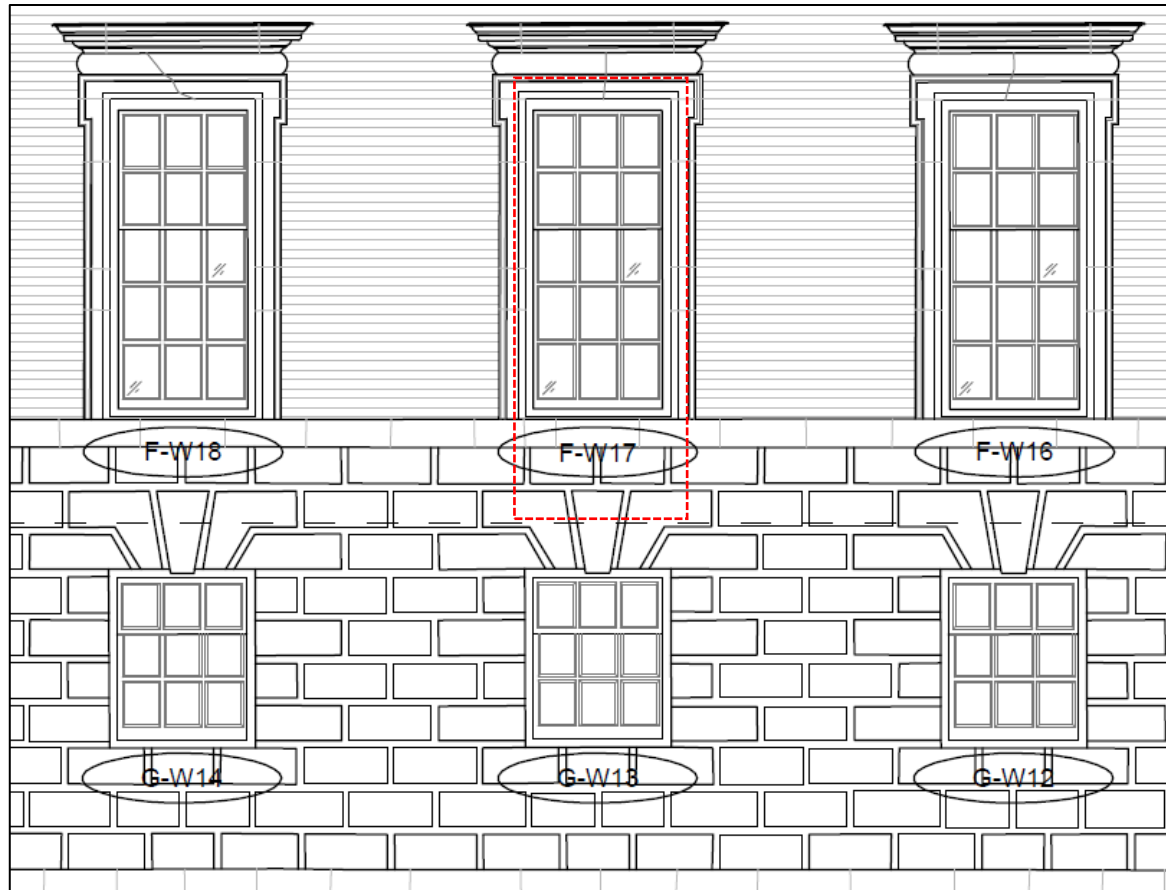


Fig.8: Detail of the exterior, showing outline of internal reveal.

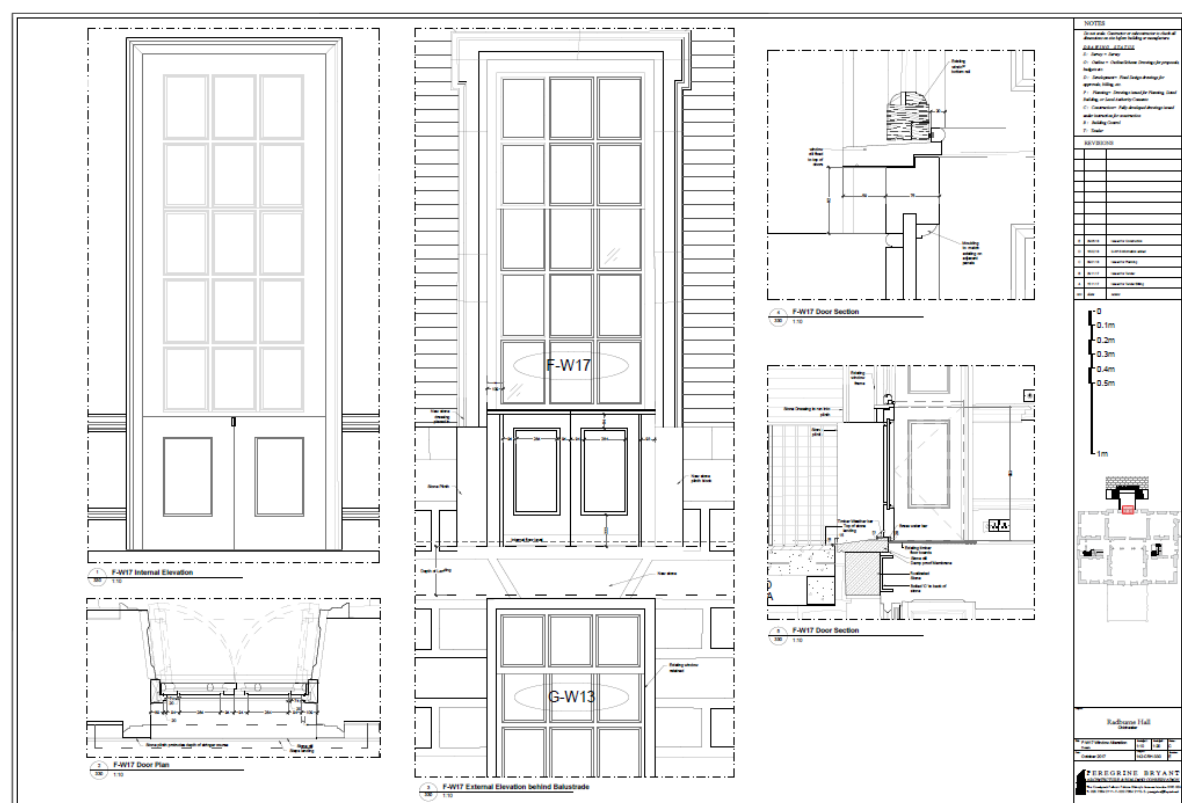


Fig.9: The proposals for the window opening.

6. The Photographs



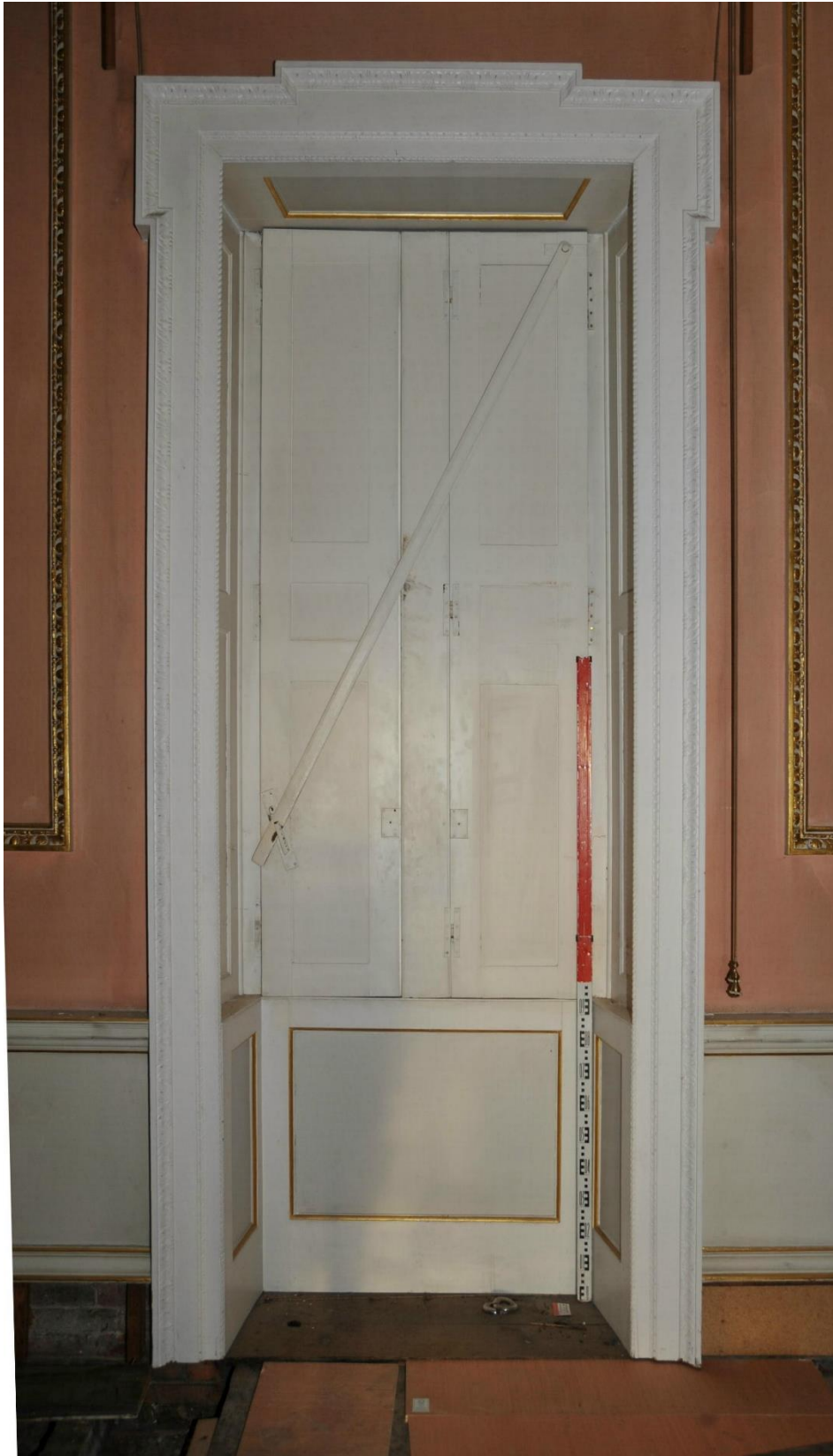
Pl.3: The central window of the Saloon, 2018.



Pl.4: The Saloon looking west, with the central window to the right foreground.



Pl.5: The reveal of the central window prior to works starting.



Pl.6: Inside of window reveal prior to work beginning, shutters closed.



Pl.7: Inside of window reveal prior to work beginning, shutters open.



Pl.8: Inside of window reveal prior to work beginning, shutters open.



Pl.9: Inside of window reveal prior to work beginning, shutters open.



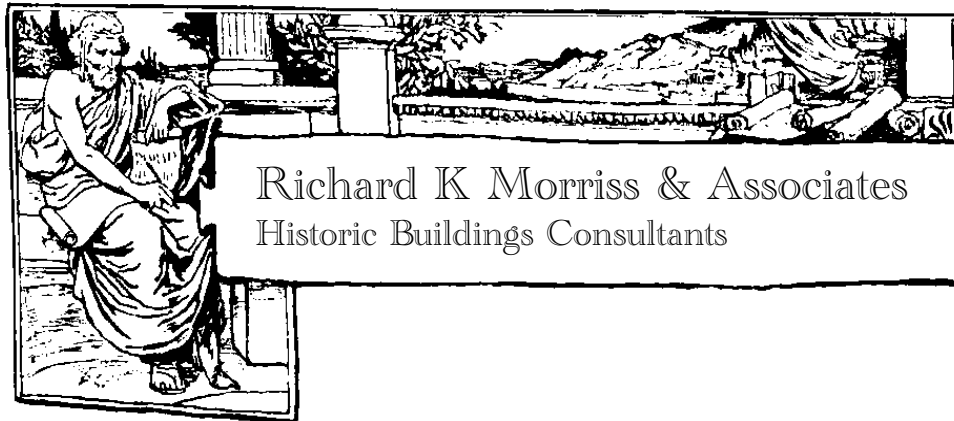
Pl.10: Inside of window reveal with dado panels removed.



Pl.11: Northern side of reveal after removal of dado.



Pl.12: Detail of stone and brick masonry in reveal after dado removed.



The Consultancy

Richard K Morriss founded this Consultancy in 1995 after previously working for English Heritage and the Ironbridge Institute of the University of Birmingham and spending eight years as Assistant Director of the Hereford Archaeology Unit. Although Shropshire-based the Consultancy works throughout the UK on a wide variety of historic buildings for clients that include the National Trust, the Landmark Trust, English Heritage, the Crown Estates, owners, architects, planning consultants and developers. It specialises in the archaeological and architectural analysis of historic buildings of all periods and planning advice related to them. It also undertakes broader area appraisals and Conservation Management Plans.

*Richard Morriss is a former Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists and of the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists, archaeological advisor to four cathedrals, occasional lecturer at Bristol and Birmingham universities, and author of many academic papers and of 20 books, mainly on architecture and archaeology, including *The Archaeology of Buildings* (Tempus 2000), *The Archaeology of Railways* (Tempus 1999); *Roads: Archaeology & Architecture* (Tempus 2006) and ten in the *Buildings of* series: *Bath, Chester, Ludlow, Salisbury, Shrewsbury, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick, Winchester, Windsor, Worcester* (Sutton 1993-1994). The latest work is an Historic England funded monograph on the *Houses of Hereford* (Oxbow 2018). He was a member of the Landmark Trust's project team responsible for the restoration of Astley Castle, Warwickshire, winner of the 2013 RIBA Stirling Prize.*



BROMLOW HOUSE
BROMLOW
SHROPSHIRE
SY5 0EA

rkmbromlowhouse@gmail.com