

## Proposals for an amended conservation scheme – 84 St Aldates

As a condition of the planning permission and Listed Building Consents granted (09/00753/LBC and 09/00754/FUL), the building has been carefully recorded by the Oxford Buildings Record to the satisfaction of the City Archaeologist David Radford. Although the drawings and report are still being finalised, David Clark as well as the owners, Jonathan and Eleanor Ungar, have been keeping the City abreast of developments and progress. The careful dismantling of the rear wing has now been completed, and the timbers derailed and stacked under cover at the yard and workshop of Miles & Co, in Mapledurham. There the timbers were all catalogued and condition recorded, together with likely cost to repair those that are decayed. The most significant discovery of this process is that much more of the original timber-framed building, dating to 1637, survived behind later finishes than was initially presumed. Remarkably, much of the exposed timber frame, although the surface has been degraded through exposure to the elements, is still capable of reuse. Therefore we have an opportunity to reassess the historic listed building and the methodology of its repair and conversion.

David Clark of the OBR and OAHS has done research on the history of the building and has discovered some significant facts relating to its role in the Civil War when requisitioned by the Royal Court when it was in residence in Christ Church. Given the historical significance of the building, and the fact that much more of the frame remains, we feel that the scheme could be amended, preserving the structural and historic integrity of the timber frame.

The previously approved scheme drawn up by Jamie Fobert, had assumed that only part of the roof was sound and would need major intervention and renewal to re-erect. Hence it was proposed to alter both the height and position of the roof, and to discard any structure below, reusing any odd sound timbers in various locations as decorative features. We propose to salvage the roof in its entirety; to retain the frame of both the first and second floors as well as that most of the floor timbers transverse beams and joists on the first floor.

Such a commitment to save a far greater proportion of the historic building clearly entails a great deal of complex and costly work. Faced with these added costs, it is essential that we achieve an economically viable scheme if we are to be able to afford to go down this route. We therefore ask Conservation Planning and Building Control Officers for help and advice in making our proposal acceptable.

We are therefore proposing a much more conservative scheme, both externally and internally. It is now not proposed to sever the roof structure and raise it, but to instead reconstruct it in its original configuration and in the same relationship with the front range. The layouts of living spaces in the restored rear wing needed to be thought out organically by those who know the building well (Dan Miles); it poses complex challenges, and that after a great deal of thought we have come up with the division into three very different one bedroom flats, each one very much determined by the frame of the building. Externally the simplicity of the rear range is most important to the streetscape of Clarkes Row, and rather than puncture the north wall with extra doorways and windows, it is now proposed to use the existing doorway and window openings. Instead of cladding the timber-framed first floor in grey clay tiles, it is now proposed to restore the plain rendered finish with a lime-based plaster externally. The roof would be covered in second-hand Welsh slates, or reclaimed plain clay tiles. On the south side, rather than connect the building to the existing two-storey medieval wall with a reinforced concrete floor slab at first floor level, it is proposed to extend a lower-pitched pent roof to the top of the wall, but primarily supported on the independent structure of the building itself, thus keeping the interior dry and helping to maintain the historic medieval wall. The south wall would provide the southern inside wall of the reconstructed building at both ground and first floor levels, and two existing blocked windows would be opened up again to provide natural light to the interior.

The large opening to the south wall would be also utilised to provide light, from a series of windows set behind the north face of this wall. All of these details we would want to discuss with the City conservation officer before deciding on a final new scheme.

We believe that simple and elegantly designed studio spaces are easily achievable within the space offered at the west end of the site where (as David Clark has shown) a building used to stand. The knowledge that the existing two buildings are not a historic entity but were part of a more extensive site (now lost) informs our approach. We want to build something of a quality that the prestigious position requires, but not showy in any way, appropriate and in harmony with the surrounding buildings, and giving necessary stability to the adjacent historic frame. This will be the key economic motor of our scheme (to avoid having to make any compromises in the historic part of the building). It will be simple in design; it could be rendered like the other buildings on the site or visibly different as a brick building- a choice that we would like to discuss this with the conservation officers.

To conclude, we wish to discuss with you a modified scheme to rebuild the rear wing of 84 St Aldates that takes into account the surviving historic fabric of the 1637 timber frame, retaining as much of it as possible *in situ* following repair. The roof levels and exterior we would wish to remain as originally constructed rather than to raise and shift them to the south, with the exception of the roof which we would like to extend with a low-pitched lean-to with roof lights to sit on the top of the medieval wall to the south with an integral gutter. This is to allow better maintenance of the north face of the south wall which would be difficult with the small gap between the two structures already approved. We would wish to preserve the integrity of the historic frame, and to design a dwelling at the west end to sit on the footprint of the now demolished extension. It is important that a building control officer receptive to working with historic listed buildings is involved in these discussions from the outset, as well as a planning officer, so that all three of these aspects can be considered together.

## RECORDING AND DISMANTLING WORK, 84 ST ALDATES, OXFORD

### *Summary*

The objective of this proposed work is to make safe internal floors, strip back later finishes, and to allow the Oxfordshire Buildings Record (OBR) to record the various building phases and historic fabric. Once the preliminary recording was completed, further remove plasterwork and wall panels to allow a more detailed record of the structural timber frame, which will also be assessed for condition. The timber frame would then be dismantled, labelling each component, and transporting to dry storage at the workshop where such repairs to an agreed schedule of repairs would be carried out. Once this was complete, the frame would be re-erected on new foundations and repaired walls. Following on from this, the new roof and walls of the west end extension and surrounding envelope would be constructed, possibly by others.

### *1. Site Set-up and Making Safe the Building*

Shore up internal floors, prop other structural elements, and provide boarded platforms to allow the recording by OBR to be carried out safely. This will require the removal of 20<sup>th</sup> century finishes and insertions, unless they are structurally supporting the building. Significant fabric will be recorded before or during removal. Temporary lighting and health and welfare facilities would need to be provided in an area of the building for the members of the OBR and our staff during the works, which would require running water. We would assume that the existing WC could be used for this purpose, if not, one would need to be provided. The owners will need to clear out all contents of the building including books and other items to be retained, and to provide an electricity supply.

With some creative repairs and adaptations it is intended to do all this work under the existing temporary roof covering and avoid the expense of a temporary roof and external scaffolding. It is intended to record the building from the inside out. A skip will be required for some of the time on site, position to be agreed. All demolition debris not being retained will be removed at cost plus 10%.

## *2. First Phase Recording and Stripping Out*

The first phase of recording should include the extent of the existing plaster finishes in all rooms, shown on plan and elevations for each. This would include the type of plaster, type of lath and lath nails, and representative samples of each to be taken. Care is to be taken with early plaster finishes to ensure that no wall paintings are present. If some are found, the recording and dismantling strategy will be reviewed with the City Archaeologist before proceeding further. Any pre-1930 joinery would be recorded and carefully removed should there be a wish to reinstate these elements. The recording work would be done by the OBR, headed by David Clark, and overseen and assisted by ourselves. There will be a team of recording personal present. But as this element of the work is being provided voluntarily to save expenses, it is not possible to be precise as to the time needed to complete the recording. We would attend to the OBR as necessary throughout the project, setting health and safety requirements.

## *3. Second Phase Recording and Stripping Out*

Once the visible internal finishes have been recorded, we will remove the outer layers of plasterwork, cover pieces, and other elements recorded to allow that below to be similarly recorded. Care to be taken not to disturb the lower layers of plasterwork during this process. This would be carried out in succession until the timber frame is fully exposed. Any wattle and daub panels encountered would be carefully exposed, drawn, photographed, and representative samples taken. If the wattle and daub panels are of manageable size, and in good, sound condition, then some consideration would be given to removing these for retention as the frame is being dismantled. However, given the poor state of the building, this scenario is highly unlikely.

## *4. Dismantling of Floors and Recording*

Any historic floorboards will also be recorded on plan, lifted, and then left loose on the joists to allow the beams and joists below to be recorded. Care will be taken to ensure trap ends are not present in the loose boards and some temporary screwing of boards may be required.

## *5. Set Out of Survey Datums and Record Timber Frame*

Next, as series of datum points, levels, and lines to be set out on each floor, from which an accurate record of the timber frame will be related to. Frame drawings by the OBR will include all cross-frames (trusses), ideally from the face side, long internal elevations, and a roof plan shown at 90 degrees to the roof slope. This plan will have to be accessed from below, but drawn as if from above, to enable the protective plastic, felt, and plywood to remain intact. A longitudinal section through the centre of the building will also be drawn, to record any second floor ceiling timbers at upper collar level. Three plans will be drawn, the ground floor showing any posts and timberwork present behind the plasterwork, a first floor plan showing all floor boards and joists, and a second floor plan taken at wall plate level again showing all floorboards and joists. All plans, elevations and sections to be drawn at 1/2" scale or metric equivalent. Individual features, such as windows and doors, will be drawn at larger scale as deemed necessary by the OBR.

## *6. Carry out Condition and Dendrochronological Survey*

Once the recording of the timber frame is completed to the satisfaction of the architect and building owners, and the City, with just the timber frame left standing, a condition survey of the timber frame will be made, recording the missing elements, timber species, and extent of decay of the timbers. The frame will then be numbered, using indelible ink on plywood plates, taking care not to damage the surface of the timbers, and cross-referenced to the drawings. During this phase a detailed study will be made of the timber surfaces and saw-marks, assembly marks and other features noted and recorded on the drawings. A schedule of repairs will then be drawn up, to be agreed with the architect, owner, and City, and the method of reinstatement reviewed. A photographic record will also be carried out of the frame prior to dismantling.

Also at this time, as the building frame is exposed, allow to assess the timbers and take a series of up to 10 core samples for tree-ring dating. If the timbers are found on inspection to be unsuitable, then this element will not be carried out any further.

## *7. Dismantling of Timber Frame, Transport to Workshop, and Storage Under Cover*

Once a spell of good weather is forecast, the roof covers will be removed and disposed of, the rafters dismantled, followed in sequence by the second floor trusses down to tiebeam levels including purlins, second floor joists, ties, wall plates, first floor framing, first floor joists and cross-beams, side girts, and principal posts, basically in reverse order of original assembly. All timbers would be then transported to the workshop and yard at Mapledurham where they would be stored under cover when not being repaired. The site would then be cleared of the remaining of the building down to ground floor level, leaving the bottom floor to be removed by others along with the remaining services. Any unstable walls to be retained would be covered and shored as necessary to prevent further deterioration.

## *8. Repair of Frame and Re-erection*

Once the condition survey has been completed to accompany the drawn survey, the proposed reconstruction of the frame will be reviewed with the architect, building owner, and City conservation officer. Once a detailed scheme has been agreed, showing the extend of the levelling up of the frame, repair or renewal of defective timbers, and other alterations to the frame, the scheme would be costed and the works carried out in the workshop. Once the site has been prepared with new foundations, wall built and repaired, and temporary scaffold frame and roof constructed, then the frame would be brought back to site and re-erected. It would then be ready for the extension to be constructed and new floors and permanent supports inserted, and the cladding to be completed.

The roof has been completely repaired and re-erected in the workshop, photographed, and disassembled and stacked under sheets. The first floor walls and first floor frame still requires repair and prefabrication prior to re-erection. The ground floor wall frame is the existing stone wall to the north, and only posts generally on the truss lines of the south wall will be reintroduced on erection. Most of the timber for these items are cut and in stick, these will have wholly seasoned by now.

Once the foundations and concrete slab have been formed, the posts to the south wall and the first floor frame will be erected and levelled up. The joists will be reused in their original position, but as they were always plastered below, modern treated softwood joists will be set next to them to provide a level floor which will have a level top side. This will have a stressed skin thick plywood base over the whole which will provide a working platform for the first floor walls and cross-walls. Once

these are set in place and temporarily supported, the tiebeams will be set down over the wall plates and tied together. The first floor wall frame will also have a stressed skin over the external face together with some new treated softwood studwork to give added strength to the structure without having to carry out excessive repairs and replacement to the timber frame. This will keep the historic character of the building at an economic cost. Once the second floor joists are put in with the tiebeams, the second floor will also be firred as necessary and boarded with a thick plywood over which will provide a sound stressed skin at wall plate level. This will also provide a sound working platform to then erect the principal rafters and other truss components, and the common rafters.

When the roof frame is complete, it will be clad externally to give further strength and then tiled with battens on counter battens and made waterproof. The area to the south of the roof will be glazed over the passage way between the south wall of the timber frame and the thick two-storey stone wall to the south. The north wall will be rendered in lime plaster flush with the chimney stack on counter battens to provide some ventilation between the render and the stressed skin.

Now that the frame has been erected, the internal partitions will be finished off and services installed before covering over with plaster. It is vitally important that the location of the services be accurately determined and pipes and drains come up through the concrete slab at the appropriate places to serve the kitchens and bathrooms as needed.