

## **Embleton Tower - repair works following dry rot outbreak Design, Access and Heritage Statement**

### History

#### Listed Grade 1

Embleton Tower (formerly the Vicarage) comprises an early fourteenth century house or solar wing which was reconstructed c.1390 as a tower, with a mid eighteenth century kitchen wing and major extensions to the West in a tudor style by John Dobson in 1828 for Rev. George Grimes. The tower is built from squared stone and rubble, with the south end refaced in squared tooled stone. The nineteenth century extensions are built of squared whinstone with sandstone dressings and Welsh slate roofs. The eighteenth and nineteenth century parts of the building form an irregular H-plan, with a link to the tower at the East end. An orangery, which has a stretched octagon plan is located at the South end of the West range. Merton College, who held the patronage of Embleton, agreed in 1332 to provide quarters where the vicar might "live suitably and entertain visitors decently".

Interior (taken directly from the listing description): Entrance porch has groined vault on moulded corbels, and half-glazed Gothick door. Tower: ground floor divided into two segmental-vaulted chambers; north chamber has old chamfered fireplace and pair of pointed doorways. 1st floor has C18 octagon room with moulded fireplace and domed niches; remains of old stair in cupboard at north end. 2nd floor has another moulded early C18 fireplace and stone roof corbels.

Cap-house has unusual roof trusses with saddles and additional outer principals carrying purlins. Kitchen wing has 1st-floor room with acanthus frieze, and contemporary fireplace with fluted pilasters and scroll cornice. Early C19 part: Open-well stair with stick balusters; coffered ceiling to hall. Drawing room has elaborate vine-scroll frieze, cornice and floral ceiling rose; dining room has coffered ceiling. Doors of 6 vertical panels; folding panelled shutters; Gothick and Tudor fireplaces, with ornamental cast-iron grates.

### Background and Proposed Works

**This application relates to part of the works approved in 2018 (reference 18/02597/LBC). Emergency works that were permitted as part of that approval, which were approved retrospectively have been removed from this application, but in other respects the remaining work is unchanged. The need for this second application is due to the original approval expiring before works to the interior could progress as originally planned. This was due to factors outside of anyone's control, namely the death of the owner and subsequent long probate period which was only completed this year. During this prolonged period there has been no further outbreak of dry rot, and the property has continued to dry out.**

Spence and Dower were asked to visit the property in September 2017 after a dry rot outbreak had been discovered in three first floor rooms and associated ground floor room in the North West corner of the building. Subsequent surveys by ourselves and MGM indicated that the best approach was a phased one. Initial emergency works were carried out to prevent water ingress, clean the property of all spores and allow the building to dry out before assessing the final damage and preparing a scheme for reinstatement. During this period we were in touch with the Conservation Officer appraising them of the works being carried out and the plans for rectification and it was agreed that certain works could proceed and that these would be dealt with in a single Listed Building Consent application that covered all works once the full scope of rectification and repair was known (these are the works no longer part of this resubmission).

In late summer 2017 part of the dining room ceiling had collapsed revealing the problem above. At the same time spores erupted in this room and in the bathroom above covering all surfaces with a thick orange dust. Fruiting bodies were also visible in various locations including in an adjacent ensuite and bedroom, although damage was more restricted in these areas. Advice was followed which included allowing the area to dry out naturally by heating and ventilating the rooms affected and cleaning all surfaces to remove spores. The floor in the bathroom was visibly unsafe after the collapse of the ceiling as some of the joists were compromised and temporary propping was installed.

In terms of background for the works already carried out to remedy the water ingress (as previously consented), vegetation/climbing plants were cleared from the West Elevation revealing areas of open joints and also dampness on the walls below certain sections of the gutters. The gutters comprised of two systems – the original system was a shallow carved timber gutter with lead lining that tapered almost to nothing at the furthest point from the outlet. Three separate sections of timber gutters ran along this elevation, subdivided by the two gables. This design had clearly been proved to be woefully inadequate and at some point in the past a cast iron ogee gutter had been run from one side of the elevation to the other (across both gables) below the original gutter. This had one outlet to the North side of the elevation and picked up water from the three timber gutter outlets and any overspill from the upper gutter that occurred during heavy rainfall. Some of the joints leaked but also the lower gutter could not adequately pick up the overspill from the upper gutter. This had added to the issues of the wetting of the wall including in the area most badly affected by dry rot. The timber gutters were rotten in a number of places and were of inadequate size to address current rainfall let alone any changes in rainfall in the years to come. The secondary gutter was not picking up overspill and did not enhance the elevation as it cut across both gables.

Repointing works were carried out to parts of the West elevation in the areas affected to try and reduce the wetting of this wall in the area where the dry rot issue was evident, but also to adjacent sections where large areas of open joints were noted, together with replacement of the gutters.

A second survey in late spring 2018 allowed the extent of the internal damage to be assessed. In the dining room further areas of damage to architraves, skirtings and floorboards was noted and the plaster ceiling rose near the area of collapse appeared to be coming loose suggesting potential damage to joists in that area. The leaf of the shutters closest to the wall when shut has been damaged on both sides of the bay window and part of the panelling below cill level in the bay has also been damaged beyond repair. Joists in the area of collapsed ceiling require repair and damage is assumed to extend further into the room than is currently visible. These will need to be replaced to their full length to ensure that there is adequate support to the floor above. The bressumer beam over the bay is also compromised and requires replacement.

The central bathroom is the worst affected of the upper rooms and will need considerable repair work. It is assumed that all joists have been damaged, requiring replacement and the majority of the floorboards are also damaged beyond repair. The panelling in the window reveal has collapsed as have architectural features along the external wall and associated areas of internal walls. At present the window is not watertight with daylight visible under the lower sash due to loss of timber below. The ensuite is affected in the North West corner of the room with floor joists indicating an issue potentially with the joists below. In the Northern bedroom there is damage to skirtings, architrave and panelling in the South West corner with some associated damage to floor joists in the area over the ground floor bay/bressumer beam. Joists will be replaced in the areas affected on the ground and first floor and floor boards replaced to match existing. Although an assessment of the extent of repair has been made, until all areas have been opened up as repair works progress, making areas safe, the exact extent of damage cannot be fully assessed.

Architectural features in all areas affected by the dry rot will be repaired and replaced as required to match existing. It is also assumed that rot may have affected the lower sections of timber behind the plasterwork and some limited removal of plaster at low level and associated timber may be required in the worst affected areas in order to fully repair the damage. This will be replaced with new timberwork and lime plaster. The plaster ceiling to the dining room will be reinstated using lime plaster along with any damaged sections of cornice.

With regards to the reinstatement work, the damage caused by the dry rot outbreak has inevitably necessitated the need for invasive works to ensure that the building is returned to a structurally sound state and features restored. Sufficient evidence of all timber detailing remains to ensure that features can be reinstated to exactly match existing. The outbreak is regrettable but the aim is to rectify the situation. External works carried out in 2018 have been successful, so there can be confidence that the conditions do not currently exist for another outbreak to occur.

There are no changes to access arrangements into the building

Photographs



The West elevation on completion



Bay window in the Dining Room



Collapsed ceiling and dry rot in the Dining Room before and after propping



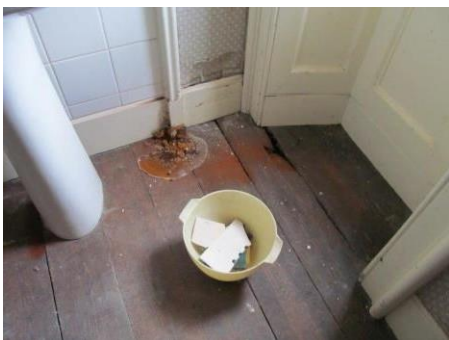
Bay window at high and low level in the Dining Room



Main bathroom showing damage to panelling and floorboards – shown before and during drying out



Damage to cill of main bathroom window



Damage to floorboards in ensuite



Damage to floorboards and panelling in North West bedroom



Updated photographs from 2021 showing areas of damaged floorboard removed in the first floor bathroom and some additional loss of plaster in the bay window in the dining room following drying out