

Woodhill Park, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY10 9AS

Design, Access and Heritage Statement



For Mr N Biegman and Mrs S Johnson

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Architects



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Prepared by Sean D Pemble RIBA

Revision A

Introduction

This application for Listed Building Consent is made on behalf of Mr N Biegman and Mrs S Johnson, the applicants and owners of Woodhill Park, Oswestry (a Grade II listed property).

The application seeks consent for a number of minor alterations and improvements to the property that will improve its functionality for the 21st century as a dynamic family home.

All proposals contained within this application have been made with due regard for relevant sections of the NPPF, and Shropshire Council core policies – namely CS5 and CS6.

Setting and location

Woodhill Park is located close to the village of Trefonen, and only a few miles outside of the market town of Oswestry, Shropshire. Sitting approximately 2 miles to its southwest, Woodhill is nestled amongst its 156-acre estate consisting of the main house, parkland and a number of properties / outbuildings forming the complete estate.

Background to application

After falling in love with the property in the summer of 2023, the applicants succeeded in purchasing Woodhill Park shortly thereafter – with completion arriving in early 2024. As with all houses, tastes and requirements of living change – and given that the house has seen little alteration for a number of decades, now would seem a sensible time to implement a series of low impact upgrades that will allow the house to perform its role as a family home more effectively.

Architectural overview and History

Woodhill, like many country houses of its provenance, is the result of multiple phases of work carried out over the last two or three centuries. The core of the house is agreed to be early-mid 18thC in date – built for a Richard Jones as (presumably) a rather sizeable farmhouse. The estate then passed to his daughter, Elizabeth, who in 1813 married Lazarus Venables. Their son, also Lazarus made further alterations in 1851 including the altered front entrance and moving of the road further south. He also acquired further land and as a result of his ambitious overspending, the estate was offered for sale in 1852.

By 1854 the estate found new ownership under the Lees Baronets, who made further alterations throughout their tenure, including the new billiard and dining room and a new projecting range with two-storey oriel window to its elevation. By the early 20thC it was George John Dumville Lees who held Woodhill as his seat – a renowned huntsman whose taxidermy collection was displayed in the billiard room – a last hurrah to the often-excessive expansion of country houses in this era. At some point in the 20thC the house lost its external Victorian alterations (including the single storey doric entrance portico) and following the Second World War the house was once again offered for sale as a whole.

This time it was acquired by David Ormsby-Gore (Lord Harlech of nearby Brogyntyn Hall and the Brogyntyn Estate) at which point it was farmed until it was once again disposed of in the early 1970s. Presumably another owner filled in the next few decades as the house was then sold once more to the previous owners – Mr & Mrs Littler – who purchased the house in the

late 1980s and have lived there until Mrs Littler offered the estate for sale in the summer of 2023.

With regard to the park, evidence suggests that it was laid out some time between 1806 and 1827, with its boundaries defined by the road to its east and the Rea Brook tributary to its north. By 1851 the park had various plantations, with the most important being that in the southwest – which extended west along the park's boundary. Whilst the areas of estate in the north were reduced by the 1870s the parkland increased in size with extensions to other areas. By 1873 the park gained its entrance lodge from which a tree lined avenue was formed to the hall – along with several trackways and paths in the parkland.

As indicated above, the house is principally of early-mid 18thC though saw significant changes under the stewardship of the Dumville-Lees, who extended it significantly in the late 19th, early 20thC. Constructed of red brick under hipped slate roofs the house is generally restrained in architectural detail – with exception of the moulded eaves cornice and handsome entrance porch with fine fanlight and mouldings. Internally the house has a curious split whereby left of the staircase has significantly higher ceilings, with those rooms east of the stair being far more humble – perhaps indicative of its humbler origins. Despite this, it still retains its 18thC staircase along with carved wooden cornices to several ground floor rooms (as well as decorative ceiling plasterwork) – as well as several carved fireplaces with foliage decoration.

In terms of its built-fabric evolution, it is clear from assessment of the 25 inch to the mile maps (as well as the few surviving photographs) that Woodhill has undergone substantial change over the last two centuries. The first map, dated 1874, clearly shows the main block of the house (with its semicircular front apron) but with a glasshouse structure to its south, and in the area of the current protruding wing – a further small glasshouse structure and yard areas. It is therefore assumed that the protruding range to the east of the main block (with its horned sashes) is of later 19th or early 20thC and as evidenced in the below photograph, the elevations used to feature a large bay window protrusion (no longer extant).

The left-hand principal block is certainly the earlier 18thC bulk of the house, though this again bears signs of 19thC and 20thC interventions to its rear elevation – the most obvious being the change in fenestration. It is clear from the early mapping that a substantial service wing of sorts used to protrude west on the rear elevation, which sadly no longer exists, and its removal is the likely reason for the change in fenestration to the rear.

The outbuildings are also of a mixed phasing – with some being earlier 19thC – presumably during Dumville-Lees ownership, and others such as the adjoining coach house range, being mid/late 19thC in date.

An extract of the Historic England listing description can be read as follows:

SJ 22 NE OSWESTRY RURAL C.P. WOODHILL

5/217 Woodhill - GV II

Small country house. Early and mid-C18, extended late C19. Red brick, slate hipped roofs with triglyph frieze and moulded eaves cornice, ridge and end stacks. Rectangular main block with C19 square projection to north-east corner; late C19 and C20 service ranges to rear. 2 and 3 storeys with attics; asymmetrical 8-bay east front, 3 tiers of glazing bar sashes to right-hand 4 bays and 2 tiers of larger sash windows to left, all with gauged heads; entrance in fourth bay from right, 6-panel double doors with decorative radial fanlight under moulded entablature supported by 4 decorated console brackets; 3-bay projecting range to right has glazing bar sashes with horns and hip-roofed dormer in roof slope. Interior: C18 dog-leg wooden staircase with elegant turned, decorated balusters and moulded handrail rides to attic; ground-floor rooms have carved wooden cornices and decorative plasterwork to ceilings, a noticeable feature being the much greater height of the rooms on the left side of the house; also several wooden fireplaces with carved dense foliage decoration. There is said to have formerly been a portico over the main entrance door.

Listing NGR: SJ2694926549

Proposals

Whilst the applicants eagerly awaited completion, they have spent the last few months formulating their vision for Woodhill so that it may function both as a comfortable family home (herein), whilst also providing a modest income for the estate (in future).

As with many other estates there are the standard avenues of tenanted properties and agricultural land – but the applicants (in this instance) will initially be seeking to offer a one-off charity event, in aid of the Severn Hospice and also for Horatio's garden (at the RJAH Orthopaedic Hospital)

To that extent it is necessary for various elements of the house and its infrastructure (which have not seen upgrades for many decades) to be 'brought up to speed' for modern occupation.

Obviously, given the size of the property and its outbuildings, it is not feasible to undertake such works all at once, so for the ease of the applicants – the works are being phased. These tasks/items required immediately (under phase one) can be summarised under the following headings:

- **Removal / alteration of partition walls.** As indicated on the accompanying plans, there are a number of areas where later – often 20thC - partition walls are to be removed so that the accommodation layout and flow may be improved. In chronological order the proposed changes consist of:
 - Bedroom 1. Formation of mirrored door opening to access W.C, door and architrave shall match existing.
 - Lobby/Dressing room to bedroom 1. Door and architrave providing access to W.C shall be removed, wall infilled with stud/plaster and walls/joinery made good to match adjacent.
 - Bedroom 3. This bedroom currently has a sizeable built in cupboard that is split between the landing and the bedroom; it is proposed that this entirely serves the bedroom and as such one of the two doors shall be removed and its internal stud partition removed to form a larger, single cupboard. From the landing, the door formerly accessing the cupboard is to be fixed shut and retained. It is also proposed that bedroom 3 gains an en suite, by means of a new doorway opening (door and architrave to match existing adjacent). Again, the room which shall become the en suite already has a door to the landing, which shall be retained and fixed shut.
 - Bathroom adjacent to bedroom 2. This is currently two smaller bathrooms and as part of the proposals, it shall form a single, more generous bathroom for general use. The partition which requires removal is clearly later (as the floor beams visible at ceiling level sail straight through the partition fabric) and the adjacent walls shall be made good once it has been removed. The eastern of the two doors shall be removed, with stud/plaster infill and skirtings to match adjacent. NB – the spine beams supporting the floor above continue straight through this partition and after structural investigation, the wall is most definitely late in its insertion.
 - Bedroom 4. In order to create an additional guest suite at first floor level, two door openings are proposed from the bedroom – serving a new dressing room and en suite. Both shall have doors and architraves to match adjacent, with the new partition being of stud/plaster with skirtings etc to match adjacent also. The door previously allowing access from the dressing room to the landing shall be retained and fixed shut, as per other areas of proposed work.

- Bedroom 5. To provide one further guest suite at second floor level, it is proposed that a series of later partitions are removed and like the bedroom directly beneath it, a suite formed. The primary partitions being removed are again clearly later (the ceiling floor beams carry on straight through the partition) and the lack of fireplace in the centre of the space is evidence that this was not a primary room/bedroom. As below, two new doorways are to be formed accessing the dressing room and en suite – with a new partition between them. The doorway formerly accessing the landing will then be fixed shut. As evidence of the existence of the partition in this space, it is proposed that a 2-foot nib of wall is retained either side for legibility. NB – the spine beams supporting the floor above continue straight through this partition and after structural investigation, the wall is most definitely late in its insertion.
- **Bathrooms.** As is often the case, a house of this size is significantly ‘under-served’, mostly due to the era of its construction. It is therefore proposed that in coordination with the above changes to partitions and room connectivity, a number of additional en suites are proposed. These have all been proposed in areas where drainage either exists, or is immediately adjacent - and as such no new drainage runs/foul pipes are required to facilitate this (the presence of so many vanity basins in the bedrooms is for once, advantageous). Floor finishes are to be retained along with any existing decorative features.
- **Foul drainage.** Currently, the surface water from the roof combines with the foul drainage from the bathrooms and runs into the septic tank. Under current regulations (and going forward) this is simply not allowed and as such, it is necessary to install a separated foul pipe to the front elevation. The current cast iron stack sits in the internal corner of the front elevation and collects rainwater from the front roof pitches and also the front facing bathrooms (via a hopper); it will therefore be necessary – amongst the dense foliage and growth – to install a second four-inch cast iron pipe to exclusively service the foul drainage system. It will not be necessary to vent this above the eaves (as the head of the run is on the rear elevation) but it will be necessary to excavate locally on the front driveway apron to connect the new pipe to the existing foul drainage infrastructure. As indicated, the pipe will be discreet and to match existing to avoid drawing unnecessary attention; no vegetation will be cut from the brickwork and instead the pipe will be ‘worked into’ the existing setting to avoid make its installation obvious.
- **Rooflights and dormers.** Several rooflights exist across the roofscape, many of which are early cast iron items that are suffering badly – others of which are likely earlier 20thC items of questionable construction, no doubt installed in order to push natural light further into the depths of the house. As such it is deemed sensible to replace this with double glazed, conservation type rooflights so that leaks, condensation, and thermal performance of such items can be resolved in one fell swoop. These shall be of flush, traditional installation type. In addition to this, in bedroom 10, a simple (presumably late 19th or early 20thC) dormer exists, facing north onto an ostensibly hidden roof slope. This is the only means of natural light into this room and its tired condition with a rotten timber casement, which when combined with the room being proposed as a bedroom, demands an improved solution. It should also be noted that no proper access is available to maintain the lead valley gutter in this area – and the new dormer shall provide such access in a safer/easier manner.
Rooflights have been considered but given that the dormer is almost invisible from ground level it is proposed that a similarly detailed traditional dormer is constructed but to double the width; thus, providing greater light levels and increased ease of access to the lead valley gutter for maintenance. The dormer will be lead clad to its roof and

sides, with painted timber casement windows and DG units. A single conservation rooflight is proposed however to the centre of the rear elevation, giving natural light to the proposed attic floor bathroom (see item below). This will be of flush, traditional installation as per the other rooflights.

- **Attic accommodation.** These were originally service accommodation for house staff (as indicated by their lath/plastered walls, limed timberwork, and presence of fireplaces) although it is clear these spaces have not been slept in for some decades. As part of the reinvigoration of Woodhill it is proposed that these spaces once again provide sleeping accommodation, and as such works will be carried out to provide this. Firstly, the existing redundant water tanks and their boxing-in will be removed, and a new timber plank partition erected (with matching ledged and braced door) to form the new attic bathroom. Secondly, along the full length of the rear elevation a new timber plank boxed-out partition will be formed, to screen the existing pipes and services which run along the base of the walls in all attic rooms. Thirdly, a door will be reinstated to bedroom 9 (again ledged and braced to match existing) with the final item being the installation of the new bathroom as indicated, and its connection to services – which are thankfully immediately beneath or adjacent.

Statement of significance

With the above in mind, and with reference to the outline history of the property, it has been possible to establish the following key significances – which must be carefully considered when proposing any interventions to the built fabric. These are:

- The restrained Georgian appearance of its principal exterior elevations. Despite the myriad of interventions during the 19th and 20th centuries, the exterior ultimately reverted to a plainer, more handsome appearance. This is a key part of its visual setting in the landscape and as such, any interventions to the principal elevations must either compliment the restrained aesthetic or remain almost illegible.
- At the same time, Woodhill (like many other historic large houses) is a sum of its alterations over the last three centuries. That is to say that whilst the house is overwhelmingly Georgian in its appearance, it still bears the marks of early and late 19thC interventions – as well as those of the early 20thC. It is therefore important that any additions or alterations to the fabric of the house – internally and externally – pay close attention to their context, so that they cause no harm to the existing and harmonise with the architectural language of the house. Of primary note are the front facing ground floor rooms (staircase included) and the handsome Palladian window arrangement on the garden facing west elevation.

Heritage Impact Assessment

Taking the above into consideration, it has been possible to identify the key areas of work which have direct impact upon the Grade II listed building and its fabric. The below table should be read in conjunction with the accompanying (approx.) age of fabric drawings.

Proposed work	Objective	Significance of affected fabric	Beneficial impact	Harmful impact	Proposed solution
Installation of new soil pipe to front elevation	To provide compliant separation of foul and surface water disposal	Principal front elevation is of medium significance, relatively unaltered appearance with minimal surface fixed items	Improved functionality of house as well as capability of serving additional bathrooms, as well as being building regulations compliant going forward	Could be seen as additional clutter to an otherwise restrained elevation	New pipe shall sit discreetly alongside existing rainwater pipe which shall be retained, with minimal disturbance to vegetation to maximise its screening.
Increasing in size of existing attic dormer	To provide greater levels of natural light and safer maintenance access	Dormer is likely late 19thC or early 20thC as part of the ongoing expansion of the house under the Dumville-Lees – whilst of an age, it is hidden from sight and of low significance overall	Increased natural light levels to a large, dimly lit room (currently) and safer access for all year usage to maintain the valley gutter at roof level	Minimal loss of historic fabric, almost zero visual change as this dormer and the central roof area is only truly visible via drone	Dormer shall maintain location but with two windows, fully openable to permit access – colour and detailing to match existing.
Renewal of existing rooflights / 1 new opening	To renew decaying items and increase thermal retention.	Rooflights are late 19thC or early 20thC, of cast iron with single glazing – low significance overall – already present in roof slopes so no significant visual changes	Increased thermal efficiency to an otherwise inefficient house, as well as prevention of water ingress from tired/failing historic items	Minimal loss of historic fabric, clearly later insertions when staff accommodation was provided at attic level	Rooflights are to be flush fitting conservation type with central glazing bar to maintain visual continuity.
Forming of new doorway openings on FF and SF	To facilitate better flow and improved ergonomics for 21stC living	Some fabric is primary 18thC, some 19thC, all have clearly been altered at some point to facilitate changes in layout and occupancy requirements.	Improved flow of spaces and ergonomics for 21stC living, as opposed to the adapted/ compromised layouts of the 20thC	Potential for loss of interpretation i.e. original layouts or visual appearance of certain rooms in question	Any new doors shall match but will clearly be of contemporary timber, paintwork and ironmongery etc to remain legible.
Alterations to existing partition walls on FF and SF	To facilitate better flow and improved ergonomics for 21stC living	Most alterations here are to 19thC or 20thC walls and partitions, that have undergone several phases of alteration since the original house was constructed	Improved flow of spaces and ergonomics for 21stC living, as opposed to the adapted/ compromised layouts of the 20thC	Loss of original fabric or interpretation of layout	Infilled areas shall be in boarded studwork to remain reversible, old doors shall be retained/stored – new openings to retain nibs for legibility of alterations.
Forming of new bathroom at attic level	To facilitate better flow and improved ergonomics for 21stC living	Relatively unaltered servants and staff accommodation from perhaps 19thC, water tank of 20thC age with no value	Having a bathroom on this floor enables the whole floor to work as additional family accommodation, serving 2no bedrooms.	Almost zero impact, all original features maintained and simply built around, use of space similar to original intention	Historic timbers to be scribed around, existing floorboards and finishes retained

Appendix of historic images and recent photographs

Please see below for a summary photographic appendix, covering all areas of the proposed works outlined/referenced above – as well as those images and maps of a historic nature, supporting that which is explained above.

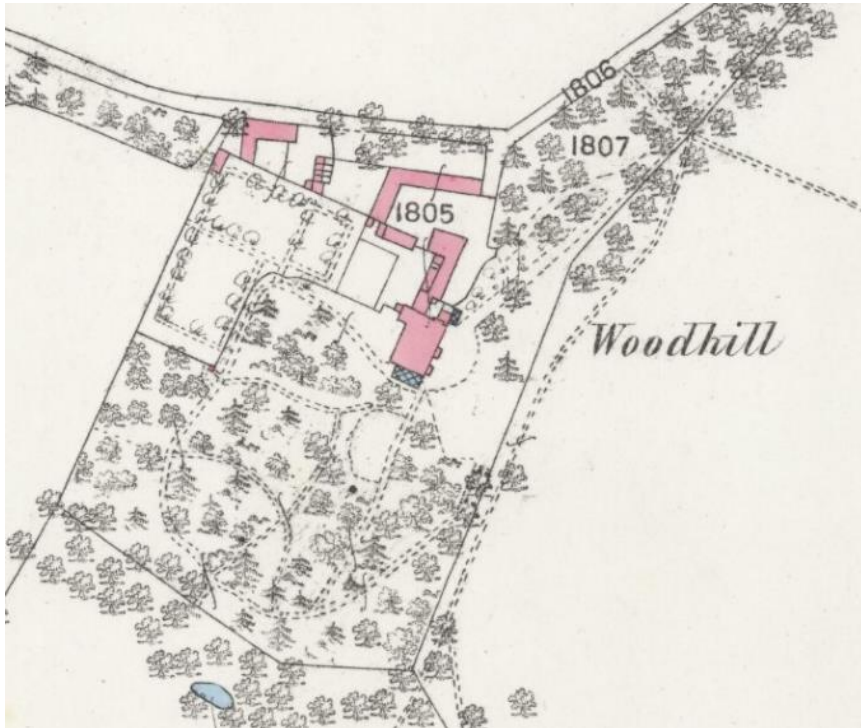


FIG 1 – 25 inch to the mile OS plan, 1874 (NLS) Note lack of protruding range to N of main block and location of east elevation additions.

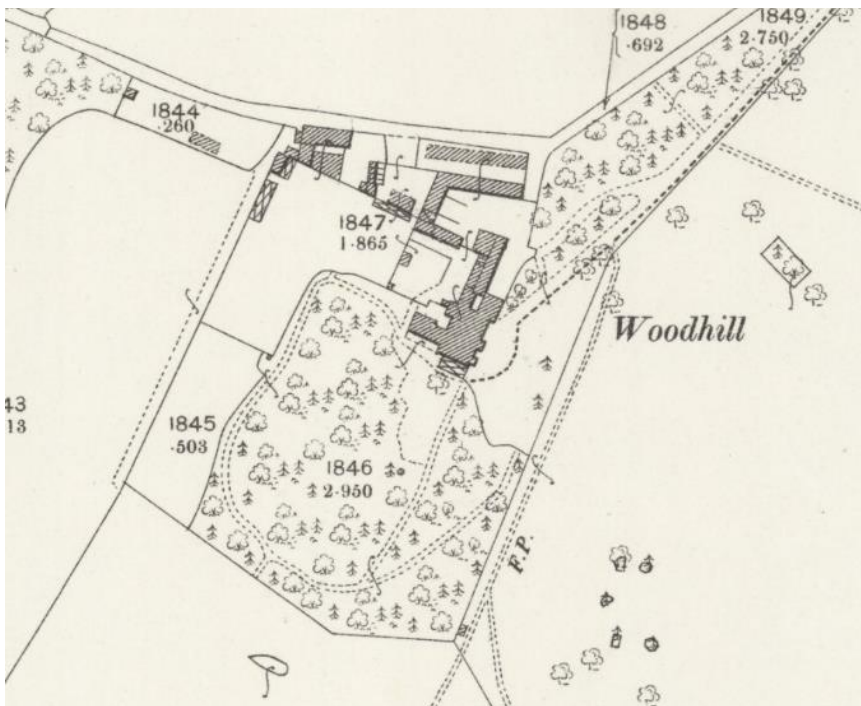


FIG 2 – 25 inch to the mile OS plan, 1900 (NLS) Note presence of protruding range to N of main block now present.

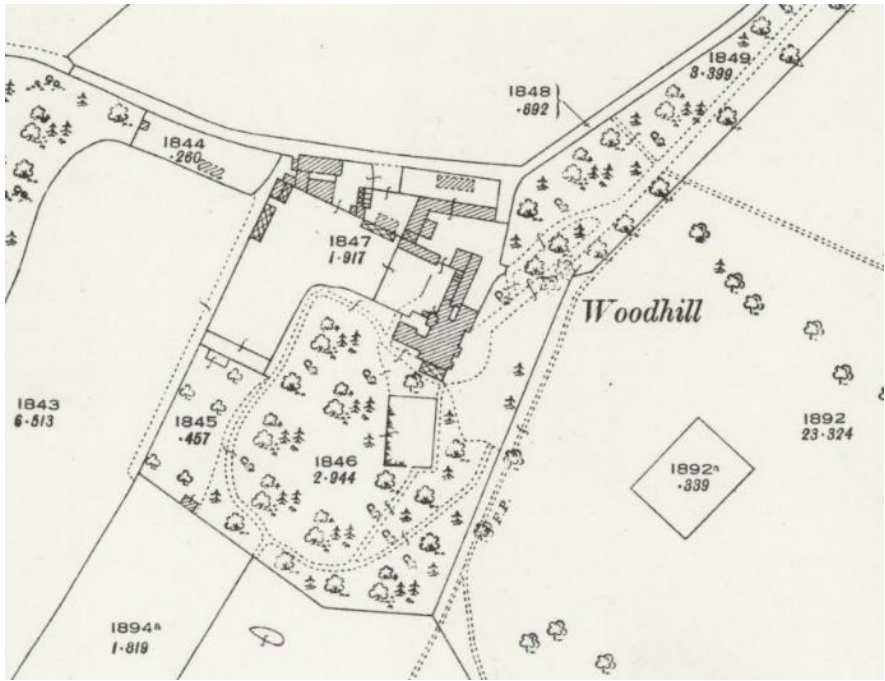


FIG 3 – 25 inch to the mile OS plan, 1925 (NLS) Note additions to east elevation still present at this point.



FIG 4 – Historic photograph of principal elevation, assumed early 20thC showing oriel bay and other additions no longer extant (Gareth Williams)



FIG 5 – Photograph of front elevation of Woodhill, assumed 20thC (author unknown)



Fig 6 – Aerial photograph showing principal west elevation (S Pemble)



FIG 7 – Aerial photograph showing general roofscape of house (S Pemble)



FIG 8 – Photograph from north approach of the main elevation (note soil pipe not visible)



FIG 9 – Photograph of the front elevation from the southern aspect, note pipe now visible in Winter



FIG 10 – Photograph of front elevation in summer, note soil stack almost invisible (Savills)



FIG 11 – Drone aerial photograph of the house in full summer (Savills)



FIG 12 – Photograph of existing dormer to be enlarged (S Pemble)



FIG 13 – Photograph showing area for attic floor bathroom – tanks to be removed (S Pemble)



FIG 14 – Photograph of attic dormer to be enlarged (S Pemble)



FIG 15 – Photograph of bedroom with dormer, note low levels of natural light (S Pemble)



FIG 16 – Photograph of Bedroom 5, from dressing-room side with later partition to open up (S Pemble)



FIG 17 – Photograph of Bedroom 5 from bedroom side, to be opened up (S Pemble)



FIG 18 – Photograph of main bedroom en suite, new door to be formed by mirror (S Pemble)



FIG 19 – Photograph of door to be closed up from lobby of dressing room (S Pemble)