

64 FRIAR STREET

DROITWICH

WR9 8EF



FINAL REPORT

on the building's architectural interest for

THE HISTORIC DROITWICH PROJECT

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund

March 2017

64 Friar Street, Droitwich (NGR SO 89923 63397)

Summary

Apart from an elegant early 19th century door case, the street elevation is quite undistinguished and gives no hint of the timber-framed structure that exists behind the façade and which contains some remarkable early seventeenth-century fixtures and fittings. A first-floor room retains fashionable Jacobean plaster ceilings, panelling and a richly carved overmantel, all physical manifestations of the wealth and aspirations of the owner at the time.

Background

The National Heritage List entry (number 1167911) dates from its first listing in 1973 and provides a brief description of the exterior of the building.

Late C18-early C19. Stuccoed. 3 casements up, 4 sashes down (all modern fenestration). Centre door, 8 fielded panels, rectangular fanlight with bars, moulded wood case and entablature. Moulded wood eaves board.

In April 2014 Christopher Pancheri, working on behalf of the Historic Droitwich Group, identified this building on the south side of Friar Street near its junction with St Andrew's Street as being of considerable architectural interest. With the kind permission of the owner the opportunity was taken to investigate the building in more detail and access the roof space. This follow-up visit was made in March 2015 and a further visit with Ian Tyers, the dendrochronologist, ensued in February 2016.

Description

The complex comprises a main range facing the street, a short wing to the south-east and two large brick blocks on the south side extending into the rear yard. This report concentrates on the main range.

The main range is a two-storey timber-framed structure which has been heavily disguised by stucco applied outside and by plastered walls inside. Internally it measures 11.5m (38ft) long with a depth of 5.79m (19ft). At the south-east end is a short two-storey timber-framed wing, while to the south west a tall brick chimney with four in line stacks sits parallel to the back wall. The stack and its flues are best seen externally from a distance and show that there are four shafts which are linked together by a brick capping, itself rebuilt. One external shaft still retains its v-shaped projections or spurs which were repeated on the external surfaces and made the original design a star plan. Together with an original oversailing capping, the stack must have made this whole chimney a notable feature of the Droitwich townscape. As well as having flues to two fireplaces in the front range, it is suspected that the stack also served two other fireplaces in an earlier timber-framed wing on the south-west side, later replaced by the present brick block. The ribbed brickwork of one flue visible above the roofline shows how it was cut back when the 19th century extension was erected.

Inside there are just a few signs of the framed structure visible within cupboards and in the passageway between the ground floor rooms immediately east of the

main stack. At first-floor level the historic divisions suggest that it is of three unequal bays - from the east 2.05m (6ft 9in), 4.17m (13ft 8in) and 5.23m (17ft 2in)) - but otherwise the best evidence for framing is in the roof space. Here first impressions appear to suggest the survival of a complete clasped purlin roof structure with close studding in the gable end trusses. Closer inspection shows that while the principal rafters and collars are mainly in situ, much of this framing has been re-assembled in an extensive repair programme carried out perhaps in the 18th century. Peg-hole evidence proves that a lot of the studs have been used elsewhere and did not originally belong with the existing collars. The clearest evidence for major repair work is to be seen in T2 where the principal rafter towards the street shows that the lower purlins do not extend far enough to even reach the principal but are secured by wrought-iron straps with clasps and at another point on the same roof slope by a wrought-iron stirrup. Because of the uncertainty of how much of the original roof is in situ dendrochronology was ruled out.

The outstanding feature of this building is the quality of the first-floor panelled room at the west end of the front range. Its distinguishing features comprise the wall panelling, the chimneypiece and ceiling plasterwork.

(a) Panelling

The panelling comprises five tiers of panels, with a wider arcaded frieze panel below the cornice. The small-square panels are arranged around the walls in framed blocks of varying lengths. On the west wall, they are five and ten panels wide, but on the east, they are nine and six wide. The blocks are separated by vertical stiles¹ which run the full height of the wall. The panelling seems to be largely in situ with minimal interventions.² The frame around each panel has mouldings along three sides and a chamfered dust-ledge at the bottom. A later skirting board obscures the foot of the panelling at floor level. In the south-west corner of the room is a cupboard or closet, accessed through a contemporary panelled door which is hung on wrought-iron cock's head hinges. The main change discernible is the evidence to show that the present entrance in the south-east corner is a later alteration. Prior to this the room was approached from the east wall where a change in the panelling reveals the position of the original doorway.

(b) Chimneypiece

Three main elements define this feature:

- Frieze level: three carved brackets divide the frieze into two panels below the cornice
- Overmantel: three caryatids or terms³, two of them male figures flank each side of the overmantel and a female figure in the centre.

¹ Stile: the end vertical member of a panelled frame into which the horizontal rails are fixed.

² 'Panelling is easy to move and has frequently been re-arranged within the same house or brought in from elsewhere, thus confusing the historical picture.' Linda Hall *Period House Fixtures & Fittings 1300-1900* (Countryside Books, 2005) p139

³ Term is a pedestal or pilaster tapering downwards, usually with the upper part of a human figure growing out of it. *Pevsner's Architectural Glossary* ed. Simon Bradley (Yale University Press, 2010) p123

The intervening framed panels contain a cartouche enclosing a lion's mask head.

- Below the mantelshelf are three recessed plain panels, then two male caryatids flanking the fire opening. A later fireplace with recessed Gothic mouldings has been inserted into the opening.

(c) Plasterwork

The ceiling is divided lengthwise by a main ceiling beam which is plastered over, an incised running pattern being formed on the underside. The two areas of ceiling display a geometric design of intersecting thin plaster ribs forming two main designs. In the panel north of the ceiling beam towards the street round-lobed trefoils intersect around an inner ribbon of six long lobes. The ceiling panel towards the chimneypiece on the south side comprises a design of a round-lobed quatrefoil enclosing a concave-sided diamond central piece with fleur-de-lis terminals. This design element is paralleled in the ceiling of the Long Gallery at Haddon Hall, Derbyshire, where it has been dated as early 17th century.⁴

In the room below an almost identical design to that used upstairs in the panel facing towards the street has been repeated. It differs in having the additional element of concave-sided hexagon enclosing it.

All three decorative ceilings include the use of heraldic emblems in the corners of their design. An eagle, mermaid, Tudor rose, ostrich feathers encircled by a coronet, a dove and another so far unidentified bird are each represented. They were all popular devices much used in the late 16th and early 17th century and are illustrated below.

Dating

In the south-eastern brick extension to the south-west wing there is an incised datestone which reads '1526/REBUILT/1849'. The stone is re-set and the lettering purporting to date from 1526 is not convincing as early 16th century work. Is it perhaps an example of deliberate antiquarianism? Has any documentary evidence been traced to suggest a major rebuild of the premises in 1849 when this might have been created, or do any plans help to show how the buildings behind the street frontage have been altered? Until further light can be thrown on the datestone's origins it raises more questions than answers!

Sadly, we are not able to use dendrochronology to establish a felling date for the timbers used in the roof and documentary research has not, so far, identified any clues to close dating. We are therefore left with comparative dating based on similar features found in other houses and, of course, should be mindful how secure the dating of these parallels is. We have already noted the parallels for the decorative plasterwork of the ceilings which suggest an early 17th century date, perhaps as early as c1600. The decorative star-plan stack is a type of chimney

⁴ Nikolaus Pevsner & Elizabeth Williamson *The Buildings of England: Derbyshire* (Penguin Books, 1986) p228. Less elaborate parallels may be seen in the multiple small square panels between the first-floor ceiling beams at Lower Nupend, Cradley, Herefordshire, which have been dated to c.1600. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments England *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Herefordshire* vol.II East (1932) plate 44.

with a long currency in Worcestershire from the end of the 16th century (c1580 in a rebuilding of Salwarpe Court) to at least the 1660s (addition of parlour stack dated 1661 at Bell's Farm, King's Norton (formerly Worcestershire, now Birmingham)).⁵ Perhaps the closest parallel are the two large projecting stacks on the east side of Greete Court at Greete in south Shropshire which have been dated to the early 17th century.⁶ The panelling and spectacular overmantel with its liberal use of caryatids, for which there are many high-status parallels, would be entirely appropriate for a very late 16th or early 17th century date.

While close dating of the primary phase is still elusive on architectural grounds, the Historic Droitwich Team has however identified papers associated with the late 18th century ownership of the building by the Bearcroft family which indicate that in 1760 the structural state of parts of the house was a major cause of concern. It is tempting to link repairs needed to rectify these defects with the reconstruction of the framing in the roof where we have already noted the use of iron straps, probably of 18th century vintage, to hold up the building.

Despite these cautious qualifications, no 64 Friar Street is remarkable in retaining an outstanding first floor room of early 17th century date, suggesting that the owners were people of considerable wealth to be able to install fashionable elements into their home. The early 19th century extensions with the creation of the stair hall are an important later phase which again reflect the status of the owner.

Stephen Price

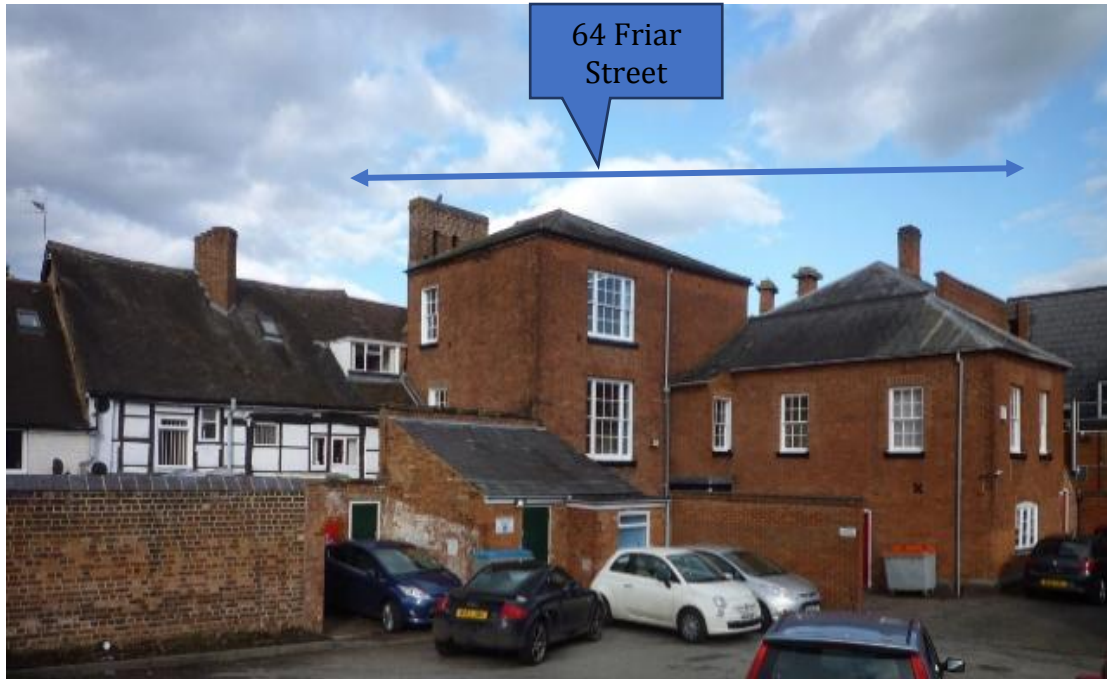
20 May 2015 (revised 23 September 2015 and February -March 2017)

Acknowledgments

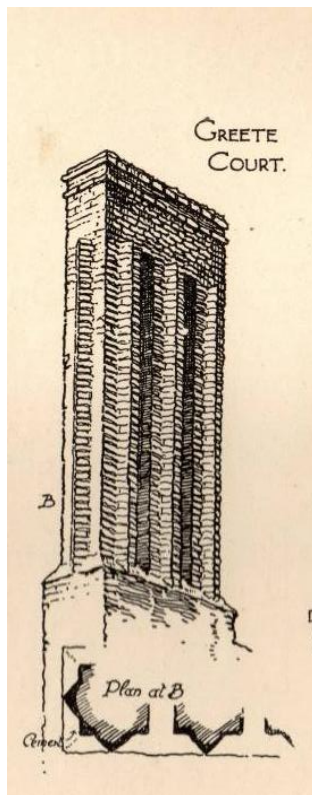
I am grateful to David Houghton, Jane Smith, Maxine and other staff at Parkinson Wright, solicitors, for their warm hospitality. The Historic Droitwich Group is indebted to Paul Jones LRPS for spending much time carefully and skilfully photographing the panelled room and other details of the building.

⁵ Stephen Price Associates Ltd *Collett's Green Farm, Powick, Worcestershire: Report on its history, architecture & archaeology* (2013) p20 (WSM 55804)

⁶ Illustrated by Sydney R. Jones in P. H. Ditchfield *The Manor Houses of England* (B. T. Batsford, London, 1910) p119. John Newman & Nikolaus Pevsner *The Buildings of England: Shropshire* (Yale University Press, 2006) p.276



64 Friar Street, Droitwich from the south-west. Left to right: the lower black and white building is Nos 60-62 Friar Street, then the red brick buildings of the southern wings behind no 64. Note the earlier chimney stack towering above the slate roof of the three-storey wing.



The best vantage points to view the original stack are at a distance from the south-west (top) or from the Waitrose car park to the north (above right (photograph courtesy of Paul Jones LRPS)). Greete Court in Shropshire (above left) shows a 3-flue version of the early 17th, also with later capping (source: P. H. Ditchfield *The Manor Houses of England* (1910)).



Top: roof space of the main range looking west with a blocked window in the end gable. Bottom: roof space of main range looking east with another blocked window.



Intermediate truss looking in a westerly direction.



Details showing the iron straps used to hold the lower tier of purlins to the principal rafter of the intermediate truss.





Roof space of south-east wing looking south.



Detail of tenoned purlin set in gable of south-east wing



The chimneypiece in the first floor room at the western end of the main range retains its elaborate overmantel which is separated into two panels by three richly carved Renaissance figures representing the upper part of a human body set on a pedestal. These architectural features are often referred to as caryatids or terms.



(Paul Jones LRPS)



(Paul Jones LRPS)



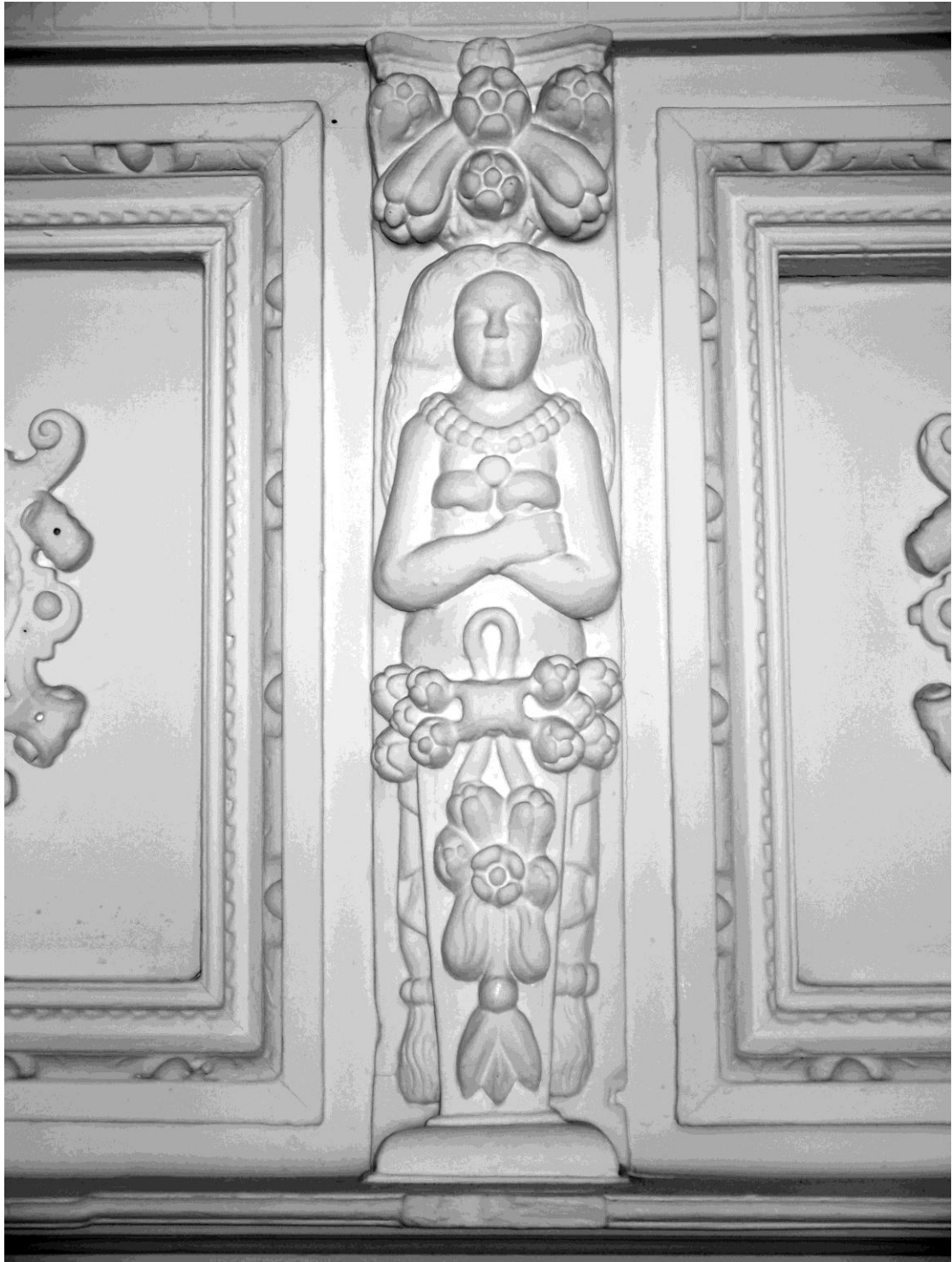
(Paul Jones LRPS)



Bracket and frieze below cornice of the overmantel. (Paul Jones LRPS)



(Paul Jones LRPS)



(Paul Jones LRPS)



(Paul Jones LRPS)



One of the overmantel panels showing the use of a cartouche enclosing a lion mask. (Paul Jones LRPS)



Panelling around the south-west corner of the first-floor room, showing (above) the closet door, and (below) the carved frieze. (Paul Jones LRPS)





Plasterwork of the ceiling panel closest to the street. (Paul Jones LRPS)



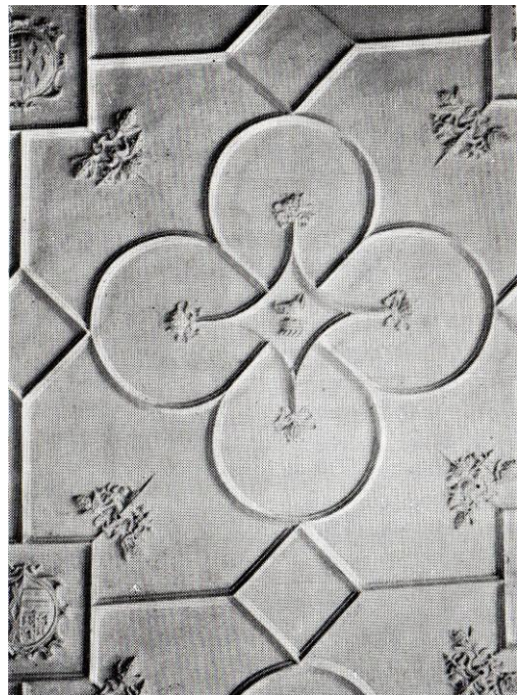
The room is lined with small-square panelling, five panels high with a frieze. It has been very little altered.



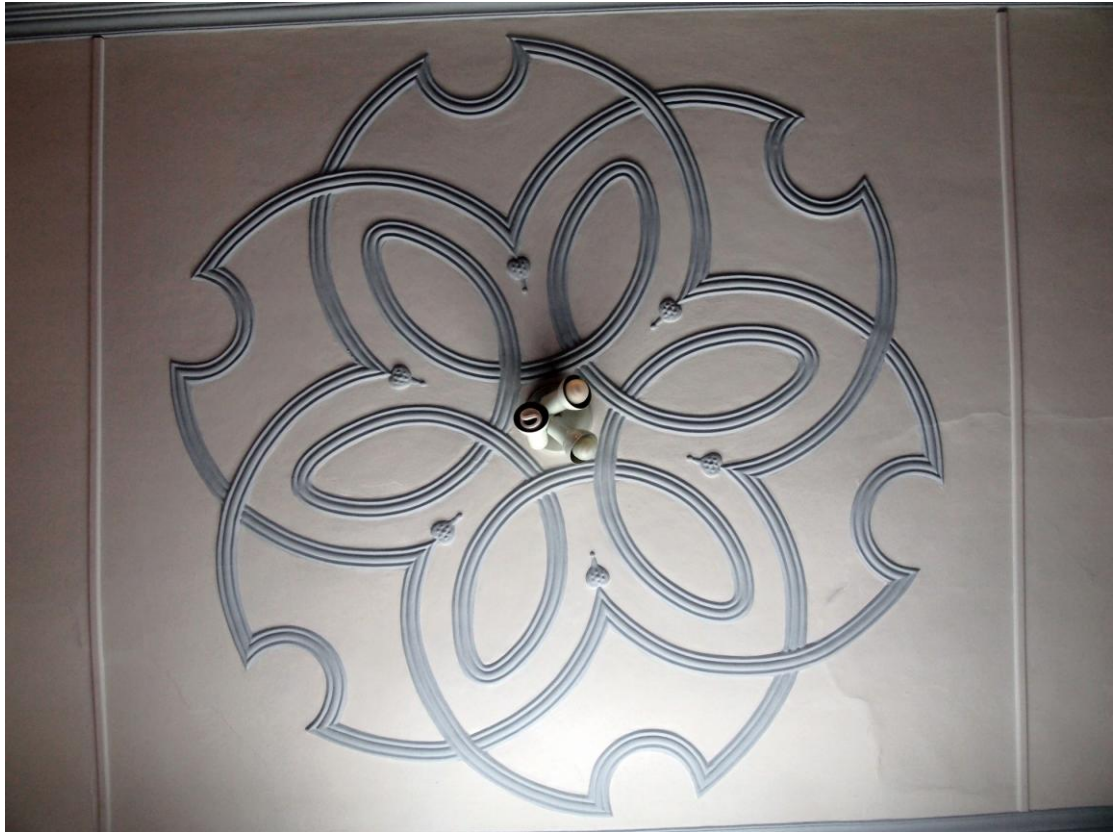
The minor alterations to the panelling around the window are associated with the changes to the original fenestration. It is possible to demonstrate that a large window once occupied a slightly wider space in the centre and to either side there were shorter frieze windows.



Panelling to the western side of the main window showing carved frieze of the original arrangement below the moulded cornice and at the bottom of the photograph the line of the primary panelling. The space in between which was a frieze light window has been blocked by plain panels. (Paul Jones LRPS)



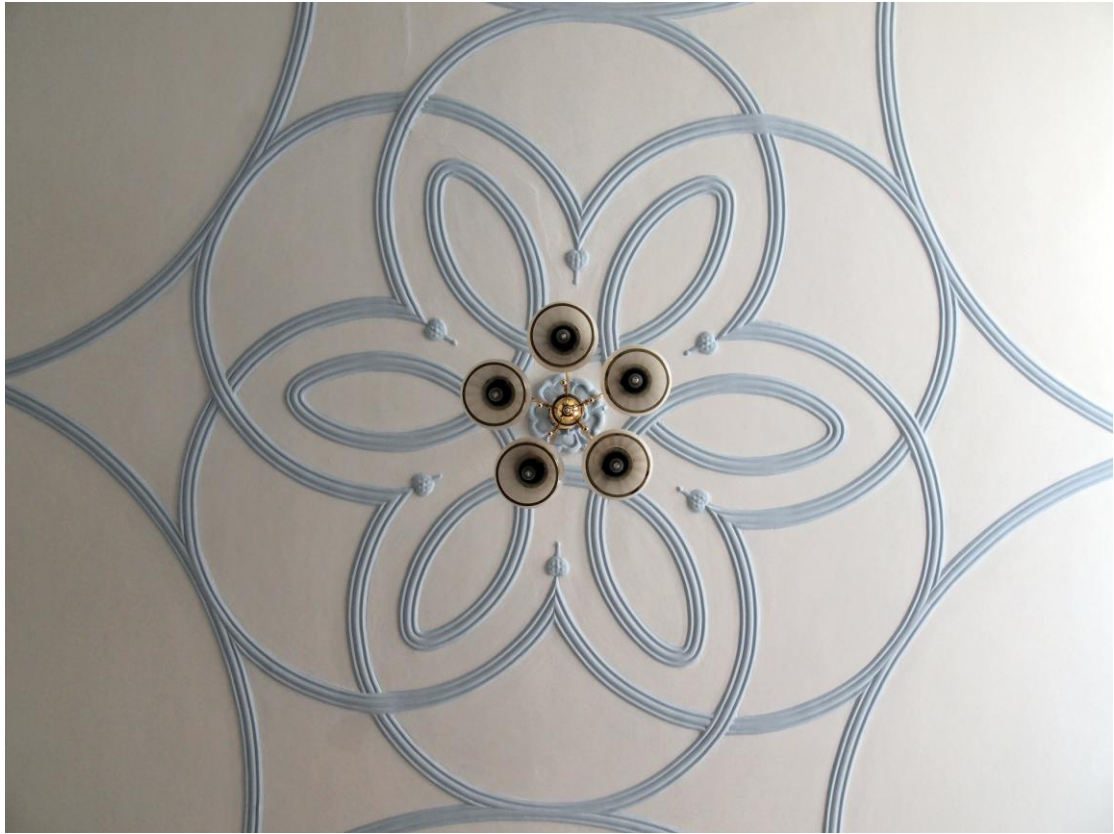
Left: cock's head wrought-iron hinge from the cupboard door (Paul Jones, LRPS); right: decorative plaster ceiling in the Long Gallery, Haddon Hall, Derbyshire, early 17th century. The round-headed quartrefoil and concave-sided centrepiece has similarities to the design used in one of the ceiling compartments at 64 Friar Street (top, photo courtesy of Paul Jones, LRPS).



Decorative plasterwork in the first floor room towards the street. (Paul Jones LRPS)



Decorative plasterwork in the ground floor meeting room.



Detail of the decorative ceiling in the meeting room. (Paul Jones LRPS)

Heraldic emblems represented in the plasterwork at 64 Friar Street. (Paul Jones LRPS)



Five ostrich feathers encircled by a coronet



Eagle



Mermaid



Tudor rose



Martlet





(Paul Jones LRPS)



(Paul Jones LRPS)



The elegant entrance hall and sweeping staircase belongs to a major early 19th century phase.



Top: landing with stair balusters. Lower photograph (Paul Jones LRPS) showing the ceiling cornice of the stairs hall.



The pattern of the decorative cast iron balusters, seen at landing level below, is derived from stylised lyres, anthemion or honeysuckle and laurel wreaths. The anthemion pattern is repeated on the dentils of the ceiling cornice with its egg and tongue moulding. (Paul Jones LRPS)



South or rear elevation showing on the right the brick wing. The porch roof is supported by the elegant cast-iron Victorian Gothic clustered column. The datestone (fig p33 below) is set in the room on the right through the open door.





Datestone re-set in the brick extension on east side of the rear yard. The lower inscription records the rebuilding of 1849, a date which might be compatible with this brick wing. However, the style of the lettering used in the upper date '1526' does not look convincing as 16th century work and may be deliberate antiquarianism or a re-cutting of an earlier datestone. (Paul Jones LRPS)



Left: back stairs showing the stick balusters and turned newels. Right: door case to Friar Street, most probably created in its present form in the early 19th century.



The cellar under the north-east rear wing has a barrel vault and although showing some stonework at its lowest level does not appear to be any earlier than c.1800. (Paul Jones LRPS)