

The Landmark Trust

THE OLD PARSONAGE History Album



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1980, revised 1995**

Re-presented in 2015

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BASIC DETAILS

Old Parsonage built	c. 1500
Rectory (South block)	13th and 14th century and c.1500
Acquired by Landmark	1979
Architect:	Philip Jebb
Builder:	F. Rendell & Son
Work completed	1980

Inscriptions in sitting room are from the Vulgate (early Latin):

Scimus enim, si terrestris nostra domus tabernaculum dissolutum fuerit, aedificium habituros esse nos a deo, domum nullis minibus factam, sempiternam in caelis.

For we know, that if our earthly house and tabernacle were destroyed, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. (2 Corinthians 5:1)

Perambulabam in innocentia cordis mei: in medio domus mea.

I will walk in my house with a perfect heart. (Psalms 101:2)

Contents

Summary	5
Introduction	9
History of Iffley Rectory before 1800	11
Some background	11
Early history	13
The Rectory-house	16
Tudors and Stuarts	18
Hanoverian irregularities	21
Structural History	23
Norman origins	23
Medieval rebuilding	25
The Tudor Rectory	26
Nineteenth Century Revival	29
Further improvements	33
Practical solutions	35
A Divided Future - the Landmark Restoration	40
Inside the house	43
The new Rectory	47
Sources and Further Reading	55



Summary

A house connected with the church has stood on the site of Iffley Rectory (as it was known for most of its history) for a very long time - possibly indeed from the date of the church's foundation in the 12th century. Furthermore the building as it exists today is one of only two or three parsonages in Oxfordshire of which there is a substantial amount surviving from before the Reformation of the mid-16th century.

The image conjured up by the Old Parsonage is of a continuous succession of gentle and learned parsons writing their sermons in the panelled drawing room, with a soothing view of the river down the long garden, past the venerable mulberry tree. If they needed inspiration they had only to look up at the text from the Vulgate inscribed as a frieze above their heads: *'For we know that, if our earthly house and tabernacle were destroyed, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; (2 Corinthians 5:1) I will walk in my house with a perfect heart (Psalms 101:2).*

Inevitably the truth is not so simple. Certainly in 1475 it was described as the house "wherein the parish priest hath been used to dwell", and dwell there he probably did for most of the Middle Ages. For most of the 19th century, too, it was a parsonage in the regular sense. But for long periods in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries the house was let to entirely unclerical gentlemen, who rented the land or "rectorial estate". The vicar meanwhile was probably living comfortably in an Oxford college. Some of them, to be fair, rode out to perform parochial duties themselves. More often they paid a curate to do this for them. Out of his small salary the curate would find himself lodgings, sometimes in the village, sometimes not. The presence of a priest at the heart of the village was by no means to be taken for granted, and it was a lucky parish that enjoyed this privilege, then as now.

Iffley Rectory is now divided in two. Only the northern half, owned by the Landmark Trust and called the Old Parsonage, is open today. The southern half is still the Rectory, the home of the Vicar of Iffley and his family. For historical purposes, however, the building will be described as one.

The main range of Iffley Rectory runs from north to south, with a staircase tower on the north-east corner, and a larger wing at the south-east. The building divides naturally into two separate halves - a great advantage when work began there in 1979. Of these the southern is the older, and the more complex, while the northern contains the finer rooms. The south end contains the walls of a small stone hall of the 13th century. In the late 14th century, apparently, a timber-framed second storey was added to these. Slightly later again a solar wing was added on the east, with an arch-braced roof. In one wall are curious carved stone fragments of the 13th century, reassembled and possibly imported from the church.

Traces of other structures have been found to the north of this small house, some of them dating back to the 12th century, but the north end in its present form did not exist before about 1500. Its fine rooms, with their mullioned windows and wide fireplaces, were clearly intended to form the principal living quarters. The service rooms were in the south end, which now had new floors, and walls rebuilt entirely in stone. The Tudor rooms of the north end were altered in small ways over the following centuries. The sitting room has a late 16th-century moulded plaster ceiling; the ground floor rooms are lined with 17th-century panelling (this does not fit very well, and may only have been brought here in the 19th century). Upstairs there are 18th-century fireplaces. On the staircase is a piece of stained glass on which is inscribed "William Moore new leded ye window 1753". Soon after this, however, the Rectory suffered a period of neglect, because in 1790 it was declared unfit for habitation.

It remained in this state for another 30 years. Not until 1819/20 were improvements carried out by a new vicar, Rev. Edward Marshall, who happened also to hold the lease of the Rectory. A two-storey corridor was added on the east, to make communication between the two halves of the building easier. A hall was made in part of the dining room, which meant reducing the width of the windows, but they were made deeper instead. The inscriptions from the Vulgate in the sitting room may date from this time, or they could date from 1857/8, when J.C. Buckler was employed to carry out improvements to the service quarters, forming a new kitchen and sculleries, with a new housekeeper's sitting room and bedroom.

Alterations in the 20th century, before the restoration of 1979-80, consist of the little oriel window above the garden door; the replacement of Stonesfield slates by tiles in 1953; and a new kitchen and larger windows at the south end in 1960.

Restoration of the Old Parsonage

The Landmark Trust bought Iffley Rectory in 1979 from the Church commissioners. The idea was not just to carry out essential repairs and provide our visitors with an exceptional place to stay, but more importantly to reorganise the building so that it could still benefit the church, without being a problem to it. This was to be done simply by dividing it in two, and the architect Philip Jebb was asked to draw up plans to this effect. A small and manageable house was to be provided for the vicar next to the church, while the north end would be let for holidays and thus generate income for its maintenance.

To make the alteration possible the 19th-century corridors and porch were stripped off the east side of the house. This also meant the north end could return to its Tudor proportions, and revealed the two great chimneystacks. To complete the division only one ground floor door had to be blocked. The new Rectory was given its own private courtyard. So that the Landmark could be entered from the lane, a window in the staircase tower was turned into a door, which was then given the stone surround from the demolished 1850s porch, which had also opened onto the lane.

The east wall, where the corridors had been, was repaired and repointed. Part of a Tudor window was found on the first floor, between the chimneys, and this was reinstated. On the west (garden) front, the two blocked lights of the sitting room window were reopened. The dining room window had to be left as it was, however, because of the partition that had been inserted in 1820 to form the garden hall. This garden hall was in fact the only place where a kitchen could be fitted without spoiling the appearance of the two main rooms. In the dining room some of the panelling had been removed by the last vicar, and this was now put back in position. The floorboards in the dining room are old, but a new elm floor was laid in the sitting room. Upstairs, partitions for two bedrooms and a bathroom were rearranged so that they did not cut across the windows. A new landing was formed at the top of the stairs, lined with a mixture of old and new panelling. In the attics, at the top of the staircase with its solid oak treads, a further bedroom was made, where a window found in the north gable enjoys a distant and romantic view of the spires of Oxford.



A typical Rectorial family of around 1900, the Wilders of Sulham in Berkshire. The grandfather, Henry, and his son, Henry Charles, who succeeded him as Rector, were both keen photographers. Henry senior also owned one of the first cars in Berkshire, and installed an electric lighting plant at the Rectory. Besides being Rector, he was trustee of the manor and village doctor. From Brown & Bhard: Village Life in England.

Introduction

Until 1979, the Old Parsonage and the present Iffley Rectory formed a single house. Together they represent a rare case of a parsonage dating almost entirely from before the Tudor Reformation. The rooms in which you are staying were added, around 1500, to a much earlier house, built mainly in the 13th and 14th centuries with later additions. It is likely that a house for a priest has in fact stood on the site for as long as the Norman church beside it.

It was hardly surprising therefore that when the Diocese of Oxford decided it was too large for a modern parson and resolved to sell it, there was a good deal of anxiety over its future. In the hope that Landmark might provide a solution, a parishioner who knew of our work told us about it. The Landmark's founder and trustee, John Smith, felt that this was not only an important building in its own right but that it also gives a strong impression of a parson's life in former days. He decided to take it on.

However, he still felt that it was the right place for the Vicar of Iffley to live, next to his parish church. With the help of the architect Philip Jebb, therefore, Landmark drew up plans to divide the house in two. While Landmark visitors would have the pleasure of staying in the Tudor rooms and enjoying the long garden, that part nearest the churchyard would be converted into a decent and manageable house, suitable for the busiest of modern professional families. The hope was that with this nesting box to tempt them, the Vicar would be encouraged to occupy the Rectory again. Thanks to the Dean and Chapter of Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford, patrons of the living, this is in fact what happened. In 1981, they put up the money to buy the house back from Landmark and it is now the Rectory once again.

The Landmark had been completed in 1980, the work having been carried out by F. Rendell and Son of Devizes. Details are given later in these notes, together with the story of the building and something about those who have lived here. We hope that, as you read of them, you will find ringing in your ears the resounding words that one of them had inscribed in the drawing room, telling us (just in case your Latin has grown a little rusty):

Scimus enim, si terrestris nostra domus tabernaculum dissolutum fuerit, aedificium habituros esse nos a deo, domum nullis minibus factam, sempiternam in caelis.

For we know, that if our earthly house and tabernacle were destroyed, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. (2 Corinthians 5:1)

Perambulabam in innocentia cordis mei: in medio domus mea.

I shall walk in my house with a perfect heart. (Psalms 101:2)

The History of Iffley Rectory before 1800

Some background

Before beginning the story of the building, it might be helpful to explain some of the terms used, and to clarify some of the images they give rise to. To start with, although what you are now staying in is called, for simplicity's sake, the Old Parsonage, for many centuries it was part of Iffley Rectory. In these historical notes therefore, the use of the word Rectory means the whole building, not just the part of it now used as such.

The word `Rectory' conjures up a picture of a large and comfortable building, lived in by a scholarly, antiquarian or amateur naturalist parson; his practical wife, ready to dispense soup and sound advice around the village; a large and lively family at all stages from the nursery to the university, forming a hub of local society. The eldest daughter will certainly marry her cousin, the Squire's son, but until such an event takes place, she and her sisters are to be found in the company of the young men whom their father takes in to coach for examinations, or the earnestly evangelical curate.

The house is set in a large garden, stocked with rare plants; there are orchards and paddocks beyond, and just out of sight, some barns, a dove-cote, and other signs of the Rectorial farm. There is a slightly larger staff, both indoors and out, than is strictly necessary, because young men and girls from the parish have to be taken on to give them a `good start'.

It is difficult to realise that such a vision is really only true, and even that but in part, of a comparatively short period: the Golden Age of the Parson, which began in the 18th century, flourished in the 19th, and died in the 20th. It is a picture that has been helped along by fiction, the novels of Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope. The conscientious scholar parson of course occurs throughout the history of the English Church, and so does the well-off farming

Rector; but for many centuries before the Golden Age, most of the pastoral clergy were too poor to live the life of a gentleman of means and education. Moreover, that great buttress of the institution, the Parson's Wife, did not even come into existence until after the Reformation.

So we should not expect that the story of Iffley Rectory will always match up with any ideal picture. To gain a better understanding of how a parish such as Iffley worked in reality from the beginning of its existence in the late 12th century, some knowledge will be needed of the hierarchy of the parish clergy, in all its intricacy.

The first thing is to discard such easy notions as that a Rector automatically lived in a Rectory, because at Iffley he almost never did. It is important, too, to take a wide view of the term 'Rectory' or 'Vicarage'. These did not just refer to a house, but to a combination of a job or office (the cure of souls) and a property or income (the benefice or living), of which a dwelling, the Rectory-house, was an incidental part.

Each parish was set up as a Rectory, with a patron who had the right of appointing new Rectors. It was endowed with land, the glebe, to provide the incumbent with his 'steady' income. The rest, the 'variable' income, came from tithes and other parish taxes. This all seems straightforward enough, and in many cases it worked admirably. There were complicating factors however.

The main complication arose when the founder of a church or their descendant, hopeful of acquiring merit in the hereafter, gave their right of patronage to a monastery, a cathedral chapter, or some other religious body. The recipient could if it so wished 'appropriate' the living, by taking over all the revenues, adding them to their existing funds and so becoming, in fact, the Rector. This institutional Rector then had only to find a small wage to pay a chaplain to perform the duties of parish priest.

Early history

This is exactly what happened at Iffley. The church here was founded by the St Remy family in the late 12th century and at an early date the patronage was given to Kenilworth Priory. Soon afterwards, in the 13th century, it passed to the Archdeacon of Oxford, who appropriated the Rectory and (as Dean of Christchurch) is still the patron to this day. Thereafter the resident priest was no longer Rector, but only a chaplain appointed by the Archdeacon.

The appropriators would sometimes forget to appoint a chaplain, or would install one who was unfit to do the work. In such cases it became customary to 'ordain a vicarage'. Vicar just means substitute, or deputy, but his office was more secure than that of a chaplain. He had a fixed amount of the total revenue (usually about a third) allotted to him, as well as some of the regular parish dues. He might be given the freehold of some part of the glebe to farm. In return he was obliged to reside in the parish.

Vicarages varied in value tremendously: at one end of the scale a vicar was probably little better off than a chaplain, and like him probably came from the peasantry, with little or no education; at the other he might be a university graduate and a reasonably prosperous farmer.

Iffley illustrates the need for such an arrangement: it was served by a succession of chaplains throughout the Middle Ages, and by the late 15th century the parish had, by the Archdeacon's own admission, become much neglected, lacking any sort of priest for lengthy periods. The Bishop of Lincoln (to whose large diocese Iffley then belonged) finally had to act: a Vicarage or Perpetual Curacy was ordained in 1475, with a stipend of £8 a year.



An Aerofilms view of Iffley in the 1950s, when little change had occurred for a century or more. At this time, the garden wall of Court Place, the large house in the foreground, still ran very close to the South block of the Rectory.

A problem which constantly faced the Church authorities in the Middle Ages was that of non-residency. This mainly occurred when the Rector or Vicar of a parish was employed elsewhere, in the King's administration perhaps, or in the staff of a nobleman or bishop. Officials, such as Treasurers or Secretaries, were invariably at that time in holy orders, and the accepted method of paying them was to grant them the income from a good living.

Another reason for non-residency was pluralism. This was when the incumbent of one parish sought to enlarge his income by becoming Rector or Vicar of one or more others. He would naturally live in the one he liked best, and neglect the rest.

Whatever the reason, the parishes of non-residents were, once again, handed over to the care of a chaplain or, as he came to be known, curate. So common were they, that it is to them and not to their superiors that the title parish priest applied in medieval deeds. It has in fact been argued that the more humble parish priest was, in the end, better equipped than his employer to serve parishioners' needs, since he probably came from the same background and shared the same interests and way of life.

The problem of non-residency did not go away with the Reformation. It was indeed more widespread around 1800 than ever before: over half the parishes in the country were then without a resident incumbent. Among the chief culprits, from the late Middle Ages on, were the universities. They contributed greatly to the abuse, particularly in their immediate vicinity, by granting livings in their patronage to dons and fellows whose positions required them to reside in college.

This is probably what had happened when, in 1518, not long after the ordination of a Vicarage at Iffley, the answers to the questions put during the Bishop's official visitation state that 'there are no resident Rector or Vicar, the Curate does not reside in the parish'. Certainly in the 18th and early 19th century almost all the Perpetual Curates or Vicars of Iffley held posts in the university, and did not reside in the parish. To their credit, most did ride out to read the necessary services.

Rectory-house

Where did a Rectory or Vicarage-house fit into all this? The best built ones, of course, belonged to a resident Rector. If he was non-resident, the chaplain or curate would then live in it. If the parish had no resident Rector for a long time, the house would decay, because the curate could not afford to maintain it. Sometimes it became completely ruinous. The curate would then have to find himself a lodging or cottage somewhere else. Lack of a suitable house could be used as an excuse for non-residency.

Where the Rectory had been appropriated, it was quite common for the appropriator to regard their property as quite separate from the cure of souls in that parish. They would employ a bailiff to farm the land, and he would live in the Rectory-house, if one existed. Later on, from the Tudor period, the Rectory could even be let on lease, possibly to a layman.

When a Vicarage was ordained, a new house of some sort was usually provided. Vicarage-houses, until well into the 18th century, were often little better than cottages or small farmhouses. Where a Vicar was also non-resident, his house would then be lived in by the curate.

Iffley, although strictly an appropriated Rectory, seems to have been treated in a more informal way, as though the Rector was simply non-resident. The land was farmed by a bailiff, but the house that went with it, next to the churchyard, was where, according to the ordination deed of 1475, 'the parish priest hath been used to dwell, with garden or close adjoining'.

After 1475, this was still where the perpetual curates or vicars were meant to live. But there is evidence to suggest that the periods when the chaplain lived in the Rectory-house alternated with others when someone with more means lived there and made improvements, either the Archdeacon's bailiff, or conceivably the Archdeacon himself.

It seems that the Rectory became dilapidated, if not ruinous, in both the 14th and 15th centuries. This may have been after periods of occupation by chaplains, who found themselves living in a house rather above their status, and unable to prevent its decline. However, the house was also largely rebuilt in the 14th century and again about 1500. A number of additions and detached outbuildings came and went, though parts of them, and materials salvaged from them, were thriftily reused in their replacements.

The feeling is of work done by a substantial occupier, not well enough off to rebuild on a grand scale but with a decent income. The Archdeacons might have helped, but they do not seem to have been active improvers of their property if the chancel of the Church is anything to go by. This, which it was their duty to maintain, has scarcely been altered since the 13th century.

Tudors and Stuarts

In the 16th century we have, for the first time, positive evidence that the Rectory was leased away from the Vicar, for a period of sixty years. The leaseholder was Arthur Pitts, registrar to the Archdeacon, and he lived in the Rectory-house from around 1560. He died in 1578, and his estates passed to his four sons. He held the leases of two other Rectories, and other land as well, so that the family was comparatively wealthy.

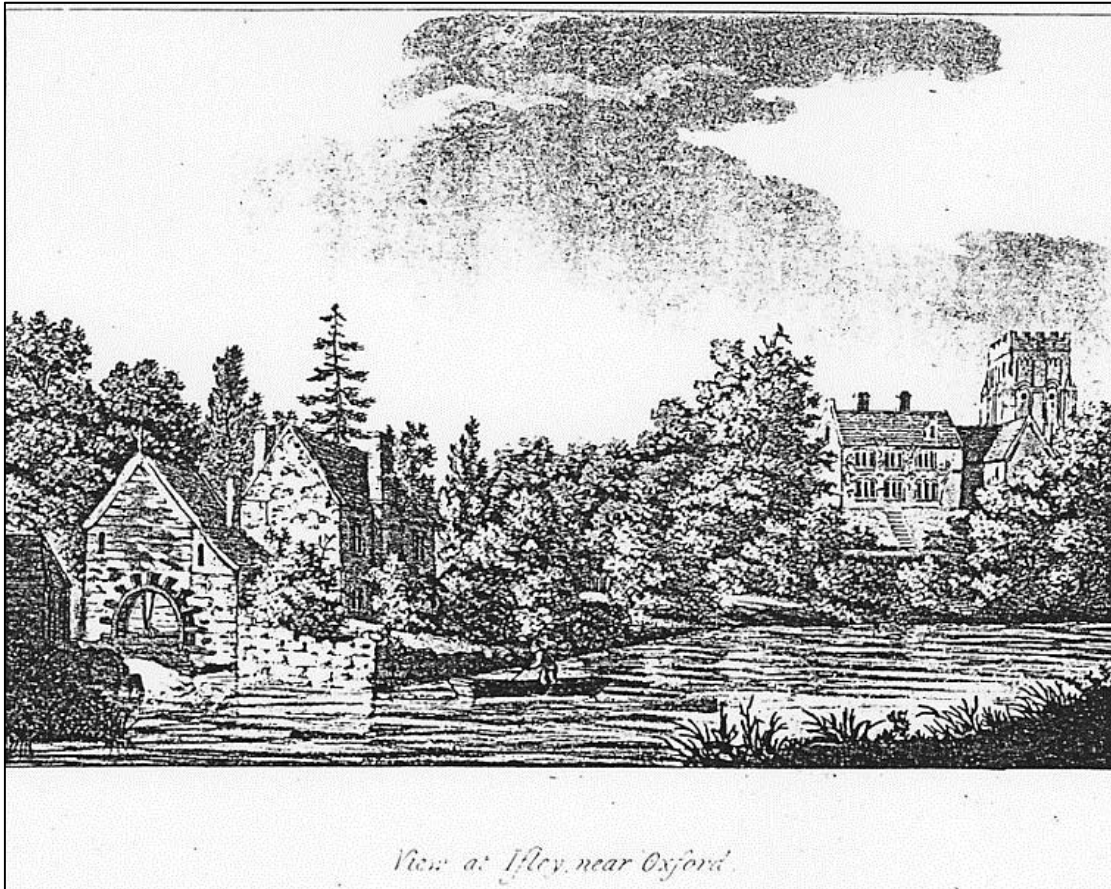
His sons, however, found themselves in trouble over their allegiance to the Catholic faith. One was imprisoned in the Tower of London and three of them, Robert, Arthur and Thomas, were subsequently banished from the country. Their property was confiscated by the Crown, but Iffley seems to have been exempted, since the younger brother, Philip, and then his son, Simon, lived there in succession until about 1620.

It is tempting to ascribe the Tudor remodelling of the Rectory-house to this family, but unless it is an example of Oxford architectural conservatism at its most extreme, the work must have been completed some years before they took on the lease. This work, which gave the house the form it still has today, must have been carried out by a previous, unknown leaseholder just before or more probably soon after 1500.

After the Pitts family had left, Iffley Rectory was for a time a Rector's house in fact as well as in theory: Barten Holiday, Archdeacon of Oxford, decided to make it his residence. He was a minor member of the group of 17th-century poet-parsons which included John Donne and George Herbert. Holiday wrote lines such as: 'The world's a prison, no man can get out, Let Atheists storm then, 'tis Heaven roundabout' and 'Britons, yee are stout men, be also wise, They'd need be so, on whom are all men's eyes'.

He was at one time chaplain to Charles I, and so lost his Archdeaconry in the Commonwealth. He later ingratiated himself with his new superiors and was given a living in Buckinghamshire. At the Restoration he gave way to the former incumbent of that parish and returned to Iffley. He died in 1661.

If the Commonwealth years showed Holiday to be more careful of his own skin than was wholly admirable, they also provide an example of the poverty-stricken but noble-minded curate for whom political considerations were no match for religious ones. Charles Forbench served in Iffley, but was so poor that his wife had to work for a tailor, to gain them a lodging in his house in Sandford. One day Forbench was arrested for reading a service from the prohibited Book of Common Prayer to a congregation in Woodstock, but no such interference could prevent him from carrying out his duty: 'If I must not read it, resolved I am to say it by heart, in spite of all the rogues in England'.



View at Ifley near Oxford.

Aquatint by Samuel Ireland, 1792. The cross-wing shown at the South end of the Rectory appears to be a mistake. There is no evidence that such a wing ever existed.

Hanoverian irregularities

After the death of Holiday, the Rectory was once again separated from the serving incumbent. For most of the 18th century, the lease was held by a family of Oxford divines called Brookes. This did not affect the Vicars too badly, since most held posts in the University and were content to live there. Such was Thomas West, of Magdalen, who served Iffley from 1734 until 1773.

The Brookes made some improvements to the Rectory-house, such as inserting new fireplaces in the bedrooms. It must have been for them, too, that William Moore 'releded ye windows in 1753', recording that fact on the outside of one in the stair tower. They felt no need to modernise the house and probably did not live there in any case, preferring to let it to tenants.

One of these, at least, was a curate: in 1781 Thomas Barnard, who held the post of Vicar, reported to the Bishop that he paid James Burton, who lived in the parsonage house, to serve the parish. Burton, a Fellow of Magdalen until 1775, stayed at Iffley until 1789, when he left to progress to better things. He was made Rector of Worton, and held two other livings besides, as well as being a Fellow of Christ Church from 1792, and a Royal chaplain.

We don't know whether he spent all his years in Iffley in the Rectory-house, but he lived there long enough for his daughter, Mary-Anne, to later regard it as her home. Her father does not seem to have done any work on the house. His successor, Mr Simpson, given the option of living there, reported that it was not fit for occupation, and asked for permission to live elsewhere.

His successors over the next thirty years lived in Oxford or, in one case, in Headington. Meanwhile the house that should rightfully have been theirs was given over to one or possibly more tenants, and steadily decayed. The story of its subsequent rescue belongs to the dawning of a new age, when, with only

one small relapse into the ways of the past, the Rectory-house was lived in continuously by the Vicar of the parish.

In one respect, Iffley has been well served by the behaviour of its reverend and academic proprietors, and their lack of interest in anything except the income from the Rectory. It remained, until the end of the 18th century, in 'the most primitive state of rural simplicity'. The Norman work in the Church, the Medieval and Tudor work in the Rectory-house, lasted until a time when such survivals were conserved and restored rather than replaced.

If these restorers were unable to stop themselves from adding a coat of 19th-century piety, it is hardly a thick one, and does not obscure anything that was already there. It is due to this careful treatment that Iffley Rectory is one of only two or three Parsonages in Oxfordshire in which there is a substantial amount of work dating from before the 17th century.

Structural History

Norman origins

Iffley Rectory runs from North to South, with a stair tower on the north-east and a larger wing on the south-east. The main range consists of two units of different dates, a North block and a South block. Of these the South is the earlier, and has the more complex history.

Externally the South block retains the plan of a single storey hall-house of the 13th century. Much of the masonry, up to the height of the first floor, also survives from this building, together with the chimney on the west front and the splays of a window on the east. The window has been reduced in height, and some fragments of 13th-century carving have been inserted into it, to form a rather improbable opening.

This was discovered during building work in 1857 and, since it shows no sign of having been a window, it has been suggested that it was a serving hatch. If this is so, it must have been put there after the east wing was added in the later Middle Ages. The fragments, strange though they are, must have come from either the Church or the Rectory. A column like the one forming the central shaft of the hatch supports one corner of the font, and a fragment of another was found in the Rectory. Their original purpose is not known.

In 1959-62, the Rev. R.J. Hills and his wife, in the course of renovating the Rectory, removed some panelling from around the early 19th-century fireplace in the dining room of the North block, now the Landmark. Behind it they found two more fireplaces, an Elizabethan one (much damaged, which they removed), and the wide Tudor one now in use.

Above these they saw a large, plain, four-centred arch. George Zarnecki, Professor of Romanesque Art at the University of London, identified the tooling on the stones of this arch as 12th or early 13th century. For a while the whole was optimistically declared to be the fireplace of a Norman hall, the North block thus predating the South by a century. There were objections, however: the 'fireplace' looked suspiciously like a relieving arch for the very wide Tudor opening; the four-centred arch was not a Norman form, and the existence of Norman ground floor halls is anyway debated.

The validity of these objections was later confirmed by the Professor himself, who said that the date of the stones making up the arch could not be used as evidence for dating the arch itself: the stones are indeed Norman ashlar work, but re-used by the Tudor builders.

Further confirmation has come from an excavation carried out by the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit in 1979-80, on the floor of the dining room. They found that part of the east wall was indeed in existence in or before the 13th century, but that it formed the west wall of another building that extended further east into what is now the courtyard. A second building, probably linked to the South block, then lay closely to the west again.

Sadly, the archaeologists did not have time to dig down to subsoil, so they were unable to discover the precise dating of the earliest buildings on the site. These were certainly in existence in the 13th century, and possibly in the 12th. The removal of one of these buildings at a later date may have provided the Tudor builders with their stone for the relieving arch. The desire to trace the building history back to the foundation of the Church has thus been satisfied in principle, if not in detail.

Medieval rebuilding

The 13th-century hall is happily established as the senior building on the site, but some of the east wall of the North block turns out to be a runner up, as a fragment of a perhaps pre-existing building lying slightly to the north-east. This, and the other buildings that stood beside it, were possibly the barns and byres of the Rectorial farm. There might have been other structures as well, such as a detached kitchen; the hall would only have been one element in a complex group.

From this date, this hall's development becomes more complicated. During the work in 1979-80, clear evidence was found that the thick walls of the original hall at one time had a superstructure of timber resting upon them. It is possible that the 13th-century roof decayed, was patched, and then could be repaired no more. When a more thorough rebuilding was finally needed, the cheapest alternative may have been simply to add a first floor hall or living room in timber onto the walls that existed already, after lowering them a bit. When this new hall was added, the ground floor became an undercroft or cellar, used only for storage. Access to the hall, which would have been open to the roof, was probably by a staircase against the outside wall.

Part of the timber frame survives in the walls. A brace was uncovered, with wattle and plaster infill, on the east side, between the main building range and the south-east wing. The bressumer beam is still there, resting on the wall, and in its turn supporting the posts of the frame and the floor joists, most of which are original.

It is reasonable to suppose that this framing is contemporary with the fine, four-bay, queen-post roof. The pairs of windbraces between the main trusses on the slopes of the roof make a slightly ogee pattern, two shallow 'S' forms meeting to form a point. This, together with the fact that there is no ridge piece or timber running the length of the roof at its apex, and the fact that the purlins,

doing the same job on the side slopes, are 'clasped' or sunk into the main trusses, suggests a date in the second half of the fourteenth century, in the period of recovery after the Black Death.

This could also be the date of a new floor level found by the archaeologists over-running the early north-west building, apparently within east and west walls in the same positions as those of the existing North block. It might not have extended so far to the north as the present building however.

In the 15th century, around 1425, an east wing was added. This contained a solar or chamber on the first floor and a kitchen below. It, too, might have replaced an earlier building, since there is a 13th-century corbel built into one wall.

The Tudor Rectory

By 1475, as already described, the Rectory was again in poor repair, but although the newly ordained Vicar was supposed to maintain the house, it remained the property of the Rector, and no work of any scale was put underway until the early 16th century. Perhaps the Rector leased it at this date to a wealthy Fellow. Certainly, the reconstruction which then took place was thorough, and in its principal features, has not been altered since.

All the outside walls of the South block were now built up in stone from the level of the first floor. A floor was inserted into the hall itself to provide extra attics, and deeper cellars dug on the ground floor. Top was linked to bottom by a spiral staircase at the north end of the hall. In the kitchen wing, a ceiling was inserted under the principal trusses of the solar, with moulded and cambered tie beams. These were afterwards dismantled and re-used in a later roof. They were re-discovered in 1979.

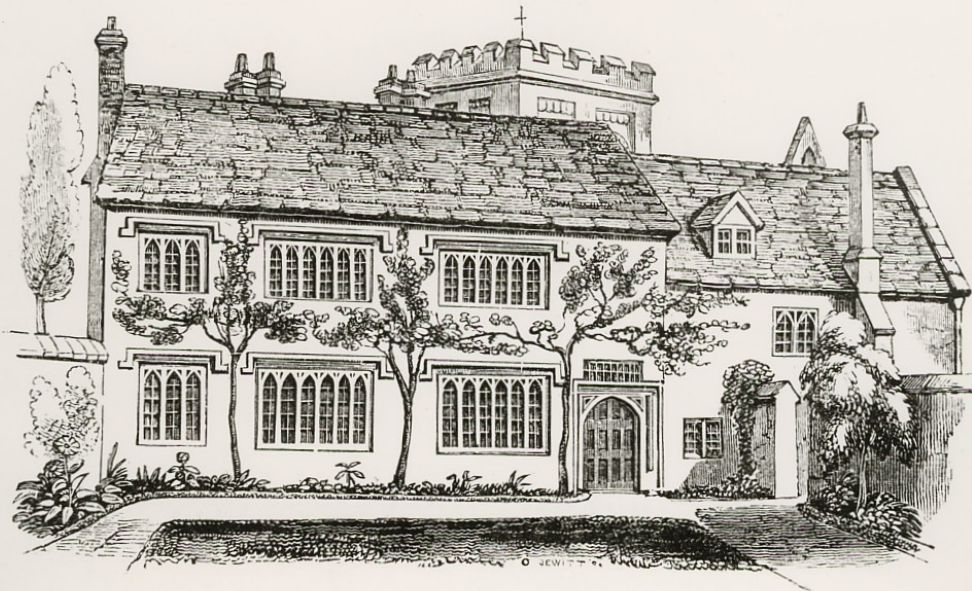
At the same time, with no sharp join between the two, the North block, in which you are staying, was built. It contained the principal rooms of this Tudor house, two on the ground floor and two on the first. There were further bedrooms in the attics above, linked to the lower floors by the stair on the north-east corner, which at the top retains its solid oak treads.

In the later 16th century, small alterations were made to the interior of the main rooms: new ceilings, one of which survives in the drawing room, and new fireplaces. In the 18th century the need was felt for heating the upper floor, and the chimneys on the east side were widened at that level to take a new fireplace each.

For the most part, however, the 18th century was a period of poor maintenance and, in the second half, of increasing dilapidation and shabbiness for the Rectory. At the same time, the social and economic status of the clergy, and the standard of accommodation expected by them, was rising. By 1800 there was a yawning gap between the two. The result of this, as we have seen, was that the Rectory-house was given over to tenants and very probably divided in two, so naturally does this happen. Having at one time been almost too good for the serving incumbent, it was now not good enough, and would remain so, until such time as the leaseholder of the Rectory, or the Vicar, should feel inclined to alter this situation.

14

IFFLEY RECTORY.



THE RECTORY HOUSE.

An engraving of the Rectory from Ingram's "Memorials of Oxford" Volume III, drawn in 1837. The author says that the windows had recently been altered, but that he prefers to show them in their original state.

Nineteenth Century Revival

By a series of happy accidents, in 1819 the office of Vicar and the lease of the Rectory came to be held by the same man, the Rev. Edward Marshall. The future of the Rectory-house was thereby secured. The estate had come to him by his first marriage, in 1803, to Priscilla Churchill. Her father had purchased the lease from Dr Brookes, a 'shameful non-resident' who held four livings. Mr Churchill then settled the property on his son-in-law. Marshall kept the lease after his wife's death a year later, and in 1812 married a second wife, Mary-Anne Burton, daughter of the former curate of Iffley.

Her great-grand-daughter, Julia Marshall, in a history of the family written in 1927, tells how the second Mrs Marshall wished to return to Iffley, 'which had been her home'. To this end she persuaded her husband to apply for the Vicarage when it fell vacant in 1819. He did so and was appointed. They could not move in immediately. Marshall reported to the Bishop in 1821 that first of all their Rectory-house had to be 'vacated and made habitable'. They eventually moved in at the end of the year.

In 1819, the only way of passing from one part of the house to the other way was by a small door on each floor, in the corner by the spiral stair in the South block. The Marshalls remedied this by building a two-story corridor along the east side of the house, opening into the stair tower at one end and the kitchen wing at the other. Doors opened off it into the North block. It is difficult to know how much they did to the South block, since it was altered again in the later 19th century. No doubt they re-arranged and improved the service rooms and cellars. They also made a study for the Vicar above, looking over the churchyard.



From the top of the Church tower, showing the 1819 corridors and the 1839 porch.

In the North block, a hall was partitioned off from the dining room to run through from the garden door on the west to the front door on the east. The main rooms were fitted with new fireplaces, and the wide Tudor windows were reduced to four lights, but had their sills lowered to make up for this.

It is not clear what has happened to the 17th-century panelling which lines both these rooms and part of the upper floor, but does not fit very well. Edward Marshall Junior, in his Account of Iffley of 1870, assumes that it came from another house, but the most likely person to have imported it was his father, which you would expect him to have known. The answer may be that the panelling does belong, perhaps fitted by Barten Holiday, but was re-arranged by Edward Marshall Senior to line the reduced dining room and windows. He might have removed parts that were rotten and replaced them with bits brought down from upstairs, which would account for the irregularities.

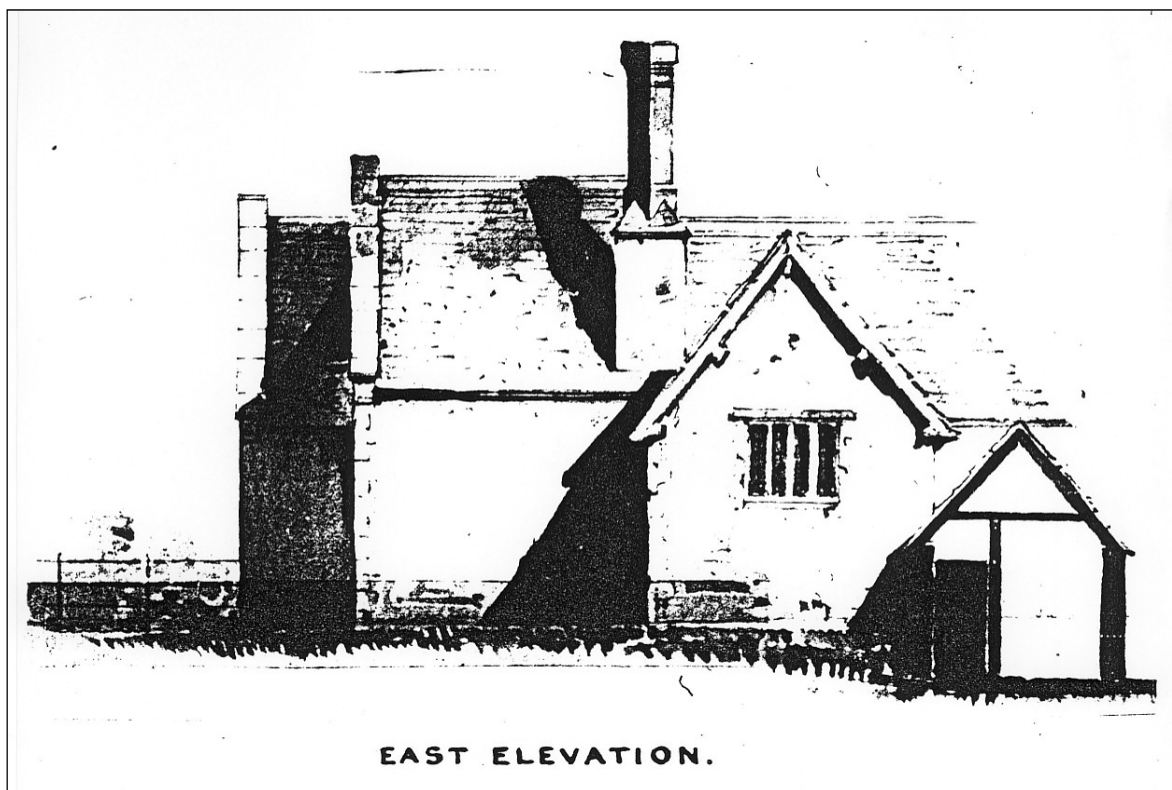
The upper floor of the North block was then divided into three rooms, instead of the original two. The partitions for these ran up against the windows, rather carelessly bisecting them. A landing was created between the two larger bedrooms, reached by a door off the corridor on the east side.

The Marshalls lived together in the Rectory-house for eighteen years. In 1827, he inherited some property from his brother, and in respect of another inheritance added the name Hacker to his own. With this new wealth, the Marshalls laid out the beginnings of a formal terraced garden, and perhaps built the first boathouse on the river.

There must still have been a path along the river bank at this time because, according to legend, in 1830-1 a party of Swing rioters (mostly discontented agricultural workers) were reported to be advancing along it to attack the Rectory. Dramatic preparations were made: holes were pierced in the garden door, and the Vicar and his menservants presumably (and rather surprisingly)

had shotguns ready to fire through them. But the rioters never turned up, and the holes cut so hastily had to be filled with some pieces of old stained glass.

In 1839, Edward Marshall-Hacker added a porch to the east side of the stair tower, entered from the lane. Soon afterwards he died, leaving the Rectory to his wife for her lifetime. She lived on there with her daughter until 1856. Perhaps it was the pious thought of her widowhood to have inscribed in her drawing room the two passages which come from the early Latin version of the Bible known as the Vulgate.



The remodelled east wing containing new service quarters, as proposed by J.C. Buckler in 1857 and realised in 1858.

Further improvements

The Marshall's son, Edward, had already inherited from his father all the large Marshall-Hacker estates. On his mother's death he had no desire to add the Iffley property to them. He believed that future Vicars should be able to live in the Rectory-house by right, rather than at the whim of the current leaseholder. He therefore made it over to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, together with most of the glebe and enough money, made from the sale of an outlying part of the property, to increase the stipend of the Vicar and pay for further improvements to the house. The architect was to be J.C. Buckler, who also did some work on the Church.

The additions of 1858, although moderate in extent, were the result of the Victorian delight in domestic arrangements. The old east wing, itself much rebuilt to include a modern kitchen and a WC, was extended to the south, to provide a Housekeeper's room, a back stair and an extra bedroom. Sculleries and sheds were built in the yard. A second chimney was added to the west front, to heat a small bedroom. Several windows were renewed, particularly on the south elevation. A wall that ran south from the corner of the house, passing close to the west door of the Church, was replaced by a railing.

The tidy Victorian mind had finally prevailed over the irregularities imposed on the Rectory by the wayward medieval Church and the easy-going 18th century. Vicar could succeed Vicar, secure in the tenure of a dignified residence. Each made their small contribution; the garden changed shape, new boathouse replaced old. Early this century, the small oriel window above the garden door in the North block was inserted by an imaginative Vicar; in the 1930s hot water was introduced by a practical one. In the 1950s, the roof needed attention and the old Stonesfield slates gave way to new red tiles.



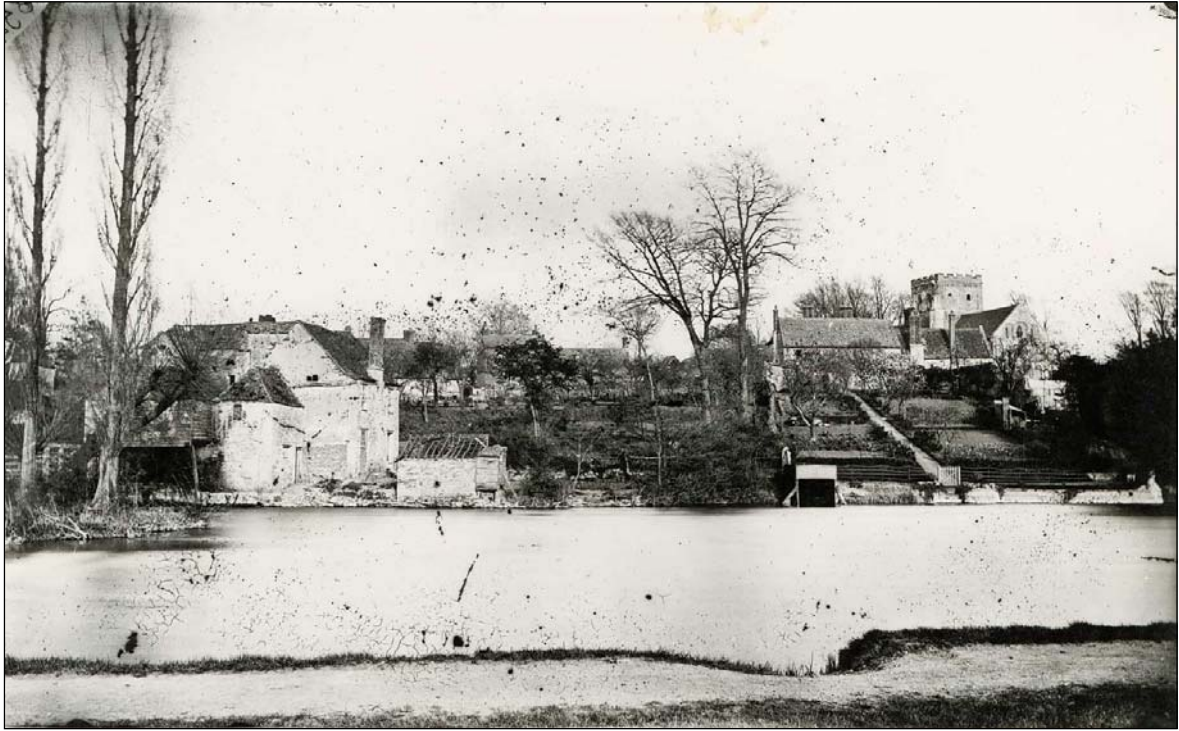
Iffley Mill by Victor Prout, from the series *The Thames from London to Oxford*
1862

Practical solutions

After a century had passed, the modern conveniences supplied by Buckler were no longer so convenient. Vicar and Mrs Hills, who arrived in 1959, set out to remedy this and to provide the Rectory with more up-to-date ways of living comfortably. Damp-proofing was introduced, as was central heating, bathrooms and abundant basins. They also created a new and liveable-in kitchen. For this they brought the cellars of the South block into use, partitions were moved and the resulting room was made lighter and more cheerful by enlarging windows on the south and west.

A tall hedge that ran close to the west front of the South block was removed, and the neighbour released enough land to make the small walled garden. For this work, the Hills were advised by the architect, Thomas Rayson, but worked hard themselves to keep the Rectory in good shape, until Mr Hills retired in 1975.

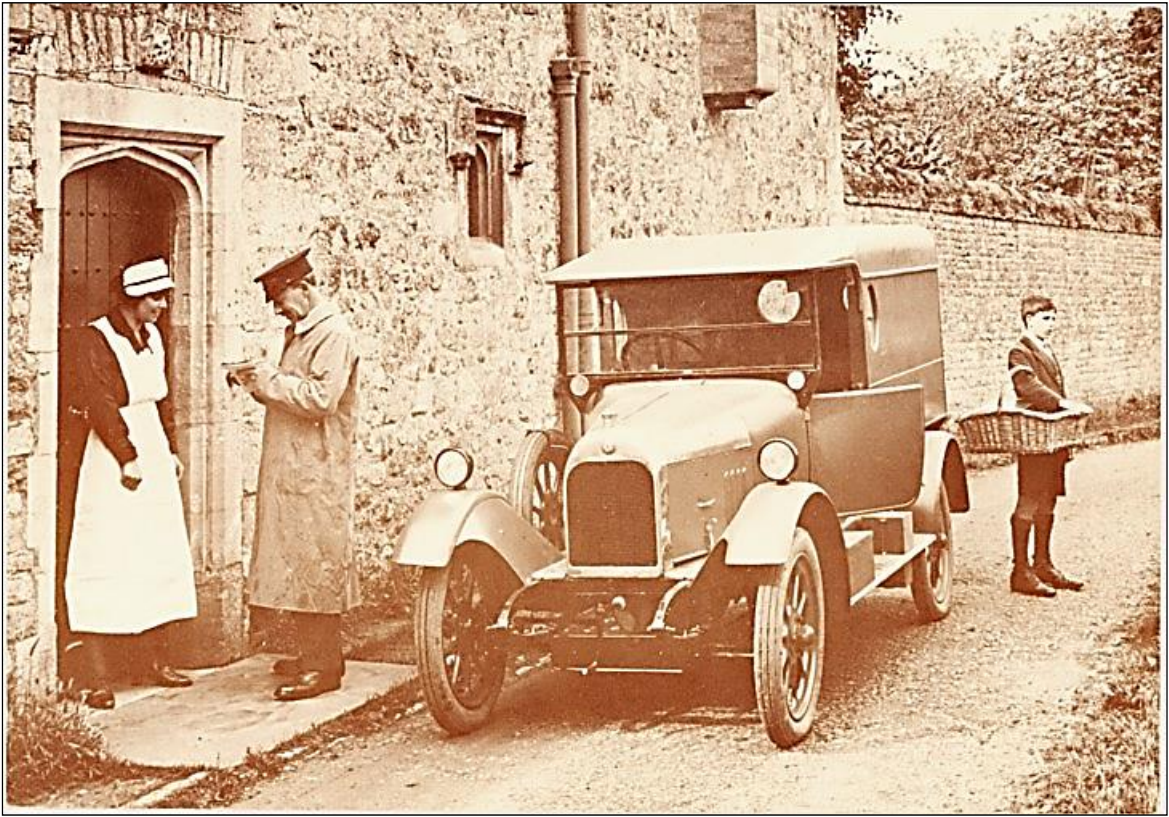
Sadly the Church Commissioners, in their wisdom, then decided that the burden of looking after a large and ancient building was too great a distraction for the Vicar of a growing and, away from the old village nucleus, increasingly urban parish. The Rectory, after its brief spell as a regular parsonage, was to go to a new owner.



The Mill, the Rectory and the Church, about 1885



The same view, early 20th century.



A Morris Cowley II, 9 h.p. ran on delivery duty outside Iffley Rectory in 1924.



The west front in 1937. The blocked window lights of the central window can clearly be seen.



The rose garden in the 1930s. The sundial was stolen when the Rectory was empty, between 1975-1979.

A Divided Future – the Landmark Restoration

The stated reasons for giving up the Rectory were its size and the difficulty of maintaining it. So the first task that faced the Landmark Trust when it took the building on in 1979 was to reduce these problems to a minimum.

The house already consisted of two almost separate halves. The obvious course, therefore, was to work with the nature of the building and complete the division, making two quite separate dwellings and lightening the burden of repair on each. The North block, with large rooms but no space for a big kitchen or utility rooms, was best suited to short-term occupation, as a Landmark. The South, with all the 19th-century service quarters as well as some pleasant south-facing rooms, would make a comfortable modern Rectory.

It was on this basis that plans were drawn up by the architect, Philip Jebb. Communication between the two halves was no longer necessary, so the corridors, which hid the core of the building and had leaking roofs, could be removed. Remarkably, only one door, on the ground floor, had to be blocked to complete the division.

Nearly all the windows of the North block look over the garden, hardly any over the courtyard. By moving the 1839 front door along a few feet to open into the stair tower, the Landmark front door could be in the lane. The South block could then have undisturbed use of the courtyard and the outbuildings round it.

The garden divided equally well, being already, in effect, two separate gardens. The wall between them was simply moved a few feet, to make the southern garden larger, and the door in it moved further away from the house to increase its privacy.

Most of the external building work followed on from the removal of the corridors: the walls had to be stripped of plaster and then re-pointed, along with the chimneys. Some fragments of medieval carving found on the site were set into the wall of the stair tower. The doors that opened into the corridors (except that which was to become the front door of the South block), were blocked or turned into windows.

When the plaster was removed round the door that led to the bedrooms of the North block, the undisturbed spandrel of a Tudor window was revealed. A new window was made to the same design and put back in exactly the same place. A few more roof tiles were needed where the corridors had joined the main roof, and in the gap left by the removal of a leaky dormer window above.

On the north end of the house, there was a 19th-century brick chimney stack serving fireplaces that were no longer needed. It also blocked one light of the attic window, so it was taken down and the window restored. Another window on the first floor was unblocked, to light the landing.

On the west front of the North block, two lights of the sitting room window were unblocked, but this could not be done in the dining room without interfering with the partition wall between it and the former garden hall.

In the South block, a window was made into a door, opening into the garden. The ground level outside was lowered, to make the ground floor rooms less subterranean.



The first floor after the 1819 partitions were taken down. New floor boards had to be laid.



The Tudor joists, lying directly on the ground in the drawing room

Inside the house

Inside the North block, there was a small amount of death watch beetle which had to be treated, and some of the floorboards on the first floor were very worm-eaten. They were removed and new deal boards laid, except on the landing, which still has the old ones.

On the ground floor, the Tudor floor joists were laid directly on the ground; many had rotted, and some of the floorboards too. New joists were laid down on a new hardcore base. There were enough sound boards left, mainly from the sitting room, to make up a complete floor for the smaller dining room. A new elm floor was laid in the sitting room.

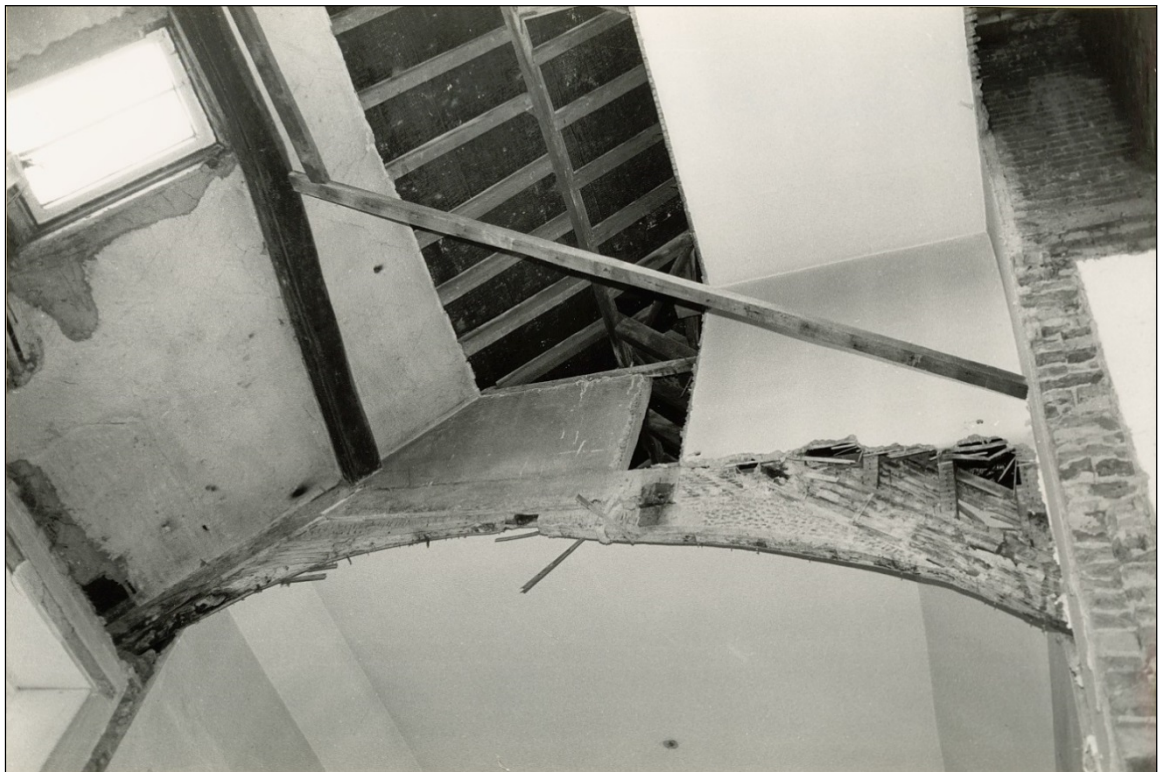
The positions of the kitchen and bathroom dictated themselves: the garden hall was the only place on the ground floor for the kitchen; and, on the first floor, the end with the smaller window was clearly best for the bathroom.

The partitions of the rooms upstairs all had to be moved, in any case: they cut against two of the windows, and left only a tiny landing which could not be reached from the stair. A new landing was formed by taking in part of the second bedroom and the new bathroom. On the fireplace wall the panelling is old, but that around the door into the big bedroom is new.

The six-light window in the big bedroom still had all its old casements and glass, bar one Victorian replacement; while the next window had all Victorian, bar one original. This was moved to make up a full set next door.



The end frame of the east wing added c. 1425. On the right an earlier brace of the main block's original timber frame can be seen



An altered collar beam in the east wing. High up on the left is a Tudor tie beam which has been re-issued as a purlin.

A third bedroom was formed in the large attics, reached by the massive stair. From its window is the perfect view of Oxford, looking like an old engraving that has been skilfully cut out and stuck to the horizon.

Downstairs again, the panelling on the fireplace wall in the dining room had been removed by Vicar Hills, and stored in a shed. It was felt that the room would look better if it was put back in position, so it was replaced, but with two doors cut in it so that the controversial arch can be inspected. The ceilings were painted but apart from polishing the brass fittings, nothing else was done to disrupt the clerical atmosphere in these two peaceful and dignified rooms.

The table in the sitting room, and the large oak chests in the downstairs rooms and on the landing above were generously lent by a local benefactor. The curtains throughout the upper floors have been especially designed and printed.

In the garden, the mulberry tree, which lost one of its branches in a gale in 1979, has been carefully propped to guard against further mishap. The garden was long past the heyday of its formal lay-out, and since the days are past when such designs can be easily maintained, let alone recreated, the remains of steps and terraces were smoothed away.



Remains of a Tudor window, found between the chimneys

The new Rectory

The South block is now a comfortable three-bedroomed house, with a new kitchen and a cleverly contrived staircase that succeeds in taking in five levels, without losing any of its symmetry. The panelled study, with a view to the west end of the Church, makes a fine sitting-room. In 1981 this house was bought by the patron of the living, the Dean and Chapter of Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford, to serve as a Rectory, as we had hoped it might. After a brief interval, a Vicar was once again to reside in Iffley Rectory.

Division can therefore be good medicine for buildings as well as for plants. The ancient Rectory has now a better chance of survival than it had as one dwelling only. The Landmark Trust, in carrying out this work, has tried to be as unobtrusive and conservative as possible; little has been taken away, even less added. If anyone looking at the house in the future finds it hard to tell at first glance just what was done in 1979-80, that will be just what was intended, for a building with a long history of partial rebuilding, carefully carried out.



The North end in 1979, before the 1839 porch was pulled down, and the door moved a few feet west, to its present position.



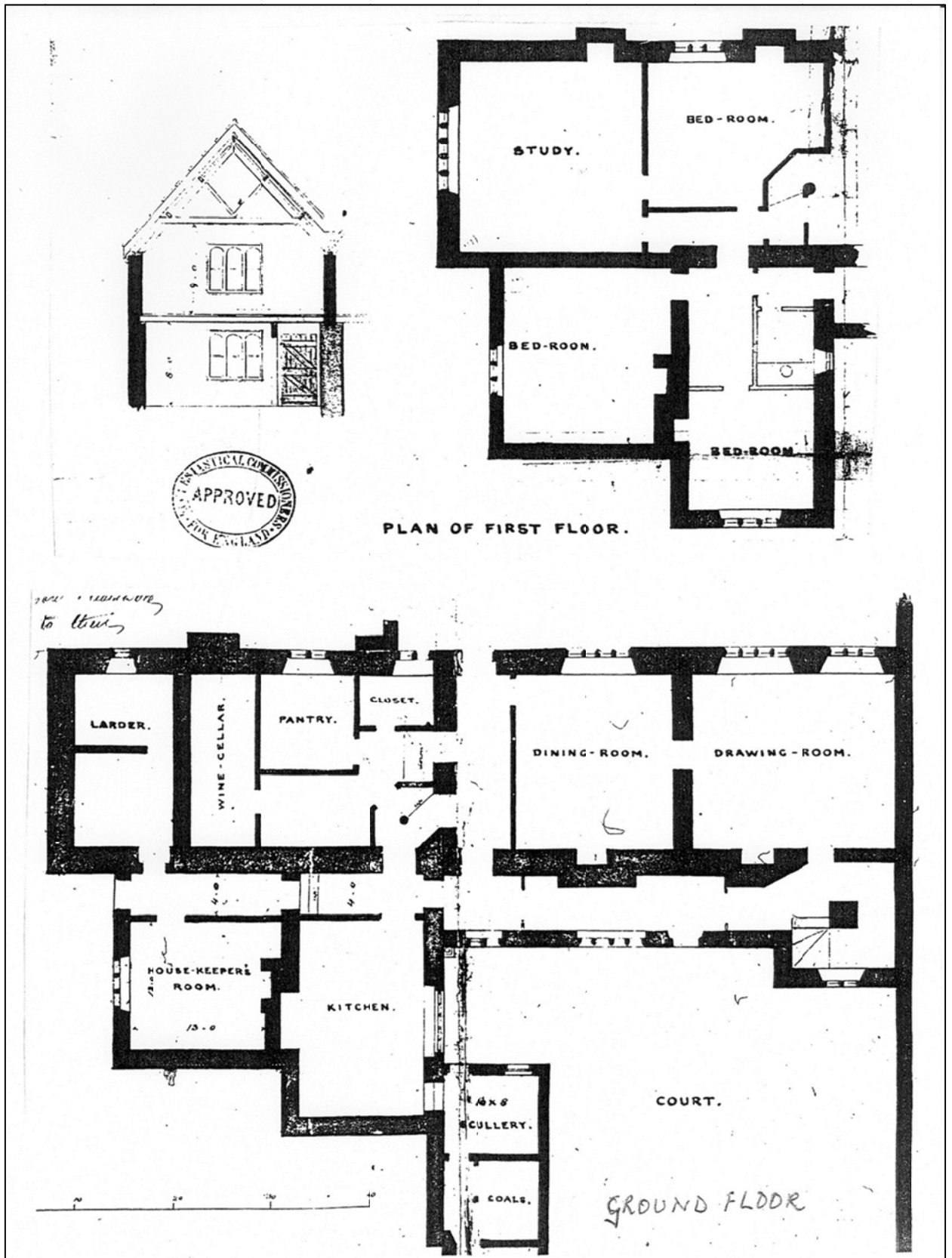
The medieval floor joists in the study, on the first floor of the South Block



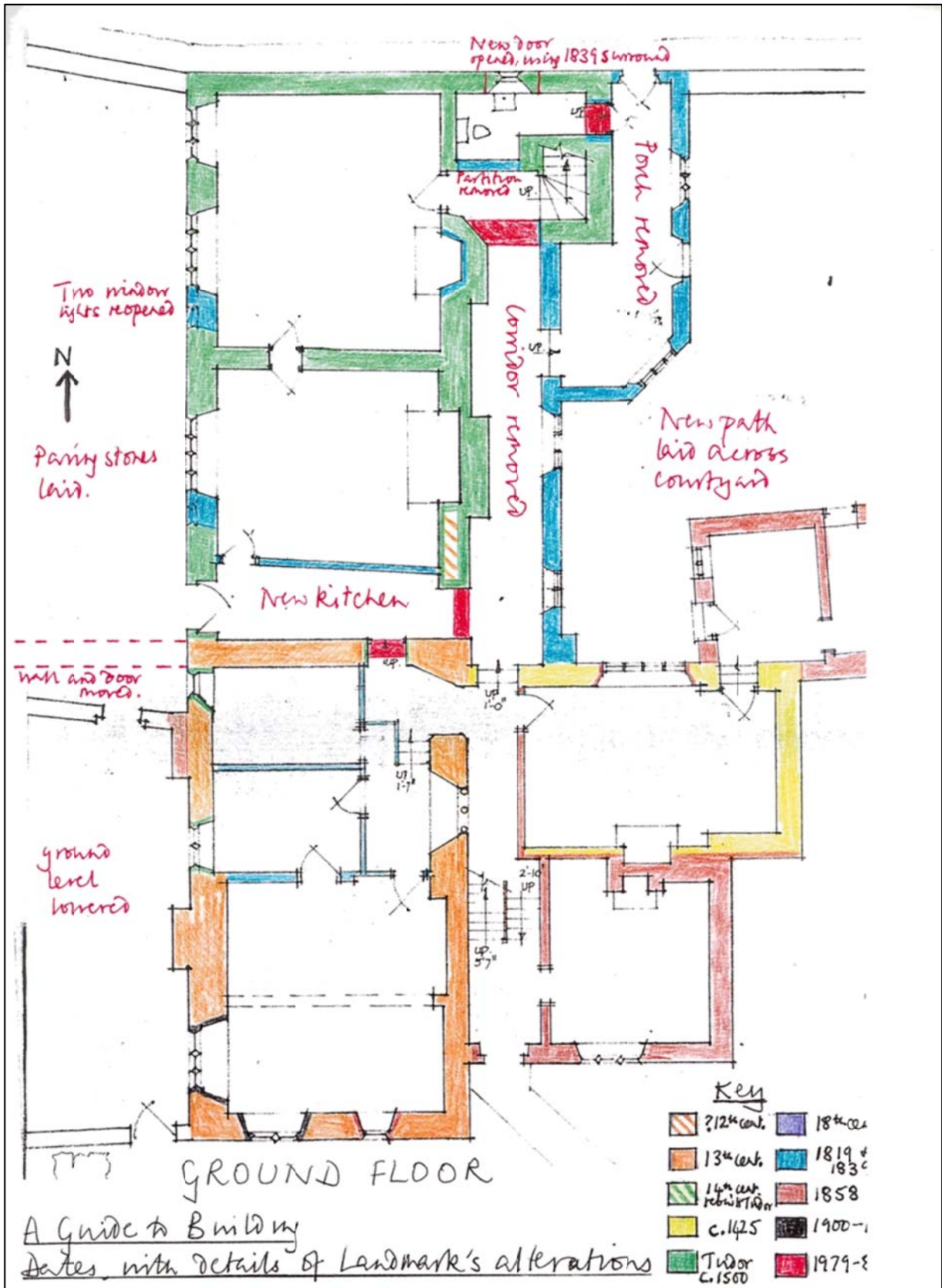
The fine set of fireplaces uncovered by Vicar Hills in 1961

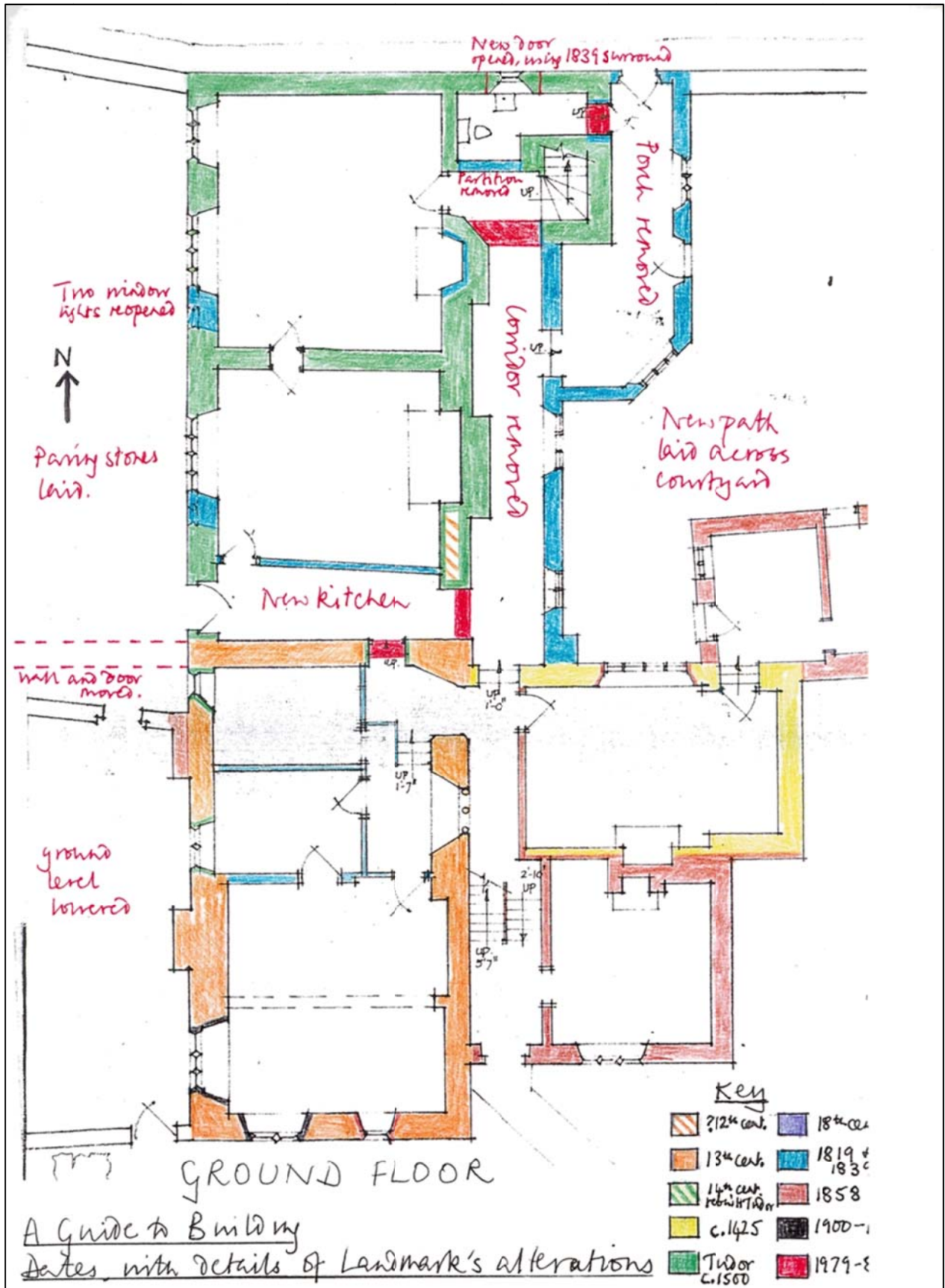


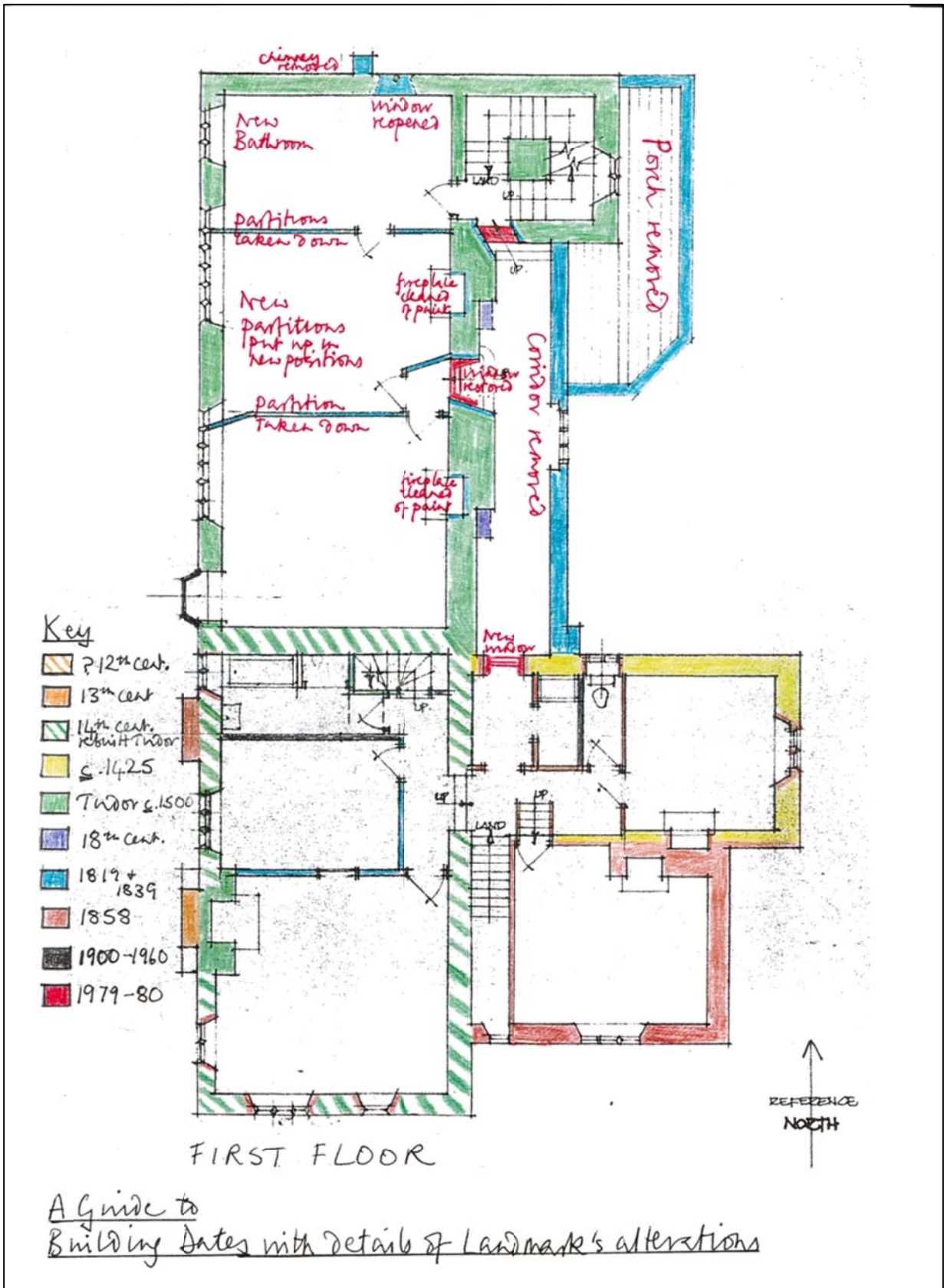
The mysterious window, or hatch, in the South block with its 13th century shafts.



J.C. Buckler's proposed arrangement of the Rectory, 1857







Sources and Further Reading

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Other information kindly given:

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