

EPWORTH OLD RECTORY EPWORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

**A report on some opening-up
work**



*Colin Briden
May 2009*

1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the outcome of a recent programme of investigation and opening-up work at The Old Rectory, Epworth, Lincolnshire.

The Old Rectory appears as an item at Grade I on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural Interest. It is a fine brick building of 1709 and possesses many architectural features of intrinsic value; however its special historic interest lies in its long association with the Wesley family. It now houses an impressive collection of memorabilia, prints and paintings, textiles, and period furniture; it also contains a specialist library and archive relating to the early history of Methodism. The Old Rectory is a Registered Museum.

In 2000 the author prepared a brief report on the development of the fabric which was intended to inform current proposals for expansion and refurbishment of the house and outbuildings.¹ This drew heavily on the 1955 proposal drawings prepared by Thomas Rayson FRIBA and kept in the Museum archive. Subsequently a Conservation Plan was commissioned and adopted.² As a result of this research new proposals were made for a substantial amount of development work to be funded by a grant application to the National Lottery Fund. At the suggestion of English Heritage a small amount of focused opening-up and investigation work was then planned in order to inform specific ideas for the use and alteration of the building. This work was put in hand in April 2009.

This report, which describes that work and the discoveries made, should be read in conjunction with the earlier documents. The survey drawings referred to in the text and reproduced at the end of the report were made for the Trustees in June 2007 by David Glew, architect and surveyor: all the room names used in the text are those employed on the drawings. The other documents used – including a most useful summary of MS correspondence and other unpublished Wesley material, and a typescript report on the Rectory by Thomas Rayson³ – were supplied by the Curator.

A brief was issued by Jaane Rowehl, Museum Development Officer for the East Riding of Yorkshire Council. This brief appears below (Section 2). By agreement with the Local Planning Authority and English Heritage Listed Building Consent was not required for any of the work required by the brief. The house was visited on several occasions in April 2009 when all areas of the building were made available for investigation. Opening-up work was strictly confined to what was deemed necessary and practical in view of the fact that the house is a Grade I listed building which is also a museum and place of pilgrimage open to the general public. It was nevertheless found possible to respond to all of the questions posed in the brief although some matters remain where further work would be desirable once the museum is closed for refurbishment. These are described below (Section 5).

¹ The Old Rectory, Epworth, North Lincolnshire: An Analysis of the Historic Building, its Outbuildings, and Garden Walls *Colin Briden May 2000*

² Conservation Management Plan for the Trustees of Epworth Old Rectory *Lindsey Archaeological Services November 2007*

³ Survey drawings, proposal drawings, and typescript report *Thomas Rayson FRIBA 1954-55*

2. THE SCOPE OF THE WORK

The detailed ERCC brief was as follows:

Core Research Questions

What type of flooring did the building have? And are the first floor floorboards original?

- 1. The Trustees are researching alternative heating arrangements for the Rectory which would remove the existing radiators and pipes, which are visually intrusive to future recreations of period rooms. One option is to install under-floor heating at ground floor level. Investigation of the existing flooring should inform decision making by suggesting which kind of flooring would have been here in the 18th century and how much original fabric survives that would be affected by the installation of under-floor heating.*
- 2. On the first floor, there are still historic wooden floorboards. Are these likely to be the original early 18th century boards or a later addition?*
- 3. Please provide guidelines on how we can repair and restore appropriate historic flooring in ground and first floor rooms.*

Which of our windows were open, which ones were blocked?

- 1. Pictorial references to the Rectory suggest that a large number of the windows were blocked up in the 19th century. When the Rectory was restored in the 1960s these windows were re-opened. To inform future interpretation of the Rectory, it is necessary to establish whether there is any surviving evidence as to which windows were blocked up originally (i.e. when built in 1709), and which windows were open.*
- 2. On the first floor there are still some remains of the original shutters. These have been painted over in the past. Investigation is necessary to establish the condition and date of these shutters.*
- 3. Where windows do not have shutters at present but were likely to be functional windows in 1709, is there any evidence to suggest that they had shutters originally?*

Which are original walls and which have been added or re-built?

- 1. The plan is to remove the dividing walls between the first floor bathrooms to create a single space for temporary displays and as an orientation space for visitors. In order to inform this work, investigation is required to establish the date of these dividing walls, and the effects that their removal would have on the original fabric and layout of the Rectory.*

Are there any surviving features of the pre-1709 Rectory?

- 1. The Rectory includes a large chimney with two fireplaces at ground floor level. There has been contradictory opinion as to whether this chimney is part of the 1709 building, or whether the building was constructed around a pre-dating chimney, which could have belonged to the earlier building on the site*

that burnt down. Investigation is needed to ascertain which is more likely to inform future interpretation.

- 2. Another part of the historic building that could possibly belong to an earlier Rectory is the external wall at the rear of the back stairs. Here the wall is unusually thick. Could this wall predate the 1709 building?
It is worth noting that the Trustees already commissioned a geophysical survey of the surrounding glebe land. No evidence of the foundations for an earlier building were found here, indicating that the pre-1709 Rectory stood in a similar location as its surviving 1709 successor.*

What evidence survives about the nature of the layout of the kitchen rooms?

- 1. There is conflicting evidence about the location of the two kitchens – the fore and the back kitchen, as they are called in family letters. What evidence survives in the fabric today to suggest which of the three possible spaces was used for what part of the household processes?*

Has there been a dumb waiter at the Rectory and if so, where?

- 1. Is there any evidence in the building for the use of a dumb waiter system, and if so what does that tell us about which room the family used to entertain guests and dine?*

What would the original 1709 roof have been like and how much of the original roof survives today?

- 1. The current roof has an unusual shape. A possible explanation is that it was altered when a previous extension was built / demolished. What evidence survives of the original 1709 roof?*
- 2. Cracks in the first floor render and previous repair schemes tell us that the roof is spreading. Is this still the case? And if so, what kind of mitigation method would you recommend?*

Can we install a lift to the first floor and improve access?

- 1. The capital project would seek to install a new lift in the Rectory to allow better access to the first floor. The location of that lift has been agreed in principle with English Heritage subject to:
 - a. Investigation of the ceiling, through which the new lift would connect ground and first floor. Is the fabric original? What evidence is there for previous alterations?*
 - b. Investigation of the area that would be affected by the construction of the lift well. Would any original fabric be affected?**
- 2. The development project seeks to improve visitor circulation at the first floor. To do so, an original passageway between two first floor rooms is planned to be re-opened. On one side, this passageway is framed by a door frame, which reduces the widths of that passage to less than 800mm. Investigation of that doorframe is required to establish whether it is part of the original fittings of the Rectory, and how detrimental its removal would be to the overall significance of the building.*

Optional Research Questions

- A. *The back stairs show signs of having been altered several times. The Conservation Management Plan suggests that this was a fairly recent modification. What evidence survive of their original design?*
- B. *Is there any evidence to suggest there is a bricked-up exit from the ground floor into the garden other than the existing doors and the known exit from the current guides room? (This is to ascertain location of the dining room, which according to archive sources connected to the gardens)*
- C. *Immediately north of the Rectory are two outbuildings, which are loosely referred to as Victorian. Based on the surviving evidence, when would these have been added and for what purpose?*
- D. *Why were the internal window-bays in the south-west corner of the Rectory chamfered?*
- E. *The second floor attic is likely to remain unchanged as far as the development project is concerned. However, it would be helpful to know more about this space. What evidence survives to suggest the original layout of the attic and when where the dividing doors added?*
- F. *Is there any evidence to suggest that the rooms within the Rectory were originally panelled or wainscoted?*

To each of these questions – including the Optional Questions – a combination of observation, documentary research, and controlled physical violence was brought, as appropriate. Some mysteries and uncertainty remain although in general moderately confident answers can be given to most questions and definite answers to some. A particular feature of the work was the discovery of three different patterns of wallpaper, all belonging to a period earlier than the early C19 refurbishment of the Rectory. The examination of these papers will for the first time allow close dates to be given to specific works to the house. Other discoveries are fully described in Section 3.

3. INVESTIGATION WORKS

CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1 *What type of flooring did the building have? And are the first floor floorboards original?*

Ground floor

Lounge: The floor of the Lounge was examined in the north-west corner. Here the carpet was lifted to reveal C20 tongued and grooved boards which appear to extend over the entire area of the room.

Entrance Hall: The mat well, the north-east corner and an area in the south-west corner were similarly examined. Here again the floor is of C20 tongued and grooved boards which appear to extend over the entire area of the room: they are carried on C20 sawn joists. This floor is ventilated by C20 air bricks.

Kitchen: Solid floor: probably C20 concrete.

Dining Room: C20 glazed floor tiles on concrete.

Visitor Information Area: C20 glazed floor tiles on concrete, as Dining Room.

Stair Hall: Late C19/C20 tongued and grooved boards on sawn joists.

Office: C20 glazed floor tiles on concrete, as Dining Room.

The nature of the original ground floor structures, all now altered or removed, remains unknown. It is likely that the fore kitchen and back kitchen (see below) had slabbed floors, while the remaining rooms and the stair hall (which is sited over a cellar) had traditional timber floors. Some original joisting may survive beneath the C19 and C20 boards. In 1954 Rayson recorded C19 encaustic tiles in the Office, since replaced.

First floor

Bedroom 1: C19/C20 tongued and grooved boards on contemporary sawn softwood joists.

Bedroom 2: This floor is now slightly raised above the level of the first floor landing which – as it is at the head of the principal stair – may be taken as the level of the 1709 first floor. It is uncarpeted. The floor surface comprises plain boards – not tongued and grooved – of varying width but typically around 250mm wide and 25mm thick. These are fastened with cut nails to sawn softwood joists placed edgewise and which measure >130mm deep by 75mm wide. Between these joists is a dense layer of smooth white lime mortar neatly floated off: this mortar layer may be supported either on boards fastened to fillets fixed longitudinally close to the base of each joist or alternatively, and less probably, on the laths of the ceiling of the room below. The remaining air gaps between the mortar layer and the floorboards have then been infilled almost to full remaining depth (about 100mm) with clean sawdust.

Bedroom 3: The floor construction of Bedroom 3 is identical to that of Bedroom 2 with one important difference: here the layer of dense mortar is consistently thinner.

The slight raising of the floor necessitated the replacement of the skirting boards at a higher level and these have trapped two superimposed layers of wallpaper. Both wallpapers therefore pre-date the replacement of the floors in these two rooms. The lower paper has been tentatively dated to 1791 making it virtually certain that the rooms were re-floored in the early C19. This is confirmed by the pattern of the associated joinery mouldings applied at the same time to the C18 architrave of the fireside cupboard in this room (see below).

The special treatment given to the floors of these high-status rooms is noteworthy: as is the hierarchy of comfort offered. The south-west Bedroom 2, traditionally the Best Chamber in a house of this plan, received approximately twice as much hard soundproofing as Bedroom 3.

Bedrooms 4 & 5: Floor level in both these rooms is that of the 1709 stair-head. However both rooms are now floored with late C19 tongued and grooved narrow boards: apparently on machine-cut joists of small scantling although the possibility of re-use of occasional old joists does exist. One such joist can certainly be seen in Bedroom 5 lodged in the north wall of the house on the line of the cupboard door in the north-west corner of the room. This joist, which is badly wormed, was presumably retained to carry the small area of surviving lime-ash floor observed under the garret stair (see below). The present floor is suspended over it.

Bathrooms 1&2: Identical floor structures to Bedrooms 4&5.

Inner Hall (first floor landing): Not closely examined but apparently late C19 narrow boarded floor.

Original floors: Small areas of flooring of 1709 were found in only two places at this level: in the fireside cupboard of Bedroom 3 (but not outside it), and in the void under the garret stair in Bedroom 5. In both cases the floor surface is a smooth layer of lime-ash. In Bedroom 3 this had broken up to reveal that the lime-ash surface layer was of pinkish mortar resting on a bed of reeds which in turn rested on massive joists aligned north-south. More reeds had been fixed to the soffits of the joists to take the plaster ceiling over the currently unexplored void beneath (see below). The total depth of this floor structure is 250mm. On it, in the late C19, battens had been laid on which narrow tongued and grooved boards were fastened to make the present cupboard floor. Following the removal of a board in the room immediately to the north of the cupboard more trapped wallpaper could be seen, matching that on the other side of the room. Also revealed was the base of the C18 pegged architrave to the fireside cupboard door. This architrave is painted in red ochre (mineral red): a narrow unpainted central band represents a lost moulding or timber fillet. A C19 moulding has been applied to the old architrave above the level of the C19 boarded floor. All this demonstrates that the C18 floor level in this room was some distance below that of its C19 replacement: presumably at the level of the 1709 floor in the cupboard, and at the same level as the head of the stair. Since this cupboard retains an C18 door it follows that the door must have been cut down to suit the higher floor level. This accounts for the fact that it is now hung on C19 hinges.

The area of lime-ash floor under the garret stair in Bedroom 5 is particularly interesting as until the construction of the stair this small area lay wholly within the

room. This is a strong indication that such a floor covered the whole area of the room: which was almost certainly used as the Wesley nursery. The question therefore arises as to whether lime-ash floors were laid only in the nursery, or only in the lesser rooms of the north side of the house, or over the entire area of the first floor. Given the practical problems of joisting floors of different covering materials of different weight and thickness it is possible that lime-ash was used over the entire first floor.

Hence it now seems probable that both the first and second floors were of identical lime-ash (on reeds, on joists) construction. Either way the present boards are nowhere original.

Second floor

A section through the second floor structure and its lime-ash covering is displayed under glass in Old Jeffery's Chamber. This material covers the whole area of the attic storey and closely resembles in its construction that noted in the fireside cupboard of Bedroom 3, described above. The numbering of the joists by the carpenter is a noteworthy feature and another indication of the high status of the 1709 house.

3.2 Which of our windows were open, which ones were blocked?

Two early engravings of the Old Rectory – one, dated 1817, the other, dated 1840 – exist in the Lincolnshire Archives and are reproduced in the Conservation Plan. Further identical examples of the 1840 print are currently exhibited on the walls of the Rectory itself. The viewpoint of both prints is from the south west, with clear views of the south and west elevations. In both prints a number of windows in these elevations are shown sealed, or blocked; remarkably, and reassuringly, they are the same windows in each.

In 1954 Thomas Rayson produced survey drawings of these same elevations and indicated on them which windows were open and which sealed: part of his brief, of course, was to restore all of them to use. In 1955 the front door was also blocked: the 1883 side door in the west elevation was the main entrance and the present Office is shown on Rayson's survey drawing as the Entrance Hall.

On the south elevation Rayson's blocked windows agree with those on the engravings although he shows an additional inserted window on the ground floor between bays 6 & 7, counting from the west; an alteration which must have been made after 1840. On the west elevation he shows the northernmost window on the ground floor, portrayed as blocked in the engravings, as a garden door, and an inserted window above it. However both these features fail to line up with the 1709 bay intervals, and are shown as being slightly displaced to the south of the older blocked openings. He also shows the south window in the west wall of the Office as blocked. This minor work was probably carried out in the 1883 alterations. In other respects his drawing once again concurs with the earlier evidence. Rayson subsequently went on to extinguish the later C19 garden door and windows and inserted new sashes in the principal 1709 openings everywhere except in the west wall of the lounge, where the original late Georgian sashes were retained. The first floor north window in the west elevation is an early

C19 window, retaining some old glass, but was placed there by Rayson. It may have come from the rear elevation of the building, where several others also survive.

The relationship of the windows of the south and west elevations to the internal detailing of their openings, particularly shutters, was examined in the course of this survey.

There are now no shutters on any of the ground floor windows, even in the principal SW room, the lounge. This is surprising; and it is unlikely that Rayson would have removed them had they existed in 1955. However the splayed window embrasures are currently of a type and size to take appropriate folding shutters and this may have been the original, if unfulfilled, intention throughout, assuming that Rayson merely unblocked existing openings to their full extent and did not modify them in any way. The sashes of the south elevation are insertions of 1954-55 but Rayson notes in his preliminary report that all but one of those windows that existed prior to 1955 had lamb's tongue mouldings: which places them at the end of the C18 or in the early C19. The exception was the central, slightly larger,, first floor window in the south elevation: maddeningly he fails to describe the moulding used. It may have been an original sash of 1709 (lighting, in all probability, the Rector's Study, as described below).

At first floor level there are folding shutters to all the windows shown as glazed in the 1817 and 1840 engravings. These shutters are of raised and fielded panels, typical of the later Georgian period. Interestingly the panelling pattern varies from room to room, although the mouldings are identical: in Bedroom 2 the shutter panels are (from the top) medium, long; in Bedroom 3, short, long, medium; in Bedroom 4 short, medium, medium. The reason for this is unknown: it does not appear to be a hierarchical arrangement. All except those in Bedroom 4 now have C19 blind-cord tensioners fitted to the right-hand shutter of the pair. These clearly date from a more recent period when the shutters had gone out of use. The shutters of Bedroom 4 are slightly mis-aligned to their embrasure and may have been inserted later than their fellows. All the shutters now are painted up but would probably respond to careful easing.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this:

- In 1709 the builders provided the house with embrasures suitable for sashes with folding shutters at ground and first floor levels on the two principal elevations;
- By 1817 a limited number of openings held late Georgian 12-pane sashes, with contemporary folding shutters to those on the upper floor at least. This work therefore broadly corresponds with the re-flooring and general enhancement of the Rectory in this period.
- The remaining windows were blind openings; there is no indication in the engravings that they were painted to resemble windows.

It will be noted that interesting as this information may be it does little to address the question asked in the brief. However there is circumstantial evidence to support an interpretation.

It has been suggested that the Rectory was originally equipped with its full complement of windows but that they were sealed up to avoid window tax. This tax was introduced in 1696 as a more acceptable means of raising revenue than income tax, widely regarded at the time as official intrusion into private matters. In the years immediately following the introduction of this measure owners customarily constructed window openings that were immediately blocked pending either the repeal of the tax or an improvement in personal circumstances. There are two reasons for thinking that this may have been the case at Epworth. In the first place, the poverty of Samuel Wesley's family circumstances is legendary and this would have seemed a suitable stop-gap measure until his debts were at least partly cleared. Secondly, the house cost at the time only £400.00 or thereabouts. Using the Bank of England Retail Price Index and other sources this can be translated into around £33000 in modern money.

This is low for the size and quality of the Rectory, even allowing for the fact that Samuel Wesley was not troubled by the costs of installing plumbing, wiring, and central heating, which add so much to the cost of a modern house. In fact one of the greatest expenses in his own day was that of glazing; and the use of sashes, at the time still a relatively new style of window, would only increase the percentage of the total cost devoted to lighting the interior of the building. By keeping the number of windows to the bare minimum (and the engravings demonstrate that the bare minimum was indeed achieved) Wesley cut his construction costs very significantly indeed. It will be noted that the room tentatively identified as the Rector's study (Bedroom 3: see below) has the only south-facing window at first floor level, that it is the central window, and that because of its primary position it is also wider than the other openings.

It seems likely, then, that the fenestration shown in the 1817 engraving is the original one as completed by the 1709 builders. However it is also clear that a later owner, perhaps in an attempt to introduce a little more light, exchanged the 1709 sashes (doubtless equipped with broad ovolo-moulded glazing bars) for a later pattern with narrower bars with lamb's tongue mouldings. These survived until 1955 on the south elevation, and, in the case of two examples, until the present day on the west. Another curious detail, on the south elevation only, is a hard mortar line in the external window reveals a little forward of the line of the present sashes: this may be a relic of the blocking itself, or of a rendered finish to the blocking.

3.3 Which are original walls and which have been added or re-built?

In the brief this question specifically relates to the partition wall between the first floor Bathrooms 1 & 2. It can be stated categorically, without the need for opening-up, that this wall was built after 1955. Rayson's survey drawing shows an earlier dividing wall which was placed a little further east, creating a large bathroom to the west and a small WC to the east; an arrangement which may date from the 1883 works. In 1954 this bathroom retained an early C18 three-panelled door, possibly original to this chamber⁴. His proposal drawing shows no change. However the present arrangement required a alteration in the fenestration of the rear wall and this

⁴ Thomas Rayson FRIBA *Typescript report 1954-5*

has been carried through in modern windows. The precise date of this work therefore remains unknown but it is certainly later C20. On the same line as this wall is a division in the first floor passage, now with a doorway and a re-used two-panel door. This is probably part of the same C20 alteration. Until recently Bedroom 5 was used for bed and breakfast accommodation; the provision of two bathrooms and a door in the passage seems designed to separate the west and east sides of the house in order to give a measure of privacy to the curator.

All the other walls in the building, both internal and external, should be regarded as original until demonstrated to be otherwise.

3.4 *Are there any surviving features of the pre-1709 Rectory?*

Debate on this subject has centred around the east stack – seemingly quite massive on plan – and the apparent thickness of the rear wall at the half-landing of the garret stair.

It should be stated at the outset that the rear wall of the house is of a constant and conventional thickness throughout. The apparent depth as seen from the half-landing of the garret stair is due entirely to the joinery work needed when the stair was modified soon after construction of the house, and when the understair cupboard which opens off Bedroom 5 was built. This matter is described more fully below.

The question of the age of the stack is a more interesting matter. The issue was first raised in 1955, following an episode witnessed by the Rev. W Le Cato Edwards, the first curator of The Old Rectory, and described in his history of Epworth published sometime after 1961. This is what he wrote:

‘On the removal of a Victorian grate in the Entrance Hall, there was a fall of brick, revealing an old flat arch, and on examination of the bricks in the chimney behind, which were smaller and older than the bricks of the house, it became apparent that here we had stumbled upon a part of the original building standing before the great fire of 1709’.

Le Cato Edwards appears, from the meticulous accounts of other matters in his book, to have been an accurate observer and a good historian. If in places we smile at his old-fashioned accounts of life in Epworth it is only because of his abounding enthusiasm and fondness for the Wesley family and early Methodism: two factors which are unlikely to have influenced his judgement in the matter of brick sizes. He had, moreover, Rayson by his side when the interior of the chimney was exposed since it was Rayson who came up with the solution we see today. There is good reason, then, to concur with his judgement.

There is also some physical evidence. In the Conservation Plan there is a photograph of the upper part of the stack (in the roof-space) which the authors of the Plan correctly describe as being of the same brickwork as the house; and they conclude therefore that so must the whole stack be of 1709 brickwork. The faulty reasoning is clear. Rayson himself, in his report, notes the poor condition of the upper part of the

stack, part of which he himself rebuilt in old materials, and it is entirely likely that two hundred and fifty years earlier, following a devastating fire, the same sentiments were expressed by the Rector regarding the upper part of a presumptive C16 stack. But what date is the fabric of the stack on the lower two floors? To attempt to resolve the matter three areas were opened up and the interior of the west flue examined.

The first area was in the fireside cupboard to the north of the stack in Bedroom 4. Here two things became clear with the removal of a band of plaster across the side of the innermost face of the stack: firstly, that the early C19 fireplace now in the bedroom is served by a raked early C19 brick flue which makes a straight joint with the stack that existed in 1709; and also that that earlier stack, in this position at least, is built of 1709 bricks and mortar. Hence it appears that if an old stack does survive it does not do so at this level.

At ground floor level the stack appears to reach the south wall of the house, giving it enormous breadth. The boards were therefore removed from the floor of the fireside cupboard in Bedroom 3 with the idea that this supposed mass of brickwork could be viewed, and perhaps sampled, from above. The floorboards were narrow late C19 tongued and grooved boards on battens laid directly, and rather surprisingly, on a lime-ash floor. This floor was cracked and broken: beneath it was a layer of reeds, a void the depth of a joist, and then, of all things, the upper surface of a ground floor ceiling. Below the ceiling was another void extending over the full height of the ground floor. This turns out to be one of a pair of back-to-back cupboards on the south side of the stack which were constructed to serve the Entrance Hall and Kitchen respectively. They were blocked in brickwork at unknown, and very likely differing, dates. The interior of the west cupboard, which could be glimpsed from above, is finished in flaking lime-wash and gives every appearance of having been sealed a very long time ago. The condition of the east cupboard, opening into the kitchen, is unknown. Both these cupboards represent very sensitive areas within the Rectory: they were unknown to Rayson (neither appears on his survey drawings) and so have entirely escaped modern restoration.

The third area examined lay on the north face of the stack, close to ground floor level. Here a small area of Rayson's very hard plaster finish was removed to reveal earlier brickwork. One brick, seen end on, measured about 1½" thick by 4" wide and was in a soft red fabric. Another nearby was more akin, in fabric and measurements, to the harder 2" bricks in the 1709 south elevation. Further brickwork of the 1709 type was seen lining the flue of the west fireplace (in the Entrance Hall) above Rayson's inserted hearth but this came as no surprise as any earlier fireback would have been routinely replaced in any case. The upper parts of the flue are rendered in lime mortar and caked in soot.

Hence the evidence remains contradictory. However there are other reasons for proposing a date before 1709 for the lower part of the stack.

Firstly, the great thickness of the stack in an east-west direction has necessitated a variation in the standard bay-lengths of the principal elevation: that is, the distance between the fifth and sixth ground floor windows (counting from the west) has been made greater than that between each of the remainder in order to accommodate the earlier feature. Secondly, Le Cato Edwards' *'old flat arch'* still survives. The general

form of the arch - oval, chamfered, with run-out stops part-way down the jambs – is entirely inappropriate to the Entrance Hall of a fashionable early-C18 house but would not be unexpected over the hall fireplace of a late C16 rectory. Finally a visitor to the house in 1944 describes the kitchen as having a big fireplace and an oven: perhaps also an indication of an earlier date⁵.

3.5 *What evidence survives about the nature of the layout of the kitchen rooms?*

Rayson's 1955 restoration of the Rectory was particularly vigorous in the area of the fore kitchen and the back kitchen. Both are now modernised to the point where no convincing historic features of any kind are visible.

His survey drawings show that before 1955 the house was conventionally laid out with an axial passage leading to a side door in the approximate centre of the east gable wall; from this passage doors led south to the principal kitchen and north to a short passage from which opened in turn doors to a scullery, to the west, and a wash house to the east. The passage terminated in an external door, pressed into service in the late C18 as an access door to the east extension, now demolished. In the wash house there was a fireplace, a copper, and a sink. At the north end of the passage, to the west, another opening led to the back stair to the first floor. In the main or fore kitchen there was a fireplace, and a hearthstone to the south of the fireplace, suggesting either an alteration or a reduction in the size of the hearth, and what is described as a 'servery' to the north of the stack. This servery may have begun life as a deep cupboard.

Rayson swept away the light partitions defining the wash house and also took out the copper and the sink. This room became 'Susanna's Kitchen'. The axial passage was closed by a wall on the line of the east wall of the scullery and the fore-kitchen servery opened out to provide direct (and unhistorical) access between the kitchen and the entrance hall. The present arrangement therefore does not reflect the 1709 layout. It is not entirely certain that the 1954 survey shows the 1709 layout either: it may have been modified in the late C19. But the very interesting evidence from the poltergeist haunting of 1716-17 goes some way to supporting the view that the service rooms of the Rectory changed little before the mid-C19. Both kitchens are referred to in documents of the time, and it is also made clear that servants ate in the kitchen and that large gatherings were also held there. It would, of course, be a warm room for the purpose, and a spacious one. Kitchens at the front of even rather elegant C18 houses are not unknown: this arrangement is seen in fashionable early C18 terraced houses in York and London, for example.

The back-kitchen was the scene of more poltergeist activity and here a back-kitchen door and a fire in the back kitchen by the copper hole are all mentioned. By Rayson's time the back-kitchen north door had been blocked by the construction of an outbuilding on the east side of the yard but he shows its position at the east end of the north wall. He also shows a fireplace and a copper. A 'back door' is also mentioned: this seems to have been a different door to the back kitchen door, and may have been that (the 'tradesmen's' entrance') in the east gable; although in his typescript report

⁵ Easter at Epworth *Gee, H L, 1944*; quoted in CMP

Rayson describes both the external doors existing in 1955 as later insertions, and filled them in accordingly. One odd detail is the existence of a 'deal partition': the poltergeist knocks on both sides of it. This was probably a lightly made division between the back kitchen and the axial passage.

There seems little doubt that these two kitchens have been correctly identified. In 1709 the fore-kitchen would have been the chief kitchen in the house, used for preparing food and as a servants' hall; while the back-kitchen would have been used as a wash house. The room shown as a 'scullery' on Rayson's survey (now the Kitchen) may have been used for storage: from it a flight of steps led down to the cellar. This room may also have been the 'dairy' referred to in the early documents. All these functions are in keeping with the plan of early C18 double-pile houses of this status.

3.6 Has there been a dumb waiter at the Rectory and if so, where?

No. There is no evidence for such a device and in any case there was no need for one. Both kitchens and both dining rooms (see below) were on the ground floor.

3.7 What would the original 1709 roof have been like and how much of the original roof survives today?

The 1709 roof survives intact. It has been suggested that the east end of the roof was altered to gables following the removal of the late C18 east extension; but in fact these gables are original. The hip rafters are cut to exactly the same pattern as the principal rafters of the two pitched roofs. It is true that the purlins to the hip are nailed on but this is not exceptional in this period. The trusses are numbered and six timbers were successfully matched (though not dated) during the scientific dating work carried out in connection with the Conservation Plan. This work demonstrated that both pitches of the roof, the hip, and the second floor structure were all of one build; one truss was dated by tree-ring analysis to the period 1705-1718 .

3.8 Can we install a lift to the first floor and improve access?

It is proposed to insert a passenger lift in the rear part of the Rectory. The proposed lift position is in the present Kitchen, against the west wall, immediately to the north of the present door to the stair hall. It will rise in the south-west corner of Bathroom 1.

The floor of the kitchen is C20 concrete. The floor of the bathroom comprises late C19 tongued and grooved boards on contemporary joists. It therefore seems highly unlikely that the construction of the lift will damage historic fabric of any consequence as this area has already undergone massive alteration. However the lift may need a pit for machinery and this will undoubtedly disturb intact archaeological deposits: albeit over a very limited area.

In order to improve access it has also been suggested that a passage be formed using the present cupboard to the south of the stack in Bedroom 3. This cupboard has an

early C18 two-panel door cut down and re-hung (when the bedroom floor was raised in the early C19) on its original pegged architrave. The original moulding or timber fillet was stripped from the architrave and an early C19 moulding applied to it, as may be seen below the level of the adjoining floorboards.

This cupboard is an important feature retaining detail from the first two significant phases of work in the Rectory: its removal to create a passage would compromise part of the historic integrity of the house.

OPTIONAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.9 The back stairs show signs of having been altered several times. The Conservation Management Plan suggests that this was a fairly recent modification. What evidence survives of their original design?

The back stair and garret stair have been altered at least twice.

The back stair from the dining room (former Susanna's Kitchen) to the first floor passage probably follows the original line but partial removal of areas of plastic covering suggests that it received new treads in the late C19.

The garret stair has had a more complicated history and this was investigated *via* the north-west corner of Bedroom 5. As originally built the garret stair was a straight flight reached through a door at the north end of the west wall of Bedroom 5 and rising to the attic or garret in one flight directly above the back stair. Both this flight and the back stair below were each lit by a single small window and these identical window openings have survived, one above the other, in the north wall.

As outlined in the Conservation Plan this was an inconvenient arrangement as it meant that access to the attic was necessarily through Bedroom 5. A new partition was then built across the west end of the bedroom to hold the turned stair. This partition was made of softwood spars of poor quality: a socket was chiselled into the lime-ash floor to take each one (a detail that may still be seen in the understairs void where the lime-ash floor and the chisel marks themselves have miraculously survived) and their heads roughly nailed to the joists of the second floor, overhead. At half-landing level the wall was broken through to enable the new lower flight to turn into the old upper flight; and the opening for the old straight stair infilled. The new opening required headroom under the joists and this was done by chiselling away at the joists from beneath and then roughly carrying the chamfer on each joist around the curve with some further, clumsy, chisel work. The joists were nailed upward to whatever kind of timber lintel was inserted to take the weight of the second-floor wall. The new lower flight of the garret stair was carried on two stringers resting on a cross beam which was supported on the new partition and on the former west wall of Bedroom 5. Finally the half-landing was framed up with pieces of moulded and other re-used timber, all of it painted with the same red ochre paint that can also be seen on the 1709 pegged architrave to the fireside cupboard in Bedroom 3, and which in that position was undoubtedly the first coat of paint applied to that timber. Fragments of wallpaper carrying an attractive red pattern on a white ground were found pasted into

the opening of the understairs void so formed, apparently returning from the walls of Bedroom 5. A window to light the half-landing was inserted into the north wall of the house, with a deep embrasure created in joinery work over the cupboard beneath. It is this timber embrasure which gave rise to the idea that the north wall was exceptionally thick at this point.

At what date was this work carried out? The present treads and risers are C19 replacements but the partition, the stair stringers, and the framing of the half-landing, clearly pre-date them. The inserted window is smaller than its predecessors but has a very similar brick head. A lot depends on the function of Bedroom 5. It seems likely that it was the nursery.

The accounts of the haunting allow us to place the nursery in context: from the documents the following facts emerge:

The nursery is next to the parents' bedchamber

The nursery is next to the east chamber

The nursery is over a kitchen

The east chamber is over a kitchen

The nursery is close to the foot of the garret stair

Bedroom 5 fulfils all these conditions if Bedroom 4 is considered to be the parents' chamber.

In addition we are told that Hetty Wesley...

'...heard one coming down the garret stairs, walking slowly by her; then going down the best stairs, then up the back stairs, and up the garret stairs...'

Hetty was waiting in the first floor passage to take her father's candle. It will be noted that the poltergeist, whatever else it did, failed to pass through any room in its path to and from the garret stair; so the route taken in 1716 in fact describes the present arrangement, not the 1709 one. On this basis and that of the style of construction it seems likely that the alteration to the original, awkward, layout was made very early in the occupancy of the Wesley family and at any rate before 1716. The reason for this is not hard to seek: it is known that servants and possibly other family members slept in the garret, which was also used for storage. It is unlikely that the relationship between parents and their sleeping children has changed much in three hundred years and the unwillingness of the Rector and Susanna to allow young children to be disturbed in the night is easily understood. Doubtless the alteration was money well spent in their view.

In the second phase of work the stairs were rebuilt although this seems only to have extended to the treads and risers, at least of the garret stair. A light partition of tongued-and-grooved timber was applied to the back of the cupboard behind the garret stair, sealing the understair void and trapping the red and white wallpaper; and the joinery of the cupboard was completed as it is today.

3.10 *Is there any evidence to suggest there is a bricked-up exit from the ground floor into the garden other than the existing doors and the known exit from the current guides room?*

No evidence for an C18 exit was seen in this survey although the documents make it clear that in 1716, if not before, there was a dining room or parlour with doors into the garden. These doors seem always to be mentioned in such a way as to distinguish this dining room or parlour from another: and it is likely that it is the small room at the north-west corner of the house – the present guides’ room, or Office on the plan – which is meant, rather than some other dining room which is also referred to, but without garden doors, and which must be the south-west room on the ground floor. Molly and Suky are mentioned as reading in the dining room, while Nancy and the servants are described at various times as sitting in a dining room with doors that open into the garden. In other words the assumption that there were *two* dining rooms, a large one for formal occasions (not that there were too many of those in Susanna’s household) and a smaller and more intimate one for family dining, answers the purpose. This latter room, identified here as the present guides’ room, is too small for the arrangement described elsewhere when the children’s little table and chairs were placed next to that of their parents.

The site of the C18 door into the garden from the small dining room is not certainly known. The 1817 and 1840 engravings both show a sash window on the approximate site of the later C19 garden door. One possibility is that the 1883 extension made use, as a doorway, of an existing opening in the *north* wall of the small dining room and that this was the position of the 1709 garden door. Since this is described in the sources as a folding door it was presumably a two-leaf door, and probably half-glazed. The present opening, which is of sufficient width for such a door, seems to possess neatly-constructed reveals in 1709 brickwork under a reproduction gauged-brick lintel (which uses wire-cut bricks); but the 1955 bricklayer was so good that it is hard to be certain of its authenticity.

3.11 *Immediately north of the Rectory are two outbuildings, which are loosely referred to as Victorian. Based on the surviving evidence, when would these have been added and for what purpose?*

These two outbuildings are late C19 in date, built of 3" brickwork in stretcher bond with occasional headers, and when Rayson saw them they contained earth closets and storage sheds. This was almost certainly their purpose: the sheds would have been used for coal, timber, garden tools, and the like. There is no evidence that they were heated or were used for laundry or any other domestic purpose.

3.12 *Why were the internal window-bays in the south-west corner of the Rectory chamfered?*

The treatment of the window reveals, in which the splays are carried down to floor level, forms part of the hierarchy of ornament and construction within the Rectory. These two rooms are traditionally the principal apartments in any south-facing house of the period, and so at Epworth this pattern of window opening is found only here.

3.13 *The second floor attic is likely to remain unchanged as far as the development project is concerned. However, it would be helpful to know more about this space. What evidence survives to suggest the original layout of the attic and when and where the dividing doors were added?*

The authors of the Conservation and Management Plan take the view that the attic floor remains essentially unchanged: in particular it retains intact floor and roof structures, as noted above. But as they point out there has been some minor alteration.

A short length of the spine wall opposite the head of the garret stair was removed in the C19 to improve access to Bedroom 7. At a later date minor lightweight partitions have been inserted in Bedroom 7 and the Storerooms either side of Bedroom 6 in order to create small storage areas and a WC cubicle. Modern cupboards have been fitted into the Display/Exhibition Area (Old Jeffrey's Chamber).

There have also been some changes to doors and door-openings. The door into the Library is an early C18 three-panel door hung on H-L hinges in its original pegged architrave: this is in fact the only authentic and wholly unaltered doorway into a room in the whole house. There is a two-panel door retaining fragments of early C18 hinges to the south-east Storeroom but it is hung in a C19 or later architrave; the door to Bedroom 6 is a three-panel C18 door hung back-to-front in a later architrave; the door to the WC is also an C18 three-panel door in a later architrave. The door to Bedroom 7 is a two-panel C18 door in a C19 architrave. The doors to the Display Area and to the Storeroom are both 4-panel doors of late C19 or C20 date.

In the case of Bedroom 6 it is likely that the alteration was made by the removal of a light partition originally forming the west end of an axial corridor. The other alterations are the outcome of the usual war of attrition against the joinery detail of old buildings: the result of piecemeal change in a marginal area of the house.

3.14 *Is there any evidence to suggest that the rooms within the Rectory were originally panelled or wainscoted?*

Panelling was normally supported against unplastered walls by nailing it to timber wedges inserted into the brickwork joints. The outcome of removing such panelling is normally either the survival of the wedges or of the sockets that held them. If the wall has been re-plastered it is very hard to detect these although occasionally there is a hard line where dado panelling and a rail have been removed and the lower part of the wall plastered to meet the earlier finishes. No evidence of either sort was detected in the course of this survey; given the limited funds available to Samuel Wesley for construction it is unlikely that panelling was fitted in 1709. No sign was seen of panelling fitted as part of the early C19 refurbishment.

4. THE FUNCTIONS OF THE ROOMS

Although it does not form part of the brief it may be interesting to examine, briefly, the evidence for the functions of the rooms in the house. Much of this evidence comes from documentary sources collected by volunteers at the Old Rectory. Not all of this evidence is easy to interpret. Part of the difficulty lies in its inconsistency. However it must not be supposed that rooms retained their functions or names indefinitely. The Wesley family, on whose papers much of this work must be based, lived in the house from 1709 to 1735, and then not continuously. Hence identification of rooms based on colour schemes (The Green Chamber) or who was sleeping there (Suky sleeping in The Best Chamber) or even function (The Rector's Study) may be unreliable over a period of twenty-six years.

The identification of the first floor rooms poses a series of riddles. As in the case of the nursery, described above, facts can be assembled which gradually rule out certain possibilities but even so uncertainty remains. Some chambers may not be mentioned at all. One would give a great deal for a good probate inventory.

These are the known constraints on the whereabouts of rooms, albeit over a range of different periods:

The nursery is next to the parents' bedchamber

The nursery is next to the east chamber

The nursery is next to the matted chamber

The east chamber is over a kitchen

The east chamber is heated

The matted chamber is heated

The nursery is over a kitchen

The nursery is also known as the green chamber

The nursery is close to the foot of the garret stair

The Rector's Study is upstairs (since while in it, confronting the poltergeist, he tells the family to go downstairs)

Nancy's bedroom adjoins the Study

Suky sleeps in the best chamber (ie the south-west bedroom, by tradition)

There is a paper chamber in which some of the children sleep

The Paper Chamber was presumably called so as it was wall-papered; at notable expense. It may have been one of two first floor rooms.

The table that follows is for discussion only: there is a fruitful and interesting field of research here. The modern room names are taken from the 2007 survey drawings.

Ground floor:

Visitor Information Area		<i>Fore kitchen</i>
Entrance Hall		<i>The Hall (this term may also include the stair hall)</i>
Lounge		<i>Dining room</i>
Office		<i>Family dining room with folding doors into the garden; Parlour</i>
Inner Hall		<i>Hall; Best stairs; Broad stairs</i>
Kitchen		<i>Scullery; Dairy? (steps to cellar)</i>
Dining Room		<i>Back kitchen and wash house</i>

First floor:

Bathrooms 1 & 2		<i>A single unheated chamber: storage</i>
Bedroom 1		<i>Heated bedchamber: Paper Chamber?</i>
Bedroom 2		<i>Best Chamber: Nancy and Suky at various times</i>
Bedroom 3		<i>Rector's Study</i>
Bedroom 4		<i>Bedchamber to Rector and Susanna; Matted Chamber; East Chamber</i>
Bedroom 5		<i>Nursery; Green Chamber; Paper Chamber?</i>

Attics:

The attic rooms cannot be differentiated on the basis of the evidence seen so far. However it is certain that both servants and children slept in the attics – probably the east rooms, which may have been heated – and that part of the attic – probably the Display Area – was used for storage of foodstuffs, as was normal in this period. In particular the servant Robert Brown had a bedroom in the attic; Molly and Suky are described as talking in 1716 in a bedchamber with an iron casement and this too is likely to have been an attic room, lit by a dormer window with casements or by a small casement window in the gable end.

5. FURTHER WORK

Further exploration work in this building is likely to be led by the detailed proposals currently being developed. However there are certain tasks which should be considered:

- The Rectory urgently needs an archaeological archive. This should include Thomas Rayson's report of 1954, Rayson's survey and proposal drawings of 1955, the assessment report by the author of 2000, the Conservation and Management Plan of 2007, this report, and a full set of up-to-date survey drawings, preferably as a digital file on CD as well as a paper copy. To this archive should be added any further relevant documents, such as structural engineers' and architects' reports, as well as information from wallpaper analysis and paint analysis and from any further opening-up or archaeological work. Once established the archive should be kept permanently in the Museum office where it can be added to or consulted whenever necessary.
- Works to the stack – particularly the removal of Rayson's entrance hall fireplace, or the opening-up of the fore kitchen fireplace – will almost certainly resolve the question that surrounds the survival of early fabric.
- Repairs to floor structures may reveal further evidence for the extent of lime-ash upper floors in the early C18 and for the gradual upgrading of the Rectory after that date.
- Almost any work to the joinery or wall surfaces may reveal evidence for early finishes and wallpapers.
- The construction of the lift may need to be preceded by controlled archaeological excavation of the machinery pit. This and the east stack are the only areas of the house likely to yield evidence for the pre-1709 rectory.
- Further documentary research would undoubtedly throw more light on the way in which the house was used and altered: both in the time of the Wesley family and later.