

8.27 STABLE BLOCK & CAFE - STABLE WALL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

**STABLE YARD WALL
AT MARBLE HILL,
TWICKENHAM,
LONDON BOROUGH OF
RICHMOND-UPON-THAMES**

Archaeological Investigation

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Historic Buildings, Landscape Archaeology

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Summary

Investigations of the rear stable wall at Marble Hill, Twickenham, London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames, revealed fabric broadly contemporary with the early 19th century date of the adjacent stable block, but of lesser quality. A considerable length of the wall has been reduced by c.0.75 metres from its original height, with a large former aperture at the northern end blocked in modern brick fabric. A large section of the wall was found to be structurally compromised by a lean of 4 degrees, with much degradation of original mortar and poor quality modern repairs. The northern return of the wall was found to be substantially rebuilt, though at both north and south ends, the short sections abutting the stable remain as constructed, and in fairly good condition.

1 Background and introduction

1.1 This archaeological investigation has been commissioned by English Heritage in order to assess an historic stable yard wall at Marble Hill House, Twickenham, London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames. The adjacent stable block is Grade II listed (List Entry Number 1357725) and the wall curtilage-listed by date and historical association. The wall is thus designated a heritage asset under the National Planning and Policy Framework.

1.2 The purpose of this assessment is to provide more information about the wall, its context, date, condition and significance.

1.3 The government's objective and policy under the National Planning and Policy Framework (2012) is that heritage assets, including setting should be described in the light of any development proposal. The following assessment addresses this and provides background information by which the future of the site may be gauged and steered.

2 Methodology

2.1 The wall was assessed and recorded by description and photography. Besides the condition of the wall, the contribution of the wall to the setting of the

stables was assessed. Photographs have been reproduced to illustrate the text, below.

3 Location, description and designations

3.1 Marble Hill House lies within an area of parkland, close to the river Thames between the historic centres of Twickenham, and Richmond-upon-Thames. The house is currently open to the public at weekends, while the park is an important local public amenity. The historic former stable block lies to the west of the house, now partly occupied by a café, with an enclosed yard to the rear, currently used as a car park. The rear wall forms a property boundary with the Grade II* listed South End House, a large mansion in Montpelier Row which was constructed in 1721.

4 Description

4.1 The stable block is a typical early 19th century building of its type, comprising two wings flanking a central carriage arch and surmounted by a small decorative cupola (Plate 1). The arch leads to an enclosed stable yard to the rear, western part of the site, which preserves traces of its original cobbling, though much has been replaced in modern tarmac.

4.2 The wall encloses the yard on three sides, with independent access given from the south via a pair of timber gates framed by tall brick piers. The northern side is also partly open to a garden beyond, but with no trace of gates.

4.3 The rear, west long wall of the yard rises to approximately 1.8 metres in height, and extends to a length of 30 metres (Plate 2). It has a western lean along much of its length of some four degrees from perpendicular. The majority appears to be of one phase, though the northern three metres is of modern construction using recycled brick and cement pointing, and clearly closes a formerly open aperture to the garden of South End House beyond (Plate 6).

4.4 In terms of construction, the majority is built in Flemish bond, though the lowest nine courses (visible to its maximum extent where the ground falls at the southern end) are exclusively of header bond (Plate 3). This may reflect a more substantial foundation, which is flush with the wall on this side; the rear face was not examined. Most of the wall is now capped with a single course of headers in cement, now mostly obscured by dense ivy from the rear. In the northern section, however, approximately three metres of the wall rises a further ten courses to over two metres in height (Plate 4). There is no evidence for any coping stone or particular finish.

4.5 The brick is a variable purple stock with some inclining to an orange hue, but all fairly homogenous in texture with a few creases, but clearly stock-made (Plate 5). Some small inclusions of flint, ash and glass are present. The bricks are of regular

size, measuring $8\frac{3}{4}$ by $2\frac{1}{2}$ by 4 inches, laid with half-inch joints in a fairly pale lime mortar, now softened and decayed by weathering. One or two distinct repairs in modern cement appear to make good diagonal cracks associated with partial slumping.

4.6 Comparison with the brickwork of the stable suggests chronological similarity. The stable brick is of a more yellow-pink tinge, but this may reflect a lack of weathering and saturation present on the wall. Notwithstanding these slight differences, the dimensions of the brick and inclusions are identical.

4.7 The northern arm of the wall abuts the stable with a straight joint and is battered to its exterior face at lower level. The western end is much rebuilt (Plate 7), but the lower bricks are consistent with the main building. The upper brickwork appears to have been reconstructed using a mixture of original fabric and recycled industrial stocks.

4.8 The southern return of the wall is now partly separated from the rest of the yard by a modern timber fence. It extends on either side of the gateway noted above (Plate 8). That to the east, abutting the stable with a straight joint is battered to its external face in the same manner as its northern counterpart, but preserves its original height and internal pointing, which has been protected from weathering and so remains in good condition (Plate 9). The western section has been much repointed in modern materials to its internal face, but rises to the original height seen at the northern end of the long wall. The external face of this section is mostly obscured by ivy.

5 Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 The homogenous nature of the brick suggests that the yard walls are contemporary with the early 19th century stables and not associated with the 18th century walls which delineate the boundary of South End House further to the south. There is, however much evidence of modification and decay. The two sections nearest to the stable building on the north and south bear similarities in being battered to the outer face and of identical brick, though the southern arm of the wall retains greater height. The long west wall probably used a lesser quality brick, as is commonly found for more utilitarian structures, but the dimensions and fabric suggest that they are of the same period. The wall has been modified by a reduction in height, probably in response to its structural failure, together with the modern blocking of an earlier aperture at the northern end and the partial rebuilding of the northern return.

5.2 The yard walls retain some significance in their relationship to the stable block but are not intrinsically significant in their own right, being subject to much modification. Yards are integral elements to stables, however, giving a sense of

enclosure and discrete screening of their activities from the park and house. The most significant fabric, in terms of degree of preservation comprises the short arm nearest on the south, extending from the building to the gate pier and this should be retained in order to preserve a sense of the original enclosure of the yard. The historic integrity of the yard could also be enhanced by the repair or rebuilding of the long west wall and the exposure of original cobbles.



Plate 1 View of the stable block from the south-east,



Plate 2 View of the long, western yard wall from the east.



Plate 3 Southern end of the long western yard wall showing repaired crack and slumping to the north. Viewed from the east



Plate 4 Northern end of the long western wall showing rise and buttress marking newer section to right.



Plate 5 Brickwork detail



Plate 6 Northern end of the long western yard wall with later blocking. Viewed from the east.



Plate 7 Northern return of the yard wall. View from the south-east.



Plate 8 Gate piers framed by the southern return of the yard wall; internal view from the north.



Plate 9 Southern wall, abutting the stable block.
View from the north-west.

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