Proposal to Replace the Back Door of Porch House, Bromham

1. Building Structure and Floor Plan

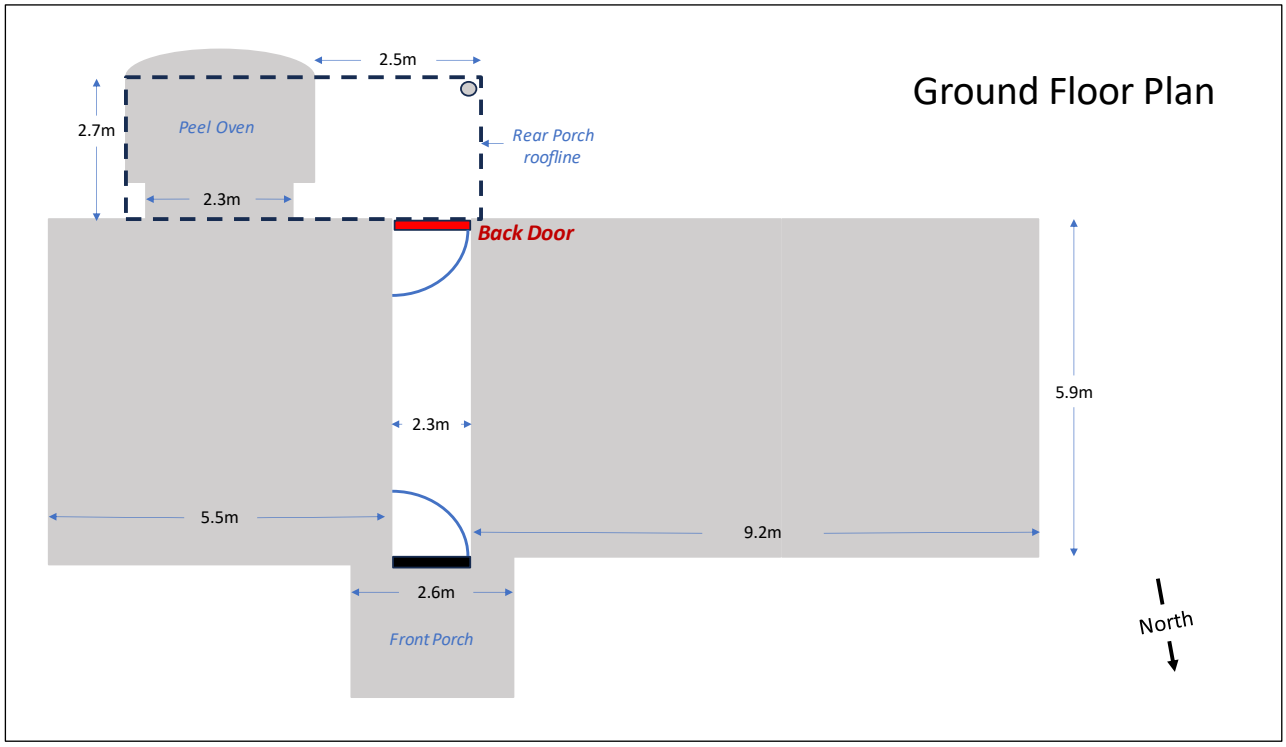
Porch House is a two story property located at the intersection of The Chantry and the High Street in Bromham, Wilts.

The eastern side of the building is constructed of rubble walls under a stone tiled roof. The western side of the building was originally timber framed with a thatched roof. In the C19th the northern face of the timber structure was superseded by a nine inch brick elevation and the thatch was replaced with single roman clay pan tiles.

To the front of the property, projecting into the street, is a substantial two story porch after which the house is named and which is described in the listing. At the rear of the property, projecting from the ground floor of the building, is a substantial, stone peel oven. Over this oven runs a pan tiled roof that extends out above the back door to create a rear porch that is open to the elements on two sides, with the roof supported by a single column at the intersection of the open sides.

The front and back doors of Porch House are located at either end of a corridor that bisects the property at the line where the rubble walled and timber framed buildings abut. The front door provides access via the substantial front porch. The back door opens to the rear garden adjacent to the peel oven and below the extended oven roofline.

The ground level floor plan is depicted below.



2. Heritage Impact Assessment

We have no documentary evidence concerning the history of the back door of Porch House, but by physical examination and comparison with other elements of Porch House, we believe the chronology of its evolution has three distinct phases. These are described below, firstly in the context of the door frame and then in the context of the existing door.

Door Frame

Phase 1. The external door frame was built in its current position as part of a timber framed building erected in 1673. That building included both the front porch and access to the peel oven via the rubble walled building. These two features dominate the early character of the building. It is our understanding that the oven was used as a neighbourhood asset, serving the population of poorer dwellings in the street, and the open porch provided shelter for people waiting for their food to cook. In this period the back door would have been used solely by the occupants of the house, to access the garden and earth closet.

The door frame was manufactured from oak posts with a 4 inch square cross section, in common with much of the structural timber in the 1673 building. The posts have been dressed with some carved architrave, but this is separate wood attached to the frame, rather than the posts themselves being carved.

The dimensions of the door opening are 183cm by 96cm (6' 0" by 3 feet 2" in the gauge of its makers). This is low and wide by modern standards but much in the character of its age. These dimensions are consistent with two surviving adjacent internal doors that were part of the same 1673 building and hold contemporaneous doors.

- The top bar of the external frame is original and in good condition.
- The uprights are also original, as is the jointing to the top bar. They are both aged at the bottom, and have been subject of some crude historic repairs, but remain structurally viable.
- The threshold at the bottom may not be original, as the points where it meets the uprights show evidence of later jointing and the tiles that abut it are of a later vintage. It has been damaged by both the passage of feet and by some historic rat infestation. It is no longer structurally capable of providing a fit with the bottom of the door.
- The protection from weather provided by the rear porch roof simplifies the preservation of the existing timbers, and we are confident we can preserve the uprights and top bar of the Jacobean frame.

Phase 2. Above the original frame is a frame extension, the style of which might suggest its being added in the second half of the C18th. This would be consistent with the date of similar, more radical changes made to the eponymous front porch, including the introduction of the stone doric columns and a six panel front door and the twin pane window above (as noted in the listing). We have physical evidence that in this period the clients of the Inn were using the back door to access latrines and transport. It is possible that the frame extension above the back door was introduced to accommodate a window, similar to the one above the front door, to lighten the passage for customers of the Inn.

Phase 3. If the frame extension was once a window, it would have fallen out of use when the current door was introduced, which obscures about half the area of the frame extension on the inside (discussed at more length below). The window frame is currently paneled over with thin timber boards.

Inside the house, a second frame has been added at a later date. This has no structural significance for the building, it was introduced to compensate for the misfitting of the current door and carries the hinges and latches associated with opening and securing that door. It is constructed from timber with a 3" by 1.5" cross section.

The external door frame is finished in black wherever visible. The secondary internal frame is finished in white.

Our plan will preserve the top and sides of the original external door frame as they are, subject only to repainting. This will maintain the visible appearance of the 1673 entrance, to conserve the direct cultural link with the origins of the house. We will sympathetically replace the threshold timber in oak of similar dimensions to the frame.

If acceptable, we would like to reintroduce the glass panel above the door to match that over the front door. We will, however, build in a demountable timber panel, visually similar the existing piece, that can be inserted over the window to recreate the current external appearance when desired or to add greater insulation during periods of cold weather.

We will maintain the inner frame, onto which the new door will be hung and new locks fitted. We will however, lower the top of this frame to align with the top of the new door. This change will not be visible from outside the house.

<u>The Door</u>

The original door fitted in 1673 would have been a 4 ledged solid plank door, similar to examples that have survived in the house. Indeed, the original back door may itself survive. When maintaining one of our oldest internal doors we revealed evidence that it was once hung the other way up, and at that time was dressed with a substantial lock. We cannot be certain, but we think it possible that this was the first back door.

During the late 18th century, when the building housed a thriving Inn, much modernization was undertaken, including the introduction of the doric columns on the front porch, the introduction of internal corridors and the repositioning of the stairs. These changes created the character of the house that has been handed down to us, and we perceive these changes as an attempt by the Inn's owner to convey both currency and means to the clients of the Inn.



The current back door is designed with six panels. It clearly was not made for its current use as it does not fit. Whilst its width is appropriate for the dimensions of the external door frame, its height is fully 25cm greater. This creates a bizarre visual effect from the outside, where the top of the door and half of its top panels are obscured. Figure two is a recent photograph which shows this anomaly.

The weight of the door indicates that it is constructed from a soft wood. Imported soft wood was first commonly deployed during the second half of the C18th. However, two observations suggest that this door was introduced to Porch House at a later date:

- At the time when much Georgian “modernization” was taking place at Porch House, when the building housed a thriving Inn, much bespoke carpentry was done and money spent. Introducing a mismatched second-hand door in a prominent location seems out of character for owners who purchased stone doric columns for the front entrance and rebuilt the stairs in line with the fashions of the day.
- The door’s overlap above the original frame renders the frame extension useless as a window.

So it seems likely that the door was introduced at a later date, perhaps in the C19th. The lack of prominent Victorian features in the house suggests that the maintenance of the property was not generous and acquisition of a bespoke door perhaps less affordable. Finding a door of Jacobean proportions would have been hard, so possibly someone selected a second-hand door of the right width and then improvised the internal door frame to accommodate its height.

We have found nothing that clarifies between these two hypotheses. However, consistent with either, we concluded that the frame extension and first introduction of a six panel door was likely contemporaneous with the additions to the front porch, intended to introduce a Georgian perception of elegance to the existing Jacobean structure. It was, in effect, an 18th century “make-over” project, which supports the proposition that there would have been a window in the frame extension.

We are keen to preserve the aspirational heritage of the 18th century changes, which form part of the social history inherent in the house. By contrast, the existing door seems to have been a mean spirited “work-around” that took little account of the historic context into which it was introduced.

We have accommodated the anomaly of the back door for many years, in the spirit of preservation, but now the aging of the door needs to be addressed, and the question of its design can be reviewed.

3. The Need for Repair

The timber used to make the original door has softened with age, causing a number of practical issues:

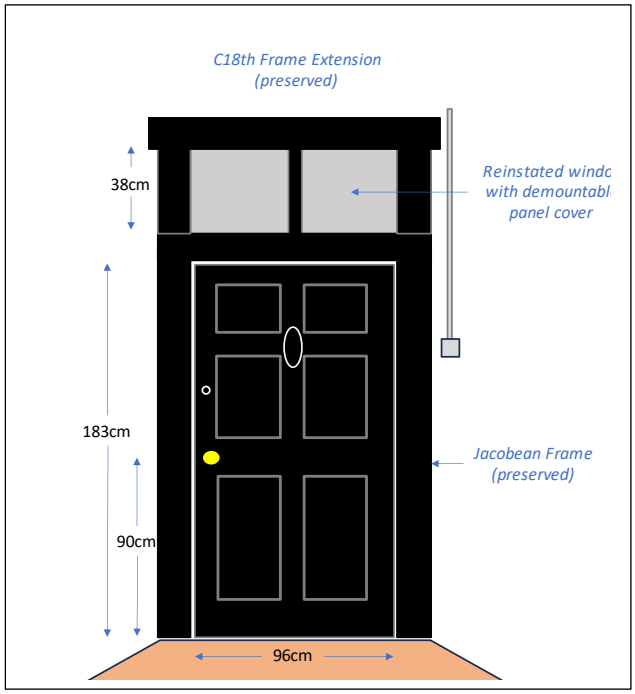
- It will no longer take the burden of fixings, so hinges and door handles are insecure.
- The lower panels in the door have split. In the worst cases these allow substantial heat loss.
- The door is no longer flush with the threshold, increasing the rate of heat loss.
- The structure of the door has become articulated, it has to be opened and closed with care.

The result of this is that the door no longer provides either the security or heat retention consistent with its use in our family home.

We have reviewed options for repair with an experienced joiner. They advised that a substantial amount of the existing timber would need to be replaced, requiring a complete dismantling of the door. In effect, they would be making a new door, reusing some elements of the old. The result would be a curious and inconsistent highbred of old and new materials.

4. Design Plan

After consideration, our plan is to commission a new door made in the six panel design that is similar to the existing door and consistent with the design of the front door, but with dimensions that match the Jacobean door frame.



Whilst a six panel design is inconsistent with the C17th frame, we propose that fusing Georgian design with Jacobean dimensions best reflects the aspirational intent of the house's C18th occupants, who gave the doorway its character. As such, we think it offers the most interesting historical narrative of how the house evolved into its current condition. We have commissioned Easterton Joinery to do this for us.

The sizing of the panels is partly dictated by the position if the door knob, which will be at the same distance from ground as on the current door.

The door will be finished in black on the outside face and white on the inside, consistent with the current door.

5. Materials Plan

We have discussed the choice of wood with two joiners, both advise the use of Sapele, which offers the least risk of shrinkage or warping in the finished product. We have a draft design from Easterton Joinery, and have agreed the cost to build and hang the door.

We will use linseed oil paint throughout, sourced from Ingilby.(https://www.ingilby.co.uk/linseed-oil-paint)

Once in situ and finished, the door will be furnished with a newly manufactured, unlacquered brass rim lock in a style consistent with Georgian design, such as From The Anvil SCU35000 (https://ironmongeryplus.co.uk/from-the-anvil-35000-polished-brass-rim-lock-cover.html). Ideally, we would have liked this rim lock to accommodate a 5 level action, to conform with the requirements of our insurer. However, we cannot source a five lever action in a design of rim lock that is consistent with the historical context of the door. So we plan to use a 3 lever action with as much sympathy of design as we can achieve. We will also fit a Yale latch and security lens, as fitted to the current door. These will be coloured to be as obscured as possible. The door knobs will be in unlacquered brass. We intend to reuse the existing iron door knocker, cleaned and finished in black.