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Mompesson House North East bedroom project

**A report on the current condition of the woodwork with advisory
comments on conservation methodology**

The room has been stripped back to remove all the modern inner walls and battens.

The panelling has some missing rails and mouldings, but all missing parts have matching details in the room against which new parts can be made.

These parts include:

1. Right hand window sill edge
2. Hearth surround
3. Mantle shelf – no extant parts but very good shadow lines on walls
4. Panel above mantle shelf
5. LH side of overmantle frame rail

These are all recorded on the architects' drawings.

All replacement timber should be species identical to the original, probably *pinus sylvestris*, and well-seasoned and stored in an environment that matches the room's RH before repairs are carried out. This will minimise any movement for all additional material.

There are smaller losses to panelling mouldings and holes made in panels. Cross grain plugs can be made for any hole over 6mm, smaller holes can be filled with a proprietary filler.

The Bolection moulded panels consist of a panel held against a rebate on the inside of the moulded rails, secured in place by nails pressed against the panel. The mouldings are attached to the main panelling rails by nails. The panels have been free to move because they are not nailed to the moulded rails. Some inner panels have become misaligned because they have been pushed back causing the retaining nails to bend backwards.

The upper bolection moulded panels have various issues. Most show signs of shrinkage, probably due to the previous use of the room with high humidity and heat. Within the normal expected fluctuations in panel sizes as RH changes, it can be assumed that the panels are now reasonably stable. Many panels have a thick build-up of old paint layers along what was the panel to moulding contact point.



Detail of a panel on the west wall showing panel shrinkage and the paint build up.

Some panels have shrunk leaving gaps between them and the moulding edge, these will need fillets added to them to enable the panel to be fixed against the rebate of the moulding firmly. Others move when pressed against and so cannot be painted without leaving unstable gaps, due to the retaining nails bending. To minimise any shadow marks being imbalanced inner panels may require fillets to be added to both sides rather than just one.

As part of the redecoration of the room, the panels should be cleaned back to remove the paint build up which is now away from the mouldings due to the panel shrinkage to enable fresh paint to be applied across the panel and mouldings. Before this can be done the bolection mouldings need stabilising.

Taking the architects drawing of each elevation for the panel references, going around the room anti-clockwise from the door:

PS-3.1	Gaps both sides and loose on LH side, moulding also loose
PS- 2.1	Loose on LH side, moulding also loose
PS-1.1	Loose on LH side
PE-4.1	Loose on LH side
PE- 2.1	Loose on LH side
PE-1.1	OK
PN-3.1	Batten left on to hold it in place – top section reported as loose, split along RH side due to nails preventing even shrinkage
PN-5.1	OK
PN- 1.1	OK
PW- 5.1	Loose on LH side
PW-4.1	Gap and loose on LH side
PW3.1	Loose on LH side
PW-2.1	OK

PW-1.1 OK
PS- 5.1 OK
PS- 4.1 Overdoor panel has shrinkage along top register

Panel PN-3.1 could be released to glue up the split if the stress relaxes after the nails to the RH side are cut off, then the panel can be refitted with screws, otherwise the split can be filled with a slither of matching timber and the upper section screwed down.

Lower panels look ok except for Panels PW-3.2 and PW4.2

PW-3.2 has a split branch delaminating from the panel, this is clearly historic so could be left but should probably be either glued back and filled or planed back and filled prior to redecorating.

PW4.2 has damage to the underside of the top moulding.

Panels with clear gaps between panel and moulding rebate will need taking off the wall to facilitate the widening of the panel. As the mouldings are nailed to the wall, it is a good idea to pre-prepare holes in the moulding for fixing screws with the panels in place. This will ensure accurate refitting.

It is likely that bolection frames with loose panels will need to be taken off the wall to stabilise them as well. The current fixing method is by nails pressed against the panel and nailed into the side to the inside of the moulding.

The bolection mouldings will be nailed to the rails and should ease off the wall with spatulas and wedges and easing bars.

Fireplace wall PE-3.1



All of the missing mouldings can be determined by existing details. The LH stile can be patched to match the existing rail.

Research by others has concluded that the area above the mantle shelf is a flat and flush panel like the one in the Drawing Room. Ghost marks and the tenon into the PH stile show the size of the cross rail above and gives the panel size.

Like all replacement pieces, the new panel board should be made of well-seasoned pine, acclimatised to the RH in the room. This should ensure that relative movement is minimal and not lead to joint failure and paint cracking.

The LH stile below the cut line could be lifted off by prising it off the return board. The horizontal panel with the papier mache decoration could also be removed at this point. The board is either attached by tenons or pinned directly on to support battens.

Due to the nature of the repairs required to the papier mache decoration to the board, it would be beneficial to remove the board to facilitate this. The board can then be reinstated after the rest of the work has been completed.

During the repair and replacement of the fireplace wall, it would therefore be sensible to fix the mantel shelf and the top architrave of the fire surround in a way that allows them to be removed – perhaps screw fixed, but not filling over in the first instance.

The upper and lower register nail holes on the board with the papier mache relate to mantle shelf and the lower fire surround fixings, but there is a nail spiked down the RH side. There may be nails in the board that are its fixings to a ground batten.

I hadn't anticipated this board being taken off, but a spatula or penknife down the vertical gaps will determine if the joints are tenons or butt. If butt joined then the panel can be detached as part of the repairs to the stile. It could then be inserted once the stile repairs are done. If tenoned then maybe the tenons could be cut off and false tenons made up that fit in to the stiles and the board then planted onto them to reattach it? The other components around the board – marble surround rail, mantle shelf and upper flat panel and the bolection panel all need this rail in place, so screw fixing makes sense. Screw fixing also reduces vibration and allow positive engagement of surfaces as they will pull up when nails might not. As with other repairs, if small screws are used these can be covered by filler, if larger, then cross grain plugs once all the works are completed.

The current Bolection moulding and panel over fireplace is correct size but panel made up of random boards that don't match other panels. The board widths are possibly too narrow relative the other inserted panels. None of the other panels have boards with endgrain joints. Redecorating may not mask these discrepancies, so consideration should be given to replacing panel. Other than changing the boards the overall look would be unchanged. The panel would then match the other panels in the room, with no end grain joints. The other panels will give the average board width to copy, so may be 4 boards, c300 mm each.

Access to the wall to carry out masonry repairs has been mentioned. In addition to this, the panel over the fireplace may require infrequent but regular removal to inspect the wall. The Bolection moulding frame can be attached to the wall either on slotted screw fittings or mirror plate brackets.



Alternatively, the mouldings can have right angle stepped brackets fitted that engage behind the rails on the top and bottom register of the panel wall. The top bracket has a longer arm to engage behind the panel to remain in place when lowered in place.

Examples can be seen at Ham (in image) or Petworth.

Skirting boards



South wall below PS-3.2



East wall below PE-2.2

Some of the skirting boards have been replaced with matching mouldings and timber. The skirting boards have, in places along the south and east walls, been dropped and run parallel to the floor resulting in wider gaps between the skirting and lower panels. This may be to accommodate

movement in the floor make up. The incorrect gap between skirting and panels is more noticeable than to the floor.

The misalignment of the skirting against the lower panels looks wrong. Correcting the gap between lower panels and the skirting I think is key to allowing the room to read correctly. Simply moving the displaced skirting boards up will leave a large gap between the skirting face board and the floor.

As the incorrectly located boards are all made from new timber, it would be justified to replace the face boards with wider boards that can be scribed against the floor to fit the contours. Other gaps to original skirtings can be taken as the datum gap.

North wall skirting not secure, requires locating block to stabilise face.

Floor



The skirting protrusion into the room is being investigated to establish whether the various plumbing piping can be removed to allow the skirting to run round the wall edge.



The floor has been laid down in a very random manner with new boards let in. Some boards were clearly against the skirting, as in the image above. Possible options are to leave the floor as it is or attempt to clean the dark boards and balance up the colour on the other boards. The floor should not be sanded. It may be that the floorboards are a random selection salvaged from around the property and so the discrepancies can be left as part of the history of the building.

Other issues

Dado above PE-2.2 to left of fireplace is split and filled with a mastic



West wall stiles have dropped along top register and wall bounces when pressed suggesting that the noggins or other fixings may have failed.

The west wall requires some upper panels to be removed to correct issues with the inner panels. This will allow the wall to be investigated. With the skirting boards taken off, the bottom register rail can be lifted up by appropriate lifting kit to push the stiles up. The stiles can be attached to the wall by new fixings through the face into blocks acting as spacers off the wall and folding wedges placed under the bottom rails under the stiles to offer further stability. The skirting board can then be reattached.



Electrical sockets are currently in the skirting boards. These need to be set at right angles to the normal orientation due to the shallow depth of the skirting boards to allow plugs to fit. An alternative option would be to create floor boxes and put sockets under the floor with hatches made in the boards.

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