



Design, Access and Heritage Statement

Lacock Abbey Dining Room

Listed Building Application – May 2026

 **National Trust**

Tisbury Hub, Place Farm Courtyard, Court Street, Tisbury, Salisbury, Wiltshire. SP3 6LW

1.0 Background

The ceiling in the dining room is showing two main cracks which have been increasing in severity.

The more significant crack is to the north (right hand side on the photo below). The other runs the full length of the centre of the room east to west.



Figure 1 - Current cracks to dining room ceiling - looking towards northwest

2.0 Heritage Significance

2.1 Listing

Lacock Abbey is a Grade I listed building:

LACOCK LACOCK ABBEY ST 9168 4/118 Lacock Abbey with Stable yard 20.12.60

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Country house, mid C16 remodelling and extension of cloister court of C13 to C15 Augustinian nunnery founded 1229 and sold to Sir W. Sharington at the Dissolution 1540. Some alterations of c1700 and c1740 for Sir John Talbot and John Ivory Talbot and entrance front rebuilt as Gothick great hall 1754-5 by Sanderson Miller for J.I. Talbot. South front alterations in Tudor style 1828-30 for W.H. Fox-Talbot and c1900-10 restoration of medieval parts by H. Brakspear for C.H. Talbot. Ashlar and rubble

stone with stone slate roofs generally and numerous ornate C16 twisted stacks. Mostly 2 storeys, the major part of the house on first floor only over unaltered medieval basement. The medieval basement comprises three sides of a lierne-vaulted C15 cloister with two C14 bays at south-west angle. Largely C14 spaces off. To east fine series of vaulted rooms, sacristy, chapter house and warming house, intact apart from openings on east side that are of c1900. This part was under the Dormitory. West side, under great hall, but originally under Abbess' lodging has 2 rooms and main entrance passage. North side is undercroft to refectory. In upper part of house medieval roofs survive, concealed, to north side refectory, C15 with arch braced collar trusses and 3 tiers of windbracing, and to south side dormitory, C14 with 3 tiers of cusped windbracing. Exterior: west front has 1754-5 ashlar fronted hall-to centre, full-height, with slate half-hipped valley roof. Octagonal angle turrets with ogee cupolas, delicate pierced parapet and 2 large ogee-headed windows flanking central door reached by two-arm balustraded outside stair. An important landmark of the C18 Gothic revival. To left, former medieval kitchen refronted in C18. Balustraded parapet, buttresses and two 2-light pointed windows similar to those on Bath House at Corsham Court by Capability Brown (q.v. Corsham C.P.). To right a plain parapetted range with two 15-pane C18 sashes and heavy stepped corner buttress. South front is similarly severe, being essentially the inside north wall of the Abbey church with balustrading and south-east tower added by Sharington and 3 oriels of varied sizes added 1828-30. The north-west angle of the church is marked by a heavily buttressed projection, west of this, in plain walling, another 15-pane sash. Sharington's tower possibly designed by John Chapman, octagonal, 3-storey, divided by string courses, has top belvedere, balustrade and stair turret. Finely detailed 2-light mullion windows. East front is the most medieval in outline, but C13 style Gothic ground floor windows are of 1900-10. Adjoining tower, 2-storey range parallel to main range, the ground floor the medieval east end of chapter house and sacristy, the parapetted upper floor with 6 stone cross windows added in mid C16. To right, the main range has buttressed ground floor and, above, four C18 Gothic 4-light windows, 2 each side of fine C16 outside stack. Battlemented parapet. South end cross-wing appears largely C16 with coped gables, heraldic finials and dentil eaves cornice. Mullion-and-transom windows of flush chamfered type with unusual roundel motif on intersections. Medieval stonework to ground floor. Two-gabled C16 north extension with first floor C18 sashes and attic mullion windows. North of house is stable court, mid C16 on east and north sides, an exceptionally complete Tudor service court, notable for the large timbered gabled dormers, some with deep eaves on scroll brackets and higher cross-gabled clock-tower at west end of north range.

Mullion windows, dripcourse and Tudor-arched doorways but 4 doorways in the Renaissance style of some of the interior C16 work. C19 low coach-houses and 2 early to mid C18 lodges form a screen across west side linking to an apparently late C17 addition to north of former kitchen, 2-storey, 5-window with sashes replacing cross-windows above and chamfered recessed mullion windows below. Fine timber dentil cornice. South end wall bolection moulded doorcase. From here projects a mid C18 Gothick ogee-headed carriage-arch with screen wall each side. Interiors: outstanding mid C18 Gothick work in great hall with exuberant terracotta figures by V.A. Sederbach in canopied niches and shallow tunnel vault with armorial decoration. c1740 south- west room in style of William Kent. South Gallery remodelled 1828- 30. Panelled parlour beyond of c1700-20. South-east tower has vaulted octagonal strong room with pendants to vaults and magnificent stone table attributed to J. Chapman. Similar but damaged table in belvedere. Stone gallery in east range is C16 with Renaissance style fireplace and doorcase, and Brown Gallery in north range has fine C16 windows to courtyard. Corbels of refectory roof visible. In service court a complete surviving brewery at west end of north range. W.H. Fox-Talbot 1800-77, pioneer of photography spent his life here and made his first photographic experiments here. (National Trust, Lacock Abbey, 1984; N. Pevsner, Wiltshire, 1975, 284-9; Country Life, 3, 10 and 17 March 1923; J. Summerson, Architecture in Britain 1530 to 1830, 1970, 42-5, 399-400)

Listing NGR: ST9194768469

2.2 Site Evidence

The walls in this area of the building show evidence of previous modification where the top storey floor structure was removed to allow the ceiling to be raised to create the dining room.



Figure 2 - Filled in window at current ceiling height and previous ceiling joist sockets in wall plate above

Work to create the room was carried out in the mid-18 century, so it is expected the ceiling and roof structure date from this time. It is not clear whether the roof structure was repurposed from the original roof, but modifications to the timbers indicate this was the case.

Previous repairs to the split secondary joist have been carried out with metal strapping. There have also been resin repairs to the ceiling in this area suggesting failure of the plaster nibs. This does not appear to have been the case throughout the ceiling, so likely relates to the deflection of the joists. These repairs likely date from before the 1980s.



Figure 3 - Joist straps and resin repairs to ceiling

Some secondary beams have timber support blocks. It is not clear if these were added at construction, or later additions. Some of these blocks are now loose and not adding any support.



Figure 4 - Typical joint between primary and secondary beams

3.0 Justification

3.1 Design

The ceiling repairs consist of three main elements.

Firstly, the additional strengthening of the main trusses to reduce the deflection towards the centre of the ceiling. The details of the proposed changes are given in the attached structural engineer's report (Hockley and Dawson 22289). These changes involve the addition of a wire tensioning system with the suggested type 3 bracket. This approach requires minimal intervention and is largely reversible if required.

Secondly, adding support to the split secondary joist to the northwest of the room. Details of this repair are given in 22289-3.03C. These repairs will require a section of the existing ceiling to be removed to allow a hanger to be installed. The area removed are expected to be only as large as needed to install the hanger, rather than removing the whole area below the joist. This approach will retain as much of the historic fabric as possible. The addition of coach screws from below will then be carried out, spaced evenly along the beam. This required small areas of plaster to be removed along the length of the secondary beam. If the timber is unable to hold a particular screw, the proposed strapping in drawing 22289-3.03C will be installed from above, without the need for further plaster removal. This assessment will be made on a per-fixing basis. Repairs to the ceiling will be carried out with matching timber lathes and lime plaster. It is not expected that any repairs will be required close to the decorative cornice.

It is expected that this repair is substantial enough to support the beam, but if further cracking reappears, a pair of additional beams are proposed, which are fitted by hanger to the primary joist and external wall. Details are given in 22289-3.04. These beams will then support the ceiling joist with angle bracket, removing the load from the failed secondary beam. No further ceiling opening will be required.

Thirdly, additional support is proposed to the joint between the primary and secondary ceiling beams. This is intended for the joints above where there is an area of failed ceiling plaster (see drawing LA4-02) but would also be considered on any joints where the timber blocks are loose. The strapping will allow existing timber support blocks to be retained, and it is reversible. A small area of failed ceiling will require repair once the brackets are in place.

3.2 Access

Access will be unaffected by these repairs.

Conclusion

The proposed repairs will provide a strengthening of the roof structure above the dining room with minimal intervention and maximum retention of historic fabric. We therefore request that you approve this application.