



Structural Investigation of Salisbury Guildhall Ceiling in the Banqueting Hall

Salisbury City Council



The Value of Certainty.

Contents

Version Control	3
Introduction	4
The Commission	4
The Brief	4
Introduction/Limitations	4
Liability	5
General Description of Property	5
Environmental, Ecology and Statutory Matters	6
Executive Summary	7
Observations	8
Summary Assessment	9
Conclusions and Recommendations	10

Appendix A - Site Photos	11
--------------------------	----



Version Control

Version	Date	Description of revision	Prepared by	Checked by	Authorised by
1.0	14/01/2026		Lucas Main/Paul O'Brien	Paul O'Brien	Chris Webb

Distribution list

Copy No	Name of holder	Company	Date issued
1	Mostyn Coombes	Salisbury City Council	25/01/2026

Introduction

The Commission

This survey and report have been commissioned by Salisbury City Council following concerns over possible deterioration of the ceiling to banqueting hall with the Guildhall Salisbury, Market Place, Salisbury, Wiltshire. following partial collapse or failure of the banquet ceiling sometime around 2018-19, a survey and interrogation of the ceiling was undertaken of the ceiling

Currie & Brown Ltd were appointed to undertake an assessment of condition and determine what intervention is subsequently required to the ceiling.

The Brief

The brief is to undertake a visual examination of the ceiling area above the banqueting hall to determine whether there has been further deterioration to the ceiling following intervention works previously undertaken to the ceiling and a previous report undertaken in 2019.

The objective is to determine a further degradation and loss of key to the lime plaster, given the associated risks to the public using the room, in order that a more comprehensive plan of action can be subsequently formulated.

Introduction/Limitations

This report presents the findings of a visual, non-intrusive structural assessment undertaken to review the condition and stability of the ceiling within the Banqueting Hall at Salisbury Guildhall. The inspection focused on the structural integrity of the traditional lath and plaster ceiling and associated supporting elements to the ceiling located within the roof void above. Due to the continued functional use of the room, the use of access plant and equipment was to be avoided with inspection constrained to within the roof void and from visual interrogation within the area below.

The limitations of our inspection include that there will only be a superficial examination of the building fabric and finishes where areas of the building had been opened up to facilitate inspection without hugely impactful and disruptive opening up or removal of sensitive finishes.

The inspection was limited to areas that were reasonably accessible at the time of the visit. No intrusive investigations, material sampling or structural calculations were undertaken. Accordingly, this report does not constitute a full structural design verification but rather an assessment of observable condition, apparent adequacy, and any visible evidence of distress or movement.

At the time of our inspection the property was predominantly unoccupied. However, we were only able to inspect those parts of the structure which were accessible without removing furniture and fittings. As part of the assessment, insulation laid between and above the timber joists and lime based plaster ceiling was temporarily lifted and set aside to facilitate closer examination of the ceiling construction and its restraint system. This enabled inspection of the plaster key, timber laths, and battens forming the primary support arrangement.

We have not carried out any investigation on planning, highway, environmental, contamination or any legal matters that may directly or indirectly affect the property.

This report does not provide warranties regarding the adequacy of concealed construction or historic repairs, and no liability is accepted for defects not reasonably visible at the time of inspection. Where risks have been identified, further investigation or specialist input may be required along with appropriate access plant and equipment for high level work.

Liability

This Report is provided solely for the use of the Client and the Client's professional advisers, and no liability to anyone else is accepted. Should the Client not act upon specific, reasonable advice contained in the Report, no responsibility is accepted for the consequences.

Complaints handling Procedure

A copy of the firm's complaints handling procedure is available on request.

General

For orientation purposes the front entrance elevation is deemed to be facing due west with the rear elevation access facing due north.

The report should be read in conjunction with the appended photographic files

Inspection

This report has been prepared following an inspection of the premises on the 9th January 2026. Weather conditions were dry, cold and overcast throughout the survey period.

General Description of Property

Salisbury Guildhall, constructed circa **1795**, is a representation of late Georgian civic or municipal architecture. The building is of traditional solid masonry construction, reflecting the robust and enduring methods typical of the period. Historical records suggest that the Guildhall occupies a site formerly associated with a Georgian prison, which has since been demolished. It is likely that the current structure was built upon, utilised or adjacent to the original foundations, adding to its historical significance.

The primary structural fabric comprises solid external masonry walls, measured at approximately **624 mm in thickness**, constructed using Gault clay brickwork laid in English bond. These walls are founded on a substantial limestone stone plinth, providing a stable base for the superstructure.

The principal elevation of Salisbury Guildhall presents a symmetrical and imposing façade, characteristic of late Georgian civic architecture. The central feature is a portico comprising six fluted limestone stone columns of the doric order, supporting an entablature and a plain cornice. This portico frames the main entrance, which is set back within a recessed bay. Around the portico on either side are large arched sash windows which are consistent around all elevations, each surmounted by decorative limestone quoins .

Internally, wall finishes are predominantly lime plaster over hessian backing, consistent with original Georgian construction techniques. This breathable finish is characteristic of the era, allowing moisture regulation within the building fabric. Decorative elements such as ornate cornices, ceiling roses, and mouldings remain evident in principal rooms, underscoring the craftsmanship of the period. The ceilings appear of lime-based plaster constituent with the banquet hall ceiling recently undergoing replacement within the last two-three decades, utilising the concept of lime plaster and animal hair mix.

While the building retains much of its original character and structural robustness, evidence of historic movement, moisture ingress and later alterations were observed during the inspection. These changes, typical of a structure of this age, include minor settlement cracks, areas of plaster deterioration and interventions to accommodate modern services. The Guildhall's Grade II* listed status underscores its architectural and cultural importance, necessitating sensitive and informed conservation practices to ensure its continued preservation.

The Guildhall has been subject to extensive renovations and restoration works during late 1980's and early 1990s which included full replacement of the lath and plaster ceiling the main banqueting hall on the ground floor.

Environmental, Ecology and Statutory Matters

Salisbury Guildhall is a **Grade II* listed** building, (listing reference 1242739) first listed in February 1952, reflecting its significant architectural and historic interest. As such, the building is subject to statutory protection, and any works affecting its fabric, structure, or appearance are likely to require Listed Building Consent. All structural repairs, stabilisation works, and associated interventions should therefore be developed and implemented on a conservation-led basis, employing materials and methodologies that are compatible with the original construction and that preserve historic fabric, load paths, and building behaviour. Generally, repairs on a like for like sympathetic manner do not normally warrant Listed Building Consent, however extensive remedial works and replacement will require Listed Building Consent as such early consultation with the Local Planning Authority and Conservation Officer is strongly recommended.

The underlying geology of the site is recorded as comprising chalk, sand, and gravel, in accordance with available Historic England records. Chalk geology is generally capable of supporting substantial masonry loads; however, it may be sensitive to fluctuations in groundwater levels, particularly where granular deposits are present. Such conditions can influence settlement behaviour and moisture migration within below ground masonry.

The site is located within an area identified as having groundwater flood risk, which is considered relevant to the moisture related defects observed within basement and lower level areas. Environmental Agency data indicates a very low annual probability of flooding from surface water, rivers, and the sea, with flooding from reservoirs assessed as very unlikely. While the overall flood risk classification is low, groundwater related moisture ingress remains a credible and influential mechanism affecting the long term performance of historic solid masonry structures, particularly where external ground levels are high relative to internal floor levels.

The environmental context is therefore considered a contributing factor to the elevated moisture levels, hygroscopic salt contamination, and associated masonry deterioration observed at lower levels, rather than an indicator of acute or episodic flood events.

Executive Summary

The Guildhall Salisbury is a Grade II* listed grand municipal and civic building constructed in 1795 typified with vernacular Georgian characteristics and architectural styling.

The building has been subject to renovations and restoration works during late 1980's and early 1990s. Following partial collapse of the banquet ceiling sometime around 2018-19, a historic survey was undertaken of the ceiling construction and its integrity coupled with temporary interventional restraint to the underside of the ceiling comprising ply timber and fibreglass netting secured by timber battens.

Currie & brown were requested to reinspect the ceiling from local vantage points and undertake a visual non-intrusive inspection was carried out to assess the structural stability of the Banqueting Hall ceiling at Salisbury Guildhall, focusing on the traditional lath and plaster construction and supporting elements within the roof space.

Insulation was temporarily lifted and set aside to inspect the lime plaster key, timber laths, and temporary restraint system. No other intrusive works or structural calculations were undertaken.

Overall, the ceiling remains in good condition, retaining its decorative plasterwork detailing, particularly dentiled cornices, with no evidence of widespread cracking. Two localised areas of plaster key loss were noted; these were first identified during the 2019 survey.

The remedial works undertaken at that time, appear to be performing adequately. While slight flexing of the ply was observed under light pressure, the boards remain secure and effective. The majority of plaster keys are still well bonded to the timber laths, and the ceiling structure is considered generally stable with no indication of immediate risk of failure.

An additional significant tapered vertical crack was identified in the masonry wall within the roof space, measuring approximately 1.8 m in height, with the width ranging from 14 mm to 35 mm at its largest point. Crack monitoring fixings are in place, and whilst the defect does not currently affect ceiling stability, further investigation is recommended.

Remedial measures identified include continued regular ceiling inspections to identify any further cracking and loss of key whilst a programme of long term restorative works is being formulated which inevitably require Local Authority approval.

Observations

The Guildhall has been subject to renovations and restoration works during late 1980's and early 1990s which included full replacement of the original lath and plaster ceiling with sympathetic replacement comprising similar materials. However, following partial collapse of the banquet hall ceiling sometime around 2018-19, a historic survey was undertaken of the ceiling construction and its integrity coupled with temporary interventional restraint to the underside of the ceiling comprising ply timber and fibreglass netting secured by timber battens.

The Banqueting Hall is one of the principal spaces within Salisbury Guildhall, distinguished by its architectural significance and ornate decorative plasterwork (Refer to images 1-4).

A visual, non-intrusive inspection was undertaken to assess the structural stability of the ceiling and its supporting elements within the loft space above. The inspection was limited to lifting insulation positioned over the lattice joists in the roof void to allow examination of the plaster key, timber laths, and restraint system. No opening-up works, intrusive investigations, or structural calculations were carried out.

Ceiling: Traditional lath and plaster system, consistent with early 18th century construction but understood to have been undertaken as a complete sympathetic replacement sometime during late 1980s, albeit unconfirmed. Decorative mouldings, dentiled cornices and a central ceiling rose are present, supporting a suspended chandelier (refer to images 3-4).

Insulation: What appears as rock mineral wool insulation was observed at plaster level, forming part of a cold roof arrangement (refer to images 017)

Roof Void: Above the ceiling, timber battens provide restraint, supplemented by areas of ply sheathing and supplemented by what looks to be a fibreglass netting fixed to the underside of the ceiling as a temporary means of securing the ceiling. The structural arrangement includes timber joists and diagonal bracing forming a lattice over the plaster ceiling (refer to images 01-04 & 5-24).

This construction relies on the integrity of the plaster key and adequate restraint from battens and fixings to maintain its long-term stability.

The Banqueting Hall ceiling remains largely intact, retaining its decorative plasterwork, dentiled cornices and central ceiling rose without evidence of significant deformation or widespread cracking. Two localised areas previously identified as higher-risk zones in the 2019 report, where a percentage loss of key was noted, were re-examined during this inspection. These areas appear stable, with no indication of further deterioration since the previous survey. Additional minor areas of plaster key loss were observed; however, the plaster behind these sections remains firm and well bonded, suggesting that the defects are superficial and not currently compromising structural integrity (refer to images 5-11).

The earlier remedial works undertaken in 2019, which involved installing ply boarding beneath the ceiling and fixing it to the joists for added restraint, were reviewed. These boards remain secure, with only slight flexing noted under light pressure, indicating that the repairs continue to perform effectively. No signs of failure or worsening conditions were observed in these previously repaired zones.

Areas highlighted in the 2019 report as high, medium, were all extensively inspected, with a handful of low and very low risk areas also inspected as part of due diligence alongside (refer to images 5-24).

In our opinion, the plaster keys in these zones continue to provide adequate support, and the ply reinforcement in the high risk area offers additional stability. Inspection of the loft space above confirmed that the majority of plaster keys remain well bonded to the timber laths, which is encouraging for the overall integrity of the ceiling. While a

handful of areas exhibit more pronounced key loss than others, these are not considered to present an immediate risk of collapse.

Based on this visual assessment, the Banqueting Hall ceiling and associated roof structure are considered **generally stable**, with no evidence of imminent failure. However, given the age of the construction and the presence of localised deterioration, the ceiling should be regarded as approaching the end of its serviceable life, and full replacement will likely be required in the longer term to ensure continued safety and compliance with conservation standards.

In addition, a significant vertical tapered crack was identified within the masonry wall in the roof space. The crack extends approximately 1.8m in height, running through multiple brick courses and exhibiting clear displacement of individual bricks, indicating structural movement rather than superficial shrinkage. The crack varies in width, measuring approximately **14 mm at its narrowest point** and up to **35 mm at its widest**, suggesting progressive movement over time. Crack monitoring fixings have already been installed and were noted during the inspection, confirming that this defect is under observation, measurements taken at the time of survey can be seen on Figure 1. While the crack raises concerns regarding the stability of the supporting wall and its ability to transfer roof loads, there is no indication that it currently impacts the stability of the ceiling finish. Further investigation is recommended to determine its cause and potential implications for the wider structure (refer to image 24-25)

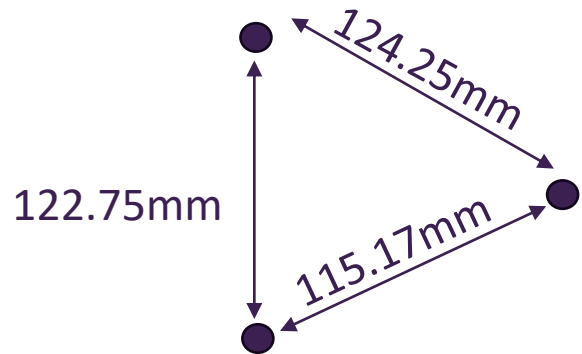


Figure 1: Crack Monitoring Measurements taken as of 09/01/26

Summary Assessment

A visual, non-intrusive inspection was carried out to assess the condition of the Banqueting Hall ceiling and supporting elements within Salisbury Guildhall, a Grade II* listed Georgian building constructed circa 1795.

The Banqueting Hall ceiling, formed of traditional lath and plaster, is largely intact with decorative mouldings and a central ceiling rose. Previous remedial works, including ply boarding for restraint, remain effective. Minor areas of plaster key loss were noted but do not currently compromise stability. Overall, the ceiling is considered safe, though age-related deterioration suggests full replacement will be required in the longer term.

A significant vertical crack was observed in the roof space masonry wall, measuring up to 35 mm wide and indicating structural movement. Monitoring is in place, and further investigation is recommended. Environmental factors, including chalk geology and groundwater moisture, contribute to historic movement and lower-level masonry deterioration.

In summary, the building retains its architectural integrity, but ongoing monitoring and conservation-led maintenance are essential to manage age-related defects and safeguard its heritage.

Overall Risk Rating: Medium

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion our professional assertion is the ceiling within the Banqueting Hall would appear to be currently stable and resilient since the 2019 investigation. There appears no progressive loss of key to the plaster and the temporary protective measures to retain the ceiling from collapse, appear to be maintaining its function.

Incidental to the investigation we did note a distinct vertical tapered crack within the roof void to the external wall on the east elevation, which does not align with the areas of high risk plaster failure, this looked to be subject to previous monitoring and is subject to a separate report.

In terms of recommendations for remedial works, we feel the following activities should be considered.

Short Term Plan

Monitoring of Ceiling Condition

- Implement a visual monitoring programme undertaken annually for identified higher risk zones, particularly following seasonal changes in temperature and humidity.
- Record any signs of progressive cracking, plaster detachment, or deformation.
- Repair localised areas of plaster key loss using compatible lime plaster based materials to maintain breathability and prevent hard, impermeable finishes.
- Undertake a targeted review of timber batten fixing density from below.

Masonry Crack Investigation

- Implement 6 monthly monitoring using existing crack monitoring tell-tales and maintain accurate records of any changes in width or displacement.

Medium Term Plan

- Implement a full ceiling renovation to ensure structural safety and eliminate any risk of collapse.
- Conservation techniques and restorative concepts should be carried out in accordance with conservation requirements, using appropriate materials and methods that respect the building's heritage. And in full consultation with the Local Authority Planning department.
- The use of a modern, structurally robust system such as plasterboard or a conservation approved alternative, designed to replicate the original appearance while providing enhanced stability and durability are viable but require appropriate consents from the Planning and Conservation team.

Currie & Brown will be delighted to assist in the formulation of and management of any conservation and restoration works to the Guildhall Banqueting ceiling and determine viable options for repair and conservation, liaising with the local Conservation Officers and Local Authority including formulating Listed Building Consents.

A

Appendix A - Site Photos





01 Overview of the Banquet Hall.



02 Detailed roses and cornice detailing.



03 Area identified beneath crack in roof, no signs of cracking in the room below.



04 Area which has been previously repaired using ply boarding and netting with fixings from below appears to be well secure.



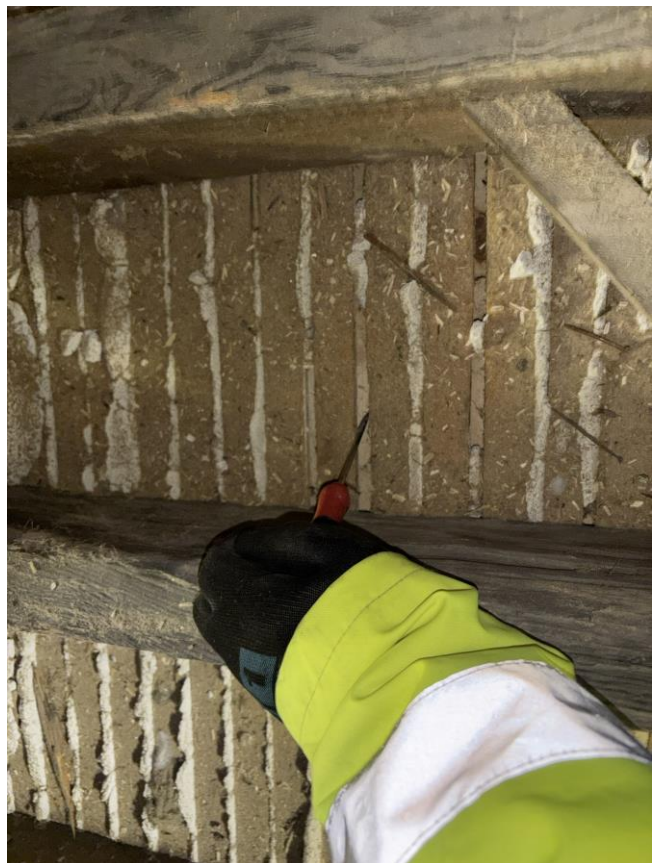
05 High risk zone identified, where key is more degraded than other areas, with ply backing been installed.



06 Evidence of ply backing has slight flex in areas however seems quite secure.



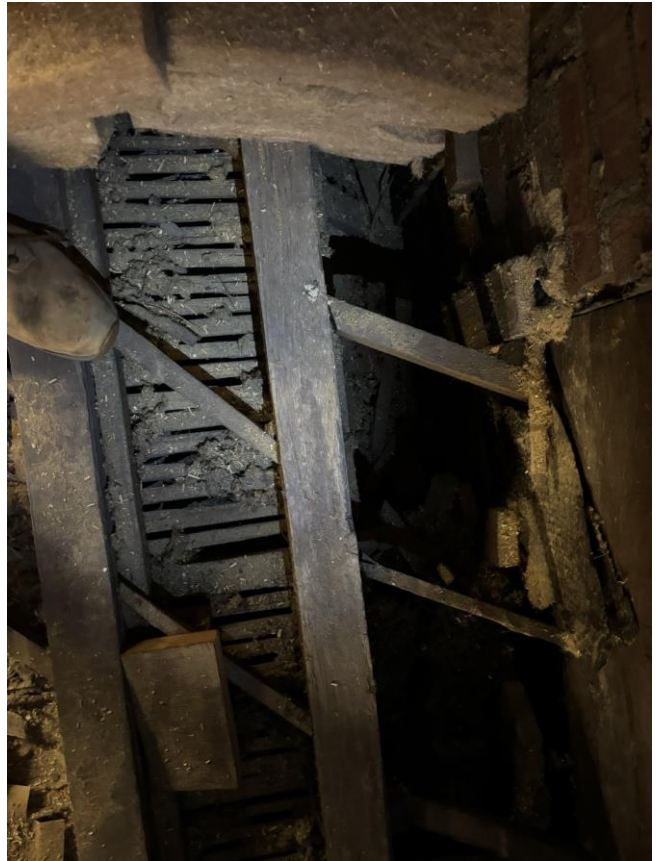
07 Area in high risk zone with loss of key (doesn't seem to have worsened).



08 Slight flex in ply however fixings seem to be secure.



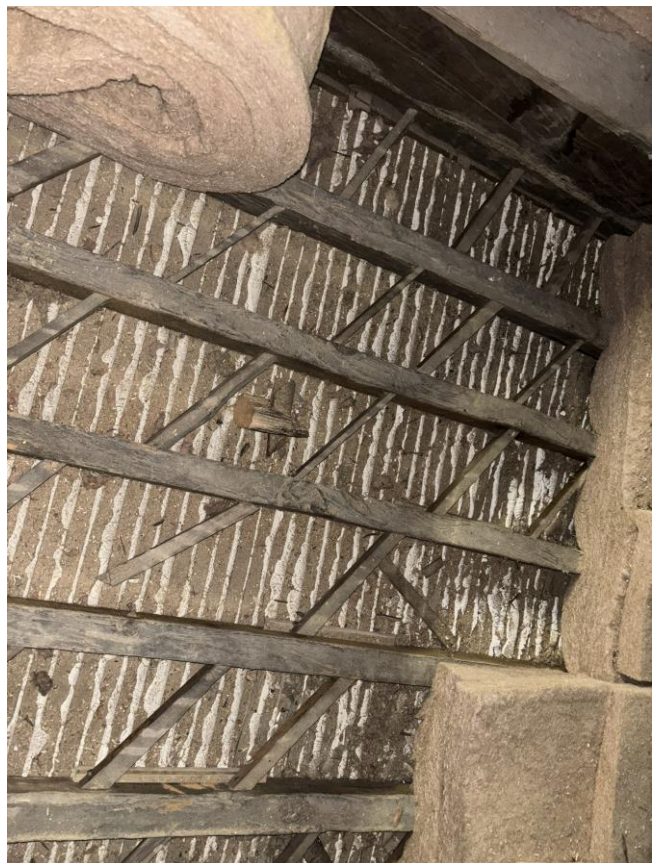
009 Medium risk zone, with no ply backing, some areas have a slight loss of key but this is in small, localised areas, with the plaster being still secure.



010 Area behind cornice detailing. Darkening area of timber would suggest historic soot/smoke damage.



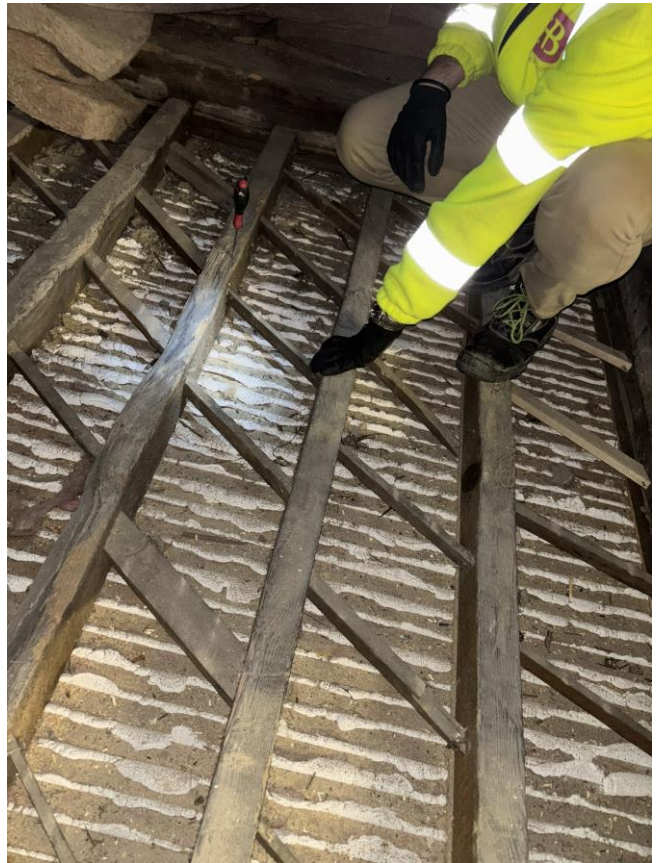
011 Key here is well covered in medium risk area.



012 Some diagonal bracing/strutting is not attached in all areas which is designed to resist torsion of joists.



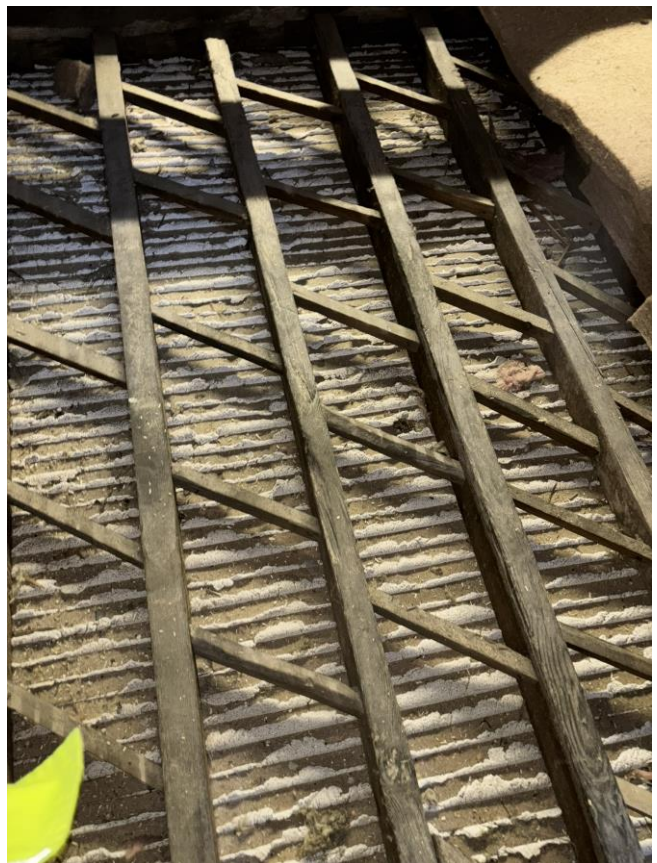
013 Area of medium risk area is all well keyed and seems secure.



014 Evidence of some repairs to diagonal bracing, medium



015 Another area behind corner area has some debris inside however not substantial.



016 Previously identified medium risk area is well secured.



017 Overview of loft space.



018 Approx 100mm fixings securing battens to underside of ceiling which in this case has missed joist.



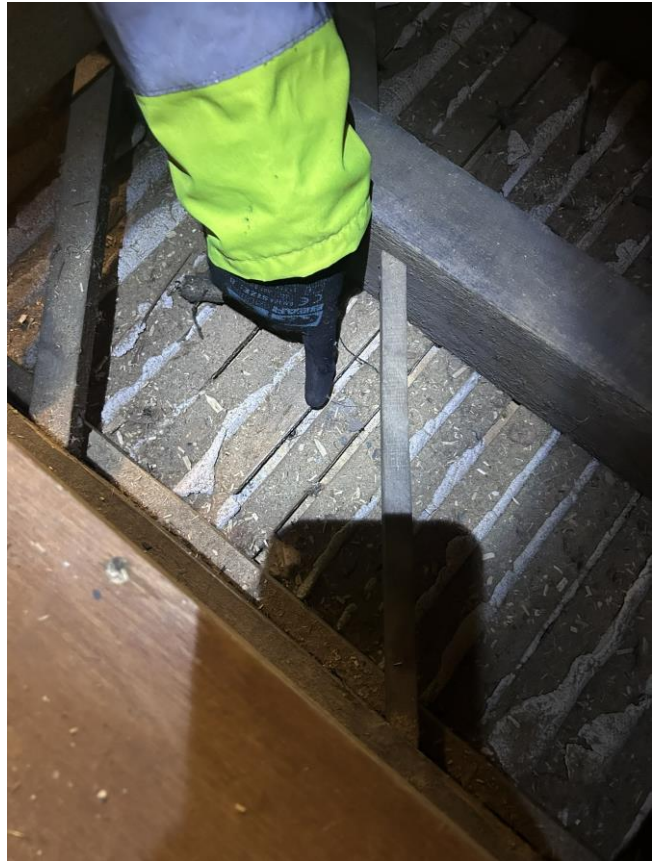
019 Area behind cornices evidence of insulation.



020 Low risk area appears to be well keyed and intact and secure.



021 Area of medium risk appears to have some missing areas of key; however plaster still seems quite secure in arched part of ceiling void.



022 High risk area of ply over boarding, repairs seem well carried out.



023 Low risk area key is well covered, the joists in some areas could do with some extra fixings as seemed to flex slightly while walking across them.



024 Area behind cornice detailing evidence of debris from timber shavings.



025 Large vertical crack on East elevation about 1.8m in length and the widest part being approx 35mm.



026 Taking measurements of existing tell-tales/crack monitoring on established fracture in brickwork.

Contact Details

Paul O'Brien

Associate Director



Paul.Obrien@curriebrown.com

Lucas Main

Assistant Building Surveyor



Lucas.Main@curriebrown.com

Jellicoe House
Botleigh Grange Office Campus
Grange Drive
Hedge End
Southampton
SO30 2AF
UK

+44 23 8021 3500



The Value of Certainty.