

## The Priory, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire



Front elevation before conservation work

The Priory is a former church house or marriage feast house located next to the town church. An early 16<sup>th</sup> Century building with a first floor function room and external staircase later converted to residential accommodation and then a single dwelling house. Rear chimneys were added in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the building was then altered and extended in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Priory is a Grade II listed building. A period timber framed building with solid brickwork walls at ground floor level, brick infill panels at first floor level and a steeply pitched and tiled roof. The Victorian changes included the central chimney stack, moving the front ground floor wall to remove the first floor jetty and the addition of various Arts and Crafts features to the front of the building.

Stuart Little was initially appointed to undertake a pre-purchase survey. After completion of the purchase the new owners then asked for help with planning permission for a bespoke replacement garage together with listed building consent for repairs and alterations to the main building. Once the consents were obtained, budget estimates were prepared and a contractor appointed for the external repairs and alteration works. Contract administration and building conservation advice was provided for work to the exterior, together with further occasional site visits and conservation advice for the work to the interior.

The building conservation philosophy for the project was to retain as much of the historic fabric as possible, however there were various other pressures on the project and the two opposing forces had to be carefully balanced. The previous owners purchased the property in 1949 and had carried out some repairs and modernisation upto the mid 1970's. The building remained largely unchanged since the 1970's and, at the time of purchase by the current owners, was in need of extensive maintenance and repair together with updating of the kitchen, bathrooms and services.



Front elevation repairs in progress

The following main areas needed to be addressed. Previous cement based repairs were preventing the building breathing properly leading to a damp and cold building fabric. The shallow pitched tiled roof coverings to the kitchen had been laid over a corrugated iron underlay. The rear porch was moving away from the main building and there were temporary repairs to the leaking roof coverings. The plumbing, heating and electrical services were very dated and at the end of their design life. Many walls and ceilings had been lined internally with modern fibreboard, hardboard or plasterboard to conceal dampness or replace defective lath and plasterwork. The windows, leaded light glazing and external doors were in a poor condition. A small 1930's asbestos garage was in a poor condition and restricted rear access and parking; this was removed and a rear parking area provided ready for the new garage.

The main works to the exterior of the building included removing all cementitious materials, repointing solid walls and repairing and repointing brick infill panels, all with lime mortar. Rainwater goods were overhauled and improvements made to surface water drainage. The external detail at first floor level was altered to prevent water from becoming trapped behind impervious finishes resulting in timber decay. Windows and external doors were repaired. Defective metal window frames were removed repaired and reinstated. Most leaded light windows were removed, overhauled, releaded and reinstated. The black paint was removed from the exposed timber framework and replaced with a breathable linseed oil applied hot. Modern plastic paint was removed from all external joinery and all surfaces repainted with breathable linseed paint.

The external and internal alterations were designed to minimise any damage to the historic fabric, to reverse the previous inappropriate repairs and to facilitate the continued economic residential use of the building to modern expectations. This continued economic use of the building will ensure adequate funding for repairs and therefore the survival of this historic building for future generations. The main alterations were in and close to the kitchen, this was also the area in need of most repair.



Alterations to the kitchen and utility area nearing completion

The kitchen and rear porch were late Victorian additions and were generally in a very poor condition. The pitch of the kitchen roof was too shallow and the roof covering had previously been stripped and relaid over corrugated iron metal sheets. Repairs and alterations to this area consisted of removing the defective rear porch structure; extending the building to form a new porch / rear entrance hall; converting the former coal store into a utility area with shower room and providing a link through to the rear entrance lobby and kitchen. The new utility area and kitchen were reroofed and the pitch of the kitchen roof was increased. The first floor bay window roof was recovered including replacing the leaking cement mortar flashings with stepped lead flashings.

Limecrete floors finished with traditional quarry tiled flooring were provided to the kitchen, utility and entrance hall areas. A brick infill panel was removed to form a new enlarged hatch opening between the kitchen and adjoining dining room. Additional insulation was provided to the lower roof areas and traditional lime materials were used for all repairs, alterations and finishes. The kitchen was refitted with modern units and appliances.

The ongoing internal repairs and alterations to the rest of the building include removal of all modern fibreboard, hardboard and plasterboard finishes, and replacing them with traditional breathable lime materials. Some modern partitions are being altered and, where practical, additional natural insulation is being installed throughout the building. More efficient heating and plumbing installations are being installed, sanitary fittings are being updated and the old electrical installation is being renewed. The conservation work to the windows has reduced the drafts and therefore reduced the heat loss from the building. Reinstating breathable lime mortar has allowed the masonry to dry out and reduced cold bridging to the interior of the building.