

4. RESULTS FROM INTRUSIVE WORKS

4.1 Architectural survey

This section will detail the results of the architectural survey, which are separated into interior and exterior parts of the structure. The description will begin with the recording of the building's elevations, both interior and exterior. Following this, the results of investigations of each floor of the building will be summarised, beginning with the basement storey and moving up through successive floors to the roof space. Finally, a brief account will be given of the finds discovered during the survey. The results provide insights into the changes made to the property through time, many of which were recorded in the historical record and are described in the section above.

The external building elevations were comprehensively photographed in 2013 and phased interpretations produced, which included the four sides of the internal courtyard (Illus 13) and the external north- and west-facing elevations. Additional recording was carried out during the refurbishment

works in 2015–16 from scaffolding attached to the external North and West Blocks, allowing up-close insight into the fabric that had been hidden behind the cement harling. The external east-facing elevation is hidden between Riddle's Court and the adjacent building. The south-facing elevation, above Victoria Street, is a late 19th-century façade and was not recorded (Illus 11). The courtyard elevations are shown in Illus 14, 15, 16 & 17. The component buildings are referred to as the North, South, East and West Blocks, with the courtyard in the centre.

4.1.1 Courtyard elevations

One of the most significant features on the east-facing elevation (Illus 17 & 18) was a chimney in the north-west corner of the courtyard that was comprised of large dressed blocks of sandstone laid in a series of quoins with rubble at its centre. The chimney was not keyed into the North Block, and on the south-facing elevation of the North Block (Illus 14) several windowsills and lintels were visible and clearly running behind this chimney, showing that in terms of phase development the North Block



Illus 13 View of the courtyard prior to alteration works. (© Scottish Historic Buildings Trust)



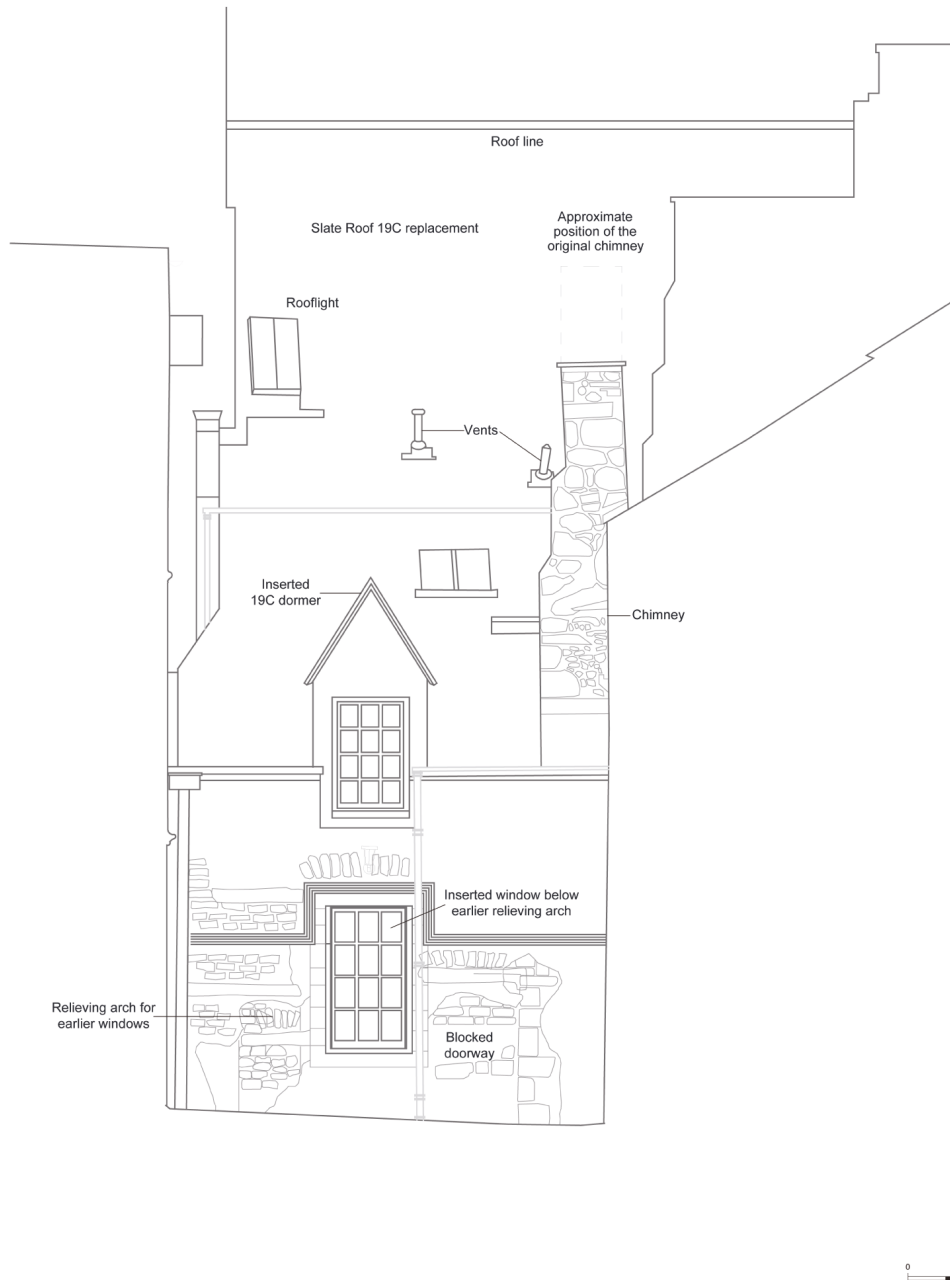
Illus 14 Courtyard, south-facing elevation. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)

had to have been built before the West Block. This is not at odds with the fact that the Great Tenement built by McMorran was the first building at the site, with the West Block built soon after and certainly by 1587, according to the date stone (Illus 19) and dendrochronology results (see section 5).

An enigmatic item recorded at first-floor level on the north-facing elevation (Illus 21) was a scallop feature comprising seven individual segments projecting from the main wall line. Past interpretations include a support for a goods-loading beam or mantel/hood over a bell. The quality of the masonry makes this unlikely and alternative interpretations could be a painted heraldic device over an earlier doorway or a formal ‘Great Entrance’ since removed.

4.1.2 External elevations

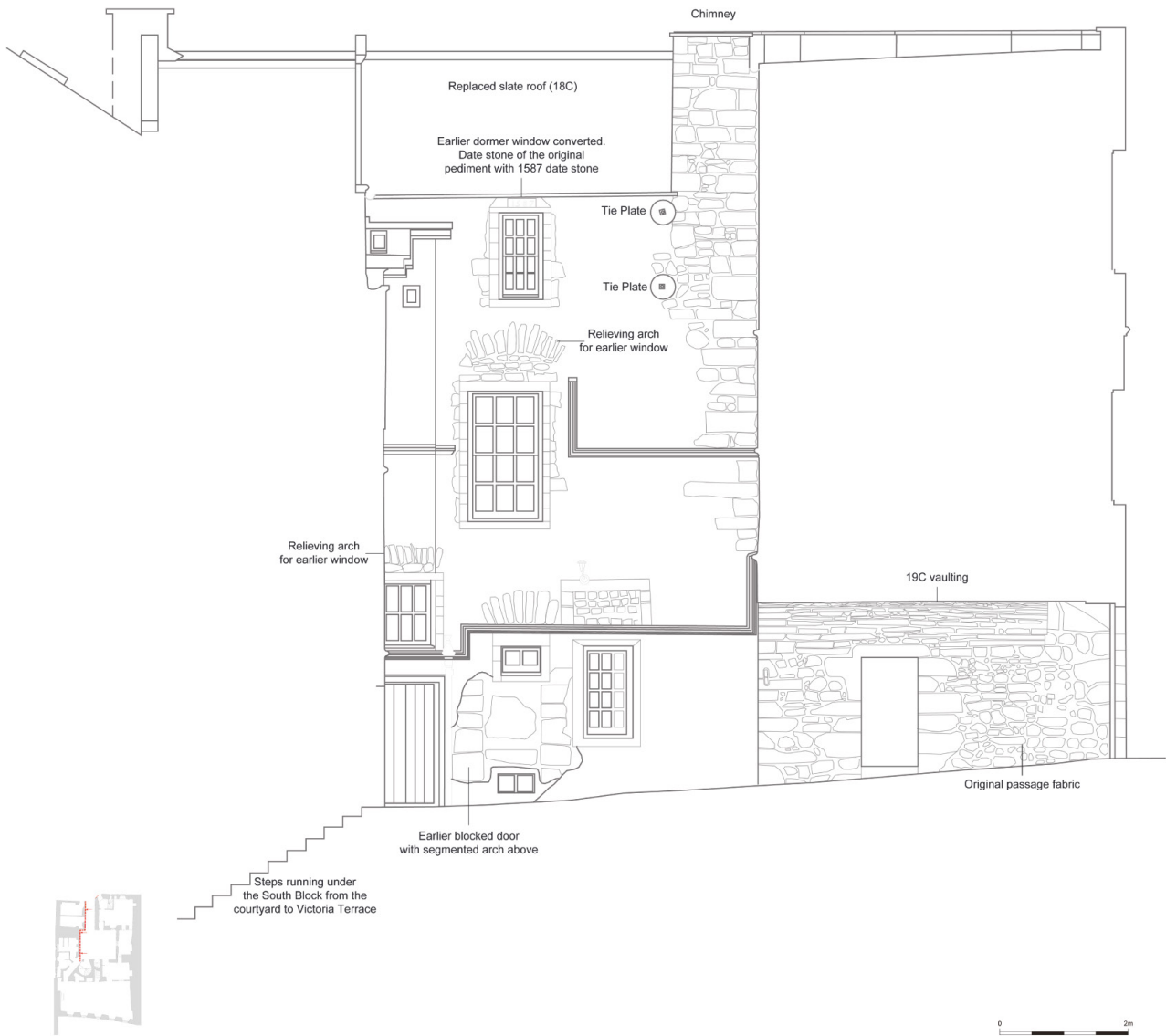
The north-facing elevation (Illus 22 & 23) incorporates the main arched entrance leading from Riddle’s Close into the interior courtyard (Riddle’s Court). The segmented arched entrance had been inscribed in Geddes’s time with the Latin inscription *Vivendo discimus* – ‘By living we learn’ (Illus 24). The arched opening was flanked by two plank-built doors, the left-hand of which has an ornate door surround with corbel work above it. An ornate moulded return stub marked the position of another door, which became a common entrance for the aforementioned demolished tenement building that occupied this position, and the scar of a stone staircase can also be seen on the wall.



Illus 15 Courtyard, west-facing elevation. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 16 Courtyard, north-facing elevation. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 17 Courtyard, east-facing elevation. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)

The largest feature on this elevation (Illus 22) is the advanced extramural pentice staircase that is a 1960s replacement of the architect Capper’s 19th-century staircase. In the absence of an internal staircase between the first and second floor of the block this pentice staircase was required.

Another interesting feature was a blocked window that, when removed by the masons, revealed the rear woodwork of the 18th-century painted panel work within Room S03, part of the so-called Norie panels that were painted by the landscape artist James Norie around 1730 and later removed and sold to the National Museums of Scotland; the Norie panels are exhibited in the National Museums of Scotland.³²

The west-facing elevation contained 18 individual windows of varying size and level (Illus 25). Only three windows on the first floor and two windows on the second floor shared the same lintel height. The line of windows including at the right-hand side (facing) of the elevation may have been associated with an external turnpike staircase; the surrounds around the second and third windows from the top are conjoined, suggesting that this was originally the position of a door.

4.2 Internal works

The building’s layout is comprised of the North, East, South and West Blocks. The individual



Illus 18 Courtyard, east-facing elevation. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 19 The 1587 date stone. (© Scottish Historic Buildings Trust)



Illus 20 Courtyard, south-facing elevation. (© Scottish Historic Buildings Trust)

room numbers and relative phase development of the building are shown in Illus 26. The phase development model shown on this plan proposes five main phases, ranging from the pre-16th century (Phase 1 medieval period) through to the 20th century (Phase 5 modern period). The phasing does not account for the possibility of sub-phases, which are likely to exist.

Targeted watching briefs and architectural monitoring were carried out during the refurbishment. The results are exceptional in terms of the number of historical features that were recorded, which include seven hitherto unknown fireplaces of various dates, the largest being a large late-16th-century kitchen fireplace that contained

a bread oven and salt press. Three new Scottish Renaissance period decorated beam and board ceilings are also an exceptional find, as they rarely survive. The presence of other features, such as the earlier roof lines and evidence for late-16th-century barrel-vaulted ceilings on the top floor of the South and West Blocks, confirm that the roofs were indeed much steeper than at present. Some of the floor joists date to the primary phase (late 16th century) and were imported from Norway (see 7 ‘Narrative of the building’s historical and architectural development’ below). The results fed into the phase development plans, allowing the anatomy of the building to be much better understood, representing nearly 400 years of continued adaptation.



Illus 21 Scallop feature on the north-facing courtyard elevation. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)

4.2.1 Basement

The archaeological work carried out in the basement was confined to Room B02, the former cafe, and B10, a small office (Illus 26).

In Room B02, two 16th-century blocked doors, one with roll moulding, on the north side were exposed, which accessed the rear vaulted rooms. The south exterior elevation fronting Victoria Terrace dates to the late 19th century and includes the sweeping curve of the terrace. The construction of Victoria Street in the late 19th century required the demolition of two 16th-century jambs on the south side of the back tenement and a stair passage was installed from Victoria Terrace up to the courtyard, providing a

private entrance to the complex of sub-let properties. The basement doorways are the only survivors of what would have been entrances to the rear of the two jambs.

A cement panel, with a randomly placed series of butter-press type impressions including roses, thistles and shamrocks, on the east-facing internal wall of the room is of historical interest in that it may represent a sample of a tradesman’s work specialising in this type of material (Illus 27). Many decorative updates were commissioned by residents during their time in the house, and a craftsman may have left an example of their work for the owner/tenant’s consideration. A similar impressed panel is known to exist in a flat at Ramsey Gardens close to Edinburgh Castle (SHBT pers comm.)



Illus 22 External north-facing elevation. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)

In Room B10 the presence of a cobble floor and large quantity of coal dust strongly suggest that this room was used as a coal house, with the intramural stair allowing access to the floors above.

4.2.2 Ground floor

Watching briefs carried out in Rooms G01, G02 and G06 showed that these had beaten earth and cobble floors (Illus 28). Room G02 produced the largest number of finds, including metalwork, pottery fragments, shell and animal bone. The animal bone and shell included fish bone and oyster shell which may have been food waste, and pottery was found dating to the late medieval and

post-medieval periods. A detailed summary of the finds is given in the archive and 4.3 ‘Finds’ below.

Room G06 had walls that were heavily modified. Intriguingly, the west-facing elevation provided evidence for an inward opening door, as the stonework forming part of a door jamb had an in situ iron door hanger. Collectively, these features represent a 16th-century doorway that entered out into what would have been open ground prior to the enclosure of Riddle’s Court. Later, the East Block was built, making the doorway redundant. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Room G06 seems to have been the brewhouse/stables, based on its position within the structure and a contemporary



Illus 23 External north-facing elevation. (© Scottish Historic Buildings Trust)

account which describes closing off the entrance to this room.³³

Immediately to the south of Room G06, in Room G07, a fireplace and press were recorded within the area excavated to accommodate the lift shaft. The fireplace was blocked and surmounted by a large stone lintel (Illus 29). The significance of the fireplace is that it was very large in relation to the room in which it sat: a similar but smaller fireplace was recorded in Room G08, and again this was a large fireplace for a relatively small room, but this room likely formed part of the principal family chambers in the early 17th century. The most significant find from Room G08 was a crushed hallmarked silver mount from a walking cane which

was dated to between 1890 and 1930, the period just following Patrick Geddes's acquisition of the building (Illus 30).

In Room G12 (Illus 26), blocking work was removed from the large kitchen fireplace and it was found to contain within its interior side walls an intact bread oven and salt press. This fireplace was in use probably up until the 19th century when it was reduced in size by the insertion of a smaller fireplace and a coal cupboard (Illus 31 & 32). The date of construction of the fireplace was *c* 1587 according to the dendrochronology results obtained from the first-floor oak beams directly above it (see 5 'Dendrochronology' below). Parallels for this monumental feature lie in other high-status houses,



Illus 24 The inscription above the courtyard entrance. (© Scottish Historic Buildings Trust)

and a similarly proportioned fireplace and bread oven of slightly later date, built by Robert Maxwell in 1635, is situated in the Nithsdale Lodgings within Caerlaverock Castle, Dumfries and Galloway.

The bread oven was framed by four individual sandstone blocks, two of which were curved to form a beehive-shaped opening (Illus 33). The interior of the oven was lined with small rectangular refractory clay bricks that formed a small dome. The oven had no flue and it was stoked and vented through its opening. On the opposite wall to the bread oven was the salt press, where pots of sea salt could be kept dry (Illus 34). The press had a lintel stone surmounted by a small relieving arch, confirming that this was an original feature integral to the 16th-century fireplace

and not a later insertion. A small slot had been cut into one of the reveals, possibly to hold a thin stone shelf.

4.2.3 First floor

The removal of the ceiling in Room F03 (Illus 26) within the North Block revealed the remains of a painted beam and board ceiling dating from the late 16th century (see 6.2.2 'Room F03 ceiling (first floor)' below); the first to be uncovered since the famous painted commemorative beam and board ceiling in Room F02 (King's Chamber) was found in the 1960s (see 6.2.1 'Room F02 ceiling (King's Chamber, first floor)' below).

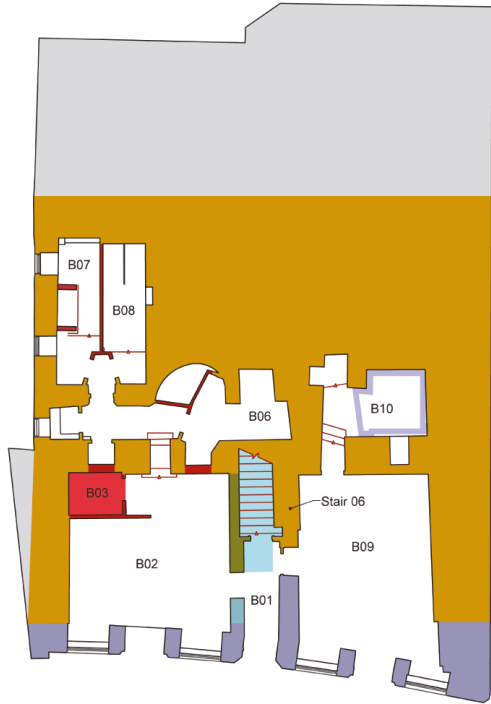


Illus 25 External west-facing elevation. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)

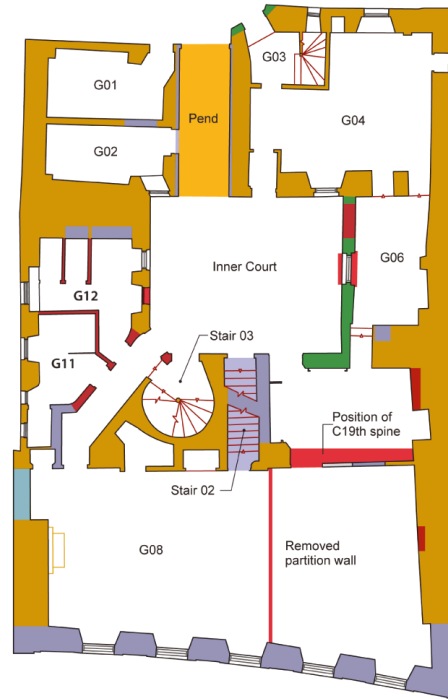
The F03 ceiling had not fared as well as the two ceilings higher in the block; the installation of a lath and plaster ceiling probably in the late 18th or early 19th century had been detrimental to the painted beams, and in some cases they had been cut back with an adze or axe to make them flush. Whereas the artwork on the beams provides a sense of the distribution of repeated patterns, the fine intricate detail that would have been present across the boards is represented by a single board only (see 6.2.2 ‘Room F03 ceiling’ below). The decoration in this area bears similarities to the commemorative artwork within the adjacent King’s Chamber (F02), but is more complex and elaborate. It possibly shows that both rooms were painted by the same artist

and that these rooms (or chambers) formed part of a suite that was used for the King James VI of Scotland royal banquet, and this decorated room may have been used as sleeping quarters for the royal retinue.

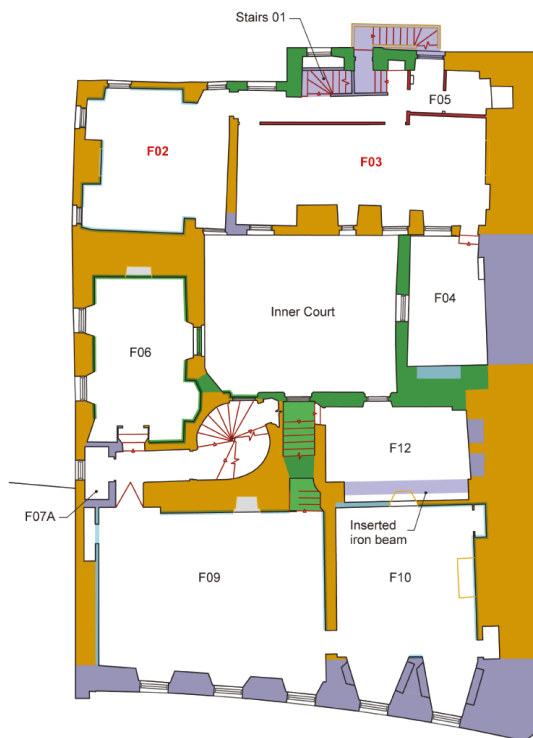
The installation of new floors within Rooms F09 and F10 revealed the sheer quality and quantity of the long straight oak beams that were probably Scandinavian in origin (Crone et al 2017). These were modified on the south side when large composite flitch beams were installed when Victoria Street was created. This is an example of how the Victorian engineers rebuilt the south-facing elevation and maintained the integrity of the painted ceilings and existing floors while introducing additional



Phase Development - Basement



Phase Development - Ground Floor



Phase Development - First Floor



Phase Development - Second Floor

- Phase 1 - 16th Century
- Phase 2 - 17th Century
- Phase 3 - 18th Century
- Phase 4 - 19th Century
- Phase 5 - 20th Century
- F02** Room Number



Illus 26 Phase development floor plans of Riddle's Court. (©CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 27 Impressed cement panel in Room B02. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 28 Cobble floor recorded in Room G02. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 29 Blocked fireplace and press in Room G07. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 30 An English sterling silver cane top with Birmingham maker's mark FS (Cornelius Shepherd & Francis Shepherd) c 1890s–1930s. Room G08 (unstratified). (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 31 The G12 fireplace showing the segmented arch of the 16th-century fireplace with a later blocked fireplace and coal cupboard. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 32 The G12 fireplace after the removal of the later insertions. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 33 The flue-less bread oven within the interior of the G12 fireplace. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)

structural support when the bressummer beams (a large, horizontal load-bearing beam which bears the weight of a wall starting on a first or higher floor, found particularly in timber-framed buildings) were laid on the spine wall within the original 16th-century core of the South Block.

In Room F12, a blocked fireplace and press on its west-facing wall were revealed. The presence of the fireplace points to domestic use, which ended when the bressummer beams were inserted. The cement used to block the fireplace and the press was the same as that used to seal the two large cast-iron bressummer beams in place on the north-facing elevation during the late 19th century. Due to its position in the building and the fireplace, it is possible that this room was used as a bedroom with its own private staircase and views into the courtyard.

The work carried out in the East Block at first-floor/roof level (Room F04) has provided a large amount of architectural information on its later development. Firstly, the room originally had a pitched roof, as shown on historical drawings and as evidenced by the presence of the earlier

roof line on its north-facing gable. Here a small fireplace was also present. An earlier blocked door with ashlar moulding was present on the opposite wall. This appears to have been bricked up when the roof was altered and given a lean-to roof. The earlier doorway is an enigma because it probably pre-dates the construction of the East Block. The late architectural historian Professor Charles McKean, who helped to develop the detailed phase development model for this building, proposed that access to this door must have been either by an external forestairs or via a wooden gallery. He suggested that the gallery may have run from the South Block to the North Block along a curtain wall that enclosed the east side of the courtyard. This also raises the question about the remains of the door hanger and door surround recorded on the west-facing elevation situated at ground level in Room G06 (immediately below). Perhaps the wooden gallery served as the primary route of a royal procession leading from the formal gardens at the rear of the back tenement (South Block) up through a turnpike staircase from the ground floor to first-floor level and along the gallery into



Illus 34 The salt press within the interior of the G12 fireplace. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)

the first-floor banqueting chambers in the North Block. It is a matter of conjecture if the banquet was a highly publicised or private affair but what we do know is that it was costly and its lasting legacy is reflected in the artwork on at least two decorated beam and board ceilings.

4.2.4 Second floor

Within the second floor of the North Block another highly decorated beam and board ceiling was discovered in Room S02 (see 6.2.3 'Room S02 ceiling (second floor)' below). Its style and detail was not as intricate as that recorded within the first floor (Room F03; Illus 40) but it does appear to be

contemporary with the hidden ceiling discovered at roof level above the ornate plaster ceiling in the adjacent Room S03, where an important 17th-century plaster ceiling survived along with later 18th-century wall panelling. The medieval painted ceilings of Scotland have a distinct national style which these ceilings are typical of. The decoration includes foliate ornament, scrollwork and patterns with a *trompe l'oeil* effect. These types of ceilings were common in the houses of major and minor aristocracy and the Royal Mile contained the highest number of recorded decorated ceilings anywhere in Scotland (see 6.3 'Discussion' below).

The insertion of the lift shaft at the top of the South Block required the removal of the wooden



Illus 35 Blocked doorway in Room S07 with chamfered door surround. (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)

staircase between the Cupboard S07 and Room S08. The removal of the staircase revealed a 16th-century blocked doorway within the east wall of the cupboard (Illus 35). This doorway must have opened into a larger room (part of Room S08) with a lean-to roof with a steeper pitch supported on stone corbels. The *c* 1580s wall must have run the full length of the north side of the South Block but it was replaced by a thinner wall supporting the existing (19th-century) windows overlooking the courtyard. This wall was later modified when the north-facing windows were installed along with the only surviving turnpike staircase in the 17th century. Room S08 would have been a chamber of significant size in the 17th century.

Above what could have been a doorway within S07, leading into the South Block at second-floor level, were two large corbels. The reason for the position of the corbels is not entirely clear. The closest parallel for the corbels can be seen above the ground-floor entrance on the north-facing elevation of the North Block, where a series of corbels underpinned an outshot section of wall associated with the possible position of a turnpike staircase. The S07 corbels may have been load bearers for a demolished outshot window that pre-dated the installation of the extant passage wall with windows leading to Room S08.

Within the South Block, the replacement of floors within the enlarged S17 and S20 rooms and Room

S11 showed, like the floor below, that long straight Scandinavian oak timbers had been used. Crone et al (2017) established that most of the oak in Scottish houses of this period was Scandinavian oak as all the native useful structural oak had been depleted. A timber trading route was well established by the late 16th century between Norway and Scotland. As with the floor below, Rooms S11, S17 and S20 incorporated a composite fitch beam running the full length of the second floor from east to west. The use of smaller pine timbers was evident within the floors of the window bays.

4.2.5 Roof space

No formal survey of the roofs of the South and West Blocks was undertaken on the grounds of health and safety; however, sufficient information was seen from the second-floor level once the lath and plaster ceilings had been removed. This confirmed that all the oak trusses present within these blocks had been re-configured, which effectively made them lower and wider to accommodate the current slate roofs. Prior to this the trusses had a steeper pitch and in both cases probably accommodated second-floor attic spaces with barrel-shaped or elliptical-shaped ceilings, deduced from the presence of elliptical-shaped plaster at rafter level within both rooms. The timbers also contained evidence from when the block was truncated to create Victoria Street, and the existing roof plan shows the South Block roof curving outwards at its east end in line with the existing south-facing elevation of Victoria Street. The oak beams contained redundant mortice joints with tree-nails (or pegs) still in situ, showing reconfiguration. All the older rafters have large Roman numerals carved into them, which was a standard 16th- and 17th-century technique (Newland 2010). On the West Block, the ridge on a dormer window containing a date stone of 1587 is partly hidden by the eaves of the existing roof, providing supporting evidence for a secondary roof.

The roof on the North Block was monitored during the removal of several layers of timber. This revealed the presence of two floors separated

by a stone-built partition wall. The base of several fireplaces was also recorded, suggesting that these floors had smaller rooms within them. An early roofline and blocked fireplace is present on a former gable wall subsumed within the adjoining 19th-century National Library offices, thus attesting that the attic was the third floor of the North Block and had a steeply pitched roof. The floor boards on the west side of the block (Room S03) were highly decorated on their underside and represent the third painted beam and board ceiling recorded during the project.

4.2.6 Courtyard

The watching brief during drainage works in the exterior courtyard recorded fragmentary wall footings that may relate to the Great Tenement that stood until the late 19th century.

4.3 Finds

Christina Hills

During the refurbishment works a number of artefacts were discovered. A detailed inventory of all the finds is included in the archive.

The majority of the more recent finds included 20th-century dated items found below the floorboards, including cigarette packets, newspapers, and a very early Edinburgh Festival poster from the 1960s for a play called *The Bailie* along with prize draw raffle tickets dated to 1956. In the corridor between Stair 04 and Rooms S02 and S04 (Room S01), a most charming find was discovered unstratified. The find was a small child's enamelled cup (Illus 36): on one side of the cup was a picture of Old Mother Hubbard standing weeping over her dead dog and on the opposite side was part of the nursery rhyme text.

One wooden decorative object is a possible medieval oak finial from a piece of furniture or shelving (Illus 37). It is blank on one side, where it would have been unseen, possibly against a wall. The other side is decorated with a hexagonal carving in the centre of a circle.



Illus 36 An early 20th-century toy cup inscribed with part of the text from 'Old Mother Hubbard' (Room S01 unstratified). (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)



Illus 37 A possible medieval oak finial with dowel fixing holes (unstratified). (© CFA Archaeology Ltd)