

8. CONCLUSION

Riddle's Court has a rich documentary archive which is remarkable for the information contained therein: it chronicles the important people and patrons who lived in the building until it succumbed to the ravages of time as the gentry moved out and the working class, representing a variety of trades and occupations, moved in. The building had the honour of being the first University Halls of Residence under the scrutiny of Sir Patrick Geddes, an astute patron of the arts and a forward thinker on town planning. His ethos of betterment through education was maintained long after his death as the North Block became the offices of the Workers Educational Association. Arts promotion continues to the present day as a venue for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

The documentary evidence confirmed that Riddle's Court has been the home of individuals spanning every social class from the major and minor aristocracy to the working classes. All of these people have left their indelible mark on the building. The presence of so much hitherto unrecorded artwork, namely on the painted beam and board ceilings, has raised the status of the North Block from a modified 19th-century tenement with surviving elements of historical importance in a courtyard setting, to a building commensurate with a very high-status townhouse during the Scottish Renaissance period. The status of the building is further underlined by its royal connections that required the remodelling

of the North Block for ceremonial reasons, and in all probability the commissioning of new painted ceilings including the one surviving in the King's Chamber. The painting which adorns the King's Chamber ceiling is exceptional in terms of the quality of its application, and due to its status as an emblem of Scottish diplomacy towards the close of the 16th century.

The dendrochronology programme has identified a cluster of felling dates between 1586 and 1590 and shown that the source of the oak timbers was Scandinavia. Recycling of useful timber appears to have used locally sourced material to build the turnpike roof within the South Block.

Fire damage appears not to have been catastrophic enough to warrant the replacement of the floors in the North Block where the painted beams and boards show evidence of fire blackening and water ingress from leaks. Research on the charred painted ceilings of F03 and S02 revealed an ornate, bold and brightly coloured scheme despite the damage. We are left to speculate whether the North Block roof space was barrel-vaulted and there is no reason it could not have been elaborate given the amount of artwork on the ceilings of the two floors below.

To date, the results are unparalleled as no other building in the Royal Mile has received this level of historical and archaeological research. As stated by one of the late authors, the truth of the building's story throughout the ages lies within its lost features and the gaps they left behind.