

February 2023



All the cement-based harling will be off by the end of this month

Removal started on the north gable and caused some concern, as it was very hard and difficult to remove. Fortunately the harling on the other walls has proved less resistant and has come off reasonably easily. This has exposed stonework which is extremely random in size. It has also shown the interior stonework is very wet and soft, with mortar joints in poor condition. The two chimneys have proved to be in poor condition as well, showing frost damage and stone disintegration as a result of the impermeable harling. The rest of this month will see work starting on rebuilding the chimneys. This has confirmed that we haven't undertaken the restoration a moment too soon. Already, thanks to the recent dry weather, the stonework is drying nicely.

The work has exposed the bricked up old doorway, which you can see from this picture from the 1920s.

Photo right: Tom Astbury.



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The 'Blast Wall'

Along the west wall is a coped buttress construction, which has been thought to be a wartime reinforcement for the undercroft when it was the Minister's designated air raid shelter. With the harling removed, it has turned out to be much older and possibly the same age as the building, but it is not at all clear what its purpose was - possibly part of a long-gone low building of some sort. When a section of coping was lifted, the stonework below proved to be very wet.



This picture of the Undercroft doorway is an example of the rough and random nature of the stonework.