

**BLAIRS**  
**ABERDEENSHIRE**

**Part 2:**  
**Standing Building Survey**  
**of the College buildings,**  
**Gardens and Recreation grounds**



Carried out March 2012  
by  
**Murray Archaeological Services Ltd**



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# **BLAIRS**

## **ABERDEENSHIRE**

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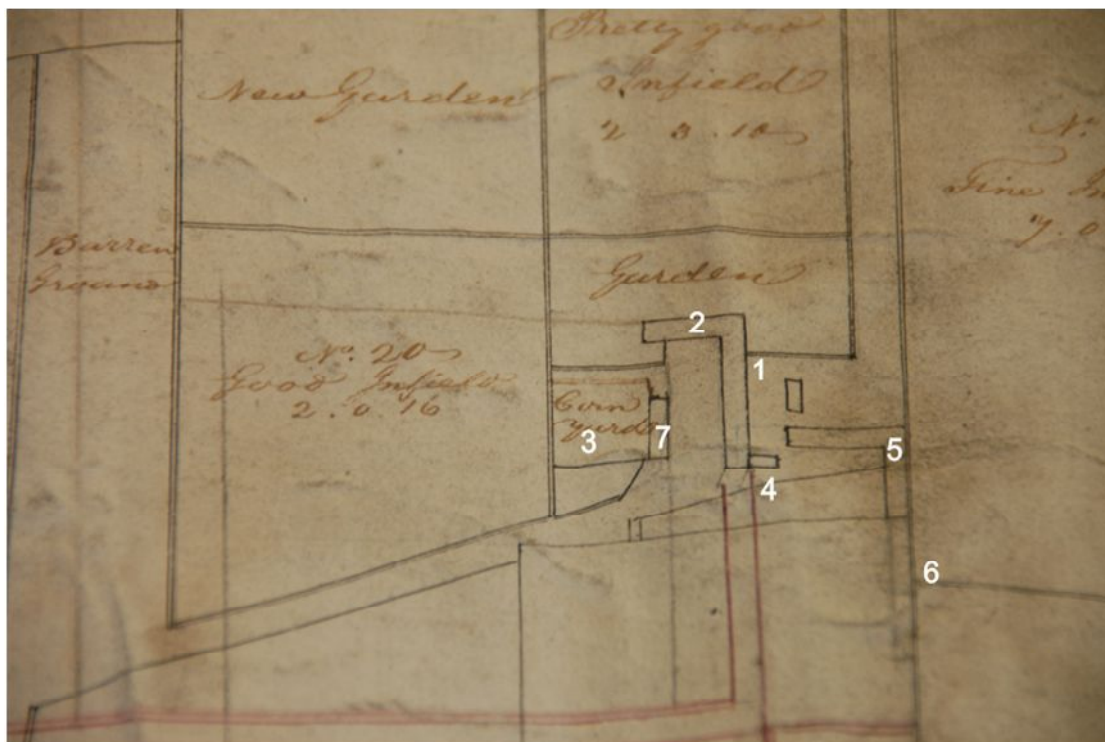
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**BLAIRS**  
**ABERDEENSHIRE**  
**Part 2**  
**Standing Building Survey**  
**Of the**  
**College Buildings, Gardens and Recreation grounds**

8 The Menzies Mansion before 1827-9

When John Menzies granted Blairs to the Scottish Catholic Church for a college in 1827 there was an existing mansion, Menzies House and possibly an earlier version of the chapel, or a building which was converted into the chapel. The only available documentary evidence for the original form of this building is the late 18<sup>th</sup> century estate map and the comments regarding its conversion to the college in the *Memorial of Blairs* by Rev Charles ‘Priest’ Gordon (Gordon, 1835).



Illus 25 Late 18<sup>th</sup> century estate map showing mansion, steading and gardens (Blairs Museum T6270 BLRBM) (White numbers added for text)

The map shows an L shaped building part or all of which is likely to be the original mansion as it is associated with both the garden and the main access. Overlays and map comparisons show that it lies on the same footprint as the N and central wings of the Menzies House. However, the E wing (Illus 25:1), which is on the footprint of the central wing of the later building, appears to have been truncated or rebuilt as the 1830 and later plans show a far shorter, wider wing, abutted by the steading. The shorter N wing of the L (Illus 25:2), probably housed the more private apartments as it faces the existing garden which wraps around the N and NE of the house. The longer E wing faces E towards an open yard with a main access road from the N, the back facing towards the cornyard (Illus 25:3), with buildings along its N and E sides. A small structure is attached to the S end of the E wall of the building (Illus 25:4). A freestanding building/structure lies to the E of the centre of the E wing and an L-shaped steading (?) (Illus 25:5), lies to the S- the latter having penciled additions (Illus 25:6), probably contemporary with the other penciled and red ink additions to the map showing the Improved estate layout. Comparisons with the later maps suggest that the L-plan building shown on this map – or at least the N part of it- formed the core of the building converted into the college in 1827-9.

The small building (Illus 25:7), shown on the E side of the Corn yards is on the same footprint as the central and S parts of the chapel. It is clear from Rev Charles ‘Priest’ Gordon’s *Memorial of Blairs* (1835) that a chapel had existed before 1827/9 as he writes that ‘*more than two-thirds of the present chapel and both the vestries are new*’. It was not unknown for Catholic chapels of late 18<sup>th</sup> century/early 19<sup>th</sup> century date before Catholic Emancipation to be somewhat disguised- the chapel at the Maxwell’s Kirkconnel House in Dumfries and Galloway was built c. 1800 to look more like a mill. So it is possible that this was in fact the original chapel. However it is equally possible that the chapel was built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century after this map was drawn and after the Improvements re-established the cornyard further to the S and that it is coincidence that there was an earlier building on this footprint.

## 9. Conversion to the College 1827-9

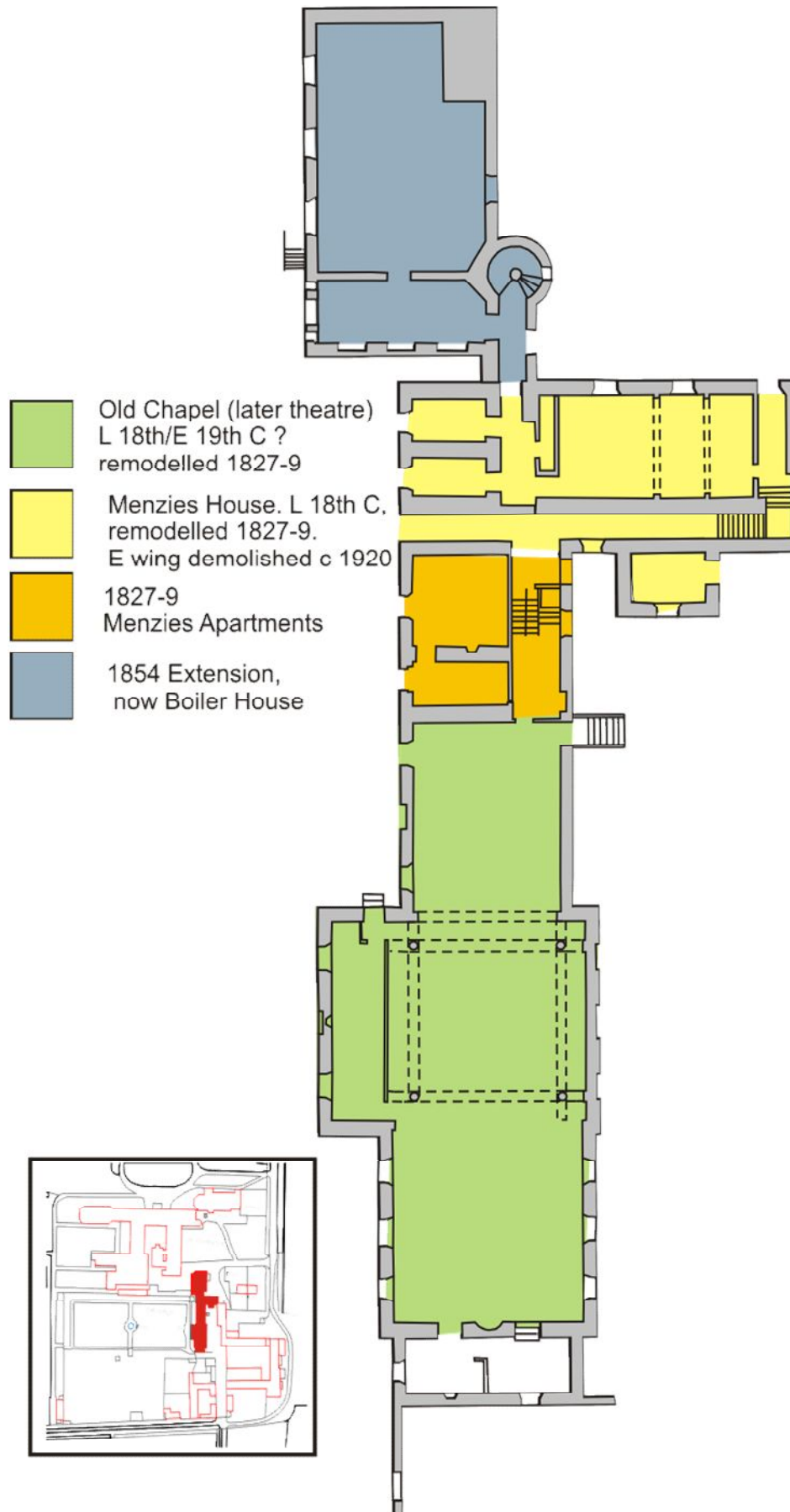
Between 1827 and 1829, John Menzies and the Reverend Gordon oversaw the alteration of the original mansion, the alteration or building of the chapel and the

building of a linking block, the Menzies Apartments between the mansion and the chapel. The Aberdeen architect John Gall was employed to design the alterations. The stratigraphy of the W façade of the building (Illus 26) demonstrates the sequence of construction.

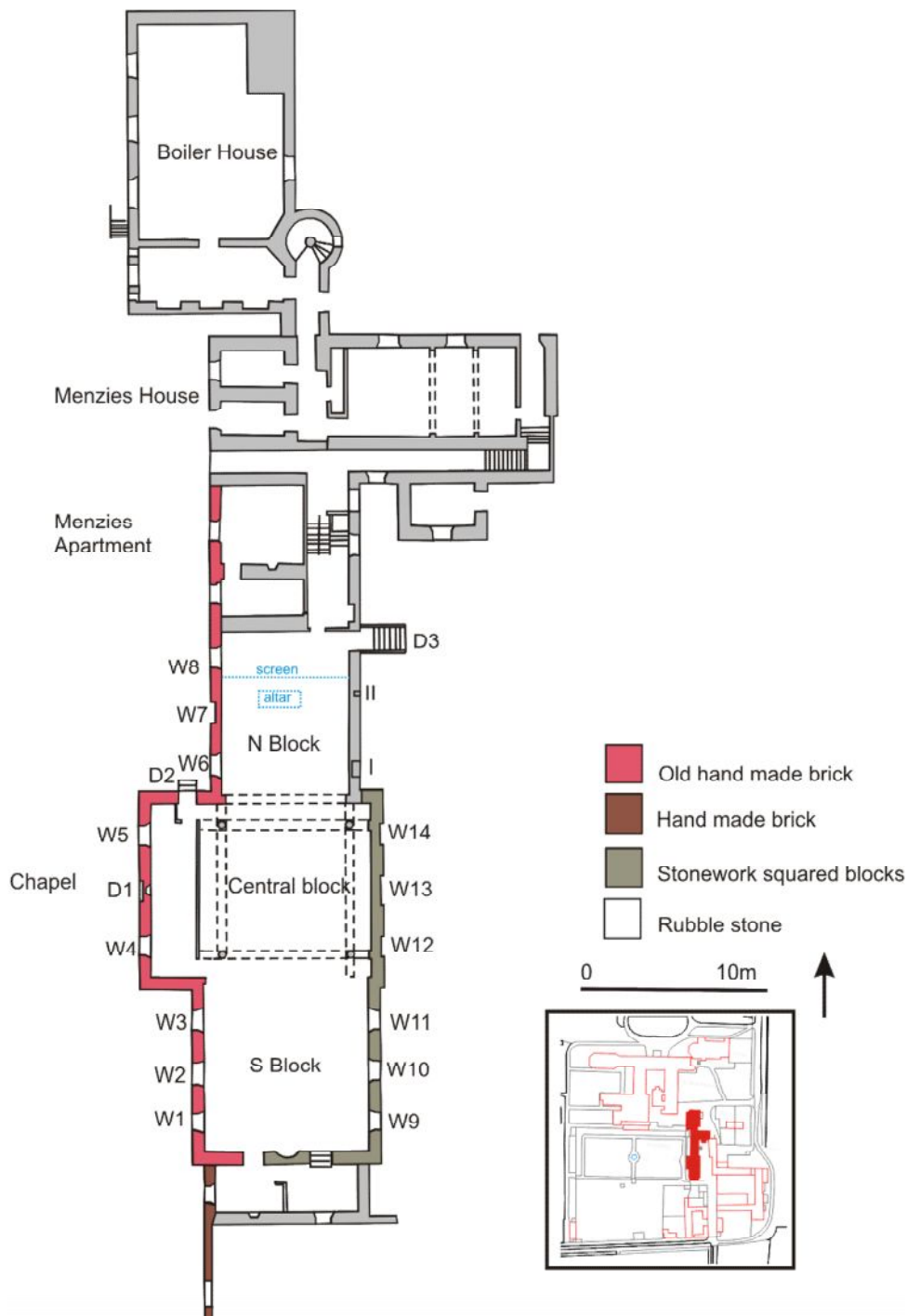


**Illus 26 Building sequence on the W façade of Old College**

Picture A shows how the brickwork of the N side of the Menzies Apartments has been built into the SW corner of the pre-existing Menzies House by knocking out some of the rybats and rebuilding with the brick (A1). On the S side (Picture B) of the Menzies Apartments the ground and first floors of the Apartments have been built against a pre-existing building, abutting the rybats of the chapel (B2), However above the level of the chapel, the rybats frame the corner of the Apartments (B3). It is interesting to note that there is a different brick used for parts of the second floor of the Apartments (B4).



Illus 27 Plan annotated to show building sequence ( based on plan from Muir Group)



**Illus 28 Annotated plan of Old Chapel, Menzies Apartments and Menzies House (based on plan from Muir Group). Position of screen and altar from old photograph. (Scottish Catholic Archives CH/SCA/PG/1032) Inset location based on OS. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital map data, © Crown Copyright, All rights reserved. 2012. License No 0100031673)**

### The Chapel/theatre

Status B listed HB number 16481

Date of construction Late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century. First map evidence 1830, possibly on the late 18<sup>th</sup> century map?

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Original use Chapel from before 1827. Theatre from mid 1950s (IF).

Description

The W façade shows a balanced symmetrical Neo-classical building of three sections; the central pedimented block projecting W with a central arched doorway (blocked) flanked by arched windows. The arched windows are mirrored by three arched windows in the flanking blocks on either side.

This symmetry is less apparent in plan (Illus 28) as the N flanking block is considerably narrower than the S block. Looking at the 'back' E façade (Illus29) it is clear that the N block (C) also has different stonework than the central and S blocks (A, B). The stonework of the N block is far more like the stonework of the back of the Menzies Apartments.

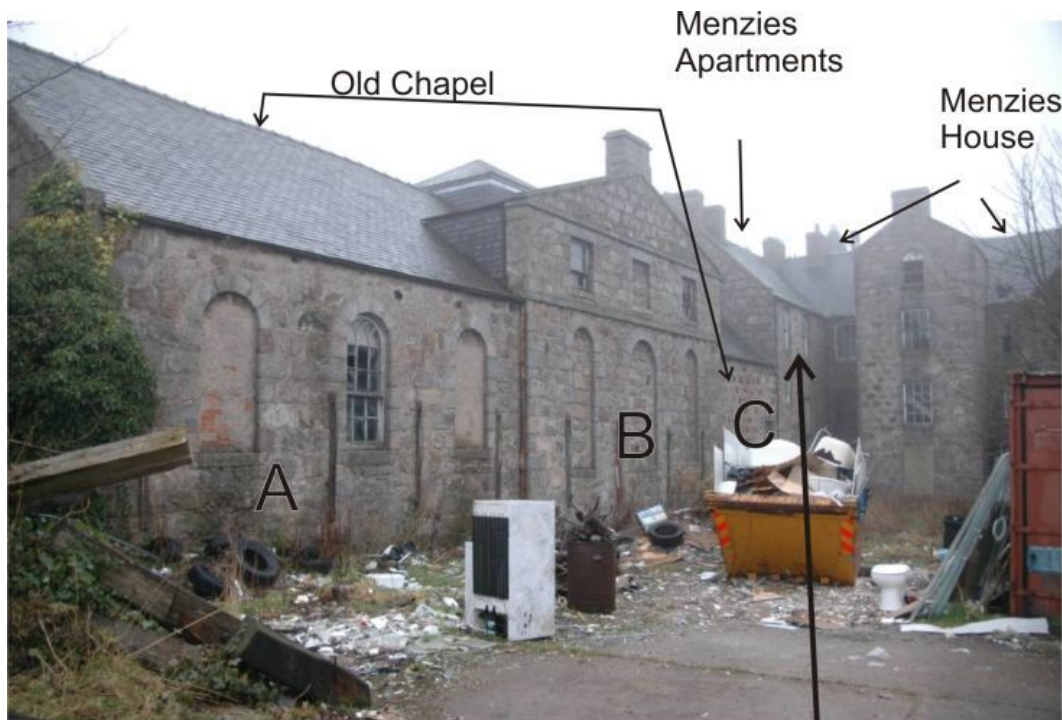
It appears possible, therefore, that the central and S blocks may represent an original building/chapel and that the work of 1827 extended the chapel to the N with the N block, built to mirror the existing S block. The small building abutting the S gable may have been the vestry/vestries. At the time of the survey it was totally ivy covered and collapsing and could not be entered but from the inside of the theatre it could be seen to comprise two rooms. However, the visible W wall was of different brick from the W walls of the main buildings but similar to that used for the blocking of D1 (see below). A stone arched doorway in the W wall copied the main part of the chapel. Rev Charles 'Priest' Gordon (1835) noted that '*More than two-thirds of the present chapel and both the vestries are new*'. This is certainly suggestive of an earlier core as discussed.

The use of brick on buildings of this status is unusual in Aberdeenshire but there is an interesting comparison at Kirkconnell House in Dumfries and Galloway where both a c. 1750 domestic extension to the late 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century house and a c. 1800 chapel were both built of brick. The comparison has some significance as John Menzies' mother was Marion Maxwell from Kirkconnell. The brick buildings at Kirkconnell were constructed by French brick makers brought to Scotland by James Maxwell when he returned from exile in France. (Historic Scotland HB NUM 17204 and <http://kirkconnellhouse.co.uk/frames/history.html> )

*Walls* The W walls of all three blocks of the chapel are of dark red to grey, hand-made bricks (220-230mm long x 50-60mm high x 100mm thick) above a 2-3 course foundation of rubble stone, c. 0.80m high. The brick above the string course in the N



angle of the central block appears to be of a different type (Illus 30). Rybats at corners and archways, string courses and skews are of grey tooled ashlar. The E wall of the central and S blocks and the S wall of the S block have predominantly grey squared granite rubble with vertical stacks of pinnings; the N block has more random rubble with a greater colour range.



Illus 29 E wall of Old Chapel and Menzies Apartments.

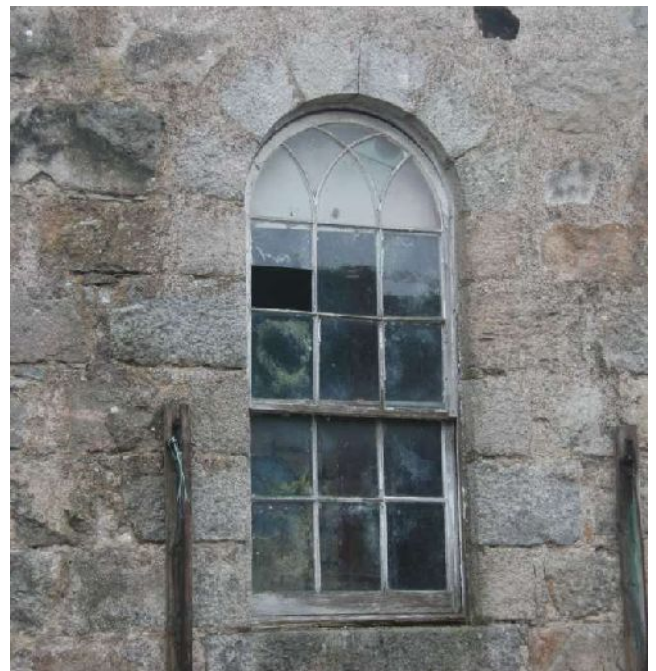


**Illus 30** N angle of projecting central block of chapel showing difference in brickwork above the string course

*Windows/doors* In 2012 all the W windows have been blocked but a photograph (Illus 31) shows they had Y- tracery as still can be seen in one E window (W10: Illus 32) and internally behind the blocking of W6-W8.



**Illus 31** W of chapel showing windows W6, W7 and door D2) 1950s? (Blairs Museum 821)



**Illus 32** (RHS) E wall of chapel. Window W10

The three windows of the E wall of the central block are stone blocked and may always have been blind. The brick blocking of windows W1, W3, W9 and W11 is of modern brick and may relate to the change of use from chapel to theatre. Windows W4 and W5 have upper and lower pairs of surviving internal wooden shutters (Illus 33).



**Illus 33 Internal shutters window W4 of W wall**

At attic level there are three rectangular windows in the E and W walls of the central block and dormer windows in the W side of the N and S blocks.

The original central door (D1) of the central block matched the flanking windows. It was subsequently blocked with early bricks – but of a type that is visually different from the wall brick on this building. This blocking presumably dates from when a secondary door D2 was inserted in the N angle of the central block.

A third doorway with steps up from the yard (D3) led through the E wall of the N block.

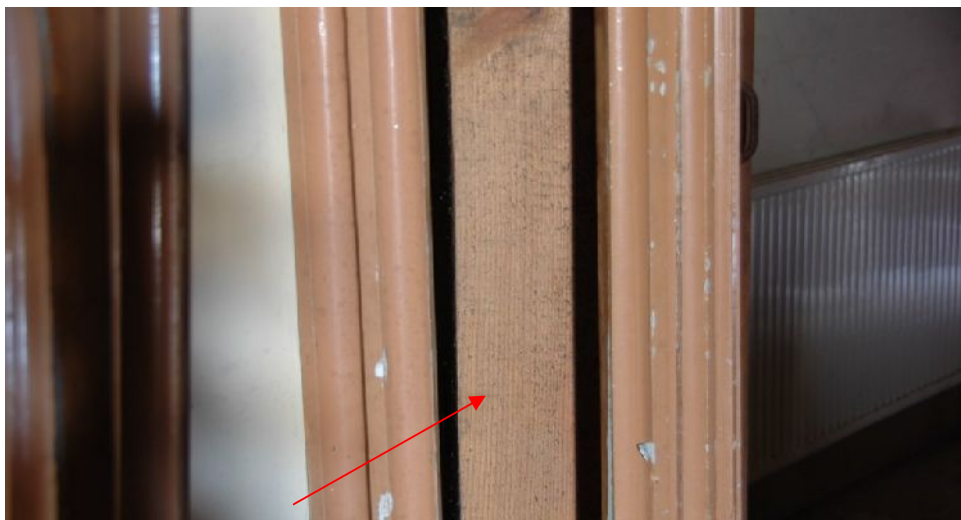
Two low blocked apertures (I: 1.06m wide x 1.09m H; II: 0.52 x 0.49m) in this wall of the N block are at a level that suggests access to a cellar (?). It was impossible to examine this from the inside as the floor had collapsed at this point.

*Roof* The central block has a central saucer dome with oculus above four fluted and reeded Ionic columns with gilt volutes. The E and W pediments are ridged and slated, each with an ashlar chimney with stacks matching those of the Menzies Apartments and Menzies House. The N and S blocks have ridged roofs. Cladding of slate; the S block appearing to have been re-slatted.

As part of investigative work on the condition of the building the Muir Group had a joiner examine one of the columns. This showed that, far from being solid supporting columns, these are constructed of a series of vertical fillets of wood joined to form a hollow circle around a rough vertical post 130mm square which is set on a small stack of bricks below floor level. Clearly, although these 4 pillars may give some support to the central square of beams supporting the oculus, but most of the weight must be on the walls. At the inner faces of the walls there are square sectioned pillars with plain capitals; although these had not been opened up, knocking suggests they are not substantial.



**Illus 34 Oculus ceiling from below, capitals of pillars to LHS and centre base**



**Illus 35 showing column with one panel removed showing central post (arrow)**

### *Interior as a Chapel*

The interior has been substantially altered. After the New Chapel was built in 1899, the Old Chapel was left unused for almost 50 years until the mid 1950s when it was adapted for use as a theatre (IF). However a photograph of the chapel in use (Illus 37) taken from the S end of the central block, shows the altar at the N end in the N block with light coming in from the windows in the W wall. Four archways appear to have been painted on the blank E wall of the N block. The northernmost of the painted arches would be above the door with steps from the yard which can be seen on the E façade. A curtained screen behind the altar blocks off about half of this N block. The central (and presumably the S) block would appear to have been used for seating. The pillars, including those in the wall lines are part of the interior at this stage. Further details, partially hidden by the later theatre, can be added. At the S end there were three arches at ground floor level- the central one being a blind alcove, the outer two being doorways into the two separate rooms in the small building attached to the S end of the chapel – this may originally have been a vestry/vestries. A similar blind alcove was central in the N wall, which would have been behind the altar screen as seen in the photograph Illus 37.

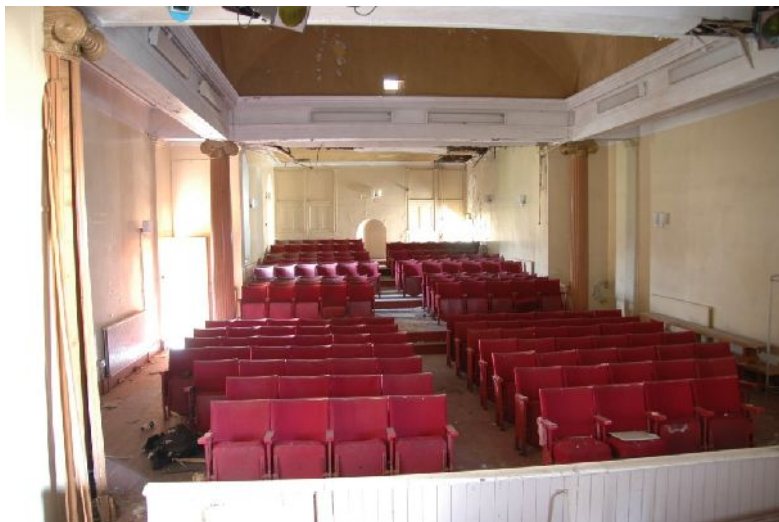


**Illus 36 Interior of S end wall with central blind alcove flanked by doors to vestries partially blocked by stage**

The main entry was through the secondary door (D2) in the N angle of the central block; this led into a rectangular room with a fireplace set in front of the blocked central doorway (D1) of the original structure. This fireplace linked to the chimney at the apex of the W pediment. The chimneys at both E and W pediments are of the same stack detail as those on the Menzies Apartment and Menzies House and may be part of the 1827-9 alterations. This suggests that this fireplace and entry porch may also have been part of the chapel interior.



**Illus 37** The chapel looking N from the S end of the central block. (Scottish Catholic Archives CH/SCA/PG/1032)



**Illus 38** The chapel as theatre looking from the S end of the central block

*Interior as a Theatre* In the mid 1950s the interior was redesigned as a theatre which remained in use until the college closed in 1986 (IF). The building is now in a dangerous condition, with fears that the oculus roof may collapse.

As a theatre, a raised stage with orchestra pit was built in the S block, with screen walls built blocking the side and end walls. The small building/vestry at the S end of the chapel appears to have been used as dressing rooms/props stores, with access down steps from the stage. The central and N blocks of the chapel were used for the audience with a floor stepped up to the N. The raised floor is held up on a number of relatively small vertical posts set in the earth below the theatre (JE-F and Joiner). The door at the N end of the E wall was retained although it was down steps from the auditorium. The main entry remained through the secondary door in the N angle of the central block which gave access to both the N and S ends of the central block (most recently to both audience and stage).

### **Menzies Apartment**

Status B listed HB number 16481

Date of construction 1827

Original use Apartment for Menzies with student accommodation in attic floor.

#### Description

The Menzies Apartment was built in 1827-9 to provide accommodation for John Menzies. He lived there for three years. As discussed above, it formed an infill between the chapel and the Menzies House mansion. It is 3 ½ stories high and two bays wide. The back (E) side had a stairway up to the student accommodation above the private apartments.

Rev Charles ‘Priest’ Gordon describes ‘*he (JM) ordered several alterations to be made upon and some new apartments to be added to the quarter of the old buildings adjoining the chapel and looking into the garden*’.

*Walls* The W wall (Illus 39) was predominantly of the same hand-made bricks as the W façade of the chapel, although there was a change of brick at 2<sup>nd</sup> floor level (see Illus 26 above). The E wall was built in courses of rubble stone with granite rybats, sills, lintels and chimneys (Illus 40). The wall construction is similar to the E wall of the N block of the chapel.

*Roof* Slate with granite chimneys



**Illus 39** Menzies Apartment W face.



**Illus 40** (RHS) Menzies Apartment E face

*Windows and doors* With the exception of the dormer in the W side of the roof the windows were rectangular sash windows with 9 or 12 astragals. The curved dormer is the same as those in the attic floor of the N and S blocks of the old chapel and probably all were part of the 1827-9 reconstruction.

There is one door in the W façade which would have given access to the private apartments and one in the E wall to the stair to the student accommodation on the upper floors.

*Interior* The building is unsafe and no access was possible in 2012.

### **Menzies House**

Status B listed HB number 19226

Date of construction Late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century. First map evidence : Late 18<sup>th</sup> century and 1830

Original use Mansion until 1827. Converted to seminary 1827-29 with alterations by architect John Gall. It continued in use as a seminary until c. 1900 when the New College was built. The E half was demolished in the 1920s as a result of dry rot (J E-F). By the 1923 (pub 1925) OS map, the E half is not shown. The W half was virtually



abandoned until the mid 1950s, when it was used for recreation rooms for the students (two for each year) until the closure of the college in 1986 (IF).

Description Only the W half of Menzies House still exists but a photograph (Illus 44) and two watercolours by James Keenan (1844-1932), one dated 1859 give an indication of its appearance before the demolition of the E half (Illus 45 & 46).



**Illus 41 1830 (Blairs Museum T6589 BLRBM)**

By the map of 1830 the N wing of the original L plan has been extended with the E wing, the central tower and the steps in front of the door in the centre of the N face of the E wing shown. Although not detailed this is the first (surviving) plan of the buildings after the 1827/9 conversion. The extent of these alterations is illustrated by some extracts from Rev Charles ‘Priest’ Gordon’s *Memorial of Blairs* (1835):

*‘It would be next to impossible to describe or even to mention how much of the buildings as they now stand, is new work and how much of the old work remains. I may simply here observe that more than two-thirds of the present chapel and both the vestries are new;-that the whole wing connected with the Library, below and above is also new;-and that the whole space till you come to a line with the Drawing Room is in like manner new. The Drawing Room was unroofed, a new storey was added, and the large apartment immediately above it is entirely new’.*

*‘The Kitchen, Refectory, Servants Hall, the Billiard Room were all new modeled’*

*‘The whole of the Attic or Garret Floors were laid out and fitted up as dormitories for the students; while fourteen small apartments were set aside for those who might be furthest advanced in their studies’.*

While it is impossible to trace these changes in detail it clearly suggest that the original mansion was raised by an additional story and the attic space made habitable.



**Illus 42 1842 (Muir Group) (Black numbers added for text)**

On the 1842 map the house is shown as an E shape with the front façade (Illus 42:1) to the N with a central round tower. To the S the W arm of the E is formed by the Old Chapel and Menzies Apartments (Illus 42:2), the central arm is now the lower building used from c.1900 as a laundry (Illus 42:3) and an E arm (Illus 42:4) extends back S almost as far as the central building. Between the W and central arms and between the E and central arms are shown small rectangular-plan additions; the W of these survives as a narrow 4-storied block- possibly originally a stair block.



**Illus 43 1865 OS map ([www.nls.ac.uk](http://www.nls.ac.uk)) (Black number added for text)**

By 1865 OS map the equivalent W structure had been removed and instead there is what may be a covered passageway (Illus 43: 1) from the S end of the E wing to the doorway of the central block (Laundry see below); this is still shown on the 1899 (pub 1901) OS map.

It appears therefore that from 1827/9 until c.1920 Menzies House had 5 symmetrical bays on either side of the central round tower; the paintings show the E wing as three bays long. The door appears to have been flanked by pillars. It was three stories with an attic with dormer windows. It would have appeared as a fairly plain but pleasingly symmetrical building larger but not dissimilar to Aquhorties (or Aquhorthies) House, Inverurie, where the seminary was before the move to Blairs- Aquhorties was built c. 1799, so probably almost contemporary with the pre-1827-9 mansion at Blairs.



**Illus 44 N façade of Menzies House as a seminary before demolition of E end (Blairs Museum T10001-28)**



**Illus 45 Watercolor of Menzies House as a seminary in 1859 by James Keenan (1844-1932) (Blairs Museum T9115)**



**Illus 46 Watercolor of Menzies House as a seminary by James Keenan (1844-1932) (Blairs Museum T6076)**

In c. 1920, when the E half of the mansion was demolished, part of the round tower was left and the E end of the building partially bricked up (Illus 47).



**Illus 47 The surviving W wing of the Menzies House. The truncated round tower is visible to the LHS. The 1854 extension (now the Boiler House) with 1925 lower extension to RHS.**



**Illus 48** The back (S) side of the surviving W part of the Menzies House, flanked by the Old Chapel and Menzies Apartment (LHS) and the Laundry (RHS)

*Walls* The stonework of the surviving W wing N frontage is of squared granite rubble with small black pinnings. The only other building at Blairs where this has been observed is the doocot (Report Part 3).



**Illus 49** Detail of stone work of N front of Menzies House showing pinnings

*Roof* Slated. The photograph and paintings suggest the E wing was partially hipped with a pediment with chimneys. All surviving chimneys are of dressed granite with broad coping stones.

*Windows* 12-paned rectangular sash windows. Dormer windows in the attic are probably part of the 1826/9 alterations as Gordon's references suggest that there was a complete upper floor added and dormitories built in the attic.

*Interior* At the time of survey the building was too dangerous to enter. The Listed Building Report (HB19226) describes it as 'substantially recast, but retaining vaulted chambers of 'wine cellars' at ground'. On plan these appear to be at the original W end.

### **The central wing /Laundry**

Date of construction Possibly 1827-9. First map evidence 1830

Original use Possibly Servants Hall/domestic range. From c.1900 Laundry



**Illus 50 Location of laundry. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital map data, © Crown Copyright, All rights reserved. 2012. License No 0100031673)**

**RHS Detail of 1842 plan (Muir Group) with building indicated by arrow**

While the 'laundry' is on the footprint of the E wing shown on the 18<sup>th</sup> century map, it is shorter and wider and it would appear that there was rebuilding. It is of different stonework, lower and appears far more domestic in scale than the main part of Menzies House, the size and layout being more like a farmhouse. There is no surviving junction between it and the surviving part of the mansion so structural

relationships are lost. Its N gable and the N end of the E side show signs of rebuilding, presumably c. 1920 when the N part of the mansion was demolished (Illus 51).



**Illus 51 Junction between the Laundry and the truncated Menzies House.**



**Illus 52 Laundry W and S walls**



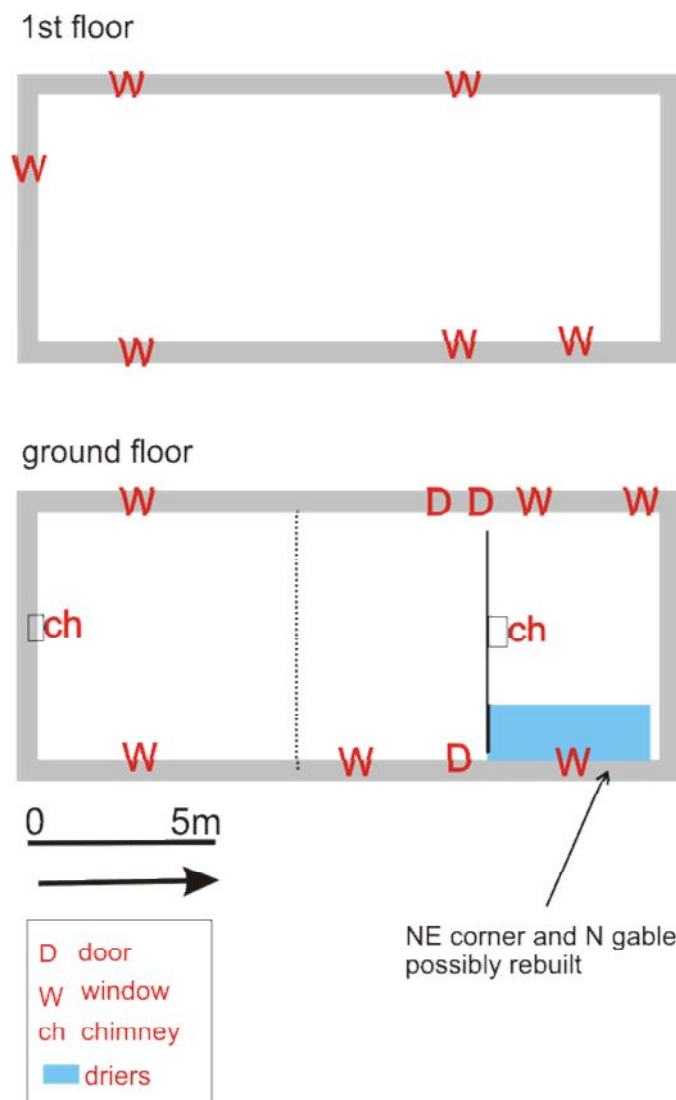
**Illus 53 Laundry E wall**

It is 2 stories high of brown-grey rubble stone with granite rybats and lintels. In general the stonework is very similar to the back (E) of the Menzies Apartment and of the N segment of the old chapel. The wide chimneys are in the same style as the main house. However the surviving skewput at the SE has a slightly different moulding. Although the interior has been opened out, probably when it was converted to an almost industrial laundry in c. 1900, the arrangement of doors and windows (most now blocked up) give an indication of its former layout (Illus 54).

At the ground floor there was a door opening to the E and two doors (one blocked) opening to the yard to the W. There were three windows each in the E and W walls, suggesting at least three rooms and a stair. A chimney in the S gable and one set back from the N end suggest fireplaces for three rooms.

At 1<sup>st</sup> floor level (the floor was removed when the laundry was established) there were three windows to the E, two to the W and one to the S.

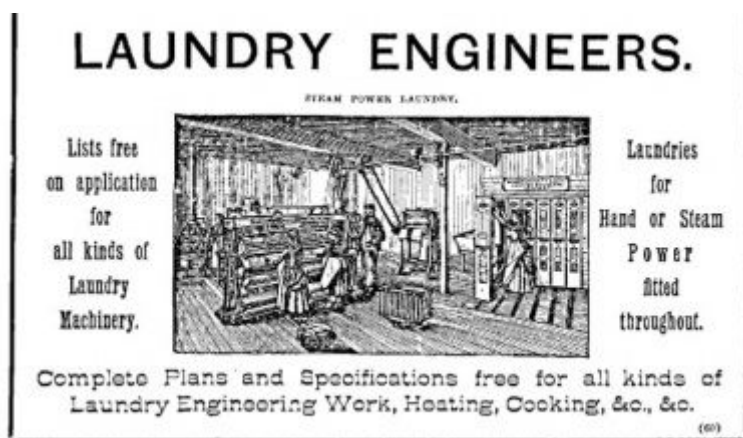




**Illus 54 Sketch plan of the laundry**

It is possible that this was originally housing for domestic staff of the mansion and later of the college. It may even be the Servants Hall which Rev Charles 'Priest' Gordon writes was remodeled in 1827-9. This would make sense of the similarity of the stonework with the backs of the Menzies Apartments which were built at that time. It is shown as the central wing on the 1830, 1842 and 1865 maps.

In c 1900 it was converted to a laundry with the installation of large drum washing machines run by a system of belts on an engine, later converted to electricity (ES). Later these were removed and 'modern' washing machines installed. Also c. 1900 drying racks were installed and these survive (Illus 55). They are on tracks so each rack can be individually pulled forward. The clothes would have been dried by warm air from hot pipes running through the system. They were made by W. Summerscales and Sons Limited, described as Laundry Engineers at Keighley, Yorkshire. This model was advertised in 1891



Illus 55 Detail of advertisement 1891 ([www.gracesguide.co.uk](http://www.gracesguide.co.uk)), drying racks to RHS. Above: detail of name on racks. RHS one of racks pulled forward on its track

Drying also took place on lines outside and brackets can be seen for these on the outer wall of the building. One of the shafts for the belts for the washing machines also survives.

## 10 1854 Extension- the Boiler House

Status B listed HB number 19226

Date of construction 1854. First map evidence 1865.

Original use Originally built as additional accommodation, this was converted to a boiler house after the New College was built. Plans dated 1925 (Illus 56-57) show the Boiler House already used as such, prior to the installation of a new boiler in a single storey extension abutting the E wall (Illus 59 and 60).

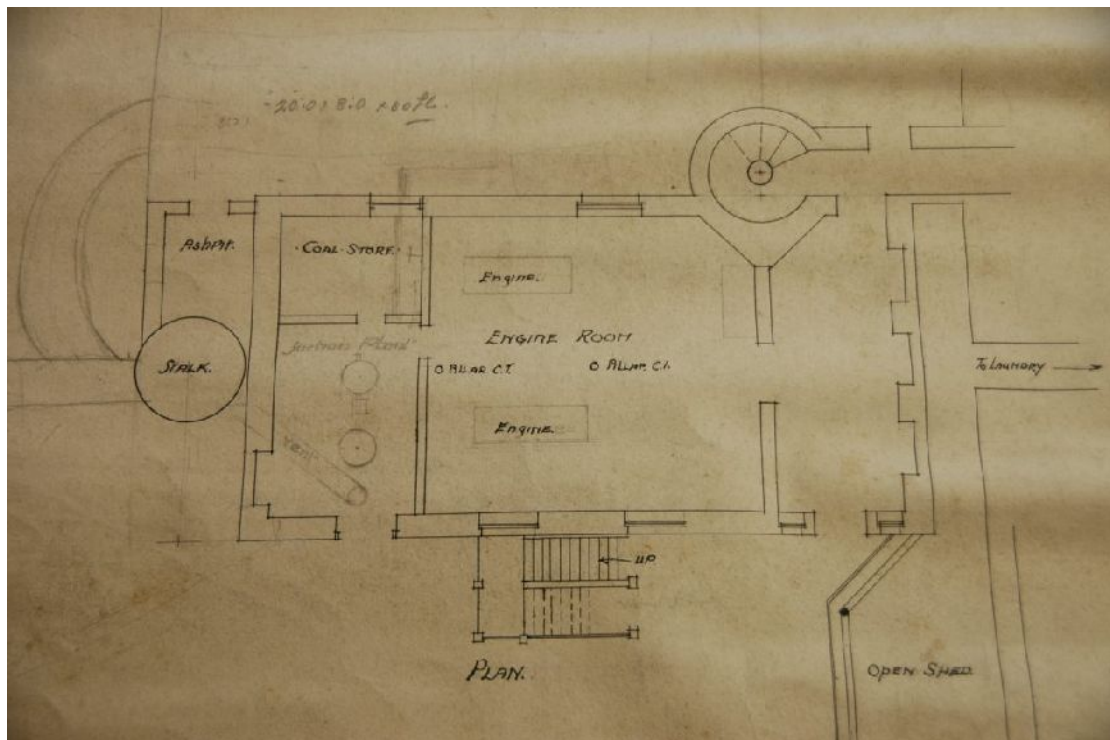
**Description** A two storey and attic block with entry to Menzies House only at ground level, the wall above being a blind wall between the two buildings. A five-storey round tower with conical roof was built on the SE corner. A passage behind the tower leads to the W end of the Menzies House. Two doors at ground floor level in the W wall, another at first floor level with an external metal stair.

**Walls** Regular quite small grey granite blocks. The E side is much obscured by the structures added in 1925 and a tank.

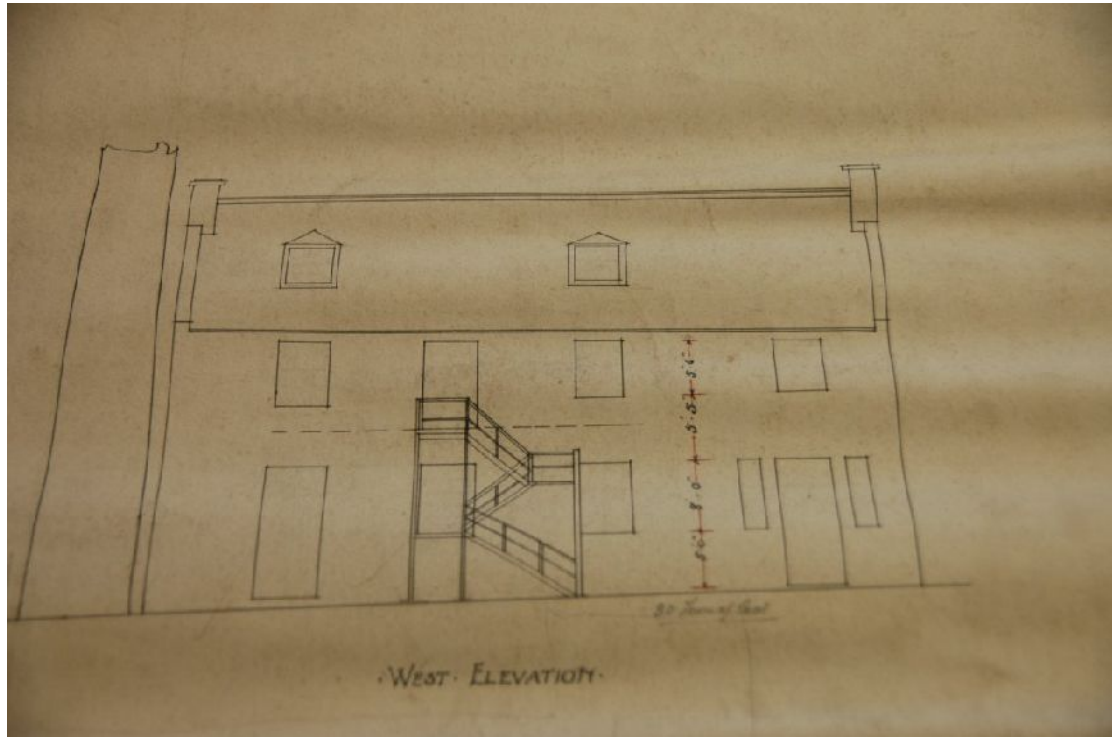
**Windows** 12 and 20-pane sash windows. Original dormers visible on 1925 elevation (Illus 57) are now missing.

**Roof** Slated.

**Interior** The original interior is gutted; it still houses the boiler for the heating system for the New College.



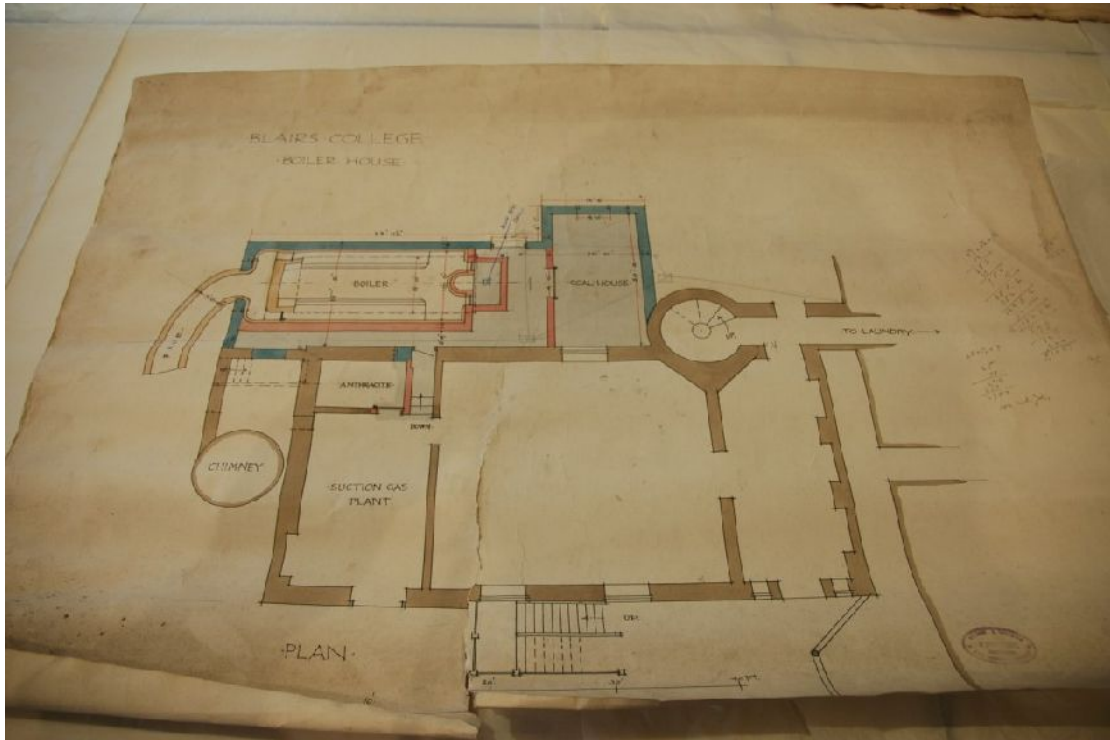
**Illus 56 Boiler House drawn 1925 (Blairs museum T6275 BLRBM)**



**Illus 57** W elevation of Boiler House drawn 1925 . Note the original dormers, now missing.  
(Blairs museum T6275 BLRBM)



**Illus 58** Boiler House/ 1854 extension from W



**Illus 59 1925 plan of additions to Boiler House (Blairs museum T6280 BLRBM)**



**Illus 60 1854 extension with 1925 additions from E**

## 11 The New College 1898-1902

Status B listed HB number 19225

Date of construction

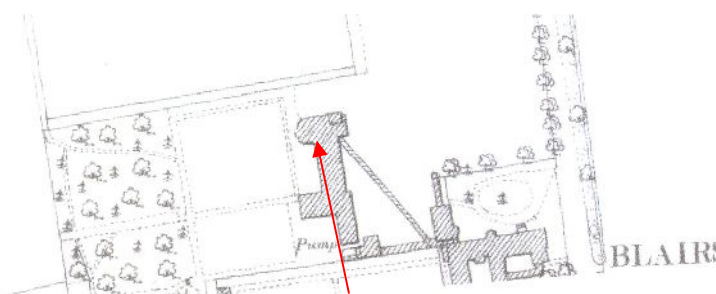
The New College was constructed between 1898 and 1902 with a formal opening on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1903. The Architects were Alexander Ellis and Robert Gordon Wilson of Aberdeen. The Chapel (not part of the present survey) was built in 1899 and designed by the architect Mr R Curran of Warrington, the interior being remodelled in

1910-1911 by Charles Jean Menart. The initial works were supervised by the then rector Aeneas Chisholm, later Bishop of Aberdeen.

The buildings of the New College were built in three stages:

1. The W wing is shown on 1899/1901 OS map (Illus 61) with a temporary covered walkway from the new building to the SW corner of the 1854 extension to the Old College (now the Boiler House). The latrines and wash-houses are also shown by this time. However the new kitchens had not been built so the domestic needs of the college would have still been carried out in the old buildings.
2. The E frontage and E wing and kitchen block Built by 1902
3. Extension at W end of frontage in 1906

Later additions such as an extension to the gymnasium block have been added since. At the same time as the New College was built, the domestic organisation was increased in scale with the conversion of the 1854 extension into a boiler house, the establishment of the new laundry and the large new kitchens and stores within the New College itself. When the New College was complete the Sisters of St Joseph of Annecy (France) were brought to the college by the then Rector, Mgr McGregor ([www.blairs.co.uk](http://www.blairs.co.uk)). The nuns were responsible for all the domestic side of the organisation; cooking, laundering, cleaning and nursing. The internal arrangements of the college buildings reflect these duties and include a separate area for their private quarters.



**Illus 61** Detail of 1899 (1901) OS map showing the first stage of construction of W wing in use with walkway between it and the old college buildings. Arrow shows direction of photograph below. Note also a similar passage between the E wing of Menzies House and the central wing (which from soon after this became the laundry) [www.nls.ac.uk](http://www.nls.ac.uk)



**Illus 62 Building work in progress c. 1898 (Blairs Museum 122) Note at this stage the then W end of N wing had a bay window, later replaced at the W end of 1906 block**

The building is a U-plan with the impressive frontage facing N towards a new entrance drive put in c 1900.



**Illus 63 N façade with detail of top of entrance tower**

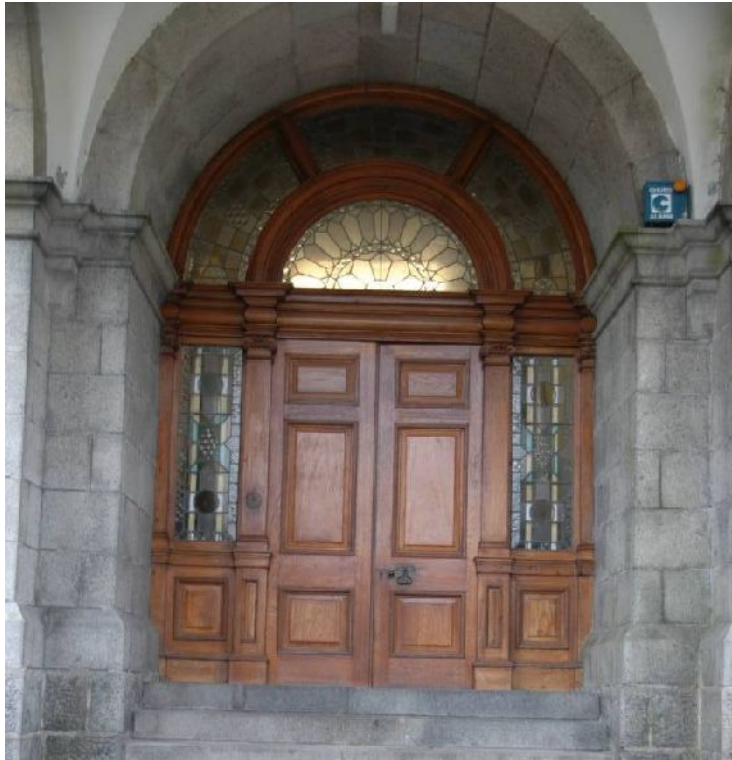
It is built of dressed granite over a rusticated plinth. The front N elevation has the main entrance with a projecting tower over arches. The keystones of the arches and other details of the arches have heraldic devices (Illus 63 and 64). At the top of the tower there is an arched belfry supporting a crown and open cupola with corner turrets. The copper finial resembles a mitre topped with a cross.



Illus 64 Details of carving around entrance tower.



Below this the entrance through an elaborate door opens into a panelled hall with panelled ceiling and mosaic tiled floor.



**Illus 65 Entrance door and door from inside**

Behind the front façade two wings (E and W) frame a central courtyard (Illus 67) with a covered walkway passage around the perimeter and a single storey kitchen (Illus 68) at the S side. The gymnasium and the later extension project W from the S end of the W wing (Illus 66). Gables and gablets vary, some plain, others with elaborate crow-stepped stonework.



**Illus 66 W façade with recent classroom extension to gymnasium block on RHS**



**Illus 67 Internal courtyard looking N to the back of the front block. The window above main stair visible on LHS. Covered single storey passage around perimeter**



**Illus 68 Central courtyard looking S to single storey kitchen block**



**Illus 69** W end of 1906 extension

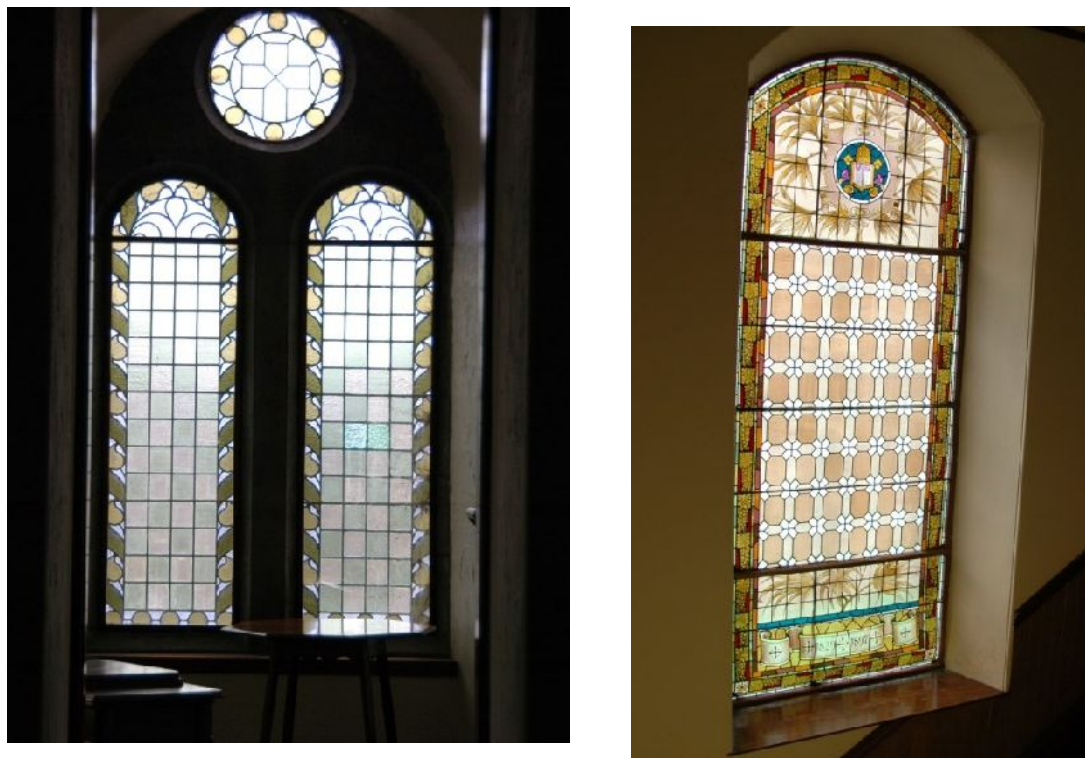
### *Windows*

There are three main patterns of window that are repeated throughout the building (Illus 70). All are sash windows with a number of small panes. Apart from the ‘bottle-shaped’ windows in the sacristy (now the museum), the window shape is not related to the internal function of the rooms. Arched windows have been used at the 2<sup>nd</sup> storey at each of the wall head gablets and the main gables. Half-moon arched windows are used above the covered passage in the central courtyard. Gable windows occur in the 1906 extension for the ground floor study hall and first floor reception room. The overall impression is of a very light-filled building.



**Illus 70** The main window types.

Stained glass windows have been used in the entrance, the entrance tower and by the main stair (Illus 71).



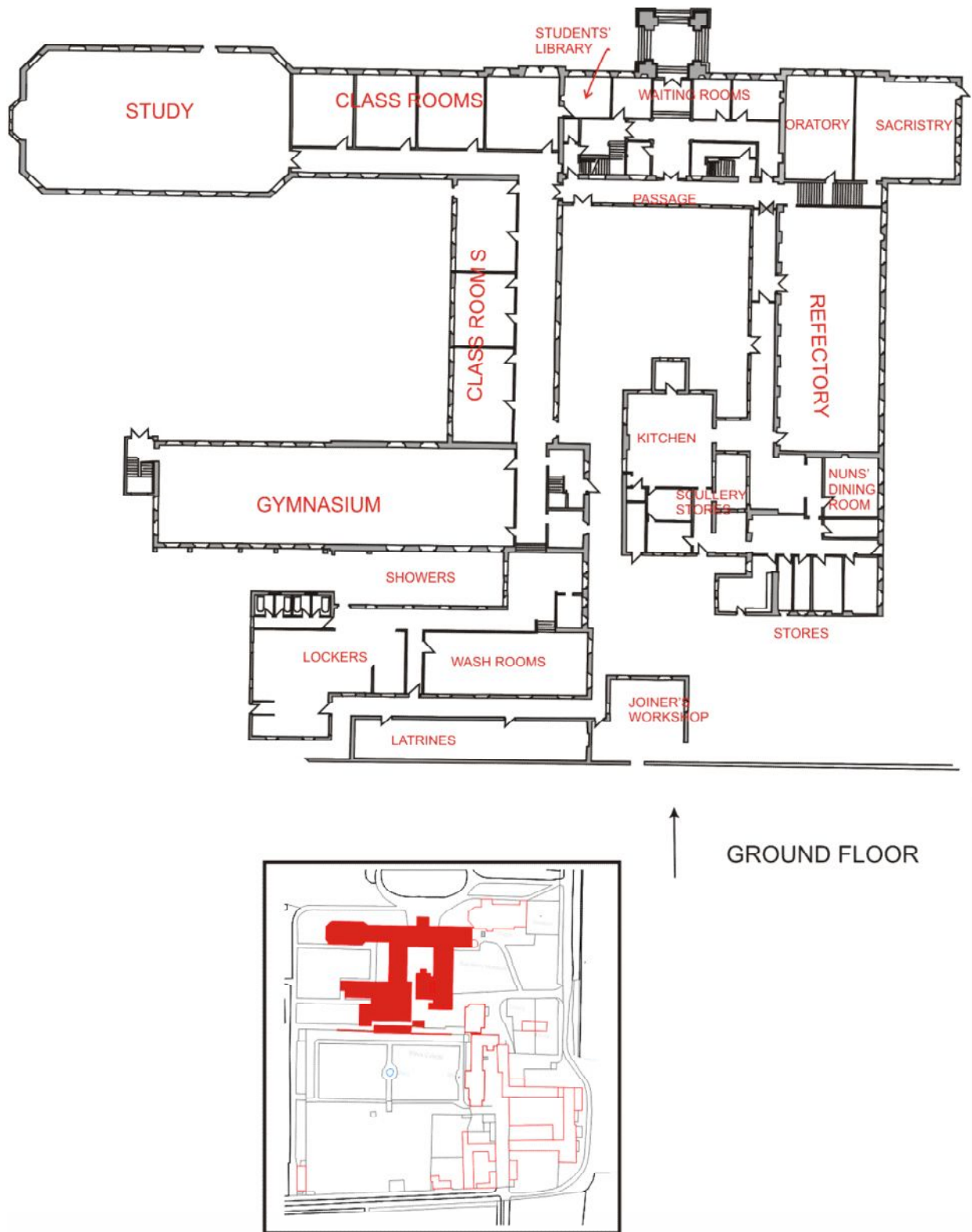
Illus 71 Windows in tower (LHS) and main stair (RHS)

### *Layout and interior*

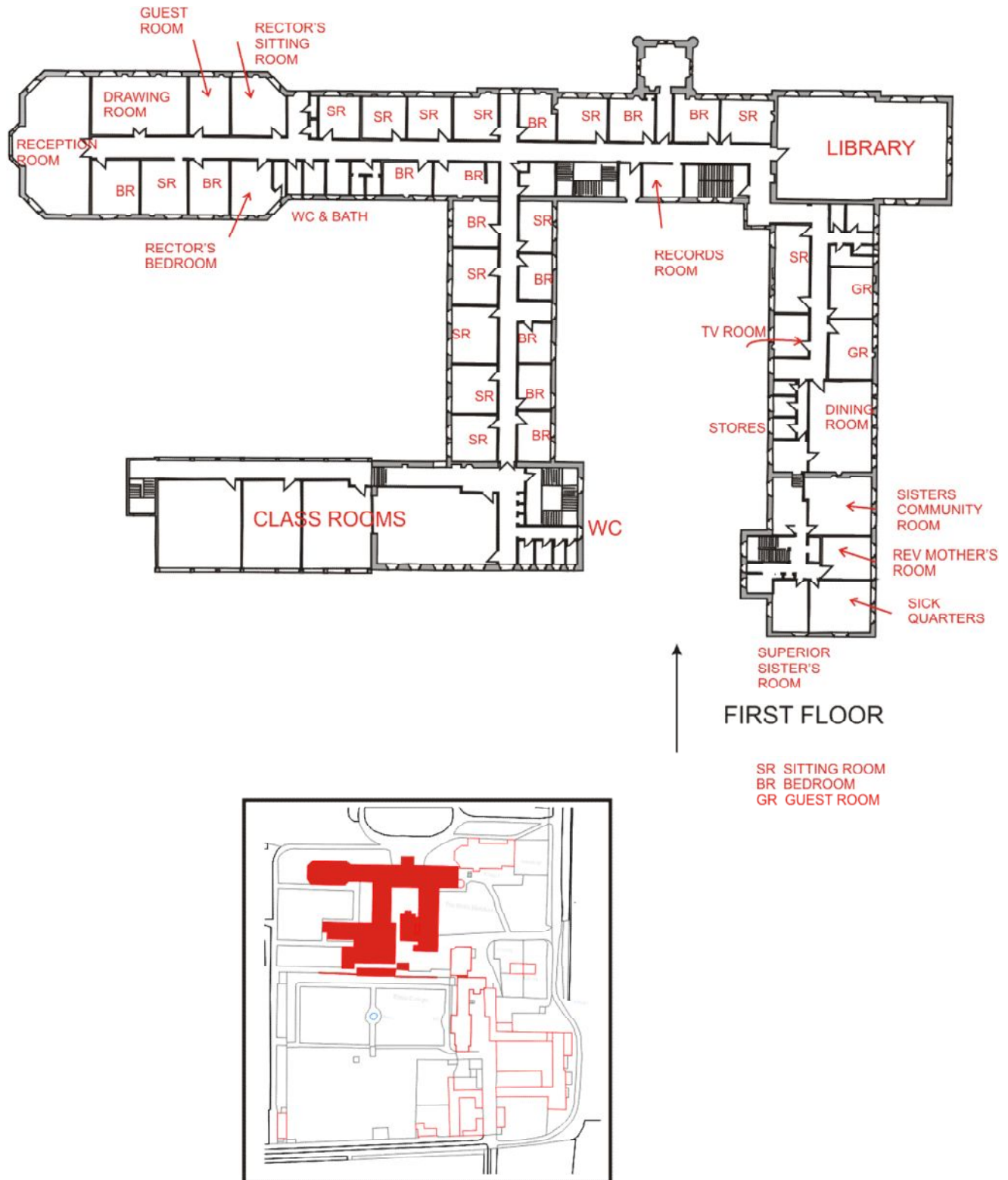
The more formal rooms such as the oratory, sacristy, study, drawing room and library are all situated on the N front side of the building. To the S, the ground floor of the E wing includes the refectory beside the kitchen, stores, linen rooms, scullery etc. A dumb waiter in the scullery took food up to the priests' dining room on the first floor and the sick bay on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

The W wing includes classrooms, with the gymnasium at the S end beside the shower, bathroom and latrine blocks.

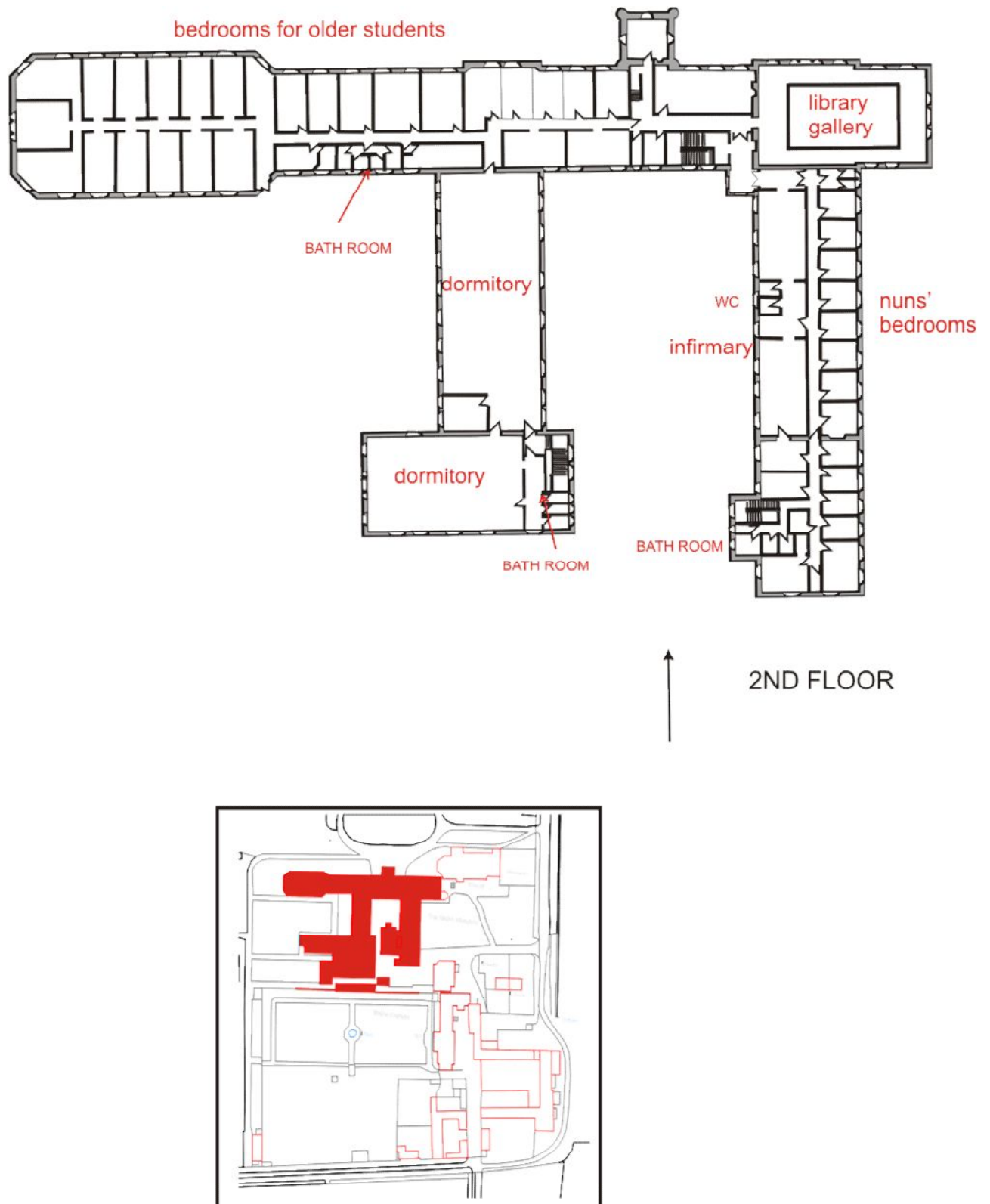
As the interiors have been stripped the identifications of function are based on a plan supplied by John Evans-Freke. Obviously there will have been some variation over the years as the student numbers changed. However the main rooms and basic layout appears to be unchanged and is shown in Illus 72-74. Only the major rooms will be discussed in detail.



Illus 72 New College. Ground floor layout (Based on plan from Muir Group). Inset location based on OS. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital map data, © Crown Copyright, All rights reserved. 2012. License No 0100031673)



Illus 73 New College 1st floor layout (Based on plan from Muir Group. Inset location based on OS. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital map data, © Crown Copyright, All rights reserved. 2012. License No 0100031673)



Illus 74 New College. 2nd floor layout (Based on plan from Muir Group.). Inset location based on OS. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey digital map data, © Crown Copyright, All rights reserved. 2012. License No 0100031673)

Essentially the ground floor contained classrooms, the gymnasium, showers, washrooms etc, the sacristy and oratory and the students' refectory with the kitchens, stores, scullery etc.

The first floor included the reception rooms, the Rector's rooms, the bedrooms and sitting rooms for priests and guests, the priests' dining room, the rooms for the senior nuns and the library which extended up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. Further classrooms lay over the gymnasium.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor had dormitories and rooms for senior students in the N and W wings, with the nuns' bedrooms and the infirmary in the E wing.

### *Library*

The library is an elegant wood paneled room with a corner spiral stair to a gallery. The ceiling is also wood paneled.

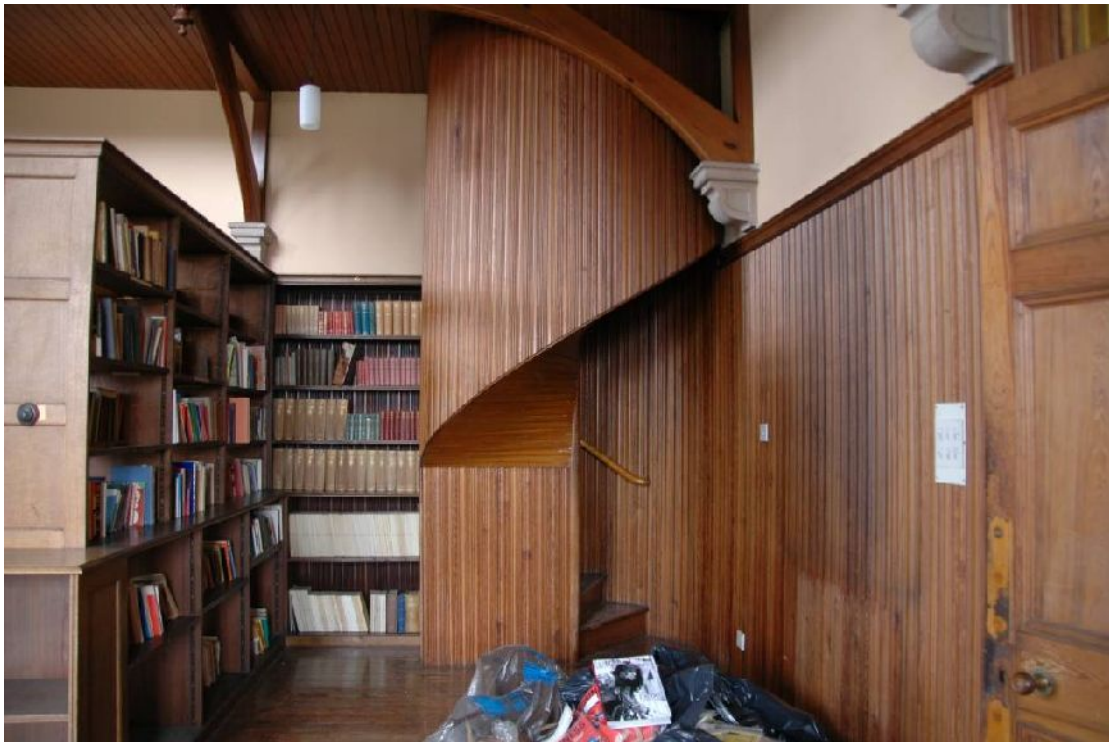


**Illus 75 Library looking E**





**Illus 76 Library looking W**



**Illus 77 Library spiral stair**

### *Sacristy and Oratory*

The Sacristy and Oratory are now used by the Blairs Museum. Weekday services were held for individual classes in the Oratory rather than in the main Chapel where Sunday services were held (IF).



**Illus 78 Sacristy (now Museum) looking W**



**Illus 79 Oratory looking S**

*Refectory*



**Illus 80 Refectory looking N**

*Priest's Dining Room*

This is half paneled with a red marble fireplace.



**Illus 81 Priests' Dining Room looking E**

*Reception room*



**Illus 82 Reception Room in 1906 extension**

*Drawing room (also known as Queen Mary Room)*



**Illus 83 Drawing Room**

This was also known as the Queen Mary Room as the portrait of Mary Queen of Scots used to be hung there.

*Student Rooms*



**Illus 84 Individual cubicles for older boys in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the 1906 extension. Note the cast iron roof.**



**Illus 85 Dormitory in 1898 W wing**



**Illus 86 Classroom on ground floor**



**Illus 87 Study hall on ground floor of 1906 extension**

*Minor fittings*

Some of the small architectural details such as doors, fireplaces and door fittings remain and are of interest.



**Illus 88** Doors of Reception Room (LHS) and Drawing Room (RHS) both in 1906 extension



**Illus 89** Fireplaces in c. 1900 Priests' Dining Room (LHS) and in 1906 Reception Room (RHS)



**Illus 90** Door fittings from the Priests' Dining Room and 1<sup>st</sup> floor Sitting Room c. 1900



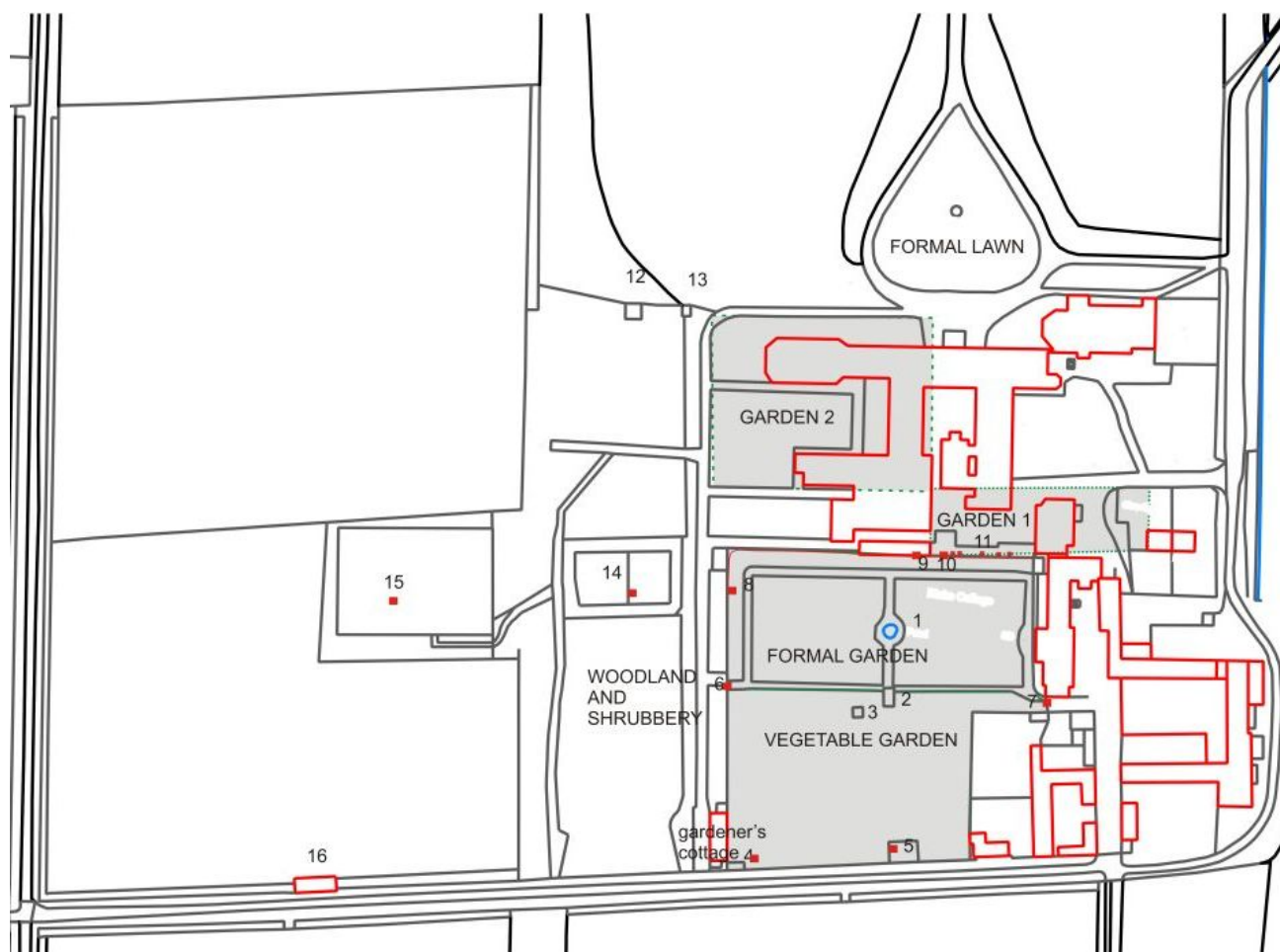
**Illus 91** Door furniture from main front door c. 1900.



## 12 The Gardens and Gardener's Cottage

Status B listed HB number 19229

Date of construction Late 18<sup>th</sup> century-early 19<sup>th</sup> century



**Illus 92 All gardens superimposed on modern layout. Key: 1: pond; 2: water feature?; 3: potting shed; 4: cold frame; 5: gateway; 6: gate; 7: door; 8: blocked door; 9: heated wall; 10: blocked door; 11: bee boles; 12, 13: summer houses; 14: ball-wall in post 1900 position; 15: tennis courts; 16: pavilion and playing fields**

### *Documentary evidence*

The earliest garden (Illus 92: Garden 1) is shown on the late 18<sup>th</sup> century estate map (Illus 93), lying along the N side of the N wing and NE and NW corners of the then house. Also on this map is shown an area to the NW marked 'New garden' (Illus 92: Garden 2). As part of the proposed Improvements, the line of the present walled garden is drawn in pencil.

By the 1830 plan (Illus 94) Garden 1 is partly in grass and partly a yard area to the E of the ball-wall. Garden 2 is named as '*Students garden*' and the surviving garden (Formal garden and vegetable garden) with the gardener's cottage is shown in outline.

An area to the W of the gardens, described on the earlier map as barren ground, is now shown and named as 'wood' with a small building (?) in it.

The estate map of 1842 (Illus 95) shows three distinct gardens: the Kitchen Garden, the Formal Garden and the former 'Students Garden' now called the Flower Garden (Garden 2) and the shrubbery/woodland area to the W. The original Garden 1 is, at this stage, a landscaped drive and lawn in front of the college/Menzies House. On this plan the structure in the woodland appears less substantial and may be no more than one of the seats shown on the 1865 OS map. A sundial shown (SD) on the 1865 to 1923/5 OS maps in front of the old chapel is no longer there.

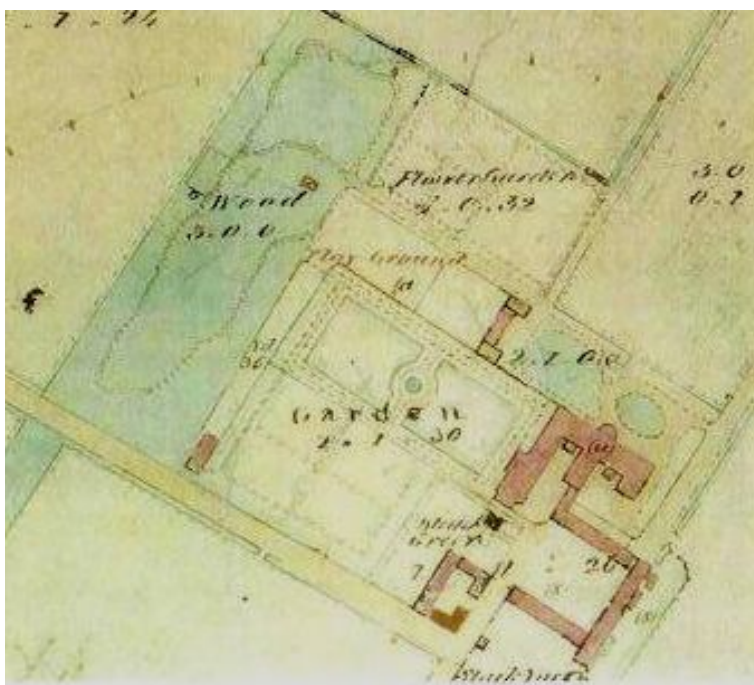
The Listed Building entry (HB 19229) suggests that the garden was rebuilt and re-sited when the New College was built c. 1898, but in fact the New College only removed the former Students Garden/Flower Garden (Garden 2). Other changes at this time were the re-siting of the ball-wall and concrete base within the shrubbery/woodland (Illus 92:14) and the creation of playing fields and a pavilion (Illus 92:16) in the field to the W of the woodland/shrubbery. Tennis courts (Illus 92:15) were also added at some point.



Illus 93 Detail of late 18<sup>th</sup> century estate map (Blairs Museum T6270 BLRBM)



Illus 94 Detail of 1830 estate map (Blairs Museum T6589 BLRBM)



Illus 95 Detail of 1842 estate map (Muir Group)

### *Survey*

#### *The garden walls*

A single wall of average height 2.5m, but up to c. 4.5m to the N, extends around the outer perimeter of the two surviving gardens (Formal Garden and Vegetable Garden) which are divided by a rhododendron hedge. Most of the wall is of stone with a variation of the capstones- triangular ones at the S wall and flat ones at the W wall suggesting it may have been built in stages. The S face of the N wall, however, is lined on the inner side by old handmade brick (wall 3.5m high. bricks 210-250 x 60-70 x 100-110mm) which extends around the curved NW 'corner' and stops c.11.5m from the corner. There is a blocked doorway (1.85m H x 1.15m W) with a brick arch

and stone rybats in the brick wall 6m from the corner (Illus 92: 8). Some of bricks around and S of the blocked door are more modern standard bricks.

There are four other gateways or doors into the garden. A main service gateway with stone pillars (Illus 92: 5) gives access from the S end of the garden to the E/W road through the estate. On the inside this is flanked by low stone walls. To the W there is a fine wrought iron gateway (W: 2.45m) on cast iron pillars which opens into the woodland/shrubbery (Illus 92: 6). A doorway with a straight granite lintel (1.69m H x 0.90mW) (Illus 92: 10) through the double skinned N wall is concrete blocked. At the SE, directly S of the old chapel and vestry, there is another doorway with a straight stone lintel (Illus 92:7) that opens to the steading.



**Illus 96 Gate to shrubbery (Illus 92:6)**

#### *Kitchen Garden*

The S garden was the kitchen garden. In 1842 it was shown with paths parallel to the S, E and W sides with a border between path and wall and with two paths running N/S and E/W across the centre forming 4 main areas. By 1865 only the outer path, which is also shown by N side, remains, with centre open.

At present no paths remain and the whole interior has been ploughed in the past and is a tangle of weeds to some height. Two wall-trained fruit trees remain on the E facing wall by gardener's cottage and three standard trees in the corner of garden by

Stockman's cottage – these possibly for private use. The 1865 OS suggests more freestanding trees.

A brick built potting shed (c. 3.2m square. Illus 92: 3) lies on the N side with doors to both N and S. Photographs and the OS maps of 1901 and 1923/5 show a greenhouse attached to the S side of this shed. The remains of a cold-frame (Illus 92:4) lie beside the Gardener's Cottage.

Accounts of the Income and Expenditure of the gardens in 1852-56 (Scottish Catholic Archives CB6/6) give an indication of the huge range of vegetables and fruit grown and the degree of self-sufficiency of the college at this time. Vegetables included cabbage, cauliflower, savoys, onions, carrots, Jerusalem potatoes, greens, leeks, French beans and potatoes. Fruits included berries, raspberries, gooseberries, cherries, strawberries, apples and pears. Honey is also mentioned.

An article in the Aberdeen Journal of 1863 refers to the abundant crop from a Honey Pear tree planted some 45 years before (c. 1818 – so part of John Menzies plantings. The peach trees grown on the heated wall are likely to have been planted c. 1900 when the heating system appears likely to have been installed (Thanks to IF for this reference).

### *Formal Garden*

The formal garden is separated from the kitchen garden by a now high hedge of rhododendron. The basic layout of the formal garden is documented from 1842 onwards with two compartments- now both lawns, divided by an N-S (approx) path with a central circular pond and with a path around the edges. The present planting comprises box hedges on either side of all paths- but just the N side of the path by rhododendrons. Wall-trained fruit trees extend all along the S face of N wall with a possible bed below this but no present planting. A depressed area parallel to the path along N side of both lawns may also suggest an earlier border. The pond is surrounded by a geometric arrangement of yellow and green foliaged yews with an overgrown cypress to S.

While the formal garden is the full width of the 1827 façade, yet the centre line is central to the whole façade rather than to the visual focus of the original chapel/theatre.

Photographs show that in the past there have been wide flower borders and at other times it appears that the lawn areas have been dug and used for vegetable or soft fruit.

The pond, which is circular and 4m in diameter is brick lined with a top course of granite and a delicate wrought iron railing (Illus 92: 1 and Illus 98). A path leads S from the pond to a rectangular brick-built feature c. 4.5m wide lying N/S between the formal and kitchen gardens (Illus 92: 2). This appears to have a stone step and possible entrance on the N towards the formal garden and possibly another opening to the S into the kitchen garden. While this may be the foundations of another greenhouse this feature is clearly shown blue on the 1<sup>st</sup> OS map of 1865, possibly indicating that there was originally another water feature here that has since been infilled.



**Illus 97 Formal garden looking E towards Old Chapel and Menzies Apartments**



**Illus 98 The pond looking S**

On the S facing side of the N wall a fan-shaped arrangement of cast iron pipes covering some 12m of the wall heated the wall for two wall-trained peach trees (Illus 92:9 and Illus 99). The heating system appears to be linked to the hot water system of the latrines/wash rooms which abut the other side of the wall. These appear to be part of the c. 1900 construction of the New College, so it is probable that the opportunity was taken to install the heated wall at the same time.



**Illus 99 Pipe-work of heated peach wall**

### *Meat House*

A small brick building 6.4 x 4.1m externally is built into the NE corner of the formal garden, with entry through a door to the N and windows to the E. Internally it is lined with concrete with a metal roof ventilator and bars across the ceiling. It is thought to have been used for meat storage. It appears to date to after 1900. It would have been easily accessible from the New College kitchens and well shaded by the old college buildings.

### *Bee boles*

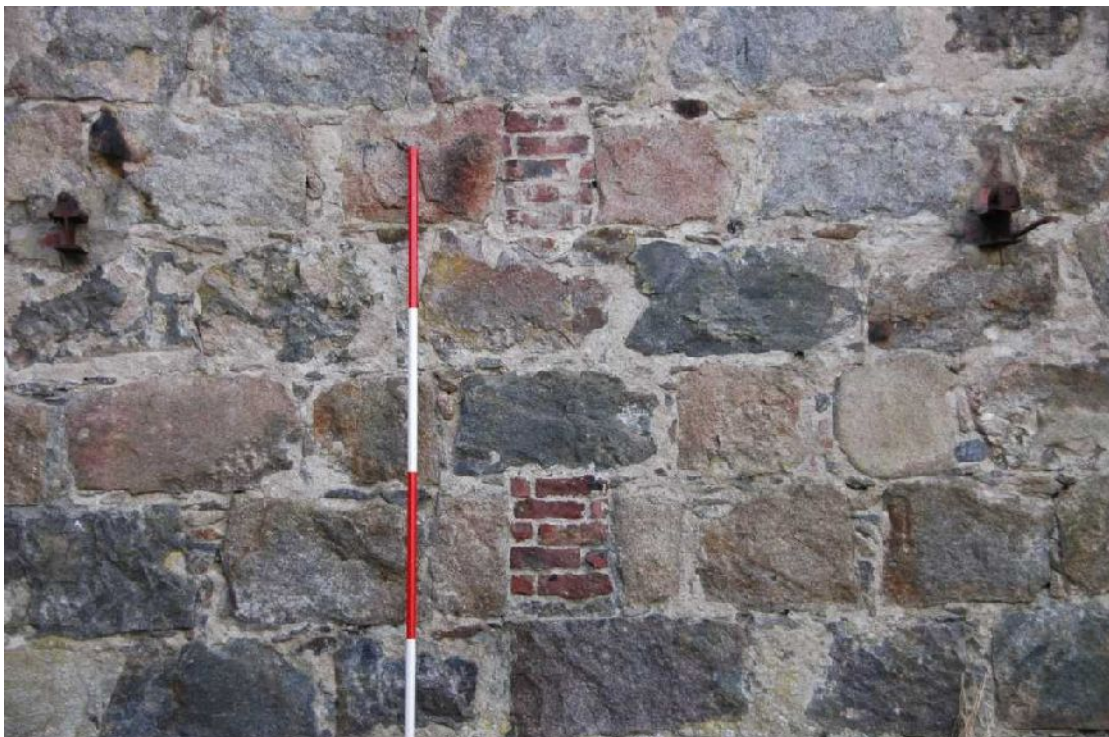
The N face of the outer stone N wall of the formal garden has until recently been used as the back of a series of open sheds/garages which have now been removed. In the face of the wall (Illus 92:11) there are 10 possible bee boles paired above one another along the length of the wall as far as the blocked door (Illus 92: 10). They are c. 410-

420mm x 300-330mm and as far as can be measured are 0.74-0.77m from ground to the base of the lowest bole in each pair and 1.85-1.96m to the base of the upper one, with between 700 and 780mm between the boles in each pair and around 7m between each set of two. They are all blocked with old handmade bricks.

These are within the typical size range for bee boles in Scotland (e.g. Walker, 2008). Superficially the odd thing is their location on the opposite side of the wall from the present garden; however as can be seen in Illus 92 they would have been on the S wall of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century garden Garden 1. The early brick blocking suggests they were blocked around the time of the alterations of 1827/29.



**Illus 100** Position of bee boles



**Illus 101** Detail of bee boles



### Shrubbery

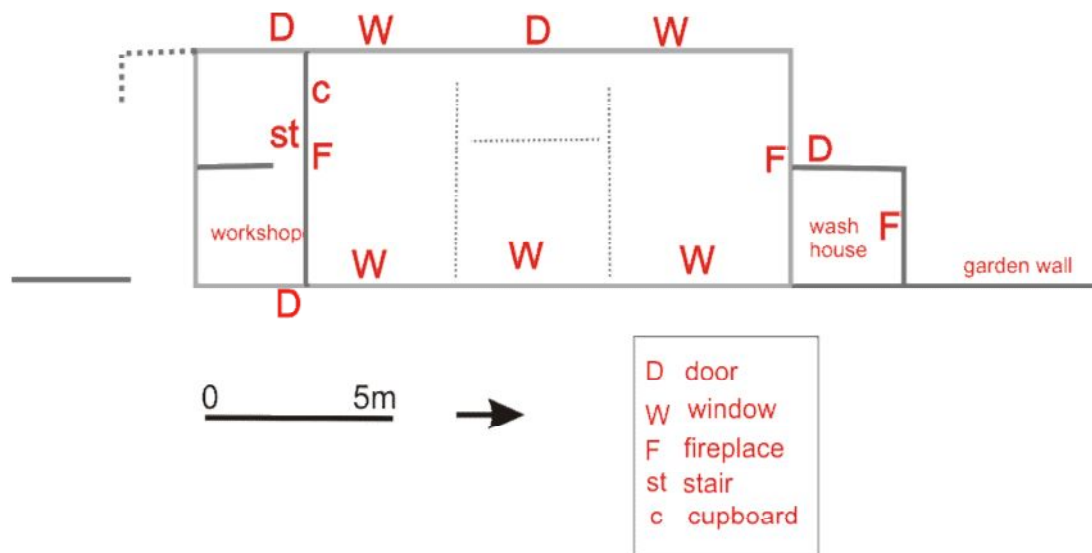
Two small summer houses, one of wood with a lean-to extension, the other of brick are situated in the N end of the shrubbery. A photograph from the front of the New College suggests there may have been something more substantial at some time but it has not been located on the available maps or on the ground (Illus 92: 12 & 13).

### Gardener's Cottage

The Gardener's Cottage lies in the line of the garden wall at the S end of the W wall. It appears on the estate plans from 1830 onwards and may date to 1827-29.

It is 1 ½ stories high and in very derelict condition with a collapsed roof. The walls are of large rubble stone with granite lintels, sills and rybats.

The roof had been slated and chimneys are of stone with same detailing as those on the college buildings. The main area appears to have been divided into three rooms with access to the attic above. To the N there is a workshop with access both from the garden and to the W. This also has access to the attic. A small structure with a fireplace abutting the N gable may have been a wash house.



Illus 102 Sketch plan of Gardener's Cottage



**Illus 103 Gardener's Cottage from E, workshop door on LHS**



**Illus 104 Gardener's Cottage from W with possible wash house in foreground**

### 13 Recreation grounds

#### *Ball-wall*

In 1827-9 a ball wall was constructed at the W side of what had been the early garden (Illus 92: Garden 1). Rev Charles 'Priest' Gordon (1835) in his *Memorial of Blairs* writes, 'I was advised to build in the playground a superb granite wall, for the

*convenience of ball playing looking to the west, while looking to the east there is a covered shed or gallery with two mechanic or working shops adjoining’.*

When the New College was built c. 1900, the ball wall, without the workshops, was rebuilt in the woodland to the W (Illus 92:14).



**Illus 105 c. 1898 The ball wall (LHS) before it was moved showing E side with workshops. Building of first part of New College in background (Blairs Museum 880)**



**Illus 106 Ball wall from the E in its post 1900 position**

### *Pavilion and Playing fields*

The playing field and a pavilion were also built c. 1900 in the field W of the college grounds (Illus 92: 16). The pavilion has a granite wall and a lean-to roof supported on cast iron pillars at the front.

### References

Gordon, Rev Charles 1835 *Memorial of Blairs*. Mss copy. Scottish Catholic Archives, CB 1/3/2.

Walker, P 2008 'Recesses used by traditional beekeepers in Scotland to protect skeps in winter', *Vernacular Buildings* 31, 21-28)