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R11 / 17_180-55
WORCESTER CATHEDRAL

**CATHEDRAL LIBRARY
SECOND MEANS OF ESCAPE**

**PROPOSED WORKS TO THE WINDOW
OF THE EAST SLYPE UPPER ROOM
ACCESSED FROM THE ROOF OF
EAST WALK OF CLOISTER**

**ARCHITECTS REPORT TO SUPPORT
A FORMAL APPLICATION TO THE FAC**

ORIGINAL ISSUE DATE:

Project Architect
Camilla Finlay

-

Rev

Checked
CF

Date of Issue
4 December 2025

1.1 Purpose of Report

This report has been prepared for the FAC of Worcester Cathedral.

1.2 Background

Access to the cathedral library and collection is challenging because it is located at triforium level above the South Aisle with a single spiral stair at the west end for access.

It is not known definitively where the books were stored at Worcester Cathedral before the 17C. We have some documentary references to the storage of the collection to the west of the cloisters and in upper rooms over the East Slype but we have no clarity on the scale and nature. Between 1670 and 1862 the collection was in the Chapter House. The current library above the South Aisle came into use in 1866 incorporating the C17 shelving from the Chapter House. In 1867 the Surveyor of the Fabric, Perkins reported to Chapter that they had abandoned a plan to build a new stair to give access to the South Triforium - so many difficulties presented themselves so they agreed to use the ancient turret staircase that we continue to use today. (Refer to David Morrison’s paper in Appendix D)

During the late C20 an emergency escape route was introduced at the east end of the library. This was through a metal casement window onto a metal platform with a fixed ladder to give access to the roof of the Cloisters below. In the event of an emergency it was anticipated ladders would be provided from ground level for escape.

Between 2020 and 2022 two major phases of repair works were carried out to the roofs and windows of the cathedral library, as part of the work the emergency escape route at the east end of the library, by the South Transept was replaced with a new arrangement that had guarding. In addition a second platform and fixed guarded ladder was introduced from the Cloister roof onto the roof of the Toilet Block where anyone escaping over the roof could be reached with a ladder from ground level. It was intended that emergency lighting and a non-slip route over the lead / walkway would be installed to assist with escape. It should be noted that escape to ground is dependant on assistance / support from others at ground level lifting the ladder into place.

The Hereford & Worcester Fire Service require the second means of escape from the library to ground to be viable un-aided by others.

This document proposes an option for delivering an un-aided escape route to ground with minimum change and impact on the medieval fabric - utilising (where feasible) the routes and equipment in place.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Report

1.2 Background

2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 Text Provided by Kate Andrew and selected photos

2.2 Drawings of the Cathedral, with library highlighted

2.3 Selected photos of the library - before works

2.4 Selected photos of current escape route

3.0 PROPOSED MEANS OF ESCAPE

3.1 Proposal of Approval - Introduction

3.2 Existing Slype Window

3.3 Precedent of Window Works

APPENDIX A

Statement of Support and Significance

by Cathedral Archaeologist

APPENDIX B

Cathedral Architects Drawings

for FAC Approval

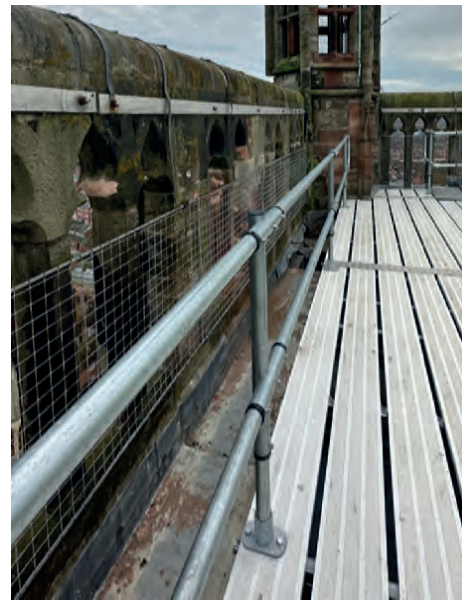
APPENDIX C

Feasibility Study - Strategic Options

APPENDIX D

The Locations of the Worcester Cathedral Library

by David Morrison



2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 Text provided by Kate Andrew, Clerk of Work

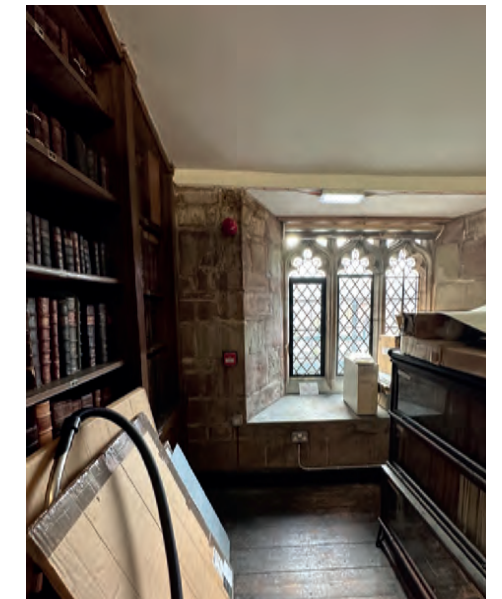
In July 2024, H&W Fire Service expressed concerns about the means of escape from the library. Following the review of our updated Fire Risk Assessment and an accepted calculation of safe distance of travel, in September 2024, the Fire Service agreed that group visits could be undertaken in the library, provided that visitors do not progress beyond the second bay of shelving.

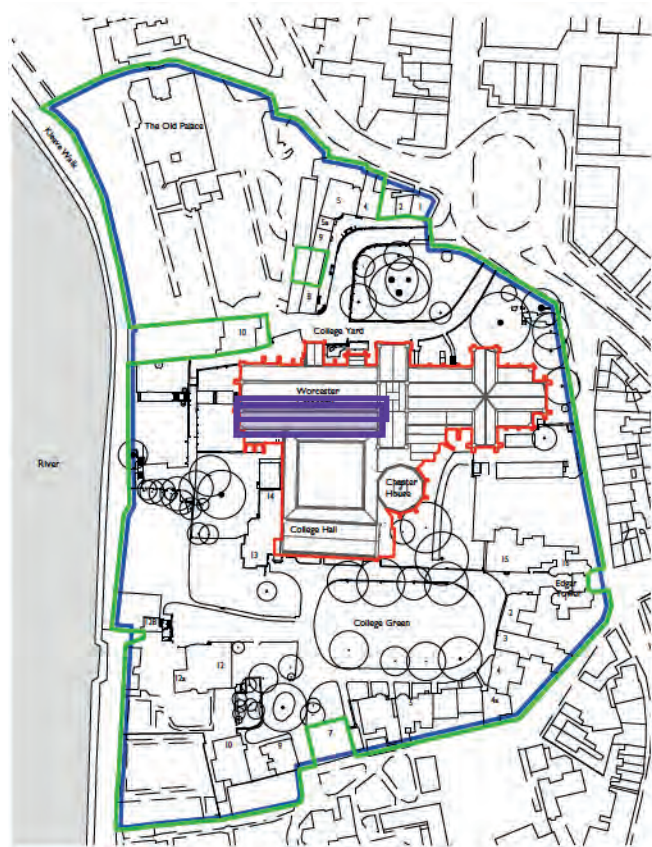
Despite the creation of personal evacuation plans for library staff and volunteers, restriction of working only in Cathedral open hours and head torches being available at the exit in case of poor light conditions. Since the final exit from the toilet roof to ground level requires assistance this solution and that of a ladder stored in a locked container on the side of the toilet building were both ruled out by the Fire Service. They require a route requires the ability to escape to ground un-aided. An escape route into the cloister garth was suggested by the Fire Service.

We then asked Ed Mullen of Lawton Fire Services, our fire risk assessor to visit to investigate possible routes of an un-aided escape to ground level and also obtained a quotation from Universal Access to install a non-slip walkway on the cloister roof (although in the process, it has transpired that the product is only available in white).

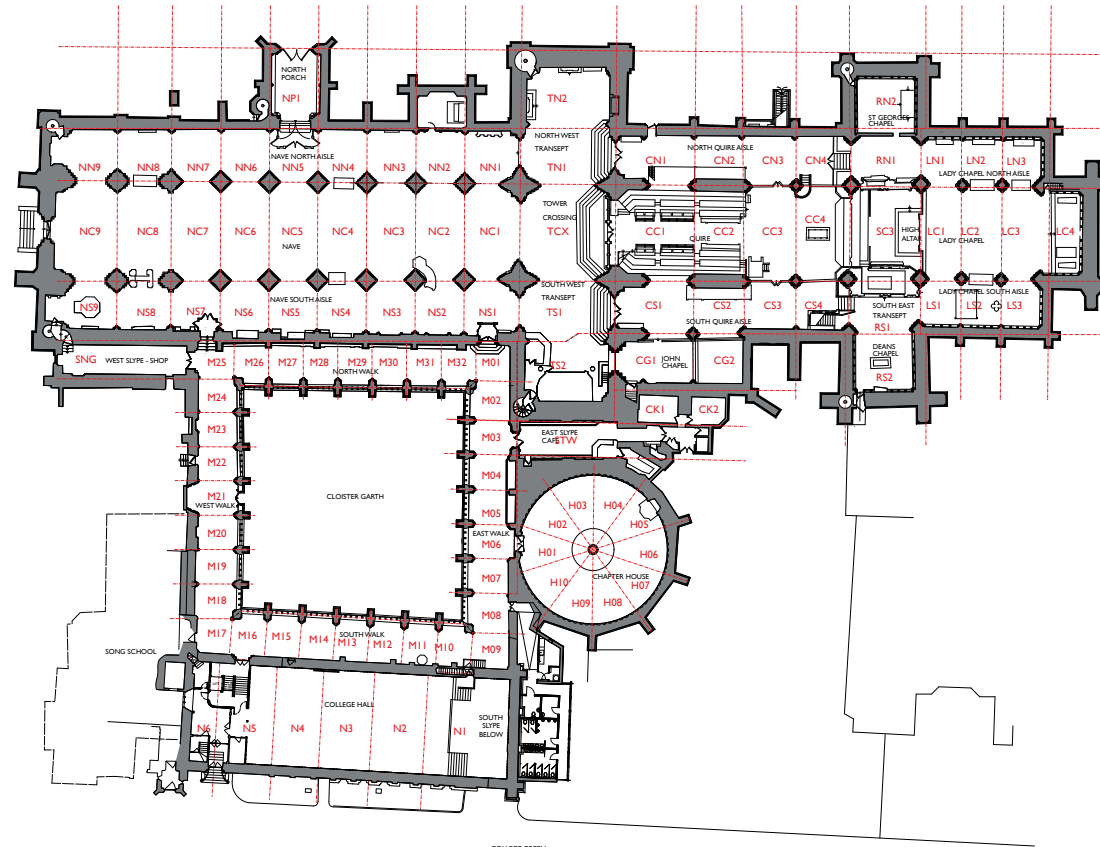
Eight different options for escape routes were discussed with the fire service in July 2025. From this meeting and subsequent discussion, three options have emerged that impact the fabric least, are the most cost effective to implement and satisfy the fire service requirements. One of these options has been agreed on as the best solution and has subsequently drawn up in this report.

Illustrated on this page is the decking installed over the lead roof of the Tower in 2023, it is anticipated a similar system would be installed over the lead of the cloister roof, potentially with a handrail. Below are selected photos of the library space in use, and the escape window at the east end.

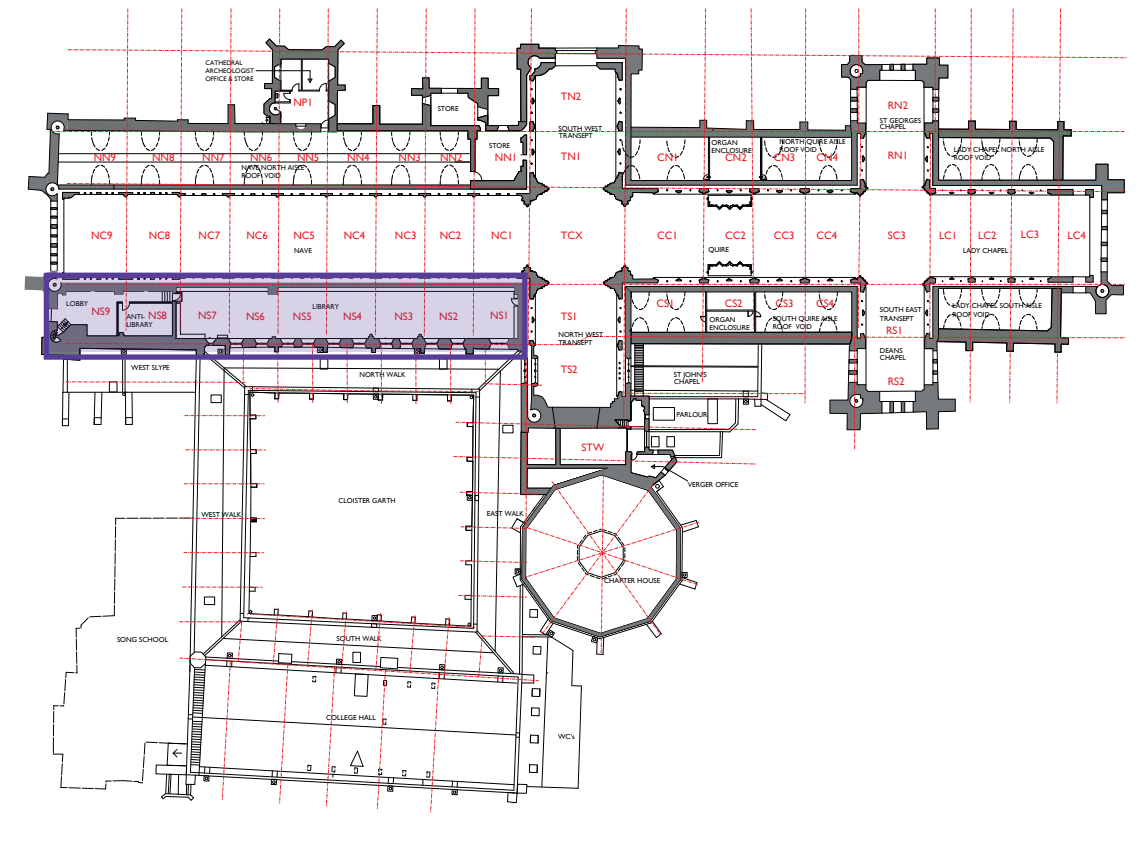




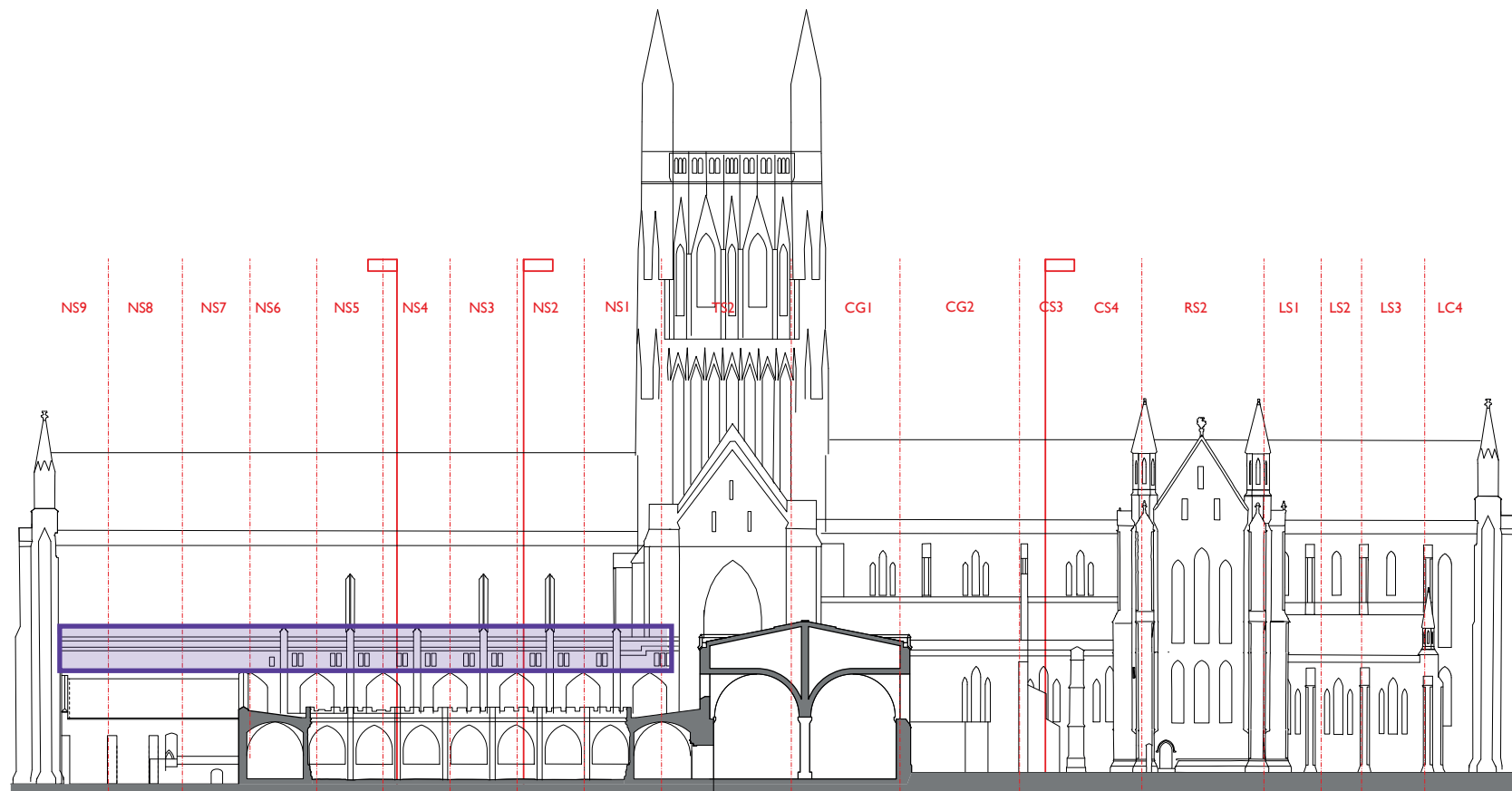
Cathedral Precinct Plan
(Library highlighted in purple)



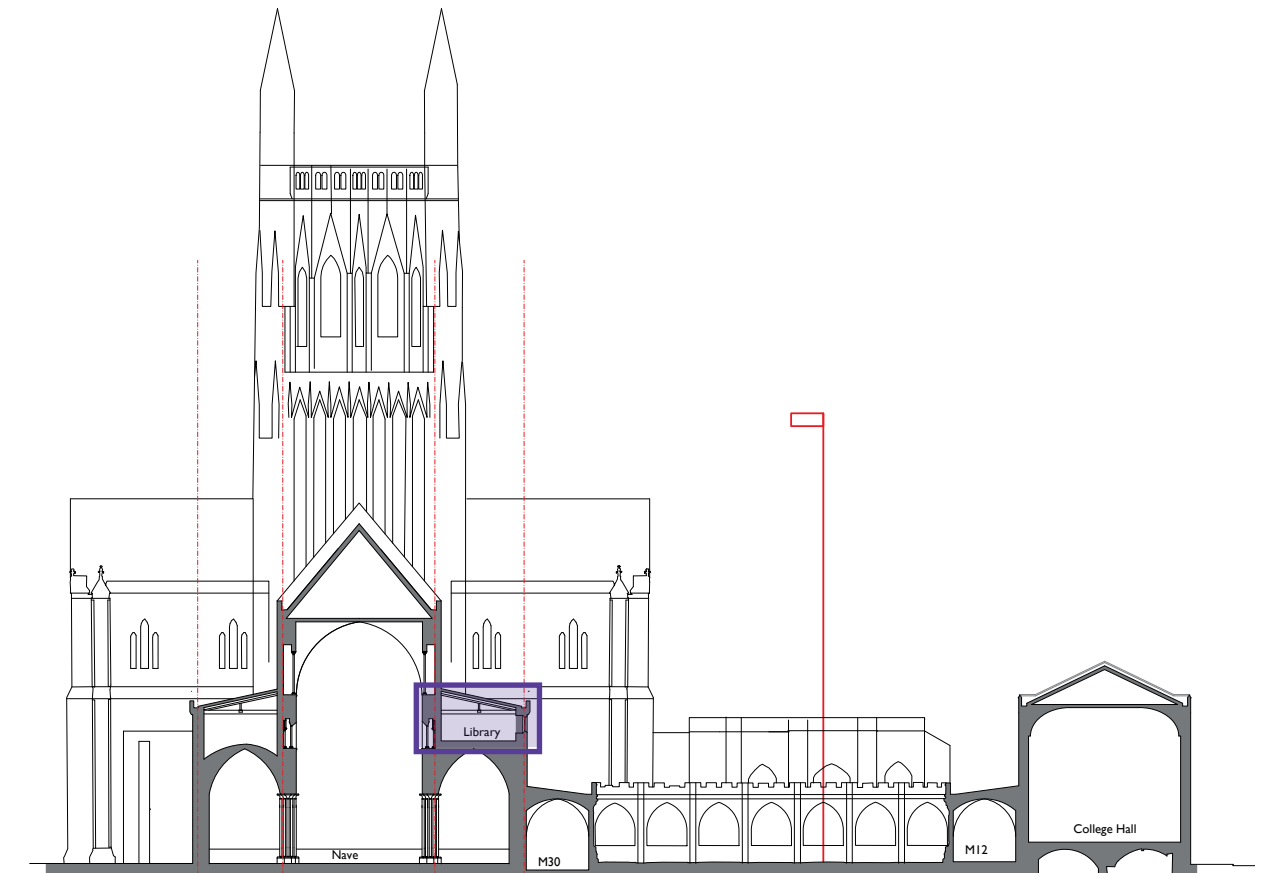
Ground Level Plan



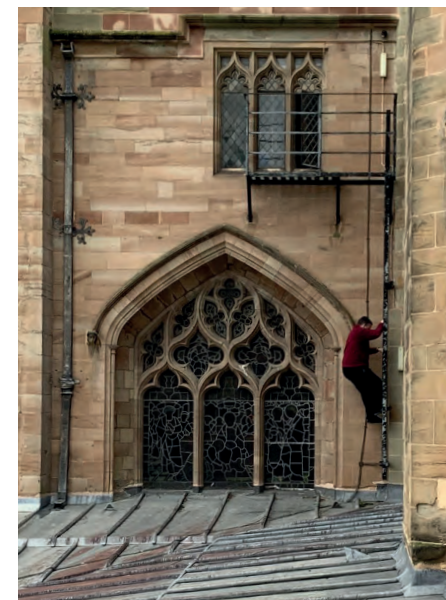
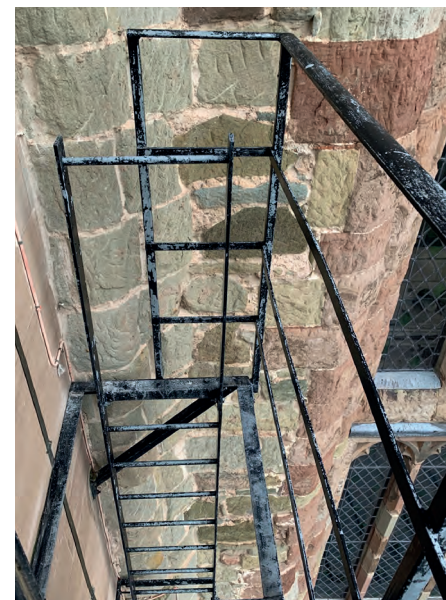
Upper Level Plan
(Library highlighted in purple)



Long section through Cloister, looking at the south walls of the Cathedral
(Library highlighted in purple)



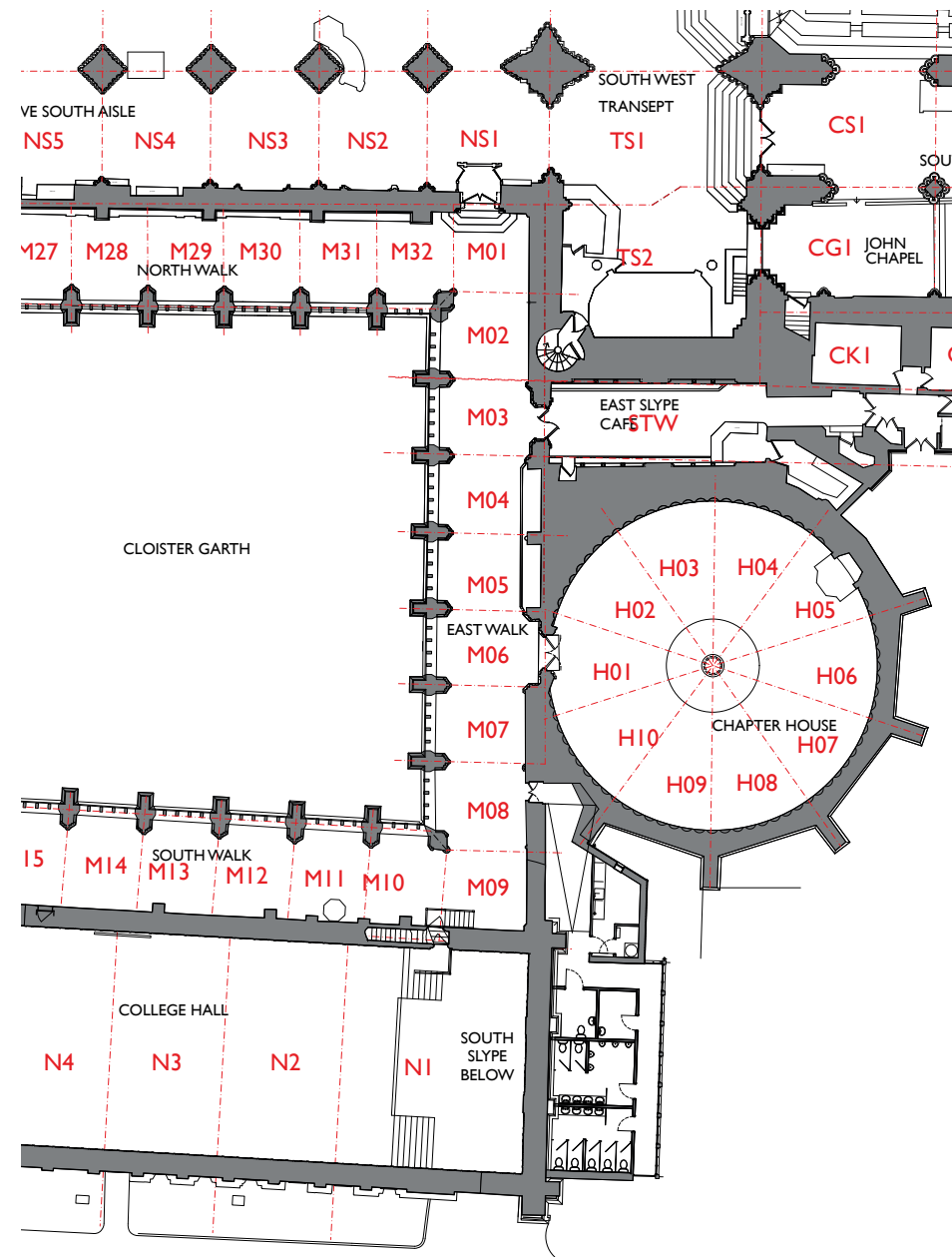
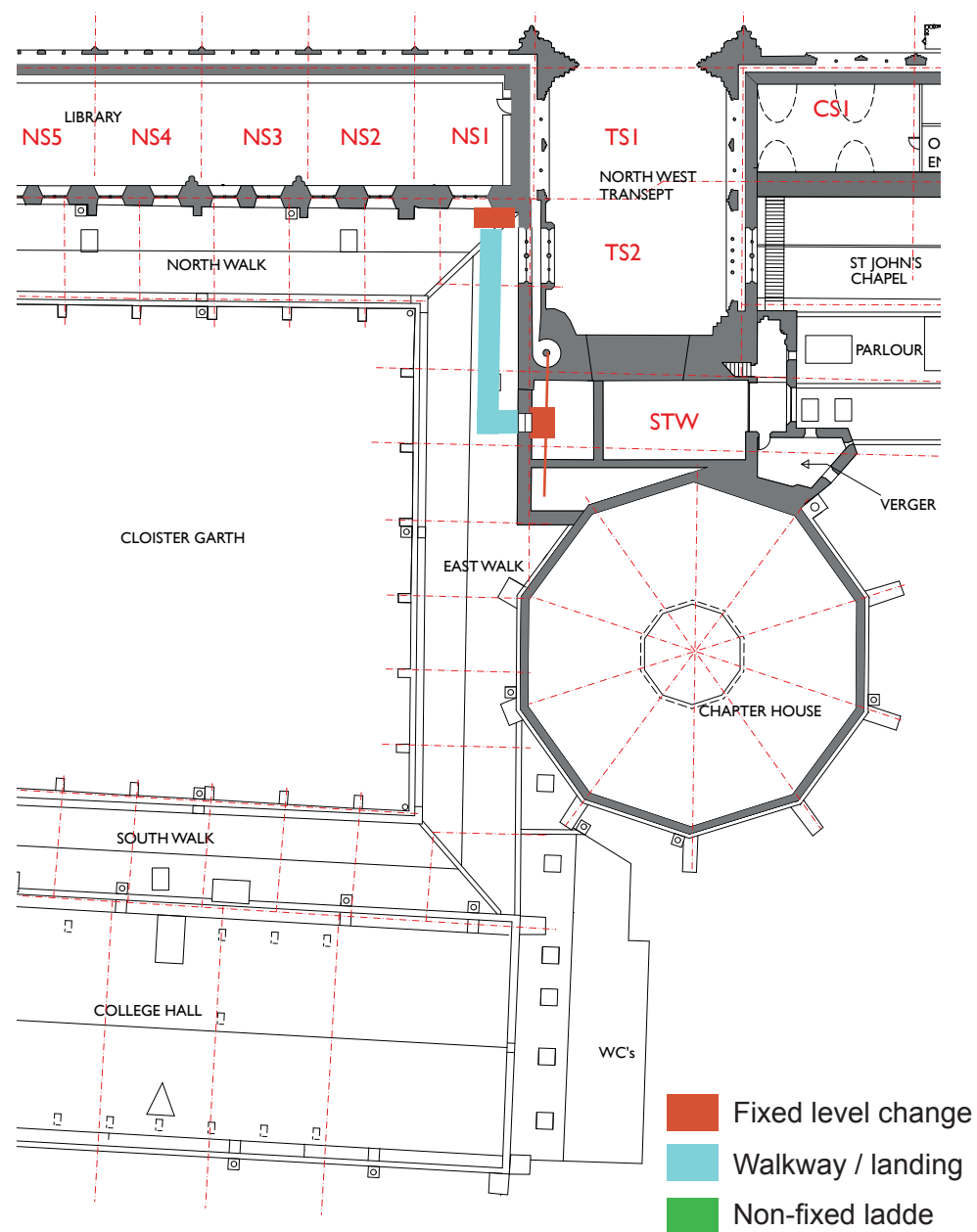
Cross section through Nave and Cloister
(Library highlighted in purple)



And after the roof works ...



CURRENT LIBRARY ESCAPE ROUTE



3.1 Proposal for Approval - Introduction

The window opening into the office will be replaced with a new window to imitate the existing with a false mullion to replace the stone that's being removed. Stone removal will be minimal but necessary for providing a large enough opening. This window is already used as the means to access the cloister roof which will be improved.

A short section of non-slip walkway will be needed along the lead roofing of the East Slype, going between the vertical library ladder onto the roof up to the office window. The walkway that will be installed will be similar to the tower roof GRP walkway, that was installed in 2023, with the option of connected guarding where necessary.

The exit route will be via the south transept spiral stairs back into the Cathedral nave, that via the slype stairs would be into the café and then out into the cloister.

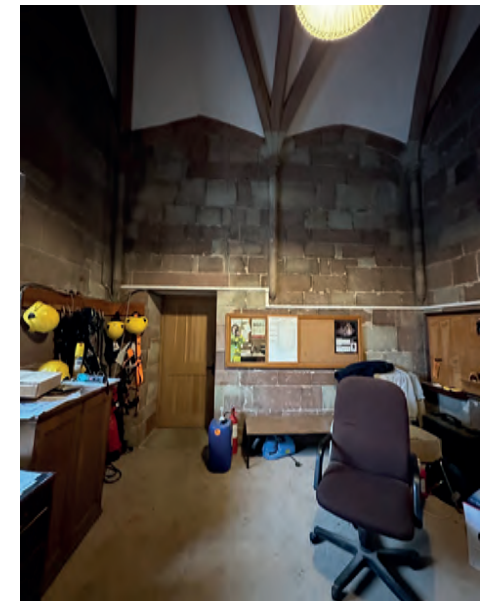
Benefits - secure in terms of not providing a visible access to the library or roofs from ground level that could be accessed by intruders.

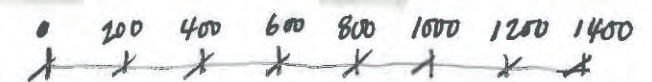
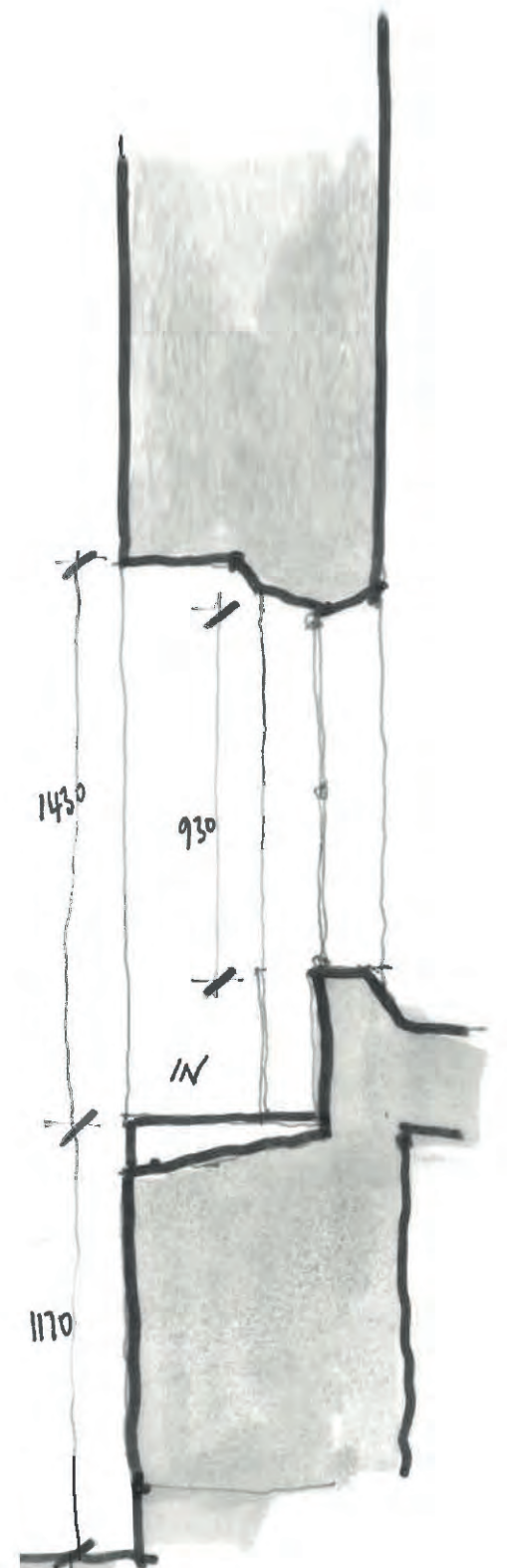
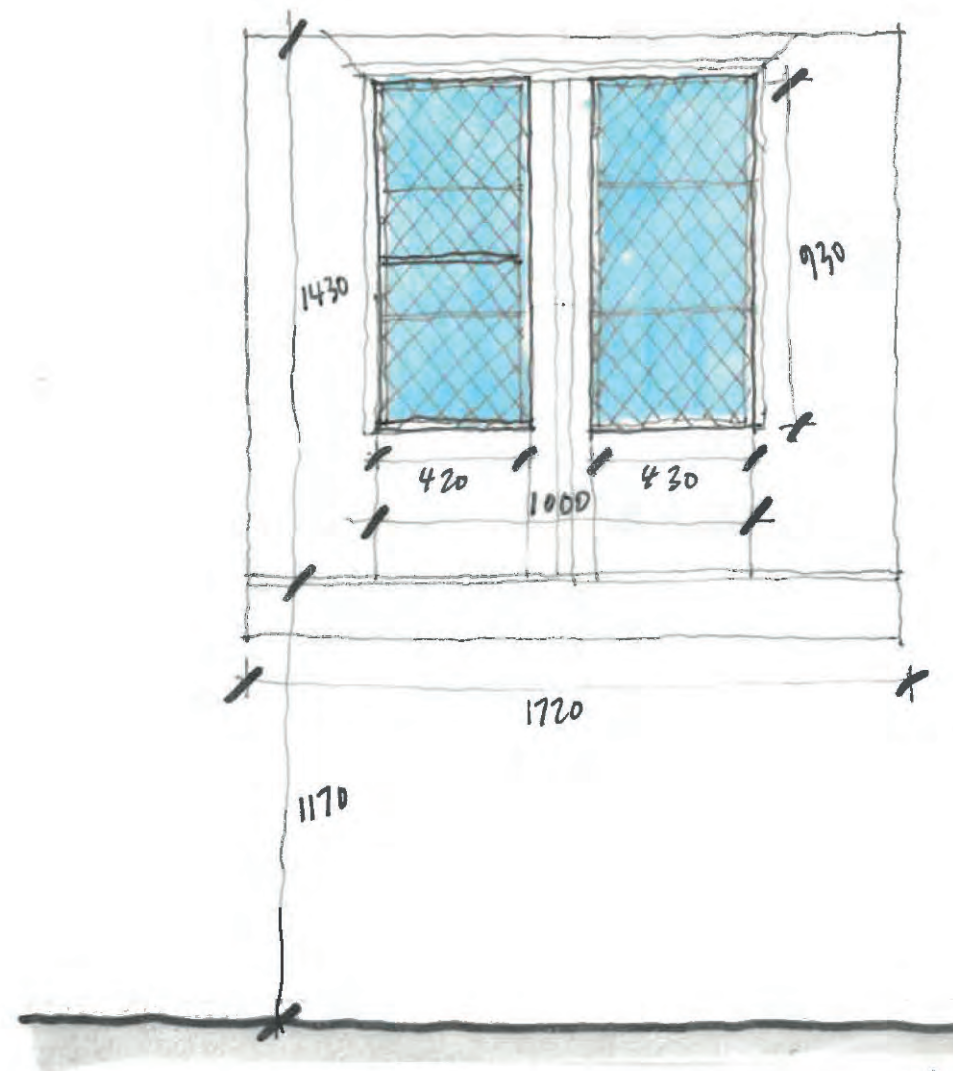
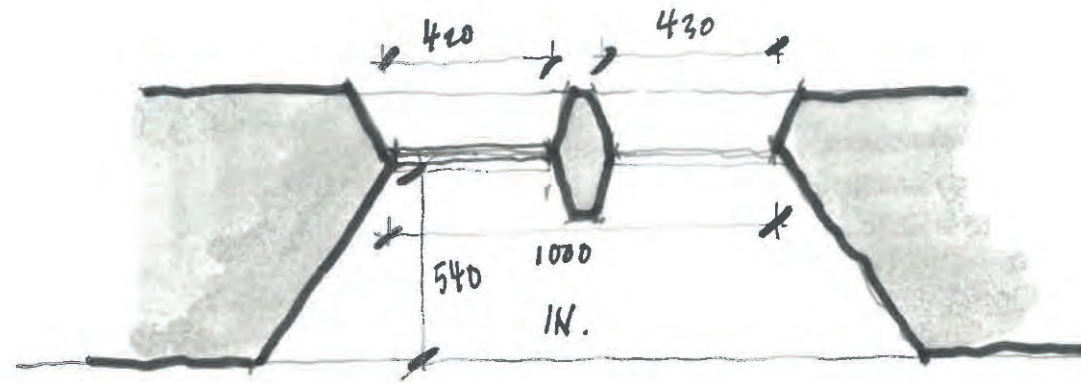
Much shorter length of non-slip walkway required that can wrap close to the building.

Unightly vertical ladder between the cloister and toilet roofs can be removed, thereby reducing the security risk.

Less visible from the cloister garth or any other areas accessed by the public.

Will significantly improve the access onto the cloister roof and roof above the shop for maintenance work.





3.2 EXISTING WINDOW - EAST SLYPE



3.3 Precedent of Works

Example of an amendment to a similar historic window opening designed to have a central mullion and adjusted to provide an effective access route.

This approach illustrated to change has been adopted in the proposals for approval.

APPENDIX A

Statement of Support and Significance -
by Cathedral Archaeologist

Library escape route

Fiona Keith-Lucas, Cathedral Archaeologist, November 2025



1 Introduction

The current secondary fire escape route from Worcester Cathedral Library is in need of improvement for safety reasons. Three options were proposed by the Cathedral Architect (Finlay, 2025, R10 17_180-55 Feasibility Study); discussed with the Cathedral Archaeologist and Fabric Advisory Committee. The proposed route (Option C), given support below, would cause low impact on historic fabric and is thought to be a logical solution providing not only an improved fire escape route, but also better access to the cloister roof for maintenance.

2 Background

The background of the library itself, and of the need for improved egress, are well covered in Finlay's Feasibility Study. In brief summary, the library has been situated above the South Aisle since 1866, accessed via the southwest nave stair turret. A further fire escape exists out of a library window and onto the cloister roof, however the current arrangement requires a ladder to be raised for escape to ground. Renewed advice from Hereford and Worcester Fire Service requires that people can escape to ground unaided. It has therefore become necessary to install an additional fixed ladder or route from the cloister roof to ground level.

3 Existing status

The current secondary escape route from the library passes an office window above the East Slype. This window is also the current access point for any maintenance works to the cloister roofs, and is woefully small for this purpose.



Figure 1: The window opening onto the East Cloister roof

4 Proposal

The proposal is to replace the existing window with an escape window and provide a landing stage with steps within the office so that people can safely access either of the two staircases that serve this office. The design of the window would incorporate a central mullion so that the historical development of the space is still readable.

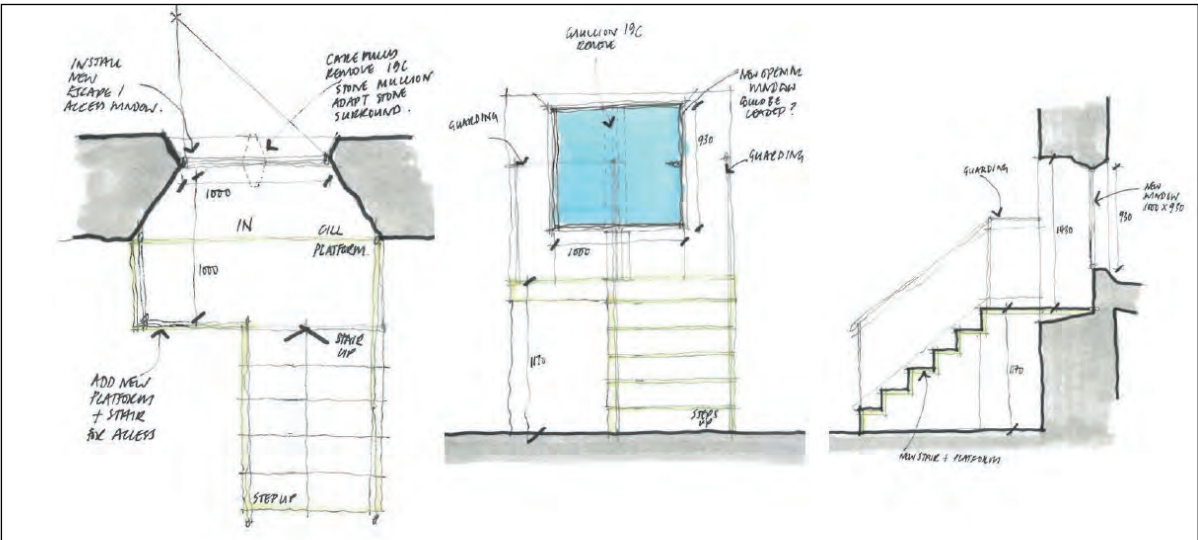


Figure 2: Proposals include a new window [with central mullion] and access steps (Finlay, 2025)

5 Archaeological and historical background

5.1 The Treasury range

The room into which this west-facing window opens ['N' in Figure 3] dates from 1377. It lies above the East Slype, a Norman passage that connected with the outside world for business and may have acted as the monks' Parlour. The room in question is accessed today via a Norman spiral staircase from the South Transept, or via a staircase in [M], but both are recent connections. Its historic communication (which is maintained via a walkway) was with the series of rooms to the east with which it linked via the polygonal space between these chambers and the Chapter House. This suite of rooms was completed in 1377, following the rebuilding of the cloisters c.1372, but preceding the re-facing of the Chapter House 1386-7 (dates from by Dr Hopkins in the late 17th Century, see Willis, 1863a, and Keen, 1978).

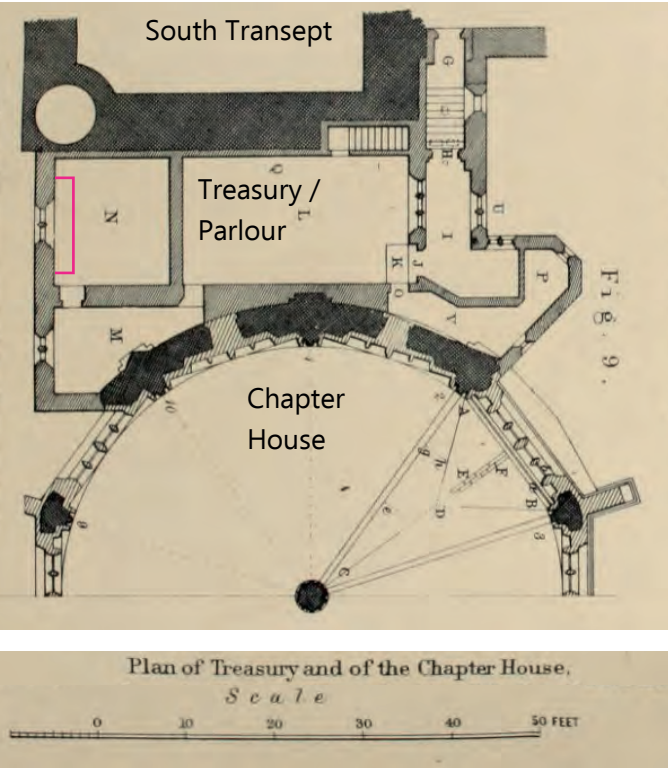


Figure 3: The Treasury and surrounding fabric (black=Norman, grey=C14th). From Willis, 1863b.

These rooms once housed the monastic Treasury, secured at the entrance with a portcullis, machicolation and spyholes (Willis, 1863b). The rooms are still accessed via a series of strong, original, doors from the southwest corner of the John Chapel. The fabric is finely constructed, with simple Perpendicular detailing, sandstone ribs with tufa webs, and a rare encaustic tile pavement (made on Silver St, in Lowesmoor, Worcester; Keen, 2015). The tiles in the western room were recorded in 1858 by O. Jewitt (*cf* Bartoszuc, 2022). They are quite heavily worn now, but form part of the wider pavement described by Keen in 1978 as of exceptional significance.

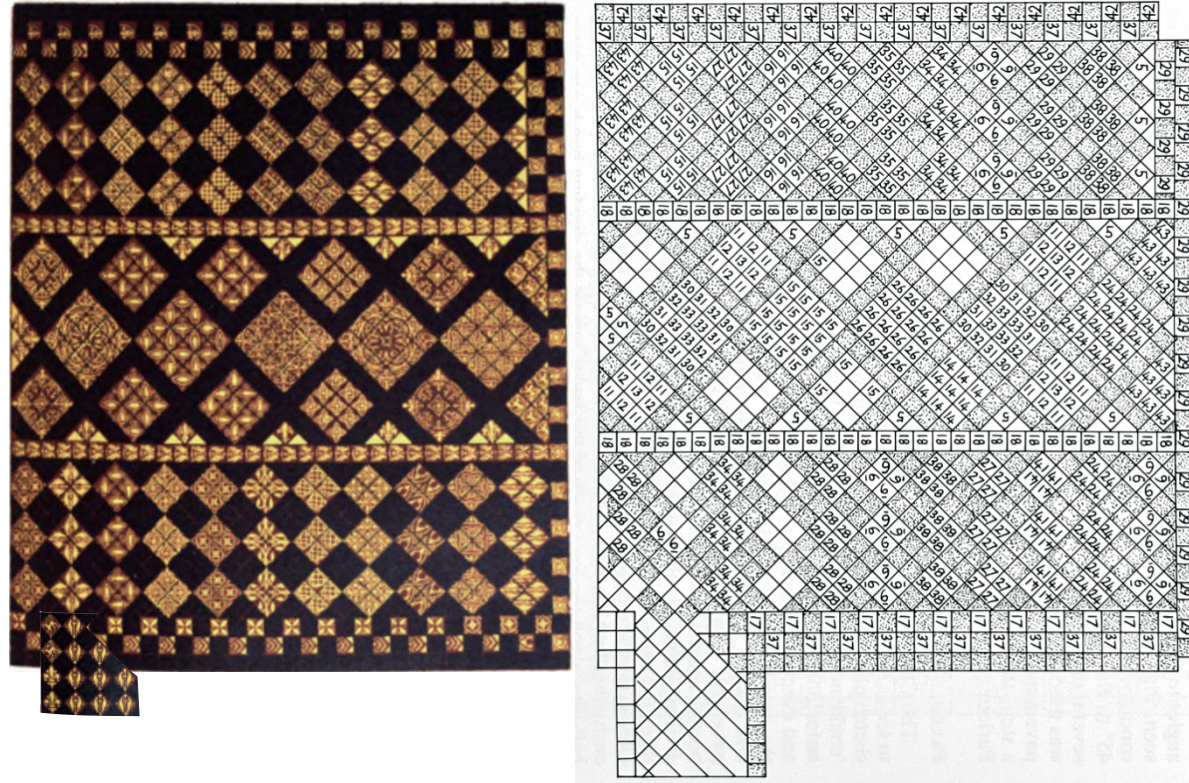


Figure 4: The tile pavement painted by O. Jewitt in 1858, and recorded by L. Keen in 1978.

The large central room is generally referred to as the Parlour today, with "Treasury" reserved for the small abutting rooms, but given the security measures upon entry from the John Chapel, it is clear that this full range was once the Treasury. According to oral tradition, the large central room was used as the Chapter Parlour for monthly Dean and Chapter meetings in the late 19th Century (Beattie *pers. comm.*), hence the current terminology of Parlour (plus perhaps a close association with, and commutation from, the monks' parlour below). Legend also held that these rooms once served as the monks' gaol; a notion that Willis describes as "amusing" (1863a).

5.2 The window

The particular window in question has a wide reveal, a single central mullion, and a broad, flat head; similar to other (mostly east facing) windows in the Treasury, and typical of simple Perpendicular detailing. The window was reglazed in the Victorian period with cast iron frames and leaded lights. Only the southern window pivots; the northern light is fixed. The original masonry was cut back to enable insertion of the window frames, and the mullion was also replaced at this time. The work was tidily executed to minimise the impact on fabric, so original features are preserved close to the Victorian window, such as corresponding pairs of indents which, given the context as the monastic Treasury, probably once held iron bars.

In more recent history, the window has seen external conservation work, so the external surround and an indented mullion section are entirely 20th Century. The window head, internally, is original, but externally has been replaced in very poor stone. The opportunity should be taken to replace this indent as part of the work.



Figure 5: The reveals hold archaeological interest, but are not threatened by the proposed work

5.3 Possible Library

The suggestion of historic ferramenta is worth further consideration in combination with Thomson's research into the origins of the library (Thomson, 2001; and covered by D. Morrison in Finlay, 20025). The location of the original library is unknown, although there is a 19th Century reference to a door from the West Slype connecting to the Old Library "above the Norman passage" (Willis 1863a). There is no evidence for a room having been constructed here, though further investigation would be valuable. Nevertheless, Thomson found "... the cellarer's record of payment in 13676/7 for 2000 roof tiles, for window bars ('repaguli'), and for 1000 'lathenayls' for the domus librarii... a new building, as its completion in 1377 is recorded in the early 16th Century Aedificiarum Chronologia in Register A.12" (Thomson, 2001).

The Treasury rooms are flat roofed to allow light into the South Transept window. The current "Adelaide" window of 1852 replaced an earlier window with corresponding cill height (visible in Britton's 1836 section), but it remains possible that the original configuration of window and/or roof was different and incorporated a volume of roof tiles as purchased in 1377. Again, further investigation would be valuable. It seems compelling to the author that valuable manuscripts would have had their own space within the Treasury, and that there is enough converging evidence to suggest this room as having been the library in 1377. Engel (2007;34) suggests a dual role for the early library and Treasury, and Keen (1978;157) is unequivocal; "the Library was no doubt contained within this suite of rooms"; a view held before the windows bars bought in 1377 had a plausible fixing location.

5.4 The Old Singing School

The Treasury was for a time referred to as “Cromwell’s rooms” due to the legend that Oliver Cromwell used them as his personal chambers (Noake, 1886). Then, in the 18th Century, Prattinton knew this space as the music rooms (ibid). When the floor of the western room was recorded in 1858 (see Figure 4), H. Shaw, noted it as “the old Singing School” (Keen, 1978). The Song School since moved to the other side of the cloister, but this room continued as the lay clerk’s vestry until the 1990s. The full range of rooms is now used as vestry or office space. The Parlour holds the clergy vestry, with vergers’ offices (previously the music library) above. The Old Singing School (in focus here) now holds office space for the service team manager.

6 Impact of proposed works on heritage significance

The proposal for replacing the Victorian mullion and cast iron windows with one opening window is supported. The window reveals hold significant archaeological features that should be recorded in detail and kept in situ, but the indent required for fitting a new window has already been cut out of the 14th Century fabric, and the external face of the surround is entirely 20th Century. There should therefore be no physical impact on significant fabric. If, when it comes to detailed design, it becomes clear that *minimal* additional cutting out is required, this must be clearly specified and agreed with a view to preserving as much fabric and archaeological evidence as possible.

As part of the window replacement, it is suggested that the poor quality 20th Century window head is replaced – an action that will positively affect the historic fabric here.

The suggestion of a central mullion to the new window is welcomed as it serves as a readable feature of how the window would have looked. Also, the internal section of the window head preserves the top of the mullion, so the history of the window will be fully readable.

The character of a new window is unlikely to feel authentic to the space, so in that sense the proposed works would be seen as detrimental to the heritage significance of the space. Nevertheless, balanced against the alternative solutions and the desire to maintain public access to the current, and internationally significant, Cathedral Library, this is seen as a reasonable loss. The proposed design should be as modest as possible to not detract from the feeling of the space.

There will also be the need for a landing stage and steps for safe egress. As discussed above, the medieval tiled pavement here is of exceptional significance. It is currently protected with a carpet. The detailed design of the landing stage and steps must be worked up in consideration of this feature, specifying minimal fixings and maximum protection. Any such structure should also be designed as temporary to not have a detrimental effect on the long term significance of the pavement. A detailed record; photographic and drawn, should be made of the tiled floor before the landing stage is fitted, and ideally to inform its specific design.

Again, the authenticity of the space will be rather compromised by the installation of a landing stage and steps. Nevertheless, if this is a temporary structure, it could be viewed as akin to a desk (which currently occupies this space), and has the advantage of allowing safer and more regular maintenance of the cloister roofs [and, of course, safe egress from the Library].

7 Conclusion

This small room was part of the medieval Treasury and may well have been the location of the Library; newly built with bars at the window in 1377. The room preserves part of a nationally significant tiled pavement which stretches across the whole Treasury.

The proposed works require only minimal (if any) cutting out, so there will be no loss of significant fabric. The installation of the landing stage will be reversible, and the loss of the Victorian window is seen as a reasonable sacrifice to enable the continued use of the Cathedral Library. The only detrimental impact from the proposed works will be to the character of the space, but again, this is minor when viewed against the project aims.

The project also gives the advantage of focussed research, of which this is the start but not the end, and of improved access not only for fire escape, but for high level maintenance work.

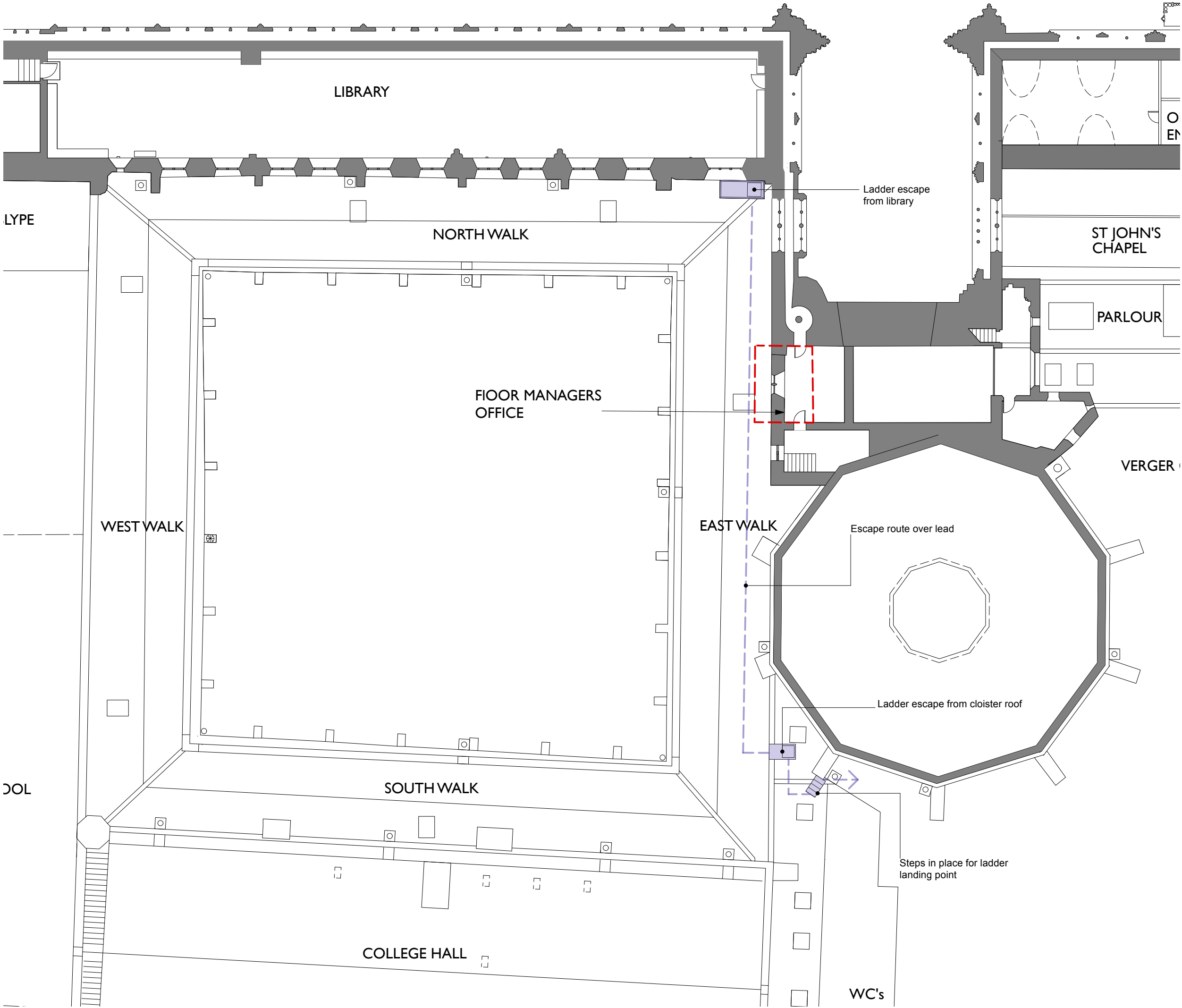
On balance, the scheme is seen as a tidy and welcome solution to improving fire safety, outweighing the slight detrimental impact on character of space.

8 Bibliography

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APPENDIX B

Cathedral Architects Drawings for FAC Approval





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ISSUE STATUS: FOR INFORMATION

Revision Date

KEY

 Existing escape route

 Area of proposed works



0m 4m 10m

Scale Bar

CLIENT
Worcester Cathedral

PROJECT
Library

TITLE
First Floor Plan
Existing

SCALE
1:200 @ A3

DATE
03/12/2025

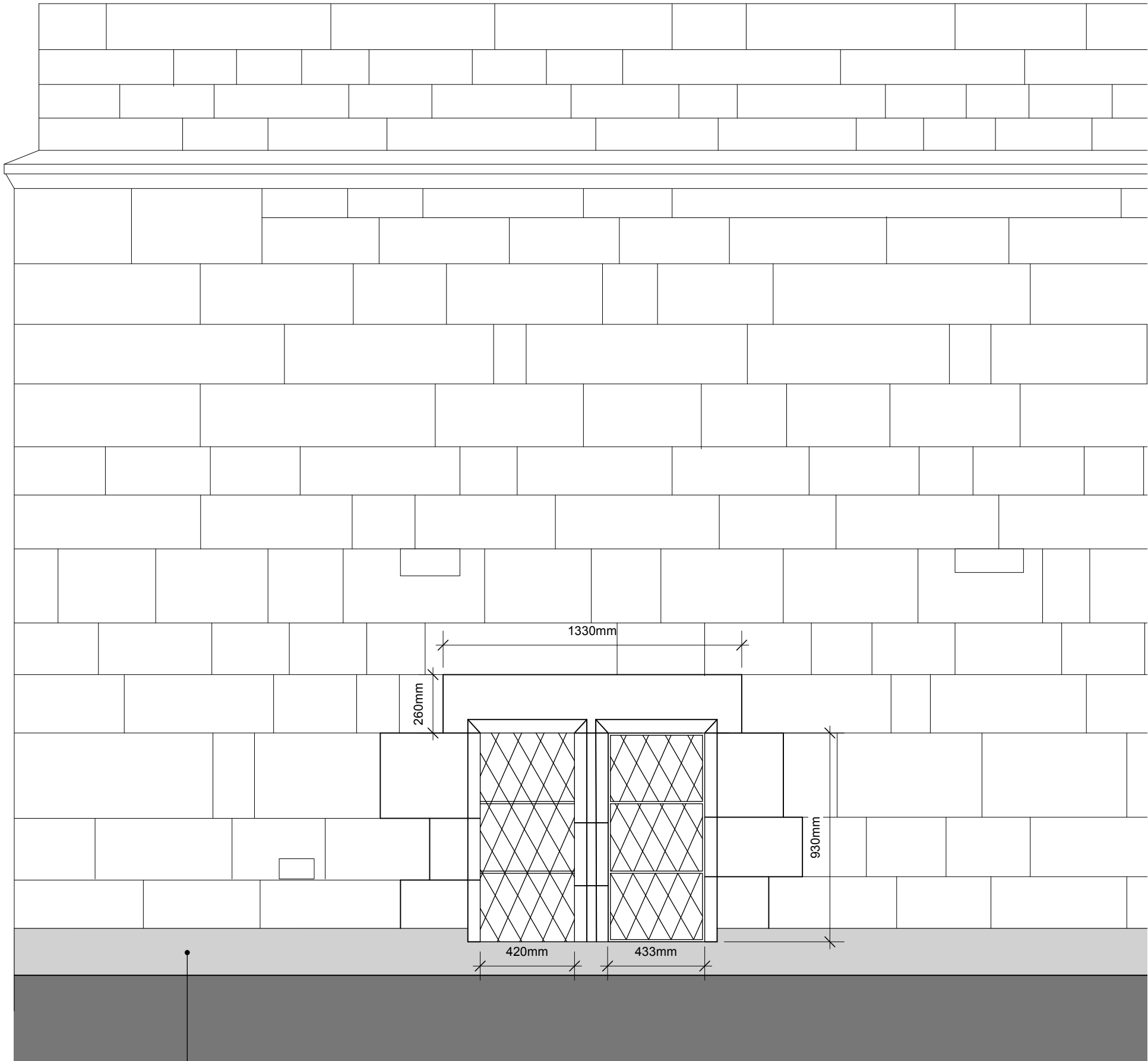
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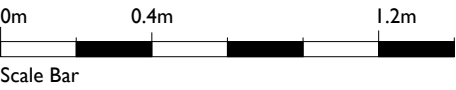
DRAWING N°
107

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01295 702600

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Lead upstand of east
slype roof



CLIENT
Worcester Cathedral

PROJECT
Cathedral Library

TITLE
Existing Window
External Elevation



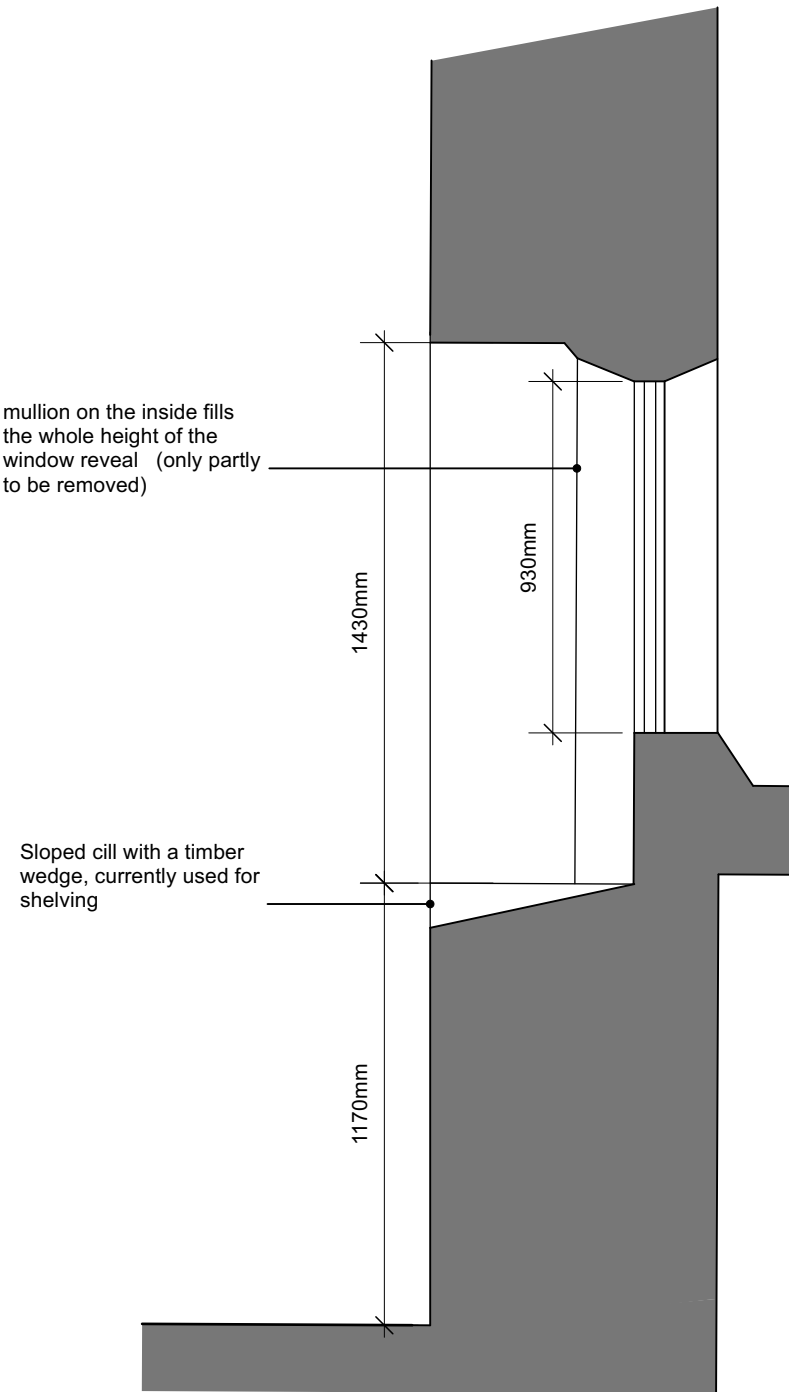
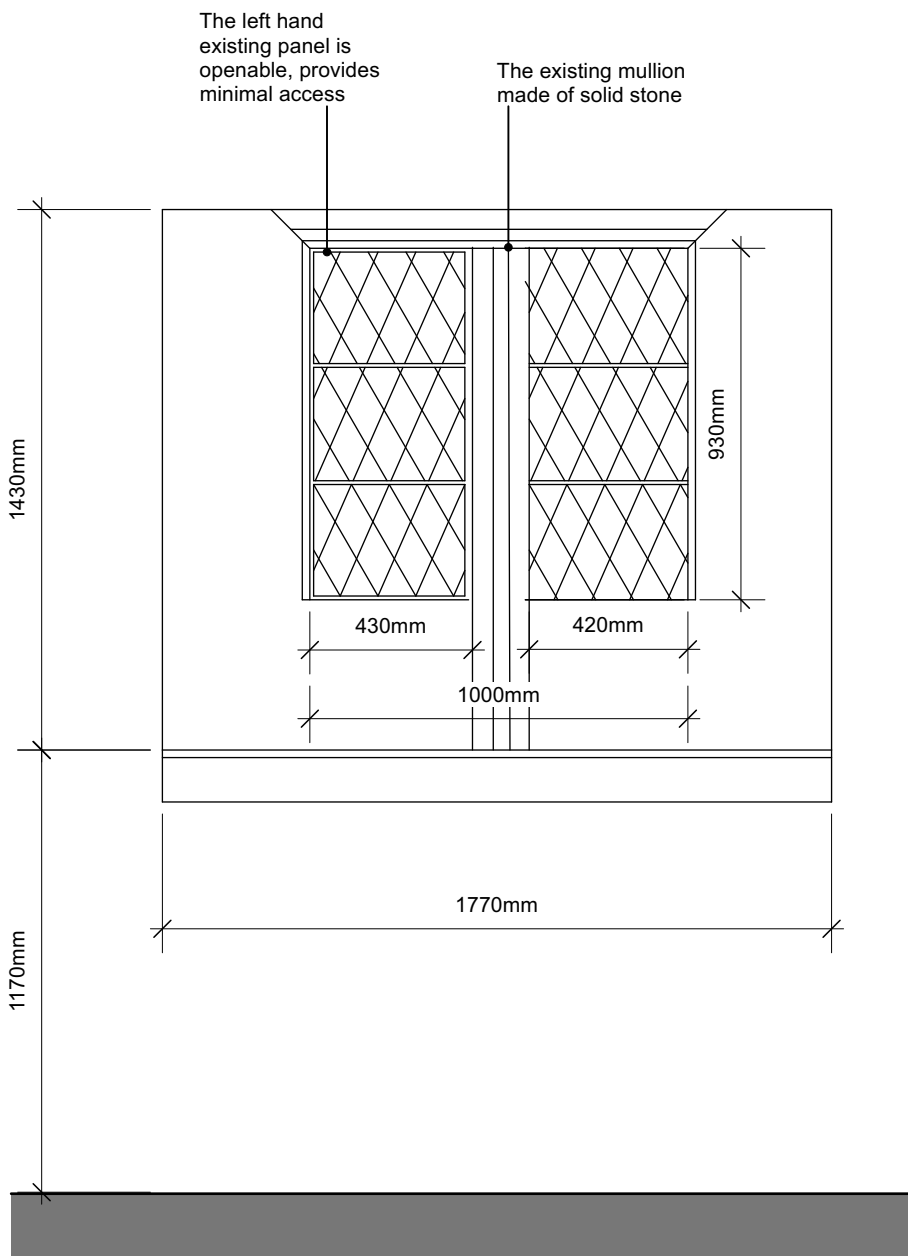
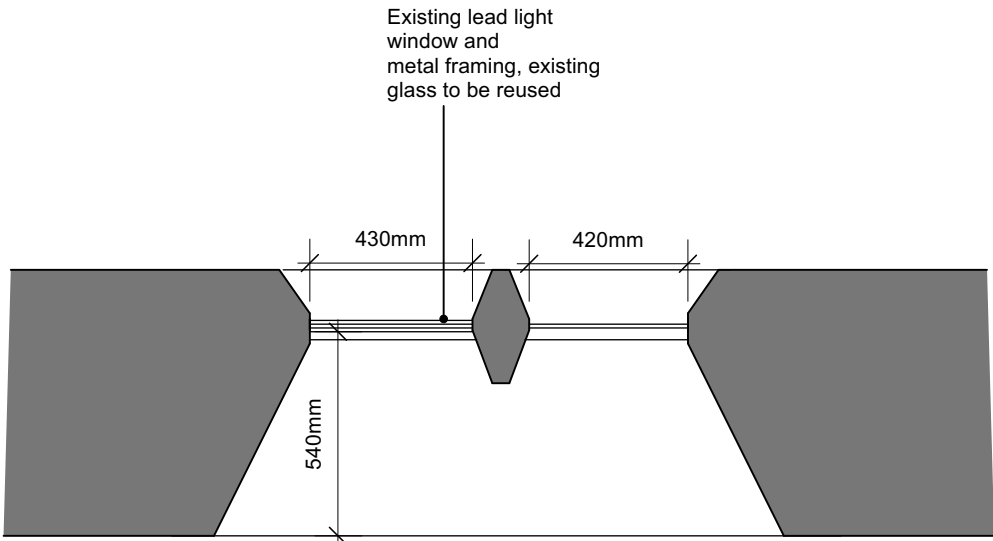
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DATE
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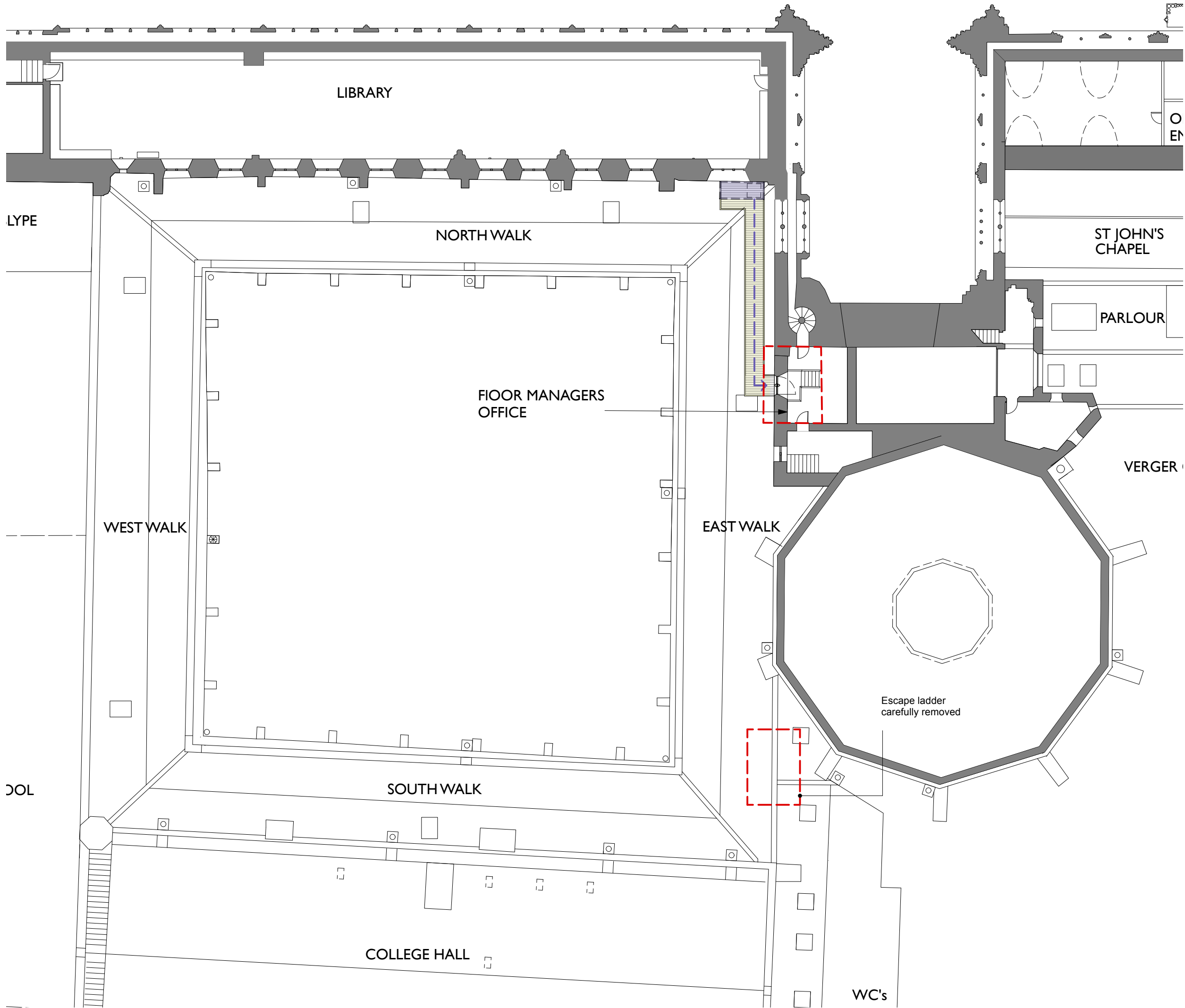
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

EXISTING
1:20 INTERIOR ELEVATION, SECTION AND PLAN

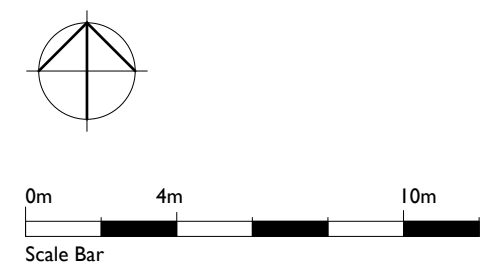



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ISSUE STATUS: FOR INFORMATION

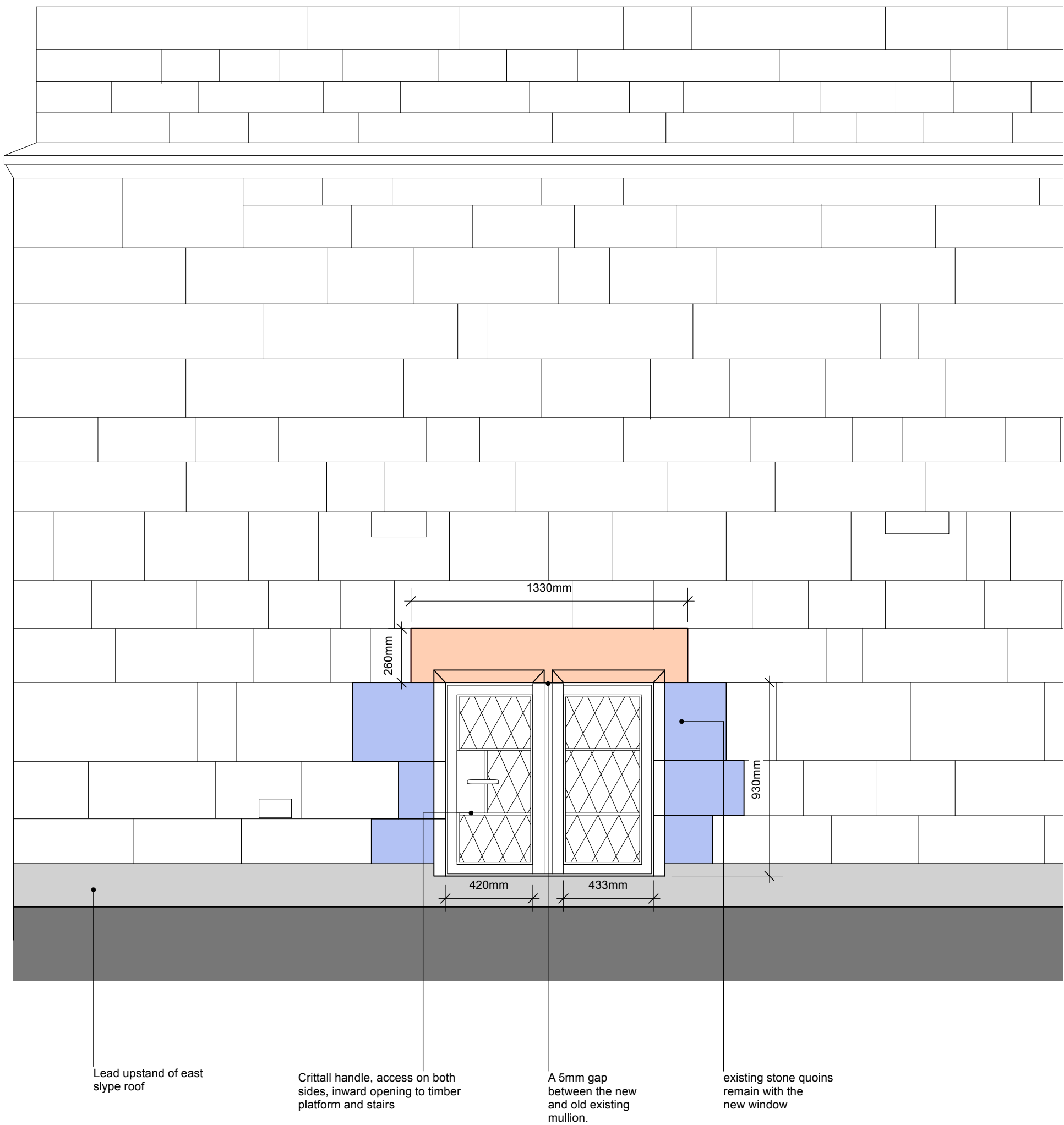
Revision	Date
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- KEY**
-  Existing escape route retained
 -  Walkway deck fixed over lead roofing
 -  Area of proposed works



CLIENT Worcester Cathedral		 CLEWS Architects Acanthus House 57 Hightown Road, Banbury Oxfordshire, OX16 9BE 01295 702600
PROJECT Library		
TITLE First Floor Plan Proposed		
SCALE 1:200 @ A3	DATE 03/12/2025	DRAWN KS
JOB N° 17_180-55	DRAWING N° 221	

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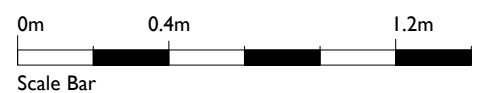


KEY

- To be removed and replaced
- Local mortar repairs and repointing

Demolition

The existing stone mullion is to be carefully dismantled in controlled sections, ensuring no disturbance to adjacent masonry or finishes. Existing leaded glass panels are to be gently removed by a specialist glazier, labelled, and securely stored for reuse or conservation as instructed. All adjoining surfaces are to be protected throughout the works, and any exposed areas made temporarily weather-tight until new installations are completed.



CLIENT
Worcester Cathedral

PROJECT
Cathedral Library

TITLE
Proposed Window Elevation

CLEWS
Architects

Acanthus House
57 Hightown Road, Banbury
Oxfordshire, OX16 9BE
01295 702600

SCALE
1:20 @ A3

DATE
Dec 2025

JOB N°
17_180-55

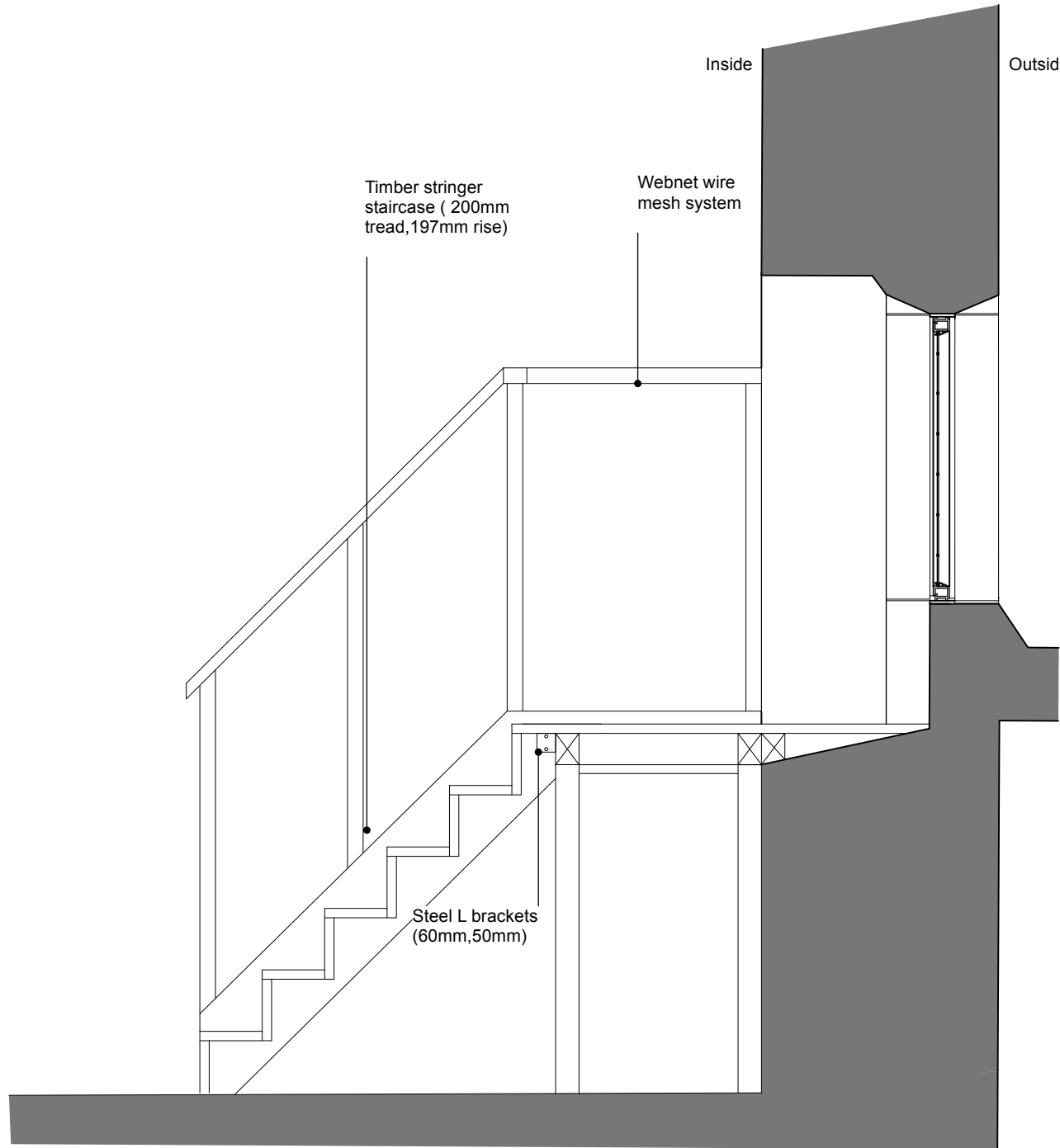
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DRAWING N°
220

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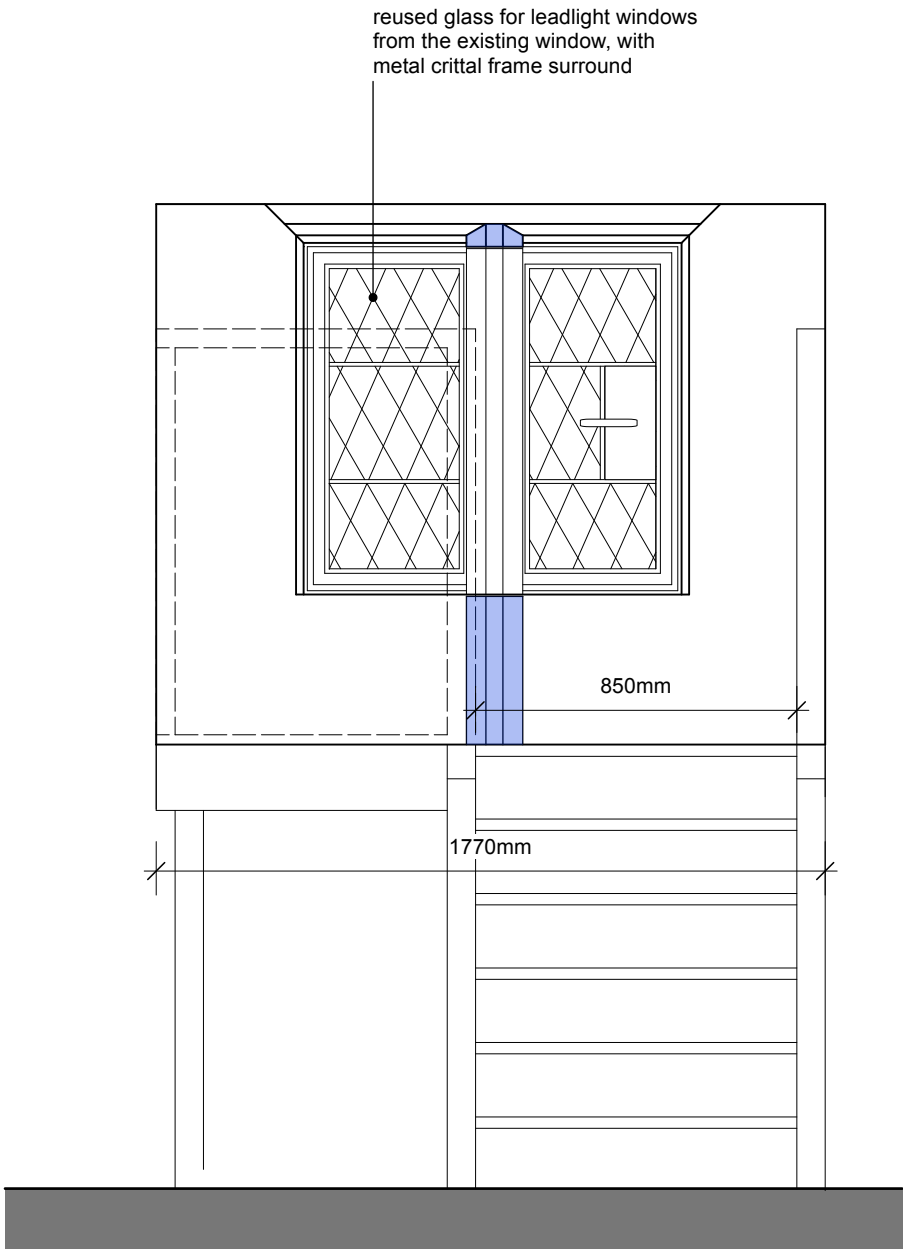
PROPOSED
1:20 EXTERIOR ELEVATION



Staircase and Balustrade

The timber staircase and landing platform are to be constructed in softwood. The balustrade will consist of a timber handrail and posts with a Webnet stainless-steel wire mesh infill system, fixed and tensioned in line with the manufacturer's requirements and finished to the specified standard.

PROPOSED
1:20 SECTION



Crittall W20 Windows

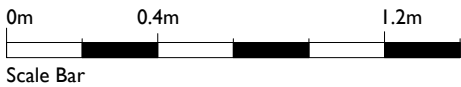
The new windows are to be Crittall W20 window units, to accommodate the reuse and repair of the original glazing for reinstatement into the Crittall frame. Glazing Blocks, supports and saddle bars are to be provided in accordance with manufacturer requirements.


PROPOSED
1:20 INTERIOR ELEVATION

DO NOT SCALE THIS DRAWING USE DIMENSIONS ONLY
VERIFY ALL DIMENSIONS ON SITE BEFORE COMMENCING ANY WORK OR SHOP DRAWINGS
INFORM THE ARCHITECT BEFORE ANY WORK STARTS IF THIS DRAWING EXCEEDS THE QUANTITIES IN ANY WAY
ISSUE STATUS: FOR INFORMATION
Revision Date

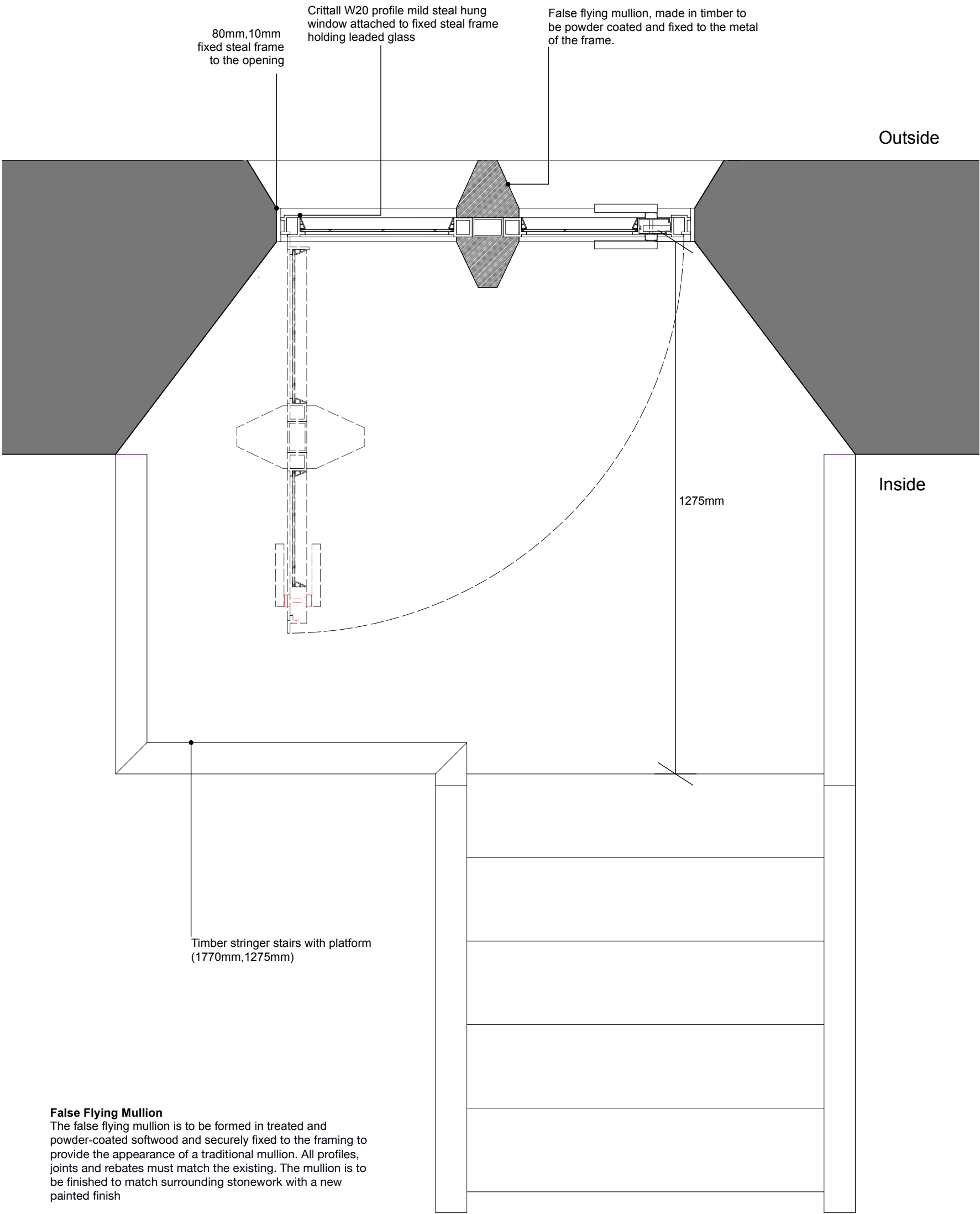
KEY

remaining parts of
stone mullion

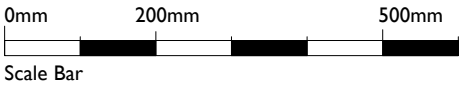


CLIENT Worcester Cathedral		 <p>Acanthus House 57 Hightown Road, Banbury Oxfordshire, OX16 9BE 01295 702600</p>
PROJECT Cathedral Library		
TITLE Proposed Window Section and Elevation		
SCALE 1:20 @ A3	DATE Dec 2025	
JOB N° 17_180-55	DRAWING N° 219	

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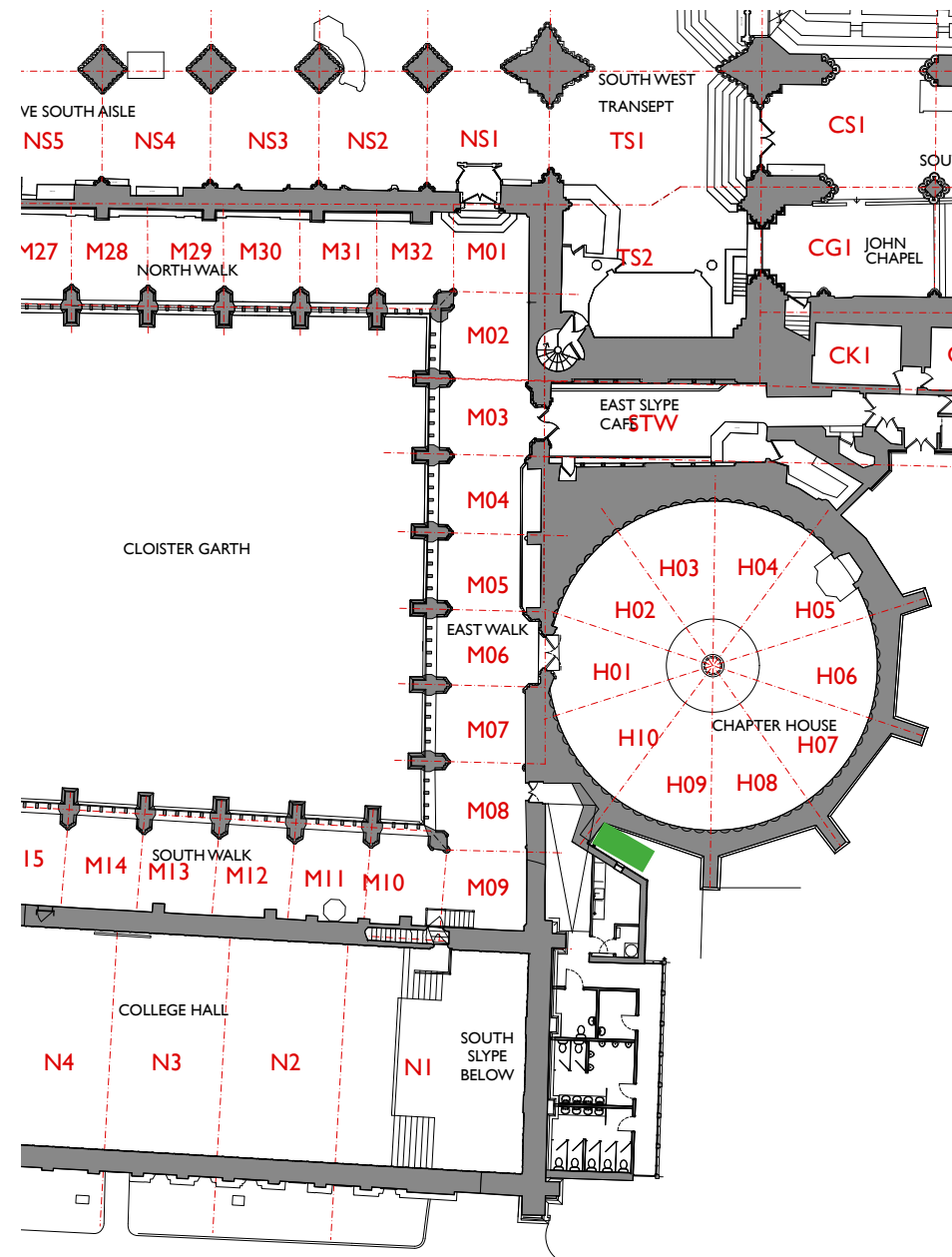
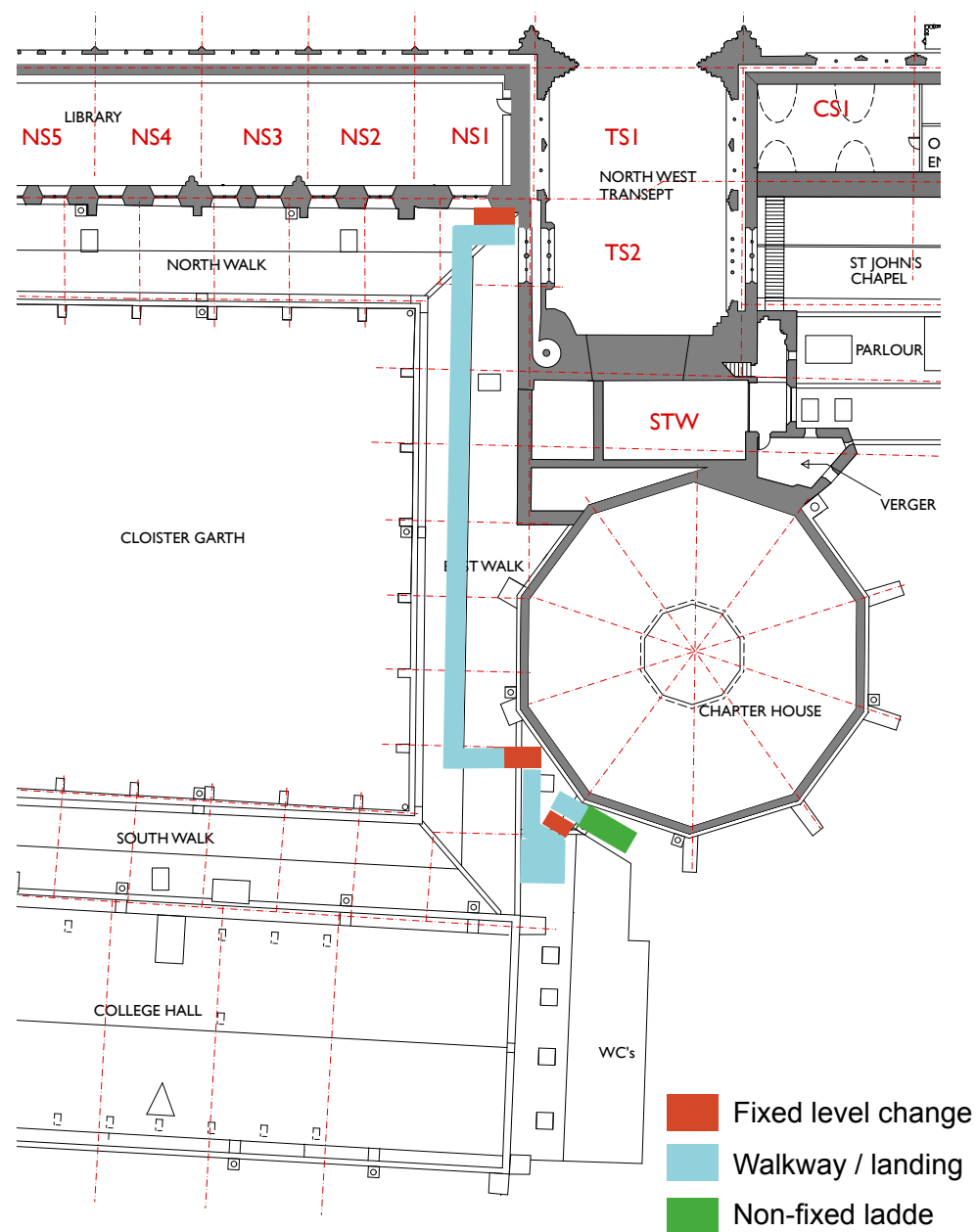
False Flying Mullion
The false flying mullion is to be formed in treated and powder-coated softwood and securely fixed to the framing to provide the appearance of a traditional mullion. All profiles, joints and rebates must match the existing. The mullion is to be finished to match surrounding stonework with a new painted finish



PROPOSED
1:10 PLAN

APPENDIX C

Feasibility Study - Strategic Options (Extract from Report R10 17_180-55)



Option A - Exit via toilet roof via new walkway and existing ladders and a fixed ladder to ground inside a new locked enclosure on the toilet block with a push-bar exit door

Non-slip walkway required for entire route with safety lighting and ideally a handrail.

Fixed ladder to ground from toilet roof.

Enclosure around the fixed ladder with a push-bar exit to the door .

Benefit – an extension of the escape route already in place that allows independent exit to ground.

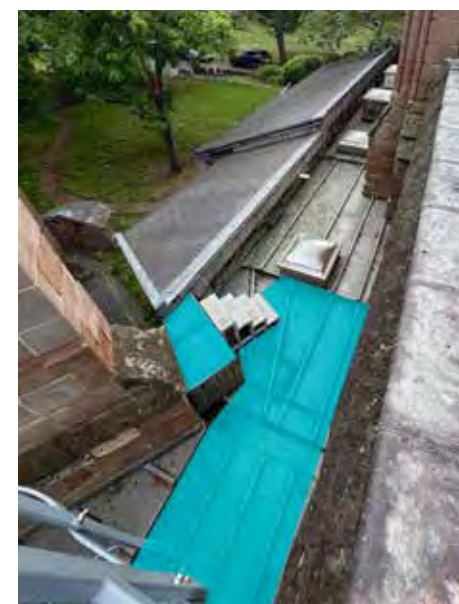
Drawbacks – substantial length of unsightly non-slip walkway needed (metal options very expensive, cheaper UPVC still around £20,000 only available in white).

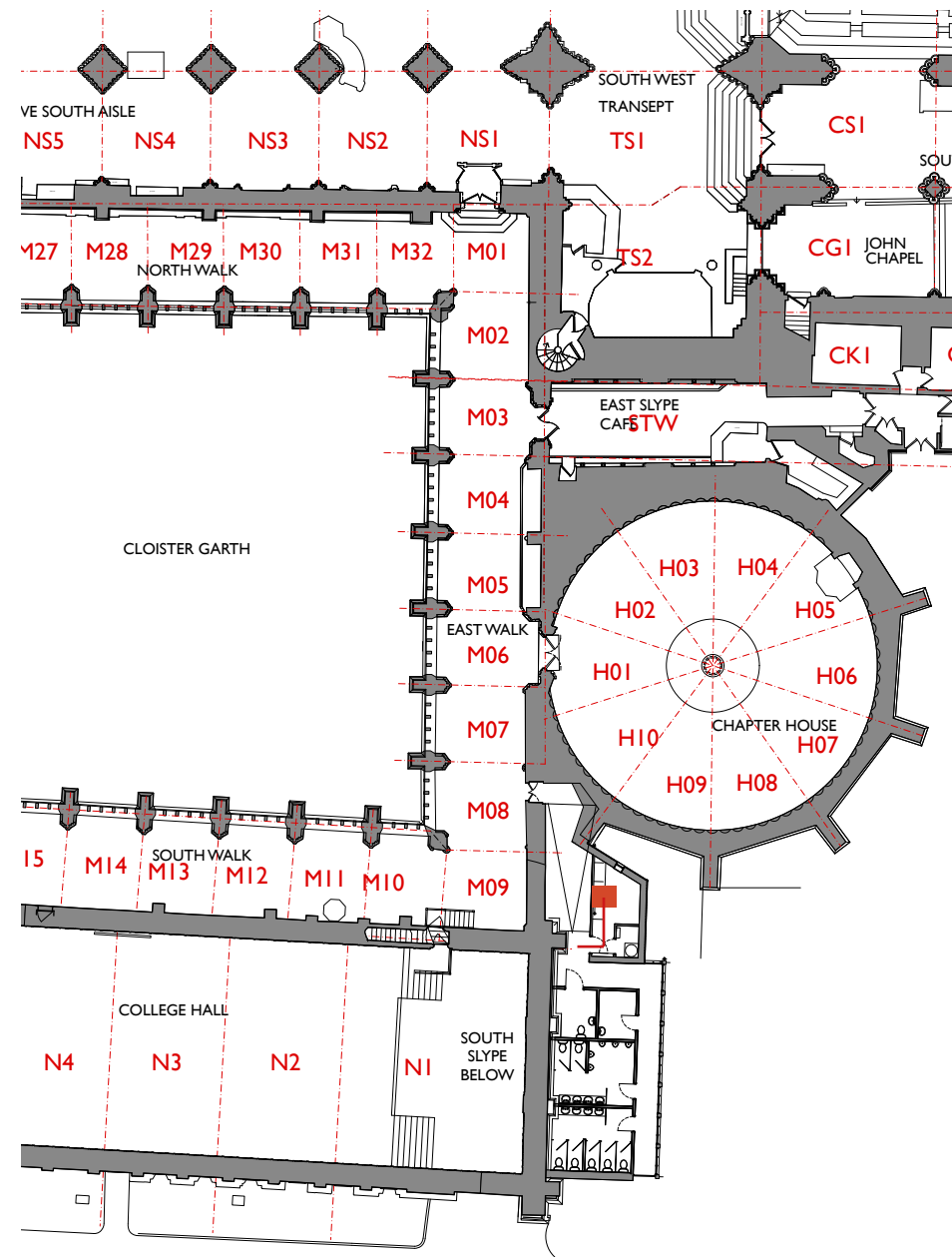
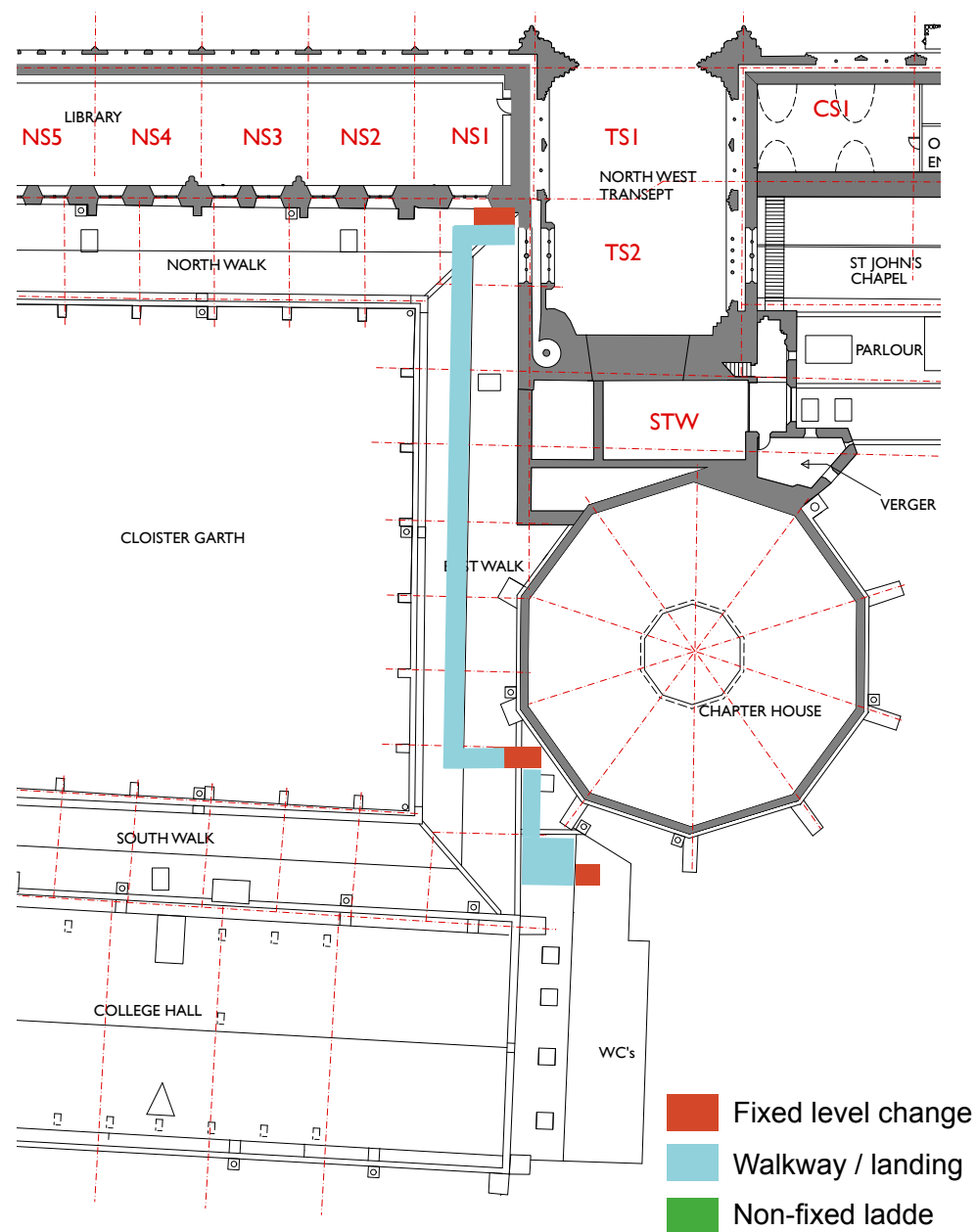
Complex route, with many complex level changes.

Walkway visible from the garth and possibly from the garden area by the Guesten ruins, final exit ladder enclosure and handrails visible from College Green.

Lighting of walkway and the handrail highlights its unsightly presence even further, causes disturbance to bats.

Door at ground level vulnerable and creates a security risk of illicit access to large parts of the cathedral roof and elevations.





Option B - Exit as far as the toilet roof via new walkway and existing ladders and then re-entry into the flower room via a fixed guarded ladder and then via the cloister and south slype or toilet fire exit to exterior .

Non-slip walkway required for entire route with safety lighting and ideally a handrail.

New opening in flower room roof

Fixed guarded ladder to ground level inside the flower room

Benefits – an extension of the escape route already in place but with a secure enclosed final route to ground with a managed space.

Drawbacks – substantial length of unsightly non-slip walkway needed (metal options very expensive, cheaper UPVC still around £20,000 only available in white).

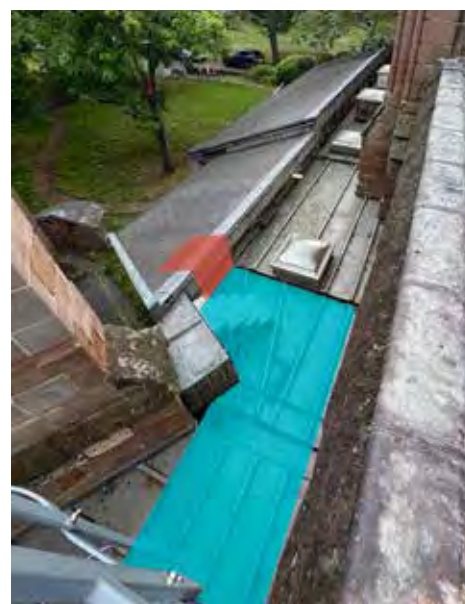
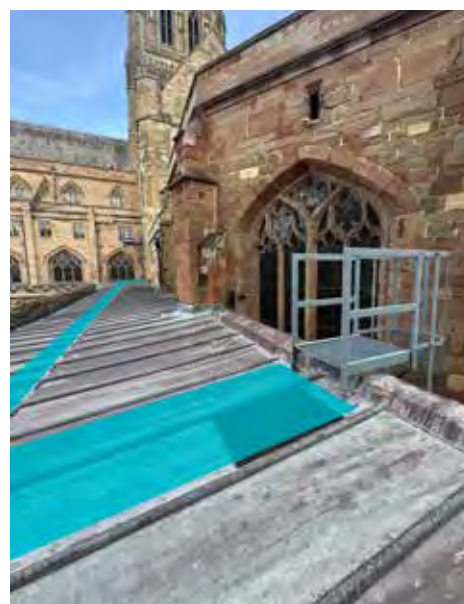
Complex route, with many complex level changes.

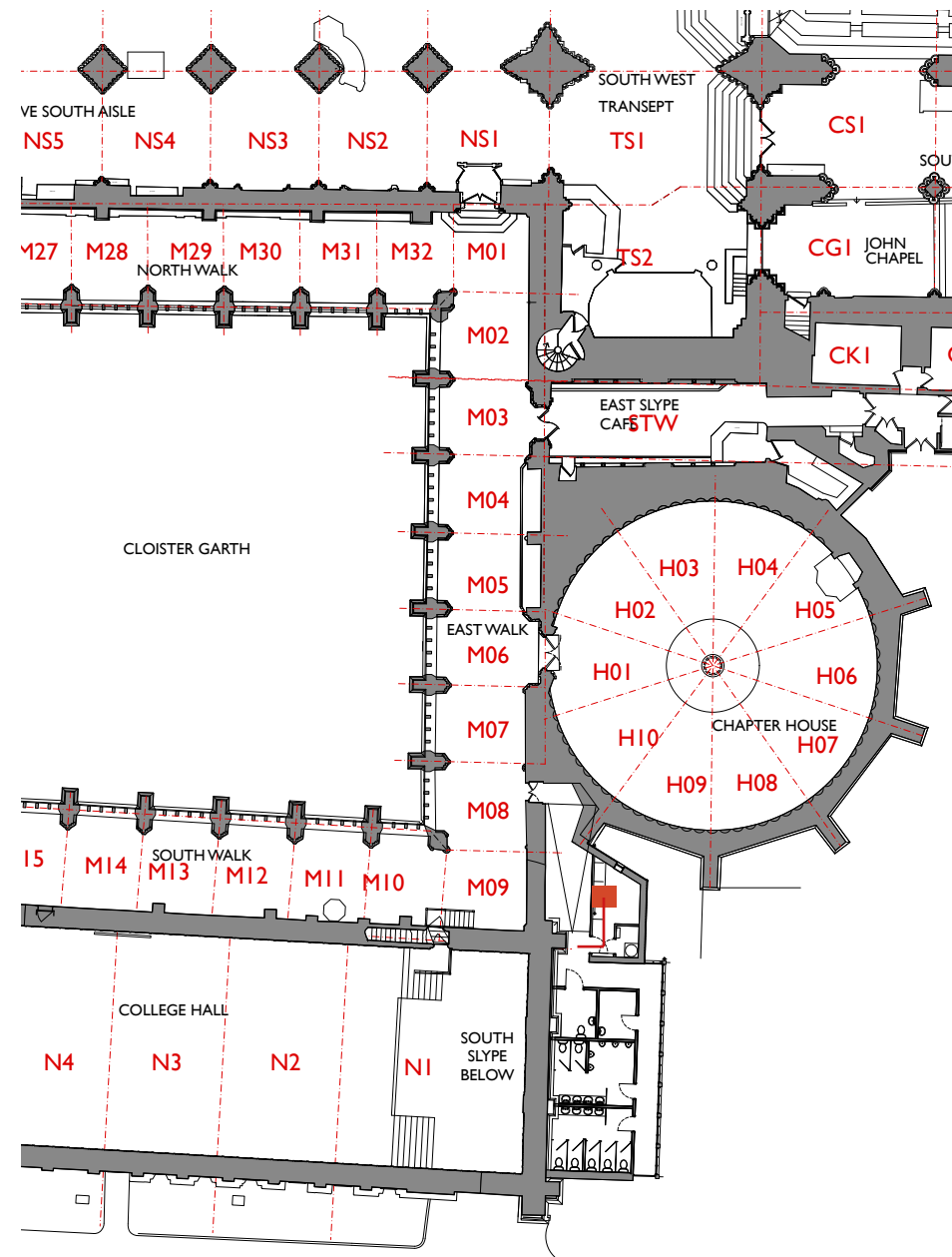
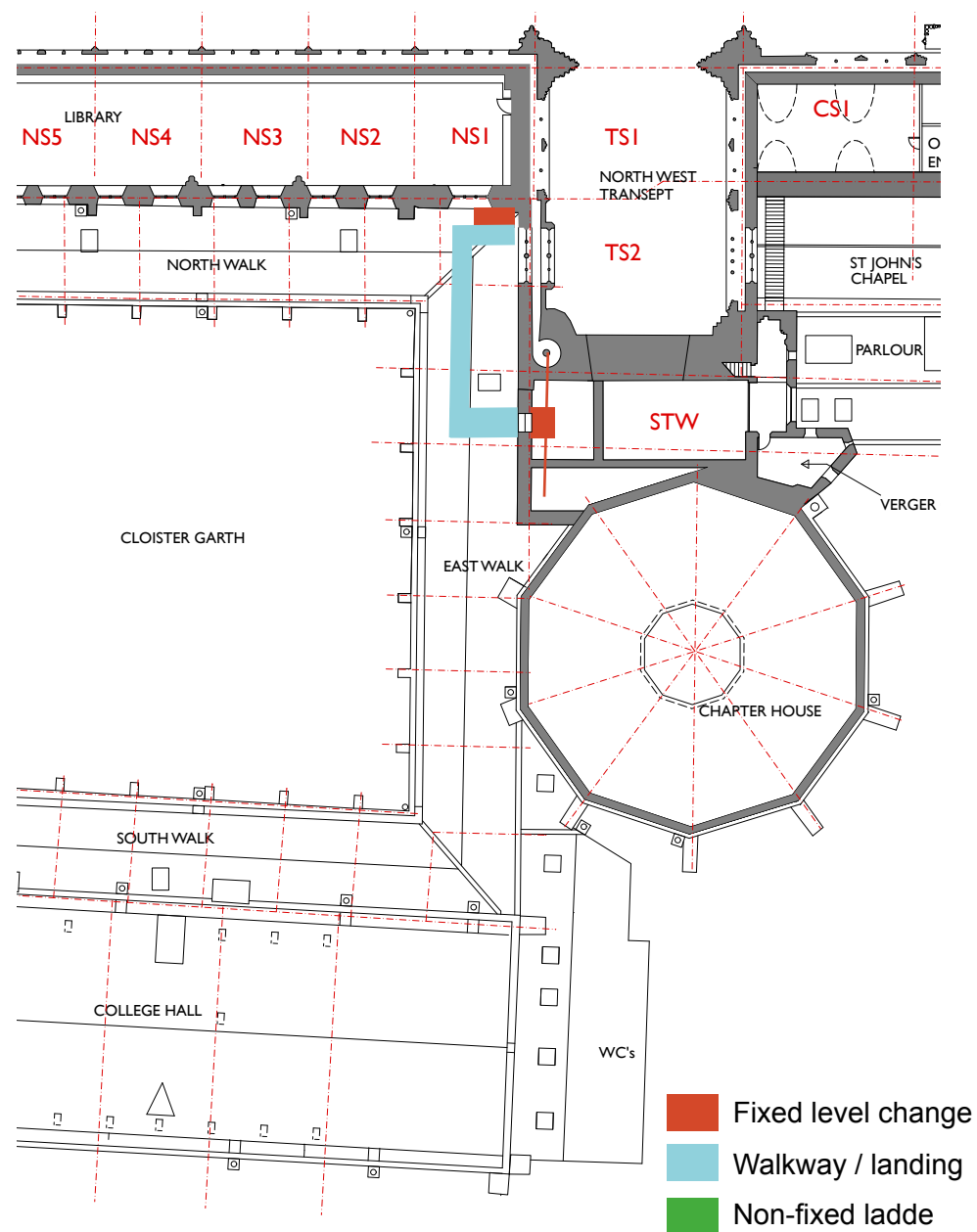
Walkway visible from the garth and possibly from the garden area by the Guesten ruins, final exit ladder enclosure and handrails visible from College Green.

Lighting of walkway and the handrail highlights its unsightly presence even further, causes disturbance to bats.

The roof of the flower room would be compromised by the addition of an access hatch.

The space with the flower room would be compromised by the fixed ladder arrangement.





Option C - Exit as far as the cloister roof from the library vertical ladder, a short length of walkway and then via a modification to the office window to a choice of routes - the west slype stair or south transept stair

Short section of non-slip walkway adjacent to the nave and south transept wall.

Modified window opening into the office. This window is already used as the means to access the cloister roof.

Exit route via the south transept spiral stairs back into the Cathedral nave, that via the slype stairs would be into the café and then out into the cloister.

Benefits - secure in terms of not providing a visible access to the library or roofs from ground level that could be accessed by intruders.

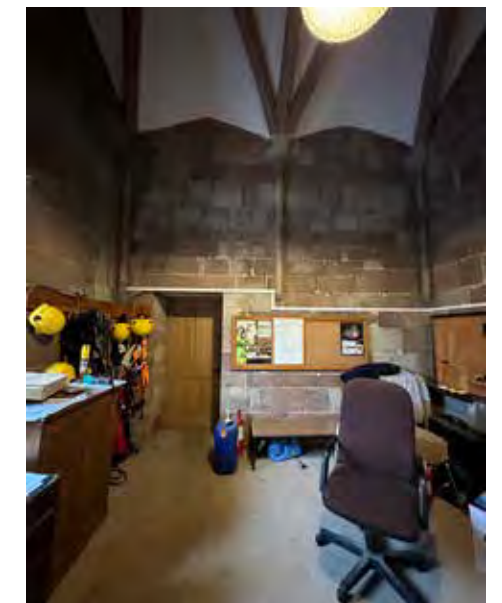
Much shorter length of non-slip walkway required (if at all) that can wrap close to the building.

Unsightly vertical ladder between the cloister and toilet roofs can be removed, thereby reducing the security risk.

Less visible from the garth or any other areas accessed by the public

Will significantly improve the access onto the cloister roof and roof above the shop for maintenance work

Drawbacks— entrance would be via a window which would need consent for removal of the mullion and a loss of working space inside the room.



APPENDIX D

The Locations of Worcester Cathedral Library by David Morrison

The Locations of Worcester Cathedral Library

Middle Ages

Worcester Cathedral library and archive exact locations in the Anglo-Saxon era are unknown. Writing in the 1860’s John Noake suggested that the medieval library was either in a room above the cloister passage or a room outside the west cloister. Canon James M. Wilson in 1911 looking at the exterior could see no evidence of a room above the cloister passage (presumably what is now the gift shop) but conceded that there may have been a room against the wall of the west cloister.

Canon Wilson thought the ante-library was a likely location for part of the medieval library but that it could not have been in the current main library room (south nave aisle triforium) before the sixteenth century, because “in the last quarter of the fourteenth century the old Norman south side of the nave, with the exception of the two western bays, was pulled down, replaced by the present perpendicular arcade and aisle and triforium.”¹

In 2001, Professor Rodney Thomson wrote that “it can be reasonably presumed that they [i.e. The manuscripts] were first kept in armaria in the cloister…” and he noted the recesses in the eastern wall of the cloister range. He noted that the cloister armaria were used continuously from 1372, when the cloister was rebuilt until the dissolution in 1540. He also estimated that both recesses combined held c.440 manuscripts. However, Thomson thought that by the early sixteenth century the armaria or cloister cupboards would have been mostly service books.

Thomson then explained that like most English monasteries this would have been supplemented with a dedicated library room but for Worcester we don’t know where or when. The first suggestion that such a room existed was in 1306 (a passing reference to “in librario” as opposed to in the cloister or in the cupboards)². By 1376/7 the cellarer paid for 2000 roof tiles and window bars and lath nails for the “domus librarii”. Not only do we not know where this was but we don’t even know if it was the same room as was mentioned in 1306.

There is no solid evidence that the current library main room was a library in the Middle Ages. The current “ante-library” is certainly early but Thomson thought that this was a store- room for books and documents³. Another possible alternative is a room above what was the Norman passage and is probably now roughly above the current gift shop. Thomson and Chris Guy calculated that the 2000 medieval roof tiles of 1376 would cover an area of 777 sq. ft., which would work as the area above the current gift shop, which is c.645.84 sq. ft⁴. With the limited and unprovable evidence of later antiquarians, Thomson suggested that a room above the “Norman passage” was the most likely place for the 1377 library⁵. However, as he noted, this is just a suggestion and the room would have been poorly lit. He went on to suggest that he could imagine that the current main library room was used in the 15th Century onwards as a reading room because of the better lighting, thanks to more windows⁶. None of this theory is provable from any contemporary documents as Thomson acknowledged.

There is evidence in medieval documents that the monks also had extra collections of manuscripts elsewhere around the complex. These included a library cupboard in the choir area, another in the medieval Precentory, and in Thomson’s opinion possibly another special collection hinted at by the word ‘libraria’ on 4 surviving Worcester manuscripts which may have been somewhere else⁷. At least 57 of the Worcester manuscripts (mainly theology)

1 James M. Wilson, The Library of Printed Books in Worcester Cathedral reprinted from The Library January 1911, p.5
2 WCM A5 Liber Albus f.26 (now folio 32)
3 R. M. Thomson, A Descriptive catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts in Worcester Cathedral Library, p. xxxiv
4 Thomson, p. xxxiii
5 Thomson, p. xxxiii
6 Thomson, p. xxxiv
7 Thomson, p. xxxiv

still have evidence of being chained but equally 65 have no evidence of this. Thomson suggests that the chained Worcester books may have been loaned for a time to form part of Bishop Carpenter’s theological library established in the newly rebuilt Carnery Chapel in 1464⁸.

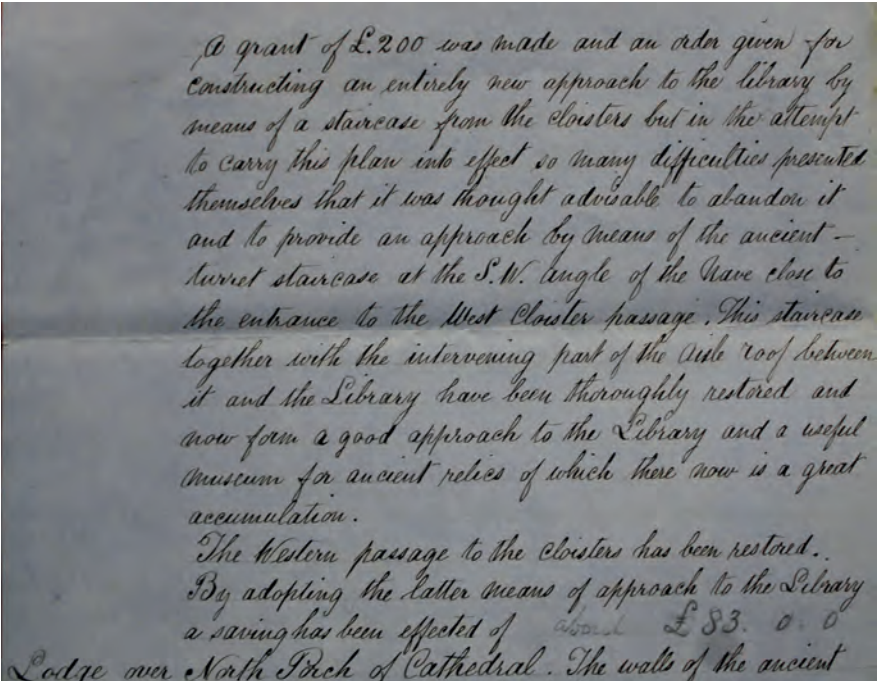
Post-Medieval

What happened to the cathedral library at the reformation? There is no record of the location during this time. The first major donation of books was by Bishop Babington in c.1610 or 1611. Rev. J. K. Floyer in 1901 with no proof claimed that in the 1630’s the library was somewhere in the south triforium area. He also stated that in 1636 the charnel chapel library was moved to “the old schoolhouse”, which he said was on the west side of the cloister. He claimed some ruins of it remained in 1901 and the doorway⁹.

In the 1670’s the library was moved by Rev Dr. William Hopkins to the Chapter House from the cathedral where is had been “over the south aisle”¹⁰. Dean George Hickes described its new home as “a large, beautiful, lightsome and spacious room, of easie access to the infirm, and much safer for tender constitutions to spend their time in.”¹¹

In 1748 the school was put in the old library space in the south triforium¹². The library stayed in the Chapter House until 1862 ¹³. Then it was temporarily taken and stored in Edgar Tower with the archives. What is now the main library room in the south aisle roof space was then fitted out as a library, with the existing 17th century shelving and cupboards dismantled from the Chapter house, cut down to fit and moved up to the south aisle roof space in 1866. A staircase was to have been inserted by the Victorians from the cloister to the library, until they rediscovered the existing staircase that came via the infirmary slype (i.e. the modern gift shop area)¹⁴. The cathedral archives continued in what is now called Edgar Tower until 1906, when many of the historical archives were moved to the current library. However, the post-1800 archives continued in Edgar Tower for some time yet.

David Morrison.



8 Thomson, p. xxxv
9 J.K. Floyer, A Thousand years of a cathedral Library in Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist January 1901, p.9
10 SH18, William Hopkins’ Sermons edited by George Hickes 1708, p. xxii
11 SH18, William Hopkins’ Sermons edited by George Hickes 1708, p. xxii
12 Wilson, pp.20-21
13 Lockett, The Victorian Restoration of Worcester Cathedral in Medieval Art and Architecture at Worcester Cathedral, The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions for the year 1975, p.182 (fn113)
14 Lockett, p. 172