

DOWN HOUSE, BROMLEY

*Notes on the Baize Door (GD19), Between the
Hall (G11) and the Servants' Area (G10)*

by

Richard Lea

Historical Analysis & Research Team
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hall, G11, and the servants area, G10

Richard Lea
Historical Analysis and Research
English Heritage

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Introduction

I visited the site on 10/7/97 and the site agent Richard Bleach, of Osbornes site contractors, asked me if I could advise on the covering of the baize door between rooms G11 and G10. The following notes are based on my observations and a 1:10 scale drawing of the north face of the door made that day.

Notes on the baize door

In recent years the door was covered with hardboard. In the current restoration works, the hardboard was removed and a fire proofing panel has been attached to the south side of the door. Its construction as a flat four panel door of uniform thickness, indicates that it was designed to be covered in fabric, Figure 1. There are no traces of paint on the flat sides of the door, only on the edges and around the margins indicating that it has always been covered with a fabric, hardboard or some such material. It has been widened by the addition of a fillet on its west (hinge) side and heightened, apparently twice, apparently to compensate for movement in the doorframe. The actual door-leaf itself does not appear to be distorted.

On the north side of the door, several patterns of nail holes were visible which relate to different forms of panel door construction. None of the nails remained *in-situ*. The holes presumably derive from the fixing of the baize fabric. There were so many holes, I did not attempt to draw them individually. I did however try to pick out lines of nails which I could relate to the different patterns. Taken together, the overall picture is quite confusing, Figure 2, but I have managed to identify three distinct patterns which appear to relate to different phases, Figures 3-5.

Many of the nail holes are surrounded by a circular indentation in the surface of the wood which suggests that the nails had cup shaped heads. Not all of the nail holes were accompanied by this feature and this suggests that some of the nails may not have had this type of head.

Furthermore, there were many more nail holes than shown even in Figure 2. This suggests either that some of the patterns were repeated when the fabric was repaired or that the actual method of fixing required more than just the cup headed tacks. It is possible that an additional strip of cloth or braid was used, either functionally or decoratively, to emphasise the lines picked out by the nails and further simulate the effect of panelling.

The spacing between the implied nails varied from pattern to pattern, Figure 2. In the pattern shown in Figure 3, the spacing between the cup-headed nails appears to have been *c* 22mm, for that in Figure 4, a spacing of *c* 38mm, and for that in Figure 5, *c* 25mm.

The pattern shown in Figure 5 appears to post date the addition of the fillet to the side and the first one to the top of the door. This pattern therefore appears to be relatively modern.

The patterns shown in Figures 3 and 4 both appear to relate to the original shape of the door, not modified by the addition of fillets.

The eight panel design, Figure 3, relates, although not exactly, to the adjacent eight panel doors to the Old Study, G15, Dining Room, G2, and closet under the stairs G3 and G4. The proportioning of the panels appears slightly odd, the mid-rail is rather high.

The pattern shown in Figure 4 is based on a typical four panel design but all horizontal vertical lines are unbroken, as it were without respect for the implied joinery pattern.

Notes on the restoration of the baize

Richard Bleach suggested that the baize is stretched on plywood before being attached to the door. I think this would not look right. I think there is probably no historical precedent for this method of fixing.

The baize may have had some kind of lining or padding behind it. This was probably of a similar type of fabric to the baize. If the baize is to be padded then the filling or lining should be chosen so as not to sag.

The two patterns shown in Figures 3 and 4 probably date from Darwin's residency at the house. Of the two, Figure 3 seems to me to be the more considered architecturally since it relates to the adjacent doors. I would therefore suggest that this pattern is adopted in the restoration. It will require some slight modification, since the door has been enlarged to fit the distorted door frame but this should not present too great an obstacle.

These notes are based almost exclusively on my own observations on the door itself. English Heritage can probably provide further specialist advice on fabrics and methods of fixing

Figure 1 Elevation of the north side of the baize door, showing the panel construction, pegged joints, additional fillets to top and side and holes for door-handles

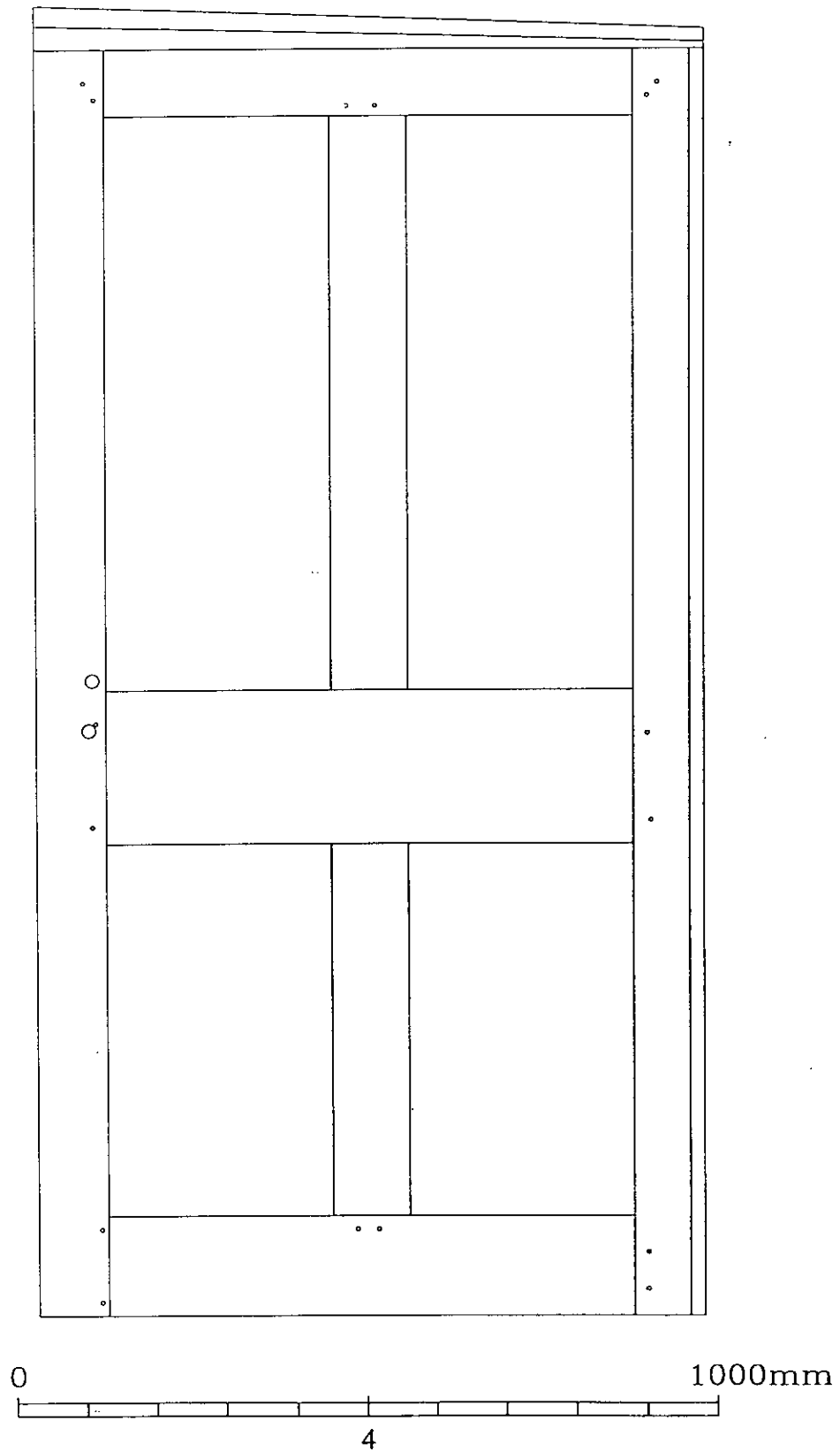


Figure 2 Elevation of the north side of the baize door, showing in schematic form the distribution of nail holes relating to the fixing of the baize

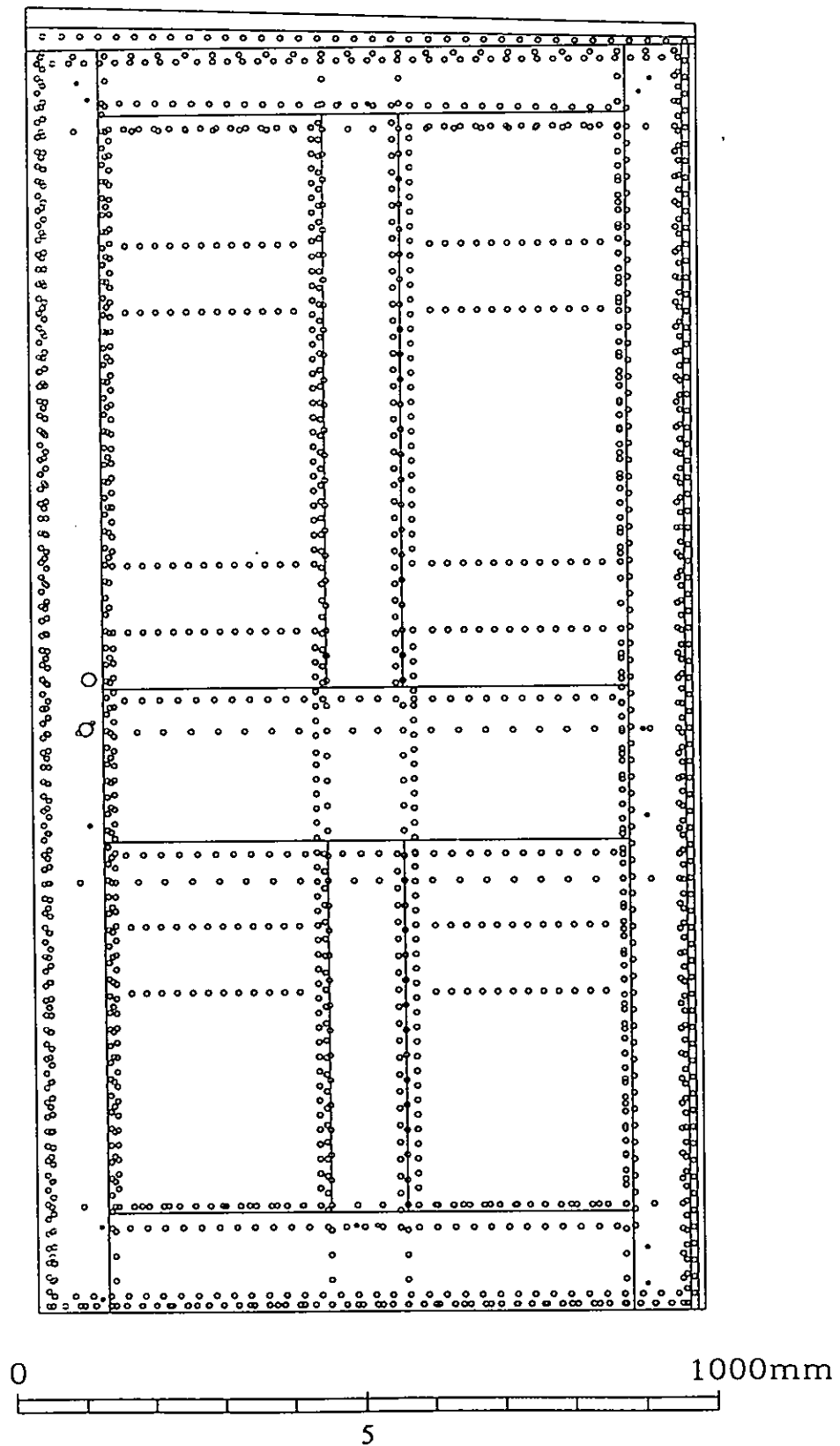


Figure 3 Elevation of the north side of the baize door, showing a pattern of nail holes which suggests an eight panel door design

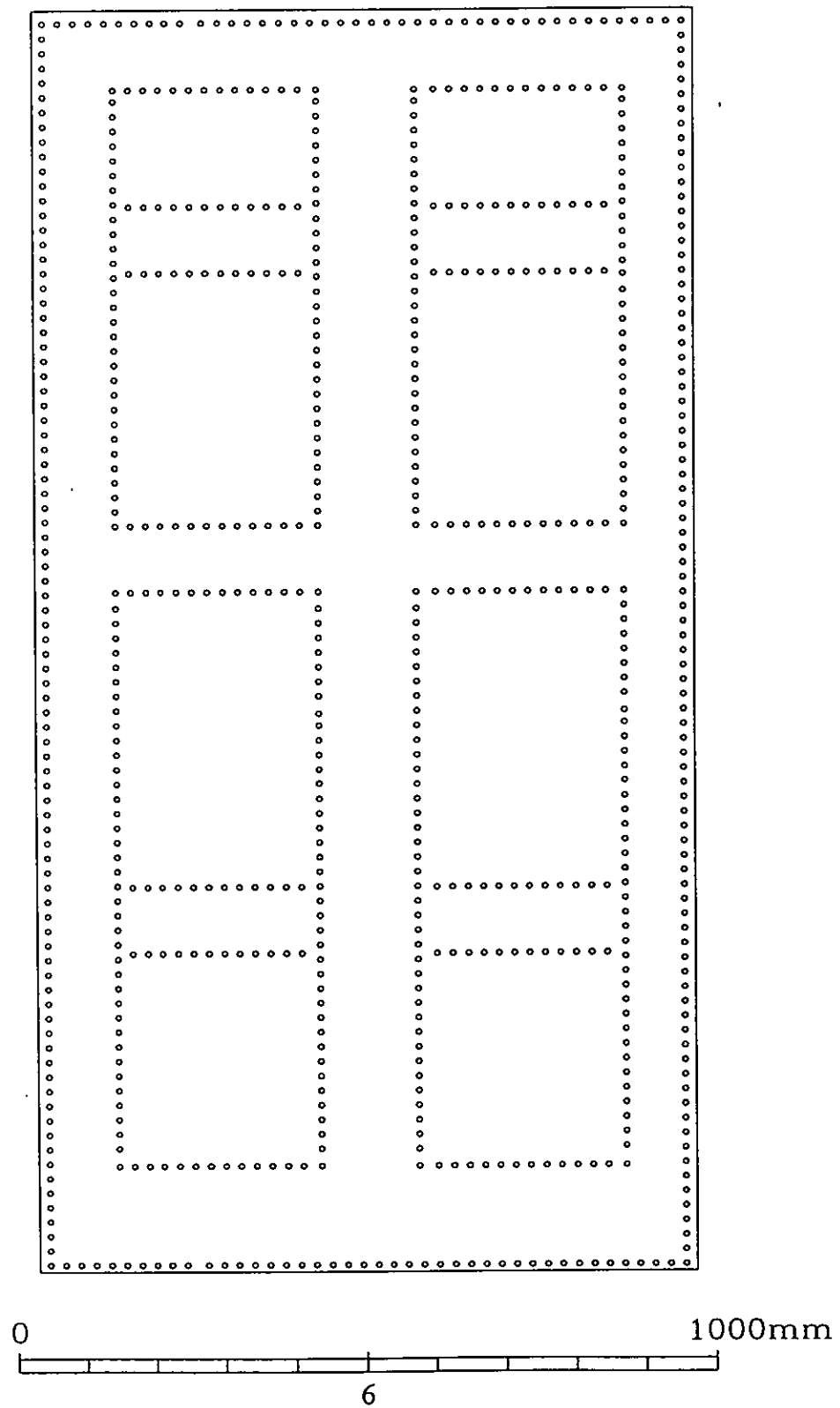


Figure 4 Elevation of the north side of the baize door, showing a pattern of nails which relates to a four panel door design

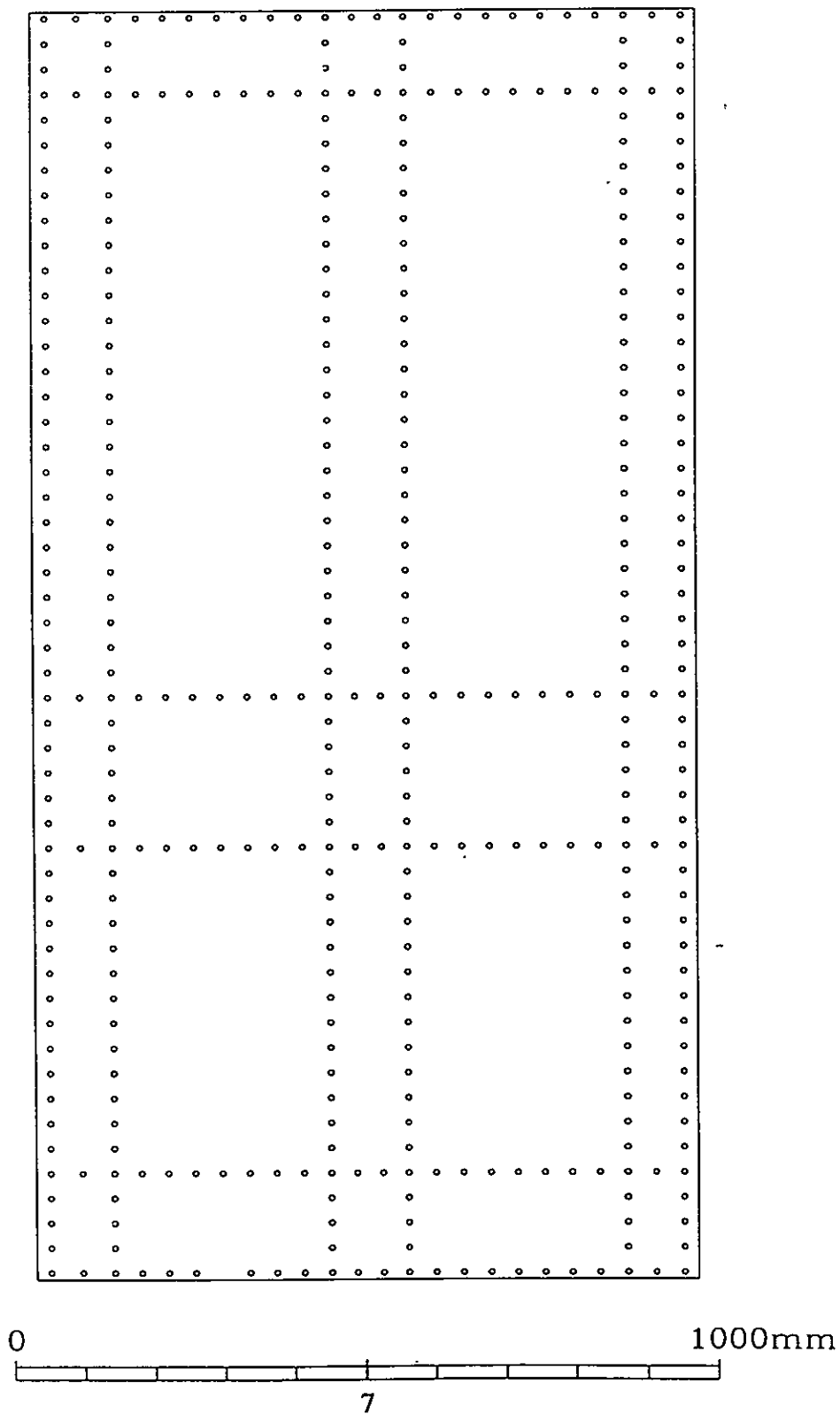


Figure 5 Elevation of the north side of the baize door, showing a pattern of nails relating to a four panel door design, apparently applied after the door was enlarged

