

Inverness Town House

Listed Building Consent

Decorative Scheme for the Main Public Hall

April 2017

LDN Architects

Revisions		

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

This report has been produced to support an application for Listed Building Consent to redecorate the main public hall of Inverness Town House, the seat of the local government in the city.

1.2 In order to obtain a better understanding of the current and past decorative schemes, Highland Council commissioned a paint sampling and analysis (Appendix A).

1.3 LDN Architects have been working at Inverness Town House since 2013 and are at present overseeing a phased external repair project (14/02423/LBC). In the process it has developed an understanding of the development of the building complex and this is summarised in section 2.0.

1.4 The external repair contract has included the repair of the fine decorative windows in the main public hall. These have been removed from their openings and rebuilt. As a result of this, and, the scale of the ongoing work, and despite the contractor's best efforts, the hall has been exposed to the weather. Once these are returned to their openings, it is the client's intention to redecorate the main hall and it recognises that it will require listed building consent if it is to alter the current scheme.



2.0 BACKGROUND HISTORICAL RESEARCH

2.1 Preamble

In the case of Inverness Town House, there can be little dispute that the building is either of significance or merits its statutory listing.

The purpose of this section is to record the results of the background research undertaken in order to understand the building and its development so that informed decisions can be made when considering the fabric and in order to ensure that the proposed solutions are compatible with preserving those aspects of significance set out below. As there does not appear to be much evidence of older fabric incorporated in the structure, this description only briefly explores the site's history.

Of particular interest is the development of the building complex. While all the fabric technically falls under the listing, it is argued that not all of it is of equal significance and different approaches might be found for different parts of the building.

The background research is presented in the form of a draft Conservation Statement. A document of this sort is produced at an early stage in a project and is sufficient to describe the significance of a heritage asset in outline form, pending further research.

In this case, the focus is on the main public hall.

2.2 Statutory Listing

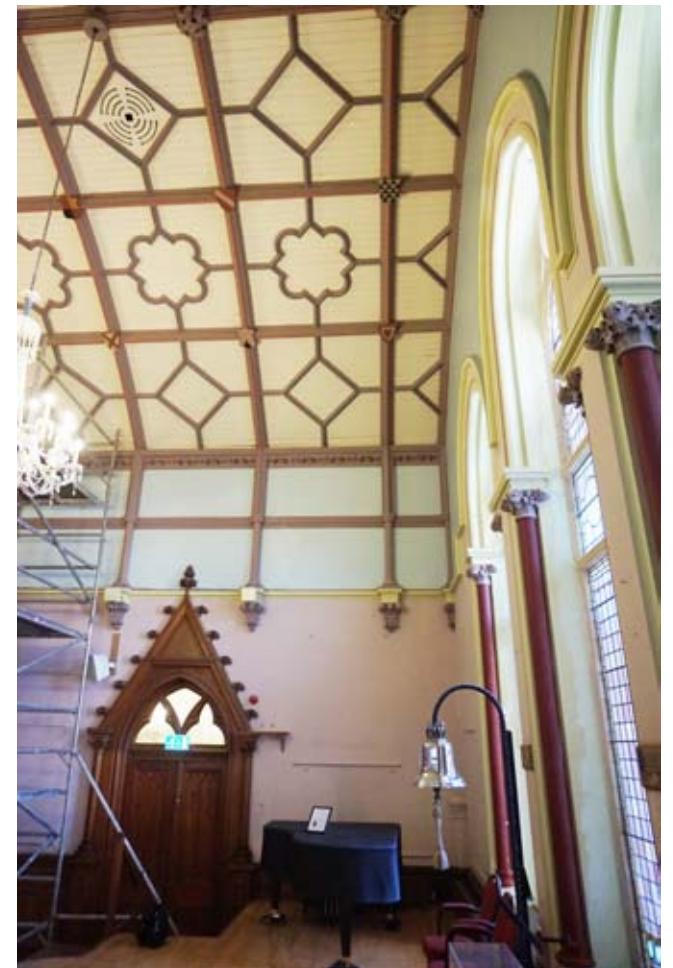
The building is currently listed Category A (21 May 1971). It is therefore regarded as a building of "National or International Importance, either historic, or fine, little-altered examples of some particular period, style or building type".

2.3 Authorship

This section of the report has been prepared by Ian Fraser, an associate at LDN Architects who holds Accreditation in Conservation from the RIAS.

2.4 Introduction

Standing as it does in the heart of Inverness, the site of the Town House clearly has a much older history than the building we see today. The Exchange, the area immediately outside the building at the end of the High Street, was the site of the Burgh markets and annual fairs, a survival of which is the 16th century Mercat Cross, now set against the front facade, but originally standing in the middle of the High Street alongside the original Tolbooth.



2.4 (Cont.) Close behind the present Town House is Inverness Castle, until 1820 the ruined site of a Hanoverian Fort destroyed in 1746. It was the former approach to this that influenced the line of Castle Wynd. Today this describes the second boundary to the site, the third boundary being the long graded approach to the Castle (Castle Street).

While it is known that Prince Charles was in residence at the Town House for two months prior to Culloden in 1745, this was a different building on a slightly different footprint. It appears that the Town Council have met on this site since the 1670s.

2.5 Brief History

The original Town House of 1708 as described in a contemporary statistical sketch, contained on its ground floor; a public subscription News Room; above this the Town Hall used for Magistrates and Council meetings and the occasional public gatherings and concerts; and on the upper floor the Guildry Incorporation Guild-Hall.

However by the late 19th century, it was necessary for Local Government to be much more business like and this required a different type of civic Town Hall.

This is reflected in a proliferation of competitions for Town Halls across the country in the 19th century, of which Inverness is just one.

2.5 (Cont.) The competition followed a bequest in 1873, and attracted national interest. It was won by local architects, Matthews & Lawrie. This Practice grew out of MacKenzie & Matthews, the Aberdeen Practice of Thomas MacKenzie who established an Inverness office in 1854, with William Lawrie as resident assistant, and then partner from 1864. From 1877 Matthews ran the Practice as two separate partnerships – running the Aberdeen office with Alexander Marshall MacKenzie, while the Inverness office was managed by Lawrie. It is Lawrie who is credited with the design of Building 1. By this time they had become one of the leading Highland practices alongside A & W Reid of Elgin and A Maitland of Tain.

However the choice of a competition was not normal in Inverness and the only other recorded example was the Poorhouse of 1859. Similarly, it was unusual for Matthews & Lawrie to enter competitions and their previous competition win was in 1859 (Invergordon Church).

The competition was judged by no less an architect than David Bryce, the Master of the Scottish Baronial country house and now at the end of his career.

John Gifford, in the Buildings of Scotland Series, describes Lawrie's winning scheme as "a large version of G Gilbert Scott's Albert Institute in Dundee" (McManus Gallery) 1864. Clearly the building is not in the forefront of architecture and sits instead in the late Victorian eclecticism, where by this point, every previous age and style had been plundered for Town Halls.



2.5 The trade magazine, The Builder, reflecting a functional
(Cont.) approach, made the following disparaging comment:

“The effect does not appear to us a successful one. The square corbelled angle-turrets are forced, and the gablets which flank the tower are apparently useless pieces of constructed decoration, which do not help the composition, merely introduced as tit-bits which the designer would not part with”

These comments however belie the quality of the fine detail and the unity of the composition inside and out. It also appears that the people of Inverness took the building to their hearts. Although the Inverness Courier describes James R Rhind’s extension design of 1904 to be ‘in strict harmony with the architectural character of the present Hall’, it is clear to see that the detail is much coarser.

One can see from the plan form of the 1878 building that it was hemmed in by the adjacent buildings and that its rear elevations were never meant to be seen, except across a tight back court. This explains the change from ashlar and leaded windows to the use of a local coursed rubble and sash and case windows at the rear.

2.5 While the design of 1878 addressed the shortfalls of the
(Cont.) accommodation in the older Town House and includes on the ground floor, a suite of offices for the Chamberlain and Clerk; on the first a Council Chamber, Provost’s Room and Hall and at second floor a Musician’s Gallery and Caretaker’s flat, it still appear to lack facilities and it is these that the 1904 design for an extension provides, in particular toilets, and a larger walk-in safe. While the 1876 design, which includes a Musician’s Rest Room, addresses the more civic side of a Town Hall and gives part of its ground floor up to a shop, by 1894 it was already recognised that the Council Chamber was too small and by 1904 it appears clear that the functional weaknesses of the building had to be addressed and additional provision made for Local Government.

Whether the limitations of the 1878 scheme was the purchase of the land or the availability of funds is unclear, but when they did come to build again, the 1904 design represents a substantial extension.

This extension also had to address a constrained site footprint; although the size of the windows to the rear suggest that by this point there was an outlook. As part of this process the bay containing the Provost’s Office (Elevation 1A) which originally projected into Castle Street, was taken down and rebuilt in the salvaged stone, presumably in recognition of the increasing traffic.

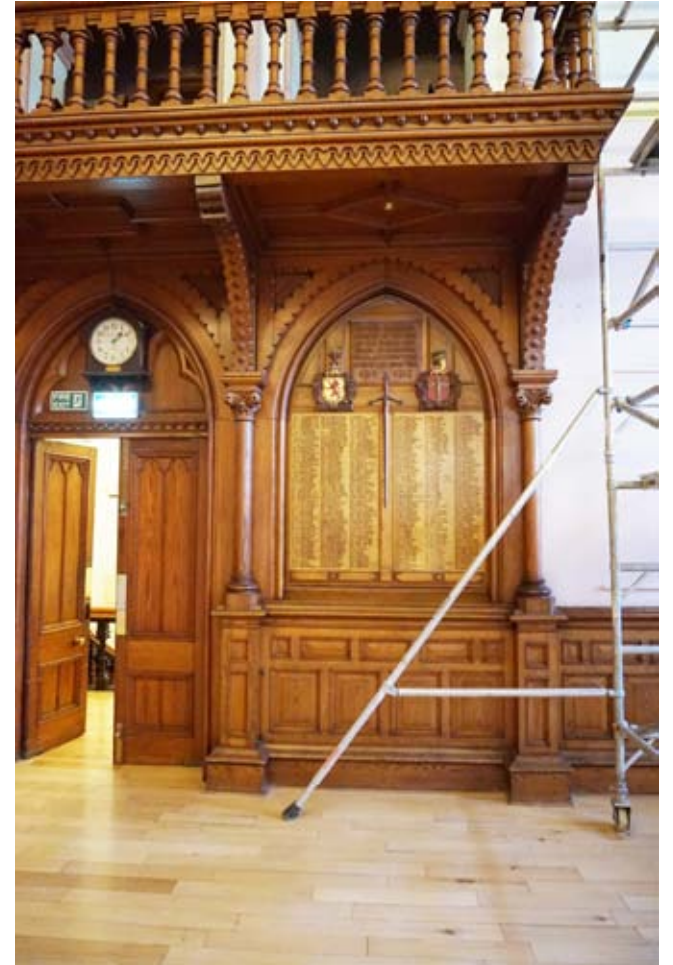


2.5 James Robert Rhind (1853 – 1918) who is credited with the
(Cont.) design of this extension, has by 1904 been in practice since 1868, first working for his father, a local architect, then in Glasgow, London and Montreal. From 1895 he was in partnership with his brother in Inverness and Glasgow, building a practice around the design of libraries in a French Beaux-Arts character.

We know the design was overseen by William Wardlaw Sclanders (1872 – 1945), Master of Works to the Town Council, then in his early thirties. He left to work in China shortly after its completion.

There seems a certain awkwardness to the Castle Street elevation, probably due to the proportion of masonry above the ground floor shop front voids, and not helped by the flat quality of the stone surface.

While the interior of the Town House contains many artefacts of significance to the history and people of Inverness, this discussion concentrates on the decorative scheme proposals for the main public hall. Hence the Statements of Significance are limited to those relevant to the proposals. It also reflects the fact that it is a working building, being the administrative centre for The Highland Council.



2.6 Description

The original Town House of 1878-81 is an accomplished essay in Victorian Gothic Flemish-Baronial; a Cloth Hall from the low country transported to Inverness. It has a seven bay front with a central bay slightly advanced and with gabled Porch, above which is a bipartite mullioned and transomed window with trefoil head, surmounted by the Burgh Coat of Arms. This window is central to the first floor Hall that occupies the full length of the High Street façade. It has a panelled and painted ceiling and is lit by beautiful stained glass on three sides. The outer windows of this frontage are mullioned and transomed with arched lights set in continuous hood mouldings.

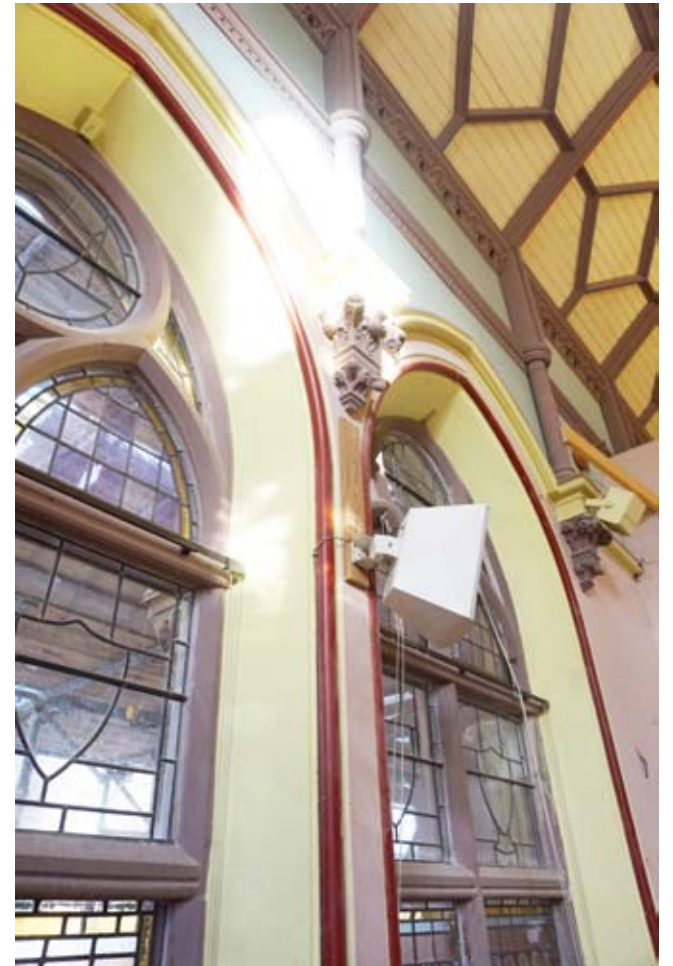
The central bay is finished in a gablet with a bipartite window purely in the roof space and decorative circular angle turret with tall fish scale slated roofs framing heraldic beast set on the skyline (now missing).

To each side, the roofline is finished with a pierced parapet bookended by octagonal caphouses with tall octagonal fish scale slated roof. The front composition was completed by a fleche, now truncated.

The interior is beautifully detailed to make an impression on its visitors, from the cast-iron lamp standards either side of the original entrance (now with modern lamps); the acid etched Coat of Arms on the entrance door glass (one renewed); the groin vaulted Vestibule, the formal staircase with glass salvaged from the previous Town House incorporated into the windows; the beautiful joinery and the elegant Hall with Gallery and panelled ceiling.

The Council Chamber and Press Gallery originally lit from two sides, but later extended by John Hinton Gall (1848 – 1929), who inherited Lawrie's Practice in 1887, as well as containing a superb set of windows, retains what appears to be furniture, purpose made for the extension of 1894 probably alongside that made for the original room.

While the side elevations are less decorative, the same themes of trefoil heads and arched heads continue, but with simpler decoration in the bays behind the main Hall containing the Council Chamber and Provost's Room.



2.7 Statements of Significance

The building as a whole is Category A listed and as such is of National Importance

This categorisation reflects the fact that the original composition could be regarded as a 'fine little-altered example of a particular period, style and building type.

This initial impression that the buildings are little altered may not stand up to detailed scrutiny as it is very much a working building and has been altered many times, but sufficient fabric survives to show the level of detail originally lavished on the interior

The Town House, as a whole, is significant in being the seat of Local Government and for this reason, will be known to many

This building is significant in the role they have played in the civic life of Inverness; the events of which they have been the focus, including cabinet meetings, royal visits, and more populist celebrations such as Coronations and regimental homecomings. For upwards of 140 years they have played a central role for the people of Inverness and beyond

The Town House is significant in terms of the many historic, artistic and other artefacts it houses

2.7 (Cont.) Significance is also gained from its location, the buildings which have gone before it and their place in the history of Inverness and the nation

Of significance to the Category A listed status of the Town House will be the completeness of its decorative detail and the way it has been applied at every level. In terms of external detail, perhaps the key components are the fine carving of the façade, the armorial panels, the decorative glass and the contribution the building makes to the skyline in terms of its conical roofs and their lead and slate detailing, the chimney heads and pierced and decorated skewes and parapets. Nearly all this detail is confined to the original building of 1878-81.

Also significant to the building is the proximity of the Mercat Cross, itself Category B listed, and the cast-iron lamp standards which, along with the unusually large pavement slabs, provide the setting for the composition.

Detrimental to the building's significance are the many ill considered alterations, both internal and external, the poor condition of much of the stonework and in places, the poor decorative order.



2.9 Conservation Policies

The conservation policies applicable to the fabric draw on standard conservation practice and reflect the principles of:

- Reversibility
- Minimum intervention
- The importance of documentation.

These policies are therefore:

- Undertake the work following best practice and the principles set down in current conservation charters
- Apply the principle of retaining as much of the original fabric as practical when deciding what requires to be repaired
- Recognise where detail may be lost in the near future, if not addressed now, and ensure that examples will survive for the future
- Seek to reintroduce missing elements where their loss has been detrimental to the overall significance of the fabric
- Ensure that all interventions to the fabric are recorded, and can be understood in the future
- Do not lose sight of the fact that the Town House is a living and working building. It will only ultimately survive if it remains relevant and practical. If this involves compromise and change to avoid redundancy, then this should be carefully weighed against the effect it has on the building's significance. The Statement of Significance applies different weightings to the five buildings. Clearly some can accommodate more change than others without damaging the overall significance of the Town House.

References:

- Dictionary of Scottish Architects
- Statutory List, Historic Scotland 1971
- RCAHMS Competition winning drawings plus photographs from 1959, 1976 and 1997
- NMRS photographic archive
- Ambaile – photographic archive – The Highland Council ordnance survey mapping 1868 – 70, 1875, 1929, 1950
- History of Inverness, a history and description of the town of Inverness; its principal buildings, public institutions etc, Kenneth Douglas, William Smith and Charles Keith, Inverness 1848
- Old Inverness in Pictures, Paul Harris, Inverness 1978
- Inverness Courier Guide, Inverness, 1920s
- Historic Inverness, A Gerard Pollitt, Perth 1981
- Buildings of Scotland; Highlands and Islands, John Gifford, Penguin 1992
- Conservation Plan, Bell Ingram Design 2010
- A guide to Inverness town House, The Highland Council 2008

Original sources for various information taken from these texts are listed in the references section of the Dictionary of Scottish Architects entry for Inverness Town House.



3.0 ANALYSIS OF PAST DECORATIVE SCHEMES

3.1 The following is based on a report produced by John Nevin - Fellow of the faculty of Decoration and Consultant on Traditional Paints dated February 2017.

3.2 An access tower was provided to allow representation samples to be taken from all the various surfaces including the ceiling.

3.3 There appear to have been up to six decorative schemes in the main public hall since its completion in 1881; this roughly equates to the hall having been redecorated on average every 30 years.

3.4 It is difficult to establish a more accurate timeline for the early decorative schemes as surprisingly little or no photographic or other evidence appears to exist to confirm either the colours or combinations and so of necessity the following summary must be caveated.

3.5 It appears that the initial scheme in 1881 combined stone coloured walls with varnished woodwork to the ceiling and dado. This makes sense when the sandstone tracery windows are visible internally. Evidence of applied stone coursing was looked for but was not found.

The second decorative scheme was a reddish brown scheme again with varnished wood. In both these early schemes the upper plaster walls appear to have been wood-grained to blend in with the timber ceiling.

3.5 (Cont.) The third scheme appears to have opted to lighten the hall and involves cream on the walls, contrasting with varnished timberwork.

The fourth scheme had pale green main wall flats. Up to this point the window ingo (reveals) are blended with the tracery stonework.

Evidence exists for the fifth scheme in the form of a drawn proposal "prepared by the decorative Service Department Smith and Weston Ltd". Unfortunately this illustration (reproduced on the right) is undated, but we know that Smith and Weston stopped producing paint around 1957 and so it is likely to be post war but early 1950's (John Nevin refers to this as the 1930's scheme).

This appears to be much more complicated with the pilasters etc picked out in deep red but essentially has a lighter ceiling with off-white wall flats and light blue upper walls.

It is likely that this was modified in the late 1970's or 80's and in this sixth scheme that survives until today, the lower walls are a lilac and the upper wall flats a light greenish blue with the window ingoes (reveals) painted pale green.



3.6 Highland Council regard the present decorative scheme to be institutional and inappropriate. The general feeling is that the light wall colours detract from the richness of the decorative detail and do not reflect the 'Victorian' qualities of the room.

Consideration has been given to stripping the present timber ceiling back to the timber but this has reluctantly been discarded as impracticable, both technically and on cost grounds. The lighter ceiling panels also contribute to the success of the current lighting strategy which involves uplights.

The proposed decorative scheme is therefore a compromise. It is proposed that a return is made to the reddish brown (BS 04C37, Autumn Brown) wall colour applied across the wall planes as it previously was, without picking out the detail on the pilasters or corner mouldings, in combination with the use of a paint colour on the ceiling mouldings that more closely resemble the colour of the varnished wood within the room.

This scheme is intended to draw on the past, and highlight the qualities of the decorative detail without reproducing a previous decorative scheme in its entirety.

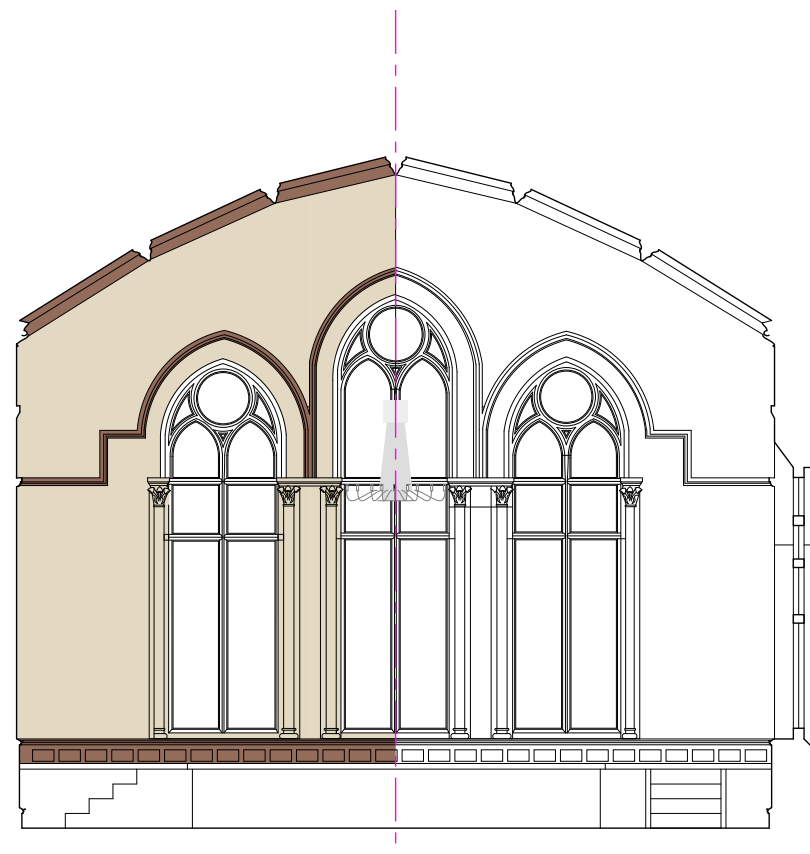
3.7 The proposal scheme will be subject to the approval of samples and these can be inspected by the planning authority during the approval process.

3.8 It is unclear when the heraldic shields were installed. The client believes that they may once have reproduced the coats of arms of the families that funded the building. They have however since all been painted in a palette of four colours.



4.0 PAST DECORATIVE SCHEMES ILLUSTRATED

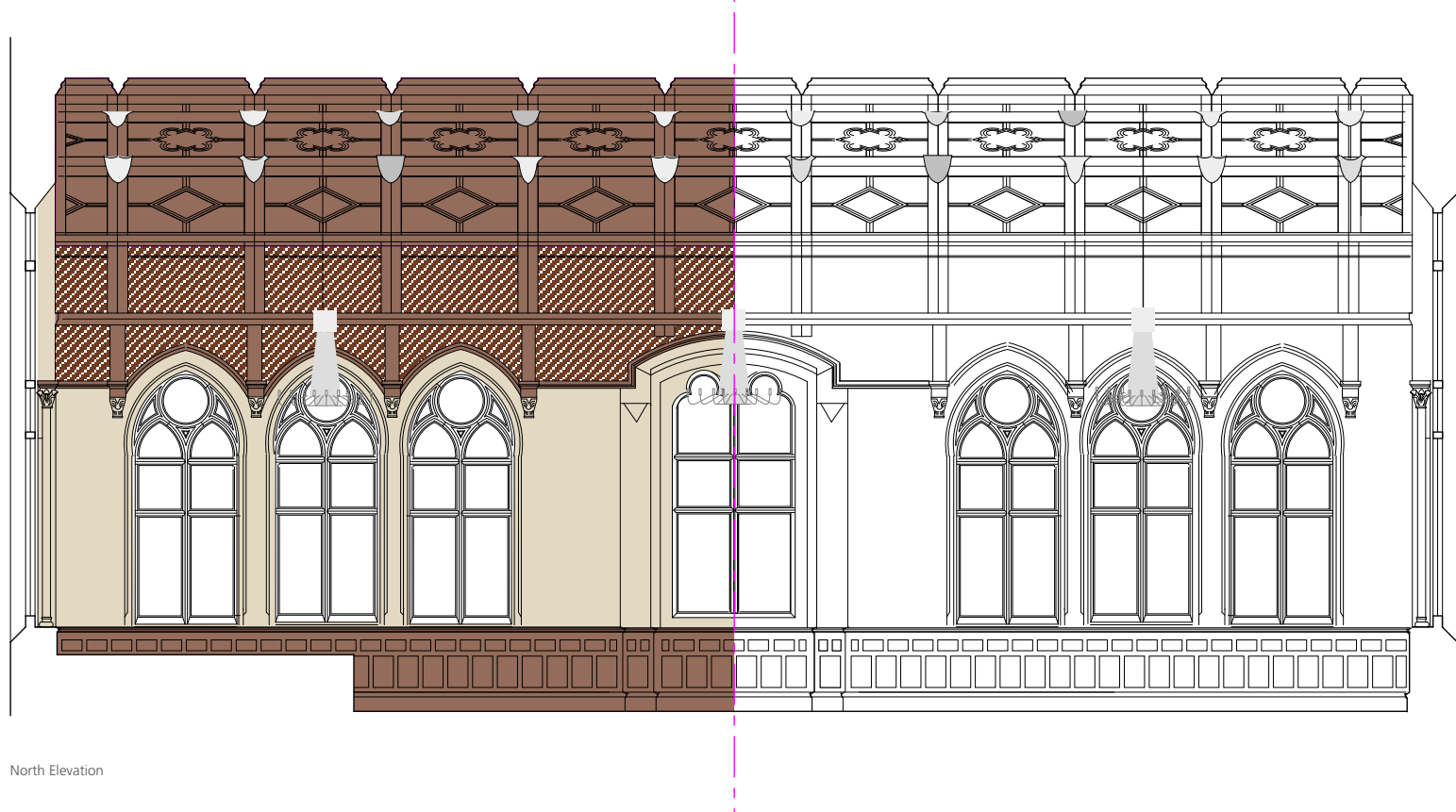
4.1 Scheme 01 - 1881



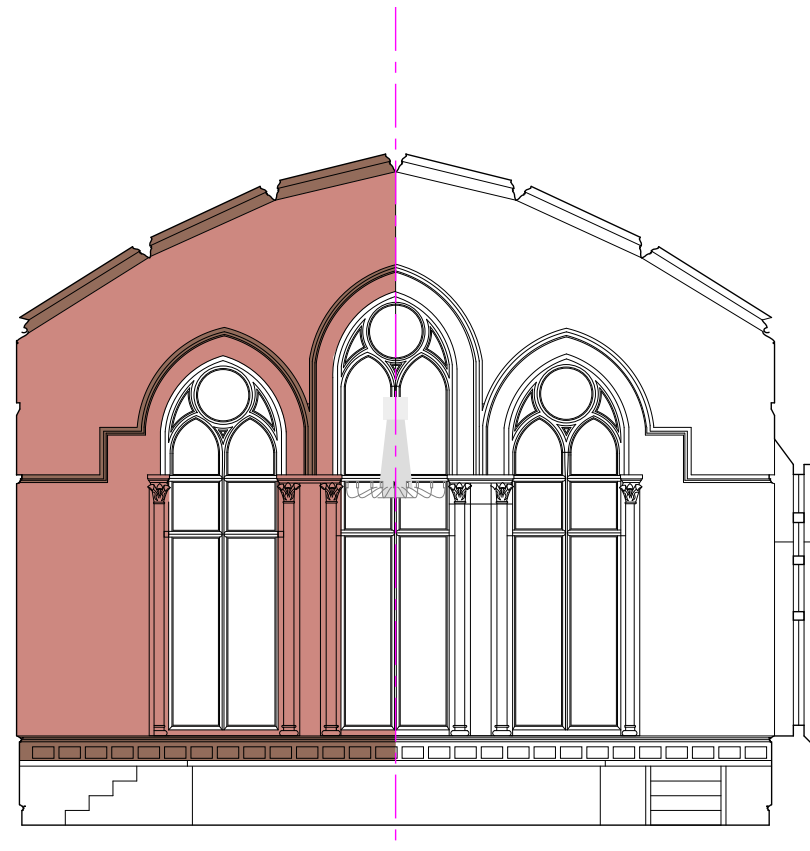
West Elevation

SCHEME 01: 1881

-  Ceiling: Dark Brown Varnished Timber
-  Upper Walls: Dark Brown - Wood Grain
-  Flat Walls - BS 08B17 'Sandstone'



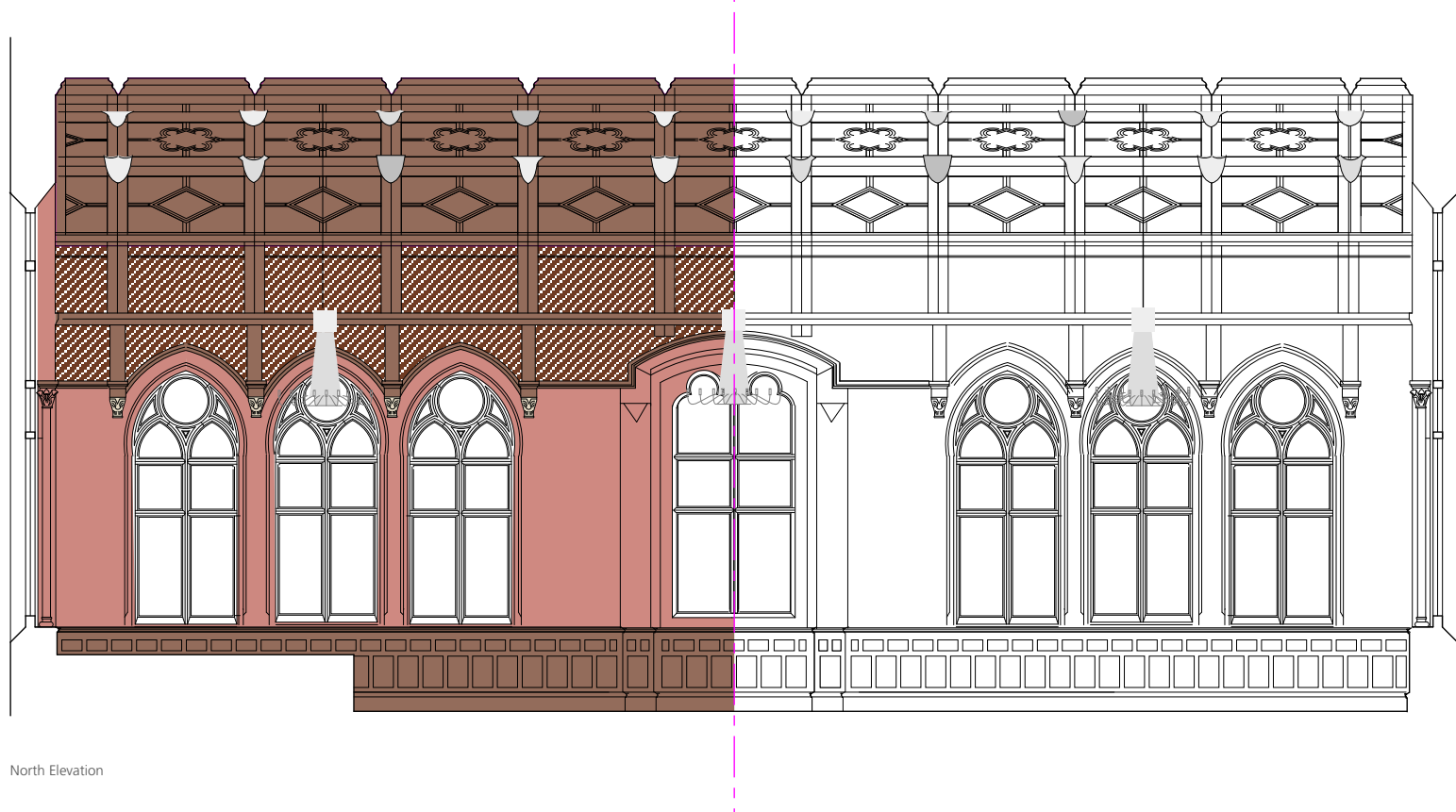
4.2 Scheme 02 - Circa 1900



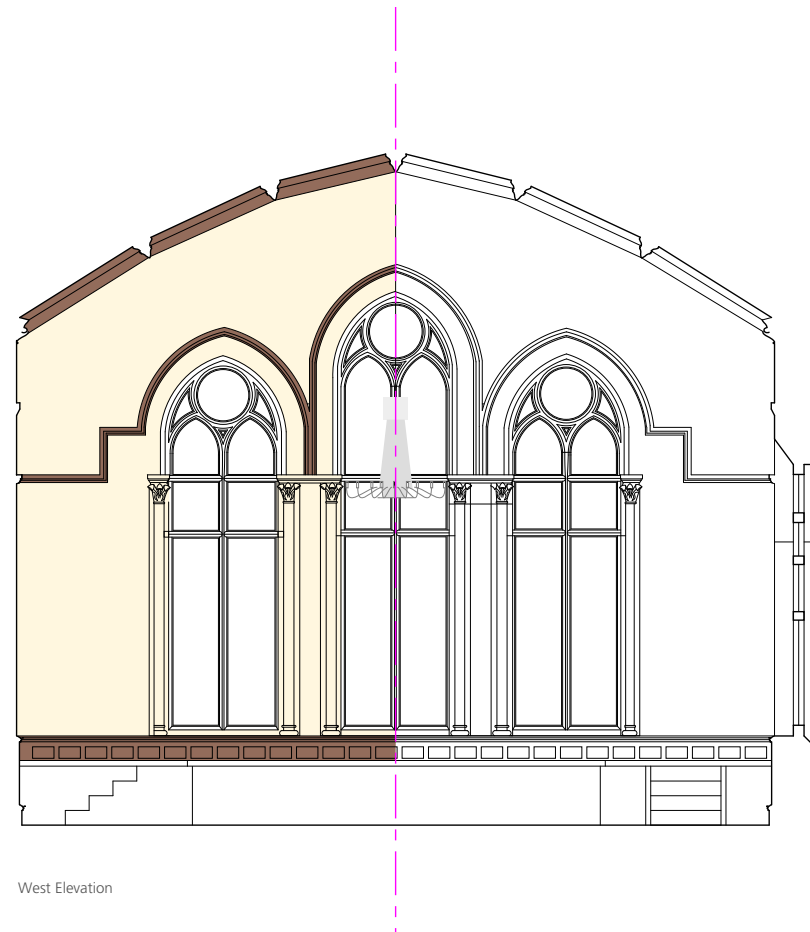
West Elevation

SCHEME 02: Circa. 1900

-  Ceiling: Dark Brown Varnished Timber
-  Upper Walls: Dark Brown - Wood Grain
-  Flat Walls - BS 04C37 'Autumn Brown'

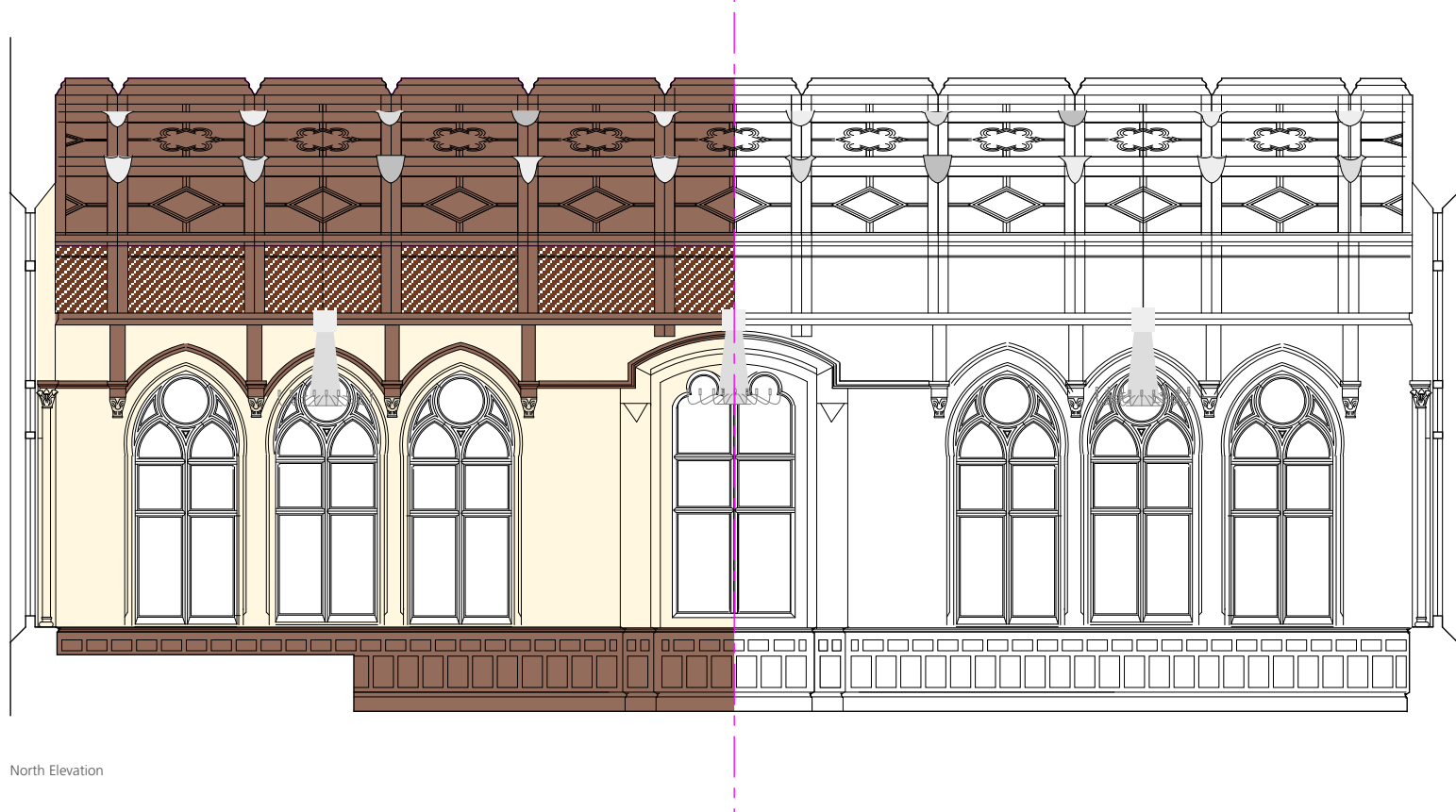


4.3 Scheme 03

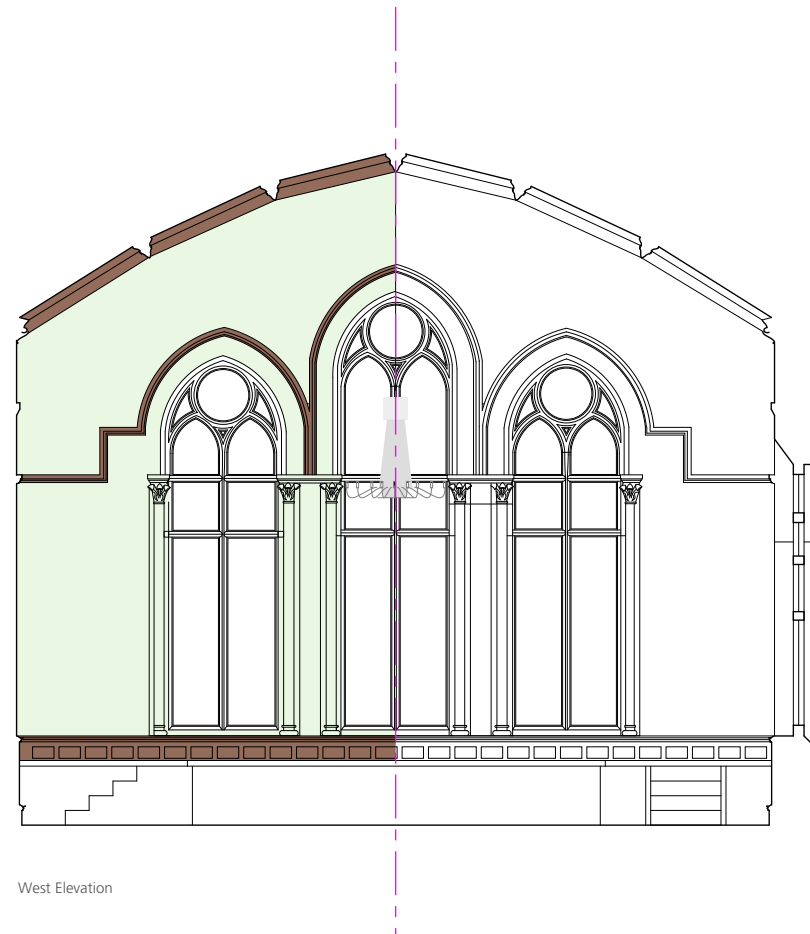


S C H E M E 03

- Ceiling: Dark Brown Varnished Timber
- Upper Walls: Dark Brown - Wood Grain
- Flat Walls: Cream



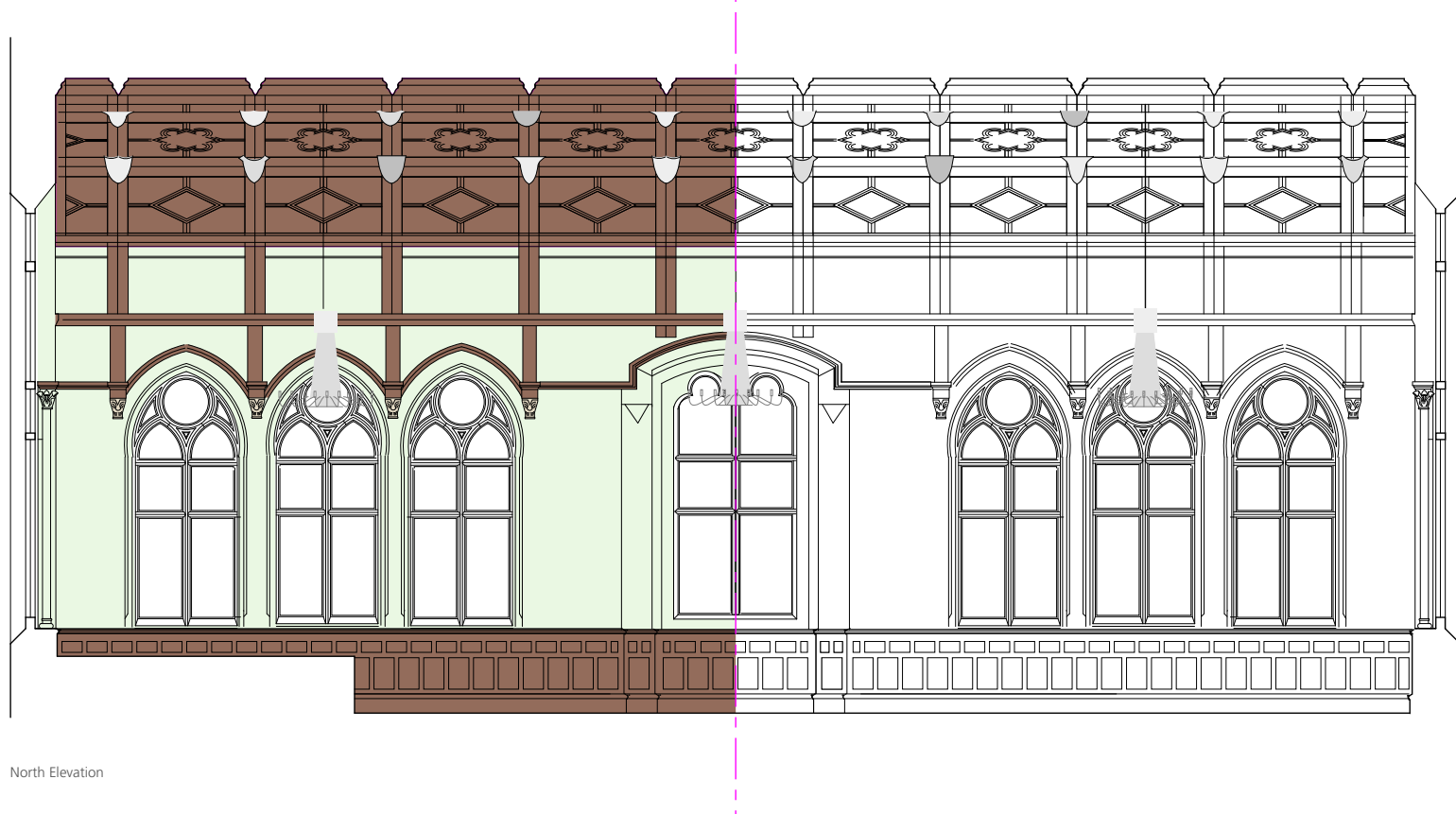
4.4 Scheme 04



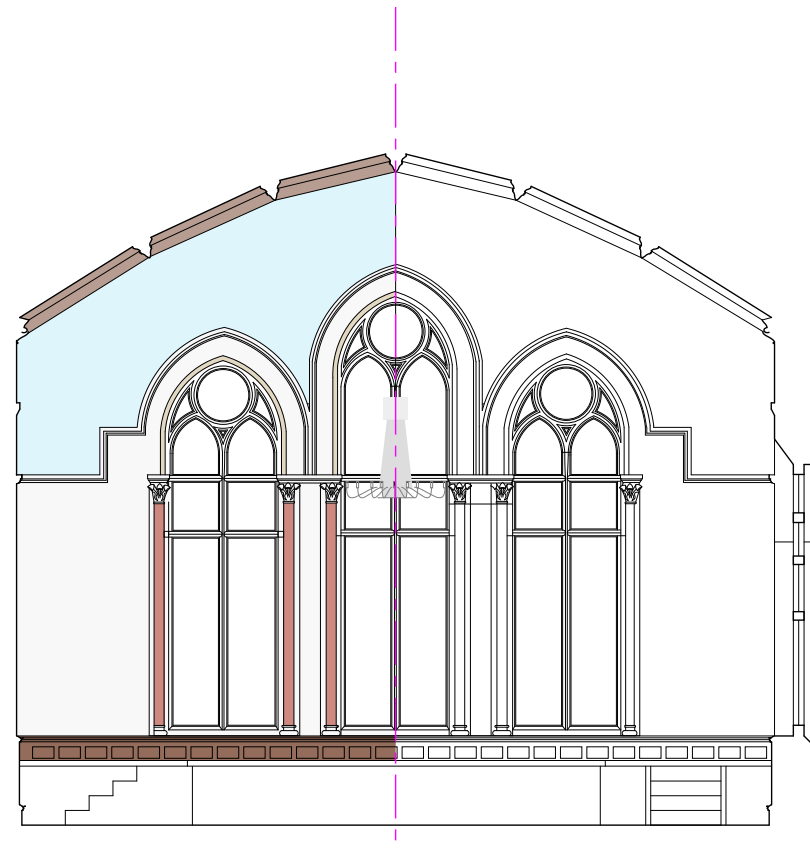
West Elevation

SCHEME 04

-  Ceiling: Dark Brown Varnished Timber
-  Upper Walls: Pale Green
-  Flat Walls: Pale Green



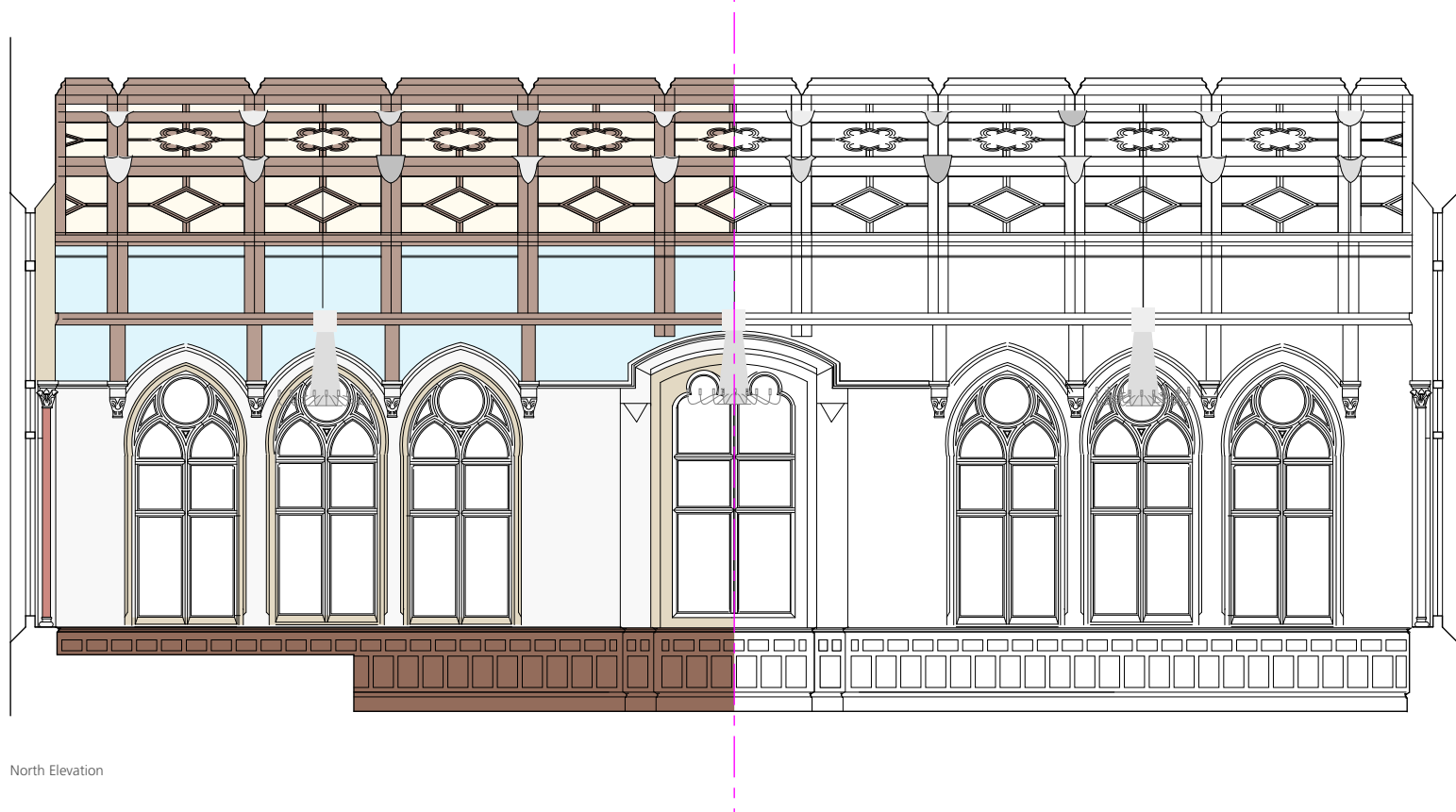
4.5 Scheme 05 - Pre 1980's



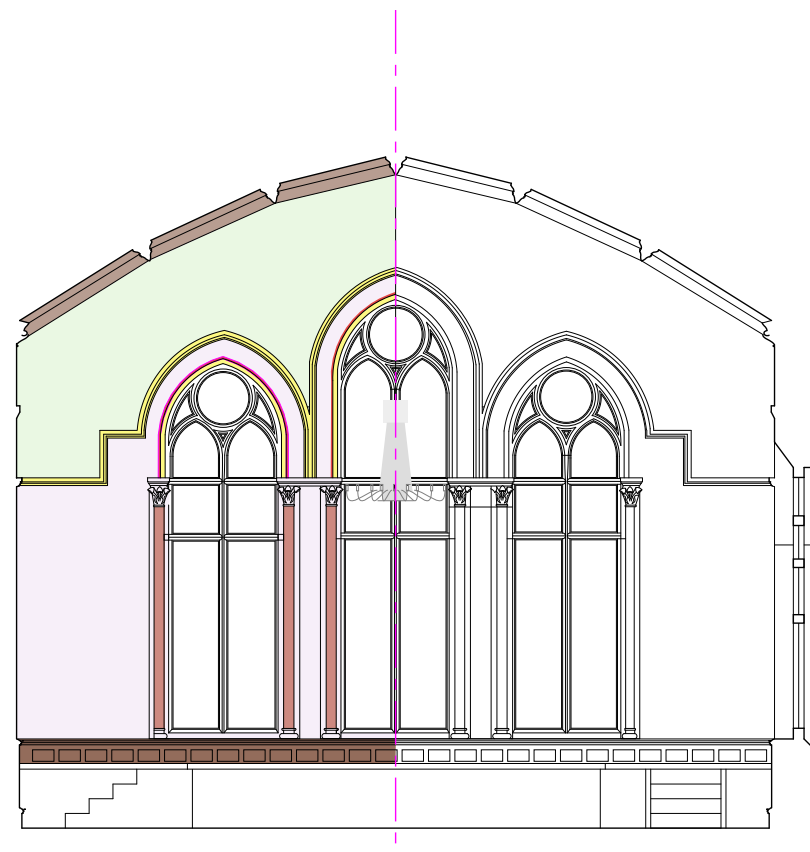
West Elevation

SCHEME 05 - PRE 1980

-  Ceiling: Dark Brown Varnished Timber
-  Ceiling panels: Cream
-  Upper Walls: Light Blue
-  Flat Walls: Off-white



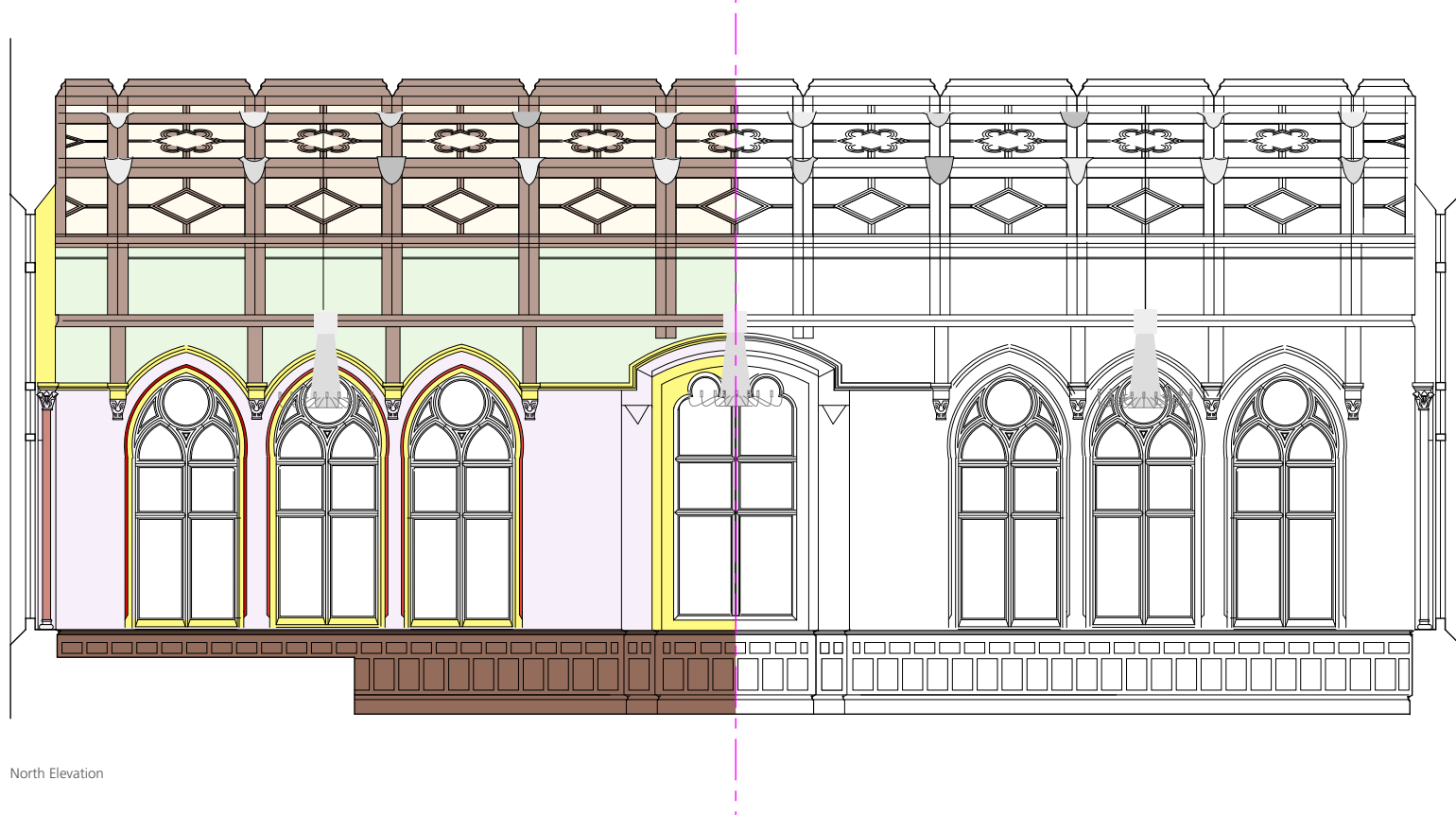
4.6 Scheme 06 - Current



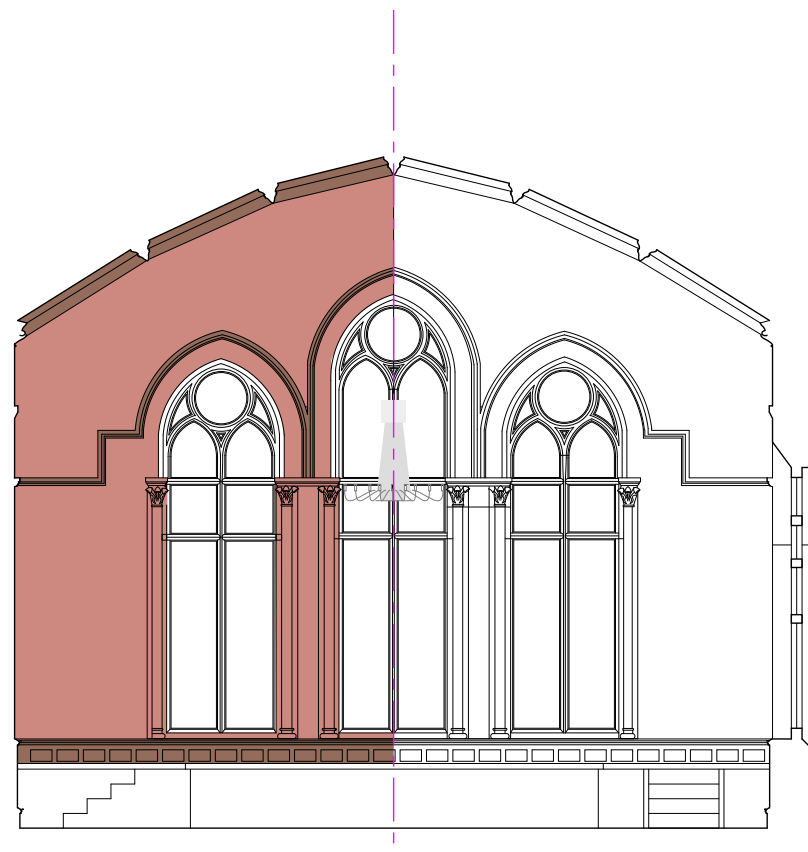
West Elevation

SCHEME 06 - POST 1980'S

- Ceiling: Dark Brown Varnished Timber with painted blue and red stripes
- Ceiling panels: Cream
- Upper Walls: Light Green
- Flat Walls: Lilac



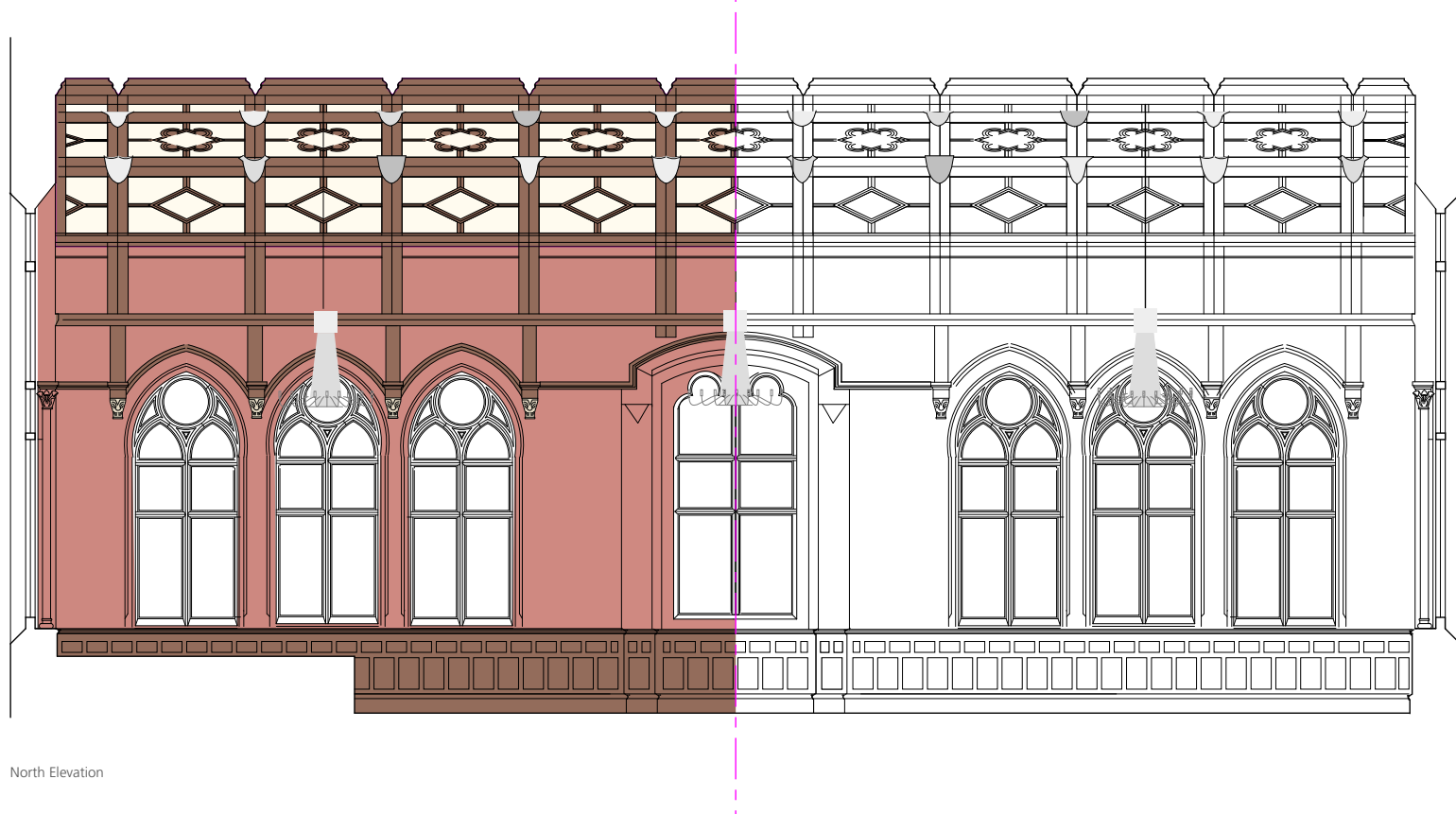
4.7 Scheme 07 - 2017 Proposal



West Elevation

SCHEME 07: 2017 PROPOSAL

- Dark Brown Painted Timber to ceiling with painted blue and red stripes
- Ceiling panels: Cream
- Walls - BS 04C37 'Autumn Brown'
- Console brackets - BS 08B17 'Sandstone'



5.0 APPENDIX

5.1 John Nevin Report

**JOHN NEVIN – FELLOW OF THE FACULTY OF DECORATION
CONSULTANT ON TRADITIONAL PAINTS
CITY AND GUILDS/ADVANCED CITY AND GUILDS**

**MACKAY DECORATORS (PERTH) LTD
1 RIVERSIDE, PERTH. PH2 7TR**

INVERNESS TOWN HALL

INTRODUCTION

We were asked by Mr Ian Fraser of LDN Architects, 29 St. Leonards Road, Forres to visit Inverness Town Hall (Main Hall) to take samples, analyse and report on same.

The site visit was carried out on Wednesday 18th January, 2017, a total of 6 samples collected, these were taken, treated and examined as described below, this report now concludes this project.

METHOD

Small samples approximately 5_{mm} square were taken from the areas concerned using a scraper or dremel drill. The sample will where possible, include all existing layers of paint, including a small part of the substrate.

In order to ensure that a complete chronology has been obtained, these samples are then encapsulated in a clear plastic resin, and when dried out, they are halved, half the cross section is then polished using various grades of abrasive cloth and examined under a stereoscope with various magnifications, using incident light. When the chronology of layers can be clearly distinguished these are photographed and recorded using a SLR digital camera for incorporation (if required) into the report.

Please note this method will inevitably leave some marks, which may require remedial works.

This method gives a clear indication of different paint layers in a particular sample, and may also; indicate the presence of a now continuous paint layer such as stenciling, gilding or Achlar lining. However, this can usually only be confirmed by further examination including removing or revealing a series of paint layers.

STORAGE OF SAMPLES

Materials taken during sampling process has been encapsulated in a clear plastic resin, after examination and recording these samples are labeled and stored.

Ownership remains with the client, who can have them returned, so he may archive them himself.

Failing instructions to return them they will be retained by Mackay Decorators (Perth) Ltd, for a period of one year, after which time I reserve the right to dispose of them.

LIMITATIONS

The information given and the conclusions drawn in the report are given in good faith and are based on the limited number of samples taken.

Colours represented in the sample images are only illustrative and are subject to variations caused by the limitations of digital photography and colour reproduction in printers and display screens.

No responsibility or liability can be accepted by the writer for any actions or damage, taken as a consequence of this report.

INVERNESS TOWN HALL – MAIN HALL

Ceiling, Timber Flats, Beams, Purlins and Up Rights

These items are currently painted off white flats and picked out beams, purlins etc in brown with a red trim to outer edge. There are approximately 5 schemes beneath, however, all areas were varnished originally. This implies that the original scheme was a natural timber finish for many years.

There is a sketch from the 1930's which suggests and in all probability was implemented to a lighter decorative scheme – oil paint were used originally – but subsequently layers are water based.

Heraldic panels are visible at the junctions of vertical and horizontal beams to ceiling, these have been poorly executed and I am unsure if there are original or added in the 1930's scheme.

The images are from cross sections to 6 areas and show the colours the walls are mainly oil paint.

As the paints are pre 1970 they will contain lead carbonate and treated as such.

INVERNESS TOWN HALL 1876

Sample 1 – Centre Panel Upper Wall

Substrate	0	Plaster
	1	Tan
	2	Dark Brown – Wood Grain
	3	Pale Green
	4	Blue Light
	5	Blue Light
	6	Greenish Blue Light

Sample 2 – Upper Wall Lower Panel

Substrate	0	Plaster
	1	Tan
	2	Reddish Brown – Wood Grain
	3	Cream
	4	Blue Light
	5	Blue Light
	6	Greenish Blue Light

Sample 3 – Main Wall Flat

Substrate	0	Plaster
	1	Stone
	2	Reddish Brown
	3	Cream
	4	Pale Green
	5	Pale Green
	6	Off White
	7	Lilac

Sample 4 – Main Wall Lower

Substrate	0	Plaster
		Same as Sample 3

INVERNESS TOWN HALL 1876

Sample 5 – Window Ingo

Substrate	0	Plaster
	1	Stone
	2	Lilac
	3	Brown
	4	Stone
	5	Reddish Brown
	6	Pale Green

Sample 6 – Window – Corner Moulding

Substrate	0	Plaster
	1	Stone
	2	Dark Brown
	3	Deep Red
	4	Deep Red

