Fox Hall - *Part 9*, Brickwork Finish

By Jim Melchor and Tom Newbern

As discussed in previous parts of the Fox Hall series, the brickwork on the front and back of Fox Hall is laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers (Fig. 1, Fox Hall front and back walls, Flemish bond with glazed headers). The endwalls are Flemish bond below the water table and above the belt course, and English bond between the water table and belt course and in the chimneys (Fig. 2, Mixed brickwork on endwalls). There are extant jack arches over the five large first-floor windows and the front door as well as decorative hound-tooth brickwork over the front-door jack arch (Fig. 3, Jack arch over a large front window) (Fig. 4, Hound-tooth brickwork over door and portion of door jack arch). This brickwork was meant to impress!

Figure 1

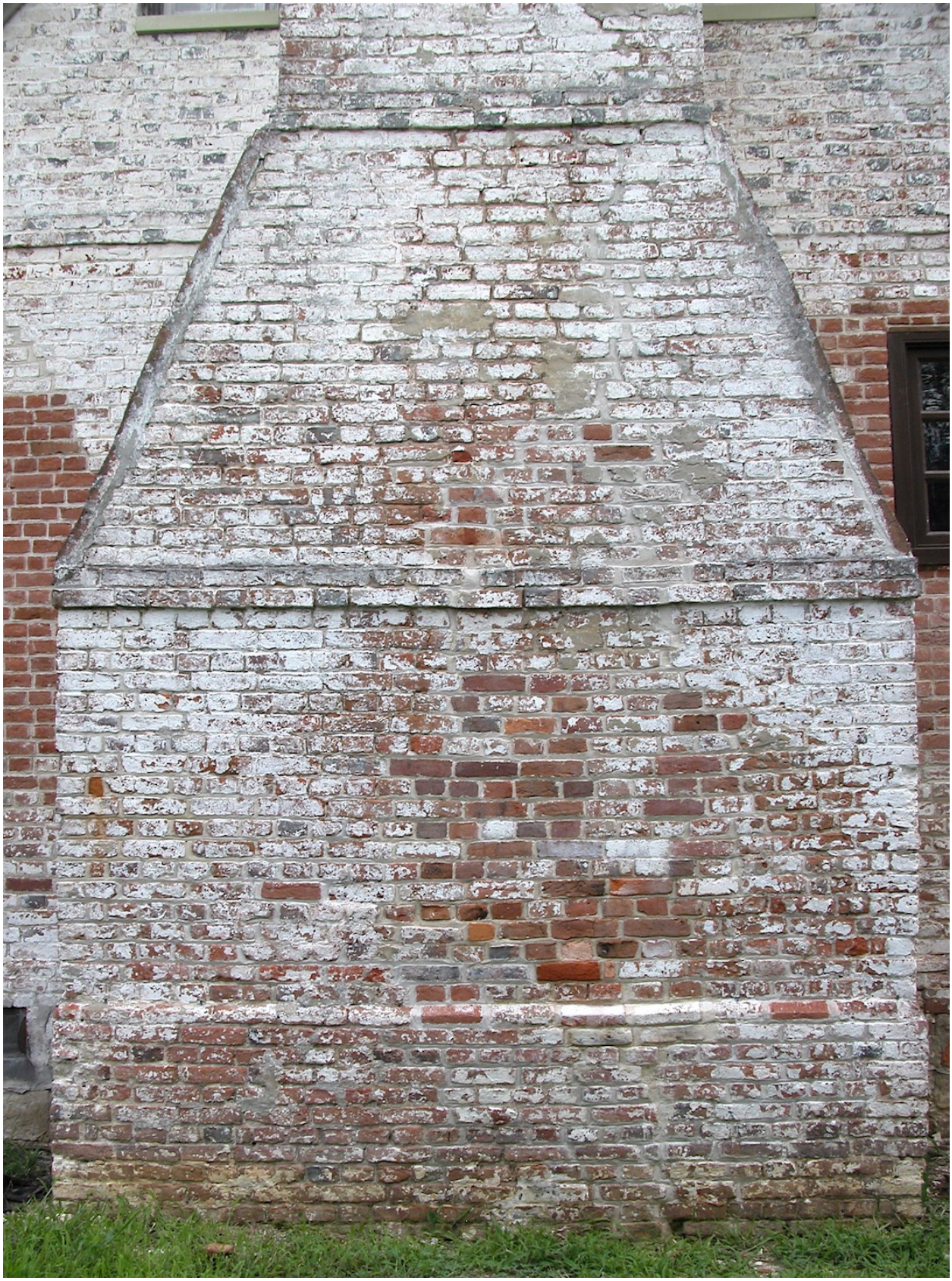

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Unfortunately, the exterior brickwork of Fox Hall, over the years, has been subjected to numerous campaigns of whitewash and white paint. Some of this has been removed with gentle pressure washing by the owner, but much remains (See Figs. 1-4). It is unlikely that all can be completely removed without risking damage to the original bricks and mortar. In repairing the chimneys, restoring the original window openings, and closing several modern penetrations in the original brickwork, the masons have had to use custom-made restoration bricks that closely match the natural color and texture of the originals. Obviously, these clean, unpainted bricks stand out and draw attention to the repairs (Fig. 5, Largest repair area, closure of a twentieth-century window).

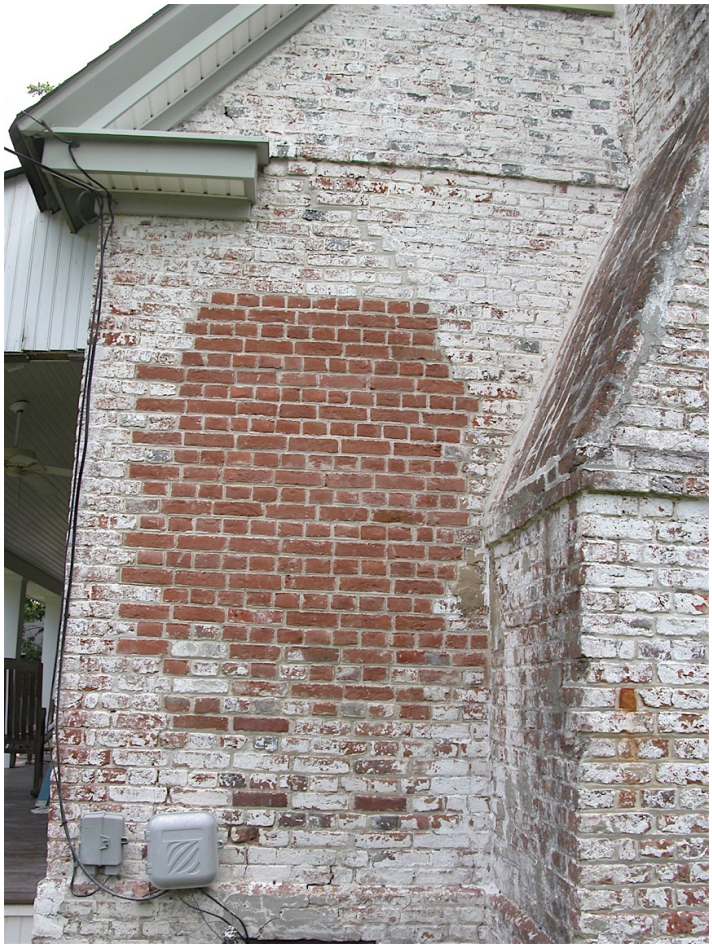

Figure 5

Repainting or whitewashing the house was out of the question, as it would again obscure the beautiful original brickwork that has partially emerging through weathering and light pressure washing.

Ideally, the restoration team would like to see all the offending white paint/whitewash removed from the house. However, the risk of damage to the original brickwork in accomplishing this is too great for the team to accept. As a fallback position, the team decided to try toning down these restored areas by visually blending them into the original brickwork. Experimenting in several limited areas was undertaken with a light, reversible, lime wash, applied to match the remaining finish on the house. The results were not satisfactory. The restoration bricks took on an overall, opaque, pinkish hue that did not match the original brickwork with its mottled remnants of white paint/whitewash.

The wash used in this unsuccessful attempt was hydraulic lime 2.0 mixed to a thin, watery consistency. This wash was based on a suggestion from the team mason who thought hydraulic lime would provide a more stable finish than common masons lime. The manager then decided to try the same hydraulic lime mixed to mortar consistency, but without any sand aggregate. Mixed this way, the hydraulic lime can be judiciously applied with a brush in splotches on the restoration bricks or brushed on to cover the bricks completely. Before applying, the bricks must first be wet with water. Otherwise, the hydraulic lime will set too quickly thus preventing working it to the desired thickness and appearance with a brush. Once applied, the lime initially appears gray,

not matching the remnants of white paint/whitewash on the old brickwork. However, after the hydraulic lime has set for an hour or so, it turns white and is a close match (Fig. 6, Unsatisfactory lime wash on stretcher [center right], successful lime mix on headers [left above and left immediately below lime-washed stretcher]).

Figure 6

After allowing this second test application of hydraulic lime to cure for two days, its stability was tested with a garden hose and city water. None of this lime washed off the bricks.

Some, but not all, restoration bricks around the window in Fig. 7 were similarly treated with the hydraulic lime to ascertain how effectively they visually blended in with the original brickwork. This test was successful as they blended very well (Fig. 7, Blending restoration bricks into original brickwork).

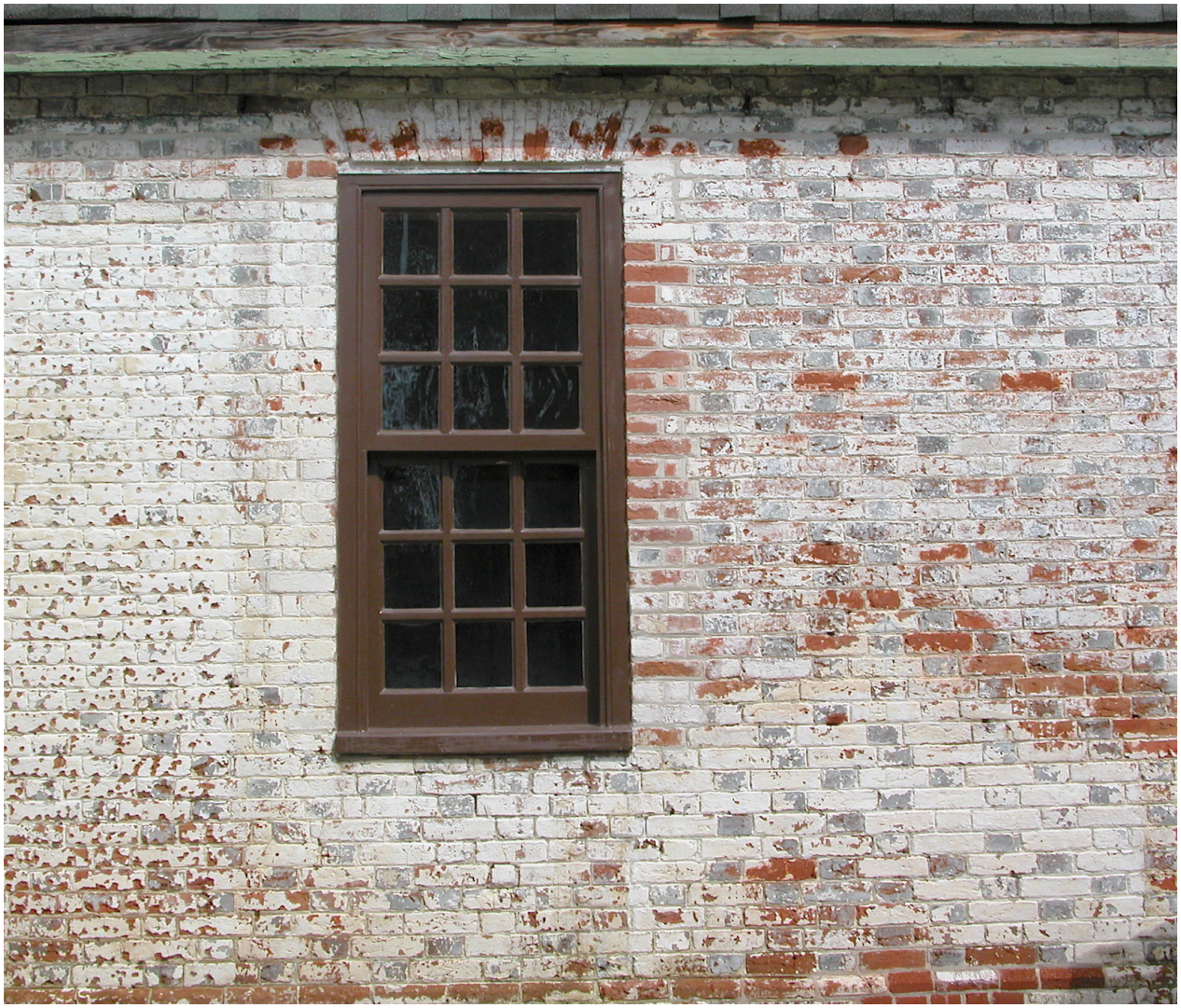

Figure 7

Over the next several months or year, our team painter will undertake the arduous task of visually blending the restoration bricks into the mottled finish on the original brickwork at Fox Hall. He will be required

to exercise great care in this process to maintain randomness and prevent any inadvertent patterns from emerging. The old white paint and whitewash, as well as the newly applied hydraulic lime, will continue to weather and expose more of the beautiful brickwork at Fox Hall.

Update

In Fox Hall - Norfolk's Oldest House, *Part 1*, The restoration team was introduced. Randy Creef has now joined the team as our painter.

Update

In Fox Hall - *Part 8*, Windows, the height and width dimensions of the rough masonry openings for the first-floor windows were given. The brick wall thickness at these openings was not noted in the article and should have been. It is 13 3/4".