

Fox Hall - *Part 14*, East-Chamber Fireplace

By

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In Fox Hall - *Part 11*, Second-Floor Assessment and in the **Update** section in Fox Hall - *Part 12*, Second-Floor Plan, the reopening and masonry repair of the west-chamber fireplace were discussed.

Fortunately, this fireplace was simply boarded over but essentially intact (Fig. 1, West-chamber fireplace) (Fig. 2, Masonry repairs needed in west-chamber fireplace) (Fig. 3, Tuck pointing complete in west-chamber fireplace).



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

A similar fireplace in the east chamber, however, is bricked in and plastered over (Fig. 4, East-chamber fireplace).



Figure 4

The owner considered reopening this fireplace and restoring it to its circa 1725-30 appearance. Prior to reopening, the restoration manager removed several bricks in the infill, hopefully to assess the condition of the firebox and flue (See top left of infill in Fig. 4 for location of viewing port).

We knew that there is a hole in the brick web separating the main flue and the flue of the east-chamber fireplace in the vicinity of the chamber fireplace. Our masons noticed this hole in the web during the restoration of the hall fireplace; however, they did not climb up the main flue to observe it more closely or to repair it. Since both flues are capped, the east-chamber fireplace is bricked in, and there is no plan to use the hall

fireplace for fires of any kind, remedial action on the hole in the web was not undertaken, simply noted as being there.

Once viewing access was gained into the chamber firebox through the infill, several observations were made. The firebox is essentially filled with brick bats, other masonry debris, and sand. The top-back portion of the firebox is missing, exposing the web between the two flues, the hole in the web between the two flues, and the flue of the chamber fireplace above the firebox (Fig. 5, Large and small holes in web between flues) (Fig. 6, Open flue above east-chamber fireplace; bottom of photo is the web between the two flues above the holes; both flues are capped at their tops).



Figure 5



Figure 6

The circular shape of the top of the large hole in the web (See Fig. 5) initially led the restoration team to think that there had been a stovepipe inserted from the east-chamber fireplace, through the web, and into the main flue, bypassing the chamber flue. This would be to accommodate a late nineteenth or early twentieth-century coal, wood, or kerosene stove. A suggested reason for this could be damage to the chamber flue obstructing its use. In light of the observed evidence, however, this scenario does not make sense. The hole in the web is too low for a stovepipe from the chamber fireplace, and there is no penetration in the

back of the firebox aligned with the hole in the web. Furthermore, the chamber flue is clear (See Fig. 6).

To answer the question about the hole in the web between the two flues, we realized that physically ascending the hall flue to the level of the hole was necessary. Observations in and photos of the hall flue indicate that the web between the two flues from just above the hole down to the restored hall fireplace is in tenuous condition with numerous open mortar joints and some brick loss. Considering that the chimney brickwork is nearly 300-years old, this condition was no surprise (Fig. 7, Hall fireplace flue; bottom of photo is the web).



Figure 7

What appears to be the hole in the center foreground of Fig. 7 is brick loss just above the hall fireplace. The actual hole between the flues can be seen higher up in the flue. Other areas of brick loss and open mortar joints are apparent in Fig. 7.

Climbing higher in the flue, reaching the hole in the web, it became obvious that the hole was not punched to accommodate a stovepipe. In fact, it is simply another area of brick deterioration and loss (Fig. 8, View of hole in web from the main flue into chamber firebox).



Figure 8

This opening provides a clear view of the intact top-front brickwork of the east-chamber firebox (See Fig. 8) (Fig. 9, Top-front brickwork of east-chamber firebox). The white material in the forefront of Fig. 9 is the debris fill in the firebox.



Figure 9

Originally, the top-back and top-front brickwork partially closed the top of the firebox to a narrow slit-type opening or throat, as can be seen in the intact firebox in the west-chamber fireplace (Fig. 10, Top of firebox in west chamber).



Figure 10

As previously mentioned, the top-back brickwork of the east-chamber firebox is missing. Why this brickwork was removed and the fireplace permanently sealed is not known. Possibly, early in the twentieth century, the owner at the time attempted to correct smoke leaking from the main flue into the east chamber through the hole in the web. Because of the tenuous nature of the web, repair was not practical, and the chamber fireplace was abandoned and sealed. The assumed twentieth-century timeframe is based on the assorted types and periods of the bricks in the infill.

This investigation has come to the same conclusion that repair of the web, closure of the hole, repair of the chamber firebox, and restoration of the fireplace to its circa 1725-30 appearance would cost thousands of dollars and is not practical at this time. Consequently, the owner has decided not to undertake this work and expense. The east-chamber fireplace will remain closed for now.