Fig. 1: The 15th century Guildhall and the later porch, before the recent restoration of the west crypt.

The pre-1411 Guildhall of London

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THE GUILDHALL has been the focus of civic life in London since the second quarter of the 12th century, but until recent years little was known about the building that had existed prior to its reconstruction in 1411. A very important study of the earlier Guildhall was published by Dr. Caroline Barron in 1974, which incorporated the extremely detailed architectural study of the present late medieval building by Terry Ball of the Directorate of Ancient Monuments, Department
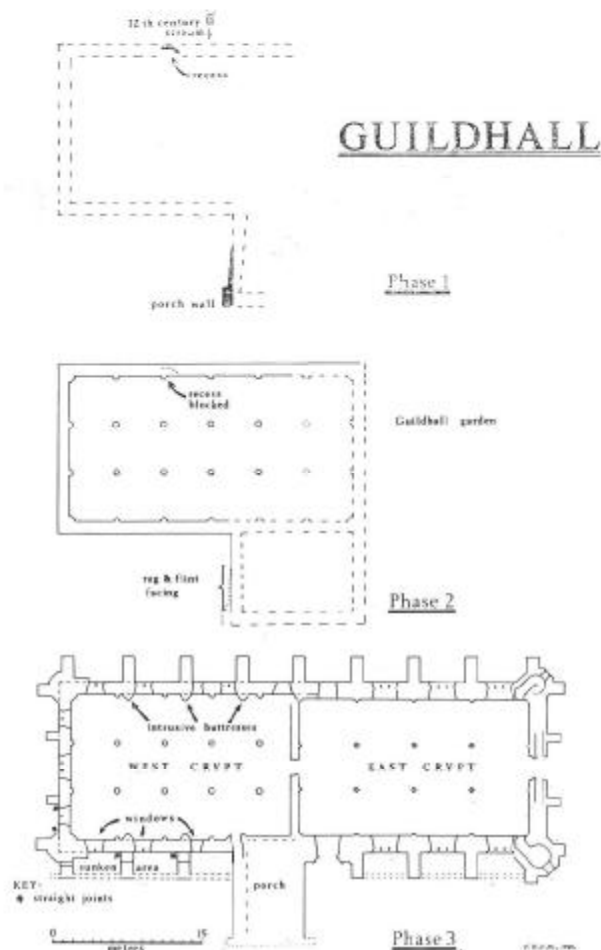
GUILDHALL

Fig. 2: Suggested phases in the development of Guildhall. Phase 1, possibly 12th century; phase 2, possibly late 13th century; phase 3, built in 1411.
(Drawn by P. Marsden)

of the Environment[1].

This study of Guildhall was published soon after the completion of the restoration of the western crypt, the porch, and the exterior of the south-western part of the building. During 1968, however, the old buildings on the west side of Guildhall Yard were demolished, and it was possible for the present author to gather further information which it has not been possible to publish before now, even in an interim form. This new information not only reinforces the conclusions made by Dr. Barron, but also adds further detail towards understanding the development of Guildhall.

1. C. Barron, *The medieval Guildhall of London.* Published by the Corporation of London, 1974.
2. Barron, *op cit,* p.15.

In spite of John Stow's claim that the Guildhall preceding the 1411 building was "a little cotage" which had stood on the east side of Alderman-bury street "not farre from the west ende of Guildhall now used"[2], Dr. Barron was able to demonstrate not only that this earlier building must have occupied part of the site of the present Guildhall, but also that it was a substantial building.

Much of the early 15th century Guildhall survives to this day (Fig. 1), and comprises a large hall and porch at ground level, and two under-crofts, called the east and west crypts, at basement level (Fig. 2). There is a tower at each of the four corners of the buiding, and the walls are reinforced by a series of external buttresses. But although much of this 15th century Guildhall appears to present a coherent and unified plan, particularly in the great hall and in the eastern crypt, on closer examination it is clear that there are some inconsistencies relating to the western crypt and to the porch, which show that those parts of the building are of earlier date.

That the west crypt is earlier than the 15th century rebuilding of Guildhall has long been suspected, and the recent study by Dr. Barron confirms this. The architectural styles, floor levels and the module of vaulting in both crypts are very different from each other, the east crypt being of a simpler and earlier style. Indeed the wall separating the two crypts preserves clear evidence that the east crypt of 1411 was *added* to the then demolished east end of the west crypt, since it arbitrarily cuts across the vaulting of the west crypt (Fig. 5). The new information shows that two building phases, rather than only one, can be identified as appa-
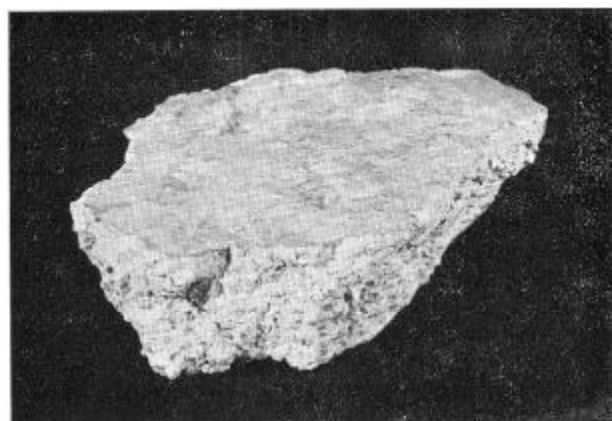

Fig. 3: Wall plaster from the recess in the west crypt.
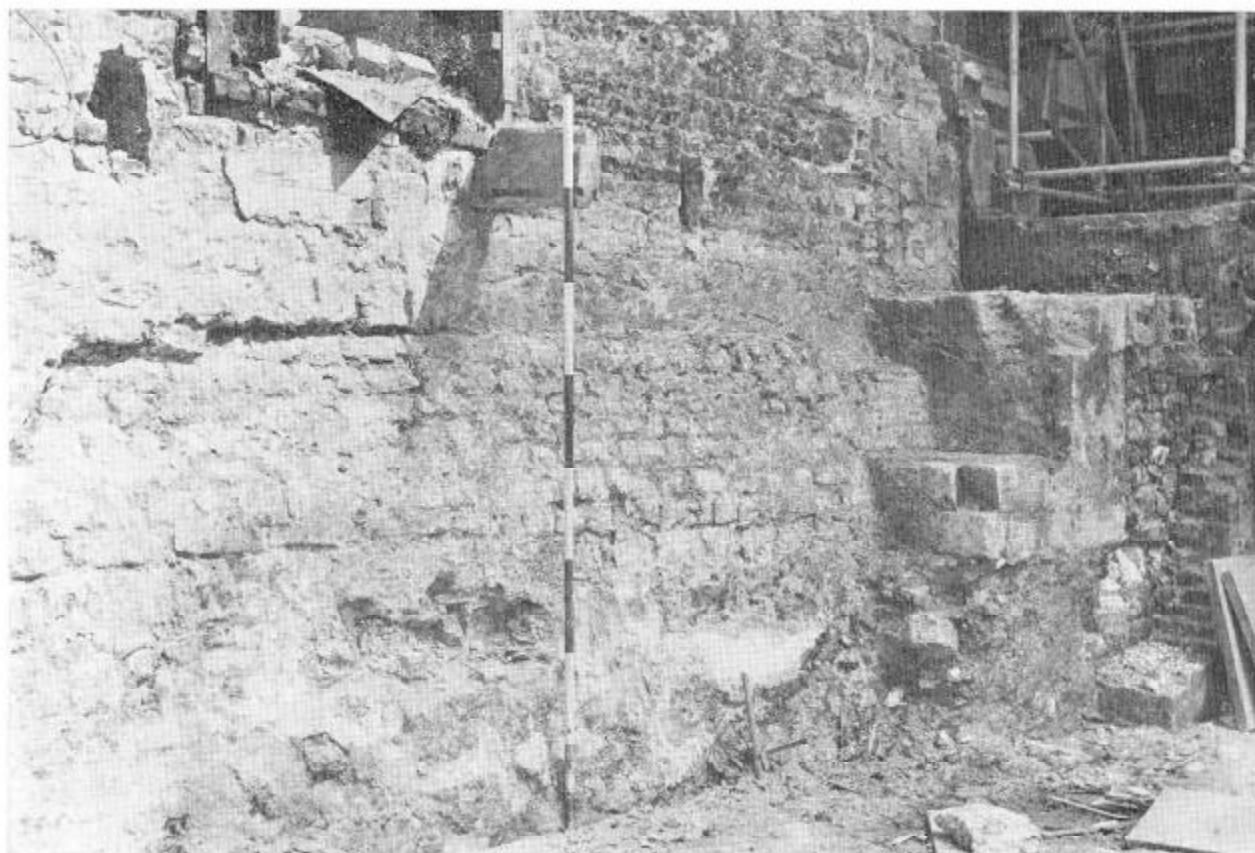(Photo: J. Bailey)

Fig. 4: Bottom of the porch wall showing the oblique Phase 1 wall overlaid by the Phase 2 wall.
(Photo: R. Merrifield)

rently preceding the early 15th century reconstruction of Guildhall. Thus, by taking into account the historical and architectural information described by Dr. Barron, it is now possible to suggest how the building may have developed.

Phase 1: ?12th - 13th century Guildhall (Fig. 2)

It was in the north wall of the west crypt that clear evidence of the earliest phase of Guildhall has been found. Since the vaulting in the crypt is believed to have preceded the 1411 rebuilding of Guildhall, and was perhaps built in the late 13th century, it is significant that a pilaster of the vaulting was found blocking a recess in the north wall. This blocked recess clearly shows that the vaulting had been constructed at least partly within the shell of an earlier standing building. The recess was noted by the author during repairs to the north wall of the crypt, at which time a sample of its surface rendering was removed. The sample (Fig. 3) clearly shows that the recess had been given a carefully prepared white

surface, and was unlikely to have been a temporary rendering made during the construction of the crypt vaulting. It is clear, therefore, that at least this part of the north wall of Guildhall was already standing and was modified to enable it to be incorporated into the second phase of the building when the vaulting was constructed.

The date of this original north wall is unlikely to have been earlier than the 12th century since only about 3m (10ft) to the east of the recess, and just north of the wall, evidence of a stream bed was found during 1951, in which 12th century pottery was found[3]. The stream was apparently earlier than the wall for the silt also contained rushes laid north-south indicating that the flow of water had crossed the line of the wall.

There is no proof that this wall containing the recess was part of the first Guildhall, since the

3. Museum of London records, and R. Merrifield, *The Roman City of London*, London, 1965, p.226, site 127.

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site of the 12th century building is not known. Nevertheless as subsequent Guildhalls were built on this site it is tempting to see here part of the building that was recorded in about 1127 when *terra Gialle* measured 52ft (15.85m) in width and 132ft (40.23m) in length[4]. Since this is the approximate width of the western crypt of Guildhall, in whose north wall the recess occurred, it is possible that the west and south walls of the crypt also may have belonged to this first building.

Additional evidence, perhaps of this first phase, has also been found in the west wall of the porch, where two phases of wall construction appear to have preceded the 1411 construction. The earliest wall lay at a slightly oblique alignment to the upper part of the porch, and was constructed of dressed blocks of ragstone and mortar on a foundation of ragstone and mortar (Fig. 4). The bottom of the faced wall and the junction with its foundation of haphazard stonework lay at 1.2m (4ft) below the pavement surface of Guildhall Yard, suggesting that this was the ground level at the time the wall was constructed. This is of course considerably lower than the porch floor level in the 15th century, and is itself an indicator of the early date of the first wall.

Judging from this it seems that the first Guildhall may have been an L-shaped building whose ground floor level may have been at about the floor level of the western crypt. Since it is notoriously difficult to date building styles, it could be argued that as the stone facing of the earliest porch wall did not match the facing of the west and south walls of the western crypt, then the
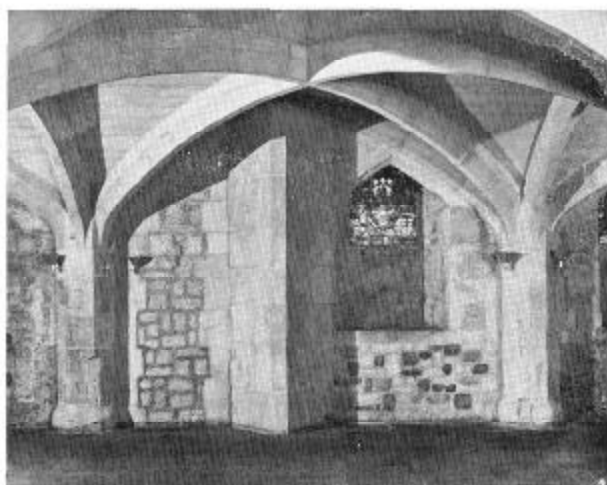

Fig. 6: An intrusive buttress of the 1411 Guildhall cutting through the west crypt vaulting. The wall face has been restored. (Photo: T. Hurst)

Fig. 5: Truncated vaulting at the east end of the west crypt. Both the vaulting and the floor have been restored, but the end of the vaulting had survived in the wall (left) which separated the two crypts. (Photo: T. Hurst)

earliest porch wall may have belonged to a different building. On the other hand, as it is clear that much of the exterior of the west crypt had been modified, particularly during the early 15th century when the windows were inserted, it could be suggested that only parts of the core of the walls of the first phase building have survived in the western crypt area. The recess, for example, was only identified in the core of the north wall.

Phase 2: ?13th - 14th century Guildhall (Fig. 2)

The second phase of Guildhall is clearly preserved in the west crypt, for it includes the vaulting which had been inserted into the shell of the earlier building or buildings. The date of this phase is far from certain since we must rely upon the simple architectural style of the pillars supporting the vaulting. Dr. Barron tentatively suggests that the vaulting may have been constructed during the late 13th century[5].

Curiously, it is the 1411 rebuilding of Guildhall

4. Barron, *op cit*, p.15.
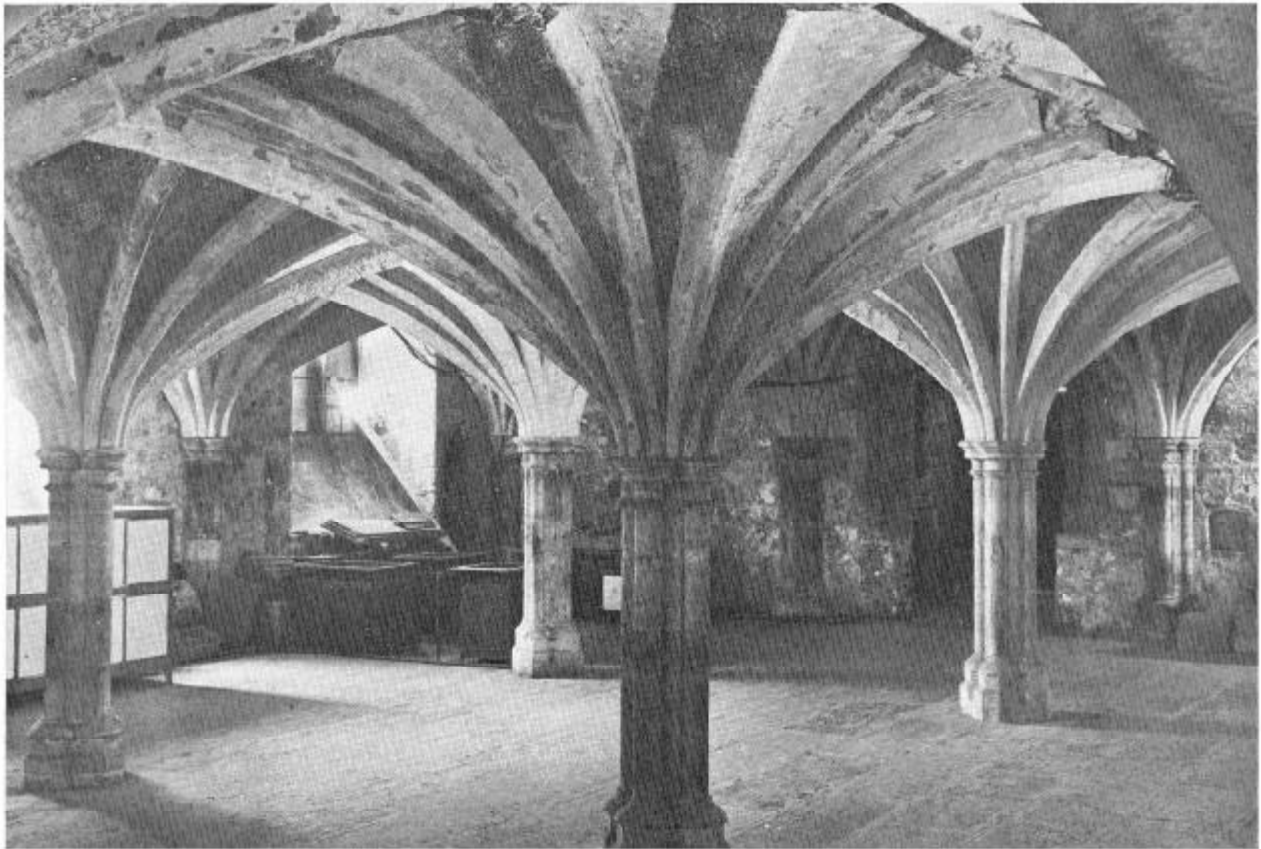5. Barron, *op cit*, p.21.

Fig. 7: The east crypt of Guildhall constructed in 1411.
(Photo: R. Merrifield)

that provides the clearest evidence of the early date of the west crypt, for at that time the vaulting at the east end of the crypt had been cut across in mid-span by a wall inserted to separate the two crypts (Fig. 5).

There is further evidence that the west crypt is earlier than the east crypt, for, not only are the floor levels of the adjoining crypts different, but also the walls are of different thicknesses. The west crypt walls are of insufficient thickness to support the heightened 15th century building, and as a result a series of massive internal pilasters had to be added, cutting arbitrarily through the existing vaulting (Fig. 6). The east crypt of 1411, by comparison, had much thicker walls, and therefore had no need for internal pilasters.

The corner towers provide another important clue. Those built at the east end of the eastern crypt were evidently constructed as part of that crypt in 1411, for their staircases were carried down to crypt level. In contrast, however, the towers at the west end of the western crypt merely had staircases rising only

from the hall above the crypt. A careful examination of the foundation of the south-west corner tower explains why, for it shows that it was separated from the crypt wall by a straight joint, thus proving that this tower had been added to the west crypt (Fig. 8). And finally the buttresses, another distinctive feature of the 15th century Guildhall, were also clearly added to the west crypt for their foundations too were separated from it by straight joints.

Dr. Barron has now shown from the historical evidence that the pre-1411 Guildhall lay on the site of the western crypt, and that it comprised a cellar (? the west crypt) which underlay a "great hall" where the "immense commonalty" met to elect the Mayor and take important decisions. In addition, she has shown that by the first half of the 14th century Guildhall had an Upper Chamber or Council Chamber, and a smaller inner chamber, about which she has written: "it seems likely, although there is now no surviving archaeological evidence, that these may have been contained in

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Fig. 8: A straight joint separating the foundation of the south-west corner tower from the west crypt wall. (Photo: P. Marsden)

a north-south cross wing at the eastern end of the building, opening off the screens passage"[6].

In fact a careful and independent analysis of the west wall of the porch has revealed substantial traces of a wall overlying the early porch wall mentioned as part of phase 1. This later porch wall is probably of 14th century date, and presumably was part of the cross wing. The wall lies on a slightly different alignment from the earlier wall, and its west face was constructed of ragstone and courses of squared knapped flints. This facing has only survived towards the south end of the wall, whereas at the north end, what presumably was its chalk and rubble core was found to be bonded into the lower part of the south wall of the western crypt. The crypt and porch walls were therefore contemporary constructions.

The courses of flint and ragstone are distinctive and somewhat similar to the mid-14th century construction of the city wall in St. Alphage Gardens and in Westminster Abbey,[7] suggesting that here is architectural evidence for some of the construction work at Guildhall which is recorded in documentary records primarily during the 1330's[8]. Above the courses of flint and ragstone there occurred squared stone facing, apparently of the early 15th century building (phase 3).

The significance of this analysis of the development of Guildhall is that each stage reflects the growing aspirations and dignity of the self-governing authority of medieval London, from its inception during the 12th century. And also it shows not only that the development of Guildhall is far more complex than was imagined, but also that the achievement of John Croxtone, Master Mason and Architect of Guildhall during the 15th century[9], was, like his building (Fig. 7), clearly of outstanding dimension.

6. Barron, *op cit*, p.22.
7. W. F. Grimes, *The Excavation of Roman and Mediaeval London*, London, 1968, p.81, plates 25, 26.
8. Barron, *op cit*, p.21.
9. Barron, *op cit*, p.25.

Letters

PUBLICITY FOR ARCHAEOLOGY

AS A PROFESSIONAL publicist and amateur archaeologist, it concerns me that on all the excavations I have worked there has been little or no appreciation of the publicity value of the activities. I have no doubt that many historians find the attentions of the media unsettling — if not repugnant — because of their tendency to trivialise information but I hope to persuade them that with the right approach the local press in particular can be exploited to their benefit. And publicity is essential. Public support for archaeological work is necessary if funds are to continue in times of economic difficulty. The simplest way to start is to send a press release, or even a letter, to local newspapers, T.V. and radio stations (c/o the News Editor) announcing the start of the excavation, informing them of the basic details. In many cases they will wish to send a reporter, so give a person to contact — and a telephone number. They should subsquently be notified of any finds likely to be of broad interest — and if additional volunteers are required they should be advised also.

We should not be afraid to publicise volunteer help but look for an interesting 'angle': I once achieved several column inches about a relatively uninteresting site in a leading national daily newspaper by writing a short note to the Woman's Page Editor reporting on the work of volunteer housewives. In times of financial stringency, the value of unpaid volunteers can not be over emphasised, so an item for the noticeboard of all local colleges and senior schools asking for such aid can pay dividends. Schools should be invited to send parties to visit the site (and be shown around by an articulate guide).

If all these suggestions meet with disfavour, can I make a plea for one single but highly effective form of communication. Put up a notice where people who come to see what is happening can read it, giving *brief* details of the site and the work and welcoming volunteers: not only will this ensure that local people know what is happening, it will save you having to put up with those inane questions with which you are repeatedly pestered!
COLIN ISAACSON