

The Undercroft 72/74 High Street, Guildford

by M G O'CONNELL, with a contribution on the documentary evidence
by SHIRLEY CORKE

Introduction

72/74 High Street (fig 1) is an early 19th century brick building constructed over a late 13th century undercroft which is scheduled as an ancient monument. In 1979 plans for the alteration of the premises for use as office accommodation by the Halifax Building Society included the rebuilding of the front wall, which was structurally unsound, upon deeper foundations. The reconstruction programme involved the excavation of a foundation trench at the front of the building which, it was thought, might result in uncovering the original frontage of the undercroft and would certainly disturb the surviving steps leading to that building. Permission was given by the architects, Messrs Hartley and Travis, and the contractors, Caesar Bros, for a watching brief to take place when work began on the trench in July 1979.

On behalf of the Conservation and Archaeology Section of the Planning Department, Surrey County Council, the archaeological investigation was undertaken by Martin O'Connell and at the same time a detailed architectural survey of the undercroft carried out by S Clapham.

As a result of the watching brief, it was shown that the original steps led directly from the street to the undercroft and that to the west of the entrance, the frontage of that building extended below the medieval street level which was about 0.34m below the present one. Several features were also noted which predated the construction of the undercroft.

The Watching Brief

The contractors excavated a foundation trench (approx 4.30m x 1.0m) at the front of the building (fig 2) to the same depth as the undercroft floor to receive two concrete piers and at the same time dug a smaller trench to the east (approx 1.0m x 0.80m and at a maximum depth of 0.80m from modern pavement level) in order to take a concrete beam.

The Undercroft Steps

It was clear from Section ST (fig 3) that the original steps would have led directly from the undercroft to the street. The bedding of chalk and mortar (15) for the original top step was still in situ, sealing an earlier pit which contained a fill of chalk blocks and light grey chalky soil (16) but provided no dating evidence apart from a fragment of medieval tile. The street level in the late 13th century would have been about 0.34m lower than the present one, if, as seems likely, it was at the same level as the top step. The access from the High Street via the steps continued to be used after 72/74 High Street had been rebuilt and according to Williamson was still the principal entrance in 1904 (1904a, 137). A drawing of the building made by Munro in 1833 (Guildford Museum G2179) indicates that the entrance was a rounded arch in stone with hinged doors. The doors are open in the drawing and steps are shown leading downwards from the pavement in line with the front of the building. A photograph taken in the last decade of the 19th century shows the same entrance with slightly different doors which were, unfortunately, closed. The frontage of the ground floor was altered soon afterwards, probably at the beginning of the 20th century, resulting in the removal of the arched doorway which was

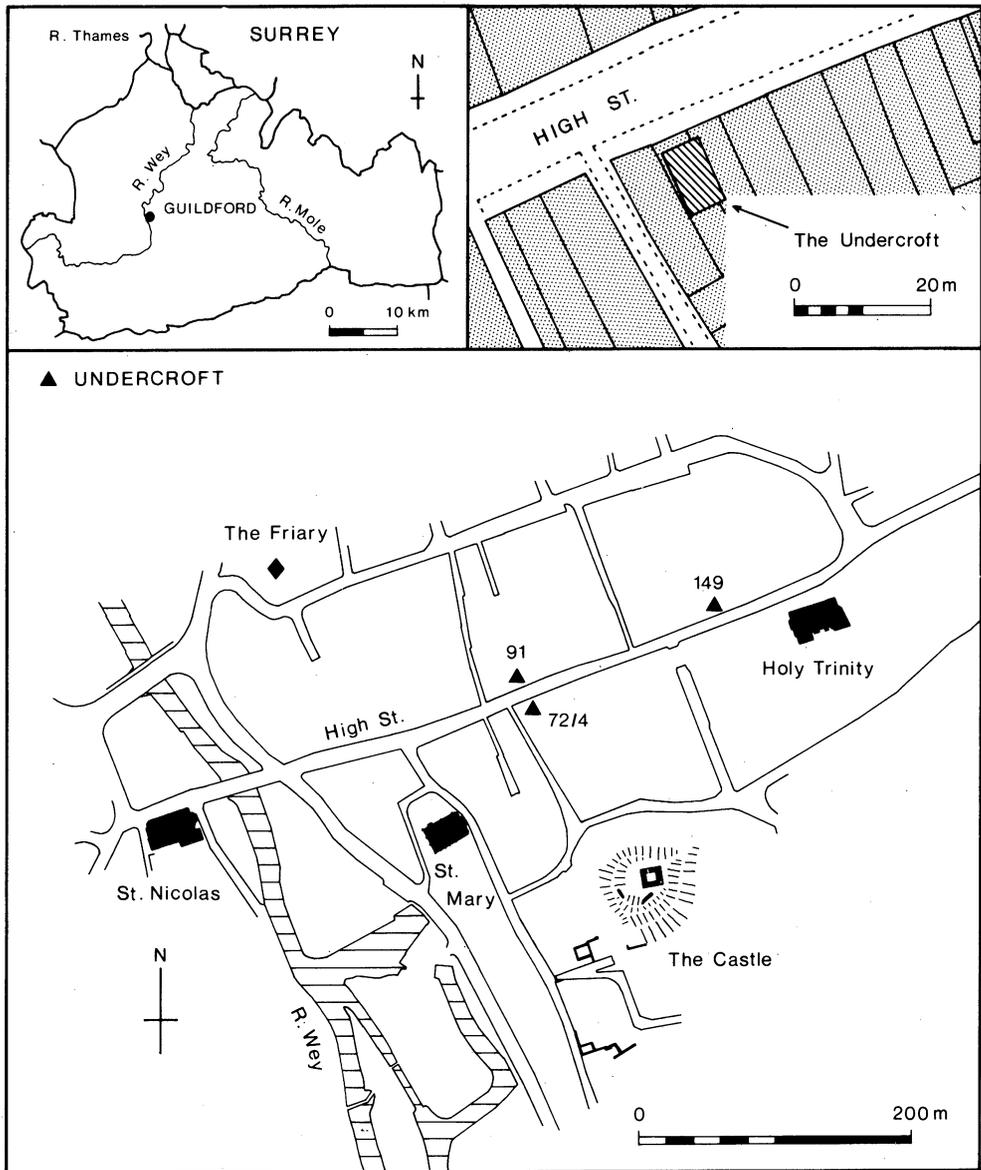


Fig 1 72/74 High Street, Guildford, Site Location

DETAILS OF SECTIONS VX, SV AND ST (FIG 3)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 — Construction cut for doorway — chalk with sand | 10 — West wall of 72/74 High Street |
| 2 — Construction cut for step — chalk and mortar | 11 — Demolition layer? — black soil and chalk |
| 3 — Posthole/Pit? — grey chalky soil | 12 — Early 20th century opening to undercroft at pavement level? — brick and concrete |
| 4 — Posthole/Pit? — brown soil | 13 — Chalk with brown soil |
| 5 — Posthole — brown soil with chalk | 14 — Grey/brown chalky soil |
| 6 — Chalky soil | 15 — Construction cut for step — chalk, sand and mortar |
| 7 — Chalk | 16 — Pit — chalk and light grey chalky soil |
| 8 — Chalk with brown soil | |
| 9 — Pit — brown chalky soil | |

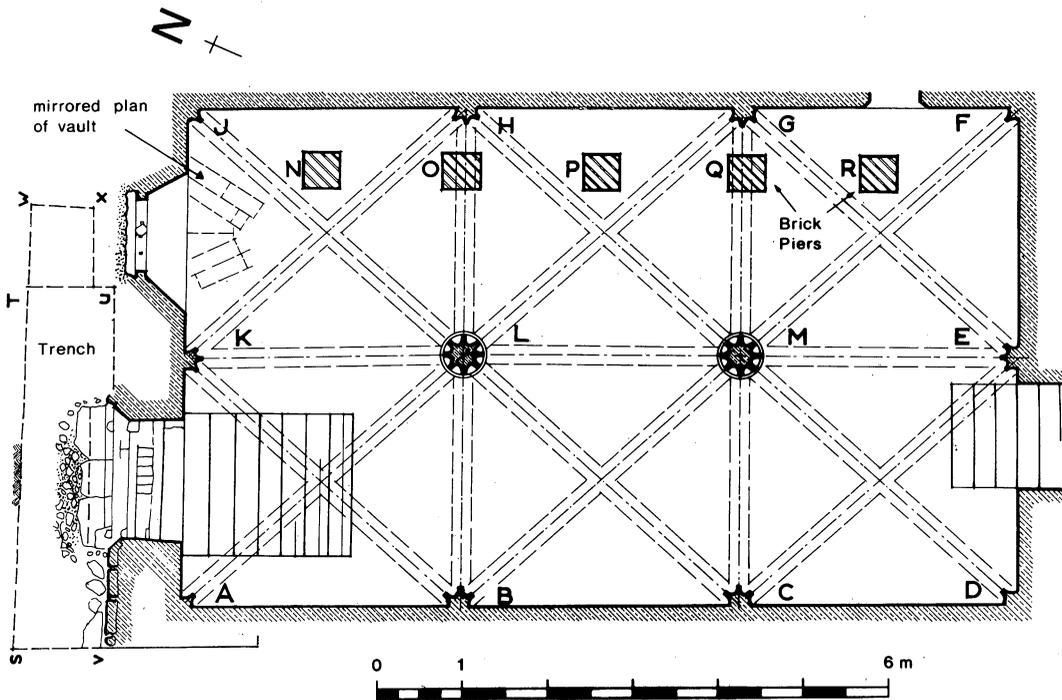


Fig 2 72/74 High Street, Guildford, Plan of Undercroft and Contractors' (Caesar Bros) Foundation Trench.
 Note: All vault stones jointed parallel to ridges except Compartment J-K

replaced by a rectangular hatched entrance. It is possible that the two original top steps were removed at the same time and the bricked opening (12) inserted at pavement level in order to facilitate unloading from the High Street when the undercroft was used to store wine.

During the excavation of the foundation trench it was necessary to remove the uppermost surviving step which consisted of three large worked blocks of chalk, repaired at some stage with brick. A rough construction trench had been cut into the chalk subsoil to receive the blocks which had then been laid upon a thin layer of mortar and the rest of the trench infilled with chalk and mortar (2).

This step and the one below were in a reasonable state of preservation in comparison with the remainder, which had undergone considerable wear and had been rebuilt with brick and concrete, suggesting that the upper two were protected or covered in some way. Indeed, it was still possible to detect the position of the original step above the surviving top one from the mark it had left upon it. Grooves in the two steps may have been used to hold some form of barrel slide. Before exposing the top step the contractors removed a thin layer of modern building debris sealed below a layer of concrete about 0.30m thick.

The Undercroft Frontage

Although badly disturbed by the rebuilding of 72/74 High Street, enough survived to indicate that to the west of the original entrance the frontage would have extended below the medieval street level and have consisted of large chalk blocks. One block of flint was noted but there was insufficient evidence to be certain of an original chequer-work construction of alternating chalk

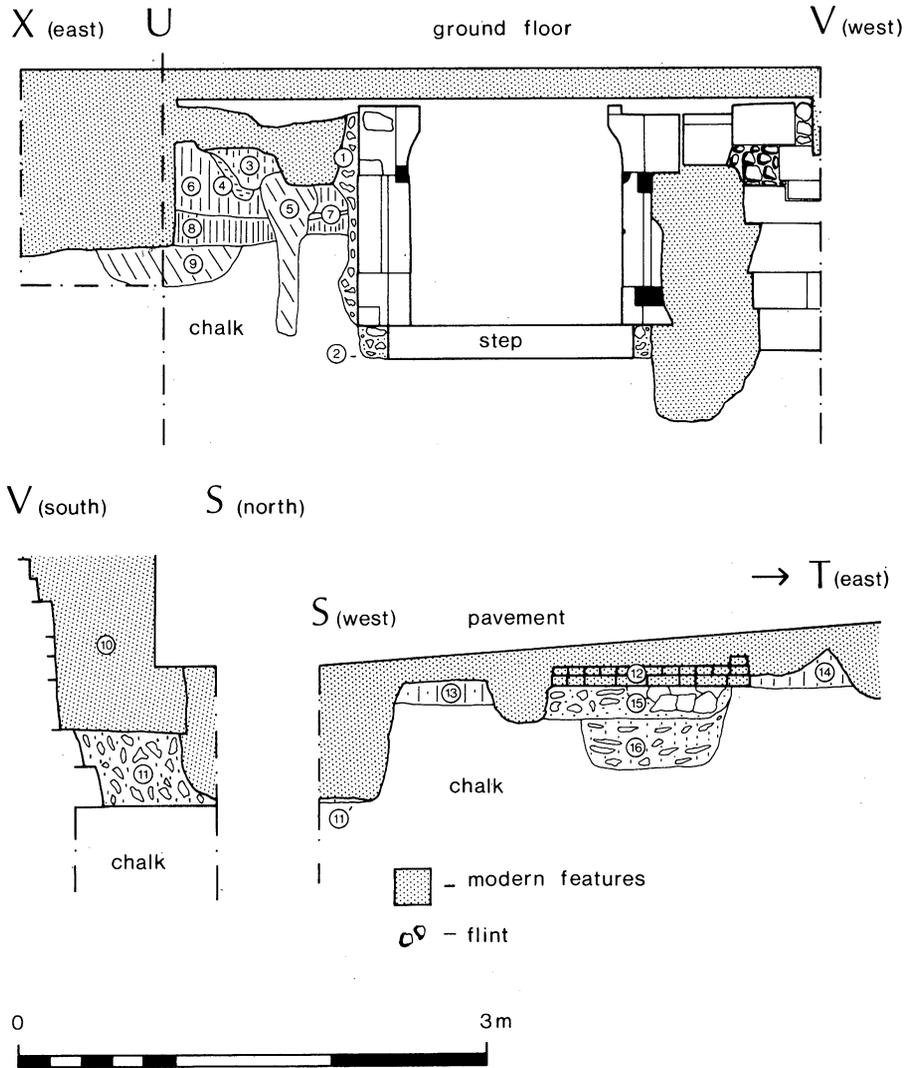


Fig 3 72/74 High Street, Guildford, Sections VX, SV and ST

and flint. In Section VS (fig 3) the front wall of the undercroft is irregularly stepped in profile and a layer of black soil and chalk (11) had been deposited against the lowest part of the wall, probably representing a demolition layer resulting from the 19th century building operations. This layer was cut by the foundation of brick and concrete for the west wall of 72/74 High Street (10) which actually rests upon the undercroft. The construction cut (1) for the doorway was visible to the east of the entrance and itself cut a number of earlier layers: Several features appear in this part of the section, including a large posthole (5), but are impossible to date due to modern disturbances and lack of dateable artefacts. It was evident from Section VX (fig 3) that the frontage would not have been continued on this side of the entrance below street level. Although both jambs are rebated externally, facing stones could only have been fitted on the east side of the entrance at right angles to the doorway because the fill of the construction cut

and the earlier layers cut by it project to the north of the rebate, that is outside the building line. It seems probable, therefore, that a spur wall may originally have flanked the steps leading to the undercroft. The original window had been blocked with chalk and brick when the front wall of the 19th century building was erected.

Discussion

Several points need to be added to Margaret Wood's description of the undercroft (Wood 1950, 83-4 and 117) as a result of the watching brief. The jambs of the doorway in the north wall are splayed and rebated externally. There is no evidence for door hooks or hinges and it is possible that the entrance was closed by shutters and that retaining bars were inserted in the holes or sockets still visible on the jambs. The lintel was probably removed in the 19th century.

The entrance in the south wall (fig 4) is modern but replaced an earlier plain two-centred doorway and stairway illustrated in Brayley's history (1841). This entrance was blocked at that time and remained so until the beginning of the 20th century (Williamson 1904a, 137). Williamson refers to a proposal to reopen the entrance in 1904 (1904b, xii) and it seems likely

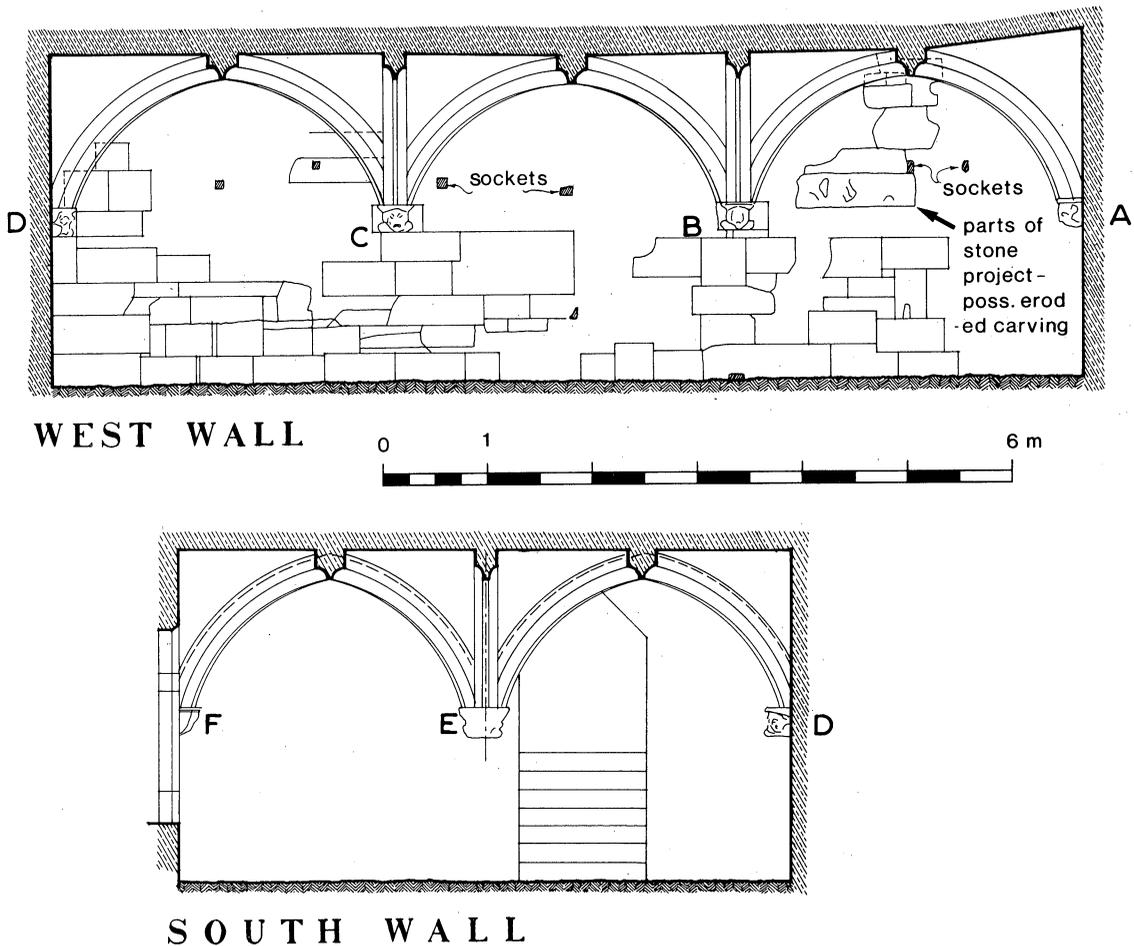


Fig 4 72/74 High Street, Guildford, West and South Walls of Undercroft

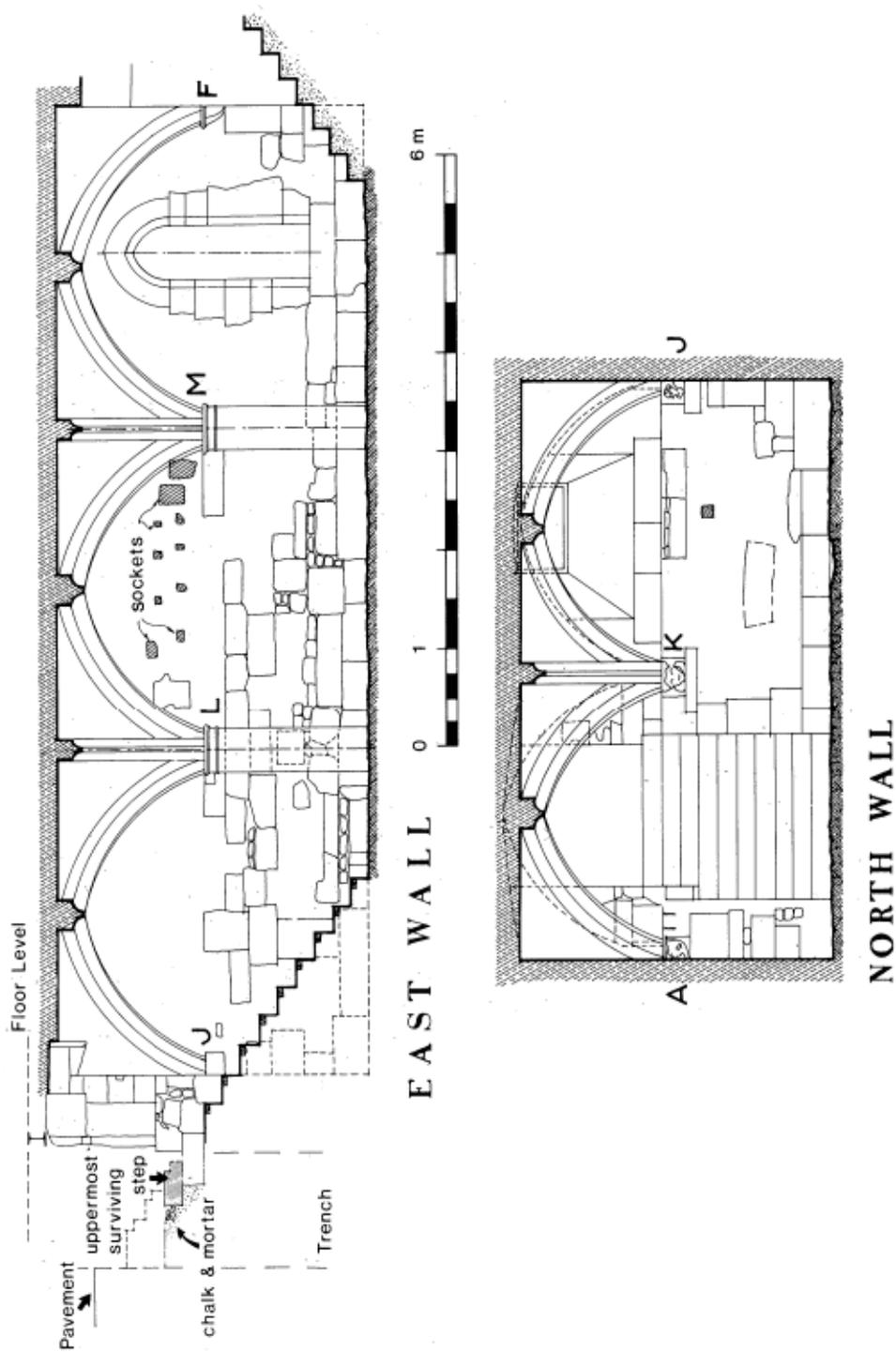


Fig 5 72/74 High Street, Guildford, East and North Walls of Undercroft

that the doorway and stairs were enlarged when the frontage and access to the undercroft from the High Street were changed (see above).

A number of holes or sockets appear in the north, east and west walls (figs 4 & 5) of the undercroft which could have been used to support cupboards, shelves or lampstands. In the north bay (west aisle) part of one block of chalk projects from the wall and may contain eroded carving, but its purpose remains obscure.

There are two other undercrofts in Guildford, one below the Angel Hotel, 91 High Street, and the other under 149 High Street (Wood 1950, 82–4). The former is the more complete, is similar in appearance and scale, and probably roughly contemporary in date with the undercroft at 72/74 High Street (fig 1).

In a recent assessment of undercrofts Faulkner argues for their use (in the front part at least) as shop premises — ‘in the sense of a combined showroom, selling place and stockroom, possibly built on a speculative basis for letting out to retail traders’ — while the ornateness of most examples points to their suitability for some luxury trade (1975b, 81). He also considers that the most significant feature they have in common is the form of access which is always from the street, while an alternative entrance from the premises above is rare (Faulkner 1975a, 122). In this last respect the Guildford examples are exceptional because both the Angel and the 72/74 High Street undercroft have an internal staircase leading to the floor above (Wood 1950, 83 and 117) and the former appears to be unique in having no direct means of access from the main street. Moreover the Angel undercroft’s principal entrance was from the rear of the building, and not from the High Street. Two windows were built into the wall facing that street, one of which was removed in 1939 but originally consisted of two chamfered pointed lights (Wood 1950, 83 and pl 8c). The latter is almost the same width as the doorway to the 72/74 High Street example and it would be tempting to interpret it as a replacement for an original entrance. However it is perfectly acceptable in a 13th century context and Wood apparently saw no reason to consider it a later addition.

The Angel example thus presents problems when considering the function of undercrofts but whatever their original purpose, Faulkner considers that the arrangement of a separate shop on an upper and lower level changed after the end of the 14th century and thereafter undercrofts were used exclusively for storage (1975b, 82).

Although it is possible to trace the ownership and occupancy of 72/74 High Street back to 1668 (see documentary evidence, below), the earliest surviving record of the undercroft dates to the latter half of the 18th century. At that time Gross refers to it as a cellar to a private house but states that when he visited the building in 1770 it was impossible to survey it accurately because of the quantity of faggots stored there (Grose 1785). Two virtually identical engravings of the undercroft, one by Hawkins in 1770 (Guildford Museum G1131) and the other by Godfrey in 1773 (Guildford Museum G1133) show it full of bundles of faggots. Williamson (1904a, 138) states that at this period in the 18th century, both the undercroft below 72/74 High Street and the one below the Angel were used by the proprietors of the latter establishment as stores but as he provides no evidence for this assertion and is not always a reliable source Grose’s contemporary reference is to be preferred. The undercroft was being used as a wine cellar by 1822 at the latest and continued to be used for this purpose, apart from a period of about ten years in the middle of the 19th century (see documentary evidence), until at least 1911 (VCH 3,553). Brayley’s history (1841) contains a drawing made when the building was unoccupied, showing it almost empty apart from some wood, bottles and baskets.

The present building above the undercroft was erected *c* 1803 by John Terry, surveyor and carpenter (TSB 2, 3 & 5), and the only documentary evidence for the possible appearance of the earlier superstructure is the Ichnography of Guildford (1739). However the structure shown on this plan is not necessarily the one originally associated with the undercroft and moreover the Ichnography cannot be assumed to be accurate (Matthew Alexander, pers comm). On the basis of surviving examples Faulkner considers that the normal superstructure would

have consisted of a hall house adapted to the typical long, narrow urban plot. It would have been constructed largely in timber and if stone was used it was reserved for the side walls (Faulkner 1975b, 81). At Guildford this building would presumably have been supported upon the outer walls of the undercroft which are not in alignment with the present plot boundaries and now extend below two separate plots, ie. 72/74 and 76/78 High Street (formerly 115 and 116 respectively before renumbering c 1960). These two plots were one unit and in single ownership until the 19th century, although in the 17th and 18th centuries the house was sometimes in several occupations (TSB title deeds and GMR LM 2023). An extensive yard and outbuildings behind had a frontage along what is now Chapel Street. The early 19th century structure is of one build and fills both plots but was divided vertically to form two separate houses, the westernmost one being the present 72/74 High Street.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must express my gratitude to the owners of 72/74 High Street, Halifax Building Society, the architects, Messrs Hartley and Travis and the Contractors, Caesar Bros, for allowing the watching brief to take place and for their helpful co-operation throughout the progress of the work. I am also grateful to the Trustee Savings Bank, the previous owners of the property, who allowed access to the original Title deeds of the building. Shirley Corke (Guildford Muniment Room) not only produced the documentary report (an abbreviated form of Mrs Corke's report appears here) but also provided many useful ideas and suggestions. Matthew Alexander (Curator, Guildford Museum) was responsible for taking black and white photographs of the site and gave helpful and cheerful encouragement during the course of the watching brief. Thanks must go to R Poulton (Field Officer, County Archaeological Unit) for practical assistance, in particular for help in drawing the site sections. I am also grateful to David Bird (County Archaeological Officer) for reading and commenting on the report.

Figures

S Clapham (Conservation and Archaeology Section of the Planning Department, Surrey County Council) is responsible for figs 2, 4 and 5, the remainder are the work of the author.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

by SHIRLEY CORKE

The following list of owners and occupiers is an abbreviated version of a report for which the principal source is the title deeds of the building in the possession of the Trustee Savings Bank (TSB), supplemented by other documents held in Guildford Muniment Room (GMR). While on temporary deposit the TSB deeds were calendared (list reference GMR/E 323), and given the individual reference numbers which are used in the text (eg TSB 1). It should be noted that the list of owners and occupiers from 1668 to 1805 refers to the whole building, and when there are two occupants, the first named was living in the western half. The purchase of 72/74 High Street by John Rand at the auction of the late John Terry's property in 1820 marks the separation in ownership of what then became two plots, and the list after that date refers only to the westernmost, first numbered 115, now 72/74 High Street.

A word of explanation about the sources of the necessarily very compressed information in the lists that follow may be helpful. The earliest title deed in the TSB series is the 1801 conveyance from Bray and Jenkins to John Terry (TSB 1). Earlier deeds from 1740 are recited in an 1834 Abstract of Title (TSB 7). From this we learn that George Chennell's conveyance to Trustees in 1740 included among other property a house in St Mary's formerly occupied by Thomas Watts carpenter and then by Samuel Tracey. Ownership can, however, be securely taken back to 1668. An annual payment of £4 to send six Wonersh boys to school with which the whole property was charged under the will of Henry Chennell in 1671 was paid in 1834 (TSB 8), and a house with this £4 charged on it was included in a mortgage taken out in 1688 by Henry Cheynell (son of the testator of 1671), at which time a lease for twenty one years to Christopher Udall, running from 1668, is mentioned (GMR 86/2/34). This can also safely be assumed to be the property in St Mary's, Guildford which was devised in Chennell (or Cheynell) wills of 1699 and 1718 (GMR 1229/10/4-5) and so came to be in the possession of George Chennell in 1740 (TSB 7). The dates of occupancy of Widow Udall, Watts, Tracey and their successors to 1822, on the other hand, are assumptions based on information about them in sources not directly connected with the house.

Owners

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|--------------|--|--------------------------------|
| By 1668-1671 | Henry Chennell of Wonersh died 1671 | GMR 86/2/34 and 1229/10/1 |
| 1671-1704 | Henry Chennell DD, Rector of Cranleigh (son of last) | GMR 86/2/34 & 35 and 1229/10/4 |
| 1704-1728 | George Cheynell, Rector of Cranleigh, in right of his wife, sister of last | GMR 96/1/19 |
| 1728-c 1740 | Sarah Cheynell, his widow | GMR 1229/10/1 |
| c 1740-1748 | George Chennell, son of last | GMR 96/1/19 |
| 1748-1781 | Elizabeth Cheynell, his widow | TSB 7c |
| 1781-1801 | William Bray & Abel Jenkins for the heirs of Eliz. Ch. | TSB 7 & 1 |
| 1801-1805 | John Terry, surveyor and carpenter | TSB 1-3 & 5 |
| 1805-1820 | John Terry's Trustees | TSB 2 & 5 |
| 1820-1834 | John Rand | TSB 5 & 7 & 9 |
| 1834-1974 | Guildford Trustee Savings Bank | TSB 9-20 GMR RB 951 |

Occupiers: A Of Whole Property

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
|-------------|--|---|
| 1668-1674 | Christopher Udall, carpenter died 1674 | GMR 86/2/34 GMR St Mary's register |
| c 1680 | Widow Udall and others | GMR LM.2023 |
| c 1680-1690 | Thomas Watts, carpenter died 1690 | TSB 7a GMR St Mary's register GMR 1251/3 |
| 1690-1742 | Samuel Tracey occupation unknown | TSB 7a GMR St Mary's register GMR 1251/1, 6, 7 GMR BR/MA/3/1 |
| 1743 | Widow Tracey | TSB 7c GMR BR/MA/3/1 |

| | | |
|-------------|--|-------------|
| 1768 | William Gardiner and Isaac Wilson | TSB 7g |
| before 1801 | William Tickner and James Harraway or Narraway | TSB 1 & 3, |
| 1801-1805 | John Terry, carpenter | TSB 1-3 & 5 |
| 1805-? | Mrs Sarah Terry, widow of last | TSB 5 |
| ? | * John Tewley | TSB 5 |
| 1820 | * John Rand | TSB 5 |

* western house only?

Occupiers: B *Westernmost House and Undercroft, 72/74 High Street*

Sources: from 1822-1885 information is taken from the Poor Rate Books of St Mary's parish.

| <i>Date</i> | <i>The House 72/74 High Street</i> | <i>The Undercroft</i> |
|-------------------|---|--|
| 1822-Jan 1825 | Daniel King | Daniel King |
| Apr 1825-Jan 1829 | Thomas Taunton, wine merchant who built a brewery (later the Castle Brewery) in Bury Street | Thomas Taunton |
| Apr 1829 | late Taunton, empty | John Nealds |
| Jul 1829-1836 | Francis Piggott | John Nealds |
| 1841-1849 | Francis Piggott | Empty |
| 1851 | Francis Piggott | Not mentioned |
| 1866-72 | Francis Whitburn | Thomas Taunton |
| 1874-84 | TSB | Charles H Master (built Friary Brewery c 1874) |
| 1885 | TSB | Friary Brewery Co |
| 1904 | TSB | Yearly tenancy agreement between Trustee Savings Bank and Friary Holroyd and Healy's Breweries Ltd for use of undercroft as a wine cellar (GMR RB 951) |
| 1911 | TSB | Use as a wine cellar referred to (VCH 3, 1911, 553) |

REFERENCES

The non-TSB documents referred to (all in GMR), are:-

| | |
|------------------|--|
| 86/2/34 | Mortgage by Rev Henry Chennell, 20 April 1688 |
| 1229/10/4 | Copy will, Rev Henry Chennell, 1699 |
| 1229/10/1 | Elizabeth Chennell's Abstract of Title to lands in Wonersh, 1743 |
| 86/2/35 | Marriage Settlement of Henry Chennell and Mary Miller, 5 July 1690 |
| 96/1/19 | Copy extracts from will of Rev George Chennell, proved 1729 |
| LM 2023 | Poor Rate, St Mary's, Guildford no date; c 1680 |
| PSH/GU/M/1/2 & 3 | Parish Registers of St Mary's, Guildford |
| BR/MA/3/1-37 | Poor Rate Books, St Mary's |
| 1251/1, 3, 6 | Guildford Borough Poll Books |
| 1251/7 | Highway Rate Assessment, St Mary's, Guildford, 1721 |
| RB 951 | Yearly Tenancy Agreement, at rent of £12 per annum. 29 Nov 1904. (from a small group of TSB deeds deposited in GMR) |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brayley, E W, 1841, *A topographical history of Surrey*
- Faulkner, P A, 1975a, Medieval undercrofts and town houses, in *Medieval domestic architecture* (ed M J Swanton), 118-133
- , 1975b, The surviving medieval buildings, in *Excavations in medieval Southampton 1953-1969* Platt, C and Coleman-Smith, R, Vol 1, 56-124
- Grose, F, 1785, *The antiquities of England and Wales*, Vol 5 (New edn)
- VCH Malden, H E (ed), *Victoria County History of Surrey*, 3, 1911
- Williamson, G C, 1904a, *Guildford in the olden time*
- , 1904b, *The ancient crypts in the High Street, Guildford*
- Wood, M E, 1950, Thirteenth century domestic architecture in England, *Archaeol J* 105 (Suppl)