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SHODFRIARS HALL, 2-4 SOUTH STREET, BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE

HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT

Luke Jacob



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SUMMARY

Shodfriars Hall is situated to the south of Boston's Market Place on an island site between Sibsey Lane and Shodfriars Lane. The earliest portion of the building, a substantial timber-framed structure known originally as the 'Old Flemish House', probably dates from the last quarter of the 14th century. The medieval building was remodelled and a new connected hall, designed in a northern European Gothic style, was built to the east in 1873-75, at which time the site was renamed 'Shodfriars Hall'. The work of the 1870s was commissioned by the Boston Conservative Club to provide clubrooms, shops, offices and a theatrical hall and was completed to the designs of John Oldrid Scott (1841-1913) and his brother George Gilbert Scott Jnr (1839-1897).

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DATE OF SURVEY

5 December 2013

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Fig 1 The 1866-7 Ordnance Survey 1:500 Town Plan.

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SHODFRIARS HALL, 2-4 SOUTH STREET, BOSTON, LINCOLNSHIRE

Shodfriars Hall is the most substantial timber-framed building in Boston (Fig 2), probably dating from the last quarter of the 14th century. Documentary evidence suggests the building served as a guildhall or 'principal mansion' for the Guild of Corpus Christi, a group prominent in the town from 1349 to 1543. In 1873, the Boston Conservative Club commissioned George Gilbert Scott Jnr and his brother John Oldrid Scott to restore, redesign and extend the existing building for use as club rooms, shops, offices and a grand hall for theatrical performances and public meetings. The history of the site and the extent of surviving medieval fabric are assessed along with the significance of the 1870s scheme in relation to broader trends in Victorian architecture and restoration.



*Fig 2 Shodfriars Hall, South Street frontage seen from the west in an undated photograph.
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History

Between the 12th and 14th centuries, Boston was a thriving mercantile port: it forged regional ties as the outpost of neighbouring Lincoln, an important medieval centre 30 miles upstream on the River Witham. It held national significance as a point of convergence for trade networks throughout East Anglia and the Midlands, but in addition to this, by virtue of its trading association with the Hanseatic League, Boston was linked by commerce to much of northern Europe. The June fair in Boston attracted merchants from Danzig, Calais, Berne and Gascony over the course of the medieval period, following the establishment of the market in the 12th century.¹ It was towards the close of this early age of prosperity for Boston, in the last quarter of the 14th century, that Shodfriars Hall was probably built. The status and scale of the building reflected the success of the port that, according to taxation records, had made Boston the fifth richest town in England in the medieval period.² Yet by 1489, when the first likely documentary reference to the site is found in the Guild of Corpus Christi's rental books, Boston had suffered a severe decline in fortune, with the port's trade significantly diminished as a result of the fragmentation of the Hansa and the migration of trade westward. By the time of the English Civil War, the town was at a particularly low ebb; on 10 October 1643, when Oliver Cromwell stayed at the Three Tuns on the eve of the battle of Winceby, the once thriving port was described as 'decayed and ruined'.³

The town's protracted decline of three centuries began to reverse in the 18th century, with the draining of the Fens and the shift of economic dependence away from the port towards agricultural production. Signs of affluence returned at this time, as conspicuously displayed by buildings such as Fydell House on South Square. This increased prosperity is also apparent around the Market Place where many medieval buildings – indicators of early wealth preserved through Boston's economic stagnation – received fashionable new Regency facades in a show of the town's revived affluence. Into the mid-19th century, the railway brought new trade connections and stimulated industry, Boston briefly being served by the main line north out of London. Along with the economic benefits brought by the railway's arrival in 1848, the 19th century also saw increased trade and fishing activity at the port, this leading to the construction of a new dock and wharves on the Haven in 1884. The relative prosperity of the town into the second half of the 19th century initiated a new phase of building projects within Boston. This is well demonstrated by the Shodfriars Hall scheme of 1873-75, which in terms of architectural ambition and quality, significance of the site and the reputation of the architects, marks it out as one of Boston's most important buildings from this period.

It is within the medieval network of streets, formed during Boston's early trading success, that Shodfriars Hall is situated. The medieval street plan, which remains largely unaltered, is characterised by the broad sweep of South Street following the River Witham, punctuated by narrow alleys set off to the east. This pattern had probably emerged by the close of the 12th century, following the formation of the Barditch c.1160 which marked the town's eastern boundary. The island site that Shodfriars Hall occupies is set on South Street between the former staiths on the River Witham and the Market Place to the north, and is defined by Shodfriars Lane and Sibsey Lane (see Fig 1). The significance of this site for mercantile activity was outlined by Boston historian Pishey Thompson, who acknowledged the importance of the building, but in lieu of firm evidence, conceded:

'[w]e have not even any tradition respecting the former occupant or proprietors of this very ancient building' (Fig 3).⁴ In the absence of documentary evidence, Victorian antiquarians after Thompson speculated on the previous roles the building may have held within medieval Boston. One such theory was printed in *Building News* on 23 May 1873 along with a report on the Scotts' scheme; this proposed links with the Dominican friary situated to the south (active c.1250-1539) and suggested that the building may have served as a 'hospitium of the friary' or even 'a hostelry frequented by Hanseatic merchants'.⁵ It is apparent that great interest was taken in the site of Shodfriars Hall at the time of the Scotts' work and the design of the restored and extended building of 1873-75 was responding to some of this speculation,⁶ yet many of these claims were archaeologically unsubstantiated.



Fig 3 Engraving of the 'Old Flemish House', South Street, published in P. Thompson, 1856.

More recent evidence, published initially in N. Kerr's article 'The Timber-Framed Buildings of Boston' (1986) and subsequently in J. Fenning's work on 'The Guild of Corpus Christi' (1993),⁷ has linked the site with the town's Guild of Corpus Christi, which was prominent in Boston from the granting of a license of incorporation in 1349. This argument is based on rental books of the guild dating from December 1489, an entry from which describes the rooms and siting of the guildhall. It states that a staith on the River Witham (then closed) was set opposite 'the frontage of the principal mansion of the gyldes called Goldenhows' (or 'golden house') which contained a hall, a parlour, a kitchen and two chambers.⁸ The description of the rooms in the late 15th century document is consistent with the scale of the building and the location stated fits with the site of Shodfriars Hall. Drawing upon early photographs and engravings, along with surviving medieval fabric, it

is argued that the scale, prominent siting and overall quality of construction would have marked out Shodfriars Hall as a building of considerable local significance, sufficient to suppose it may have served as a guildhall. The important position of the island site, less than 100 metres from St. Mary's guildhall which is roughly contemporary with Shodfriars Hall, having been built c.1390, strengthens this notion. A comparison of Shodfriars Hall with the guildhall at Thaxted, Essex, dated through dendrochronology to 1462-1475, was drawn upon by Kerr to support the notion of the building's former guildhall function.⁹ Whilst the ties drawn with the Guild of Corpus Christi present the most thorough and plausible explanation of the early history of Shodfriars Hall, the absence of early maps or more detailed documentary evidence makes it difficult to definitively prove that Shodfriars Hall is the building referred to in the 1489 rental book.

Despite the keen interest in the building's early history, very little information has been uncovered which relates to its usage or development in the intervening five centuries up to the Scotts' scheme of 1873-75. Some inferences into the site's history can be drawn from the 1489 rental book; notably that the building referred to as the 'Goldenhows', stated to be 'late in the tenure of Richard', had by the late 15th century ceased to serve solely as the Corpus Christi principal mansion,¹⁰ whilst the fact that the guild disbanded in 1543 makes clear that there was a change of ownership by the mid-16th century. The extent of alterations to the site between the late 15th and early 17th century remain unclear. But a photograph taken prior to 1873 (Fig 4) shows some evidence of later



Fig 4 'Old Flemish House' seen from South Street prior to 1873, Hackford Album, courtesy of the Boston Preservation Society.

phases of development. The second storey on the south-west corner is diminutive compared to the ground and first storeys, whilst the low-pitched, hipped roof of this portion of the building contrasts with the steep gable end roof running parallel with South Street, both features suggesting that the second storey belongs to a later phase. However, owing to the extent of the rebuilding at the upper level from 1873, such speculation cannot be readily confirmed.¹¹

By the mid-19th century, a great deal of development had occurred in the streets surrounding the Shodfriars site. The engraving published in 1856 (see Fig 3) shows Shodfriars Hall adjoining a row of small houses of varying widths and heights along Shodfriars Lane.¹² The full extent of the development in this area is shown in the 1741 Robert Hall plan, which shows further built-up plots along the parallel Sibsey Lane and, by the time John Wood's plan was published in 1829, the density of building had further increased.¹³ A sense of how these buildings may have appeared can be gleaned from the pre-1873 photographs, which show a decrepit house with very small window and door openings on the south side of Sibsey Lane (see Fig 4). Shodfriars Hall itself, covered in signage with lath work exposed by failing plaster, also appears in a relatively poor state at this stage. The building served as a shop, probably with dwellings above from the evidence of the 1856 engraving, a function it continued to have into the 1870s, when photographs indicate the shop was run by J. D. Barrand, confectioner and baker, with part of the premises occupied by 'Bradshaw's Machine Works', as announced by the faded sign on the corner of Sibsey Lane.

The decision to acquire the 'Old Flemish House' (as it was known prior to the 1873-75 scheme) and the nature of the subsequent work commissioned, offers a strong indication of the Boston Conservative Club's intention to invoke the town's mercantile history as a key element of their building project. Contemporary accounts of the scheme indicate that the Conservative Club was responsible for the decision to retain the medieval building occupying the site, and having 'consulted with their architects upon the desirability of restoring... the old Flemish House', plans were drawn up, serving to prove that the Club was 'not only conservative in name, but in deed'.¹⁵ The substantial restoration work planned would have made the Scotts desirable architects for the work at hand. By the 1870s, both George Gilbert Scott Jnr and John Oldrid Scott were beginning to become known for their restoration work; Oldrid Scott had begun to work on a number of ecclesiastical restoration projects in the 1870s, and was to go on to oversee of the restoration of St Alban's Cathedral from 1878 to 1880. Similarly, George Gilbert Scott Jnr had undertaken a mixture of church restorations and secular work by the time of the Shodfriars commission in 1873, notably substantial restoration schemes at St. John's College, Cambridge (between 1862 and 1871), and Peterhouse College, Cambridge (1867-70).¹⁶

Along with their perceived expertise for the work at hand, the Scotts' family connections to Boston would also have helped them obtain the commission. Their father, Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811-78), had conducted the restoration of Boston's St Botolph's parish church between 1845 and 1847, the same church in which he was married in 1838 to his cousin Caroline Oldrid (daughter of a prosperous Boston draper and merchant). The employment of the Scott brothers, both architects of national significance, indicates

the importance of the Boston Conservative Club's commission, and by extension, the prominence of the Club within the town at this time. The scheme came at a considerable financial cost, a total of £11,500 according to the *Boston Guardian* of 2 April 1881,¹⁷ which underlines the ambition of the work undertaken. It is clear that the Club took pride in the achievement, its secretary stating in 1874 that, 'there is only one opinion about the entire building which is that it is magnificent... for a small provincial town we have done wonders'.¹⁸ This sentiment was echoed in *Building News* (Fig 5), which celebrated the 'very unique and pleasing' design with a lengthy article accompanied by two full page illustrations.¹⁹



Fig 5 Illustration of Shodfriars Hall published in *Building News*, 23 May 1873.

Description and Analysis

Shodfriars Hall occupies a prominent island site between Sibsey and Shodfriars Lane, with the principal frontage facing South Street and the site extending east to the present Quaker Lane. The restored club room portion of Shodfriars Hall is of box-framed timber construction with lath and plaster infilling and plain tile roof with red brick chimneys. In contrast to the brick-built hall to the east, which was constructed entirely between 1873 and 1875, the western portion is formed of a complex assemblage of medieval and Victorian elements. The timber-framed portion of Shodfriars Hall facing South Street and the hall to the rear are both L-shaped and interlock to give the building an outlying rectangular form.

South Street Club Rooms, Exterior

Shodfriars Hall has an imposing presence on South Street. The double-jettied frontage facing the River Witham is symmetrically divided into two broad gabled ends set above eight narrow arcade bays at street level. On the first and second floors, along with the attic storey, narrow mullioned windows with wooden frames and tracery are set between upper portions of the timber studs.²⁰ The plaster panels set beneath the windows on the first and second floors are adorned with pargetted Tudor roses, whilst a continuous band of decorative diamond bracing marks out the attic storey. Close inspection of the South Street frontage shows that a detailed pattern of small rose motifs adorns the plaster, though this has been partially obscured over time. At street level a series of eight arcade bays set under carved four-centred arches are arranged to form two equally sized shop fronts divided by two entrance doorways giving access to the club rooms on the upper levels and the great hall set to the rear. The shops, which flank the entrances, both have central doors with glazed upper portions.

The shop front arrangement continues on the south elevation fronting on to Shodfriars Lane, this side extending four bays further than the frontage along Sibsey Lane, with alternating wide and narrow four-centred arched windows set alongside narrow shop doors. All but one of the windows along Shodfriars Lane (that closest to South Street) have been blocked, the same being the case for the shop doors (all blocked with the exception of that furthest from South Street), the rooms within now being used for storage. To the north, on Sibsey Lane, four arched bays are set beneath jettied first and second floors. All of the shop windows, except that furthest from South Street, survive on this side. This north frontage is set beneath a fretted bargeboard gable, which repeats the gables of the South Street side, all of which were raised as part of the Scotts' design. The design and arrangement of these three gables is the anchoring point of the Scotts' scheme, serving to give a consistent height to the building, organise the existing bay distribution into a neat compositional symmetry and offer additional space for the decorative work that the Scotts' included. This element of the design is integral to what Gavin Stamp referred to as the 'tidying up' of the irregular appearance and probable multiple-phases of the pre-restoration building.²¹ The symmetry implemented by the gables, framed by the arched-bracing and reinforced by the even window distribution, certainly contributes to the overall Victorian appearance of the façade.

This orderly arrangement of the South Street frontage doubtless gave rise to a long-held assumption that Shodfriars Hall was built as 'a spurious imitation' of the medieval original, as was claimed in the short-lived periodical *Boston Society* in 1900.²² This was echoed in the *Lincolnshire: Buildings of England* volume, published in 1964, which described Shodfriars Hall as 'the ghost... of a timber-framed building' which, 'must now all be of J. Oldrid Scott's restoration of 1874'.²³ Over the last half-century, this assertion has been repeated in local guidebooks and histories of the town, with the effect of confounding the complex history of the site. The misconception that Shodfriars Hall was completely rebuilt on the site of an earlier building was corrected in the updated *Lincolnshire: Buildings of England* volume, which recognised that whilst the building was restored in the 1870s and 'was long thought to be of that date... a close look at the timbers and a glance at the C19 engravings prove this not to be the case'.²⁴ Indeed, the evidence offered by the 1856-published engraving of Shodfriars Hall, along with pre-restoration photographs and plans drawn by the Scotts (which highlight original elements of the frame to be retained, see Fig 6), give a strong foundation from which it is possible to identify much of the early fabric of the building. In this regard, it is possible to note the cut-back and carved four-centred arch over the shop doorway in the 1856-published engraving, which is not only retained in the existing building but also appears to be the model for the Scotts' narrow-bay, arcaded effect which characterises the ground floor throughout. Further elements of early fabric can be noted in the bay posts facing South Street, the substantial carved dragon posts and beams along with studs at ground level. On the first floor, several arch braces have clearly been integrated with the Scotts' scheme although, on the upper floors, less medieval work is found as a result of the Scotts' construction of three new gables facing onto South Street and Sibsey Lane. The overall plan and the bay distribution of the club room buildings are certainly derived from the pre-restoration structure.

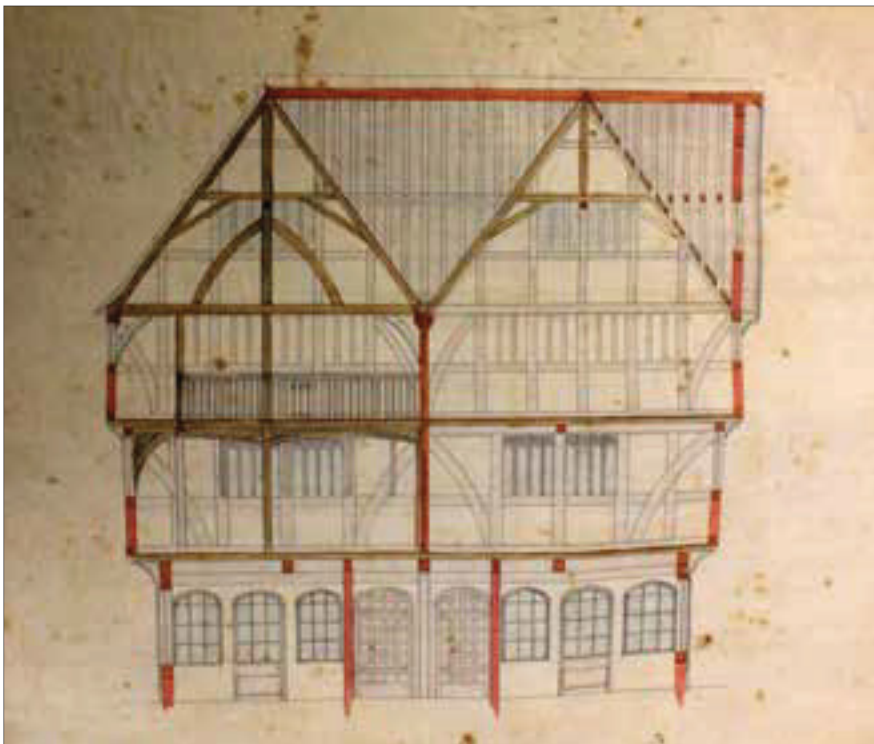


Fig 6 Section drawing of Shodfriars Hall signed by George Gilbert Scott Jr and John Oldrid Scott. Courtesy of Lincolnshire Archives

South Street Club Rooms, Interior

The interior of the restored club room building contains some further remnants of early fabric, though rather less than has been noted externally. In May 1873, in the early phases of the restoration scheme, *Building News* reported that, 'although the original exterior of this fine old building will be... strictly adhered to, the interior has required entirely remodelling'.²⁵ From this evidence, it is likely that the room layout noted in the Scotts' plans, (which consisted of three lock-up shops and an office at ground level with separate stair access to a first-floor library, reception and club room, overlooked by a third-floor gallery and adjoining committee room), was all a product of the 1873-75 scheme. The room arrangement shown in the Scotts' plans remains largely unaltered,²⁶ although the functions of certain rooms have changed over time, perhaps most notably with the former committee room having been converted to a kitchen. It is notable that the divisions between separate sections of the club room building are all intact; the shops remain accessible solely from the street, whilst the two adjoining South Street entrances, which served the Conservative Club and the hall to the rear, are both retained along with their respective sets of stairs and lobbies. The intention of these separate entrances and staircases was to allow the shops, the hall and Conservative Club to function independently. It is particularly impressive that this key element of how the Scotts planned the building, despite many subsequent changes of use over the past 140 years, remains completely coherent.

The demands of the 1873 commission necessitated the loss of earlier internal room arrangements, but despite the great extent of change noted, several elements of internal early fabric were incorporated into the Scotts' designs in much the same way as has been seen externally. Most notable here is the arch-braced crown post in the south gable, which has distinctive upward bracing to the ridge-plate with corresponding downward bracing joining the crown post and tie beam (Fig 7). Owing to scant documentation of other timber-framed buildings in Boston, the insight that can be drawn from stylistic comparison is limited here, but the characteristics of this form of crown-post bracing shows notable similarities with a number of examples identified in York that have been securely dated to the third-quarter of the 14th century.²⁷ Further elements of probable late 14th century date are the exposed ceiling joists and dragon beams seen from the first floor, some of which appear to bear carpenter's assembly marks. A particularly impressive feature found within the first-floor club room is a Delft-tiled fireplace with an ornately carved Jacobean overmantle (Fig 8). The provenance of the fireplace and overmantle are unknown, but the fact that these elements are integrated with Victorian-era panelling suggests that it was likely to have formed part of the Scotts' design. Several other elements of the Scotts' scheme are retained in the club room portion of the building, giving a good sense of its original appearance. Notable in this respect are the stairs (with banisters and newel posts), the wrought-iron gallery rails and painted faux-timber bracing (in the upper club room), along with a small original fireplace surround, with carved rose motifs (in the first-floor library).



Fig 7 Club room gallery. © Pat Payne, English Heritage, DPI61078



Fig 8 Carved Jacobean overmantle and Delft-tiled fireplace in the first-floor club room.

© Pat Payne, English Heritage, DPI61069

Great Hall, Exterior

The great hall to the rear of the club rooms strikes a sharp contrast with the timber-framed South Street frontage. The steep, street facing, crow-step gables and alternating red and yellow brick sections, along with the towering chimney stacks which rise above the roof pitch, create a strong vertical emphasis in a distinctively northern European Gothic style (Fig 9). It is telling that, in the 1964 *Lincolnshire: Buildings of England* volume, the rear portion of Shodfriars Hall was mistaken for a warehouse,²⁸ for the Scotts' design seems to have consciously evoked Boston's mercantile associations with the Hanseatic League through modelling the hall 'on the ancient warehouse fronts to be seen in the cities "of the Low Countries"'.²⁹ It is possible that the hall was specifically referencing earlier buildings of northern European character in Boston. One building which Shodfriars Hall bears a particular resemblance to is the Old House at Gully-Mouth in Boston, which shares the crow-step gables, stone mullioned windows and four-centred arch door openings. Although this building was pulled down in 1750, its publication in Pishey Thompson's 1856 history of the town would certainly have been known by local antiquarians, not least amongst members of the Boston Conservative Club. Their historic interest in the site was clear, not only from the design of the hall, but also by the inserted green man corbel on the north front of the hall (Decorated Gothic in style and possibly excavated from the former Dominican Friary, built c.1250).



Fig 9 The Scotts' great hall, seen from the south. © Pat Payne, English Heritage, DPI61082

Whilst the 'Hanseatic style' employed for the hall held particular significance within Boston, and indeed may even have been based on local precedents, the broader vocabulary of northern European Gothic architecture was familiar to the Scotts and used in both their religious and secular work throughout their careers. In his 'supreme masterpiece' at St Agnes' Kennington (1874-89), George Gilbert Scott Jnr showed influence from architecture he encountered on visits to Bruges and Ghent,³⁰ whilst John Oldrid Scott's unbuilt scheme for Manchester Town Hall (1867) consciously drew upon the civic buildings of Flemish cities.³¹ The medieval buildings of northern Europe were of enduring interest to British architects in the late-Victorian era; a lecture delivered by John Tavenor Perry to the RIBA in 1894 on the architecture of the Hanseatic League listed some of the key stylistic elements of mercantile buildings. These included the use of the gable as a decorative element along with panelled brick sections, recessed and projecting, to create 'a most rich effect in light and shade'.³² Such features are certainly in evidence at Shodfriars Hall; in their design, the Scotts exploited the site's narrow plot to create a dramatic steep roof pitch from which three crow-stepped gables project on both the north and south frontages. The sharp effect of the 'light and shade' created by the treatment of the brickwork can be clearly noted in Fig 9. The 16 foot-high 'taking-in' door, set above the stage portion of the hall, is a particularly effective feature in the Scotts' evocation of a Hanseatic warehouse.

Great Hall, Interior

The great hall initially served as a venue for theatrical performances, public meetings and as an occasional exhibition space for the Boston School of Art (Fig 10), being owned and run by the Boston Conservative Club for just over six years before being sold to its builder, Samuel Sherwin, in 1881.³³ In 1911, after a period of closure, it reopened as a 'high class concert hall', a function it held up until 1929 when the hall finally ceased to hold public performances.³⁴ The hall's short-lived tenure as a circuit theatre and public meeting venue must have been in part linked to the awkwardness of the 1873-75 design. The problems presented by the 16 foot-high taking-in door, the low roof height above the stage, and the narrow plan which would have restricted lines of sight must have made for an unsatisfactory venue for performances. As the Theatre Heritage Trust concluded in their description of the hall, 'the town must have been infinitely better served by the Blackfriars Theatre', which is situated on the parallel Spain Lane, less than 50 metres away from Shodfriars Hall.³⁵ Despite this early closure and the hall's numerous subsequent functions, only superficial alterations have been made and consequently much of the original layout and many features are retained internally.

In the Scotts' original plan the hall was sited on the first floor above four lock-up shops, male and female dressing rooms and a scullery and kitchen, with a substantial cellar set beneath. In the hall, the stage remains at the east end with the elevated gallery to the west accessed by a staircase set at the back of the hall. To access the hall, those attending events would have entered from South Street and followed the stairs up to the lobby entrance, this being entirely separate from the ground-floor lock-up shops and dressing rooms (not inspected), which were accessed from Shodfriars and Sibsey Lanes, an arrangement which remains unaltered. Notable internal features in the hall include leaded, grisaille windows made by noted Victorian stained-glass manufacturers Burlison &

Grylls, though unfortunately now covered internally. The elevated stage is marked out by a proscenium arch with an upper section divided into distinct panels. This arrangement closely resembles George Gilbert Scott Jr's sketch design, included in a letter of 24 April 1874 (Fig 11).



Fig 10 The great hall in use as an exhibition space for the Boston School of Art, Hackford Album, courtesy of the Boston Preservation Society.

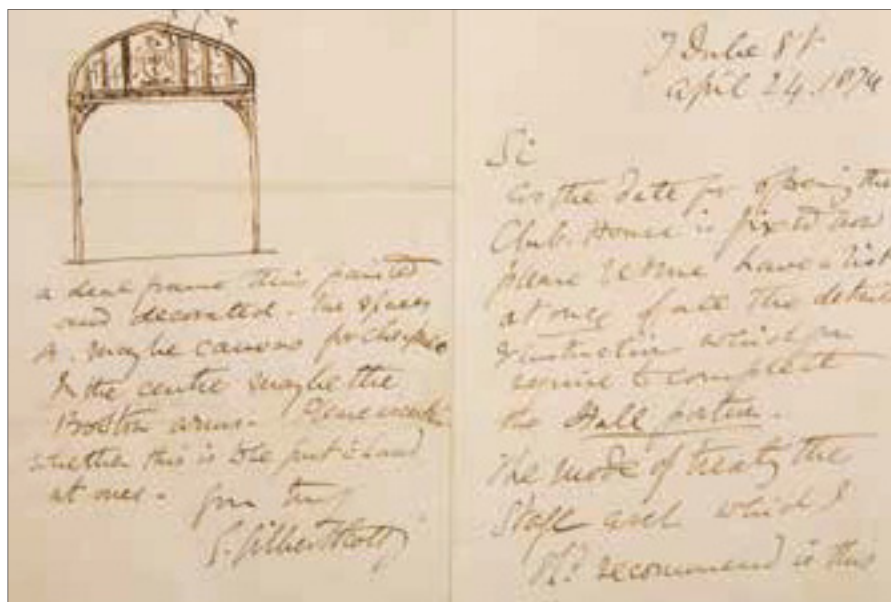


Fig 11 A letter of 24 April 1874 containing a sketch design for the proscenium arch above the stage signed by George Gilbert Scott Jr. Courtesy of Lincolnshire Archives

The roof structure of the hall is a particularly impressive element of the Scotts' design, clearly conceived to maximise height and give unobstructed views of the stage from the gallery. To achieve this, the Scotts employed an inventive structural arrangement. Each roof truss comprises a raised tie beam supported by arched braces, carrying queen posts and a collar. The underside of the arched braces is ceiled, creating a deep coving articulated by ribs and punctured by cross-vaults corresponding to the heads of the tall side windows. The queen posts, collar and collar purlin create a framework for a raised section of roof, similar in form to a clerestory or ridge lantern, but with blind panelled sides and positioned beneath the ridge piece. This false clerestory is therefore not visible externally, and is lit solely by windows in the end gable wall of the double-pitched roof. The roof spans the full width of the hall with the assistance of wrought-iron ties and rods (with some decorative wrought-iron detailing). This helped to transfer the weight of the structure to the outer load-bearing walls, thereby circumventing the need for a tie beam at wall-plate level, and allowing central supports to be omitted, creating a clear span. Overall, the design evokes the hammerbeam roofs of great medieval halls, perhaps an intentional reference in the design to the late 14th-century origins of Shodfriars Hall.

Whilst the current somewhat decrepit state of the hall detracts from its previous grandeur, it is improbable that it would ever have been quite as ornate as suggested in the illustration published in *Building News* in 23 May 1873 (Fig 12). Features seen in this engraving, such as the wrought-iron ties and rods, carved timbers and the gallery arrangement, differ from their built appearance. This along with the early date of publication within the building scheme makes clear that the illustration represents the hall's intended design, rather than the structure as actually built.

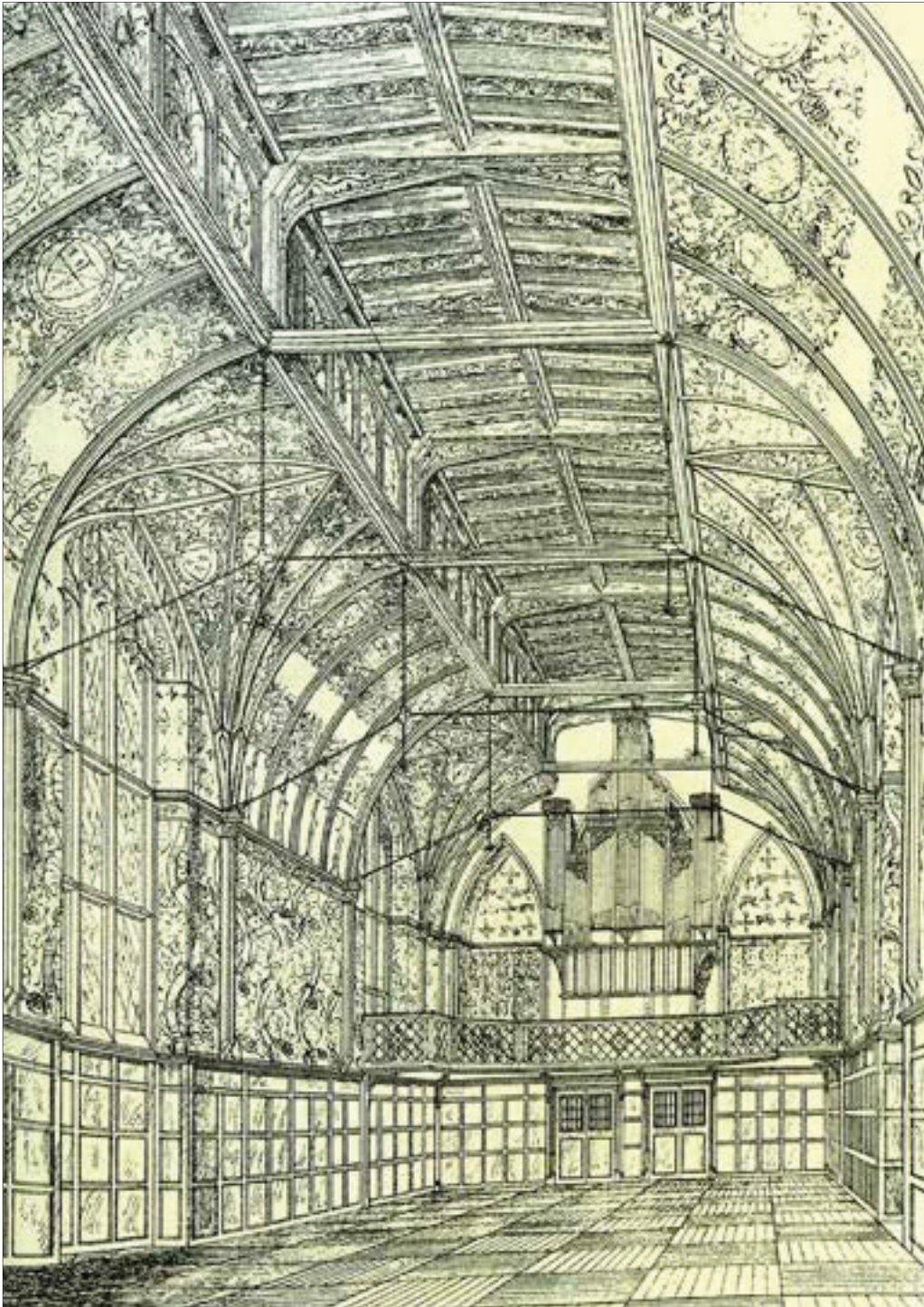


Fig 12 Illustration of Shodfriars Hall published in *Building News*, 23 May 1873.

Current State

When visited in December 2013 Shodfriars Hall was in multiple usages with certain parts of the building in a poor state of repair. The ground floor of the great hall was functioning as the 'Eclipse Nightclub', whilst the main club rooms and the hall were unoccupied following the closure of the Snooker Club (c.2010). It is evident that Shodfriars Hall has suffered from a sustained lack of investment for many decades. Since the hall ceased to host performances in 1929, this portion of the building has served variously as a billiards hall, restaurant and nightclub as well as a snooker club. The lack of recent investment and current redundancy of parts of Shodfriars Hall is, to an extent, part of a wider pattern of physical decline within the town, which is reflected in the Boston Town Centre Conservation Area being placed on the Heritage at Risk register in 2012, with its condition described as 'very bad' and 'deteriorating'.³⁶ This decline seen in the town's historic buildings and places can be partially attributed to economic factors, but in the specific case of Shodfriars Hall there has been a particular problem caused by the multiple uses of the building and the often temporary nature of the commercial lettings which have not been conducive to undertaking repair work or sustained investment.



Fig 13 Roof structure and suspended false ceiling of the great hall. © Pat Payne, English Heritage, DPI61079

It is worth noting that the multiple uses of the site ultimately stem from the Conservative Club's initial commission to accommodate separate sections for lock-up shops, offices, club rooms and a hall for meetings and theatrical performances. On this basis, Shodfriars Hall was designed to be divided into separate spaces intended for multifarious activity. As such, the site has never been appropriate for single-purpose usage and this has consequently acted as an obstacle to investment in the building as a whole. The result of this lack of investment is seen in the poor state of elements of the site that were inspected, that is; the hall together with gallery and the stage area, all rooms contained within the upper floors of the club room building and the stairways and hall that connect these two parts of the building. In the hall the grand auditorium has, to use Gavin Stamp's term, been 'mutilated' by the insertion of a false ceiling (Fig 13),³⁷ which is now itself in a bad state, with many of

the panels having collapsed. The elevated stage has been sectioned off by a thin glazed screen which, like the false ceiling, could be removed, but at present disrupts the space and compromises the historic integrity of the hall. The stage itself, along with the wings, has wooden floorboards of which several have begun to deteriorate, some of the treads on the stairs leading down to the former dressing rooms (not inspected) having fallen in. The ceiling of the hall, seen from the gallery, is in a poor state with elements of damp and failing plaster obvious in places. The club rooms, in the west range of the building, show further superficial signs of deterioration, though not to the extent seen in parts of the hall. Whilst much of this damage is superficial and could be remedied by a sustained program of investment, this pattern of deterioration shows little sign of being reversed in the immediate future. Clearly, this is a very unfortunate fate for a building of considerable distinction which should be a great architectural asset to Boston.

Significance

As the most substantial surviving timber-framed building in Boston, situated on the key trading route between the staiths on the River Witham and the Market Place, Shodfriars Hall represents a highly important link with Boston's medieval mercantile history. As has been outlined, many components of the timber frame of the building along with significant detailed elements of early fabric exist *in situ*. From this physical evidence, along with the Scotts' plans and pre-restoration photographs, a strong sense of how the late-medieval building would have looked can be gleaned. Although the Victorian remodelling of the site has obscured the earlier appearance of the building, the frontage seen from South Street remains a rare example of the timber-framed buildings that would have characterised the roads flanking the river Witham from the latter half of the 14th century. There appear to be at least ten timber-framed buildings with medieval fabric situated between the Market Place and the Customs House (12 South Street), which sits opposite the site of the former staiths. Examples can be noted at 19 and 27-8 Market Place, but these buildings, in contrast to Shodfriars Hall, have all been refronted and, as such, their antiquity has been disguised. It remains possible that further examples of medieval structures exist behind later frontages along this key trading route, but surely none of the status and importance of Shodfriars Hall. The fact that Shodfriars Hall has retained features such as double jetties on all three street facing sides, carved dragon posts and decorated, cut-back, four-centred arches marks it out as a building of evident distinction.

The probable function of Shodfriars as the 'principal mansion' of the Guild of Corpus Christi adds considerably to the significance of the site and its commercial, social and religious role within medieval Boston. The Guild of Corpus Christi (founded 1335) was, along with St. Mary's (founded 1260), amongst the most significant of the 16 medieval guilds noted by Boston historian Pishey Thompson.³⁸ The distinctiveness of Shodfriars Hall and the roughly contemporary and closely located St Mary's guildhall (South Street, dated by dendrochronology to c.1390) give an insight into the rich diversity of building types being erected in Boston at the end of the 14th century. This variety, likely a result of the town's regional, national and continental trading networks and possibly driven by the nature of competition between the guilds, present interesting questions of how and why buildings associated with separate guilds differed and, in a broader sense, how inland and overseas trade influenced Boston's buildings.

Shodfriars Hall, through the 'restoration' work of the 1870s, also reveals much about Victorian attitudes towards their medieval inheritance. The work of Victorian restorers is often characterised as being heavy handed, imposing idealised notions of how buildings were perceived to have appeared at a particular time, often supported by exaggerated claims of historic precedent with generous license granted to the aesthetic whims of the architect or patron. In this regard, Charles Dellheim noted in *The Face of the Past: The Preservation of the Medieval Inheritance in Victorian England* (1982), that what 'passed for, and was passed off as, restoration was in fact a species of visual transformation, a strange compound of archaeological erudition with a cavalier attitude toward the past.' Dellheim continued, '[I]t is ironic that the visual remains that shaped the sense of the past had often been restored so extensively that they were in some respects no less Victorian than medieval'.³⁹ This form of 'transformation' is very much in evidence in the Scotts' work at Shodfriars Hall, a building so comprehensively reworked that it has been regularly mistaken for 'a Victorian *fake*'.⁴⁰

Whilst the outlying plan and many elements of the timber frame were retained by the Scotts, the overall appearance of the building changed dramatically as a result of their scheme. The outcome of the work was to be a design with closer resemblance to a mid-16th century structure than the multiple-phased, late 14th century building that the Scotts' had initially encountered. Features such as pargeated Tudor roses, vast brick-stack chimneys and double-jettied gable frontages (arranged in a manner very similar to Leigh-Pemberton House, a merchant's house on Lincoln's Castle Hill dated c.1543) contribute to the overall mid-16th century appearance of the restored Shodfriars Hall. The restoration work inventively used elements of the existing frame, and certain detailed elements of the timber work, though the restoration had in essence used existing fabric to create a new design, for which there was little genuine historic precedent.

The 'restoration' work undertaken by the Scotts at Shodfriars Hall reflects the mid-Victorian tendency for idealised recreations of medieval structures, of the sort popularly reproduced in Joseph Nash's popular and influential *Mansions of England in the Olden Time* (initially published in 4 volumes between 1839 and 1849). By the mid-1870s this form of archaeologically unsubstantiated restoration had drawn criticism from key figures such as William Morris, along with other high-profile members of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), founded in 1877 to counter what was seen as the 'forgery' of such work. The Scotts' design for Shodfriars Hall presents a scheme undertaken on the cusp of a time of changing attitudes towards Victorian restoration and, in this sense, the building offers a dramatic example of this type of approach towards restoration in the mid-Victorian era.

The Scotts' work at Shodfriars Hall was, of course, a far more complex commission than a standalone restoration scheme; the work of 1873-75 not only reworked the South Street frontage together with its room arrangement, but also saw the construction of the distinctive rear theatrical hall, a particularly interesting and unusual work by two significant figures working within the Victorian Gothic tradition. Into the late 19th century, George Gilbert Scott Jnr and John Oldrid Scott together with their father Sir George Gilbert Scott formed an architectural dynasty of national renown, responsible for a range of significant buildings and restorations throughout in England. The Shodfriars Hall scheme, a project jointly undertaken by Scott Jnr and Oldrid Scott, is a rare,

early example of the Scott brothers working in partnership and is the only known collaborative work completed which involved a secular building. The level of survival of the Scotts' scheme, both internally and externally, is particularly impressive, with the original plan form of the theatre and its attendant rooms and much of their detailing remaining little altered, if in a poor state of repair in certain areas.

Possibly the most striking part of the Scotts' work at Shodfriars Hall was the elevation design of the great hall, which forms a dramatic Gothic counterpoint with the timber-framed South Street frontage. The design employed for the rear hall was somewhat unconventional, the elevations apparently referencing brick-built, northern European Gothic warehouses of the medieval period, a design which clearly alluded to Boston's mercantile connection with the Hanseatic League. The result of this was to be, as Gavin Stamp has stated, 'one of the most interesting and exotic secular Gothic buildings of the decade which deserves to be better known.'⁴¹

Endnotes

- 1 N. Kerr, "Timber Framed Buildings in Boston", *East Midlands Archaeology*, No. 2 (1986), p. 71
- 2 According to taxation records of 1334, noted in Stephen Rigby, "Medieval Boston: Economy, Society and Administration", ed. Sally Badham and Paul Cockerham, *The Church of St Botolph, Boston, Lincolnshire, and its Medieval Monuments*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series, 544 (2012), p. 6
- 3 Quoted in A. E. Richardson, "The Charm of the Country Town: V. Boston, Lincolnshire", *The Architectural Review*, vol. XLIX, no. 291 (February 1921), p. 36
- 4 Pishey Thompson, *History and Antiquities of Boston* (1856), p. 230
- 5 *Building News*, 23 May 1873, p. 586
- 6 The name 'Shodfriars Hall', given to the restored site at the time of the 1873-75 scheme, appears to respond to links drawn with the adjoining Dominican Friary in the 1870s (the wearing of shoes was associated with Dominican Friars which distinguished the order from the 'unshod' Benedictine Friars). The current name superseded 'Old Flemish House' which referred to the pre-restoration building and was in use some time prior to Pishey Thompson's *History and Antiquities of Boston* (1856).
- 7 N. Kerr, "Timber Framed Buildings in Boston", *East Midlands Archaeology*, No. 2 (1986), pp. 70-78; H. Fenning, "The Guild of Corpus Christi", ed. W. M. Ormrod, *The Guilds of Boston* (1993), pp. 35-44
- 8 Guild of Corpus Christi rent books of December 1489, quoted in H. Fenning (1993), pp. 41-42
- 9 N. Kerr (1986), p. 71
- 10 Guild of Corpus Christi rent books of December 1489, quoted in H. Fenning (1993), p. 41
- 11 Despite the extent of change to the structure seen as a result of the Scotts' scheme, it is apparent that significant elements of early fabric remain in situ in both portions of the building, which if appropriate for dendrochronological examination, would doubtless give more secure grounds for dating and identifying distinct phases within Shodfriars Hall.
- 12 Pishey Thompson (1856), p. 231; *Building News*, 23 May 1873, p. 586
- 13 Frank Molyneux and Neil Wright, *An Atlas of Boston* (1974)
- 14 Nikolaus Pevsner and John Harris, *Lincolnshire: Buildings of England* (1964), p. 473
- 15 *Building News*, 23 May 1873, p. 586
- 16 For a full list of George Gilbert Scott's work see Gavin Stamp, *An Architect of Promise* (2002), pp. 363-406
- 17 *Boston Guardian*, 2 April 1881
- 18 Gavin Stamp (2002), p. 192
- 19 *Building News*, 23 May 1873, p. 586 and illustration plates on facing pages
- 20 On the first floor the windows, in both bays, are comprised of one three-light and two four-

light types, whilst on the floor above the windows are of greater width, consisting of four three-light types. These are surmounted by pairs of three-light gable windows at attic level

21 Gavin Stamp (2002), p. 192

22 *Boston Society*, vol. I, no. 6 (7 February 1900), p. 100

23 Nikolaus Pevsner and John Harris (1964), p. 473

24 Nikolaus Pevsner, John Harris and Nicholas Antram, *Lincolnshire: Buildings of England* (2nd edition 1989), p. 166

25 *Building News*, 23 May 1873, p. 586

26 Conservative Club Buildings, plans and elevations, C/11 Sherwin Reynolds Collection, Lincolnshire Archives

27 As seen at the Merchant Adventurers Hall (1358-60), noted in Robert Hook, "Medieval Roofs in the North of England", in ed. John Walker, *The English Medieval Roof* (2011), p. 116

28 Nikolaus Pevsner and John Harris (1964), p. 473

29 Gavin Stamp (2002), p. 192

30 *Ibid*, p. 83

31 C. Dellheim, *The Face of the Past: The Preservation of the Medieval Inheritance in Victorian England* (1982), pp. 148-49

32 John Tavenor Perry, transcription of lecture delivered on 28 May 1894 on "The Influence of the Hanseatic League on the Architecture of Northern Europe" from *The Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, extract from the journal, third series, vol. I, no. 14 (1894), p. 491

33 *Boston Guardian*, 2 April 1881, quoted in Gavin Stamp (2002), p. 367

34 *Boston Guardian*, 7 October 1911, quoted in Gavin Stamp (2002), p. 367

35 Heritage Theatre Trust entry for Shodfriars Hall, <http://www.theatretrust.org.uk/search?q=shodfriars&commit> (accessed 22 December 2014)

36 East Midlands Heritage at Risk Register 2012 <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/har-2012-registers/em-HAR-register-2012.pdf> (Accessed 22 December 2014)

37 Gavin Stamp (2002), p. 367

38 Pishey Thompson (1856), pp. 113-155

39 C. Dellheim (1982), p. 85

40 N. Kerr (1986), p. 71

41 Gavin Stamp (2002), p. 192



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