

SURGEONS' HALL, OLD BAILEY, DESIGNED BY WILLIAM JONES

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INTRODUCTION

The Hall completed in 1752 for the Company of Surgeons and abandoned in 1796 in favour of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields—a move that led to the dissolution of the Company and the foundation of the Royal College of Surgeons—is generally known only by its elegant west front (Plate 1), which was often illustrated (Adams, 1983, 37/70, 38/34, 48/42, 57/53, 61/63). The design of the building has long been attributed, in architectural history, to the elder George Dance (1695–1768), father of the principal architect of the College's first building in Lincoln's Inn Fields (Papworth, 1852–92, D, 6; Stroud,

1971, 42).

This paper presents further information on Surgeons' Hall, from its insurance particulars, two ground plans and a little-known map. It also shows that the 'Mr Jones' who was chosen as Surveyor to the Company in 1747 (Wall, 1937, 63) was indeed the architect of the Hall and identifies him as William Jones (d. 1757), Surveyor to the East India Company from 1752, who is best known for the Rotunda at Ranelagh (Colvin, 1978, 476). Dance's many designs for the site in Old Bailey were not formally commissioned and not used.

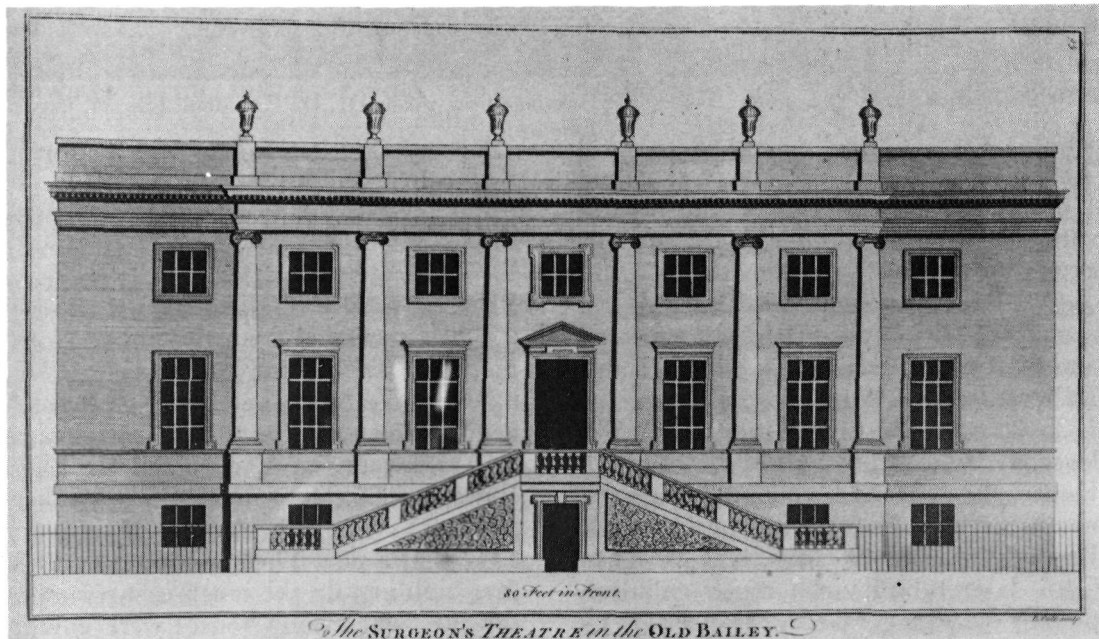


Plate 1 Benjamin Cole's engraving of the elevation (W front) of Surgeons' Hall, used in the 1754 edition of Stow's *Survey of London* and in Maitland's *History of London*, 1756.

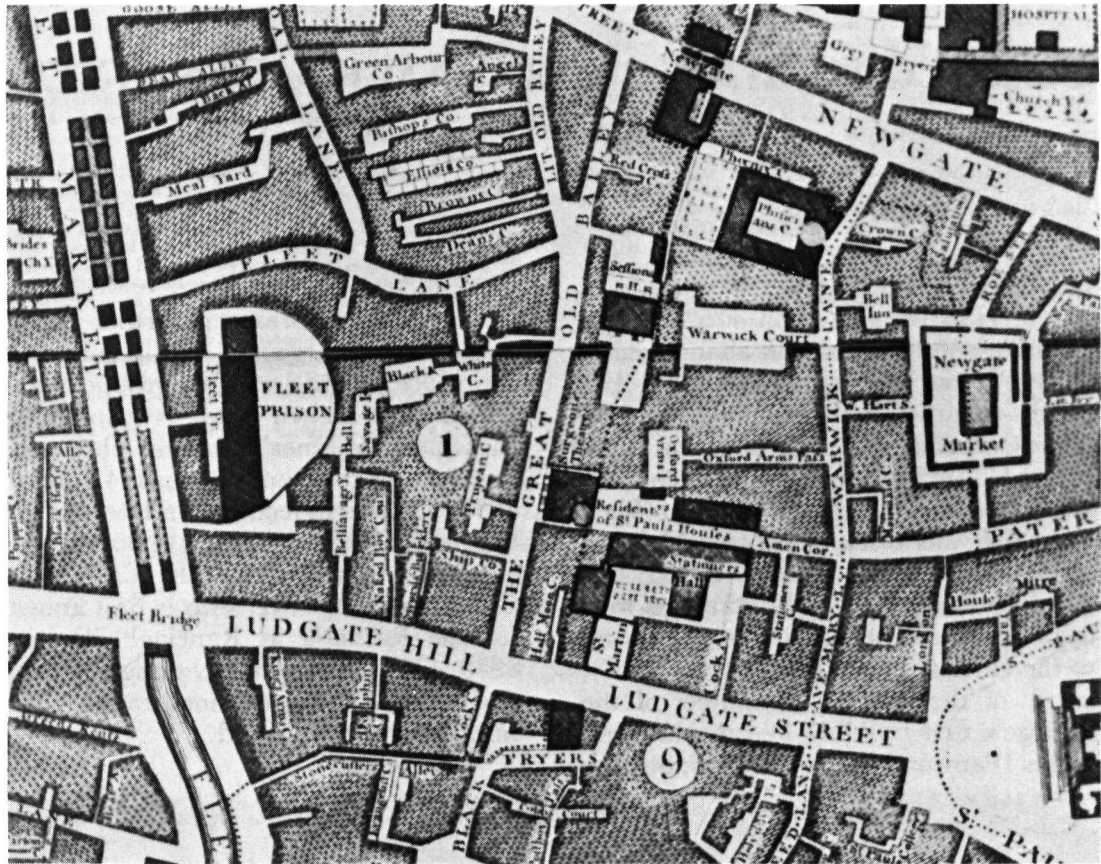


Plate 2 Rocque's map of London, revised, 1761: collage from sheets D1, D2 (Guildhall Library, City of London).

THE SITE

The lease granted by the City to the surgeons in May 1746 was for ground extending almost 154 ft along the east side of Old Bailey, with a depth (back to the remaining City Wall) of 97 ft at the north and 87 ft 6 ins at the south end¹. George Dance, Clerk of Works to the City since 1735, drew the outline of the site on the lease. It lay a little south of the Sessions House, the garden of which indented the north-east corner of the surgeons' ground. Beyond the Sessions House was Newgate Gaol, later rebuilt on a much enlarged plan by the younger George Dance (1741–1825). The surgeons were to pull down the existing houses and erect a Hall, Theatre

and other buildings, which should 'in front towards the street run in a regular line' (Plate 2).

PLANS FOR A THEATRE

Their secession from the united Company of Barbers and Surgeons in 1745, after two centuries, had deprived the surgeons of the use of the anatomical Theatre in Monkwell Street, designed by Inigo Jones in 1636 (Dobson & Milnes Walker, 1977, 80). They decided on 15 January 1747 that a new Theatre should be their first building, on the south-east corner of the site, where four houses were now in possession, and that it should not be in the same form as Inigo Jones's oval². William

Cheselden, the Master, produced a plan for the Theatre and associated buildings, which was tentatively approved. It was perhaps his own design, though with some professional help: payments amounting to £7.17s.6d. had been made for surveys, plans and drawings³. Further designs were commissioned (13 April) for sixty guineas from William Kent (1684–1748). They were admired, but rejected (26 June) because they would cost £10,000 to execute; work was to proceed on the Theatre and Clerk's house 'according to the present plan'.

SURVEYOR APPOINTED

With John Freke as Master, the Court of Assistants on 24 August 1747 chose 'Mr Jones' (who is never given a Christian name) as Surveyor. He was to light [fenestrate] the Theatre 'after his own manner and give orders for such proportions in all parts of that building and the Clerk's house as he shall approve of'; he was to have fifty guineas (half at once, half on completion) 'for his former and future care of this building by making drawings and measuring the same'. Three weeks later it was agreed that the building of the Theatre should proceed 'so far as the covering in'; nevertheless, a committee was to consider the plans of Kent, Cheselden and Jones. The committee's resolutions (two confirmed and one withdrawn) are not set out in the Minutes for 7 January 1748, when Jones presented a further plan; but by 3 March the windows for the Theatre were ready and were to be installed. On 5 May it was agreed that 'the Theatre be finished forthwith (agreeable to Mr Jones's plan) before any other part of the building be proceeded on'.

Cheselden may have been responsible for its octagonal ground-plan (Cope, 1959, 9), but clearly Jones had the final say in the design of the anatomical

theatre. Within the ensuing year he became the architect for the remaining, greater part of the Hall. He was surely the William Jones who had made his reputation as the architect of the Rotunda at Ranelagh, opened in 1742 (Plate 3). He does not appear in the records of the Surgeons' Company after his final payment for their building in Old Bailey (8 Nov. 1754). By then he was designing buildings in Leadenhall Street for the East India Company. Early in 1757 he submitted a drawing for the rebuilding of Newgate Gaol (Stroud, 1971, 55); he was dead by 23 November, when the East India Company had to elect a new Surveyor⁴.

DANCE'S CLAIM

There is no mention of Dance in the Minutes of the Company of Surgeons until 5 May 1748 (when the Theatre was to be 'finished forthwith'): he was then to be 'desired to deliver into the Company an account of the particulars upon which his demand is founded'. The Company would consider it and 'make reasonable satisfaction'. On 4 August his demand was referred to the Building Committee. Six months later, a payment of forty-five guineas was made to 'Mr Geo: Dance for drawings &c. by order of Master and Wardens'⁵.

Perhaps he had been approached unofficially early on, or even while rival plans were still being discussed in 1747; but it is clear that Dance was not formally commissioned for his extensive work. His drawings, preserved in Sir John Soane's Museum, show nearly a score of differing schemes, some using the whole and others only part of the site⁶. Many ignore the condition in the lease of a continuous front to the street; few place the Theatre at the south-east corner, where it was started early in 1747; and none makes it octagonal. One deliberately reproduces Inigo

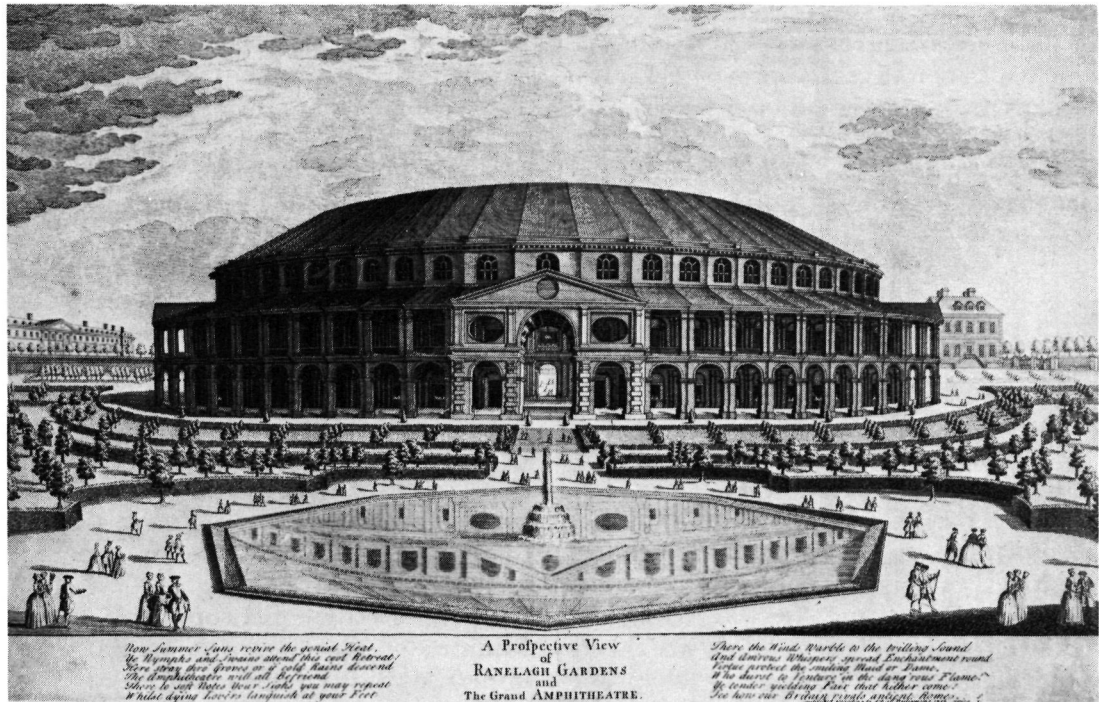


Plate 3 'A Prospective View of Ranelagh Gardens and the Grand Amphitheatre', 1743 (Chelsea Library).

Jones's Theatre, contrary to the first decision by the Company (Beck, 1970, Fig. 10). There is no drawing like the eventual structure.

THE THEATRE COMPLETED

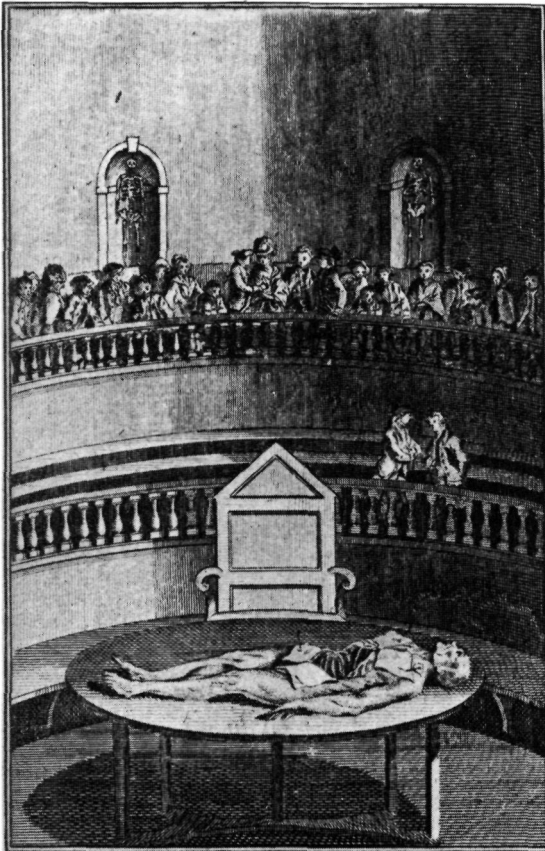
In May 1748, when scaffolding was to go up for plastering to finish the Theatre, James Steere, Surveyor to Guy's Hospital and to the Hand-in-Hand Fire Office, was asked to use it to remeasure the work of the bricklayers and carpenters. He was also to check the estimates of the plasterer, Mr Laban, and the carpenter, Mr Scott. The floor of the basement under the Theatre was to be paved (2 June). Laban was paid £60 in September for progress with the plastering; he did not receive his final payment until 24 August 1749, when Scott was paid too and Jones received his second twenty-five guineas.

However, it was not until 1 August

1751 that the Court of Assistants first met 'at the Theatre'. It had been insured for £1,425 with the Hand-in-Hand Fire Office in March as 'an octagon Theatre' with 'a stokoe [stucco] ornamented ceiling with fretwork niches on each cant ornamented with pediments, festoons and architraves over semicircular windows and a Corinthian block cornice all full enrich, a gallery with seat and balastrade all round and three rows of seats with wanscotting all round', measuring 36 by 36 ft⁷. An engraving shows how the niches were later occupied by skeletons (Plate 4). Adjoining the Theatre on its north side and insured for £575 at the same time was a brick building 'being the Beadle's apartments and Library over', 32 by 30 ft. This was the Clerk's house, which had only just been started in May 1749, when the Theatre was almost finished. Its construction was included in the main contract for the Hall at that time.

THE HALL

Jones's plan for the main building was approved on 2 February 1749, when he was to make detailed drawings and estimate the cost. In April he was asked 'to prepare another elevation of the said building without the pilasters' and calculate the saving, which he thought would be £46. Tenders were invited in May, when James Scott (the carpenter for the Theatre) made the lower of only two offers: £3,555 with the pilasters or £3,500 without them. He was given the contract on 25 May 1749, when the Court heard



Added below *White walls*
The Body of a MURDERER exposed in the Theatre
of the Surgeons Hall, Old Bailey.

Plate 4 'The Body of a Murderer exposed in the Theatre of the Surgeons Hall, Old Bailey' (Guildhall Library, City of London).

that Jones was asking for 5% of the cost as his fee 'for his past trouble in drawing and designing plans &c. and his future care in surveying the building'. This was agreed on 19 July. Progress payments to Scott started in October and to Jones the following April.

By 15 March 1751, when the incomplete building was insured for £2,000, Scott had received £1,900. (His payments finally amounted to £4,068. The insured value was never increased.) The policy was on a brick building of three storeys, 50 by 80 ft, being 'their Hall, Clerk's office and committee rooms on the east side of great Old Bayley in the parishes of St Martin within Ludgate and St Sepulchres standing clear and known by the name of Surgeons Hall now unfinish'd⁸.

Payments to Scott and Jones continued regularly until 7 March 1752; a woman was paid £2.12s.6d. for cleaning out the Theatre in July, when the first body of an executed murderer was dissected there; the first engraving of the completed building was published in November⁹. Final payments to Scott's executors in April 1754 and to Jones in the following November closed the account for the buildings shown on Rocque's map of 1761 (Plate 5). The Hall is indeed drawn as 'standing clear' of the buildings on either side. A passage 5 ft wide on the south gave external access to the Theatre; another on the north, 6 ft wide, led to the Clerk's house and his garden (52 by 34 ft), behind premises occupied by a coachmaker, on the remainder of the ground leased by the Company. An aquatint of the Hall that has been used to illustrate Histories of the Company and the College gives a false (presumably retrospective) image, because it shows contiguous building on both sides (Wall, 1937, 34; Webb-Johnson, 1950, Fig. 1; Cope, 1959, Fig. 1).

The ground to the north of Surgeons'

Hall was soon involved in schemes for the rebuilding of Newgate Prison and the Sessions House, for which the younger George Dance was eventually responsible, having succeeded his father as Clerk of the City Works (Stroud, 1971, 97–101). The Company surrendered 62 ft of the frontage on Old Bailey in 1769 and its Clerk lost his garden¹⁰. The new Prison extended much further south than the old

one and the new Sessions House, completed in 1774, stood with its south wall 11 ft from the north side of Surgeons' Hall. Half of this wider passage-way still belonged to the surgeons.

GROUND PLAN

The two surviving plans of the basement of Surgeons' Hall were made after the erection of the new Sessions House.

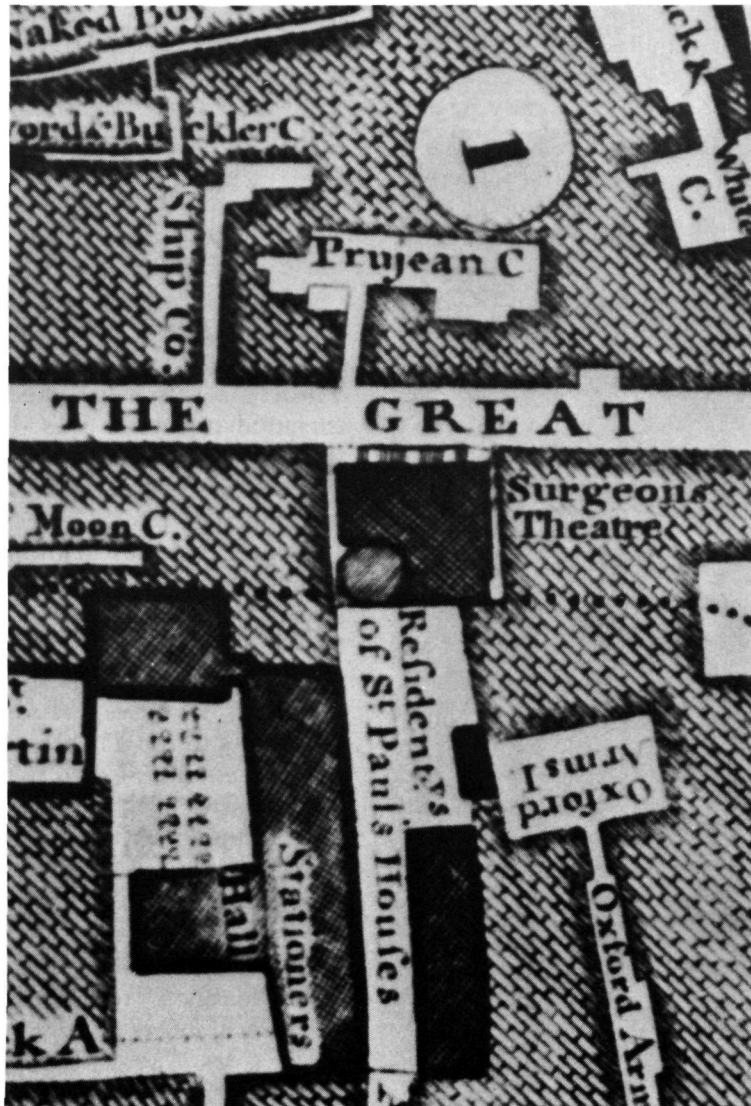


Plate 5 Detail from Rocque's map of 1761 (Plate 2), showing the octagonal Theatre on the SE corner of Surgeons' Hall.

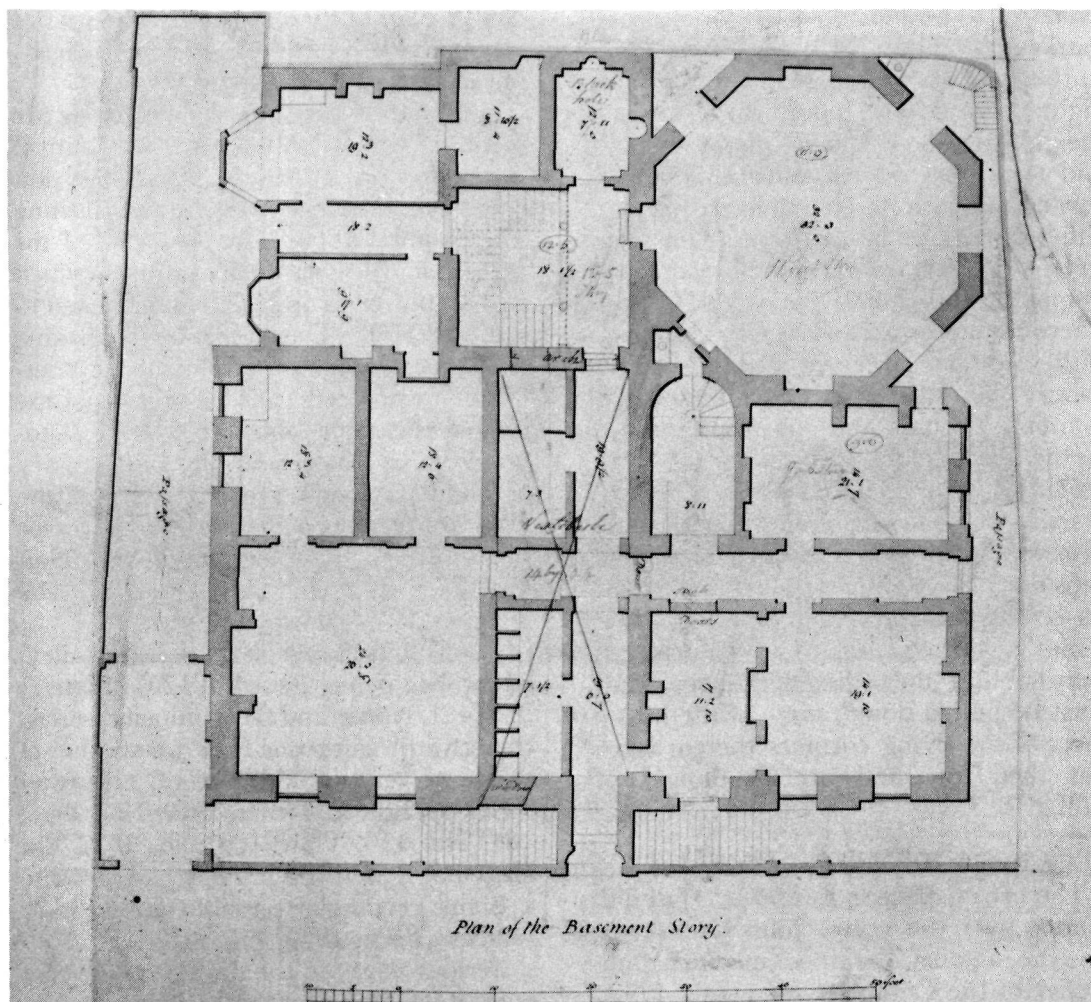


Plate 6 Surgeons' Hall about 1780. The octagonal area (top right) is under the Theatre in the SE corner (Corporation of London Records Office).

The one shown here (Plate 6) is anonymous¹¹. It seems to date from before 1783, when the surgeons allowed the City to install iron gates in the wide passage-way and throw a roof over part of it (Wall, 1937, 67). The other, more detailed but unfortunately less suitable for reproduction, is signed 'J. Neill Decem^r 1790'¹². The description that follows is based on a combination of the two drawings, with names of the rooms as in Neill's Plan.

Reading clockwise from the octagonal basement (height 11 ft) under the Theatre

(to which external stairs gave access), the curved staircase and Clerk's kitchen (height 9 ft 6 ins) were separated by a passage from the parlour and its smaller ante-room, which lay behind the southern flight of steps up to the main entrance (see Plate 1). The central corridor, from a doorway at street level under the entrance steps, ran past a wine cellar and then two more cellars to reach the square 'great staircase' (with a 'black hole' beyond it); this was the route by which bodies could be conveyed to the basement under the

Theatre. (The pencilled diagonal cross, marked 'Vestibule 14 by 44', must refer to the floor above.) Behind the northern flight of entrance steps a large kitchen (height 10 ft 3 ins) gave onto a scullery and a coal-store. The rooms in the north-east corner with projecting bays, lying on either side of a separate entrance passage, were only 7 ft 9 ins high; the larger (with a small room behind it) is called 'Office'. These should be part of the Clerk's house, with 'Library over' in one insurance policy. The other policy located a Hall, committee rooms and the Clerk's office in the main block. Of these, the Hall probably occupied both storeys above the basement on one side of the long vestibule onto which the main entrance gave: perhaps on the north, over the large kitchen. Its ceiling needed repair in 1796, when James Peacock, the City Surveyor, reported that 'the ceiling of the great Hall must be pulled down, some of the heavy parts of the flying cornices therein have lost their key and are in danger of falling'¹³.

DECLINE AND FALL

The use of space in Surgeons' Hall did change over the years. John Gunning's diatribe against the incompetence and futility of the Company on 1 July 1790, at the close of his year as Master, included famous remarks on the Hall.

'You have in it a Theatre for your lectures, a room for a Library, a committee room for your Court, a large room for the reception of your community, together with the necessary accommodations for your Clerk. But . . . your Library room without books is converted into an office for your Clerk and your committee room is become his eating parlor . . . the lower part of your house is by this means not inhabited.'

Gunning's suggestion that a Surveyor should be appointed probably led to

Neill's plan of the basement. The uses of rooms marked on it are new (or revived) ones as a result of his strictures.

A survey 'made some time since by Mr Neill' was reported to a special Court of Assistants on 19 May 1796: it said that extensive repairs were needed, costing more than £1,600. This was one of the reasons for the Court of Examiners (which had no power to do so) having decided to sell the Hall. The Court of Assistants (improperly constituted) named a committee to proceed. The remainder of the lease was assigned for £2,100 on 11 October 1796 to trustees for the Lieutenancy of London, which had decided that the Hall would make a good headquarters for the militia¹⁴. The 'late Surgeons' Hall and Theatre' would now be called 'The London Militia Head Quarters'.

It was 'Late Surgeons Hall, Old Bailey' on a token penny issued in 1797 (Plate 7) in the London and Westminster series, though still 'Surgeons Hall' on another of the same year in Skidmore's Clerkenwell series (Dalton & Hamer, 1910-18, i, Plate 104, No. 110; Plate 109, No. 163). On Horwood's map of 1799 it had become a blank rectangle, possibly for military secrecy (Beck, 1970, Fig. 9).

Serious decay in the timbers of the roof over its Great Hall was discovered in 1798¹⁵. The militia having been disembodied, this H.Q. was regarded in 1801 as 'a very heavy and unnecessary expence'¹⁶. It was sold back to the City for £2,475.16s.0d. in March 1803¹⁷ and soon demolished: the site was clear by October¹⁸.

By that time the Royal College of Surgeons in London had succeeded to the Company's freehold house (No. 41) in Lincoln's Inn Fields, bought its neighbour (No. 42) and invited George Dance, James Lewis and Neill to prepare plans for the conversion of the two to house John Hunter's museum.



Plate 7 The two sides of a 1797 token penny (see text). The edge is inscribed I PROMISE TO PAY THE BEARER ON DEMAND ONE PENNY X.

NOTES

1. Corporation of London Records Office (C.L.R.O.), Box 24, No. 8.
2. Company of Surgeons, Minutes of the Court of Assistants. References by date, using New Style years.
3. Company of Surgeons, Accounts, 10 July, 7 Aug. 1746, 6 Jan. 1747.
4. India Office Library & Records, Court Minutes, B74, 554.
5. Company of Surgeons, Accounts, 9 Feb. 1749.
6. Soane Museum, Dance, A.L. 5D, 36-75.
7. Guildhall Library, MS 8674/77, 155, Policy No. 72660.
8. *Ibid.*, Policy No. 72659.
9. *Gent. Mag.* 22 (1752) f.p. 493.
10. Endorsement, 15 March 1769, on counterpart of lease (Note 1).
11. C.L.R.O., Surveyors Justice Plans, No. 76.
12. *Idem.*, No. 1308.
13. C.L.R.O., Lieutenancy of London, Minutes 1784-97, 434.
14. *Ibid.*, 426.
15. *Idem.*, Minutes 1797-1800, 296.
16. *Idem.*, Minutes 1800-7, 93.
17. Surrender of lease (Note 1), 31 March 1803.
18. C.L.R.O., City Lands Committee Journal 95 (1803) 99, 159.

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