The dedication of Guildhall Chapel

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SUMMARY

Recent archaeological work at the Guildhall Art Gallery site (GYE92) in the City of London revealed two 15th-century foundation stones, upon which were painted the names of Thomas Knollys *and* Henricus *[Henry]* Frowyk. *It is documented that both Knollys and Frowyk were closely involved in the rebuilding of Guildhall chapel in the 1440s. This appears to be the first occasion, however, on which dedicatory stones have been found* within *the foundations of a medieval building.*

INTRODUCTION

Rescue excavation at the Guildhall Yard site (GYE92), next to the medieval Guildhall of the City of London, has been undertaken in several phases from 1987–1996 by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS), and its predecessor the Department of Urban Archaeology (for summaries see Bateman 1990 & 1994; Greenwood & Maloney 1994, 1995 & 1996). The site lies in the north-west corner of the City within the area bounded by the Roman and later medieval City wall (see Fig 1, site **10**). The area between Guildhall Yard and Basinghall Street has been redeveloped by the Corporation of London as a new art gallery, and this has necessitated the complete excavation of all archaeological deposits on what was a very large site (*c.*85m × 40m). In places up to six metres of complex urban stratigraphy survived. The final phase of excavation finished in November 1996, and an extensive programme of post-excavation analysis has now begun (Bateman 1997a).

The site contained important archaeological material of all periods, including the Roman amphitheatre (Bateman 1997b) and a significant group of late Saxon wattle and timber buildings (Porter 1997). The medieval period was represented by a large group of important masonry building remains, including foundations and superstructural elements of an early version of the Guildhall itself, Guildhall Chapel and its associated College and Library, Blackwell Hall (the centre of the cloth trade in London from the 14th to the late 18th century), the church of St Lawrence Jewry, and a variety of buildings belonging to Balliol College Oxford on the west side of Guildhall Yard (see Fig 7). This Yard formed the focal point of a precinct around the medieval Guildhall which reached its zenith in architectural integration and elaboration during the 15th century, though some elements were to survive to the early 19th century. Although there was generally far less associated horizontal medieval stratigraphy, important stretches of related internal and external surfaces survived within Blackwell Hall and, in particular, a deep sequence of surfaces was recorded across nearly all of the length and breadth of Guildhall Yard itself, representing its entire development from the early 11th century to after the Great Fire.

Most of the buildings were continuously occupied throughout the medieval and postmedieval periods and material evidence survived from most of their centuries of use. However, because of the size, complexity and importance of this group of remains, and because post-excavation analysis has barely begun, it has been decided to offer only one particularly unusual and illuminating aspect of the medieval sequence in this article. Furthermore, it should be understood that dating and interpretations offered are both provisional and summary.

Most of the site has been excavated in large open areas. However in certain areas and at certain times it has only been possible to make more limited observations. Such was the case

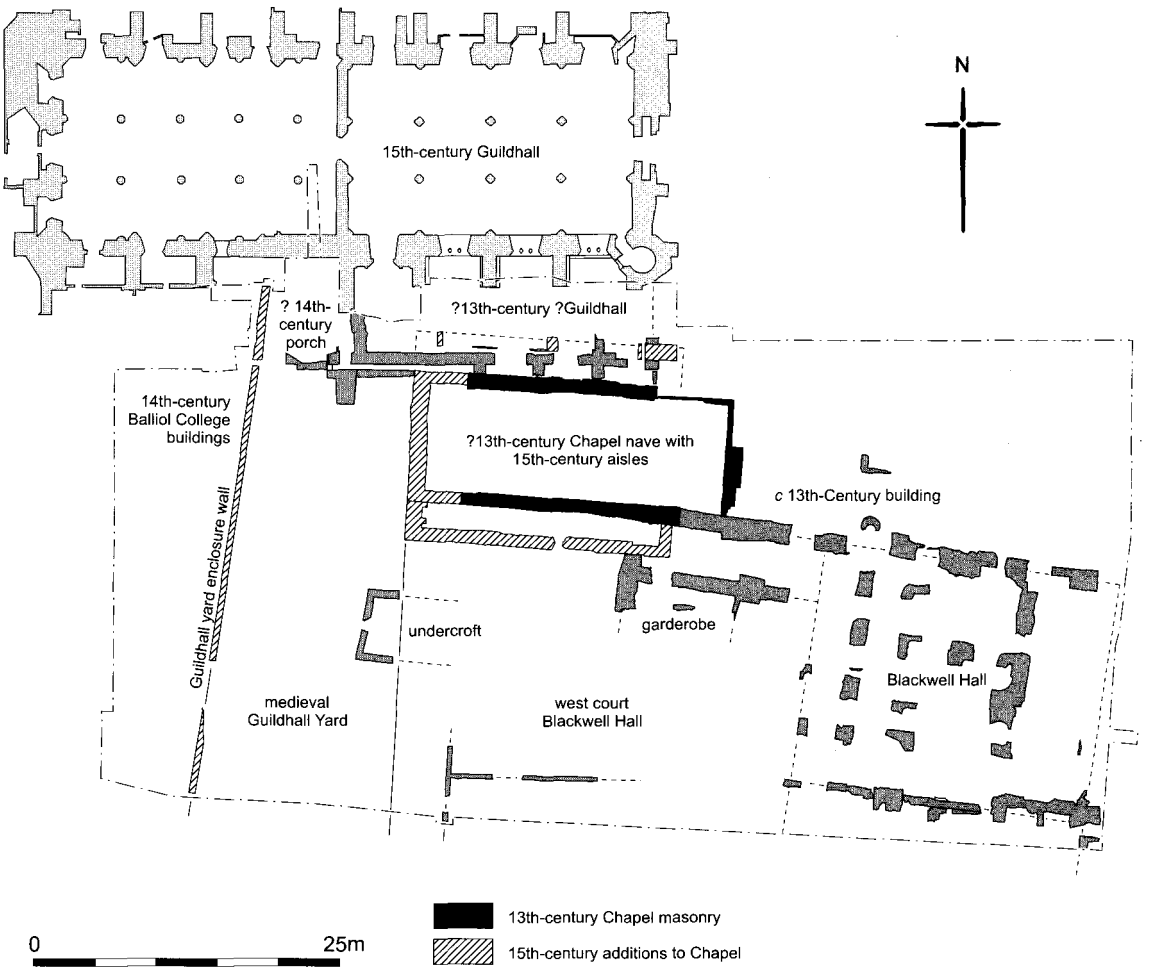

Fig 7. Plan of 13th-century Guildhall Chapel, showing the extent of the 15th-century aisles and adjoining buildings (MoLAS)

during June 1996 when the wall of an adjacent modern building had to be underpinned as part of the new art gallery redevelopment programme, and MoLAS was called upon to monitor the underpinning holes.

In one of these holes it was apparent that the modern brick wall was itself founded upon the remains of a substantial medieval foundation. The materials used in this, a mixture of chalk and ragstone rubble set in hard, white, lime mortar, as well as the position and alignment of the wall, suggested that the foundation represented part of the north aisle of Guildhall Chapel, the greater part of which (*ie* the piers and foundations of the nave, chancel, and south aisle) was extensively recorded in the first part of the GYE92 excavations in 1987.

THE STONES

During the underpinning process two large roughly squared Reigate-type stones laid at the very base of the medieval foundation were accidentally loosened and so removed. Each stone was *c.*0.50m long by *c.* 280mm by *c.*200mm deep. Both stones were seen to be very roughly hewn, each with only one well-dressed and very smooth face. On the smooth faces, which had been placed uppermost and were thus mortared into the body of the wall, were two painted inscriptions (see Fig 8), each of which proved to be a personal name, written in Latinized English in the Black Letter Gothic script characteristic of the late Middle Ages. The lettering was *c.*50mm high. Although the script occurs in some

Fig 8. Two possible dedication stones from Guildhall Chapel (scale text 'Henricus Frowyk' is 430mm long) MoLAS

manuscripts from the 14th century, it is usually of 15th-century date in the context of inscriptions (John Clark, Museum of London, and Dr Michelle Brown of the British Library, pers comm). There *are* small differences in the scripts on the two stones but these are unlikely to be significant and do not seem to indicate different dates. The inscriptions had been clearly set out between thin marking-out lines carved into the stone. Above each of the inscriptions is a 'Maltese' Cross, executed in the same black ink.

The names shown are those of Thomas Knollys and Henry (*Henricus*) Frowyk, both of whom were documented historical figures of importance in the history of the City Corporation and, in particular, that of Guildhall Chapel.

GUILDHALL CHAPEL

At the end of the 13th century a chapel dedicated to St Mary, St Mary Magdalen and All Saints was built close to the Guildhall (Barron, 1974, 23). It was described as 'near' to Guildhall in a document of 1356 and 'contiguous' in a document of 1382 (*ibid*, 23 and 47 n.58). It was also described as 'the new chapel' in a document of 1299 (*ibid*, 47 n.59), but it is not known whether this 'new chapel' itself replaced any earlier Guildhall Chapel, either in the same location or close by. The chapel had its principal frontage and entrance at its western end, leading onto the open space in front of Guildhall to the north (see Fig 7). Documentary evidence suggests that, at least up to the middle of the 13th century, this open space may have been merely the northern continuation of Lawrence Lane, which was itself the principal means of approach from Cheapside to Guildhall until after the Great Fire (*ibid*, 23 & 47 n.60). However, at least as early as 1293, the open space before the Guildhall was deemed 'enclosed common land of the City' and from this time it is known in surviving documents as *Guildhall Yard* (*ibid*, 22). Provisional analysis of the recent GYE92 excavations seems to confirm that what had, until then, been a rather narrow metalled street, with its origins in the early 11th century, was enlarged to become a more extensive and formalised yard at some time in the mid to late 13th century. The discovery of a tall but narrow chalk and ragstone wall of similar date, with no doors or windows through it, stretching from the northern to the southern end of Guildhall Yard along its western side, and still standing up to 2m high when excavated, seems to confirm the suggested date for the enclosure of the yard (see Fig 7). It is likely that the first Guildhall Chapel for which we have documentary evidence was built at approximately the same time.

Originally associated with the Society of Pui, Guildhall Chapel acquired a new importance for the Corporation in 1406, from which time it became the regular setting for the Mass preceding mayoral elections (*ibid*, 35). The idea of enlarging and improving the chapel in recognition of its increased status may first have occurred in 1411 when work on the new Guildhall was started. The scheme for a new chapel was certainly taken up again by aldermen in 1423 when more land fell into the possession of the Corporation, and a Royal Licence to rebuild the chapel was obtained in 1430. The new chapel was larger than its predecessor, being extended by the addition of north and south aisles like many parish churches during the 15th century (Schofield 1994, 47), although there is some suggestion that the old chapel had in fact extended slightly further west into Guildhall Yard (Barron 1974, 48 n.77). The work did not really start in earnest till *c.*1440 when the master mason, John Croxtone, was asked to transfer his attentions to it from the rebuilding of the Guildhall itself (*ibid*, 35–36). In fact Croxtone's involvement only lasted to *c.*1442 when he was moved to supervise the new Leadenhall Market building.

The excavations at the Guildhall site in 1987 revealed substantial elements of Guildhall Chapel built into the foundations of the 19th-century art gallery building. Although, following a special Act of Parliament, the Chapel had been demolished down to contemporary ground level in 1822 (Wilkinson 1825, 128), deep foundations survived below that level and the entire ground plan could be recovered. A preliminary analysis of the foundations, and the masonry styles and building materials employed therein, firmly identified two principal phases of construction. The first phase, comprising a large rectangular nave and chancel, has been identified with the late 13th-century Chapel discussed above. The second phase, involving the addition of aisles to both north and south as well as rebuilding of the nave and chancel (see Fig 7), is identified with the work in the 1440s (Samuel 1990, 161–166).

FROWYK AND KNOLLES: TWO CORPORATION DIGNITARIES

Two Henry Frowyks are known from relevant documentary sources. The first was responsible for establishing a college of five priests at the Chapel in 1356 (Barron 1974, 23). The second was an alderman of Bassishaw ward from 1424–57; who was twice mayor of London (1435–6 and 1444–5), and was appointed in March 1440, along with two others, to supervise the rebuilding of Guildhall Chapel (Barron, pers comm). Thomas Knolles (or Knollys) was a Common Councilman appointed by the Corporation to supervise the completion of work in June 1442. Knollys too was to become Mayor later, and both he and Frowyk were heavily involved with various legal arguments at the time of the formal dedication of the chapel on October 30th 1444 (the second Frowyk would actually have been Mayor at the time). This dispute revolved around the terms of a bequest to the Chapel, which were only to be implemented if the new building was actually finished. It is not clear how much of the work was completed by this date: it is certainly true that some primary construction work was still going on at the Chapel as late as 1455 (*ibid* 36–8). It should be noted that both names were written in a very similar script and there is no justification for assuming that Frowyk's stone was anything other than contemporary with that of Knollys.

MEDIEVAL FOUNDATION STONES

Medieval foundations stones have been found *in situ* in comparatively few buildings. There are records of an inscribed stone on a pier base in Winchester Cathedral which was laid by Bishop Lucy in the late 12th century, and is therefore one of the earliest known (Atkinson 1943, 263). Unfortunately it is unclear whether it was physically engraved or merely painted, though Sir Howard Colvin has commented that no certain medieval painted dedications are known at all (pers comm). A few 13th to 15th-century dedications also survive. The foundation stones of Eton College and King's College were laid by Henry VI in person; and the ceremony surrounding the laying of the foundation stone of Henry VII's Chapel at Westminster is recorded by Holinshed (Atkinson 1943, 264–7). All of these were, however, located low down on superstructural walls or piers and were clearly visible to passers by. There is no certain documentary reference to stones being laid at the base of, or within, subsurface foundations, where they clearly could not be seen. However, records in the annals of St Alban's Abbey could be interpreted as suggesting a *painted* inscription being placed *in* (rather than *on*) the foundations there. Here the abbot 'laid the first stone in the foundation of the new cloister....on which was written his name with the year of Christ' (trans Salzman 1952, 391). The Latin may seem to suggest a painted dedication rather than an inscription: '*posuit primum lapidem in fundamentum novi claustri...in quo quidem lapide nomen ejus scriptum est, cum anno Christi*' (Riley 1867, 282). In contrast to current practice it was also common in the medieval period to lay more than one foundation stone within the same building (Atkinson 1943, 267). For example, at the foundation ceremony for St Stephen's Walbrook in 1439 where eight foundation stones were laid by 'important people' including the mason (*ibid*, 266; Milbourn 1881, 330–331); and at Salisbury Cathedral where foundation stones were laid by many people in 1220, including the Bishop (who laid three), the Earl and Countess of Salisbury, the Dean, the Precentor, the Chancellor, the Treasurer and various other nobles and dignitaries (Salzman 1952, 87 & 381). Atkinson suggests that none of these stones is now visible (Atkinson 1943, 264). Were they in fact laid below ground level?

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the lack of any real precedents, there are three pieces of evidence which appear to lead to the same conclusion. First, the masonry foundation in which the stones were found seem to belong to a building, Guildhall Chapel, that is known to have been built, or substantially rebuilt, in the 1440s. Secondly, the script is of a type characteristic of the 15th century. Thirdly, the names are those of City dignitaries who were not only alive in the 1440s but who are known to have been actively involved in supervision of the Chapel rebuilding. Taking all the evidence together, it seems impossible to suggest that the painted stones were merely in a secondary context, removed from a demolished earlier building to reuse as hard-core in the new foundation. On the contrary, a more justifiable conclusion would seem to be that, though the

stones themselves might have been redundant or unused pieces of semi-prepared masonry lying handily by, they were deliberately painted with the names of relevant attending dignitaries at the official dedication of the new Guildhall Chapel, only to be mortared invisibly into the base of a foundation where no-one but those present at the ceremony would ever know they were hidden. It was, as Dr John Harvey has said (pers comm), 'the numinous fact of their being laid as the formal foundation stones that counted'. It may furthermore be presumed that they were not the only stones so laid, and that the names of others present at the dedication ceremony would also have been commemorated.

It is, unfortunately, unlikely that more such stones will be found in what little now remains of the foundations of Guildhall Chapel, but it must also be asked whether the subsurface foundations of other important medieval buildings in London, and indeed in other cities, might also contain similarly decorative and informative dedication stones.

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