

BEST OF THE OLD WITH THE BEST OF THE NEW: THE GUILDHALL COMPLEX AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

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When commenting on the necessity of rebuilding the bombed-out Commons Chamber in 1943, Churchill said: “we shape our buildings and afterwards, our buildings shape us.” I was reminded of those words when I was invited to read a paper today, and what came to mind was the theme of ‘change’; not only the structural changes made to the Guildhall Complex, but the changing culture within the City of London Corporation itself.

The City Corporation is unique: it brings together the functions of a local authority, a property and financial investor, a police authority, a port health authority, an education provider, and a public open space provider, to name but a few. Many of these are the result of the Corporation’s long history; with the various roles having emerged and evolved over time. It is this theme of change therefore, that I would like to consider today.

I will use the Guildhall Complex itself to illustrate this change. With Mansion House, it is an enduring symbol of the City of London. Even a brief consideration of its history and development can help provide an insight into how the City has changed, even since the Second World War.

My consideration of organisational change is informed throughout by the theory of “cultural ecology”, the idea that cultural change can be the result of adapting to the physical environment. Put another way—the extent to which the fabric of the Guildhall Complex has reflected and, on the other hand, encouraged the development of the organisation of which it is the home.

The Guildhall Complex 1884–2015

When looking at the Guildhall Complex from 1884 to the present day, John James Baddeley’s ‘The Guildhall of the City of London’, is an excellent source for both the built environment and the organisational structure of the City of London Corporation. Reprinted seven times between 1905 and 1939, it demonstrates both what we have lost, and the scale of change that the Guildhall Complex has undergone since Churchill spoke those words.

What stands out in particular is the ‘new’ Common Council Chamber, used by the Court from 1884, until its destruction during the Blitz. What now remains

of it, lies buried beneath the current North Wing of Guildhall. Members would have accessed the chamber from the centre north doorway of the Great Hall, up a short flight of steps (where the North Ambulatory is now), leading to a lavishly decorated Lobby of the Council Chamber, and from there into the Council Chamber itself.

Constructed in just over a year, under the supervision of the then City Surveyor, Horace Jones, the interior of the Chamber was made particularly striking by its duo-decagonal design and twelve canopied carved screens that divided the body of the chamber from an ambulatory corridor. Above this corridor was set a surrounding balcony, which allowed the press and public to observe Court of Common Council proceedings. In layout, this would have been reminiscent of the chamber of the modern Scottish Parliament.

In the Great Hall of Guildhall itself, you would have seen overhead, a flat beamed roof installed as a temporary measure after the Great Fire of London. This remained in place two centuries later until the late 1860s, when Horace Jones recommended that the flat roof was replaced by today's open, vaulted roof and the sixteen windows along the north and south facades of the Great Hall. These changes were both in keeping with Guildhall's original fifteenth century character, but also, the then-contemporary tastes for Gothic revival; evident in Barry and Pugin's Houses of Parliament at Westminster.

Lost however, is the former Art Gallery on the eastern edge of the Yard: its modern replacement constructed in the late 1980s revealed the Roman heritage of the Guildhall, when the remains of Londinium's amphitheatre were uncovered. Lost too, are the Justice Rooms along the western edge of the Yard that incorporated the site of the current Court of Aldermen. As late as the 1970s, Guildhall Yard would have been unrecognisable to the modern observer: enclosed on all sides to create a space barely large enough for the Lord Mayor's Rolls Royce to turn.

As historians, these changes will of course be of interest to us all, but I would like to use them to make some suggestions about the type of City government they represented. Arguably the grand and expensive opulence of the Council Chamber and its Lobby, suggests an organisation that was conscious of its own status and comfortable in the Imperial urban heart of Britain and its Empire.

The circular banks of seating within the Chamber itself would have promoted a collegiate identity amongst its members, at variance perhaps with the more adversarial seating arrangements in Parliament or indeed, the modern Court of Common Council. The enclosed nature of Guildhall Yard served to present an organisation crammed into a small, cluttered space.

In addition, the renovation of the flat roof of the Great Hall from the early modern era of Wren to the arched neo-Gothic Victorian roof, illustrates a transition to a City authority that was in step with wider Victorian municipal ideas of town planning and development—a Great Hall of an organisation that built the likes of Smithfield Market and Tower Bridge, rather than so much focused on the representative role that the City holds today.

Guildhall Improvement Project

Following the damage to the Guildhall Complex and the destruction of the Council Chamber during the Second World War, the Guildhall began to change. A block of brick offices, dubbed the North Block, was constructed during the 1950s to a pre-war design to the north of Guildhall. Twenty years later, the West Wing, a more architecturally striking wing of offices, a product of 1960s and 1970s architecture, which is arguably not as appealing, was constructed along Aldermanbury.

More recently, and as part of the Guildhall Yard East project, the Guildhall Art Gallery was built. This has allowed the City to display, coherently, major elements of its art collection for the first time—opening the collection up to a wider audience, as well as having a digital ‘Collage’ system, which allows one to view and buy images from both Guildhall Art Gallery and the London Metropolitan Archives.

Originally estimated to cost under £10 million, the final bill for construction was over £80 million. This was largely due to the fact that when site excavation began, we found the remains of London’s formerly lost Roman amphitheatre—to say nothing of the pre-Roman settlement that remained underneath. Unfortunately, this settlement, arguably even more interesting, was completely ruined upon its contact with air. This discovery required the Roman remains to be recorded and then incorporated into the gallery’s basement to create the Amphitheatre exhibition, thus providing an eastern frame to reinforce the Yard as a central feature of a newly ‘open’ and welcoming Guildhall. Other factors included finding a Black Redstart, a protected bird, nesting in the construction area which contributed to increased delays and costs; as well as the fact that the Guildhall Yard East project expanded in scope during its life.

An office block behind the gallery that fronted Basinghall Street was amalgamated into the site and the former City Management Suite, now called the City Centre, was constructed. This space allowed the City to provide corporate hospitality and meeting rooms, as well as housing a three dimensional scale model of the Square Mile that is of great benefit to property developers and City professionals—serving our wider audience.

In keeping with the move to 'open up' the complex, it is now possible to progress through the City Centre into the Roman amphitheatre, and from there into the Art Gallery and thus Guildhall. Further detail on the Guildhall Yard East project can be found in the paper that was delivered to this association in 2004.

By the turn of the century it was clear that the post-war developments of the North and West Wings were in dire need of improvement. The Guildhall Improvement Committee was therefore formed (in typical City Corporation fashion). As the then Chairman of Policy, I also chaired that Committee, given the scale and cost of the work to be done. It was a challenging yet enjoyable task, and from the start we were clear that it was of vital importance to ensure that the best of Guildhall's legacy was maintained throughout improvement works. This required a delicate balance of maintaining the key features and characteristics of most parts of the Guildhall complex, whilst ensuring a modern, fit for purpose working environment.

Nineteenth century buildings such as the Old Library and the Old Museum were comprehensively renovated and equipped with modern facilities such as Audio Visual equipment and "mood lighting". The old Livery Hall was converted into an accessible Chamberlain's Court, a reception and offices. It also means that areas such as the new Livery Hall were flexible enough to host both our Planning Committee and corporate hospitality clients. More hospitality kitchens were provided in areas such as outside the Chief Commoner's Parlour and the Livery Hall, in addition to the finishing kitchens in the North Ambulatory and the extensive main kitchens below. These allow the City to host more functions at the same time as one another: meaning more clients, more events to promote the City, and more flexibility of space.

The project also sought to integrate space more effectively across each of the areas of the complex. For example, the entrance on Basinghall Street, as well as the grand staircase, were reopened on the eastern edge of the complex. The Basinghall Entrance had previously housed the Road Safety Centre, which featured a Ford Anglia driving simulator. This was removed, and a superb corridor created that allows access to the South Ambulatory, past the Great Hall and thus into the West Wing.

The internal fabric of both the North and West Wings was altered entirely. Walled offices that discouraged staff interaction and communication and created a claustrophobic sense of space were removed, and replaced with modern open plan offices and furniture; as well as a new restaurant and facilities for staff. More ambitiously, the piazza in front of the North Wing was demolished, lowered and rebuilt. Revolving glass doors were inserted into the building façade, to provide a readily-accessible central entrance. The rear of the North Wing was removed and replaced with a glass wall,

allowing users of the new glass lifts to look down into a newly landscaped courtyard as they travel between floors.

Overall, the effect is such that a visitor entering the North Wing has an uninterrupted view of the north side of the Great Hall. To achieve this view, unsightly plant was removed from the space that is now a quiet central courtyard, and the former Lady Mayoress' Corridor was largely removed in order to restore the view of the Great Hall's northern frontage. It is still possible for the Lady Mayoress to access her Gallery undercover: the press however, must access their gallery externally.

At the conclusion of the improvement project, the complex was radically different to what it was before. The progress made during the Guildhall Yard East project and the Guildhall Improvement Project has opened up and modernised the complex, moving away from the previously cluttered, enclosed Yard that had existed up until the early 1970s, enabling much greater circulation throughout the entirety of the complex. New corridors made it possible to travel from one wing to another, breathing new life into the physical environment in which City Corporation Members and Officers work. Physical change therefore set the stage for organisational change.

Organisational Culture of the City of London Corporation

The question remains as to how this physical change has actually been reflected in the cultural ecology of the City of London Corporation; in fact the name of the Corporation changed during the course of the improvement project. In 2006 we decided to 'put the City first,' and refer to ourselves as the City of London, rather than the Corporation of London. This is clearly still work in progress.

Whilst the physical appearance and the internal layout has been modernised, even today, an external observer could be forgiven for looking at some of the practices and ceremonies of the City Corporation and consider them indicative of old fashioned and dated attitudes. An example perhaps being that the Lord Mayor, Alderman and Chief Officers use nosegays and scatter lavender oil during Common Hall to mask, however unfairly, the odour of the assembled Livery. Nevertheless, changes to the built environment of Guildhall, and the West Wing in particular, have gone hand in hand with changes in organisational behaviour. One example is committee meetings.

Until the early 2000s it was customary for committee tables to be laid out in an E shape: three tables emanating out at right angles from a long table with the Chairman at its centre. This E pattern meant many members were sat with their backs to one another and officers, simply serving to segregate members from each other. This pattern also served to stifle discussion and

debate, although officers who were seated at one side of the room in those days were more accustomed to indicating strongly what Members should decide.

The décor also was very much of its time. Walls were covered with 1970s era padded orange leather, and the furniture typified by heavy oak tables and chairs. It was common for alcohol to be served during non-public business: during summer months pot pourri was used to hide the smell of port. In all, it is not difficult to make the case that committee business in such an environment was somewhat stilted, rigid and oppressive.

The first phase of the Guildhall Improvement Project swept this away through renovating committee rooms. Committee tables are now modern and moveable: the Chairman remains at the centre; but it is the centre of a collegiate group of seating that ensures members can engage in discussion and debate, and in which officers are an integral, but advisory, part of proceedings.

Décor is now modern, simple and light. A nod is given to past practice: the Clerk remains on the Chairman's left, the Aldermen to his or her right. Officers remain at the table to the Chairman's left, but it is not unusual in some sub-committee meetings for members and officers to be intermingled. The striped trousers and black jacket of committee clerks has given way to modern lounge suits. We are, however, still awaiting a more collegiate setting for Court meetings in the future, as requested by the Members over three years ago.

Last year, the Guildhall Historical Association heard of the development of the City's role as a representative body of the City 'financial' and the emergence of the Policy and Resources Committee as the premier decision-making body, after the Court of Common Council, since its establishment in 1979. It has meant that it is commonly accepted that the Policy Chairman is—dare I say it—in all but name the Leader of the City of London Corporation. However it was not until the 1990s when the City Corporation was expanding into its representative role that this came to be apparent. The development of the role of Policy Chairman, and the City's wider representative role, were reflected in the physical development of Guildhall.

When I started as Chairman of Policy in 2003, I was convinced of the need for facilities and support to be made available to the Policy Chairman that are commonly available to leaders in other local authorities, indeed any organisation. Initially, I was obliged to share a secretary with two or more other Chairmen, compared to the current arrangement whereby the Policy Chairman has an executive officer and an executive assistant, an office and meeting facilities—to say nothing of a very small flat.

In the early days, as I sought to establish the role in its current capacity, I

occupied some space in the current City Centre, which meant that the City Corporation officers with whom I had to work were always running about between my temporary office and theirs. After negotiations, some insistence and little patience, the West Wing provided the current meeting and office facilities adjacent to the Town Clerk's Department.

Along with the changing role of the Policy Chairman came a wider organisational change; led by the then Town Clerk and me, from what was arguably for many years a federation; with authority over each chief officer and most decision-making residing with each service committee. It is now, more or less (!) a single integrated organisation, with Chief Officers reporting to the Town Clerk and coordination between committees led by Policy and Resources. The roles of Policy Chairman and Town Clerk took on more characteristics of their modern peers, that of Leader of a Council, and Chief Executive, whose remit now reaches every corner of the organisation.

We can perhaps illustrate this best by referring back to the early years of the twentieth century. Many of the premier committees in Baddeley's time have gone. Powerful as they once were, the functions of the City Lands Committee, Coal Corn and Rates Committee, and Bridge House Estates Committee and have been taken over by their modern counterparts: the Policy and Resources Committee; Finance Committee; and Investment Board.

This change in committee structure has brought with it changes in the roles and responsibilities of committee chairmen. Whereas the primary Common Councilman in Baddeley's time was the Chairman of the City Lands Committee, whose role included that of Chief Commoner, that role in the modern era now falls to the Chairman of Policy and Resources who acts as the political 'leader' of the City Corporation. The role of Chief Commoner is now a separate annual post, the holder of which is responsible of matters of discipline and propriety among members of the Court, and a civic representative of the City Corporation.

Conclusion

Arguably much of the change that is apparent to us today is the direct result of the scale of destruction inflicted on the complex during the Blitz. The opulence and wealth of buildings such as the Common Council Chamber has disappeared: there is therefore little to hold back any conservative attachment to the ways of working and practices they embodied. Instead, organisational behaviour is framed by the sparse grandeur of the Great Hall set amidst the open, unencumbered Guildhall Yard, and the airy simplicity of the modern committee rooms.

Moreover, it is perhaps no accident that the formation of the modern Policy

and Resources Committee is roughly concurrent with the opening of the modern offices and committee rooms located in the West Wing in the 1970s, and its emerging remit, free to develop and adapt to changes in society, business and government.

This paper has attempted to canter through what has been a complex development of both Guildhall and the City of London Corporation. Whilst change is clearly also driven by wider societal and generational attitudes, external factors such as the global economy and the politics of central government; I hope you will agree that physical change has made it easy for members and officers to meet our Corporate Plan, and ensure as stated, that all we do here combines 'the best of the old with the best of the new.'

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