

The Guildhall Lyme Regis Dorset  
Statement of Significance and Heritage.



JME Conservation Ltd.

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## Research parameters:

This Statement of Significance and Heritage Statement has been prepared to inform applications for planning permission and listed building consent for the replacement of the oriel window in the principal elevation of The Guildhall with a new gabled dormer window. The Guildhall is a Grade II\* listed building that was first listed on the 23rd April 1952, and it forms part of an important group of listed buildings within this part of the historic core of the Lyme Regis Conservation Area. Lyme Regis lies within the Dorset AONB, and its coastline forms part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. The purposes of this statement are firstly to provide an assessment of the significance of the Grade II\* listed building and its setting within the Conservation Area; and secondly to assess the impact of the proposed development on these designated heritage assets and their settings.

This statement does not provide a detailed historical appraisal of The Guildhall nor does it record in detail the complete architectural development of the building. It provides a proportionate assessment of significance for the purposes of understanding the significance of the oriel window (which is the part of the designated heritage asset that is the subject of the current proposals), its setting; and the impacts of the works in order to inform the current applications. It is based upon a visual assessment of the guildhall and its setting, supported by sufficient documentary research to elucidate the results of the visual assessment.

A full examination of documentary and other sources has not been undertaken, however in addition to the documentary research that has been undertaken, much useful information on the development of The Guildhall and this part of Lyme Regis has been provided by Richard Bulle of Lyme Regis Museum; and Max Hebditch who has provided additional information on the architect George Vials.

N.b. The historic photographs (Figs 21, 22, 28, 29, and 34) including photographs from the Vials family archives have been provided by Lyme Regis Museum, and are reproduced by kind permission of the copyright holders.

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# The Guildhall, Lyme Regis Dorset.

## Statement of significance and heritage.

### **Brief description of The Guildhall and its setting:**

The Guildhall lies at the eastern end of the historic port and market town of Lyme Regis at the right-angled junction between Church Street and Bridge Street overlooking Lyme Bay. The town is enclosed to the east and west by steep Blue Lias hills that terminate as cliffs enclosing the bay. This topography has restricted access into and through the town, which developed on either side of the crossing point of the River Lim. The main historic route through the town, (now the A3052), runs east-west broadly parallel to the shore. From the east, it descends steeply into the town along Church Street before turning sharply into Bridge Street, where it crosses the much-altered medieval bridge over the river Lim before it rises out of the town to the north and west along the wider Broad Street.



Fig 1. The north elevation of The Guildhall seen from Church Street with Lyme Bay behind. Many of the buildings lining the streets within the historic core of the town were re-fronted in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Within the historic core, Church Street and Bridge Street to the south and east, and Monmouth Coombe Street to the north and west, are narrow winding roads reflecting their medieval origin; they are lined with historic buildings defining the older part of the town. A network of narrow historic winding lanes runs at right angles to these roads which are also lined with historic properties. Fronting Church Street and the north side of Bridge Street the housing is predominantly of three storeys or two storeys with attics. The majority of these properties appear to be of 18th or 19th century date although many are earlier buildings that have been re-fronted with fashionable formal elevations with sash windows, and well-detailed doorcases. Many of these buildings incorporate shops at ground floor level and have symmetrical elevations





Fig 3. The much altered medieval bridge crossing the River Lim can be glimpsed below the modern road bridge and this historic road crossing was a focus for the development of the town along the sea frontage

To the west of the medieval bridge, a lane now formalised as The Promenade linked the medieval town with the small medieval harbour that was already enclosed by the 16th century by an artificial breakwater known as The Cobb. 18th and 19th century expansion driven in part by tourism and sea-bathing resulted in the expansion of the town beyond its medieval core—most notably along Broad Street westwards, out of the town. To the east of the bridge, the land on the seaward side of Bridge Street is protected by a series of substantial stone sea walls that protect the Lias ridge to the east of Church Street and the properties off Long Entry.



Fig 4. Seen from The Cobb the medieval core of the town nestles behind sea walls whilst the unprotected coast to the east has suffered heavy erosion. Broad Street and The Promenade to the west mark the later expansion of the town during the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Guildhall is sited on the south side of Bridge Street, on the corner with Church Street; and forms a right angle with No 62 Church Street (Guildhall Cottage). No 62, now the Town Council offices is of two storeys with a slated roof which is hipped at its south end. The building is predominantly finished in white painted render over rubblestone. The front (west) elevation has a gabled bay to the left with moulded bargeboards and slate hanging to the apex. It is articulated by black painted pilasters at first floor level, supported on stone corbels on either side of a wide four-centred arched opening.



Fig 4. No 62 Church Street, (Guildhall Cottage), now the Town Council offices, and probably also remodelled by Vials when the Guildhall was rebuilt as it shares similar detailing.

Above the arch is a moulded cornice supporting a decorated plaster panel extending the full width of a four-light mullioned window with arched transoms detailed with single paned casements below and small paned lights above each transom. A crudely detailed later timber box containing a stained glass sign reading *Theatre* has been planted on this elevation and this cuts across both the head of the arch and the moulded cornice above, and appears to have replaced a sign within the panel above.

The remainder of this elevation has a wide full height flat-roofed canted bay window, with three windows to each side of the splayed side windows. At first floor level these are all sashes, and they are separated by slate hanging from the deeper shopfront window below; the joinery is all detailed to match the window to the left, with small paned lights above larger glazed panes. At ground floor level, there are doors to each side of the bay, with pilasters to each side of the arched door into the shop, and a moulded surround to the right.

To the west of the Guildhall, a small partially-cobbled open space known as Cockmoile Square separates the building from Lyme Regis Museum, which is a late 19th century L-shaped building constructed in brick with stone dressings. It is detailed with large mullion and transomed windows with Flemish gables to the street and side elevations, and a projecting entrance and imposing stair tower set in the angle which rises to an octagonal lantern that is carefully positioned to make a statement in views towards the Guildhall from Church Street and Bridge Street.





Fig 6. The small square (Cockmoile Square on historic maps) separates the Guildhall from the Museum (both designed by Vials). Until the mid 20th century the Square was enclosed by cottages that extended to the east of the museum and south of The Guildhall, and the arched openings provided access to the sea. The principal range of The Guildhall is of two storeys and is five bays long; it is rough-cast rendered at first floor, with rubblestone and dressed stone detailing at ground floor level, under a hipped slated roof, detailed with decorative ridge tiles, finials, and bargeboards to the verges. Attached to the west



Fig 7. The front (north elevation of The Guildhall with its wide projecting gable to the left and the oriel window to the right. The two open ground floor bays to the left have been further opened up by removal of the east wall in the mid 20th century. Set back slightly on the right is the former jail and remodelled stair tower incorporating the main entrance porch. The left hand projecting bay may have survived the 1890 road widening.



side elevation is a small two storey range incorporating a lock-up, with a tall circular entrance and stair tower which becomes octagonal at second floor level. This upper level has dressed stone pilasters at the corners rising to an eaves cornice and dressed stone detailing to the windows, all of which has been painted with a white masonry paint. Above is a short octagonal slated spire terminated by a lead-covered cupula with a ball finial. Within the stair tower the windows are small direct glazed leaded lights with one opening metal light on the stair at first floor level.



Fig. 9. The reformed north elevation of the former jail and guildhall, which was rebuilt behind its historic line to allow the road to be widened c.1890. It is unclear how much of the stair tower is historic.

The rest of the windows within the principal range that overlook the street at first floor level are small-paned timber sashes. The sashes are painted white but the boxes and most of the other joinery is painted black. There is a narrower two storey range attached to the rear (south) side of these stone additions, which lines through with the rear elevation of the principal range and its associated hipped roof. The west gable elevation of this rear range is angled forward to face more directly onto Broad Street.



Fig.8. The west elevation with the ornate entrance porch containing the steps up to the first floor Guildhall and on the right the arched door to the ground floor rooms within the former market hall. Until the mid-20th century a row of cottages infilled the space between the Guildhall and the museum building on the right.



On the principal north elevation, the two left hand (east) bays break forward under a gabled roof with an *oculus* within the apex of the gable. Set within the gable at first floor level is a centrally positioned Venetian window which has a formally-detailed dark painted surround with a keystone to the arched opening to the taller central window, and entablatures to each side window which are detailed with *metopes* and supported on fluted pilasters. These pilasters extend below cill level to rest on a deep moulded lower rail, which forms a plinth to the whole window. Within this moulded surround, the windows are sub-divided to form small paned sashes, with a curved head in the upper sash to the central window. A thicker surround to one pane within this upper sash reflects the later insertion of a small metal opening light.



Fig. 11. The north elevation showing the possibly original left hand projecting bay with the refronted and set back central range with the former gaol and stair tower to the right.

At ground floor level within this projecting gabled bay there is a full width opening defined by a moulded timber “entablature” supported on four timber pilasters that separates the ground and first floor levels of this north facing elevation. The right hand third of the opening is enclosed to form a small room, accessed through a pair of six panelled doors with the upper panels replaced by turned spindles now with glazing behind but originally providing ventilation. A double pilaster separates this doorway from the open passageway occupying the rest of the ground floor within this bay. The pilaster to the right of the double doors is attached to a rusticated stone corner. The open passageway to the left opens onto what is now an open yard to the rear of the building, beyond which are views of the stone sea wall and the sea beyond.

A moulded fascia encloses the eave to the two central bays, which are rendered at first floor level and at the right hand (western) end of this elevation the end bay breaks forward to form a gabled oriel window which is also rendered. Within the central two bays, the left bay contains a pair of small four-over-four paned sash windows, within a timber frame and separated by a central timber mullion. To the right, the oriel window projects some 200mm in front of the elevation and is supported on four moulded timber brackets. The base of the oriel lines through with the moulded timber separating the exposed stonework of the ground floor from the roughcast render at first floor level.



Fig 14. The oriel window showing recent vehicular impact damage. The rendered panels and much of the lower framework is of modern construction following repeated vehicle damage.

The oriel window is detailed with two pairs of four over six paned sash windows (the right sash currently boarded up externally), separated by a central timber panel detailed with a vertical row of three raised roughcast rendered panels. Above the window is a coved moulded plaster head supporting a wide pedimented gabled roof.



At ground floor level, the two central bays have full-height wide, shallow four-centred arches supported on stone pilasters; it is understood that these arches were originally open to provide a small covered market, but they now have later 20th century glazed infill following conversion to offices. Beneath the oriel window is a door set within a smaller dressed stone arched surround. There is quoining to each side of the door, with the right side forming the corner of the range.

The slightly recessed stone rubble range links the guildhall to the adjacent entrance tower to the right (west). A door within a dressed stone surround opens into the former lock-up, which is described in a stone panel set into the wall above the door. At high level there is a roughly dressed stone opening containing a historic timber louvered vent. The tower is detailed with a series of leaded light windows within dressed stone surrounds that light the staircase, and a more symmetrical arrangement of smaller windows at high level and within its octagonal section.



Fig. 16. The simply detailed raised front porch to the west elevation with the adjacent ground floor door to the right into what is now a separate office.

On the west side of this tower, is the principal entrance into the guildhall set within a parapeted stone porch and reached by flight of stone steps that is incorporated into a dressed stone doorcase with a curved arched surround surmounted by the town coat of arms, set within an ornate corbelled pediment. The timber entrance door is detailed with raised moulded rails and small panels with decorative steel strap hinges and door handle. A less ornate but similarly detailed timber door to the right of the porch provides access into the west gable of the attached rear range. This door is set within a shallow four centred arched surround.

Above the porch and this door is a canted oriel window supported on moulded brackets. It has fixed leaded light windows set within a stone surround divided into three by mullions and transoms. The central light has been converted to an opening metal casement and the lights above transom level have shallow arched heads. The oriel is surmounted by a dentilled and pedimented gabled roof supported on brackets, with an oval *oculus* within the pediment.

In contrast to the other elevations the rear (south-facing) elevation of this range is plainly rendered with a smooth finish, and is simply detailed with two ground floor sash windows. Historic photographs show adjacent buildings that have subsequently been demolished and this explains the simpler detailing to this section of the elevation which was not designed to be seen.

The two end (east) bays reflect the detailing of the north elevation, in that they have a centrally positioned Venetian window with a gabled roof above the two bays; however this window has a more simply moulded outer frame, and the whole elevation is flush with slate hanging to part of this gable at first floor level. There is a modern small lean-to addition tucked below the oriel window serving the offices on the ground floor.



Fig. 18. The more simply detailed south elevation with its angled eave and plain rendered facade was originally attached to historic cottages which were set on the lower ground in front of the railings.



The west elevations of The Guildhall open onto the small, partially-cobbled square called Cockmoile Square on historic maps. Part of this is used as parking and railings and stone setts separate the pedestrian and parking areas from a raised courtyard at the eastern end of the Guildhall accessed from the opening adjacent to the Town Council offices in Guildhall Cottage.



Fig. 19. The south elevation of The Guildhall with its angled eave and plain rendered facade where the adjacent cottages set on the lower ground beyond the railing were demolished.

### **The setting:**

As one descends Church Street, the carriageway narrows to a single track. An almost continuous frontage of historic properties lines each side of both Church and Bridge Street, and the narrowness of these streets is such that from the churchyard southwards there are only very narrow footpaths to either side, and in some places there is no footpath at all. Along the lower length of Church Street, just beyond the church, the view is terminated by part of the principal elevation of The Guildhall, and more of its principal elevation comes into view as one approaches the sharp bend at the junction with Bridge Street.

The properties on the west side of this part of Church Street are predominantly rendered or of painted brickwork with slate or clay tiled roofs. They are of late 18th or 19th century date in appearance and are of two or three storeys with symmetrical elevations and sash windows; and several have particularly good quality doorcases. On the east side of the street, immediately beyond the church are later 20th century buildings, but below Long Entry is a row of three predominantly-rendered buildings, the central one of which is a fine late 18th or early 19th century three storey dwelling. This is detailed with a symmetrical elevation incorporating three-window sashes to each side of the central entrance bay containing a modern door but within a fine painted timber doorcase.

There are similar three-storey dwellings, some incorporating shopfronts at ground floor level, on the opposite side of the street. No 1 Church Street is a symmetrically designed corner building that turns the corner on the north side of Bridge Street, opposite the Guildhall. This elevation reflects

the detail of the buildings opposite, which comprise three storey dwellings with well detailed eight over eight sashes.



Fig. 19. The Breakfast room passage off the hall. The arched infill and bookshelves are both modern. The panel over the historic doorway would have been glazed, and the hall cornice continues above it.

To each side the buildings are later 19th century, and the corner building (Guildhall Cottage – described below) is contemporary with the Guildhall, and contains the Town Council’s offices.



Fig. 20. Seen in the context of the restrained detailing of the adjacent 16th and 17th century refronted buildings, the exuberant turn-of-the-century detailing of the Museum, Guildhall and Guildhall Cottage stand out.



### Interior:

The former shop is now in office use and has not been inspected internally, although looking through the window, all the internal finishes are of late 20th century date. A 1991 photograph provided by the Museum shows that its existing plasterboard ceiling conceals apparently *in-situ* deeply moulded ceiling beams, of 16th century appearance. There are remnants of a lath and plaster ceiling to the south side of this beam, which are fixed to joists which appear to have horizontal proportions (also indicating a 16th century date), suggesting part of this ceiling remains *in-situ*.



Fig. 21. The 16th century moulded ceiling beam surviving above the plaster ceiling in the ground floor of the guildhall. Exposed following vehicle damage in 1991 it shows charring from fire damage in the 19th century.



Fig. 22. A second view shows the ceiling beam attached to a cross beam both of which are *in-situ* but cut back when the building was refronted and narrowed by Vials. *In situ* floor joists can be seen on the left.



Within the former gaol, the internal walls are all natural stone, with the exposed underside of the steps up to the first floor Guildhall forming its ceiling.



Fig. 23. The remnant of the former town gaol survives in truncated form with the historic entrance door reset in the repositioned front wall. The stairs to the Council chamber cut through its original roof.



The entrance lobby within the tower is well detailed with dressed stone arches with raised keystones to the opening onto the staircase and to the commemorative alcove. The staircase rises above the



Fig. 24. The good quality Victorian entrance door opens into the small entrance lobby with its decorative stone detailing and commemorative plaque within the arched alcove.

cut back remnant of the former gaol, to a small landing at the entrance to the Council Chamber. The landing is lit by the west lights of the oriel window, and a partition aligned with the central blind window to the oriel separates the two spaces.



Fig. 25. The staircase added in the Vials remodelling rises to a small landing with the Council Chamber beyond.



A door in the partition opens into the principal meeting room – the Council Chamber - which occupies the east and central bays of the building. The two central bays are lit by the two east lights to the oriel window and the smaller pair of sash windows, and has a panelled dado and a decorative central roof truss exposed to just above collar level. A second door in the partition at the south end of this room opens into the west-facing Mayor's Parlour which is adjacent to the entrance lobby and tower staircase.



Fig. 26. The first floor meeting room, with the late 19th century truss in the foreground. The circular post supporting the downstand is historic; and the structure beyond this forms part of the earlier building. .

The central roof truss is supported on timber corbels and the collar is decorated with chamfers separated by decorative pendants. It has queen posts detailed with struts to the principal rafters and a curved braces rising to the collar; and more simple curved braces between the queen posts and purlins; and there are exposed ceiling beams above the collar.

A moulded timber beam (panelled on its underside) supports a plastered downstand which separates this bay from the wider east bay. This beam and downstand is supported on a reused (probably 17th century) round timber post with moulded capital; and this rests on a raised timber dais which extends across the entire bay and projects slightly into the central bay and terminates at a reused late 16th or early 17th century timber balustrade that separates off this bay from the rest of the Council Chamber.

This bay has a curved barrel ceiling and is lit by the Venetian windows on the north and south elevations. It contains other late 16th or early 17th century timber fittings (incorporating later sections of joinery) including timber panelling, other moulded railings and seating, and the central section of panelling against the east wall is raised on either side of the central more elaborately panelled Mayors seat which is set beneath the town coat of arms of painted stone set beneath a timber hood carried on fluted Corinthian pilasters.

At the rear (west) of the Council Chamber a door opens into the Mayor's Parlour, which is also pan-elled and the decoration includes other 17th century fittings. From the Mayors Parlour, a door leads to a winding stone stair rising within the tower to a simply detailed small store room in the tower and on up to the roof.



Fig. 27. The tower stairs seen from the upper room. The inner face of the walls are lined with brick with steel reinforcing to the stair opening and the tower roof.



### **Detailed history of development of The Guildhall.**

The Guildhall lies within the historic core of the Lyme Regis, and the site is likely to have been occupied from an early date. Historic documents indicate that the present Guildhall dates from at least the late 16th century; and the detailing of the surviving *in-situ* ground floor ceiling beams is compatible with a 16th century date for its construction. A thorough and scholarly report prepared in 2005 by Jo Draper (*Cockmoile Square & the Museum Area, Lyme Regis: Archaeological Assessment & Historical Survey*) provides a detailed summary of the archival evidence for the site and records that the earliest specific reference to the Guildhall is a deed of 1613 for a lease by the Borough that included permission to erect a shop “under the Guildhall”.

According to Roberts’ 1823 *History of Lyme-Regis*, this earlier phase of the Guildhall contained the magistrate’s court, the council chamber and the town gaol (at its western end) which gave its name to the adjacent square. The public spaces occupied the upper floor; and on the ground floor, in addition to the gaol there were areas that were let out for storage and shops. Draper’s 2005 report records that much of the east part of the medieval town to the south of the Guildhall was swept away by sea in the 14th century; and although this area was protected by sea walls, there was a history of these being breached and rebuilt at various times, including records of repair works undertaken several times in the 19th century.

Photographs and early 19th century maps within the report show dwellings enclosing the west, south and east sides of Cockmoile Square. The latter included dwellings attached to the rear elevation of the Guildhall, and there were other dwellings to the east around Gun Cliff.



Fig. 28. The late 1890's photograph showing cottages built against the south side of the Guildhall, which still has its central lantern tower. The museum has not yet been built and other cottages occupy the site.

These 19th century photographs show the north elevation of the Guildhall, and the gabled elevation to the east bay, with its first floor Venetian windows that indicate an 18th century phase of alteration, to this bay, that escaped the rebuilding of the rest of the north front. A slightly earlier photograph shows the north elevation and projecting oriel window with a roughcast render. At ground floor level the east bay incorporates a covered walkway leading to Gun Cliff, with the entrance to the covered market to the right. The wide arches to the central market bays were closed by railings



Fig. 29. The guildhall following the Vialls work in the late 19th century. The open walkway to Gun Cliff and the adjacent entrance to the open market area below the guildhall can be seen on the left, with the open arches to the market on the right. The adjacent door is on the site of the former entrance door to the guildhall stairs but following the rebuilding it opens into the open market area .

At first floor level there are small-paned late 18th or early 19th century sashes in the central range and in the jetty. The photograph of the west elevation, shows a large blocked ground floor opening in the side of the gaol with a grille above and parallel rear range, to which a further rear range can just be seen.

The *in-situ* moulded ceiling beam within the central range, together with the beams beneath the covered walkway all appear to be 16th century in date, and whilst it is possible that the jetty in the photograph is early 17th century, it is suggested that the gaol and building above would also have been of 16th century date. The Venetian window indicates an 18th century phase of alteration, with early and later 19th century alterations to the external joinery.



**The Victorian rebuilding:**

The historic form of the earlier Guildhall is recorded on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey County maps surveyed in 1887 (Devon) and 1888 (Dorset); and the map also shows that by this date the dwellings around the south and west sides of the Cockmoile Square had been demolished.



Fig. 30. The 1st edition O.S. map of 1887 showing the footprint of the earlier building on the site, with additional buildings attached to its south elevation facing onto Cockmoile Square; and to its southeast corner.



Fig. 31. The 2nd edition O.S. map of 1900 showing the footprint of the new building set back from the road behind the east bay; the buildings attached to the south elevation and south east corner remain in place.



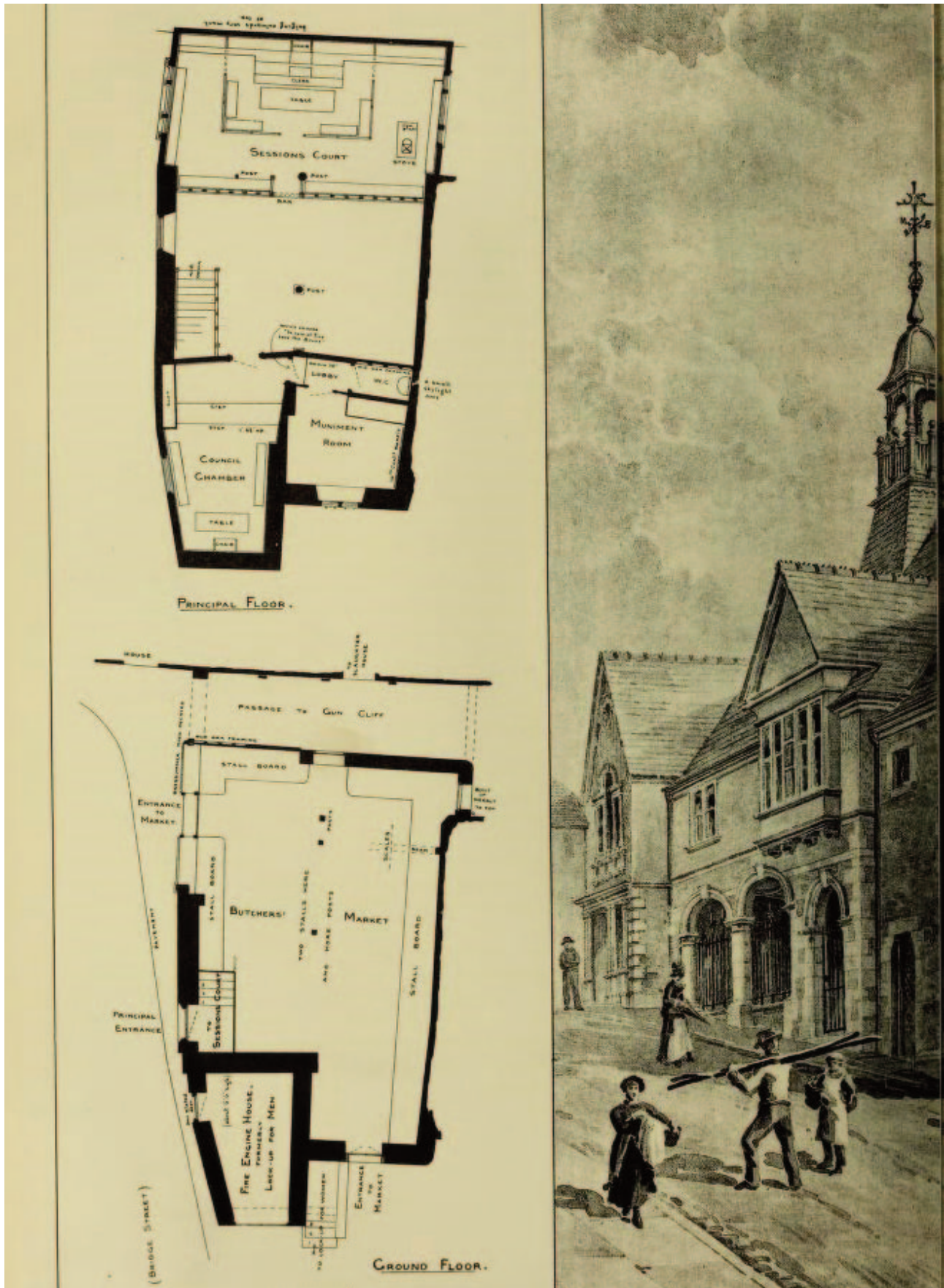


Fig. 32. The plan of the Guildhall prior to alteration. Structural elements are shown in black including two support posts below the east (top) bay. Note the position of the original stairs.



The list description suggests that The Guildhall was rebuilt in 1887 to the design of George Vials, incorporating 16th and 17th century fittings from the earlier building. An article in the Devon and Exeter S Daily Gazette records the reopening of the Guildhall on 21st January 1889. This article records that the work followed an offer from Revd Edward Peek to restore the historic fittings to the Guildhall at his own expense, and a request that his architect (Vials who had already undertaken extensive work on the church) be commissioned to provide a report on the building.

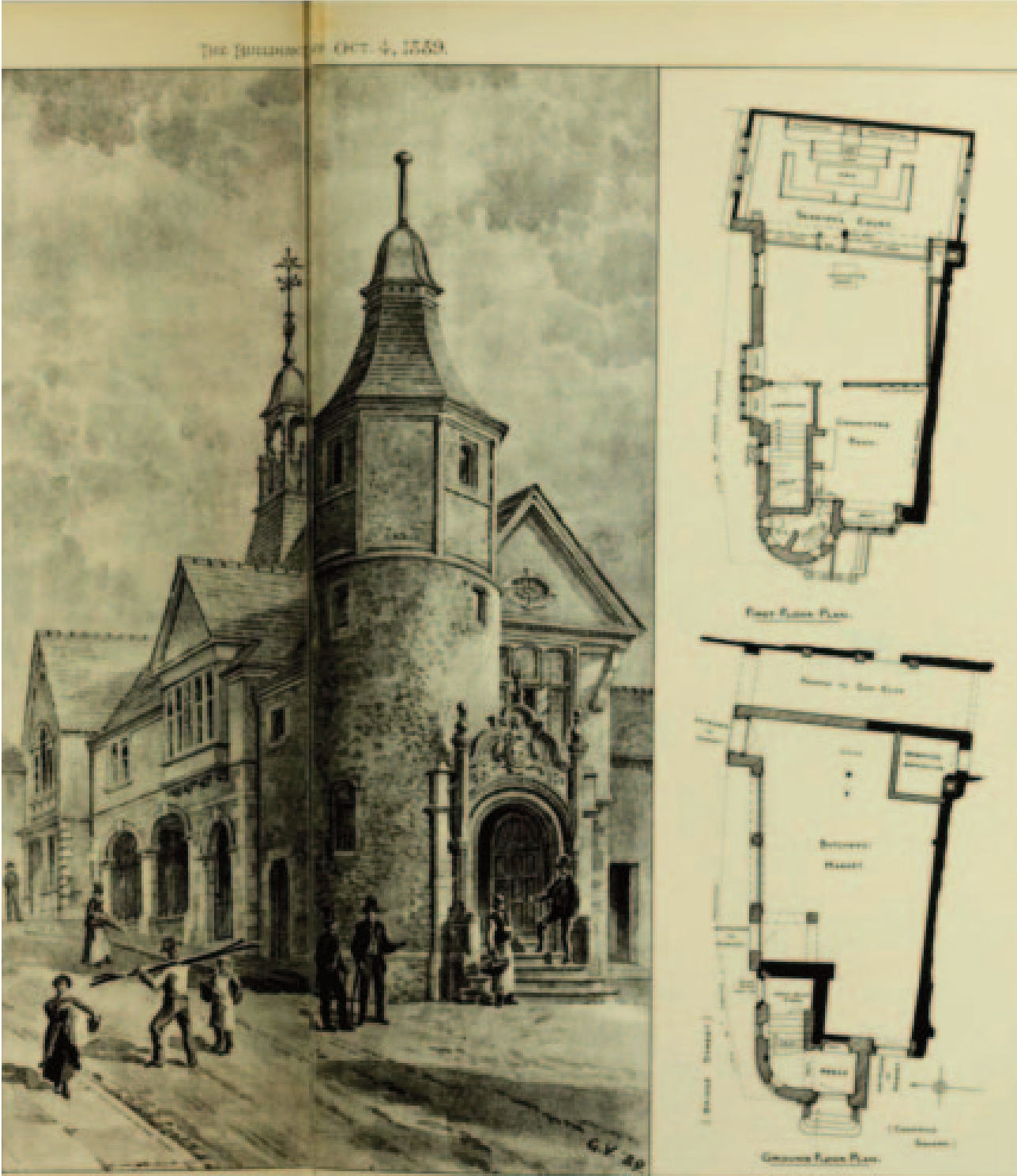


Fig. 33. The guildhall after alteration. The floor plans show the retained historic fabric. Most of the east (top) bay is retained as is the south wall and part of the prison. Note the two posts survive at the east end and in fact much of the first floor appears to have been retained over the market.

This report found the building to be structurally dangerous; and the Corporation therefore instructed it to be partially rebuilt, and took the opportunity to relocate the north wall at the west end of the building in order to allow the road to be widened and to allow the entrance to be relocated to the west end. The new circular tower which formed part of these works was added to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Plans of the original Guildhall and its remodelled form were published in the 4th October 1889 edition of *The Building News and Engineer* and are reproduced in figures 32 and 33 above. These show that prior to the commencement of the works the mens gaol had previously been altered to form a Fire Engine House. The remainder of the ground floor was used as a Butchers Market, and the door in the north elevation led to steps up to the first floor. The Court room was laid out almost as-existing with a Council Chamber and Muniment Room in the west bays.

Although these plans suggest that extensive demolition was undertaken, in practice the survival of the historic ceiling beams indicates that much of the historic fabric within the east bay remained untouched and indeed this bay was not shortened as part of the road widening. Within the central range, only the north part of the 18th century floor structure appears to have been cut back, and then only sufficient to allow for the repositioned north wall. The roof over this central and western end of the building was entirely replaced to respond to its narrower form. Because the first floor structure is concealed by modern finishes it is unclear how much of this floor was damaged during a fire recorded within one of the ground floor shops in the early 19th century.



Fig. 34. The first floor of the guildhall after the works were completed. The plans show that the post supporting the ceiling beam was retained in-situ as was the step up to the court within this east bay.



Comparison with the 2nd edition map of 1900 confirms that the eastern projecting gabled wing retained its historic plan form, as did the rear (south) wall. The maps also show a ground floor passageway through this bay providing access to the sea wall behind, suggesting that this access was a historic one. More importantly, whilst the archaeological report notes that the dwellings to the south and west sides of Cockmoile Square were demolished in the latter half of the 19th century; those to the rear (south) of the Guildhall remained in place.

These adjacent cottages (now demolished) against the south wall of the Guildhall would have made it difficult to rebuild that wall and the change in construction of the west tower from circular stone rubble at the base to octagonal brickwork with a stone facing above first floor level suggests that the Vialls' work involved high level rebuilding only.

It is primarily the north wall that changes and this is moved southwards to line through more closely with the west tower. The awkward space below the stairs between the Guildhall and the tower appears to have been formed from historic masonry and represents the remaining fragment of the Town Gaol following the repositioning of the north wall. On the west side, steps appear on the historic maps in the same position as the current steps to the first floor of the Guildhall but are now enclosed within the projecting porch suggesting that this was part of the Vialls' work.

The Philpot Museum was also designed by George Vialls, and was erected in 1901 on part of the cleared site within Cockmoile Square; and initially the museum was attached to the houses to the rear (south) of the Guildhall, and together with the Guildhall these buildings enclosed the smaller square opening onto Bridge Street. These houses, together with other dwellings along Gun Cliff were purchased by the Borough in 1921 from the Henley Estate.

The final house was vacated in 1927 and they were demolished in 1930, following which the Town Council's archives show that the former party walls to the Museum and Guildhall were repaired and rendered in September 1930. The area formerly occupied by the demolished cottages was hard surfaced to provide parking; it is enclosed with metal railings which separate it from the slightly higher hard surfaced area to the rear of the east wing; and these areas are separated by a retaining wall from the public area incorporating the town's sea flood defensive walls.

#### **Recent Planning History:**

**WD/D/15/000198** *Replacement of Venetian window on south elevation.* Approved 25/03/2015

**W/2001/1158/LB** *Fit traffic warning signs to building.* Approved 20/09/2001

#### **Significance:**

As a Grade II\* listed building, The Guildhall is considered to have high significance. Its principal north facing elevation has greatest significance, in which the elevation of the later 19th century recessed central range was carefully detailed to reflect and enhance the appearance of the surviving east wing. At first floor level, the smaller gable above the symmetrically-designed oriel window complements the form of the Venetian window within its larger gabled elevation; and the ground floor alterations introduce a more balanced relationship between the Venetian window and the through passage/shopfront below.

On this elevation, the Venetian window makes a particularly valuable contribution to significance because of its architectural quality; this is enhanced by the manner in which views through the rear Venetian window provide opportunities to glimpse the sea, and together with the passageway below they provide a visual link between the town centre and the sea to the rear. The use of stonework

detailing to the openings to the formerly open market area beneath is carried round into the more robust stonework to the tower, and reference the historic use of this west part of the site as a gaol.

Whilst the tower and west entrance are felt to be less architecturally accomplished, they provide a successful foil to the design of the adjacent museum. The oriel on the southwest corner of this west side elevation both reflects the detail of the principal elevation, and has additional historic significance in that its splayed orientation was a direct result of the constraints arising from the now lost buildings that lined the historic rear elevation of the Guildhall. The more utilitarian appearance of the rear elevation would be considered to have low significance, because of its plain form and modern rendered finish, however the historic evidence shows this to be part of the original building and therefore it has medium significance.

Internally, the surviving fragment of the former gaol and at first floor level the Council Chamber and former court room are considered to contribute most to the significance of the building both architecturally and historically. The reused historic fittings including the gaol door and the panelling, rails and benches to the Council Chamber are the most significant features within the building as a whole, because of the evidence they provide for the continuity in use of this part of the building. The surviving historic fabric within the first floor reinforces this evidence.

### **Significance of Setting:**

The Guildhall occupies a prominent position in the historic core of the town, and together with the geological constraints which have resulted in the tight development to each side of the narrow streets, this setting means that the building's principal north and west elevations of the building are always seen in juxtaposition with, and as an integral part of, groups of historic buildings lining the streets. Seen from the north as one descends Church Street, the gabled elevation of the east bay terminates the view and the Guildhall is framed by the historic buildings to each side of the street; different parts of the building come into sight as one approaches and turns the corner into Bridge Street, when it is seen in relationship to the close-by buildings to each side of both streets.

Seen from the west along Combe Street and Bridge Street, the design of the building exploits the sequence of views as the street narrows and then opens out at Cockmoile Square. The corner tower and entrance to the Guildhall make an impressive architectural statement which, when seen in juxtaposition with the plainer houses lining the north side of the street, reinforces the significance of this more open and prominent setting.

The juxtaposition with the museum makes a particularly valuable contribution to its setting, in which the architecture of the later building (notably the turret) complements the form of the Guildhall and reinforces their significance as important public buildings within the town. The contrast between the more open setting of these buildings and the tight grain of the adjacent streets provides a further visual and physical distinction that emphasizes their status within the town

### **Proposed works and their impact on significance:**

It is evident that even in the 19th century the narrowness of Bridge Street at its east end was causing difficulties for vehicles entering and leaving Church Street, and whilst the late 19th century alterations to the Guildhall allowed the carriageway to be widened slightly, the extent that the road could be widened was limited.

The height and size of commercial vehicles increased during the 20th century, and since the mid-20th century the lower part of the oriel window has been hit and damaged regularly by buses, coaches



and lorries, with most damage being caused by articulated vehicles. Highways measures introduced to control large vehicles entering the town centre include a weight restriction of 7.5 tons (except for loading), and signage directing vehicles with no need to enter the town to use the primary route along the A35 to the north of the town.

Unfortunately, these measures have not prevented large vehicles from using the shorter route through the town and the oriel window has been damaged regularly since these measures were introduced. In 2017 it was hit five times. It was hit once again in early 2018, and was awaiting repair in March when a meeting was arranged with all interested parties (except the District Council's Conservation Officer who was unable to attend).

This meeting was attended by officers from Dorset County Highways and Historic England; and officers and members of Lyme Regis Town Council together with their Heritage Consultants (JME Conservation Ltd). At the meeting, Historic England confirmed that in the first instance it was necessary to ascertain whether further traffic measures could be introduced to protect the Guildhall from damage. Alteration or removal of the oriel window could only be considered once these measures had been fully explored, and the effects of any new measures had been monitored.

Following the meeting, the following highways measures have been pursued:

### **1. Introduction of bollards:**

Bollards were installed shortly after the meeting in front of the Guildhall to provide additional protection to the window above. Unfortunately these have proved ineffective because they were centrally positioned in the pavement, in order to avoid services and to comply with the statutory requirement that bollards should be set a minimum of 450mm back from the kerb edge. There was also a concern that if the carriage width were restricted too much it would push vehicles towards the buildings on the opposite side of the street.

The damaged oriel window was repaired following the introduction of the bollards, but it was hit again before the works were completed, and it has subsequently been hit once more. The building on the opposite side of the road has also been hit, although it is acknowledged that this cannot be attributed to the introduction of the bollards.

### **2. Improvements to signage:**

At the meeting County Highways advised that they are not empowered to introduce further signage, which is the responsibility of Highways England. Following requests from both JME Conservation and also Historic England, Highways England has reviewed the signage, and confirmed that they are unable to install any further signage. However, they pointed out that most HGV drivers rely on satellite navigation systems rather than signage, and suggested that the satellite navigation providers be contacted to see whether their guidance can be strengthened to prevent large/articulated vehicles from driving into the town unnecessarily.

### **3. Satellite Navigation System amendments:**

Ordnance Survey Highways was contacted by Heritage England. They advised that their data only relates to the road network, and not buildings. However they also explained that: *"If the road was subject to a Traffic Regulation Order with a height or width limit then this would be included within the attribution of the Highways dataset, although whether users of the data choose to use the attribution is not something that we can dictate."*

#### **4. Traffic Regulation Order:**

A request for such an order has to be made by the Town Council to Dorset Highways, who have previously advised that they cannot do this because of a lack of resources. The Town Council has requested once again that Dorset Council implement such an order and interestingly the Council's own web page (<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/roads-highways-maintenance/traffic-management/requesting-new-traffic-management-measures.aspx>) states that the making of Orders will be given priority where there is a history of collisions - which is manifestly the case here.

In their written response, Dorset Highways has explained that they consider additional signage will mean more large vehicles will use the residential roads; and also advised verbally that the increased risk of accidents on these roads is material to this assessment.

In the continuing absence of such an Order, it has been concluded that there are no realistic alternative traffic management measures that could be implemented to reduce the risk of further vehicle damage to the Guildhall and reluctantly therefore the Town Council are proposing to make alterations to the oriel window on the front elevation of the Grade II\* Guildhall which is the area most at risk of continuing damage. Three alternative schemes were prepared and the impacts of these alternative schemes on the significance of the listed building were assessed as follows.

##### **Option A**

This proposes to reduce the projection of the oriel window by 200mm (i.e. by removal of the rendered cheeks), to the level of the existing timber corner posts so that the window will still project slightly in front of the outer face of the wall. The existing pedimented roof structure will be retained *in-situ*, and supported on corbels carried off the timber corner posts. Any necessary strengthening will be carefully detailed and concealed within the coved plasterwork and joinery of the pediment detailing, with any new detailing matching the existing moulded timber detailing to the eave and window frames. The existing sashes will (if possible) be re-used, or replaced if beyond repair.

##### Impact:

The oriel window projects on that part of the building which is closest to the road and at this point the front wall is only separated from the carriageway by a narrow strip of paving. Generally, the impact damage to the window is to the plasterwork beneath the window and the right hand corner of the window above. Whilst this option involves some loss of historic fabric, the loss is kept to the minimum and it also affects part of the window which has already been the subject of numerous repairs.

##### **Option B**

This proposes the complete removal of the oriel window and its roof structure, and the introduction of two pairs of sash windows (one to each side of the internal partition) to match the east paired sash window; the roof and eave detail would be reformed to match the existing detail.

##### Impact:

terms of impact, this approach is considered to result in most harm to the significance of the building arising from both the loss of historic fabric and harm to the appearance and character of its principal elevation. Whilst the harm would be less-than-substantial it is considered to be in the upper level of harm

##### **Option C**

This proposes the relocation of the oriel window further to the east, with the blind panel positioned



in front of the principal truss within the Council Chamber. The existing paired sash window would be repositioned to replace the oriel window and light the stair hall, in association with remedial works to the elevation and roof structure.

It seemed sensible to explore this option, because in this position the wider pavement in front of the building would provide additional protection to the relocated oriel; it would retain more of the character of this elevation, and would also work well with the later 19th century architectural detailing within this part of the Council Chamber. Initially it was also assumed that with this arrangement the repositioned oriel would be centred over the ground floor arches; however in practice the internal roof truss does not bear on the central pier, and consequently the window would be slightly off-centre in relation to the ground floor arches.

#### Impact:

It was concluded that this option will also cause harm to significance, arising from loss of historic fabric. In addition, whilst the quality of the internal space would be retained there would be harm to the character and appearance of the external elevation of the building (albeit less than would arise from option B).

#### **Assessment:**

It was concluded that Option A would be the best option because it requires the least intervention, retaining the oriel window *in-situ* although in modified form; and preserving the intrinsic character and appearance of the listed building. This preliminary assessment was agreed at a pre-application meeting with officers from Historic England and Dorset Council, and is the subject of the current applications.

These applications are supported with detailed drawings showing the existing detailing and the proposed alterations required in order to reduce the depth of the oriel window so that the sash boxes fit tightly against the wall, as explained under **Option A** above. The works require the existing decorative corbels supporting the oriel to be cut back, and new decorative brackets to the pilasters each side of the relocated window which will support the roof structure above. Generally, all the other existing detailing will be reused or replaced in facsimile; and this will include the reinstatement of, the existing modern ceiling and plaster finishes, with minor adjustments to take account of the repositioned window.

A close examination of the window shows that, with the exception of the corbels, all the fabric to this oriel window has previously been replaced; and indeed it is understood that extensive repairs were undertaken in the mid-1990's following a particularly bad collision. Consequently the only loss of historic fabric is the cut-back ends to the corbels. It is considered that this scheme has minimised the harm to the significance of this feature, and also the harm to the significance of this listed building and this part of the Conservation Area.

The scheme also proposes to retain bollards in the pavement, although the existing temporary ones will be replaced with more traditionally detailed metal bollards. Dorset Highways has confirmed verbally that they would be amenable to the principle of relocating the bollards closer than 450mm from the carriageway, if this could be achieved without harming the services below the pavement; and the scheme includes a proposal to surface mount these.

#### **Conclusion:**

The oriel window to the Guildhall is regularly suffering impact damage by large vehicles. Although there are highway measures in place to restrict unessential journeys by large vehicles within this part

of Lyme Regis, such vehicles continue to drive along these narrow streets. Since March 2018, the Town Council have been working with central and local government bodies to explore alternative traffic management measures. Unfortunately at present there seems to be no effective alternative solution that could be implemented to provide long-term protection to the Guildhall. As a consequence the Town Council feels it has no option but to address this ongoing problem by make alterations to the principal (north) elevation of the building itself.

A number of alternative options have been thoroughly explored, and the current scheme is considered to cause the least harm to the significance of the Grade II\* listed building, and its setting, including its contribution to the character and significance of this part of the Lyme Regis Conservation Area.

JME Conservation Ltd.

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