



The Guildhall Testimonial

Stop this folly



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Marcus Binney
President of SAVE

Most major public buildings and their interiors are familiar from photographs. Courts are different.

The Pugin interiors of the Houses of Parliament have been restored with infinite care and pride over more than 20 years. Yet just across Parliament Square the Department of Constitutional Affairs is proposing to strip out Gothic Revival interiors of equal quality and completeness for the proposed new Supreme Court. The vandalism is the greater as the building in question, the Middlesex Guildhall, is far from redundant and in intensive use as one of London's busiest criminal courts, the purpose for which it was designed.

It was restored, modernised and reopened by the Lord Chancellor in 1989. What the present Lord Chancellor proposes is a disgrace, an example of needless destruction and waste which no other owner of a listed building, public or private, would be allowed to contemplate.

The "statement of importance" by English Heritage on August 26, 2004 classed the three main Court interiors as "unsurpassed by any other courtroom of the period in terms of the quality and completeness of their fittings".

Most major public buildings and their interiors are of course familiar from photographs. Courts are different as a blanket prohibition of photography of court proceedings has been interpreted as a prohibition of all photography inside court buildings.

The first purpose of this SAVE report, like so many others before it, is to show the quality of what is at stake –

the magnificent interiors with furniture and fittings of the highest quality supplied to the specification of the original architects.

The majority of these photographs were taken in difficult circumstances by Mr James Mortimer who was allowed little more than an hour to photograph three of the finest Edwardian interiors in England. No time was allowed to even tidy the rooms. But we must be thankful that we have been able to take these photographs at all.

With these photographs come a series of testimonials from leading authorities on Edwardian architecture, interior design and furniture. They make it crystal clear that the interiors of the Guildhall are of the very highest quality both in terms of craftsmanship and artistic distinction and completeness.

No other owner of a Grade II* listed building would be allowed to strip out interiors of this quality on the basis of a vague promise to display a few key pieces in the basement and find a home for the rest in some other building not yet designed or built.

All the Government planning guidance on listed buildings lays down a presumption in favour of continuing the original use of a historic building. So why make an exception for the highest court in the land? If the Lord Chancellor and the Law Lords can drive a proverbial coach and horses through the listed

building legislation what sort of precedent will be created? No fine interior will be safe from similar special pleading.

If the Law Lords wish to deliberate in a minimalist modern ambiance let them commission a new building which can hold its own with the other handsome and impressive supreme courts around the world. Britain, as the leading common law country in the world, deserves nothing less.

SAVE is determined to challenge the Government, English Heritage and Westminster Council all the way in this disgraceful matter. On the last page we list ways in which you can support our campaign.

Only very recently SAVE fought an almost lone campaign to prevent the destruction of a masterpiece of Edwardian engineering – Span Four in Paddington Station, brilliantly designed to match the original work by Brunel; one of the greatest engineering geniuses of all time. That, too, looked a lost cause, but Network Rail issued a statement in July 2006 withdrawing its proposals to demolish and announcing repair works to the structure.

Please help us stop this madness, which will never be more than a temporary stop-gap solution.

The throne of Court 1 with its intricately carved coat of arms. Art Deco influences can be seen in the treatment of the ogee arches and their spandrels



The main staircase illustrates the quality of the ironwork, fittings and fixtures. The walls are stucco imitating stone

Testimonials: Architecture

Middlesex Guildhall was the crowning achievement of the career of James Glen Sivewright Gibson, one of the most original architects of the late Victorian and Edwardian times.

DAVID WALKER

Chief inspector of historic buildings Scotland 1976-1993, expert adviser to the National Heritage Memorial Fund 1980-99, Professor of Art History in the University of St Andrews 1994- , Director of University of St Andrews Dictionary of Scottish Architects project 2002-.

Middlesex Guildhall was the crowning achievement of the career of James Glen Sivewright Gibson, one of the most original architects of the late Victorian and Edwardian times. Born in Arbroath in 1861, sheer brilliance took him from those unpromising offices in Dundee to those of William Wallace and most importantly Thomas Edward Collcutt in London.

In partnership with Samuel Bridgman Russell, also from Wallace's office, he had a remarkable run of success in competitions in the 1890s, notably at the County Offices in Wakefield in 1894, West Ham Technical College in 1895 and Hull Library, only narrowly missing Edinburgh North Bridge and Cardiff City Hall where they came second.

All of these were brilliant freestyle designs developing themes from Collcutt. In 1900 he went on to a still more successful phase in partnership with first Wallace and then with his associate Walter Symington Athol Gordon, a pupil of the Beaux Arts - trained Frank Worthington Simon,

and the still more gifted Frank Peyton Skipwith, who was responsible for so much of the superb detail, inside and out, at the Middlesex Guildhall.

Middlesex Guildhall differs from Gibson's other work in being gothic rather than baroque as at Walsall Municipal Buildings and Debenham and Freebody's in Wigmore Street. In its sheer originality of composition and detail it is the secular equivalent of Giles Gilbert Scott's Liverpool Cathedral, and although a much smaller building it should be treated with exactly the same respect. British parallels outwith the mostly unrealised designs of Harry Wilson



Court 2, lit by powerfully designed electroliers and large windows facing a light well, remains a busy court room that imparts the full majesty of the law

are hard to suggest. One has to think more in terms of the work of the American Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue: the Guildhall is quite simply a building of international importance in early twentieth century gothic revival work, and the notion of forming a museum of some of the best interior work in that context is quite unacceptable: the building was designed as courts and it is hard to see why the Law Lords cannot adapt to what exists. They would have had to if Soane's courts had survived, and Gibson's building should not be treated any differently because it is Edwardian. It is not less important.

SIMON SWYNFEN JERVIS V.P.S.A

On 7th August Mr Laverick showed me round the Crown Court at the Middlesex Guildhall. As I had not been inside the building before, the quality

of the interior ensembles and their good state of preservation was a revelation (like most Londoners I was familiar with the sophisticated and rewarding late Gothic Revival exterior).

Clearly there have been practical interventions, particularly in the infilling of courtyards. But there has been very little damage at all to the original interiors. All the components of these grand ensembles, carved stone, plasterwork, oak roofs, panelling and furniture, tiles, stained glass, electroliers, and numerous details from door furniture to clothes hooks, constitute a paradigm of the ability of the final generation of Gothic Revival architects to achieve congruity without monotony, supported by an extremely accomplished cast of builders, craftsmen, suppliers etc. I was, naturally, particularly impressed by the excellent woodwork, executed by

the leading Glasgow firm, Wylie & Lochhead, who were associated with the greatest days of Glasgow prosperity, employing distinguished designers such as E. A. Taylor, George Logan, John Ednie. Already in 1882 they had 1,700 employees.

I was for over 23 years in the Furniture & Woodwork Department of the Victoria & Albert Museum, ending up as its Curator, before spending five years as Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, and then seven years as Director of Historic Buildings of the National Trust. I continue active in retirement. I am shortly to serve as a Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, which is part of the National Gallery of Art in Washington. There, ironically, I shall be a stone's throw from the United States Supreme Court, housed in a great purpose-built monument. How sad if its British equivalent were to be set up in a make-shift conversion, involving the vandalising of a distinguished Grade II* building.

The proposals involved the flattening out and reorientation of the former Council Chamber, the gutting of one excellently preserved court into a library, and the other into a committee room. I gather that a token and pathetic act of reparation would involve the retention of odd selected elements in a basement 'museum'. Surely the obvious answer is for the Supreme Court to be housed elsewhere and for the present sympathetic use of the building to continue. Minor adjustments could





JGS Gibson 1861-1951

In the early 1880s Gibson moved to London, to the office of TE Colcutt. In 1889 he went into practice, to be joined in 1890 by SB Russell. They were successful in a number of competitions including the LCC hostel on Drury Lane, London 1891, the West Riding County Offices in Wakefield (1894 – free Tudor, 190ft tower), West Ham Technical College (1895), the North Bridge Scheme in Edingburgh 1896 and the Free Library Hull, and second in the competition for Cardiff City Hall (1897, Edwardian Baroque). Pevsner celebrates West Ham Technical College (now the University of East London) thus

“Every conceivable motif is used which was available at that peculiar moment in the history of English architecture when the allegiance to forms of the past was at last thrown to the winds.

Giant columns and Gibbs surrounds of windows are still permitted, but the turret and cupola shapes for instance are without any period precedent. Besides the grouping of masses is completely free. Altogether the architects have certainly enjoyed being fanciful and have not minded being a little vulgar. But the whole is of a robust vitality which seems enviable today”

The building includes a splendid pair of gesso panels by HC Fehr. In 1900 Gibson's partnership with Russell ended and Gibson won the competition for Walsall Municipal Buildings, with carving by Fehr, including women's faces amongst the foliage. In 1906/7 with Wallace and Gordon they worked on Debenham and Freebody in London. The work on Middlesex Guildhall displays “delicate late Gothic detail with tendencies towards Art Nouveau, by FP Skipwith, killed in active service in 1915” (A. Stuart Gray, *Edwardian Architecture*, Duckwork, London 1985)

be made to bring the courts up to date, witness the Scottish example. But the integrity of the ensembles is what singles out the Guildhall. It is quite remarkable that these have survived so well. I urge your authority to reject these proposals and to secure the survival and continued appropriate use of these distinguished and enjoyable spaces.

JOHN HARDY

During our tour of the beautiful and impressive interiors of Middlesex Guildhall, it seemed to me that the building merits a written description detailing its embellishment and furnishing. Then we would all better understand its importance.

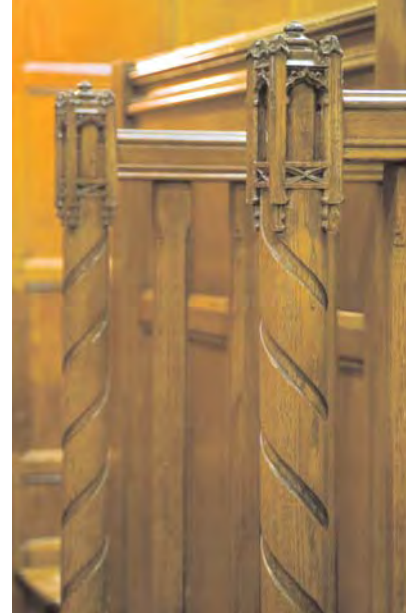
It appears to suffer, like so many Government buildings, from the lack of a 'curator' with a proper archive of information. A building of such historical importance needs an informed explanation of its interior symbolism and iconography.

For instance, there is a label/tablet, like a key-stone, above the Guildhall's triumphal entrance that represents the Palace of Westminster's ancient Hall of Justice. This provides an explanation for the principal court room's rich carvings, although no mention of this was made to assist our understanding of the decoration and furniture.

We are hindered by the 20th century architectural historians' study of building exteriors, with little

attention being given to interiors or explanations of ornament. In fact today's historians even condemn the Guildhall with their dull title of 'late Gothic Revival'.

I was reminded of my time as a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, when a member of a Palace of Westminster's Art Committee requested the loan of early Georgian furniture as part of their 1970s destruction of some Palace interiors. He was amazed to learn that we considered the 19th century Palace furnishings of any importance. His visit led to the Museum's report on the 'Furniture in the House of Lords', and this was followed by a chapter on the Palace's furniture contributed to M.H. Port's, *The Houses of Parliament* (1976) by the late Clive Wainwright. As you know Clive was the author of 'The Romantic Interior', 1989; and played a leading role in the preservation and restoration of the



splendours of much of the Palace of Westminster interiors.

The romantic, impressive and 'fit for purpose' embellishment of the Middlesex Guildhall is equal in importance to that of the Palace of Westminster. I wonder if those who are prepared to see the completeness of its interiors destroyed, would be equally happy to see its exterior and that of the Palace of Westminster disfigured?

PROF GAVIN STAMP

FSA, Hon FRIAS, Hon FRIBA

The Middlesex Guildhall is one of the best secular buildings of the Gothic Revival, and certainly one of the very



best of the 20th century. It is often thought that the national enthusiasm for the Gothic declined after the 1870s, but in truth the treatment of the style became more refined and elegant – both in church architecture and in the handful of secular buildings in the style. Gibson's Guildhall is remarkable not just because it is an Edwardian public building that is Gothic rather than Baroque, but also because its Late Gothic style – a compliment both to the Abbey and to Parliament – is enlivened with a delicious Arts and Crafts - almost art nouveau - vigour in the details and in the sculpture. It can be related to the early parts of Liverpool Cathedral by Giles Gilbert Scott and, perhaps, to the contemporary work of Cram and Goodhue in the United States, but not to much else.

All this can be seen, and enjoyed, on the exterior. What is a revelation is the quality of the interior. The invention in the handling of Gothic detail in the courts, the old council chamber and in the lobbies and staircase is impressive, while the rich, decorative quality of the joinery, metalwork and furniture is superb. This imaginative and thoughtful treatment of Late Gothic sources, touched with a Renaissance feeling, can perhaps only be compared with another secular public building, Basil Champney's Rylands Library in Manchester, as well as with Giles Scott's later use of Gothic in the rebuilding of the House of Commons.



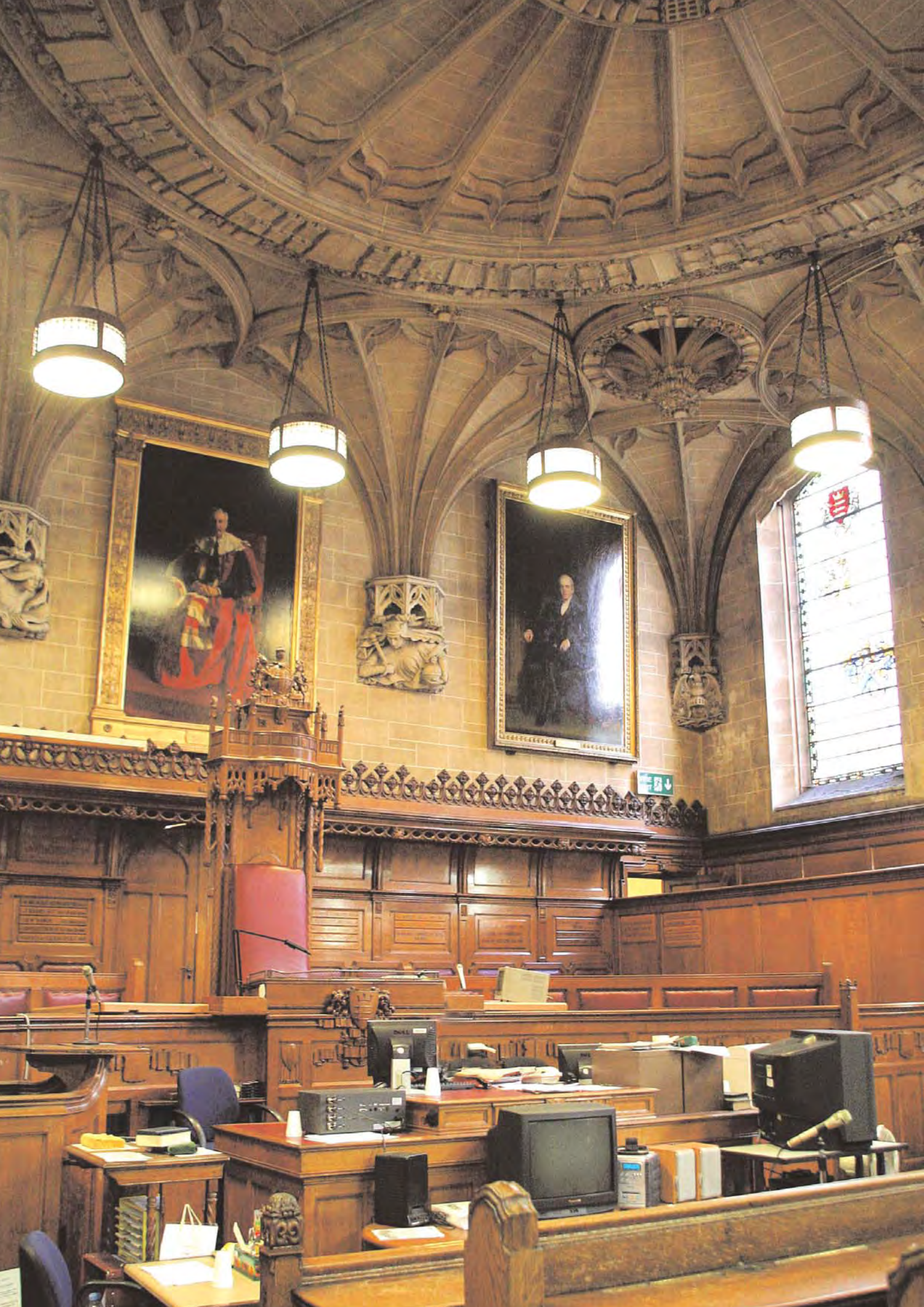
The intricately carved linenfold panelling and Middlesex coat of arms below the throne in Court 1

The Middlesex Guildhall is a rare and special building, of the highest quality. When it is appreciated that it is not redundant but in regular use as an Assize Court, the proposal to mutilate the interior for a purpose which would be better served by a new building seems as monstrous as it is gratuitous.

JULIET KINCHIN
*Senior Lecturer and Hon Reader,
 Department of History of Art,
 University of Glasgow*

At the time of the Middlesex Guildhall commission, Wylie & Lochhead of Glasgow were one of Britain's largest and most pre-eminent furnishing firms. Established

in 1829 as cabinetmakers, upholsterers and undertakers they had diversified rapidly, and by 1900 were offering an astonishing range of services, interior fittings and household goods as well as undertaking important contract work on the furnishing of individual houses, ships, churches, hotels and institutional interiors like the Glasgow City Chambers and Middlesex Guildhall. Relatively few of these important commissions have survived intact, but the quality of workmanship, materials and design in what remains is consistently high. I heartily endorse the current campaign to preserve the unique interior of the Middlesex Guildhall. The firm operated a fashionable department store and factories in



Glasgow, but also had outlets in London, Paris and Manchester, and a thriving export business supported by an international network of agents in Europe, North America and the British Empire. As well as employing in-house designers, Wylie & Lochhead bought in designs from independent studios in Glasgow, Paris and London, from individuals such as Christopher Dresser, CFA Voysey and Jessie King. They also collaborated with leading Scottish architects such as James Sellars, James Miller, and latterly Basil Spence and Thomas Tait, but their name has come to be associated most closely with the 'Glasgow Style' around 1900, and figures like E A Taylor, John Ednie and George Logan who were all linked to the Glasgow School of Art and the circle around Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

DR KATHRYN FERRY

*Senior Architectural Adviser,
Victorian Society*

The architectural style of Middlesex Guildhall owes much to the 19th century Gothic Revival but its architect, J S Gibson, also drew upon more contemporary currents to create a unique synthesis that Pevsner refers to as Art Nouveau Gothic, a

deferential but highly original response to its neighbours in Parliament Square. The application proposes a new use for Middlesex Guildhall as home of the Supreme Court. This would involve the removal of exceptionally high quality furnishings that were designed expressly for the building and which constitute an integral part of its special interest. In addition, the proposals for a new triple height library in Court 1 would entail an unacceptable loss of historic fabric for which insufficient justification has been provided. The Foster & Partners design seeks to create a '*dramatic and contemporary library*' which we simply do not believe to be compatible with, or appropriate in, such a nationally significant historic building.

If the building was redundant the extent of alteration required to create the Supreme Court facility would still have to be justified against the criteria set out in PPG15. As it is, Middlesex Guildhall is currently in beneficial use as a Crown Court able to function within the existing layout and with the original furnishings. We therefore believe that the scheme which has been given consent by Westminster Council is contrary to government guidance.



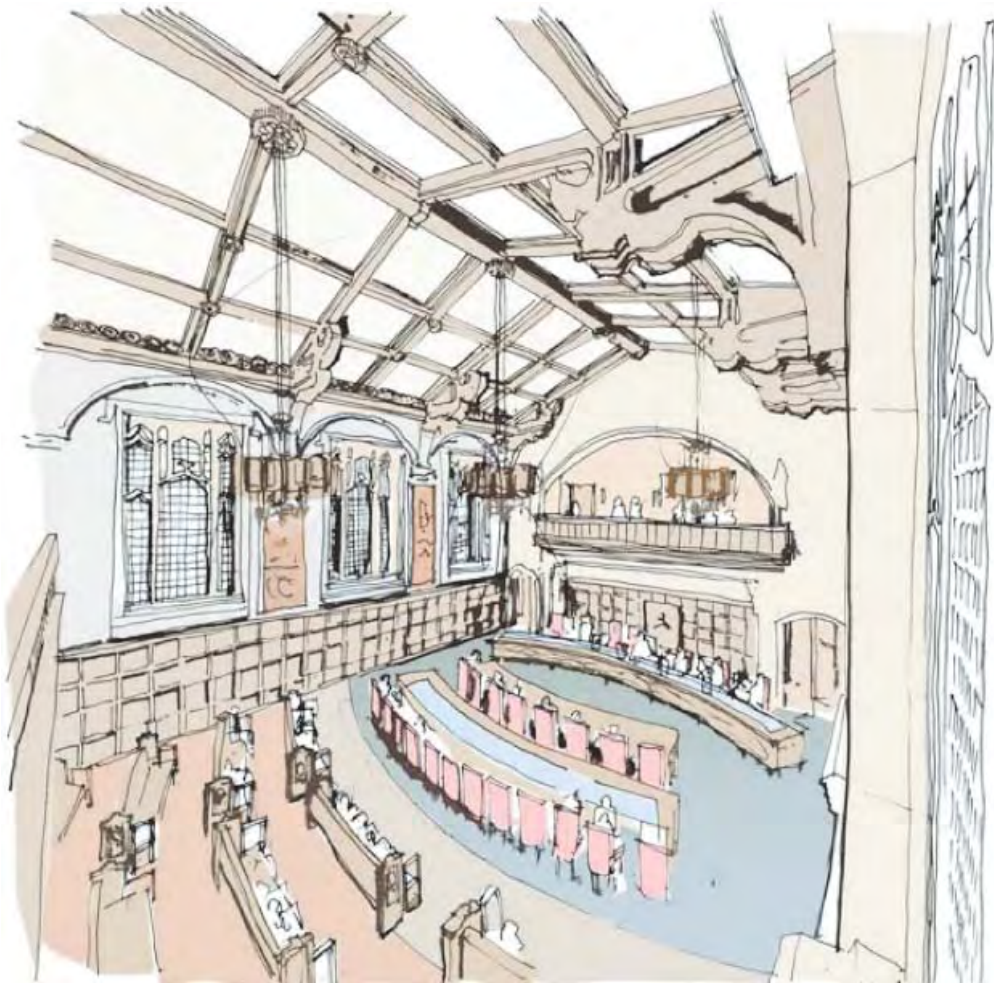
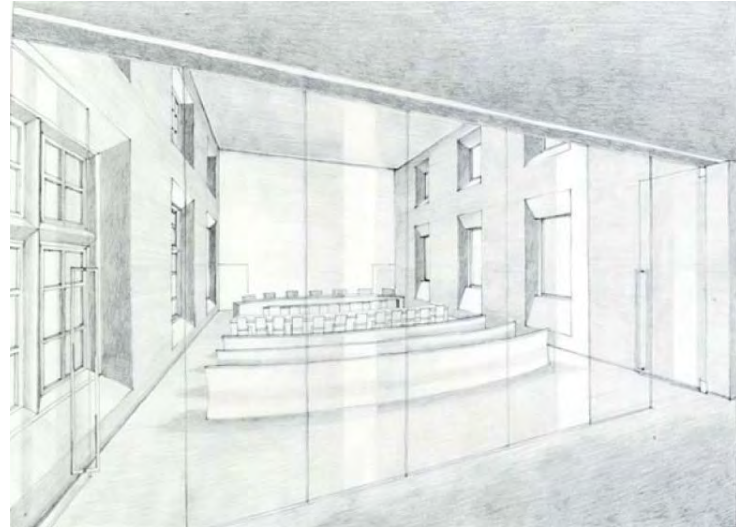
ENGLISH HERITAGE

“These three interiors are unsurpassed by any other courtroom of the period in terms of the quality and completeness of their fittings.”
Statement of Importance, August 2004

“The building is constructed using the finest craftsmanship of the period including decorative work in stone, wood, plaster and stained glass.”
Statement of Importance, August 2004

“The building is the most accomplished example of this architect’s work”
Statement of Importance, August 2004

If the scheme for the Supreme Court goes ahead, all of the furniture in Court 1 would be ripped out, the floor dropped to the basement, and the rear wall replaced with glass to allow the public a view of their Lordships in their triple height library



Preliminary sketches of the Fielden and Mawson's proposed interiors for the new courts

Testimonials: The Price of Justice

It is one of the most disgraceful things that they won't build a new building for the most important court in the land.

WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

"The decision to locate the United Kingdom Supreme Court in Westminster is welcomed and the importance of locating the Court in a building of outstanding quality and in a setting of national importance worthy of its unique status is recognised."

Westminster City Planning and City Development Report, August 2006

"In December 2004, the Lord Chancellor announced that the Middlesex Guildhall was the preferred option. This decision was based on its prolific location, its fit with the requirements of the Supreme Court and its value for money."

Westminster City Planning and City Development Report, August 2006

JUDGE MOSES

It is one of the most disgraceful things that they won't build a new building for the most important court in the land. I feel so strongly about that. It shows a terrible meanness of spirit and a complete misunderstanding of national culture and pride ... the Treasury won't pay for one justifiable opportunity to make a new public building. When you go to the Supreme Court in Washington, I defy you not to have a lump enter your throat as you walk up those steps. And that's what the building should do.

Interview with the Daily Telegraph 11/05/06

LORD HOPE

"In March 2004, in his written evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitutional Reform Bill, Lord Falconer said that the Government believed strongly that our highest court should be one which others could look to as a beacon of excellence. Later in that evidence he said that it was appropriate that the Supreme Court should sit in the nation's capital, in the same city as the legislature and the executive, and that he had undertaken to provide an appropriate building that was suitably prestigious with first class facilities. But almost in the same breath the qualifications began to appear. Value for money and affordability were to be among the factors on which the final decision was to be based."

Law Quarterly Review, April 2005.

"A phoenix from the ashes? Accommodating a new Supreme Court"

"The conclusion that I would draw is that the Lord Chancellor lacks the resources that would be needed to meet the challenge of creating a new building. Critically, the project appears not to have the support of the Treasury. No additional cash is to be made available. Running costs, which are likely to include a notional rent to cover the cost of the refurbishment, are to be met by a surcharge on civil court fees in England and Wales and a public expenditure transfer of funds by the Scottish Executive.... The political

climate is for cost cutting, not for the building of a new acropolis."

Law Quarterly Review, April 2005.

"A phoenix from the ashes? Accommodating a new Supreme Court"

MP Attacks Costs

The Department for Constitutional Affairs has been criticized by MPs for spending more than £50million on management consultants in ten years. Keith Vaz, a former DCA minister under Labour, told the Commons Constitutional Affairs Committee that its spending was out of control.

The Times,

Wednesday 18th October 2006



The spectacular Court 3, originally the council chamber, would lose all its furniture under the scheme for the Supreme Court





The magnificent throne of Court 3. The proposals for the Supreme Court would see this removed and put on public display in the basement of the building

Testimonials: A New Building for a New Court

The institution of a supreme court is a vital one and it should be housed with dignity in a skillfully designed building fit for the purpose.

SIR STUART LIPTON

“This new project should honour our great civic traditions of providing outstanding buildings in appropriate locations to enhance our position as a nation. We’re all creatures of our environment, and visitors and foreign businesses come to this country because of our historic civic values.

The proposed conversion of the Middlesex Guildhall to Supreme Court illustrates current government practice of seeking the lowest cost option which will have the least impact and benefit to society. The institution of a Supreme Court is a vital one and it should be housed with dignity in a skillfully designed building fit for the purpose, rather than as a compromise where cost is the prime driver. Government has committed itself to producing buildings on a whole-life basis where cost is valued for the life of the building rather than as a short-term expedient. “

Letter to The Times 30th June 2006

PATRICK PHILLIPS, QC,

Sir, If the Law Lords wish to sit at the same level as parties appearing before them in the proposed new Supreme Court, why not choose a structure designed for that purpose instead of mutilating the Middlesex Guildhall, one of the finest courts in the land? Your sketch of Sept 14 shows that their lordships are to sit in a barn-like building. Perhaps they should go further by emulating the

insurgent Robert Ket in 1549, and holding court under a tree.
Letter to The Times 16th September 2006

LORD HOPE

“No one who enters the chamber [at Holyrood], with its wide and open design and its remarkable arching roof of oak beams and latticed steel, can fail to be impressed by the sheer scale and ambition of the place. Here is architecture at its most adventurous and its most exciting. But there is dignity here too, and a reassuring balance between the floor where the work is done and the long and ample public galleries that surround it on three sides. The accommodation in the Parliament is, of course, far more than would be needed for a Supreme Court. But the public statement that this chamber makes, that this is a Parliament for a nation that believes in itself and that believes also in the value of democracy, could serve as a model for it too.”

Law Quarterly Review, April 2005.

“A phoenix from the ashes? Accommodating a new Supreme Court”

“We have a right to expect the building which houses our Supreme Court to be, in Lord Steyn’s words, [FN62] “a signal to the world” that the rule of law and equal justice for all are values that are held in the highest regard throughout the United Kingdom. If there is to be a signal to the world, it has to be visible. Above all it is the building in which the court is housed that must provide it.

The new court will, after all, have no other symbols. There are no plans for the justices to wear robes, let alone wigs. There are no plans for any form of ceremony, for a mace or for anything else of that kind.”

Law Quarterly Review, April 2005.

“A phoenix from the ashes? Accommodating a new Supreme Court”

LORD STEYN

“In every constitutional democracy, large or small, the Supreme Court is accommodated in a dignified building fit for a co-ordinate branch of government. To accommodate our Supreme Court in an unsuitable building would be a signal to the world that the values of constitutionality, allegiance to the rule of law and equal justice for all are not held in high regard in our country.”

Quoted in Law Quarterly Review, April 2005. “A phoenix from the ashes? Accommodating a new Supreme Court”

FABYAN EVANS

Resident Judge of Middlesex Guildhall Crown Court 1995-2005

Apart from government ministers and a handful of civil servants who are hastily, and no doubt loyally, implementing government policy, there are few if any who, with any knowledge of the facts, are enthusiastic for the conversion of Middlesex Guildhall into premises for the Supreme Court. Even the Lord Chancellor used guarded language

when he first announced that the location was his “preferred option”.

The public should also take note that there are no current plans to replace the seven criminal courtrooms in Westminster or, as was proposed, elsewhere in Greater London. This will mean that the victims of more than 300 cases will have to wait for

justice and bide their time while they are added to the backlog of other work with which the London courts are currently burdened. These figures are likely to be compounded within a few months.

It is not too late to think again. There is no need to hurry about the creation of suitable premises for the highest

court in the land. Middlesex Guildhall is fit for its present purpose and the justices of the Supreme Court deserve a new building fit for their own.

Letter to the Times
28th June 2006

THE SCULPTOR

Mr Henry Charles Fehr RBS (1867-1940)

Middlesex Guildhall is widely acknowledged as Fehr’s masterpiece, its entire front being described as a sculpture gallery, including the friezes around the main entrance illustrating King Henry III granting a charter to the Abbey of Westminster, King John granting the charter to the Barons at Runnymede. On the right is Lady Jane Grey accepting the crown. Between the scenes, in the elaborate niches, are placed statues of Justice and Prudence. Perhaps Fehr would appreciate the irony. Fehr was also responsible for the fine carved oak bench ends illustrating the Kings and Queens of England in Court 3 as well as other elements of the decorative work.

Fehr was educated at the City of

London School, Schools of the Royal Academy and taking all the prizes for sculpture that were to be won. He “plunged with extraordinary courage into the elaborate problems of his art” (Edgar Hunt), first exhibiting at the RA in 1887, and in 1893 with his sensational plaster of Perseus and Andromeda. Cast in bronze in 1894, it was bought by the President, Lord Leighton, and the Council for the Chantry Collection. It was subject to great critical acclaim, endorsed by, among others, by Sir John Everett Millais and Mr Alfred Gilbert. It now stands outside Tate Britain in London.

Commissions included both statues and portraiture, with his bust of “Mr. Gladstone” considered at the time by many to be the finest example of portraiture in contemporary art, challenging Chantrey’s Sir Walter Scott. Other great memorial

busts by Mr Fehr include Ruskin, Robert Browning and William Morris, and famous public memorials include the widely copied Colchester Monument, Queen Victoria at Hull, James Watt at Leeds, and John Hampden and Lord Beaconsfield at Aylesbury.

“Mr Fehr.. combines with the sense of sculpture, a fine and poetic imagination and freedom of conception” (Speilman)

“He excels in every department of his art, his absolute mastery of anatomy as shown in many of his delightful studies of the nude, how he excels in perhaps, the most difficult of all branches of sculpture, viz, portraiture.” (Edgar Hunt).

Source: Colchester War Memorial Souvenir, Editor Edgar A. Hunt JP MRCS, LRCP, LSA Colchester 1923

A Introduction to the Building and Proposals

Adam Wilkinson

“The key issue is the extent of change that the new use will impose on the special interest of this Grade II listed building and in particular on the outstanding quality of the principal internal spaces of the entrance hall and Courts 1,2 and 3, together with their layouts and fittings. The proposals are major interventions and will compromise significantly the building’s special architectural and historic interest.”*
Westminster City Council Planning Report August 2005

The Grade II* listed Middlesex Guildhall sits in Parliament Square on a site that has seen the administration of justice since the end of the 18th century, the current building dating from 1913. It is the result of one design and one building campaign, rather than the makeshift adaptation of buildings over time to suit new needs and requirements. This is a result of its architect, James G S Gibson’s (1861-1951), brilliant reaction to the confined site on which the building is situated.

Squeezed into a space of roughly 100ft x 160ft x 50ft (plus basements) are all the rooms, circulation spaces and storage required for a sessions court and local authority administrative centre, with grand court rooms, prison accommodation, archives, an even more imposing council chamber, offices and services, all naturally lit.

The exterior is in white Portland stone, with exuberant sculpture emphasising the focus of the building, the entrance on to Little

George Street CHK. The unusual use of neo-gothic (for its time) represents a sturdy response to its remarkable neighbours, standing its ground while in no way dominating or distracting attention from them. Gibson’s intention was to ‘keep it quite distinct in scale and style so as to preserve its own individuality and act as a foil to the larger building’.

The main entrance leads to a vestibule – there is no great hall – and the Courts 1 and 2 are accessed from this space. These, and Court 3 (the former council chamber, sensitively adapted to court use), are the spaces on which the architect and sculptor lavished most attention and are the spaces that would suffer most under the plans for the Supreme Court. The buildings was restored and adapted in 1985-88 by the Public Service Agency.

THE PROPOSALS

The Supreme Court would require three committee rooms, a library and ancillary accommodation for the Justices and their support staff. The new supreme court would use two of the three committee rooms full time, the third for the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

Externally the proposed alterations to the building will be subtle but significant. The alteration of the entrances to allow

easier access to the building is of course entirely acceptable. However, when proposing the removal of the Middlesex iconography from around the door (on a shield above the main door and on plaques either side) the Department for Constitutional Affairs probably did not make the comparison with the Roman Emperors’ habits of changing inscriptions on buildings and monuments. The arrogance of this action, then as now, is great, and it is a significant marker of the way in which the rest of the building would be treated.

Once through the doors (it is not clear whether these will survive), the character of the building will have been fundamentally altered by the proposals

While a reordering of the vestibule might allow the space to be better appreciated, the Supreme Court proposals go too far, in that they would result in the removal of the wall facing the entrance, giving a clear view into what is now Court 1, (the proposed library), and radically





Credit PSA

This view of Court 1 clearly shows the layout of the high quality furnishings of the room.

altering the ordering of the building. The glazed tiles on the ground floor corridor walls (apart from those on the south wall of the south corridor) will be hidden behind new wall finishes.

THE COURTS

The interiors of the courts are quite simply the very best built in the country from 1860 to the Great War, in terms of the sheer quality and richness of their interiors, furnishings and their layout. However, the needs of a Supreme Court are entirely different from those of a Crown Court: there are no defendants, witnesses, evidence or jurors, making the furniture (and indeed custody areas) redundant. Consequently the plans for the Supreme Court would see

them ripped out. This would entail a remarkable reversal from the restoration of the courts carried in under the auspices of the PSA in 1988 – a depressing sign of the times.

“This fundamental requirement of the brief necessitates radical change to the existing room layouts, together with alteration of floor levels to provide level floors and/or removal of wall panelling, lobbies and fittings.”
Westminster City Council planning report, August 2006

In existing Courts 1, 2 and the (original) Council Chamber (existing Crown Court 3) the layouts, finishes and fittings are an important part of the building’s special interest. The joinery fittings in Court 3 are particularly fine.”
Westminster City Council planning report, August 2006

COURT 1

Court 1 manages to be both an impressive and intimate space through its lofty ceiling with its remarkable fan vault made of plaster but painted to look like stone (executed by Carl Maggioni), and its furniture: the distance from the judge to the defendant is no more than 7m. The judge sits in a fine throne surmounted by heraldic beasts, while in front, facing the defendant, is the Middlesex coat of arms, in amongst gloriously exaggerated linenfold panelling. The seats of the court are covered in red leather affirming its status as Court 1 – Court 2 is in green leather – reflecting the colours of the House of Lords and House of Commons across the square. Bench ends are carefully carved with crowns. The court was originally heated by a forced air system, with vents built into the panelling. Details, such as coat and umbrella racks for the court staff remain in place. Natural light comes from lightwells either side of the court, and massive decorative electroliers provide the rest.

Under the proposals, Court 1 would become the library. This would entail the removal of all of its furniture, the sinking of the floor to the level of the basement, the removal of the lobbies between the court and the vestibule and the replacement of the solid wall between these with a glass wall. The furniture would be stored and possibly dispersed and reused in other courts, the throne put on display in the basement.



A stained glass window commemorating the restoration of the building in 1989. These works represented a significant investment in the future of the building - an investment which the proposals for the Supreme Court threaten to undo

COURT 2

Although a similar size to Court 1, Court 2 feels much more spacious, in part due to the public gallery being in the form of a loggia at first floor level, and partly due to the ceiling, timber and plaster painted white rather than stucco imitating stone. It is however actually a little smaller, with the judge sitting even closer to the defendant. The layout is similar to Court 1, as is the impressive quality of its furnishings - however, the seats are covered in green leather.

Again, the proposals for the Supreme Court would see the removal of the furniture, with the throne displayed in the basement and the other furniture stored and then possibly reused in another building. The floor would be levelled and new furniture installed, and a platform lift installed in one of the lobbies

COURT 3

Court 3 is the most spectacular of the three main courts – a large space with balconies at either end, a powerful roof imitating the traditional hammerbeam construction found in Westminster Great Hall, here decorated with vigorous angels and floral bosses.

The furniture of the court is laid out in a semi-circle, with the spectacular judge's throne its focus. The bench ends are carved with Fehr's kings and queens of England, and various beasts atop these – lions, boars,

dragons and others. Each seat has a fold out writing table in front of it, many retain their original ink wells and electronic voting mechanisms from the room's days as a council chamber – in this role it could seat 100. It is lit by six large perpendicular gothic windows and massive, powerfully decorated electroliers.

It is a splendid architectural set piece and clearly the focus of a great deal of pride, not only that of its builders but also of its everyday users.

The proposals for the Supreme Court would level the floor and turn the axis through 90° in order to allow the Law

Lords to process in more neatly, with new furniture incorporating the existing bench ends. The throne would join the other two in the basement display space, and the benches alongside it, with their leonine arm rests, would be used in a waiting room outside the court room

"The outstanding quality of the joinery in this room includes bench ends with carvings by Henry Fehr, sculptor of the external statuary and friezes." Westminster City Council Planning Report, August 2006

Fittings and Fixtures: law and listing

Listing covers an entire building and it is the case that English Heritage routinely refuses to list buildings of a similar date to the Guildhall where the interior has been substantially altered – indeed it frequently appears to be the case that alterations to an interior are used as an excuse not to list.

In law it is a "building" that is listed, but what constitutes a building is not entirely clear. The 1971 Act defines it thus "... any structure or erection and any part of a building structure or erection but does not include any plant or machinery

comprised in the building" – although exceptions are made for industrial mill buildings. Included in that definition is "any object or structure fixed to the building".

In the case of Middlesex Guildhall, the furniture falls into this latter category, all the more so as it is a fundamental part of the design of the building, vitally important to understanding its history and function. The removal of the furniture is akin to ripping out the box pews from a Georgian church – unthinkable today. That Westminster City Council has allowed Government to walk all over law and established listed buildings precedent is extremely discomfoting.

The layout of the fine furnishing in Court 2 is evident in this view from the public gallery





THE WIDER ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

Middlesex Guildhall belongs to a small number of architecturally important courts built from 1860 to 1914 known as “swagger courts” for their ebullient expression of the import and dignity of justice.

Survivors include GE Street’s masterpiece, opened in 1882, the Grade I listed Royal Courts of Justice. It is a remarkable building in every respect, although its deliberately austere interiors do

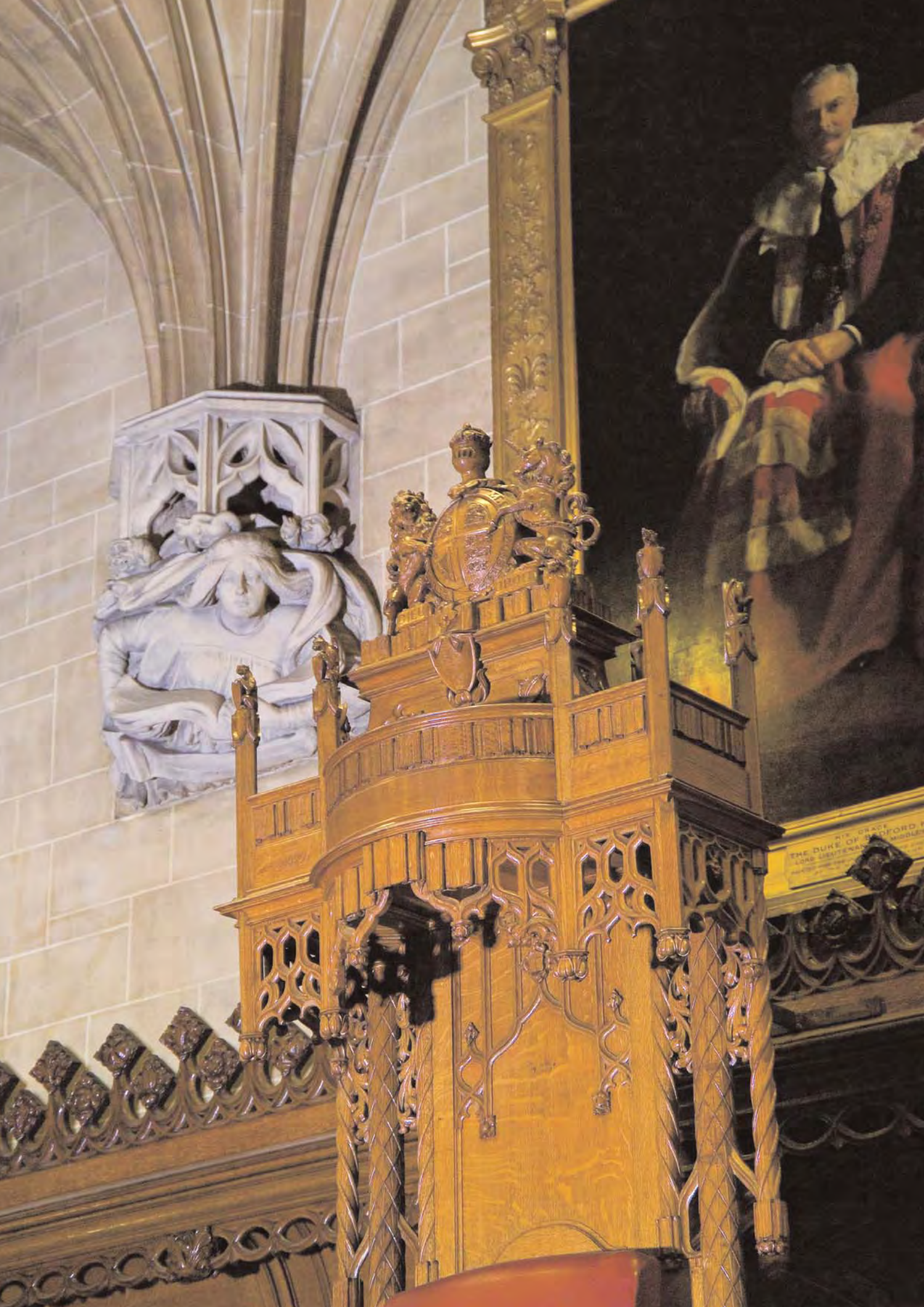
not contain the luscious detail of the Guildhall courtrooms. A more contemporary building to the Guildhall in London is the Central Criminal Court, listed Grade II* (EW Mountford 1902-07).

Perhaps no greater a celebration of the law can be found than in Aston Webb’s Victoria Law Courts in Birmingham with its wonderful great hall. By contrast, a modest but delightfully detailed swagger court is Liverpool County Sessions House (which even retains its 1880s original wooden seated Shanks

patent closets) with sophisticated plan form and excellent interior. The Grade II listed Preston County Sessions House has been sensitively refurbished and modernised under the watchful eye of Jim Stevenson of Hurdrolland with its glorious Edwardian interiors.

Sources: *Ordering Law* (Clare Graham, Ashgate, 2004), *Silence In Court* (Richard Pollard, SAVE Britain’s Heritage, 2004)





RIP GRACE
THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM
AND
LORD GREAT TREASURER

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The Clock is Ticking

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