

# Information Sheet

Archaeology Series No.2

## THE STONEBOW AND THE GUILDHALL



*An engraving of the Stonebow published by Havell in 1836*

### THE ROMAN GATE

For almost eighteen hundred years a gateway has stood where the Stonebow stands in Lincoln today. The first gateway on this spot was built in the early years of the third century, and served as the main south entrance to the lower Roman town. It was through this gate that people travelling from the south along Ermine Street, the Roman road connecting Lincoln with London, would have passed into the Roman town. The southern wall of the Roman town is no longer visible, although we know from archaeological excavation and chance observations that it ran along the north side of Saltergate to the east and Guildhall Street to the west. Exactly what the Roman

gate looked like is not known, for all trace above ground has long since disappeared, but as one of the main entrances into the town, it would have been an imposing structure, with a single or double carriageway, a pedestrian passage on either side and probably two massive flanking towers. It is possible that the Stonebow as we see it today still reflects some of the elements of that earlier design.

### THE MEDIAEVAL GATE

During the mediaeval period, the old Roman town walls were patched up and repaired, and continued in use as the walls of the mediaeval city. How many of the original Roman gateways survived in use is not known. Certainly Newport Arch, the north gate of the upper



*The Stonebow today from the south*



*The Stonebow today from the north*

Roman city was, and still is in part standing, but whether the Roman lower south gate was renovated and reused we simply cannot say in the absence of archaeological evidence. It is possible that by the early mediaeval period the south gate of the city had undergone a series of rebuildings in the hands of the Anglo-Scandinavians. Indeed the very name 'Stonebow' comes from the old Scandinavian word 'steinn-bogi' - 'an arch of stone'.

We do know, however, that towards the end of the fourteenth century, the south gate or Stonebow as it was now commonly called, was demolished. It had become inconvenient and structurally unsound. Although a start was made on rebuilding the gate insufficient funds and the general unwillingness of the townspeople to contribute towards the cost, meant that the work went all too slowly. Indeed it was not until the 1520s, over a hundred years later, that the rebuilding of the Stonebow and the Guildhall was finally completed.

## CHANGES

Since the sixteenth century, the Stonebow has been altered and repaired on a number of occasions. In some cases it is possible to detect these works in the fabric of the building, but often later building work has destroyed the physical evidence of the gate's earlier appearance. We have, therefore, to rely almost wholly on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century illustrations, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century photographs of the gateway to supply us with details of these changes. Taken together with descriptive accounts of the gateway by early topographers and historians, and the various entries relating to the Stonebow and the

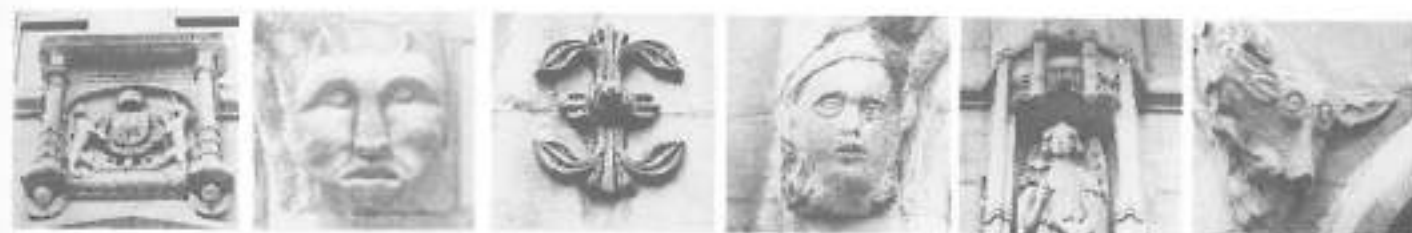
Guildhall in the City records and early Lincolnshire newspapers, we can build up a picture, albeit fragmentary, of the Stonebow's long history.

## SOUTH SIDE

As you look at the Stonebow today from the south, the gateway looks much as it would have done in the sixteenth century, although a number of changes, in some cases quite radical, have taken place since that date. On either side of the main arch are commercial and domestic premises at first and ground floor level which have been leased by the City to a variety of tradesmen and private individuals through the years. The earliest records we have date to 1515 when the east range was in the hands of a taverner. The two ranges are not of the same date, which shows quite clearly in the different architectural detail of the doorways and windows. The range on the east side, with its heavy hood mouldings over the archways and windows supported by carvings of grotesque and human heads (some of which are later replacements) dates broadly from the mid-late fifteenth century, while that on the western side with its much plainer, larger windows and doorways can be placed in the late fifteenth-early sixteenth century. This difference in building is not surprising when we remember that the Stonebow was being built over a considerable length of time.

The two ranges have been altered a number of times. The west range seems to have always had one pedestrian archway, but until the 1880s the outer of the two side archways was a doorway leading into a room behind, and this is shown quite clearly on prints and drawings, like the example on page 1. The modern doorway now on its west side was

then a window. We also know from such sources that along the west side of the inner passageway was a solid wall, which in some cases is drawn as being timber-framed, and in others is shown as having a doorway and bow window set into it. Over the inner passage, the floor of the room above was carried on beams, and the east wall of this room (inside the gate itself) was supported on a massive beam running between the two west gate towers. There are traces of the support for this beam on the inside faces of the gate towers, where the Victorian restorers have left some of the original stonework in place. The stone arcading on either side of the two passageways was inserted in 1885-87 and replaced the earlier walling.



*The Stonebow — architectural details*

On the east side of the gateway, there are today two passages. As with the west side, this was not always the case. The inner archway is recorded in the City Minute Books as having been ordered opened for passengers in 1758. What this means is not altogether clear, and it is possible that it refers to the opening up of an original passageway which had been previously blocked, rather than the creation of an entirely new passage. If this were the case, it would balance the west side and more especially be in keeping with the style of archway. The outer archway was created in the restoration programme of 1885-87, and until that date had been a window, and is shown as such on most earlier illustrations. The arcading on either side of the two passageways is similar to that on the west side of the gate and belongs to the same period of restoration. A plaque inside the gateway records the date of this work. As with the west side the floor of the room above the inner passageway was supported by a beam running between the inside faces of the two eastern gate-towers, and in the west wall of this room a window looked into the gateway (see illustration on page 1).

The iron tie-bars, the decorative ends of which can be seen on ground and first floor level, were inserted during the 1885-87 restoration work to prevent further slippage of the gate-

way. The buttresses against the east range are undated, but were presumably built later than the windows as they cut through their hood mouldings. The need for both tie-bars and buttresses is apparent when we look at the main arch of the gate, which is badly contorted and leaning outwards. The reasons for this are not certain, but one possibility is the presence of an early town ditch running parallel with the town walls in front of the gate, the soft filling of which would be much more unstable than the ground on either side, and could cause such settlement. There is, however, no archaeological evidence at present for a ditch in front of the town wall on this side of the town, and poor foundations may simply be the answer.

On either side of the gate arch is a shallow, projecting tower, incorporating an elaborate canopied niche at first floor level. The west niche holds a statue of the Virgin Mary, patron saint of the City and Cathedral, while that on the east has a much restored statue of the Archangel Gabriel holding a scroll in his left hand and a palm branch in his right. He is supported by two winged beasts, while Mary is supported by a winged serpent with a human head on either side. The two statues represent the Annunciation. Above the centre of the arch, and placed rather awkwardly across the middle string course are the arms of King James I (1603-1625). On either side of the statues are the arms of the City of Lincoln, a single gold fleur-de-lys on a red cross on a silver shield.

Some of the windows of the upper storey are replacements in sixteenth-century style. A number of the original windows, were apparently destroyed during an election riot in the eighteenth century. Above the upper storey is a battlemented parapet, with a nineteenth-century clock in the centre. This clock which dates from 1888 replaced an earlier clock given to the City in 1835. In a late eighteenth century print a sundial is shown in the same position, and it is this sundial which is referred to in the City Registers as 'being much



*Interior view of Guildhall*

impaired and decayed' in 1751. By the early nineteenth century it had been taken down.

## THE NORTH SIDE

The north face of the Stonebow is, not surprisingly, much plainer than the south and has been heavily restored. The towers are repeated on this face but they lack the canopied niches. To either side of the towers is a small square window. Until the 1880s the west side of the gateway had been largely obscured by buildings fronting onto the High Street, but in 1883 a fine new bank building, now the National Westminster Bank, was erected some 10-12 ft (3-4 m) further west and much of the west face of the Stonebow was exposed. In 1885 the City Council asked the architect J.L. Pearson to draw up plans for a major programme of restoration work on the Stonebow and Guildhall. Letters and documents in the County Archives office and photographs housed in Lincoln City Library provide detailed information about this work. Pearson almost totally rebuilt the western side of the north face of the Stonebow. He inserted a new window in sixteenth-century style at second floor level after demolishing an earlier brick chimney and continued the string courses across the face of the building. He also continued the parapet to the western end of the building. The extent of his work can be seen in the marked contrast between the old and new stonework.

But more important were the considerable changes he made to the ground floor. As we have already seen, the arcading on either side of the passageways is of this date, and on the north side of the gateway, the westernmost archway is also a new creation, and is of a



*The Civic Insignia*

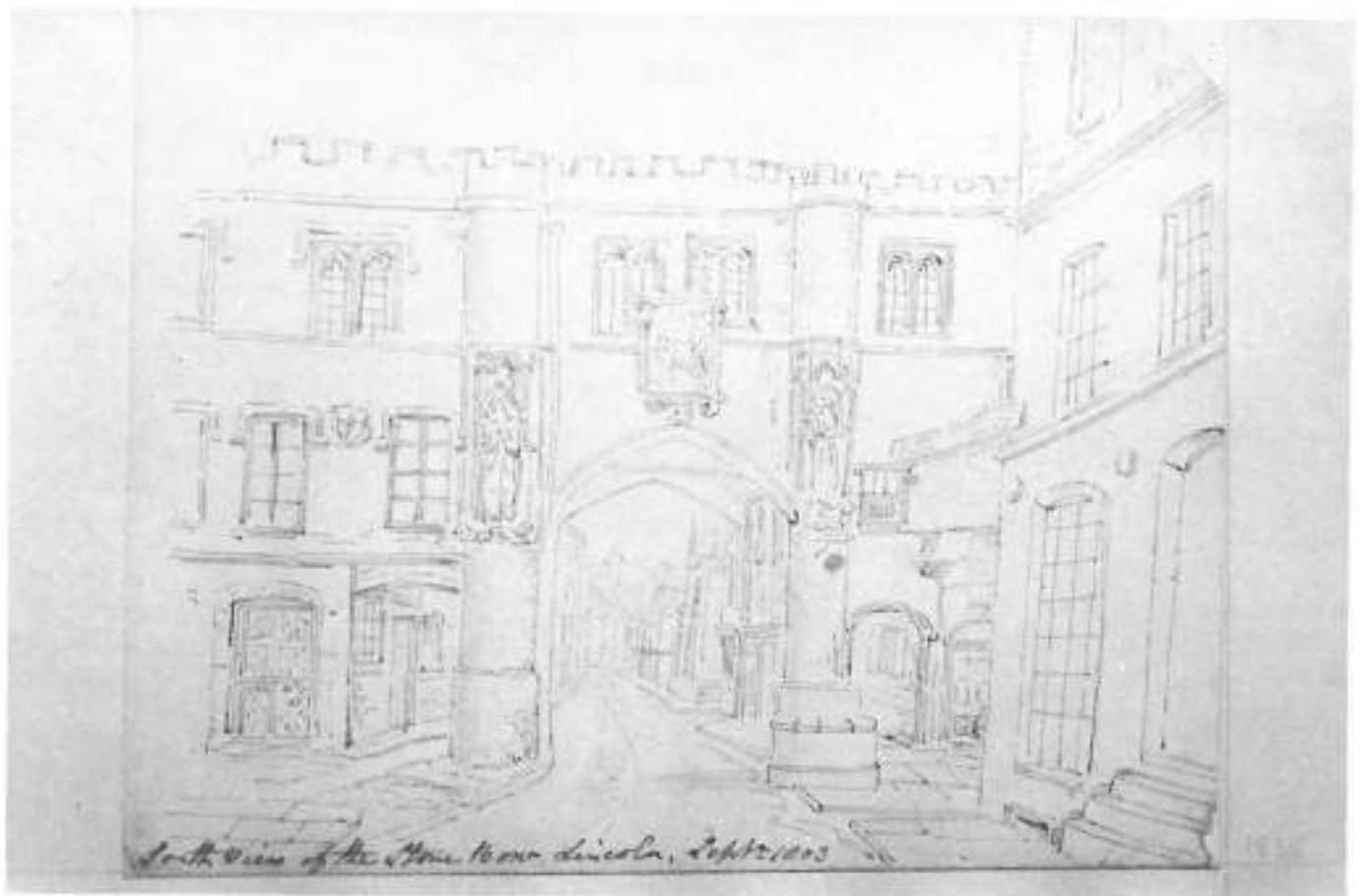
different size to the archway of the original inner passageway. These more than any other changes radically altered the look of the Stonebow, although Pearson's scheme was sensitively conceived and well carried out by his builders. Indeed, in 1885 the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* noted that 'the clearance of the low ceilings over the footways is a good and great improvement ....'.

Since that time the Stonebow has been repaired and cleaned on several occasions notably in 1930 and 1971. Undoubtedly the recent closing off of the gateway to traffic has removed the obvious danger from vehicles passing underneath the arches, and has given the Stonebow a much longer lease of life.

## THE GUILDHALL

The Guildhall occupies the whole of the second floor of the Stonebow and like the gateway is basically of fifteenth- and sixteenth century date, although it too has undergone some alteration since it was built. Most of the fittings and furniture are of much later date.

The Guildhall seems originally to have been sited in the south-east corner of the mediaeval city, but was moved above the Stonebow most probably in 1237 when its site was handed over to the Greyfriars by the citizens of Lincoln at the request of Henry III (1216-1272). The Guildhall served in the mediaeval period as both the meeting place for the Gild Merchant, the body which looked after the commercial interests of the citizens, and for the Burwarmote or borough court, the general assembly of the citizen body. The function of the Gild Merchant and the Burwarmote gradually merged to give rise to a more formalized civic government of which the modern City Council is the direct descendant. The Hall is still used today, over seven hundred years later, for meetings of the City Council.



*Pen and ink drawing of the Stonebow from the south by an unknown artist, September 1803. On view in the Usher Gallery, Lincoln.*

The Guildhall itself is in two parts — an outer chamber and an inner chamber. The inner chamber was originally used for meetings of important officials and for the safekeeping of the City records. Careful examination of the central tie-beam in this room shows that it marks the line of an original timber-framed wall — the timber framing has been sawn off and the original joint positions show clearly along the beam. This partition would, therefore, have divided the inner chamber into two separate parts, but at what date it was removed is unknown. The ceiling of the inner chamber is known to have been altered in 1691, and this may have been the occasion. The central wooden boss on the tie-beam is a replacement. The two wooden chests kept in this room belong to the sixteenth century and both have the complicated locking mechanisms then in fashion. There are similar chests in the City and County Museum and the Usher Gallery.

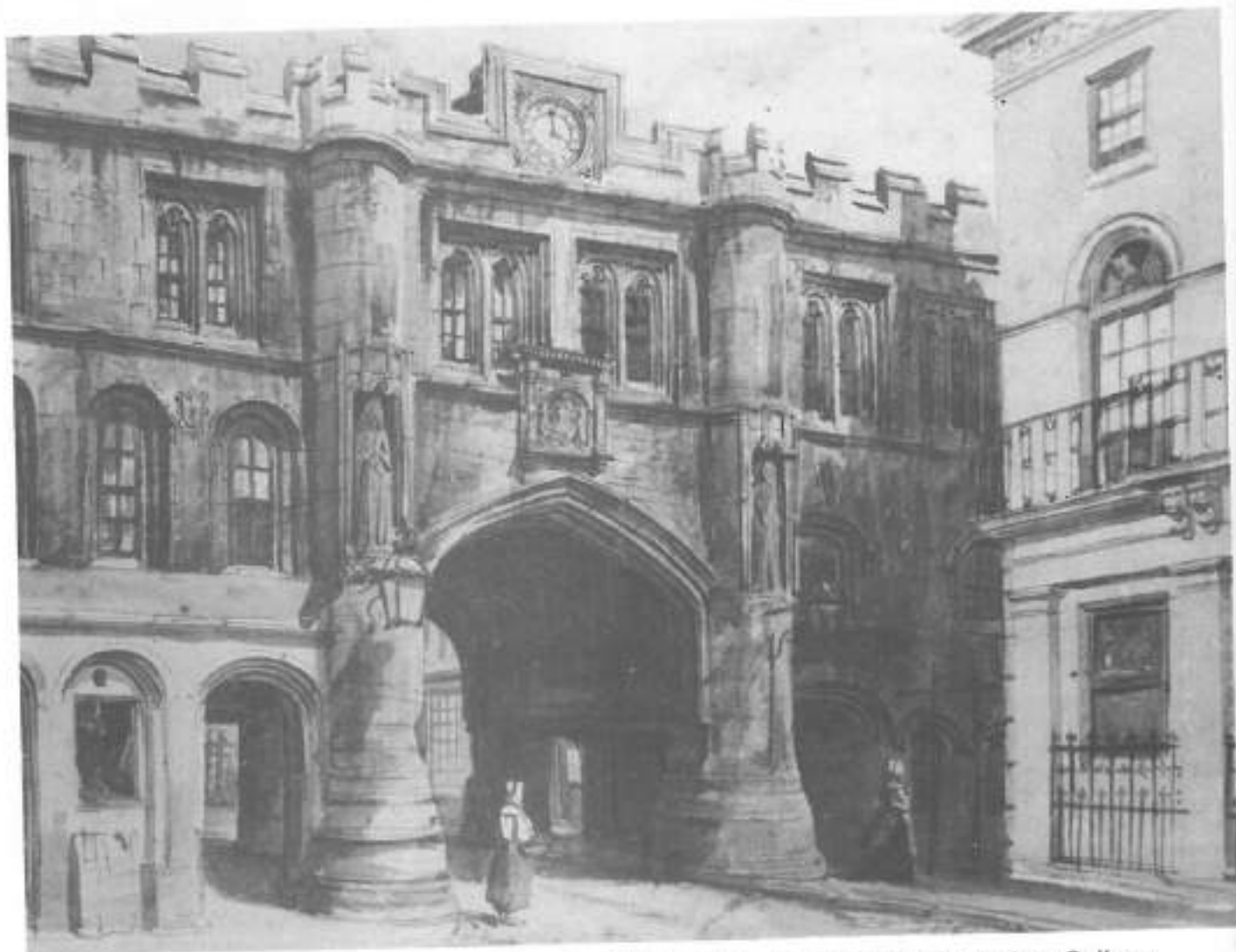
The main hall is divided from the inner chamber by a timber-framed wall. The doorway through this wall has been altered at some date to take the present door. Against the wall is an elaborate panelled screen of the eighteenth century in front of which is the Mayor's chair framed by two Corinthian columns

supporting the arms of George II (1727-60). On the north wall are two portraits, of George III (1760-1820) and Queen Victoria (1837-1901).

But the chief glory of the Guildhall is its magnificent open timber roof. Each of the massive tie-beams is supported by braced wall posts the feet of which are carved with animal, human or mythical faces. The tie-beams bear king-posts with large braces, while on either side of the room the purlins are supported by arched braces. The bosses on the underside of the tie-beams are of interest, mostly carved with rose or foliage motifs while one on the middle tie-beam is carved with four faces.

On the lead-covered roof of the Guildhall is the Mote Bell. Dating from 1371, it is the oldest bell of its type in England and was rung at the opening and end of sessions of the Burwar-mote. It is still rung today, over six hundred years later, for five minutes to summon members to meetings of the City Council.

The Guildhall is the official home of the Mayor during his year of office. It is open on the first Saturday in each month from 10.00-12.00 a.m. and 2.00-4.00 p.m. so that visitors can be conducted round the hall and shown the Civic Insignia housed in the adjacent building.



Watercolour of the Stonebow by A. Everitt (1824-1882). On view in the Usher Gallery, Lincoln.



#### INFORMATION FROM:

City and County Museum —  
Sites and Monuments Index

Lincolnshire Archives Office

Lincoln City Library

Usher Gallery

Sir F. Hill *Mediaeval Lincoln* (1948);  
*Victorian Lincoln* (1974)

Sir F. Hill *City of Lincoln Civic Insignia* (1964)

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