ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS 1983 The Old Hall of Lincoln's Inn

given by Sir John Summerson in the old Hall, on 22nd June, 1983 on the occasion of the Annual General Meeting of the Ancient Monuments Society.

The history of Lincoln's Inn has been written by a great many authors and it might well be thought that the history of its architecture was by now established beyond dispute. That, however, is not the case. Nearly every book I have laid hands on in preparing this paper makes mistakes and the ones that don't are the ones that don't mention architecture. The vagueness and inaccuracy of the published works is the more surprising because the records of the Inn are wonderfully full, and the 'Black Books' which record the affairs of the Society year by year in an unbroken series from 1422 have been in print for eighty years.¹ The 'Black Books' do not, of course, tell us everything we would like to know, but what they do tell us is basic. What I shall say in the next half hour is nearly all taken from these books. Where I interpolate my own speculations I will make it clear that I am doing so.

Of the date of the Hall's original construction the Black Books leave us in no doubt. In 1489 the Treasurer's accounts contain an item of £46.13.4 towards 'making of the new Hall by order of the Governors'.² The Hall was probably the first building which the Society erected on its own initiative and with its own funds for it had grown up and settled in a house not its own, the Inn of the Bishops of Chichester.³ None of the Bishops' buildings survive but there is a 13th century doorway, unearthed when the chapel was enlarged in 1882 and now built into the north wall of this building, which may well have been the Bishops'.

We are assembled, then, in a hall of the early years of Henry VII, by far the oldest of the three surviving halls of the London Inns of Court, the hall of Grays Inn having been built in 1556-60 and the huge hall of the Middle Temple in or about 1570. This statement, however, needs some qualification for in the reign of George V the Lincoln's Inn hall underwent a restoration which amounted to nothing less than total reconstruction. There is some medieval work here, in the walls, the windows and the roof. I will try to distinguish what is what in due course, when I come to describe the reconstruction of 1924-8. But that must come at the end. I want to begin with the changes which have occurred in the building in the course of the 500 years of its history. There are episodes of great intrinsic interest and which help to explain not only what we see around us today but much that has gone and will never be seen again.

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In the later reign of Henry VII, in those of Henry VIII, Mary and Edward VI there was little change. In 1505 there was some unidentified 'new work' in the Hall costing $\pounds 6.6.8.^4$ In 1552 there were repairs consequent upon 'the great wind', a storm which evidently wrecked the louvre, for a new one was supplied, with a gilded iron vane.⁵ That is about all.

The first major alteration to the hall was its extension by one bay southwards and the construction of the two oriels at the lower end, balancing those at the north, an alteration which makes the hall an unusual specimen of its kind (Fig. 1). The date usually given for this (first, perhaps, by Sir John Simpson the architect for the restoration) is 1624.⁶ But I am sure this is wrong and that the extension was made under Elizabeth I, more precisely in 1582-4. The evidence is in the Black Books.



1. The Old Hall from the West (Photograph: Christopher Dalton, 1983)

In June 1582 it was ordered that 'no Utter Barrester shall have a clerke in commons untyll further order be taken uppon ye enlargyng of ye Hall'.⁷ In July certain benchers were deputed to take charge of 80 tons of stone and 160 loads of timber 'towardes the buyldinges purposed' and sufficient brick earth was to be dug on the site to make 300,000 bricks.⁸ Clearly a substantial building enterprise was in hand and one which was certainly an extension and partial rebuilding of the hall block; for in April 1583 there is an allusion to two chambers as being 'nexte the Hall ende newely intended to be inlargid'.⁹ There is mention of a new 'entry'—i.e. screens passage—with chambers over it. The new oriels are not specifically mentioned but the quantity of stone ordered seems to make liberal allowance for them.

I think we may safely date the southern oriels at 1583. When we come to examine them we find that although they seem at first glance to be facsimiles of the northern pair they are not. They are a Tudor mason's equivalent, using, I suppose, profiles to which he was accustomed (Fig. 2).

The reasons for duplicating the oriels are obscure. Was it the new liking for symmetry (one thinks of the balanced oriels at Kirby) or simply to get more light into a rather gloomy building or was there some special reason? We do not know. What we do know—and this gives the enlarged building a special interest—is who planned the extension. The minutes of 13th April, 1583 direct that 'the plott of Symons [is] to be preserved as nere as may be, and he to be used for his advice touchinge the same buildinge'.¹⁰ This Symons was John Symons (d. 1597), one of the best known London surveyors of Elizabeth's time. I wrote a paper about him 26 years ago but unluckily missed this reference.¹¹ He was bred up in the King's Works, was apprenticed to the Surveyor, Lewis Stocket, who lived at Temple Bar, worked for



2. Profiles of the jambs of the North and South pairs of oriels. A-the North oriels, c. 1489. B-the South oriels, c. 1583.

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Lord Burghley and, among other things, made plans for Cursitors' Hall on the other side of Chancery Lane which still exist in the Public Record Office.¹²

Symons was presumably responsible for the new bay, with its oriels and, immediately adjoining to the south, a building containing new pastry, surveying place and kitchen with chambers and garrets over.¹³ All this, except the hall bay, has been rebuilt at various times.

The extension to the hall involved building a new end wall on the south and continuing the roof, with the addition of one new principal. Simpson tells us that in restoring the roof he found the new principal to consist of the half-truss which went against the old south wall with a half-truss of the later date joined to it with slightly different mouldings.¹⁴

I come now to the history of the screens, an important factor in medieval and Tudor planning. We must assume that there was always a screen and a screens passage at the lower end of the hall. The earliest mention is in 1565 when it was ordered that 'a stronge and favre gallery shalbe made forthwith over the skryne in the nether ende of the Hall'.15 The gallery was perhaps not made for there is no mention of it in the accounts. The position of this screen in the unextended hall is clearly indicated by the survival of part of the entry to the screens passage in the east wall. If a new screen was erected under Symons after 1583 where did it go? The addition of the oriels puts the orthodox arrangement out of court. It must have stood on the north side of the oriels, very near where the old screen stood, leaving the new bay as a sort of floodlit vestibule between it and the back wall of the hall, with the screens passage where it is now, behind the back wall: a most unorthodox arrangement. There certainly was a screen because it was ordered to be removed in 1624 when it was replaced by the screen which we see today.¹⁶ But there can hardly have been a gallery.

The present screen cannot, surely, be in its original position. It is a two-storeyed affair comprising not only a screen but a gallery front, behind which must have been a gallery; it was the gallery in which the King's violins entertained Charles II when he dined in the hall in 1671.¹⁷ The screen and gallery front are fixed against the back wall of the hall and Simpson maintained that this was always their position. The back of the wooden screen, he says, is not wrought and must therefore always have been backed against solid wall. The gallery, he maintains, was beyond the back wall, over the screens passage, but he does not say how, in that case, the upper part of the back wall was supported.

I suggest that the screen originally stood at least 10ft. forward from where it is now and that it occupied this position from 1624 until 1819. In November of that year a writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* reported that 'during the long vacation Lincoln's Inn Hall has been most elegantly and commodiously improved. The hall is now ten feet longer than formerly'.¹⁸ I can see no way in which the hall could be extended by that length except by the removal of the screen from one place to another. But what of the gallery? I think we must accept the fact that in 1624 a new gallery cut right across the oriels. This may seem like vandalism to us but it would not do so to the benchers in 1624 who were more interested in procuring space than in preserving the integrity of Tudor monuments. In 1819, of course, the gallery was eliminated.

1819 as the date of removal is supported by two other factors. When the screen was pinned to the back wall, the blinded openings in the upper part would look ridiculous and in 1820 a series of heraldic paintings was commissioned to fill them.¹⁹ You can see them now: they are the arms of Charles II, the Duke of York and members of the nobility who dined on that great occasion in 1671. Also, in 1819 the clock was acquired and placed in the carved taffrill of which more in a moment.²⁰

unorthodox word more about the curiously One relationships of hall and screen before as well as after 1624. If you go into the screens passage behind the end wall you will see the usual two openings from passage into hall, and these are in conformity not only with the openings in the screen but with the pattern of the rather pretty Gothick plaster ceiling which is almost certainly of 1818-19. But between these two openings are the remains (exposed by Simpson) of a square-headed opening with moulded and chamfered jambs which is clearly of Symons' period. My guess is that the two side openings were only formed when the screen and gallery front were backed against the other side of the wall (i.e. 1818) and that previously there was only one, central, opening from the passage into the hall.

So much for the placing of the screen. Now let us look at the present screen as a piece of architecture. It was made in 1624 by Robert Lynton, joiner, who was paid £40. In the same year £10 was spent on 'the staircase and frame of timber at the lower end of the hall', presumably for access to the gallery.²¹ The screen is one of that family of elaborately grotesque screens nearly all of which have, as a common feature, 'terms'—i.e. pedestals growing into human heads or torsos at the top and narrowing to the base. An early example is at Grays Inn, c.1560; then comes Middle Temple Hall, c.1570 and the Charterhouse 1571. Outside London, Lord Buckhurst's screen at Knole comes at c.1600 and is the obvious prototype of the Earl of Suffolk's screen at Audley End (after 1603), a screen which has perspective panels very like

the perspective panel in the middle compartment of the screen at Lincoln's Inn (Fig. 3). At Trinity College, Cambridge the hall screen dates from 1604-5, at Wadham College, Oxford—again with perspective panels—from c.1610-13. This chronology shows how very late our screen comes in the historic series. It is curious to reflect that in 1618, six years before the screen was made, the benchers of Lincoln's Inn had been toying with the idea of employing Inigo Jones to design their new chapel. They did not so employ him and one can quite see that their taste in the arts was not yet ready for the great leap forward into Palladianism. In fact, of course, for the chapel they went back to the Gothic.



3. Detail of the screen showing the perspective panel in the centre bay. The screen was made by Robert Lynton, joiner, in 1624. (Christopher Dalton 1983)

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One feature of the screen which is a puzzle is that lively taffrill at the top which encloses the clock. Stylistically it is alien to the screen itself and must have been added. An item of £5 'for the top of the screen' in 1627 may refer to it;²² if it does we must presume that another joiner was employed. It is a piece of rather clever mannerist design in what was called the 'Ditterling' Style because of Hans Dietterlein's famous pattern-book of 1594-8. The clock face is, of course, an intrusion in the place where a shield of arms would normally go.

After 1625 there was no significant change in the hall till the end of the century. By this time the Society was busy with the development of New Square; the Carey Street archway dates from 1697. In 1716 the Society appointed a surveyor. He was a Mr. Stroud, a bricklayer, and he was appointed 'surveyor and overseer of all work to be done at the charge of the Society in relation to repairs and alterations, no work to be done without his advice and direction'.²³ It sounds as if the Society had some important building work in prospect but Mr. Stroud's name never appears again. In 1720, £330 was spent on 'work in the hall' and the payment is to a 'Mr. Gibbs'.²⁴ His name never appears again either. Who was he and on what did he spend that money? I believe that the illustrations Figs. 4 and 5 provide the answer.



4. Interior of the Old Hall, looking South, before 1924, showing the plaster vault inserted, probably by James Gibbs, in 1720 and removed in 1924-8. (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments)



5. The Old Hall, with the Court of Chancery in session, Hogarth's 'Paul before Felix' hangs over the Lord Chancellor's chair. Engraving after T.H. Shepherd, from London Interiors, c. 1841-4. (Christopher Dalton, 1983)

They show the interior of the hall before 1924, with an elliptical barrel-vault springing from a foot or two below the window arches and spanning the hall continuously from end to end. It is crossed by broad flat ribs rising from between the windows and longitudinal ribs forming panels. Transverse vaults rise over the windows and penetrate the main vault in groins which meet at a point. The transverse ribs and the wall arches unite betweeen the windows and receive apparent support from massive corbels, each corbel consisting of a fully articulated entablature sitting on a large console. The entablatures return briefly along the wall while the consoles are repeated in profile against the wall under the returns.²⁵ The effect of this interior must have been very like that of some of Wren's city churches and in fact the handling of corbels is almost exactly what Wren did at St. Mildred, Bread Street.²⁶

Such was the interior of the hall from some date in the 18th century—and I am pretty sure it was 1720—till 1924 when the whole vault was removed and the medieval interior reconstituted. I suspect that 1720 is right because no other item in the Black Books fits the case and expenditure of £330 is about right for the work in question.²⁷ As to 'Mr. Gibbs' there is evidence pointing to

the famous James Gibbs. In 1720, James Gibbs was 38. He had built St. Mary le Strand but was not yet the celebrated master he was to become. His chief patron was Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford.²⁸ Harley had been called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1701 when he was Speaker of the House of Commons, and awarded the honourable title of 'associate of the bench':29 his arms were placed in a glass panel in one of the hall windows (now in the Chapel). I cannot vouch for Harley's influence with the Lincoln's Inn benchers in 1720 but it is an obvious possibility. Stylistically Gibbs borrowed much from Wren so the ceiling is quite in character. Better still, the peculiar design of the corbels is almost repeated in the aisles of Gibbs' church at Derby (1723-5). In short, I believe that in the plaster vault which was so ruthlessly torn out of the hall in 1924 we have to recognise (posthumously, alas!) a work by the architect of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. A very minor work to be sure and one which, in the matter could hardly claim precedence over a fine of preservation, medieval roof.

The next important event in the history of the hall was the arrival of Hogarth's painting 'Paul before Felix' in 1750. Five years earlier Lord Wyndham, who had been Lord Chancellor of Ireland, left £200 in his will to Lincoln's Inn, 'for adorning the Chapel or Hall or both, as the Benchers shall think fit'. It seems to have been Lord Mansfield who suggested that Hogarth should be commissioned to paint a suitable picture. The Benchers agreed, leaving the subject to Hogarth. The appropriateness of a biblical trial scene in a house of lawyers is obvious and it gave Hogarth the opportunity of doing something on the sublime lines of Raphael's St. Paul cartoons. Hogarth intended the painting for the Chapel but no suitable place could be found for a picture of such a size. The wall where it now hangs was Hogarth's second choice and its forward inclination is according to his instructions. The frame is also from his specification.³⁰

A commonly held view is that the painting is ridiculously bad—one of Hogarth's flops. Certainly the figure of Paul is faintly ludicrous but the idea in the picture, as analysed by Ronald Paulson in his great work of 1971, makes up for what it may lack in pictorial charm. It is a representation of a psychological situation in a court of law. Choice is in the balance. Consciences are at work. Social criticism is here, as so often in Hogarth, blended with pictorial ambition.³¹

Since Gibbs intruded his vault in the hall, fixing his new timbers to the old rafters, the building had, not suprisingly, shown signs of unease. In 1733 clumsy new buttresses replaced slim Tudor buttresses on the west side to correspond with buttresses previously erected (at an unknown date) on the east.³²

In 1770 new flooring was put in and the roof stripped and recovered.³³

In 1792 the Society brought in the great James Wyatt to advise them on the Chapel,³⁴ but so far as we know his advice was not asked on the hall, though Simpson rashly and wrongly attributes to him the Gibbs ceiling. In 1801 £200 was paid to Bernasconi for 'repairing the outside of the hall'. This suggests high-quality stucco but there are no details of what he did or under whose direction. The Society does not seem to have had a regular surveyor at this time. In fact the first recorded appointment of such an officer since Mr. Stroud the bricklayer in 1716 only comes in 1810 when the Benchers appointed Mr. James Wigg. Wigg was very active at Lincoln's Inn till his death in 1824 when he was succeeded by his son, Francis Wigg, and most things requiring any design skill, up to the building of the new hall can be ascribed to one Wigg or the other.³⁵

James Wigg's great year was 1818-19. The removal of the gallery and re-erection of the screen against the south wall were done under him. The 'Gothick' ceiling in the screens passage must be his and so was the rather pretty little 'Gothick' lantern which shows in the photographs taken before the restoration (Fig. 6). He stuccoed the east side of the hall to correspond with the



 The Old Hall before 1924. The stucco facing and ornament, probably by Bernasconi, 1801. The 'Gothick' lantern by the Inn's Surveyor, Joseph Wigg, 1818-19. (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments)

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west, already stuccoed, presumably by Bernasconi. He stripped the tiles off the roof and substituted slate. He did, in short, a proper modernising job.

Meanwhile, how was the hall used? Since 1737, when not used for dining it was a court of law. The Lord Chancellor sat here out of term. We can see him in session under Gibbs's ceiling in the view in Pugin and Rowlandson's *Microcosm*, 1808, with a tester over his head to give him dignity and a fine iron stove in the middle of the floor to keep him warm (the Hall, by the way, never had a fire-place). In 1820, when Westminster Hall, his term-time habitat, was turned up-side-down for George IV's coronation, the Lord Chancellor sat here both in term and vacation until, I suppose, Soane's somewhat eccentric Chancery court at Westminster was ready for him.³⁶ But he still sat here in vacation and Dickens must have seen him here later on. The opening scene of Bleak House (1852) is set here, shrouded in the most famous fog in literary history.

Through the later 19th century there were various repairs and restorations but the only one I shall mention is that of 1883 when that arch-philistine, Lord Grimthorpe, built a Gothic facade on the north front, took away the Hogarth and inserted a Gothic window of which I have never seen an illustration.³⁷

Then in 1924 came the great restoration. It was put into the hands of Sir John Simpson, lately knighted for his participation, in partnership with Maxwell Ayrton, in the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley (the stadium is theirs). By this time the poor old building was really on its last legs, alive and jittering, the windows cracking ominously.

Simpson crawled into the roof and found, to his delight, that the timbers of 1489-92 were still there, so the first thing he did was to detach the Gibbs interior from them and pull it out. The second thing he did was to pull the old roof to pieces and prepare the timbers for a full restoration. This was not easy because the timbers were badly warped. Simpson discovered a short way with warped timbers. He made mortice-cuts in the middle of their length and pressed them straight under screw-jacks so that the timber cracked across the grain. He then filled the mortice-holes with 300 year old oak. Having got the bits and pieces straight he rebuilt the roof approximately in its original form. There is a lot of extraneous timber in the roof but its appearance is certainly plausible. The scissor-trusses, with their archbraces penetrating the collar and continuing across to the opposite rafters, Simpson compared rightly with the roof of the Bishop's Hall at Hatfield, built some ten years earlier.38



 Interior of the Old Hall, looking South, 1983, showing the 15th century roof as reconstructed by Sir John W. Simpson in 1924-8. The screen and gallery front were fixed against the West wall in 1818-19. (Christopher Dalton 1983)



8. The Old Hall in 1983. The block of chambers on the right is a reconstruction of 1924-8 when a new opening was formed to the 'screens passage' introduced by Wigg in 1818-19 and the 17th or early 18th century stone door-case moved to the south. (Christopher Dalton 1983)

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Having removed the Gibbs vault and dismembered the roof. Simpson turned his attention to the carcase. He stripped the stucco off the walls, revealing the diapered brick-work of the 16th century. The walls, however, were found to be cracked longitudinally and had to come down. The bricks were saved and used in the rebuilding, the diapers being reconstituted as correctly as possible. As to the stonework he found that this had been 'made up' with stucco (?Bernasconi) to the extent that there was hardly anything left of the exterior stone face. The stones were numbered (and in some parts of the interior still are) and taken down. Portland stone exterior faces were dowelled to the old Reigate interior faces and the composite stones then reassembled.39 Some masons' marks on the north-east oriel got lost in the process.⁴⁰ Remains were found of two entrances leading presumably to the original screens passage of 1489-92.41 The fragment of the jamb on the east is exposed and shows mouldings in the style of the oriels. On the west a whole door has been reconstituted externally but shifted a few feet to the north. This is in a different style and I suggest may be part of the work of 1505 recorded in the Black Book.



9. North-west oriel, part of the original structure begun c. 1489. (Christopher Dalton 1983) Parts of the old crenellated parapet were found and reproduced along both sides. A new lantern light was designed to replace Mr. Wigg's fancy effort over the old louvre opening. Internally, the corbels under the wall-posts of the roof were found too far gone and were replaced by modern substitutes.⁴² The walls were provided with linenfold panelling based on specimens found serving as a crawling-way in the roof.⁴³

From all this you will understand why I postponed a description of the hall till I had recounted its history. For the fact is that we are in a building of 1924-28 which is, however, made up to a great extent of the materials of its predecessor. William Morris would not, I think, have been very happy about either the method or, indeed, the results. But in such cases it is only fair to ask what the alternative was. We have at least a very attractive souvenir of the ancient building and some good fragments of carved masonry. If the fabric no longer tells its own story we must, I think be grateful to Simpson and his workmen for an intelligent and careful rescript, of deep historic interest in the annals of the law and not altogether without significance in the history of English architecture.

NOTES

1.	The Records of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn: the Black Books.
0	Ed. J. Douglas Walker. 4 Vols., 1897-1902. Cited hereafter as BB.
2.	<i>BB</i> , i, 92.
3.	The classic early history of Lincoln's Inn is contained in W. Dugdale, Origines Judiciales, 1666. See also H.H.L. Bellot, Grays Inn and Lincoln's Inn, 1925;
	W.H. Spilsbury, Lincoln's Inn, its ancient and modern buildings, 1873; Sir G.
	Hurst, A short history of Lincoln's Inn, 1946; Sir R. Roxburgh, The Origins of Lincoln's Inn, 1963.
4.	BB, i, 143.
5.	
0.	<i>BB</i> , i, 301-2 Stow, <i>Survey</i> 1633 ed., p. 488 states that Sir Thomas Lovell, who contributed largely to the cost of the gatehouse, 'caused the <i>Lacies</i> Armes to be cast and wrought in lead on the Lover of the Hall', with two other escutcheons. 'This Lover being late repayred the said Escutcheon was left out'.
6.	J.W. Simpson, Some Account of the Old Hall of Lincoln's Inn, 1928, p. 35.
7.	BB, i, 425.
8.	BB, i, 425-6.
9.	<i>BB</i> , i, 428.
10.	Ibid.
11.	J. Summerson, 'Three Elizabethan Architects'. Bulletin of the John Rylands
	Library, xi, no. 1 (1957), pp. 209-16 and 222-225.
12.	P.R.O., MPA 71.
13.	<i>BB</i> , i, 428.
14.	DD, 1, 420.
14.	Simpson, $op. cit., 52-3.$
16.	<i>BB</i> , i, 345.
	Simpson, $op. cit., 52-3$.
17.	<i>BB</i> , iii, 78-81.
18.	Gents Mag., lxxxix, 455.
19.	Simpson, op. cit., p. 45, quoting T. Lane, the Students Guide through Lincoln's Inn.
20.	Ibid., 79.
21.	BB , ii, 253.
22.	BB , ii, 274.
23.	<i>BB</i> , iii, 248.
24.	BB, iii, 258.
25.	The only illustrations I have found of this interior are the print in Pugin and
	Kowlandson, Microcosm of London, 1808, another in London Interiors [c.1840], p. 49, and the photograph pl. 78, in Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, London (West), 1925.
26.	Destroyed in World War II. Photograph in R. Comm. Hist. Mons., London (City), pl. 80.
27.	Compare the accounts of St. Andrew Holborn, 1686 (Wren Soc., x, 95-107). The total cost of carpentry and plaster-work was £1,700. The church occupies about
	twice the area of the Hall. The carpentry includes nave and aisle roofs, galleries
	and staircases and the plaster-work is heavily enriched. Scaled down to the
	simple vault at Lincoln's Inn, £330 seems about right.
28.	B. Little, The Life and Work of James Gibbs (1955), 32-3.
29.	<i>BB</i> , iii, 403-4.
30.	R. Paulson, Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times (1971), ii, 51-55.
31.	Ibid.
32.	<i>BB</i> , iii, 403-4.
33.	<i>BB</i> , iv, 53.
34.	<i>BB</i> , iv, 90.
35.	
	BB, iv, 199. H. Colvin, Biog. Dict. of British Architects (1978), s.v. Wigg, Francis, p. 887.
36.	T. Lane, The Student's Guide through Lincoln's Inn (4th ed. 1823), p. 31.

37. Simpson, op. cit., 80. Ibid., 67-72. Ibid., 72-76.

- 38.
- 39.

- Masons' marks on the north flank of the east oriel are recorded in W.M[artin], 'The old Hall of Lincoln's Inn, London and Middlesex Archaeological Soc., N.S., v, Part iii (1926), 333-4. 40.
- The remains of the west doorway were already revealed in 1911. 41.
- Simpson, op. cit., 74-5. 42.
- 43. Simpson, op. cit., 67-70.

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