

## Maison Dieu - History

### The Building’s Setting & History

Dover Town Hall, also known as Maison Dieu (the house of God – Domus Dei), is a remarkable building which is situated to the east end of Dover High Street, on a corner plot between Ladywell and Biggin Street, with the River Dour running just to the north of the site.

It was founded as the Hospital of St. Mary by Hubert de Burgh (Chief Justice, Earl of Kent and Constable of Dover Castle) in the early thirteenth century. At first it was probably a simple hall offering hospitality to pilgrims travelling to Thomas Becket’s tomb in Canterbury, or to and from pilgrimage sites in Europe.

In 1227, King Henry III was present at the dedication of a new chapel built to allow religious services to be held. The king became patron of the hospital, and over time it grew into the large complex of buildings.

Following the Suppression of the Monasteries by Henry VIII the hospital passed into the full ownership of the crown in 1544, and the existing bakery, brewery, granary, stables and storerooms were used as part of a victualling yard (for the provision of food and drink) for supplying the navy.

The victualling yard remained in use until 1830, and then in 1834, Maison Dieu was bought by the Corporation of Dover to establish a new Town Hall having outgrown their court hall in the Market Square. In these new premises they established their offices, a gaol (a type of jail) and a court room, and, between 1849 and 1861, restored the building.

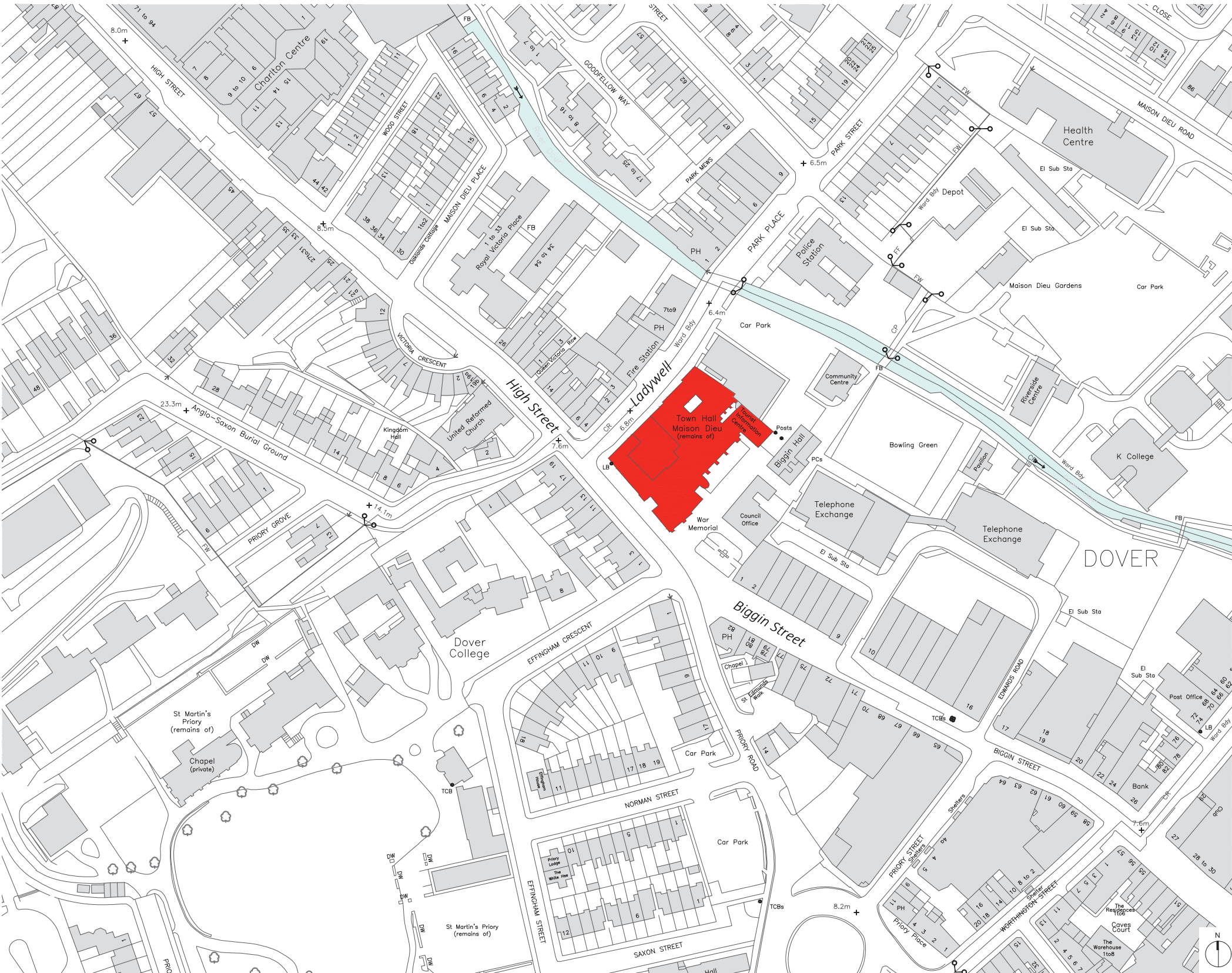
The Maison Dieu has seen many uses since with the addition of a prison (now demolished), a police and fire station, a new council chamber, an assembly hall for meetings, theatre and dances, and, more recently, a museum.

Little has survived from Hubert de Burgh’s original Pilgrim Hall and hospital. The medieval buildings that can still be seen are the Chapel (which later served as the Court Room or Sessions House), the Stone Hall and the south west tower (Flag Tower) dating from the late 13th or 14th centuries.

The changes of use have shaped and reshaped the buildings, which is now clearly divided into a medieval section and a Victorian section, largely created by the eminent architect W. Burges.



Historic drawing (1825) depicting Maison Dieu at the time it was used as a victualling office.



Plan showing the location of Maison Dieu in red.



# Maison Dieu - History

## Changes to Maison Dieu during the Victorian Period

It was during the Victorian period that the second most extensive renovation and extension works to the building complex took place.

The prominent architect Ambrose Poynter (1796-1886) was in charge of the initial restoration works. Poynter was assisted by a young up and coming architect called William Burges.

William Burges (1827-1881) was an acclaimed architect who is best known for his work at Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch.

William Burges was commissioned to design and construct a large extension to the northwest end of Dover's Maison Dieu. The design included forming a new assembly hall (Connaught Hall) and civic offices (Mayor's Parlour).

Burges, like many of his contemporaries including the renowned architect Augustus Pugin (1812-1852), favoured the Gothic Revival style, which was highly fashionable in the Victorian period.

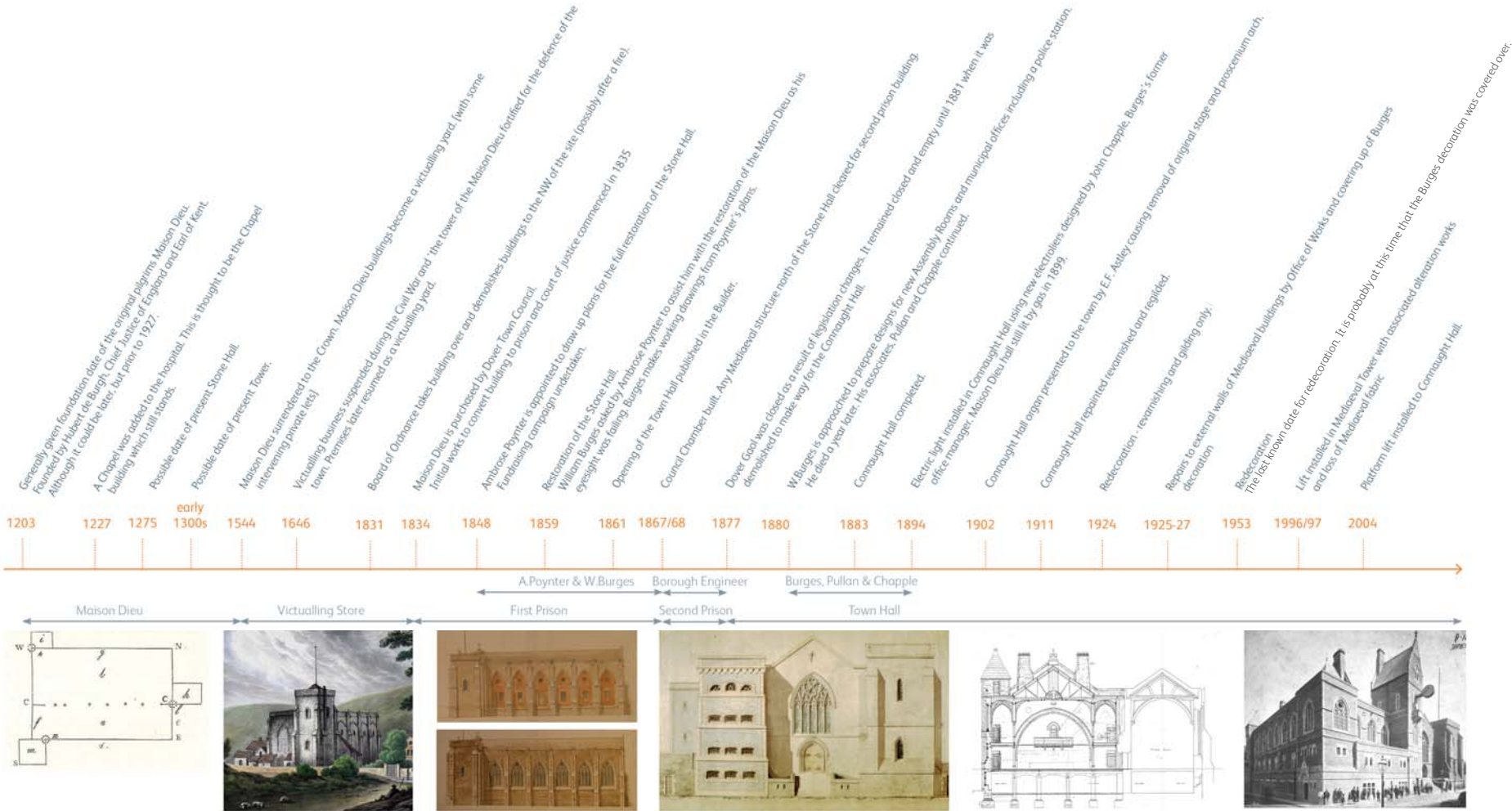
Burges's vision for Dover Town Hall's extension included highly decorative exteriors and interiors, presenting a rich collection Gothic features, including complex pitched roof structures, stained glass windows and intricate decorative patterns applied to the internal walls, including painted stonework, colourful geometric designs and detailed floral motifs.

Burges commenced the design of the scheme in 1880 but died the following year, before the drawings were fully finalised.

The building works were carried out by two of Burges's former colleagues, Pullan & Chapple, who completed the works in 1883.



Above: An example of W. Burges decorative interiors at Cardiff Castle (Banqueting Hall).



The timeline above illustrates the historical development of the Maison Dieu from its origins to the present day.



The historic photographs above show Burges's Victorian Connaught Hall extension; a view of the exterior from Ladywell and images of the Connaught Hall's rich decorative interiors.



Maison Dieu - Issues & Proposals

Current Use and Condition of the Building

Maison Dieu still serves a wide range of uses, including to regularly functioning as a venue for community functions, social events, celebrations and performances. In addition, part of the building is used to store Dover Museum archives.

Although same improvements have been made to the building in recent years, including the introduction of a passenger lift to the Flag Tower in 1997, followed by the insertion of a service lift in the Connaught Hall in 2004, the building still presents limited accessibility and circulation constraints.

There are also many issues that need addressing such as much needed repairs to the building fabric, which has been badly affected by water ingress and outbreaks of dry rot.

Existing Issues:

- 1) Lack of step free access to the main entrance. Access to the building is currently via the Stone Hall and there is no separate access to the Connaught Hall.
- 2) The main reception and office are located to the rear of the Stone Hall, providing a poor welcome experience and little control over access to the building.
- 3) W.C. facilities for the whole building are not well positioned and are split over two levels, making accessibility difficult.
- 4) The main kitchen is located on the Lower Ground Floor, serving both the Connaught and Stone Halls. Only one dumb-waiter (a lift used for catering purposes) provides a vertical link to the servery at Upper Ground Floor.
- 5) A poor quality 20th century extension encroaches into the Mayor’s Parlour courtyard.
- 6) There are many under used spaces underneath the Connaught and Stone Halls.
- 7) The service lift in the Connaught Hall is in need of upgrading.
- 8) The original Burges interiors to the Connaught Hall and Mayor’s Parlour have been covered.
- 9) Extensive damage to building fabric due to water ingress and dry rot outbreaks.

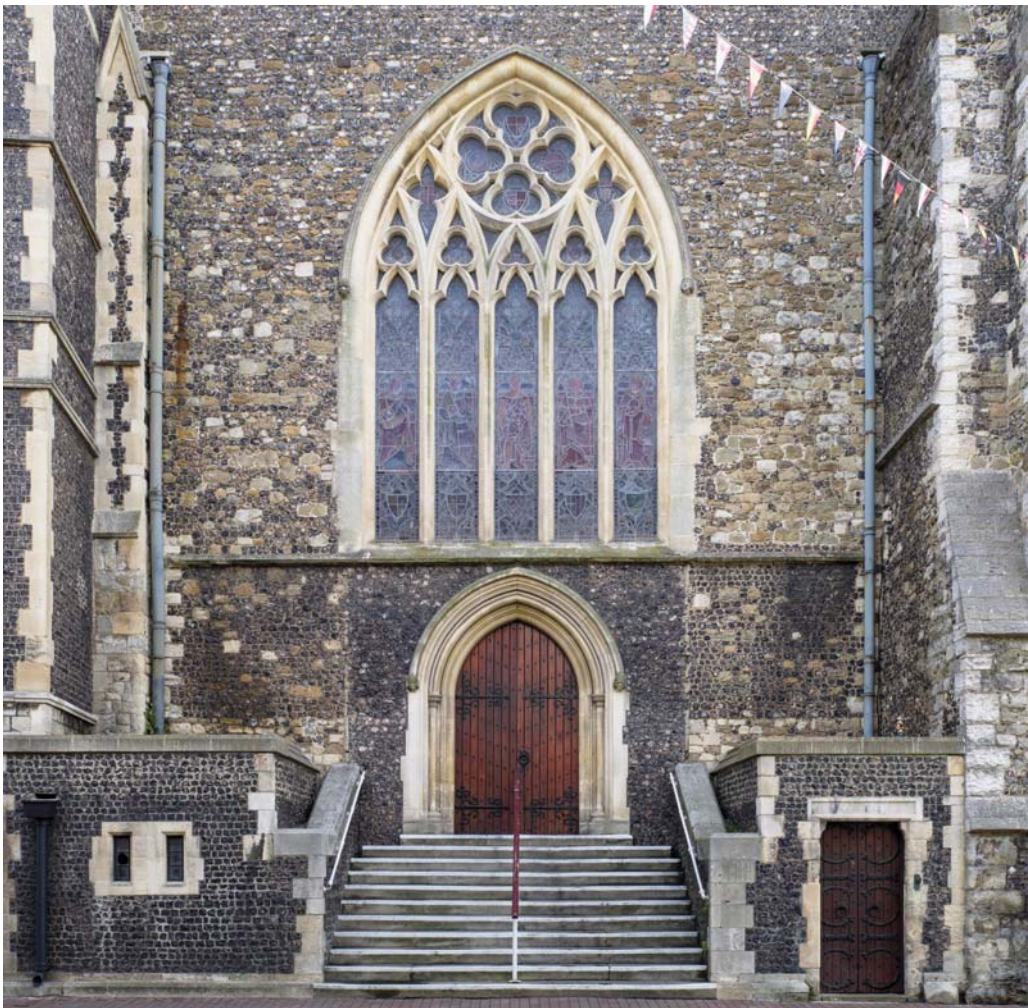
Proposed Improvements:

The proposal aims to repair and re-present Maison Dieu by providing improved public access and enhanced uses as well seeking to gain revenue from renting out spaces to help pay for the upkeep of the building.

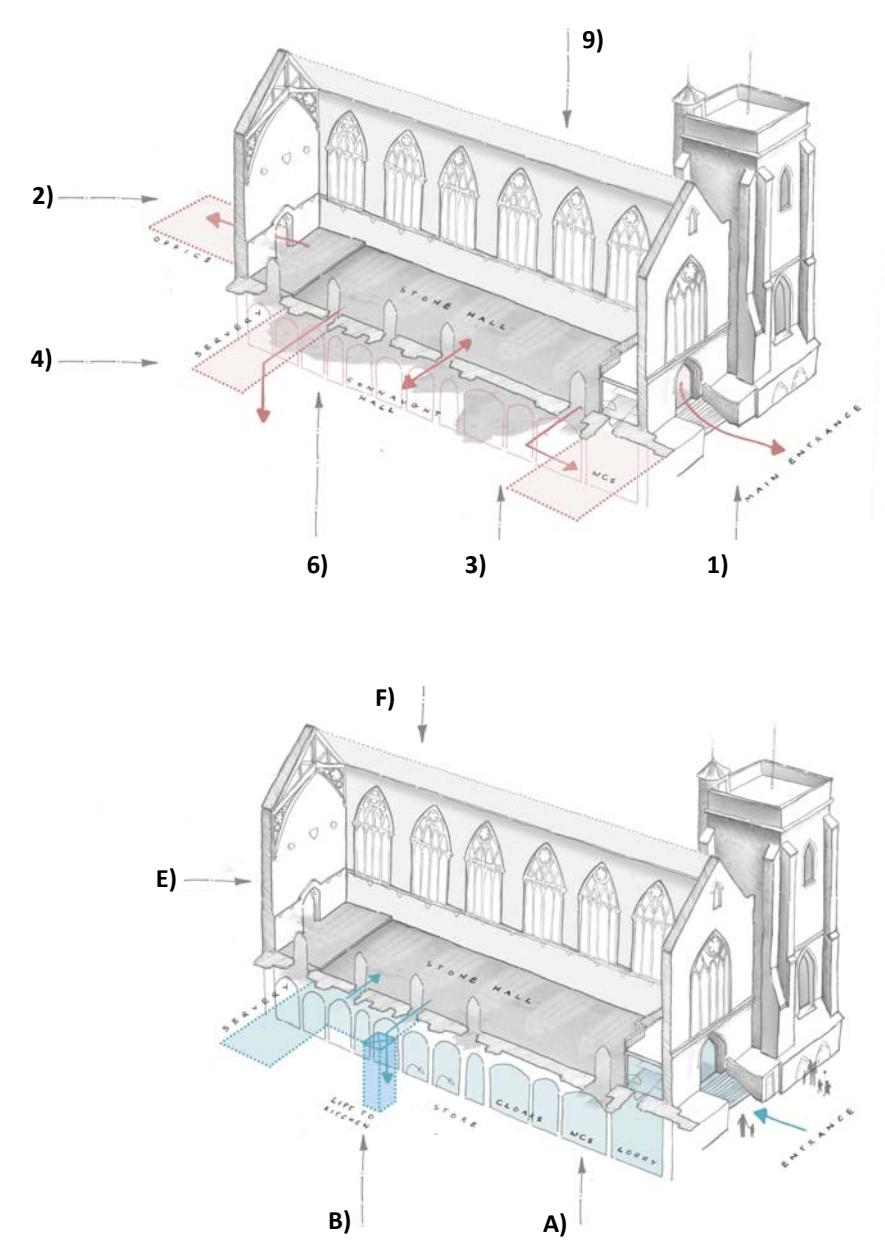
The current project mainly focuses on the Victorian parts of the building, however it also seeks to put the external fabric of the building complex in a good state of repair.

The proposal is centered around delivering the following;

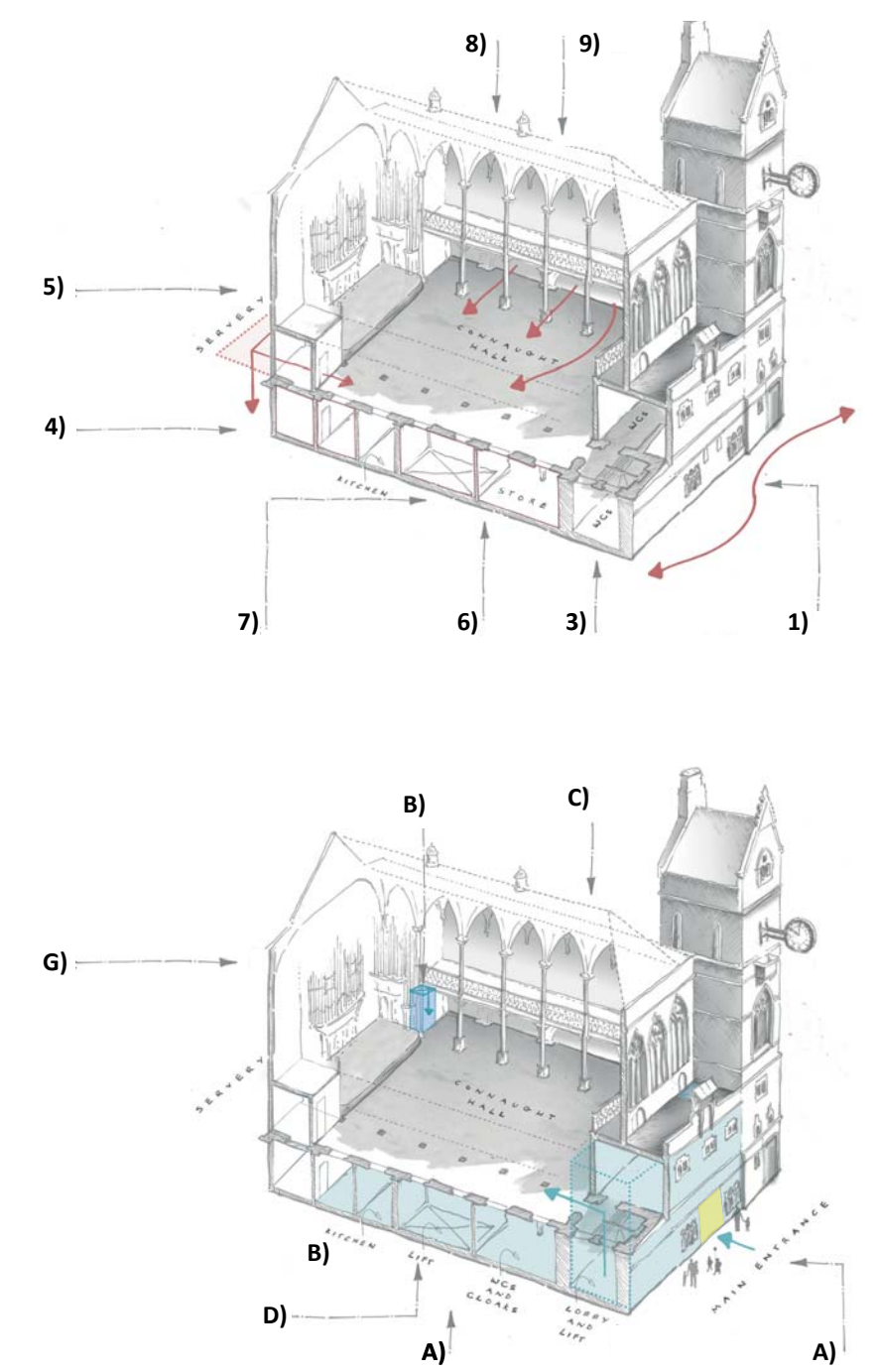
- A) New entrance with improved accessibility and facilities.
- B) Improved kitchen & servery facilities including the introduction of a new catering lift.
- C) Improvements to the Connaught Hall including restoring the Burges’s decorative interiors.
- D) Improvements to the service lift.
- E) Insertion of additional W.C.’s into the Council Chamber office area.
- F) Conversion of the ex-Visitor Information Centre (VIC) and former cells into a cafe with separate W.C.’s and kitchen facilities to be let out commercially.
- G) Conversion of the Mayor’s Parlour into a modern holiday let including restoring Burges’s decorative interiors.



Dover Town Hall existing entrance via the Stone Hall.



Existing issues and proposals for the Stone Hall.



Existing issues and proposals for the Connaught Hall.



## Maison Dieu - Proposal for the New Entrance

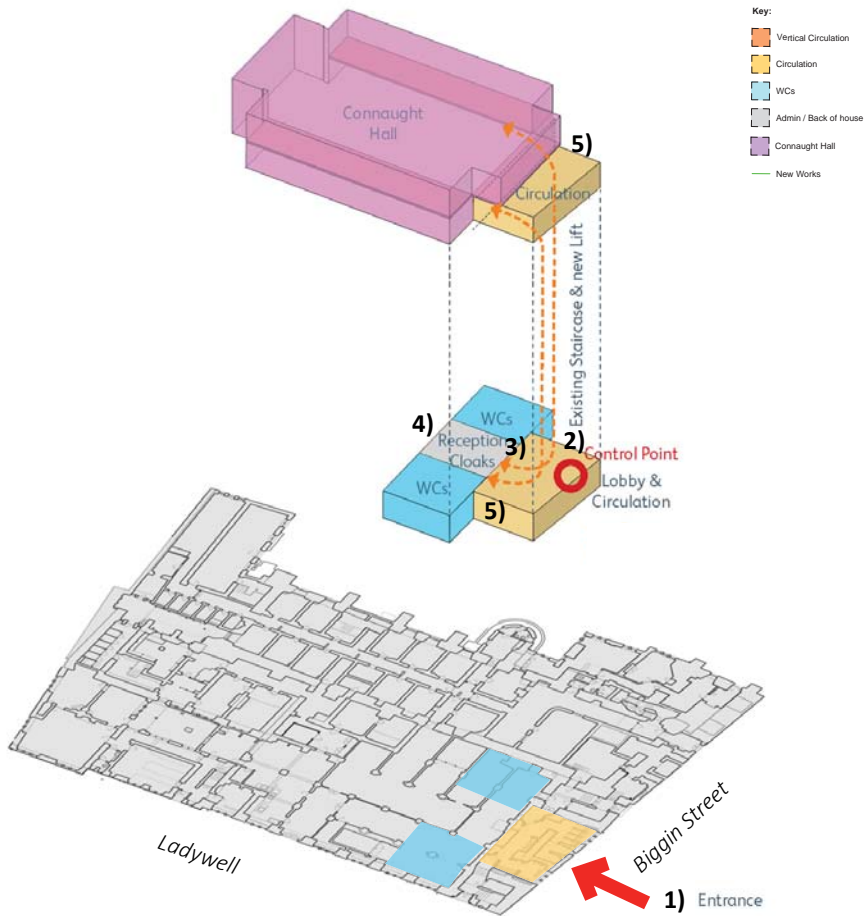
The proposed interventions for the new entrance to the Connaught Hall seek to achieve the following improvements;

- 1) Increased street presence with a new and visible 'shop front' entrance.
- 2) Direct street level access and a new modern passenger lift to provide access to various levels within the building (Lower Ground, Street Level and Upper Ground Floor).
- 3) Welcoming reception point by main entrance and an increased building capacity (including regular users and drop in day visitors).
- 4) Increased and repositioned cloak room and toilet facilities to meet modern standards.
- 5) Improved circulation links around the building.



Proposal: 3D view of the new entrance to Connaught Hall from Biggin Street.

New entrance. Cutaway with stone surrounds and glazed doors highlighted to show position.



Proposal: Diagrammatic Lower Ground Floor plan showing the position of the new entrance, reception, cloak and W.C. facilities.



Proposal: 3D view of new entrance lobby.



View from Ladywell / Biggin Street corner: Proposed location of new entrance highlighted.



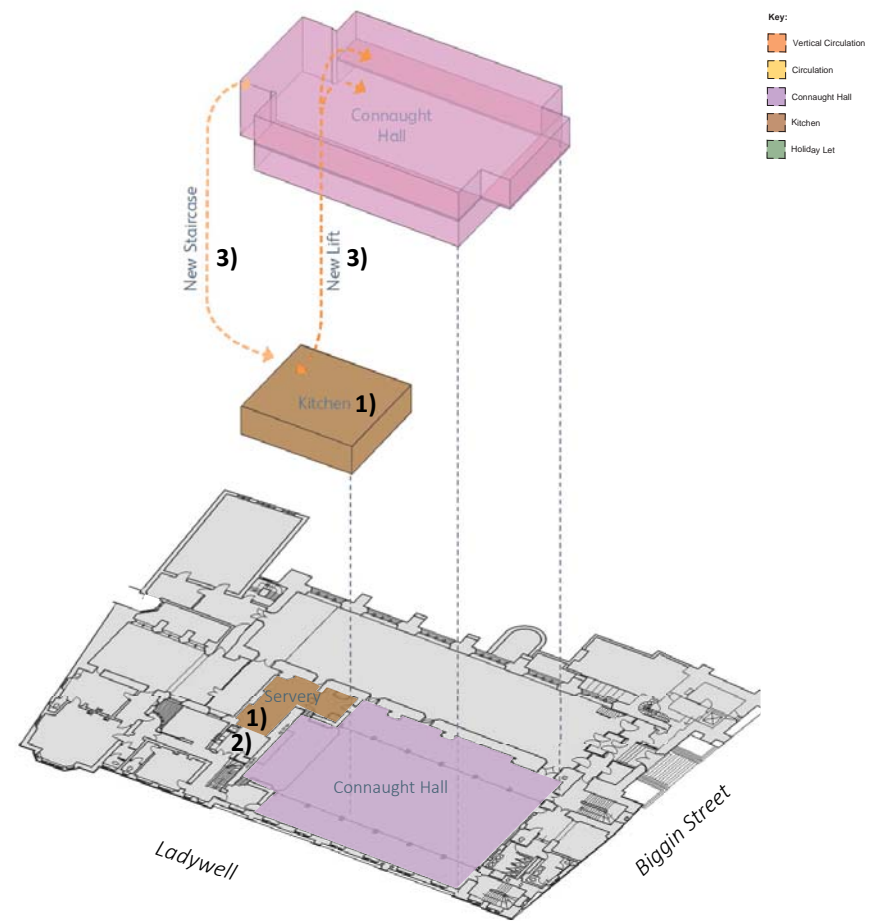
Proposal: Plan of Lower Ground Floor showing new entrance, lobby and facilities. Photos by Matt Emmett.



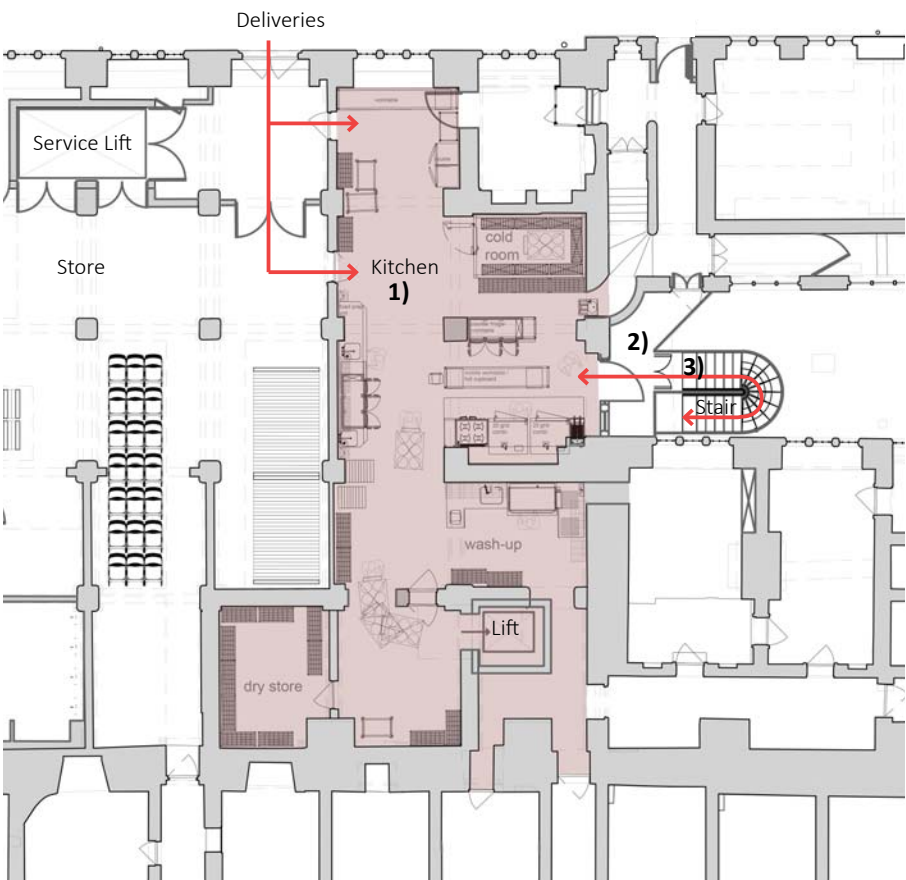
## Maison Dieu - Proposal for the Kitchen & Served

The proposals for the new kitchen and back of house areas seek to achieve the following improvements;

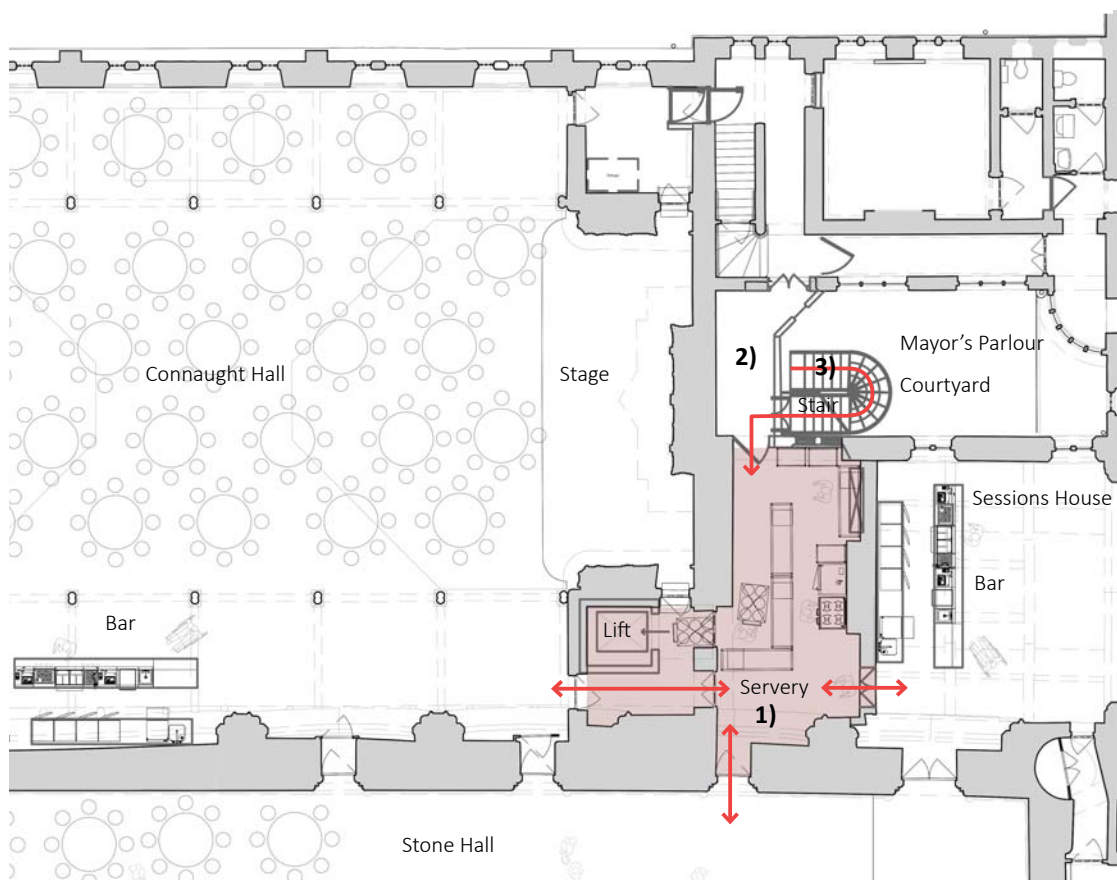
- 1) Improved and more efficient catering and hospitality facilities to increase capacity.
- 2) Removal of low grade extension from Mayor's Parlour courtyard and reinstatement of lost windows and other original features.
- 3) Improved circulation links to and between the kitchen and the served areas.
- 4) Improved energy consumption and environmental performance.



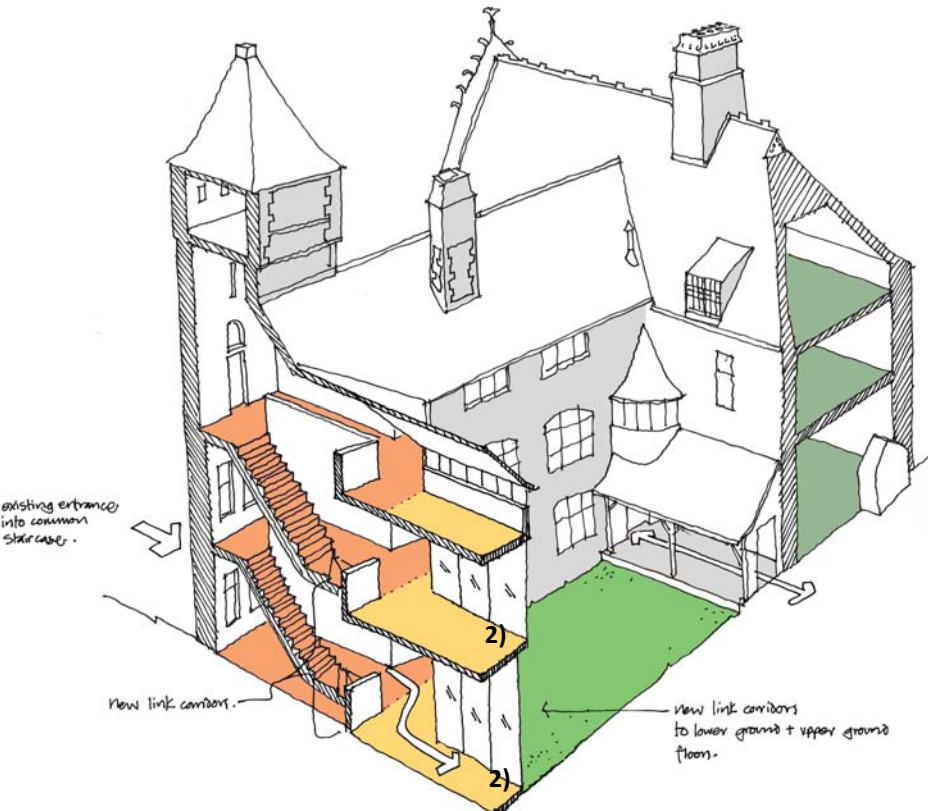
Proposal: Diagrammatic plan showing the position of the served at Upper Ground Floor level with the kitchen located on the floor below.



Proposal for Lower Ground Floor: Improved kitchen facilities and circulation routes.



Proposal for Upper Ground Floor: Improved served facilities and circulation routes.



Early hand sketch showing the reinstated Burges circulation link.



3D view showing the new staircase connecting the kitchen to the served.



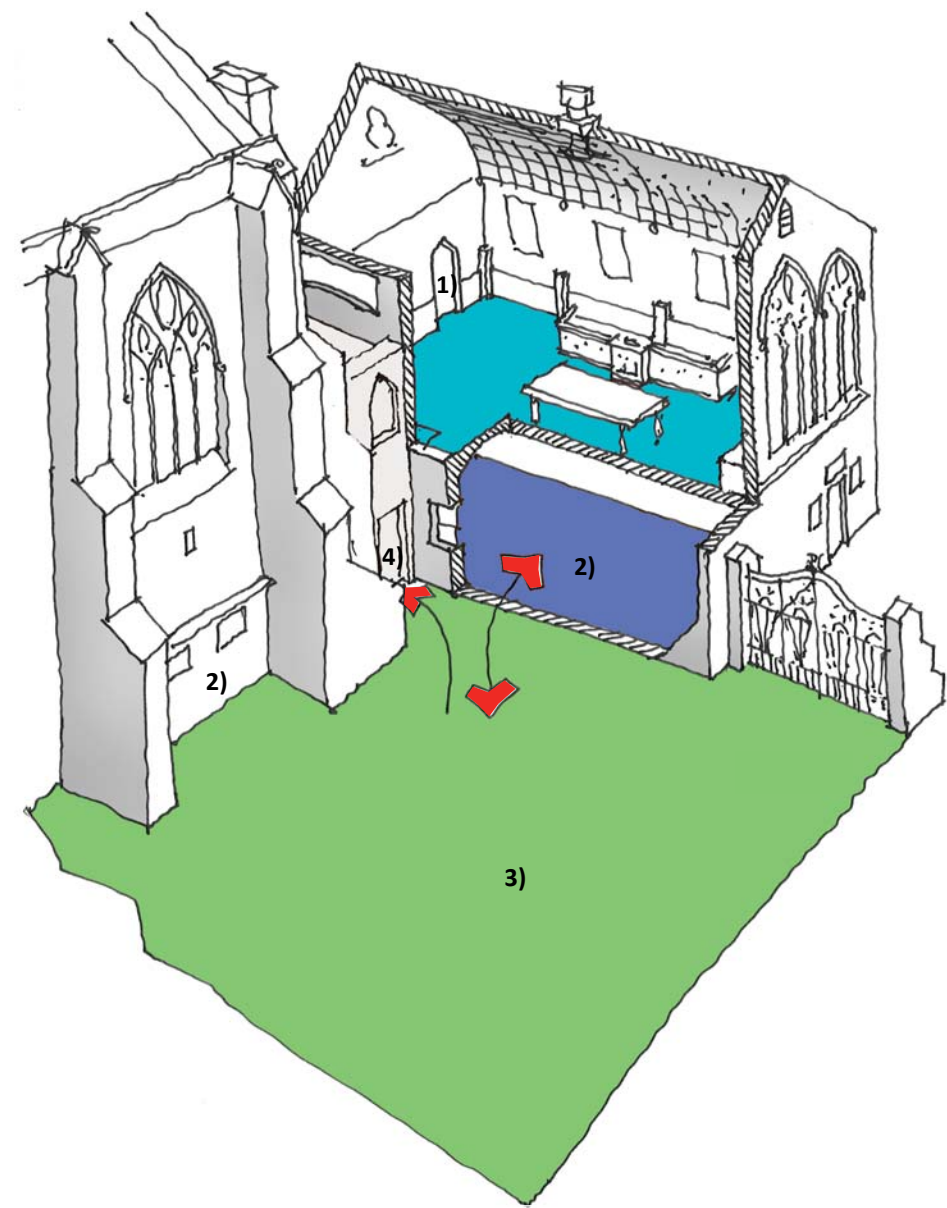




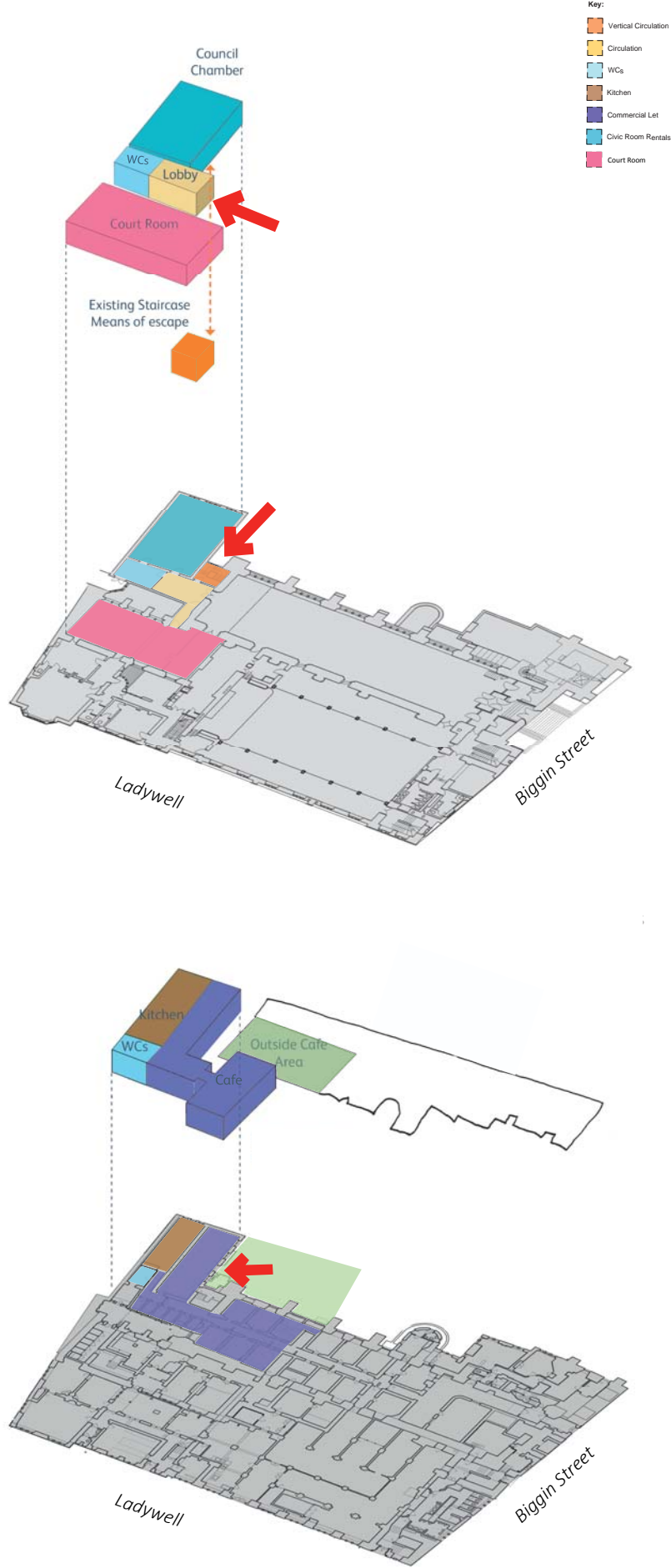
Maison Dieu - Proposal for the Chamber & former VIC

The proposed interventions to the Council Chamber and former Visitor Information Centre (VIC) areas seek to achieve the following;

- 1) Providing additional W.C. facilities within the building directly accessible from the Council Chamber suite.
- 2) Proposed use of currently underused spaces in the former VIC and former holding cells for use as a cafe with its own independent W.C.'s and kitchen facilities.
- 3) Proposed use of external green space by the new cafe.
- 4) Improved circulation links to and between spaces with the introduction of a new door to improve access and escape routes to the building.



Early hand sketch showing proposals for the Council Chambers & Ex-VIC areas.



Proposal: Diagrammatic Lower Ground Floor plan showing the Ex-VIC and cells as a proposed cafe use.



Stone Hall from Bishops Walk, Ex-Visitor Information Centre and holding cells.



Photos by Matt Emmett.



## Maison Dieu - Proposal for the interiors

### The interior decoration of the Victorian Spaces

William Burges’s vision for the interiors of the Connaught Hall and the Mayor’s Parlour consisted of highly decorative painted schemes which included geometric designs and detailed floral motifs in a rich palette of colours directly applied to walls and ceilings. The rich decor created a highly atmospheric Gothic feel to the Victorian rooms, tying these in with the medieval parts of the building complex.

Over time, the Gothic Revival style went out of fashion, and this, added to the costs and effort to maintain the intricate painted schemes, was overcome by covering over Burges’s original designs. Although some areas have been lost, many of the original painted schemes have survived to this day, hidden beneath layers of modern paint and wallpaper.

Dover Town Hall is significant from both a historic and architectural perspective. It was the last built work by acclaimed architect William Burges and is also a great example of a civic building in the Gothic Revival style.

As part of the proposed works a series of studies have been undertaken to determine the condition and location of the original painted schemes to walls and ceilings. Hirst Conservation are historic paint specialists who have been carrying out paint analysis trials over several months. These trials have revealed areas of the original painted scheme as well as discovering several additional layers that were made over the top.

The proposals for the restoration and representation of the painted schemes are currently under development, but in principle these seek to largely restore the interiors to Burges’s vision with the intention of bringing the building back to its original Gothic splendour.



Before: Historic photo of the interior of the Connaught Hall.



After: Visual of the interior of the Connaught Hall.



Work in progress: Uncovering work in the Connaught Hall.



Before: Current condition of the Mayor’s Parlour.



After: Exposed decorative ceiling in the Mayor’s Parlour.



After: Visual of Burges’s decoration in the Mayor’s Parlour.



Work in progress: Uncovering work.