

THE STRATFIRE PROJECT

No. 20 Chapel Street, Stratford-upon-Avon Documentary History (pe-dendro version)

1. In 1553 Stratford-upon-Avon became an incorporated borough and, under letters patent issued by Edward VI, the newly-appointed Corporation was granted the properties in the town previously held by the suppressed Guild of the Holy Cross. This was principally to provide the new borough council with an income to support the provision of a school and almshouses, earlier the responsibility of the Guild. These properties included the building occupying the site of today's No. 20 Chapel Street.
2. Early tenants of the property can be deduced from the Guild rentals. These included John Street, the elder, a weaver, who is recorded at the property from 1446 to 1458, followed by his son, John, also a weaver, from 1460 to 1469. He died soon afterwards, to be followed by his widow, in occupation in 1472. Her successor, John Bragg (1474-5) was a weaver as, presumably, was Patrick Weaver (1477-80). His family remained tenants until the early sixteenth century, pursuing the same trade.
3. There is then a break in the rentals, though a Richard Marshall occurs in 1537. When, in 1553, the Corporation took over the freehold, Thomas son of Robert Wainwright was the tenant and his successor was the painter, Richard Spooner (1560-65), granted a 41-year lease in 1563. This lease had been assigned to the schoolmaster, Walter Roche by 1574.
4. At the time of the 1594/5 fires there is some indication of disruption. By that date the lease of 1563 had come into the hands of Richard Bradley whose sub-tenant for the year 1594 was Francis Smith, junior. The following year he had been replaced by John Tomlins. But in July 1596, there is also a record that Richard Bradley and Elizabeth his wife assigned to John Combe for £15 Spooner's lease of 1563.
5. Bradley and his wife Elizabeth, when involved in four cases at the court of record, are cited as the executors of Humphrey Brace, d. May 1591. His widow had married Bradley by February 1594. Amongst Humphrey Brace's debts listed in his will is £15 owing to John Combe. The assignment of the lease of 20 Chapel St may therefore have been to discharge this debt.
6. Brace, before his death, was also the Corporation's tenant at No.7 Chapel St and Bradley assumed responsibility for paying this rent as well. The property was known to have been affected by the 1594/5 fires. This may be just a coincidence but it might also imply that both No. 7 and No. 20 suffered the same fate. However, these complex links between at least two properties and two families do not establish that No.20 was damaged. Indeed, in the survey of Corporation property in 1599, which records several incidents of fire damage, the house on the site of No. 20 Chapel St is simply featured as:

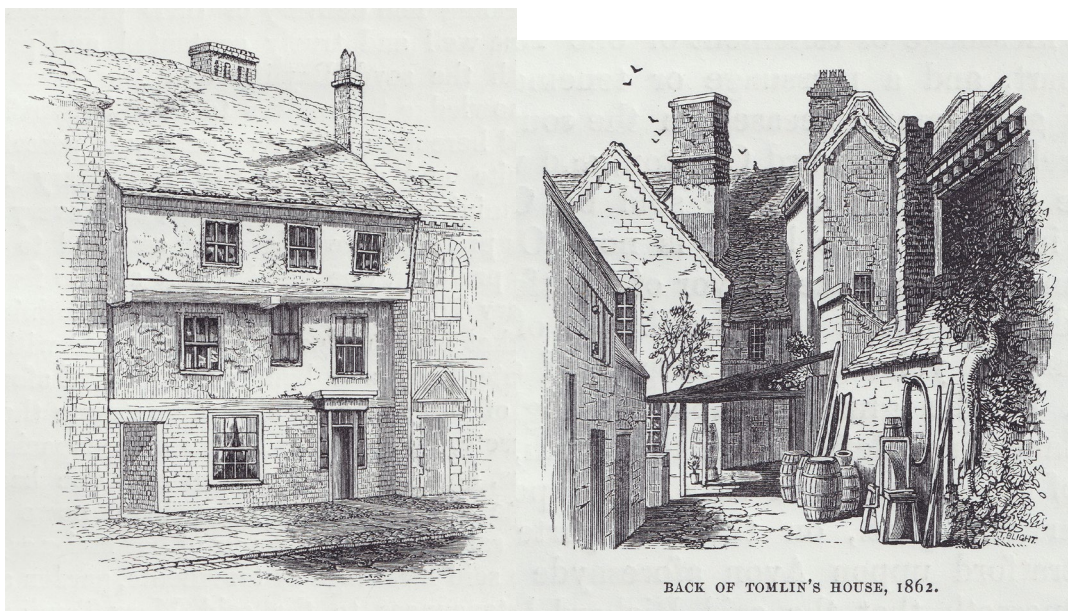
John Tomlins, a tenemente, in the strete side, ii baies tiled, from the stret house to the garden v baies thatched, his garden in length about xvi yardes. In the old buildinge on Juli Shawes yarde [No. 21] there is a collar poste broke & Silles wantinge and an ill gutter.

{Defec': warninge must be geven for these defaultes accordinge to his lease.}

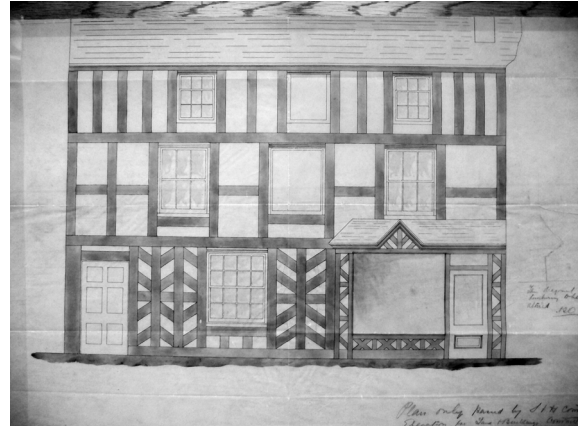
7. John Tomlins was a tailor and continued to pay a rent of 13s.4d. to the Corporation until his death around September 1608. His burial is not recorded in Stratford but the business was taken over by his widow Mary who was granted a new lease in 1619. She died after 1630, by which time she was listed as one of the Corporation's tenants to allow their property 'to remayne out of repaire & to Fall into decaye', though like her husband before her she was not buried in Stratford.
8. She was followed as principal tenant by her son Henry, also a tailor, born in September 1593. In 1619, Mary had been granted a 31-year lease of the premises and by 1646 her son Henry negotiated a new lease. If the state of Mary's property can be taken at face value, here was an opportunity for the Corporation to see that repairs were carried out. It was therefore minuted on 19 February that Henry Tomlins shall have a new lease if he 'newe build the forefront'. The lease, sealed on 10 June added: 'providedthat the said Henry Tomlins .. at his owne proper Costs & Charges within the term of Sixe years next insuing shall & will build, erect & Sett up a good and sufficient new building for a forefront to the said Messuage or Tenement on the Street side thereof, And the same so builded, erected & Set up with the residue of the said Messuage or tenement ... he shall reedify, uphold, maintain and keep in by and with all manner of necessary reparations'. Moreover, the 46-year lease had opened with the statement that t he had already incurred 'great charges ... in the erecting and Setting up of back roomths and buildinge to the said Messuage or Tenement'.
9. Tomlins died in 1654 and it is fortunate that he left a detailed will, accompanied by an inventory. The latter records a hall, a parlour, a 'greene' chamber, and a kitchen, probably on the ground floor, a room over the parlour, a chamber over the kitchen and a gallery. The will confirms the existence of a chamber over the kitchen, left to his wife Jane, with a chamber above that, and the use of the 'Kichine stayers' to access them, and of the pump in the yard. His lease of the house itself was left to his youngest (and under-aged) son Henry.
10. Henry 's widow Jane lived for a further ten years. If she made a will, it has not survived but there is an inventory, dated 1664, of her possessions in the hall, the chamber over the hall, the parlour, the chamber over the parlour, the kitchen and the chamber over the kitchen.
11. Jane's leasehold interest in her late husband's 46-year lease had some years to run and the Corporation tenant after her death in 1664 was her son Henry Tomlins until 1673. He was followed by William Barker, a brazier, who lived there until 1688. He was granted a new lease in 1689 by which time Richard Bromley is named as a sub-tenant. He was also a tailor suggesting some sort of relationship with the Tomlins family. He remained as occupier until 1697.
12. Subsequent Corporation leases were to Richard Newcombe (1729); Samuel Winter the elder (1774-4), with a note of 'New Sashing and Rough Casting the late Mr Winters House' including the construction of a brewhouse, slaughterhouse, stable in 1785 endorsed on it; Job Archer (1786); and William Southam (1808).
13. The earliest detailed view of the building is a drawing by the young artist, John T. Blight, dating from around 1860 (below). Like most of the town's timber-framed buildings, its frontage by the 1860s had been treated with a coating of plaster or stucco. In 1885 James Callaway submitted plans for a new shop front at No. 20 Chapel Street together with an overall restoration of the frontage (below). His scheme, when it first came before the building committee, was described as 'exposing the old timber work in the front of the house' but from the drawing he

supplied there had clearly been very little thought given to what might actually be discovered when the plaster was removed. The committee was not entirely happy with what looked more like a rebuild of the front wall in 'mock Tudor' and asked Calloway to talk things over with two senior aldermen, Edward Gibbs and William Colbourne. Gibbs was a well-established architect, earlier involved in the restoration of Shakespeare's Birthplace, and of his own house, Ely Place. He evidently managed to persuade Calloway to take a more sympathetic approach, as early photographs make clear (below). Some new timbers had to be introduced – for instance, after the removal of the two central windows – and he was allowed to keep his protruding shop window. But otherwise, what seems to have emerged is Tomlins' much simpler frame of 1646. Close study of the studding reveals traces of the original numbered carpenters' marks.

14. This studding is generally of thin and sometimes irregularly cut timber, quite unlike the solid studding on many of the town's more famous timber-framed buildings erected after the town fires of the 1590s. This might have been simply the result of cost-cutting but it might equally reflect the fact the changes of the 1640s (specified in Para 8) created today's frontage and that from the very start the building was meant to be plastered over. It has been argued that the somewhat earlier Shrieve's House, in Sheep Street, with good strong close-set studding on the ground floor, was constructed at first floor level with more widely spaced, thinner and slightly recessed studding as if to be finished off with a coat of plaster. Perhaps Tomlins had decided on a similar approach.



Blight's drawings from the 1860s.



1885

