

## THE STRATFIRE PROJECT

### The Five Gables

Now part of the Shakespeare Hotel (Nos 14-19 Chapel Street)

#### Documentary History (version 10.6.2024)

1. The documentary history of the ownership of the Shakespeare Hotel has two main threads, one associated with the four-gabled section next to the Town Hall, notionally numbered 13-15, and the other the five-gabled building adjoining, notionally numbered 16-18, and here termed the 'Five Gables'. No. 19, later absorbed into the Shakespeare Hotel, was until then an entirely separate building. This report deals with the Five Gables only.
2. The history of the 'Five Gables' in any detail begins in 1647 as the northerly abuttal to a property on the site of what is now No. 19 Chapel Street. It is there described as the house of John Loach, elsewhere known as John Loach, alias Richardson (ER 2/62).
3. For the earlier period this does at least allow a link to the property in Chapel/Church Street ward for which John Loach was charged a chief rent of 12d. in 1637 (Kent RO, U269/E249/6) and, with less certainty, to an entry, in a 1590 survey of the estates of the late earl of Warwick, for a chief rent of 12d in the same ward due from a property formerly belonging to the former Stratford College (*Minutes & Accounts*, iv, p. 101).
4. This College had been suppressed during the English Reformation and its possessions forfeited to the crown. Over the years these were sold off, generally in batches to speculators, who then sold them on, often to individual townspeople. When the College was suppressed, there were six such properties in Church and Chapel Street ward described as previously held by the College. Attempts to link these to specific sites, however, have proved generally unsuccessful. Only one other of these properties owed a 12d rent and it is here proposed that the Five Gables was one of these, included in a section of the survey covering the east side of Chapel St.
5. The earliest mention of John Loach, alias Richardson, so far traced, occurs in June 1626 when he was admitted to the company of joiners and wheelwrights (BRU 2/2, p. 497). He then married, and by 1634 was father of three children, Nicholas, baptised in June 1628, Frances in 1630, and Rachel in 1634 (*Baptism Register*, pp. 112, 115, 122). In 1631 he was negotiating with the Stratford Corporation for a lease of what is now No. 7 Chapel Street (BRU 2/3, p. 50) but in 1637, as already indicated, he is found as the occupier, if not the owner, of the Five Gables site (Para. 3). The substantial chief rent of 12d for which he was liable is consistent with the footprint of the existing building, defined when the borough was set up, as the width of a burgage into which the street frontages were divided, namely, 3½ perches (18m), each one yielding a chief rent of 12d. The hearth tax returns credit this building with three hearths (*Hearth Tax, 1670*, p. 217).
6. John Loach, alias Richardson, made his will on 11 May 1677, a fortnight before his burial, and it was proved on 22 June (Appleton & Macdonald, *Stratford Wills*, ii, No. 383). An inventory is lacking. His son Thomas (who may be the 'Thomas filius Johannis Loch', baptised in Stratford on 2 April 1637, but by the time of the will living in New England) was left £30 if he returned but John's house in Chapel Street, of which by that time he was clearly the owner, was left to his daughter Frances Holmes (her marriage is not recorded in Stratford), and to her son Richard Holmes, subject only to the payment of £30 if John's son Thomas returned to England. He adds a clause to the effect that if, after payment of his debts, his house, goods and chattels 'did not amount to the summe of Fowerscore & Tenne pounds', then his son Thomas was to have a third share with the remainder passing to Frances Holmes

and her two children. Frances died in May 1686 without making a will (see BRT3/2/89v for the administration of her estate) and in 1698, Richard Holmes is duly noted as the occupier or owner of the house to the north of what is now today's No. 19 (Folger Shakespeare Library, W.b.126). He may be the Richard son of Richard Holmes, baptised in Stratford on 28 August 1653.

7. For the next hundred years, the 'Five Gables' (or at least the southerly part of it) is described as an abuttal to the house now known as No. 19 Chapel St as follows:
  - i) as the house of John Cookes (FSL, W.b.126) in 1723
  - ii) as the house formerly in the tenure of Thomas Vigers and now of Richard Lord (FSL, W.b.126; Z.c.36 ) in 1782
8. John Cookes, twice mayor of the town, died on 5 May 1737 (Bloom, *Shakespeare's a Church*, p. 173). Thomas Vigers, a maltster, had died in 1756 and under his will he devised his real and personal estate to his wife Catherine for life, with reversion to his three brothers and a sister who had married Nicholas Jarrett (DR148/1/246). Vigers was clearly a young man – he had only married four years earlier – and by 1782 the premises he occupied had evidently passed to Richard Lord.
9. This is corroborated to some extent by the payment of the 12d. chief rent due to the lord of the manor (see para. 32). From 1703 to 1734 (ER 1/6; ER 1/133) John Cookes was listed as liable for the payment of this, followed by Benjamin Haynes for the years 1735 to 1756 (ER 1/6). However, from 1769, there are, instead of the single payment of 12d, two of 6d each 'for Vigers' (with payee not otherwise named) and for a tenement late Bradley's but then by John Meacham (ER 1/6) .
10. This would indicate that some sort of division had taken place. The southerly part (i.e. adjoining today's No. 19) was (from the abuttal evidence cited in Para. 7) occupied until his death in 1747 by Thomas Vigers, and perhaps by his family for some time afterwards (reflected in the casual 'for Vigers' in the chief rent accounts). Abuttal evidence, however, indicates that Richard Lord was occupier, if not owner, by 1782 (Para. 6). He died the following year bequeathing his entire estate to his son, John Lord (ER 60/6). Later surviving chief rent accounts record John Lord paying the 6d rent.
11. As for the northerly part of the Five Gables, a draft conveyance of 1788 records its transfer from John Meacham of Stratford, an apothecary, to John Lord (ER 1/108, f. 51). It is further described as a messuage in Chapel Street, formerly occupied by William Masters and now by John Meacham, abutted on the south by a tenement late of Richard Lord and now John Lord, and on the north by a tenement late of Hugh Black but now converted into part of the Shakespeare Inn. This would locate it, then, between the Shakespeare Hotel on the north (i.e. the 'Four Gables') and the house of John Lord which he had recently inherited from his father Richard (above, Para. 10). The conveyance also describes Meacham's house as having been purchased by him from the late Dionysius Bradley and that it was formerly part of the estate of Benjamin Haynes, tying up with evidence cited in Para. 9 . More surprisingly, it goes on to say that since the purchase, the premises had been 'almost entirely taken down and rebuilt'.
12. Thus the two tenements which for a time had made up the Five Gables were re-united in the single ownership of John son of Richard Lord. Of the intermediary owners of Meacham's house, there is frustratingly little mention. Benjamin Haynes died intestate in 1768, more or less consistent with his payment of the 12d. chief rent up to at least 1756 (ER 1/6: there is then a break in the rentals until 1769 and see above, Para. 9). Dionysius Bradley, a well-documented Stratford attorney, who died in 1771, could well have been involved in the break-up of Haynes's estate but conveyances from Haynes (or his executors) to Bradley and then from Bradley to Meacham have not been traced. However, the earliest surviving land tax assessment for Stratford of 1775 confirms Meacham as the owner of the property, with Mrs Meacham as tenant (WaCRO, QS 77/218/82).

13. The surviving 18<sup>th</sup>-c. poor rate levies broadly reflect these changes. In 1751 Benjamin Haynes was listed as liable for the whole property whereas by 1774 this obligation was shared by John Meacham and Richard (later John) Lord (BRT 8/9-10). John Meacham continued to be assessed until 1789.
14. Later records confirm the continuation of this division, albeit under John Lord's single ownership. The chief rentals of 1791 to 1801 (ER 1/137) record payments of 6d. each by John Lord, who lived, as he declares in his will of 1822, in Meacham's house, and, by a succession of his tenants in the tenement to the south. By the time John Lord made his will (see below), this had been let to Mary Taylor, the former owner of the 'Four Gables'.
15. In 1822 John Lord left the freehold of the Five Gables to his wife Ann for life and then to his cousin Elizabeth Lord of Shipston (ER 60/9). On her death in 1835 it passed to her sister Mary Bellamy and her daughters. In 1887, trustees for the family sold the freehold to Charles Justins, the owner of the 'Four Gables' and to whom the northerly part of the Five Gables had been let since at least 1880.
16. In the early nineteenth century stucco had been applied to the street frontage and this had been removed by the 1890s. (**Figs 1, 2, 3**). A more precise date for both these operations as yet to be established.

### Dendrochronology

Dendrochronological investigation indicates that the current Five Gables dates from the early 1620s. John Loach, alias Richardson, was thus occupying recently rebuilt premises for which, at least by 1637, he was liable to a 12d chief rent. However, he was unlikely to have been the builder as he had not served out his apprenticeship until 1624 (Para. 4). An alternative candidate might be the wealthy woollen draper, William Walford. He was a major property owner in Stratford by the early 1620s and his will of 1624 lists over twenty freehold properties in the town (Appleton & Macdonald, *Stratford Wills*, i, No. 175). Some can be identified, including, in Chapel Street, the Falcon Hotel (Nos 1-3) and No. 22 (Nash's House). Another Chapel Street house, let to a butcher Thomas Griffen, but which until now has not been identified, was amongst the properties bequeathed to his son Richard Walford.

At this period, Chapel Street only contained twenty or so properties and the occupants of nearly all of them are known. This unidentified property, in Griffen's tenure, could perhaps therefore be the Five Gables. When he made his will, Walford was engaged in the rebuilding of what later became the Falcon Hotel as two separate units. He may also have already been responsible for the rebuilding of Nos 19-21 High Street, divided this time into three. The Five Gables may thus be another of his ventures, sold off soon after his death to John Loach but nevertheless also intended from the start to be divided in two. Towards the end of his will Walford included, almost as an afterthought to the bequest to a daughter Katherine of a tenement in Henley Street, that 'my goodes shall build both that house and Griffens'.

Richard Walford, to whom the house was bequeathed, died in 1635 apparently without leaving a will. By 1637 John Loach, as we have seen, was the occupier if not the owner.

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10 June 2024



**Fig. 1: view by James Saunders, 1820s, showing the Five Gables', already plastered over.**



**Fig 2: photograph of the Five Gables from the 1880s showing this plaster still in place**



**Fig 3: photograph of the Five Gables, c. 1895 with the plaster removed**