

THE STRATFIRE PROJECT

No. 21 Chapel Street, Stratford-upon-Avon

Documentary History (version 7.7.2024)

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. 21 Chapel Street.
2. Earlier records of the Guild of the Holy Cross, as owners of the freehold before the grant to the Corporation, provide additional information regarding the site from at least 1446. Its earliest known tenant was William Stanford, a baker, who is recorded there until 1466, followed by William Trewman (occupation unknown) paying rent in 1468 and 1469, and then by John Tyler, a parchment maker (from 1472 to 1491), William cardmaker (1499-1500), and Robert Lock (1530-7) (BRT 1/3/121-5, 127-44, 147, 150-1).
3. On 17 December 1545 the Guild of the Holy Cross leased the building to Thomas Fyll, a glover, lying between a tenement of William Phillips (No. 22) and a tenement of the Guild in the tenure of Robert Sadler (No. 20) for sixty-one years at an annual rent of 12 shillings (BRT 1/2/608). An endorsement on his lease makes it clear that it was assigned to Robert Mills, apparently a brewer, was paying this same rent to the Stratford Corporation, to which the freehold of the property (and all other holdings of the Guild), had been transferred in 1553 (Para. 1; *Minutes & Accounts*, i, 111).
4. Robert Mills was buried on 31 January 1563/4 (*Burials*, p. 9) and, from the evidence of his will made seven days earlier, he had clearly taken responsibility for the young children of Thomas Fyll deceased, including the cost of clothing Thomas Fyll junior before sending him to London, probably to serve an apprenticeship (*Stratford Wills*, i, No. 44). Whether this link between the two families was a family or business one is not at present clear. He names an under-age son William but his residuary estate went to his wife Benet. His inventory lists belongings in the hall, the chamber, the kitchen and the yard (*Stratford-upon-Avon Inventories*, i, No. 22).
5. At some point the lease was assigned to Robert Gibbs, a yeoman, who is first occurs as paying the 12 shilling rent for the Chapel Street house in March 1573/4 (*Minutes & Accounts*, ii, 81). Early in 1582 the house was described as 'sufficiently repaired save a little outhouse lacketh tiling & a piece of a bay is thatched which was tiled before his time' (*Minutes & Accounts*, iii, 107). A survey made a week later records that Gibbs held the property under the lease made to Thomas Fyll, with a note added later that July Shaw was the new tenant (BRU 15/7/107).
6. When, in 1591, with Fyll's sixty-one-year lease of 1545 nearing its end, Gibbs negotiated for a new lease of the property which was sealed in September of that year (BRU 8/4/5). It was for thirty-one years at the former rent. In October 1594 Gibbs was appointed one of the two borough serjeants-at-mace but was buried on 14 June 1596 (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, 27; *Burials*, 55).
7. Robert 1 Gibbs was a man of some substance and in November and December 1595, during a period of food shortage, he had been bound over in £120 not to make any further malt or to

allow it to be 'delivered out of his house' (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, 51). His holdings were recorded as 25 quarters of malt and 10 quarters of barley. Given that only 10 quarters were his, but that his household comprised '4 persons', he was ordered 'to bring unto the market at Stratford weekly six strykes of malt' (WaCRO, CR 1886/2663, f. 5).

8. Gibbs's payment of the 12-shilling rent for his house was listed in the chamberlain's account submitted on 9 January 1596 (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, 74). However, also amongst the Corporation's expenses over the previous twelve months, is a payment of 9 shillings to Robert Gibbs for his loss of twelve strikes of barley (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, 80). The next entry in the account is for 3s. 4d. 'by the 3 strikes of beans the which I payed him by Mr Baylyes & the companies appointment'. The inference is that, Gibbs may have suffered losses in one of the 1594/95 fires and that, as one of the Corporation's officers, he had been compensated for his losses.
9. Robert Gibbs, buried on 14 June 1596 (*Burials*, p. 55), left no extant will, nor is there a surviving inventory of his possessions but on 29 April 1597 the Council agreed that 'Julinus Shawe shall have a newe lease of the howsse that was graunted to Roberte Gybbs For as many yeres as are yett to Come in the former lease, for the Fyne of 20s. only for that the former lease was voyd by the sellinge of yt wthout license of the balyff & burgesses' (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, p. 101). The 'former lease', presumably the one granted to Gibbs in September 1594, would have contained a standard clause against any assignment, without the Corporation's consent.
10. Little is known of Gibbs's family. With no surviving will, and very limited evidence of the baptism of any of his children, Gibbs himself, or those responsible for his estate after his death had presumably sold the lease of No. 21 Chapel Street to an unnamed third party without consent, making the lease invalid. Alternatively, there may have been no intermediary sale, Shaw purchasing the lease directly from Gibbs., or his administrators after his death.
11. July son of Rafe Shaw was baptised on 2 September 1571 (*Baptisms*, p 71). Rafe was a wool driver, with a house in Henley Street which in his will of March 1592 he had left to his wife for life, or until any second marriage, with reversion to his second son, William, then under age (*Stratford Wills*, i, No. 92). Rafe had already given to July all his 'stock of money, wool and other things' to which he now added £17 10s. 0d. to bring the total up to £40. The value of Rafe's chattels, as recorded in his inventory, totalled £61 6s. 8d. and confirm his status as a man of considerable substance (*Stratford Inventories*, i, No. 65).
12. While his mother was alive, July would have been able to remain in the Henley Street property and in December 1595 he was said, in the corn enquiry, to have been storing 18½ quarters of malt and 10 quarters of barley (WaCRO, CR 1886/2663, f. 2). However, in October 1594 his mother married for a second time (*Marriages*, 17), forfeiting her life interest in the house. With his brother William due to come into his inheritance in 1598, July clearly had good reason for looking for a new home, hence his move to Chapel St in 1597.
13. July's lease for 31 years was sealed on 11 May 1597 and in a survey of Corporation property, taken in April 1599, it is described as 'a tenemente, in the strete, 2 baies tiled, on the backside a barne of 2 baies with either side a depe lentoo thatched. More inward another crosse backhouse of 2 baies thatched; betwne that & the stret house a range of 1 baie thatch & 2 baies tiled & a garden answerable in bredth to the house, in length as John Tomlins', the occupant of No. 20 (BRU 8/4/8; *Minutes and Accounts*, vi, 74). As several other buildings in

this survey are described as having been burnt down or damaged in the fires, this description rules out serious damage – or indeed that it was affected at all.

14. July Shaw lived at the house until his death in 1629. He was elected a capital burgess in 1603, chamberlain in 1610, alderman in 1613 and bailiff in 1615/16 and again in 1627/8 . Twice his lease was re-negotiated, first in 1613 when a further term of thirty-two years was granted, and then in 1626 for a generous sixty-one years, on both occasions subject only to the old annual rent of 12 shillings (BRU 8/4/15, 19). In this second lease, the dimensions of the property are given: 26ft along the street, 180ft. in depth and with a rear boundary of 30ft.
15. Shaw made his will on 1 November 1628 (*Stratford Wills*, i, No. 200) and the generous lease he had negotiated for his Chapel St house was bequeathed to his wife Ann for life, or until her re-marriage, with reversion to John Bromley ‘which I keep’ (July and Ann were childless). There is no inventory arising out of this will, though probate was granted on 4 July 1629. His widow Ann, who had a life interest in the property, was buried soon after, on 25 October 1630, with an inventory taken the same day (*Burials*, 118; *Stratford Wills*, i, No 202; *Stratford Inventories*, No. 187). This shows the house then comprised, at a minimum, a hall, a little chamber, ‘small rooms & backside’ (including by implication a kitchen), and over the hall, ‘a great chamber’. The items valued, at £76 19s. 4d., exceeded those of her father-in-law by some £15 (Para. 11). Like her husband, she included mention of John Bromley ‘whom I keep’, who would inherit the lease of the family home when he came of age.
16. John Bromley is thought to be the John son of John Bromley the younger baptised on 28 December 1617 who became fatherless on 27 April 1621 and possibly motherless in the same year (*Baptisms*, 93; *Burials*, 100). The reason for his adoption by the childless Shaws is not known but he would have come of age in 1638. This is slightly at odds with the entry a year earlier that John Bromley had been charged with a chief rent of 6d. for a tenement in Chapel Street (Kent Archives Centre, U269/249/6), but he took over payment of the 12s. rent to the Corporation from at least 1640 until his death in 1655. His widow Elizabeth continued with this payment until she died in June 1677. In her will of 16 May 1677 she bequeathed the lease of the house to her daughter Susanna Bromley who died in September 1693 (*Stratford Wills*, ii, No. 385).
17. In 1674, Elizabeth Bromley, by now widowed, surrendered the former lease of No. 21 Chapel St and negotiated a new one securing the family’s tenancy in what was now described as ‘all that messuage or tenement in Chapel Street in her occupation between the tenement of Mr Thomas Nash on the south; the tenement in the occupation of William Baker, brazier, on the north; and the said street on the west (BRU 8/4/24). This lease was accompanied by measurements of the plot, confirming it to be the same property as leased earlier (Para. 14).
18. The lease is not specifically referred to in Susanna Bromley’s will (*Stratford Wills*, ii, No. 482; *Stratford Inventories*, ii, No. 313) but evidently it was assigned to Thomas Burman, a dyer, who in 1714 surrendered it in exchange for new lease to run for forty-one years of ‘all that messuage or tenement with appurtenances in Chapel Street heretofore in the tenure or occupation of Peter Frensham but now in the tenure or occupation of Elizabeth Dixon and Mary Dixon ... bounded by a messuage or tenement of Katherine Baker, widow, on the north part and a messuage or tenement in the possession of Madam Barbara Ingram, widow, on the south part’ (BRU 8/4/28). This lease was accompanied by measurements of the plot (as in Para. 14) confirming it to be the same property. Burman did in 1724.

19. On 2 November 1754 the Corporation leased to Mary Bird of Welford, a widow, for 41 years 'all that messuage or tenement with appurtenances in Chapel Street formerly in the tenure or occupation of one Peter Frensham since in the tenure or occupation of Elizabeth Nixon and Mary Nixon and now of Sarah Coleman, widow, bounded by a messuage or tenement of Elizabeth Newcombe on the north part thereof and a messuage or tenement of Grace Hatton on the south part thereof' (BRU 8/4/36). This lease was accompanied by the same measurements as given above.

20. In July 1790 a another lease was negotiated, this time between the Corporation and Charles Henry Hunt of Stratford-upon-Avon, again for 41 years, of a house formerly in the tenure or occupation of Mary Nixon and Elizabeth Nixon, since of Job Archer and now of Hunt himself, bounded by a messuage or tenement of the said Job Archer on the north part and a messuage or tenement of C.H. Hunt on the south part. However, this policy of subletting had clearly taken its toll on the fabric of the building and it was therefore made a condition of the lease that Hunt 'shall and will within the space of one year from the commencement of the lease take down the said messuage and shall and will lay out and expend the full sum of £60 in building and reedifying the same upon or near to the spot or ground where the same now stands in a good and substantial manner and produce vouchers [etc] for the expenditure' (BRU 8/42). This was quickly done, as far as the front part of the present building is concerned (**Fig. 1**) although, to the rear the fabric of the original building was largely retained, captured in a mid-19th-century drawing by John Blight (**Fig. 2**). Charles reopened the building as a bank but following his bankruptcy the concern was taken over by a larger concern, Battersbee and Morris (BRU 8/4/44).

Robert Bearman
7/7/2024

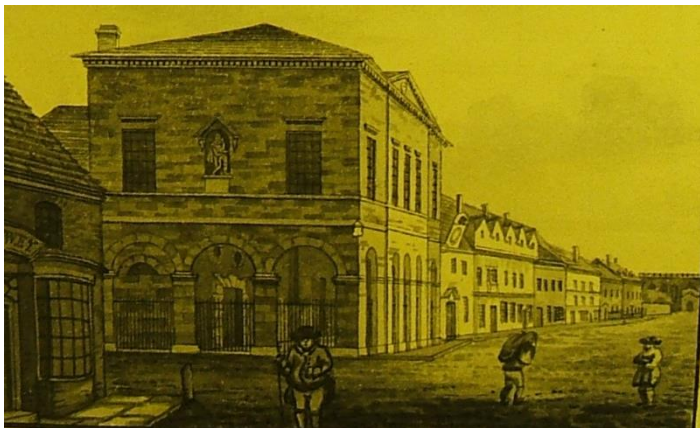


Fig 1.

Watercolour by James Saunders of east side of Chapel St, c. 1820, showing (as the penultimate building at the far end) the rebuilt No. 21 Chapel St



Fig. 2

Rear of No. 21 Chapel St, by J.T. Blight, c. 1850