

THE STRATFIRE PROJECT

Nos 23/24 High Street (The Tudor House), Stratford-upon-Avon

Documentary history (version 1.1.2026)

No surviving title deeds earlier than 1722 have been identified for buildings on the site of Nos 23/24 High St. For the earlier period, or at least from 1650, we are largely dependant on the wills of successive members of the Woolmer family to track the descent of the freehold. John Woolmer can further be shown to have been in possession of Nos 23/4 High St from 1611 on the evidence of a rent charge of 6d. due on the property. This was originally granted to the Guild of the Holy Cross in the 1470s and the right to it passed in 1553 to the borough of Stratford on its incorporation. It was known as Torperley's rent (see Appendix) and may have originated in a shop. The payees of this rent are therefore the principal source for outlining the descent of the freehold of Nos 23/4 until the early seventeenth century.

Dendrochronological investigation has not established a date for any major rebuilding after the 1594/5 fires, and thereby to any of the families known to have had historical links with the building. As No. 25 and No. 26 are known to have suffered in the 1590s, the expectation would be that Nos 23/4 would have been affected too. However, there is no direct documentary evidence of this. There is only the confusion over the payment of the 6d. rent charge between the date of the fires if 1594/5 and 1616 to suggest rebuilding work (Paras 12-16 below).

1. A building on the site of Nos 23/4 High Street is first described in any detail in the inquisition *post mortem* held on 1 November 1498, following the death of Hugh Clopton two years earlier (TNA, C142/12/30). Amongst his properties was listed 'a tenement in High Street on the corner of the Corn Market in which John Balamy lives' (*uno tenemento iacente in High Strete super corneram de le Corne market in quo Johannes Balamy inhabitat*). This tenement, and others, are then listed as having been demised to Roger Paget and Elizabeth his wife for the life of Roger, with reversion to the heirs of Hugh Clopton. That this entry relates to premises on the site of Nos 23/4 is confirmed by a rental of 1498, particularising payments to the Guild of the Holy Cross by its leaseholders. One of these properties (on the site of today's No. 25 High Street) is recorded as abutted on one side by a tenement of Roger Paget in which John Balamy then dwelt (BRT 1/2/530).
2. This links to an entry in a later inquisition *post mortem* of 1521, following the death of William Clopton (Hugh Clopton's great-nephew and heir) for 'a burgage in High Street with one head abutting towards the estate (*fundum*) of the Master of the Guild of the Holy Cross on the north [i.e. today's No. 25] and with the other head abutting towards the highway called Ely Street on the south' (Bellew, *Shakespeare's Home*, pp. 73-4).
3. This neat account of the situation in c. 1500 – of a property belonging to the Clopton family but leased for life to Roger Paget – is further confirmed by other references in accounts of the neighbouring property (today's No. 25). Being a Guild property it is

recorded in successive rentals as having access (as it still has) to Ely Street by means of a passageway across the back of Nos 23/4. This is referred to on several occasions after 1473 as accessing Ely Street at the end (*ad finem*) of Paget's tenement (BRT 1/3/139-41, 143-4, 146).

4. On the other hand, the situation is complicated by the existence of a shop on this corner site. At some point, the Guild of the Holy Cross had been granted a 6d. annual charge from this shop, a sum that is therefore recorded in surviving Guild rentals. It is clear from its description that it adjoined today's No. 25, being described as such on several occasions. When, in the 1470s, the shop was merged with the main building on the corner, subsequent payments of the 6d. charge serve to identify the owner or principal tenant of Nos 23/4.
5. This became known as 'Torperley's rent' after late fifteenth-century references to its origin. In particular, in 1472, 1475 and 1476, the payment was made by Richard Torperley (BRT 1/3/132, 134-5). However, in 1474 Torperley made an arrangement with Roger Paget by which the shop passed into Paget's possession (Folger Shakespeare Library, V.b.88, Clopton cartulary). This was achieved through a long lease of the shop from Torperley to Paget at an annual rent of 4 shillings but on the condition that if Torperley purchased 'grownd in Stratford to byld Apon' and if Paget agreed to 'delyver to the seyd Richard Torperly in tymber to his buyldyng to the valewe of vi markes' then Paget would acquire 'the seyd Shope to hym hys heyres & to his assigns for ever'.
6. For two years, 1475 and 1476, Torperley continued to pay the 6d. rent charge to the Guild even though Paget was said to be in tenure but in 1477 it was Paget who paid the charge, implying that the arrangement of 1474 had been implemented and that the shop had become merged with main building on the corner of Ely St (BRT 1/3/136).
7. In the 1474 agreement (Para. 5) the 'Shope' is described as 'in lenthe xix fote & in brede ix fote' lying in High Street 'bytwixt a place Called Magottes & a place of the gyldes in Stratford'. The second of these abuttals is represented by today's No. 25 High Street owned by the Guild. 'Magottes', the first abuttal, derived its name from Thomas Maggott who, with his wife and son, joined the Guild in 1431/2 and who was the occupier of the house on the corner of High Street and Ely Street between 1446 and 1463 (BRT 1/3/121-5: see also Appendix).
8. Paget paid the rent charge until his death around 1500 (BRT 1/3/148) with abuttal evidence confirming that he also continued to hold the main house on the corner of Ely Street. On his death the freehold reverted to the Clopton family and, as recorded in Para. 3, William Clopton was still in possession in 1521. But thereafter there are few surviving Guild property rentals and we know only that the rent charge originating in the shop was due from a house in the tenure of Richard Machin in 1530, of John (or Joan) Dixon in 1546, and of Christopher Smith in 1561, by which time it was paid not to the Guild but to the Corporation (BRT 1/3/150, 152; *Minutes & Accounts*, i, p. 111).
9. In 1574, Henry Rogers, a butcher, was the occupier of the property from which the Torperley annual charge was due (*Minutes & Accounts*, ii, p. 82). He was buried on 27

February 1597 two years after the Stratford fires. Apart from his link to High Street through his payment of the 'Torperley rent', he was reported, as a resident of High Street, during the 1595 corn enquiries, as a man with a household of twelve persons, who 'useth besides his butchers trade the trade of vyctuallinge and utterethe by buyinge weekelye vi strykes of mallte.' (WaCRO, CR 1886/2663, f. 12). More revealing is the 'Torperley' charge of 6d., last recorded as due from his widow Elizabeth, as late as January 1610 (*Minutes & Accounts*, vii, p. 122). She is often listed as Elizabeth Rogers 'of the Bull Ring' (i.e. the crossroads at the south end of High St) to distinguish her from a namesake who lived in Sheep Street (e.g. *Minutes & Accounts*, vi, p. 349).

10. On 11 March 1597 an inventory was taken of the goods of the late Henry Rogers listing objects to be found in the hall, the parlour and the tavern on the ground floor. On the first floor was a little chamber over the hall, a middle chamber and a chamber over the parlour. Topping this was a loft, and outside was a stable (*Stratford Inventories*, i, No. 96).
11. Henry and Elizabeth had five sons and five daughters though two had died in infancy. After Henry's death his widow, Elizabeth, evidently continued with the tavern business, being initially fined for unauthorised activities but later securing a licence. Lewis Rogers, her son, was also fined for licencing offences but was listed as a butcher (e.g., *Minutes & Accounts*, vi, pp. 191-2, 221-3, 239-41). However, Lewis Rogers, in a deleted entry, last occurs as paying the rent charge early in 1611 (*Minutes & Accounts*, vii, p. 72). Whether the family continued to occupy the site of Nos 23/4 remains in doubt but they are not known to have lived elsewhere in High Street and the reference to Elizabeth in 1608 as of the Bull Ring (Para. 9) certainly suggests they continued to live at the south end of the street.
12. In view of the documentary evidence that the next-door house (on the site of today's No. 25) had to be rebuilt after the fires of 1594/5, the question arises as to whether this would have affected Nos 23/4 as well. Of this there is no documentary evidence but a continuity of occupation seems fairly certain. Henry Rogers's inventory, the taking of which on 11 March 1597 would have required access to the property (Para.10), contains no indication of any major disruption.
13. On the other hand, some confusion does seem to have arisen over the payment of the Torperley charge of 6d., originating in the shop (as described in Para. 7) but which in the late fifteenth century had come into the possession of the freeholders (or their tenants) of the property on the site of today's Nos 23/4. This charge can be traced in the few surviving Corporation rentals of late sixteenth-century date. In 1574 Henry Rogers, as stated above, had paid this charge on the freehold but in the next surviving accounts, for 1586 or 1587, allowance was made for a failure to collect it (*Minutes & Accounts*, iii, p. 165; iv, p. 18). The next surviving rental, of January 1598, does not mention the charge at all and in an accompanying survey, the obligation is entered twice, in different hands, as if there was some uncertainty (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, pp. 131-2). Moreover, from 1599 until 1607, a period during which the Corporation accounts survive on an annual basis, the Torperley charge disappears from the record altogether.
14. On 19 January 1607 the 6d. rent charge resurfaces on a house in High Street owned (or tenanted) by Alderman Henry Walker, which he did not pay (*Minutes & Accounts*, vi, 401, 403). However, on the same day the Council ordered that 'a Lease shalbe made to

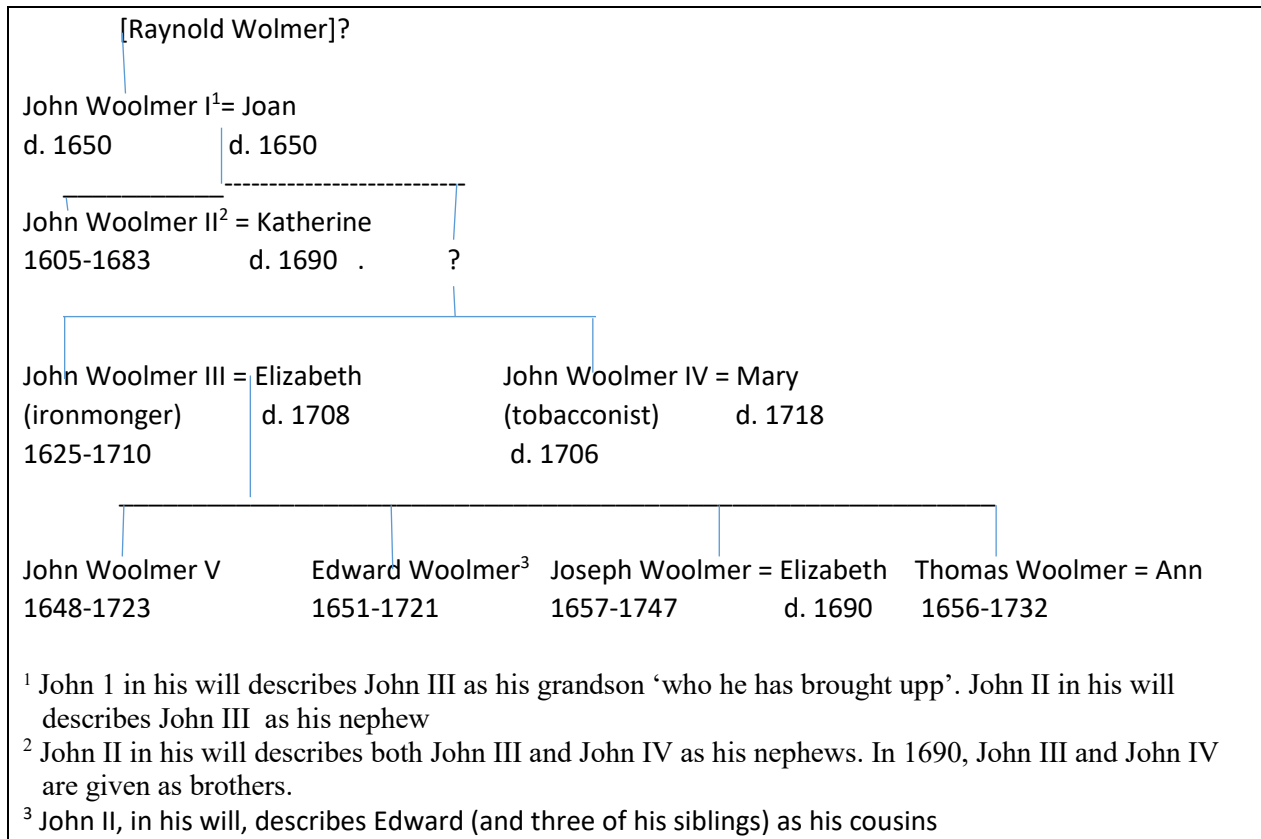
Roger Smyth of the howses sometyme in Thomas Teggs occupacion & burnt downe [i.e. today's No. 25]; & in respect of the sayd Roger's great charge in reedifyeinge, he is to have yt from michaelmas last for 21 yeres at 24s yerely rent; And the Fyne to be only 3s. 4d. in respect of his great Charge in buyldynge & the rent for Terplys heires' (*Minutes and Accounts*, vi, 395). This would suggest that Smith, the Corporation's tenant of today's No. 25, was about to take over the responsibility for the payment of the Torperley charge on the house next door.

15. However, for the next two years the 6d. charge is not accounted for and in 1610 there is uncertainty as to whether it was paid or not. But in the chamberlain's account submitted in January 1611 (covering the previous twelve months) the charge of 6d., previously listed as due from Elizabeth Rogers and then Henry Walker, is now described as linked to John Woolmer's house, though it was not paid (*Minutes & Accounts*, vii, pp. 176, 189). Woolmer still declined to pay the 6d., both in 1611 and in the two successive years, but in January 1614, on the chamberlain craving 'allowance for Torpleys heires rent forth of Land in John Wilmore his occupacion in the High Streete', Woolmer agreed to 'graunt unto the Baylyff & the Burgesses of this Boroughe for ever of his owne free guifte, payeable at Michaelmas, vi^d rent' (*Minutes & Accounts*, vii, 303). The Company was so pleased with this offer – thus 'avoydyng of all suites & doubttes' – that it immediately resolved to repay 'to M^r John Wilmore the resayd vi^d yerely rente supposed to be yssueing forth of Torpleys Landes'. However, two years later 'upon sight of the old parchment roll', Woolmer accepted the obligation to pay the 6d. as a charge on his freehold (*Minutes & Accounts*, vii, p. 416).
16. In 1618 the payment is described as due from the property where 'wher M^r Wylmers dwelleth' and the following year the location of this freehold is confirmed as on the corner site: i.e. to the south of the house on the site of today's No. 25 High St and on the east of the rear access into Ely Street (*Minutes and Accounts*, vii, p. 507; BRU 8/9/29). In April 1618, in a parish levy, he was rated at 6s. for a house in High St (*Vestry Minutes Book*, p. 3).
17. John Woolmer, not recorded in Stratford, at least with any certainty, before November 1592, may have been born in Crowle in Worcestershire where he is later recorded as holding property (*Stratford-upon-Avon Wills*, ii, p. 7). In that case he may be the John son of Reynold Wolmar baptised there in 1563. In 1592 Woolmer brought a case in Stratford's court of record against Abraham Sturley who had failed to pay £14 13s. 4d. for twenty-two quarters of malted barley which Woolmer had supplied to him (BRU 12/1/Part 2, p. 192; BRU 12/6, No. 5). In December 1595, in a survey of those holding malt and other grains, he was listed, as head of a household of four people, as holding 'x quarters of mallte' of his own and five quarters belonging to 'one Kerbye of Henley' (WaCRO, CR 1886/2663, f. 3). Another entry in the same survey names him as son-in-law of Thomas Rogers (f. 2). In a later survey of 1598, under Henley Street ward, he was holding twelve quarters of malt of his own and three quarters of a fellow townsman (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, p. 136). In a deed of 1609 (BRU 8/6/6), he is described as a yeoman which would be consistent with such activity. In 1603 he may have been living in a house, as a tenant of George Badger in Henley Street, next door to John

Shakespeare's house, although this is only known from an abstract of title which may contain errors (ER 1/31, f. 58). He is there described as 'John Woolmer ... fishmonger'.

18. Woolmer was elected a capital burgess on 25 April 1599 but was expelled four years later on its being found that he had recently (and improperly) bound himself apprentice to Richard Rogers of Hidcote (*Minutes & Accounts*, vi, pp. 70, 277-8). However, he was re-elected capital burgess in February 1610, was quickly promoted to alderman in 1614 and then served as bailiff of the borough in 1618/19 (*Minutes & Accounts*, vii, pp. 129, 356, 528). It would therefore seem likely that he had moved his household to Nos 23/4 High Street shortly before 1611 when he became liable, as a freeholder, for paying the Torperley charge on the property (Para. 14). Despite his description as yeoman in 1609, and his dealings in malt, it is evident that he then set himself up as an ironmonger at Nos 23/4 High Street and by the early 1620s he was supplying iron-manufactured items to the Corporation. He resigned as alderman early in 1647 (BRU 2/3, pp. 230, 232, 239) and died three years later.
18. By his will, wherein he now describes himself as gentleman, Woolmer bequeathed to his wife Joan for life 'All that Messuage or Burgage Tenement with the appurtenances scituat and lyeinge and beinge at the nether end of Hide streete, and in Eelie streete ... wherein I nowe live and dwell' to revert then to his son John Woolmer and his heirs. 'And for default of such heires of his bodie lawfully begotten or to be begotten, the said Messuage or Burgage Tenement with the appurtenances from and immediately after the deceases of the said Jone my wife and John my sonne, to be and remaine unto John Wolmer my Grandchild whome I brought upp his heires and assignes forever' (*Stratford-upon-Avon Wills*, ii, p. 6). No such direction would have been necessary if this John was grandson by John the younger. It is therefore more likely that he was descended from an unidentified son of John the elder (but see below, Para. 20).
19. Joan Woolmer died in 1650, allowing John Woolmer II to enjoy the property unencumbered (*Registers of Stratford-on-Avon: Burials*, p. 148). Born in February 1605, John II, like his father, was elected a member of the town's governing elite; capital burgess in July 1634, alderman in 1637, bailiff in 1641/2, and then mayor on two occasions, the first in 1662/3 and the second in 1675/6 (*Registers of Stratford-on-Avon: Baptisms*, p. 71; BRU 2/4, pp. 72, 300). He had a wife Katherine when he died in 1682 but the couple are not known to have issue. The property, under the terms of the first John Woolmer's will, therefore passed to the grandson, John III, whom he had brought up.
20. The terms in which, in his will, John Woolmer II recognises this reversion raises further issues about family relationships (*Stratford-upon-Avon Wills*, ii, No. 420). John III is described in John II's will both as an ironmonger and as John II's nephew. This would substantiate the suggestion made above (Para. 18) that he was the son of an unrecorded brother of John II. Confusingly, however, in his will John II names a second nephew of the same name (here referred to as John IV) who was a tobacconist. This could imply the existence of yet another unrecorded brother of John II. On the other hand, in 1690, when John IV resigned from the town council, he said he was doing so at

the request of his brother, John III (BRU 2/4, p. 591). Even if the two men were half-brothers, this would imply that their father had married twice but had named two of his sons John. R.B. Wheler records a memorial stone (now illegible) to John III in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford, which gives his age at death in 1710 as eighty-five (Wheler, *History and Antiquities of Stratford-upon-Avon*, 1806, 55). This would give a date of c. 1625 for his baptism which has, however, gone unrecorded in Stratford. These confusing data are summarised in the family tree below.



21. No will has been traced for John Woolmer III but a deed of 1695 records a mortgage by John Woolmer, senior, of Stratford-upon-Avon, gentleman, and John Woolmer, junior, of Gainsborough, co. Lincs., mercer, his son and heir (i.e. John Woolmer V) to Robert Fotherby, a London salter, of a close at the nether end of Church Street in Stratford (ER 3/377). In 1717 the younger John Woolmer (of Gainsborough) was involved in further dealings in Stratford property (BRU 8/13/8-9).
22. However, it is clear that, though John Woolmer III's son and heir (John Woolmer V) had moved to Gainsborough by 1695, the family's ironmongery business was kept alive by another of John Woolmer III's son, Joseph, who continued to trade from Nos 23/4 High Street into the eighteenth century, twice serving as mayor in 1697/9 and 1715/16.
22. Following John Woolmer III's death in 1710, the family sold Nos 23/4. The immediate buyer has not yet been identified but by 1722 the freehold was in the possession of a Stratford grocer, Thomas Huckell, who settled it that year on his future wife Mary Ash, daughter of Mary Ash of Coventry, widow (ER 4/460). Huckell died in 1741 leaving his

entire estate to trustees, charged with an annuity to his wife Mary for life and then to the use of his four children John, Thomas, William and Martha, share and share alike, on their reaching the age of twenty-one (ER 4/460). This complicated arrangement led to tortuous legal investigations and it was not until 1795 that the property was eventually sold by Ann Dunn of Evesham (devisee under the will of Elizabeth Dunn, herself the aunt and heir of the Reverend John Huckell, late of Hounslow, the only surviving child of Thomas Huckell, late of Stratford-upon-Avon, grocer, by Mary his wife) to a grocer, Richard Allen (ER 4/460). He had been the tenant of the property since 1784, as his father William Allen had been from at least 1750 and probably since Huckell's death.

23. When advertised for sale in 1818 the property is described as having undergone recent repairs (ER 4/460) and an engraved view of High Street by Thomas Radclyffe, c. 1830, gives an impression of how the building might then have looked (**Fig. 1**). It was purchased in 1902 by A.J. Stanley and then further restored. The original intention was to retain the stucco which had been added early in the nineteenth century (**Fig. 2**) but at the instigation of Marie Corelli, who had just settled in the town, this was removed to reveal the timber-framing (**Fig. 3**). In 1925, H.E. Forrest, in *The Old Houses of Stratford-upon-Avon*, discussed the building in some detail, drawing particular attention to the carved brackets at first floor level though it is not evident from early photographs that they were *in situ* before the restoration. Forrest's photograph of the elaborate corner post (**Fig. 4**) appears to show some stones at its foot. These may be the ones referred to when the 1902 work was in hand: they were said to have been found under a floor and to represent window tracery.

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1.1.2026

Appendix

Location of shop from which the Torperley rent was due

(Above, Paras 4-7)

1. The shop from which this annual charge of 6d. was due, originally to the Guild but later to the Stratford Corporation, stood next to the Garrick Inn (Para. 4).
2. In 1474 it was measured as 'in lenthe xix fote & in brede ix fote' lying in High Street 'bytwixt a place Called Magottes & a place of the gyldes [No. 25]' (Para. 7); i.e. 19' x 9'.
3. A plan of 1817 (BRU 8/9/72) of the site of the Garrick Inn includes a southerly projection (bottom left) into what appears to be the original footprint of Nos 23/4. This is measured as 9ft deep at the east (and 8' 6" at the west) and its width as 16' 6" (**Fig. 5**): i.e. 16' 6" x 9'.
4. The recent Historic Building Record gives this extension as 18' x 10'.
5. There is sufficient similarity in these measurements to propose that this protrusion represents in some form the dimensions of the shop from which the 6d. charge was due.
6. It does not explain, however, why the charge was still due from the freeholder of Nos 23/4 even though its footprint had been taken into No. 25. It had been hoped that dendrochronological investigation might resolve this but the extension was reported as built with elm timbers which have not yet been possible to date.
7. However, evidence immediately post-dating the fires of 1594/95 suggests a period of confusion during which the liability for the payment of this charge was resisted by the freeholders of Nos 23/4 on the grounds that the land from which it was due could no longer be proved to be in their possession. However, in 1616 John Woolmer, 'upon sight of the old parchment roll', acknowledged the charge was due from him.



Fig. 1 High Street, c. 1830, engraved by Thomas Radclyffe



Fig. 2 Initial restoration plan 1902 (BRR 49/1/255)



Fig. 3 Building News, 7 August 1903



Fig. 4 Forrest, *Old Houses of Stratford-on-Avon*:
corner post (facing p. 69)

