

THE STRATFIRE PROJECT

Nos 26-8 High St, Stratford-upon-Avon (includes Harvard House)

Documentary History (version 6.9.2024)

1. The site of Nos 26-28 High Street appears to have been owned as a single unit from the medieval period until the 1660s. From c. 1592 until the end of this period the owners were successive generations of the Rogers family, namely Thomas Rogers (1), who died in 1611, his son, also Thomas (2), who died in 1639, and then the latter's son, Edward Rogers, who died in 1679. Edward left two sons, Thomas (3) and Joseph, who both died in 1684/5. It was their sister Modesty who in 1707, with other family members, sold the property out of the family. Its documented history, both up to this point and then afterwards, has been meticulously recorded by N.W. Alcock in *The Harvard House, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire: the documentary evidence*, 2001. This present report is therefore confined to a discussion of the earlier history of the site, though a broader picture of the Rogers family is also provided.
2. This block of property was freehold, that is, held freely in return for an annual rent paid to the lord of the manor. In the borough charter of c. 1190 such plots had been liable to a 12d. for a burgage measuring c. 60 ft along the street. However, due to its width, Nos 26-8 High St was later rated at 24d. In the one surviving seventeenth-century rental at present known to have survived, for 1637, this sum, the only one in High St, was due from Thomas Rogers (2) (Kent History Centre, U269/E249/6). A Corporation lease, dated 1621, of a house also in High St, the present Garrick Inn (No. 25), describes it as bounded on the north by a tenement of the same Thomas Rogers, thus establishing the position of the latter (BRU 8/9/29). The initials carved on the front of No. 26 (Harvard House) – TR AR below WR – can therefore be taken to represent Thomas Rogers (1) and his wife Alice (parents of the Thomas Rogers (2) of 1621) and (probably) their son William Rogers, then aged eighteen.
3. Earlier leases of No. 25 High Street provide further information about its northerly abuttal, one of 1498 describing it as the house of Thomas Hannys in which William Jeffes then dwelt, and linking it to a lease of a cottage in Ely Street (BRT 1/2/530). In 1472, this abutting property was said to have been held by John Hannys, and in 1460 the cottage in Ely Street, then held by Thomas Magottes, was bounded on the west by the 'door of John Hannys' giving rear access to his property in High Street, i.e. Nos 26-8 (BRT 1/3/125, BRT 1/2/401).
4. John Hannys and his son Thomas Hannys, both mercers, were leading civic figures. John, born in Hidcote, but of Stratford by 1437, was master of the Guild of the Holy Cross thirteen times between 1443 and 1468. His son Thomas, who inherited the bulk of his father's lands and tenements, joined the Guild in 1480 but, following his apprenticeship to Hugh Clopton, already in business in London, Thomas remained in the capital (*Register of the Guild*, 30-1). Under his will of 1502, he left sufficient money to the Guild to fund a row of almshouses in Church Street (*Stratford Wills*, i, No. 9). He was survived by his wife Philippa and daughter Jane who appears to have inherited the bulk of his Stratford property.
5. There is then a long gap in the data record before the property came into the possession of Thomas Rogers (1). Given that in 1637, the Rogers family was paying a chief rent for the property of 24d. (the only example in High Street: see Para. 2), it would be expected that a parallel entry could be found in the inquisition post mortem held in October 1590 after the death of the lord of the manor, Ambrose earl of Warwick. This particularises the chief rents payable by Stratford burgesses but, under High St, the only sum of 24d. (2s.) was due from George Gilbert (*Minutes & Accounts*, iv, 97). Though in a survey of 1580 Gilbert is listed as one of only thirty-eight gentlemen and freeholders in Stratford, no record other than the chief rent

of 1590, links him with High Street (*Minutes & Accounts*, iii, 56). If he were buried in the town (as his wife Joan was in 1583) no entry was made in the burial register.

6. On the other hand, Thomas Rogers (1), the apparent freeholder in 1596, was appointed as one of the two headboroughs for the High Street ward in October 1592 (and reappointed in 1603). (*Minutes & Accounts*, iv, 164; vi, 273). It was customary for headboroughs to live in the wards that they supervised. If he had acquired the property from Gilbert it would therefore have to have been after 1590 (or possibly slightly earlier as listings of tenants could be out of date). If that were not the case, then one would expect Rogers to have featured elsewhere in the inquisition which he does not.
7. In some respects, Thomas Rogers (1) is a well documented figure, by trade a butcher but also with extensive interests in grazing and malting. The search for data on him is necessarily complicated by the commonness of his name. However, he may be the Thomas Rogers fined for infractions of the local bye-laws in 1560 and 1561 (*Minutes & Accounts*, i, 104, 117). He married Margaret Pace in January 1563 and ten children were born to the couple between November 1563 and February 1580. Margaret is then said to have died – though her burial is not recorded in Stratford – leading to Thomas’s marriage to Alice Calle by whom he fathered a further five children.¹ Thomas and Margaret’s eldest son Charles, born in March 1565, had married by 1593. He seems to have been a source of anxiety to his father (e.g., *Minutes & Accounts*, vi, 356, 360, 367) which may explain why it was his second son William whose initials (WR) were added to the plaque on 1596 concerning the rebuilding of No. 26 (Harvard Houser). William, born in June 1578, would have been nearly twenty years of age.
8. Thomas Rogers (1) apparently served the Corporation as ale taster in 1569, and then as constable in 1570, presumably the same man as was sworn constable again in November 1582 (*Minutes & Accounts*, ii, 29-30; iii, 100). He was then chosen to join the Common Council as a capital burgess but it was not until October 1585 that he agreed to serve (*Minutes & Accounts*, iii, 142, 157). Two years later he was appointed an alderman and briefly served as chamberlain in 1588/89 before his election as bailiff in 1589/90 (*Minutes & Accounts*, iv, 24, 46, 68). He was chief alderman for the year 1591/2 and then went on to serve as bailiff for the second time in 1595/6, the year of the second fire, and chief alderman again in 1597/8 (*Minutes & Accounts*, iii, 157; v, 41, 107). However, on 21 April 1609, ‘Mr Thomas Rogers by reason of great age and infirmity to bear the office of Alderman be with great allowance of his good desert of this place to be removed from the office of alderman’ (*Minutes & Accounts*, vii, 102). He lived for nearly another two years and was buried on 2 February 1611, still described as ‘one of the aldermen’.
9. Though his career in the Corporation’s service is well documented it is not easy to identify his place of residence prior to his occupancy of No. 26 High St. As explained above (Para. 6), from 1592 onwards this can be taken to have been in High Street but no document survives before that to place him anywhere in the town at all. Nor, except in the unsatisfactory case of George Gilbert (Para. 5), can anyone else be proposed as the occupier of Nos 26-8 High Street. However, in 1595, during the food shortages of the mid 1590, Rogers, then bailiff, was found to have ‘in his howse of his owne 15 quarters of mallte and 2 quarters of Barley’ and twenty belonging to his ‘sonne in lawe’ John Woolmer (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, 48). The compilers of the survey continued: ‘Wee are gyven to understand That besydes his Butchers trade which untill now of late hee allwaies used hee ys a buyer and seller of Corne for great somes; And with all usethe grazinge and buying and sellinge of cattell; And hathe in howshold xiii persons’. To help ease the shortage of grain he was ordered ‘To bringe to Stretford markt weekelye vi stryke of Rye’. He was also one of forty-five townfolk bound in £100 against their making malt

¹ Certainly by 1596 her initials were given as AR on the details carved into the frontage of No. 26 High St on its rebuilding and when, in August 1608, she died, she was indeed confirmed as Alice.

(*Minutes & Accounts*, v, 47). In another list of 'byers of corne' it was reported that 'Mr Thomas Rogers on 30th October did buy a carte load of barley before it came to market and did forestall the market and did and say he will justifie it and careth not a turde for them all and theise word being spokinge the 28th day of November (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, 49). In the same survey it was noted that Rogers had been included 'in the subsitty book and now he is got forth and payeth nothings'. These listings place Rogers amongst leading civic figures. A household of sixteen would confirm that his property included more than No. 26 (Harvard House). In a later survey of February 1598, his holdings, now listed under High Street, comprised seven quarters of malt, four quarters of rye and two quarters of mill corn in addition to five quarters and three strikes of malt belonging to Ralph Hubaud (*Minutes & Accounts*, v, 138, 140). The reference to his inclusion in a 'subsidy book' is unclear but in payments of national taxation his goods in 1594 were valued at £6 but from 1598 at only £3 (TNA, E 179/193/235, 260a, 275)

10. One incident occurred during Thomas Rogers (1)'s lifetime which provides some information on the layout of the family's principal residence. It primarily involved his son Thomas Rogers (2), the latter's wife Ann and his sisters Rose and Frances (TNA, STAC8/228/3). Early in 1610, William Osborne, apparently apprenticed to the attorney Thomas Lucas, featured as plaintiff in a Star Chamber case against the members of the Rogers family listed above, alleging a physical attack on him in the Rogers' house as the result of a disagreement between him and Rose who did 'conspire, combine & confederate themselves together howe & by what means they might drawe your subject into the dwelling howse of the said Thomas Rogers in the night tyme' to carry out 'their divelish & wicked plott in beating & greevously wounding your said subject'. Osborne, having been persuaded to make this visit, was enticed into a 'back roome where your subject did then find the said Thomas Rogers, Anne his wife, Rose Rogers, Frances Rogers all being weaponed with piked staves, billes & pichforkes, having in their handes cordes ready to binde your subject'. Having locked the door, Osborne's adversaries 'did greevously & riotously with their said weapons beat, hurt & greevously wound your said subject giving unto your subject being so bound many greevous blowes, woundes and hurtes to the effusion of much of your subjectes blood & with their cordes & handes almost strangled your subject'. Henry Walker, the chief alderman who lived next door at No. 29 High St 'did then come to the howse of the said Thomas Rogers who then, having locked his utter door, did stand in the streete having the key theirop in his pocket'. Walker demanded that Rogers 'open the doore & declare unto him what was the occasion of this outcrye & whether they had any in his howse he meant to have murdered'. Rogers again refused him entry but Walker with the aid of passers by managed to break into the house. Nevertheless, Rogers 'came upon your subject and, notwithstanding that he was by him commanded to keepe your highnes peace ... again struck & greevously hurt your subject'.
11. Thomas Rogers (1), on his death in February 1611, left a will which has not survived though it was proved on 27 April 1611 by his son Thomas Rogers (2) as executor (*Alcock, Harvard House*, 4). In this capacity Thomas (2) was also summoned to the local court of record in 1612 concerning a bond his father had signed on 10 February 1609 to pay the vicar £20 by the following 1 May which neither he nor his son had done (BRU 12/2/4/33).
12. Thomas Rogers (2) was baptised on 11 June 1587 and had married Ann (not further identified) by 18 September 1610 when their first child, another Thomas (3), was baptised. This younger Thomas may be the Thomas son of Thomas Rogers buried on 19 July 1630 leaving Edward, baptised on 8 January 1615, as the eldest son. Two daughters followed, Lydia and Hanna, before the death of Roger (2)'s first wife. On 27 April 1624 Rogers took as his second wife Ann

Cook by whom he had two further daughters, Ruth and Hannah. Little other biographical material survives for Thomas Roger (2), though soon after his father's death, under High Street, he was listed as a possible contributor to a subsidy and in a parish levy in 1618 he was rated at 3s. 4d., the second highest sum in High Street ward (*Minutes & Accounts*, vii, 192; *Vestry Minute Book*, 2).

13. Thomas Rogers (2) made his will on 27 August 1639 and was buried four days later (*Stratford Wills*, ii, No. 235). His wishes are expressed in a rather unusual form, with his house bequeathed to his wife Ann for life and then to his four daughters, Lydia, Alice, Ruth and Hanna until such time as his son Edward Rogers pay them £20 each, when it would revert to him. His personal estate followed a different route – to his wife for life and then to be divided between his five children. Edward, a bookbinder, married Mary Perkins on 29 November 1640 and his mother Ann was buried on 12 April 1648. His will was accompanied by a detailed inventory recording possessions in at least eight rooms in the main house (*Stratford Inventories*, ii, No. 209).
14. No document has survived to the effect that Edward paid this £20 to any of his four sisters but in Edward's will, made on 29 March 1679, it is clear that this requirement had been met, at least in part, giving him control of the freehold of most of the property. However, it is during this period that the combined freehold of Nos 26-8 began to break down. In Edward's will there are clear instructions as to the varied descent of several parts of the property, albeit that the end result would be that its component parts were likely to descend eventually to his eldest son Thomas Rogers (3) (*Stratford Wills*, ii, No. 390). The gatehouse and 'backside', allowing access to the property from Ely Street, was left to his wife Mary for three years, as was a 'shop with the rooms therto belonging', then in the tenure of Philip Wilkins (and formerly of Francis Ferris) for her to use the rental income to pay off some of his debts. Both properties were then to pass to his daughter Modesty for a further eight years 'in lieu of a portion'. Only after these eleven years had passed, were the shop and rooms to pass to his son Thomas (3) and his heirs and the gatehouse to his younger son Joseph for life. As for the 'rest and residue of my house wherein I now live' this was bequeathed to his wife Mary for life and then to his son Thomas and his heirs.
15. However, this property now seems to have comprised Nos 27-8 only. According to the Hearth Tax returns, No.26, at least from 1664, was occupied by John Capp, followed by Thomas Capp, his brother, by 1674 (whose son, another John Capp, was occupier in the early eighteenth century) (WCRO, QS11/2, 5, 12, 41, 51; *Hearth Tax* (2010), 217). This evidence alone does not establish that the Capps also held the freehold of this property but, given that a property in the Capps' tenure was not mentioned by Edward in his will, nor in the wills of his sons (below, Paras. 16-17), it is more than likely that Edward had sold it off. His father's will (above, Para. 13) suggests some difficulty in providing for his daughters, and Edward himself, by March 1670, appears to have mortgaged the house in High Street where he lived to William Lyndon for £210, payable within three months of Lyndon's decease which occurred in March 1672/3 (*Stratford Wills*, ii, No. 356). Perhaps it was the sale of No. 26 which had helped him to pay off the mortgage on his dwelling house. Edward's will of 1679 (Para. 14) with its admission that he was not able to provide a marriage portion for his daughter, also implies straitened circumstances.
16. Mary Rogers, Edward's wife, was to live until 1705 outliving both her sons who died at more or less the same time, Thomas (3) in July 1684 and Joseph over the winter 1684/5. It was Thomas who made his will first, on 30 June 1684, leaving 'all that my house in Highe Street now divided from my greater house' to his sister Modesty and this 'greater house', occupied by his mother Mary for life, to his brother Joseph (*Stratford Wills*, ii, No. 443). He was buried on 8 July.

17. When, two months later, Joseph made his will on 27 September 1684 he left the house to which his mother was entitled for life, to his sister Ann wife of George Hunscombe, again for life and then to her issue (*Stratford Wills*, ii, No. 438). The final act in the story of the Rogers' ownership of the site occurred soon after the death of Mary Rogers, Edward's widow, in 1707. Later that year a document records the probable sale of the property from William Todd and Modesty [Rogers] his wife, Ann Hunscombe, widow, and Anne Blackett, widow, and Susanna Atty, widow, probably her nieces, to Joseph Smith (DR 134/41/11). Modesty would have been involved in this transaction as a result of Thomas Rogers' bequest to her of part of the property (Para. 16) and Ann Hunscombe and her family as a consequence of his brother Joseph's will (Para. 17).
18. In the context of the Stratfire project, and with Nat Alcock's detailed report of 2001 already in circulation, it is not necessary to trace the history of the building further. However, it is clear that, following Thomas Rogers' ascendancy at the time of the 1594/5 fires, the standing of his family was to decline over the next hundred years. This might be better explained after building analysis and dendrochronology of Nos 27-28 is carried out, albeit that its original timber-frame is hidden by later stucco, perhaps added c. 1800. Indeed there are aspects of the Alcock report on No. 26 that might be resolved, especially regarding the inventory of 1639 (*Stratford Inventories*, ii, No. 209).

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