

STRATFIRE PROJECT

Nos. 12 Chapel Street & 1 Ely Street

The Stratfire Project, investigating the effect on the town of the urban fires of 1594 and 1595 primarily in High Street and Chapel Street, is not limited to the study of timber-framed buildings still to be found in the two streets. For a better idea of the extent of these fires, we are also looking into the site histories of every property for references to fire damage (or not), regardless of whether the building that stood there at the time has since been demolished.

One such group of buildings, now absorbed into the HSBC bank in Chapel St, once stood on an L-shaped plot. At one end, it faced out into Chapel Street (later known as No. 12) but also dog-legged out into Ely Street as No. 1. The freehold of this property originally belonged the Stratford Corporation and for the period before 1607 was leased out as a single unit. However, from 1607 until well into the nineteenth century the plot was divided into two and leased out separately. Later in the nineteenth century, however, the Corporation sold the freehold to the Stourbridge and Kidderminster Bank, already operating on an adjoining site on the corner of Ely Street. The bank itself was demolished in 1883 and rebuilt in flamboyant Gothic style, but including the residence of the bank manager on the site of No. 12. The present building is shown as **Fig. 1**. No. 1 Ely Street was also rebuilt, but less dramatically (**Fig. 2**). Documentary evidence establishes that buildings on this combined site were affected by the 1594/5 fires, bringing it into the remit of the Stratfire project.

From 1574 until the 1630s the history of both halves of the property is associated with the Burnell family, first Francis Burnell from c. 1574 until his death in 1598, to whom the whole property was let, and then of his sons Thomas and Ralph between whom the property was then divided. Francis was already elderly at the time of the 1594/5 fires and it was his thirty-year-old son Thomas who was promised a new lease if 'all that tenement and milne with appurtenances in Chapel St and Ely St ... near consumed by fire' were rebuilt within five years and covered with tiles.

Thomas Burnell paid this rent for a few years but was soon in arrears, perhaps the result of the costs of the rebuilding work, and so the Corporation took steps to repossess the property. By January 1607 Thomas was dead and the Corporation instead decided to divide the property into two parts. It was first proposed that, if Mary (Thomas's widow) surrendered her late husband's lease of 1599, the house facing Chapel Street (No.12), now described as 'new built', would be leased back to her. However, for some reason this didn't happen and the rebuilt Chapel Street house was leased instead to Thomas Rutter, a haberdasher, and thereafter enjoyed a separate existence.

During these negotiations it was further agreed that the mill and tenement in Ely Street would be let to Thomas's brother, Ralph Burnell. This arrangement lasted longer. Ralph paid a rent for this property into the 1620s but on his death (also impoverished, it would seem) it was agreed in March 1628 'that the howses which Raphe Burnell held by Indenture from the Chamber shalbe graunted by a new Lease To foure men of this Company ... For the use of the Children of the said Raphe Burnell'. However, even this didn't happen and the lease merely assigned to someone else for his own benefit.



Fig 1. site of No. 12 Chapel St, 2023



Fig. 7 Site of 1 Ely St, 2023