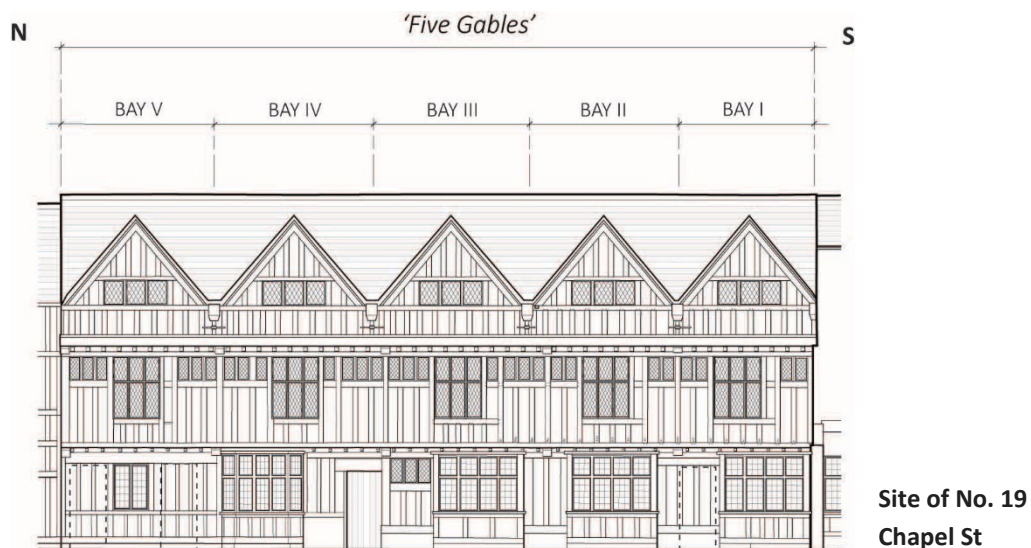


The Five Gables, Chapel Street (now part of the Shakespeare Hotel)

The 'Five Gables', now absorbed into the Shakespeare Hotel, is made up of a double-jettied range of five bays and two full storeys with attics, the latter with gables, one per bay. The three northern bays (III, IV, V) are somewhat wider than the southern two bays (I, II), perhaps reflecting an historical subdivision of the property. A long sequence of carpenter's marks on the close-studded front elevation, however, shows that it is of one build. Recent tree-ring dating carried out as part of the StratFire project, has established that it was built in the early 1620s, since which time the street elevation has changed little.



The early history of this property is not well documented but in 1637 John Loach was recorded, under Chapel Street, as liable to the customary payment to the lord of the manor of a chief rent of 12 pence for the property. In 1647 Loach's property was described as being to the north of a tenement on the site of today's No. 19 Chapel St (see drawing above) so defining its position in the street.

John Loach, alias Richardson, first occurs in Stratford records in June 1626 when, having served out his apprenticeship, he was admitted to the company of joiners and wheelwrights. He then married and by 1634 was father of three children: Nicholas, Frances and Rachel. In 1631 he was negotiating with the Stratford Corporation for a lease of a property it owned (now No. 7 Chapel Street) but in 1637 he is found as the occupier, if not the owner, of the Five Gables on the other side of the street. The substantial chief rent of 12d he was obliged to pay is consistent with the footprint of the existing building.

Recent tree-ring dating has established that the Five Gables was built in the early 1620s. Loach was thus occupying recently rebuilt premises for which, at least by 1637, he was liable for payment of the 12d chief rent. But he could hardly have been the builder. He had only served out his apprenticeship in 1626. Moreover, a building on this scale might have been beyond a young artisan's personal needs. Instead, could the Five Gables have been built

with the idea from the start of dividing it into units, under single ownership but let out to tenants? Documentary evidence clearly establishes that there was just such a division, at least at a later date, but could that have been the initial intention?

The primary source for pursuing this idea would normally have been through title deeds but in this respect the Five Gables is sadly deficient. One will, of 1677, can be brought into play but no surviving title deed earlier than 1788 has so far been traced. This confirms the division into two units: indeed, for a while the ownership of the freehold itself was also split between two people. Luckily, despite the lack of title deeds, evidence for the earlier period can be worked out from surviving chief rentals. In 1637, John Loach was liable for a chief rent of 12d in respect of the Five Gables. For the rest of the seventeenth century no similar rentals survive but for the eighteenth century the coverage is virtually complete.

John Loach, the freeholder in 1637, made his will on 11 May 1677, a fortnight before his burial. He left his house to his daughter Frances Holmes for life and then to her son Richard Holmes. Frances died in May 1686 without making a will leaving Richard Holmes as owner (and perhaps occupier), duly recorded as his in 1698 as an abuttal to No. 19 Chapel St.

By 1709, however, the freehold had passed to John Cookes, a well-documented glazier in the town, who continued to pay the 12d chief rent on the property until he died in 1737. The freehold then passed to Benjamin Haynes who paid the 12d chief rent due on the property until at least 1756 and probably until his own death in 1768. However, from 1769 this 12d rent was replaced in the rentals by two payments of 6d each. One of these was for Thomas Vigers' house (probably Bays I, II as shown on the above drawing), recorded in 1782 as the former owner, or at least occupier, of the property to the north of No. 19 Chapel Street. The other 6d was paid by John Meacham, an apothecary, for a tenement 'late Mr Bradley' (Bays III, IV, V). The earliest surviving title deed relating to the Five Gables, of 1788, confirms this division, transferring Meacham's part to John Lord. It further records that Meacham had bought it from the late Dionysius Bradley (died 1771) and that it had formerly been part of the estate of Benjamin Haynes (died intestate in 1768), so providing a neat link to the earlier recorded owner of the undivided property.

The same deed of 1788 describes Meacham's house (Bays III, IV, V) as bounded on its south by the second of the two units into which the property was by then divided, now belonging to Richard Lord (Bays I, II). The following year, as part of Richard's estate, it was bequeathed to his son, John Lord, by then also the owner of the other part of the property. The Five Gables was thus brought back under single ownership.

Surviving eighteenth-century poor rate levies confirm this division. In 1751 Benjamin Haynes had been rated as liable for the whole property whereas by 1774 this obligation was shared by John Meacham and Richard (and later John) Lord. Similarly the chief rentals from 1791 to 1801 record payments of 6d by John Lord, who lived, as he declares in his will of 1822, in Meacham's house, and 6d by a succession of his tenants in the tenement to the south.

So what does this tell us about when the building was first divided into two units? It's true that documentary evidence does not establish a formal division until 1768 but this may only

have been a reflection of the fact that at that point the freehold became divided as well. Before that, there may well have been a division between the freeholder (who was still called on for payments affecting the whole building) and his or her tenants who lived in other parts of the building. In this respect (although the structure has been much altered historically) it may be relevant that there is no surviving evidence of primary access between the two sections (i.e. Bays II and III), in particular at upper levels. Also, as previously pointed out, the two bays to the south are narrower than the other three. The hearth tax returns credit the building with three hearths, reasonably one to each part at ground floor level and one to the rear.

If the builder in the early 1620s was not John Loach, can a more likely candidate be suggested? One possibility would 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. 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 contained only twenty or so properties and the occupants of nearly all of them are known. So might this unidentified property, in Griffen's tenure, be linked to the Five Gables? As far as a Walford connection is concerned, this would have been very much in character. 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. Could the Five Gables be another of his ventures, sold off soon after his death to John Loach but nevertheless 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'. If this were a reference to the rebuilding of the Five Gables (i.e. Griffen's) at the time of Walford's death it would certainly match the tree-ring date.

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 its new owner.

The timber frame of the Five Gables had been plastered over by the time of the earliest surviving images but this had been removed by 1890s, at which point the extant windows were introduced and the near continuous band of flanking windows, hard beneath the jetty at first-floor level, exposed.



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



Fig. 2: Photograph from the 1880s showing the plaster still in place



Fig. 3: Photograph from c.1895 with the plaster removed