

Derek Palmer collected some information and photographs about the Mayors Parlour

Time Line

1489 Mayors Parlour

1596 - 1685 Dr. Percivil Willoughby Physician - gynaecology buried in St Peter's Churchyard

Miss Clay

Henry Richardson - banker

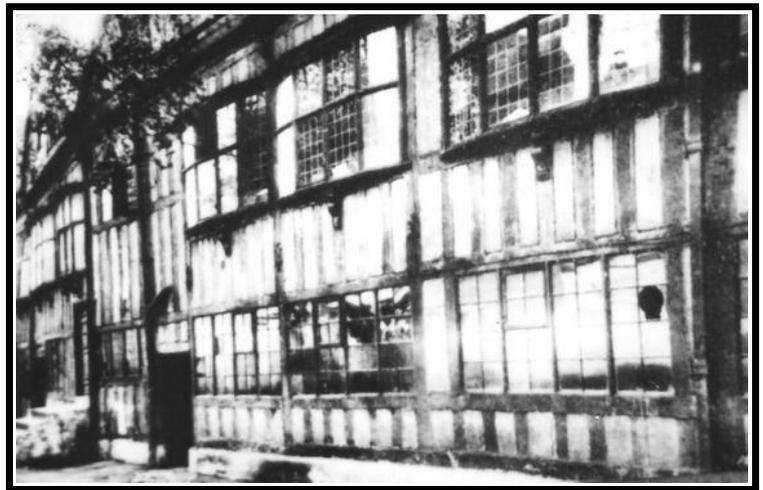
1850 The house belonged to Alderman Thomas Evans of Allestree

1929 The Town Clerk Francis Gadsby

1930's Development around the area started and it went into neglect.

1948 Although it was promised by the Council that it would not be demolished it was.

The Desk in the Mayors Parlour today was made from the oak from the old building by Mr Baldwin who had a furnisher shop in Queen Street.



The pictures, left and above show the building in all its glory and we can only imagine what an asset it would have been to Derby had it been preserved. Perhaps it would have been turned into a theme pub, an upmarket hotel or an Elizabethan tea rooms, who knows? Unfortunately we will never have the chance to find out.



The picture, top left, is taken from the roof of the building during demolition and the large building in the background is the Council House. The second picture, above right, shows the Mayors Parlour almost demolished. Tennant Street is the street behind the site and the Guild Hall tower can be seen behind that.



Almost gone. This picture is taken from inside the demolition site and shows the sad remains of this once glorious building. For many years the location remained undeveloped and at one time there was a great 'hole' here surrounded by boarding and filled with water. It even became the butt of jokes including, I am told, from none other than Glaswegian stand-up comedian Billy Connolly. It had to be bad if he thought it was funny.

The following article, written by John Ward in 1893 about old Derby, was copied by hand by Derek Palmer and is presented hereunder. I hope I have retained the correct spelling and grammar of the original.

A Bit of Old Derby (Including the Old Mayor's Parlour – Tennant Street)

Few places have undergone such a complete transformation during, say, the last twenty years as has the town of Derby.

Not only the old familiar landmarks, in the shape of houses, but entire streets have been completely "improved of", to make way for thoroughfares more in consonance with the busier life that is lived today than was the case in the days of our sires and grandsires.

Defoe who visited Derbyshire in the course of his memorable "Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain" describes Derby as "a town of gentry rather than trade" He says moreover "It is a fine, beautiful and pleasant town, and has more families of gentlemen in it than is usual in towns so remote from London." At the present time Derby is a town of trade rather than gentry, and herein is to be found the reason of the removal of many of the quaint old residences which were wont to be its principal glory.

Exeter House, which stood between Derwent Street and Full Street, was demolished to make way for such improvements which it is mockery to describe as such. The widening of the Wardwick sounded the knell of several other notable structures. St James Lane, with its ancient hostelries, carrying ones mind back to the days of the stage coach, is no more, and the rearrangement of the whole of the eastern side of Irongate obliterated many other picturesque public and private habitations, Who again would recognise in the St Peter's Street of today the same thoroughfare of twenty years ago? The quaint pile of buildings known as the piazzas which graced the Market Place has become a memory and the Shambles and Rotten Row, which this block comprised, are a reminiscence.

Elbowed out of existence too has been many an old tenement which in "the days that were earlier" imparted architectural interest to the town's streets and alleys. Among these may be mentioned the old White Horse Inn, in Friar Gate, which fled before the approach of the horse of iron – The Great Northern Railway to wit; the old house in Amen alley, long the residence of the Marshalls; and the fifteenth century house, with its curious carved oak corner pillar, in St Peter's Street where the Shaddetons lived.

Derby, however, still boasts several houses which serve to link the past with the present. Among these is the old school house in St Peter's Churchyard, and in its vicinity a quaint Queen Anne structure which has had many narrow escapes, but so far has survived; the still habitable mansion of the Gisbornes, in the Wardwick, dating back to 1611; the old Seven Stars Inn, in Queen Street and the house in Full Street which the late Dr. H F Gisborne occupied. But perhaps the finest example of old Derby yet extant is the subject of this article. It is hidden away behind Mr Gadsby's residence in Tennant Street, and ninety-nine out of a hundred of Derby's hundred thousand inhabitants are probably unaware of its existence. It is the best half-timbered house of the Elizabethan era that can be seen at the present day in any part of the county, although at Hilton, Hartshorne, and Somersall Herbert there are somewhat similar examples. The modern structure facing the thoroughfare hides it from the public gaze, and gives not the slightest clue to the highly-picturesque building behind. Entering the passage which leads to it, one feels like stepping into the leisurely life lived by the past ascetically-garbed people we read about in English history, or who walk the stage in the Shakespearian drama.

We expect to be greeted with such exclamations as “Ods bodkins” and “Gadzooks” and “Marry come up” and to be invited to taste a cup of sack, or to partake of a pinch of snuff from curiously chased silver snuff-boxes.

Insensibly the mind wanders over the centuries, and we see in imagination one of the city fathers emerge from the portal attended by his stout serving man, while his good dame, Anne, with Cicely, her waiting woman, stand by to give him a cheery adieu. Or again, we see the courtyard crowded with the wild looking followers of the Young Pretender who, in 'the 45' disturbed the quiet, easy going tide of affairs in Derby. The uncouth speech and rough manners of the kilted clansmen would not be calculated to attract the attention of the well clad and well-fed servant of a substantial citizen of a century and a half ago and doubtless it would be with fear and trembling that they obeyed the behests of their uninvited guests.

The old building is little altered, if at all, since the far away time when it was laboriously put together. In the official handbook of the Church Congress for the year that important function was held at Derby (1882 we believe), the house is accorded the following prettily-penned tribute:- “It is a picture more than a place; a ballad rather than a building. People who lived and moved and had their being in Queen Elizabeth’s time passed in at its doorway or peered through its lancet-windows. In the last century the celebrated Dr Darwin practised medicine and studied philosophy under its peaked gables. Today the house hides from the intrusive gaze of the new civilization. Modern erections crush it out of sight. You pass down a narrow entrance twenty yards from the Market Place, on the left hand side of Tennant St, and lo! this russet remnant of history, a building that is a study of 'white and black' with diamond panes catching the sunlight, and pointed gables that throw angular shadows, bursts suddenly upon the view, a revelation in old architecture. A green lawn slopes slowly down to the Derwent, here widening to a basin, spanned by a bridge of crazy timbers and altogether the artistic eye is taken captive in pleased surprise that such a relic of the old world is bequeathed to Carlyle's age of 'gin and steam hammers'. Some such mansion, invested with the old world flavour, must Philip Gilbert Hamerton have had “in his minds eye Horatio” when he wrote

I have seen
Old houses where the men of former time
Have lived and died, so wantonly destroyed
By their descendants, that a place like this
Preserved with pious care, but not 'restored'
By rude presumptuous hands, nor modernized
to suit convenience, seems a precious thing
And I would thank its owners for the hours that
I have spent there; and I leave it now,
Hoping that his successors may preserve
Its roof with equal tenderness, It gave
Good shelter to their fathers many a year.

Horace Weir.

Derek comments that all of this was written about a building which in 1948 was thought nothing of and was demolished. Now all that remains are recorded memories and, thanks to Derek Palmer, photographic evidence of the building and it's wanton destruction.

Derek even managed to add pictures of the gardens, or at least what remained of them, to his collection and these are copied below. (All of the pictures and records herein are the property of Derek Palmer).



Where was the Old Mayor's Parlour? Ron McKeown investigates with unexpected results.

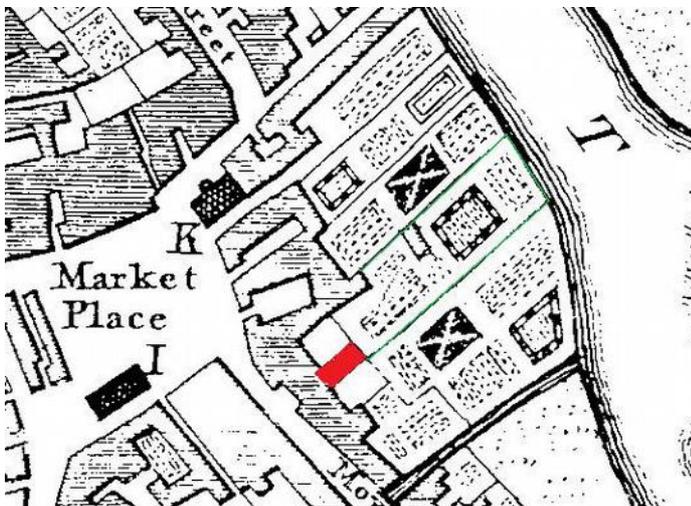
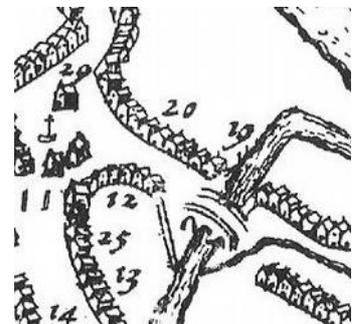
Historical evidence for the Mayors Parlour. A Derby Myth?



The first place to start is with the East Prospect of 1728. It shows this building at the known location of the Mayors Parlour. The houses behind it are fronting Tennant Street and stand some way behind.

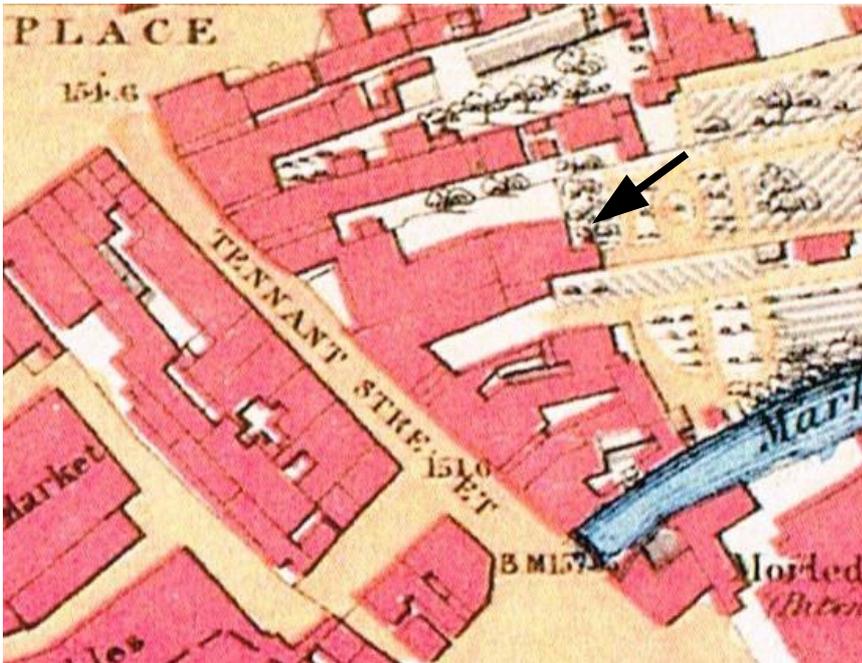
This house is in the second garden from the brook. With the roof and chimney coloured brown the building and it's location are enhanced.

The 1610 map, right, gives no clue to a large building on the site. They are all much the same size. Perhaps Speed recorded nothing of merit?



Having seen the evidence from 1610 and from 1728 we can move on to the map produced in 1791 by Burdett but surveyed around the middle of the seventeen hundreds. The same building from The East Prospect is seen here in red and it is now attached to a building built onto the front of it. (Unless the original was demolished and the front and rear are both new?. There is no indication on Burdett that they had been separate buildings but it would seem odd that it would be in such a different style and configuration if both the front building and

this one were the same build date. See the demolition photographs below.).



From the 1852 map we can see that more construction has taken place on the site and next to the site. The front building and the early building have had a further extension to the rear whilst the next door building to the south has also been extended.

The rear extension to the Mayors Parlour building looks to have been deliberately built with a narrow part to the south or it was two stages of building?

Using the knowledge gained from the maps perhaps we can piece together the various contexts of the available photographic evidence. The following picture is from one taken during the clearance of the land prior to construction of the new council house.



Further evidence of the construction phases is shown on this picture of the demolition



Front building Old building New extension Final extension completely demolished

It would seem that at least three construction phases produced the building known as the Mayors Parlour. The photographs taken when the Parlour was still in use, first page herein, also show a variation in the black and white frontage. The frontage appears to be an added feature similar to that which now adorns the Old Bell Hotel in Saddler Gate and makes at least three separate buildings look like one single construction. The loss of so many council records, ironically in this building when the cellars flooded, may have removed the historical documented evidence. Circumstantial evidence for this not being an ancient building of note may come from the lack of mention of it in local histories. Hutton; Simpson; Glover; Keys nor Davidson make any reference to it and Nikolaus Pevsner, the twentieth century's best known architectural chronicler, completely ignores it. (Citation needed)

Ron McKeown.
June 2015