

CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

BULLETIN

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THE SPRING TALK: “UP THE WOODEN HILL”: A HISTORY OF THE STAIRCASE IN DURHAM AND THE WIDER NORTH EAST.

We are delighted to welcome back **Martin Roberts**, now recovering from the knee operation that prevented him from giving his customary autumn talk to the Trust last year.

“Up the Wooden Hill” will follow the development of the timber staircase in Durham and the surrounding region, from the earliest examples through to its fashionable heyday in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It will examine its position in the house plan, moving from relative obscurity to centre stage as a proclamation of wealth and status. It will draw heavily from Francis Johnson’s hugely informative *Historic Staircases in Durham City*, published by the Trust in 1970, considering one or two of the (fortunately very few) staircases lost since publication. The image shows the striking staircase at St John’s College, 3 South Bailey.



The talk will be at held at **2.pm on Saturday 20 May in room CG 85 in the Chemistry Building on the University Science Site.** Access: from the Hallgarth Street direction cross Stockton Road and head straight up the side road nearby into the science site, towards the security barriers. Enter the main entrance to the Chemistry Department and then go through the double doors beyond and immediately down the stairs to your left - straight to CG85. Alternatively, coming from the Church Street direction, simply turn right from the Stockton Road pavement to the main entrance to the Palatine Centre. Walk directly across that entrance and you will find the Chemistry Department conspicuous just round the corner and to the left. From there lecture room 85 is down some 140 metres of signposted corridors on the ground floor (with no steps), just off from the canteen to the left.

Alternatively, watch via zoom. Email zoom@durhamcity.org a day or so before the event to request the link.

STACK

Remember the old Marks and Spencer on 4-6 Silver Street, the site now occupied on the ground floor by the Yorkshire Trading Company? On 11 April a proposal was approved for that site for something called “STACK”, turning that large building into a space divided up as a number of smaller food and drink and entertainment outlets, with a terrace on the roof. STACK Durham would open till half-past midnight in the week and till 1.30 am Friday to Sunday. No live or recorded music is to be allowed on the roof terrace after 11 pm and a Noise Management Plan was one condition of approval. This establishment is called “STACK”

because in other places similar schemes have been made from reworked, stacked shipping containers, but not in the middle of Durham obviously.

The Trust objected to the application, as did the Parish Council. It means the loss of prime retail space to another leisure and entertainment venue. Noise seems set to be an issue. Some student dwellings are on the upper floors in Silver Street itself and the proposed roof terrace is only 60 metres from student accommodation at the Castle. Safety was also a major item in the Trust's objection. The two proposed emergency fire escapes are onto Moatside Lane, a steepish, uneven, slippery vennel, little more than a metre wide in places. It seems a dangerous trap for the sudden evacuation of a late-night crowd from a drinking establishment. Francis Pritchard, now Honorary Secretary for the Trust, reports he was once involved with a test fire evacuation onto Moatside Lane and it was a shambles. Roger Cornwell spoke for the Trust at the planning meeting: "Our problem was in part that the Fire Safety Certificate was ruled not to be within the scope of the Planning system." Let us hope this ruling proves not to be a tragic one.



The Trust is not opposed to Stack Durham *per se*, but it fears for the impact on this sensitive location, as does Mary Foy, MP for the City, writing "This scheme would fundamentally alter the nature of Durham City Centre and change what remains the key shopping area of the city to a mixed-use entertainment area." Some dismay was felt at the evident bias towards approval of this scheme in the local press, with some articles reading much like a press release from the developers themselves.

PENDING

As this bulletin goes to print, two significant planning matters described in the last bulletin are still pending.

Sniperley Park

After withdrawing their planning appeals last autumn, both Bellway and County Durham Land LLP submitted in December revised planning applications for this large new housing estate, one of the so-called "sustainable urban extensions" approved in the County Plan of 2021. In February Bellway also submitted a supplementary "outline" planning application for the site, covering only basic access but leaving further matters to piecemeal future applications. The outline application seems a fallback should consideration of their more comprehensive application of December become "elongated". The December application from County Durham Land LLP is also "outline" rather than comprehensive, but includes a masterplan.

Trustees supported Durham County Council last year in its resisting the substandard schemes of the earlier submissions. They now urge a continued refusal to accept anything but the best for this huge development, in respecting Policy 5 of the County Plan. The resubmissions strive to address the concerns expressed in the Council's feedback, but this has sometimes been done in a minimalist box-ticking way. The tension is still felt acutely between aspirations of "sustainability" and the pressures of commercial developers. The County Durham Plan stipulates unequivocally that "The development of Sniperley Park will deliver 1,700 new homes along with associated retail, services and facilities", but the developers want a total of 1,920 (1,550 from County Durham Land LLP, and either 368 or 370 from Bellway).

This excess has knock-on effects in the designs submitted. For example, whereas the Council's own Masterplan for Sniperley includes a broad linear park to be named "The Avenue", offering an attractive vista north east from Sniperley Hall, the December Bellway application shows a much narrower strip in which a



row of houses blocks a substantial part of the view. In addition, the sample housing designs submitted by both developers do not particularly relate to the architectural landscape of Durham City itself.

National Policy is that developments “give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements” (NPPF, para. 112), yet these very standard plans clearly unfold, unimaginatively, by first positing a road network then placing the housing along those roads and, only last, fitting in a rather inadequate cycle and pedestrian network. The need, recognised better in the Council’s Masterplan, is for a design that marginalises the option of car-use, freeing land for uses other than car-parking, and allowing landscape designs that maximise the amenity value of green spaces, as well as discouraging the “school run” to the new primary school. Proposed tree planting is inadequate. The prospect is that any “verdant tree-line avenues” will be outnumbered by vistas of hard landscaping and car-park front gardens.

Even though gas boilers are to be prohibited for new developments from 2025, the Bellway application still offers them for all but an unclear number of so-called “Future Homes”, despite the Council’s Masterplan wanting to ensure more sustainable planning by there being no connection of the site to the Gas Network. Trustees welcomed, however, the conclusions of the authoritative Wardell Armstrong report submitted with the County Durham Land LLP application. This investigates the possibilities for mine water as a heat source and concludes that ground-source heat pumps coupled to solar panels could offer effective and efficient sources of renewable energy for this site. This approach should be taken further to accord with Policy 29 of the County Plan.

It is only recently that the Inspector for the County Plan dismissed the argument from Durham County Council that a “Western Relief Road” would be needed if more than 350 houses were built at Sniperley. Instead, in deleting the relief roads from the draft County Plan, he stipulated that measures be taken to ensure that the cumulative impact of new traffic on the wider road network would be minimal. The current applications for over 1,900 houses cannot be responsible in this respect.

Hoping for something much better is not a pipe dream. Trustees suggest as an example of best practice an award-winning scheme at York for a 600-house net-zero project, using the innovative so-called Passivhaus approach, <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/city-york-council-zero-carbon-homes-programme> .

Latest on the Arup Police Mast

The controversy about the fate of Arup’s Grade II-listed police radio mast seems set to last some time. The non-functional but architecturally iconic radio mast was sited next to the old Police Headquarters at Aykley Heads, but removed in 2017 so that new housing could be built on that site. The mast, designed by the firm founded by the prestigious Ove Arup, was recognised nationally as an icon of brutalist architecture and given Grade II-listed protection. Permission to remove it was on condition that the mast be dismantled carefully and later relocated adjacent to the new police HQ, now built nearby. The designers gave detailed advice on both the mast’s dismantling and its reconstruction. However, the Durham Constabulary has been seeking to demolish it, despite a Council enforcement order in 2020 for its re-erection, and despite the earlier commitment made that some of the large sum of money raised by the Constabulary in selling its former site for housing would be used to restore the mast.

Early this year the County Planning Committee supported by 10 - 2 an officer's recommendation to refuse demolition. Committee members were not impressed by the Constabulary’s argument that it now wanted to avoid the cost of re-erecting it, nor by the shoddy way in which the mast has been treated since it was dismantled. This could even suggest that there was always little intention to restore it. The public stance of the Durham Constabulary on this matter has seemed a rather disingenuous performance of seeming outrage, with this legally protected local monument being described in the local press as a “redundant mass of damaged concrete”. The claim that the mast was “currently being stored under tarpaulin” was illustrated with the image of a neatly wrapped structure, contrasting strongly with the photograph shown here, taken on 12 February 2023.



It seems possible that the police authority may seek to offer some alternative to demolition, though short of the required re-erection, but in that case the impression from the planning committee was that it is more likely that DCC would again pursue enforcement action on re-erecting the mast. Might Durham Constabulary appeal the issue to the Secretary of State? It would mean the latter being asked to override a legitimate enforcement order.

PERSONALIA

It is a pleasure to report that **Dr Douglas Pocock**, our former long-standing honorary secretary, has been made the first Honorary Freeman of the City of Durham Parish. This was at a civic reception held by the Durham City Parish Council in the Town Hall last December.

Vice-Chair of the Trust. **Sue Childs** has been elected to the office of Vice-Chair of the Trust. The reinstatement of this role is a precautionary measure in case of illness of the other Trust officers, as signatories to cheques etc. Such empowered officers had numbered only two since Francis Pritchard became both Treasurer and Hon. Sec.

WORTH NOTING

The Trust website has been updated. New interactive planning application pages are now live on the Trust website, <https://durhamcity.org/our-work/planning/>. A map shows the site of recent planning applications, with link to details about and to the Trust's responses. Monthly summaries of past responses are also available (<https://durhamcity.org/our-work/summaries/>). Trustees thank Matthew Phillips, Sue Childs and Roger Cornwell for the combined expertise behind this invaluable new resource.

The Special Exhibition "How Historic Durham Survived the 20th Century" continues at the Durham Museum and Heritage Centre, North Bailey, until the Museum closes in October. The exhibition celebrates the work of the Trust, founded as the Durham Preservation Society in 1942.

Interested in being a volunteer for the Museum? Visit <http://durhammuseum.co.uk/volunteers.html>.

Heritage Walk. Admirers of David Miller's leaflet design for the *Durham City Seven Hills Trail* will be pleased to know that a second such trail is now available, covering mainly more central sites in the same easy-to-use-while-walking format. Free leaflets for the *Durham City Heritage Trail* can be found at the Town Hall, WHS Visitor Centre, Durham Museum and other tourist outlets. Trustees were happy to share printing costs with Durham City Parish Council.

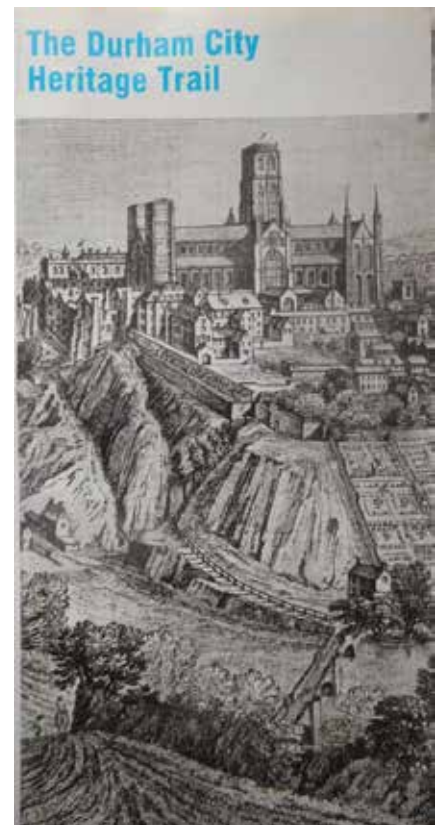
Architectural Award for 2022. As most members will know, each year the Trust gives an architectural award for an outstanding development in Durham City completed in the year before. However, candidates for 2022 currently seem elusive and we invite members to submit any nominations to trust@durhamcity.org.

Interested in becoming a Trustee? Local citizens engaged with the life, architecture and history of Durham City are always welcome to join us and are invited to contact our Chair, *John Lowe*, chair@durhamcity.org.

Plaques around the City. Trustees warmly support The City of Durham Parish Council's blue plaques scheme, commemorating important people, buildings and events in the City. The Trust website now also offers an extensive list, with images, of the many, varied heritage plaques about the City, both recent and long-established, <https://durhamcity.org/resources/list-of-plaques-in-the-city/>. This list has been compiled by Sue Childs with the help of members of the public to gather the photos of plaques installed by the Trust and other organisations.

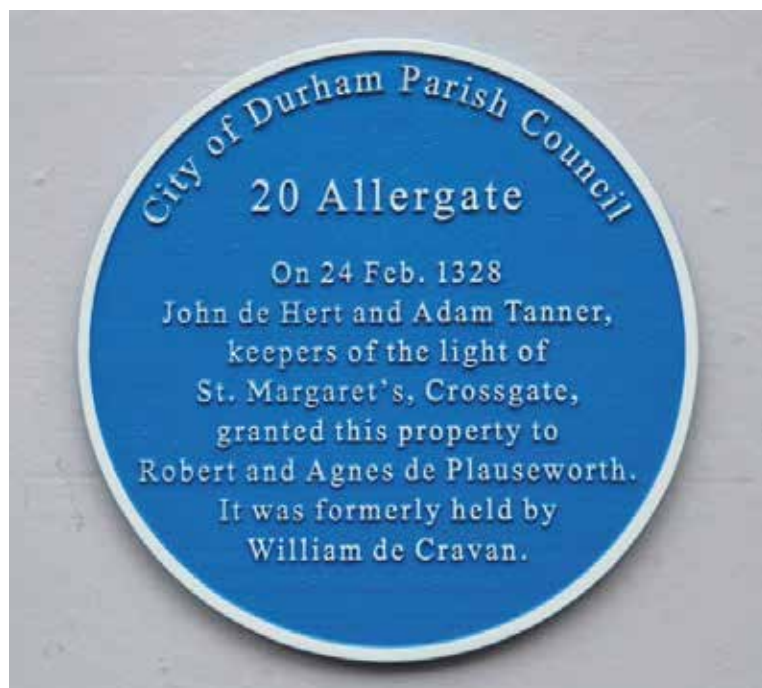
The 4-page supplement to this bulletin is an account by Robert Banks of the story behind one new plaque.

The Trustees



Robert Banks, The Blue Plaque in Allergate

The City of Durham Parish Council has installed a Blue Plaque on 20 Allergate to mark the significance of the property in the history of the street, usually known in medieval times as Alvertongate.



Alvertongate. Long before the arrival of the railway and, before that, the enclosure of Crossgate moor, Alvertongate was a high road over the Red [or “Reed”] Hills and westwards to Ushaw and Esh. Its status as a high road declined with the arrival of the turnpike road to Newcastle through Neville’s Cross, then ceased completely with the arrival of the railway and the building of the viaduct with its embankments. The origin of the name is unknown. It is often suggested that it has something to do with [North]Allerton in Yorkshire, but its direction alone makes this highly unlikely. Other streets in Durham City that include the root “gat, gath, or gate” signify that they lead to a place nearby, e.g. Crossgate (presumably to Neville’s Cross), Milburngate, (to the Mill Burn), and Gilesgate (to St. Giles’). This would suggest that Alvertongate signified the road to Alverton, which itself is probably from an Anglo-Saxon personal name – the estate (“-ton”) of Aelfward, or something similar. Today

Allergate is a short, residential street from its origin as a branch of Crossgate between the Elm Tree and the Angel pubs to its junction with Sutton Street near the Colpitts.

Finding the key documentary evidence

To establish the identification of the property as the one described in the plaque, we must first jump forward to the 19th century. Directories for the city show that during the first half of the 1800s it was occupied by Mr. George Naggs, who appears as the proprietor in John Wood’s map of 1820. A search for George Naggs in the Durham County Record Office catalogue soon revealed that he held the property by lease from St. Margaret’s Chapelry at an annual rent of 2s. In addition to the present house and garden, the property as owned by St. Margaret’s included a garth [or field] bounded on the north by the Mill Burn, which runs from Flass Vale and was originally an open stream but now flows in a culvert under North Road. The terraced houses of the east side of New Street were subsequently built on the garth. In April 1830 St. Margaret’s vestry book records that it was “Ordered that a Sum not exceeding ten pounds be allowed out of the Church Rate to enable the chapelwardens to have plans made of the property belonging to the chapelry.” The plan is now in the Durham County Record Office and includes some twenty properties all of which can be identified on the Crossgate and Framwellgate title maps of 1838 and the first edition of the Ordnance Survey of 1861.

George Naggs was baptised in 1766 in Whitworth Chapel, the seventh of eight children of Thomas and Elizabeth. The family moved to Durham by 1772 at the latest and was probably living in Crossgate, when Thomas was Overseer of the Poor for the Crossgate township. George was originally a tailor like his father, but his status changed to “gentleman”, no later than 1839, implying that he was by then of independent means. He was one of the twelve vestrymen of St. Margaret’s for the Crossgate township, serving successively as Constable, Overseer of the Poor, Sidesman, and Chapelwarden. He died in 1850, leaving the property in trust to his widow Elizabeth, and then to his three nieces.

Sale of the Freehold. It is important to note that the lessee of the property was not required to live in the house, but that it could be sublet to other tenants. However, documentary evidence in the form of wills and other legal documents held in the County Record Office indicate that the house was continuously occupied by the lessee from the mid 18th century (Ralph Holmes, yeoman) to the mid 19th century (George Naggs, gentleman). The next lessee, John Tiplady Esquire, did not occupy the house, but the Durham Directory shows that it was continuously occupied by a succession of tenants throughout his tenure of the lease, apart from 1862-3 when no occupant is listed. Several structural details show that the house was modernised during those years. John Tiplady was a solicitor whose dwelling house is now the police station in New Elvet. The Allergate property

passed into private freehold ownership in October 1874 when it was sold to Mr. John Hall Robson, who owned the steam mill in North Road on the site of the present bus station. Details of the sale are given in a report of 1900 to the House of Commons concerning the Endowed Charities (Administrative County of Durham), which also names the last lessee as Mr. J. Tiplady. Undoubtedly he would have bought 20 Allergate had he not died suddenly in March 1874, apparently of a stroke. The report of 1900 was prepared by the Charity Commissioners [see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charity_Commission_for_England_and_Wales] and shows that, as a registered charity, the endowments of the chapelry of St Margaret were being administered by the vicar and other trustees under a scheme approved by the Commissioners in 1871. Sale of real estate had to be approved by order of the Charity Commissioners, as specified in the report. On being sold to John Hall Robson the sitting tenant was Thomas S. Miller, a clerk, who continued to occupy the house until 1882. It was then briefly occupied by R. M. Dixon, a post messenger, in 1883. In 1884 the house once again appears to have been unoccupied and may have been further altered, in particular in the rear service offshot, by the new owner, James Dowson Smith. Smith was himself a builder with business premises in Reform Place. He is listed in the Durham Directory as in occupation from 1885 until his death in 1897.



(Above left) Extract of the map prepared for St Margaret's in 1830, showing the chapelry's properties in the Crossgate township. North ("New") Road had just been laid out and was undeveloped at that date. Note the Mill Burn passing under the road and supplying a mill pond before falling into the Wear below Framwellgate Bridge. (Durham County Record Office, EP/Du.SM 154). The extract has been rotated to correspond with the orientation of the same area shown on the right in the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map of 1861, where St Margaret's and the churchyard are coloured blue, 20 Allergate with its garth are shown in brownish red, and the other properties belonging to St Margaret's are in lilac. (Digimap, © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2023). All rights reserved. (1861)).

Following the documentary evidence back to the 17th century

Let us now start moving back from the 19th Century. While the property (including the garth) was owned by St. Margaret's chapelry, it was leased on 21-year leases that could be renewed, inherited, or (with the permission of the chapelry) assigned to a new lessee. Four extant vestry books for St. Margaret's covering the period from the 17th to the 19th centuries are now in the Durham County Record Office. They record annual payments of the 2s fee for the lease by the named lessee from Easter Tuesday 1665 to Easter Tuesday 1802, after which vestry receipts were recorded as total only. The first named person to pay the fee was George Comyn who is also recorded as paying a "fine" of 8s for admittance to the property, implying that he had just taken out a new lease. Other properties owned by St. Margaret's can also be identified by their individual fees. It appears to have been normal practice with property owned by St Margaret's for new leases to be issued some 4 or 5 years before the expiry of the old lease. Seven part or counterpart indentures for leases exist, now also in the Durham County Record Office, dating between 1701 and 1839.

The Indenture of 13 April 1701 was held by Ralph Hutchinson, William Kay (yeomen) and Jane, "his now wife". It describes the property as:

“All th^t Burgage and Tenem[en]^t Close or Garth on the Backside thereof with the appurten[en]ces^{scituate} Lyeing and being in Allertongate aforesaid on the North side of the said street: there now in the possession of the said Ralph Hutchinson or his Tennants abutting or adjoyneing to a house of one Dr John Smith one of the Pr[e]bends of the Cathedrall church of Durham and now in the poss[ess]ion or occupation of one George Kirkley present under Tennant on the East, a Burgage of one Ralph Hutchinson and now in the occupa[t]ion or poss[ess]ion of one Matthew Briggs the present under Tennant thereof on or Towards the West, a Close or Garth belonging to the said house and extending to a parcel of Ground com[m]only called the Sheriffe Meadows on or Towards the North and the high Street of Allertongate on or towards the South, togeth^r wth all and singular houses edifices, buildings, ways, easements, profits, Commodityes & hereditam[en]^{ts} whatsoever to the same belonging or in any wise appertaining”.

The indenture tells us that Ralph Hutchinson also owned the adjacent property, now number 19.



(Left) South elevation of the house. In 1862-3 the first-floor bay window was added and the roof was raised, the original line of the eave being marked by the decorative wood fillet along the front. The ground floor bay window was inserted in 1884. Rendering covers the stone wall of the ground floor and the first-floor wall of hand-made brick.

The rear offshoot, (aerial view, right), has mostly rubble stone walls, but was extended to the north with a new machine-made brick gable wall, again probably in 1884



The medieval records

Note the distinction in the 1701 indenture between the “burgage”, in essence the present house and garden, and the “tenement”, now occupied by the terraced houses on the east side of New Street. Before the dissolution of the monasteries, Durham Cathedral was a Benedictine priory and Allergate (or Alvertongate, as it was then usually known) was part of the township of Crossgate. A new tenant of a burgage in the Crossgate township would be confirmed at a meeting of the head court of the Old Borough of Durham on payment of a “fine” and the swearing of an oath of loyalty to the prior as overlord. The tenant thereby became a burgess with attendant privileges and responsibilities. The court occupied the space opposite St. Margaret’s, which is now the rear loading bay for the Iceland supermarket. Under the lordship of the prior, properties in Alvertongate were held as burgages and owed an annual rent, known as landmale, collected on behalf of the priory by the sacrist. The sacrist’s rental for 1500 provides evidence concerning the date of acquisition of the property by St. Margaret’s chapelry (published in Britnell, R., *Records of the Borough of Crossgate, Durham 1312-1531*, Publications of The Surtees Society, Vol. CCXII, The Surtees Society/ The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2008). The rental is a list of all properties in the township of Crossgate, in the order of their locations. The entry for the property appears under Alvertongate north side as [original in Latin]:

21. from the chapel of Saint Margaret in Durham for a burgage in the same place [i.e. as the previous entries for Alvertongate] formerly of John Chester [Chestre] and rendering per annum iij d [3 pence].

John Chester had also owned 3 further burgages in Alvertongate: by 1500 they were owned by the Guild of Corpus Christi, and as such were presumably confiscated by Henry VIII’s or Edward VI’s commissioners following the suppression of the guilds and chantries. They are identifiable as the modern properties of 24-26 Allergate. John de Chester was the perpetual curate of St. Margaret’s Chapel from 1390-1405 (Colgrave, B. and Norris, R. *The Parish Church of St. Margaret of Antioch, Crossgate, Durham*, published 2008) and he probably bequeathed the property to the chapelry, since records of similar donations at about this time are preserved in the records of the Crossgate court (Britnell, op.cit.), though sadly none for this particular property.

The details on the Blue Plaque. From the dissolution back to the early 14th century the records for Alvertongate mostly form part of the Cathedral muniments and were analysed in detail by Margaret Camsell (*The Development of a Northern Town in the Later Middle Ages: The City of Durham, c. 1250-1540*, Volume IIa, D. Phil. Thesis, University of York, Department of History, October 1985). Taking the sacrist's rental of 1500 as a fixed reference Camsell traces several named holders of the property back to:

24 Feb. 1328 John de Hert and Adam Tanner, keepers of the light of St. Margaret's chapel, with the consent of 7 named parishioners, grant Robert de Plauseworth and his wife, Agnes, a burgage in Allertongate, lying between the burgage of Roger de Hert and the burgage of Adam de Rylly. This burgage was formerly held by William de Cravan, and owes rent to keepers of the light of 4s. p.a. (Arch. Ael. New Series, II (1858), p. 26).

Keepers of the light. The keepers of the light were chosen by the parishioners, perhaps annually. It was their duty to provide sufficient wax for candles to burn permanently in the chapel. In a similar conveyance of a property in Crossgate by John de Hert, also in 1328, the property is said to “render[] yearly 4s. for the maintenance of the wax lights before the image of Blessed Margaret in the chancel of the said chapel.”

The key to the history of the Crossgate township. The importance of the identification of what is now known as 20 Allergate to the local history may be briefly illustrated by the sacrist's rental for 1329, which is particularly complete. It allows the tenants of all properties with dwellings on the north side of Allergate to be identified by name (the south side was undeveloped at this time). There were 17 such burgages held by 15 tenants, three of whom were women. The landmale rents ranged from 2d to 8d. Between the present numbers 22 and 23 was a common vennel or narrow lane that led to a communal well somewhere in the vicinity of the present bus station. The vennel has now been subsumed into 22, but is still recognisable in part as the passageway leading to 22's annex (or 22A).

Outline structural history of the house

Although the house was substantially modernised during the 2 years it was unoccupied in the 1860s and then again in 1884, it is clear that most of the fabric of the walls and at least part of the main roof structure were retained from its earlier phases. The ground floor walls are of local sandstone rubble construction, as also are the first-floor east wall of the main offshot and probably other walls. Some are 2 feet thick. The first floor of the south (front) elevation is, however, of handmade brick, as are the east and west gables of the main roof. Given the documented history of the property back to the medieval period, it is likely that at least some of the stonework is of medieval date, at which time the first floor would have been a half-timbered solar. The first floor may then have been replaced in brick at any time from the 16 – 18th centuries. In the 1970s a bathroom and new kitchen were added, the bathroom being an external addition and the kitchen replacing a previous one that most likely dated from the late 19th century alteration. Finally, in 2006, the 1970s kitchen was removed and a new two-roomed extension was added at the rear of the house.



The photograph (*above right*) shows the inner face of the front wall of the ground floor, when it was exposed in the 1980s for remedial damp-proofing. The wall is of local sandstone construction and is approximately 2 feet [65 cm] thick. The bay window was inserted in 1884 beneath a pre-existing first floor bay window dating from the 1862-3 alterations. The drawing shows the ancient timbers of the roof of the main part of the house. This roof was raised by about 2 feet as part of the 1862-3 alterations, but the main timbers were retained from earlier phases. They are all hand cut and consist of a pair of principal rafters scarfed together at the apex and located mid-way between the brick gables by eight butt purlins, tenoned through the principal rafters and held in place by wooden wedges.

