

Bishop Lloyd's Palace

A Grade 1 Listed building in the heart of Chester



HISTORY MONOGRAPH No 4 – ROYALISTS, ROUNDHEADS, RESTORATION AND RECONSTRUCTION c.1615-1774

The association between George Lloyd, Bishop of Chester 1605-1615, and the building which still bears his name was over almost as soon as it began. This monograph traces the subsequent owners of the property in the context of the Civil War, the restoration of the monarchy and the equally fascinating 100 years thereafter.

It may seem surprising that a building as iconic as Bishop Lloyd's Palace, which has been famous not only in Chester but throughout the world for so long, should still be such a mystery. While the visual evidence associating the building with Bishop George Lloyd is incontrovertible, extensive research has so far failed to reveal the existence of any documentary evidence to confirm his ownership or occupation, or to satisfactorily explain the date of 1615 on the frontage, which while coinciding with the date of his death, is unlikely to be the date of the building's construction.¹ Although Lloyd was appointed Bishop of Sodor and Man in 1599, and translated to Chester in 1605, it would appear from parish records that throughout this period, and for a while thereafter, he was primarily resident in Heswall on the Wirral, to the rectory of which he had been presented in 1597. The baptisms of two of his children are recorded in the registers of that parish in 1599 and 1604 respectively, and the burial of a third in 1607. Lloyd was subsequently presented to the rectory of Thornton-le-Moors, which he appears to have made his chief residence until his death on 1 August 1615, following which he was interred in Chester Cathedral.² The parish registers of Holy Trinity, Chester, within which the house now known as Bishop Lloyd's was situated, do, however, record the baptism of an unnamed 'f[emale]' child of a 'George Lloyd' on 29 April 1599. Although this predates the baptism of Lloyd's son John, at Heswall, on 9 October 1599, by only seven months, it is not impossible that it relates to a child who died in infancy. No

subsequent references to an elder daughter have as yet been found.³

The structure now known as Bishop Lloyd's Palace was originally two separate town houses, only the westernmost of which, with its elaborate decoration, is associated with Bishop Lloyd. It has been suggested, in the absence of documentary evidence linking it directly with the bishop, that the house may have been built by another member of his family. This included several prosperous citizens of Chester. Alderman David Lloyd, George's elder brother, was a successful merchant, holding office as Mayor in 1593-4.⁴ It is possible that the arms of the Merchant Adventurers Company, which appear on one of the carved panels on the frontage, may allude to him.⁵ David Lloyd's very extensive will, which was proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury in 1600, provides no clues, although the detailed inventory appended to it shows that he was fabulously wealthy.⁶ Another candidate is Dr David Yale, Chancellor of the Diocese of Chester and close associate of Bishop Lloyd, whose son Thomas married the latter's elder daughter Ann. However his will, dated 1626, is also unrevealing.⁷

Equally frustrating is the fact that so far no firm evidence has been found concerning the history and ownership of the property immediately after Bishop Lloyd's death. Lloyd does not appear to have left a will, and that of his widow, Ann, who survived him by thirty-three years, dying in 1648, contains no specific reference to her place of



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residence, describing her simply as 'of Chester'. Her request to be buried in the Cathedral close to her husband, rather than in one of the city Chester', who died unmarried in 1631, left a short will leaving the majority of her possessions to her mother, with whom she may have been living at the time. However her burial in the church of St Mary-on-the hill, although it does not prove that she was not living in her late father's house, would suggest otherwise.⁹

A number of secondary sources have made unsubstantiated assertions that after the death of Bishop Lloyd, the westernmost house was occupied by either his daughter Ann Yale, grandmother of Elihu Yale, the benefactor of Yale University, or a certain 'Sir John and Lady Bowyer', the latter at the very specific date of 1616.¹⁰ No documentary evidence has so far been found to confirm any association with the former. However, the reference to the Bowyers may indirectly derive from an entry in the churchwardens' accounts of the parish of Holy Trinity Church recording the receipt of 6s 8d from 'lady bower.... for her seate and her daughters seate in the church', dated 4 July 1616.¹¹ As will become clear later in this account, the possession of a pew in Holy Trinity was an important badge of status for the owners and occupiers of Bishop Lloyd's house, which was probably the most prestigious in the parish, but there is no other evidence to support the association of this entry with it. The exact identity of these members of the Bowyer family is also uncertain. The only contemporary candidates would be Sir William (not Sir John) Bowyer of Knypersley in Staffordshire, a wealthy mine owner who had been elected MP for Staffordshire in 1614, but he was not knighted until 1617, and no evidence has so been found of a connection with Chester at this date.¹² A 'Colonel John Bowyer' is referred to as one of the Commissioners of Sir William Brereton, the Parliamentary Commander at the time of the siege of Chester, but this is too late to be relevant.¹³ The crest of a bird of prey surmounting the huge overmantel in the easternmost house now forming part of Bishop Lloyd's, has been adduced as evidence for this association, on the basis that the arms of the Bowyers of Knypersley included the crest of a falcon, but this interpretation is questionable.

More reliable evidence for the owners and occupiers of both houses during the period after 1615 was found among a collection of deeds and

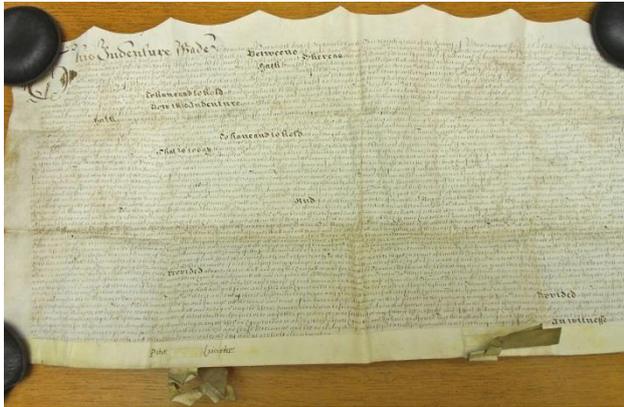
churches, is unsurprising.⁸ Her youngest daughter, Alice, also described as 'of the Cittie of

family papers formerly belonging to the Brown family, owners of Brown's department store, which include a large series of documents transferred to Alderman Charles Brown on his purchase of the property in 1899.¹⁴ This collection does not include any original title deeds predating 1871, but among it is a covenant for the production of title deeds dated 14 October 1872. This includes a schedule of conveyances dating back to 1661, which must subsequently have been lost or dispersed.¹⁵

This document lists conveyances relating to two separate transactions which were concluded in 1661, providing crucial evidence for the ownership of the property at that date, and a lynchpin for research into both its earlier and later history. The first, dated 2 January, is a conveyance from one Jonathan Ridge and Jane his wife to Dame Eleanor, Viscountess Kilmorey, and the second, dated just one month later, 12 February, is the conveyance of another, almost certainly adjacent, property, also to Lady Kilmorey, by one Henry Harpur.

Full details of these transactions are not given in this document, but a search of indexes to other collections in the Cheshire Record Office revealed the existence of a related deed, almost certainly a stray from the Brown collection, which constitutes the earliest surviving original source for the history of the property.¹⁶

The endorsement on this document, which is dated 27th September 1661, reads 'The Counterpart of the settlement of Ridge's House', but it is in fact a deed of release, or enfeoffment, for the benefit of the children and grandchildren of Viscountess Kilmorey, to Sir Peter Leicester of Nether Tabley, the antiquary (Lady Kilmorey's son-in-law), and Sir Geoffrey Shakerley of Hulme, as trustees, of *both* of the properties conveyed to Viscountess Kilmorey in January of the same year.



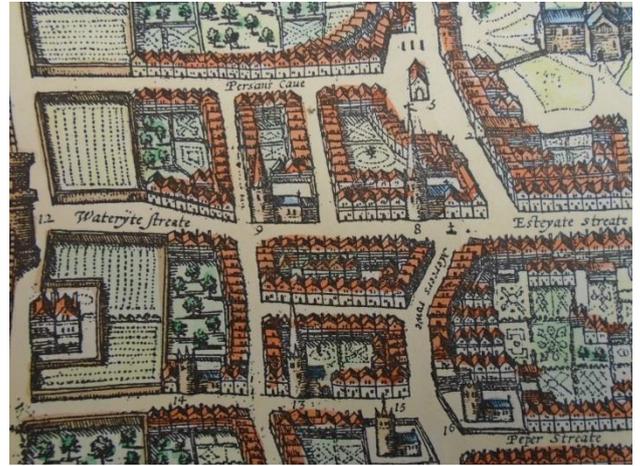
Deed of Release relating to two properties in Watergate Street 1661.

[Cheshire Archives & Local Studies, ZCR 63/2/129]

The importance of this source, beyond the fact that it confirms the ownership of the property at this date, is the description of the premises, and the names of the previous owners included in it. These are as follows:

'all and singular that one Messuage Burgage or Tenem[en]t scituate Lyinge and beinge in watergate street w[i]thin the City of Chester together w[i]th the Kilne Stable other Outhousing Garden and Backside thereinto belonginge or therewith all used or enjoyed Lately p[ur]chased by her the sd Dame Eleanor from Jonathan Ridge now or lately Alderman of the City of Chester. As Alsoe all and singular that other Messuage Burgage or Tenem[en]t scituate also and beinge in Watergate st together w[i]th all the Outhousing and Backside theirunto belonging lately purchased and bought from Henry Harpur now or late of the s[ai]d City of Chester Gent.....'

Clearly, at this point, the two houses subsequently known jointly as Bishop Lloyd's Palace, were still separate entities, lately in separate ownership, with gardens, kilns and stables at the rear, reflecting the still relatively undeveloped backlands behind all the main streets of the city as shown in Braun & Hogenberg's map of 1580.¹⁷



Map of Chester by Braun & Hogenberg

[Cheshire Archives & Local Studies, PM 14/1]

The loss of all but one of the early deeds relating to the property is partially remedied by a set of notes by Thomas Hughes (local antiquary and author of *The Stranger's Guide to Chester*), entitled 'Materials for a History and Architectural Description of the Mansion'. These were compiled in 1871 at the time of the sale of the property by public auction.¹⁸ In a preface Hughes relates that the 'more ancient' title deeds to the property were 'lent' to him on behalf of Mr Prichard, one of the numerous purchasers in the sale. He then goes on to partially recite and comment on the 1661 conveyances referred to above, providing very significant additional information relating to both earlier and later owners and occupiers of the two original houses, as well as clues to their modification and probable amalgamation.

As already mentioned, the conveyance of 4 January 1661 names Jonathan Ridge as the owner of one of the two houses sold to Eleanor, Viscountess Kilmorey. However, according to Hughes, an earlier deed of 1660, forming part of the same transaction, stated, in addition, that this house had formerly been 'in the Tenure of Robert Harvey, Alderman'. It also specified the consideration, or price, of this house as 450 pounds, which compared to the 44 pounds which Lady Kilmorey paid for the second building, acquired from Henry Harpur on 12 February 1661, suggests that the house occupied by Harvey, and later by Ridge, was probably the more substantial of the two, and therefore most likely to have been the westernmost, ie. the house associated with Bishop Lloyd.

Alderman Robert Harvey was a glover by trade, and a wealthy merchant, with extensive property in Chester and Ireland. He is best known as the founder in 1666 of the 'Nine Houses' in what was Claverton Lane (now Park Street).¹⁹ He held

office as Sheriff in 1625-6, and Mayor in 1639-40.²⁰ In 1635 he paid five shillings to the churchwardens of Holy Trinity for a seat for his wife in the church, which suggests that he was already resident in the parish, and he was still in occupation of this seat during his mayoralty in 1640.²¹ On 23rd August 1639 Harvey is named, along with other substantial Chester merchants, as part owner of a cargo comprising calfskins, salt salmons, fustians and lead, on a ship named 'le Content of Chester'.²² He was elected Mayor for a second time towards the end of the siege of Chester in 1645, but refused to take office, for reasons which are not clear.²³ Outwardly a committed Royalist, the city records for the period indicate that he was very active during the siege, contributing towards the cost of fortifications, clearing ditches, assisting in the filling in of breaches to the walls, and acting as one of the assessors following the warrant of Lord Byron, the Royalist governor, for the drawing up of an inventory of the stocks of food remaining in the city at the end of 1645.²⁴ These returns confirm that Harvey was living in St Martin's Ward (which included Bishop Lloyd's house) at that time, recording that there were ten in his family, with two soldiers billeted on them, and '2m wheate and rye, ½ m beanes' remaining.²⁵

Harvey was one of the dissentients to the Articles of Surrender of February 1646.²⁶ However, when he subsequently came before the Parliamentary Sequestration Committee as a 'delinquent', in 1647, he produced a number of witnesses who argued that he had refused to become one of the Commissioners of Array for the King, had never borne arms against the Parliamentary forces, and had been very slow to respond to requests to summons to the pentice.²⁷ Several of these depositions, now in The National Archives, also state, in mitigation, that Harvey's wife was 'a great reliever' of the Parliamentary prisoners in Chester Castle, and that she looked after the goods of a number of 'the Parliament's friends', presumably when they were forced to leave the city. The truth of some of these statements is open to doubt - Harvey was not the only former Royalist to attempt to trim his sails in this way - but interestingly, all of the witnesses called to give evidence confirm that Harvey had indeed been living in Watergate Street for at least the last twenty years (some actually said thirty). They also refer to fire damage sustained to his property in Chester because of alleged ill-feeling towards him by Lord Byron and others resulting from various 'free speeches which he uttered.....viz. by saying that they had overmastered us, & such like speeches'.²⁸ We know from the eye -witness

accounts of Randle Holme and other contemporaries, that Watergate Street suffered very badly from bombardment towards the end of the siege, but there is evidence that a number of suspected Parliamentary sympathisers also suffered damage from enemies within the city.²⁹

In spite of questions about his allegiance, Harvey managed to retain his seat in the assembly after the surrender of the city to the Parliamentarians in 1646³⁰, but, although there is no evidence for this, it may have been at this politically unsettled time, possibly as a result of financial losses sustained as a result of the siege, that he decided to sell his house in Watergate Street and adopt a rather lower profile in the city.

If Harvey had indeed been living in the house for twenty or thirty years prior to his appearance before the Sequestration Committee in 1647, then it is quite possible that he did in fact acquire the property immediately after the death of Bishop Lloyd in 1615, and may have been responsible for the plasterwork and fireplace in the street chamber. As a merchant with overseas interests and connections with the port of Chester, for which his house in Watergate street was ideally placed, the choice of nautical themes in the décor of this room, although probably taken from pattern books and found elsewhere in the city, would certainly have been appropriate.

Alderman Jonathan Ridge, to whom Harvey sold the house, possibly soon after the end of the siege, was a draper, who had held office as a Parliamentary militia commissioner and been a prominent member of the Chester Sequestration Committee.³¹ By 1646 he was in the ascendant as a hard-line Cromwellian and associate of Sir William Brereton. References to him in the city records as 'Captain Jonathan Ridge', and as former 'Ensign' to Captain William Wright, suggest that he had an active role during the Civil War, possibly under Brereton's command.³² He may not have been a local man in origin. A Jonathan Ridge, son of a Robert Ridge of Salford, draper, was bound apprentice to a William Johnson of Chester, merchant draper and hosier in 1637.³³ He held office as Sheriff in 1648-9,³⁴ and was elected an alderman in 1655,³⁵ but his apogee came in January 1659, when he was elected as one of the city's two MPs in Richard Cromwell's Parliament.³⁶ The baptism of a Jonathan, son of Jonathan Ridge, at Holy Trinity Church on 1 January 1656/7 would tend to confirm that he was resident in Watergate Street at that time.³⁷ Inevitably he was 'degraded and discharged' from the City Assembly at the first meeting after the

Restoration of Charles II in May 1660³⁸, and a number of suits against him referred to in the city records suggest that, like Harvey in the aftermath of the siege, Ridge may have found this an appropriate time to downsize.³⁹

Henry Harpur, who is named in the release of 1661 as the owner of the less valuable of the two messuages purchased in that year by Lady Kilmorey, was a wealthy lawyer, not a merchant, and held the office of Chapter Clerk or Steward to the Dean and Chapter of Chester.⁴⁰ In 1618 he had been appointed Master of the leper hospital of St Giles Boughton, which was destroyed by the Chester garrison during the siege.⁴¹ There is evidence from various sources that while outwardly a Royalist, he may, like Harvey, have had divided loyalties, or more likely took care to remain ambivalent. A petition to Cromwell on his behalf from the Cheshire Justices in 1656 asserts that during the siege he was 'for his affection to the parliament plundered of his goods of great value.....and that 20 houses of his were burnt',⁴² whereas a rather bizarre undated document of c.1660 transcribed in the *Cheshire Sheaf*, names him as one of a number of suggested Cheshire recipients of a proposed 'Order of the Royal Oak', eligibility for which was restricted to those who had 'rendered special and important service to the Martyr King'. This proposal was apparently dropped for fear of the animosity it might create.⁴³ Interestingly, it appears that, like Harvey, Harpur may have taken care, and arranged for the removal from the city, of the personal goods of a number of wealthy inhabitants, in his case probably Royalists. A curious item dated c.1643, transcribed in the *Cheshire Sheaf*, lists the contents of a trunk sent by Harpur to his wife, seized by a 'Collonell Bagott' at Lichfield, which included large quantities of jewellery, silver, paintings (including 'The kings picture all in gold'), shoes, clothes and fabrics.⁴⁴ Further evidence of these activities is a very ambiguous letter from Harpur to John Leche, among the archives of the Leche family of Carden in the Cheshire Record Office, referring to the transfer of another box of goods out of the city by Harpur on behalf of Leche's 'sister Thelwell'. This letter is dated 29th August 1645, just five days after the Royalist defeat at the battle of Rowton Heath, as the siege began to escalate.⁴⁵

The exact date of Harpur's acquisition of the easternmost house is not known, and no evidence has as yet been found that he actually lived there, (his name does not appear under St Martin's Ward in the 1645 inventory of stocks of food)⁴⁶, but the comparatively low consideration which,

according to Thomas Hughes, Lady Kilmorey paid for this building compared to the price she paid for the adjacent property, may be significant, as will be discussed later.

In view of their recent experiences, it is probably more than a coincidence that in early 1661, not only did Alderman Jonathan Ridge, and Henry Harpur decide to sell, but that Dame Eleanor, Dowager Viscountess Kilmorey, widow of a prominent Royalist, now in a position to re-enter public life, should have wished to purchase, a property in Chester suitable to a person of rank and status. It is probable that it was during the period of her ownership and occupation that the property acquired some of the distinguishing features which remain.

Eleanor, Viscountess Kilmorey, was born circa 1596, and was the only daughter and heiress of Thomas Dutton of Dutton Lodge in the parish of Great Budworth [d.1614]. She was married twice, firstly to Gilbert, Lord Gerard of Gerards Bromley [c.1609], and secondly, as a very wealthy widow, to Robert Needham, 2nd Viscount Kilmorey [c.1623].⁴⁷ Although of Cheshire extraction, Viscount Kilmorey had his main seat at Shavington Hall in Shropshire,⁴⁸ and inherited the Irish estates and title of Viscount Kilmorey, from his father, Robert Needham, 1st Viscount Kilmorey, who had held a number of commands in Ireland under James I.⁴⁹



Portrait of a lady of the Dutton family, possibly Eleanor, Viscountess Kilmorey, by an unknown artist, c.1625. Location unknown.

[The Grand Ladies Site' www.gogmsite.net]

Robert, 2nd Viscount Kilmorey, a staunch Royalist, was very prominent in Chester during the Civil War, being appointed a Commissioner of Array for the King in 1642, and subsequently being closely associated with Lord Byron, Governor, during the siege.⁵⁰ There is evidence that he and his very large extended family (there were twelve children from his marriage to Eleanor Dutton, nine of whom were still living at the time of the siege) were already resident in St. Martin's Ward when Lord Byron ordered an inventory to be made of the quantities of food remaining in January 1645/6, although, as we have seen, they are unlikely to have been living in Bishop Lloyd's house at that time. The relevant entry records that there were sixteen in Lord Kilmorey's family (this may have included some household servants), that four soldiers were billeted on them, and that they had no corn in the house.⁵¹

While the majority of the members of the Chester Assembly were, at least at the outset of the Civil War, Royalist in sympathy, as Governor, Byron was well aware that their loyalty was primarily to the city, rather than the cause, especially as the siege wore on, and the level of deprivation increased.⁵² Indeed it was for that reason that he had been appointed Governor early in 1644, as it was felt that an external appointee, whose loyalty to the King was not in doubt, was a much safer proposition than a locally favoured candidate.⁵³ It may have been as an attempt to obviate the unpopularity resulting from this, that at about the same time (the exact date is unknown), Byron allied himself with the local gentry by marrying, as his second wife, Eleanor, daughter of Lord Kilmorey, who although aged only about seventeen at the time, was already a widow, having been previously married to Peter Warburton of Arley, who had died in 1641. After the surrender of Chester on 3rd February 1646 Byron was allowed to leave the city, with his wife and entourage, and travel to Caernarvon, but eventually he was forced into exile, accompanied by his wife, and died in Paris in 1652, where he had held a post in the household of James, Duke of York.⁵⁴ Robert, Lord Kilmorey, reputedly escaped to Oxford before the end of the siege, but after being fined as a 'delinquent' was allowed to retire to his wife's family home, Dutton Lodge, where he lived in obscurity until his death in 1653.⁵⁵ Lady Kilmorey seems to have remained at Dutton Lodge during the remainder of the Interregnum, although whether this was 'quietly' seems debatable. There is a suggestion in the Cheshire Quarter Sessions records that she may

have encouraged some of her tenants in Dutton to join the Booth rising of 1659.⁵⁶ Although she was not arrested, her elder son Charles, 4th Viscount Kilmorey, who was more actively involved, was, and died while imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1660.⁵⁷



John Byron, 1st Lord Byron, by William Dobson c.1644.

[Tabley House Collection, Tabley Hall, Cheshire]

Although the family's primary residence after 1661 was still Dutton Lodge, that Lady Kilmorey spent at least part of the year in Chester is indicated by the following entry in the churchwarden's accounts of the parish of Holy Trinity:

'Att a general & publique meetinge of ye Parishioners of ye Holy & Undevided Trinitye ye 6th day of Jan 1662 It was Concluded & Agreed by ye afforesd Parishners that Dame Elinor Viscountess Doweger Killmorrey & Thomas Needham Esqr her sonne Haveinge desired to bee accommodated with seates suitable to their degree & quallitye; shall have & enjoy six foote & 6 inches square beinge now in two seates at the upper end of ye south Ile adjoyneinge to ye Wall & ye seate Above it ffor there servants to Sitt in to be neare them'.⁵⁸

By 1661, when it is assumed that Lady Kilmorey took up residence in Bishop Lloyd's house, it seems more than probable that a number of her

large family were living there with her. In addition to the Thomas Needham mentioned in the last reference, these almost certainly included her unmarried daughter, Katherine, and Eleanor, Lady Byron, widow of Lord Byron, who was buried in Holy Trinity Church on 29th January 1663/4.⁵⁹

Lady Byron, presumably having followed her husband in exile to France at the end of the Civil War, at some point, probably towards the end of the Interregnum, became the mistress of Prince Charles, later Charles II. There is an ungallant, frequently quoted, reference to her in Samuel Pepys' diary describing her as 'the King's seventeenth whore abroad'.⁶⁰ However Sir Peter Leycester, the antiquary, her brother-in-law, and a close friend of the family, described her in his *Historical Antiquities* as 'A Person of such comely carriage, hansomnes, swete disposition, honour, and generall repute in the world, that she hath scarce left her equall'.⁶¹ Accusations of avariciousness levelled at her by Pepys and perpetuated by others, may have resulted from a misunderstanding of an annual pension granted to her by the King as recompense for the services of her late husband.⁶²

Lady Byron's relationship with the King seems to have been quite short-lived, but the existence of a very fine portrait of her by Sir Peter Lely, possibly formerly owned by Sir Peter Leycester, and still hanging at Tabley Hall, suggests that she was still in favour at the time of the Restoration, although she must have soon after returned to her family in Cheshire, where she died, probably in her mother's house in Watergate street, aged only 37.



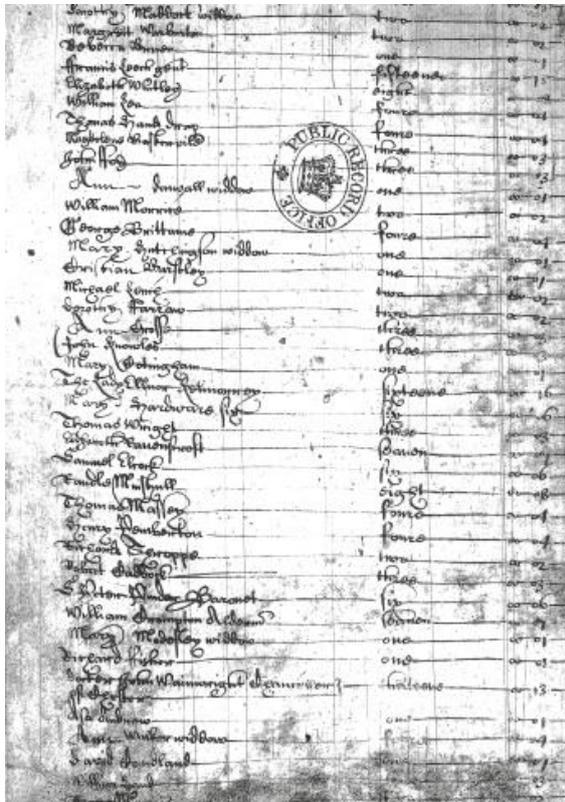
Eleanor Needham, Lady Byron, as St. Catherine, by Sir Peter Lely c.1663.

[Tabley House Collection, Tabley Hall, Cheshire].

When in 1661 Lady Kilmorey acquired the two properties which came to be known as Bishop Lloyd's Palace, one of them, presumably the western house, with the more distinctive frontage, was considerably more valuable than the other. Thomas Hughes' interpretation of this was that the existing eastern house was built only after Lady Kilmorey acquired it.⁶³ Another explanation is that it was badly damaged during the siege, hence the low price, and that she partially rebuilt it, simultaneously amalgamating it with the adjoining property to form one large house to accommodate her large family. Possible confirmation of this is provided by two deeds of 24th & 25th January 1706, transcribed by Hughes, in which Robert, 7th Viscount Kilmorey, great grandson of Viscountess Kilmorey, and the 'Honble Elizabeth Nedham of Shavington', possibly one of her unmarried daughters, sold the property to Thomas Partington of the City of Chester, Merchant. The description of the premises in these transactions reads:

'all that Messuage Burgage or dwelling house with its appurtenances situate standing and being in Watergate Streete and Comon Hall lane in the City of Chester.....which said Messuage and tenement was heretofore severall Messuages and tenements and were [?] heretofore purchased by the Right Honoble Eleanor Viscountess Kilmorey now deceased from Jonathan Ridge Alderman and Henry Harpur gentlemen deceased.'⁶⁴

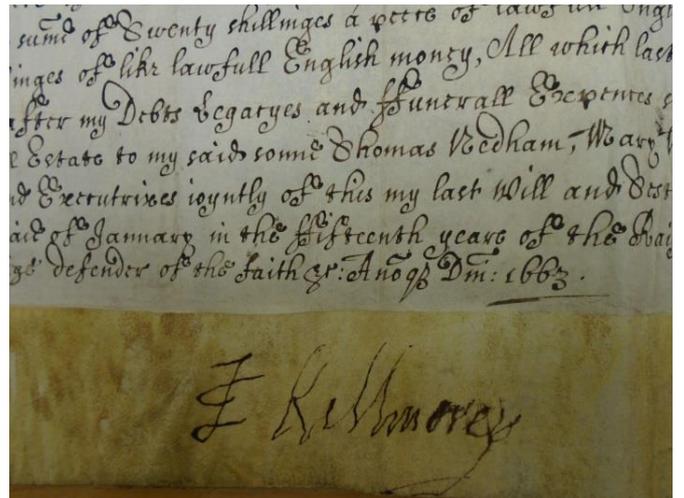
That the partial rebuilding and amalgamation of the two properties took place soon after its purchase is also suggested by the Hearth Tax returns of 1664, which list Lady Kilmorey's house as containing no less than 16 hearths, the highest number in St. Martin's Ward and one of the highest in the city as a whole.⁶⁵ The returns of a Royal Aid levied in 1665 record that Lady Kilmorey's property was assessed at 5 shillings, the second highest in the ward, again presumably reflecting the size of the property.⁶⁶



Hearth Tax Assessment for St. Martin's Ward, Chester, 1664.
[Cheshire Archives & Local Studies, Microfilm 13/1]

Lady Kilmorey and her daughter Katherine died within a day of each other on 11th and 12th March 1665/6, and were buried at Great Budworth Church on the same day, 16th March 1665/6.⁶⁷ They were in residence at Dutton Lodge at the time. Both left wills, but sadly not inventories, and

they include no references to landed property or buildings.⁶⁸



Will of Eleanor, Viscountess Kilmorey 1663 (detail).
[Cheshire Archives & Local Studies, WS 1666]

The history of the house in the immediate aftermath of Lady Kilmorey's death is not clear. However a search of the Chester City Aids and Assessments did provide a clue. A Parliamentary Assessment for 1677 lists a sum of 14 pounds and 12 pence received from Alderman Mainwaring as a tenant of one Thomas Needham. Individual houses are not generally named in rate assessments at this date, but the level of the assessment, which was the second highest in St Martin's Ward, and the name Needham, suggests that the property concerned was that of the Kilmoreys, and that it was at this point being let.⁶⁹

Thomas Needham was the last surviving of the four sons of Lady Kilmorey, and named as one of her executors in her will. As a younger son he was not the heir to the title, but following the early deaths of the 4th and 5th Viscounts he may have been acting as a trustee for his nephew Thomas, 6th Viscount, who was only 19 in 1677.⁷⁰ On 14 December 1666, nine months after the deaths of his mother and sister, he was admitted to the freedom of the city gratis as 'a person of honor [who] hath an estate in this city'.⁷¹ He died in 1690, and both a will and inventory survive. The will contains no references to landed property, but on the last membrane of a very extensive inventory, primarily of the contents of Dutton Lodge, is a list entitled 'Goods at Chest[er] house'. In his notes on the history of the house, Thomas Hughes mentions that the family always referred to the property by the not very original name of 'Chester house', and indeed the property is described as such on the endorsement of the only surviving original deed of 1661.⁷² Therefore it can be safely assumed that this list refers to the

Fig

of Edward, who 'fell over the rails of the Rows while standing on a bench outside his father's house in Watergate street and was killed.'⁷⁸ This is one of many incidents of this kind recorded in this source.

Documents in the Brown family collection record that on the death of Edward Partington in 1748 the house was inherited by his son, Thomas Walley Partington, born 1730. A lawyer and land agent like his father, Thomas Walley Partington eventually rose to be London agent to the Grosvenor family, and became extremely wealthy, owning several properties on prime sites in London and a house in Brook St, Hanover Square. ⁷⁹ It seems unlikely that he personally occupied the house, except as a child, and during the period c.1750 to 1783 the building was transformed into an inn, known as 'The Yacht' or the 'Upper Yacht' (to distinguish it from 'The Lower Yacht' situated on the corner of Nicholas street). ⁸⁰In 1774 it was sold to Thomas Brock, who was not only Town Clerk of Chester but also brother-in-law and partner to John Wood the Younger of Bath, another property speculator,

who may have been a business associate of Partington.⁸¹

Clearly, from the middle of the eighteenth century the building ceased to be the high status family home of successive city dignitaries, aristocrats and gentry that it had been since the early seventeenth century, and began its downward trajectory in the hands of property speculators, who saw profits in the development of the backlands for the gradually increasing urban population, and the commercial exploitation of the Row and street level accommodation.

Diane Backhouse

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 - ⁸ CALS, WS 1648 Will of Ann Lloyd
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