

# Bishop Lloyd's Palace

A Grade 1 Listed building in the heart of Chester



## HISTORY MONOGRAPH No 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPERTY

**Bishop Lloyd's Palace on Watergate Street was originally two separate town houses. The two gables show the extent of each. We have found no documentary evidence as to whom the buildings belonged until 1661. This was when Lady Kilmorey bought the two houses from their separate owners and made them into one residence.**

There has been a building on this spot since Roman times. Watergate Street was originally a Roman road. Timber framed medieval houses lined these old thoroughfares. In late Tudor times there was a lot of housing improvement of older properties in Chester. The Great Halls, which rose from the Rows to second storey rafters, were being adapted to produce more individual chambers. Chimneys were being incorporated into buildings and extra storeys being added. In all this flurry of renovation the timber structures were retained. The present building dates from this time.



*A pair of early 17th century town houses:  
Listed Grade 1 and now the headquarters  
for Chester Civic Trust.*

**Looking at the buildings from Watergate Street** you can see the under crofts at street level. These are the oldest parts of the buildings and date from the Middle Ages. There are steps leading up to the Rows where the entrance to the building is. The house then jetties out over the Rows. Above that floor is an attic floor. These three storey houses were two of the grandest houses in Chester.

**When you are on the rows look at the giants acting as pillars to hold up the floors above them.** The bigger ones are original to this house. The smaller ones were added in late Victorian times by the architect T M Lockwood.

The house was purchased by Alderman Brown in 1899. It was feared that a group of Americans were going to buy the building, dismantle it and take it to America. At this time the building was in a bad state of repair. It was a multi-occupancy property with poor sanitary facilities. The family of Alderman Brown gifted the house to Chester City Council for the people of Chester in 1948.



Examples of the carvings on the western gable



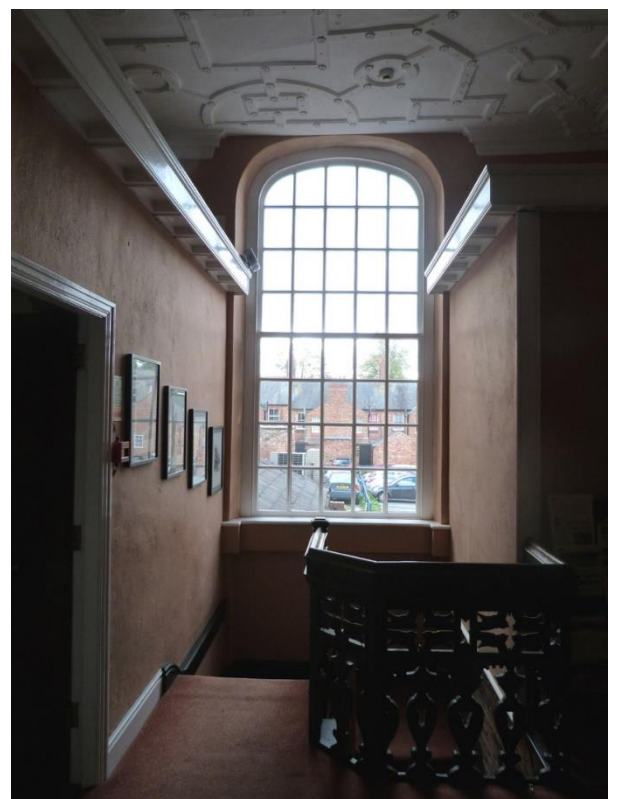
T M Lockwood did the renovation work. He put in the present windows. They form a dazzling swath of glazing uniting the separate buildings.

**Whilst you are looking at the front of the houses notice the fine carvings on the house to your right-hand side.** It is this adornment that makes the building so special. The carvings at the top of the house are very flamboyant. There are imaginary beasts and people. Below the windows on the first floor above the Rows are panels with varying decorations. There are three scenes from the Old Testament to your left. To your right are panels featuring women- Susannah and the Elders and the Roman matron, Lucretia, committing suicide. You will notice the panel with the coat of arms of George Lloyd when he was Bishop of Sodor and Man. It contains the Legs of Man and the horses of the Lloyd arms We can date this panel from between 1599 to 1605 when he was bishop of that island. Afterwards he became Bishop of Chester, and his arms changed. His actual connection with the house is not documented.

In the top right-hand corner of this panel are the arms of the Merchant Adventurers. Chester was a busy port with trade in Wales, along the Wirral and in France and Spain. Watergate Street was a bustling mercantile thoroughfare leading down to wharves on the River Dee. In the days before numbered addresses people and organisations were found by the symbols on buildings. These chartered merchants would need a building from which to regulate their businesses. Another of the panels celebrates the son of James I becoming Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester. Another panel bears the date 1615, but it is unclear as to what the inscription above it refers.

**Before you enter the house notice the stall boards next to the balustrade.** They are a feature of the Rows. Goods would be sold from them. Above it are carved animals. One is an owl, and another is a calf. As you go through the entrance door you enter a passageway. This was once an alley between the two houses. It led to the burgage plots behind the houses where the original owners had gardens and stabling. They later became crowded with other buildings.

**The design of the bannisters on the stairs is taken from Chippendale.** The huge window in the stairwell is an eighteenth-century addition. At the top of the stairs, you have entered into a main reception room of one of the original houses. The room has been much altered, but the fine plaster strap work ceiling shows how important this room once was. The sideboard in this room was made in the 1899 when Lockwood replaced the wainscoting in the other major rooms. It is made from some of the wooden wall coverings in the building at that time.





The photographs displayed on the walls show how Lockwood changed the big Georgian windows in the houses to the present ones. The Georgian windows had replaced others, which were here previously.

## Large Room

**We now go into the largest and most impressive room in the building.,**

The main features of this room are the elaborate seventeenth century plaster ceiling and the massive fireplace. This ceiling is a fine piece of craftsmanship with moulded shapes of oval, square and lozenge panels. Small putti are scattered throughout it. A similar ceiling is in St Anselm's Chapel in Chester Cathedral.

The more austere fireplace was added at a later date and is topped by a phoenix which formed part of the Kilmorey coat of arms. The ceiling has been refigured to contain it. On the wall is an acknowledgement of Alderman Brown's contribution to the restoration of the building.

**From this room we walk into the other house. Lady Kilmorey bought and united the houses on the Restoration of Charles II.**

## Small Room

The decorations in this room are less sophisticated than in the previous room. The plasterwork ceiling has a number of nautical references. The huge roundels appear to be ship's wheels. There is also a mixture of other simple mouldings- horses, Tudor roses and stars or jelly fish. All around the room is a frieze, which is partially covered by the wooden panelling. The frieze contains dolphins. These were nautical emblems bringing good luck. Dolphins were fabled to rescue ship-wrecked sailors. These designs complement the Merchant Adventurers' coat of arms on the front of this house.



The fireplace is not original to the room. The figure in the centre is Cupid riding a lion. This was a popular Jacobean emblem. It signified that 'Love Conquers All'.

Leaving this room, we enter a small area which was once an important reception room. Over the door are classical plasterwork arches. A recurring plasterwork pattern covers a beam. This is only a remnant of what once must have been here. The room has a partitioned section where the original staircase in this house entered the first floor and continued to the floor above. The top storey is privately owned but also has plasterwork, suggesting some of the rooms were further important chambers in the house. In a corner of the room a fragment of tie beam and a rafter of timber framing are exposed. This could indicate the height of the earlier house before the late Tudor improvements.

**The house is a Grade I Listed Building. There is more in-depth discussion of issues about Bishop Lloyd's Palace in monographs on the Chester Civic Trust website.**



***Investing in our heritage***

Having established ourselves in Bishop Lloyd's Palace since 1996, the Civic Trust decided to embark on an internal refurbishment project in 2002/3. This entailed re-wiring, new lighting, new heating, new carpets and new curtains as well as specialist redecoration of the historic ceilings and panelling. Generous grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the then Chester City Council helped us to achieve this substantial improvement.



## **AVAILABLE TO HIRE**

The large and small rooms at Bishop Lloyd's Palace are available to hire individually or together at modest hourly rates. Kitchen facilities and equipment are also available for teas, coffees and light refreshments. Please e-mail [admin@chestercivictrust.org.uk](mailto:admin@chestercivictrust.org.uk) or go to [www.chestercivictrust.org.uk](http://www.chestercivictrust.org.uk) to enquire about booking or to get further information

