

NEW LIGHT ON THE HISTORY OF 'THE PEACOCK', CHESTERFIELD

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Ten years ago a small building on the south side of the Market Place in Chesterfield, then the Peacock Inn, was found to contain, beneath modern rendering and despite much alteration during its history, two bays of a substantial box-framed structure dating from c.1500. At the time, the pub was due to be demolished and the site redeveloped; following the discovery of the timber framing the Peacock, together with the rest of Low Pavement, was carefully conserved. The building is now a heritage and information centre, restored as far as possible to show its appearance when first erected. During the restoration it was possible to examine the structure in great detail and a report on this investigation, coupled with a small excavation beneath the present building, appeared in this *Journal* in 1978.¹ At the time, a date of construction was proposed purely from archaeological evidence, since the surviving deeds to the property (65-67 Low Pavement) date only from 1687 and its earlier history could only be a matter for speculation. The layout of the building suggested to the investigators that it might originally have been an open-halled public building of some kind. In preparing a tentative history of the site at the time, I suggested that if it had been such a hall it would probably have belonged to one of the gilds of medieval Chesterfield.² The only evidence for this attribution was structural: the deeds to the property do not use the tell-tale phrase 'lands of the late dissolved gilds of Chesterfield' which elsewhere in the town identify former gild estate, nor is there any other documentary evidence. On the contrary, as late medieval Chesterfield becomes better known, it seems most likely that the gilds not only worshipped but also met socially in the parish church or its vestry, as did the town council until they built themselves premises of their own behind Low Pavement in 1617. A recent reconsideration of the deeds to property at the western end of Low Pavement near the Peacock strongly suggests that the tenement was owned by a local gentry family, the Revells of Carnfield Hall, near Alfreton, in the early eighteenth century and from what is known independently of that family's connection with Chesterfield it is possible to suggest a rather more convincing early history of the present building than was possible when its structure was first examined.

Until the building of New Beetwell Street, Markham Road, Park Road and Tontine Road over the last hundred years, the Low Pavement properties formed a continuous row from the corner of South Street to the site of the Hotel Portland, laid out in the usual way with narrow street frontages and long back crofts creating a 'strip' effect at right angles to the Market Place. Figure 1 shows this layout near the Peacock. The present timber-framed structure at the Peacock is 67 Low Pavement; the replacement building filling a gap created by demolition is 65; and the remaining buildings on Low Pavement to the west (except the Hotel Portland) are numbered 69-77. No 77 has a separate history; 69-75 form a continuous row sold as a group to Chesterfield Borough Council shortly before the area was redeveloped. The row, however, as the vendors' solicitors appreciated when handing over the prior deeds, was historically two tenements (B and C on Fig. 1), with 69-71 forming one property and 73-75 the other. On the other hand, 69-71 are not an historic burgage plot, running the full depth of the site; the plot has been cut out of a larger block (D on Fig. 1) which is in fact the

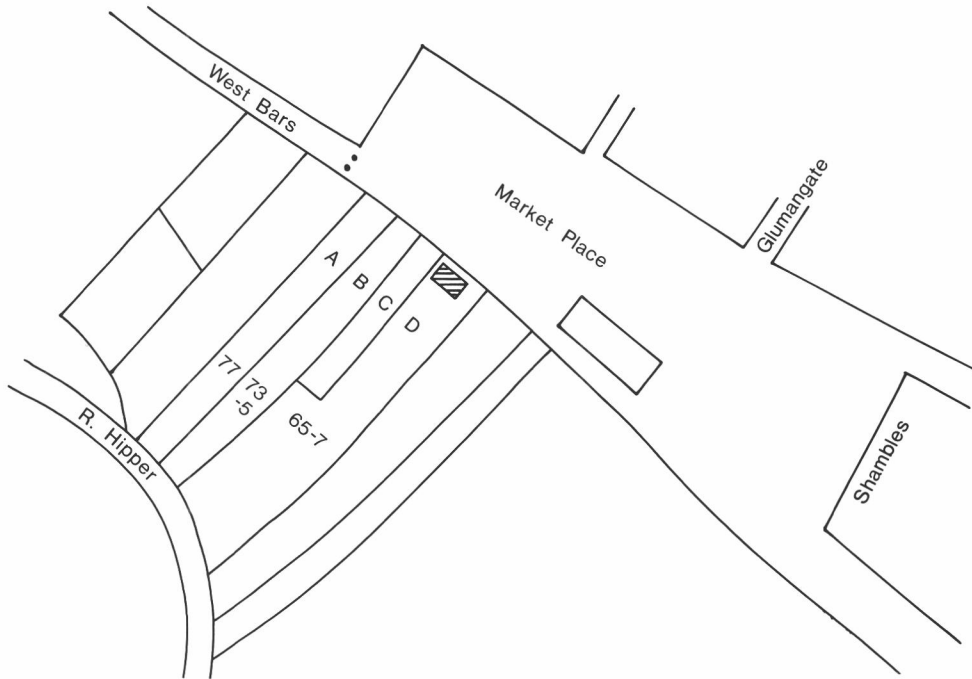


Fig 1 Sketch-plan, based on the tithe map of 1849, showing the Peacock (shaded) and adjacent tenements on the southern side of the Market Place. See text for explanation of letters and figures.

Peacock. Deeds to 69-71 trace the process by which this block was detached from the rest of the Peacock tenement and merged with 73-75 on its other side to form the present terrace.³

The earliest deeds to 69-71 Low Pavement record the sale of the property by Francis Revell of Brookhill Hall, Pinxton (Notts) to Richard Calton, a Chesterfield attorney, in 1738. The property is described as 'All that Antient Messuage or Tenement as the same hath late been converted into several Dwelling houses or Tenements', late in the occupation of Richard Nuttall, London carrier, now that of John Prissick and Richard Calton. The property remained in the hands of the Calton family until 1775 when it was sold to another local attorney, William Manley. By 1753 it had been rebuilt as two dwelling houses and remained divided until modern times. In 1781 Manley sold the houses to James Bland, a Chesterfield tailor, who remained owner until his death in 1794 when they were bequeathed to his son Richard. Three years later, now encumbered with a mortgage, the property was sold to George Bainbridge of Chesterfield, a builder who almost certainly erected the present buildings at 69-71 and possibly 73-75 also. In 1806 Bainbridge entered into an agreement with the owner of 67, Bernard Lucas of Highfield Hall, Newbold, which allowed him 'to have the Liberty in building his House in the West Square of Chesterfield on part of the Site of the Old House he has now taken down, of setting and building a part of the East Wall of his new House at the Distance of four feet from the Windows of the West side of the adjoining House, now belonging to Bernard Lucas'. This agreement confirms that 69-71 once formed part of the Peacock tenement (as the shape of the property boundaries makes pretty clear anyway) and establishes that in 1806 Bainbridge demolished a structure to the west of

the present Peacock and put up two new brick and slate houses in its place. It is interesting that in both 1738 and 1806 deeds show that the parties were aware of the age of the Peacock compared with its neighbours ('Antient Messuage' and 'the Old House'). This agreement appears in the deeds to both 65-67 and 69-71 Low Pavement; unfortunately in the past the copy among the Peacock deeds was misunderstood to refer to the lost *easterly* bay of the timber-framed structure (i.e. the gap at 65 filled by a modern replacement during redevelopment). In fact, it refers to the rebuilding of the *western* end of the building. One might suppose that Bainbridge had demolished a fourth bay of timber framing were it not for the discovery of a blocked window at the *present* western end of the Peacock (i.e. in the closed truss at the western end of Bay III), which appears to be an original feature.⁴ If the window is contemporary with the rest of the structure, then there must originally have been a gap between the end of the third bay of the house and the western boundary of the plot, filled in with a later building sometime prior to 1738. A layout of this kind, with houses at the head of the Low Pavement plots flanked by open space on either side rather than forming a continuous terrace as they do today, is in fact suggested by William Senior's sketch-plan of Chesterfield in the 1630s.⁵ This is obviously not critically accurate in its representation of the built-up area, but does seem to distinguish streets on which the building line was continuous from those on which houses stood apart from one another.

Later deeds trace the history of 69-71 Low Pavement from 1806 to the present without ambiguity. Although owned before purchase by the Borough Council by the same vendors as 73-75, deeds for the two properties can be separated and the earliest conveyances (i.e. those involving the Revell family) belong with those for 69-71, not the adjacent property to the west. The surviving deeds for 73-75 begin in 1808 and form a straightforward sequence to the present day. In both cases the owner shown on the Chesterfield tithe map of 1849 corresponds with the owner at that time in the two series of deeds, confirming that the material can be sorted correctly.⁶

My argument so far is that the deeds of 69-71 Low Pavement trace the history of that property from 1738 and that at that date the messuage was owned by the Revells of Carnfield. At an earlier period, the property at 69-71 was separated from the rest of the historic burgage plot that contains the Peacock itself. From this it follows that at some earlier date the whole of the Peacock property belonged to the Revells of Carnfield.

There is one extraneous deed that supports the idea that the whole of the historic Peacock plot (i.e. what would have become 65-71 Low Pavement had it not been divided in 1738) was owned by the Revells. This is a bargain and sale of 1619 surviving out of context among the Pegge Burnell MSS, the post-dissolution muniments of Beauchief Abbey in Sheffield City Library, conveying a messuage and tanyard in Chesterfield near West Bars from Margaret Clarke, widow, to Godfrey Alwood, tanner.⁷ The main interest of the deed for present purposes lies in the abutments: the Market Place to the north, the Hipper to the south, property of the Earl of Devonshire to the west and property of Edward Revell east. West Bars at this period means not the modern road of that name but the actual bars closing off the western end of the Market Place. The northern and southern abutments locate the property on Low Pavement and the reference to West Bars puts it towards the western end. It is also possible to locate the Devonshire property because of the survival of a detailed survey of their Chesterfield estate in 1610, which not only lists tenants, acreages and rents but gives actual dimensions of burgage plots. Where these can be checked elsewhere in Chesterfield they prove very accurate.⁸ The survey lists four Devonshire properties on Low Pavement, varying in length considerably. Because of this variation it is possible to locate them on a modern map without ambiguity: a plot 114 yards long can only be the present 73-75 or 77 Low Pavement. These two plots (A and B on Fig. 1) are roughly

similar in width but all the abutments and the surviving deeds to 69-71 Low Pavement fall into place if we assume that Plot A is the Earl of Devonshire's and Plot B that conveyed in the deed of 1619 from Clarke to Alwood. The plot next eastwards was owned by the Revells in 1619; in later times the eastern boundary was formed by two parcels (C and D on Fig. 1) but the deed of 1619 speaks of one only. The conclusion must be that in 1619 Plots C and D were one and were owned by the Revells of Carnfield. Taken with the evidence of the deeds from 1738 for the present 69-71 Low Pavement this suggests that the whole of 65-71 Low Pavement formed one property in the middle ages, occupied about 1500 by the present Peacock building erected most probably by the Revell family. It is unfortunate that the deeds to 77 Low Pavement and to 73-75 do not extend far enough back to be linked with the survey of 1610 or the conveyance of 1619, although it is possible to discover more about the earlier history of the tenements west of the Peacock. All the Devonshire property surveyed by William Senior in Chesterfield in 1610 had been bought from the Foljambe family of Walton, who were then breaking up their once very extensive estate in the town. A detailed rental dating from the first decade of the sixteenth century lists the Foljambes' holdings in Chesterfield in a logical topographical order, making it possible to identify with reasonable certainty the tenement near West Bars which reappears in the Cavendish survey of 1610.⁹ Next to this property c.1500 lay a tenement of the Abbot of Beauchief, whose Chesterfield estate the Foljambes then held on lease. If the Beauchief property was 73-75 Low Pavement, adjoining the Foljambe tenement to the west, it would be reasonable to discover, among the later muniments from Beauchief, a deed relating to the same messuage nearly a century after the Dissolution. Otherwise, conversely, it is rather difficult to explain why the stray conveyance of 1619 should be among the Pegge Burnell deeds.

The Revells of Carnfield rose to prominence towards the end of the fifteenth century as minor landowners who prospered from their involvement as merchants in the lead industry. They first appear in Temple Normanton and Shirland but in 1468 bought a largeish bundle of property in and around Chesterfield from a family named Bate, who lived at Swathwick near Wingerworth. The conveyance was effected by final concord in the court of Common Pleas, a device that preserves no topographical detail of the property, although we know that seven messuages and 125 acres of land were involved. The family added to their Chesterfield estate in the following fifty years but made their seat at Carnfield, between Alfreton and South Normanton, where they built the present hall. The family's position weakened after about 1680 and in the 1730s they can be found selling in Chesterfield and elsewhere: several properties in the town have deeds beginning with a Revell sale in this decade. The male line died out in 1797 but a female heiress married the Turbutts of Ogston. Unfortunately, their muniments have been dispersed and partly lost. There is nothing among surviving material that throws more light on their Chesterfield estate in general or the Peacock property in particular. The reference in 1468 to seven messuages alone makes clear that a terrier of the family's possessions in Chesterfield of 1557, which includes only one messuage, on the north side of the Market Place, is far from complete.¹⁰

As association with the Revell family from about the time the present timber-framed structure was built down to the 1730s provides the Peacock with a far more satisfactory early history than a hypothetical connection with one or both of the parish guilds of the medieval borough, who seem quite definitely not to have possessed halls of their own. A date of construction of around 1500 falls conveniently shortly after the family bought an estate in Chesterfield and before they acquired Carnfield. They might be expected to have rebuilt one of the messuages they had bought from the Bates (and the Peacock is excellently positioned as a town house) in a rather grand style, with a very high standard of workmanship. In the later sixteenth century, as they established themselves

as gentry near Alfreton, a house in Chesterfield would have been of less use and might well have been let. Typically, that would lead to subdivision, a drop in status and eventually the sale of the property. The evidence of the deeds to 69-71 Low Pavement suggests that the tenement was sold in 1738 and the description of the premises as an 'Antient Messuage' now divided into several dwelling houses implies that the whole historic structure (i.e. everything standing at what would now be 65-71 Low Pavement) was being disposed of. This appears to be contradicted by the earliest deeds incorporated into the title to 65-67 when an abstract was drawn up in 1800. The title begins with a sale by Robert Middleton of Leam (Derbys), Deborah his wife and their son Robert to Samuel Slater of Chesterfield of two messuages and a cottage in Chesterfield, none of which are precisely located. In 1715 Slater sold the same property to Richard Calton, the purchaser in the Revell sale of 1738. It might be supposed that by 1687, when Middleton sold to Slater, the Revells had already disposed of part of the Peacock property and that in 1738 the two halves were re-united by Calton's purchase, only to be divided again later in the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the description of the premises in 1738 strongly suggests that the whole burgage plot is included. Possibly, therefore, the deeds of 1687 and 1715 do not belong to 65-67 Low Pavement at all and were included mistakenly when the title was drawn up nearly a century later. In some respects, the point is irrelevant. Whatever the details the general picture of subdivision and partial demolition as the premises changed hands is clear and does not affect the early history of the timber-framed structure. If, however, the deeds of 1687 and 1715 were wrongly attributed to the Peacock, then the hypothetical reconstruction of the property based on inventories drawn up after the deaths of two of the occupiers named in the sale of 1687 must now be discounted.¹¹

As a postscript, it may be worth recalling that the small excavations carried out beneath the Peacock revealed a succession of earlier structures, the last phase being a fairly substantial house.¹² The Bates were apparently quite wealthy freeholders in Swathwick and may perhaps have had a town house of their own on the site before it was sold to the Revells. As yet, no medieval deeds have been found which can be identified with the property.¹³ Although the early history of the site may always remain obscure, it is now possible to place the Peacock tenement alongside others in the late medieval town, such as Durant Hall in Holywell Street, Licker Hall in Saltergate, and the 'Old Hall' in Beetwell Street, as examples of fairly grand private houses, usually conveyed as 'capital messuages' and known less formally as 'halls', which were the homes of wealthy local merchants. Of this group, only the Revells' house on Low Pavement survives (and then only in part) but the carefully restored structure provides at least an impression of the appearance of the more ambitious domestic buildings in Chesterfield in this period.

REFERENCES

- 1 P. Borne, T. Courtney and P. Dixon, 'The Peacock Inn, Chesterfield', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, XCVIII (1978), 7-58; P. Riden, *The Peacock Information and Heritage Centre* (Chesterfield Borough Council, 1981).
- 2 P. Borne *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.30, is based on information supplied by me.
- 3 Chesterfield Town Hall, Clerk's Dept deed collection. The Peacock deeds are Box 143 Parcel 2; those for 69-75 Low Pavement are in four packets numbered 134/1; and the deeds to 77 Low Pavement are in 121/12. Deeds to the property abutting eastwardly on the Peacock do not add any useful information. I am greatly indebted to the former Town Clerk of Chesterfield, Mr D.R. Harrison, for kindly allowing me to examine this material in great detail; without his help I would have been unable to produce this new account of the Peacock's early history.

- 4 P. Borne *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.25; Riden, *op. cit.*, pp.8, 15.
- 5 Welbeck Woodhouse, William Senior's Plans of the Estates of William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle (c. 1630), f.44.
- 6 Derbyshire Record Office, DL 26.
- 7 Sheffield City Library, BM 880.
- 8 Chatsworth House, William Senior's Survey of the Estates of William, Lord Cavendish, f.57.
- 9 Nottinghamshire Record Office, DD/FJ/19/1/1.
- 10 C.J. Williams, 'The Revell family of Carnfield', *Derbys Archaeol. Jour.*, XCI (1971), 141-63. Some of the muniments are now Derbys RO, D184M, including the terrier of 1557; much other material is lost or inaccessible.
- 11 Borne *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp.31-3, 52-6.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp.10-18.
- 13 See notes by Daniel Dakeyne in Derbys RO, D9, Vol. 11, pp.326-30 for the family in general.