

SAFFRON WALDEN HISTORY

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Saffron Walden Town Hall

H.C. Stacey

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Saffron Walden Town Hall 19th century before alterations. Image by courtesy Saffron Walden Town Library.

A book with the title 'Acct of Town Hall & New Buildings begun 1761' in the town archives is endorsed 'Samuel Fiske 1826 given me by J. Wolfe Esq'. The Town Clerk during the period 1743-1776 was Thomas Wolfe so the 'Acct' was probably compiled by him. J. Wolfe may have been his son. Thomas Wolfe was succeeded by Thomas Hall Fiske (1776-1797), the uncle of Samuel Fiske (Mayor 1818, 1824, 1829, 1837 and 1839).

As late as 1759 Thomas Wolfe performed the duties of Mayor, Alderman, Town Clerk and Coroner. (The Borough had its own Commission of the Peace, Quarter Sessions and Recorder and a Borough Petty Sessions.)

'Saffron Walden Town Hall' – *Saffron Walden History* No 16 (1979)

On 8 February 1760 various people agreed to –

raise and pay to the Chamber of this Town Corporate, the several sums of money set and figured against our several names for and towards the Charge of Pulling down the present Town Hall there and ye Tenements adjoyning to the Market Place there belonging to the Corporation now in the Tenure of Tho. Campin and John Clark, And for Erecting a Building a new Town Hall, Gaol and other Tenements upon the Spot where Campin's and Clark's houses now stand, in such Manner as shall be Agreed on by the Majority of the Corporation...'

Charles William Maynard (1759-1772), £100 from Charles Lord Maynard, the previous Recorder (1749-1759) and £50 from Thomas Wolfe, Mayor.

On 4 May 1761, at a meeting of the Mayor and Aldermen at the *Rose & Crown* -

it was and is unanimously agreed to pull down the houses belonging to the Corporation called the Dolphin in the occupation of Thomas Campin And the adjoyning Tenement late in the occupation of John Clark, they being very ruinous and out of repair. And as it is apprehended there will be sufficient room in the places where the ... two houses stand, not only to Erect two other Houses, Convenient for habitation, the one as a private House and the other as a Publick house... but also between such two new Houses to Erect a sufficient Town hall And a Goal (sic) for the town... under the same... It is moreover agreed to pull down the present Guild or Town Hall and the Goals under the same... and thereby to Enlarge the Market place... And that the same be set about forthwith.

Jonathan Parker (footnote: died 1764 aged 70, tombstone in parish churchyard restored by SW Lodge of Freemasons 1931) prepared a plan and was appointed Surveyor of the work, for £30 for surveying. This 'Guild or Town Hall' is shown on the plan of the Market Place taken from the 1758 map (see SWH, April 1977, p.82).

On 1 June 1761, a further decision was made:

'... taking into consideration the Convenience and Accommodation it would be to this town and all persons travelling to and from the same, to have the Middle Row or Alley of houses facing the Market place belonging to Mr Wale, the Widow Church and Jn Woolley (late Ball's) wholly pulled down and ye street there widened to ye Markett place, we have agreed to purchase the same in order to pull down... as the Materials thereof may be useful in the new intended Buildings...

Woolley's Tenement, in front of ye Markeplace £20
Mrs Church's two tenements adjoyning at ye back part £31.10s
Mr Wale's two Tenements at ye further End costs £40
Total £91. 10s

At a meeting of the Mayor & Aldermen of the said town on Tuesday the 21st December 1762 relating to the Corporation Buildings. At this meeting it is agreed that any sum not exceeding Five Hundred pounds be raised under the Corporation

Seal and be borrowed at Interest on the Credit of the Corporation estate as it shall be wanted... carrying Interest at this time at 5 p. cent p. ann..'

The Mayor and seven Aldermen were present. Five of them signed a promise to lend £100 each *'towards finishing the above buildings'*. The Mayor & 9 Aldermen, meeting at the Cross Keys on 4 March 1763, decided that as the money subscribed was insufficient to pay for the project undertaken, they would borrow another £500. The Town Clerk was instructed to insure the buildings against fire to the value of £800.

Bonds dated 4 March 1763 were negotiated with:

William Impey, Brazier £160
Thomas Westrope, Gent. Wimbish £160
John Winstanley, Malster £160

It is recorded on page 11 that in 1763 a sum of £625 was borrowed which, added to the £717 9s 6d subscribed in 1760, brought the total to £1,342 9s 6d. (This £625 included the above £500).

In order to pay the interest on the loan, it was decided on 14 August 1763 before the election of the Mayor, to reduce the Mayor's allowance for the three Quarter Sessions dinners (Michaelmas, Christmas, Easter) from 40 shillings to 20 shillings, and to abolish the annual allowance of £10. Instead of new cloaks every two years for the Clerk of the Market and the two Sergeants-at-Mace, they should be allowed one guinea every third year.

In 1764 Thomas Wolfe and Henry Archer turned their contributions to the above loan into gifts, thus reducing the loan to £425.

On 17 June 1774 a meeting of the Mayor and Aldermen was held at the *Rose & Crown 'on Special Matters relating to the New Erected Town Hall & Buildings & the state of the Corporation Debt concerning the same'*. Thomas Browne, Philip Martin and James Raymond, holders of loan bonds not yet redeemed, offered to accept repayment of capital and forego all interest grown due. These bonds were redeemed by (a) Sir John Griffin Griffin's subscription *'hitherto withheld'* of £100, (b) a new loan of £200. (Sir John was Recorder 1772-1797).

'An Account of Moneys paid to Workmen for the Pulling down the Corporation houses and Town Hall and Erecting the New Town Hall and houses adjoining and ye pulling down Creepmouse Alley or Middle Row and altering ye Corn Cross'.

The total payments, including the £91 10s for purchase of Middle Row, came to £1,083 3s 3d from May 1761 to January 1764. The total

payments on page 121 added up to about £1,200 whereas on page 11 they seem to come to £1,342.

The Shop and premises in the Market Place pulled down in 1761 for improvement of King Street are described in an Assignment of Lease dated 20 January 1724 from William Pomfrett to Christopher Ball, Cordwainer (i.e. shoemaker) as:

All that shop... in length 14 foot and in breadth 14 foot... now or late in the possession of Jane Williamson. In a 1760 deed the property was in the tenure of James Spicer and before him of Robert Deadman, 'Perriwiggmaker'.

The final Assignment of 3 June 1761 for £20 to William Mapletoft, draper (Mayor at the time) quotes the lease of the Shop for 994 years by the corporation to Theodore Cole of 'Bumstead Helion' 15 February 1650. Coles' interest ultimately passed to the above William Pomfrett.

In 1787 £22 18s 6d was spent '*For Iron Gates before the Town Hall*', the ground floor being originally open to the public.

1831-1879

In November 1831 the Borough Council considered a proposal from George Youngman, who had his shop and printer's business at the junction of King Street and Market Street, 'that if the Corporation approved of the plan for a New Front to his Shop, he would do the same... at the cost of about £60 in consideration of the Corporation granting to him a transferable Lease for 14 years and remove from him the disagreeable practice of Juries assembling in his house. The Corporation agreed to send for Hockley and for him to put out a plan and to report the probably expense of altering the space below the Town Hall subject to the consent of the Parishioners'.

On 14 March 1832 the Council decided to annex 'the first floor room' of the house of Mrs Gayle (who was quitting the house) so that the County Magistrates might hold their Petty sessions there'. This room, I imagine, was until recently, the Magistrates' Room.

In 1935 – the year of reform of the Municipalities – an inventory was made of property held by the 'late Corporation' which included:

1. Jail erected on a site belonging to the Parish 'Cattle Market' (this site could not I think have been in the Hill Street Borough Market –originally called Pig Market – acquired in 1931, but more likely the east end of the open lane (Mercers Row) at the back of the Town Hall. The Jail probably adjoined the Policeman's dwelling lying between Mercers Row and Butchers Row).

2. Messuage occupied by George Youngman held on lease at a rent of £27 10s. P.a. (known to be the property on the east side of the Town Hall).
3. Messuage held by the Misses Low and Burrows at £20 p.a. (this I guess was the property on the west side of the Town Hall occupied in 1832 by Mrs Gayle and in 1840 by Henry Butterfield).
4. Piece of ground in lane at back of Town Hall let to James Wisbey at £1 8s p.a. (Lane = Mercers Row). (James Wisbey lived at the Dog & Gun – lately 'Glovers Too').
5. Grand Jury Room occupied occasionally by the County Magistrates who pay £10 10s p.a. (I think it probably that this was the first floor room above Youngman's shop –where the Juries assembled).

It was decided on 30 March 1836 that 'The Room lately called the Jury Room, in future to be the Council Chamber (?No 5 above). A Quit Rent of 2s 6d was to be charged on *'each of the Windows thrown out by John Parker Burrows in the house occupied by Henry Rogers in the Market Place'*.

Rogers' house, fronting north on Mercers Row, is further evidence that 'The Lane' and 'Mercers Row' referred to the same lane and that it was used, with Market Street and Market place, as part of the 'Cattle Market' after the new Market was built in Hill Street in 1831 and before Rand opened his private market in Market Street (now Cheffins).

On 8 July 1839 'Mr Dunn having purchased the Borough Gaol and having offered the same to the Council for one year... at such a rent as shall be fixed by . Wm Ward and Wm Leverett – Mr Dunn agreeing to fence the same off from the old Workhouse by a wall and gates'.

I have plan of Duke of York, High Street, marked *'sold to Hannibal Dunn for £900 July 23 1845'* showing the large area behind the Inn as already belonging to Dunn. I deduce from the 1839 entry and my plan that Dunn may have owned the Ingleside Place (originally 'Albert Place') property pulled down under slum clearance about 1937. This property adjoined the Workhouse which accommodated the Gaol (pp 32 & 73 Saffron Walden Then and Now). Dunn could possibly have bought the Borough Gaol with all or part of the Workhouse when it closed about 1836/37.

On 9 April 1840:

The Committee made an inspection of the premises belonging to Richard Day called the New Brewery, the House occupied by Matthew Ward and the premises at the back of the Town hall occupied by Mr Youngman and Henry Butterfield... in consequence of the heavy outlay which the two former situations would require, the last mentioned premises would be the most advantageous to the Town to be

obtained as a Lockup House and with a view of rendering that property more secure and as a Public Improvement, the Committee recommend that the Lane running between the Corporation property at the back of the Town Hall should be enclosed so as to connect the properties and prevent the thoroughfare.

William Day's 'Castle Brewery' was the site of Jack Southall's Laundry in Gold Street. I have a picture of it taken in the early part of this century. Richard Day's 'New Brewery' doubtless referred to this property.

Matthew Ward, a painter, plumber and glazier, lived in High Street. William Ward, Surveyor, architect and builder, lived at Walden Common.

On 5 May 1840 the tender of William Ward to construct for £230 three cells, a stable and chaisehouse for the 'new' (1761) Town Hall and Gaol, was accepted. The works proposed necessitated the stopping up of the 'old lane or highway... immediately at the back of the Town Hall' certified in a document and plan presented at the General Quarter Sessions at Chelmsford on 20 October 1840 as '*unnecessary in consequence of its being entirely useless to the public and a nuisance to the owners and occupiers of properties near and adjoining thereto*'. The Order was granted.

The Lock-up plan I can but guess was copied from Ward's contract. It has no scale, no compass indicator, does not identify Market Place, Market Street or Butcher Row. The 'Lane' is not named but it could only have been Mercers Row. According to Pigot's 1839 Directory, Henry Rogers was a dealer in china, glass and earthenware in the 'Market Place'.

On 29 May 1840 the Council decided to purchase Mr Blackman's property to add to the site for Lock-up cells to be erected on '*site of the buildings now used as a Workhouse by Mr Butterfield, the Chaisehouse by Mr Youngman and a portion of the lane at the back of Henry Butterfield's house*':

... the property lately disposed of by the Parish the proceeds of which have been applied towards the erection of the 'New Union Work House', a portion of which the Town Council consider they have a just and equitable claim to... some years ago [in 1817] the Gaol was under the Town Hall which is... in the Market place and which was not only considered a nuisance by the people residing there but an unsuitable prison from its publicity, the windows being towards the public road. To remove this and provide a secure place for the Magistrates to commit prisoners to, a subscription was entered into and a Gaol etc was erected (at a cost of about £400 or upwards) which was placed upon Parish property against the Workhouse which together with it has been sold for £720. The Town Council are now called upon by the Magistrates to provide a suitable place for the reception of prisoners therefore*

they... solicit you to allow them the value of the materials which compose the Gaol... at £240... in the erection of a receptacle for prisoners.

In 1849 William Campling, the Chief Constable, was murdered. He lived at Bridge End.

On 2 August 1852, Benjamin Judd (Police Sergeant) appointed at 25 shillings per week and occupy 'cottage at back of Town Hall' rent free.

On 2 May 1854, 'In consequence of the Chief Constable being resident in the house adjoining the Lock up house, there is no longer any call for a Gaoler within the Borough'. Had Sgt Judd been promoted? Anyway, Samuel Francis who had held the office of Gaoler from 1 January 1836, was relieved of his job.

On 6 October 1856, Inspector Harvey, late of Cambs Constabulary, was appointed Chief Constable at 28 shillings a week plus 'rent-free house at back of Town Hall'.

It would appear from the Lock-up plan that the 1761 Town Hall extended southwards from the Market Place only as far as the north side of Mercers row, 'James Wisbey's dwelling' being today the rear part of the Westminster Bank, the Stable, the Bank's extension formerly Butterfield's 'Workhouse'. The 'Chase-house and Harness Room' was probably the property purchased 29 May 1840. Market Place and Butcher Row are not shown on the map but the boundary of the present Town Hall plus the two shops would seem to be.

Butcher Row - until the Bank leased the old barber's shop there was always a back-door into the 'well' area, to an outside toilet and fuel shed. When William Wendwood had the Shop (Toys in front and Hairdressing at rear), Miss Walls, who managed the Toy Shop, lived for years on the top floor above the Magistrates Room. Where the Gents Toilets are now, there were in my early days, small 'cages' or cells with iron gates where prisoners were brought by the police and locked up until they were required in the court room - mainly at Quarter Sessions.

The three cells marked on the 1877 map are in the position of those I remember. They cannot be identified with those shown on the 1840 plan.

4 October 1871. Committee appointed to inspect Council property, report the present arrangement of Town Hall etc, render it expedient to spend money on repairs and recommend remodelling it and adjacent property - including provision for the removal of the County Police Station from Newport to Walden. Notice to be given to Mrs Butterfield and Mr Legerton.

Architect Donald Purkiss thinks it probable the three cells marked on the 1877 map were provided as part of this 'remodelling' to be retained and incorporated by Burgess in his 1879 design.

7 August 1871. *'A Bill of Mr Whiffen for laying down a Cement pavement in front of the Corporation Property was ordered to be paid'*. (Town Hall etc).

3 February 1875. Front of Town Hall and houses occupied by Mr Youngman and Mrs Butterfield to be repainted.

5 May 1875. Committee appointed to consider need for a new Town Hall.

2 February 1876. Messrs Ekin applied for a renewal of lease of the Dog & Gun granted to James Wisbey 'Novr 8, 1836 for 40 years of a piece of land on the Pig Market on which he was to erect a Building – now known by the sign of the Dog & Gun and afterwards made over to Messrs Ekin. *'The house had for some years been held in conjunction with an adjoining Building used as a Butcher's Shop and as one House'*.

1 March 1876. Decided to sell Dog & Gun house lately occupied by Thomas Legerton to be transferred to his son.

3 May 1876. Messrs Ekins paid £250 for Dog & Gun.

9 November 1876. Memorial to Treasury: Lease granted to James Wisbey, Common Brewer, of a small piece of land 401 sq. ft. between a Lane or Row, Butcher Row, north, Pig Market, south, premises of Jos. Player, west and of Robt Blackman, east. Treasury sanctioned sale for £300.

13 June 1877. Legerton having left the town and the Polcie Inspector having pointed out smallness and *'unhealthiness of the Dwelling now occupied by him at the back of the Town Hall and used as a Police Station and the Tenancy of the adjoining House belonging to the Corporation lately occupied by Mr T.P. Legerton having become vacan'*, decided to appropriate the house as a future Police Station and residence for Police Inspector. Committee appointed.

3 October 1877. Committee appointed 13 June last re Legerton's house, recommended plan for new Town Hall, etc (G.S. Gibson, Mayor, had paid for plan prepared by Ed. Burgess). Cost estimated at about £3,500. G.S.G. offered 4,000 to the Corporation.

1 January 1879. Half year's rent remitted to Mrs Butterfield for damage and inconvenience caused by 'the late heavy rains and the alterations at the Town Hall'.

THE NEW TOWN HALL, 1879 presented by George Stacey Gibson (quoted from a local paper, October 1879)

At a special meeting of the Town Council, October 3 1877, 'the Committee appointed to consider the plans for the proposed new Town Hall reported that they had unanimously recommended the Council to adopt them... the Council having for some time inspected the plans and appearing quite satisfied with them, the Town Clerk called order and said: I have had, just now, a letter put into my hands, and

having scanned over it, i will with the permission of the Council, read it as it will speak for itself.

The Town Clerk then amid the utmost attention of the Council read the following communication which at the close thereof was received with a rapturous outbreak of applause and pleasurable surprise:

*'Gentlemen – the long residence of my family in this Town and the close connection which they have had with its public institutions during the last fifty years, has led me to desire to leave some lasting evidence of their and my own interest in its welfare and prosperity. It has long been a desideratum to have a Central Hall** for lectures and public meetings of various descriptions, together with suitable accommodation for the Corporation and other public bodies. This the present Town Hall does not supply, but it is thought that the plans now submitted to the consideration for the Council will etc these requirements as far as the space at disposal will admit and that the proposed building will add a pleasing architectural feature to the present market place. The cost of the building is roughly estimated by the architect at £3,500 and i feel that it would be a satisfaction to myself and a fitting conclusion to my two years 'term of office as Mayor to place the sum of £4,000 at the disposal of the Corporation, to carry out these plans, so that the Town may be provided with a building creditable to itself and calculated to promote the convenience and pleasure of the inhabitants. – I remain, Yours very respectfully, G.S. GIBSON, Mayor.'*

The old Town Hall was built in 1761 on the site of a former 'Moot' Hall. [This was not correct]... the cost will probably exceed £5,000 borne entirely by G.S. Gibson Esq... Mr Gibson has also bought an old building at the back of the Hall and for many years used as a printing office e this he has taken down and the space will be given to the Corporation, thus removing an unsightly building and one which would have lessened the light of the Council Chamber.'

The architect who designed the Town Hall was Edward Burgess who was also commissioned by George Stacey Gibson to design and build the new Friends' School – a boarding school for boys and girls moved in 1879 from Croydon to Saffron Walden. I cannot say for certain that Burgess was also responsible for enlarging the Friends' Meeting House in High Street, but I would think it probably that Mr Gibson engaged him for this work.

On 1 October 1879 the Corporation assembled at Dorset House, the residence of the Mayor, Joseph Bell and having robed, walked in procession to the new Town Hall. George Stacey Gibson handed the keys to the Mayor.

Alderman Joshua Clarke said the robe the Mayor was wearing he had intended for the use of future mayors but as in one instance the Mayor had sent it back and declined to wear it he wished now to prevent any future misunderstanding by presenting it to the Corporation for the Mayor's use.

At a luncheon in the new hall, a former old inhabitant, Mr S.P. Low, said that when he used to pass the old Town Hall, he was 'particularly struck with its mean appearance'.

(note: the same Ald Joshua Clarke had, on March 8 1873, when he was mayor presented to the Corporation a gold official chain to be worn by the Mayor on all ceremonial occasions.

The S.P: Low on May 6 1874 placed at the disposal of the Council a presentation for a destitute orphan girl to the National Orphan Home at Ham Common.)

George Stacey Gibson died on the 5th April 1883, at the Temperance Hotel, Bishopsgate, and it is fitting to mention here that the portrait of him hanging in the Assembly Hall was subscribed for by the inhabitants.

G.S.G.'s cousin, Edmund Birch Gibson, was Mayor at the time of the ceremony of unveiling and presenting the portrait. On entering the hall the Mayor proceeded to a chair placed opposite the picture. Alderman and councillors in robes, sat at right and left of him and chairs placed semi-circularly behind them were occupied by the general public. Cllrs Joseph Bell and Stebbing Leverett stepped forward and removed the crimson baize covering the portrait, then the Mayor advanced to the centre of the room 'to receive with gratitude on behalf of the Corporation, this portrait of our deceased towns and for which the inhabitants of the borough have subscribed and have desired should be placed in this hall.'

The artist, Henry Scott Tuke R.A. was a nephew of Mrs G.S. Gibson. His portrait of his sister had been so much admired in the Royal Academy the previous year. The portraits of Mr and Mrs G.S. G. hanging in the Council Chamber are also by H.S. Tuke. The three pictures were sent on loan to the Centenary Exhibition of the Works of Henry Scott Tuke held in Falmouth in 1957. Falmouth was Tuke's adopted home and he lived, worked and in 1929 died in his clifftop cottage at Swanpool, his simple grave being nearby.

The two large pictures of Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria were given to the town by Cat and Mrs F.J.O. Montage of Shortgrove. For a long time they hung on the wall at the back of the stage. They had to be protected with plywood when stage plays required scenery. This proved such a nuisance that the pictures were eventually moved to their present position at the head of each staircase.

*at a Public Meeting held at Workhouse 9 October 1818 to consider '*the plans and estimates for building the new Gaol and House of Correction and Room for the Workhouse over the same*', Daniel Hockley produced the plans for the proposed buildings and estimates amounting to £406. £300 had been subscribed. A rate not exceeding fourpence in the pound was raised to provide the balance.

** Before the 1879 Town Hall was built incorporating an Assembly Room, lectures, public meetings and concerts etc were held in the Great Hall at the Museum – originally the Agricultural Hall.

NOTE: The plan referred to by the author has recently been re-drawn and can be found in an article on the Town Hall history published in the *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* No 33 (Spring 2017).