

Perambulation with Norden

Within ten years of Norden's map of Orford, made in 1601, most of the prominent inhabitants of the town had died leaving wills that give more information about them and their properties. Much could have happened, of course, in those ten years, and several wills mention recent purchases. However the map and wills taken together are of interest.

This perambulation begins at the Quay, invariably spelt Keye, in the documents, at the river end of Bridge Street, as Quay Street was known in 1601. Near the river along Bridge Street, were about two dozen kettlehouses or towhouses, where fishing gear was normally stored. A dispute over fishing rights and other matters in 1540 resulted in various depositions being obtained from mariners and others who knew the river well. This dispute was over the number of stall boats, which were anchored in the river to catch fish in nets as the tides ebbed and flowed.

Edmund Bentes of Aldeburgh, aged 46, declared that stall boats had been there for 30 years, but when he was a boy fish were caught using stake nets. [EE5/7/13] These weirs, consisting of wattle fences set on sandbanks in the form of a V, caught the fish in wicker baskets, called kiddles. Thus the kettlehouses were known as kiddlehouses in an earlier period. Towhouses may have been for the storage of ropes, especially, tow being made from hemp.

Analysis of these 'houses', sheds in reality, shows that in 1601 only one, a towhouse, was owned by a mariner, George Westerbye. All the others were owned, either freely or by copyhold, by merchants, mercers or Portmen of the Borough. A mercer, John Copping, refers to his warehouses in his will, and it appears that they were not used primarily for fishing gear at this time, although some may have been rented by mariners. There was one inhabited house on the quay (no. 63 on Norden's map) which the fisherman Thomas Westerbye had bequeathed to his son George in 1582.

The Friary was a roofless ruin in 1601, but its surrounding wall was intact. An enclosure of half an acre belonging to William Beversham lay between the wall and an unnamed inn (no. 52 on the map). This is likely to be the present Jolly Sailor. The latter was purchased by the merchant Robert Bence from Robert Golde before 1601 and the occupants were Clement Tokeley and Peach, a baker.

Almost opposite the inn stood a property, called Cockrells, with a pightle (no. 50) belonging to John Ball. Walter Brabye made his will in 1589 and left the house he lived in, previously two tenements Hamondes and Cockrells, to his son. The son seems to have retained the three shops he was also left, but disposed of the house, perhaps to pay various legacies. In 1531 Thomas Hamonde bequeathed his house in Bridge Street to his widow, describing it as 'lately gild'. This therefore is likely to be the old guildhall, now in 1601 John Ball's house, although the property might merely have belonged to the guild and not been the guildhall itself.

The complex of buildings at the junction with today's Daphne Road (no. 48) was owned by the merchant and Portman, William Gowltie. It comprised his house, with a buttery, backhouse, outhouses, yard and garden, along with another tenanted house and a brewhouse. These he left to his son-in-law William Lewys, along with the lease of Peacock's Hill in 1611.

The baker, John Campe, occupied a house on the corner of 'the lane leading to Bridge Street' and the present Daphne Road (no. 33). John had died shortly before Norden surveyed the town, and his heirs were recorded as the owners. The building was of three storeys, and John's widow, Mary, was left the parlour, the chamber over the parlour and the chamber above that. She was required to provide, at her own cost, access to the first chamber from the street. Presumably access to the other chamber was internal, perhaps by a ladder. Their son and heir, also John, was to be kept at school until aged 13, and then apprenticed until aged 21 years.

Next door, towards the church, were two properties, the owner of which, Robert Gildingwater, had also just died (no. 32). One house was newly built and the other was called 'Spicers'. The new house was occupied by Edward Austen, alias Mellows, who died the following year. He was a mariner who owned property in Aldeburgh and had part shares in two ships there, and a quarter share of an Orford hoy and a half share in a stall boat. Robert's daughter Sara inherited.