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on Jun 08 2020

Moving Manchester's 'Tudor' Shambles

In Haunt

The twentieth instalment as part of an ongoing series for Haunt Manchester by Dr Peter N. Lindfield FSA, exploring Greater Manchester's Gothic architecture and hidden heritage. Peter's previous Haunt Manchester articles include features on Ordsall Hall, Albert's Schloss and Albert Hall, the Mancunian Gothic Sunday School of St Matthew's, Arlington House in Salford, Minshull Street City Police and Session Courts and their furniture, Manchester's Modern Gothic in St Peter's Square, what was St John's Church, Manchester Cathedral, The Great Hall at The University of Manchester, St Chad's in Rochdale and more. From the city's striking Gothic features to the more unusual aspects of buildings usually taken for granted and history hidden in plain sight, a variety of locations will be explored and visited over the course of 2020.

In this article he considers the area known as Shambles Square in the centre of Manchester, currently flanked by the buildings of Sinclair's Oyster Bar, The Mitre Hotel and The Old Wellington Inn. All are currently closed (at the time of writing, 8 June 2020) due to Covid-19 pandemic measures, and government guidelines as well as their websites should be visited where possible for future opening information.

Pictured below - Fig.1: The Shambles, Manchester. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Dr Peter N. Lindfield FSA is a Senior Research Associate in the Departments of English and History at Manchester Metropolitan University. He has published widely on Georgian Gothic architecture and design broadly conceived, as well as heraldry and the relevance of heraldic arts to post-medieval English intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic culture. Last year, as part of Gothic Manchester Festival 2019, he co-organised an event at Chetham's Library Baronial Hall with Professor Dale Townshend titled 'Faking Gothic Furniture' (it also features, along with The John Rylands Library, in a previous article by Peter, here). This involved discussing the mysterious George Shaw (1810-76), a local Upper Mill lad who developed an early interest in medieval architecture and heraldry, going on to create forgeries of Tudor and Elizabethan furniture for a number of high-profile individuals and places at the time, including Chetham's!

Currently Peter is completing his Leverhulme-funded research project exploring forged antiquarian materials in Georgian Britain, and also working on the recently re-discovered Henry VII and Elizabeth of York marriage bed, which itself was the inspiration behind many of Shaw's so-called 'Gothic forgeries'.

Moving Manchester's 'Tudor' Shambles

As noted in my previous post on Chetham's Library, here, precious little of Manchester's medieval and Tudor architectural built heritage survives today. The Cathedral, see here, has seen significant interventions, particularly in the Victorian period, and so whilst it has a medieval foundation, like Chetham's Library, the majority of the fabric is later than is perhaps assumed.

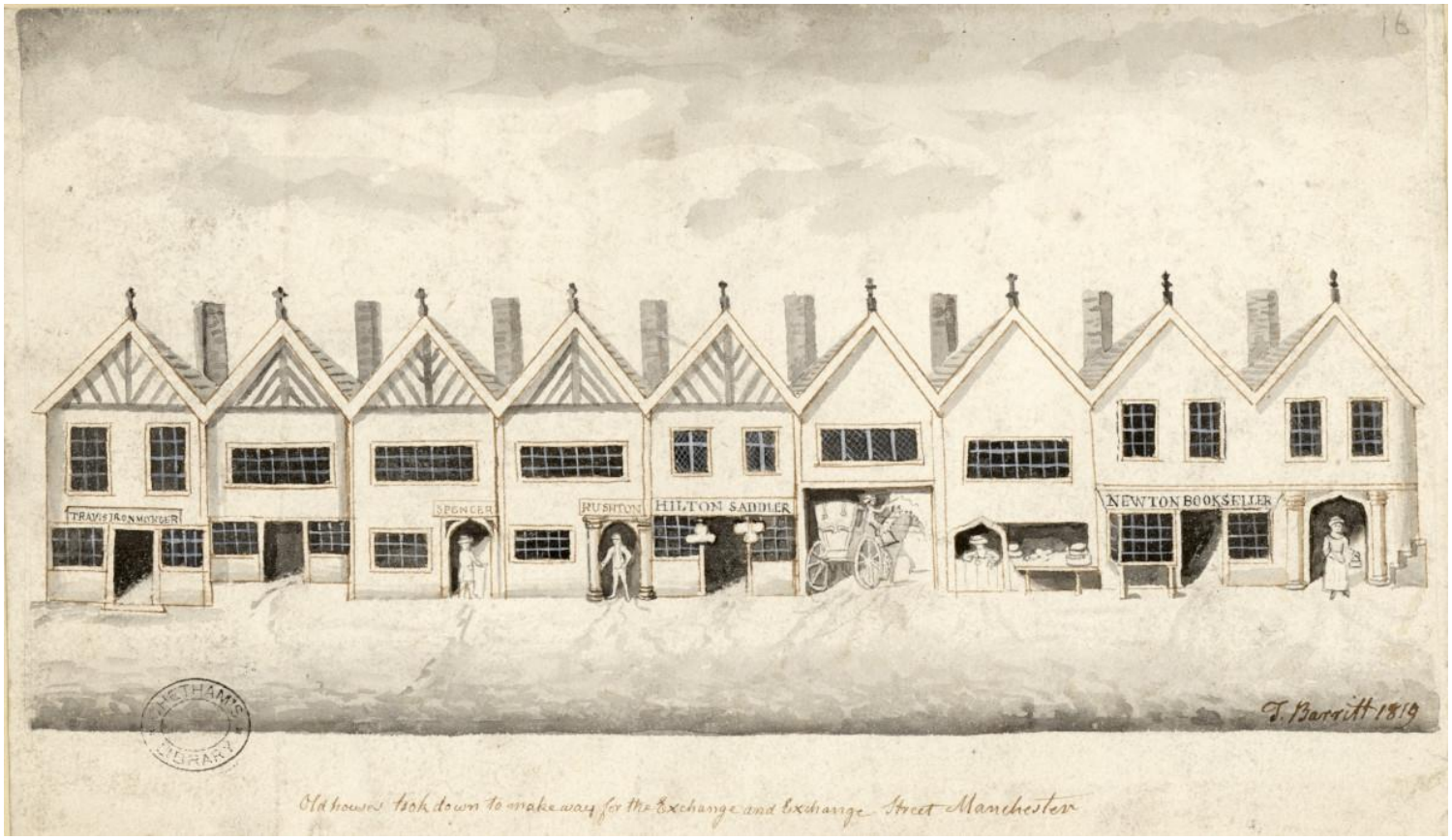
Although closed at the time of writing, there is a miraculous survival from Tudor Manchester, that, as this post demonstrates, has had a literally fantastic history including being jacked up around 9 meters, and also moved from its original site, piece by piece. This is essentially something out of Disney; but these changes actually happened!

Below - Fig.2: The Old Wellington Inn, The Shambles, Manchester. © Peter N. Lindfield.

I am, of course, referring to Manchester's Shambles. Part of this, what is now The Old Wellington Inn (here), is a wonderful survival from Tudor England (**Fig.1**)—built perhaps in 1552, just after the end of the reign of Henry VIII (1491–1547). The mid-sixteenth-century building is Grade II-listed by Historic England (see here) (**Fig.2**). The adjoining Sinclair's Oyster Bar is occasionally thought of as Tudor as well (see *TimeOut* here), but it is actually much later than The Old Wellington Inn and it dates to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Also Grade II listed by Historic England (see here) (**Fig.3)**, it is a parody of the Tudor style, which is a particularly unusual style to build in at the time, although the choice of style is understandable given how they were originally attached. These two buildings are exceptional historic survivals that not only tell of Manchester's now lost medieval, Tudor, and Georgian architectural heritage, but also of the striking redevelopment of Manchester in the twentieth century.

Below - Fig.3: Sinclair's Oyster House, The Shambles, Manchester. Rept0n1x (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Below - Fig.4: Thomas Barritt, Old houses took down to make way for the Exchange and Exchange Street Manchester, 1819. Courtesy of Chetham's Library, Manchester.



Thomas Barritt, a saddler-antiquary from Hanging Ditch in Manchester, recorded some of Manchester's now lost buildings. These include 'Old houses took down to make way for the Exchange and Exchange Street Manchester' from 1819 (**Fig.4**), and also 'The Dog & Partridge public house in Fennel Street & the adjoining public house corner of Toad Lane called the new Church or St. Anns from the sign' also from 1819 (**Fig.5**). These come from the Manchester Scrapbook now in the collection of Chetham's Library, Manchester, and the drawings record Manchester buildings somewhat similar to The Old Wellington Inn and Sinclair's Oyster Bar.

Below - Fig.5: Thomas Barritt, The Dog & Partridge public house in Fennel Street & the adjoining public house corner of Toad Lane called the new Church or St. Anns from the sign, 1819. Courtesy of Chetham's Library, Manchester.

Notice the wattle-and-daub construction of these buildings, the Gothic doorways in **Fig.4** and the more general contrast between the dark wooden framing and the white painted infill panels. In the Victorian period the wood was painted black to heighten the contrast between the two materials, and this is where the term black-and-white houses comes from; when originally constructed in the Tudor period the wood wasn't painted like this! Part of the reason for this change in the Victorian period is that old wood had a dark finish, and that such dark brown finishes were thought indicative of age; by painting the framing black they enhanced this idea of age! Both The Old Wellington Inn and Orsdall Hall in Salford, see here, do not display such Victorian interventions.

The Sinclair's Oyster Bar is particularly interesting; the late Stuart or even very early Georgian building is in imitation of Tudor timber-framed buildings, like The Old Wellington Inn. The black and white exterior is in actual fact not wattle-and-daub, but a superficial reproduction of the style designed to merge well with the general appearance of Tudor buildings, but not directly reproduce the construction method. For example, the detailed diaper pattern found in the gables of The Old Wellington Inn is nowhere to be found in this later addition, and the black beams are just painted on, rather than been wooden framing.

Above - Fig.6: The Shambles during demolition works for construction of the Arndale Centre. Courtesy of Chetham's Library, Manchester.

Although The Old Wellington Inn and Sinclair's Oyster Bar are now presented in an L-shape plan adjacent to the Cathedral, they were not originally built here and in this arrangement. As you can see from a photograph taken during the development of the Arndale Shopping Centre in central Manchester (**Fig.6)**, the buildings were originally in one line. With the need for sufficient space to accommodate the Arndale, most of the site was cleared: The Old Wellington Inn and Sinclair's Oyster Bar were retained. To fit in with the new development, the buildings were raised around 9 meters in 1974.

At the end of the twentieth century, following the 1996 Manchester bombing and the city's subsequent redevelopment, the Shambles was moved once again; this time to a completely different site (300m north of their original location) with the buildings being dismantled, moved, and reassembled piece by piece. Their current presentation in an L-plan was arrived at because the site selected—adjacent to similarly historic and ancient buildings, namely the Cathedral and Chetham's—wasn't large enough to accommodate the structures as they were arranged earlier. The solution was to split the buildings in two, arrange them in an L-shape, and connect them with a modern addition. They, consequently, form two sides of the Shambles Square. The third side of this square is the Gothic Mitre Hotel (originally built as the Old Church Tavern in 1867), another Grade II listed building, see here, although it is listed incorrectly by Historic England as in the Jacobean in style (**Fig.7**): in all they form Shambles Square.

Below - Fig.7: The Mitre Hotel, built as The Old Church Tavern in 1867; note that this is a Gothic-style, rather than Jacobean-style building as claimed in the Historic England listing. © Peter N. Lindfield.

This square is meant to appear as an historical area of the city, with additional historic cultural buildings including the Cathedral and Chetham's Library. The 'historic' Shambles Square includes Tudor, Stuart/Georgian, and Victorian architecture, but is an entirely modern fabrication. As reported in The Manchester Evening News, here, plans for the square caused consternation, and it was feared that the end result would be a "Walt Disney historical ghetto"; the realised square is certainly not a "Walt Disney historical ghetto", but, despite including truly historic and remarkable buildings, this supposedly historical square is essentially fabrication lacking the air of authenticity. It was conceived, however, as a pragmatic solution for saving these interesting and important examples of Tudor and Stuart/Georgian architecture.

Hopefully, when the Inn and Oyster Bar reopen post COVID-19, revellers and diners will appreciate the buildings' historical importance and their re-presentation fit for twenty-first century Britain.

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By Dr Peter N. Lindfield

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