

82/86 FENCHURCH STREET – THE STORY OF A GIFT

If you walk east along Fenchurch Street on the south side and you stop just before the traffic lights at the junction with Leadenhall Street you will see a handsome new, granite clad, air conditioned office building which was known at the time when I gave our Honorary Secretary the title of my paper as 82/86 Fenchurch Street but today, at the insistence of the Greater London Council is known as 84 Fenchurch Street. This new development is, I am sure you would agree if you have seen it, a tribute to modern technology, design and town planning.

I would now like to perform one of those feats so loved by film makers and producers of television thrillers and to transport you back in time some 592 years to 1391, to the reign of Richard II and to a remarkable man William of Wykeham, a Bishop of Winchester, Lord High Chancellor of England from 1367 to 1371 and a one time keeper of the Privy Seal but, most particularly for my story, the founder of both Winchester College, finished in 1394 and New College, Oxford finished in 1386 for in 1391 William acquired the site on which now stands 84 Fenchurch Street and the College have owned it ever since.

At the time of Wykeham's purchase the property was known as "Mountjoy's Inn". It would appear that at some time between 1163 and 1290 and for reasons unexplained, the Inn was acquired by Hornchurch Priory in Essex. This Priory was in turn a dependency of a religious community in Savoy whose location, according to grants made by Henry II, was "Mons Iovis" or "Jupiters Mountain". If you study a modern map you will find a "Colonne de Joux" close to "Col du Petit Saint Bernard" for it was the religious order of St. Nicholas and St. Bernard who were the overlords of Hornchurch Priory, they specialised in helping pilgrims to cross the Alps and are perhaps best portrayed by a St. Bernard dog carrying a keg of brandy. We must, however, return from the Alps to Fenchurch Street!

The earliest piece of written material in the New College Archives which mentions "Mountjoys Inn" is an undated document in a 13th Century hand. This Deed deals with the transfer by Walker son of William de Kirkehere of a piece of land in Allegate "in front of the houses of the Mungii" to Robert of Curingham. In this document the words "excepto iudaismo" are used which indicate that this transaction must have happened before 1290 when Edward I banished Jews from England.

The earliest dated document in the College archives concerning "Mountjoys Inn" is a lease granted by the Prior and Brothers of Hornchurch Priory to Thomas of Bristol and his wife Isabella. This lease is dated 1331 and was for a term of seven years, the premise leased comprising

“all their tenements and shops in the Parish of St. Katherine London except one room and two stables” which the Priory retained for its own use when visiting London.

This then is some of the background to the property that William of Wykeham purchased in 1391 and for which he paid 4,000 English nobles and 500 French gold francs to the Sayoyards. It is interesting to note that although England and Savoy were technically in a state of “cold war” being on opposite sides in the 100 years war and although the English property of the Brothers of St. Nicholas and St. Bernard had been confiscated along with English property of other foreign religious houses William still had to pay a substantial sum to acquire his endowment.

From 1391 until the present day “Mountjoys Inn” and other houses on the site appear regularly in New College Estate records — for example the total annual rents of the Aldgate properties in 1436-37 amounted to £6-18-0 (as an aside the asking rental today is some £1,168,000!) In 1436, however, Henry Coldyngton paid 40s per annum for the Inn whilst John Forbs paid 12s for his tenement. By 1475, when a general Valor of all New College endowments was taken, the Aldgate Street property was worth £8-9-0 per annum.

One of the tenants of “Mountjoys Inn” in the 16th Century was a man who became notorious for a suspected plot against the life of Elizabeth First. He was a Doctor Roderigo Lopez, a Portugeuse jew, who had been living in London since about 1571. In 1586 he was appointed chief physician to the Queen. A New College account roll of 1592-93 shows that Lopez was paying rent for “Mountjoys Inn” as a subtenant of Doctors Bayley and Barber two New College alummi.

In early 1594 Lopez was tried and convicted for plotting to poison the Queen. He was executed in 1595. It was suggested that Shakespeare used Doctor Lopez as a model for his character Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Perhaps one of the most far reaching occurrences of the 17th Century was the Great Fire of 1666. Records show that the eastern end of Fenchurch Street including the area owned by the College escaped the ravages of the fire so that a survey carried out in 1732 by R. Rountree most likely referred to the medieval buildings. In any event he was prompted to complain that “I found most of the tenants very shy and unwilling to let me into any truths!” — a common complaint even today by landlords agents! Rountree also noted in his survey that the name “Mountjoys Inn” was ceasing to be used. He reported that “the Mansion House is large and built of timber . . . and rooms to be very old and much out of repair and has not been inhabited for some years”. On the other hand, “the Coach House and stables are in

good repair . . . and the seven houses in the street are all old but in very good repair and well tenanted and tho old with little expense should so far as I could see may stand 30 or 40 years longer”.

The total annual rents at the time of the survey amounted to £478 — apart from a coach maker attached to the Inn, the tenants included two apothecaries, a pawnbroker, baker, carpenter, attorney-at-law, in fact a cross section of occupations that the local community would require for their day to day needs.

Up to the 19th Century the site continued very much as an Inn with surrounding houses and gardens. However a plan dated 1873 shows the whole property as having been developed to comprise a residence, coffee roasting shop, stables, a dairy, timber store, farriers, printing works and other businesses. It would appear that the old Inn had been converted into a warehouse.

In the 1890's the College granted long leases for further redevelopments to take place. Amongst them was one to the Charing Cross and Strand Electricity Company who proposed to build an electricity sub-station on the site as a result of which deep and extensive excavation took place. In addition, the redevelopment housed printing works, tea and coffee preparation and tasting facilities, offices, and a public house. Their redevelopment destroyed much evidence that would have been of archaeological interest, indeed a redevelopment has just started to the south of College property where the cleared site has been the subject of an archaeological dig and which I believe has revealed material of some historic significance.

These late 19th Century/early 20th Century buildings were demolished in 1980 to make way for the new building that I referred to at the beginning of this short paper. The College property today has a frontage to Fenchurch Street of some 90 feet and a depth to Carlisle Avenue of about 180 feet. There is still an Inn now known as “The Pump-house”. There is still some residential accommodation for the new building contains four flats and for stables read parking for seven cars.

It is a subjective view as to whether this new building is an improvement on its predecessors and whether it makes a contribution to the environment and the general street scene in this part of Fenchurch Street. It is however for better or for worse, part of the continuing cycle that has taken us so far from a 13th Century Inn, dwelling houses and garden to the advances of the last quarter of the 20th Century and into the world of computerised, air conditioned offices.

William of Wykeham was a far sighted man and he would, I like to think, have approved of the way in which his College and his successors have managed his endowment.

Although this story is not unique in terms of City property ownership, indeed one only has to look at the Corporation's own City Lands and Bridge House Estates to realise this, nevertheless a continuity of some 600 years is perhaps worthy of this briefest of surveys. Here then is a property close to Aldgate where Geoffrey Chaucer leased a dwelling house over the gate and close to Northumberland Alley where once stood Northumberland House which belonged to the Earls of Northumberland. The Northumberlands in fact left the house during the reign of Elizabeth I whereupon "the gardens thereof were made into bowling alleys and other parts into dicing houses common to all comers for their money, there to bowl and hazard". All of which must have delighted the publican at "Mountjoys Inn".

In preparing this paper I am grateful to Miss Betty Masters for the interest that she has taken but I am most particularly grateful to Mrs. Caroline Dalton the Archivist at New College not only for providing me with extensive notes but also for sparing time to take me up to the Muniment Tower and showing me a number of the historic archive documents in the College's ownership. To see the original of the lease of 1331 and the transfer of 1391 was a privilege. I could not help but reflect upon a possible link between those parchments so painstakingly prepared by hand and the word processors used today but even the agreement produced in 1980, after many drafts, made between the College and their partners had to incorporate a reminder of the antiquity of the site for the College had to demonstrate good title and the only way of providing this was for the Warden and the Bursar to swear an affidavit that the College had been entitled to receive rents from properties on the site for at least 300 years. This was seen as a suitable time upon which to rely!

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