

A History of Ock Street to 1835

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Part 2: A study of leases for Corporation properties in Ock Street

Throughout its history, Ock Street has been in a state of development. Plot boundaries, once laid out, are hard to change; but the plots they define may be repeatedly subdivided, or alternatively landholders may take up neighbouring plots and unite them, so that in the one case the boundaries are no longer sufficient to define a holding, while in the other they continue to exist in legal documents but are no longer visible on the ground. Houses are built, altered, finally pulled down with new constructions taking their place. Pastures and orchards turn into courts and factories, and later into blocks of flats and executive residences. What follows is an attempt to track the histories of various Ock Street properties through the centuries, using information mostly derived from a study of Corporation leases.¹ It is a perhaps unfortunate fact that the properties which are best documented tend to be from the more opulent, eastern, end of the street, but some attempt will be made to cover the industrial western parts as well. The criterion for inclusion has generally been that the position of the property, even if it no longer exists, can be reasonably closely pinpointed.

Leases, it should be noted, were basically for the ground on which buildings were situated; construction, maintenance and repair were the lessee's responsibilities, not the Corporation's. The lease itself formed only one part of an often complex set of financial arrangements surrounding the property. Although leases were a major source of the Corporation's income, there seems to have been little attempt to maximise their yield. The lessee's outlay fell into two parts: the fine at entry or renewal; and the annual rent, payable in two instalments at Lady Day and Michaelmas. The rent would normally remain fixed even through several centuries, and the fine move only within narrow limits which may have been subject to negotiation based on the current state of repair and of the property market. Leases were notionally renewed at 7, 14 or 21 years, but most often between 14 and 21 years, and the standard fine was raised by 2.5% for each six months' delay after fourteen years. In a few cases where the

¹ I wish to thank Jackie Smith for her help with the Corporation records, and am grateful to Jessica Brod for her work on 19th century maps and valuation schedules of Ock Street, which have made it possible to identify the location of many of the properties referred to. Also, Christopher Lewis generously provided me with the text of numerous wills in the National Archives. None of these individuals is responsible for my use of their information. **Information in this section not specifically referenced can be found in the Corporation minutes for the appropriate date, and/or in the collection of Ock Street leases currently held by Jackie Smith, archivist.**

calculation can be done, the lessee's outlays, smoothed over time, amounted to 5-6% of the annual value of the property – although it may well be that the valuation was itself based on the fine and rental and therefore theoretical only. Fines were sometimes reduced or waived altogether in view of building or improvement costs, of hardship, or of imposed conditions; some leases, especially in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, required the lessee to make provision for the widow or children of his predecessor or his own aged parents. Where the property was occupied by sub-tenants, these are often named; where it was subject to a mortgage, this is often mentioned, or else the lease is in the name of the mortgagee and not of the mortgagor. Only in the rare cases where a lease ran for its full 21-year term and was allowed to fall in could the Corporation make a radical change in its terms, and it does not seem that the opportunity was ever taken before the nineteenth century. If a property was subdivided, the lease costs were also subdivided, without any overall increase.

1. The Corner House and its occupants

Amyce describes what would later be the Corner House as a corner tenement, held by John Meadowe from the churchwardens of St Helen's, and paying 18s per year for an obit at that church. It must therefore have been in existence before 1548, when obits became illegal. Richard Wright had it at 23s 4d by 1580, and Richard Bowlls by 1586.² The property must have been at the corner of Boar Street, later Bath Street, perhaps about where Barclay's Bank is now.

By 1600, the property was already in three parts. Humphry Bowlls, presumably a son of Richard, had a little room and a shop, each with a chamber over; and John Heath, fuller, had a shop with a loft above. This shop, and possibly also that occupied by Humphry Bowlls, was separated from the main building and on the east side of the messuage. Neither of these was included in the main lease. Humphry Bowlls paid 20s, and it appears, although this is not specifically mentioned, that Heath paid 14s.³ The three parts of the tenement can thereafter be distinguished by the rents paid for them.

By 1605, when the main lease was taken over by Peter Stevens, the rent had increased to 28s; in 1616 it passed to Christopher Willisby and in 1618 to John Steed. Steed also took over Humphry Bowlls's rooms in 1636. By 1642, he had the entire property, with Humphry

² BRO, D/EP 7/83

³ Corp Minutes Vol 1, f.89 (this volume is somewhat disordered!)

Bowlls's widow occupying what was probably the part that had been used by John Heath. This 14s lease passed in 1645 to Thomas Bowles, barber, presumably a son of Humphry.⁴

The old Bowles lease at 20s had gone in the meantime to a Richard Gillett, who seems to have had problems holding on to his money. As part of his contract with the Corporation, Steed was to exercise some sort of guardianship over him. He was to pay off a £4 debt to John Richardson, and 'keep in his hand' £5 which he had lent to Gillett and presumably had been repaid. He would give security for Gillett's other debts 'during his lifetime'. What consideration he received for this rather hazardous responsibility is not recorded. But by 1650, when the lease was renewed, Gillett was no longer there. In 1658, John Steed having died, his widow Elizabeth took over the 20s lease, while the larger tenement at 28s passed to Samuel Pleydell, a prominent citizen who was a member of the Corporation. He had the right to let it on to Anne Stacie, presumably a relative, since Samuel's wife had been a Sarah Stacey of Stadhampton.⁵ A Bedford Stacy was also an Ock Street resident and a fellow member of the Council. Samuel Pleydell died in 1662, but the hearth tax lists in the following year show Mistress Pleydell paying on six chimneys. Samuel's son, the grocer Harim Pleydell, renewed in 1682 and again in 1717. In 1684, Pleydell also acquired the secondary lease on the 'rooms', and renewed both leases in 1733.⁶

After the death of Elizabeth Steed, some time before 1683, her tenement was held jointly by her two children, but by 1731, Harim Pleydell and his son John had the complete property. When Harim died at a ripe age in 1736 John got the main part of the Corner House, and the other son Samuel got the two adjoining tenements which were sub-let, apparently as a workplace. Samuel himself was living in Edinburgh, and apparently willing to sell out.

In 1747 the 14s lease was taken over by Elizabeth Knapp of Cumnor, widow. She was probably the widow of Thomas Knapp, baker, and daughter of Jacob Evans, sackclothmaker. The house she had previously lived in, at the lower end of Ock Street, had been a holding of her father, but she had had to pay off the mortgage.⁷ To her, plainly, property was an investment that would bring an income, and not a residence. Nothing more is heard of the third tenement which had been leased at 20s; it simply disappears at that point from the records. Most probably, it had been given up by Samuel and demolished as part of the

⁴ Unpublished transcripts, J. McGovern.

⁵ Information from David Jarman, Pleydell Society.

⁶ In naming his son, Samuel Pleydell was showing off his biblical erudition. See Ezra 2:32,39; 10:21,31; Nehemiah 7:35,42; 12:15.

⁷ BRO Wills, D/A1/66/96

redevelopment of the Sheepmarket in the later eighteenth century. The Corner House had always been in a prestige location, but this was now more the case than ever.

There was a tripartite agreement of 1753 between George Knapp, grocer, Katherine Tyrrell, spinster, and Charles Nourse, surgeon, of Oxford together with Joseph Tyrrell, gent, of Kidlington. Over the next few years Nourse and Mr Tyrrell took over both the leases. This seems to mean that Knapp had taken over the Pleydell business by means of a mortgage on the property which would give him a lump sum and pay the maiden lady an income. The Knapp family, wealthy and prominent in Abingdon affairs, now effectively owned the property and were using it in a financially astute way. George Knapp's son, also George, was in occupation by 1800.

In 1800, the 28s lease was to be renewed by a successor to Nourse but he died with it unsigned, and it was taken over by George Knapp. Since Knapp was Mayor of Abingdon at the time, the document was signed by the entire corporation. Knapp died in 1809, as Abingdon M.P., by falling out of his chaise in London.

Finally, in 1811 the two holdings were united into a single lease at 42s, held by Henry Knapp, as heir to George. The documents state that the Corner House and its outbuildings and the other messuage connected with it had lately been rebuilt and united, and that the latter 'is partly used by Messrs Knapp, Tomkins and Goodall as a banking shop'. This was not, however, the main office of the Knapp bank, which was on the High Street. Knapp renewed the lease in 1825, but by the time of the 1831 census it was John V. Collingwood, butcher and victualler, who was in residence. James Fidel in 1835 attributed to the property an annual value of £59 9s.⁸ Its rental at that time was 2 gns, and the entry fine if renewed at 14 years was £16 8s 6d. Thus we can calculate that the Corporation was taking a modest 5.5% of the annual income from its property.

2. The Lamb and its landlords

Another high status property towards the eastern end of the street, facing the Corner House across the Sheepmarket, was the Lamb Inn. This was already well established at the Amyce census, which shows it as a 300 by 30 ft property with pertinences and curtilage or close, held by Richard Ely under letters patent of 12 December 1553, and lately in the tenure of John

⁸ BRO, D/EP7/162

Goodridge; it paid 40s annual rent on a 21 year lease. Ely was a founder member of the Corporation, and, for a short period before his death, a governor of Christ's Hospital. With the Lamb went a garden or orchard, leasehold, some way to its west and near the Ruddle Cross, which may in fact have been used as a pasture for customers' horses; its rent was 2s 8d.

In 1577, the double lease was renewed at 46s 8d by Avis Carter, who seems to have been the widow of Richard Ely.⁹ It is not clear whether her second husband, Robert Carter, was still alive, but by 1589 she was again a widow.¹⁰ Her will, when she died in 1594, has an inventory which is very informative on the organisation of a major sixteenth-century inn.

There were two main reception rooms, well furnished with wainscot, glass windows, and painted cloths. The kitchen (or buttery) seems to have been equipped to feed twenty or more people. The three bedrooms were of different classes of comfort. The Kingston Chamber had two feather beds and three straw beds, although two of the latter might have to be spread on the floor. The Four-bedded Chamber had four feather beds and three of straw, though again there were, as the name implies, only four bedsteads. Above this was another bedroom, much more spartan but probably adequate for most travellers. It had neither glass nor painted cloths, but there were two feather beds for its three bedsteads. Altogether, the inn boasted twenty pairs of sheets, with one missing.

The living and working quarters were separated from the public rooms. There was a family bedroom which had three bedsteads with featherbeds, and a trundle bed. A son, Robert Carter, had a room to himself; he seems to have been handicapped in some way and his half-brother, Richard Ely jnr, was asked in the will to look after him. The maid or maids had a chamber with miscellaneous furnishings and 'old' covers. There was a cellar, a kitchen, a brewhouse, and a milkhouse. Apparently in a separate building were storehouses of various kinds, mostly with lofts for grains and malt. Five hogs, a sow, and six piglets rooted about in the backside, at the far end of which were the stables and a wood store. Elsewhere, there were five 'beasts', either horses or cows.

The inventory also mentions a holding in Ock Meade, presumably the orchard, garden or pasture already referred to, which was valued at £9, and 'a certain mead' in Wilsham at £10 10s. This may well have been the 1 acre meadow in Wilsham mentioned by Amyce as belonging with Ock Street, and having a rental value of 3s 4d.

⁹ BRO, A/AT 5

¹⁰ BRO, D/EP 7/86

The inn remained in the hands of successive Richard Elys until the last of that line died in 1732. In 1676, the lease is made out to a Richard Green, who seems to be financing some modernisation. By 1695, a Richard Ely again had the lease and there had been a partial rebuilding; instead of the untidy jumble of sheds in the old backside, there was now a Great Court with a stairway and gateway built over part of the yard. Presumably, Green had provided the funds, and had held the lease as his security. Also, the lease of 1695 indicates, rather ambiguously, that Christ's Hospital now had 'lodgings or chambers' within the boundaries of the inn.¹¹ In 1715, there was a further mortgage agreement, involving two prominent Abingdon men, Matthew Anderson and Thomas Prince, both sometime mayors, and a London goldsmith. Anderson would eventually take over the inn after Ely's death. In 1747 a Richard Clement was in occupation. Clement would later go into competition at the Rising Sun, which faced the Lamb from the north side of the Sheepmarket.¹² In 1769, the Lamb passed to a Robert Ridge of Clifton, Oxon, and in 1773, Coventry Hardiman was the landlord and was followed by John Hardiman, presumably his son, in 1801. The father was still alive, and now described himself as a corn factor. In 1815, and again in 1830, the leases were renewed by William Westbrook. At the 1831 census, the inn was home to four adult males of whom two were described as innkeepers, and three adult female servants. Fidel's valuation of 1835 appears to show the house in the hands of the butcher John Collingwood as owner, which seems to be an error; Westbrook reappears in Read's valuation of 1838.¹³

The Lamb closed as an inn in 1851, and was redeveloped as a dwelling house, the Square House, with remarkable ornamental brickwork.¹⁴ This was demolished in 1935 to make way for the Regal Cinema, and that in its turn has been replaced by a new block of flats.

3. No 12 Ock Street and its neighbours¹⁵

Two doors west of the Lamb, according to Amyce's survey, was a tenement that had already been granted to Christ's Hospital. The occupant, George Moore, paid 6s 8d per annum rent. The surname seems to have many variants, and Moore is probably to be identified with the

¹¹ Smith and Carter, *Inns and Alehouses*, 51; Corp Minutes, Vol 2 f.78v.

¹² *Idem*.

¹³ Fidel seems to have transposed a group of houses from the north of the Sheepmarket to the south.

¹⁴ Abingdon Herald, 6 Jan 1900 (I thank Jackie Smith for this reference); Elizabeth Drury and Judy Thomas, *Abingdon Past & Present* (2003), 59.

¹⁵ I have especially to thank Bridget Rudge for information on this building.

George Moforde *alias* Mose mentioned in the original grant.¹⁶ He was a shoemaker, according to Bridget Rudge, and was buried in 1557.¹⁷

On the west side of Moore's house was an inn or alehouse 'At the sign of the Bear'. By 1562 both were held by Thomas Orpwood, a distinguished member of Abingdon's elite, three times mayor and once master of Christ's Hospital. Presumably there was a sub-tenant who actually ran the Bear, but of him there is no record. There is also no record of lessees of the properties after the death of Orpwood in 1580.

Both the properties became part of Wrigglesworth's charity in 1647. Richard Wrigglesworth, originally from Marcham, had gone to London and made good, becoming a member of the Fishmongers' Company – this does not necessarily mean he sold fish, but does imply that he became wealthy enough to keep up appearances in a moderately exclusive metropolitan society. It was expected of men in his position that they would do something for their home town in later life or at their death, and Wrigglesworth left £800 to pay for a weekly 'lecture' – a sermon, in fact – which was to take place in Marcham in summer and at St Helen's, Abingdon, in winter. Wrigglesworth was, plainly, of a puritan persuasion, and it may be significant that many of the properties acquired were in Ock Street with its developing reputation for godliness. Widow Alice Wise held the later No 12 from 1653, and paid hearth tax on three chimneys in 1663. Her neighbour at the Bear was John Spinnage, who paid on five, although the lease is made out to William Dickinson.

The lease passed in 1693 to an Andrew Ety, who seems to have held not only the future No 12 but also the houses on both sides of it. The Bear already existed, and now the property immediately to the east also became a tavern, the Chequers. From 1735, the Tomkins family, wealthy Baptists, were the leaseholders. This was a time of rebuilding. Bridget Rudge's article describes the replacement of thatch with tiles on the roof, the insertion of new stone chimneys, ceilings, an attic floor and a staircase. Drawings from 1742, reproduced in Jackie Smith and John Carter's book, show No 12 retaining the gabled appearance it still has, and the Bear already equipped with a more or less Georgian front. No 12 seems now to have been divided into three tenements, arranged, according to the maps of the 1830s, one behind the other. It would be interesting to know whether the location between two drinking houses

¹⁶ CPR, 7 Edw VI, Pt 7, 142.

¹⁷ Bridget Rudge, 'The Occupants of No 12 Ock Street, Abingdon', *The Oxon Recorder – Newsletter of Oxfordshire Buildings Record*, Issue 25, Winter 2005-6, 2-4.

made it easier or harder to attract tenants. At a date which is unclear, the building on the far side of the Bear also became a public house, the Cock and Bottle.¹⁸

4. The present premises of Leach, the Printers¹⁹

As noted above, Amyce's survey shows Richard Ely, landlord of the Lamb, holding an orchard or garden, leasehold, some 14 doors to the west of his inn. To the east of that was a tenement and garden belonging to Christ's Hospital. The orchard or garden was normally included on successive leases for the Lamb, but in 1676 for the first time separate leases were issued. Ely had previously been paying 6s 8d rent and about £20 for his renewal fines. These sums were now split, with 6s 8d rent and £5 fine attributed to the Ruddle Cross garden. The current Richard Ely had taken the lease of the neighbouring Christ's Hospital property in 1675, and now renewed both together. Henceforth, the two properties by the Ruddle Cross would be effectively united although still formally in different ownerships and requiring separate leases, one from the Corporation and one from the Hospital.

Both leases were taken over in 1692 by the clockmaker Joseph Norris. He was a member of the town's elite and sometime borough chamberlain, and seems to have built a house suitable to his status. The property stayed in his family, passing after his death in 1716 to his niece Jane Waldren and then to her daughter Elizabeth Deering, who lived in Kent and to whom it represented an investment. In 1772, the occupant was Richard Saunders, gent. After Elizabeth Deering's death in 1786, the leases were taken up by George Hawkins, a wealthy and apparently unmarried local gentleman. Mienneke Cox has much to say about this enthusiastic dabbler in science and horticulture. His house, described as Georgian and brick-built, still stands.²⁰

The next lessee was William Faulkner, and by 1835 there were three additional buildings in the grounds: two tenements valued by James Fidel at £3 and £1 respectively, and a spinning shop and warehouse at £5. With the main house, the total value was £20. The Corporation was expecting £2 5s 6d as a renewal fine at 14 years, and the annual rent had been 6s 8d for centuries. Assuming the Hospital was taking an equal sum, the leasing cost was almost exactly 5% of the assessed annual value.

¹⁸ Smith and Carter, *Inns and Alehouses*, 74-75.

¹⁹ I have used notes on Christ's Hospital leases taken by Bill Greenaway and passed to me by Mrs Eileen Neail.

²⁰ Mienneke Cox, *Abingdon, an 18th century country town* (Abingdon, 1999), 179, 215.

5. 84-96 Ock Street and Brooker's Yard

The previous examples have been of élite properties – a town centre grocery, a major inn, a couple of gentlemen's residences. As we move further west from the Ruddle Cross, we are in the area of workmen's cottages, workshops, and, increasingly towards the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, of crowded courts and slums.

In 1677, John Stiles, a silkweaver, took a lease on a messuage on the south side of Ock Street a short distance to the west of the Ruddle Cross, as well as a garden adjoining it with the name of Stramger's Land.²¹ The plot was a large one going down to the Ock, and had probably formed part of, or else had bordered on, the historic Thistlecroft.²² He may have been taking a financial risk. The holding carried a rental of 15s and an entry fine of 20s, but the previous lessees had arrears of rent amounting to 25s that had to be paid off. It seems that finance was obtained from one Richard Clissard, and when the lease was renewed in 1692 there was a Martha Hobbs who ensured that the Corporation knew of her interest. By 1710 Styles, who must have been an old man by then, was in serious difficulties. The lease would normally have been renewed at fourteen years, but this had not been done, and no rent had been paid for seven years. Stiles was described politely as a 'distracted person', and the Corporation took a remarkably charitable line with him. The holding was divided irregularly into two, taken as of equal value. A plot large enough for a house and garden was marked off at the west of the frontage, and with this went a garden or orchard which occupied the whole of the southern half of the original holding. This was taken by Francis Hyde, linendraper, and his wife Jane, while Stiles and his family retained the eastern half of the frontage together with the full width of the plot as far back as the orchard. The Hydes had probably had to be persuaded into the bargain, since no fines were levied when the new leases were issued 'because of John Stiles's poverty'. Both parties were to pay 7s 6d p.a. as rent. The Stiles family kept Stramger's Land, paying 4s annual rent.

The three tenements passed over time through various hands; fines for Stiles's portion varied around £2 10s, for the Hydes' £3 10s, and for Stramger's £3. In 1801, the Hydes' portion was in the hands of Richard Edgington, sacking manufacturer, who seems also to have held

²¹ Or Stranged's or Swanged's. See Corporation Minutes, Vol 1 fo. 233v.

²² Agnes Baker takes the Thistlecroft as having been behind the later nos 80-160 – the present Knight's Yard to some way beyond the Cross Keys – see *Historic Streets of Abingdon* (1957), 15. This was granted to Christ's Hospital in the sixteenth century, but nineteenth century maps show that at some intervening time parts of it had passed to the Corporation.

Strangers' Land. Edgington was bankrupt by 1818.²³ At this time, what had been Stiles's part of the plot was held by trustees under a former lessee's will. Knowing that the leases would not be renewed, the Corporation seems to have decided to take the lead in a development project.

Six old tenements on a part of Edgington's ground were demolished by 1823, and the materials sold for £46 10s. The various parts of the plot were re-organised. One tenement with garden was separated off to be leased as a unit at a fine of £2 10s and rental 5s.²⁴ There was an exchange between the plot and a neighbouring one to straighten the boundary. The lease on a part of the property was then to be auctioned, with a fine set at £9 and bidding on the rent. The successful bidder was to build, within a year, one or more tenements, which were to be of uniform construction, with street frontage, and be brick-built and have sash windows. They were to be at least 21 feet high to the roof plate, and at least 15 feet deep. These would be houses for the more prosperous among the working class, and it was specified that they should not be of worse appearance than 'those lately built by Robert Stiles in the same street'.²⁵ The lease went to Thomas Ayriss, described as a kilnman, of Marcham, at a rental of ten guineas. In 1835, William Mayo, victualler, took over both Ayriss's lease and another part of the plot or of a neighbouring one. For the latter, he would pay a moderate rent of 10s per year, but was charged a surprisingly high entry fine of £130, of which 20% was payable immediately. It is rather hard to disentangle the details of what was done and exactly where, but it seems that Mayo was getting a considerable and compact portfolio of rental properties: the new uniform houses with street frontage (which still exist as Nos 84 or 86 to 92), and beyond them a court of six smaller dwelling houses running back from the street which by 1838 would be known as Brooker's Yard. Behind all these was ample land for further building, although it does not seem that this was used at the time. Today it is part of the Meadows estate. One assumes that Thistlecroft might not have seemed adequately inviting as a name to the developer's marketing department.

6. The Bird in Hand

In 1646, as was noted in Part 1, the sievemaker John Prince split his lease 2:1 with William Collins, who had previously been merely a subtenant. Prince and his successors paid 10s per annum in rent, and entry fines that varied around £6 or £6 10s. In the hearth tax assessments

²³ Corporation minutes Vol 4 p. 168.

²⁴ It is possible that this holding was elsewhere. Edgington had held several Corporation leases.

²⁵ Corporation minutes Vol 4 p. 260. See below for Robert Stiles's houses.

of 1663, Prince was noted as having a single chimney but was not liable to pay the tax. This probably means that he was aged and receiving support from public funds. Nonetheless, he, or perhaps a son, maintained the lease until 1688. After Prince's time, the property passed through the hands of Frances Watkins, under whom it was briefly an inn with the name of The Bird in Hand, of Thomas Day, mopmaker, and then of John Cripps, sackclothweaver. By 1767, there were two occupants, John Cripps himself and Thomas Middleton. In that year, the lease was taken over by the Yates family, whose interest was as investors. They began to develop the holding, but later generations of the family became London grocers and seem to have lost interest. The Corporation discussed the property on 30 April 1817 by which time the last lease had run out.²⁶

The property by then included dwelling and spinning houses, a close and a garden. The Standing Committee was instructed to get the occupiers out of possession, and to sell the materials of the dwelling houses as they saw fit. The site was to be let to the best bidder at a rent of 20s yearly, the bidding being on the entry fine payable. The Committee would be authorised to regulate dimensions and materials of the house or houses to be erected.

Events now moved quite fast, leading one to suppose that deals had already been done. Barely five weeks later, on 4 June 1817, the property formerly held by John Yates passed to Robert Stiles, who covenanted to erect 'a house or houses'. The bidding plainly had not been on the entry fine, for that was agreed at the old level of £6, while the rental was not 20s but £4 15s. Plainly, Stiles was not ready to make a large down payment.

In 1831, the Stiles property passed to Richard Copeland on the same terms, and at that time there were four occupants, Richard Robins, William Williams, Joseph Evans, and Anthony Veasey or Vasey. All of these except Williams, who was replaced by a Robert Stone, appear in the 1831 census, and there are at that point 24 people living in the four houses which, from contemporary maps, are each barely 12 feet square. Robins is a labourer, Stone a baker, and the other two sacking weavers. It is interesting that Fidel in 1835 valued the total property at £15, on which, at the old rates, the Corporation would have been taking about 6% of the yield. What Copeland was actually paying suggests that its true value to him must have been over £100.

Copeland's Court no longer exists. Its position was where Mayott House is now.

²⁶ Corporation minutes Vol 4 p. 151.

7. The Spread Eagle

The property which would be known as the Spread Eagle is of interest both for industrial development in Ock Street and as an illustration of how property leases could be used deliberately to guarantee lodgings for the old.

In 1619 Ralph Wise took a lease at 10s annually on 'a garden ground with tenement lately built and now divided into two tenements'. These two tenements were taken over respectively by Robert Lapworth on the east and Nicholas Butler on the west at 5s each, although their later history indicates that there continued to be connections between them, and that in fact Lapworth may have been in overall control. In 1655, the eastern portion was taken over by Samuel Duhem, a silkweaver immigrant from France.²⁷ As part of his lease contract, he was to take care of Widow Butler, his presumably deceased neighbour's mother, paying her 6d per week and 11s per year for her house rent. This shows that there must have been some intermediary between the widow and the Corporation, for the latter received only 5s on its lease. The extra 6s will have been in respect of the dwelling house as such. It is not clear how Duhem was reimbursed for his outlay, but it is probably relevant that no entry fine was charged at this time. When he renewed the lease in 1675, he had to pay 20s. Duhem held the property until 1682, when it passed to Thomas Vokins and from him, in 1710, to John Pullin. Under Vokins and Pullin, it was known as The Spread Eagle, with Widow Timms as the occupant.²⁸ In 1721 it was again taken by a silkweaver, William Styles. In the late seventeenth century, there had been mention of John, Robert, and William Styles in Ock Street, all silkweavers, and it is tempting to think that Duhem had been teaching his craft and had started a local tradition of silkweaving.

Styles held the property until 1756, when presumably he died. It was taken over by Benjamin Yates, gent, and John Winterborne, mason, both of Abingdon, as trustees for Styles's stepson or grandson, William Clarke. They paid 8 guineas fine. For some reason, their lease was not renewed in the usual way after fourteen years, but was allowed to run out. Nonetheless, Clarke, a wheelwright, was given his lease in 1777 at a fine of 10 guineas, which represents a reasonable rate of interest for the extra seven years. The trustees had not been idle. There were now five tenements, separately occupied. Clarke was able to turn his holding into ready cash in 1785 by taking mortgages from Thomas Franklin and from Joseph Tubb, a local

²⁷ Mieneke Cox, *The Story of Abingdon Part 3* (Abingdon, 1993), 126.

²⁸ Smith and Carter, *Inns and Alehouses*, 115.

shopkeeper, but it seems that after Clarke's death in or before 1793 Tubb's executrix foreclosed, and the next lease was made out to her.

Meanwhile, the neighbouring tenement, which had been occupied by Widow Butler, had passed in 1657 to John Ling, labourer, who seems to have taken responsibility for the venerable lady. His rent was now 6s 8d, and again there is no record of an entry fine. In 1664, Richard Ling, probably John's son, and Jonathan Bell had identical leases. It is not clear whether this represents a sub-division or whether the two men shared the property on the basis of a partnership. Mrs Butler had presumably passed on, and Richard Ling was now caring for another widow, Jane Bachells. If she moved, married or died, he was to pay the Corporation £2, no doubt some part of what he had been granted for her upkeep. Neither Ling nor Bell was to pay an entry fine, but this seems to be in respect of the new stone or brick chimneys they bound themselves to construct within two years. In 1688, both tenements were taken over by John Bell, labourer, son of Jonathan, although Ling was still living there; now there is a clause in the lease to the effect that Bell's father was to have a room of his own in the house. This tenement disappears from the records after 1727, by which time it is in the hands of William Geagle, hempdresser, and in the occupation of William Thorn.²⁹

The old Spread Eagle can be identified with a moderate degree of confidence on the nineteenth century maps, since it is described as bounded on the west by a ditch, and at least one of the occupants named in a lease of 1822 is still present at the census of 1831. By the time of Fidel's valuation of 1835, the five houses, four of them having street frontage over a total length of 51ft 6in, had become part of a single property unit with another two houses on a further stretch of frontage of 27ft to the east, and with another five houses, three of them occupied, going back from the street towards the ditch to the south. It seems very likely that the original holding of Ralph Wise had been reconstituted to house a total of ten families. Later, the plot would be even more intensively developed, and would look southward towards the Tower Brewery on the other side of the ditch. These properties are now lost under the large block of flats opposite the corner of Victoria Road.

To sum up, this chapter has attempted to describe the history of a selection of Ock Street properties from the time of Amyce's survey in the sixteenth century – if they already existed then – into the nineteenth century with its relatively abundant documentation. The picture that emerges is one of variety, and of slow but steady change. Properties tended to stay in one

²⁹ Geagle also made money as keeper of the local lock-up, and used the prisoners as cheap labour – Cox, *Abingdon, an 18th century country town*, 160.

family through two or more generations, with the later generations likely to hold them as investments rather than as residences or workplaces. Tenements were being subdivided even in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but increasingly so in the eighteenth and nineteenth, so that the personal information we have from leases, tax lists and wills pertains to a steadily declining proportion of the population. For most of the humble journeyman weavers and labourers who were subtenants of the lessees, we have only names, and often not even those. Ock Street shows us several aspects of English urban history in microcosm: the divide between greater and lesser townsmen, between merchants and craftsmen; the varying fortunes of families; and the unavoidable development of a largely faceless industrial proletariat as population rose vertiginously in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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