

St Albans Museums: 'Talking Buildings' project, 2016

Building: The Vine, 19 Spicer Street

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This research was undertaken by volunteers and is not an exhaustive history of the building but captures what intrigued them during the project.

If you have any memories you'd like to share, or any queries about the research, please do let us know: museum@stalbans.gov.uk

Richarde Raynshawe - a Tudor benefactor and a 'home for honest poor persons'

Location

Spicer Street is just a short step down from the Town Hall towards St Albans Cathedral near Romeland. 13th century Abbey records show the monastery nearby had tenements in this, one of the town's oldest parts. It is thought the name 'Spicer' comes from the word *épiciers* (spice sellers or grocers) who traded there; being central, close to the monastery and near the Cathedral, would have made for successful business as spices were essential ingredients in cooking at the time.

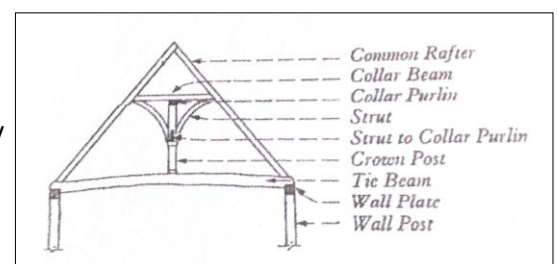
Walking along Spicer Street from the Cathedral end, on the lefthand side is no. 17, then The Vine, followed by three almshouses forming The Richard Raynshaw Charitable Trust. These buildings are known to have existed in the time of Elizabeth 1 - perhaps even before 1500.

The Building

It is easy to spot The Vine which has a plaque on its porch painted with grapes and beside it on the brickwork the indistinct words 'BENSKINS FINE ALES & STOUT' - relating to one of its past lives. The Vine, Richarde (or Richard) Raynshawe's home, originally a timber-framed, medieval great Hall, covered the land now occupied by no. 17 and The Vine.

His entire household lived in this space though there may have been a *solar*, a small room with its own staircase for his privacy. However, as was common, his servants would have eaten in the Hall but continued to sleep in their places of work - cook and scullery maids in the kitchen, groom in the stables and his personal servant, James Goodacars, probably slept outside his master's bedroom door. No luxury for them. Altered over the centuries, it is one of only a few such buildings left in St Albans today.

A detailed inventory compiled sometime after Raynshawe's death in 1569 shows that he had greatly updated the accommodation with additional downstairs rooms, some with wainscott panelling (high quality riven oak boards) – a new luxury at the time - a pantry with storage for food and drink, staircase, 5 upstairs rooms (one a 'gilden' room); the heavy timber beams, including an unusual crown post (see illustration), still show the building's structure. This gave him a large house as befitted a man of Raynshawe's status, suitable for showing off to and entertaining his many important acquaintances and friends.



Crown-post roof

It is believed The Vine, as Raynshawe knew it, was divided around the late 1600s becoming The Vine itself and no. 17 Spicer Street, a later building. At this time, a large chimneypiece, now a feature of the house, was installed to take the smoke from the Hall which previously had made its way up through a hole in the roof. Over a long period both properties changed hands many times until in the early 19th century when no. 17 was privately occupied and The Vine was a public house let to Samuel Wildbore by 'Rainshaw's Charity'. Then leased to Benskins Watford Brewery, who were freeholders by 1927 hence the company name on the wall; in 1944 it became privately occupied.

Over the centuries the almshouses have had good times and bad and they too have been altered, now having a uniform Victorian red brick facade, erected in 1846 - its many-paned windows and low doorways opening directly on to the street; 'Ranshaws Charity 1846' on a stucco shield records the re-building. Originally three residences, they are now divided into five cosy dwellings, each with its allotted garden. So when, in 1569, Richarde Raynshawe, in his will gave 'The Vine and three tenements or cottages', together with funding, to the Mayor and Burgesses of St Albans for their safe keeping, he was providing 'a home for honest poor persons' for nearly 500 years.

(Illus: Hertfordshire, Buildings of England, The, Pevsner, N., 2nd ed, 1953. revised Cherry, B, Wm Clowes & Sons Ltd, p.429).

So who was Richarde Raynshawe?

Richarde Raynshawe (Raynshaw/Rainshaw/Ranshaw/Renshaw) became one of 16 Serjeants-at-arms to Henry VIII in early 1540, having been appointed a yeoman of the guard about 10 years before and a Justice of the Peace in 1538.

Paid 12d a day, Raynshawe's role as a sergeant-at-arms¹ in these Tudor times was *to attend the person of the King, to arrest traitors, or men of worth or reckning [conspiring against the King] ... and to attend the Lord High Steward of England sitting in judgement upon any Traitor* Later he was made a commissioner for collecting rents for both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I - not a popular occupation - at times perhaps acting as a banker. These important jobs would have set him apart in St Albans despite his obvious wealth which enabled him to own a large house, land, woods, livestock and several properties.

Towards the end of his life he sold pieces of land, including some to Sir Francis Bacon at Gorhambury. He may have benefited from Henry VIII's re-settlement of land but how he came about his influence and prosperity is hinted at, rightly or wrongly, in a report of a disturbance which is mentioned later. However, on his death on 22 December 1569, it is clear that Raynshawe was a generous man to the highest and lowest of his friends and to the community.

Raynshawe came from Flexton and Urmesone, Lancashire so his northern accent would also have set him apart. How or why he came south is not known though it is thought he was here by 1530. He married Alice, daughter of the owner of Rothamstead and there are no children mentioned in his will. He had contacts in Berkhamstead, Hytham in Kent and Stretton near Manchester; to their parishes and to the poor of St Peter, St Michael and St Stephen's here he left money and clothing to be distributed at his tomb each Good Friday for 10 years.

In addition, he left an emerald and gold ring to *my very honourable Lord the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal (Sir Nicholas Bacon of Gorhambury), to Knight Lord Chief Justice of England ...4 sovereigns in gold* and 20s to a friend in Grays Inn, London. His many other personal bequests, including to the *parson of the ... church of St Alban for my tythes heretofore forgotten ... [and] towards the reparations of the same church and for my burial there.*, ranged from his several saltcellars, silver and gold plate, particular items of his clothing, including his riding coat to his groom, his own and feather beds and their furnishings, livestock and sums of money - all these carefully allocated.

His many godsons each received a silver spoon and in some cases, a payment. Particularly mentioned was *lytell Bess Preston*, step-daughter of perhaps his greatest friend, George Ferrers, courtier and poet; to Bess he left 3 score sheep (60). 3 cows, 'my bed' (furnished), a black gown and 20 nobles (ie 6s.8d. each/½ of £1), a gold chain to be sold as a dowry at her marriage: and to *James Goodacars my olde and trustye sarvante [of] twenty years*, 20 sheep, a colt, a cow, his whole year's wages, a feather bed and 40 shillings a year for life to be paid out of his lands called Oysterhills (off

¹ Sergeant at arms - an officer of a legislative or fraternal body responsible for maintaining internal order. Collins Concise Dictionary, 1988

Redbourn Road, St Michael's parish).

His household, 13 people in all, from housekeeper to 'kitchen wench', who received food and drink for a year after his death, was remembered and many sheep passed to new owners. As well as varying sums of money, every person mentioned was given a black gown or coat of differing fabrics depending on their importance, to be worn in mourning as was the custom at the time. It's possible to see from his will that Raynshawe had regard for his household as well as those in the world of the landed gentry.

However, Raynshawe's longest lasting legacy was the gift of The Vine and the three adjoining 'tenements or cottages' to the Mayor and Burgesses of St Albans. Raynshawe stipulated that the almshouse occupants at the time were to live rent free until their deaths when the executors and the Mayor and Burgesses, on the advice of the Abbey Rector, should suggest further deserving tenants. This arrangement was to be funded from the renting out of The Vine, together with profits from land and woods owned by Raynshawe in St Michael's parish. Today the trust continues to be run by trustees appointed by St Albans City Corporation on similar lines as those proposed by Raynshawe in his will.

Tudor times were such that manors and lands changed hands frequently and Raynshawe appears to have bought and sold too, perhaps acquiring a reputation and a few enemies. There is a report² of a disturbance which took place in St Albans Cathedral (or St Andrew's chapel) on Easter Day 1540. An official complaint of threatened bodily harm was made against Raynshawe by Ralph Rowlat, the younger and John Maynard. The two men's story was that Raynshawe with his 'servants' came 'in ryotous manner' to the Abbey armed with 'long swords and bucklers'³ in order to pick a fight and remove the two men by force from the pews they were occupying. Rowlat and Maynard claimed that because of Raynshawe's reputation for picking quarrels, violence, fighting and for claiming other people's livestock as his own, they assumed they, and others who opposed him, would be killed. At the time it was common for pews to be set aside for the sole use of important families or people and Rowlat and Maynard may have been in the wrong place, deliberately or not. All the noise and threatened violence brought crowds who calmed the situation but the two men were ejected and said they continued to be in fear of their lives afterwards.

After his death, through his estate, Raynshawe gave up his right to copyhold⁴ land in St Peter's parish so as to benefit the boys at St Albans School. This glimpse of Rayshawe's life through his will⁵ leaves no doubt that the community received an important gift and that if you were friend or servant of Richarde Raynshawe you were not forgotten.⁶⁷

Also currently included in Raynshawe's Charitable Trust though not part of his will are:

'A tenement on the north side of the Clockhouse and another on the north side of [Lower] Dagnall Street had been demised by Thomas Lathbury by his will of 1579 to the use of the poor. The property next to the Clockhouse was at one time known as the Rose and Crown but in our period was often referred to as "John Kilbie's house" from the name of its occupier for much of the time.'⁸ It is now occupied by a travel agent – Trailfinders at 1 French Row.

² Arc & Arc: Some old Lawsuits connected with St Albans by W J Hardy, Esq., FSA. pp.11-13

³ Buckler - a small, round shield to protect the arm - Collins Concise Dictionary, 1988

⁴ Copyhold - land held by a tenant/copyholder (usually for low rent but not leasehold), who has the right to nominate and pass on the use and right to a successor (often family). [as in freehold/leasehold/copyhold].

⁵ Will - The National Archives, Kew (TNA) - PROB 11/52/88

⁶ A Tudor Official in St Albans and his House - St Albans Architectural & Archaeological Society Journal, No. 12, p86-96

⁷ Mayor of St Albans v. Robatham - TNA - C2/Eliz/S 19/34 17 Nov 158-24 Mar 1603

⁸ St Albans 1650-1700 A thoroughfare town and its people, SAHAAS, Ed. JT Smith & MA North, Herts Publications, 1988, p.60