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**Historical Building Report  
on  
Bridgwater Town Hall  
High Street  
Bridgwater**

**February 2008**

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Fig. 1 18th Century Town Map (n.d.) SRO: DD/SH C/202

Fig. 2 1806 Survey Map (used with the 1836 Town Survey) SRO: T\PH\bw/1

Fig. 3 1887 OS Map of Bridgwater (SLS)

Fig. 4 1904 OS Map of Bridgwater (SLS)

Fig. 5 1930 OS Map of Bridgwater (SLS)

Appendix I - 1866 Memorial New Town Hall

## **PLANS**

Plate 1 1720 Basement Plan (SRO: D\B\bw/CL/21)

Plate 2 Basement Comparison Plan 1820 -2007

Plate 3 1720 Ground Floor Plan (SRO: D\B\bw/CL/21)

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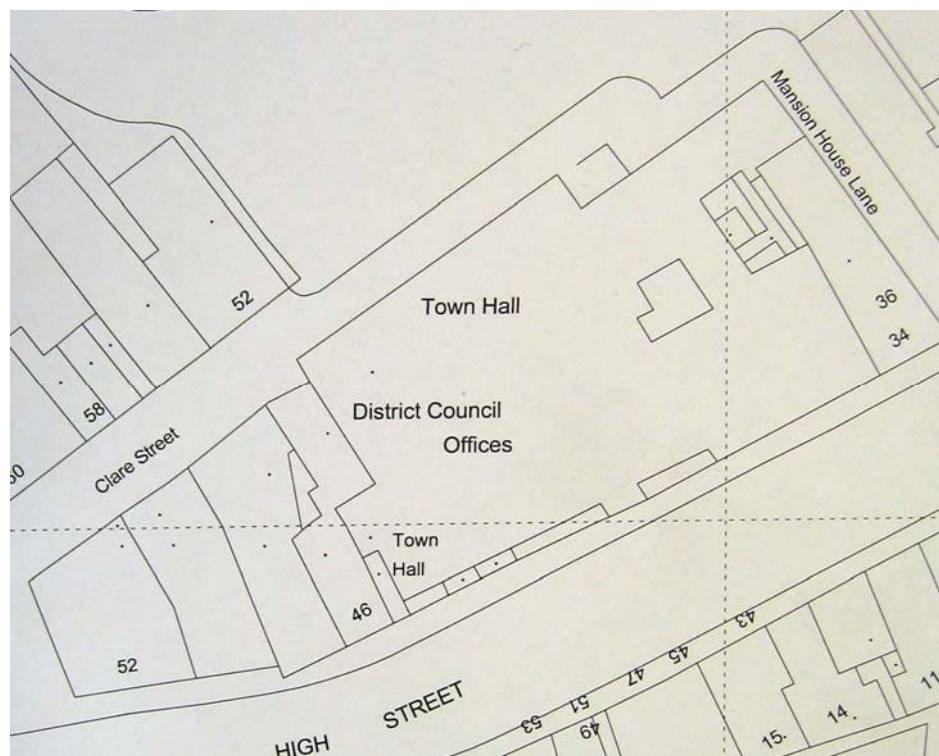
## Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the staff at Somerset Records Office and Somerset Local Studies Library (SLSL), The Blake Museum, Bridgwater (BMB) and Bridgwater Library (BL) as well as the NMR at Swindon. I am indebted to Dr Peter Cattermole for cataloguing the earlier plans of the 1865 Bridgwater Town Hall held at SRO. The property deeds used in this report are from both Somerset Records Office (SRO) and Sedgemoor Borough Council (SBC).

This report has been carried out at the request of Stuart Martin, Principal Planning Officer at Sedgemoor Borough Council by Kay Ross of McLaughlin Ross llp. All colour photographs are by Kay Ross unless otherwise stated.

## Location

The 1950 Town Hall Site is located on the north side of Bridgwater High Street. To the rear is Clare Street, formerly Back Lane and earlier still, Penel Orlieu. Mansion House Lane and The Bridgwater Book Shop [34/36 High Street] are to the east and further shops and restaurants to the west [46-52 High Street]. The Town Hall is to the east of the earlier 1865s Town Hall, now a theatre, and the former 1820s Judges' House whose frontage still dominates the High Street.



## Scope

The 1950 Town Hall has a flying freehold above and to the rear of 34/36 High Street. Whilst concentrating on the history of the 1950 Town Hall building, by necessity the history and architectural plans of some of the other buildings involved in the Town Hall Island Site will be included to give a context to the current building and how it evolved. Unfortunately there appears to be no planning history for the 1950 Town Hall at either Sedgemoor Borough Council or Somerset Records Office, so its creation and subsequent alterations can only be conjectured from the structural layout. For the purposes of this report, the 1950 Town Hall will be referred to where feasible as the Town Hall and the earlier Town Hall will be referred to as the 1865 Town Hall.

## Summary

The Site of the Town Hall is directly to the east of the 1820 Judges House by Richard Carver, who also built 4 houses on the site of both the Town Hall and the Bridgwater Book Shop to the east. A 1902 photograph shows the elegant Regency frontages. One of the frontages remains, fronting the council offices to the east of the Town Hall. Corporation deeds of the original burgage plots along the north part of the High Street date back to at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century and probably much earlier. The building of the Assize Hall in 1720 encroached on some of the rear burgage plots to either side, before which they were more regular, stretching back to what is now Clare Street.

Both the Town Hall and the bookshop (34/36 High Street) are listed, though the Town Hall is dismissed in one sentence, and incorrectly ascribed to the c1930s. Pevsner, too, incorrectly assigns Charles Knowles building to the 1820s Judges House.<sup>1</sup> Knowles' 1865 Town Hall to the rear of the Judges' House is now a theatre, the concert hall still regularly used.

Prior to 1800 the Town Hall Site was a cordwainer's shop and dwelling with a 'hanging house' or drying shed behind attached to the kitchen of the adjacent Noah's Ark fronting Mansion House Lane (now the bookshop). The inn closed around 1800 and became first a grocer's then a saddlers, which it remained until just before World War I. After this it became the Gas Board, then a clothes shop and more recently a bookshop.

The Town Hall, despite its 1930s design, was built in 1950 following the war. It was probably planned before war broke out, hence its 1930s style. To the rear of Carver's 1824 buildings remain a mixture of yards, stables, workshops and outbuildings. They are all now rendered or painted with 20<sup>th</sup> century windows inserted, making it difficult to date them further than the 19<sup>th</sup> or possibly 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They have been incorporated into the Town Hall as additional offices and it appears that nothing of any particular architectural significance remains. The central courtyards, former yards, remain, surrounded by the different buildings.

The Town Hall retains all its metal Crittall windows and many other features, some of which have been hidden beneath later flooring and ceilings. Outside, the original lamps and clock remain, as well as the balcony on the first floor. Whilst there are a number of plans for the Judges House and the 1865 Town Hall, there appears to be no planning history for the 20<sup>th</sup> century Town Hall at either Sedgemoor District Council or Somerset Records Office. This makes it difficult to ascertain how the earlier buildings were adapted and what alterations have taken place since.

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<sup>1</sup> 1958 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South and West Somerset*, 1958

## The Medieval High Street

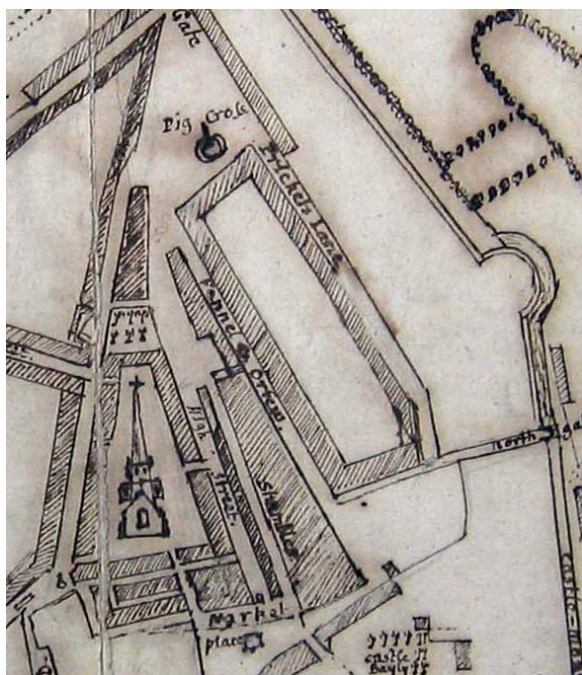
*The town's street pattern may have been based on a large, probably planned, central market place which became less prominent as the town developed as a port.<sup>2</sup>*

The market place appears to have originally formed a large, square area at the east end of the churchyard with roads leading off to the south, east, and west. At the north-eastern corner was the main entrance to the castle and nearby the high cross. The market place probably extended as far as the south-eastern corner of the churchyard, marked by St. Mary's Cross. The market place was called Cornchepyng or the Cornhill in the mid 14th century until encroachments on the south and west sides severely limited the mercantile area, probably causing the stall holders to move to the High Street on the north side of the churchyard.

The wide High Street was known as the Great Street by the mid 13th century. A hundred years later it had become the site for fairs and market stalls, so popular that it too was encroached upon by a long 'island' of shops and stalls known as Cokenrewe, accommodating both the flesh and fish shambles. An engraving shows the island before its demolition for road widening in the 1820s.

The increase in business in the port established further shops and stalls in Fore Street to the east of the High Street, known also as 'between church and bridge'. The High Street ran west from the Cornhill, converging with Penel Orlieu which ran to the north and St. Mary Street, forming a triangular area, called the Orfair in 1399, and continuing as Pynel Street up to the west gate. Pynel Street (Pickett's Lane) ran parallel to the north of Back Lane. Penel Orlieu features on many of the High Street deeds, becoming known as Back Lane by the 18th century and Clare Street in the 20th.

King John's charter to William Brewer in 1200 declared Bridgwater to be a free borough, in which William might levy tolls of all kinds on outsiders. The burgesses were to be free of tolls beyond the borough, except in London. The charter was confirmed throughout the 14th century to 1400. In the later 14th century the borough paid its manorial lords rents for burgage plots and stalls, tolls from the port, markets and fairs, and perquisites of courts. In 1468, with the town in decline, the Crown granted a charter which incorporated the borough with a mayor, two bailiffs, and an unspecified number of burgesses. The mayor and bailiffs had the right to pay a reduced rent to the lord of one third of the borough as a fee farm. The rent of the remaining two thirds of the borough, sometimes called a fee farm, was paid to the Zouche family until the late 17th century. The borough received 3 more charters until the Corporation was established under the Act of 1835 (dissolved 1974), though the town retained a titular mayor.<sup>3</sup>



Map of Bridgwater<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Bridgwater, A History of the County of Somerset: Victoria County History Volume 6, 1992, p. 192-206

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> DD/CLE/3/19 Bridgwater Plans, 18th Century Town Plan (n.d.)

Bridgwater was reported to be severely damaged in 1645 when it was besieged during the civil War and a proper rebuilding programme did not take place until the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1820s a building programme was carried out, including the new Judges' Lodgings in front of the 1720 Assize Hall and the 4 buildings to the east and the demolition of the Island site in front of it. In the 1840s the town began to expand eastwards following the arrival of the railway and a new Town Hall was built on the site of the old Assize Hall in the 1860s.

## **Burgage Plots**

The Burgage Rent, rather like a Borough Rate, was 1s. for every burgage of land in the Borough, payable to the Mayor, Bailiffs & Burgesses of Bridgwater. In return they pitched and paved the streets in front and paid for 'divers other charges and payments'. Each plot was approximately 16 feet wide and those along the north side of the High Street stretched back to Penel Orlieu, later Back Lane. The 1836 Town Survey examined bundles of leases haphazardly stored for centuries and sorted them into properties, street by street. In doing so, they came across anomalies between fines, many of them being very low and, co-incidentally, bearing the names of those members of previous Corporations.

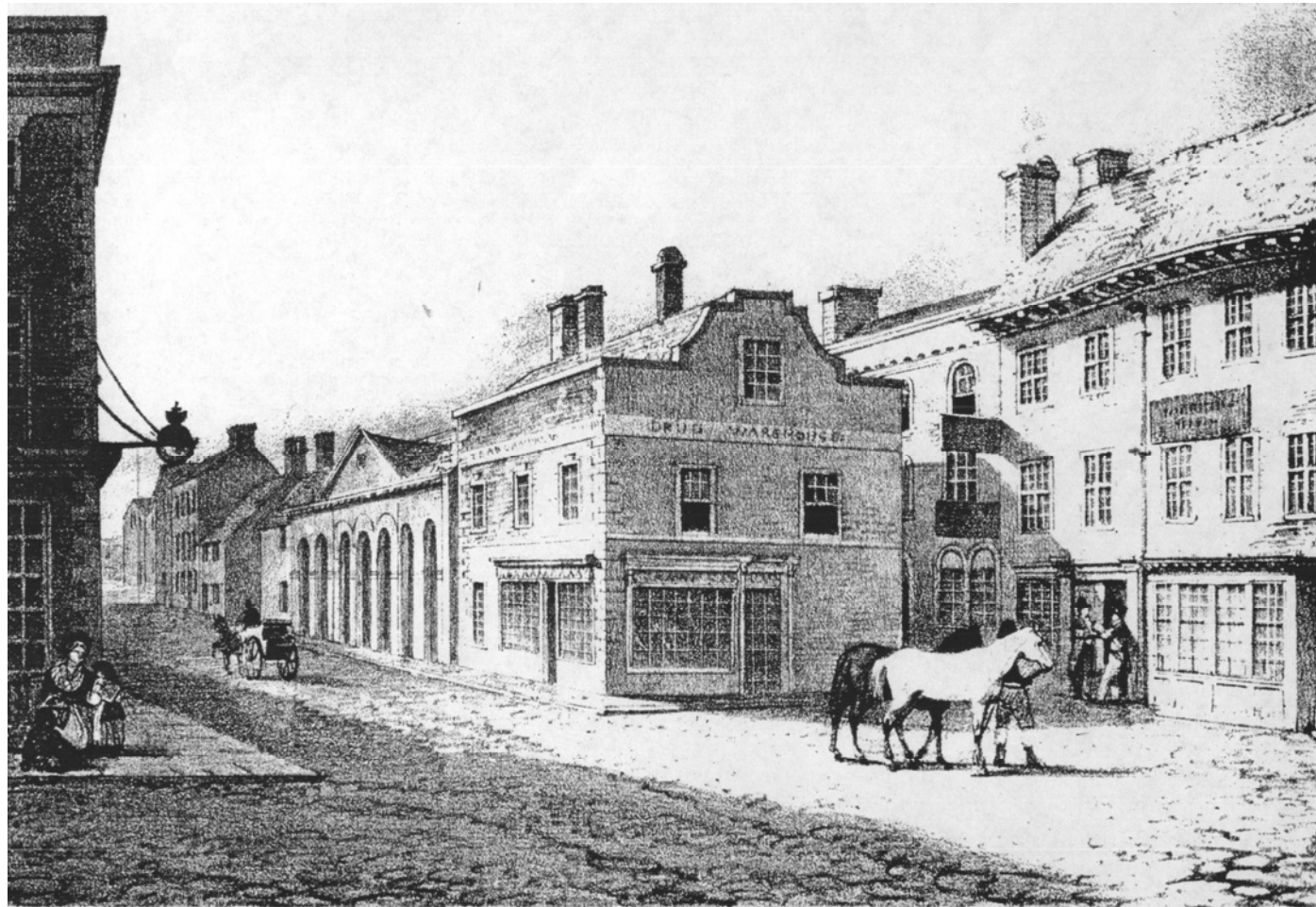
*To observe the very striking coincidence of names; their circumstance made it the interest of the Corporation to keep down the price of fines, and furnished opportunities to the members to make good bargains for themselves in dealing with the corporation, to introduce injurious covenants for perpetual renewal of trifling fines, and to overlook encroachments; and there is ample testimony in the Leases that they were not slow to avail themselves of these privileges.*<sup>5</sup>

Most plots belonged to the Corporation, leased on 2 or more 'deaths', usually the occupier and his family, or 99 years, whichever occurred sooner. Whenever a death occurred, the leaseholder had to pay the corporation a fine to add a new life, thereby extending the lease indefinitely. By the 19th century the practice stopped and people leased properties for multiples of 7 years.

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<sup>5</sup> SRO: D\B\bw\CL\1-34 28 July 1836





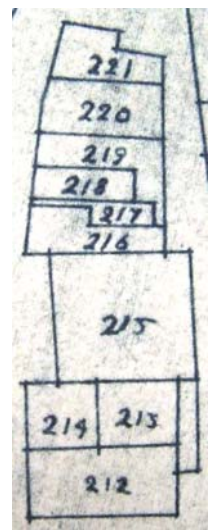
Early 19c engraving of The Island to the south of the Town Hall Site (BMB)

## The History of the 1950 Town Hall

The Site of the 1950 Town Hall comprises several earlier buildings, all of which are documented in a series of deeds held by both Somerset Records Office (SRO) and Sedgemoor Borough Council (SBC). A survey map drawn in 1806 (Fig. 2) shows the various plots which comprised what is now 'The Town Hall Island Site' on the north of the High Street which stretches west from Mansion House Lane, with the former Clare Street or Back Lane/Penel Orliou to the rear. A written town survey of 1836<sup>6</sup> links the survey map with descriptions of the buildings following the erection of the Judges House in 1824. The properties relevant to this report are numbers 212, the former Noah's Ark Inn (34/36 High Street), 213 and 214 which forms the bulk of the 1950 Town Hall and 215, the Judges House and the 1865 Town Hall (now the theatre) built on the site of the former 1720s Assize Court. Whilst 213-214 were owned by the Corporation, The Noah's Ark [212] was privately owned by the Earl of Hertford and was only purchased by the Corporation at a much later date, so earlier deeds are sparse.

### Site of The 1950 Town Hall [213 & 214] <sup>7</sup>

This was originally two properties, one behind the other, with deeds dating back to at least 1654. A 'hanging house' or drying shed had been erected in the small garden to the rear around 1654, abutting the rear of Thomas Hartnell's cordwainer's or shoe shop [214]. The hanging house was no doubt to dry the animal hides for shoe and boot making. The property fronting the street is described as 12 feet by 15 feet. The hanging house was bounded on the west by a 'dead hedge' and by Thomas Hartnell's own dwelling house, and by the Noah's Ark on the east. It lay against the kitchen of the Noah's Ark and the stable wall to the north. It was a sizeable property, with a rent of 15s 10d a year.



By the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was a blacksmiths with a yard to the rear. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a rear passage leading to a stable, with a doorway leading from the stable into the area in front of the Assize Hall. The property then became a shop until it was demolished in 1824 by Richard Carver who built two houses between 1824 and 1827, with a further 2 on the site of [212]. They were adjacent to his new Judges' House [215] which the new building complemented.

The Noah's Ark Inn [212] closed around 1800. It was built on land owned by the Duke of Hertford.

5 May 1589 A lease for [215] describes the land to the east [2113 & 214] as belonging to James Boyes. Between 1589 and 1654 the property was leased to Christopher Franklin, and then to his son Joseph, whilst the garden had been occupied by John Kingsbury.

17 Jul 1654 Mayor etc. to Thomas Hartnell, Bridgwater cordwainer and Thomas Portnell of Northampton, Gent. for the lives of Hartnell, his wife Ann and daughter Jane.

*Dwelling House and appurtenances on North side of the High Street, late in the tenure of Joseph Franklin. Bounded on the east by the lands of the Earl of Hertford [the Noah's Ark] and on the north by a garden late in the tenure of John Kingsbury and then Christopher Franklin (father of Joseph Franklin) with a plot of ground 15 feet in length against the street and 12 feet in breadth...*

<sup>6</sup> SRO: D\B\bw\CL/1-34

<sup>7</sup> SRO: D\B\bw\CL/3 Corporation leases: Bridgwater 1646-1881, pg 55 [214, 134]

5 May 1646 the lease on the property was renewed for the lives of Thomas Portnell, George Portnell and Joseph Franklin.

19 Feb 1680 Mayor etc. to Matthew Mills, blacksmith for the lives of himself, Catherine his wife and their son John.

17 Jan 1689 Mayor etc. to John Mills, Bridgwater blacksmith.

*Dwelling House and appurtenances on North side of the High Street, late in the tenure of Joseph Franklin but now John Mills. Bounded on the east by the lands of the late Duke of Hertford and by the Noah's Ark; on the north by the garden of land in the tenure of Bartholomew Mitchell and then Christopher Franklin (father of Joseph Franklin) with a plot 15 feet in length lying forward against the street...;...on the South by the High Street.*

15 July 1720 The Corporation paid to incorporate part of the property into the new Assize Hall.

*All that part of the curtilage or garden adjacent and belonging to the shop, bounded on the east and south by the other part of the garden and on the west and north by Corporation land lately in the tenure of Robert Lowrey and Thomas Milner.*

14 May 1722 The Corporation paid 3 guineas to John Mills for part of the curtilage belonging to his shop which had been built on, lately in the tenure of Thomas Humphrey.

14 Dec 1733 Mayor etc. to Mr John Mills for a fine of £9: 15s 10d annual rent for the lives of John Mills, wife Mary and son Matthew.

*Dwelling House, bounded on the East by Mr Milner's Land called the Noah's Ark; on the West and North by the Assize Hall and other Town Land; on the south by the High Street.*

18 Feb 1745 John Mills had died and his widow Elizabeth renewed the lease for a fine of £10 for the lives of herself, her daughter Sarah, 21, and her daughter-in-law Mary Mills, widow of Matthew. The Noah's Ark next door was now run by maltster Thomas Milner.

25 March 1752 The property was now leased to John Mines, 34. It is probable that Mary Mills, now 38, had remarried John and they had a 6 year old son John Clement Mines, 6. When Elizabeth died, the property became theirs.

27 Feb 1772 Mayor etc. to Mrs Mary Mines for a fine of £20: 15s 10d annual rent.

10 Mar 1801 Mayor etc. to Mr Charles Mines, Felmonger (a person who prepares skins for the tanner), a messuage or tenement for a fine of £40: 15s 10d annual rent. The lease had an additional condition; that Mines would

*at the request of the Mayor etc. give up a certain way or passage leading to the stable belonging to the premises and will at such request effectively block up with stone or brick the doorway opened from the stable into the area before the Assize Hall and will permit the Mayor to erect any wall or building against the western end of the premises whenever they shall think proper to do so.*

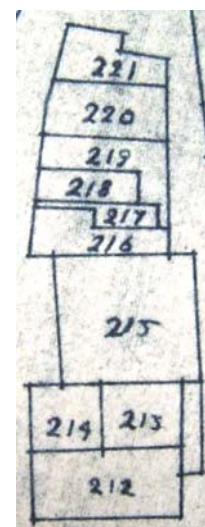
By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the two properties had become a single dwelling.

10 Jun 1824 The premises had been occupied by a Miss King. A Building Lease was granted between the Mayor etc. and Richard Carver, Builder for the lives of Richard (32) and Betty Carver (30) and Charles Mines Huggins, son of Andrew Huggins of Shepton Mallet, Breeches

24 Sep 1827 The Mayor etc. to Richard Carver, newly erected dwelling houses and premises for the lives of Richard Carver, Charles Mines Huggins and Samuel Sutton Rawlinson (18) articed clerk to Richard Carver and son of George Rawlinson, Lace Manufacturer. The annual rent remained 15s. 10d.

### Site of The Bookshop [212] <sup>8</sup>

This building was originally the site of The Noah's Ark Inn which operated in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Though the Noah's Ark is mentioned on neighbouring deeds as far back as 1689, the archive deeds for the property only exist from 1812. It stood between Back Lane and the High Street, with Old Mansion House Lane running to the east. The Mansion House itself once stood on the opposite side of the lane. It also had a stable and garden attached on the north side of Back Lane, extending back as far as Picketts Lane. It was part of an extensive range of properties belonging to the Milner family, malsters, and was originally owned by the Duke of Hertford rather than the Corporation.



When the landlord, John Mounsher, died in 1729, his inventory described the inn's layout, with 11 rooms. The entrance was on Mansion House Lane.

*The entrance room contained 24 pewter dishes, six dozen plates, 4 patty pans, one pewter pint, two half-pints, two noggins and two punch ladles. The assessors then named four utility rooms, the Fore-Room, the Cider Cellar, the Brewhouse and the Beer Cellar, followed by 5 bedrooms, the Back Chamber, the Inner Chamber, and Chambers Over Sargeant Hall, Over Burgess Hall and Over Common Gaol. The only furniture mentioned is beds and bedsteads. There was a withdrawing room called the Puppy Parlour, named presumably after a painting on the wall. The inn lacked a malt-house but had a brewing vat and a beer cellar with hogsheds. The total value was assessed at £29 19s. 4d. <sup>9</sup>*

A 1735 deed for the School House is described as being west of

*the lane from Noah's Arke to Back Lane <sup>10</sup>*

Joseph Solyer was landlord of the Noah's Ark in 1769 and William Freeman was landlord from at least 1771-1798.

**1790** Thomas Ritchens Smith Gent. won a litigation against John Wainwright for the recovery of his property in Bridgwater which included The Noah's Ark; 25 messuages, 5 shops, 5 stables, 15 gardens, 10 acres land, 70 acres meadow and 70 of pasture, seized by Hugh Hunt. It may have been the subject of a mortgage, the property seized unlawfully.

The property was leased by the Milner family. John Milner of Bridgwater and his eldest son Thomas were maltsters. Thomas' son John became a cleric and married Joan Sheele and it was their daughter, Hester, who inherited the property. It seems probable that the inn closed around c1800 after Thomas Milner, the last maltster, died. His eldest son, a clergyman, would probably not have had an interest in the inn and Hester lived in Islington, London. John's sisters and Hester's aunts, who had had a share in their father's property, were all dead by 1805. Susannah Milner died 5 Oct 1799, Ann Milner on 18 April 1798 and Mary Milner 5 Feb 1805.

<sup>8</sup> SRO: D/B/bw/CL/20 Corporation leases: Bridgwater pg 58 [212] 1812-1857

<sup>9</sup> The Story of Bridgwater P.133. Unfortunately the author didn't put any references in the book to identify the source.

<sup>10</sup> SRO: D/B/bw/1735

There are no further mentions of the inn as a going concern, and by 1812 it is referred to as 'late Noah's Ark'. The property was leased to Francis Wride, a carrier, who probably continued his business from the site.

**29 Sep 1812** Lease by Hester Milner to Francis Wride, of the former Noah's Ark, for £3000. The property measured 38 feet 6 inches along the High Street; 62 feet 6 inches along Back Lane and was 88 feet in depth. The stable and garden beyond Back Lane and stretching to Pickett's Lane measured 25 feet 6 inches wide and 18 feet 3 inches deep.

The property was split into 3 equal parts between Charles Mines, John Mines and Charles Clement Mines, with Wride able to use the property during his lifetime.

**1815** On his death merchant Charles Clement Mines left the property to his children Sarah, John, Anna and Susannah and grandson Charles Mines Huggins, to be managed by John Chubb, his friend and executor. Chubb died, passing the role to his eldest son Morley. Both men were local 'spirit merchants'.

It seems probable that Hester died between 1812 and 1814. Francis Wride continued as tenant. Anna Mines died on 25 June 1816 and the remaining children sold the lease of the property to Thomas Burnell.

**24-25 March 1820** Francis Wride, currier and John Mines of Shepton Mallet, surgeon, Susannah and Sarah Mines, spinsters and Morley Chubb, gent. sold the property to Thomas Burnell, mercer for £1200. The description of the property was still just 'late Noah's Ark'. Burnell was a grocer and it was probably he who converted the premises into a shop.

**31 July 1828** Thomas Burnell mortgaged the property to Mr Spiring Spurway Baker for £600.

**22 Jan 1857** Baker transferred the mortgage to Robert Bate and William Fuller, a grocer, for £600, who then proceeded to sue for repayment.

**29 Sep 1860** The pair sold the property to Thomas Plowman, a saddler. The property was now described as

*messuage with cottage and stable behind, the measurements unaltered.*

The lease also mentions

*the stable warehouse and garden behind it between Picketts Lane on and the north side of Back Lane measuring 25 feet 6 inches by 183 feet in depth.*

These were in the various tenancies of Thomas Plowman, Jeffery Denman, Ann Snow, Mrs Kirk and Joseph Cresswell.

**1860** the shop became a saddlery, and it continued as such into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1883 William Henry Smith, Plowman's partner, was running his business as saddler and harness maker from the premises.<sup>11</sup>

**25 Dec 1882** Thomas Plowman died, leaving the property to his wife Mary Rawles Plowman and their children Richard and Elizabeth on Mary's death. The latter pair had by then taken the name Cleve as their surname, though no explanation is given.

**28/29 Sep 1893** Richard Plowman Cleve of Temple Chambers, London and Elizabeth Ralls Plowman Cleve of Bayswater sold the lease to William Henry Smith, a saddler for £1,525. He

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<sup>11</sup> Kellys Directory 1883

took a mortgage for £1500 from James and Herbert Rawle, no doubt to make improvements to his new shop and house. By now the property was described as

*a shop and dwelling house with premises, with a dwelling house and premises to the rear occupied by a Mrs Slocombe and the stable occupied by Henry Rossiter.*

In 1897 William Henry Smith was described as a

*saddler, harness maker and athletic outfitter, selling bags and portmanteaus, cricket and tennis goods.*<sup>12</sup>

**27 May 1903** James Rawle died and the mortgage was transferred to his brother Herbert.

**16 Mar 1905**

The Corporation paid Smith for the right to discharge rain water from the east side of the Town Hall roof over their W.C. and lavatory onto a lead gutter belonging to Smith (between letters A and B) for an annual sum of 6d.

**25 Nov 1909** Smith took out a further mortgage from Herbert Rawle of £500. His business seems to have been thriving and he was possibly upgrading his premises.

**25 March 1912** Herbert Rawle conveyed the mortgage to Dennis Denman for £1500. By now the **High Street** had been numbered and the property was described as 34/36 **High Street**. The shop was still occupied by Smith, whose prominent painted sign on the east side of the building can still be seen. The cottage to the rear was empty but the stables were occupied by John Alpin.

**17 Feb 1913** The property was sold to The Bridgwater Theatre Ltd. for £2,000. It seems probable that the company were planning to incorporate the property into the theatre. By December, however, it seems to have proved unfeasible and the property was put up for sale by auction. Smith moved out in 1913 and by 1929 the property was owned by the Bridgwater Gas Light Company.

Post war it was merged into the South Western Gas Board which it continued as into the 1960s. By 1966 it was a clothes shop, Creedys 'ladies and childrens' outfitters'. Today it is The Bridgwater Book Shop.

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<sup>12</sup> Kellys Directory 1897





c1850s North side of the High Street just to the east of Mansion House Lane



1902 Francis Frith





1917 High Street <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> SRO A3016035



1923 High Street <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> SRO A3016037



1950 (showing the drainpipe of the new Town Hall to the right) <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> RFW 3226 Spring NMR.



1961<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> E536 A PHOTO NMR

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McLaughlin Ross llp  
Members David McLaughlin and Kay Ross  
Limited Liability Partnership Number OC315256  
Registered Office 4 Springfield Cottages, Brewery Hill, Upton Cheyney, Bitton, BS30 6NA





1960<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> E536 A PHOTO NMR



1960<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> E536 A PHOTO NMR

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McLaughlin Ross Ip  
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## English Heritage Listing for Bridgwater Town Hall

IoE Number: 373930

TOWN HALL AND MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS AND ATTACHED RAILINGS, HIGH STREET (north side), BRIDGWATER, SEDGEMOOR, SOMERSET

Date listed: 24 March 1950 / Date of last amendment: 24 March 1950

Grade II

ST2937SE HIGH STREET 736-1/10/115

Town Hall and Municipal Buildings and attached railings GV II Town Hall. 1823. By Richard Carver for the Bridgwater Corporation; extension to rear, of 1865 by C Knowles, built on site of former assize hall. Stucco facade, stone cornice, blocking course, cills, string courses and porches; brick and rubblestone to the rest; slate roof with brick ridge stacks to left and right of centre.

PLAN: rectangular plan. Late Regency style to 1823 work, Venetian Gothic to 1865 work. 3 storeys; symmetrical 9-window range. A box cornice and platband are returned to each side; the 5 central bays are stepped forward and articulated by pilasters with recessed panels, the 2 flanking the centre appear above the cornice and have square panels. Second floor has flat arches to 3/6-pane sash windows; first floor has moulded archivolts, continuous impost band and continuous cill band to semicircular arched 6/6-pane sashes; ground floor has flat arches to 6/6-pane sashes, 2 to outsides; 3 to centre flanked by Tuscan-style porches with elliptical arches inset to front and panelled blocks to centres of blocking courses and plaques below. The cornices to porches continue as moulded string-course above ground floor. Double panelled doors in elliptical recesses, those to left have octagonal panels to centre, those to right are similar with a leaded overlight with the words TOWN HALL incorporated; lower sash of window to right also has coloured leaded glass. The rear extension of 1865 has limestone plinth, rusticated quoins, and moulded kneelers; coursed red sandstone rubble to ground floor below a wide platband and cill band; Flemish-bond brick and bracketed eaves to first floor. 7 recesses have gauged brick semicircular arches with keystones over moulded stone archivolts which have a continuous moulded impost band. The central 5 bays have 4-pane semicircular-arched fixed windows and a wide continuous cill band. Single-storey entrances to each side, returns of which have steps up to double 2-panel doors with semicircular overlights. To right is an extension of c1930.

INTERIOR: entrance to right is panelled below a high dado rail; double inner doors have 6-panels with long glazed panels to the tops; diagonal glazing bars with hexagonal panes to centres of large overlight and side panels below a coved top to architrave. The Mayor's Parlour to right is panelled, with names of former mayors, to centre is an elliptical arch on moulded pilasters. Ornate double doors to hall have a moulded architrave, panelled reveals, and acanthus leaves to the scrolls of consoles flanking a foliate panel below the dentilled cornice. The open-well, open-string staircase to left of these doors has oak barley-sugar-twist balusters, fretted ends, panelled below, a wreathed handrail and curtail step and cast-iron newel; the high dado rail has a foliate frieze. The concert hall, to rear, has a balcony to 3 sides similar to that of the Wesleyan Chapel, George Street (qv), of bulging trellis of raspberry canes, fruit and leaves supported by cast-iron columns with acanthus leaf tops. Ground floor has pine panelling up to a high dado height, 2 marble fireplaces in left-hand wall bearing the town crest, and pierced cast-iron skirting panels for heating system. Above the balcony are 5 pairs of fluted pilasters to each side and back, a coved and coffered ceiling with lunettes to right and blank semicircular panels to left. C20 stage. The Council Chamber to first-floor front, panelled below high dado, has moulded cornice to very high ceiling, 2 large foliate plaster ceiling roses, three 6-panel doors in moulded frames, raised dais with panelled bench, and to centre, a carved wooden canopy with segmental pediment bearing the town crest.



SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: tall square-section railings with arrow heads enclose area between porches and to right. Attached to right, and to rear of No.104 High Street (qv) is a mostly C18 range with rendered walls and pantile roofs; mid C20 doors and windows including taller mid C19 two-window front immediately to rear of No.104 High Street.

(Buildings of England: Pevsner N: South and West Somerset: London: 1958-: 98; Orbach J: Blue Guide to Victorian Architecture in Britain: London: 1987-: 373; Somerset: London: 1910-: 138; VCH: Somerset: London: 1992-: 202).





## The Bridgwater Bookshop Listing



© Mr Terry Abbiss, 2002

IoE Number: 373921

Location: WH SMITH PLOWMAN, BRIDGWATER, SEDGEMOOR, SOMERSET

Date listed: 31 January 1994 / Date of last amendment: 31 January 1994

Grade II

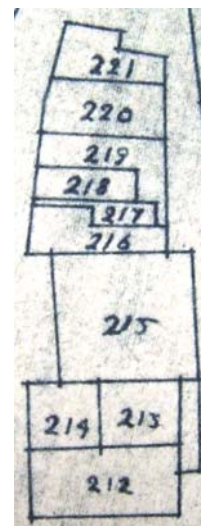
ST2937SE HIGH STREET 736-1/10/104

Shop with dwelling. Early C19. Flemish-bond cream brick, stone coping to C20 red brick parapet cills and narrow cornice returned to the right, roof unseen, brick stacks to gable ends. Double-depth plan. 3 storeys; 3-window range. Flat gauged brick arches to 3/6-pane sash windows to second floor and 6/9-pane sashes to first floor, those to the right are tripartite on both floors. C20 shop to right of ground-floor front and right return; to left a wide gauged brick segmental-arched recess with moulded stone imposts contains a gauged flat arch to former 6/6-pane sash, now C20 window; tall gauged semicircular brick arch to right (left-of-centre) has a semicircular overlight above a rectangular one. The stack on right return has a small window to centre of top. Painted on right return is 'W.H.Smith Plowman and Trundle Saddler'.

INTERIOR not inspected.

## The Structural History of the 1950 Town Hall Site

The site of the 1950 Town Hall incorporates the former 38/40 High Street [213 and 214] and the upper and rear floors of The Bridgwater Book Shop [34/36 High Street]. The offices above and to the rear of 34/36 High Street, originally The Noah's Ark Inn, incorporate a former cottage, stable, hayloft and yard [Plate 16]. A comparison plan between the 1913 layout of 34/36 High Street and today's layout gives a clearer idea of how the former property was used and how the 1950 building was incorporated into it. Integrated into the core of the building are 2 courtyards which were formerly part of the rear yards of the properties. There are a number of plans from 1820 when the new Judges House was built and the 1850s when the original Town Hall was designed. The Town Hall's proximity to the 1720 Judges' House and the 1865 Town Hall, now the theatre, on the site of the former Assize Hall, calls for the inclusion of some of their plans in this report. The offices on the upper floors of the former Town Hall (1865) and Judges House (1820) are not included in this report.



The 1865 Town Hall was built behind the Judges' House on the site of the former Prius Nisi courts after the 1720 Assizes closed. Both buildings, and the 1865 Town Hall, had encroached on the western burgage plot [213 & 214] from 1720 onwards. The Town Hall had become a Theatre by the end of the 19th century and its offices were ranged across the front of the building. The only surviving part of the property which would incorporate buildings older than 1820 is probably that which forms part of 34/36 High Street. The description of Carver's building lease for 38/40 is ambiguous and it may have contained the core of the earlier building, but probably all of it was demolished to build the Town Hall in 1950. In some cases, however, neighbouring properties had to agree to block their windows overlooking the courts, no doubt to prevent prisoners escaping. Throughout, the 2 courtyards appear to have remained, no doubt essential for passage from one part of the property to another, as well as providing light for the adjoining properties.

The property [213 & 214] comprised a former 17th century cordwainer's shop with dwelling house with a 'hanging house' in the rear yard for hanging skins. It was attached to the kitchen of neighbouring inn, Noah's Ark, and later belonged to a blacksmith. It is possible that the hanging house became a smithy. By the beginning of the 19th century there was a rear passage leading to a stable, with a doorway leading from the stable into the area in front of the Assize Hall.

The former inn, The Noah's Ark, [212] has deeds dating back to at least 1689 and probably much further. The former properties along this stretch of the High Street were all built as burgage plots, with shops at the front and dwellings, workshops and yards to the rear. A burgage plot was usually 16 feet across, the property usually stretching back to a rear lane or street which provided access for carts and deliveries. In this case Penel Orliou was the rear lane, later called Back Lane and later still Clare Street. Carver's 1824 plans show the frontage of 38/40 was 16 feet 10 inches.

A 1729 inventory described the inn as having 11 rooms with an entrance was on Mansion House Lane. There was never a malthouse, but there was a brew house to the rear of the property.

*The entrance room contained 24 pewter dishes, six dozen plates, 4 patty pans, one pewter pint, two half-pints, two noggins and two punch ladles. The assessors then named four utility rooms, the Fore-Room, the Cider Cellar, the Brewhouse and the Beer Cellar, followed by 5 bedrooms, the Back Chamber, the Inner Chamber, and Chambers Over Sargeant Hall, Over Burgess Hall and Over Common Gaol. The only furniture mentioned is beds and bedsteads. There was a withdrawing room called the Puppy Parlour, named presumably after a painting on the wall. The*

*inn lacked a malt-house but had a brewing vat and a beer cellar with hogsheads. The total value was assessed at £29 19s. 4d.*<sup>19</sup>

One property [215] which formed the main part of the Assize Hall and later Judges' House was clearly a pair of burgage plots which had joined together at a fairly early date. Others had encroached on a neighbour, as 216 and 217 had done, and 217 and 218 (Fig. 2). The 1806 survey map (Fig. 2) shows the Judges House [215] with the 1720 Assize Hall to the rear. The latter was demolished in order to build the 1865 Town Hall, and only the cellars remain. The Corporation had gradually purchased the leases of the properties they needed, or in some case part of the properties, in order to build or carry out alterations.

The original 1720 Assize Hall was

*a most magnificent large & capacious hall ...modelled on Westminster Hall...the Arms of this Burrough in Front over the Entrance to the Hall*

Unfortunately this is one of the few descriptions yet found and no images of the building were discovered during the writing of this report. The 1820 plans [Plates 1-8] for the Judges' house, for which a number of additional properties were purchased, show that the Assize Courts were to the rear and to the east, though they did not form part of the plans other than as boundary walls (pink) with some of the room's functions pencilled in. The comparison plans of the 1820/2007 plans [Plates 2,4,6,8] show which walls remain from 1820. The plans show the east wall of what is now the Charter Hall. Though some of the partition walls do not quite line up, it is evident that most of the original 1820 eastern party walls have been retained.

It seems probable that the Noah's Ark inn closed around c1800 after Thomas Milner, the last maltster, died. In 1801 the Corporation leased the adjoining property [213/4] to Charles Mines, Felmonger (a person who prepares skins for the tanner) on the condition; that Mines would

*at the request of the Mayor etc. give up a certain way or passage leading to the stable belonging to the premises and will at such request effectively block up with stone or brick the doorway opened from the stable into the area before the Assize Hall and will permit the Mayor to erect any wall or building against the western end of the premises whenever they shall think proper to do so.*

In 1824 a Building Lease was granted to builder Richard Carver for 38/40 High Street. The property, by now a single house, was described as

*generally is in a very fair condition except 3 windows at the back which require new fasteners, hinges and other repairs at a cost of 10s. The cost of converting the premises back again into 2 separate dwellings including building up all doorways, make good the plaster skirtings and other matters will be £20 after allowing credit for the value of the doors, mouldings etc.*

It appears from the building lease that whilst Carver contracted to erect 2 new dwelling houses on the premises, he was converting the houses and refronting them rather than building from new. The annual rent remained 15s. 10d. which suggests he did it this way. He agreed to erect the dwelling houses with stone or brick fronts onto the High Street with an elevation of at least 30 feet from street level. There were to be no windows or lights opened onto the west end of the new building or in the rear looking onto the Court adjacent to the Assize Hall. The plan (below) mentions 'the ground on which two new houses are to be erected.' He did reclad 34/36 High Street because there is a 1913 description of a 15<sup>th</sup> century beam in one of the ground floor

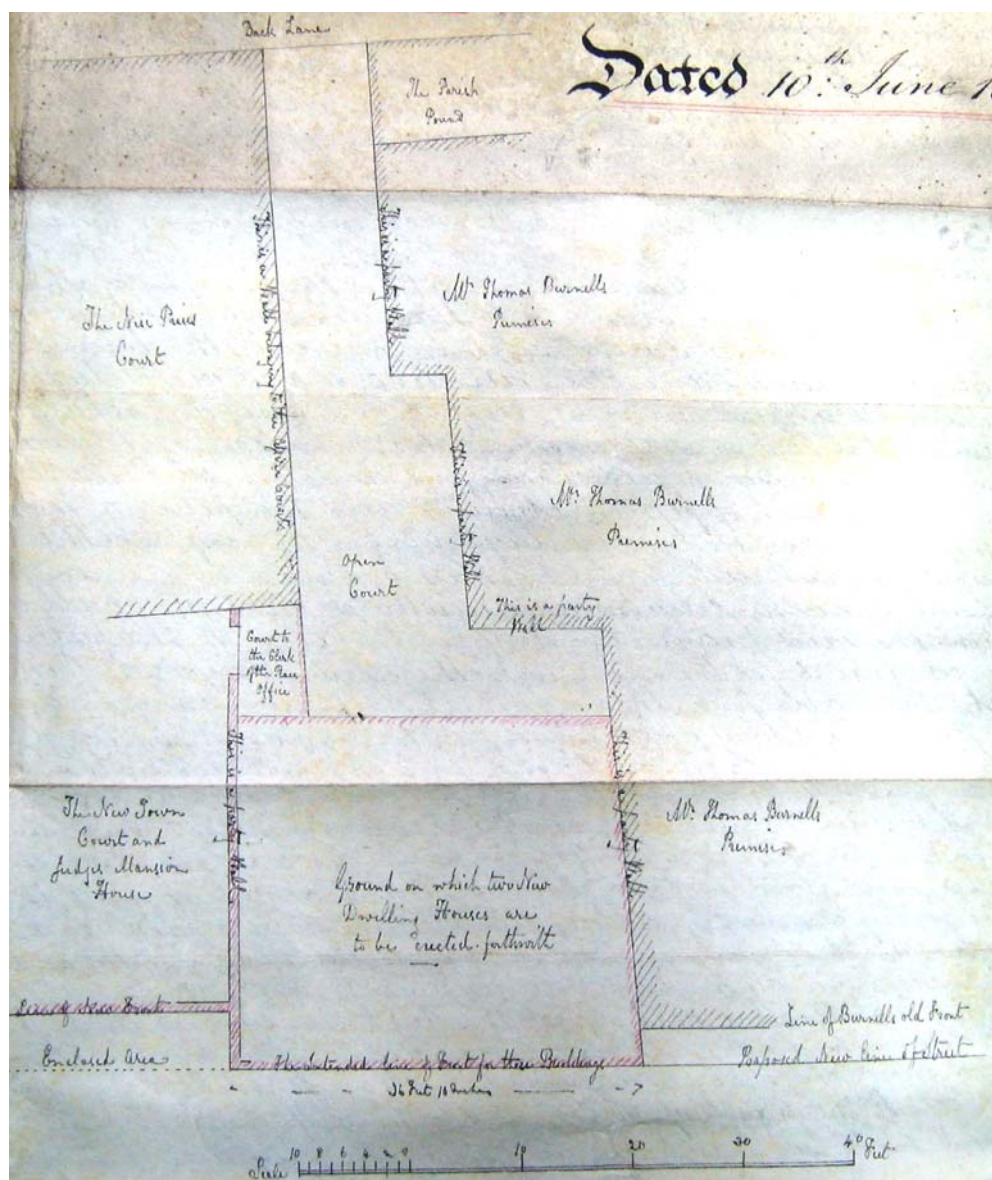
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<sup>19</sup> The Story of Bridgwater P.133. Unfortunately the author didn't put any references in the book to identify the source.

rooms, so it is probable he did the same with 38/40. It is not clear if he brought the line of the new building forward, or it had been further forward than the Judges' House for some time.

The plans (below) show that the new line extended across the proposed new frontage for 34/36 High Street as well. The width of the site onto the High Street retained the former burgage width of 16 feet 10 inches and shows the encroachment to the rear of the Assize Hall and Judges' House to the west and in particular the former Noah's Ark to the east. The 1812 lease gave the property dimensions of [212] as 38 feet 6 inches along the High Street; 62 feet 6 inches along Back Lane and was 88 feet in depth.

There was a further stable and garden on the other side of Back Lane stretching to Pickett's Lane. By now there was just a narrow yard to the rear of 213 & 214, the north-east boundary shared with the Town Pound where stray animals were impounded on market day. To the west was the Nisi Prius Court and encroaching onto the yard was the Clerk of the Peace Court's office. To the west of the new dwelling was the Town Court, now the Charter Hall.



Lease 10 June 1824 (SDC)

The south front is typical Regency style and 36 High Street retains its wide brick segmental arched recess. The remaining sash windows are contemporary with them apart from a later pair above the bookshop. The 1836 Survey described Carver's houses on the [213/4] site,



suggesting there was a further house to the rear fronting Back Lane. There is no survey description for 212 (34/36 High Street) which was never owned by the Corporation.

Two newly erected Messuages or dwelling-houses, situate in High-street, and another in Back Lane; bounded on the east with late Milner's, now Burnell's land, formerly the Noah's Ark Inn; on the west and north partly by the Assize Hall, and partly by Penel Orliou, or Back Lane; and on the south with High Street; measuring in front in High Street 37 feet in width, in Back Lane 9 feet, and in depth from north to south 96 feet.



There are few photographs of this part of the High Street, but one remains from 1902 (below left) showing that a range of 4 properties all refronted in c1800 in the same style. 54 High Street had altered its two windows on the upper floors to single ones but the remaining 3 houses had 2 windows on each floor. The 2 left hand properties, which abutted the 1820 Judges' House and 1865 Town Hall to the rear, were demolished in 1950 to build the new Town Hall (below right).

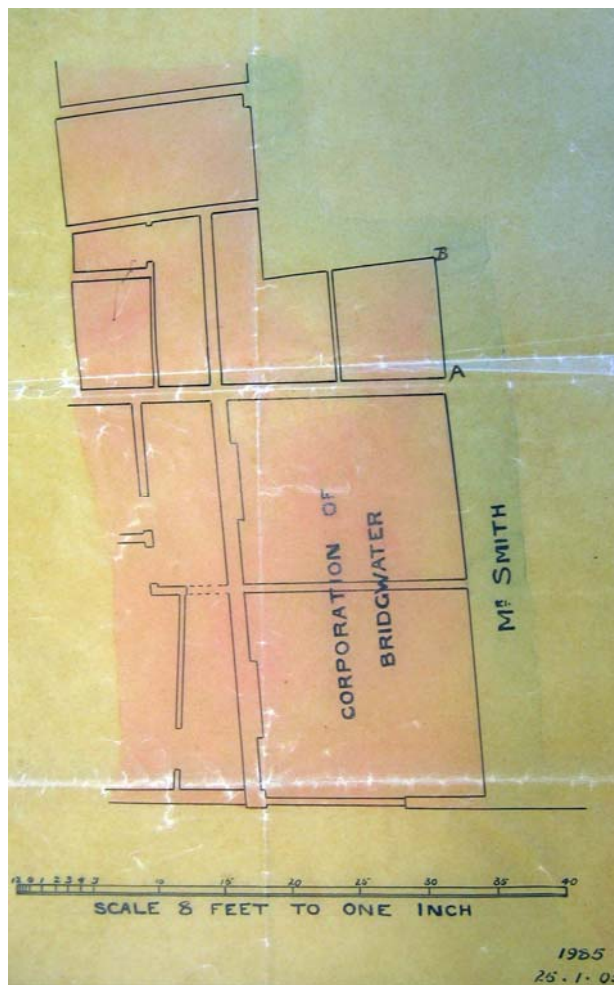
The property had been leased to Francis Wride, a carrier, in 1812. He probably continued his business from the site using the courtyard and stables and probably with a cart house. It was then leased to grocer Thomas Burnell who probably converted the premises into a shop. In 1860 the property was taken over by Thomas Plowman, a saddler. The dimensions remained unchanged and the property was now described as a '*messuage with cottage and stable behind*'. There was a stable warehouse and garden on the north side of Back Lane. The saddlery continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1883 William Henry Smith, Plowman's partner, was running his business as saddler and harness maker from the premises.<sup>20</sup> The upper wall facing Mansion House Lane still bears an advert for 'W.H.Smith Plowman and Trundle Saddler'.

In 1893 William Henry Smith took out a mortgage for £1500, possibly to make improvements to his new shop and house. By now the property was described as two separate dwellings.

*a shop and dwelling house with premises, with a dwelling house and premises to the rear occupied by a Mrs Slocombe and the stable occupied by Henry Rossiter.*

On 16 Mar 1905 the Corporation paid Smith for the right to discharge rain water from the east side of the Town Hall roof over their W.C. and lavatory onto a lead gutter belonging to Smith (between letters A and B on plan right) for an annual sum of 6d.

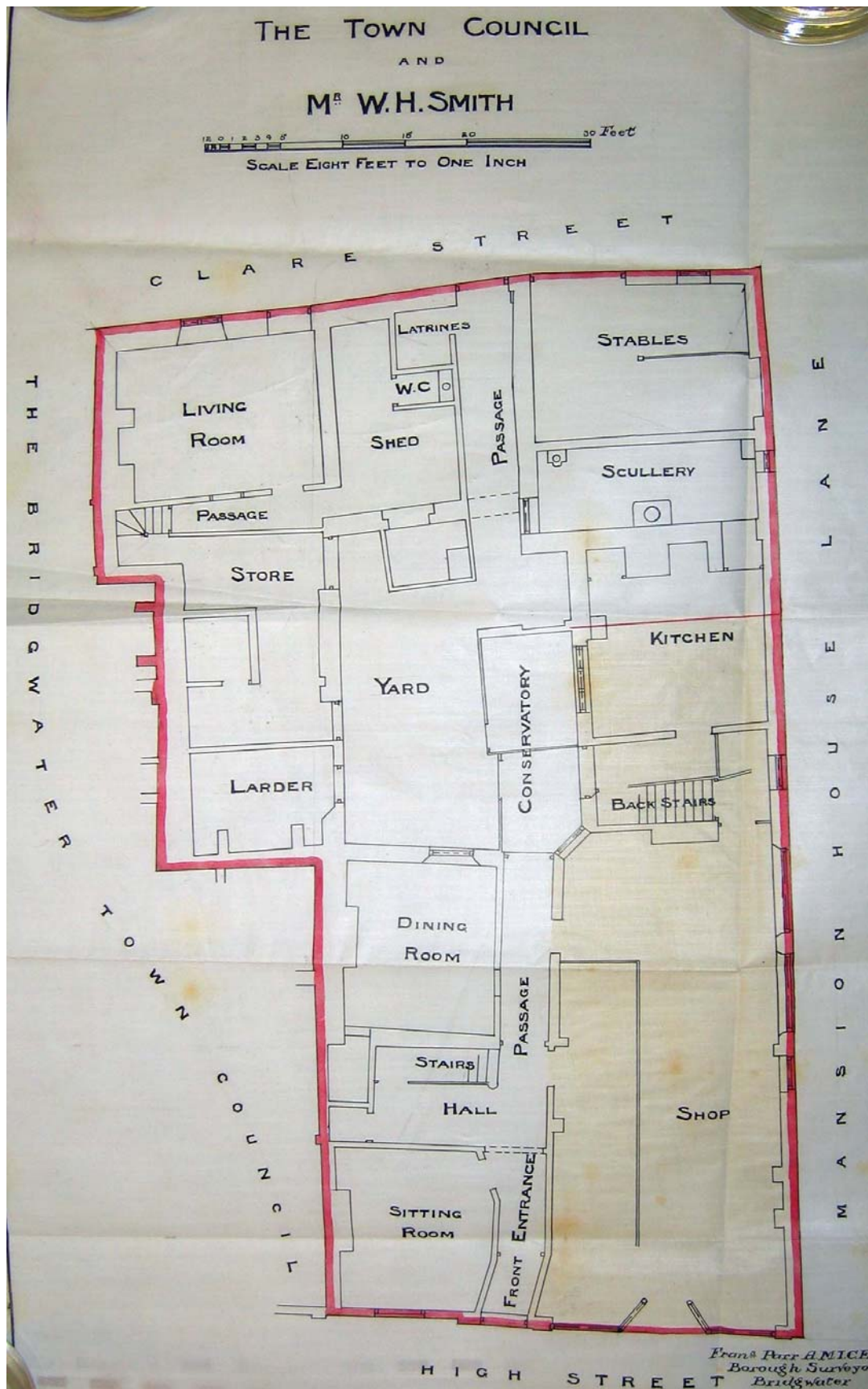
<sup>20</sup> Kellys Directory 1883



1905 Plan showing Smith's property

By 1913 the High Street had been numbered and the property was described as 34 & 36 High Street and still occupied by Smith. The 3 roomed cottage to the rear was empty but the stables were occupied. There was a wood house, coal store and store lofts.

In 1913 the property was sold to The Bridgwater Theatre Ltd. for £2,000. A plan with the deed (below) shows the outlay of the property. It seems probable that the company were planning to incorporate the property into the theatre.



1913 Plan of 34-36 High Street, Bridgwater



By December, however, it seems to have proved unfeasible and the property was put up for sale by auction.

*Exceedingly valuable Freehold Corner Shop and Dwelling-House. Large double fronted corner shop with partition office, 2 large first floor rooms and 2 work rooms.*

The Ground floor consisted of a Dining and Sitting Room with a 15<sup>th</sup> century oak ceiling. The mantel piece was not included in the sale or the 'old door against Clare Street'.

There was a pantry, kitchen and small conservatory overlooking the small courtyard. There was a wood and a coal store and store lofts.

On the first floor was a Drawing Room, 2 bedrooms and a store cupboard. Above were 5 more bedrooms on the second floor and a further 2 on the third floor.

To the rear was a 3 roomed cottage and the 2 stall stable with a loft above.

The description of the 15<sup>th</sup> century ceiling suggests that the properties were re-fronted rather than rebuilt from scratch.

**HIGH STREET  
BRIDGWATER.**

---

Sale of a Valuable Freehold Property situate in the main thoroughfare of the Town.

---

**STILING, KER & DUCKWORTH**  
HAVE RECEIVED INSTRUCTIONS TO  
**SELL BY AUCTION**  
At the BRISTOL ARMS HOTEL, BRIDGWATER,  
**On Wednesday, 17th December, 1913**  
At 7 p.m., precisely.

(Subject to the Public Sale Conditions of the Somerset Law Society, and to such Special Conditions as shall be then read, a copy of which may be seen at the Offices of the Auctioneers or Solicitor during the 5 days prior to the Sale) THE FOLLOWING EXCEEDINGLY VALUABLE

**FREEHOLD  
BUSINESS PROPERTY**

situate at the junction of High Street and Mansion House Lane and abutting on Clare Street, Bridgwater, viz :

ALL THAT EXCEEDINGLY VALUABLE  
**FREEHOLD CORNER SHOP & DWELLING-HOUSE**  
being Nos. 34 and 36, High Street aforesaid, with the Stable, Cottage and Premises thereto adjoining and belonging as now in the occupation of Mr. W. H. SMITH.

The Business Accommodation comprises large Double Fronted Corner Shop, with important frontages to High Street and Mansion House Lane, with partition Office, two large first floor Store Rooms and two Work Rooms.

THE RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION CONSISTS OF

**ON THE GROUND FLOOR:** Dining and Sitting-room (with 15th Century Oak Ceiling), Pantry, Kitchen, and small Conservatory, small Court yard, Wood House, Coal Store and Store Lofts. *mantel piece not included*

**ON THE FIRST FLOOR:** Drawing Room, Two Bedrooms and Store Cupboard. *wood not abutting against Clare Street*

**ON THE SECOND FLOOR:** Five Bedrooms, and on the **THIRD FLOOR:** Two Bedrooms.

At the rear and abutting on Clare Street are, **THREE-ROOMED COTTAGE**, being No. 35, CLARE STREET, and Two-Stall Stable with Loft over.

The Property has the following frontages, viz: to High Street 39 feet, Mansion House Lane 92 ft. 9 ins. and to Clare Street 54 feet, or thereabouts.

The Premises command one of the best Business positions in the Town, being in the main thoroughfare and adjoining the Town Hall and Municipal Offices. With such good frontages to important thoroughfares it offers a magnificent and unique site for those seeking an improvable Property. It is eminently suitable for Commercial purposes, or for a Theatre or Hall, and in connection with this the purchaser would have the opportunity of acquiring the Cinematograph Licence already granted in respect of the Property.

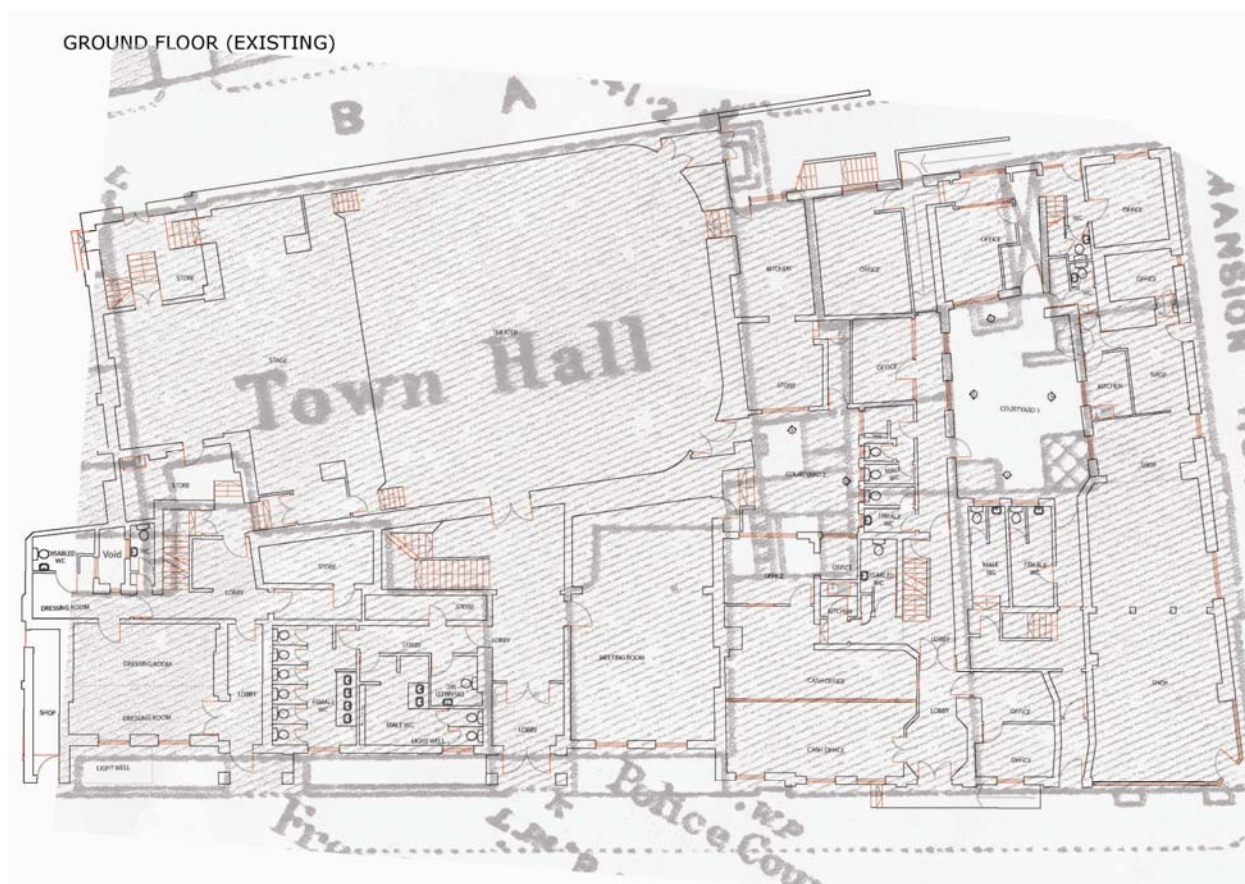
**VACANT POSSESSION CAN BE GIVEN ON COMPLETION.**

To View apply to Mr. W. H. Smith, who will kindly show the same, and for all further particulars apply to the Auctioneers, Bridgwater and Burnham, or to

**ROBERT RITSON, Esq.**  
SOLICITOR, 17, ABOVE BAR, SOUTHAMPTON.

Dated Auction and Estate Agency Offices, The Mart, Bridgwater, and 18, Victoria Street, Burnham, 24th November, 1913.  
Coombs & Dilks, Printers, East Gate Press, Bridgwater.





**1887 – 2007 Comparison Plan of Ground Floor**

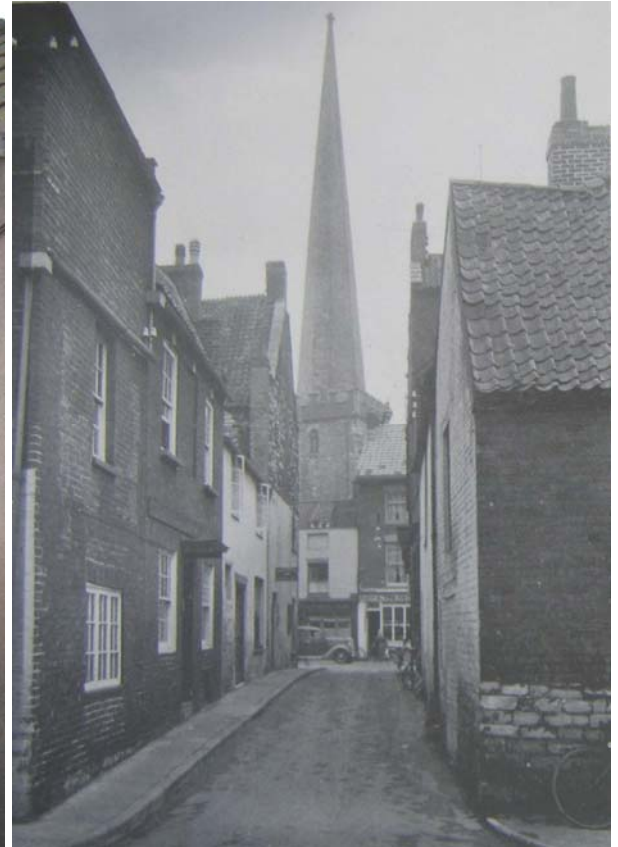
Looking at the layout on the 1887 – 2007 Comparison Plan (above) and the 1913 / 2007 Comparison plan (Plate 13) it seems probable that the 2 properties were demolished in 1950 and rebuilt within the framework of the 2 party walls on the east and west which still retain their fireplaces and other sections of wall. The building was restricted by the courtyard [C1] to the rear, no doubt because it was integral to the theatre, the building to the north with the arched Edwardian window providing access to the upper balcony of the theatre.

The remaining offices were created from existing earlier buildings both above 34/36 High Street and to the rear of the 2 courtyards. The OS maps (Figs. 3-5) show the jumble of buildings around and to the rear of the courtyards. The rear entrance to the yard was built over by 1930. These had incorporated the cottage to the rear of 34/36 as well as stable and outbuildings, latrines and a yard entrance. The long 1 ½ storey building attached to the theatre was probably originally the open blacksmith's yard accessing Back Lane.

The Town Hall, built in 1950 is more redolent of the Moderne design movement of the 1930s. It seems probable that plans were drawn up prior to World War II and carried out after the war. The quality of the fittings and fixtures is high, as is the woodwork. A disabled ramp was added in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century and the ground floor cash office floor level altered. A similar ramp has been inserted to the rear of the building, probably replacing a series of shallow steps where floor levels changed.



Bridgwater Town Hall Site 2008 and 1961 (NMR: E536)



Bridgwater Town Hall Site East Front along mansion House Lane 2008 and 1930s



## The Exterior

The 1950 south front has altered little since the building's inception. The only alteration appears to be the raised brick ramp outside the front door for disabled access. Though the front door is not visible in the 1961 photograph, there would have been a shallow flight of steps up to the main doorway. The windows, doors and Moderne balcony are unaltered and the clock and lamps are still in situ. The only alteration may be the parapet at roof level, which appears to have been rebuilt.

The 2 upper floors of the Town Hall continue above The Bridgwater Book Shop and the Municipal Building to the west which retains Richard Carver's original 1820s design, including the sash windows; 6/6 on the first floor and 3/6 on the top floor. The 2 windows above the shopfront were altered later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to provide a single 6/9 sash with margin lights on each level. The bookshop at ground level has undergone a number of alterations resulting in the interior being almost entirely stripped out at the front.



The east front to the rear retains the advert for the 19<sup>th</sup> century saddlers on the brickwork, which remains exposed to the rear of Carver's building and above the return along the north front. There are 2 windows in the east front at this point; a small sash at attic level and a 1950 insert at first floor level [1F-16]. Beyond the Carver building remain the rendered former kitchen, scullery and stable of the former saddlers, which correspond to the layout on the 1887 OS map (Fig. 3). The doorway of the former kitchen passage has been retained but all other windows have either been blocked up or altered in the 1950s and later. The roof levels appear to be much as they would have been prior to the Town Hall being built. In the gabled stable block is a single ground floor window [GF-18] and a first floor window 1F-12], both 1950s. A comparison between the current building and the unrendered one in 1930 (see photo above) shows the walls were of brick, with a stone plinth along the north return. There was a sash window at first

floor level, possibly late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century and probably inserted when it was converted from a hayloft into residential or office accommodation. The roof appears unaltered with terracotta tiles.



Along the north front, the frontage has been altered more radically in the 1950s. There are 2 separate buildings, the east low one incorporating the 1887 yard entrance beside the stable whilst the 2 storey fronted west building incorporates the former shed and cottage to the rear of 38/40 High Street [213]. The east building has a 1950 window and later inserted doorway into what had been the stable, with a further 1950 window on the other side. The higher building has a concrete rendered staircase leading up to first floor level and connecting to the first floor of the theatre and the projection room beyond. The gable roof was given a stepped Moderne style finish to match the gable on the courtyard side and all the windows and doors are 1950s inserts. Between is a lower 1 ½ storey brick building probably added when the Town Hall was built in the 1860s to provide staircase access to the balcony of what is now the theatre. A modern security fence prevents access to the ground floor below the staircase.



## The Courtyards

The 2 rear courtyards are mentioned in a number of 19th century deeds, and were retained even after the properties had been rebuilt.

### Courtyard 1

Courtyard 1 has a 1 ½ storey building, forming part of the theatre, to the rear with an unusual semi circular window which appears to be Edwardian. It is now blocked internally but may have been inserted when the theatre was being altered in the late 19th/ early 20th century, to light the balcony staircase. It was extant in 1927 [Plate 10]. Above the gable is a stepped modern rendered wall to match the one on the northern end of the building. Most of the windows overlooking the courtyard were inserted in 1950, allowing the maximum amount of light into the rooms around it. The concrete and metal staircase on the north side is contemporary and there is a glass roof above it. Exposed pipes, modern windows and its use as a storage facility make it appear cramped and untidy but it has the potential to an integral courtyard area for which it was probably intended.



Looking South (above); looking north (below)





Looking South; 1865 north-west doorway into theatre

## Courtyard 2

This courtyard behind 34/36 High Street has retained its jumble of older buildings around it, unaffected by Carver's rebuilding to the south. Part of the building to the south has a stone base, having been rebuilt further up with brick. There is a great disparity of building styles and heights here, and it is probable that many of the buildings were workshops and outhouses which were adapted as and when required. Most of the windows are 1950 or later though there are sash windows on the north side. The interiors have been so altered that it is difficult to ascertain what the original buildings would have looked like or what purpose they served, other than those indicated on the 1913 plan.

The courtyard does, however, serve to explain what the externally rendered buildings looked like and what their function was. The long range along Mansion House Lane was brick with a small stair tower in the south-west corner of the stables. The steep roof of the building across the north front was probably rebuilt in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, having had an open yard entrance below and a shed and latrines to the west. To the west of this is another 2 storey brick building which was once the cottage of 34/36 High Street. It appears to have been altered in order to extend the building north for offices and given a flat roof in the 1950s. Without plans for the post war building it is only possibly to conjecture this.



Looking N; Looking NE



Looking N; Looking W



Looking W; South wall



Looking N; Looking SE

The buildings to the south extend beyond the rear of Carver's 1820s building with a gabled wing and a diagonal infill between it and the bookshop. The windows are all later 20<sup>th</sup> century. All the buildings along the west side were stores and utilitarian buildings, and probably of little remaining architectural value.

The windows on the west side of the courtyard are unusual. Whilst they look like sashes, they have in fact hinged hoppers. As they are in the same position as those on the 1913 plan, it is probable that these were original sashes which have been modified with later hinges rather than replaced in 1950. The whole courtyard, like Courtyard 1, is used for storage and is now very run down with a variety of veranda's, covered walkways and dustbins cluttering it up.





Looking SW; Looking NW

## Ground Floor

The ground floor of the Town Hall at the front is very typical of the Moderne movement. The remaining woodwork is skilfully crafted and much of the moulded skirting remains whilst many of the wooden floors with their slim floorboards remain beneath the carpeting. The double entrance doors with their 4 panes of glass are in good condition as is the staircase with its panelled sides and chrome handrail supports. The treads have been encased in later lino, but it is probable that they remain in good condition beneath. Part of the floor to the rear is concrete. The wood is probably mahogany or some other more exotic wood which was far easier to acquire in the post war years than pine or oak which were used for the extensive rebuilding of bombed housing and subject to licence.

The windows are nearly all Crittall metal casements allowing the maximum amount of light into the building. The exception are some unusual sash windows in the rear corridor [GF-07] which open on a hinged mechanism opening the lower panes inward allowing in air without the sashes moving up or down. There were windows in situ on the 1913 plan and it is probable that they were converted to hinged hopper openings later. The ceilings have all been lowered in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century but the original ceilings and fittings may have been retained above.

The floor levels change at both the front and the rear. The entrance into what was the former payment office rises up a ramp, possibly added for disabled access. It suggests that the former counters were set higher and beneath this the floor is probably intact. To the rear, remnants of former layouts are more obvious. The original floor level can be seen above the sloping floor in corridor [GF-12] where a former passage leads into what were stables, latrines and sheds. The floor levels here would have been uneven, with a series of steps and varying doorways. Later modern partitioning has also added to the different level changes. The whole affect would have originally been very stylish, with warm wood, brass door furniture and bright, sunlit offices. Modern additions to the rear and further partitioning have spoilt the effect, as have a number of exposed pipes and electricity cables. There is extensive damp to the rear, probably caused by the concrete rendering which doesn't allow the buildings to breath. Much of the eastern wall along Mansion House lane has been rendered and former windows and doorways blocked beneath it.





GF-01



GF-03



GF-03; GF-04; GF-07



GF-07; GF-08



GF-09; GF-12



GF-12; GF-13 looking E; GF-13



GF-10-11

## First Floor

The first floor retains far more of the stylish 1950 design, though the staircase is spoilt by the heavy lino covering. Again, the slim floorboards have been retained and the Crittall windows.



1F-01; Staircase S1



1F-02; 1F-02; 1F-03



1F-05; 1F-08a





The front offices overlook the High Street and the large office [1F-17] above the bookshop retains its later 19<sup>th</sup> century sash window with margin lights, whilst the other window and that of the kitchen [1F-18] are Craven's 1820s sashes. Office [1F-02] has the original 1950 double doors opening onto a wrought iron balcony. Both this room and the adjoining office [1F-03] retain their rounded skirting and slim floorboards, as well as the Crittall windows with hinged central inward opening panes and margin lights. There is a picture rail running around the rooms, the effect spoilt by exposed pipes and cabling. The ceilings have all been lowered.

The offices to the rear, overlooking the courtyards, have larger Crittall windows with horizontal barred casements, to allow the maximum light in. Room 1F-05 and [1F-06] were once a single room, possibly with connecting doors. The toilet in [1F-08a] has a mosaic style rendering on the walls contemporary with the 1950 build. The long office in 1F-09 is unusual, with a barrel ceiling. Above is a flat roof, and from the exterior it appears this building was probably extended in the 1950s. Part of it had been the upper floor of the cottage, but there remains no evidence of it.



1F-09



1F-10



1F-12; Staircase to Second Floor [S1]



The offices over the rear of 34/36 High Street were originally a stable and service buildings. There are no remaining architectural features other than some older trusses in the roof space above the stable. Access was not possible but from the angle available they appear to be 19<sup>th</sup> century with 20<sup>th</sup> century rafters. Further investigation may help date them more accurately. There are some narrow, edge-on timbers above the roof of 1F-12 and 1F-13 and a small window in the latter overlooking the courtyard. This was originally a back staircase from the kitchen below, and the window would have lit it. The thick wall in 1F-12 is the chimney stack from the former kitchen below.

## Second Floor

The second floor only covers the rooms above the bookshop for 34/36 High Street, but extends above the whole of the western property. The front offices above the bookshop are similar to those on the floor below, 2F-03 having a modified window whilst Carver's 1820s windows are retained in 2F-01 and 02. No other architectural features remain in the office other than blocked fireplaces, but there are no surrounds remaining. The rear kitchen [2F-05 also has an 1820s window. The long corridor [2F-00 – 2F06] was inserted when the party wall was opened up into the adjoining property. It seems probable that there were probably just 3 rooms on this floor and that the wall of 2F-02 has been moved east into 2F-03. To the rear 2F-04 (which retains a single gas mantle) and 2F-05 were also probably a single room.



2F-01; 2F-06;



2F-03



2F-09; door handle



2F-11; door and surround of 2F-13



2F-16 & 17



2F-02; Kitchen 2F-05

There is one feature of Carver's building which has remained unaltered, possibly because it served its purpose so well. The 1820s winder staircase above the bookshop remains unaltered,

other than the treads being covered with lino. The ramped narrow handrail and slender newel posts are contemporary with Carver's house, the balusters plain square edged. The panelling is also contemporary. The upper attic floor was not accessible, but the stairs would have run from the top to the bottom of the house. The panelled cupboard on the landing appears to be a composite, but there may be original panelling behind it.



2F-04; gas bracket 2F-04; Staircase



Staircase



Void beside staircase and panel of attic room above

## Conclusion

The Town Hall, despite its obvious 1930s Moderne feel, was built in 1950 following the war. It was probably planned before war broke out, hence its 1930s flavour. Unfortunately there appears to be no planning history for the building at either Sedgemoor District Council or Somerset Records Office. Whilst most of the 1950 build is obvious, it is more difficult to ascertain how the earlier buildings were adapted and what alterations have taken place since.

The Corporation deeds show that the original burgage plots for this part of the High Street date back to at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century and probably much earlier. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were 4 properties, but the building of the Assize Hall in 1720 encroached on some of the rear burgage plot. When it was decided to build a new Judges House in front of the Assize Hall, Richard Carver was chosen as architect. He was also commissioned to build 4 new houses to the east, comprising 34-40 High Street. From a survey carried out into the condition of 38-40 and the fact that the 1913 sales description mentions a 15<sup>th</sup> century ground floor roof timber, the properties were reclad in brick but probably incorporated much of the existing interiors. A 1902 photograph shows the elegant regency frontages, of which only part (36 High Street) survives.

To the rear were a jumble of yards, stables and workshops, and it appears that nothing of any architectural significance remains following its incorporation into the 1950 Town Hall. There are what appear to be 19<sup>th</sup> century timbers above what had been the stable hayloft [1F-10] but most of the structural features inside and out have been blocked up or removed, and replacement windows inserted. The only exception appears to be the 1820s winder staircase above the bookshop on the first and second floors, leading up to an attic room above (not accessed). There are also a number of 1820s windows in this part of the building, but no other discernible contemporary features.

The courtyards are the remainder of the 2 original yards or 'backsides' and are both surrounded by a jumble of different buildings with alternating heights. Both are used primarily for storage and access to other parts of the building and have become very run down.

The Town Hall itself retains all its metal Crittall windows, the wide rear ones designed to allow the maximum amount of light into the building, with high ceilings (many now lowered) and unembellished walls. The slim wooden floorboards remain in many rooms beneath the carpeting, whilst coloured concrete was used in the corridors. The low wooden skirting with rounded edges is very attractive and compliments the wood used for the doors and staircases. The decoration is low key throughout, but there is consistently well carried out detailing around doors and entrances. Outside, the original lamps and clock remain, as well as the balcony on the first floor.

A railed brick ramp was added to the front door in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century and the floor level of the cash office raised. Similar ramped access was provided at the rear entrance where varying levels between the older outbuildings meant that steps had been inserted. The rear offices are suffering from damp probably due to the concrete rendering which doesn't allow the buildings to breath. The general view from the rear is unattractive compared to the front of the building, the rendered staircase and security fencing dominating, and a later 20<sup>th</sup> century canopy over the rear door detracting further.

The 1950 was well designed and built, using good wood and other materials, and the original frontage, despite the unsympathetic ramp, has been retained. Some of the rear rooms are later developments with smaller partitioning and unsympathetic windows and doors. The central courtyards detract from the Moderne style of the buildings and are generally used for storage and refuse, creating a run down feel.



## Statement of Significance

The Town Hall is an attractive building which, despite being constructed in 1950, was probably designed just before the war in the 1930s Moderne style. It breaks away from the more classical frontage of the 1820s Judges' House, designed by Richard Carver who also rebuilt the 4 properties which now comprise The Bridgwater Bookshop, the municipal offices and the 1950 Town Hall. Carver is better known for his Gothick church designs, principally Theale (1820) and Blackford (1823), both built about the same time as the High Street Site.

The north side of the High Street was originally divided into mediaeval burgage plots reaching back to Penel Orlieu, an early name for Back Lane, now Clare Street. Though some encroachment took place from neighbouring properties, the Town Hall retains its original 2 burgage widths as does 34/36 High Street. The Site stands in a prominent position on the High Street, bounded by Mansion House Lane to the east and Carver's Judges House frontage to the west. Diagonally opposite is the spire of St Mary's behind the high Street.

To the rear of Carver's Judges' house in the 1865 Town Hall designed by Charles Knowles, now a theatre. Knowles designed Bridgwater's Corn Exchange. The eastern boundary is probably a mediaeval thoroughfare, called Mansion House Lane after the former Mansion House (and a later inn named after it) located on the opposite side of the lane. To the rear of the property are a number of stables, yards and outbuildings dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. They have painted or rendered brick walls with pantiled roofs and are chiefly 1 ½ or 2 stories high.

The Town Hall has Moderne style frontage, complete with balcony, lamps and a clock. The Crittall windows are all original, as are the well preserved internal staircase, floorboards and skirting. The offices extend to the upper floors of Carver's 1824 34/36 High Street which retain the 1824 windows and a panelled winder staircase. The Town Hall island Site is within the Bridgwater Conservation Area and both the Town Hall, the adjoining Municipal Office and The Bridgwater Book Shop (34/36 High Street) are listed.

## Recommendations

1. The 1950 building has well built features such as its staircase, doors, windows and skirtings. There may be other features above the lowered ceilings. Fixtures such as door handles, lamps and the external clock remain.

These should be retained and if possible replacements found to give a uniform look. The missing skirting should also be re-instated. The original floor level in the former cash office should be re-instated and all the floors and staircase treads uncovered. The restored floors and staircase will be a major asset to the building.

2. The current front ramp is unsympathetic to the 1950 building.

Alternative methods of disabled access should be investigated in order to comply with current legislation at both the front and back but provide a more sympathetic look.

3. The large Crittall windows overlooking the courtyards were designed to let in the maximum amount of light.

The 2 courtyards could become integral features of the building, removing the clutter and re-locating rubbish collection points. They could be utilised for the occupants of the building to congregate in. Courtyard 2 (the smaller one) could possibly be covered over with a glass roof.

4. The rear buildings comprise a series of older outbuildings and a former 3 bedroom cottage, of indeterminate age. The roof lines along both Mansion House Lane and in particular from the courtyard show that the range of outbuildings has been retained. There appears to be nothing remaining of any architectural merit, the windows and doors having all been replaced or blocked up.

The damp in the rear buildings is probably caused by the concrete rendering which doesn't allow the buildings to breathe. Its removal would enable a proper assessment of what features, if any, remain beneath it.

5. The buildings behind and above the bookshop are perhaps of the most significance, the former kitchen chimney stack remaining and in particular the 1820s winder staircase. The panelled staircase is in good condition up to second floor level, though above that point the stairs and attic room appear to be in a poor state.

The chimney stack should be investigated further if there are plans to remove it. The staircase should be retained, and as the building is listed it would probably be objections to removing it.

A number of the rooms have been re-partitioned and the original walls could be re-instated to make some rooms larger.

6. An archaeological watching brief should be carried out if any structural works are planned, in particular to the rear of the building where the mediaeval burgage plots extended to what is now Clare Street.

## MAPS

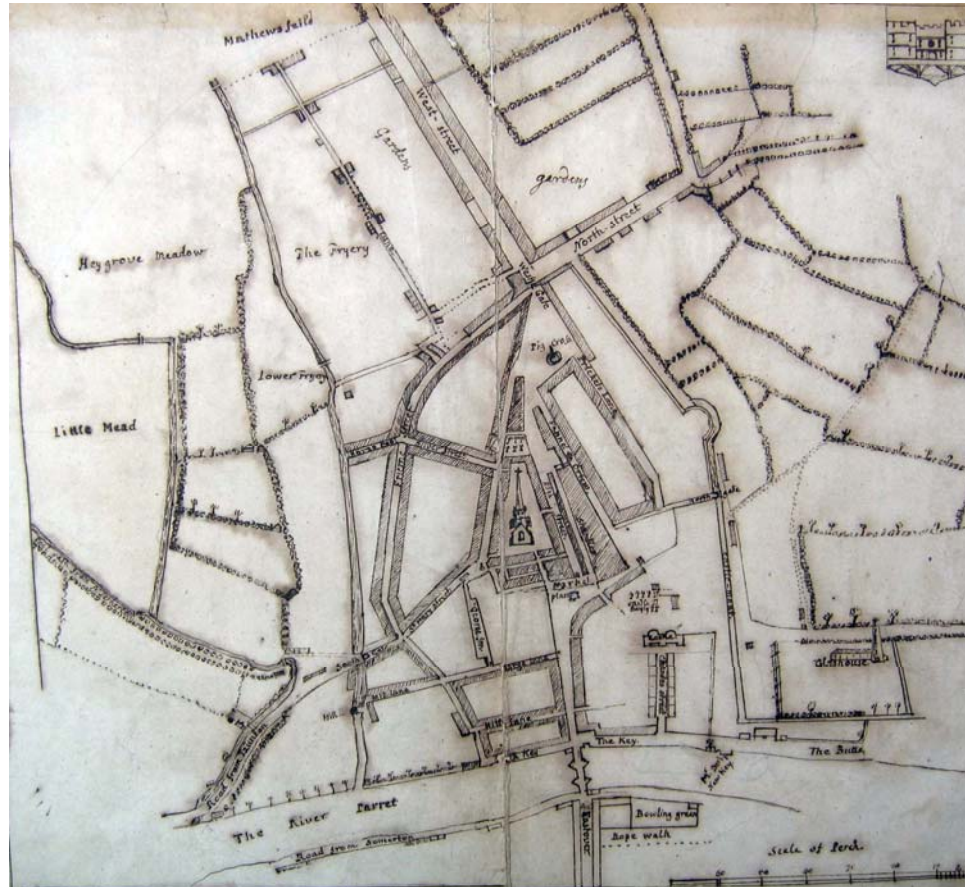


Fig. 1 18th Century Town Map (n.d.) SRO: DD/SH C/202

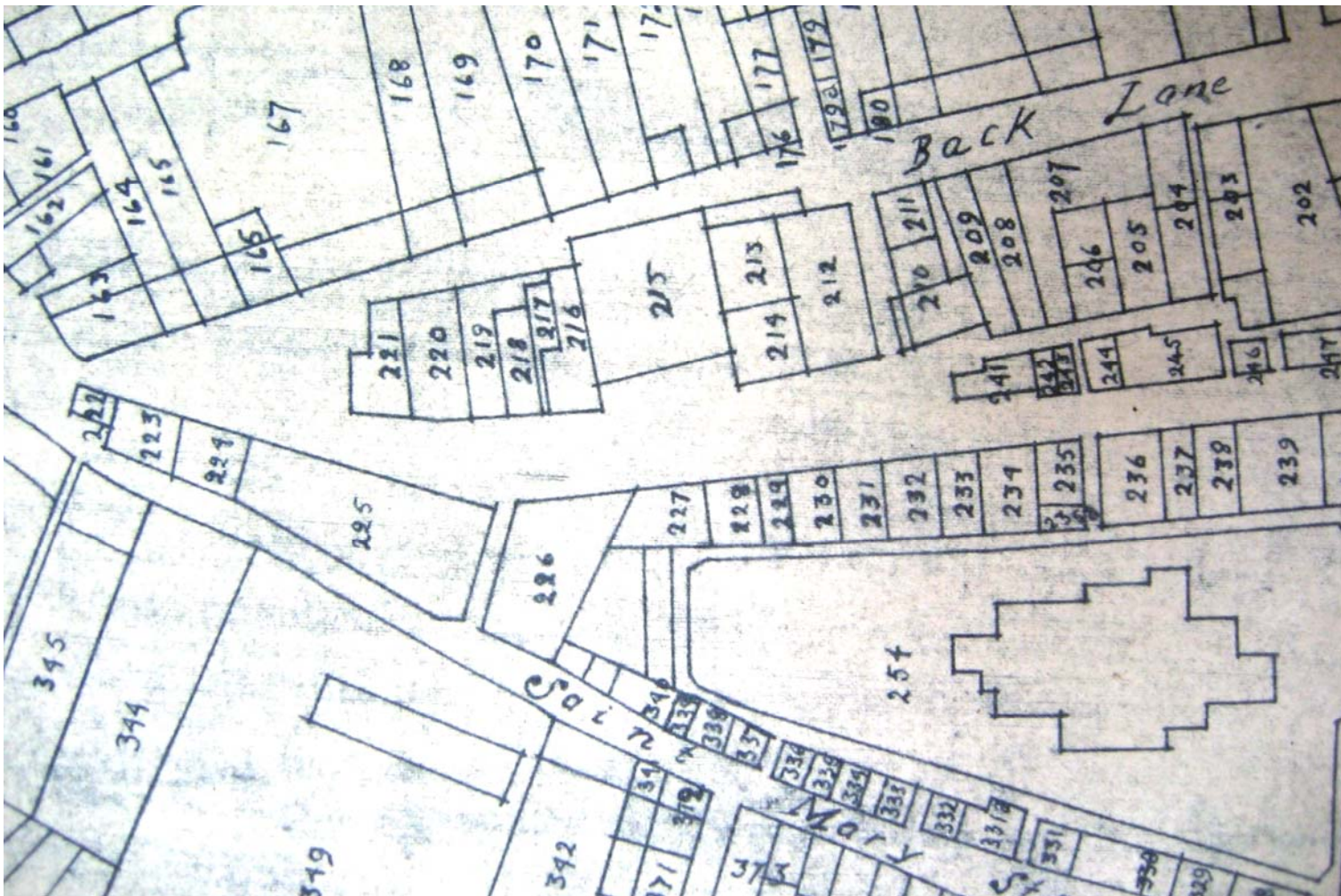


Fig. 2 1806 Survey Map (used with the 1836 Town Survey) SRO: T\PH\bw/1



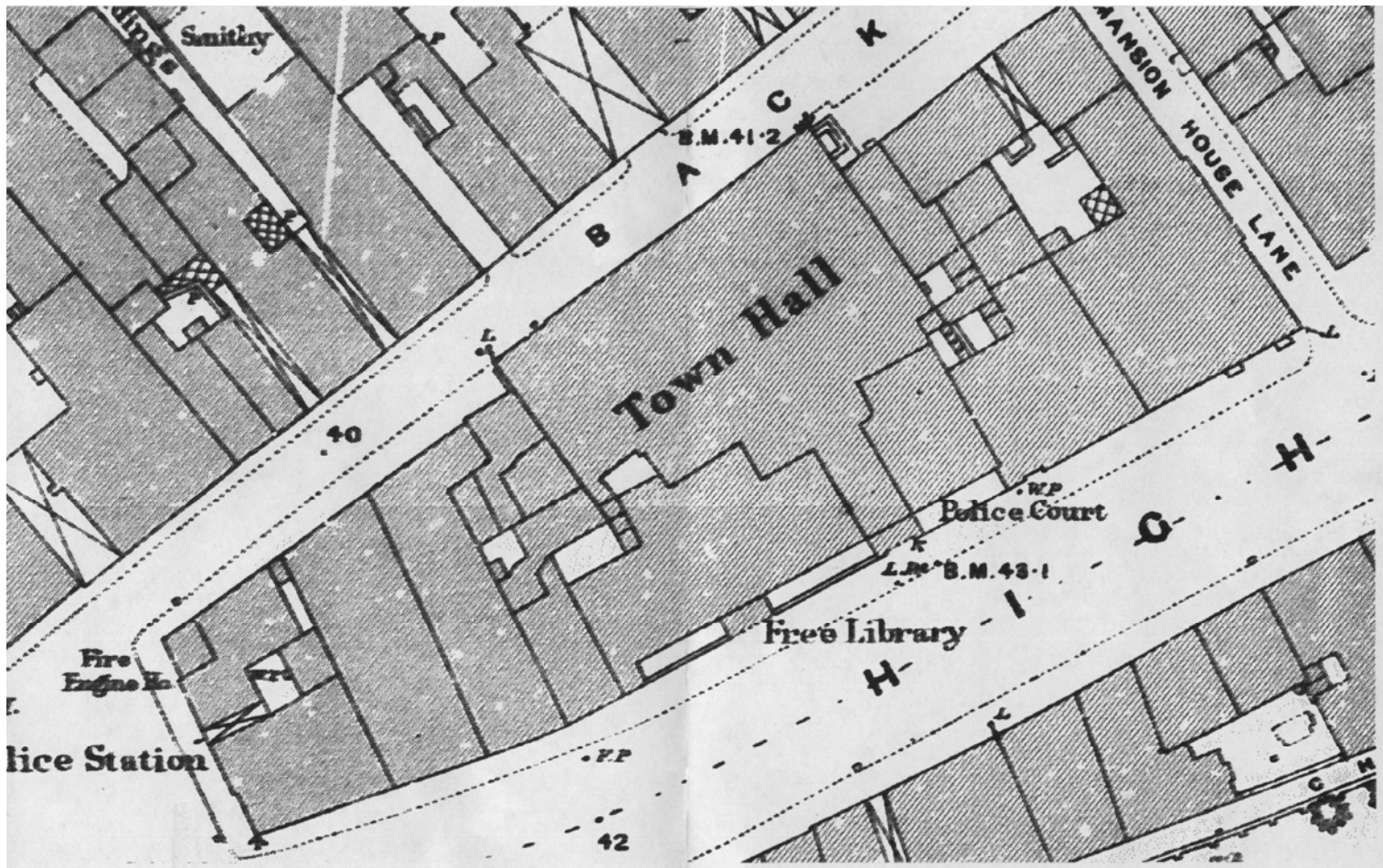


Fig. 3 1887 OS Map of Bridgwater (SLS)



Fig. 4 1904 OS Map of Bridgwater (SLS)



Fig. 5 1930 OS Map of Bridgwater (SLS)



Appendix I - 1866 Memorial New Town Hall

To, The Right Honorable the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury.

The Respected Memorial of The Mayor Aldermen and Burgesses of the Borough of Bridgwater in the County of Somerset.

Sheweth,

That your Memorialists obtained Tenders for the erection of a New Town Hall and accepted one for the sum of one thousand nine hundred and ninety four pounds.

That after proceeding for some time with the building the Contractors found themselves unable to continue the works and eventually applied to your Memorialists to consent to their abandoning the contract to which your Memorialists agreed and eventually obtained fresh Tenders to complete the works and accepted one for the sum of £1874.

That your Memorialists paid the first Contractors on account of the work done by them and for materials and scaffolding left the sum of . . . . .

That the cost of various alterations and additions which your Memorialists found it requisite to make from time to time amounted to	250	0	0
That the expense of the Gas fittings amounted to	104	1	8
Amount of Compensation to be paid in consequence of its being necessary to interfere with the rights of the adjoining property	100	0	0
The seating of the Hall (and which is not yet completed)	57	0	0
The Architects Commission, and also legal expenses in reference to the sale of the separate properties and matters in connection with the Hall	275	0	0
For the supervision of the erection of the building lasting over two years, and expenses in connection with the opening	90	0	0
	£ 3360	11	5