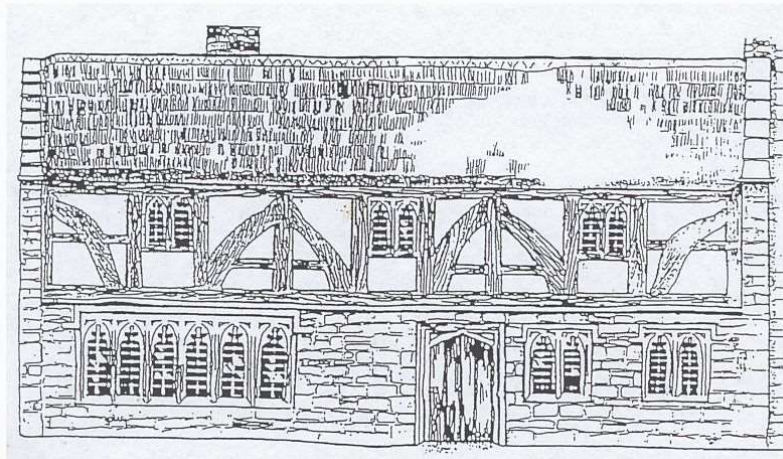


BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL

Blake Museum



Blake House as originally built, by courtesy of Chris Sidaway

ARCHITECTURE & HISTORY OF BLAKE HOUSE

By Chris Sidaway

It is probable that the house was built on the site of an earlier building (or possibly two) in about 1500. It is one of the handful of buildings that survived the firing of the town in the Siege of Bridgwater in the Civil War, 1645.

It was an 'L' shaped structure with the North-South range, containing the Great Hall and Parlour, running parallel to Blake Street. A service wing ran at right angles to it, back from the street at the southern end.

Ground Floor

The GREAT HALL (Blake Room and Reception Area) occupied the most northern part of the house. Originally this room had two or three Ham Stone windows, parts of which can still be seen on the outside wall. In the 19th century an open fireplace in the east wall was replaced by one in the north wall.

Also the most southern bay of the Great Hall was partitioned off to form the present entrance. A 'screens passage' would have originally separated the two main rooms from each other, and the front and back entrances. A door would have led north into the Great Hall and south into the PARLOUR (Meeting Room). This room was greatly altered in the 19th century, with the in-corporation of the screens passage at the north end and the creation of a new passage at the south end. More recently the room has been restored to reveal a Ham Stone fireplace and small Ham Stone Window. The room probably had one or two similar windows facing the street. A doorway to the right of the fireplace leads into a room which was originally part of a separate property, acquired by the council and incorporated into the Museum in 1962.



Blake House, looking up Blake Street

Upper Floor

The staircase to the first floor originally rose from the Great Hall, beside the fireplace. It was probably of stone and contained in a stone turret, the remains of which can still be seen in the Office Store. Much of this staircase was destroyed when the present wooden stairs were inserted in the 19th century. The late medieval timber roof is more or less untouched. It is of six bays carried by three-jointed cruck trusses, which form the partitions of the three upstairs rooms (Bygones, Maritime and Battle). In the present Battle Room, the Ham Stone fireplace corresponds to the one below. To the left is a blocked window opening, now a display case, which was probably similar to the window below. The room is known for the late 17th and 18th century graffiti, which had been found etched into the plaster - these were described in a sale poster of 1924.



Blake House, looking down Blake Street towards the Town Mill

South East Wing

The changes made to this area in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries have all but destroyed the medieval layout of this wing. Originally a two-storey structure it is only the south wall that remains intact - the original north wall has disappeared. There is also a considerable difference in height between the principle range and what remains of the wing. It is suggested that the first floor of the main building overhung the ground floor by four feet, the overhang being supported by pillars. The alterations have resulted in a wider and perhaps shorter wing.

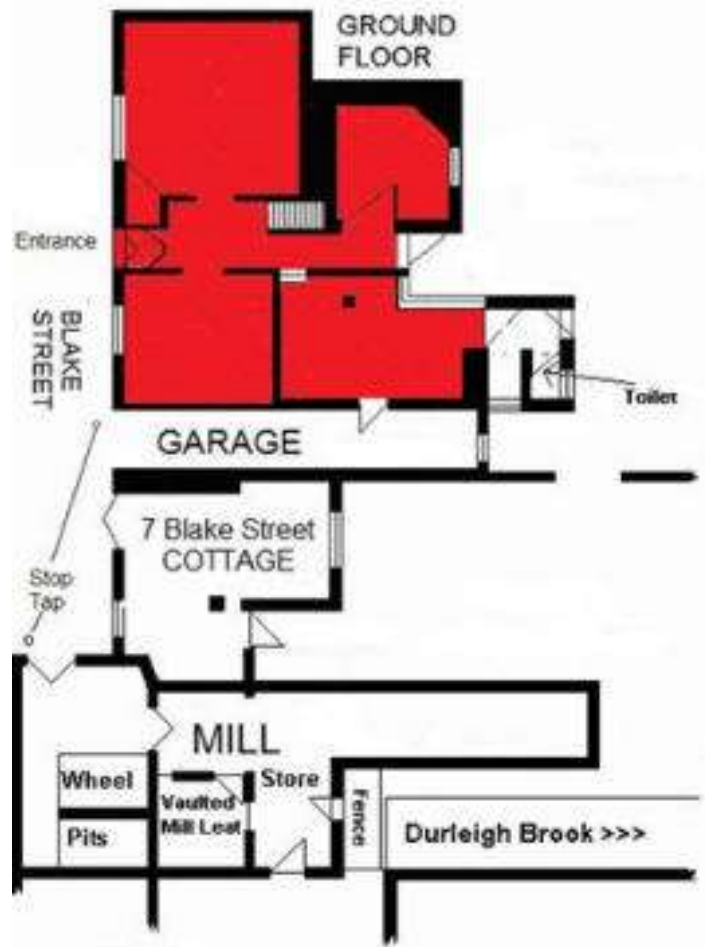
Ownership

Blake House is a late medieval building of about 1500; it is believed to be the birthplace of Robert Blake (1598- 1657). Robert's father, Humphrey Blake, owned the house by the time of his marriage to Sarah Williams in 1597. Humphrey was an important merchant in the town having inherited a shipping business from his father. At Humphrey's death in 1625 his estate was divided between his first two sons Robert and Humphrey- Robert inherited an estate at Crandon-cum-Puriton, and a share of the family house in Bridgwater. Humphrey shared the Bridgwater house and took over the management of the shipping business. Sometime after, Humphrey left Bridgwater for London and retirement. He probably left the business in the hands of his son William. William died in 1714, the last member of the family with the name Blake in Bridgwater; he was survived by a married daughter. A hundred years later the house was owned by the Mayor, Alderman and Burgesses of the Borough of Bridgwater. In 1814 it was rented to Miss Christina Balch. Ten years later Mr Edward Sealy (brick maker and merchant) was the leaseholder. In 1863 George Parker acquired the freehold from the Borough, and by 1908 it

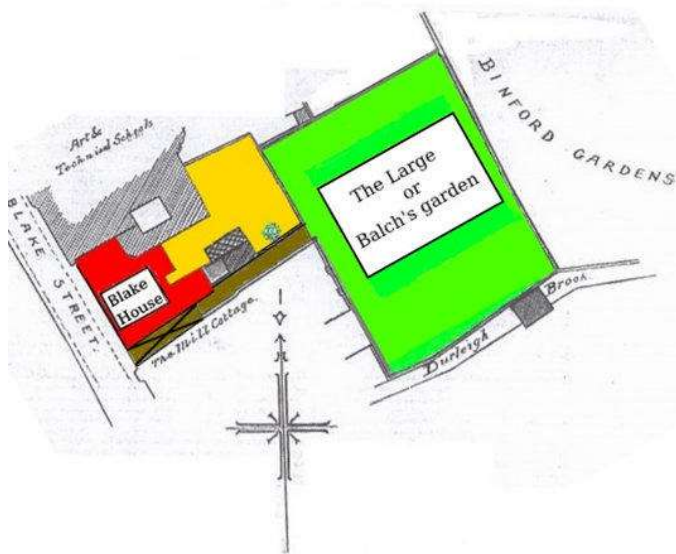
was owned by William Kitch a local builder and entrepreneur. In 1924 William Kitch sold the house back to the Borough Council for use as the town's Museum, with the garden destined to become part of Blake Gardens. The Blake Museum opened to the public in 1926



The present Blake Room when it was a private house.



Ground plan of Blake House and neighbouring buildings, 1926. The Museum is in red.



The house and grounds purchased for the Museum in 1924



The front of the museum today



The back of the Museum today

Adapted from the Museum's
information page

<http://www.bridgwatermuseum.info/index.htm>

Blake Museum is owned by Bridgwater
Town Council
and managed by volunteers from The
Friends of Blake Museum
(Registered Charity 1099815)

www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk/

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