

Historic fireplace

Research by Kevin Graham

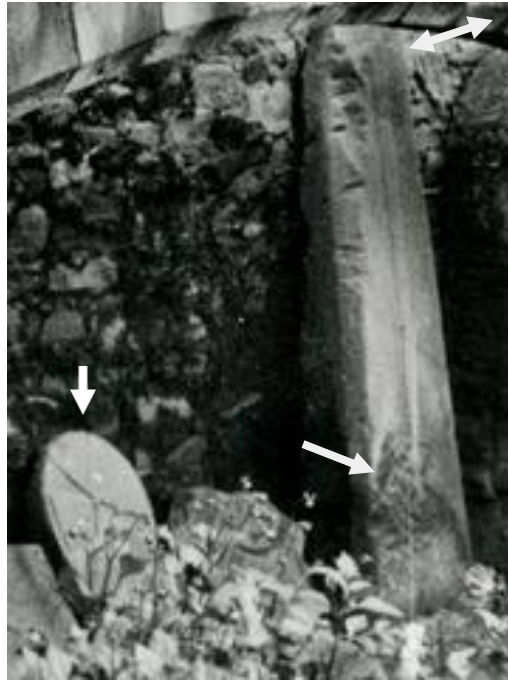
I would like to acknowledge the following for their invaluable assistance in producing this piece of research. Dr. Catherine Kent, honorary fellow in the department of history, Durham University, Dr. William Purkis, Department of History, University of Birmingham, Dr. Vardit Shotten-Hallel, Israel Antiquities Authority, Abigail Cornick, curator at the Museum of the Order of St John, London, David Moore collection, Guild of Freeman, Berwick-upon-Tweed, and Cameron Robertson, Research/Photography.



Much speculation has been given to the siting of an old impressive fireplace on the photograph above, and to the building in which it was housed. Also the two large horizontal engraved stone artefacts shown inside the fireplace, and the engraved circular stone pictured centre.

Research has shown that fireplace was resited in Crawford's Alley, approximately behind the old Berwick Library Building in Marygate. It came from a house in Church Street that was being demolished in 1935. It is said that the house is where Oliver Cromwell resided when in Berwick. Looking at the actual age of fireplace and the site in Church Street where it was discovered, Dr Catherine Kent comments, "The fireplace would have been used for cooking, whether in a medieval hall or a later kitchen. However, it seems unlikely that a kitchen would have been sited on a valuable street frontage and so I would suggest it is more likely to have originated in a ground floor hall, possibly dating from the 15th or early 16th century. There is evidence of a very similar fireplace in the ruins of Twizel Castle, apparently from the 15th century when a tower was added to the earlier hall block."

Carved Stones



We now know of the exact location of where the fireplace came from. But what of the two large vertical carved stone artefacts that were placed inside the fireplace in Crawford's Alley, along with a circular carved stone? One of the vertical stones is shown in the photograph above, with the circular stone visible just to its left.

The Cross pattée, a Christian cross, the form of which appears in very early medieval art is just visible on the circular stone indicated by the arrow on the left.

On the right indicated by the arrows, is what appears to be a full length engraved sword. The handle of the sword is just visible near the top of the fireplace arch. At the sword's point there appears to be another carved Cross pattée in a circle.

It is possible that the stone artefacts were recovered from the same site in Church Street as the fireplace and placed inside it in Crawford's Alley. Could they have belonged to an earlier religious order? It is known of a presence in the town of the Knights Hospitaller and the Knights Templar who owned lands in Berwick. Abigail Cornick, curator at the Museum of the Order of St John, in London, and Dr. Catherine Kent, draw on this prospect in the 'Conclusions' section on the next page.

The 15th and 16th century

The property in which the fireplace originally stood was at 28 and 30 Church Street. Documentary research below by Dr. Catherine Kent, gives us an insight into the occupancy and ownership in that area in the 15th and 16th century; also the possibility that it was once in ecclesiastical ownership.

According to a survey in the Borough Archives, in 1562 the house with the fireplace belonged to Anthony Temple (Mayor in 1565) by right of marriage with his wife Agnes. Her family had purchased it from George Moreton in 1558. However, it had previously been through the hands of John Smith of London, mercer, in 1541 and Thomas Parnell, Draper of London, in 1540; these men were some of those buying up monastic land in bulk at the Reformation, implying that (like many properties in Berwick) the property had earlier belonged to an ecclesiastical body of some sort.

From the same survey, a plot on the northern half of the Police Station site 'seeme[d] to be Chanterie landes by an olde dede of Harry Barwick al[ia]s Raie dated xx mo Novembris anno 1458'. In Berwick, 'Chantry lands' implies those taken by the Crown at the Dissolution. It was common for one plot of a divided site to retain the original deeds and so the whole Police Station site may once have been in ecclesiastical ownership.

Demolition in Church Street



The photograph on the left shows the properties that existed in Church Street prior to their demolition for the new police station, which was completed in 1901. On the right prior to its demolition in 1935, is the property in which the fireplace was discovered; just visible beyond it is the police station building. Copyright: Photograph right courtesy of the David Moore collection, Guild of Freeman, Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Conclusions

I looked at the possibility that the sword and cross carvings on the stones were linked to a monastic building, possibly to the Knights Hospitaller, or the Knights Templar. With the help of Abigail Cornick, curator at the Museum of the Order of St John, in London, Dr. Vardit Shotten-Hallel, at the Israel Antiquities Authority, and Dr. Catherine Kent, honorary fellow in the department of history, Durham University, we can draw on some of their conclusions in the paragraphs below.

We now know, thanks to Abigail Cornick, curator at the Museum of the Order of St John, in London, evidence that seems to suggest the presence of the Knights Hospitaller in Berwick, but not their locations. We also know that the Knights Templar owned lands in Berwick.

And from Dr. Vardit Shotten-Hallel, at the Israel Antiquities Authority, who suggests that the carved cross on the circular stone shown on the photograph is probably the Cross pattée, a Christian cross, the form of which appears in very early medieval art. We also learn that the right stone is an elongated block chamfered from the lower part and not worked on the back; hence it could have been embedded in a wall or another built element (a tomb stone?).

So there is the possibility that the carved stones placed inside the fireplace had a monastic connection within a local building where they were a symbolic feature, possibly near to the house in Church Street that was demolished. Dr. Catherine Kent states, "Many monasteries held property in Berwick, although in most cases it is very hard to define their exact position in a street. So it is conceivable that the house with the fireplace was on land once held by the Templars. If so, the carved stones may have been found on the site during the Police Station building works and relocated with the fireplace when the house was demolished."

Knights Templar



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The connection between the Knights Templar and Berwick-upon-Tweed is documented in an article by Clarence Perkins, "The wealth of the Knights Templar in England and the disposition of it after their dissolution" (in *American Historical Review*, vol. 15 no 2, Jan. 1910, pp. 252-263). Click on, or copy the link to view the full article on JSTOR; see especially pages 253- 254 https://www.jstor.org/stable/1838333?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

Newspaper reports, and photographs of the demolition of 28 and 30 Church Street, in 1935

Cromwell's House

The house in Church Street, along with other properties were in the ownership of Miss M. W. Holland. After her death the properties in Berwick linked to her estate were auctioned off in the King's Arms Billiard Room in 1933. The report below in the Berwick Advertiser (February 23, 1933), shows in Lot 3 the location of the house where the fireplace came from, and its apparent link with Oliver Cromwell.

BERWICK PROPERTY FOR SALE

OLIVER CROMWELL'S HOUSE

In the King's Arms Billiard Room on Wednesday evening, Mr. Jonah Davidson, favoured with instructions from the executors of Miss M. W. Holland, deceased, offered for sale three lots of freehold property. There was a very large attendance of prospective buyers.

Mr. J. M. Edney, jun. solicitor, Berwick, read out the conditions of the sale.

The first lot was a freehold dwelling house, No. 21 Quay Walls, consisting of five living rooms and three bedrooms with conveniences. There is an annual rental of £36 with a garage at an annual rent of £8. Mr. Davidson gave a tentative price of £500, but the first bid came at £300, rising by £25 bids to £425, thereafter by £5 bids to £515, when it was knocked down to Mr. R. W. Smeaton, acting for Mr. J. R. Dickinson, Quay Walls.

Lot 2, No. 16 Palace Street, containing three living rooms and three bedrooms, with annual rental of £17 14s, was withdrawn at £55, the first bid coming at £40.

Lot 3, a block of freehold property, numbers 28 and 30 Church Street, was, explained the auctioneer, of great local interest, being the house in which Oliver Cromwell lived when he stayed in Berwick. There is a remarkable ceiling. The shop consists of shop premises and workroom, at present in the occupation of Border Electrical Services at an annual rental of *£30. Also three dwelling houses a store and a garden, at a total rental of £75 4s 8d. The auctioneers gave a tentative price of £600, before the first bid came in at £300, rising by £10 bids to £400, and by £5 bids to *£500, when the property was knocked down to Mr. W. J. Coulson, Newcastle.

*Indicates that the figure given in the newspaper is barely visible.

Demolition of house where Cromwell reputedly stayed

A report which appeared in the Berwickshire News, (May 28, 1935), relating to the house in Church Street, and Cromwell's apparent association with it is shown below.

DEMOLITION OF HOUSE THAT CROMWELL STAYED IN

The house, in which Oliver Cromwell stayed in when he visited Berwick, is being demolished this week. It stands in Church Street almost adjoining the Police Station. A feature of the old house is its ornamental ceilings and its fine old fireplace. The building is being demolished to make a road to the new police houses which have been constructed behind it.

Concern at the possible destruction of the fireplace

The house in question at the time of its demolition had become the source of much interest to local people. In particular, there was concern at the possible destruction of such a fine looking fireplace. So much so that the following letter from Councillor Philip Spowart appeared in the Berwick Advertiser, (June 27, 1935).

ANCIENT FIREPLACE PRESERVED

33, Palace Street,
Berwick-upon-Tweed,
June 26th, 1935.

Sir. – In view of the apparent anxiety expressed by certain townspeople concerning the removal of the old fireplace, part of the building now being demolished at Church Street, it may be of interest to state that, thanks to the action of our Surveyor and the kindness and courtesy of Messrs. J. G. Green and Son, builders, Warkworth, the fireplace is retained in the town, and shall be re-erected in a public place, which shall be notified in due course. – Yours, etc.,

PHILIP SPOWART
(Chairman, Reading Room Committee)

Three to five feet thick walls

This leads on to the building in Church Street, itself. The report below in the Berwick Advertiser, (June 27, 1935), makes interesting reading. In its description of the building being demolished it describes it as having walls between three, and in one case five feet thick.

THREE FEET THICK WALLS

OLD FIREPLACE IN CHURCH STREET HOUSE

Considerable interest has been taken in the demolition work at the old house *32 Church Street, which is reported to have Cromwellian associations. The walls all round are three feet thick, and in one place, approaching five feet, a great contrast to present day two-brick houses. An old fireplace, known to exist by those living in the house and shop below, has now been disclosed to passers by, and nearly everyone has stopped to inspect it. The stones have been numbered, and it is intended to take the fireplace down and have it rebuilt.

*House number does not tally with that at the auction sale of Miss Holland's property on page two.

“Old stone fireplace”

The area where the 15th century fireplace was resited in Crawford's Alley, was described in one report in the Berwick Advertiser (July 11, 1947) as such – “At the rear of the Berwick Museum there is a triangular piece of ground which, somehow or other, appears to be there. It is railed off by a stout, if rather a prosaic fence, there is an old stone fireplace this having come out of a Berwick House.”

Berwickshire Naturalists Club report 1957

Around Crawford's Alley, what happened to the fireplace and the engraved stone artefacts after the clearance of the area is unknown. What we know from a Berwickshire Naturalists Club report in the Berwick Advertiser, on the 16th of May, 1957, is that the fireplace was still in situ in Crawford's Alley at that time.

Photographs of 28 and 30 Church Street

On the following pages are a set of fascinating photographs of 28 and 30 Church Street, reputedly where Oliver Cromwell resided on his visits to Berwick. These photographs are kindly reproduced courtesy of the David Moore collection, Guild of Freeman, Berwick-upon-Tweed.



The building in Church Street, where it's reputed Oliver Cromwell resided on his visits to Berwick-upon-Tweed. The Police Station building can be seen on the left. Copyright: The David Moore collection, Guild of Freeman, Berwick-upon-Tweed.



Looking at the rear of the property towards Church Street, prior to demolition. The rear of part of the Police Station can be seen on the right. Copyright: The David Moore collection, Guild of Freeman, Berwick-upon-Tweed.



The fireplace comes into view after the majority of the demolition work was completed, and the thickness of the wall behind it also becomes evident. The area was being cleared in 1935, to make way for an entrance to the new police houses seen in the background. Copyright: The David Moore collection, Guild of Freeman, Berwick-upon-Tweed.



The huge size of the fireplace becomes apparent from this photograph. Also what the photograph appears to show is that the fireplace was blocked up by stone at some point, as the large gap on the left shows. Copyright: The David Moore collection, Guild of Freeman, Berwick-upon-Tweed.



The fireplace with the individual stones now numbered for removal to Crawford's Alley. Copyright: The David Moore collection, Guild of Freeman, Berwick-upon-Tweed.



The size of the blocks of stone shown on this photograph give an idea to the construction of the building behind its facade. An indication possibly of a previous more substantial structure. Copyright: The David Moore collection, Guild of Freemen, Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Sources:

Berwick Record Office, First Book of Enrolments; reference B/BA/1

The Berwick Advertiser – February 23, 1933 – June 27, 1935 – July 11, 1947 – May 16, 1957.

The Berwickshire News – May 28, 1935.

Acknowledgement:

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