

21 King Street, Chester.

Restoration Work
Started August 1969—Completed July 1973

21 King Street was built in the early eighteenth century in the Georgian style. There are three storeys, three windows on the first floor, brick, stone base, one string cornice, brick parapet, with plain stone coping and a slate roof. Windows are plain triple sashes with glazing bars, brick arches stone keys and sills.

The entrance is a six panel door in pilastered and corniced wood surround, early nineteenth century. The house has a very fine early eighteenth century staircase.

The restoration work began in 1969 and took four years to complete. The condition of the house was very bad and no attempt had been made to maintain the property adequately for many years. Woodworm, dry rot, rotten beams and unsafe floors were found, with the result that most of the woodwork and panelling has had to be renewed and recarved to its original style, and the staircase has had to be strengthened.

During the course of this restoration, ships timbers were found under the floors, with the result that the curved timbers produced some very uneven surfaces. After some research it was found that these timbers must have come from the wharf near to the bottom of the street.

The inside of the brick frontage was investigated and it seems likely that the house was not refronted in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century as had been suggested, but just the windows were enlarged at about that time. The brickwork of the house on the north and the south sides has been cleaned and repointed, and the badly corroded areas have been cut away and replaced with bricks of a similar nature.

The garden at the rear of the house was completely overgrown with weeds and briars, and large areas of rubbish and rubble had clearly been a feature for many years. It was found that many plants and shrubs would not grow and on inspection a complete layer of scrap leather, making a matted seam—thousands of small pieces, covered the whole area to the rear of the house. This leather was poisoning the ground and not allowing drainage to take place. It was found that William Collinson, boot manufacturer, lived in 21 in 1857, he had workshops at the rear of the property and hence all the

leather.

Notable persons who resided in the house include, 1750—William Brown, shoe trader. 1776—John Paul, Senior, possibly owned the house. He petitioned for the freedom of the City and set up as victualler at the Pied Bull Inn at the top of the street. 1795—John Paul, Junior, came to live at 21 and started a profession as coach maker with his workshops at the rear. John Paul, Junior, obtained the freedom of the City in 1798 as a coach maker. 1840—Joseph Ridgeway, fringe weaver.

In 1845 the houses became numbered for the first time, and 21 King Street was at that time number 24 King Street. From approximately 1880 the house was used as a residential unit, with some light commercial content, for example, the offices of a family firm of solicitors. In the last few decades however, up until 1969, with the deterioration of the house becoming serious, it was used as offices throughout.

The house has now been restored to its former glory, with its fine staircase and through window as a feature, and large square rooms lending to versatility—use as offices—town house—flats—or a selection of all three.

The very expensive investment and renovation programme did not alter the structure of the house. All defective parts were renewed to the original state, and modern fittings have been placed where necessary.

The house now has central heating, air conditioning, de-humidification and anti-dust systems throughout. Refrigerated wine cellar. Strongroom. Full security system wired direct to Chester police station. Automatic door-porter to many rooms. Full private telephone extension system to all parts of the house. Floodlit patio and garden. Treble glazing on bedrooms fronting King Street, to totally eliminate the noise factor. Sauna room, impulse shower and solarium.

A grant was not sought from the local Authority at the beginning of this work, as the process of obtaining such a grant was somewhat slow, and at that time the rewards were limited. Fortunately the climate now has changed, and full grants should be obtained with many other houses in King Street for their restoration.

King Street Preserved

From remote times this way was known as Barn Lane, and was an approach to the crofts, where a Grange or barn of the Abbey was situated. The name Barn Lane persisted as late as the middle of the eighteenth century, as shown on De Lavaux's plan of Chester, executed about 1745. By 1782 the name had been changed to its present day one of King Street, and the alteration seems to have been accompanied by the erection of a number of more pretentious houses. The reason for the alteration can only be assumed, but it may have been due to a wave of popular loyal sentiment in favour of the reigning house. The street still retained its character and its shape as far back as 1296 when it was known as Bernebone.

Most of the street's historic buildings are in fact Georgian terraced houses, three storeys high with central crossed stairs, with other characteristic features. Numbers 32, 34 and 36 are typical and number 21 is a larger version.

The street was clearly one of considerable charm and standing during the eighteenth century, there were several prosperous traders, and many County names, living in these town houses at that time—George Bushell had shares in the Theatre Royal—Robert Merrick, who lived in number 21, purchased the office of Sword Bearer and became a Freeman of Chester in 1776—Richard Tunner, a brewer,—John Paul, a coach maker, also lived at number 21. Many clergymen, doctors, attorney of law, and excise men, lived in the street.

The street hopefully will be restored to its original flavour, and it is proposed to erect town houses, as illustrated, in the gap on the north side, between numbers 30 and 32, which is now a garden. In addition, the development and landscaping proposed at the bottom of the street, opposite Kings Buildings, should provide the area, once again, with the style and pattern of life that the neighbourhood was used to years ago.

Some of the historic data supplied by courtesy of the Chester City Librarian and the City Archivist.

Some information provided by the Cheshire Sheaf and the Insall Report.