

The STORIES of FIVE HOUSES WE CAN SEE ...OVER 400 YEARS

Chris Robinson MBE

Chris's presentation looked at five Plymouth properties that were all standing in 1620 and which are all still with us today. With the exception of the consistently misnamed Prysten House, these buildings were all relatively new or new 400 years ago and they all had very different stories to tell.

Yogge's House, or the Prysten House, is the oldest domestic residence in what is now known as the Barbican area, and dates from the late-fifteenth century. It's proximity to the mother church of the town, now the Minster Church of St Andrew, led locals to later assume that it was originally an ecclesiastical structure, however the site was acquired by Thomas Yogge in 1498 and for the next 200 years or so it was invariably referred to as Yogge's House.

Thomas Yogge was a Cornish-born businessman and his elder brother William was four times Mayor of Plymouth. A century or so later, in 1601, the Mayor of Plymouth was William Parker, another wealthy merchant, and seafarer, who lived in a building just yards from Yogge's House, namely 33 St Andrew Street, in what is now known as the Merchant's House or Parker's House. Parker is said to have been the master of the Mary Rose, the victualling ship that sailed against the Armada in 1588. The property was restored by Plymouth City Council in the 1970s and served for many years as a local mini-museum but it is currently unoccupied.

Another English officer who took part in the Armada encounter was William Cocke, who lived in the grand residence on the corner of Southside Street and Pin Lane. Cocke has the unfortunate distinction of being the only English officer to have lost his life in the battle with the Spanish fleet. This building is now split into several residences and was restored by the local authority in the early 1930s, shortly after the Old Plymouth Society, largely through the endeavours of local architect Arthur Southcombe Parker, and the financial support of Lady Astor, had saved what is now called the Elizabethan House in New Street.

The Old Plymouth Society, which was originally constituted purely for the purpose of restoring that building, is still going strong today, while the building itself has recently undergone a multi-million pound restoration that will hopefully preserve the structure for generations to come. It is a significant tourist attraction.

Perhaps the most obvious of the five buildings considered in Chris's presentation is the Island House. It's address is 9 The Barbican and the isolated property is in the middle of a run of buildings properly called 'The Barbican' – a title that has subsequently been appropriated as a term to describe the whole of the historic quarter of Plymouth that is nestled around Sutton Harbour. Thought to have been ravaged by fire soon after it had been built, the Island House was swiftly constructed on its original footprint. The house at that time was almost certainly on the water's edge and it has been in the hands of the Bayly family for well over 200 years.

As well as talking about the five houses, Chris presented over 80 illustrations – paintings, sketches and photographs – showing these properties over the centuries.