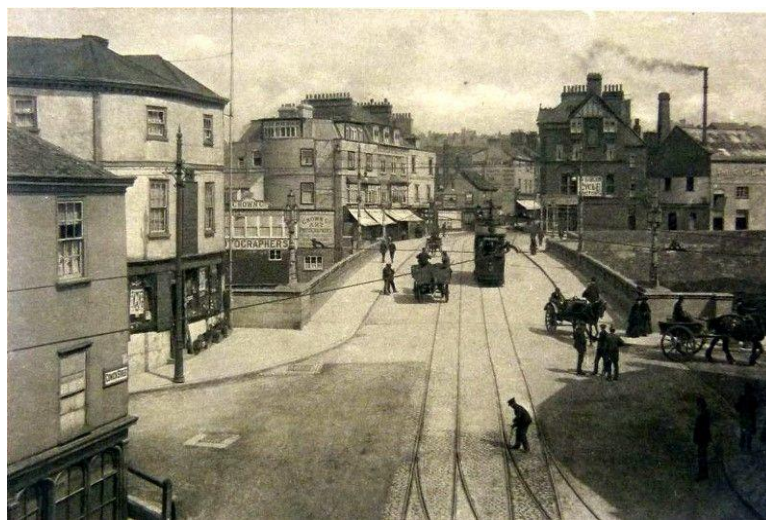


My House Through Time



I lived the first 6 years of my life at 187 Cowick Street, St Thomas from 1953 until 1959. It was the last building on the left before you crossed over Exe Bridge to venture into the city.

The building itself was a huge Victorian building and it started in Cowick Street and wrapped itself around the corner into Okehampton Street. I wouldn't call it a house really because it was a 3 storey building with a fruit and veg business on the ground floor with living accommodation above. It wouldn't have looked out of place in Dickens' Christmas Carol and the shop windows remind me now of the Old Curiosity Shop. The owner was Mr Rowe who ran the fruit and veg business with his wife Marie. They lived on the first floor whilst my family, my mum, dad and my half brother and half sister on the top floor. Mr Rowe had a wooden leg and you could often hear him crossing the rooms over the wooden floorboards. The passageway always smelt of damp or the type of smell that you get when lifting potatoes from the ground.

The entrance to the building was via a green door and led down a long, dark passageway. The door to the shop was to the right just along the passageway but straight ahead were stairs up to the first and second floor. Half way up was a 'shared' toilet – no bath, just a toilet and wash hand basin.

The top floor where we lived consisted of a living room, and 3 bedrooms. Two bedrooms fronted on to Cowick Street whilst the living room had a window with a view out over Okehampton Street, the river and the Casablanca cafe across the river. Also visible was part of the bridge and I used to sit at the table which was in front of the window and watch the traffic and pedestrians during the day. The best sight though was the light from the lamps on the bridge which sometimes twinkled a reflection in the water. The third bedroom, my parents room, was situated at the rear of the living room.

There was a large fire grate with brass fender surround where my mum would air the clothes or hang my nightie ready to change in to after a bath on a Sunday night. The bath was a tin one and placed in front of the fire for maximum heat during the winter months.

The river Exe burst its banks many times and that together with congestion on the roads to and from the city over Exe Bridge made the council act and they decided to introduce a flood prevention scheme and the building of a new bridge over the Exe which incorporated road widening. This meant that the buildings leading up to the bridge from St. Thomas' station would be demolished. So, starting in 1959 the demolition of these buildings started and the residents moved, mostly to the new estate on Broadway or to houses in Burnthouse Lane.

The building housed us for a short while out of its long history as my mum didn't move there until around 1949 but 187 Cowick Street started its life well before then.

Using the resources available to me I've been able to start at 1841 when the building seems to have been already well established. There were no building numbers then, the census just records the building as 'corner of Cowick Street'. The residents John Bond, aged 70 and his son, William, aged 30 who were coopers. Also there is William Gilbert aged 11, and Ann Westcott, classed as Independent, aged 90 and Mary Pearce, aged 20 who is a servant. Living next door is John Bond's son, John Bond, aged about 40 who is also a cooper. With him is his wife, Anna Marie nee Mitchell, aged about 35. John is from St Thomas but Anna Marie is from Lypstone and that is where they were married in 1831. Living with them in 1841 are their children Anna Marie, aged 8, Sarah, aged 3 and Elizabeth aged 1. (I add these in because in 1851 the census says double house so I've a feeling that the families shared the building).



In 1851 John, now widowed, is still there with daughters Sarah Jane, aged 12 and Elizabeth, aged 9 and Mary Ann aged 6. John's wife Anna Marie had died in 1849. His occupation now is that of cooper and spirit merchant and he employs 3 men. With them is Harriet Westcott, aged 14, a servant.

In 1861 the family are still there but John is no longer a cooper he is listed only as a spirit merchant. He has remarried, an Esther Sarjeant, aged 56 who is from Middlesex. They married on 28 June, 1852 at St. Thomas Church. On their marriage her father is named as John Sarjeant, a soldier. This would make sense in Esther being in St. Thomas when he father is in the army. With them is Sarah, now aged 22 who is a fundholder and Kathryn Hawkins, granddaughter, aged 2. Sadly, John dies in 1862 and is buried in the parish of St. Thomas.

The 1871 census sees Esther, now a widow, has taken over the license and is now the licensed victualler. None of John's children are with her, instead there is Elizabeth Hucklebridge, aged 72 and Elizabeth's daughter, also Elizabeth who is 35. Elizabeth, also widowed, is listed as Esther's sister but she is in fact her sister-in-law, John's sister. Elizabeth is an annuitant, whereas Elizabeth's daughter is listed as an assistant. With them is a general servant, Mary A Elson, aged 16 and born in Whitstone.

Elizabeth had married Thomas Hucklebridge in 1827. Thomas was a butcher by trade and they had, in the 1840s, a shop in Fore Street before moving to Boycotts Buildings off Alphington Street.

The men of these families had good trades, they had at least one servant and at times employed people. The women, even young Sarah were able to live off their own means which means the families were quite well off.



Esther dies in 1871 and by 1881 we find Charlotte Hucklebridge, Thomas Hucklebridge and Elizabeth's daughter, has taken over as licensed victualler. This is the first time that the building is listed as 187 Cowick Street. With her is her nieces, Charlotte and Caroline, daughters of John Hucklebridge, a master plumber who had also lived in Cowick Street. The younger Charlotte, aged 24, is a school mistress, whilst her younger sister, Caroline, aged 22, is a shirt dealer. Mary Ann Elson is still their servant. The map of the area has it as a PH (public house).

The 1891 census again doesn't have a number for the building but the frontispiece of the

schedule for the district states 'Commencing at Mrs Hills spirit vaults corner of Cowick and Okehampton Street.



1891 map of Cowick Street also showing Boycotts Buildings off Alphington Street

The family Sarah Jane Hill, a widow, the licensed victualler lived with her children, William H Hill, age 26, a photographer, Minnie Hill aged 24 and Sarah Hill aged 22 and Emma aged 20. None of the children had been born in St Thomas but Sarah Jane was the daughter of John Bond, the original owner of the building. She had married William Laskey Hill in 1862 in St. Thomas Parish Church.

Sarah Jane Hill is listed in Kelly's directory for 1914 and 1915 as being the publican of Bond's Vaults, 187 Cowick Street.

Sarah is still there in 1911 with her daughter Minnie, together with their housekeeper, Ethel Brown. It states there are 9 rooms in the building. The electoral roll of 1920 shows only Minnie being there.

According to the electoral rolls by 1923 the house is occupied by Emmeline Peters, Frank Peters and John Endacott. In 1939 it is still occupied by the Peters family, possibly related to those who had lived there in the 1920s. They are William Peters, aged 36, a boilerman, his wife, Rhoda who is 33, and their children Doris, who is 12 and Gordon who is 9.

This is probably when the building got split back up as 2 households living in the same building as there is also William Jordan, aged 29, a labourer building heavy worker and his wife, Ellen, aged 28. They have one child with them.



By 1947 the owner is Mr Rowe and my mother went and rented the rooms on top floor from 1949 until its demolition at the end of the 1950s.

The landscape this end of Cowick Street didn't change that much in over a 100 years. From the windows on the Okehampton Street side there was a view across the river to the Casablanca cafe once the original Seven Stars and the Exe Bridge buildings along with others on Okehampton Street were destroyed by bombing in 1942.

(Sources – images - from those in the public domain on the internet; snips of maps – from www.old-maps.co.uk)