



# GRESHAM COLLEGE

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## HOUSE, SHOP AND WARDROBE IN LONDON'S MERCHANT COMMUNITY

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Tonight, and in my next lecture on January 17<sup>th</sup>, I am leaving the world of the royal court, the aristocrats the makers of the big and glamorous buildings, the architects and builders of civic magnificence to look at a class of people and of builders whose activities I have barely mentioned over the last few years. These are the industrial and commercial classes who made up most of London's population; people who tonight I shall call merchants. The architectural activities of the merchant class has been rather overlooked. Partly because what the crown, church and aristocracy built seems more impressive and exciting, but also because so little merchant architecture has survived. These were men whose principal building activities were urban. Merchants built in the middle of successful towns and cities and so their buildings have been uniquely vulnerable to redevelopment. The significant and important architectural achievements of London's medieval merchants have therefore been erased from the history books.

I'm going to approach the subject chronologically and tonight I will be looking at Merchants and their buildings from the eleventh to the end of the fourteenth century and next time I shall be looking at the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and will, of course, be including a consideration of our patron tonight, Sir Thomas Gresham.

But before I turn to look at those early London merchants, and indeed define them as a group properly, we need to look at London as a trading hub and understand a little of the economic and topographical context.

London was, of course, invented to make money. It was, from the start, a trading colony blessed with natural advantages. It was both a sea port and a river port: river-going craft could take goods downstream past the River Lea to the estuary towns or to the Medway and, upstream vessels, transported goods as far as Oxford, or perhaps more commonly to Reading and Henley. Meanwhile sea-going craft linked London with other English trading ports such as Ipswich, Lynn, Boston, Hull and Newcastle on the east coast, and round the Kentish coast to Sandwich and even further west to Portsmouth, Exeter and Plymouth. Trade also of course took place with ports all along the northern coast of the continent and round the west of France down the Iberian Peninsula.

We have also to remember that London's position on the river was determined by the fact that it was the lowest bridging point on the Thames feasible within first Roman, and then medieval, engineering and this made London a crucial node in the national road network. The Gough map that probably represents England in the fourteenth century shows the bunching of roads round the capital which had already taken place.

But despite our familiarity with London's economic primacy we must not get ahead of ourselves for the tax records of 1203-5 show that although London was England's largest single port, handling a total of 16% National trade, if you were to add the volume of trade passing through Boston and Lincoln together they pushed London into second place. Indeed, in the thirteenth century, such provincial ports were growing faster



than London in wealth. You might well expect this, as the east coast ports were all close to England's wool and grain producing areas that were the principal, and most lucrative, exports. London's most valuable trade was in wine followed by luxury goods.

It must have been in part London's commercial success that led to the establishment, at Westminster, of the royal court. Westminster was not only a separate place it was a separate market - one hungry for what the City could offer – food and drink of course, but more important, in the long run, were luxury items such as silks, goldsmiths-work and spices. The court, as seat of government, was also hungry for cash. This came in the form of taxes, but more important for the city's development, was the fact that the Crown needed to borrow money thus stimulating a financial market.

The court helped establish London as the centre for luxury goods but it, and the policies of successive monarchs, also contributed to the relative decline of the provincial ports and the gradual relocation of the wool trade to London. I'm not going to try and explain the politics and economics of how this reorientation took place, as it is not central to my argument tonight, but what we do have to understand is that in 1269 provincial towns paid 285% of the tax paid by London and this percentage had dropped to 173.6% in 1304 and to only 93.7% in 1312. Meanwhile as England's wool production moved from the export of raw wool and fleeces to finished cloth, so London captured more of the market. By 1400 30% of English wool and 50% of English cloth was exported from London. In fact, by this date, half of all Customs payable on imported and exported goods was taken by the London collectors. Thus by 1300 London was locked into a national network of trading centres as unarguably the largest and most important hub. The merchants who lived there had the greatest commercial opportunities and some of the most ambitious started to relocate their businesses from the provincial centres to London.

London's position in the national market was secured by the deliberate and systematic organisation of its traders. Provoked by the penetration of foreigners into their markets, by royal taxation and by political interference London's merchants began to establish their own associations such as the vintners and the skinnners who first organised themselves to keep foreign traders out and control domestic distribution. But in due course formed larger associations such as the wool staple to act in unison to guarantee wider trade privileges.

In parallel with the organisation of people and economic structures was the determination of the merchant community to establish the physical infrastructure to make London commercially successful. By 1300 the City of London had won self-government from the crown. A mayor, twenty-four Aldermen and two sheriffs were established and they commissioned the mason John Croxton to replace the old city guild hall in 1411. Over nearly twenty years he built the largest and most important building in the City after St. Paul's. Keeping the metropolis supplied was a huge task and one that was successfully managed, save in the great famine of 1315-17 when Londoners had to eat their pets. The granary at Leadenhall privately funded by Sir Simon Eyre, Lord Mayor, and completed in 1455 was an attempt to prevent such a disaster happening again. The building was a quadrangle with an arcaded lower floor facing inwards. This was the venue for the sale of poultry, grain, eggs, butter and cheese. The two floors above the arcades were devoted to the storage of grain, piled in sacks on strengthened floors; the windows were sealed with wooden shutters that could be opened for ventilation. On the east was a chapel and school partly as a chantry for Sir Simon but also to provide divine service and education for the traders. On three sides there were no ground-floor windows, this was deliberate, the granary was fortified against civil unrest. This sort of enlightened construction was matched by a huge investment in religious building as wealthy merchants paid for and endowed Churches, chapels, monasteries, friaries, hospitals and schools. These complimentary and overlapping infrastructures were the product of sustained focus by the city authorities, the crown and the efforts of private enterprise to fit London for its commercial services.



The physicality of the City was, in the Middle Ages, still defined by three miles of encircling Roman wall only entered through one of six gates. On the east was the brooding mass of the royal castle at the Tower. In the middle of this, on a knoll was St. Paul's Cathedral set in a walled precinct. Nearby in another precinct was the Guildhall. To the south was a royal enclave, the Blackfriars and the royal Wardrobe close to the royal house of Baynards Castle. All over the city were churches and monastic houses built in stone. But the vast majority of Londoners lived in timber framed houses. Whilst the few depictions of the pre-fire city seem to show a place developed willy-nilly there was, in fact, civic control over building from the late twelfth century and this enabled a basic underlying order and fairness to be imposed on building development.

It was ecclesiastics who were the first to build stone houses in the City. Drawn by the necessity to serve at court or to attend to their business interests they bought land and built houses in the city and in its immediate suburbs. It was not until the late thirteenth century when the merchants began to invest in stone houses. This investment in real estate coincides with the rise of London's national importance as a trading centre which I have just summarised.

So now let's turn to look at the people I'm talking about tonight – the merchants. These merchants were all freemen of the city, residents who had sworn loyalty to the city government agreeing to pay their taxes and act as responsible citizens. By so doing these freemen were enfranchised and eligible to participate in the governance of the city. From around 1300 it became normal to enter into freemanship through one of the established trades, or crafts, often called misteries in the middle ages. Thus men became known not only by their Christian and family names, but as Freemen and as members of a trade. So I might be Simon Thurley, Freeman and Fishmonger.

The trades or crafts varied a great deal. The masons and carpenters, for instance, almost all were artisans practicing their craft, selling their skills, either directly to those who needed them, or to contractors who hired them for a larger task. Such craftsmen might also dabble in the sale of stone, timber, nails or other associated goods, but essentially they earned their living providing the services of an artisan.

Others were retailers buying goods and selling them to other citizens from their shops, these might include some goldsmiths, ironmongers and drapers. But here an important distinction must be drawn between retailers and artisans and those who were primarily wholesalers. Any citizen of London could buy goods wholesale at the waterfront or elsewhere but there were a class of men, who I shall call merchants, whose primary activity was trading in wholesale goods. Many of these wholesalers were also involved in other types of trading activity using their capital or collateral to make money. These merchants tended to belong to a small number of trades whose companies were not just craft guilds, but can be described as merchant companies.

These merchants always specialised in trading specific goods but, as entrepreneurs, had an eye to anything else they could buy and sell at a profit and also had a keen interest (either direct or indirect) in retail sales. As men with capital they could invest in real estate (as we shall see), lend money and invest in and promote business opportunities as they came their way. The merchant companies divided their membership between those who were successful and rich – the liverymen, and the others who were humbler traders, artisans or retailers. The liverymen were so called because they wore a livery, or uniform, to distinguish them from the others.

So tonight I am focussing my remarks down to the class of men and women who were the upper echelon of city merchants, the liverymen of the merchant companies, the rich, successful and socially interconnected traders who lived and worked in the City of London. So how many people are we talking about? We can turn to the records of the merchants' companies that tell us, for instance that the mercers had 107 members in 1347 and the Goldsmiths had 150 in 1369. But these don't get us to the numbers of merchants, as I have defined them. To get to this figure we have to turn the clock forward to 1501 or even to 1537-8 when lists of liveried merchants survive. These tell us that in 1501 there were 617 and in 1537-8 there were 831. To this number of men, the



heads of the families, have to be added their wives and children (the sons were normally destined to follow their fathers into the trade) and for each family a number of apprentices. So perhaps the merchants in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, their families and apprentices might have numbered as many as 3,000. So how large a proportion of the population were they?

It is not possible to be absolutely certain as to the population of London in around 1300 but estimates and calculations put it at between 50,000 and 80,000. This figure roughly halved as a result of the Black Death in 1348-9. The city's population remained low right the way through to around 1500 when it may have reached the level of 50,000 again. Perhaps then this very rich merchant class of maybe 3,000 people was 6-8% of the population of fourteenth century London.

So how rich were they? It is notoriously difficult to give a true and fair idea of the wealth of our ancestors as there are so many variables. Looking at Royal taxation we can estimate that the total value of imports and exports in 1204 was between £55,000 and £75,000 and that in 1300 the equivalent figure was around half a million pounds. If we allow for inflation it has been suggested that this represents a tripling of the value of overseas trade in a century. Clearly much of this flowed through merchants hands representing a significant increase in their wealth. Looking at the wills of men in one of the wealthiest companies, the Grocers Company, over a long period from 1350 to 1497 it can be seen that Grocers' estates were worth between £50 and £2,000+. Nine Grocers had estates worth more than £2,000 and another three had assets of £1,000-£2,000; eight more were valued at £600-£1,000 and eleven at £400 to £600.

These figures are total assets at death rather than an annual income. There is some evidence of income, again taken from probate evidence. A Vintner who died in 1397 was able to leave his wife an income of £80 a year from city property while a Grocer who died in 1376 had a rental income alone of £118. To help to put these figures into perspective, we should note that the average income of a noble family was around £900 a year and only four aristocratic families were worth more than £2,000; the average for a bishop was around £1,000. To take up a knighthood you needed to earn at least £40 a year, but most gentry earned less than that. In all over 90% of the population earned less than £20 a year. But I'm not sure these figures help place merchant wealth very effectively, quite apart from anything else their outgoings were considerably lower – the aristocrats had high living costs with costly political and social obligations, several houses and a large household staff.

I think the best way of looking at merchant wealth is to consider the Sumptuary legislation. This was the legislation first introduced in 1363 because it was believed that extravagant dress was both causing inflation and eroding class distinctions. It is this latter point that is important because it was the rising wealth of the merchant classes which was blurring class distinctions. So the rules specified that ermine and cloth of gold was reserved for knights and aristocrats worth over 400 marks a year. Silk and cloth valued at 5 marks could be worn by gentry worth £200 a year and merchants worth £1,000 in goods. Lesser grades of cloth could be worn by others down the social scale. The legislation set a high bar for merchants and, through they could easily afford it, excluded them from the top range of cloths.

When we come to ask the question as to what was the architectural impact of this wealthy merchant class on the City we are, of course, looking at a range of buildings, from those occupied by the merchant who lived in his own shop with an income of £30 a year to the most wealthy who lived in buildings little short of palaces. But the important point to make first of all was the investment in property was at the core of a merchant's aspirations. Not only property in which to live and trade, but property bought for investment and, at the highest end of the social scale, for pleasure.

As we currently understand it timber-framed houses with jettied upper floors start to be built in London in the 1220s and 1230s and the reason for this must have quite simply been one of space. London was already crowded and plots of land on the street front were valuable, building up and over was an obvious solution to maximising



the value of your plot. Within a period of a couple of decades houses were of three or four stories as carpenters became more and more confident building upwards. There are no early timber framed and jettied buildings in London so what we now have to do is look at the provincial towns with which London traded and see what was being built there. These towns were economically and socially linked with London and the merchants there were often business partners and close relations of their London cousins.

One of the earliest surviving jettied three story town houses that we can look at as a comparator is 9 Queen Street Salisbury which was built between 1306 and 1314. London was full of such houses by 1300.

These early timber-framed houses contained two other common components, a cellar or undercroft for the storage of goods, particularly wine, and a hall, the communal eating room of the house. Undercrofts were part of the commercial apparatus of town living, and so to a degree were halls -. Merchants' houses were extended families containing apprentices and servants as well as the blood relations of the merchant. Urban halls were the thus both focus of family life and the commercial relationships that were vital to an economically successful family unit. In the hall the family and their apprentices would eat together and entertain friends and business associates.

These halls could be quite magnificent. This is a tiled pavement plan of the 1260s from Clifton House in King's Lynn. This was a large stone merchants' house with a hall and behind it, a parlour. The parlour was the merchant's private downstairs living room where the family could withdraw from the hall and perhaps sometimes eat. At Clifton House both hall and parlour were tiled with Westminster type tiles imported from London by sea. The hall had a central hearth made up of roof tiles on edge bordered by a stone band. There were no chimneys in these early halls and smoke found its way out through the cracks in the roof.

Halls were multi-purpose and relatively public structures and, by the early fourteenth century, any owner who could afford it built a parlour next to or near his hall. Slightly smaller houses might have a parlour on the first floor, but generally parlours were ground floor reception and entertaining rooms into which owners could withdraw with friends and family. Increasingly owners would eat in here rather than the great hall. In the 1370s William Langland famously complained that 'now hath a rich man a rule to eaten by himself in a privy parlour' rather than dining with his staff and associated in the hall. Crucially while a hall was a public room a parlour was not and so they were normally buried in the back of a mansion, often with large windows overlooking the garden, where there was one.

Perhaps what is most noticeable in considering even the greatest of these early merchants' residences was the apparent lack of desire for what we might consider privacy. There was an absolute necessity for a hall and for a parlour, but even quite large houses did not have many bedrooms. In a fishmongers house, described in 1373, there was a parlour off the hall and, from this, invited guests could enter a small chamber furnished with three chairs and a cupboard. Other rooms included a kitchen, larder and a servants' room. The bedroom was a single family room above the parlour. An inventory taken of a substantial Grocer's house in 1390 reveals that it only had one bedroom for him, his wife and their five children (two of whom were girls).

These houses must have been very similar to the late thirteenth century phase of Clifton House in where above the parlour, as far as can be ascertained, there was only a single bedroom for the family.

Halls, parlours and other domestic accommodation tended to be located behind the shops or commercial premises that lined the main thoroughfares. So a contract for building a house in Cornhill in 1310 specified three shops on the ground floor, two halls with chimneys on the first floor served by a kitchen, pantry and buttery and, on the top floor, two 'beautiful' chambers (presumably bedrooms) and a privy. This was the sort of house lived in by a successful, but middling, merchant.



In Southampton there are the standing remains of some 29 medieval houses from the late twelfth to the sixteenth century and, of these, 58 French Street is the most complete. It was built for a merchant in the fourteenth century in a tightly developed part of the town, now opened up by wartime bombing and later clearance. In plan it is a simple rectangle 62ft long and 23ft wide raised up on a vaulted undercroft accessed separately from the street. The house is of six bays, the middle two of which formed a double height hall and the front and back two bays two-story blocks of rooms. The front ground floor room was a shop with an overhanging pentice to keep shoppers on the street dry. The beauty of this design was that the house, and the cellar beneath, could be let separately or could form a single unit.

The ability to have several functions, tenures or activities in a single house was a common one. Three merchants' houses from the period 1300-1340 survive in Strand Street Sandwich. Sandwich, on the River Stour and the shore of the former Wantsum Channel, was one of Medieval England's most successful ports, trading with London, Canterbury and the continent. A wealthy merchant community grew there and built substantial houses from the thirteenth century. 39 Strand Street is a remarkable timber framed survival built in two sections. The street frontage contained shops at ground floor level, and above were two stories of domestic accommodation. These were self-contained and could be let as a single unit. Behind the valuable commercial frontage was a great hall accessed from a yard and behind this were three floors over an undercroft. It is not entirely clear how this back house was used, but the hall was a prestigious structure and the rooms behind it potentially provided a parlour and upper bedchamber.

Perhaps easier to interpret is a building contemporary with 39 Strand Street erected on Oxford High Street in c.1291-1300 by Roger le Mareschal, the parson of nearby Tackley. 106-7 the High was re-fronted in the eighteenth and nineteenth century but retains its undercroft and remarkably its hall. The house was bought in 1324 as a home for Oriel College, who still own the building, but it was not built as a hall for the college, but as a house with commercial premises. In plan and in section you can see that there are a number of possible separate units. The undercroft, the shops above it, the rooms above that and the hall and chamber that lie behind it could all theoretically be in separate occupation, or at least in separate use. On the street front you would have seen door to shops, a staircase down to the undercroft and a through way to the hall at the back. Typical of these halls is the way that the passageway passes through the lower end of the hall.

And finally let me take you to another successful early medieval port – Exeter. Here at 36 North Street we have a less ambitious building than Tackley's Inn in Oxford, but of exactly the same type, although much later – the house dates from the fifteenth century, outside tonight's timescale but illustrative of what I am describing. On the street front there is a shop beside which runs a passage, this provides access to the hall and chamber that lie behind the shop. Beneath is an undercroft and to the rear, slightly detached, is the kitchen.

These are the sorts of houses which London's increasingly successful merchant community began to build themselves after around 1300. There were hundreds of such houses lining the commercial streets in the middle of the city although not one of them remains today.

It used to be argued that these medieval houses were essentially adaptations from the sorts of houses you find in the countryside. This argument was based on the fact that they all contained halls a building form found in all houses in the countryside. But those of you who have been to my lectures before will know that my approach to looking at buildings starts with looking at the social and economic context of people's lives as we have been doing this evening. If we are to find that the merchant houses of medieval London are a type of building that originated in the countryside we should expect the social and economic conditions to have been broadly the same. So we need to ask were houses in the town and the countryside used in the same way or were there differences between town and country life that made the houses of the wealthy different from each other? Well, of course, they were very different. Nobody in the countryside was building multi-story buildings in the 14<sup>th</sup>



century, or indeed for many centuries afterwards. They didn't need to land was never that valuable. When, much later, jetties appear in gentry houses in the countryside it is in imitation of town houses which had been using the technique for centuries.

So one key difference is that as urban merchant's houses were built on extremely valuable plots of land, the use of space to be maximised. This meant that they built upwards, but it also imposed a tight discipline on planning. Houses of medieval merchants had to combine domestic, service and commercial functions round a very small yard or passage. The examples I have just shown you were all cunningly planned to capture maximum value from a small plot of real estate. This meant that house, warehouse, show room, office and shop were integrated in a variety of ways with the residential quarters.

As we have seen some merchants had shops as parts of their houses, but they also bought shops as investments, and even built them as speculations. Shops, as we recognise them today, were well established in London and the provinces by 1300 and all the features we associate with modern prime-site retail were already existed. The most valuable sites were in areas of heavy traffic where shops selling specific goods clustered together. The most successful shopkeepers rented buildings that were highly decorated and impressive to attract the best and highest spending customers. The most valuable buildings were of stone; while most shops were timber framed. Outside the central retail areas were shops in which goods were manufactured as well as sold.

Before the Black Death Medieval shops were very small by contemporary standards. Those on Cheapside, London's principal shopping street, were only, on average, six or seven feet wide and ten to twelve feet deep. This was, of course, because it was England's (and possibly Europe's) most valuable shopping highway. Shops in less valuable locations might be as wide as 15ft to 20ft, yet even these larger units were tight on space. The street frontage had a window with a board that, during the day, let down to form a counter and, at night, could be raised and locked as a shutter. Beside this a door led to the interior where there was just enough room for sideboards and chests for the goods; most customers stood on the street and were served through the window. As shops had overhanging pentices to shelter shoppers and as few, if any, had fireplaces there was no particular benefit to going inside. Above were one or two stories containing rooms most often known as solars. These might be used by the shopkeepers but were as likely to be let separately.

As a retailer the alternative to renting one of these street-side shops was renting a stand in a seld. These were covered markets containing numbers of retailers trading from fixed stalls. Like Victorian covered markets, at Oxford for instance, they had no street frontage but were entered by a long dark passage leading to the market hall tucked behind the street-front shops. Before the Black Death a shop might cost between £3 to £4 a year to rent whereas the annual rental for a stall in a seld might be from 6d to 2s. Some selds were very large containing dozens of shops, other specialised in specific goods.

After the Black Death shopping in London remained buoyant despite the reduced population. Rents initially decreased but by the fifteenth century they had risen again almost to levels seen in 1300. But the pattern of the shops had changed. Many of the smaller units had amalgamated and most shops were larger than in the early Middle Ages. Fewer shops were owner operated and shop owners employed people to work in the units for them. Most importantly of all was the rise of the warehouse. These were large storerooms separate from the shops that sold goods to the public where bulk stock was stored. In the largest houses that I shall be talking about in January the warehouses might be part of the overall residential complex, but in the fourteenth century they tended to be separate holding stations for goods.

While some of these shops were certainly rented out by the owners who may have built them specifically as a commercial investment, many were used by the merchants themselves. It should not be assumed that all the shops we have been looking at attached to houses were for rent. A contract for houses in Friday Street in London specified a ground floor shop with a sale room and an office within a merchants house. This was clearly



designed to be operated as a single unit. Inventories from other merchants' houses paint a similar picture of the shop being one of the components of a series of rooms designed for commercial transactions, record keeping and sales. An Exeter merchant's house had a spying house and a study and a house in King's Lynn describes a shop, adjoining study with a desk and writing materials.

I think you can tell whether the shop was for a retailer or for a merchant because the street retailers had windows and hatches on their shops so they were essentially open to the elements while the merchant traders had a door and an enclosed room where goods could be laid out on a table much more in the manner of a modern shop. So houses with shops without counters may have been used by owner occupiers while others may have been rented out.

So far I have been considering timber-framed houses and I will be moving onto the large stone built merchant complexes in January; however it is important to point out that in London stone houses seem to have started being built again from around 1100 and, as the twelfth century wore on, more were built.

Obviously stone buildings were more expensive to erect than timber framed ones, and, of course, had a longer life, witnessed by the fact that a small selection remain to this day. Most important, though, was the fact that a stone house was a bigger investment than a timber one, it tied up more capital, but it also gave a larger yield, either through rental or resale.

At first it was the abbots and bishops, in fact, by 1300 44 abbots and bishops had houses in the City and its suburbs, but in the thirteenth century it was secular builders who were erecting stone dwellings. Most stone-built secular houses in London have been found in the central commercial district round Cheapside and near the Thames waterfront. The lower parts of a fine stone house of the early twelfth century were found in Gracechurch Street in 1872. Entered by a porch with blind arcading, it was a square building; the lower parts were presumably for storage while a spiral stair near the porch led to upper chambers. Another survived to be surveyed by Ralph Treswell in 1612. This house was similar, built on a stone undercroft above which were two stories and an attic.

Stone houses stood out and, as well as being an expression of wealth, were a sign that goods of high value, and perhaps fragility, were stored there. This explains why such buildings seem often to be found on the waterfront where goods would have been unloaded. Several stone houses belonged to Jews who presumably stored gold and silver in their vaults. Modern street names 'Old Jewry' and the church of St. Lawrence Jewry indicate the principal concentration of Jews in medieval London. On the corner of Aldgate and Jewry Street a stone undercroft was found in 1880, this was not part of a grand house, but the lower part of a corner shop nicely made with carved stone bosses.

So what were these fourteenth century merchant houses like inside? How were the halls, parlours and bedrooms furnished? Merchant's houses were full of colour. Hangings were bought for all the main rooms; made of wool and dyed bright red, blue, purple, orange or green, they covered the plastered or framed walls. Furniture was not upholstered but cushions, covers and cloths of similarly brightly coloured fabrics covered them. We have seen at Clifton House that floors could be tiled with brightly coloured encaustic tiles. In the later fourteenth century there was more tapestry and some walls were panelled and painted with motifs such as flowers or stars and sometime simple heraldic figures such as dragons or unicorns. The hall and parlour would have had tables and benches, moveable goods were stored in chests and sometimes cupboards there were stools and, for business, a desk and chair. Coloured and figured ceramics were everywhere but these were also pewter and sometimes silver plates and other vessels. Owning a horse was a sign of wealth and the larger houses had stables. Stabling very important just as much of a problem as car parking these days. In fact it was worse as horses needed to be fed, their stables furnished with straw, their dung removed and unlike a car which you can park on the street and lock, nobody would leave their valuable horse tied to a post as it would be nicked.



A merchant, called Richard of Southwick, who lived in Cuckoo Lane in Southampton in the 1270s and 1280s had a fine house that was excavated in the 1970s. In one of his rubbish pits were found a seal of a merchant in Normandy called Bernard de Vire, there were broken jugs that came from north west France. A smashed Spanish lusterware plate was in the pit too. Broken wine vessels from Spain were jumbled up with a Spanish leather sheath for a dagger. Analysing the food debris it was found that his family enjoyed fig and grapes as well as English fruits and the pit also contained the skeleton of a small African monkey that must have been brought back to England and acquired as a pet.

The men who lived in these fine timber framed multi-story houses, dining in their halls, closing business deals in their parlours, reaping rents from their shops and investing their profits in fine textiles and exotic goods were an international lot who enjoyed the fruits of their labours and lived in style that some at least thought was above their station. Few during the fourteenth century built houses on an aristocratic scale, but that, as we shall see, changed in the following century when these houses and their owners developed in to something entirely different.

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