= Medieval Merchant 's House =

The Medieval Merchant 's House is a restored late @-@ 13th @-@ century building in Southampton , Hampshire , England . Built in about 1290 by John Fortin , a prosperous merchant , the house survived many centuries of domestic and commercial use largely intact . German bomb damage in 1940 revealed the medieval interior of the house , and in the 1980s it was restored to resemble its initial appearance and placed in the care of English Heritage , to be run as a tourist attraction . The house is built to a medieval right @-@ angle , narrow plan design , with an undercroft to store wine at a constant temperature , and a first @-@ storey bedchamber that projects out into the street to add additional space . The building is architecturally significant because , as historian Glyn Coppack highlights , it is " the only building of its type to survive substantially as first built " ; it is a Grade I listed building and scheduled monument .

= = History = =

= = = 13th to 15th centuries = = =

The Medieval Merchant 's House was built in about 1290 on French Street , Southampton , then a major port and a large provincial town with a population of around 5 @,@ 000 , grown rich from the trade with England 's continental possessions in Europe . The area of Southampton around French Street had been re @-@ planned earlier in the century , reducing the numbers of farm animals kept in and around the houses , driving poorer merchants and craftsmen into the less desirable northern half of the city , and creating a quarter of large , impressive houses , often built in stone with tiled roofs . The original house was designed for use by John Fortin , a prosperous wine merchant , with a vaulted cellar for holding stock , a shop at the front of the property and accommodation for the family ; much of it was built in stone , but it featured a timber front , a fashionable design for the period . At least 60 other houses similar to the Medieval Merchant 's House were built in Southampton at around the same time .

By the 1330s , Southampton 's prosperity was in a slow decline . In 1338 there was a successful French attack on the town , during which various buildings were burned and castle was damaged . The house may have been one of those damaged in the raid , as the south @-@ western corner of the building collapsed around that time and had to be quickly rebuilt ; other alterations , including the addition of a fireplace , may have been carried out at the same time . Southampton 's economy collapsed in the aftermath of the attacks and never fully recovered . The character of French Street began to change , as many houses were sub @-@ divided or redeveloped to fit in more buildings . The Medieval Merchant 's House ceased to be used by major merchants and by 1392 appears to have been rented out to tenants by Thomas Fryke and John Barflet , the latter a descendent of John Fortin , for whom the house was originally built .

During the 15th century the economy of Southampton improved as a result of the Italian wool trade and the presence of many foreign merchants . The Medieval Merchant 's House was acquired by a sequence of established Southampton merchants , but it remained intact as a detached dwelling , unlike many other properties in the neighbourhood that were combined to form the larger homes that became more fashionable in the late 15th century . In the middle of the 16th century , however , Southampton 's economy collapsed once again as trade with Italy declined , taking with it the prosperity of French Street . A new parlour was installed in the house , and a floor was added halfway across the open hall to produce additional sleeping space .

= = = 16th to 20th centuries = = =

The house was transformed into three cottages during the 17th century , which involved a new door and additional fireplaces being added . The economy and status of Southampton did not begin to improve until the 18th century , when it became a noted cultural centre . In 1780 the three cottages

were converted back into a single building , owned by a Mrs Collins as a lodging house for actors . During the Victorian era Southampton saw a huge expansion of its maritime docks and the construction of a new railway line . The Medieval Merchant 's House was converted again , and had become a beer @-@ shop by 1883 , and a popular public house called the Bull 's Head .

Late 20th and 21st centuries

When the Second World War broke out in 1939 the house was being used as a brothel . In 1940 Southampton was heavily targeted during the Blitz . German bombs seriously damaged the house , revealing its medieval interior , and as a result Southampton City Council bought the property . In 1972 it was passed to the Secretary of State for the Environment , before being placed into the care of English Heritage in 1984 .

The decision was taken to restore the Medieval Merchant 's House as a tourist attraction , and the necessary work was carried out between 1983 and 1985 . Academic Raphael Samuel has noted that the restoration was heavily influenced by the late @-@ 20th @-@ century tradition of living history , in which " reinterpretation " gives way to " retrofitting " . The process was also constrained by the damage that had occurred to the post @-@ medieval parts of the building during the late 19th and early 20th centuries . Following archaeological investigations , the house was restored as closely as possible to its medieval condition , removing later material . Where the original medieval parts of the house had been lost , the work was based on archaeological reinterpretation . The finished house was fitted with replica late @-@ 13th @-@ century and 14th @-@ century furniture , and the uniform for the English Heritage staff running the house was originally medieval in design .

The Medieval Merchant 's House on 58 French Street remains a tourist attraction and is a Grade I listed building and scheduled monument .

Architecture

The Medieval Merchant 's House today faces onto French Street and combines walls built of Bembridge and Purbeck stone with a timber frontage . The layout of the house follows a medieval right @-@ angle , narrow plan design , in that the hall stretches away from the street to conserve frontage , and there is no internal courtyard built into the design . Architecturally the house is important because , as historian Glyn Coppack highlights , it is " the only building of its type to survive substantially as first built " .

At the front of the house , on the ground floor , is a reconstructed medieval shop front , from where the owner would have conducted his mercantile business . Behind this is the central hall , originally designed with an open hearth in the middle , but now fitted with a 14th @-@ century Flemish chimney , plastered so as to resemble brickwork . A hallway runs along one side of the hall ; hallways were a traditional feature of the period , although the fashion was eventually abandoned because of the difficulty of lighting them effectively . At the rear of the property is an inner private room , with a decorative ceiling . Beneath the house is an undercroft , or cellar , designed to store barrels of wine at a constant temperature ; the brick floor is 18th @-@ century in origin , however . This is an architectural feature found in several other English coastal and river medieval towns , including Winchester and London .

On the first floor the house is split into east and west bedchambers , linked across the central hall by a gallery . The east bedchamber is at the front of the house , and projects out into the street ? this was a feature used to add space to houses , and is also seen in properties in Shrewsbury , Tewkesbury and York . Some of the makers ' marks of the original builders can still be seen on the timbers in the room . The west bedchamber more closely resembles its 19th @-@ century appearance rather than the medieval , as the Victorian @-@ era ceiling has been left in place . The roof of the house is an identical replacement for the medieval original , tiled with Cornish slate .