

Hull Museum Education

The Significant Buildings and People of High Street

Blaydes House

"No Hull merchant in the 18th century voluntarily exchanged the counting-house for the country house. Many of them owned land but they continued to trade... The Maisters, Sykes and Broadleys created useful estates; the Mowlds, Williamsons, Wilberforces and Peases did not. Many of the richer families left Hull in the early 19th century, and the old... merchant dynasties gradually ceased to trade.

G. Jackson, Hull in the 18th Century



The Blaydes, an influential merchant and shipbuilding family in Hull for in excess of 200 years, built their High Street home in about 1740 adjacent to their counting house, shipyard, wharves and warehouses. The Blaydes family owned a private staithe and it still bears their name today.

The north-end yard near Blaydes House is one of the oldest shipyards in Hull; from the 17th century sailing ships, whalers and warships for the Napoleonic Wars were built there. A well known ship "Bethia", was made in 1784 for Benjamin Blaydes which was passed to the Royal Navy. It became known as "Bounty" of the Mutiny on the Bounty fame.

During their time of prosperity in Hull, the Blaydes family provided the city with five chamberlains, five Sheriffs and three mayors. James Blaydes married Ann Marvell, sister of the poet Andrew Marvell in the 17th century.

The matter of when the High Street residence passed out of the family ownership is not clear, but it seems feasible that they resided there into the 19th century. In 1971 the house was presented to the Georgian Society of East Yorkshire. The house boasts a fine main staircase, displaying the skills of the 18th century Hull craftsmen, and numerous family portraits and studies by various artists adorn the walls. Much of the house is in a conservative style as it served the dual purpose of business premises and living accommodation for the merchant family. Nevertheless, the interior has many features of interest and architectural merit.



The layout of the house is simple: a central hall and staircase with pairs of rooms on either side, a lobby between those on the left and on the right the servants' staircase next to the kitchen. Viewed from the outside, the irregular positions of the chimney stacks and the different roof pitches suggest that the house has been altered and added to over the years, but that the oldest surviving part is that of the kitchen. There are the remains of a lookout at the top from which the shipowner could spy the arrival of his ships in the Humber.

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The front doorstep of the house is cut from massive blocks of black marble, immediately displaying to the Old Town the confidence and opulence of the Blaydes family. The entrance porch of Blaydes House, a doric portico, one of the finest in the area leads to:

The Entrance Hall

The floor is laid with black and white marble squares. On the ceiling is the monogram BB, Benjamin Blaydes, possibly Benjamin who was the town's Chamberlain in 1736, who died in 1771 and in whose memory there is a tablet in St Mary's, Lowgate.

The Office

The room to the left is thought to have been used as the counting house for the business, which is suggested by the lack of ornamentation and the plain vertical wood cladding on the walls. The discreet entrance to the side of the house was built to avoid the inconvenience of business traffic through the main door. It was here that payments to workers and traders took place.

The Partners' Room

The panelled room (to the right) was probably the partners' office. The frieze, the panel moulds and the style of the fireplace are similar to those found in Wilberforce House, which served the same business purpose.

The Tabernacle Room

This room (to the left of the staircase on the ground floor) seems to have been designed as a family dining room. It had a door perhaps for service. Leading out below the stairs to the kitchen area.

The Staircase

This fine example is in line with the fashions of the day. Comments written in 1750 state that "there is no part of a house where the eye is more naturally directed upwards than the staircase; this is the reason why some compartment and ornament of the ceiling is particularly proper".

The sweeping carvings of the handrail are impressive. Plotting and cutting these curves by hand took all the carpenter's skills but in a town of shipwrights the necessary skills were available. The stair balusters are also heavily decorated. As there is no fanlight above the entrance door, the impressive Venetian window on the half-landing had to throw light onto the entrance and stairs.

The Drawing Room

This room on the first floor (to the left opposite) is the largest room in the house. If there had been any panelling in the room it was removed before 1760 and replaced by the plaster cornice, the chimneypiece of white and coloured marbles, and the magnificent boldly-carved doorway. This room was clearly refurbished and redecorated to become the grandest room in the house. It has the dado mould carved with Vitruvian scroll and a richly carved skirting. The walls would have been covered by stretched silk or one of the new painted wallpapers.

The Georgian Society for East Yorkshire Registered Charity