

# Stoke Toll House

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## Summary

The history of Stoke Toll House (SK240759) has not been researched in any detail before. Evidence points to its most likely construction date as around 1759. It seems to have been built in an unusually ornate manner for a toll house to make it complement the grand additions to Stoke Hall which were being undertaken by William Booth at this time. Inspiration from James Paine's designs were likely to have influenced its style.

Evidence to assess whether Stoke Toll House is the same building as Stoke Hall Lodge, mentioned in an article in the Derbyshire Courier in 1905, is inconclusive but it is likely that they are indeed different names for the same building.

Details of some of the owners and tenants are given in the second part of the article.

The house has also been called Stoke Bar, Stoke Toll Bar and Stoke Bar Cottage.



North facing side of Stoke Toll House, 2018. This side faces the minor road called Froggatt Lane or Stoke Lane. The main road from Calver to Grindleford is visible on the right of the photograph.

## Introduction

An article in the Derbyshire Courier of 1905 mentioned a house called "Stoke Hall Lodge". I was unable to place it and turned to the internet for help. A quick search revealed that there was no extant house of this name but that it might have been another name for Stoke Toll Bar in the past. It became apparent that no one had explored and published the history of this rather interesting building and so I decided that this was my next challenge.

I have used the Derbyshire birth, marriage and death registers, electoral registers and census records as well as Ancestry website and the British Newspaper Archive website. I corresponded with the current owner and local people who have knowledge of the history of Stoke. I also asked for help from historic buildings specialists.

## Building Evidence

The toll gate is shown as a line across the road on the Burdett map of 1767 which gives the first documented date for the Toll House (A line like this is the recognised indicator in Burdett's key). There is also a possible indicator on the Fox map of 1760 but I have been unable to locate a map or other documentation before this date which identifies the property.



Burdett's map of Derbyshire, 1791. This is the same as the 1767 map with additions of prominent Estate owners.

Plans of the property made in 1955 before renovation, show that the original building was "two up, two down" with an internal staircase, possibly of the "Derbyshire winder" type passing between the two rooms on the eastern side. It is unclear if the small separate building housing the fuel store and privy on the east side was erected at this time or added at a later date.

The north side of the building is unusually grand and ornate when compared with other local toll houses and particularly when compared to others on the Chesterfield to Hernstone Lane Head Turnpike.

It is orientated with the front, decorated side of the building facing north towards the minor lane (Froggatt Lane/Stoke Lane) where it joins the main Turnpike, rather than the main road itself. This means that this side faces Stoke Hall and supports the idea that it was built to look attractively eye catching from the Hall.

On the west side there is evidence of a blocked door way with a small window positioned closely next to it which would be convenient for collecting toll on the main road. A postcard (see below) confirms the presence of a working door on this side of the cottage. The structure of this door frame is simpler and vernacular in style compared to that of the ornate door frame on the north side. When comparing the size of the toll window in a photograph of 1929 with its present day appearance it seems that in modern times the toll window has been increased in size. There were two possible external doors on the south side; one remains and evidence for the other (or an outer alcove) was seen during renovations. These gave access to the simple one storey extension to the south which can be seen in the postcard and which was added at an unknown date. Another door was present on the east side which gave access to the detached outbuilding via steps.





West and south sides of the building. 1929 (Postcard courtesy of David Turner)

The roof ridge runs across the shortest side of the rectangular building (north south), a most unusual feature, suggesting it was built for appearance rather than by building convention. Because of this unusual roof line, it is possible for the gable on north side of the building to be given the appearance of a pediment with rondel. This circular opening is lined with rough stonework suggesting that it may have contained a plaque or sculptured feature which has been removed in the past.

Alternatively it may have been a window lighting the loft in the roof which has been removed.

Evidence of scorched roof timber suggest that there may have been a fire in the loft and the window may have been damaged and removed at that time.

Rosemary Lockie has drawn to my attention to the fact that Stoke Cottage, at the junction of the Grindleford Road and the old turnpike road to Eyam (now closed), has a rondel in its gable apex with a window. Further comparison shows both buildings have bands of stone work below the rondels linking the flushed mullion windows on the first floor in both buildings. This suggests that Stoke Cottage and the Toll House may have been built around the same time and influenced by similar architectural designs.

The front door on the north side has a steep drop onto the lane and there is no evidence of an integral door step making egress impossible. This may be evidence for a "show" building rather than practical living quarters. Examination of plans of the cottage from 1955 show that this door is false with no internal opening in the wall behind it. This may reflect the structure of the cottage as it was originally built. The original internal partition wall between the two rooms at ground level meet the external wall where the door is positioned. This is also the same at the first floor level where the central window is "blind". This makes it impossible to use the central door and window and unlikely that they had a practical function in the original design.

1729 or 1759?

The house plaque gives its erection as circa.1729. This would mean that the building was erected for a purpose other than toll collection as it was in place before the roads were turnpiked around 1759.

If supporting evidence is found for the 1729 date it would be tempting to think that the building was part of the Stoke Hall Estate and might have had a role as a lodge and/or for accommodation for Estate workers. If the building was to be used as a lodge it is in a typical position on the main road. However it is unusual in that it was erected on the south side of the road junction rather than the north within the curtilage of the Hall. This position is evidence that the building was erected for toll collecting rather than as a lodge integrated into Stoke Park.

The present owner believes that 1729 is a mistranscription of as yet unidentified evidence and should read 1759. This would suggest that the building was erected as a toll house at a similar time to the rebuilding of Stoke Hall and the ornate façade was to complement the style of the new Hall and to enhance its view. It may have been built at the same time as the rebuilding of Stoke Hall dated to 1751 (Present owners give this date and not 1757) which took place under the ownership of Reverend John Simpson. This was reputed to have been designed and constructed by William Booth of Stoney Middleton, using designs which formed the basis of James Paine's *Plans, Elevations and Sections of Noblemen's and Gentlemen's Houses (1767)*. Both Paine and Booth were working nearby on the redevelopment of Chatsworth House at the time.

Alternatively the toll house may have been built under the direction of Sir Henry Bridgeman who occupied Stoke Hall by 1755 after his marriage to John Simpson's daughter. There is evidence that Stoke Hall was still being reconstructed in 1762/9 as masons' marks with an unclear date were found during restoration in the early 2000s.

Because the Hall was still under construction it follows that the Toll House itself could have been designed and built by William Booth using inspiration of James Paine's plans when the Turnpike Trust was upgrading the road to a Turnpike. An examination of Paine's design books by an RIBA librarian looking for comparable features lead to the conclusion that "there had been no whole scale replication of any of his designs but that the door and finials do appear in some designs. Whether Paine's books were an inspiration (for the design of the toll house) is not certain".

It is interesting to note that Booth was born in Grindleford Bridge and he was likely to be on hand when an additional building to the new Hall such as a Toll House/ Lodge was being built.

The Toll House shows features typical of the Palladian Period and similar to the new wings of Stoke Hall with classical symmetrical design. Stone balls are still in place on the two corners and apex of the gable of the toll house and similar balls are present on the Hall roofline. Also the new south and west wings of the Hall were constructed to impress with a very grand appearance. These are the sides of the new Hall which directly overlook the Toll House. It seems likely an attractive "eye catching" building would be built in the manner of Lancelot Brown whose park design was in vogue at this time.

Another feature typical of Paine is shown in the Toll House windows. Those on the upper floor were smaller than those on the ground floor. Brickwork shows evidence of shorter mullioned windows to the first floor windows. These are now taller and the mullions have been removed.

The shape of the internal lintels of the Toll House windows are curved in a manner similar to those of some of the grand rooms in the new wings of the Hall (Restoration Homes televised 16 January 2012). The ground floor room on the west side has a beautiful Derbyshire vernacular fireplace with tall lintel and narrow uprights. This room is likely to have been the parlour and therefore fitted out

more impressively. It is also the room most likely to be seen by travellers on the road and may have been given slightly more elaborate features to impress passers-by as they approached Stoke Hall.

In "The Derbyshire Country House Book" 1991, Craven and Stanley record "A lodge...classical in style stands on the road itself". As the authors have already described the Stables in the text it appears that they are describing the Toll House as a lodge, as there are no other buildings "on the road".

## Owners and occupiers

It is usually the case that toll house buildings were in the ownership of the Turnpike trust and if evidence can be found to support the 1759 date then it is likely that the structure was built as a toll house. Its ornate north elevation suggests that the occupier of the Hall at the time, Sir Henry Bridgeman, may have helped or cajoled the Trust to make the building look attractive from his new Hall. As stated before if the toll house door plaque date of circa 1729 is substantiated then the building is likely to have been built by Rev. John Simpson of Stoke Hall and passed to the Turnpike Trust when this branch of the Chesterfield to Hernstone Lane Head Trust was formed.

Documents in the Matlock record Office show that when Stoke Hall Estate was owned by Henry Bridgeman Simpson in 1865 he bought the toll house from the Chesterfield and Hernstone Lane Head Turnpike Trust when £25 was paid for the building and £5 for the land.

This suggests that tolls were no longer taken at this point on the Turnpike Road from 1865 although the Trust was not disbanded until 1878. The sums arising from tolls at each bar can be found in annual newspaper advertisements for the toll lettings and Stoke Bar always had a very low income when compared with other bars owned by the Trust. For instance in 1832 Stoke Bar had an annual income of £18 whereas all the other bars had income in £100s and frequently no one came forward to let this bar meaning that the Trust itself often managed Stoke Bar. Maybe the tolls eventually did not pay running costs and the bar was removed around 1865. The present owner suggests that this branch of the road was always a minor part of the Chesterfield and Hernstone Lane Head Turnpike network. Tolls for this Turnpike trust are more likely to have been collected by the Bars at Froggatt, Calver and Grindleford Bridge.

To help clarify the reasons for its closure I examined the minutes of the meetings of Turnpike Trust. In the 1864/5 period, the reorganisation of toll collecting around Calver is documented. The weighing machine shed at Calver crossroads was upgraded to a house to collect tolls. The improvements were paid for by Colonel Leslie of Hassop Hall, and the building was leased to the Trust. The toll bars at Stoney Middleton, Calver Old Bridge and Stoke were closed in 1865. No reason for the changes was given but maybe the running three toll houses and one weighing machine within a mile and a half of each other was no longer economical.

David Turner of Calver (who was born in Stoke Parish) recalls seeing evidence that, in the early part of the 1900s Stoke Hall used the cottage for staff accommodation. Examination of the census records and electoral rolls indicate that this may have been the case from the time that the cottage was occupied around 1760 and that some of the families collected tolls in addition to Stoke Hall estate work.

The following people lived in the cottage. Further information on the families (in bold) is given below. Changes of ownership are included.

1759 Built and owned by Chesterfield to Hernstone Lane Head Turnpike Trust?

1759 – 1865 Toll collectors. Tolls advertised 1788 – 1841. British Newspaper Archive.

1815 **Samuel Bennett**, gardener, and Ann and family, possibly 1815-1821. Eyam Parish registers.

1824 Thomas and Hannah Drable (daughter Mary died at Stoke Toll Gate). Thomas recorded as servant not toll collector. Eyam Parish registers.

1841 – 1846 **Grace Key** and family. Eyam Parish registers, Stoke Census.

1850 Tithe award for Stoke – No tenant specified.

1851 – 1857 **John Wragg** with occasional toll collecting locally elsewhere. Stoke census, Baslow census, British Newspaper Archive.

1861 **John Unwin**. Stoke, Rotherham and Norton Censuses.

1865 Ownership passed to Stoke Hall Estate – Henry Bridgeman Simpson, owner with unknown tenant. Derbyshire Archives. D365A/TC 54-57

1871 (possibly) William Cocker gamekeeper. Stoke Census.

1881 Unoccupied. Stoke census.

1885 Ownership passed from Granville Orlando Bridgeman to Michael John Hunter. Title Deeds.

1891 Thomas, quarryman, and Avis Stanley. Stoke Census

1901 and 1911 Harry, gardener, and Susan Hawksworth and family. Stoke Census.

1921 – 1925 Elizabeth Ann Sanderson. Electoral Register.

1930 – 1937 **Walter J. and Sarah Williams**. An old postcard dated 1929 shows a couple outside the unmodernised toll house. Maybe these are the people shown in this photo. Electoral Register, British Newspaper Archive.

1938 Cottage sold by Michael John Hunter to Stoke Hall Estate Ltd. Title Deeds.

1939 Cottage sold by Stoke Hall Estates Ltd. to Emile Viner. Title Deeds.

1939 William, gardener, and Emily Walker, tenants. 1939 Register.

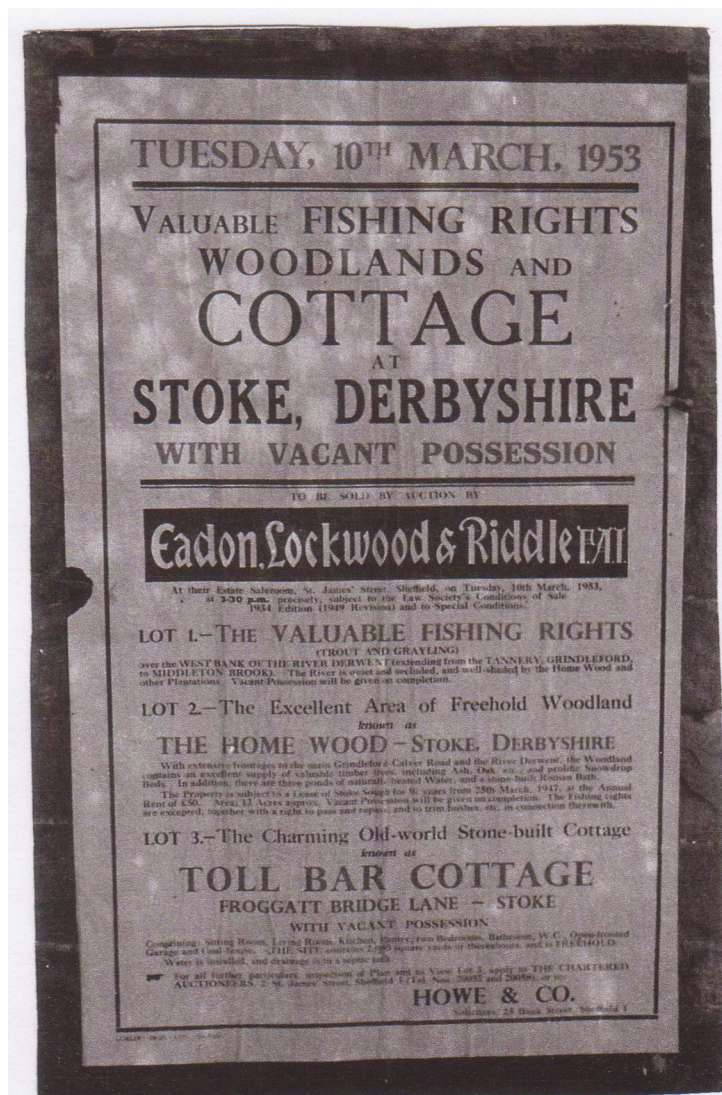
1945 - 1952 Edgar and Alice Austin, tenants. Electoral Register.

1950/1 Ownership passed from Emile Viner to Hedley and Ida Abson when they bought Stoke Hall. Title Deeds.

1953 **Harold Kenneth and Margaret Fletcher** bought the Toll House at auction on 10<sup>th</sup> March for £650. Conveyance signed 22 April. Sale particulars made available by David Turner show that between the 1937 sale advertisement and 1953 sale, a bathroom and water closet had been added



to the amenities as well as an open fronted garage all within a plot increased to 2000 square yards. They were the first owner occupiers.



1955 Planning permission given for a modern extension. PDNPA planning file.

1980 Permission given for extension works on east side of house. PDNPA planning file.

2010 Ownership passed to Fletcher children on death of parents. Title deeds.

2012 House sold to Dr. Susan Nicholls on 17 August. Title Deeds.

## Additional information

### Joseph Bennett

An article appeared in the Derbyshire Courier on the 10 August 1905, about the Bennett family called "Hassop Ghost". Joseph Bennett said that he was born in Stoke Hall Lodge in 1816 and that his father was a gardener at Stoke Hall. His christening record in Eyam, and those of his three brothers, list the Bennett residence as Stoke Bar between 1815 and 1821. I am unsure if Stoke Bar was sometimes called Stoke Hall Lodge or if he is referring to another house in the Stoke Bar area (although in records examined so far there were no other houses nearby). In the article Joseph does not record any toll collection activities but it was not uncommon in census records for the main



resident living in a toll house to list another occupation while the family collected tolls making this evidence inconclusive.

Consulting birth and marriage registers for Hassop Church it was likely that the Bennett family had moved to Hassop by 1825 where Samuel Bennett became the Gardener for the Eyre family. Joseph, the subject of the article, was a gardener with his father and eventually became a tenant farmer on the Hassop Estate. He married Charlotte Pynrell in the Catholic Church at Hassop and their children were baptised there. Correspondence with Anne Thomas, a relative by marriage, confirms that the Bennetts were Catholics and it would be logical to make the move closer to the community around Hassop.

#### Grace Key

In 1841 the toll collector was Grace Key/Kay who was a widow living there with her mother Mary Briddock (Bradock) and two of her children, John 9 and Mary 8. She was from Edale and had married William Key who was from an Eyam family. There is evidence from christening registers that the family lived in Grindleford Bridge from 1829 but there is no positive evidence that they were toll collecting at this time as his occupation is given as labourer. He died in 1833. Her eldest daughter Jane Key was a female servant at the Willis Farmhouse at Hill House (possibly Bank Top Farm today), Bank Top Lane, Grindleford Bridge. Conditions may have been hard as Jane died at Stoke Bar in 1842 and Mary died in Brampton in 1845. By the 1851 census Grace had remarried and was living in Brampton Chesterfield and had another daughter also called Mary.

#### John Wragg

In 1851 the toll was collected by John Wragg who was unmarried and aged 72. He was a professional toll collector from a Baslow family and was recorded collecting tolls at Baslow Bar in 1855. He must have returned to Stoke Bar by 1857 because there is a newspaper report of a burglary at the Toll Bar in the middle of the night. The thieves broke a window to make an entry and stole 8/-, a silver watch and a ham worth 18/-. John Wragg had returned to Baslow for the 1861 census and died there in 1863. His advanced age and lack of other household members to help with duties again supports the suggestion that the gate was infrequently used at this time.

#### Joseph Unwin

In 1861 the toll was collected by Joseph Unwin 45 and family, Hannah 47 and children Laetitia 16 and Harriott 15. He was a career toll keeper but combined this role with other occupations such as coal agent (1851, in Rotherham) and clerk (1871 in Norton, Sheffield).

#### Walter and Sarah Williams

On 24 October 1937 the Derbyshire Times reported that the cottage was turned into a hospital where doctors worked by candlelight putting stitches into the wounds of six injured in a two car accident at the junction by the toll house. Medical supplies and hot water was sent from Stoke Hall and eventually an ambulance carried four of the injured to hospital in Sheffield. Mr Williams was a witness to the accident and appeared in court later in the year when one of the drivers was prosecuted for driving a car in a dangerous manner which resulted in a £10 fine and no endorsement to his licence.



Harold Kenneth and Margaret Fletcher.

David Turner has many childhood memories of the Fletchers because he was friendly with their son. He recalls that both Ken and Peggy Fletcher, as they were known by everyone, were teachers. Mr. Fletcher ended his career as Deputy Head teacher at Hope Valley College and Mrs. Fletcher taught at several local primary schools.

Also Mr. Fletcher was a very practical man and constructed both extensions to the property himself in the 1950s and 1980s.

Another memory is related to the old water supply to the cottage. Before it was connected to the mains water in recent years, the water supply came from two reservoirs located in a field near the Eyam New Road. In springtime, the Fletchers would often turn on the tap to find tadpoles flowing out, which David witnessed himself.

Evidence from newspaper articles also provides more information about the Fletcher family. Their daughter Ruth was in the process of clearing out the house after her parents had died, when she was tragically drowned in a diving accident in Northumberland. She was doctor, sportswoman and an experienced diver. The coroner said "She must have been an inspirational person, and her life seems to have been full of hard work, achievement and service to her local community." (The Journal, 25th June 2013)

### Acknowledgements and thanks

Sue Nicholls has been a mine of information about the history of the building and considered all my musings about dates and structures with a readiness to discuss them all. And she fortified us with tea and cake.

David Turner has passed on his local knowledge to me very generously and sent me a copy of the old postcard and sales particulars in his possession.

Rosemary Lockie has an invaluable website and knows Stoke very well. She helped by providing contacts and local detail.

Philip Heath and Rebecca Waddington made useful comments about the building history.

Cathy Wilson of RIBA searched Paine's design books held in their library and made useful comments about the Palladian style of Architecture.

Ann Thomas has given me additional notes of the Bennett family from her family history research.

Please contact [annhall4@hotmail.com](mailto:annhall4@hotmail.com) with any queries or suggestions.