

Outside Saint Peter's Gate

Austin Friary 1342 – 1538

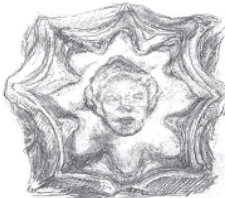
The uneven and lumpy surface of the field below is now the only visible feature to suggest that this was once the site of a medieval monastery, the Austin (Augustinian) Friary, one of a number of religious houses flourishing in and around Stamford in the 14th and 15th centuries. There are, unfortunately, no structural remains or written records to give us an idea of what the buildings may have looked like.

This site was first occupied by a small house of Friars of the Sack, an order suppressed in 1317, their land here eventually being granted to the Austin Friars. In 1342 Robert de Wodehous, archdeacon of Richmond, had a licence to build and found an oratory and dwelling houses for twelve Austin friars, and by 1345 at least part of the monastic church had been built.

There were only six friars when the house was eventually dissolved in 1538. The buildings were soon destroyed and the stone removed. The site was excavated in 1712 and, from descriptions made at the time by local antiquarians Forster and Peck, it seems that the monastic buildings had been arranged around a central courtyard. Inconsistencies and a lack of precision in these descriptions unfortunately rule out making a satisfactory reconstruction. The earthworks in the field are no help as they are mainly spoil heaps from the 1712 excavations, though the large rectangular depression in the middle may have been a pond of relatively late date.



Forster recorded that human bones and glazed tiles had been unearthed and also "stone pillars and windows.... which render the structure very magnificent". Artefacts found on the site were taken to embellish other buildings around Stamford. The finest surviving piece is a cusped panel with a carved head at its centre, possibly a section of panelled walling or the side of a tomb chest (though not a roof boss as formerly thought). This was recovered in the 1980s from a building in the High Street and is now in Stamford Museum.



Stamford Civic Society

By kind permission of Burghley House Preservation Trust Limited

Hopkins' Hospital 1770

The building behind you, Hopkins' Hospital, was built as an almshouse for poor married couples following demolition of the medieval St Peter's Gate in 1770. The site, on the line of the town wall, was given by the Corporation to the Mayor, Alderman John Hopkins, for this purpose, the Earl of Exeter donating an additional strip of land for the gardens. Financed by public subscription and donations, the building, which heralds the arrival in Stamford of Gothic Revival architecture, was completed by 1773.

The extension next door was added in 1869. In 1962 the rooms were re-planned and several doors blocked.



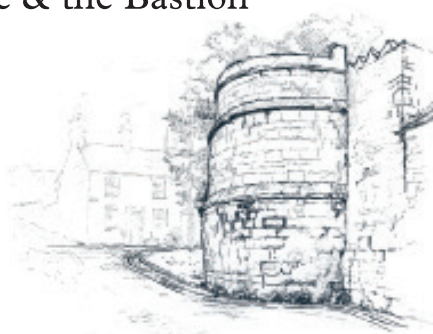
The scrolled cartouche between the central windows displays the arms of Stamford. The small fragment of medieval window tracery immediately above, and the gargoyle of a crowned head set into it, may well be remnants from the Austin Friary.



St. Peter's Gate & the Bastion

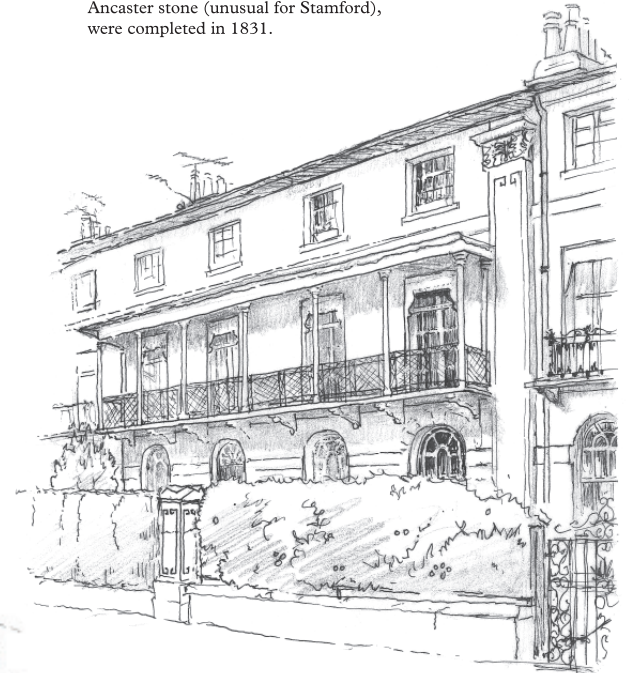
St. Peter's Gate was one of seven principal gates of medieval Stamford. By the late 18th century these ancient stone structures, which no longer served any useful defensive purpose, had become serious obstacles to the increasing traffic. St. Peter's Gate was eventually demolished in 1770. The adjacent town wall was flattened at the same time to provide the site for Hopkins' Hospital on the south side of the street.

Petergate, the narrow road running uphill from St Peter's Gate at the eastern (town) end of Rutland Terrace, leads past the Bastion, a round defensive tower which is now the best surviving fragment of the late 13th century town walls.



Rutland Terrace 1829 – 1831

Stamford is aptly described as a town of discrete buildings. Terraces and groups of buildings forming a unified design are notably few. The elegant late Regency terrace immediately to the right (north) is outstanding as one of those few. There are twenty houses with arched entrances, good cast-iron balconies and incised pilasters with crisp anthemion ornamentation to their capitals. Those to the east, faced with stucco, were completed first, in 1829; those to the west, with a better quality ashlar facing of Ancaster stone (unusual for Stamford), were completed in 1831.



Built on the site of a former bowling green, this development was intended to meet the aspirations of a growing and prosperous new middle class who wanted to escape from the increasingly congested and unhealthy conditions within the town. Rutland Terrace was a well chosen location enjoying the pleasing outlook colourfully described by Francis Peck, writing about the Austin Friary back in the 1720s, as "sweet, pleasant and delightful as if here nature wanted no assistance from art". It remains unspoilt to this day.

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Drawings by Jean de Gale

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