

Sparrowe House, by F. Tibbenham, 1930's

Imagine yourself walking by Sparrowe House in Ipswich, England during the late sixteenth century. The smell of fish surrounds you as you stroll through Buttermarket. Looking toward the harbor you see bundles of wool being shipped to Germany. If you look carefully you will see that the hustle and bustle of this sixteenth century market town is represented on the façade of this wonderful building. Below the central pane of each bay-window are pargetted (plaster cast) images of different figures each one representing the four known continents of the world during the sixteenth century, Africa, America, Asia and Europe. (Australia was not yet discovered.) These parget figures were added to the façade in 1567 to represent the importance of wool trade and its impact on all corners of the known world. You will notice more molded elements between the bays; these designs are symbols of earth, water, and air, the basic ingredients of life in the minds of Europeans of the sixteenth century.



The owners of this Ancient House, as it was originally called, included knights, merchants and local politicians. Holding the record for longest residency, over 300 years, is the Sparrowe family. Their legacy began in 1601 when William Sparrowe bought the house from George Copping and established a grocery and spice business in it. From then on the Sparrowes made an impact in Ipswich through their efforts of improving the town and also through local politics. Not only did the town reap the benefits of their occupancy but the house became known by their name.

Throughout the Sparrowes' residency, royals such as Charles II and George I came in contact with the family. Oral traditions say that Charles II, while in exile for his Catholic leanings, hid in Sparrowe House. This rumor has been "verified" by the fact that the royal crest of Charles II is above the central door of the building and by the fact that the attic contained Catholic relics and a locket with a picture of the exiled king. A painted portrait of Charles II is among the contents of the house as well. Another royal portrait is also present in Sparrowe House- a full length portrait of George I. George I was a friend of the Sparrowes and is known to have visited the house gifting its owner, John Sparrowe with a portrait of his majesty.

Today the full size Sparrowe House is owned by the Ipswich Borough Council. It was renovated in 1984 and the building contains commercial shops. Viewing the miniature replica allows the curious mind to travel back in time and learn of its history and the history of the town of Ipswich, England. Through this experience, the observer truly leaps into a mini-time machine.