

# Tiverton Almshouse Trust

## John Greenway Chapel



### Background

It is believed that John Greenway, who built the chapel and almshouses attached, was born in 1460 and died in 1529. He started life as a weaver and there are no records to show how he acquired enough capital to become a clothier. He obviously had a flair for trading and was admitted to The Draper's Company in London in 1497 which was a great step forward in his career.

When the chapel was completed, John Greenway was actively trading in wine as well as making considerable profit by buying wool in Ireland. In 1524 John Greenway's property was assessed at £150 making him the richest man in Tiverton.

### Chapel

The chapel, which is Grade II listed, was built sometime between 1517 and 1520 and shows the Draper's coat of arms and the staple mark that he would have used to mark out his goods for trading. At the time, not only was he a City of London merchant, but he also traded from Topsham, Barnstaple and Dartmouth to as far afield as Portugal and Spain. As early as 1482 he had a ship of his own called "The Mary" and in 1517 he had a whole fleet. His ships are carved in stone across the front of the chapel that he built adjoining St Peter's Church in 1517.

### Rebuild

Sadly, in 1732, the great fire of Tiverton which started in a bakery opposite the almshouses destroyed much of which John Greenway had built, however, two figures were saved from the fire – one of St Peter holding the keys of heaven with the motto "O St Peter pray for us" and the other of St Paul. Both were re-embedded in the wall. On the porch is the staple mark of John Greenway and two heraldic emblems – one showing the royal arms of England and France encircled by the Garter and the other the arms of the Courtenay family. Near these the carving of an eagle holding in its talons a bundle of sticks appears twice.

## Inscriptions

Visitors will note the many inscriptions appealing to the public and the alms people for prayers in favour of John and Joan Greenway.

Under the cornice, it says

“Have grace ye men and ever pray

For the sowle of John and Joane Greenway”

On the side of the wall you can also see under the gothic niche

“Pr. For John and Joane Gr.”

Both John and Joan Greenway are buried in the other chapel that John Greenway built adjoining St Peter’s Church in Tiverton.



## Tiverton Almshouse Trust

The origin of the Trust dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and, in particular, to three benefactors who were all wealthy Tiverton Merchants (John Greenway, John Waldron and George Sles). Today, there are 41 almshouses behind the chapel and a further 43 almshouses. These are for people aged 60 years or over in financial or housing need. The Trust also provides residential accommodation and has a number of commercial properties within the town including shops, offices and flats available to let on assured shorthold tenancies.

## Visit

The Trust will hold open days throughout the year for the general public to be able to see this important historic chapel. If you would like to visit the chapel, please look at our website for dates or contact us below:

**Office Hours:** 08.30am – 4.00pm Monday to Friday

**Telephone:** 01884 251444

**Address:** The Market House 18 Bampton Street, Tiverton, Devon EX16 6AA

**email:** [trust@tivertonalmshouse.org.uk](mailto:trust@tivertonalmshouse.org.uk)

**website:** [www.tivertonalmshouse.org.uk](http://www.tivertonalmshouse.org.uk)

