

Pete Smith, who has made a study of Nottingham Town Houses, was our speaker at our February meeting.

In 1697, Celia Fiennes, a lady of “remarkable originality and independence” passed through Nottingham describing it as “the neatest town”. A few years later, Daniel Defoe was not so complimentary. Narrow Marsh and Broad Marsh were decidedly not “neat”. It would seem Nottingham was a town of contrasts: Paradise to Misery. This evening, Pete concentrated on Paradise.

He explained how the appearance of houses owned by the wealthy continually changed. Early roofs were usually hipped with dormer windows. Later roofs were hidden by a parapet. Casement windows were changed for sash windows and eventually plate glass.

Pete’s examples were chiefly on Castlegate, once considered the most beautiful and dignified street in the whole city. One house was studied in detail. Stanford House, on the corner of Castlegate and Stanford Street, was changed beyond recognition. In 1775, the original street frontage was given a completely new facade with a venetian window above an imposing portal. Later came a new garden frontage with a two-storied bow staircase window. The side between, facing Stanford Street, still looks much as it would have done when first built. An architectural sandwich!

Pete Smith also showed us handsome houses on High Pavement, Middle Pavement and St. James’ Street. In one, an oval entrance hall and curved staircase was being restored. It is reassuring to know these eighteenth century town houses are still cared for and used.

After this stimulating illustrated talk, those of us present will walk along these streets with new interest and appreciation.