

# Buildings and dwellings of Krakow in the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century – descriptions contained in the city deeds

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**Abstract:** “Wiertelnicy” – those were City officers appointed by the City Council to oversee the construction industry in the old Krakow. Preserved in the state Archives are the City books of records that contain minutes and rapports regarding the activities of the “Wiertelnicys” – often referred to as the “construction police” or as it probably would be more adequate the old-time city engineers. The “wiertelnicys” conducted site reviews. The preserved documentation of their activities such as divisions and subdivisions of real property; preformed estimates of value of real property; damage assessment (particularly, as it was pertaining to border or division walls, and prescription of construction works that were necessary to ensure building and construction safety constitutes an very important source of historic documentation in regard to city engineering as it allows to follow not only the history of the physical constructions of buildings and dwellings themselves, but also the technology and technical solutions i.e. plumbing or other necessary adaptations needed by particular workshops or craftsmen’s sites. It can be observed that some solutions that were used by the owners of the buildings were frequently cost driven and consequently of a very provisory nature. Later on, much greater investments were necessary to avoid imminent “construction catastrophes”. The information contained in the City public records of the “Wiertelnic’s Deeds” give also some insights that are not directly related to the construction requirements or activities themselves, but were the predominant factors that determined the physical shape of the building or a site.

**Keywords:** buildings, Krakow, construction police, real property, plumbing, construction requirements, Old Polish period

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## INTRODUCTION

Research into former urban buildings is a field of cooperation between archaeologists, architects, historians, art historians, and often other specialists from many other spheres. It is difficult to decide which sphere is the most important – it depends on the epoch, access to sources and the state of the investigated buildings. Researchers must trace various matters concerning property over a period of centuries, which when combined paint a full picture of the building’s history. Basic questions are; who were the owners of the houses

and the tenants of the flats, which techniques were the buildings constructed using, what was the basic technical infrastructure used, what was the artistic value of the interior decoration and the façade, what were the building and maintenance costs, how were the property footages planned and utilized, and how was the question of contact with public space solved? The presented research survey was formulated by Kizik (2009: 12, 13) for Gdańsk, but can be successfully used for other towns, including Krakow. Sowina (2004: 15) stated that, “there is no doubt today that the best results are obtained by inter-disciplinary research, that is,

research undertaken jointly by historians, urban planners and archaeologists using and comparing all basic source types, in other words, written information, archaeological reports, iconographical sources and preserved monuments”.

When we take a look at Krakow’s townhouses and recall their frequent mediaeval origin, a natural question appears – how did they look in the past? Because, after all, successive owners changed them in accordance with the requirements of fashion in architecture and art. Is it possible to recreate at least some elements of their former shape? Researchers into the history of Krakow have undertaken such attempts and have tried to describe how Krakow’s townhouses looked in previous centuries. One such attempt is the work of Adam Chmiel under the collective title of *Domy krakowskie* (Krakow’s houses) published in the series “Biblioteka Krakowska” (Krakow’s Library). Currently, we are able to create a visualization of townhouses in former times based on inter-disciplinary research results. In this way, a reconstruction of Krakow’s Rynek Główny (Main Market Square) was formed in the Historical Museum of Krakow within the framework of the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Krakow being granted its town rights (Lichończak-Nurek red. 2007: 99–129, 199, 202, 414; Komorowski & Sudacka 2008: 68, 77, 92, 109, 111, 112).

## RESEARCH METHODS

I have analysed the inspection acts (*Acta quartaliensium*), stored in the National Archives in Krakow, in terms of their usefulness while creating a picture of Krakow’s townhouses. These materials, due to the task of the office that created them, represent a potentially excellent source. The inspectors (appointed by the city council to oversee building construction in Krakow) were sworn local clerks, who could be called “building police”, active in Krakow until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They were nominated by the council and acted on its recommendations; therefore they began clerical activities only when the council, with the mayor as its head, recognized the validity of an application. They were sworn surveyors and authorities in all building aspects. They performed official inspections connected with land and building property, and settled property

border disputes. They checked the adherence to building regulations, conducted local inspections in the area of building damage, especially in property border walls, stating the necessity to perform building work for safety reasons. They also confirmed the repair work undertaken together with the costs incurred. For their services they received fees from the parties (Mecherzyński 1845: 226–234, Ptaśnik 1949: 257, *Księga...* 1997: VI, Góralski 2000: 175, Suproniuk 2006: 57, 58, 66, 70, 71). During these inspections conducted “on the ground”, in other words, on site, a protocol (or its draft) was created, which was later entered into the council records (before a separate series of books was established, the protocols were entered to the town record books). In Krakow’s Archives, there are 21 record books containing entries from 1568–1794 and 21 sets of loose acts (in other words, the afore-mentioned drafts and ready protocols as well as entries from record books) from the years 1568–1808. Loose acts were divided according to streets and, if there was no such information, according to the owner’s name (rkps). Of course, the inspectors did not describe every property, only those in which disputes appeared. Some buildings have extensive documentation, but the inspections of others are found sporadically or not at all. Inspections contain a great deal of interesting information, both for historians wanting to establish a list of successive property owners, and for researchers investigating the building itself under various aspects. One problem is matching the description to a particular property, here it is necessary to know the names of its successive owners, and it would be helpful to know about the owners of neighbouring properties.

## RESEARCH RESULTS – DESCRIPTIONS OF OLD BUILDINGS IN KRAKOW

I will provide a few examples from the inspection acts with interesting details about the former appearance of buildings.

The most representative part of a building is its façade, in other words, how the front of townhouses is described in inspection reports. Also important for research into the architecture of townhouses, and often also when creating the list of owners, is to establish when significant changes

took place in the building's appearance. This is because the change of owner was often connected with a change in the building's construction. One example is the townhouse at Rynek Główny 22, whose owner according to the tax register records from 1764 was Dominik Wielowiejski arms Półkozic, a Krakow town clerk. In October 1767, a description was made of the repaired townhouse, then belonging to his widow Honorata Wielowiejska, also a Krakow town clerk. In the inspection acts we can read that the two-storey façade was extensively renovated, re-plastered and painted, and that it was decorated with stucco work and the owner's coat of arms (rkps 1410: 25). In a description from 1733 concerning the townhouse at Rynek Główny 32B (part of the current no. 32, a former corner building) we know that the building, which belonged until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to Arcybractwo Miłosierdzia (the Brotherhood of Mercy), was renovated and inspectors had to estimate its value after the renovation. The façade of the townhouse was plastered, whitened and painted. On the corner of the building, a bar serving to hang a garland, signifying the sale of wine in the townhouse, was mounted. New paving stones were laid in front of the building, reaching as far as the public road (rkps 1384: 1297). In the inspection records we can also find a description of later damage to this townhouse caused by a gunpowder explosion in October 1736 (rkps 1384: 1586–1588, rkps 1408: 393–394, 397–404, *Książka...* 1884: 238). In 1789, a description and valuation of the townhouse at Rynek Główny 39, belonging to the Stachowicz family, was made. It is interesting that the "top", in other words the roof and attic of the townhouse, was common with the neighbouring building, no. 40 (rkps 1396: 313, Komorowski & Sudacka 2008: 329, 331). We can often find out from the descriptions about the elements of the façade which have not survived until today. A good example is at Rynek Główny 31A (former corner building). In a description from 1732, we can read that, between the windows of the first floor, there was a picture of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, protected by a dome of white sheet metal (rkps 1408:369). In the townhouse at Rynek Główny 9 in 1732, the façade had a stone lion, with a stone unicorn underneath (rkps 1408: 351). Sometimes, elements of the façade, which do not exist anymore, were the basis for a building's name, an example of which is the

townhouse at Rynek Główny 21, known as "Under the Evangelists". As we can see in the description from 1761, in the townhouse known as Morsztynowska, there was a balcony with an entrance from the first floor, supported by four stone pillars, decorated with an iron grid and wooden figures of the four Evangelists (rkps 1409: 425, Wawel-Louis 1890: 119–121, Komorowski & Sudacka 2008: 293).

The names of townhouses used in documents from the period, including those in inspection acts, often show the name of the owner, even from many years before. An example is the townhouse at Mikołajska 22, which in an inspection from 1752 was defined as the one formerly known as Wadowitzowska (rkps 1406: 347). From the information contained in other sources, we know that the owner of this property in the years 1618–1623 was Father Marcin Vadovius, a priest from the Church of Saint Florian in Kleparz (Follprecht 2008: 209). For unknown reasons, his short ownership of the building was set into the name of the building, used almost half a century later. When trying to establish the property owners, inspection acts are very useful, because they can include the names of the owners of the three neighbouring townhouses, as the location of the building was defined by giving the names of the owners of the neighbouring properties (sometimes even a previous name, if it was still in commonly use). In some cases, while describing the property, the owners of the properties behind the building were also listed.

Analysing the inspection records, we can see how differently the property location was defined in former times. In May 1608, the townhouse known as Czeczotkowska, which currently has the address of Wiślna 1, was described. In the inspection entered in the town records, it was described as a corner building, lying on św. Anny (rkps 457:86), however, in the inspection records it was described as lying in the Market Square, between Wiślna and św. Anny 9 (rkps 1378: 45). Both protocols state that the rear entrance to the building was located on św. Anny. In inspections we find interesting information about the entrance gates to the townhouses. In a description from 1704 concerning the townhouse at Rynek Główny 36B (formerly, the second building from the corner), it was stated that the entrance gate to the property was situated at Sławkowska 1, where the entrance of the rear building, in other words,

the back building, was converted into stables (rkps 1384:44). In the case of the townhouse at Mikołajska 22 from, among others, references in an inspection report from 1752, we know that the rear building had an entrance from św. Krzyża 11 (rkps 1406: 348). In the townhouse at Rynek Główny 9 in 1732, on both sides of the entrance doors were stone columns, with stone sculptures of people above. The door-frame was stone, the doors wooden, covered with iron, and there was a gate inside (rkps 1408:351). In the description of the townhouse at św. Jana 12 from 1776, an iron decorative grid found above the doors was mentioned (rkps 1393: 192). This grid still exists today, with the year 1647 inscribed, connected with the owner of the townhouse at that time, Krzysztof Krauze (Chmiel 1924:175). An interesting entry from 1749 concerns the townhouse at Szpitalna 18, belonging to the Order of the Virgins of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This included information about the former entrance to the chapel in the façade (rkps 1386:473).

An important part of townhouses is the roof, therefore its description, more or less precise, is always found in the building descriptions. In a description from 1772 concerning Rynek Główny 10, it was noted that the whole roof construction was completely new and was covered with a new shingle roof. The reference to the roof which was plastered around testifies to the then functioning attic (rkps 1408: 440, Komorowski & Sudacka 2008: 109). In an inspection from 1780 concerning the townhouse at Grodzka 35, purchased by the Frelichs, we find out that part of the roof had been changed shortly beforehand, however, the remaining part was still in very bad condition, and the roof construction was old and damaged. Above the attic was a summer-house, which was covered by a new roof (rkps 1394:387). A reference to a summer-house on the roof is also found in the description of the townhouse at św. Jana 15B from 1645 (rkps 1379: 212–213). In the townhouse at Rynek Główny 32A in 1727, there was an entrance from the attic to a summer-house with six glass windows (rkps 1384: 1039). In the description of the townhouse at Floriańska 28B from 1632, there is information about a lantern located in the roof above the entrance (rkps 1378: 499–500).

In each building inspection, we find mainly brief references to windows, restricted to their

condition. However, there were also more detailed descriptions, such as the one for the townhouse at Rynek Główny 41 from 1786, where on the first floor there were two double windows overlooking the Market Square, English ones, with the whole pane and new oak frames. These windows had wooden shutters. In the second room, there were two double windows onto the Market Square, English, with oak frames, glass panes, also with shutters. On the second floor were four larger windows overlooking the Market Square, with four smaller ones above them, with oak frames, divisions with glass panes in wooden frames held by putty (rkps 1410: 311).

Usage and maintenance of property border walls was a particularly frequent cause of conflict. In the case of some properties, e.g. the townhouses at Rynek Główny 7 and 8, the course of the wall dividing the properties changed during the centuries. Probably, in the Middle Ages, both buildings belonged to the same owner and were considered as one building, and the result of ownership changes was the formation of enclaves, legally belonging to the neighbour. We can find their descriptions in inspections from July 1570, carried out after an application by Sebastian Montelupi, and within the framework of the agreement with the owners of townhouse no. 8 – Szymon Ronenberg and Jan Baptysta Revexla – a straight border line was set (*Księga...* 1997: 109–112, Komorowski & Follprecht 1998: 16–18). Border disputes between the owners of the two townhouses lasted, however, for centuries – in the inspection report from 1743, we can read about two new columns and a partially new border wall, four and a half ells high. Because this wall's condition was deteriorating, inspectors had to decide which neighbour was responsible (rkps 1386: 240–241). The owners at Rynek Główny 7 were also in dispute with the owners of the property on the other side, the Szara townhouse (Rynek Główny 6). In a description from 1780, we can find interesting information written by the inspectors – at the height of the first floor, the wall was 3.5 ells thick, and half belonged to each property, so the inspectors designated its centre. It turned out that this point was located in a place where a haberdasher had his stall in front of the townhouses (rkps 1394:409). In the event of necessary repairs of border walls, the inspectors decided who was responsible for the damage and

how the cost of repair work should be divided. In August 1761, while assessing the state of the wall between the townhouses at św. Jana 10 and 12, the inspectors decided that the cause of the damage from townhouse no. 12 was based on the heavy damaged pots resting against the wall, and the unsuitable sewage system. Meanwhile, for townhouse no. 10 the main influence on the wall was the sewage system. The inspectors considered that the greater damage was from townhouse no. 12 and, as a result, its owners were responsible for the cost of the repair work in the proportion of 3 to 1 (rkps 1389: 315-317).

A very important element of buildings in those days was porches, which were mainly wooden. Sometimes, however, we find out from inspection descriptions that they had previously been built of bricks, as described for the townhouse at św. Jana 12 from 1756 and 1761. At that time, there were only some visible traces of the previous vaulting porch, which had been replaced by a wooden one (rkps 1388: 194, rkps 1389: 316, rkps 1405: 223).

A common reason for destruction, both of border walls and buildings, was the sewage system. Inspections concerning the use of water from the turn of the XVI and XVII centuries were presented by Sowina (2009, 2011: 269–273), however, these issues are also found in later inspection records. The problem was with gutters. In 1744, in the description of the townhouse at św. Anny 3, it was stated that the building was full of water, because the gutter which took water from this townhouse to the cross-street, in other words, Jagiellońska, had been blocked (rkps 1386: 286). The next inspection from the following year shows that the problem had not been solved, because the gutter was filled with stones and rubble 8 ells high and, due to this, water did not flow into it, but instead flowed under the rear building, causing its destruction (rkps 1386: 339). However, there were also positive descriptions in these matters, such as in 1678 in the townhouse at Grodzka 35, where it was stated that there had for many years been a cesspool as deep as a well, well-timbered, to which water from the gutter flows and does not damage the walls (rkps 1402: 63). Inspections also allow the localisation of wells in the town, which is important as they were not located in every property. Sometimes the descriptions included, as for example in the townhouse at Rynek Główny 32A

in 1727, information that the well was near the window of the lower room of the rear building, there was an iron crown on iron bars over the well, the bucket was covered, and the crank for removing the bucket had a wooden winch, line and a piece of chain 3 ells long (rkps 1384: 1039). On a few occasions we can also find references to additional appliances connected with water usage in the building. One example in 1704 referred to a bathroom with a copper boiler on the first floor of the townhouse at Rynek Główny 36B (rkps 1384: 44), whereas in 1743 there was information about cranks for taking water to the third floor of the townhouse at Rynek Główny 14 (rkps 1386: 259). An important element of the local sewage system was supplying water to receiving pits, whose brief descriptions can also be found in inspections, for example, in the townhouse at Sławkowska 25B from 1638, or the townhouse at Sławkowska 25D from 1650 (rkps 1379: 8, 326).

Information concerning the activity of craftsmen conducted in the grounds of properties is also important, because nothing remains of some buildings, for example, breweries, mainly wooden ones. Often the entire fittings of the brewery are described, which allows the changes in the production process to be traced. This information was successfully used by the authors of the work about Krakow's malt-houses at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Dryja & Sławiński 2010). For researchers of this subject, an interesting subject might be how the locations of the breweries in Krakow were decided upon, for example, in 1645 in the townhouse at Floriańska 44 and the townhouse at św. Jana 15B (rkps 1379: 212–213, 220–221). In 1726, a brewery was located in the townhouse at Szpitalna 32 (known as Półka), belonging to the Holy Spirit Hospital (rkps 1384:764). We can also find, in the inspections, descriptions of rooms designated for trading, such as in the townhouse at Rynek Główny 14 from 1743 (rkps 1386: 256) or at Rynek Główny 32A from 1727 (rkps 1384: 1034). The activity of craft workshops was often the cause of disputes between neighbours, one example being the accusations of Piotr Robertson, owner of the townhouse at Floriańska 35, from 1681 and 1690, of burdensome noise connected with the activity in the neighbouring townhouse, no. 37, of a coppersmith, who built a huge chimney with two bellows, and anvils in

front, with which boilers were shaped (rkps 1383: 155, 414, Chmiel 1917: 122).

Descriptions of the internal fittings are also interesting, but unfortunately they are generally very brief. In 1649, in the townhouse at Szpitalna 17, there was mention of a cupboard for glasses which was in bad condition and destroyed benches under the window in a room (rkps 1379: 290–291). In 1727, while describing the Margrabska townhouse in the Market Square (no. 47), among others, the following were mentioned; in one of the offices there was a plaster sculpture standing on a wooden base, as well as a ceiling made by a stucco-worker and an oak floor, laid in slabs (rkps 1384: 804). From the inspection descriptions we know that, in the townhouse at Grodzka 35 in 1739, the main steps to the first floor were wooden (rkps 1384: 1695–1700), whereas in the townhouse at św. Jana 12 in 1776, there were old, worn-out stone steps (rkps 1393:194, 197). An interesting element of the fittings of townhouses are stoves – in the townhouse at Grodzka 35 in 1739, on the ground floor was a floral stove on stone foundations, connected to a fire-place with iron sheet metal located in the vestibule, as well as five green ceramic tile stoves (rkps 1384: 1697). In 1780, the same townhouse included an old tile stove on foundations, in other words, wooden legs, heating two rooms and a reredos chimney (rkps 1394: 384–385).

A large space in the townhouse inspections is taken by descriptions of cellars. In the townhouse at Sławkowska 25D from 1650, even the dimension of one of the cellars, which was entered through one of the rooms, was given (rkps 1379: 326). It was noted whether the entrance to the cellar was from the street, or if there was a window, like in 1638 in the townhouse at Sławkowska 25B, or in 1646 in the townhouse at Floriańska 30 (rkps 1379: 8, 225). Sometimes, there were descriptions of the cellar entrances located at the front of the building, like in 1768 in the townhouse at Rynek Główny 46 (rkps 1410: 29).

We can also find out from inspections that building work was carried out incorrectly and that's why the border walls were damaged. Such information is found in the description of the common walls of the Pod Krzysztofory Palace (Rynek Główny 35) and the neighbouring townhouse (no. 34B) from 1751. The inspectors stated that while setting the wall of the Schedlowski

townhouses against the old palace wall, a new room structure was set and during the building, wood was used unsuitably to move the wall (rkps 1409: 193, 194).

Properties belonging to the town were also described by the inspectors. Descriptions concerning the buildings located in the Market Square, in other words, Wielka Waga and Mała Waga (Great and Small Scales), Kramy Bogate (Rich Stalls) and stalls in the Sukiennice (Cloth Hall), were published (Follprecht & Jelonek-Litewka 2007). The few known inspections of the Town Hall have been used by researchers (Komorowski 2007, Komorowski 2008). However, descriptions of other town properties are also interesting. One example is from 1775 when all the townhouses belonging to the town known as the Siedem Kramów (Seven Stalls), located at Szeroka Street (currently plac Dominikański 4–6) were described (rkps 1393: 45–50, 62–73). At that time, town properties at św. Jana 30, known as Pod Pawiem (Under the Peacock), as well as two townhouses on Różana (currently św. Tomasza 29 and 31), were also described (rkps 1393: 73–79). In 1712, a tenant applied for a description of the town property, Podelwie, at Grodzka 32A (rkps 1384:173–176). In 1749, the town building known as Miednica at św. Anny, located between building no. 12 and the town walls, was inspected (rkps 1409: 177, 178).

We also find out from inspections about contemporary principles of common building usage. The townhouse at Szpitalna 15A was divided into two parts and, in 1670, it was written that there was common use and cost of repairing the doors to the townhouse, the paving stones in front of it, in front of the rear building and in the vestibule, the roof, guttering and cesspool (rkps 1382: 5, 6, rkps 1414: 5).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Even in previous centuries, owners of townhouses had problems with establishing the former shape of properties and were surprised by traces discovered from previous years. In 1730, in the townhouse of the nobleman Sobolowski at Mikołajska 6, in the stables in the rear building were large and wide doors, which had been bricked up. Similarly, bricked arched doors were visible in the back wall of the brewery next to the property at Szpitalna 9.

The fact that this was previously part of the property at Mikołajska 6 is testified to by the bricked windows and doors in the townhouse, as well as the traces of the corner stones of the neighbouring townhouses, in other words, the ones at Mikołajska 4 and 8 (rkps 1384: 1085–1087). At that time, these issues were settled for practical reasons, while we are currently driven by the desire to recreate the former appearance of the town and to explain some mysterious elements found in buildings. However, in order to clarify these, it is necessary for researchers from many fields to cooperate – the task of the historian is to establish, using the stored Old-Polish acts of the town of Krakow, which building concerns particular inspections and who the owner was at that time. The interpretation of entries in inspections, however, requires the help of architects, archaeologists, art historians, and sometimes specialists in metal and wood dating, who can match descriptions to parts of buildings, and these joint conclusions allow many mysteries of the former buildings in Krakow to be solved.

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