

UPDATING THE GUILDHALL

Various improvements took place in the century following, including, in 1624, "*Lattinge and plasteringe the Comon gaol overhead To Keep the Smoake and Nesty Smell*" out of the Council Chamber above!

Record keeping was taken seriously and by now there was a room "*ffor the more Comendable & safe keeping of the Recordes of the Court and of the Records of the Session*".

By this period, brick making was well established locally and some families re-fronted their timber properties with fashionable brick.

In 1719 improvements to the Guildhall were carried out using 8,000 bricks at a cost of £4. A new chimney was built on a stone base and the cupola put in place.

The Town's greatest benefactor, and inspiration for the revival of the Olympic Games, was Dr William Penny Brookes, 1809-1895. His lifelong home can be seen almost opposite the Guildhall, which he helped to preserve. He paid for new panelling, incorporating pieces of seventeenth century carving.



By the end of Queen Victoria's reign the Guildhall was equipped with a retiring room for the magistrates and a new staircase and entrance in brick.

The most recent renovation to the Tudor timber frame can be seen, dating back from 1970.

THE GUILDHALL TODAY

The largest county borough in England, Much Wenlock functioned effectively for centuries.

In 1885 the Town lost its MP and, in 1966, demographic and other changes finally led to its demise, when control passed to the local authority at that time, Bridgnorth District Council.

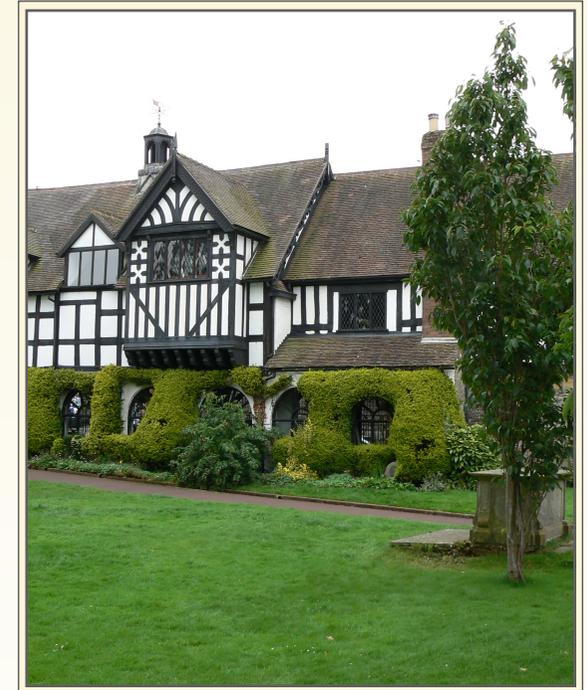
The Guildhall presents displays featuring the history of Much Wenlock and famous people linked with it, and hosts a programme of exhibitions and small functions open to visitors between Easter and the end of October.

This much loved building is owned and cared for by Much Wenlock Town Council.



OPENING TIMES
FROM EASTER TO THE END OF OCTOBER
FRIDAY TO MONDAY
11.00AM TO 4.00PM

THE GUILDHALL MUCH WENLOCK 1540



FREE ENTRY

For nearly four and a half centuries, this building "The Guildhall" was the administrative and judicial centre of some 70 square miles of the Borough of Much Wenlock.

The ancient courtroom was an active court of law until 1985. The open space below held a Corn Market.

The Guildhall owes its existence to Henry VIII's decision to close down the monasteries. This radically altered society because, since Anglo-Saxon times, the church had provided most social services.

In Much Wenlock the Prior, as Lord of the Manor, ran his own courts, (possibly using the stone gaol below, which dates from the fourteenth century).

BURGESSES

Much Wenlock merchants, or burgesses, paid rents and supplied services to the Priory but as early as the thirteenth century they had established a separate identity for the Town.

Bailiffs, previously royal appointees, were now elected from the burgesses as administrators. Their names are listed here.



Richard Ridley, twice a Bailiff, is shown with his wife on a 1592 brass, in the Holy Trinity Church.

In 1468, Edward IV's charter granted privileges, including the right to hold markets. In 1540, the Town became responsible for administrative functions like taxation and justice. Eventually control of markets involved trading standards: in 1853 the fine brass measures were purchased for £87 3s 6d.

The new court stood close to the stone gaol. The contractor, Richard Dawley, a burgess himself, was paid £13 6s 8d to construct it. Edward Brower received a similar sum for roofing the belfry, and there was expenditure on "*wine given to various men as a reward*"!

This type of building, with an open market below, can be found in towns all over Europe.



THE COURTS

Four types of court were held here; the Bailiff's Court, the manorial Court Leet and the Petty and Quarter Sessions. The latter were the most important, conducted by a Recorder or senior judge. Within the first year, two felons were sentenced to hang on Wenlock Edge. Lesser offences could be punished by whipping: the remains of shackles can still be seen on the post outside. The last offender sentenced to a period in the (handily mobile!) stocks was Thomas Lloyd, in 1852.



The Coat-of-Arms that looks down on the Courtroom is that of Queen Elizabeth I and bears the date 1589, the year in which her forces defeated the Spanish Armada. Opposite the lion of England, the red dragon of Wales refers to the Tudor queen's Welsh ancestry.

The Latin inscription reads, from upper to lower line, "*This place hates wickedness (iniquity), loves peace, punishes crime, upholds the law, honours the righteous.*" Note the thrifty way the spelling error has been corrected!

Early eighteenth century records give us a flavour of life in the Town: people were fined for such public order offences as having a pig-sty in Mardol, setting up a saw-pit and maintaining a stable and dunghill in Wilmore Street.

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

In 1577 the Town extended the Guildhall with a larger Debating Chamber. The Parish Register records that "*upon the 23rd and 24th day of this month of September was reared the house over the prison house.*" The timber components were numbered, fitted together and raised into position as a framework. Spaces were in-filled with wattle and daub (willow laths and plaster), windows inserted and panelling fitted.

On the beam opposite the Mayor's chair the Latin inscription reads: "*Give right judgement and exercise mercy.*"

