



**Shropshire Museums**  
Collections and Curatorial Services

**WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL COLLECTION REVIEW**  
**04 December 2017**

**ON BEHALF OF WENLOCK TOWN COUNCIL**

LUDLOW MUSEUM  
RESOURCE CENTRE



SHREWSBURY  
MUSEUM  
& ART  
GALLERY



## Responsible Officer

Emma-Kate Lanyon  
Team Leader, Collections and Curatorial Service

emma-kate.lanyon@shropshire.gov.uk  
01743 258891

### 1. Introduction

The Archives Room in the Corn Exchange houses a variety of records, publications and objects including some Town Council records that are not required for day-to-day management. In addition, it provides a home for the records of the former Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society (WARS), founded by William Penny Brookes and others, and its more famous offshoot, the Wenlock Olympian Society (WOS).

Whilst the Wenlock Olympian Society remains active today, WARS became moribund in 1900 when its last remaining trustee gifted its assets, including what survived from the library and museum collections to Much Wenlock Borough Council.

What survives of these collections are an important legacy to Much Wenlock, both in terms of the local history and wider national significance of the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society. The collection is also an important asset in developing our understanding of the of the County, in particular its changing natural history. William Penny Brookes was one of the key early naturalists who's work to document the flora, fauna and antiquities of Shropshire was the foundation of modern scientific enquiry.

A separate review and set of recommendations for the long term care of the archival elements of the collection has been prepared by colleagues from Shropshire Archives. This second report looks at the objects and specimens within this collection and provides specific advice on their care from a museums perspective. It provides an overview of their current condition and provides a set of recommendations for their long term curation.

### 2. Summary

Overall, conditions within the Archive Room have been improved since the 2013 review:

- Light levels are controlled with blinds and UV filters to the windows. Items are boxed where possible.
- Pests are monitored, although archivists are not sure what pests are a risk. (Guidance is provided in reference A in the attached appendix.)
- Pollutants have been reduced due to a better regime of dusting and general housekeeping.
- Temperature and humidity were both within acceptable limits during the site visit. The installation of a dehumidifier has reduced the humidity levels to within acceptable levels but care should be taken to keep this stable and to monitor collections as some sensitive materials may be stressed by the change in conditions.
- Physical damage still appears to be an issue with some breakages since the last visit. Sensitive items such as herbarium specimens would benefit from a reduced in handling. Ceramics as other fragile items would benefit from boxing with acid free tissue used to reduce the risk from of knocks and drops. (Guidance is provided in reference B in the attached appendix.)

- Chemical damage should be avoided by wearing gloves to handle certain items such as metalwork.
- It is unclear if audits are undertaken to ensure items have not been lost. No records seem to be kept of damage to items and any remedial conservation or actions to mitigate against future damage.
- There is an awareness of basic health and safety risks associated with manual handling. However, archivists should be aware of possible dangers posed by the collections themselves such as preparation chemicals and fungal growth.

However, a number of key issues remain which need to be addressed to ensure the long term curatorial care of, and adequate public access to, the objects within this collection.

### 3. Key Issues and Recommendations

<b>3.1</b>	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Herbarium</b>
	<b>Current Condition</b>	Fair / Stable
	<b>Overview</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society herbarium established by William Penny Brookes has been previously remounted and repacked into archival folders and is well organised and inventoried.</li> <li>• The reduction in the relative humidity within the store, whilst reducing the risk of mould damage are now more fragile and prone to physical damage. There is evidence of recent physical damage due to poor handling and damage to, and a resulting loss from, a number of specimens.</li> <li>• Although not ideal (steel herbarium cabinets would provide the best conditions), the wooden herbarium cabinets provide an adequate level of security against physical damage and pest infestation.</li> </ul>		
<b>Recommendations</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICOM's factsheet on the care of botanical collections is attached in reference C in the appendix below. This will provide basic guidance for the archivists currently caring for the collection.</li> <li>• Handling should be kept to a minimal. Herbarium specimens should not be placed on display due to risk posed from UV damage and both physical damage and gradual deterioration due to changes in humidity damage from movement.</li> <li>• Archivists should be aware of possible dangers posed by herbaria specimens such as the historic use of mercury and arsenic in their preparation.</li> <li>• Ideally, in the medium to long term, the herbarium should be moved to modern steel herbarium cabinets.</li> <li>• The Town Council should consider transferring the Herbarium into the care of Shropshire Museums where it could be relocated to the Museum Resource Centre where it could be both cared for to professional standards, kept alongside the rest of William Penny Brookes' herbarium specimens and made accessible as one unified collection to researchers.</li> </ul>		

<b>3.2</b>	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Seal Impressions</b>
	<b>Current Condition</b>	Poor / Stable
	<b>Overview</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A collection of Victorian seal impressions which are part of the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society were relocated in 2011 from Much Wenlock Museum to the Museum Resource Centre in Ludlow at the request of Much Wenlock Town Council which did not have the space to store them.</li> <li>• At present the collection is boxed but has not been inventoried, catalogued or appropriately packed. There is no formal loan agreement in place with Wenlock Town Council to formalise the arrangement upon which Shropshire Museums holds the collection.</li> </ul>		
<b>Recommendations</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Town Council should consider transferring the Seal Collection into the care of Shropshire Museums where it could be both cared for to professional standards and made accessible to researchers.</li> <li>• This loan or any future transfer should be formalised with a written agreement between both parties.</li> </ul>		

<b>3.3</b>	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Geology Specimens</b>
	<b>Current Condition</b>	Poor / At Risk
	<b>Overview</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small collection of geological specimens and labels exist which appear to be what remains of the Geological and Archaeological collection amassed by William Penny Brookes for the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Society.</li> <li>• These are currently housed loose and unpacked within an unlidded box with a number of loose labels. They are currently at a high risk of physical damage and loss.</li> </ul>		
<b>Recommendations</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This collection needs to be re-identified by a subject specialist, inventoried and packed appropriately.</li> <li>• The Town Council should consider transferring the Geology Collection into the care of Shropshire Museums where it could be both cared for to professional standards and made accessible to researchers.</li> </ul>		

<b>3.1</b>	<b>Collection</b>	<b>Guildhall Fabric</b>
	<b>Current Condition</b>	Poor / Stable
	<b>Overview</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The surviving timbers from the dock from the Guildhall were relocated in 2011 from Much Wenlock Museum to the Museum Resource Centre in Ludlow. The timbers were freeze treated for woodworm in 2012 at the request of Much Wenlock Town Council wished to display them within the Guildhall. To date they have not been collected from the Museum Resource Centre.</li> <li>• There is no formal loan agreement in place with Wenlock Town Council to formalise the arrangement upon which Shropshire Museums holds the item.</li> </ul>		
<b>Recommendations</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These timbers should be returned to Much Wenlock Town Council.</li> </ul>		

#### 4. Recommendations

Much Wenlock Town Council is responsible for an important heritage asset which has a relevance not only to the town but is also invaluable to our wider understanding of how scientific enquiry and understanding developed within the County. Therefore Much Wenlock Town Council has an obligation to manage the risks associated with caring for this collection.

##### Recommended Immediate Actions:

- The rotation of herbarium sheets for display at the Guildhall should be stopped immediately due to the high risk of ongoing damage.
- Much Wenlock Town Council should formalise the arrangements in place with Shropshire Museums in regards to items presently in store at the Museum Resource Centre.
- That Much Wenlock Town Council review its current valuation and insurance arrangements for its heritage assets, in particular some of its more valuable antiquarian books.

##### Recommended Medium Term Actions:

- That Much Wenlock Town Council review its inventory control for the collection to ensure that any damage or losses are identified and properly recorded.
- It would be in the best long-term interests of the above herbarium, seal impression and geology collections to be transferred into the care of Shropshire Museums. This would ensure that:
  - a. Professional museum staff provide suitable curatorial care.
  - b. That this resource is accessible for academic study.
  - c. That this material could be researched alongside contemporary early museum collections made by learned societies in Ludlow, Shrewsbury, Whitchurch and Ellesmere.

## 5. Appendix

- A. English Heritage Guide to Insect Pests found in Historic Houses and Museums  
<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/content/learn/conservation/2543455/2543024/insect-pests-poster>
  
- B. Museum of London Packing Guidelines  
<https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Resources/e-learning/packing-museum-objects-for-storage/index.html>
  
- C. The Institute of Conservation produce an excellent leaflet on the care and Conservation of Botanical Specimens  
[https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/care\\_and\\_conservation\\_of\\_botanical\\_specimens.pdf](https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/care_and_conservation_of_botanical_specimens.pdf)