

The Guildhall Today

As 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 further reduced its powers until, in 2009, it was subsumed under the unitary authority, Shropshire Council.

This much-loved building is owned and cared for by Much Wenlock Town Council. It presents displays on the history of the town as well as changing exhibitions.



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Much Wenlock Town Council

www.muchwenlock-tc.gov.uk



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11.00AM TO 4.00PM

FREE ENTRY



WELCOME TO

THE GUILDHALL



MUCH WENLOCK

1540

For over four centuries this building was the administrative and judicial centre of the Borough of Wenlock, the largest English borough.

The Courtroom was an active court of law from 1540 until 1985. The open space below was the butter-market, where farmers and producers could sell goods under cover.



A New Regime

Erected in 1540, the Guildhall marks the transfer of power from church to civil authority. The town was now responsible for taxation and justice.

The Courts

Four types of court were held: 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 had been sentenced to hang on Wenlock Edge. Lesser offences could be punished by whipping and the remains of shackles can still be seen on the post outside. Until the late 20th century, a Magistrates' Court functioned here, dealing with minor offences and civil cases.

Burgesses

In 1468 Edward IV's Charter granted privileges including the right to hold markets.

Much Wenlock merchants, or burgesses, paid rents and supplied services to the Priory but as early as the 13th century they had established a separate identity for the town.



Richard Ridley, twice a bailiff, is shown with his wife on this 1592 brass, which is on display in Holy Trinity Church, Much Wenlock

By 1540, the burgesses represented a newly powerful middle class, forming the town's corporation (council) and electing the bailiffs (later mayors). Bailiffs, previously royal appointees, were now elected as administrators from among the burgesses.

The Building

The Guildhall's timber frame was pre-fabricated and erected on site. The contractor, burgess Richard Dawley, was paid £13 6s 8d. Edward Brower received a similar sum for roofing the belfry, and there was expenditure on "wine given to various men as a reward". The building has



This decorated Truncheon represents Law and order

remained in use and been repeatedly altered to suit changing needs.

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



The Council Chamber

In 1577 the Guildhall was extended to provide a Debating Chamber. This impressive room was refurbished in the 19th century with funds raised by Dr Brookes. The Town Council meets here today.

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



The Mayoral Chains

Updating the Guildhall

In 1624 improvements were made, including plastering the ceiling of the gaol below, to keep the "Smoake and Nesty Smell" out of the Council Chamber above! Record-keeping was taken more seriously, with accommodation provided "ffor the more Comendable & safe keepinge of the Recordes of the Court and of the Recordes of the Sessons".

In 1719 more upgrading required 8,000 bricks at a cost of £4. A new chimney was built and the cupola set up.



Dr William Penny Brookes (1809-1895). The town's benefactor and inspiration for the Olympic Games, he raised money to preserve the Guildhall.

By the end of Queen Victoria's reign the Guildhall was equipped with a magistrates' retiring room, as well as a new staircase and entrance.