

Wellington Town Council

A HISTORY OF OUR WELLINGTON

BY ALLAN FROST

WELLINGTON TOWN CREST

The crest (above) was designed and authorised by the College of Arms from information and ideas submitted by Wellington Urban District Council clerk John Broad, as well as chairman Cecil Lowe, in March 1951.

The design of the Coat of Arms features:

- a castle (a reference to Apley Castle which was demolished during the 1950s);
- two fleurs-de-lys (from the Arms of France which were quartered and appeared in the Royal Arms of King Charles I, who made his famous Declaration to his troops near Wellington, thus marking the beginning of the English Civil War in 1642);
- a lion rampant (from the Arms of the Charlton family who owned Apley Castle);
- a fret (the hashing behind the lion rampant, taken from the Arms of the Eyton family at Eyton-on-the-Wealdmoors and the Cluddes of Orleton);
- and a bugle horn (from the Arms of the Lord Forester, whose ancestors were custodians of part of the Wrekin Forest from the Middle Ages onwards).

The portcullis at the top of the crest is an emblem denoting the town's relationship with Apley Castle.

The motto *Deo Adjuvante* translates as

'With God's Help'.

THE FIRST 1000 YEARS

Wellington is an ancient town in Shropshire, subsumed into the Telford conurbation since 1968 but with its own distinctive identity and proud history.

Various theories have been put forward to explain the town's humble origins but none can compete with the accepted wisdom that Wellington is named after an Anglo-Saxon settler named Weola, Weala or similar who arrived and farmed here at some time during the sixth or, more likely, seventh century.

Whether or not he was descended from mercenaries invited to quell native rebellions in sub-Roman Britain, or was obliged to relocate after the destruction of the nearby Roman town at Wroxeter, is not known. Whatever his background, he must have been happy to settle here.

Between Weola's arrival and the Domesday survey of 1086, the settlement had expanded into that of a village, complete with a windmill and small Saxon chapel with its own priest.

After the Conquest of 1066, Edwin, earl of Mercia (who died in 1071) was replaced as owner of Wellington manor by a Norman 'tenant in chief': Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury. Roger was succeeded by his son Robert de Belleme who, by all accounts, was quite an unpleasant and cruel character.

He forfeited his possessions to the Crown in 1102 and, between then and the early thirteenth century, Wellington and its revenues were passed from one favoured family to another until county sheriff Thomas de

Erdington was granted possession of the manor in 1211.

Although it was normal for English manor houses to stand close to churches, quite where the manor at Wellington was located has never been ascertained. The 'manor' lands originally included not only Wellington itself but also several villages in the area plus five outlying berewicks (estates) at Apley, Arleston, Aston, Dothill and Walcot.

With Norman rule came a gradual expansion in both the population and size of the village. Located as it was between two main east-west thoroughfares of the day (Watling Street to the south and The Portway linking Shrewsbury with Newport to the north), it was linked to both by narrow lanes.

In time, a by-pass road (now called King Street) enabled travellers to avoid the narrow streets of the village centre. In those early days, the main route into Wellington was via Church Street from the north, a road along which early dwellings and hostleries would have been built to catch passing trade. The road was split into two during the Victorian period whereupon the northern section was renamed Park Street.

To distinguish it from other Wellingtons in England, the settlement was known for a while as 'Welyngton under The Wrekyn', perhaps reflecting the importance and dominant nature of the nearby prominent hill.

In keeping with the increasing size and importance of Wellington, a larger new church replaced the original Saxon chapel during the twelfth century. It was in the



church yard that markets, fairs and other community entertainment took place, until King Edward I changed the law by the Statute of Winchester (1285) after which such secular and irreligious events were supposed to find new venues.

It was probably then that The Green, located next to the church yard, appeared. Only a small triangle of The Green remains, as this 2009 photo shows:



Markets have been the key to Wellington's commercial success since at least the thirteenth century. They were already popular and attracted folk from far and wide when, in 1244, Giles de Erdington paid King Henry III a suitable inducement to grant him a market charter (the extract from the original vellum roll recording the grant is shown below). Wellington as a township, it should be noted, has never held a market charter in its own right.

This charter allowed Giles to raise a toll on animals and products brought into the town for sale. In other words, the Charter was nothing more than a money-spinner for lords of the manor.

Wellington's was just one of 3,300 charters granted during that

century. While such charters were often hereditary, they could be (and often were) withdrawn by the Crown and given to some other favoured person.

Over the years, Wellington's markets and (eventually) quarterly fairs were the subject of four charters (1244, 1283, 1514 and 1692) before entitlement to collect tolls was transferred by local landowner Lord Forester (sometimes called 'Forster' or 'Foster') to Wellington Market Hall Company in 1856.

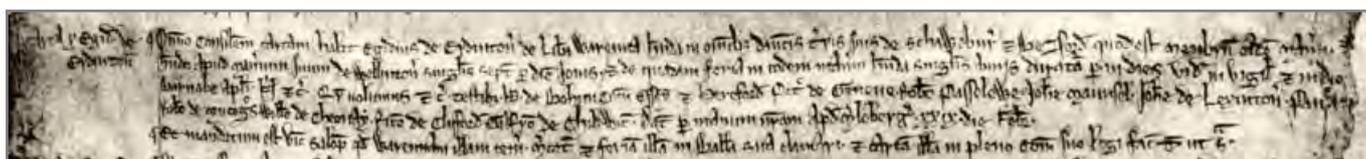
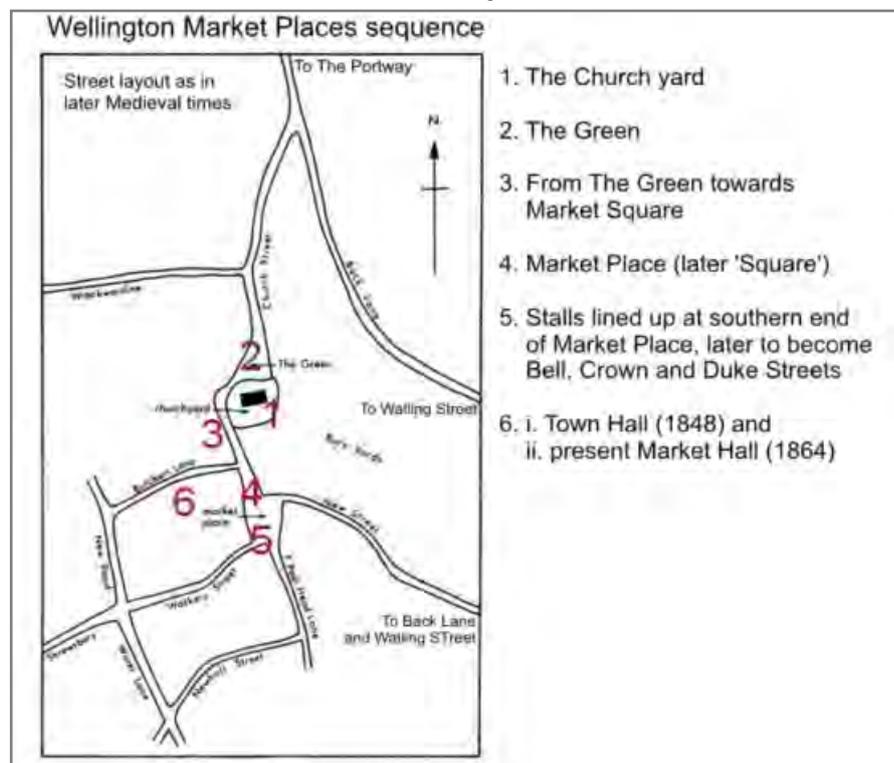
It was at about the same time as the first charter that plans were put into effect to develop the centre of Wellington.

The market seems to have spread along the southern section of modern Church Street from The Green into what is now Market Square; the whole of this section was called Market Place until the early years of the nineteenth century and was bounded on one side by the church yard and on the other by a succession of new buildings from which folk could ply trades and play their part in developing the local economy.



The narrow entrance (above) to an ancient lane called Ten Tree Croft still exists between these buildings; the name is derived from a corruption of 'Tenter Croft', a smallholding with a field in which fabrics were stretched on wooden frames and held in place using tenter hooks.

The difference in levels between the road in Church Street itself and the ground within the church yard is probably due to the pounding of feet wearing the ground down on the one side, and



centuries of burials raising the soil level on the other.

Market Square itself was much larger than it is now and gradually bounded on its southern side by rows of wooden stalls which subsequently became more permanent until, by 1600, they had developed into the cellared rows of buildings forming Bell, Crown and Duke Streets.

Three new parallel lanes were also laid out, which later became Market Street, Walker Street and Foundry Road, while the western end of New Street seems to have been created at the beginning of the fourteenth century, with burgess plots (long, narrow patches of ground with a shop or house fronting the edge of the road with workshops, warehouses and gardens behind) providing more permanent dwellings and trade outlets. In time, New Street extended eastwards.

A few years ago, archaeological discoveries behind Edgbaston House (below) in Walker Street indicate that this area was the southern limit of the earlier village prior to or shortly after the creation of Market Place.

Something may have happened to halt Wellington's expansion as very little progress in town development appears to have occurred between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries.

It could well have been the arrival of the Black Plague around 1350, which greatly reduced the population and ultimately led to the breakdown of the last vestiges of the feudal economy.



Thereafter, as the free market developed, greater emphasis was given to financial considerations than obligation, and land and other property was able to change hands more freely, without constraints imposed by class. If anyone had the money, they could use it to advance themselves and their families.

This became more obvious as time progressed. Interestingly, the basic street layout in the centre of Wellington remained pretty much the same from the later medieval period until the nineteenth century.

This is not to say property development stagnated; in fact, the contrary was the case. New buildings tended to be erected in gaps along existing streets; eventually, New Street, for example, which stretched from Market Square to the present junction where Mill Bank meets King Street, had so many properties by the mid nineteenth century that it was split into two, with the eastern portion renamed High Street.

Wellington remained a community whose existence depended on farming, both pastoral and arable. Medieval livestock, particularly pigs, were able to take limited advantage of the Royal Forest of The Wrekin whose 'verdurers' or wardens enforced harsh forest laws to limit what could and couldn't be done by peasants in the woodland over which they had full control. Provided the monarch had a good supply of deer, boar and other creatures capable of giving a few days' worth of good hunting, the verdurer was guaranteed a job, not only for his own lifetime but also during the lives of his heirs.

The forest wardenship was eventually held by the Foresters who lived at (below) Old Hall,



Holyhead Road from about 1480 and later at Dothill Manor (above) until the late eighteenth century when the family seat moved to Willey Hall near Broseley. As with the Charltons, the Foresters became lords and managed to acquire considerable property and land in and around Wellington.

One of them, John Forester (sometimes Forster'), was granted a most unusual concession by King Henry VIII in 1520 when he was allowed to wear his 'bonnet' in the king's presence on account of 'certain diseases and infirmities which he has in his head'. This concession has apparently been retained by successive Lords Forester to the present day.

The Old Hall became a school in the nineteenth century and the grounds are now a private housing estate.

Another, more famous, Wellingtonian, was Sir Thomas Leigh (c.1499-1571, below). His father Roger was a mercer in the town. Mercers were among a growing band of businessmen whose family fortunes would be made over the next few centuries.



© Image courtesy of Stoneleigh Abbey

Thomas was appointed as London agent to another mercer, Rowland Hill of nearby Hodnet. While Rowland became Lord Mayor of London in 1540, Thomas, also a member of the Haberdashers' Guild, attained that powerful position in 1558, the year in which Queen ('Bloody') Mary died.

Thomas was instrumental in deferring the accession of Elizabeth I so that the politically sensitive issue of realigning the English monarchy's sympathies from Catholic to Protestant would not result in anarchy. As Lord Mayor, Thomas arranged and led Elizabeth's coronation pageant in January 1559 and gained a knighthood for his efforts.

His country seat was at Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire and is well worth a visit.

1600 TO 1800

Gradually, small farming-related industries developed. By the end of the sixteenth century, Wellington had grown sufficiently to attract tradesmen and was benefitting from a new breed of well-heeled gentlemen willing and able to invest in the local economy.

This was to prove a good foundation for subsequent economic and social improvement. It was at about this time that the true wealth and industrial potential of minerals in the east Shropshire coalfield to the south and east of Wellington was being discovered, with the first commercially-viable iron furnaces appearing in places like Madeley Wood and Donnington Wood.

In Wellington itself, bell casting became an important activity from the 1580s until about 1700.

Although we do not know where the foundry actually stood, it was run by the Clibury family and produced bells for over seventy churches in Shropshire alone. Interestingly, Wellington's Medieval parish church had six bells by the time of its demolition in 1789, yet none were cast in the town.

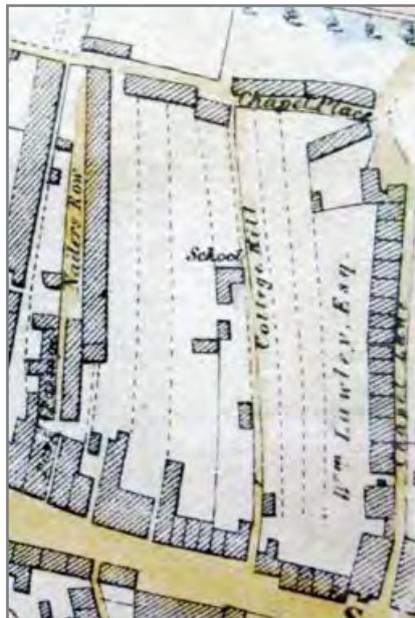
It was probably during the seventeenth century that an

important nail making industry emerged and continued in places until the mid 1800s. Nail making was essentially a 'cottage' industry which took place in the homes of very poor people.

They would be given a supply of metal, probably in wire and wrought iron lengths of varying thicknesses, by a middle man who told them what sort of nails he wanted them to make, and gave them a deadline. Using the most basic tools (anvil, hammers, pliers and a coal fire blown by bellows), they'd toil in hot, filthy conditions.

Providing their work was satisfactory, the middle man would pay them and leave another supply of materials for processing.

It has been estimated that over 130 different nails were produced in rows of hovel-like cottages along Chapel Lane (along which today's health centre is located) and 'Nailors Row', whose name is preserved in a car park off Victoria Road.



Wellington gained an important place in British history when King Charles I stayed overnight from 19th to 20th September 1642. Unfortunately, despite unsupported speculation, the exact location of his stay is not known other than that it was 'in the environs of Wellington'.

Apley Castle (top right, the second to be built north east of the town centre) has been suggested,



where the members of the Charlton family lived and whose members were mainly supporters of the Crown. Apley lay close to The Portway, the shortest route from Newport, where Charles and his growing army had spent the previous night on their recruitment journey from Nottingham to Shrewsbury.

Contrary to wishful thinking, there is no evidence that Charles himself ever set foot in the town (although his recruiting officers undoubtedly did), and his famous 'Wellington Declaration', pronouncing war on Parliament's opposing forces, was delivered to his army and Privy Council, *not* the townsfolk, immediately before moving on to Shrewsbury. This Declaration signalled the start of the English Civil War; special coins were subsequently struck to mark the event.



However, Wellington didn't escape unscathed. Apley Castle became a target for Parliamentary troops, who captured it for a short time and before the Royalists retook it and dismantled damaged parts. A new (third) castle, in the style of an impressive stately home, was built nearby in the 1790s and enlarged in the 1850s, and parts of the former castle converted into a stable block. Sadly, the building was sold and



demolished 100 years later, although the grounds may be visited, and the stable block now comprises private apartments.

In the absence of any larger building in the town capable of accommodating even a small number of troops, Cromwell's soldiers occupied the parish church, extensively damaging the fabric, windows and statuettes, which were used for musket target practice. Thereafter, the Medieval church became increasingly unstable and unusable until it was demolished to enable the present church of All Saints to be built in 1790, a few metres east of its predecessor.

The Civil War not only caused considerable upheaval to peace in the country but also within families, whose members could find themselves on opposing sides in a war in which no one could be trusted. The war not only destroyed castles, churches, homes and families, it also caused severe damage to the economy.

Coinage became scarce, and there was a danger that trade would suffer a total collapse if tradesmen weren't allowed to issue their own currency. (A similar situation arose towards the end of the eighteenth century.)

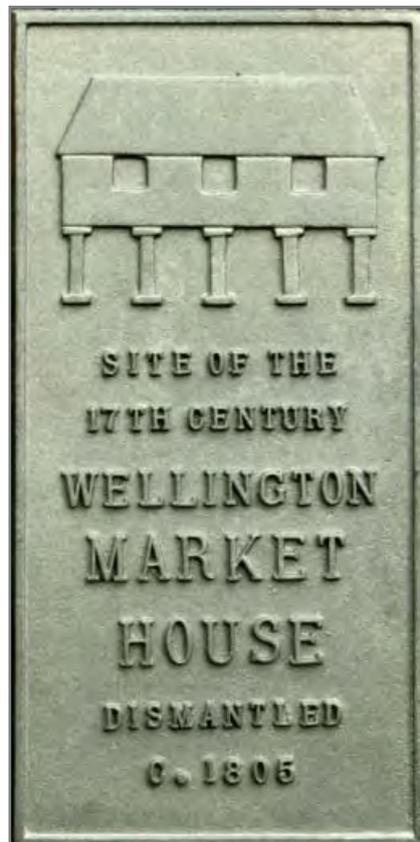
Consequently, mercers like Stephen Wright were allowed to produce their own small-denomination copper, brass, pewter, lead and even leather coins between 1642 and 1672 in an effort to stimulate and maintain trade. Although these coins, or



'trade tokens', were supposed to be redeemable solely by the person issuing them, such was the dearth of national coinage that they became common currency throughout the duration of the war until shortly after 1672 when the Royal Mint was able to resume normal production.

One major addition to Wellington's public buildings was the Market House, which seems to have been built and paid for by Lord Forester some time before 1680. Whether it was on the site of an earlier building in Market Square isn't known, but the Market House was a half-timbered building supported by columns.

The upper building was used to conduct market and court business and was let out to societies and as an amenity for social activities, while poultry and

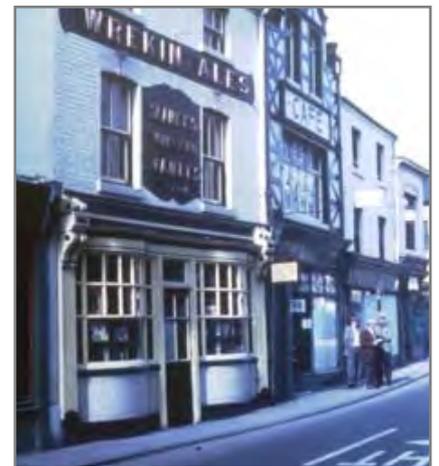


dairy products were sold by women on market days in the sheltered space on the ground between the columns. Sadly, the House was dismantled by the Foresters c.1805 as it was apparently causing congestion and inconvenience to the free movement of pedestrians and (horse drawn) vehicles. Plaques set in the paving of Market Square show the approximate location and dimensions of the Market House.

Wellington's economic fortunes continued their long and steady upturn throughout the eighteenth century, predominantly as a direct result of burgeoning mining and industrial activity on the coalfield. It became the largest commercial centre in the district, providing not just legal, banking and accountancy services but also an extensive range of trade supplies (among them rope-, basket- and candle-making) as well as fashionable mercers, haberdashers, milliners, tailors and a variety of other personal and household goods suppliers (including dealers in imported tea, coffee, wines and spirits and a range of other exotic items).

One firm deserves special mention. It was based in the Bradford Arms pub in Market Square and begun by William Wardell in or before 1780.

The business was taken over by John Slaney in January 1835, whereafter it became known as Slaney's Vaults, with later trade outlets in Market Street as well as Oakengates and Broseley. Wrekin Brewery acquired the firm in 1932.



While small businesses helped the process of turning Wellington from a large village into a sizeable and notable town, some credit must also go to the two dominant landowners whose own fortunes improved during this period. The Foresters and Charltons encouraged exploitation of mineral wealth on their extensive lands.

In particular, lime working and coal mining just south of Wellington took place on Lord Forester's land, while the Charltons had considerable interests in all manner of mining and industrial activities throughout the east Shropshire coalfield. Wellington was fortunate to have such forward-looking benefactors.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the town was well served by plenty of everyday shops, permanent accommodation in the form of cheap tenements and more than a smattering of public houses, taverns and inns. Prosperity in Wellington, at least for those engaged in middle class enterprise, was definitely on the increase.

Four Wellingtonians from this period deserve special mention.

George Downing (below, 1684-1749), was raised by Lord Forester at Dothill Manor. His spy-diplomat-shady property developer grandfather (also named Sir George Downing), described by Diarist Samuel Pepys as 'a perfidious rogue', amassed a fortune which paid for Downing



Street in London to be built. 'Our' George preferred to live a somewhat dissolute life and what was left of the family fortune following his death went to found Downing College at Cambridge after years of legal wrangling.



Nathaniel Plimer (above, 1757-1822) and his brother Andrew (c.1763-1837), sons of a Wellington clock maker, achieved enviable reputations for painting extremely fine miniatures which are now highly sought after. Regrettably, it has not been possible to find a portrait of Andrew Plimer.

Dr. William Withering (below, 1741-1799), son of an apothecary, studied medicine at Edinburgh University and became one of the most eminent physicians of the day. A member of the illustrious Lunar Society comprising inventors and industrialists, he is best remembered as a botanist and the man who recognised and developed the properties of



digitalis (extracted from the humble foxglove) in treating heart disease.

Unfortunately, we do not know whereabouts in Wellington either the Plimers or Dr. Withering were born, although a sketch of Withering's birthplace drawn a few years after his death by Shrewsbury schoolteacher David Parkes, has survived:



1801 TO 1901

The nineteenth century witnessed an astounding series of changes to Wellington's economy, society and appearance. Although the first half of the century saw continued steady growth, the town's future relied heavily on the fortunes of the district's mining activities and scattered industrial concerns as well as the state of local farming.

Early in the century, single- and two-storey timber framed dwellings and shops in and around the town centre were either clad with bricks and made taller with added storeys, or replaced entirely by brick buildings, a process which continued for over a century, ultimately altering the centuries-old outward appearance from that of a dusty low-roofed village to a business-like modern town.

Wellington was in an advantageous position when it came to communications, particularly from around 1820 onwards when travel by stage coach became not only more



frequent but also (slightly) less uncomfortable as improvements to the condition of major roads became increasingly important.

Businessmen could travel more freely and postal services became more regular and reliable.

However, it was the arrival of steam railway passenger services in 1849 that provided an incredible boost to the area's economy.



One noticeable addition to the types of business trading in Wellington was that of breweries. Prior to about 1850, beer and ale production had largely been conducted by inns located within the town itself.

However, various Beer Acts dating from around 1830 had been introduced with a view to weaning the public off gin, which was seen as responsible for too much that was wrong in society, and onto beer and ale, which were regarded as highly preferable at a time when drinking unprocessed water was inadvisable (as, indeed, it had been since the Middle Ages).

As a direct result, malting enterprises expanded at a remarkable rate when laws concerning beer production and sale were relaxed. Malthouses were scattered in various locations around the town, with the more successful centred around The Lawns.

It was only a matter of time before someone hit on the idea of opening a brewery, where the benefits of large-scale production and distribution could lead to healthy profits. The first brewery to open was the Shropshire Brewery in 1851 (aside, top), followed by the Wrekin Brewery (bottom) in 1871. Several pop (or 'mineral water') works followed provided a safe and more

acceptable alternative to unprocessed water for those who did not wish to consume alcohol for one reason or another.

The effects of the Beer Acts and the arrival of passenger railway services included a steep rise in ordinary folk travelling to and from the town, and the number of visitors (especially those wishing to breathe the healthy air on The Wrekin Hill) requiring food and accommodation. Consequently, the number of inns, hotels (including the iconic Charlton Arms) and other hostelries with varying facilities increased.

Tourism also had the desirable knock-on effect of encouraging other enterprises, like souvenir and gift shops, photography and art studios, laundry services and a wealth of other small, family-run businesses wishing to satisfy the rise in consumerism as the Victorian era progressed.

The most important aspect of the town economy to develop from the 1850s was that of a well-run livestock market, which became known as The Smithfield.

Run by John Barber (top right), it regularised the sale of farm animals and did away with the openly dishonest practices of dealers from Wolverhampton and Birmingham who had previously dominated local sales.

John Barber, a surveyor and property agent as well as a livestock and household goods auctioneer, gained a reputation for honest and fair dealing. He was



also a major driving force in commercial development and town improvement. It is no exaggeration to say that Wellington's prosperity during and after Victorian times owes much to this man whose enthusiasm, vision and achievement was unprecedented.

Barber's original Smithfield soon outgrew the small plot (approximately where the public convenience building is at Victoria Road Bus Station) he operated from for the first dozen or so years.

He needed to expand, and the opportunity arose during the mid 1860s when Wellington Markets Company enlisted his help to draw up plans and oversee the necessary legalities to acquire land to build a new Market Hall, which remains an essential asset to the town's economy.

In 1868, as a gesture of thanks, the Market Hall Company erected a new Smithfield (below), much larger and better equipped than Barber's original, and granted him sole rights to operate there and collect the tolls to which the Company was entitled.

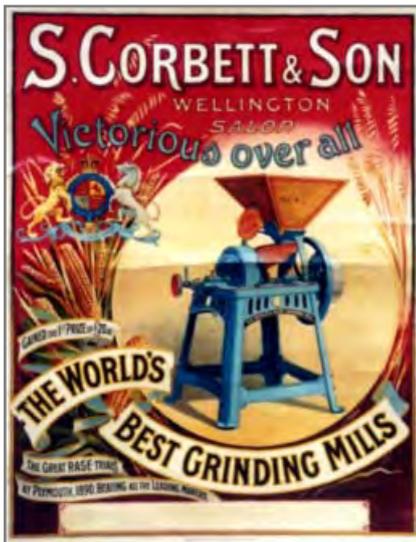
The Smithfield (which eventually became the largest and most successful outside London



but was obliged to close in 1989 because of the economic climate) stood on land now occupied by today's Morrison's supermarket and car park.

Although the Market House had been demolished c.1805, a replacement wasn't built until Wellington Market Hall Company (which subsequently changed its name several times) erected a Town Hall off The Shambles (now named Market Approach) in 1848. This was rebuilt when the present Market Hall was erected in 1866.

There were several successful manufacturing businesses operating in Wellington throughout this period, particularly Samuel Corbett & Son's Park Street works, which produced numerous award-winning mechanised implements for use on farms throughout the world. Unbelievably, more than a few have survived and are still in use in farms scattered around the globe.



Another firm of international renown was Richard Groom (aside) & Sons, timber merchants whose premises were near Groom's Alley. As well as major manufacturers of wooden products from indigenous trees, the firm was also the largest importer of foreign timber in the country.

Between 1856 and 1894, sanitation and other developments in Wellington were overseen by Town Commissioners, a body which invariably comprised the

town's more successful businessmen. From 1894, Wellington Urban District Council replaced the Commissioners.

In addition to securing a clean and regular water supply, commissioners also saw to the creation of a new cemetery (to replace the parish church yard, which had become overcrowded through centuries of burials) and a replacement workhouse on Holyhead Road, located significantly further away than the former Walker Street workhouse originally erected in 1797 (itself rebuilt c.1840) and behind the cemetery.

To our Victorian ancestors, reputation and image were all-important, so much so that some of Wellington's streets were renamed to give the impression of respectability. Brewery Street (which became Prince's Street, the only road with an official apostrophe), Dun Cow Lane (Duke Street), Swine Market (Bell Street) and The Shambles (Market Approach) were some of those affected.

From the mid nineteenth century onwards, members of the middle class displayed their success and wealth by living in new 'gentlemen's villas' in areas then regarded as out-of-town, like Mill Bank and Waterloo Road, as well as other streets on the periphery.

Perhaps the most notable of these villas is Sunnycroft (top right), now a National Trust property on Holyhead Road, originally built by J.G. Wackrill,



owner of the town's first brewery which stood a couple of hundred yards east, also in Holyhead Road.

The later years of the nineteenth century saw a rise in the number and variety of leisure and social events which were accessible to the general population, not just businessmen.

One notable development was that of a town football team. Initially known as Wellington Parish Church Institute ('PCI') around February 1875, the team joined the English Football Association when the governing body was formed in 1877.

By 1879, the team seems to have adopted the name 'Wellington' or 'Wellington Town' which was retained (although known locally as 'The Lilywhites') until it changed to Telford United in 1969.

The club ground (below) is at the Buck's Head, taken from the name of the adjacent former pub in Watling Street, and the team may have been located here since the late 1880s.



Over the years, the club has won many trophies (with five visits to Wembley Stadium and winning the FA Trophy three times) and played in various leagues, currently the Conference North League. Following financial difficulties, the club has been called AFC (Amateur Football Club) Telford United since 2004.

Henry John Gauntlett (1805-1876) was the church organist who



gave us the hymn tune format with which churchgoers have become so familiar.

Indeed, he wrote many tunes, including IRBY, the name of the music which begins many a Christmas service with the carol 'Once in Royal David's City'.

Henry's father (also named Henry) was curate at All Saints church until 1814 when the family moved to Olney, Bucks.

Although starting a career in law in London, Henry became increasingly immersed in the world of church music and became involved in virtually every published collection of hymns for almost fifty years. He was also instrumental in aspects of organ design.

Despite not being formally trained, Henry became a Doctor of Music and a man of colossal musical knowledge. His reputation was such that the composer, Felix Mendelssohn, announced: 'He ought to have a statue'!

Sarah Smith (1832-1911), arguably Wellington's most famous daughter best known by her pen name Hesba Stretton, was born in New Street where her father Benjamin Smith was postmaster and owner of a printing works and bookshop.

Influenced by what she witnessed while growing up and working in the town, she became an internationally famous authoress following her discovery



by Charles Dickens and the publication of *Jessica's First Prayer* in 1866. She wrote a further 60 or so books and numerous magazine articles, many about the plight of the poor in Victorian England as well as other subjects like the legal position of women.

A founder member of the body which became today's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Hesba's work and the impact her writing had on politicians and the shaping of certain social laws during her lifetime, is now sadly overlooked.

Cecil Lawson (1849-1882) was born at Fountain Place, New Church Road, and became one of England's most famous artists, exhibiting at the Royal Academy between 1870 and 1871 while living in Chelsea. After marriage in 1879, he moved to Haslemere, Surrey, where his health deteriorated dramatically. He died before reaching his full potential.



SINCE 1901

The first half of the twentieth century was yet another period of change, undoubtedly the most far-reaching in its history. Whereas family-run shops and other businesses probably reached the peak of their relative importance to the town's economy, the success of manufacturing would see a rapid upturn before an inevitable decline.

Furthermore, the attitudes of ordinary folk to the government of the day in general and the town's leaders in particular were increasingly affected by the devastating aftermath of the Great War.

People no longer knew their proper place, an aspect of British social history which became more apparent during and after the Second World War.

Folk expected (and demanded) politicians, both local and national, to raise standards of living.

The Lych Gate war memorial at All Saints parish church was erected in 1922 and contains brass plaques listing the names of Wellingtonians who died as a result of both World Wars.



Wellington Urban District Council responded by embarking on improving the quality of council-owned housing, initially at the southern end of Regent Street.

However, larger council estates really got under way from the 1930s onwards, when new estates needed to coincide with ambitious slum clearance projects, processes which continued into the 1960s.

Sadly, slum clearance was pursued with an enthusiasm which ultimately destroyed examples of the town's architectural and social heritage, especially within the High Street-Glebe Street-St John Street triangle where planners encouraged the



construction of blocks of flats and storeyed maisonettes; fortunately, high rise flats, the blight on many a townscape, were avoided.

The 1930s was a time when private home ownership became a reality for those who could obtain and afford to repay mortgages. Herbert Avenue (above, caustically called 'Bread and Dripping Lane' because some new homebuyers couldn't afford to eat nutritiously after taking on a mortgage), Roseway and Christine Avenue are some of the earliest roads developed exclusively for private dwellings.

These significant developments were followed by more ambitious projects for further council and private housing development elsewhere in and around the town.

Some firms adapted to changing times, others didn't. For example, four independent breweries and several mineral water manufacturers were ultimately reduced to one ... but what a strong one it proved to be! Under the initial leadership of O.D. Murphy ('O.D.', (below) whose name became synonymous with drink production) and later his two sons, the Wrekin Brewery dominated the scene from the 1920s onwards.



While the Wrekin Brewery itself remained in Market Street, the Shropshire Brewery became O.D.'s fizzy pop works and the preferred bottling plant for large concerns like Guinness and Worthington, as well as pop manufacturers whose products competed with the Wrekin Brewery's own. Another important acquisition was that of Slaney's Vaults (see above) in 1932, which gave O.D. a crucial wines and spirits licence.

In a prolonged period when the pub trade was at best unpredictable, the Murphys took risks, and ultimately enabled the Wrekin Brewery, with over 200 tied houses, to become the largest privately owned brewery in the country. The brewery's assets were acquired by Greenall Whitley in 1966 and both brewery and pop works closed for good in 1969. Both were subsequently demolished despite their importance to the town's heritage.

Sadly, every other once-important manufacturing business in the town closed during the twentieth century. The Smithfield market, Groom's timber yard, Corbett's agricultural implements, and many more no longer trade, victims of changing economic conditions, social demands and political whims.

Soft toys, expertly produced by the Chad Valley in their Wrekin Toy Works (below) in New Street (where Sooty (bottom right) and Sweep were made alongside innumerable much-loved Teddy bears; comedian and broadcaster Kenneth Horne was a director).

Additionally, Norah Wellings's Victoria Toy Works (next column, top) in King Street created high quality dolls, including bespoke sailor dolls for luxury cruise liners, especially during the 1930s) began



and ceased trading during the century. Both businesses were, coincidentally, housed in former chapels.

Similar economic and social changes have affected the number of public houses in the town. A mere handful now exist when, a hundred years ago, there were at least 45, each with its own band of regular patrons.

There are countless reasons for this, not least excessive regulation and taxation, but the fact that there has been a shift away from brewery tied houses towards ownership by pub chains and property developers has undoubtedly adversely affected trade. However, the demise of the public house seems to have coincided in recent years with a rise in the number of cafes and eating establishments catering for customers.

As with other British population concentrations, 'modern' ideas on town planning and subsequent building developments weren't always beneficial in the long term.

The example often cited is that of the ring road (visible in the photo at the foot of the next page), originally conceived in the 1940s and already outdated when



implemented in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This 'noose' had the effect of restricting economic growth, deterring existing business investment, and severely hitting the modestly successful trading areas beyond the ring road, leading them into a rapid decline.

Fate dealt yet another blow to Wellington's fortunes and independence when Government plans to create a 'new town' were expanded in 1968 to include a much wider area than originally intended. This new town, which was actually no more than a conurbation of existing townships within the area designated as 'Telford', ultimately removed the Wellington's ability to determine its own future.

Wellington Urban District Council governed the town until Local Government reorganisation in 1974, whereupon Wellington ceased to be in control of its own destiny and ultimately became just one of several townships within the Telford conurbation. That year marked the beginning of Wellington's political, economic and social development relying on decisions made by the newly-formed Wrekin District Council, often in conjunction with Telford Development Corporation, a quango whose powers of property acquisition, demolition and construction were greatly resented by many locals.



1988 saw the relinquishing of a few decision-making aspects of local government when Wellington Town Council, complete with mayoral leadership which had not existed hitherto, was created. Although the present Telford & Wrekin Council is responsible for final decisions, the Town Council has the ability to express at least some of the opinions of its electorate.

Wellington's overall trading economy has suffered a decline over the last 30 years, partly due to policies of neglect adopted by leaders of Telford & Wrekin Council who apparently preferred to concentrate their efforts on promoting a central, privately owned shopping centre. The situation has been changing in recent years and greater emphasis has been placed on making good the damage with projects intended to boost the town's economic prospects as well as improve its outward appearance.

Whereas there are few traditional small, family-run shops, and national charity shops seem to dominate and make competition with local traders almost impossible, Wellington's prospects appear to be on the ascendant.

Market Square (top right) continues to be the commercial hub. One particular business continues to provide an anchor for trade as it has done for centuries:



the market, which currently opens on Tuesday, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and brings many tourists, as well as shoppers, to the town.

Throughout its long existence, Wellington has welcomed and accommodated folk from all ethnic and religious backgrounds, which might explain why visitors and residents find it such a pleasant place.

There is so much more to Wellington's story than is related here. For further historical information on Wellington, The Wrekin Hill and the surrounding countryside, follow the link to Wellington History Group's web site, and experiment with searches on the internet.

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THE WREKIN HILL



Despite what geologists say, many locals know, without a shadow of doubt, that The Wrekin Hill was created by at least one, possibly two giants (the precise details, as with all good legends, vary). It certainly wasn't a volcano, although volcanic activity did play its part, and some of the oldest rocks in the British Isles are to be found here.

The remains of two hill forts lie beneath the surface around the summit, the oldest dating back some three thousand years. The original fort was reshaped and reinforced some five hundred years later and fell into disuse

when the Romans left their former legionary fortress at nearby Wroxeter (now protected by English Heritage and well worth a visit) during the latter years of the first century, whereupon the land there became the first proper town occupied by the Cornovians, our tribal ancestors.

Despite its national importance and international renown, there have only been two, relatively minor, archaeological explorations, in 1939 and 1973 (the latter before a telecommunications building was erected). Nevertheless, some interesting finds have been unearthed, like pottery containers for storing salt (the Cornovians were famous for salt production) and even a decorated enamel cow bell, rather like the ones you see in 'happy cow' advertisements for Swiss chocolates and real butter.

Rather than occupy the summit of the hill throughout the year, it looks as though the ancient community sheltered here over winter before returning to lowland farms in spring, and migrated back to the hill after harvests had been gathered and grain stored in pits in readiness for the next period of seasonal occupation.

The fortress not only provided protection against wild animals but also shelter in times of adversity. Having said that, there is no evidence that a battle against the Romans ever took place on the hill: a couple of javelin or arrow heads and a little burnt timber don't constitute a battle. However, numerous Bronze Age weapons were stumbled across around 1840 at Willowmoor (on the south-eastern slope of the hill) when a farm worker was digging drainage channels. Their existence, together with a few buried human remains, implies that a battle of some description took place on or near the hill. Unfortunately, it's impossible to say when.

For the last thousand years, The Wrekin Hill has been the

source of materials needed to support a rural economy with its vegetation carefully managed to provide timber for buildings, fuel, artefacts, grazing and food. Charcoal was once produced in substantial quantities on countless platforms (levelled ground) around the hill, much of it used for smelting iron before the use of coal and, later, coke became the norm.

Contrary to popular belief, The Wrekin is not a publicly-owned hill but rather owned by people who need to manage it carefully. The public has the right to wander its footpaths but also has responsibilities, such as not causing damage or excessive erosion to footpaths.

This fact was understood when Forest Law applied in the Middle Ages. The hill gave its name to the Royal Forest of The Wrekin whose upkeep was the responsibility of a 'verdurer', one of whose descendants became the Lords Forester. As 'keepers', the Foresters made sure that ancient laws governing access and use of the woodland by villagers were strictly followed. Forest Law was unyielding and its punishments harsh. Basically, the forest needed to be well stocked with deer, boar and other game on the off chance the monarch (Henry II, for example) or noblemen came here to enjoy the thrill of the chase. At one time, the hill was known as Mount Gilbert and had succession of hermits living on its slopes.

The Wrekin Hill is known throughout the world. People come great distances to visit. Even in the 1840s, a leisurely climb up its slopes was an essential aspect of tourism by the well-to-do.

By the time railways opened up a whole new world of travel for ordinary folk, those with an eye for business opportunities introduced amenities for visitors in general and the tourist trade in particular.



Souvenirs in the form of scene-bearing pottery and postcards were sold in Wellington shops. Horse drawn carriages could be hired from 'posting houses' like the Charlton Arms, the Ercall Hotel and the Duke of Wellington which also advertised family accommodation, not just for 'commercial travellers'.

The Halfway House (above) was well known for its cooked breakfasts and frilly-uniformed waitresses.

However, pride of place went to the 1889 Forest Glen Pavilion (below), which became a much-loved venue by visitors to The Wrekin who expected the courtesy of being able to access basic amenities, especially since they had travelled a distance and were supporting the local economy.

The Pavilion closed after one hundred years serving the needs of travellers and local residents. A visitor car park currently marks the location.

A walk up The Wrekin is like a pilgrimage. It occupies a special place in the hearts of everyone who was born beneath its shadow and provides an everlasting memory for those who have experienced its magic; it's almost as if it casts a spell demanding loyalty and affection from which there's no escape.



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