

MUCH WENLOCK CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

This appraisal was approved by Bridgnorth District Council's Planning Committee on 27 April 1994.

The Much Wenlock Conservation Area was designated on 15th May 1970. It was extended on 9th March 1981. Further extensions and revisions to the boundaries were designated on 27th July 1994.

Much Wenlock is a small historic market town 7 miles north-west of Bridgnorth. The Conservation Area comprises the whole of the historic core of the town including the remains of Wenlock Priory, High Street, Barrow Street, Wilmore Street and Sheinton Street and part of the area to the west bounded by Smithfield Road and New Road, Victoria Road, and part of Bourton Road, Stretton Road and Shrewsbury Road.

Topography

Much Wenlock lies within a shallow valley or “bowl” at the north-west of Wenlock Edge. The town is surrounded by agricultural land and trees and is visually contained within this “bowl”. Views outwards from many points within the town are closed by the surrounding slopes, which can be seen rising up above the buildings. These views are a significant part of the town's character, preserving and emphasising its attractive rural qualities.

Equally important are views from the “rim” of the hollow looking down into and across the town from surrounding countryside. Large areas of the town can be seen from viewpoints such as Windmill Hill, halfway up the lane north of Wenlock Priory, above Southfield Road and by Station House. These views are particularly sensitive to change: alterations or development can have an impact far beyond their immediate location.

The town's main water course, the Shit Brook, runs down High Street, along Back Lane, through the Bull Ring and north of the Priory. It is now largely underground, but its course largely shaped the mediaeval boundaries of Much Wenlock which can still be recognised today.

History

Much Wenlock is a town of ancient origin, with evidence of prehistoric and Roman occupation. From the Anglo-Saxon period onwards it has always been the only large settlement in the parish. In the 680s a double monastery (for men and women) was founded on land acquired from Merewald, King of the Magonsaete, whose daughter Milburga became abbess. The communities probably had separate churches. The parish of Holy Trinity probably originated as the church of one of these. In about 1080 the Cluniac Priory of Much Wenlock was established, and Much Wenlock passed into its ownership. In the early 12th century Holy Trinity was re-established as the parish church and was rebuilt.

By 1247 Much Wenlock has become a borough. The developing street pattern of the mediaeval town centred not on the Priory, which had its principal gate onto Bull Ring, but on a market place at the entrance to the parish churchyard. That mediaeval street pattern can still be traced and is a fundamental element of Much Wenlock's special character. The building of shops on the approaches to the churchyard began the principal streets, meeting in a T-junction at the market

place. These are High Street, originally known as Spittle Strret and later as Hospital Strret after the Hospital of St. John; Barrow Street, originally Southpool Street; and Wilmore Street and its northern continuation beyond Bull Ring as Sheinton Street. Some of the mediaeval lanes running off these street still survive, such as St. Mary's Lane. The long burgage plots running back from these streets largely survive. Like the street pattern they are an important relic of Much Wenlock's mediaeval origins, and a significant element of the town's historic interest and character. Many vestiges of mediaeval buildings also survive, often disguised by later alterations and rebuilding. They contribute greatly to the town's special architectural and historic interest.

In the 15th and 16th centuries development continued. By about 1500 Spittle Street was built up as far as the Bridgnorth Road, and Barrow Street and Sheinton Street were equally developed. The principal market place was reduced in width by the encroachment of building such as the Guildhall built as a court hall about 1539-41. Bull Ring was similarly narrowed.

In 1540 the Priory was dissolved, and its site and lands passed into private hands. The Prior's Lodging effectively became the manor house. During the 16th and 17th centuries the population of Much Wenlock increased greatly. In 1524 it was somewhere between 200 and 400; by 1695 it had risen to 1,138. This increase and the success of Much Wenlock's varied trades, including cloth manufacture and leather working, together with its importance as a supplier of goods and services to the surrounding agricultural area, were reflected in the development of the town. Old houses were altered and adapted, or replaced altogether, and more cottages were built at the ends of the main street, in back lanes and groups outside the mediaeval part of the town. By the early 18th century there were clusters of cottages around quarries and junctions on the Shrewsbury and Stretton Roads.

During the latter part of the 18th century Much Wenlock's economy stagnated, and the population increase halted. Building activity slowed down to match. Fresh stimulus came in the early 19th century with an upsurge in prosperity due to the success of the local limestone quarries as a result of demand from the iron industry. Between 1801 and 1831 the population of the parish rose by 22%, with the rate of growth especially high in the 1820s. A great deal of rebuilding and alteration took place, especially in the town centre.

Between 1831 and 1871 there was little further significant growth. The arrival of the railway did little to improve the situation. In 1862 the Much Wenlock and Severn Junction Railway opened a line to Buildwas, and in 1864 the Wenlock Railway Company extended the line to Coalbrookdale and to Presthope, and later linked it to Craven Arms. It was hoped that the railway would ease transport of local limestone. Initially it stimulated quarrying, but lack of direct links to the east Shropshire coalfield made it uncompetitive with Welsh imports, and the decline of Shropshire's iron industry further reduced demand. Passenger services continued to Craven Arms until 1951 and to Buildwas until 1962. The line closed in 1963, but the former station and gateway embankments and bridge abutments and other structures are important remnants of the railway's impact on Much Wenlock which now form part of its historic and architectural character. From 1871 to 1921 the parish population fell by 21%, reflecting agricultural and industrial recession. Little development took place and by the end of the 19th century Much Wenlock was being admired by some for its quaint and "historical" character. Since the 1920s the population has again risen, accompanied by a considerable amount of new building at the edges of town. The historic core of the town, has, though, remained largely intact.

Archaeology

Much Wenlock is a town of great archaeological interest and importance. The town's extensive archaeological remains comprise not only buried Roman, Saxon, mediaeval and post-mediaeval

deposits but also standing structures, and the mediaeval and later pattern of settlement, streets and boundaries. These in turn have a marked affect on Much Wenlock's character and appearance. As a result of the town's low-lying, formerly marshy situation, deposits are extensively waterlogged and therefore likely to be of very high potential interest due to the preservation of organic materials.

Evidence from past excavations and finds has indicated Roman occupation. Much Wenlock was a Saxon ecclesiastical centre: evidence of the Saxon abbey has been found, and the parish church of Holy Trinity is probably on the site of a Saxon church. Although there are no surviving Saxon buildings or earthworks, buried Saxon deposits have been found, for instance on the site of the market place, now the Square. Deposits are most likely to survive west of Wilmore Street and the northern end of Barrow Street, the probable location of a small settlement which would have formed the nucleus of the later town. Roman or Saxon waterlogged deposits are likely to be of national importance.

Archaeological remains from the Mediaeval period are extensive. Numerous buildings and parts of buildings survive, both within the Priory site and the town. The mediaeval earthworks to the east of the Priory are the remains of an important groups of monastic fishponds. Important buried deposits have been excavated, and there is a strong likelihood that many other significant deposits of great potential interest survive. The former market places in Bull Ring and Wilmore Street are likely to have deposits relating to shops and stalls, and evidence of domestic and industrial activities is likely to survive in the backyards of the mediaeval burgage plots throughout the town. Mediaeval road surfaces may lie beneath later layers. There is also extensive evidence of mediaeval street patterns, plots and boundaries in the present-day fabric of the town.

Post-mediaeval remains, both standing structures and buried deposits, are extensive and well-preserved due to relatively limited development within the historic area since 1800. The development of later street and boundaries extending and developing the mediaeval pattern can be clearly seen. All of these provide valuable evidence of the later development of Much Wenlock. The large number of surviving buildings with associated deposits are of particular significance, especially with regard to the development of the town's industries in the 17th and 18th centuries. These would have been based in existing buildings, and evidence of both domestic and industrial use is likely to be found both in the buildings and in buried deposits in land to the rear.

Pattern of Development

The historic core of Much Wenlock is shaped by the survival of the Priory and the mediaeval street pattern, overlaid by later development. The Priory still forms the eastern boundary of the town, as it did in the middle ages. The buildings and associated archaeological remains not only reflect the mediaeval development of Much Wenlock, but also make a vital contribution to its character today. The principal mediaeval streets – High Street, Barrow Street, Wilmore and Sheinton Streets – converge on the churchyard and the site of the former market place; Bull Ring, the site of a second market place and the approach to the principal gate of the Priory, Back Lane and St. Mary's Lane are also part of the mediaeval pattern.

In the centre of the town the streets are narrow: High Street broadens out noticeably west of Back Lane, reflecting later expansion in that direction, and Barrow Street widens south east of the churchyard. Development along the principal streets is tightly concentrated and urban in feeling and public open space is very limited. The Square at the junction of High Street, Wilmore Street and Barrow Street provides a focal point, but is small in scale. The churchyard is a much

larger green open space, but is very largely hidden from view from the main streets by the buildings around the perimeter.

Most buildings in the main streets front directly onto the pavement with few gaps between them, resulting in largely unbroken frontages. There is very little 20th century development. To the rear many buildings have long rear gardens reflecting the extent of the original mediaeval plots. The original rear boundary of these plots, separating the town from the countryside, is still an important feature of Much Wenlock's character, particularly to the rear of Barrow Street and Sheinton Street. Behind many of the frontage buildings are a variety of outbuildings, attached or separate, some with direct access onto the mediaeval lanes. Some of these outbuildings were domestic, others were for industrial or commercial use. They are an important element of the historic character of the town.

Away from the principal streets the pattern is more fragmented, reflecting the subsequent development of the town. Back Lane on its eastern side is the boundary of the mediaeval plots, and has a varied and irregular mixture of outbuildings and boundary walls, with views of the backs of buildings in High Street and Wilmore Street. However, it is breached by the car park behind the Corn Exchange, and on its western side are the mid 20th century council houses of St. Owen's Road. St. Mary's Lane, like Back Lane, is narrow and irregular, tightly enclosed by buildings and boundary walls, but again lacks the continuously built up frontages of the principal streets. Queen Street has scattered old buildings including St. Owen's Well Cottage and the extensive buildings of Brook House Farm. King Street and Smithfield Road are very largely 18th and 19th century development, with a few 18th century cottages and Mardol Terrace of 1870 in Smithfield Road marking the western boundary of the conservation area.

Beyond New Road the northern continuation of Sheinton Street developed in the 18th and 19th centuries retains some of its original urban fringe character. Nos. 23-29 on the western side are 18th and 19th century cottages, set closely together and mostly fronting directly onto the street, with long garden plots running off at an angle to the rear. Further north the cottages are much more scattered, set back in shallow plots backing onto open fields. On the east side Nos. 37-39 again front onto the street but on either side are large gardens. To the east of them is the Red House, a large Georgian house which originally stood in its own grounds. Station Road and the former railway embankment represent major 19th century development, and Nos. 35 and 36 and Wheatland Grove are substantial late Victorian houses. 20th century housing development has completed the change from open rural to suburban character.

Further out from the historic core to the west the pattern of development is yet more scattered and irregular, and altogether less urban in feeling. The junction of High Street, Bridgnorth Road, Bourton Road and Victoria Road forms a sizeable open area dominated by two large detached buildings, The Gaskell Arms, a building of mediaeval origin, and the early 19th century vicarage set high in its own grounds. Bourton Road has a garage based in old agricultural buildings, the former Malthouse and a few houses, but merges rapidly into the surrounding countryside. Victoria Road, Stretton Road and Shrewsbury Road have a scattered irregular linear pattern of development quite different to the majority of Much Wenlock. Much of this is probably due to the development of the local limestone quarrying industry in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The group of small stone cottages on Shrewsbury Road and Stretton Road were occupied by quarrymen.

Buildings

Much Wenlock has a large number of buildings of historic and architectural interest. Some, notably the Grade I listed Priory ruins and Wenlock Abbey, are of outstanding national

importance. A number of others, including the Guildhall, Raynalds Mansion, and Ashfield Hall are Listed Grade II* as buildings of major architectural and historic significance. However, the town has a very high concentration of old buildings of lesser individual importance, listed and unlisted, ranging from small outbuildings to substantial houses and public buildings, which together make the greatest contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The chief buildings of mediaeval Much Wenlock still form a major part of the town's character. The parish church, a Grade A listed building, dominates Wilmore Street. Its tower is a focal point of views south along Sheinton Street, and can be seen from many other more distant viewpoints. A mediaeval corner tower of the Priory's precinct wall is a prominent feature of the street scene in Bull Ring. The Priory ruins and Wenlock Abbey (the former Prior's lodging), close to the centre of the town yet appearing separate, are not only an outstanding group of mediaeval buildings but a vital element of Much Wenlock's unique character, reflecting the relationship between the religious foundation and the town which grew up outside its gate. The gardens of Wenlock Abbey are also of historic interest, including features of possibly mediaeval origin in such as a pond which may be the site of a monastic stewpond, although much of the present layout is 19th century. They are listed Grade II in the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.

A significant number of late mediaeval hall houses survive, to varying degrees: one of the most obvious is Ashfield Hall, a Grade II* listed building in High Street. Other examples include the Talbot Inn (formerly Abbots Hall) and Bastard Hall, 55-57 Sheinton Street. Whilst these have been extensively altered and changed from their original function, there is still visible external evidence of their origins. But in other cases mediaeval structures are very largely hidden within apparently later buildings, such as 23 Barrow Street. These former hall houses are quite large buildings in the main streets, but there are also late mediaeval terraces of small cottages at 7-10 Bull Ring, 25-28 Barrow Street and 16-20 High Street, disguised by later alterations. Walls between plots also include mediaeval and later construction.

One of the most striking characteristics of Much Wenlock is the mixture of buildings of many different periods, purposes, sizes and materials, reflecting the town's development as buildings were altered or replaced, or their uses changed. Many reflect the enormous impact of Much Wenlock's development and expansion in the 16th and 17th centuries. Some of the most prominent buildings in the town date from this period/ The earliest part of the Guildhall, the principal public building, was built of stone in 1539-41 as a prison house. In 1577 the timber framed council chamber was built over it and over an open arcade which served as a butter market. Buildings within the town were remodelled or rebuilt: Raynalds Mansion, one of Much Wenlock's largest timber framed houses, was enlarged and elaborately remodelled from a mediaeval hall in the late 17th century. Other 16th and 17th century buildings include Barclays Bank and 10-11 High Street, 16 Barrow Street and 11 Bull Ring. Many more houses, cottages and other buildings were erected as the main street grew outwards and the lanes were built up. Among them are the Manor House and No.50 in Sheinton Street, 41 and 21-22 High Street, and 34 Barrow Street.

Eighteenth century buildings are fewer, due to a period of economic stagnation until the last years of the century. Nevertheless, there are some good quality Georgian buildings in the centre of the town and elsewhere which make a valuable contribution to the town's character and interest. The most prominent are probably the Post Office, 19-21 Barrow Street, and the front of 48 High Street with its gate piers. Other good examples include numbers 2,3 and 5 Wilmore Street. Away from the town centre the Red House off Station Road is an ambitious 3-storey detached house with Venetian windows. All of these buildings reflect the architectural

fashions of the day, with careful proportions, symmetrical or balanced elevations and refined detail.

In the late 18th and early 19th century renewed prosperity and expansion left its mark on the appearance and character of Much Wenlock. There was an considerable amount of rebuilding on existing sites, particularly on the main street in the centre of the town. Among examples of this are Nos. 3 to 6 High Street, 4 Wilmore Street (Lloyds Bank) and 22 High Street. Many of these buildings are tall, vertically proportioned and relatively narrow, generally of 3 storeys, and 2 bays with sash windows in brick or stucco. Some older buildings, such as 61 High Street, were re-fronted in a similar style. Some new buildings, further out from the centre, followed the same trend: 3-storeyed, but often double-fronted of 3 rather than 2 bays; among them are 14 Barrow Street and the main block of the Raven Hotel. A variation on this are 2-storey houses such as 2 Bourton Road, 13 Barrow Street; School House, Bull Ring, and Holly Grange, Sheinton Street.

Some larger detached houses were built on the fringes of the town such as the Old Vicarage and Maryway House of 1823. Others of earlier origin were extensively rebuilt and enlarged: the Priory in Bull Ring is a good example. Numerous small houses and cottages were also built or remodelled, both in the town and on the fringes. The more 'fashionable' of these are in brick or at least brick-fronted, rather than local limestone. Some are designed as terraces or pairs, such as No.s 26-32 and 42-43 High Street, 1-3 Bull Ring, or the Almshouses, 51-54 Sheinton Street. Others are detached or in small groups, particularly in the more outlying parts of the conservation area. Examples include cottages in St. Mary's Lane and King Street; 10 Victoria Road, the group of quarrymen's cottages on Stretton and Shrewsbury roads, and cottages at the northern end of Sheinton Street.

Later 19th century and early 20th century buildings are few: Mardol Terrace of 1870 stands out not for its (fairly undistinguished) quality but for rarity value in the context of the town as a whole. Though there are numerous 19th century shopfronts, Victorian and Edwardian commercial buildings are also scarce, with the exception of 64 (the Midland Bank) and 65 (Lo Cost supermarket) High Street.

On the other hand, most of Much Wenlock's public buildings were erected in the 19th century. The Priory Hall (formerly National School) of about 1847, the Corn Exchange of 1852 and the Museum (originally Market Hall) of 1878 were all designed by S Pountney Smith. The Corn Exchange is on a much grander scale than any of its neighbours. The Cooke Clock of 1897 forms a focal point to the square. The former Police Station in Sheinton Street is also late 19th century.

20th century commercial development within the historic core of the town has been confined to the redevelopment of the Square, and a variety of (not always sympathetic) shopfronts. Residential development has however been much more extensive. This has had only limited impact on the main historic street, but within the conservation area the character of lanes and side streets such as Queen Street has been damaged by unsympathetic housing.

The mix of types of building is an important element of Much Wenlock's character. There is no rigid stratification of social class or building use. Large houses are mingled with small cottages in the main streets. The commercial and public heart of the town is around the junction of High Street, Barrow Street and Wilmore Street, but there is no rigid segregation of building uses. Public and commercial buildings are mixed together quite randomly. This is equally mingled with residential use, often in the same building: a significant number of commercial properties continue to be inhabited either by their owners or with tenanted flats on upper floors. In recent

years there has been a tendency for more outlying shops to close and revert to solely residential use.

This mix of uses is reflected in the survival of many of the buildings associated with the town's trades and crafts. Although most have been converted to other uses, or abandoned, these buildings continue to make a significant contribution to the character of Much Wenlock. A quite unusual feature is the survival of several farmsteads within the town. The most notable, both for the quality and interest of its buildings, and because it is the only one which is still a working farm, is Brook House Farm. Its continued agricultural use is an important element of Much Wenlock's character. Small groups of former farm buildings are in St. Mary's Lane, King Street and to the rear of High Street. Cowhouses, such as the former 'town cowhouse' behind Barrow Street, stables such as that on Back Lane behind 57 High Street, and pig sties also survive.

Other buildings reflect other important local trades, many of them linked with agriculture. The majority are late 18th or early 19th century. Commercial malthouses can be seen on High Street and Bourton Road. Milburga Row, off Barrow Street, was once a currier's workshop. There are carpenter's workshops off Barrow Street, a former wheelwrights's workshop at the top of High Street, and the remains of several forges. But the general pattern in the town, reflected in many surviving buildings, was smaller-scale than these, with a house and shop or Inn across the frontage, and production in small attached or free-standing buildings to the rear. Examples include the former malting to the rear of the Talbot Inn, a brewhouse behind The George and Dragon Public House, and a carpenter's workshop and detached kitchens to the rear of 57-58 High Street.. All of these, together with more domestic outbuildings such as wash houses, have created a conglomeration of small buildings, visible from back lanes and side streets and from areas such as the St. Mary's Lane car park, which are an important part of the intricate, irregular and picturesque character of the town.

Materials

The dominant materials of Much Wenlock are stone, timber framing and brick with clay tile roofs and a few of Welsh slate. In some buildings one or other of these is the principal material, but in a great many buildings several different materials are used, often reflecting a long history of alteration and rebuilding. In some cases the structural materials are disguised or concealed altogether by paint or render. The result is a rich mixture of colours, textures, forms and detail which is a vital ingredient of the town's unique character.

The silurian grey limestone quarried close by on Wenlock Edge was extensively used for building in Much Wenlock from the Middle Ages until well into the 19th century, and is a vital element of the town. The Parish Church and much of the Priory buildings and parts of some of the substantial Hall houses of mediaeval origin, such as Ashfield Hall in High Street and Bastard Hall in Sheinton Street, are all of Wenlock stone. Stone is used for the whole range buildings: public buildings such as the Corn Exchange; houses and cottages; farm buildings such as those at Brook House Farm; outbuildings of all types; commercial buildings, notably the National Westminster Bank; and the boundary walls which are an important feature of the town especially in Bull Ring, St. Mary's Lane and Victoria Road. Most of the stonework is rubble, generally roughly coursed, but some of the finer and more ambitious buildings such as the Corn Exchange or National Westminster Bank, have squared coursed stone with ashlar dressings to principal elevations – though with cheaper rubble to the rear.

The local tradition of timber framing is a vital part of Much Wenlock's character. A significant number of buildings – many more than at first sight – are wholly or partly timber framed. They vary greatly in date, type, size and quality. There is an equally great range of constructional

techniques: crucks, close studding, jetties, decorative panels, with wattle and daub, lath and plaster or brick infill, in many different combinations. This diversity makes a major contribution to the town's visual and historic interest.

5 Queen Street has exposed crucks in the gable end. The Guildhall, with close studding and decorative panels, is one of the principal buildings in the town. The restored front of Reynalds Mansion is the most elaborate timber-framed façade in Much Wenlock but the majority of buildings are simply detailed, with little decoration. Other prominent timber-framed buildings include Barclays Bank and the Manor House in Sheinton Street, but there are also many houses and cottages with exposed framing such as 41 High Street, 7 Bull Ring, Church House and 34 Barrow Street.

The Talbot Inn and 12 High Street is a 15th century jettied building of considerable importance, partly disguised by early 19th century render and alterations. A large number of other buildings have timber construction hidden from view by later rebuilding in other materials. 23 Barrow Street is a hall house dated by dendrochronology to 1327-30 with a hall of base cruck construction and 18-22 High Street is also of cruck hidden behind painted early 19th century brick. 18-22 High Street and 25-28 Barrow Street are exceptionally rare terraces of cruck-built cottages. 61 High Street has an early 19th century rendered front, but inside there is extensive timber framing, and there are many other examples.

Stone and timber remained the chief materials until the 18th century, when brick began to be used. 57-58 and 59-60 High Street are early 18th century brick facades. 19-21 Barrow Street, the Post Office in High Street, Nos 2,3 and 5 Wilmore Street and Red House are good quality mid to late 18th century brick buildings with quite sophisticated details. All of these are substantial houses, but brick became increasingly used for a much wider range of buildings during the upsurge in building in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Gaskell Arms, The Old Vicarage and The Priory in Bull Ring were built or rebuilt in brick, but it was also used for smaller individual houses and buildings such as 13, 14 and 22 Barrow Street, and for small houses and cottages such as 33-34 High Street and 51-54 Sheinton Street. In some of these buildings brick was used only for the front elevation, with Wenlock stone to the sides and rear; examples include 1-3 Bull Ring and 8-13 Sheinton Street. Some stone cottages have brick segmental arches over doors and windows. Brick was also used for other buildings, such as the simple Methodist Chapel in King Street.

The majority of the brick buildings are of local bricks in a range of colours from red to plum and buff. There were local brickyards, as well as the brick factories a little further away at Broseley. Brick can be seen used to provide 17th century details which combined function and decoration, such as the star-section brick chimneys of Ashfield Hall, gauged brick flat arches over sash windows, and dentil cornices to eaves. The potential of coloured bricks for decorative effect can be seen exploited in a few buildings, notably 3 and 4 High Street with chequered blue and pale yellow bricks, and the Old Police Station of blue engineering brick with contrasting yellow brick bands and dressings.

Throughout the town a variety of buildings in all of the principal materials – stone, timber framing and brick – have been rendered or painted. In some cases, such as 7 (Burford House) Wilmore Street smooth render is a vital part of the original design. In others, such as 61 High Street, it is clearly part of early 19th century rebuilding or remodelling, as attempt to update the building. The Talbot Inn is another example. Numerous buildings in the town are painted, such as 1 High Street and the George and Dragon Public House, 23 and 29 Barrow Street and 2 and 3 Sheinton Street. This gives a unified finish, but the form and texture of the materials beneath can still be seen.

In the past many buildings in the town were thatched, but none remain. Some buildings had roofs of stone slates, of which Wenlock Abbey is now the only surviving, but particularly fine, example. Most buildings now have prominent roofs of clay tiles, many of them hand-made, which give colour and texture to the roofscape of the town. A few early 19th century buildings, such as The Old Vicarage and 6 High Street, have contrasting shallow-pitched roofs of Welsh slate. Roofs are predominantly pitched, with roof slopes parallel to the street and plain verges to the gables. Hipped roofs such as those of Burford House in Wilmore Street or 11 High Street, or gables towards the street such as those of 10 or 23 High Street are the exception rather than the rule.

Architectural Details

Much of the visual interest of Much Wenlock's historic buildings is provided by the wide variety of details they display. These owe much to the materials and methods of construction. Much of the character and appearance of the town's timber framed buildings is provided not only by the exposed timber but by the type of framing. Some buildings, especially the simpler houses such as 41 High Street, have simple panelled framing with little or no ornamental work, while slightly more ambitious buildings such as Barclays Bank have some purely decorative framing. Other buildings such as Bastards Hall and the Guildhall use close studding, but the Guildhall also has elaborate decorative panelled work, while there is nothing else in Much Wenlock to compare with the elaborate framing of Raynalds Mansion.

Wenlock stone is not suitable for fine quality dressings, mouldings and carved work, and as a result the vast majority of the town's stone buildings do not have elaborate architectural details. There are, however, some notable exceptions where Wenlock stone walling is used in combination with other stone for dressings etc, such as the Parish Church and Priory buildings which have mouldings and carvings of high quality. Much later examples of this are the Corn Exchange and Midland Bank in High Street with arches, columns, string courses, cornices, window surrounds and other details in fine ashlar stone. Some simple stone buildings have contrasting details such as simple cornices, lintels and arches in brick. 27 to 30 and 31 and 32 High Street are good examples.

A variety of cornices and treatments of opening recur frequently around the town. Most brick or stone buildings have cornices, predominantly of brick. The main types are simply detailed: continuous corbelling, square or moulded as on 3 and 4 High Street, dentil or dog-tooth, or a combination of these. Rather fewer are of painted timber, and most of these, such as that of Lloyds Bank in Wilmore Street, are quite simply detailed. There is nothing else to match the elaborate heavily moulded dentil cornice of 21 and 22 Barrow Street. The deep moulded plaster cornice of Burford House in Wilmore Street seems to be unique in Much Wenlock.

In timber framed buildings openings are fitted within the framing with little elaboration, but masonry buildings have a variety of treatments. The majority of cottages and small houses have segmental arches or flat arches of brick or stone, with windows or doors slightly recessed within them. An interesting local variation found in a number of buildings are Gothick arches, whether simply pointed such as those of 5 St. Mary's Lane or the simple ogees of 51-54 Sheinton Street. More ambitious 18th and 19th century buildings such as 22 Barrow Street have fine gauged and rubbed brick flat arches over openings. A variation of this are the flat arches with keystones of 5 Wilmore Street and 20 and 21 Barrow Street.

Very widespread is the painted stone or rendered lintel and sill, usually found with sash windows. These are detailed in a variety of ways: channelled as at 3 and 4 High Street,

channelled with key blocks as at 12, 13 and 14 Barrow Street, or channelled and stepped as at Lloyds Bank. A quite widespread variation on this is the moulded very shallow segmental arch with a keystone and impost blocks, examples can be seen at 2 Bourton Road, School House in Bull Ring and 6 Wilmore Street.

Within these openings a number of types of doors and windows are characteristic of Much Wenlock. Plain vertically boarded doors, often painted, can be seen used on many cottages and small houses such as 8 Bull Ring or 17 High Street. Simple painted 4-panelled or 6-panelled doors in simple moulded frames, such as those at No. 18 or 27-30 High Street are typical. Inappropriate replacement of these with standard mass-produced late 20th century doors has caused some damage to the character of the conservation area. The next stage up from this is a slightly more elaborate treatment with moulded panelled doors and simple moulded timber doorcases, such as the three-panelled doors and surrounds of 1-3 Bull Ring. More ambitious buildings have more elaborate doorcases, moulded or reeded with shallow hoods such as those of 13 and 14 Barrow Street or the pediments of 11 and 12 Barrow Street and School House. School House and 11 Barrow Street also have fanlights and others in a variety of designs can be seen around the town, notably at the Old Vicarage and the Gaskell Arms.

The most characteristic type of window in the town is the timber casement. This is very widely used in cottages and small houses, but also in some larger buildings such as the Manor House. Widespread but under increasing threat from unsympathetic replacement is the timber casement with iron opening lights and glazing bars. Many examples can be seen throughout the town, and horizontal bars seem to be particularly prevalent. A few buildings such as 10 Victoria Road and 5 St. Mary's Lane have an attractive late Georgian Gothick version. Superficially similar but often 19th century or later is the timber casement with horizontal glazing bars used in numerous cottages in Sheinton Street and elsewhere. A much smaller number of buildings, such as the Guildhall, Raynalds Mansion and Barclays Bank, have timber mullioned windows with leaded lights.

Vertically sliding sashes are widespread amongst the more ambitious 18th and 19th century buildings. They vary according to date: there are a few early/mid 18th century types with exposed sash boxes, some with 8 panes, such as those at the Post Office or 21 Barrow Street, some with 18 panes and thick glazing bars, such as those of 58 High Street. More common are the 12 pane 18th and 19th century sashes of buildings such as 5 Wilmore Street or 22 Barrow Street with their varying details of sash boxes and glazing bars. Also characteristic of Much Wenlock are the late 18th and 19th century 16 pane sashes of buildings such as 48 High Street, the Gaskell Arms and the Old Vicarage. Rather rarer are the horizontally sliding sashes of 27-30 High Street.

A long history of commercial use and adaptation has left Much Wenlock with a considerable number of historic shopfronts, all constructed of painted timber. The double fronted bow windows and doorcases of 29 Barrow Street and 43 High Street are early 19th century and considerable rarities. No. 12 High Street has a simple early 19th century rectangular bay with small panes. No. 4 Wilmore Street (Lloyds Bank) has an early 19th century frontage of pilasters fascias and cornices, while 19 Barrow Street has a mid/late 19th century version.

The majority of shopfronts, however are late Victorian and Edwardian. They take a variety of forms. Some are double-fronted rectangular bays with slender mullions and recessed entrances under a continuous fascia, as at 17, 18, 20, 21 and 22 Barrow Street, 2, 3 and 5 Wilmore Street, 3 and 4 High Street and the Post Office. 18A High Street has a very plain and simple late 19th century shop window with mullions, while 6 High Street has a much larger version with a heavy coved cornice above; another variation is the simple mullioned window extended out over the

pavement at 57 High Street. No.54 High Street has another double fronted variation, with large windows and pilasters under a continuous cornice.

The Character of the Conservation Area

Some aspects of Much Wenlock such as its wealth of historic buildings in distinctive local materials, are common to the character of the conservation area as a whole. Much Wenlock's exceptional historic and architectural interest is the predominant element of the town's character. The long history of the town is visible everywhere within the conservation area, from the ruins of the Priory which dominated the town to the very high concentration of buildings of historic and architectural interest reflecting all the major periods of development.

Its history is reflected also in less immediately obvious ways which have nevertheless shaped the appearance and character of Much Wenlock, notably the survival of much of the mediaeval street pattern and burgage plots which largely determined the form of later development. Economic stagnation for much of the 19th and 20th centuries has meant that the historic core of the town has been largely unscathed by redevelopment. Recent housing development has been concentrated mostly on the fringes of the town, preserving the historic core of the conservation area substantially unaltered.

The distinctive local materials – Wenlock stone, timber framing, local brick and clay tiles – common to most of the town's historic buildings throughout the conservation area are perhaps the most dominant visual element of Much Wenlock's appearance and character. They provide a range of colours, textures and distinctive details and a richness and variety which is an essential part of Much Wenlock's "sense of place".

History, old buildings and local materials are elements which individually or together can be found in other places, but the relationship between them and to the physical location and setting of the town within hollow gives it a strong sense of containment within natural boundaries. It also contributes greatly to the character of the street and spaces within the town; the surrounding slopes can be glimpsed above and between buildings, closing views down streets, and from sudden unexpected viewpoints. As a result, from almost anywhere within the town the surrounding countryside appears very close, emphasising Much Wenlock's character as a small rural market town. This setting is critical to the town's character but is very vulnerable; it has already been damaged by poorly sited housing development forming isolated extensions out into the surrounding countryside which breach the "natural" boundaries of the town.

Within the conservation area there is considerable diversity: different parts have their own character.

The Historic Centre

Around the junction of the principal mediaeval streets – High Street, Barrow Street and Wilmore Street – there is a strong urban feeling, but the town centre is by no means exclusively commercial: many buildings, combine commercial use on the ground floor with residential use above, maintaining its character as a living centre. It is made up almost entirely of historic buildings of many periods, types, styles and materials, clustered tightly together with virtually unbroken frontages to narrow streets; behind are long narrow plots which preserve the original mediaeval pattern of settlement. Most of the larger buildings of the town are concentrated here.

The three streets meet in The Square which although small is the only truly urban open space in the town. The recently restored Cooke Clock provides a focal point. The timber framing of the

Guildhall, one of the principal historic buildings of the town, fills one corner, with a glimpse beneath it through to the churchyard, while the Museum fills most of its northern side. Tall three-storey Georgian brick buildings enclose the eastern side, and to the west and south late 20th century commercial redevelopment reflects the scale of adjacent two-storey properties and the traditional materials and detail of many of the town's buildings. The stone paving of the Square could provide a model to be followed in the adjacent streets.

High Street

From the Square the slight curve of High Street is clearly visible, and the timber-framed gable end of Barclays Bank is particularly prominent. The street presents a very varied appearance with buildings of varying sizes, heights and scales, in a variety of materials and styles. Close to The Square there is a high concentration of tall buildings, many of them three storeyed or with prominent attics. They include the early 19th century chequered brick fronts of Nos.2 and 3 with intact late Victorian shopfronts, the late Victorian supermarket premises on the corner, the tall Tudor-style bank in local stone, several Georgian brick facades with cornices and sash windows, and the elaborate large-scale timber framing of Raynalds Mansion. The Corn Exchange of tow high storeys stands out from the rest by its much grander scale, but still uses local stone and respects the general building line and roofscape.

The open loggia of the Corn Exchange contrasts with the tightly enclosed street scene. A few small alleys and entries, such as the George Shut provide intriguing glimpses through to the areas behind. Between No.14 and Barclays Bank there is a wide break in the frontage with a view along the side elevation of the bank, but the poorly paved area and mid-20th century commercial building set back do little to enhance the character of the street. There is also a break in the frontage opposite.

Towards Back Lane the size and scale of buildings tends to diminish as High Street move away from the commercial heart of the town. At the junction the built-up frontages on both sides break, with the walled garden of No. 16 opposite Back Lane itself. The open "hole" created by the car park on the corner rather detracts from the enclosed character of the street, and opens up a somewhat uninspiring view of 20th century housing in St. Owen's Road.

A little further on, High Street bends slightly and begins to broaden out. Built-up frontages resume but with generally smaller and humbler dwellings especially on the south side where there are several rows terraces of cottages such as Nos. 16 to 20 and 27 to 30 as well as small individual houses. The feeling is less urban, more village-like. On the north side there are fewer but larger buildings, notably the wide timber-framed and stone-gabled frontage of Ashfield Hall and the Georgian façade of No.48, the only building set back from the street. Nos. 47 and 42 have original bow-windowed shop fronts. The Wheatland Fox, with its unusual raised ground floor, dominates the corner of King Street.

Back Lane and Queen Street

Linking High Street and Queen Street, Back Lane is a mediaeval road behind the plots running back from High Street and Wilmore Street. There are no old buildings on its western side but the eastern side has boundary walls and a variety of brick and stone outbuildings fronting directly onto the road and set within the plots. These mask the lower parts of the backs of buildings in High Street, but rising above them the upper floors, roofs and prominent chimneys form a very varied and fascinating townscape. This view is opened out by the car park to the rear of the Corn Exchange. Northwards the townscape is marred by some insensitive 20th

century fencing and garaging. The second floor loading door and hoist of the supermarket building is clearly visible.

Further north the road narrows, enclosed by a single small mid 19th century house on the eastside and boundary walls on both sides, and pavements cease. The church tower rises above the roofs of Wilmore Street. Ahead the extensive stone, brick and timber framed buildings of Brook House Farm, the biggest and best preserved farm complex remaining in Much Wenlock, give a strong agricultural character to this part of the town. Nos. 5 and 6 Queen Street on the corner have exposed crucks. Enclosed within the boundary wall, St. Owen's Well, one of the mediaeval wells of Much Wenlock, is an unusual and important feature. The opposite side is quite different, with small houses following the curve of the road round into Queen Street.

Barrow Street

The view south east from The Square along Barrow Street is close by buildings with the green slopes of the hollow in which the town lies rising up behind. The street is initially narrow with tall three-storey 18th and 19th century brick commercial/residential buildings on the north east side, and lower, older, painted brick and stone houses and cottages on the south west. At the corner of No.17 it abruptly widens out. Between No.17 and the picturesque timber-framed Church House across a lawned area into the open green space of Holy Trinity churchyard, with trees and the Priory grounds is a fine view beyond the churchyard wall. This sudden view is a dramatic element in the character of the street.

Back towards High Street the view is closed by the front of the Museum. Small scale built-up frontages continue on the south west side, but are then suddenly terminated by the much greater bulk of the detached three-storey Raven Hotel and its associated buildings. The north east side is more fragmented, with larger and more ambitious two and three storey houses. A cobbled area behind the pavement, pollarded trees, high brick or stone walls enclosing private gardens are important features in the street scene. Abbeywell House, a skilful conversion of old buildings with unmistakably late 19th century detailing but traditional materials, is a good example of late 20th century development which preserves and enhances the character of the conservation area. Views out into parkland over walls and between the houses on the north east side are a significant part of the street's character.

South east of St. Mary's Lane, Barrow Street gradually narrows and bends slightly. Built-up frontages continue, though the building lines are irregular rather than continuous with a variety of massing, heights and rooflines. St. Milburga's Row forms a narrow court opening off the street. The scale of buildings diminishes down to small houses and cottages. Laurel Bank, a detached house of about 1900 set well back and raised up on a garden behind iron railings, makes a break in this pattern on the south west side. A more damaging break is created by the access opposite The Royal Oak leading to a modern dwelling towards the rear of the site. The Royal Oak is the last of the historic buildings on the north east side. The high garden wall and coach house of Carver's Cottage continue the tight enclosure of the south-west side and forms the historic edge of the town. Carver's Cottage stands isolated within its large garden behind the wall, set part from the street, but still part of the town. Looking back towards the town, fields rising up to the trees on Wenlock Edge can be seen between and above the varied roofs.

St. Mary's Lane

The junction of St. Mary's Lane with Barrow Street was originally tightly enclosed by buildings. No.1 St. Mary's lane remains on the south east corner but demolition of a building on the opposite corner has destroyed the effect. Redevelopment of this corner site offers the

opportunity to restore and enhance the character of this part of the conservation area. Unlike Barrow Street, St. Mary's Lane does not have continuous built-up frontages. On the north west side is a two-storey range of buildings and walling to The Raven Hotel which incorporates mediaeval remains. Opposite are the converted buildings and boundary walls of a small former farmstead. There are also a number of small cottages and houses close to the road. Maryway House is an exception, a large early 19th century house, now subdivided, with a large garden. No.5, an unusual small house with a big shaped gable and Gothick windows is prominent in views along the lane, and marks the boundary of the conservation area in this direction.

Northward, St. Mary's Lane runs towards the High Street between stone boundary walls, cottages and houses fronting directly onto it. It opens up views of the complex grouping of outbuildings, rear wings and backs of buildings to High Street and Barrow Street. The varied roofs of one and two storey buildings in the foreground, building up to the roofs of the taller ranges fronting High Street, are a major element of the character of this area. From here the original plots running back from the street can also be seen, although some have been disrupted by the creation of the car park.

Wilmore Street

The third principal axis of the town is Wilmore Street and its continuation as Sheinton Street. Wilmore Street begins very narrow, tightly constricted between the timber-framed Guildhall on one side and the Museum and adjacent three-storey buildings on the other, with the church tower dominating the view. At Lloyds Bank the building line breaks back a little and the street opens out suddenly onto the green space of the churchyard, giving views of the church and across towards the trees of Wenlock Abbey. The great stone mass of the mediaeval church and its open setting makes a dramatic contrast to the 18th and 19th century brick buildings with Victorian shopfronts and the enclosed urban character of the street. The early Victorian moulding stucco façade of Burford House is the only one of its kind in the town. The church tower abuts directly onto the street, and between the tower and the side of 11 Bull Ring is an intriguing glimpse of the north side of the church and the backs of cottages on Bull Ring.

Bull Ring and The Priory

At the junction with Bull Ring the streets widen out to form a small urban open space. It is enclosed to the north by the prominent side elevation of 1 Sheinton Street jutting forward on the junction with Queen Street and by the symmetrical late Georgian front of School House the former Savings Bank. On the southern side of Bull Ring the north aisle and tower of the church loom massively over the low timber framed and stone cottages, especially No.11 on the corner. The cobbled area in front of Nos. 7-10 is an important element of Bull Ring's largely unaltered character. Stone boundary walls and high gates enclose the street on both sides. The Priory Tower constricts the road and blocks distant views along it.

Beyond this point the urban character of the town centre is left behind as the former precincts of the Priory are entered. To the north, Priory Cottages and The Priory are large detached houses standing back behind their front gardens with walls and railings, while to the south the Priory Hall (formerly the school) has a forecourt enclosed by a high stone wall. Ahead is the bank of trees, above a stone wall and hedge, which screen the Priory ruins. The ruins have their own very strong and impressive character. Amongst them and within the gardens of Wenlock Abbey there is little sense of being on the edge of a town. The character is that of a country house converted from monastic ruins, with its parklands stretching away to the north and east. With the parklands are important and extensive archaeological remains.

Sheinton Street

Sheinton Street, like the High Street, is relatively narrow, tightly enclosed with built-up frontages and long plots to the rear of many properties. The southern end of the street has the strongest urban character with two and three storey buildings and a mixture of residential and commercial use. Nos. 1-5 have 18th century fronts and sash windows, and the railings of School House add interest to the street. The Old Police Station is made prominent in the street scene by its unmistakably Victorian mixture of blue and yellow brick. Nos. 57 and 58 are an interesting juxtaposition of a two-storey double-fronted building with a 19th century shopfront and a tall three storey one-bay house. Between No.57 and Bastard Hall (55 and 56) there is a good view across roofs to the Priory ruins. Bastard Hall, one of Much Wenlock's mediaeval houses, is the dominant building of the southern end of the street, on a considerably larger scale than anything around it. Its timber framing stands out amongst the surrounding brick and stone.

Further north the scale of buildings diminishes and the urban character lessens. Buildings here comprise small two storey stone or brick houses and cottages, some in short rows as the almshouses (51-54) or Nos. 15-18A. The eastern side of the street is more fragmented, with some detached houses with outbuildings in large gardens, such as Nos. 48, 49 and 50, and glimpses between the buildings out into the parkland to the north of the Priory. The building line pulls back with No.19, only to come forward again with the Manor House. Its considerable size and height, timber framed cross wing and prominent position on the corner of New Road makes this the dominant building of the northern part of Sheinton Street.

The junction with New Road and Station Road and the former railway embankment effectively cuts off Sheinton Street from its northern continuation. Looking back towards the town centre from just beyond the junction the timber framed side elevation of the Manor House is prominent on the right, and in the centre the church tower rises above the roofs of Sheinton Street. On the left the octagonal gatepiers of the former station approach and the stone abutment of the demolished railway bridge are important Victorian contributions to the character of the street scene and the town, as are the Tudor-style former station and the trees along the embankment.

From the junction Sheinton Street is on a rising gradient, and the gable ends of roadside buildings mounting up as they climb the slope are an important part of the street scene. The western end retains much of its original rural fringe character, with small houses and cottages, mostly of stone, of a variety of sizes and heights and varying relationship to the street. Some have been altered to varying degrees, but others are substantially intact. Nos. 25 to 29 form a built-up frontage onto the street, with long gardens running off at an angle to the rear. Holly Grove is an exception to this pattern, an early 19th century brick villa set back and above the street. Stone retaining walls on both sides of the street are significant elements of its character at this point, maintaining a strong sense of enclosure.

The eastern side is quite different. Only Nos. 37-39, a block divided into three dwellings, reflect the same pattern of development. To the south and east is extensive 20th century housing (outside the conservation area), but there are glimpses across to the tall three-storey Georgian front of Red House and Wheatland Grove, large Victorian semi-detached houses now rather incongruously set amongst the later development.

Further north, at the bend in the road, the view ahead is closed by the trees in the grounds of the Hospital, and the character of the street changes. As before, on the western side are small stone cottages, but now widely separated, set back from the street in shallow gardens, with views between them of fields rising behind. On the eastern side Nos. 35 and 36, a pair of large

Edwardian semi-detached houses in bright red brick, are quite unlike anything else in the conservation area.

King Street

King Street's junction with High Street is tightly enclosed by the Wheatland Fox and Old Malthouse. To the rear of the Old Malthouse a range of former farm buildings and yard enclosed by a stone wall are a relic of Much Wenlock's agricultural past. The adjacent surgery car park is a late 20th century intrusion. Southwards there are good views of the rear of the buildings in High Street, and of trees and countryside rising above. The Primitive Methodist Chapel and Sunday School, with characteristically Victorian polychrome brick and gabled fronts provide variety in the street scene while fitting into the typical Much Wenlock pattern of small houses and cottages presenting a built-up frontage to the street.

This pattern is particularly strong on the east side, though 20th century alterations such as the insertion of garage doors and inappropriate windows have damaged the character of some buildings. A little further north the pattern changes: Mardol Cottage and No.8, set back behind a walled front garden, are large detached houses. The stone gable end and high retaining walls of Mardol Cottage contrast strongly with the more open aspect of the rear gardens of Mardol Terrace opposite. Brick and stone boundary or retaining walls are a major element of the street's character, especially in the northern part. At the northern end the view up the street is closed by 16 Queen Street, a 17th century stone cottage.

Smithfield Road and New Road

Cottages in Smithfield Road are quite characteristic of Much Wenlock, small and low, of brick or stone, though some have been unsympathetically altered. No.5, tall and narrow with a gable to the street, is more unusual. Most of New Road lies outside the conservation area, but Mardol Terrace is on its western boundary. This long terrace of tall red brick houses, dated 1870, is unique in the conservation area, but alterations have affected its character quite significantly.

Bridgnorth Road and Bourton Road

At the end of High Street the junction of Bridgnorth, Bourton and Victoria Roads forms an important open space which contrasts strongly with the narrow streets of most of the town. It is dominated by two large brick buildings, the long two storey frontage of The Gaskell Arms enclosing the southern side, and filling the west side the tall austere three-storey three-bay front of the Old Vicarage set high above the roads behind its front garden and retaining walls. To the north are strongly contrasting smaller buildings, the rendered late Georgian front of No. 40, timber framing to No.41 and brick to Nos. 42 and 43.

To the south west the fringes of the town extend a little way down Bourton Road, with the view along the road closed off by rising pasture. The high stone garden wall of the Old Vicarage encloses one side of the road, and on the other is a small group of varied buildings including a large three storey former malthouse with its gable facing the road, and No.2, an unusual early 19th century brick house raised on a high basement, with good quality joinery and ironwork, and 19th century farm buildings to the rear.

Victoria Road

Victoria Road, rising to the west, is lined with boundary or retaining walls, mostly of stone. On the north side the Old Smithy (Nos. 2 and 3), part timber framed, part stone, is the only historic

building. Running west from it High Causeway, a footpath raised on a limestone wall, is a major and unusual element of the character of this part of the conservation area. Further west the southern side of the road has a semi-rural character with trees and fields rising up behind the shallow garden of No.10 Pound Cottage, a stone cottage with Gothick windows. The Pound adjacent to it is a significant historic feature. Further west buildings are more closely grouped and varied in character, ranging from The Cedars, a large early 19th century three storey house, and the early 20th century timber fronted garage.

Shrewsbury Road and Stretton Road

At the junction with Southfield Road the embankments and an abutment of another demolished railway bridge constrict the views ahead; trees and shrubs on the embankments contribute to the attractive character of this area. Shrewsbury Road climbs more steeply, and is contained by a high retaining wall and bank with trees and shrubs on the north east side. On the south-west side a row of small stone cottages creating a built-up frontage to the road are former quarrymen's dwellings while ahead the view is out onto open countryside. There are more quarrymen's cottages in Stretton Road, but these are set back from the road and widely spaced apart. The overgrown vacant site of a former cottage at the junction of Stretton Road with Shrewsbury Road detracts from the character of the area at this point.

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