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Sect. 2.3, Municipal Buildings

This text is made available to readers in advance of its full publication. We welcome suggestions for improvement, references and, of course, we invite readers to point out errors.

The majority of the text is by Wendy Horton. The account of the medieval buildings is drawn from text prepared from the late W. A. Champion, and the account of the municipal baths is taken from draft text prepared by Dr P. Upton, and expanded and updated by Wendy Horton.

Illustration may be found in a further file.

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Municipal Buildings*

The Guildhall

The first guildhall appears to have been erected in September 1270.¹ A new Guildhall and Exchequer house were built in the market square in 1310-11. The complex consisted of two halls and an office for the town clerk. The Guildhall, often called the Booth Hall, evidently comprised the 'great' hall mentioned in borough records. It was probably used for meetings of the burgesses as a whole, whereas the 'little' hall was used by the borough theynesmen (aldermen after 1444). The Guildhall itself was situated on the first floor, while the space beneath was used for shops, either granted in fee farm, or leased for high rents.²

In 1451-2 the guildhall complex was modified and extended. The borough accounts indicate that the *parvam aulam* was re-built - entries on the roll describe it either as that or alternatively as the *novam aulam*.³ The scheme was probably intended to accommodate recent changes to the borough constitution. From 1444 the borough council had been enlarged with the addition of 24 assistants or common councillors, and the 'little' hall may have been modified as a result. In addition, a tower of ashlar stone was built *iuxta novam aulam*. Timber for the hall came from Haughmond, and 2,000 bricks were purchased to build a chimney. A 'crest', presumably of the borough arms, was carved and erected over the entrance to the 'new' hall. The new Little Hall, where the borough council met, appears to have had a similar configuration to its neighbour, with a hall located above a ground floor. Shops beneath the guildhall/booth hall continued to be let by the bailiffs and burgesses. It is possible that the term 'Guildhall' or 'Booth Hall' was applied to the whole complex, not simply to the Great or Common Hall.

Just beyond the south end on a slightly different alignment to the Little Hall, the three-stage Exchequer tower was added in 1490, of stone with battlemented parapets and flat-arched windows. The mayor held his court there and it was used for the storage of the town's

* By Wendy Horton, with the medieval section based on text by the late Dr W. A. Champion and the account of the municipal baths by Dr P. Upton.

¹ D. Cromarty, *Everyday Life in Medieval Shrewsbury* (1991), 7. See also M. C. Hill, *The History of Shropshire's Many Shirehalls* (1963).

² *Ibid.*, 68.

³ SA, 3365/881, pt. 2.

valuables including muniments, charters, other records and money. Despite this, Hugh Owen reported that in 1633 two villains broke in and stole money from a chest.⁴

In December 1530 the borough council proposed that carpenters should be approached about ‘the making of a new both hall’, but nothing seems to have come of this plan.⁵ Instead, in 1546–7 the roof and walls were restored (‘reedyfyed’), most of the cost being privately borne by alderman Humfrey Onslow.⁶ In 1578-9, as part of enlargements to the Booth Hall, the ‘nether hall next adjoining to the Eschequer’ in which the borough council kept its assemblies (i.e. the Little Hall of 1451-2), was ‘beutyfied’ with wainscot, glass windows and a chimney, and a ceiling was inserted. On 1 October 1579 it was named the ‘chamber of concord’ by the visiting Lord President of the Council in the Marches, Sir Henry Sidney.⁷

In 1583 the seat for the bailiffs and aldermen in the ‘Guyld hall commenly called the boothe hall’ was wainscotted;⁸ in June 1584 the stairs to the entrance were rebuilt⁹; and in July a ceiling was inserted and other embellishments made to impress visiting assize judges.¹⁰ At the east end an octagonal clock tower is reported to have been erected in the Summer of 1592, with one dial facing the High Street, another facing The Square and a third inside.¹¹

The Guildhall complex seems to have undergone no further alterations of consequence until 1741-2. According to Phillips the Booth Hall was an old, low, timber building, consisting of a large room 63 feet in length and 25½ feet in breadth in which the assizes, sessions and other courts were held; ‘it is commodious, but in no respect elegant’.¹² Further descriptions were given by Owen. For example, he wrote that ‘The old Town Hall was a large strong timber building with a high clock turret, and stood across the present square at right angles ...The ground floor was let out for shops, and a covered passage for carriages communicated with the High-street.’¹³ This assemblage of buildings is shown in a watercolour dated 1774 but which claims to be a copy of an earlier depiction (Fig. 1).

⁴ SA, 6001/200: Revd Hugh Owen, 1825, 179-92; Madge Moran, *Vernacular Buildings of Shropshire* (2003), 237-8; H. E. Forrest, *Old Houses of Shrewsbury* (1935), 65-6 inc. plate; Shropshire HER PRN 01482; Owen and Blakeway, Vol. 1, 564. An article in *SC*, 24 May 1912 reconstructs the layout.

⁵ SA, 3365/75/2, fo. 36^v.

⁶ W.A. Leighton, ‘Early Chronicles of Shrewsbury’, *TSAS* III (1880), 258.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 280-1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹¹ Owen and Blakeway, I, 564

¹² T. Phillips, *The History and Antiquities of Shrewsbury* (1779), 133.

¹³ H. Owen, *Some Account of the Ancient and Present State of Shrewsbury* (1808), 404-06.

In 1741-2 the council agreed that the chamber of concord, ‘commonly called the Green Room’, should be improved.¹⁴ This was used for assemblies, as a jury room and for other municipal functions. It was altered and beautified with classical-style detail. In the depiction of 1774 (Fig. 1), it had a wide entrance framed by columns, above which were three tall windows under a triangular pediment with matching windows flanking.

Proposals for a New Shirehall, 1783-5

The county was obliged to provide for both an assize court and a nisi prius court, but there was insufficient space for both, so the latter was held underneath the north end of the Market Hall screened off by partitions. This situation was regarded as unsatisfactory and at the Summer assizes in 1782, Judge (later, Baron) Beaumont Hotham threatened to fine the county £2,000 unless a new Shirehall was built along with a Guildhall and Exchequer. Action was taken quickly and it was resolved at the quarter sessions in October and November that an application should be made to Parliament to build a new Shirehall. The Corporation of Shrewsbury was asked to join the application, although it was unusual for two civic bodies to share a building. All the county and corporation buildings were to be demolished and a new building was proposed on the east side of The Square, roughly on the site of the Green Room. The much larger proposed hall also required the purchase and demolition of surrounding private property. A committee was set up to drive the project forward and a rate of *6d.* was set to raise funds.¹⁵

The Act of Parliament for building the new Shirehall and guildhall was passed in 1783. By the act, the mayor, aldermen and burgesses gave up the right to the ground under the old Shirehall and conditions stated that the land could not be sold on, construction work must be inspected by a surveyor, and that the rate could not exceed *6d.* in the first and second years.¹⁶

James Smith, surveyor of Shifnal, was asked to value the premises to be purchased on behalf of the commissioners, after which he was to liaise with the owners to secure possession. Several tenders for constructing the new Shirehall were received in May 1783,

¹⁴ SA, 3365/72, order of 13 November 1741; SA, 6001/299, fo. 58r.

¹⁵ www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaumont_Hotham,_2nd_Baron_Hotham (15/08/22); Owen and Blakeway, 584; SA, QA/11/1/3/1; Shrewsbury Chronicle, 24th May 1912

¹⁶ SA, QA/11/1/5: Act of Parliament, 1783

including from the same James Smith, Edward Haycock, Mr Turner and Mr Standbridge. Only the drawings by Smith survive.¹⁷

The neo-classical architect, George Steuart, who was undertaking a commission at Attingham Park and later designed St Chad's church, was asked by the committee to comment on the tender plans on 30th June. This seems to have been an underhand way of asking Steuart to submit his own proposals which he duly did. In September, the plan marked 'G' was adopted as the most eligible, which was by Steuart with some alterations approved by the chairman. He was then directed to produce the working drawings and indicate his expenses. The cost of obtaining the Act of Parliament also had to be allowed for, and Mr Bishop proposed increasing the rate from 6*d.* to 9*d.*¹⁸

Matters had changed by 3rd October 1783 when the commissioners resolved that George Steuart should be informed that his working drawings were no longer necessary, that he should be thanked for his input and asked to name his fee for the work he had undertaken. Steuart's scheme must have been too expensive and raising the rate from 6*d.* to 9*d.* was not possible under the terms of the act. Instead, Steuart was offered the post of inspecting surveyor for a fee of 60 guineas, which he declined. A payment of £80 was made to him in December 1783. The plan produced by Mr Haycock was to be accepted without further alteration and the price agreed. He was asked to prepare working drawings as soon as possible. Later that year, Jonathan Scoltock, a local builder, was appointed by Messrs Haycock to take down the surrounding buildings valued by James Smith. Although Edward Haycock had produced the plans for the original tender, the contract was awarded to his brother, John Hiram Haycock, and was signed on 1 January 1784 for the sum of £4,924. Work was to finish before Lady Day 1786. Six drawings were submitted as part of the contract, two by Mr Haycock and four by James Smith. The latter differed from Smith's original tender drawings. Robert Hill was appointed inspecting surveyor for a fee of £60, whilst James Smith continued in the role of quantity surveyor. The overall cost of the project was said to total £11,000. Hugh Owen noted that on digging the foundations for the Shirehall, a stratum including straw, grain, cattle dung and nut shells was found several feet down, as if there had once been a farmyard there.¹⁹

¹⁷ SA, QA/11/1/3/1; QA/11/1/8; QA/11/2/1/1-4: Drawings by James Smith, 1783; James Lawson, *Shropshire Newsletter*, 44, (June 1973), 17-18

¹⁸ SA, QA/11/1/3/1; QA/11/1/8: The final cost for the Act of Parliament was £422 14*s.* 6*d.*; Lawson, 17-18

¹⁹ SA, QA/11/1/3/1; QA/11/1/8; QA/11/1/6: Statement of Accounts; QA/11/2/1/1-4; Lawson, 17-18; Owen (1825), 192-3

The demolition of the former hall had opened up the north side of The Square to the High Street and was seen as an opportunity for town improvements. The High Street was widened and old houses demolished, as far east as St Julian's churchyard where the road was single carriageway.²⁰

The new Shirehall was a handsome two-storey stone building in the typical classical style of the late 18th century (Figs. 2, 3). In the centre was a full-height Ionic portico of four heavy columns supporting an entablature bearing the date 1785 in Roman numerals, crowned by a pediment decorated with a figure of justice sitting on a rock between swags. Inside the portico were three tall round-arched doorways and windows to the upper storey. Over the central doorway was an ornamental emblem bearing the town's arms. On each side of the portico were pairs of tall sash windows with round-arched windows above. Detail included banded masonry beneath the sills, a moulded string course and eaves cornice and shallow parapets. The north end, facing the High Street, was three-window with similar detail. Inside the entrance was a large vestibule flanked by the nisi prius and assize courts, with cells beneath for prisoners. There was a fine spiral stone staircase towards the rear. The first floor including a large room for county meetings, a grand jury room, records room and offices. Moulded plaster ceilings were decorated with flowers under the auspices of Joseph Bromfield. To the rear was a hall keeper's house. Towards the end of 1785, pictures of George I and Admiral Benbow were cleaned, re-framed and hung in the new building and furniture was moved in. Each court had a carving of the king's arms costing £27 each.²¹

In October 1784, Mr Haycock was asked to design cast iron palisades to go around the building and produce an estimate for casting them and the associated stonework. The cost was £83 and they were erected by William Smith and Joshua Blakeway in September 1785. They are shown in contemporary drawings with decorative circular panels flanking the three pairs of entrance gates. A new wall was built around the rear. The first meeting of the commissioners was held in the building on 26 May 1786. There was a subscription library in the building by 1808.²²

Smirke's Shirehall, 1833

²⁰ Owen (1825), 193

²¹ Owen, 194-5, inc. watercolour; Thomas Howell (1816), 75, 153; BL, Add Ms 36378: Drawing by John Buckler, May 1823. Also negative, held by SA, PR/3/334; SA, PH/S/13/S/33/32; MI6753/1: Print, 1785, published by Hulbert; SA, QA/11/1/8; Mary Hill, *The History of Shropshire's Many Shirehalls* (1963), 2.

²² SA, QA/11/1/3/1; QA/11/1/8; Owen, 194-5, inc. watercolour; BL, Add Ms 36378: John Buckler, May 1823

Many Georgian civic buildings survive to this day but Haycock's Shirehall was ill-fated, serious structural issues having arisen by September 1832. Thomas Telford, county surveyor, reported to the quarter sessions that the foundations were in a defective state leading to cracking in various parts of the building. In his opinion, the Shirehall was dangerous for the public to use. To investigate further, he had instructed Mr Stanton to dig nine pits to ascertain the quality of the ground beneath. He issued the results of this investigation in October and they confirmed that the building was unsafe. The front wall resting on a timber footing was sound, but the north end facing the High Street was built on clay, a fracture in the wall suggesting it had given way unequally. There were serious issues with the rear wall, partly built on a platform of beech timber on piles, some of which had rotted to a pulp. The interior transverse walls were on similar foundations. The hall, he found, was constructed on a mixture of clay, sandy gravel and peaty soils, which had suffered unequal compression. It is worth remembering Hugh Owen's observation that on digging the foundations for Haycock's building, a stratum of made-up ground was found, which may not have been properly removed. Telford's conclusion was that it was not feasible to repair the hall. Even if the timber platforms on which it rested were replaced, the costs would be prohibitive and the problems of settlement and fracture would probably return.²³

On Telford's advice, Sir Robert Smirke, (1781-1867), was asked to investigate the building in December 1832. Smirke had a high-profile and prolific career and was architect to both the Board of Trade and the Board of Works, the latter disbanded in 1832 when he received his knighthood. Travelling to Greece in his youth had given him an interest in Greek styles of architecture, but he was most well-known for his technical expertise, including correcting the mistakes of others.²⁴ In Shrewsbury, he was asked to consider the feasibility of repairing the hall, the relative costs of rebuilding and repairing, and the length of time required for each operation. In addition to Telford's observations, Smirke noted that the south-east angle of the building was nearly 8in below the north-east angle, and in the entrance hall, the transverse walls had a 4in difference in height over a length of 20ft. There were full-height cracks through the chimney stacks, a fire and smoke hazard, some of the floors were slumped and twisted and the ceiling of the crown court was defective as one of the pillars had sunk. There were also issues with the roof slates and lead guttering. Smirke's view was that the dilapidated state of the building meant that repairs would not be advantageously carried

²³ SA, QA/11/1/15; QA/11/1/8; Owen and Blakeway, 1, 584; Owen (1825), 193

²⁴ Howard Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of English Architects 1660-1840* (1954), 545-9; Mary Hill, 4

out even if the foundations were secured. His estimated cost of repair was £8,000, whilst a rebuild on new foundations would cost £12,000 assuming the re-use of some materials. The length of the project would be two summers, whether the hall was to be repaired or rebuilt. Following an advert for further expertise, advice was sought from George Hamilton who also recommended rebuilding rather than repairing the hall.²⁵

In June 1833, a presentment was made at the quarter sessions. It was resolved that the Shirehall was insufficient, inconvenient and deficient and that it was necessary to erect a new Shirehall on the same site. A committee of magistrates was formed, who were to advertise for tenders and take the advice of Telford and Smirke regarding the designs submitted. In late July the committee set out a detailed statement of the accommodation required in the courts, rooms and offices, including their size and layout. They asked Telford and Smirke to produce a sketch of this arrangement, but Telford asked Smirke to proceed as he was more experienced in this type of work. In August, Smirke sent a letter to the Clerk of the Peace saying that none of the tenders submitted met the magistrates' requirements, and that neither he nor Telford could take responsibility for recommending any of them. Smirke offered to prepare his own plan, which would take a little more time, and he was duly instructed to do so. At the October meeting, Smirke's plan was approved and he was thanked for producing a proposal that did not require the purchase of additional land. As he had been asked to combine economy with attention to public convenience, the exterior was to be simple and unassuming although it did include a portico. He was asked to submit elevations and a specification by 23 November so the committee could advertise for building tenders. Smirke did not have time so he advertised in local papers for a builder to prepare them on his behalf.²⁶ A comprehensive and detailed set of drawings was produced by Shrewsbury builder, Joseph Birch and his sons, Benjamin and Joseph Jnr. They are dated 7 December 1833 and include floor plans, elevations, sections and detail drawings.²⁷

Four tenders for the construction project were received on 25 January 1834, from Joseph Birch, Edward Haycock, John Bennett and a Mr Newell. The latter's bid was the cheapest but was rejected as it would make a loss, and the most advantageous was from Joseph Birch for the sum of £11,261 14s. 4d. including the use of old materials. A contract was prepared for

²⁵ SA, QA/11/1/15

²⁶ SA, QA/11/1/15 & 23; QA/11/2/9

²⁷ SA, QA/11/2/11: Set of drawings by Joseph Birch & Sons

Joseph Birch & Sons to demolish the old Shirehall and build a new one in its place, the work to be finished by 1 August 1836.²⁸

There was a slight delay to starting the foundations as the Shirehall committee wished to liaise with the Shrewsbury Street Act committee, whose brief was to improve and widen the High Street and The Square. The latter offered to lend the former £900, raised through public subscription, in return for changing the alignment of the building and setting it back slightly. This required purchasing and demolishing two properties to the rear and taking down and rebuilding the hall-keeper's house. Smirke was asked to revise the layout in June, with the north end set back 16ft and the south end 11ft.²⁹

The foundation trenches were dug out and filled with concrete which was left to harden for two months and checked by Smirke before building commenced.

The change of plan produced delays in the building. In January 1837 the commissioners were advertising for suppliers to furnish the building. The allocation of rooms between the two councils was under discussion in April.³⁰ The building appears to have opened without ceremony and the first quarter sessions held in the shirehall took place in April 1837.

As well as the drawings by Messrs Birch, an engraving of c.1850 show a 3-storey stone building under a shallow pitched roof partly hidden by parapets (Fig. 4). It had a symmetrical front with an advanced central entrance bay flanked by three windows, beyond which were narrow advanced outer bays with doors. There was banding to the ground floor, moulded string courses and sash windows in moulded architraves. The building was generally plain but there was some decoration such as the deep corbelled eaves cornice. The entrance portico had a moulded entablature on four shafts, within which were double doors flanked by side-lights. There were triple windows to the floors above, also with four shafts supporting triangular pediments, in a simple Greek style. The end bays had first floor windows under triangular pediments, those to the top floor with enhanced lintels on corbels. Facing the High Street was a 5-window elevation with the same detail, the central upper windows with corbelled lintels. The south end had triple windows to the right and single windows to the left.³¹

Internally, Smirke's plan of October 1833 shows a large central staircase with the *nisi prius* court to the left and *assize* court to the right. The ground floor plan by Birch shows a

²⁸ SA, QA/11/1/15

²⁹ SA, QA/11/1/15; QA/11/2/10: Layout of the new Shirehall; Mary Hill, 4

³⁰ SC, 6, 13 Jan. 1837; 7 Apr. 1837.

³¹ SA, PR/1/568: Wood engraving of c.1850 from an unidentified publication; SA, QA/11/2/11/13-15, 21-2, 24

semi-circular seating arrangement in the courts, but this was changed to sub-rectangular in the crown court in November 1835. The entrance hall and staircases were to be paved with stone, with a judge's room behind the main staircase and rooms for the mayor and witnesses at the front. At first floor level were seating galleries connected by passages, the nisi prius court with a skylight. The outer bay doors led to staircases for the general public. In the basement were cells, lock-up rooms and a witness room. The plan of the upper floor shows the Great Room over the crown court, small clerks' offices, whilst the records were kept in the outer bays over the staircases.³² Classical-style detailing included wood panelling, triangular pediments over the doors, panelled plaster ceilings, chimney pieces, a deep ceiling cornice with rosette motifs over the Great Room, decorated consoles over the upper floor windows and ornate scrolled brackets over the main staircase.³³

Like its predecessor, the hall was surrounded by iron railings. The fluted standards were of cast iron, the panels and gates of wrought iron, with diagonal braces forming diamond banding.³⁴

The fire of 1880

On the morning of Friday 19 November 1880, a fire was caused by plumbers working on the roof.³⁵ The town clerk, E. Cresswell Peele, was attending a committee meeting at the time and reported seeing smoke and flames in the central part of the roof over the staircase which then spread beneath the landing skylight. Peele, committee members and volunteers removed as many important records as possible from the building before exiting the building themselves and congregating in The Square. The fire office was in attendance but was ineffective at getting water up to the roof, so Peele asked Wellington and Oswestry to send fire-engines and they helped to bring the fire under control. The interior was badly damaged although the remaining papers in the records rooms survived, along with the paintings in the Great Room. It was the county who was responsible for restoring the building and investigating the causes of the fire, but the Corporation noted their dissatisfaction with the fire office and the lack of a steam fire-engine. The clerk suggested that the records should in future be located on the ground floor.³⁶

³² SA, QA/11/2/9: 1st floor plan by Smirke, October 1833; QA/11/2/11/1-4, 59-62

³³ SA, QA/11/2/11/30, 32-3, 42-55

³⁴ SA, QA/11/2/11/40-1

³⁵ For accounts of the fire, Eddowes, 24 Nov. 1883; SC 26 Nov. 1883.

³⁶ SA, DA5/124/4: Reports of council meetings; Mary Hill, 5-6

Thomas Lockwood, architect of Chester, was asked to repair the building and reconstruct the interior. The main staircase and upper floors had been the most affected by the fire, the timber floors, partitions, and fittings in the courts had all suffered water damage. The specification stated that broken staircase steps should be removed and replaced with York stone and new Gibbs-patent iron fireplace lintels inserted. Externally, the whole of the parapet, eaves cornice, copings and chimney caps were to be taken down, whilst the window mullions facing into The Square were to be replaced. Elsewhere, damaged stone blocks were to be removed and replaced with recovered material or new Grinshill stone. The record rooms were to remain on the top floor with new iron doors, the muniment room in the basement with a similar door.³⁷

A photograph of 1890 compared with the engraving of *c.*1850 shows that Lockwood's renovations had little impact on the external appearance of the building (Fig. 5).³⁸ Despite this, the building was extended considerably to the rear, increasing in area from 791 to 1308 square yds. A site plan of 1881 shows the four houses fronting the High Street which were acquired for £6,150 and demolished. Also removed was the hall-keeper's accommodation, adjoining the existing building and over a passageway. Fronting The Square to the south was Cecil Peel's house, which became party to the site and was converted into constabulary offices with a new hall-keeper's house to the rear. The cost of the project was £34,397 with completion in 1883. It was paid for entirely by the county.³⁹

Inside the extended shirehall on the ground floor, the two courts were enlarged to the east but were open to the roof, meaning that some space was lost inside the building. There were new rooms to the rear lit by skylights, including ones for the grand jury, judges and barristers. Flanking the entrance was a sheriff's room to the right and mayor's court to the left, the latter only 30 x 18ft which the borough felt was inadequate.⁴⁰ At first floor level were small rooms along the front for the county treasurer and clerk of the peace, whilst directly above were the town clerks' offices. Along the north and south ends were narrow rooms for storage of papers, and in the front angles, two small strong rooms. In the basement were cells and a muniment room. Following receipt of Lockwood's plans, the committee requested changes to the access to the courts and wanted the records stored in the basement rather than under the roof. The strong rooms were subsequently moved underground, but this

³⁷ SA, QA/11/1/48: Specification, July 1881; Mary Hill, 6

³⁸ SA, PH/S/13/S/33/33, 1890. Compare PR/1/568, *c.*1850

³⁹ SA, QA/11/1/49; Shrewsbury Chronicle, 24th May 1912; SA, QA/11/2/19: Site plan showing existing, purchased and party buildings; Mary Hill, 6

⁴⁰ SA, DA5/124/4: Reports of council meetings; SA, QA/11/2/17/2

led to issues with high humidity.⁴¹ A sepia photograph reveals the entrance hall in Greek-revival style, with triglyph friezes, decorative consoles and a mosaic floor with Greek key decoration, which could be the work of either Smirke or Lockwood.⁴²

Additional Building, 1904-6

By 1887, a new plot was marked out to the south-west, encompassing the constabulary offices and the adjoining property, 17 The Square, with a combined area of 249 square yds (Fig. 6). The same plot is shown on a second plan dated 1904 with a site for county offices to its rear.⁴³

In December 1904, a scheme was put forward by Mansell and Mansell, architects of Birmingham, to construct a new 2-storey building for the borough on the south-western plot. A doorway to the left was to lead into a large entrance hall with committee room to the right and offices to the rear. On the first floor were the town clerks' offices and a landing leading to an external link to the shirehall. To the rear was a records room and strong room, whilst the muniment room was in the basement. These rooms were to have steel and concrete fireproof ceilings and fireproof doors, the latter with thick walls. The asymmetrical front had doorway with segmental pediment to the left and similar 3-light ground-floor windows. There were five sash windows above and a deep eaves cornice and parapets like that of the adjacent Shirehall.⁴⁴

Sadly for the borough, the new accommodation was never erected. An outline plan dated March 1906 by the county surveyor, A. T. Davis, labelled the proposed new structure 'County Buildings'.⁴⁵ A 3-storey building with basement was now proposed, with a link to the main hall at first floor level and some design elements to match, such as windows with small triangular pediments. Detailed drawings show committee and common rooms and a chairman's office on the ground floor, whilst marked out in a dotted line is a future extension on the corner of The Square and Princess Street. The basement included a records room and strong room, whilst the upper floors included the finance department, county surveyor's offices, a laboratory and health department. The new block to the rear housed the elementary education department, all reflecting the increased responsibilities of the county. Fronting The Square was a tall gabled entrance bay at the right end, clearly intended to be central once the

⁴¹ SA, QA/11/2/17/1-4: Plans, July 1881; Mary Hill, 6

⁴² SA, QA/11/2/28: Sepia photograph, probably late 19th century

⁴³ SA, DA5/701/1, 1887, based on OS Map, 1882; SA, QA11/2/23/1; Mary Hill, 7

⁴⁴ SA, QA/11/2/25/1-9; QA/11/1/94: Mansell & Mansell, 1904

⁴⁵ SA, SCC1/G/1090: Plan by A. T. Davis

future extension was built. A photograph shows the new block under construction, whilst the completed building is just visible in a postcard of 1920.⁴⁶

Extension, 1938

In 1936-7, drawings for the proposed extension to the 1906 building were made by the county architect, A. G. Chant, construction taking place the following year. The project involved the purchase and demolition of Lloyds Mansion (2-6 The Square), said to be one of the earliest timber-framed houses in Shrewsbury. The new extension housed the department of births, marriages and deaths.⁴⁷ Combined with the 1906 block, there was a symmetrical front to The Square, but the extension also occupied a corner site with a 3-window elevation to Princess Street (Fig. 7). The ashlar fronts had large sash windows and plainer detail than the 1906 block, the ground floor with banding and round-arched windows. There was a prominent rounded corner bearing an inscribed war memorial, dedicated to members of the county council staff who laid down their lives for their country in 1914-18 and 1939-45. Higher up was a stone sculpture of the crest of Shrewsbury including 'Floreat Salopia'. It may have been carved by Bridgwater and Upton, sculptors, of Harborne, Birmingham who produced a drawing as such in February 1937 (Fig. 8).⁴⁸ The Shirehall had become a large complex which had spread considerably to the rear as well as over shops along Princess Street. Further legislation in 1940 conferred more responsibilities on the council and some departments had to be accommodated outside the hall. There were still two court rooms but one doubled as the council chamber.⁴⁹

The Guildhall: Newport House

From the beginning of the 20th century, disagreements continued between the county and borough councils over the use of space. Both had increasing responsibilities, the Education Act of 1902 putting particular pressure on the county. Matters deteriorated in 1912 when the clerk of the county council refused to open the grand jury room for a borough council meeting, and the latter members broke open the door. A settlement was reached in 1915 when the county agreed to buy out the borough for £12,500, the money intended for new municipal

⁴⁶ SA, SCC1/G/1090-9; PH/S/13/S/33/34; PC/S/12/S/5/22

⁴⁷ SA, SCC1/G/1105: Plan by A.G. Chant, 1937; SA, PH/S/13/S/33/30: Demolition of Lloyds Mansion

⁴⁸ SA, PH/S/13/S/33/41-2: Photographs, NMR copyright, 1963; SCC1/G/1108

⁴⁹ SA, SCC1/G/1105-6; D. C. Cox, *Shropshire County Council: A Centenary Guide* (1989), 53-6; SA, xls25195: The New Shirehall

offices.⁵⁰ This was confirmed by the Salop County Council (Shirehall and Guildhall) Act 1915. There were delays caused by the First World War and the agreement was postponed until 1917 and then 1919. The payment was finally made in March 1920 and the borough then vacated the Shirehall, except for the muniment room which they wished to retain for a suggested rent of £25. The borough council had in 1917 bought Newport House in Dogpole from Edward Burd, a surgeon at the Royal Infirmary, but it had been requisitioned during the war by the Food Control Committee. Rationing resumed in 1919 and the Food Control Committee agreed to vacate the upper floors, but by the end of the year they had left.⁵¹

Newport House had been built as a residence for Francis Newport, first Earl of Bradford, in 1696 (Fig. 9). This fine two-storey town-house is a symmetrical square block with five windows to each elevation, constructed of brick with a hipped slate roof with modillion eaves. Set at an angle to the road and facing downhill, which increased its prominence, the front has a large early 19th-century Doric portico, inside which is the original doorway with moulded architrave decorated with scrolls, swags and the coronet of Francis Newport. It has sash windows and dormers lighting the attic. The interior is not symmetrical and contains much panelling and an elegant staircase with twisted balusters, the newels formed by groups of four balusters set under large caps. The size of the property, including outbuildings, enabled the borough to convert it into a guildhall without any significant or subsequent alteration.⁵²

A new Shirehall, 1964

From 1945 it was proposed to re-locate the Shirehall to a site with more space. Schematic plans and 3-D reconstructions showed new county offices at the Column, Abbey Foregate, whilst new borough offices were to be located on Smithfield Road. An alternative scheme showed the county offices on the Smithfield site.⁵³ There were delays caused by public opposition and lack of finance, particularly as priority had to be given to the construction of schools. The Column site was finally acquired (Fig. 10) and planning approval obtained in 1963 by a margin of one vote. Within the new 10a. site was a large early 19th-century house called Nearwell which required demolition before work could start. It was a fine white-painted square-plan house with shallow hipped roofs and pentices, set within landscaped

⁵⁰ Cox (1989), 53-6; Salop County Council (Shirehall and Guildhall) Act 1195

⁵¹ SA, QA/11/1/178/50

⁵² Madge Moran, 275-6; H.E. Forrest, 75; Shropshire HER PRN 10246; Historic England, 1270999: grade II*

⁵³ SA, SCC1/G/1088, n.d.

gardens with trees. The Column was incorporated within the south perimeter of the site, necessitating some changes to the road layout, whilst the former Holy Cross vicarage, an asymmetrical building of red brick under a hipped roof of c.1891, remained freestanding in the car park to the north. The former Shirehall was demolished in 1970 and replaced by Princess House.⁵⁴

The new Shirehall, in the style of the Modern Movement, was a large, ambitious building designed by the County Architect, Ralph Crowe (1915-90). Tenders were received in June 1963, the contract awarded to the lowest bidder, general contractor G. Percy Trentham Ltd. of Longton, Stoke-on-Trent at a cost of £1,496,874. There were many specialist contractors involved, including Ove Arup and partners, structural engineers. Work began in August 1963 but a late decision was made to add law courts to the east end, which caused some disruption to the project. The main building was completed in December 1966 and the court wing in January 1967, after which it was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II.

The Shirehall is composed of flat-roofed rectangular blocks of different heights and sizes laid out on an irregular H-plan with enclosed courtyards. It is supported on 700 concrete piles with a reinforced concrete super-structure laid out on a 40ft block-width and planning module of 4ft. Finishes were mainly in Portland stone or grey-green Italian mosaic. The main six-storey block, with south front facing Abbey Foregate, has prominent window bands to the upper four floors alternating with mosaic facings (Fig. 11). Its angular appearance contrasts with the council chamber in front, an irregular sub-ovoid structure faced in Portland stone supported on four inverted, tapering concrete pillars. The chamber has a concrete shell roof and the underside is convex and decorated with mosaic. A freestanding flat-roofed canopy with an timber-boarded underside is supported on thin metal piers and surrounds the chamber, extending northwards over the main entrance into the office block. The interior of the chamber is fan-shaped and has a first floor link to the office block which houses the committee rooms. Inside the main entrance is a cast iron mural depicting Shropshire industries, by Rosalind Alexander and cast in Coalbrookdale. An aluminum sculpture by Michael Eastham was installed in one of the courtyards. The rear ranges are lower, with open linking walkways at ground level (Fig. 12). On the roof of the central north-south block is the hall keeper's flat, the domestic-style fenestration contrasting with the window bands below.

⁵⁴ D.C. Cox, 53-6; SA, SCC1/G/1089, n.d.; OS Map, 1:2500, Shropshire XXXIV.11 (1901); SA, PH/S/13/A/4/53, 61; SA, DA5/710/15/6: Plans for new vicarage, 1891; SA, PC/S/12/S/5/30: Before demolition; PH/S/13/S/33/44: Undergoing demolition

There is a natural slope at the west end which allowed easy access into a basement carpark, along with a civil defence control centre, boiler plant and prisoners' cells.

The single-storey flat-roofed wing for the law courts is constructed of Staffordshire blue brick with vertical slit windows contrasting with the window bands elsewhere, some containing coloured glass. There were three law courts, for assizes, quarter sessions and a smaller one for magistrates and juveniles. This wing was converted to registry offices when the courts were re-located. In front of the Shirehall was a rectangular pool with fountains, later removed, and hard landscaping which extends around the Column, the latter situated 200ft from the main office block. Around the rear and west is a large car park, laid out for 350 vehicles, which incorporated the former vicarage and a free-standing building of blue brick, originally a store and later the library headquarters. Further west was a sports pitch and pavilion.⁵⁵

A new magistrates' court designed by Peter Westby, County architect was built in the south-east corner of the car park in 1992 (Fig. 13). The two-storey post-modern building has blocks of yellow brick with small lead-covered mono-pitch roofs at different angles and an open canopy over the front entrance. By March 2016 the building was empty, the magistrates' court having been moved to Telford. The Ministry of Justice was granted planning permission in March 2017 to convert the existing four courts into two and add a multi-purpose hearing room, judges' chambers and jury rooms. This included a two-storey rear extension totalling 154 square metres, to be in keeping with the existing building and with a new pedestrian access.⁵⁶

In 2022 the Shirehall was partly empty, and it was the council's intention to demolish the building and redevelop the site.

Borough Council Offices, 2004

Newport House, despite its origins as a dwelling, remained the guildhall for 84 years. In 2002-4, new offices for Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council were built on Frankwell Quay on the south bank of the River Severn by Pidduck & Whittaker of Shrewsbury. The building is of brown brick in a neo-vernacular style with massed 2- and 3-storey blocks with

⁵⁵ D.C. Cox, 53-6; Newman and Pevsner, 536-7; Shropshire HER PRN 33546; SA, xls25195: The New Shirehall; RIBA78352-4: Photoprints, 1967; SA, xls25192: Offprint from Architects' Journal Information Library (29 March 1967), vol. 145, no. 13, 767-84

⁵⁶ Newman and Pevsner, 537; www.shropshirestar.com/news/2016/03/31/shrewsbury-magistrates-court-closes-its-doors-for-good; www.shropshirestar.com/news/crime/2017/02/09/shrewsburys-former-magistrates-court-to-be-upgraded-to-crown-court; Shropshire Planning Portal: 17/00410/FUL, granted 27 March 2017

prominent gables (Fig. 14). The Guildhall was short-lived, as the county and borough councils were merged into a unitary authority, Shropshire Council, in 2009, the building subsequently becoming the administrative base for Shrewsbury town council. In 2015 a planning application for change of use was granted to the University of Chester and the building was refitted internally to provide teaching and learning accommodation for the newly-established University Centre Shrewsbury. The town council moved to Shrewsbury Library, Castle Gates.⁵⁷

Municipal baths⁵⁸

In September 1887 the first meeting of the baths committee took place.⁵⁹ Various sites were considered for the building of public baths and in June 1890 the baths sub-committee decided that land adjacent to the Quarry would be suitable.⁶⁰ Design drawings were produced in 1891 by the borough surveyor, W. Chapple Eddowes.⁶¹ In February 1893 the baths sub-committee accepted the tender of Mr Henry Farmer, builder, of Shrewsbury to build the baths at a cost of £7,008 2s. 0d. for the baths and a further £137 10s. for urinals.⁶² The foundation stone was laid during the Whit-Monday fete that year (22 May), preceded by a procession of the Mayor and Corporation from the Guildhall. The stone was laid by Constance Mary, wife of George Butler Lloyd, alderman and chairman of the baths committee, and formerly mayor of Shrewsbury.⁶³

One year later, on 14 May 1894, the Shrewsbury Public Baths were opened. The building was constructed of red pressed bricks with raised segmental pediments, copings and string courses of Ruabon bricks (Fig. 15). There was a large domed tower surmounted by a weather vane, its window band lighting the kiosk inside the front entrance. The latter had a round arch of polychrome brickwork with the town's coat of arms above.⁶⁴ Inside there was a first class plunge bath and private slipper baths; a second class plunge bath; a shower bath; and a soap bath. Water was taken from the Severn and brought by gravitation from the pumping station

⁵⁷ Newman and Pevsner, 537; www.shropshirestar.com/news/education/2015/10/14/shrewsbury-guildhall-transformed-into-seat-of-learning-for-university; www.pa.shropshire.gov.uk/Ref15/00160/COU

⁵⁸ By Dr. P. Upton, updated by Wendy Horton.

⁵⁹ SA, DA5/119/6/1.

⁶⁰ SA, DA5/119/6/1.

⁶¹ SA, 6007/7

⁶² SA, DA5/119/6/1.

⁶³ SA, DA5/119/6/1.

⁶⁴ SA, PH/S/13/Q/2/92

to the Quarry then passed through filter beds and into the baths.⁶⁵ By the end of the first month more than 10,000 people had used the facilities.⁶⁶

New swimming baths were built immediately uphill of the old baths in 1968. During construction, both complexes were used simultaneously, before the demolition of the old baths. The new Modernist complex, of concrete and glass with tile-hanging, contains four pools, some with diving boards, and a cafeteria.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ SA, DA5/119/6/1.

⁶⁶ www.shrewsbury.gov.uk/Public/sport/facilities/quarry/shrewsburybathhistory.htm

⁶⁷ SA, PH/S/13/Q/2/98-9