

VCH SHROPSHIRE

Newport

The Booth Hall

This text has been prepared for VCH Shropshire by Professor Richard Hoyle with the research assistance of Dr Judith Everard, Linda Fletcher and Wendy Horton. It 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.

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The Booth Hall

In the last years of the thirteenth century Nicholas of Audley granted to his burgesses of Newport a plot of land some 40 by 30 feet. This was granted ‘for building on the plot and for carrying on all manner of trades and business’.¹ A rent of 3s. 0d. was reserved. The Booth Hall or, in a later Latin source, the *aule communi*, had been built by 1314.²

The Booth Hall remained in the possession of the burgesses until sold in the 1720s or 1730. Its use may have been superseded by the building of the market hall in 1662-3, but even before then some or all of the building was being used as a school room. William Adams, the founder of the Grammar School, recalled – evidently without pleasure – being taught in the English school there in the 1590s. His recollections did not flatter the building: ‘hurtful for both the town schoolmaster and scholars’.³ Adam’s new foundation did not supersede the school which continued in the Booth Hall. Peter Greene, a candidate for the headmastership of the English school in 1691, offered £10 for repairs to the building (‘which is very ruinous’) if he was elected.⁴ In about 1705 the school was moved to a room over the church porch.⁵

The sale of the Booth Hall may have been prompted by one of the Burgesses’ financial crises. The date of the sale is unknown but the purchaser was William Holmes formerly of Stanford, Edgmond, an ironmaster, who had a commission of bankruptcy issued against him in 1743. It was then offered for sale in 1747-8 when it was called ‘a dwelling house called [the] Booth Hall’.⁶

The exact location of the Booth Hall has been uncertain. It certainly stood between the churchyard wall and the Puleston Cross but there seems to be no local tradition equating it with a particular building. Edward Jones, the Newport antiquary, did identify a particular building as the Booth hall but did not describe its location. He does, however, offer the possibility that the Booth Hall was still standing in the 1880s.⁷ From the description given in

¹ Everard, *Early Records of Newport*, no. 13. The charter reads ‘ad edificandum super predictam placiam et omnimodas mercandias et omnia alia co[m]moda sua faciendum’ and bears the endorsement ‘pro le Bothehall’. This may have marked the beginning of the infilling of the market place. For other grants of land in the market place adjacent or close to the Booth Hall apparently continuing this process, *ibid.*, 54 (1435), 78 (1597) and 80 (1606).

² *Ibid.*, no. 80 (1606), 474 (1314).

³ David Taylor and Ruth Taylor, *Mr Adam’s free grammar school* (2002), pp. 19-20.

⁴ SA, P207/Q/3/10.

⁵ Taylor and Taylor, *Mr Adam’s free Grammar school*, p. 71.

⁶ SA, NTM 3/1 which shows that the rent of 3s. 0d. was still being paid. *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette*, 10 Aug., 1 Dec. 1747, 14 Mar. 1748, and NTM/6/4/1.

⁷ Edward Jones, ‘Historical records of Newport’, *TSAHS*, VIII (1885), p. 242.

the early charter and later descriptions of buildings which take their bearings from the Booth Hall, it appears to have been one of the houses facing the Butter Cross, nos. 429 or 430 on the tithe map, now 76-78 High Street (Figure 1). Both houses had by at this time been converted into rows of cottages, three a piece. It makes sense to suppose that the Booth Hall was the nearest property to the churchyard wall, so no. 430. An early photograph of the Butter Cross shows this building in the background. This is a low building with an unusually steeply-pitched roof with attic gables but relatively modern-looking fenestration. Each cottage appears to have a door and a ground floor window (Figure 2). Jones says that the house he identified as the Booth Hall was of wood and brick construction and had tall gables. This matches the one in the photograph. It is at least possible that what was captured here was the building of c. 1300 in a much-altered form, originally open, but with a floor and upper windows inserted and converted into a row of cottages.⁸

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⁸ NHS, SNAP, N002521 (undated but pre-1860). We are grateful to Linda Fletcher for drawing this to our attention. T. W. Picken thought that the site was slightly further to the east, at 70 High St which equates to property 428 on the tithe map. The evidence points towards a location nearer the churchyard so Picken may have been mistaken. NHS 1768.

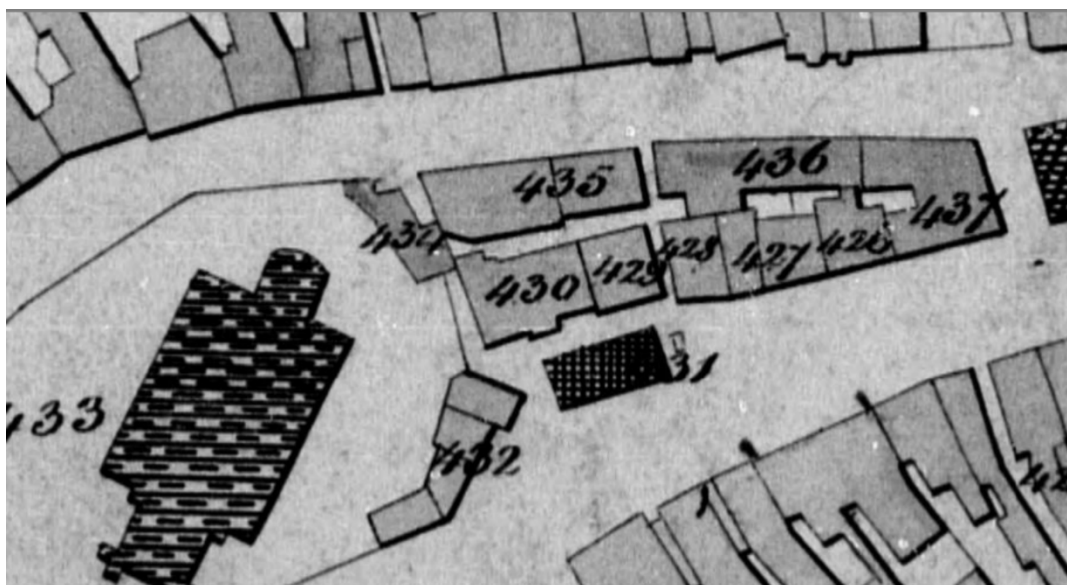


Figure 1. The location of the Booth Hall from the tithe map (1840)



Figure 2. The possible Booth Hall pictured before 1860. Newport History Society, SNAP N005251