

DISCOVERY OF A DRAWING OF WENDOVER
MARKET HOUSE

BY

FRANCIS W. READER

That Wendover formerly possessed an ancient Market House has long been well-known; also that its site was that on which the Literary Institute, or Library, now stands, at the junction of the High Street and Aylesbury Street.

Lipscomb says:—"The road from Aylesbury makes a sudden flexure close to the old unsightly Market House, built of timber and plaster, in the style of King Henry VIII's time."¹ To which Sheahan bleats this echo: "The Old Market House was an unsightly building of timber and plaster in the style that prevailed in the time of King Henry VIII."²

Undeterred by the early Victorian idea of what was "unsightly," many of us have been anxious to see some print or drawing of this structure, but as all search and enquiry had been in vain, it came to be confidently asserted that no such record was extant.

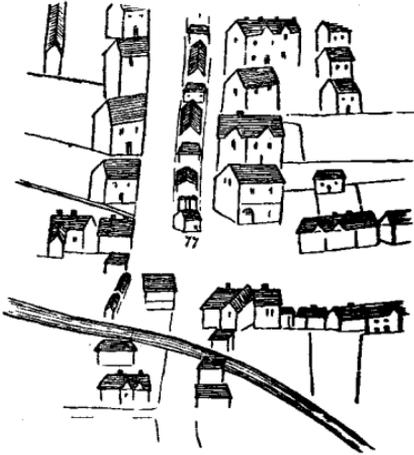
There is a Manorial Map of 1620, which by the kindness of Major Edward Smith is preserved in the Library, entitled "A Topographical Inscription and verticular mensuration of the Mannors of Wendover Borrough and of Wendover Forrence in the County of Buckingham, being part of the possessions of the Right Worshipfull Dame Mary Wolley, Widdow ladie thereof anno D'ni 1620."

It is 7 feet 10 inches by 4 feet in size, and is formed of six skins of parchment neatly fastened together and drawn in the excellent style of the cartographer of the 17th century. Every building of the townlet is minutely and carefully shown in elevation, but for the most part, they are but cyphers, and in their Noah's Ark-like simplicity are as uniform as the houses of a

¹ Vol. II., p. 466.

² p. 207.

London suburb. In some cases, however, there appears to be an attempt to portray the main characteristics of the more important buildings. Although the Market House is represented differently from any other building, it conveys no idea of its structure, but hitherto this has been its only known delineation. A small portion of the map showing the "Towne House," marked 77, is here reproduced. In the original the roofs are coloured red.



Portion of the Manorial Map of Wendover, 1620, showing the "Towne House," (77).

Sheahan further tells us:—"The present Market House,³ erected by the late Abel Smith, Esq., Lord of the Manor of Wendover, in 1842, faces the High Street, is constructed of red brick, with a slated roof, and a turret containing a bell and clock, with good dials on three of its sides. The clock was erected in 1843, at a cost of £90, by subscription. The lower part of the building is enclosed by a pair of iron gates, and is occasionally used as a lock up."

When the old Market House was demolished, I have been unable to ascertain, but it would appear to have been standing when Lipscomb wrote, 1847, and had

³ Now known as the Clock Tower.



Wendover Market Hall, 1839

disappeared in Sheahan's time, 1862. It seems that the site had been cleared between these dates, and remained an open space for some years, as among the invaluable collection of matters concerning Wendover, in the possession of Mr. F. W. Blake, is a note that one of the old inhabitants, when a militia-man, was drilled on this ground. In 1863, the Literary Institute was built on the site and presented to the town by Philip Smith, as a memorial to his father.

The drawing that has by a strangely slender chance, now come to light, has long been in the possession of Miss Young, of Bournemouth. As Wendover was unknown to this lady, it is hardly surprising that the drawing had little meaning or interest to her, and that it narrowly escaped destruction.

On the appointment of her friend, the Rev. A. E. Cornibeer, to the Vicarage of Wendover, Miss Young thought that the drawing might be of some interest to him, and when motoring to London, in the summer of 1934, took the opportunity of visiting Wendover. The Vicar happened to be away at the time, so the drawing found its way to Mr. F. W. Blake, who in turn referred it to me. Permission to copy it was kindly granted, and a reproduction is here given.

It is evidently the work of an amateur, but is drawn with great care and delicacy that suggests general accuracy of detail, in spite of some weaknesses from inexperience. The method employed is a combination of pencil line and stump, and it is vignettted in the style of the steel-engravings in vogue during the early 19th century. It is about 8 inches wide and titled "Town Hall, Wendover." In the left hand corner it is signed Mary Anna, beneath which is another signature Louisa Downes. On the other corner is written:—
Sketched 30.7.39.

Judging from the nature of the work, it was more probably drawn indoors than on the spot, although it may have been sketched outside and finished up later. It may, however, be the production of a "young ladies' school," and be a copy of a drawing by the teacher, as some of the faulty drawing of the accessories suggests,

and this may be the explanation of the double signature. Whatever may be its origin, it is of great topographical interest and value, while there is little reason to doubt the general accuracy of the main architectural details.

Lipscomb gives⁴ some important information respecting this building, which goes far to explain some of its features which might otherwise be obscure.

“ In 1630, a Commission of Charitable Uses, dated 12th April, before Sir William Fleetwood, Sir Robert Lovett, John Duncomb, of Aylesbury, Esq., John Birde, Clerk, (Rector of Cheddington), and John Vintener, Clerk, (Rector of Weston Turville), sets forth, on the Oaths of Samuel Theed, Francis Nixon, John Keene, James Spencer, John Houghton, John Younge, Isaac Seere, William Harding, Henry Barnaby, William Hampton, Richard Jordayne, Edward Worcester, Thomas Wells, Thomas Keene, Thomas Jenners, and Robert Hale, given before the Commissioners, Sir Wm. Fleetwood, &c. that (Anno 15 Hen. VIII. A.D. 1524), the Churchwardens of Wendover did, in behalf of the Town, then pay to John Collet, of London, for a Tenement called the Church House £8, viz. in hand 6/8 in earnest, and afterwards £7 13 . 4, residue of the said summ of eight pounds, and the said House was enjoyed by the inhabitants, and some parts divided into Shoppes and letten to divers people, and that the upper part was employed to teach Schollars till about 17 years since, when the Inhabitants having revived an ancient free Market in the said Town, did then cause the said Church-House to be laid open, and converted the lower part of the same into a Market House, and extended thé upper part for a Common School to teach Children of the Parish of Wendover, and that ever since Richard Plaistow, Bailiff unto the lady Wake, in respect of her Mannour of Wendover, hath by usurpation, viz. in setting up stallgeers and otherwise, taken the profits and benefit of the said House, and that there ought antiently to be paid ten pence yearly as a

⁴ Vol. II., p 488, note 4,

quit rent and no more to the Lord or Lady of the said Manor. And the Jurors do present, that for enlarging the said Church House, one John Machell, gent., and Henry Baldwin, John Collet, John Jacson, with six others, did, about the 12th of our late Sovereing King James, contract with the said Richard Playstow for one parcell of ground in length 30 feet, and in breadth 14 feet, at the rent of 5d. and that the said Richard after the contract, did assign the ground to be built upon for charitable uses.”

From this, it appears that “Wendover Towne House” was originally the Church House, but that by 1524, it had passed into the possession of the Lord of the Manor, and was rented to the town; the upper part as a school, the lower portion let as shops. Except, perhaps, for the gain from rents, it does not seem to have served any other public service.

About 1615, it was converted into a Market House, and the building was extended by the addition of a bay to the north, or Aylesbury Street end. The upper part was still used “to teach Schollers,” the increased space required, indicating the growing desire for learning, at this period. The lower portion had the walls of brick or plaster⁵ removed, leaving the timber supports as open columns, in the customary manner of Market Halls of this period, and for long subsequently.

Even in its enlarged form, it must have been quite a small building for its purpose. The measurements of the additional piece of ground taken for the extension enable us to compute its full size to have been about 42 feet by 30 feet, in the upper floor, which over-sailed the supports by about a foot or 18 inches on all sides.

The drawing shows a distinct difference of character in the two sides of the building. The upper portion of that facing the High Street is divided by ‘studs’ into five panels, each of which is surmounted with a timber

⁵ Lipscomb says “plaster”; this drawing indicates brick.

four-centred arch. Some of these panels may originally have contained windows, but all are shown as filled with brick. The lower supporting timbers on this side are represented as skilfully shaped, perhaps moulded, and having the appearance of columns and arches. There seems little doubt that the original Church House was almost square, and a modestly beautiful building of two bays, and of similar style on all sides and was of late 15th or early 16th century date.

The representation of this building on the Manorial map does indeed show it as square, with some curious structure above the roof which may be meant for gable roofs, or turrets. The date of the map is three, or five, years after the extension took place; but the map may well have been several years in preparation, or this building may have been recorded traditionally.

I have ventured to suggest a restoration of the original appearance of this building, with the details and facts as now known to us. (See plate). The roof is conjectural but based on that of the Guildhall at Thaxted, Essex, which, although a much larger building, is of the same period.

On the side facing Aylesbury Street, the only indication of the original work is the first spandrel of the supporting timbers. All the rest appears to have been re-built at the time of the extension, and has even undergone later alterations. It is certainly of much later date and rougher construction, all due allowance being made for artistic exaggeration in order to obtain picturesqueness.

It will be noticed that the important corner post has been replaced, or strengthened, by a column of large 'erratics,' which stones seem to have been abundant in the neighbourhood, judging from the large number built into the houses generally. This column has been further protected by having another large stone standing in front of its base. Its position at the junction of the cross-roads, would naturally have rendered



Restoration of the Church House, Wendover, 15th Century.

this post liable to damage from carts, while the large stone in advance of it, which may also have served as a mounting stone, must have proved a source of danger to reckless drivers.

The new bay, at the northern end, was in the lower portion, built in to form a cage or lock-up, and was ultimately brought flush with the face of the oversail. Its walls would have been of brick⁶ and, originally, it would have had a gate of iron bars. The roughly boarded arrangement shown in the drawing, is evidently a late contrivance, possibly as late as the early 19th century. The stocks were kept here, but at the demolition of the Market House were removed to the Clock Tower.

An interesting early reference to this cage is given by Lipscomb:—"A view of Frankpledge with Court Baron for the Borough of Wendover, holden 14th October, 1666, when it was ordered, that any of the inhabitants of Wendover Forrens shall have free access unto the Cage and Stocks within the Burrowe of Wendover, and to putt their prisoners into the said Cage or Stocks as often as they have occasion soe to doe, &c."⁷

A new roof would have been necessary in 1615, and this may have been renewed later, when the bell-turret was added, the gable-end weather-boarded, and the bracket clock fixed, which was probably during the 18th century.

The sun-dial was no doubt a survival of the 17th century and may have been re-set.

It is a matter of great gratification that this drawing has been found, as it does much to help us visualize this ancient and important building. Its unexpected resurrection encourages us to hope that some record of

⁶ In his *History of Wendover*, p. 45, Sir Leonard West says that this cage was built of brick; he believes that this was told him by old Mr. Stevens.
⁷ Vol. II., p. 476.

Wendover's still more ancient building—the Chapel of St. John—may yet be discovered. Its ruins were removed to make room for the school when the Old Market House was demolished.

The drawing has now been returned to Miss Young, but it is to be hoped that it may, at some time, find its way into the safe custody of the Bucks County Museum at Aylesbury.