

ACTON PARK

If you come into Wrexham via the Chester Road, you will see an unusual gateway with 4 dogs on top of pillars. This was the entrance to Acton Hall, the home of the infamous Judge Jeffreys, better known as the "Hanging Judge". He gained the nickname after the severe punishments he handed down at the trials of the supporters of the Duke of Monmouth during King James II's reign. He rose to become Lord Chancellor and Chief Justice, but when William III gained power he was arrested; by then he had condemned over 200 people to death. He was locked in the Tower of London for his own protection, and spent the last year of his life in solitary confinement there.



Acton Park Gates - Image Courtesy Wrexham Archives

The former grounds of Acton Hall are now a public park, with a modern stone circle. Near this is another stone, thought to be where Judge Jeffrey's beloved horse was buried. If you stand on the centre stone of the druid circle and repeat "Judge Jeffreys" three times whilst turning around he will arise from the ground on his horse. *Would you dare to do this in the middle of the night when it's pitch black and the shadows of the trees are dancing round like imps of the night?*

In 1917 the Acton Hall estate was bought by the diamond merchant and philanthropist Bernard Oppenheimer. He set up a trust to employ disabled soldiers and sailors, and opened a "Diamond Works" where, after training, the ex-servicemen cut and polished rough diamonds. The business, however, did not do well and survived just six short years.



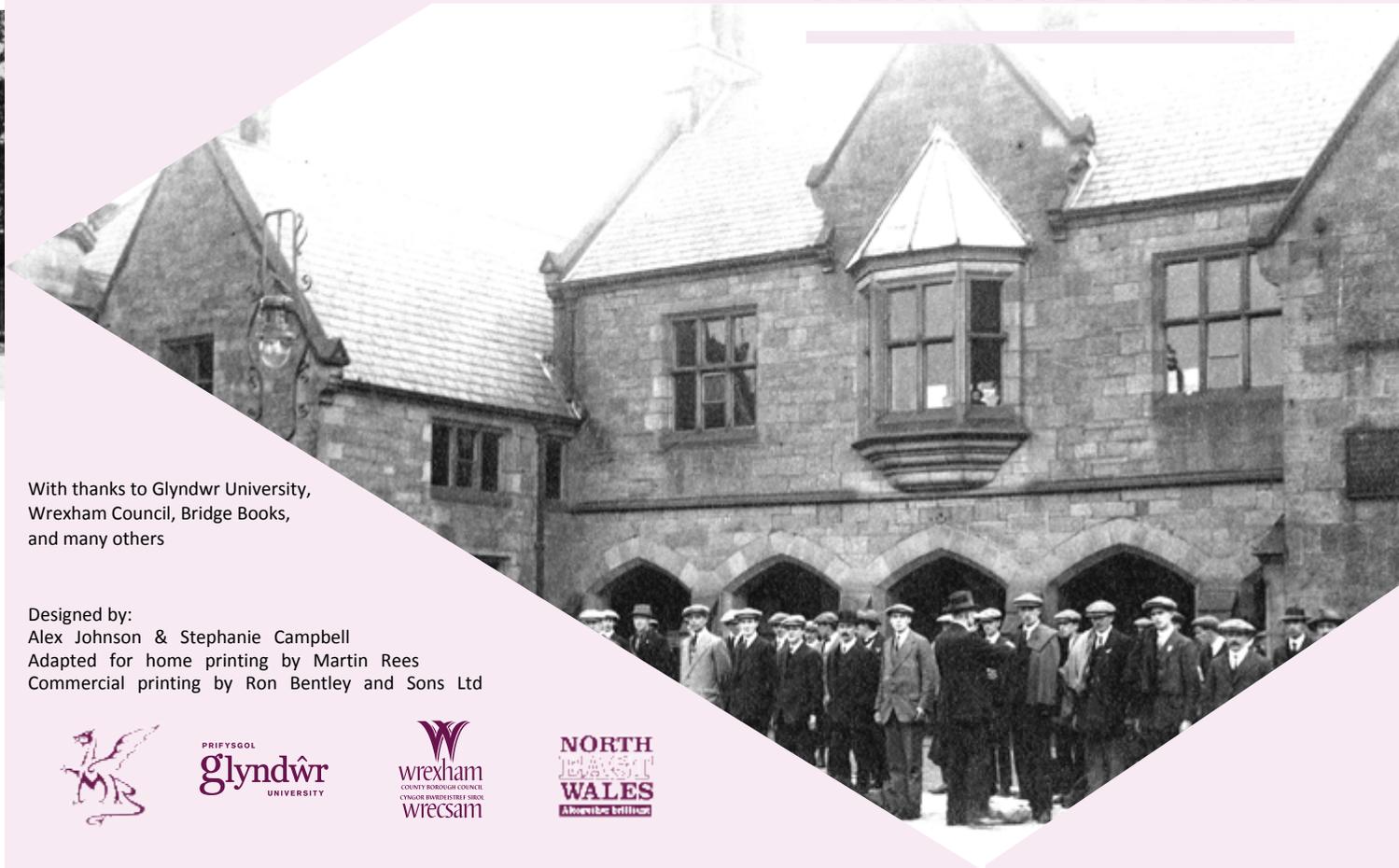
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WREXHAM TOWN HERITAGE TRAIL



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A BRIEF HISTORY

Wrexham Barracks - Image Courtesy Wrexham Archives

EARLY DEVELOPMENT There's been settlement round here since at least the Bronze Age, and the Romans built a brickworks at nearby Holt. Wrexham began to develop as a trading town after the Princes of Powys conquered the area in the early 12th century, creating the stability that Wrexham needed to flourish as well as trading further afield.

17TH AND 18TH CENTURY Wrexham, now a regional market town, was central to the economy of North Wales, attracting travelling merchants from as far as Birmingham and Manchester. Purpose built market courts were built in the late 18th century, such as Manchester Square (where the General Market is now). The Beast Market on Eagles Meadow attracted farmers and drovers from throughout the borders. The wool and leather industries were booming.

19TH CENTURY The town kept growing. 1840 saw the arrival of the Shrewsbury and Chester Railway, and further rail routes opened up to the north in 1866 and south in 1895. New shops and businesses opened to cater for those now in steady employment in local industry – iron and steel making, coal and lead mining, quarries and brickworks, and of course the breweries!

20TH CENTURY In 1934 Wrexham was rocked by the tragic Gresford Colliery disaster, which killed 261 miners and three rescuers. Mining, steel-making and brewing went into decline, but other industries took their place, and the main Industrial Estate became the biggest in Western Europe.

21ST CENTURY The town is now home to Glyndwr University. New shopping developments like Eagles Meadow have changed the town's layout, but it's still a lively place, with lots going on.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many of the local townsfolk firmly believe that there is a whole network of tunnels under the town. According to legend, these tunnels all come from the Parish Church and generally end in pubs around the area. Some say that these were used by the church wardens to ensure that everyone was in church on a Sunday and not in the pub! Probably the main sources for the tunnel stories are the large cellars under many older buildings, some of which interconnect; the drains, sewers and culverts, such as the one which takes the river Gwenfro underground at the junction of Brook Street and Town Hill; and a few genuine underground passages here and there.

Wrexham was a stop on the world's first scheduled passenger helicopter service, which ran between Liverpool, Wrexham and Cardiff between June 1950 and March 1951. Wrexham – Liverpool return fare was £1! They were based on a concrete pad on the site of Homebase, Plas Coch Retail Park. Limited capacity and high running costs made the service uneconomic – by the time flights ceased they had carried only 219 passengers. One of the aircraft is now at Cosford Aerospace Museum.



Hope Street and Parish Church - Image Courtesy Wrexham Archives

ELIHU YALE

The great Welsh American Elihu Yale was born in Boston, USA, but his family moved back to Britain when he was only three. He spent most of his adult life in India, where he worked for the East India Company and rose to be a local government official in Madras. He grew very rich as he also traded on his own behalf in diamonds and other gems, spices, and many other commodities. He retired to the family estate, Plas Grono near Erddig, Wrexham in 1699.

He was a benefactor of St. Giles church, where he was buried in 1721. (He wrote his own epitaph, which you can see on his tombstone; the lines "Much good, some ill, he did; so hope all's even, And that his soul thro' mercy's gone to Heaven" seem to show a quaintly merchant-like attitude to balancing the books on his life!) Yale University in USA is named after him.



Helicopter on the Liverpool - Wrexham Cardiff route 1951

Image Courtesy Wrexham Archives



Mount Street with St Giles Parish Church, Wrexham - Louise Rayner

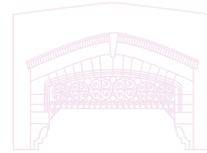
Image Courtesy Grosvenor Museum, Chester



3. SCHOOL OF ART



2. ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL



6. ARGYLE ARCH



13. GENERAL MARKET

Key to map

Roadway



Pedestrian Footpath



WC Public Toilets

P Parking

i Tourist Information

Train Station



4. WREXHAM LAGER BREWERY

CENTRAL STATION

ISLAND GREEN SHOPPING

EAGLES MEADOW SHOPPING



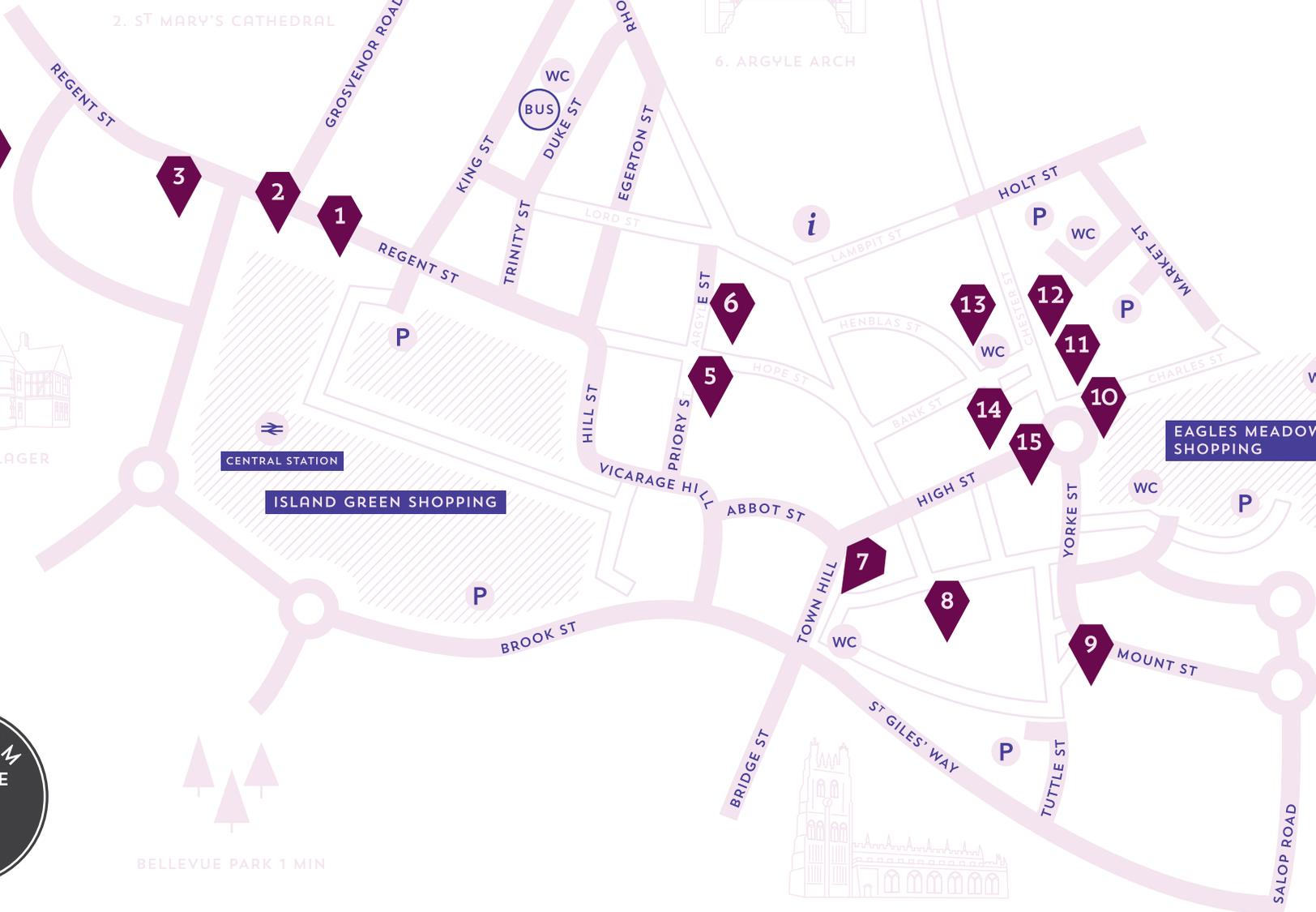
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8. ST GILES CHURCH



10. WYNNSTAY ARMS



1 Museum and Archives

Built in the mid 19th century as the headquarters of the Royal Denbighshire Militia. Originally it had four towers, and was home to the Sergeant Major, the Quarter Master, several Sergeants and their families; the militia's weapons were securely stored here, ready to be used to quell civil unrest or defend the town in the event of invasion. In 1879 the Militia moved to the newly built Hightown Barracks, and it became home to both the Magistrates' Court and the Police. Later, weeping wives waved off their husbands from here on their way to fight in both world wars. In World War 2 The ARP (Air Raid Precautions) were based here; the old siren is still sounded on Remembrance Day.

2 St Mary's Cathedral

A fine neo-Gothic church designed by Edward Welby Pugin, the son of A. W. Pugin who was at the forefront of the Gothic Revival movement. A local colliery owner and ironmaster, Richard Thompson, financed its construction in memory of his wife Ellen. It served as the Roman Catholic parish church for many years, then became a cathedral when the new diocese of Wrexham was formed. Internally much was lost in the 1960s, but it retains much high quality stained glass by the famous firm of Hardman & Co, which feature memorials to families who were at the forefront of the 19th century growth of Wrexham.

There is also a shrine celebrating the life of Saint Richard Gwyn, who was executed at Eagles Meadow after refusing to give up his Catholic faith.

3 School of Art (Old Infirmary)

Now housing the North Wales School of Art & Design, the building has a beautiful Neo-Classical front and entrance. The infirmary was built in 1838 at a cost of £1,800, which was entirely raised from charitable donations, and answered the growing demand for more health care following the establishment of the Wrexham Dispensary in 1833. The building was originally set in its own grounds, surrounded by gardens and trees, but these were lost as the 20th century brought heavier traffic and the roads needed to be widened. It was extended and improved several times, and continued to serve the people of Wrexham until 1926.

4 Wrexham Lager Brewery

The original office buildings (1883) are all that's left. The round turret and the decorated half timbering look like buildings in Bavaria, the home area of the founders and early staff. They picked Wrexham because it had good rail links, excellent water, and deep cellars could easily be dug for cooling, essential in the process of lager brewing. Two railway branch lines came right up to the buildings, one for coal, and the other for the barley etc, which would then start a complex automated journey through the 5-storey factory. Wrexham Lager was served on the Titanic and other White Star Line ships, and drunk by British soldiers at the siege of Khartoum.

5 Horse and Jockey

A charming thatched building which was, originally a 16th century hall house. You can still see glimpses of its original timber frame construction inside. The pub is named after champion jockey Fred Archer, who would often have raced at the nearby Bangor-on-Dee racecourse. The pub sign is based on a portrait of Fred Archer himself. After the pub survived two devastating fires nearby in just a few years, locals believe George, the resident ghost, is protecting his abode.

6 Argyle Arch

Commissioned by Scottish-born engineer, William Low. The Archway cost around £6000, and is built in the High Victorian Gothic style. You can still see some of the gothic style pilasters that decorated the shop fronts as well as decorative ironworks, which are still visible under the arches. William Low was a civil engineer who developed the first serious designs for a channel tunnel to France. Some of the tunnel was actually constructed until the government pulled out for fear of a French invasion. Low's involvement in the forefront of engineering made his building an appropriate entrance way to the "Art Treasures & Industrial Exhibition of North Wales", held in 1876, which showcased industrial innovation as well as art-work. There were turnstiles under the arch which led to a large temporary glass and iron structure, which was removed at the close of the exhibition.

7 Town Hill

Nos 5 and 7 Town Hill retain much of their original timber framing and actually formed a single residence, probably constructed during the early 16th century. No. 7 also contains a three-bay cruck frame with an open hall. Restoration in the 1990s revealed some internal panelling marked with the date 1681, and remains of what may have been a priest hole. Down the gated passageway to the left of No 7, you can see some of the original timber framing.

8 The Parish Church of St Giles, Wrexham

The largest mediaeval Parish Church in Wales, St Giles' contains many interesting features, including stone and wood carvings dating from the 15th and 16th centuries, as well as a rare Doom painting. There are also very fine stained glass windows. The Tower, one of the 'Seven Wonders of Wales' is 135 feet high. There's a replica of it in Yale University in the USA, which was partly funded by gifts from Elihu Yale, whose grave is outside the West door. St Giles' is in regular use and is open daily.

9 Nag's Head and old Border Brewery

Brewing here started in quite a small way in 1834, but grew and expanded under different owners until the Great Depression, which brought hard times for the brewing industry. In 1931 it merged with 2 other local breweries, to form Border Breweries. Their Border Bitter was a popular drink in the area for many years, and was marketed as "The Prince of Ales". Eventually it was taken over by Marstons and the brewery closed within 6 months, despite promises to the contrary; the chimney, a much-loved local landmark, was later bought by local M.P. John Marek to save it from demolition. The Nag's Head was thought to have a pipe running under the road from the brewery directly into the bar – in fact it probably just ran to the bottling plant, which was behind the pub.

10 Wynnstay Arms Hotel – Yorke Street

In the early 18th century this coaching inn was known as the George, then the name was changed to The Eagles, after the three eagles on the coat of arms of the owners, the Williams-Wynn family of Ruabon. That's why the Eagles Meadow area nearby is so named. In the 18th and early 19th century, a post outside the entrance was used for bear-baiting. The inn was also the meeting place for 'The Cycle of the White Rose', a Jacobite secret society. Later it was the birthplace of the Football Association of Wales!

11 Feathers Hotel – Chester Street

The Feathers Hotel was originally known as the Plume of Feathers; it was owned by the Meredith Family for over 200 years. The inn was on a popular drover's route along Wrexham's main thoroughfare to The Beast Market, where farmers took their cattle to sell. Around the side in Charles Street you can see the old stable yard; the small round window in the side wall would have been used to transfer hay from a large hay wagon directly to the hay loft within.

12 Martin Rees Jewellers – Chester Street

The structure of this row of 5 shops dates back to Charles II's time. (The original shop fronts date from Victorian times, but were renovated in the 1980s.) It's thought they would have been workshops for small traders such as saddlers or tinsmiths, rather than dwellings, as there seem to have been no chimneys in any of the buildings! In the early 1900s the shop was trading as "Bell's Modern Cash Grocers". It's now reaching its centenary as a jewellers; the original safe fitted in 1915 is still in use today.

13 The General Market

This was opened in 1879, to give indoor accommodation to some of the many traders in butter, cheese and dairy goods; thus it was known as the Butter Market, but later was re-named the General Market. During the Second World War it was used as a dining-hall for officers of the US Army Medical Corps, who were billeted nearby.

14 The Butchers' Market

This was the first of the indoor markets to be built, and was opened in 1848. Enter at the Henblas Street entrance, which has a splendid terra-cotta bull's head over it. Looking across to the High Street entrance on the other side of the market, you will see the bell which used to be rung to mark the end of trading hours, and a splendid clock donated by Gray's, a well-known local firm of electricians. The exterior of the High Street entrance is a striking neo-Jacobean design. The extensive cellars under this market were used as air-raid shelters in WW2; many locals believe a tunnel used to lead from them to St Giles' Church.

15 Alliance Assurance Building – Yates Wine Bar

In the 19th century many financial institutions began to build purpose-made offices in the town. The Alliance Assurance Company was a Wrexham success story, forming in 1852 and advertising themselves as the only Welsh insurance company. The Italianate design of their building was meant to suggest wealth and substance. The local newspaper said it had "the finest room in Wrexham, with a telegraph to point out which clerk is wanted, and ... where he is wanted", and having "hot water and cold water everywhere at command". The building was claimed to be fireproof, and contained shop units on the ground floor with modern central heating, and with windows and doors fitted with patent revolving shutters. Local people must have been very impressed with this showcase of modern building design.