

rather than the usual troublesome navvies. Although the basin has long been filled in (now covered by industrial buildings), the bridge and wharfinger's cottage survive. The road to link the basin to the town (**The Wharf**) was built on land bought for £100 5s 0d. (£100.25) from Richard Amber, a leather dresser.

## COWDRAY HOUSE



The most iconic building in Midhurst is the 16th century Cowdray House, which in Georgian times was still the seat of the Viscounts Montague. Although remaining a Tudor house several improvements were carried out including, in 1708, the painting of the staircase hall by Pellegrini. Between 1772 and 1774 Capability Brown was paid £850 by the 7th Viscount for landscaping the surrounding park. Dr Johnson visited Cowdray in 1782 with James Boswell and was very impressed, saying *Sir, I should like to stay here for four and twenty hours, we see here how our ancestors lived.*

On the night of 24 September 1793 the house was destroyed in a tragic fire whilst the hapless 8th

Viscount was on holiday in Switzerland; he never got to know of this as he was killed in a boating accident before the news could reach him. The house was never rebuilt and remained a romantic ruin that was much loved by Georgian engravers. The gates now sited in front of the ruins were moved in 1964 from the far end of the causeway in North Street.

## MIDHURST GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Midhurst's famous grammar school had been founded at the Old Town Hall in 1672 by the philanthropic Gilbert Hannam for the education of *twelve poor boys of the town*, but it moved to North Street in the early 18th century using Hannam's own house as one of its buildings. (It is now an academy in new premises further north.) The handsome Greek Revival *Schola Grammaticalis* building was added in 1821 to house the expanding establishment which then numbered 90 boys.

## IN SUMMARY

The Georgian era saw a significant increase in Midhurst's prosperity, the impact of which lives on in the many elegant buildings of the time. They more than repay study on a gentle stroll around its streets.



The Midhurst Society, promoting new ideas and supporting our heritage to help Midhurst become a better place to live, work and enjoy. *Like to know more?*



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# GEORGIAN MIDHURST



St Ann's, Sheep Lane

Anyone arriving in Midhurst for the first time might think that the town had been created in the Georgian era, gaining that impression from the stock of Georgian – or apparently Georgian – buildings that line North Street and Church Hill.

These Georgian buildings are the result of the considerable transformation that Midhurst underwent in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Such a Georgian transformation was not however unique to Midhurst; it was happening all over the country, reflecting the increased prosperity that swept the land from the end of the 17th century.

The wealth and status of a man in business was reflected in his house and an old fashioned, timber-framed house simply would not do. However, all is not what it at first seems for behind many of Midhurst's elegant Georgian frontages lurk much older buildings.

The distinctive Georgian building style was derived from classicism whose rules imparted satisfying proportions which, when expressed with characteristic Georgian understatement, produced buildings that were elegant and harmonious. This is in sharp contrast to the excesses of the forthcoming Victorian era that was to be characterised by overstated fussiness.

## THE GEORGIAN BOROUGH

Georgian Midhurst was a market town with its economy based upon agriculture, leather processing, malting and weaving. Its population grew from '200 families' (i.e. about 800 souls) in 1724 to 1256 in 1811.

It was a borough returning two MPs, and ruled through manorial courts by a steward and borough officials. From 1760 these met in the upper room of the 16th century **(Old) Town Hall** in the Market Square.

MPs and borough officials were elected but the electorate was few in number. Medieval Midhurst had developed on the burgage system, whereby the Lord of the Manor granted plots (burgages) to peasants who built their houses thereon and paid him rent. In the 18th century the legacy of the burgage system was that only burgesses – i.e. those who owned or rented burgage houses – had the vote, and in 1790 there were only 153 such.

The system was open to corruption and landlords could coerce their tenants into voting the way they wanted by bribes or reducing rents, and they even sub-divided burgage plots in order to increase the number of voters! It was not until 1832, when the Reform Act eliminated the burgage system, that anything approaching true democracy began to emerge.

The town was subject to considerable influence from the Montagues at Cowdray House and other wealthy magnates. One such magnate was John Charman, who owned property not only in Midhurst but in Arundel, Lewes, Chichester and Lurgashall. He built **Eagle House** on the south side of Market Square in 1734 on the strength of his investments.

## THE GEORGIAN REBUILDING

Those who could afford it built grand new brick houses, and a good example of this is **St Ann's** on the north side of Sheep Lane. It was built for Captain John Quantock of the Dragoon Guards who acquired the site by marriage in 1778. This handsome house is of three storeys with the steps to its front door set into the deeply-recessed porch. Nearby is **St Ann's House**, the largest Georgian house in Midhurst, built by Major Richard Newland, also of the Dragoon Guards. Its present severe façade is not the original; it had to be rebuilt following a bombing raid in 1943. The undamaged rear elevation is much finer, with crenellations to its parapet.

In North Street **Clock House** exhibits an unusual feature. Facing the street a new two-storey Georgian portion was built to the same height as the much-older rear portion (visible from Lambert's

Lane) which is of *three* storeys. The new part was so built in order to provide loftier rooms and it has a fine stone cantilever staircase. The canted bays in the front are clad with mathematical tiles – tiles made to look like bricks.

Those with less money to spend added a brick front to their timber-framed house; the new wall generally aligning with the overhanging jetty and the space beneath it being filled in. However the sides and rears of such buildings were generally left untouched. A good example of this can be seen at **Tudor View** in North Street where, on its wall facing onto the entrance to the *Angel Hotel*, all the original timber framing is exposed and both the in-filled jetty and the thickness of the added front wall can be clearly seen.

## TRANSPORT

Midhurst is 55 miles from London to which it was linked via the Chichester and Fernhurst turnpike, set up in 1749. Midhurst was served by a daily stage coach from Chichester to London which called at **The Spread Eagle** in South Street. The Georgian part of this fascinating coaching inn dates from around 1700-1710 and contains a fine oak staircase. The Turnpike Trustees used to meet here to decide how to allocate the monies raised by the tolls to the maintenance of the road. The other coaching inn was **The Angel** in North Street where public assemblies were often held.

In 1794 Midhurst was linked to the inland waterways network when the Rother Navigation opened from Stopham, on the River Arun, to a basin and wharf south of the town. The promoter was the Third Earl of Egremont who used Petworth Estate workers to build the navigation