

Grammar School, now the Midhurst Rother College, in North Street.

The market house was probably built to preserve the existing trading centre and prevent its migration down the hill, near to where the lord of the manor was developing his splendid mansion of Cowdray. Some merchants did move their premises close to its gates, but the convenience of the new market house ensured the Old Town remained the principal business area of the time.

THE TOWN HALL

In about 1760 its ground floor walls were filled in and the same building became the Town Hall. This was the civic centre of Midhurst where public meetings were held, where the law courts sat and where wrongdoers or vagrants were jailed. The stocks were near the church and can be seen today in a railed-off enclosure under the exterior steps.

The building was renovated, re-roofed and the stairs moved outside (to give more space) in 1843/4. By the end of the 19th century the square was only a cattle market, held three times a year and the corn market had transferred to the Angel Hotel in North Street. The tolls collected paid for the uniform worn by the Town Crier.

THE FIRE BRIGADE

At the back of the Town Hall they housed the fire engines. The first one was given to the parish in about 1730 by Bulstrode Peachey, the

MP for Midhurst, and was maintained out of the church rate. One important call-out was on 24 September 1793 for the disastrous fire at Cowdray House. A second engine was purchased and the Volunteer Fire Brigade was set up in 1865. By day the horses were pastured



on St Ann's Hill and had to be caught if there were an emergency. The brigade moved to new premises at The Wharf in 1955, but the old fire bells still hang outside the original 'fire station'.

TODAY

In 1910 the building passed into the care of the Midhurst Town Trust, which also looks after the stocks, the town's mace and the pound in Bepton Road where straying animals were once confined.

The market has gone, but this is still a busy trading area and the centre for the town's outdoor festivities. If you visit the market house, now commercial premises, you can see old photographs and learn more about this fascinating part of Midhurst.



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THE MARKET SQUARE



For a thousand years the Market Square has been the heart of Midhurst. The church has stood in silent witness while medieval pilgrims, Tudor courtiers and Georgian merchants prayed there, and Cromwell's Roundheads desecrated it. We have celebrated in the Square, and over the centuries we have watched our sons march away to fight for their country at Crecy, Agincourt, Blenheim, Waterloo, Ypres and Normandy. School boys once learnt their Latin and Greek near tombs whose epitaphs time has erased. The Curfew Bell rings out every evening (at 8.00pm) as it did after the Norman Conquest in 1066 and, if you listen carefully, you may hear the ghostly voices of the medieval market place. Time stands still.

THE BEGINNINGS

Midhurst began as a small Saxon trading centre that grew up where the lane north from Chichester met the trackway leading to Winchester. Here, on a hill rising out of the boggy thickets, people gathered to buy and to sell the necessities of life. Every three weeks the law court of the Easebourne Hundred met "...under a certain ash tree" east of the market place. (The Hundred, an administrative area, stretched east-west between Iping and Lodsworth: north-south between Linchmere and Cocking.)



THE MEDIEVAL MARKET

Every Tuesday, later Thursday, farmers from about a 6-mile radius came to the market with their wives, bringing sheep, cattle and produce to sell. They took home goods made by the craftsmen who had set up shops nearby where they sold woollen cloth, shoes, saddlery, metalware, knives and tools. The

farmers rented stalls in the market place and had to obey the local regulations. Nothing could be sold before the seller reached the market; all bread and ale was inspected for purity and anyone selling sub-standard products was fined; weights and measures were checked. Wrong-doing was immediately punished by a special market-day court. The ale houses were busy all day. It was noisy, smelly and boisterous.

An annual fair, more important than the weekly market, was held on 22 July (St Mary Magdalen's Day). This was the opportunity to buy luxuries from the travelling merchants who worked a circuit of the fairs at various towns and villages, each with a long-standing fixed day. These traders carried specialities from overseas and from distant parts of Britain. They sold the spices that were very necessary in the long meatless winters, wine from Spain or Gascony, linen, tar and pitch, salt, iron, tin and lead.

A bell rang to announce the opening and closing of the fair. It was a punishable offence to begin trading beforehand or to continue afterwards. People came to Midhurst that day from all the surrounding villages and were entertained by street performers: jugglers, acrobats, music makers and dancing bears. The unwary were preyed upon by pickpockets and all kinds of charlatans. Merry-making continued when trading ceased and many a country girl had reason to remember Midhurst Fair.



BURGAGE TENURE

Skilled craftsmen from the countryside were encouraged to move into the town. As an inducement, the lord of the manor allowed them to rent properties near the market. They held these by a special arrangement known as 'Burgage Tenure'. They were allowed a plot of land, usually with a frontage of 16½ft (the old measurement known as a perch). They could build a house with a shop front and living accommodation for a family above. At the back, a long garden could be used for workshops, to keep a pig, or grow vegetables. The tenant paid 2d a year and, provided he behaved, the plot was his family's for ever. It could remain in one piece, be divided for sons to inherit, or be sold. Only certain ancient towns had this form of tenure. The system ended in the 1690s.

THE MARKET HOUSE

By the 16th century some of the market stalls had been replaced by permanent shops, but visiting traders still needed somewhere to display their wares. In 1551, the lord of the manor gave the burgesses a plot of land in the square, 70 feet by 30 feet, to build a market house. This was open-aisled to allow access from all directions and had rows of benches where goods were displayed. More stalls stood on the cobbles outside and on the grass around the church. Upstairs in the market house Gilbert Hannam, a wealthy cloth merchant, founded a school in 1672 for 12 local poor boys. He paid a tutor £20 a year to teach them Latin and Greek, and also writing and arithmetic "...if they be capable to learn". This was the beginning of Midhurst