

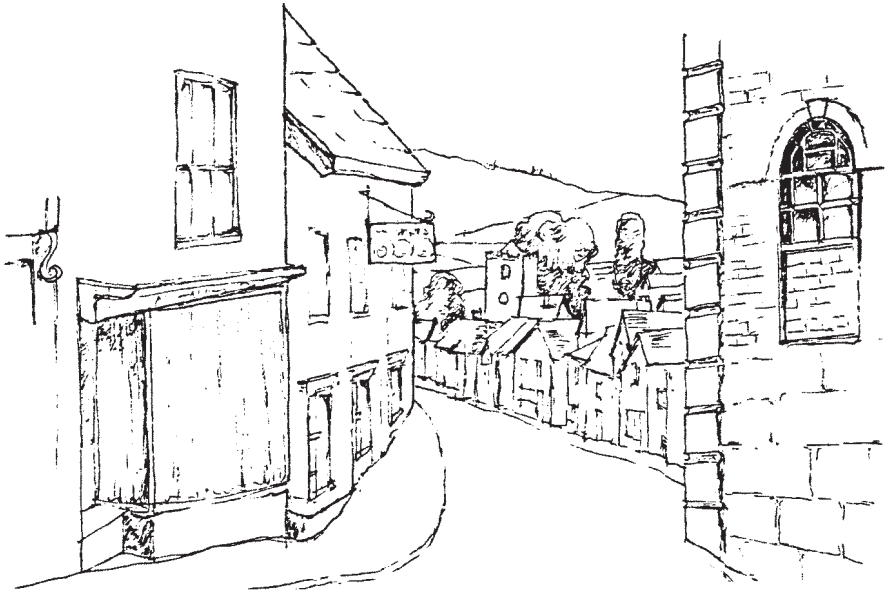
Bishop's Castle

Shropshire



Castle Street

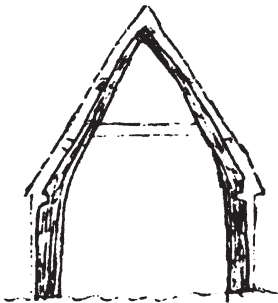
A Town Trail



The main street down to the Church

If you look at the street map of Bishop's Castle today, you can see clearly the regular layout of a twelfth century *PLANNED TOWN* with the castle site at the top of the hill, a main street from the castle to the church at the bottom, shorter streets crossing at right angles, and back lanes, wide enough for turning horses drawing wagons, giving access to the *BURGAGE PLOTS*. These rectangular burgage plots of about 33 feet frontage on to the main street were allocated to the first settlers and ran through to the back lanes.

In time the original settlers or their heirs were able to buy the freeholds of their plots, and this resulted in the building of as many cottages as could be crowded in along the *SHUTS* or passages, running off the main street. Much of this pattern remains, and can be traced as you follow the Town Trail.



Plain Cruck Roof

Hidden behind many of the present-day house fronts is original timber-framing; often when a house has been completely rebuilt there may be old beams and timber-framed partitions inside.

'*CRUCK*' construction remains in some buildings although disguised by later brick, stone or rendering on gables. Crucks were thick curved timbers supporting walls and roof, often one big oak tree with a curved limb, sawn in two to form identical cruck 'blades' which made up a single arch.

1.
The Trail starts from the Lych Gate of the Parish Church of St. John the Baptist. (Numbered plaques are placed at some of the places of interest)

The **CHURCH** stands at the opposite end of the town from the Castle. The castle and mediaeval planned town date from the first half of the twelfth century, the church from 1291. There may have been an earlier church or shrine on this site which is on the Kerry Ridgeway, an ancient east-west trade route, later a drovers' road.

Only the tower and font remain of the 1291 church, which was partly destroyed by fire in 1592 and again in 1644, and completely re-built in 1860. A mediaeval arch and sedilia are preserved as part of the south wall of the churchyard. The present church is a large and well-proportioned example of Victorian ecclesiastical architecture. Interesting features are an effigy in the south transept, said to be of Gervase Needham, a vicar expelled in the Civil War for his Royalist sympathies, and some fine Pre-Raphaelite stained glass in the Prayer Chapel.

The red line painted near the base of the tower is said to be where a game of 'Fives' used to be played. There are two interesting graves in the churchyard: one, listed by English Heritage, near the small north-east gate is in memory of '*I.D. a native of Africa 1801*'; and near the tower, but sadly now almost illegible, one to Louis Paces, (d. 1814) a French Cavalry Colonel, a prisoner in the Napoleonic War.

Before proceeding up Church Street you may like to walk up Church Lane (the first turning left after the Lych Gate).

Note the *OPEN STREAM* before it goes underground. In Church Lane on the east side you will notice the *TITHE BARN*, repaired and used as a Church Hall; opposite is the Fire Station.

A *SKIN YARD* was situated in Church Lane between Fields Lane and Woodbine Terrace, and there were two cottages there in 1841 and 1851, although they were not mentioned on later census returns. The name Fields Lane refers to the *OPEN FIELDS* of the town, which were still recognisable at the time of the Tithe Map of the mid-nineteenth century.

Return to Church Street.

2.
The **SIX BELLS** public house once had a blacksmith and a coachbuilder working in its yard. On the other corner opposite is the **TAN HOUSE**. There was a tannery and a hempyard here. In the private garden of The Lymes next door, is the only building remaining – a small kiln thought to have been used in the curing of certain kinds of leather. The field below Tan House, now a garden, was once called Washing Pool Close.

This tanyard was for many years owned by George Beddoes, then by his son, also George, and later passed on to John Norton whose wife Mary was a member of the Beddoes family. In 1871 Mary Norton, now a widow, was described as a tanner, currier and maltster. In 1881 a Samuel Norton was living at the Tan House, employing four men and a boy; he worked as a butcher as well as a tanner and maltster.



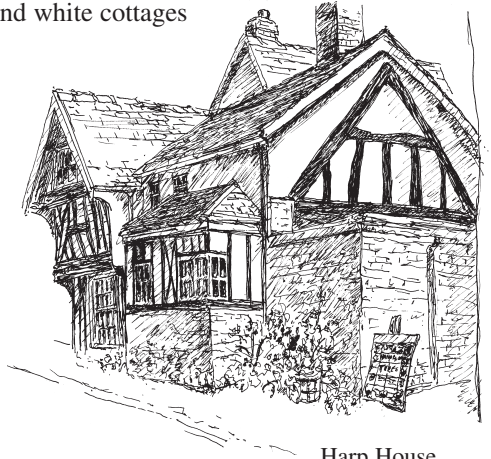
Norton House

In his will, dated 26th August 1787, George Beddoes Senior left to his son William the house and land in Bishop's Castle, 'known as the Workhouse'. **NORTON HOUSE** on the west side of Church Street and a little above the Tan House, is thought to have been a private or parish workhouse before the first Clun Union workhouse called Stone House was built in the 1840s.

3.

Walk up the west side of Church Street past Norton House and the Old Brick Guest House.

Notice the black and white cottages opposite (the right-hand one was formerly Weaver's the wheelwright). Pause at the Petrol Station, and look across at the **HARP HOUSE**, kept as the *HARP INN* until 1902. Notice the mediaeval timbering showing the original thatched roof-line. Adjacent to the seventeenth century **BOAR'S HEAD** Inn, see the half-timbered jettied gable with red brick in-fill. There is a *DRAGON POST* with a piece of *BARLEY-SUGAR CARVING* that dates this part of the Harp House to around 1570.



Harp House

At the crossroads, turn left and walk a short way along Union Street. From the corner to where the road bends to the right was once known as *PIG FAIR* from the markets held in the open. It later became *POUND STREET* since the parish pound (where stray animals were kept) was on the corner by the entrance to the present-day playing-fields. It is now all part of Union Street.

4.

Walk back to the Boar's Head and continue up Church Street. Between Nos. 32 and 46 Church Street is a passage, now closed off, which once led to a small court called *JENKINS SQUARE*. Nothing of this remains, but the census returns show that the 'square' consisted of three cottages in 1841, 1851 and 1861, and four in 1871 and 1881. Over forty years these cottages were occupied by labourers, shoemakers, a charwoman, a sawyer and driver of a mailcart. Richard Medlicott, a labourer, lived in Jenkins Square for over thirty years. With a wife, five children, and a lodger, his small cottage must have been crowded.

Many cottages built on the *BURGAGE PLOTS* of Bishop's Castle were let by the owners to labourers, charwomen and other poor people. These cottages were reached by passages or *SHUTS*, but as they became uninhabitable, doors were put across the openings. There are examples of this at the top of Union Street between No. 36 and Tudor House; in Church Street between Nos. 54 and 58 and between Nos. 7 and 11 High Street.

5.

Beside Gwyther's Shoe Shop between Nos 33 and 43 Church Street, a passage leads to *OWEN'S YARD*. (Mr. Owen kept a lodging house and tea-rooms there in 1881). There were six cottages in this yard in that year occupied by labourers, a dealer and two paupers; a row of these dwellings still stands.

6.

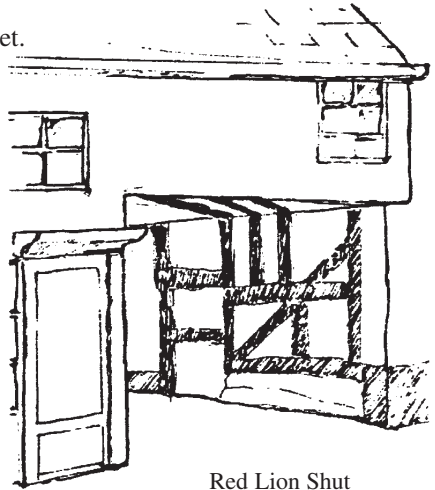
The *RED LION INN* occupied No. 61 Church Street.

The alleyway (known as *RED LION SHUT*) **leads out into Union Street.** You may like to go part of the way along it and look at the buildings there. In Victorian days the Red Lion yard led by *TUGG'S PASSAGE* into *WOOTTON SQUARE*. There were two houses in this passageway and nine in Wootton Square.

Some of them were demolished to make a new road from Church Street to Union Street.

The owner of these houses gave the land for the road and it was named after him, Harley Jenkins Street as he wished. One cottage which still remains now forms part of the supermarket, No. 63 Church Street, and from old deeds it is known that a row of old cottages

in Harley Jenkins Street which have been modernised and converted into two dwellings and a flat, were part of Wootton Square. Opposite Red Lion Shut, No. 58 Church Street, Bumbles Cottage, is another of the few dwellings with its original half-timbering.



Red Lion Shut

7.

Continue up Church Street and turn left along Harley Jenkins Street. At the far end, in Union Street we see **STONE HOUSE RESIDENTIAL HOME AND BISHOP'S CASTLE COMMUNITY HOSPITAL**, built on the site of the old *CLUN UNION WORKHOUSE* and opened in 1965. The old Workhouse or Union (from which the street gets its name) was built in 1844. In 1881 there were 68 inmates – 27 men, 9 young women and 32 children. There were also 8 vagrants with 3 children. Some of them were mill-workers from Lancashire.

VAGRANTS or tramps walked from one workhouse to another, most who stayed at Bishop's Castle being bound to or from Knighton in Wales. The men had to do a certain amount of stone breaking (for road-building) before being allowed to move on. Even in the 1920s it was a common site to see tramps on the road. They would often call at houses asking for boiling water to be put on their spoonful of tea and sugar which they had in a tin can with a piece of wire threaded through holes at the top to make a handle. They were polite and caused no trouble on the roads. Most farmers would let them sleep in a building, which they liked to do in good weather, rather than go into the workhouse and have to break stone. Sometimes '*ROADSTERS*' (as they were called) would earn a little money by playing a musical instrument or singing around the streets. They had their 'rounds' and some became quite well-known, especially one man who played a cornet, and a couple who caused much amusement when they came with a gramophone on a perambulator.

THERE IS AN INFORMATION BOARD IN THE FREE CAR PARK.

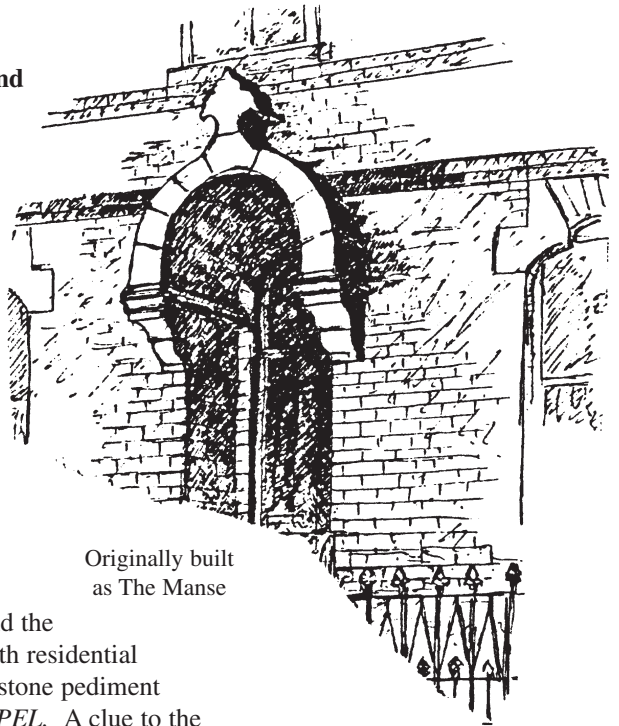
8.

Walk back along Harley Jenkins Street to the main street where Church Street merges into High Street. The stone and brick building opposite, now a pharmacy, was the old *PRIMARY SCHOOL*. Mrs. Mary Morris gave money to educate the poor children of Bishop's Castle. She also left £200 to erect this school to be called 'Mr Wright's Charity School' in memory of her first husband.

The street running beside the old Primary School is New Street. Before New Street existed, Stone House Shut (or 'Bogey's Shut' as local people called it) led to the row of cottages which still stands as an example of early terraced houses. Bogey was a policeman who once lived in the shut, and was supposed to have chained prisoners to his fire-grate for want of a gaol. (In 1842 No. 1 High Street was built as a police station with lock-up).

9.

On the corner of High Street and New Street, the house with a prominent hood over the front door was for a time the vet's surgery (until replaced by the modern surgery on the Love Lane/Crow Gate industrial estate). At one time the building was the *POST OFFICE* – signs of the site of the old letterbox can still be seen in the New Street wall.



Originally built
as The Manse

Still on the east side of the High Street,

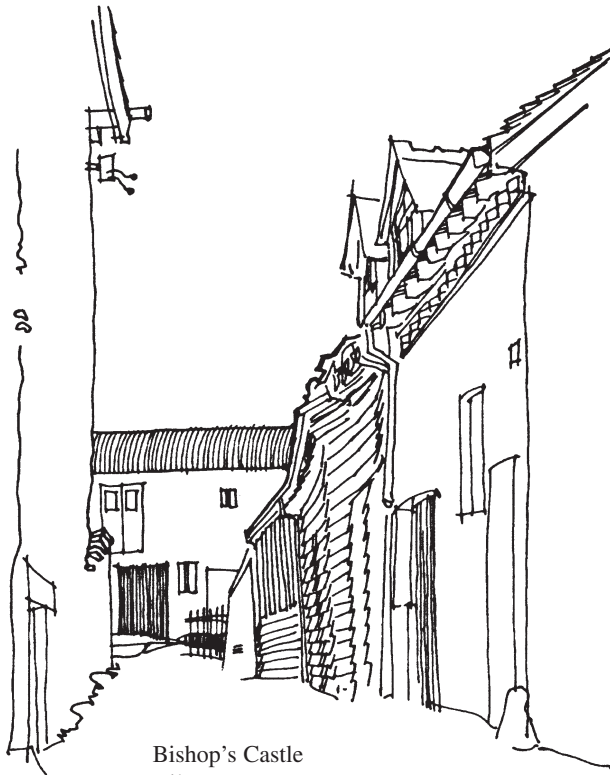
the next building has had an unusual sequence of uses. Behind the frontage of a solicitor's office with residential flats, you will notice the elegant stone pediment of the original *WESLEYAN CHAPEL*. A clue to the second use of the building as our *CINEMA* is the outside safety escape stair from the projection room. The heyday of the Plaza was during World War II when soldiers were billeted at Walcot, and buses used to bring in cinema-goers from the country.

Continue up High Street.

10.

Above the Bank (14 High Street) turn into CHAPEL YARD. This is one of the best-preserved of the old courts built on the original *BURGAGE PLOTS*. It was probably this court which is described in a government report of 1869:– ‘*The first visited was a little house nine feet square, one room below, one above: no back door but a little bit of garden. Rent 1s.6d (7.5p) a week.*’.

There was a group of six cottages with one outside lavatory between them. The six houses had nine bedrooms altogether, and were occupied by 33 people, including 23 children. Water for all these households came from a tap in the yard, and the rents averaged 1s.9d. (9p) a week. Today this group has become three attractive modernised cottages.



Bishop's Castle
Railway Museum

11.

At the end of Chapel Yard the former *CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL* has been used as an electric power station, a scout hut, and a public library. The building is now **BISHOP'S CASTLE HERITAGE RESOURCE CENTRE** and the **LIBRARY** is now at Enterprise House, Station Street.

Walk up past this building into School Lane. As you come back into High Street, the last building on your left houses the **BISHOP'S CASTLE RAILWAY AND TRANSPORT MUSEUM**. This building, restored after a fire in 2000, has recently been the subject of research and has been identified as part of a Jacobean 'Market Hall'.

12.

Opposite on the west side of High Street is the **PORCH HOUSE**, dendrodated to 1564. The original carvings inside the porch, on the fascia board under the eaves and under the *JETTY*, were augmented in the 1990s by unique modern carvings. In Victorian times the Porch House was divided into two properties, and the frontage set back from the pavement was a saddler's shop for about a century.

The TOWN HALL, with its clock and cupola, faces down the High Street.

13.

To the left of the Town Hall is a quaint cobbled way with a wooden hand-rail, leading to the Market Square. The building which overhangs the cobbles supported by wooden posts is known as the **HOUSE ON CRUTCHES**. It was built between 1610 and 1630. After being derelict for many years it was acquired and restored by a voluntary trust (The Old Castle Land Trust) for use as a **MUSEUM** run by volunteers, open at weekends and on Bank Holidays (Easter to end of September). Displays cover all aspects of local life, past and present. Experts think this old house has not been much altered since it was built in the early seventeenth century.

14.

The present **TOWN HALL** was built about 1760. The first mention of a building here was in 1608, but it was in a '*ruinous condition*' in 1615, and so must have been built much earlier.

The *STOCKS* and *WHIPPING POST* were in the street below the Town Hall. Offenders who had been drunk were punished by being put in the stocks, and those who had committed larceny were often imprisoned and publicly whipped. The last recorded conviction occurred in 1793 when one John Cartwright was found guilty of stealing two pieces of candied peel and a piece of lump sugar, value threepence (1.5p), for which he was committed to gaol, then taken to the post and publicly whipped.

The lower room in the Town Hall, now called the *CHARTER ROOM* after restoration in 1973 to celebrate 400 years since the Town's first Charter (in the time of Elizabeth I), is used as a weekly Friday Market and for regular Farmers' Markets. On market days in the past, farmers' wives brought dressed poultry, butter, eggs and vegetables for sale, also live poultry which were put in cages around the sides of the room. These would be sold by an auctioneer from Craven Arms. This market was much enjoyed by the townspeople and bidding would be higher for butter considered to have the nicest taste.

In the south wall of the Town Hall are two barred circular windows thought to be part of the old gaol. Here is a case with details of the opening times of both Museums – provided by the **Bishop's Castle Civic Society**.

15.

On the right of the Town Hall, look across the street at the tall door with the iron bars above, between Nos. 40 and 42 High Street. You will notice a carved inscription: '*DAUED MORRIS TAN ... MDCIXXX*'. Experts interpret this as 1629. In 1638 a Morris Tanner was leasing land from Richard Oakeley of Oakeley near Bishop's Castle. Perhaps there is a connection here?

16.

The cobbled way by the House on Crutches, and the High Street both lead up to the Market Square. The Square was in earlier times called the Broadmarket, and in 1871 was known as the Butter Cross. The 1871 Census lists a milliner, her apprentice, two draper's assistants, three draper's apprentices, a groom and a porter, all living in one house with a housekeeper and a domestic servant. This house is believed to be the large one on the corner of the Square and Union Street – No. 17, with fluted pilasters to the oak front door.