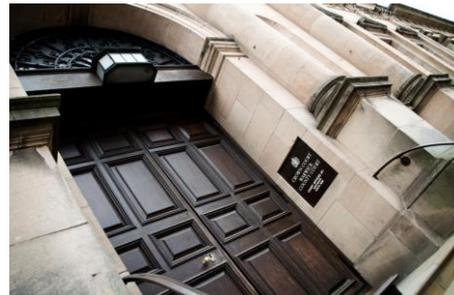




Welcome to The Old Shire Hall and Judges' House

Welcome to The Old Shire Hall and Judges' House on historic Northgate Street, described as “one of the most handsome Georgian streets in the Midlands” (Alec Clifton-Taylor OBE).



Our history timeline

This site has a long association with the judiciary as it was home to the Warwick Assizes, which were periodic courts held around England and Wales, from the late **15th century**.

These courts continued until the early 1970s, when they were abolished by the 1971 Courts Act.

Upstairs in Courtroom number 3, there is a photograph of the members of the Grand Jury of the County of Warwick (Warwick Division) Summer Assizes in 1933. You can also spot the ‘gaffs’ (poles) on the wall, which were used by the local gentry of the Grand Jury for passing down the indictments via what was originally a hole in the floor.



In **1542**, the Warwickshire County Gaol moved to Northgate Street (you can see one of the original gaol doors around the corner on Barrack Street, opposite Warwick Methodist Church) before moving to Cape Road in 1860.

In **1675**, the building was sold to trustees and became the County Hall. Between **1676 and 1680**, the hall, gaol and House of Correction were rebuilt by William Hurlbutt, a local architect who had already built the Market Hall.

In **1694**, the Great Fire of Warwick tore through the town. The hall suffered little damage in the fire, but both the gaol and House of Correction adjacent were destroyed.

In **1749** the buildings were declared inadequate, so between **1753 and 1758** The Old Shire Hall was completely rebuilt to include courtrooms, a gaol and military barracks.

The Georgian Grade II listed Judges' House was built between **1814 and 1816**, with the final Crown court sessions being held as recently as **2010**.

Take our 'Trial Trail'...

1. Starting at the main entrance...

Q: Which famous monarch and his consort have their portraits here?



Turn around and look back at the main entrance. You can see a portrait of Sanderson Miller the Elder to the left of the entrance. His son designed The Old Shire Hall.

Look to the left of this portrait at the window shutters.

Q: Can you see the plaque, marked 1815, that names the surveyor, carpenter and mason that built the building?

2. Go through the doors into the Grade I listed The Great Hall.

You'll see on the walls the original javelins that were used by bodyguards, paid for by the Justice, to protect the judges in procession until the police took over the role in 1890.

Look up! You will see the Hall's beautiful coved, compartmental ceiling with its decoration of gold leaves.

Q: Look at the carvings in the four corners of the ceiling. What animals and fruit can you see?



Q: How many globes can you count on The Great Hall's period chandeliers?



Looking through the central archway, you will see a heraldic 'cartouche' with swags of fruit and flowers.

Q: What animals are represented on there? How many lions can you count?

3. Go through the doors into Courtroom number 1.

This courtroom was used for Crown court trials up until as recently as 2010 and was the Criminal Law Court, used for criminal trials including theft, assault and murder.



It is one of three courtrooms in The Old Shire Hall, with courtroom number 2 being the 'Nisi Prius' Court, used for civil law cases, and courtroom number 3 being the Grand Jury Court, used to investigate whether there was enough evidence for a case to proceed.

The tiered seating of the court surrounds the canopied Judge's chair, which still displays the hook upon which the black cap, traditionally worn when passing the death sentence, would hang.

4. Go back through The Great Hall and into Courtroom number 2.

Don't forget to look up at the elaborately decorated high-domed ceilings!

Q: Look at the free-standing Corinthian columns. How many columns are there? What shape are the courtrooms? (clue: they have eight sides!)



Retrace the steps of sentenced prisoners from the dock, through to the back of the courtroom.

Q: Can you spot the doorway that leads down to the **holding cells**, which were still in use until late November 2010?

From the basement, a flight of stone steps leads to the darkened **17th century dungeon** which dates back to the original county gaol.



These well-trodden steps were worn down by centuries of prisoners, who were chained to posts and exposed to the elements from a small grated opening above.

Did you know? You can take a virtual tour of The Old Shire Hall, including the cells and dungeon, on our website at www.theoldshirehall.co.uk/about.



5. Go back out into the main entrance and walk towards the stairway.

Q: You will see the only portrait of an animal in The Old Shire Hall. What is his name?

6. Step inside The High Sheriff's Room.

This was formerly used by The High Sheriff of Warwickshire, who is appointed by her Majesty the Queen as her representative in the County on matters relating to law and order.

Q: How many portraits can you count in this room?

7. Go up the sweeping staircase of The Judges' House.

This was used as accommodation for the sitting judge at trials up until the court function of the building ceased in 2010.



8. Step into the Regency decorated Judges' Drawing Room.



Q: How many paintings of famous British monarchs can you see in this room? Can you spot James I and Henry VIII?

Q: How many are male and how many are female? Can you put them in date order of when they reigned?

9. Go through into the Judges' Dining Room.

Q: How many portraits hang in this room? How many of the subjects appear to be wearing armour in their portraits?

Q: How many globes are on the chandelier in this room?



10. Go back down the stairs.

At the bottom you will see a landscape painting of Warwick town and castle painted by H. Milbourne.

Q: How many church spires can you see in the painting and which churches do you think they belong to?

Thank you for visiting The Old Shire Hall and Judges' House.

Today, this unique heritage venue is available for use for wedding ceremonies and receptions, fine dining, conferences, meetings, gala dinners, filming and photography.

For more information and to make an enquiry, visit our website www.theoldshirehall.co.uk.

You can also follow us on Twitter @OldShireHall and on Facebook /TheOldShireHall.