

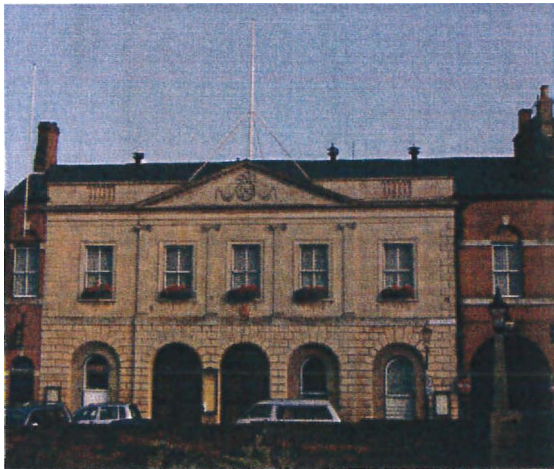
# A brief guide to Wisbech Town Council



## Council Chamber

### ***Council Chamber of Wisbech Town Council.***

The building housing the Council Chamber was built in 1811 as an Exchange Hall on a site previously occupied by The Nag's Head public house.



These upper rooms were originally a gentlemen's club billiard room and newspaper room, but have been in use for Council business since 1836 and the passing of the Municipal Act when; *'the town was divided into two wards was denominated a borough and the homely Town Bailiff and Capital Burgesses were succeeded by a more aristocratic body of Mayor Aldermen and Councillors'*.

In 1872 the roof was raised and the room altered into a *'much more lofty and capacious hall'*.

Beneath the Council Chamber lies the Corn Exchange. Originally used for commerce and exhibitions; in more recent years it has been used for dances, concerts, roller-skating, and all-in wrestling as well as its last use as a bingo hall.

The Rolling Stones played their first ballroom gig there on 20 July 1963 and Bill Wyman relates that it *'was exiting for the sight of pictures and posters of ourselves outside as we arrived'*

List of the first election  
with numbers of votes.

<i>North Ward.</i>		<i>South Ward.</i>
Henry Leach (Aid.. 1st Mayor)..	119	T. Dawbarn (Aid.)
Henry Marton (Aid.)	118	J. R. Weatherherd ( <i>Ald.</i> ) .....
Charles Jecks (Aid ).....	107	T. S. Watson .....
James Usill (Aid.) ....	93	J. Brewin .....
C. Metcalfe, Jun. ....	137	R. Clarke
J. Rumball .	93	J. Utley .....
J. Miele	82	C. Boucher .....
H. M. 1.7sill	81	Joseph Groom .....
W. G. Jackson .....	77	N. Walker .....
W. Jecka .....	76	W. T. Cleave .
R. P. Pate* .	71	H. Leach. ....
John Bellamy..	61	H. °Bard
R. Ward .....	<b>ea</b>	
W. Exley .....	60	

Mr. Pate declined serving, and paid .825 fine.

There are now eighteen councillors and seven wards within Wisbech parish. The Council Chamber itself is still a working building used for regular meetings of Wisbech Town Council and its corn mittees.

There is also a Wisbech Youth Council; the first meeting of which took place on 23 September 2008.

The Council Chamber and Mayor's Parlour are filled with many pictures and artefacts that reflect the civic history and accomplishments of Wisbech.



**1. Coat of Arms of Wisbech**



Enamel badges of the Wisbech coat of arms can be purchased for £2 with all proceeds going towards the Mayor's Charities.

Officially described as: Azure representation of St Peter and St Paul standing within a double canopy Or (Arms of the Borough of Wisbech). Crest on a wreath of the colours, A 16<sup>th</sup> Century ship with three masts Or on each mast a square sail Azure the centre one charged with two keys in saltire wards upwards and the other two charged with a castle Gold (Crest of the Borough of Wisbech)

The Coat of Arms is an amalgam of the arms and crest of the Borough of Wisbech.

4 The ship makes reference to Wisbech as a port (the only port in Cambridgeshire).

St Peter and St Paul make up the emblem of the Common Seal of Wisbech. 4 The helmet denotes the presence of a castle in Wisbech.

## **2. Benefactors to Clarkson Memorial.**

A list of the benefactors who raised money in order to erect the Clarkson Memorial on Bridge Street (over the river from the Council Chamber). Erected in 1886 at a cost of £2035, it was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott (the designer of the Albert Memorial), whose brother, Revd. Canon John Scott, was vicar in Wisbech.



## **3. Henry Leach (1798-1873)**

**Artist unknown, presented to the Wisbech Corporation by his family.**

Henry Leach was the last Bailiff, and first Mayor of Wisbech following the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act. He was also Mayor in 1839 and 1847. The Leach printing company printed many significant publications through the years, and there is still a Leach printers on Nene Quay.

**4. Carved oak case containing the list of benefactors to the original Town Library.** The 17th century deposited library of Wisbech Town Council is now housed in the Wisbech & Fenland Museum (located in Museum Square near Wisbech Castle). The Town Library contains books and manuscripts, the oldest of which date back to the 17th century. It is located in the Museum's basement and holds around 1,200 items.

On the mantelpiece can be found items commemorating the twinning of Arles and Wisbech in 1964. Below is a bas-relief moulding given to the Mayor of Wisbech, Cllr Roger Symonds during the celebrations of St Augustine of Canterbury in 1998.

## **Parliament Clock**

**John Vise, Wisbitch — note the spelling (and compare to the Vise clock in the Mayor's parlour)**



c 1777 given to Wisbech Borough Council in 1955 by public subscription.

In July 1797 George III's Prime Minister William Pitt passed Act of Parliament. Revenue had powers to charge an annual duty of five shillings for a clock; 10 shillings for a gold watch and two shillings and sixpence for a silver or "any other watch, or timekeeper used for the like purpose, not before charged, of whatever materials the same shall be made".

Tax assessors were to be given notice of the location of any clock or watch and householders had to supply lists of all timepieces they owned within 14 days. Parliament Clocks were adopted widely by innkeepers and the custodians of public buildings - town and market halls and the like - as a service to their patrons who were unable to carry their own watches for fear of being forced to pay duty on them.

In the event, the tax on timepieces proved too difficult to administer and collect and, following intense lobbying, the Act was repealed in April 1798, just nine months after it was enacted. Consequently, few true Act of Parliament clocks remain in existence. Tavern clocks of similar style had been around since about 1720 and the fashion for the distinctive timepieces continued long after the tax was dropped.

The plaques either side of the clock commemorate the contributions to the Spitfire Fund during World War II. Local legend has it that the main contributor to the fund was Alexandrina Peckover who preferred to give money than lose the railings at Peckover House.

**Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846)**



**Bust of Thomas Clarkson artist unknown**

**Portrait of Thomas Clarkson by Samuel I Lane**

*This is a fine picture of a fine nervous old man whose keen eye and energetic features almost tell of one who was able by indomitable zeal to shame mankind of his crimes, and make justice prevail over interest. It was executed by Si Lane at a cost of eighty guineas raised by subscription.*

Thomas Clarkson slavery abolitionist, was born on 28 March 1760 in the free grammar school, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, of which his father, the Revd John Clarkson (1710-1766), was headmaster.

The Cambridge University Latin essay topic for 1785, set by the vice-chancellor, Peter Peckard, was 'Anne liceat invitos in servitutum dare' ('Is it lawful to enslave the unconsenting?'). After winning the prize in 1784, Clarkson once more engaged in what he thought of as 'an innocent contest for literary honour'; but it changed his life. The *Essay* had a great success and led to the creation of an informal committee to lobby MPs; its most important achievement was the recruiting of William Wilberforce, in which Clarkson played the chief part. His work contributed greatly to the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807.

**Display cabinet**

This was commissioned by Wisbech Town Council as an end of year piece by Chris Tomba, a student at the College of West Anglia in 2008.

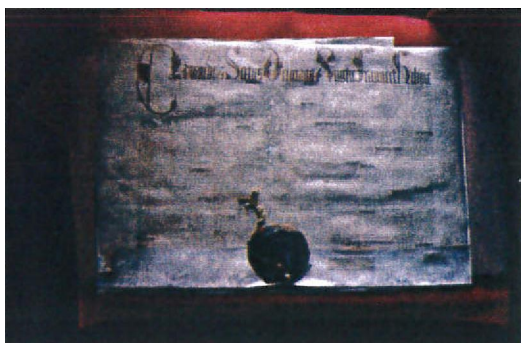


Within the cabinet can be found much of the Civic Regalia of Wisbech, including the Loake Cup, and the Wisbech Town mace; the symbol of office of the Town Beadle. The Town Mace is described as a very fine piece of plate, 45 inches long with, with 6 1/2 crown; designed from a mace of the time of William III. The head, has the arms of the



Borough of Wisbech on top, and is surmounted by a large crown, and is decorated with the rose, thistle, harp, and fleur de lis. Between these, forming an alternate ornament, are conventionalised demi-figures with bases of leaves. The shaft is decorated with oak leaves and acorns, and the bases, of which there are three, with oak and acanthus leaves.

The drawers of the cabinet hold the charters granted to Wisbech by Edward VI, James II and Charles II. They are very delicate and must be handled with care.



## **Mayor's parlour**

### **Long case clock**

#### **William Vise, Wisbich note the spelling (and compare to the Vise clock in the Chamber)**

Presented to Wisbech Town Council by James Crowden on the occasion of the granting to him of the Honorary Freedom of Wisbech in 2001.



Wisbech's most recent granting of the Freedom of the town was made to Jody Cundy, Paralympic gold medallist, in 2010.

**Or Nick Meekins, Mayor of Wisbech and Mr James Crowden, Freeman, on the occasion of the presentation of the Freedom of Wisbech to Mr Jody Cundy, 20 May 2010.**

The parlour also contains further commemorative artefacts from Arles, the twin town of Wisbech, located in the Carmargue area of France.



## **Stairs and lobby**

A variety of further, local pictures and paintings can be found on the staircase and in the lobby. There are many old views of Wisbech showing the changes in buildings and layout, including an aerial shot of Wisbech taken in 1969 (after the canal had been filled in to form Churchill Road, but before the construction of Freedom Bridge).

There are also photos of those holding the position of Wisbech Town Clerk through the years.

### References:

Watson, William, (1827) **An Historical Account of the Ancient Town and Port of Wisbech, In the Isle of Ely, in the County of Cambridge And of the Circumjacent Towns and Villages, the Drainage of the Great Level of the Fens, the Origin of the Royal Franchise of the Isle of Ely &c** , Wisbech: H & J Leach

[Watson, Thomas Steed], (1834) **The History of Wisbech with an historical sketch of the Fens**, Wisbech: William Watts

Walker, Neil, and Craddock, Thomas, (1849) **The History of Wisbech, and the Fens**, Wisbech: Richard Walker, Wisbech

Gardiner, Frederic John, (1898) **History of Wisbech and neighbourhood during the last fifty years, 1848-1898**, Wisbech: Gardiner & Co.

### Useful contacts:

Octavia Hill Birthplace House 01945 476358 <http://www.octaviahill.org/>

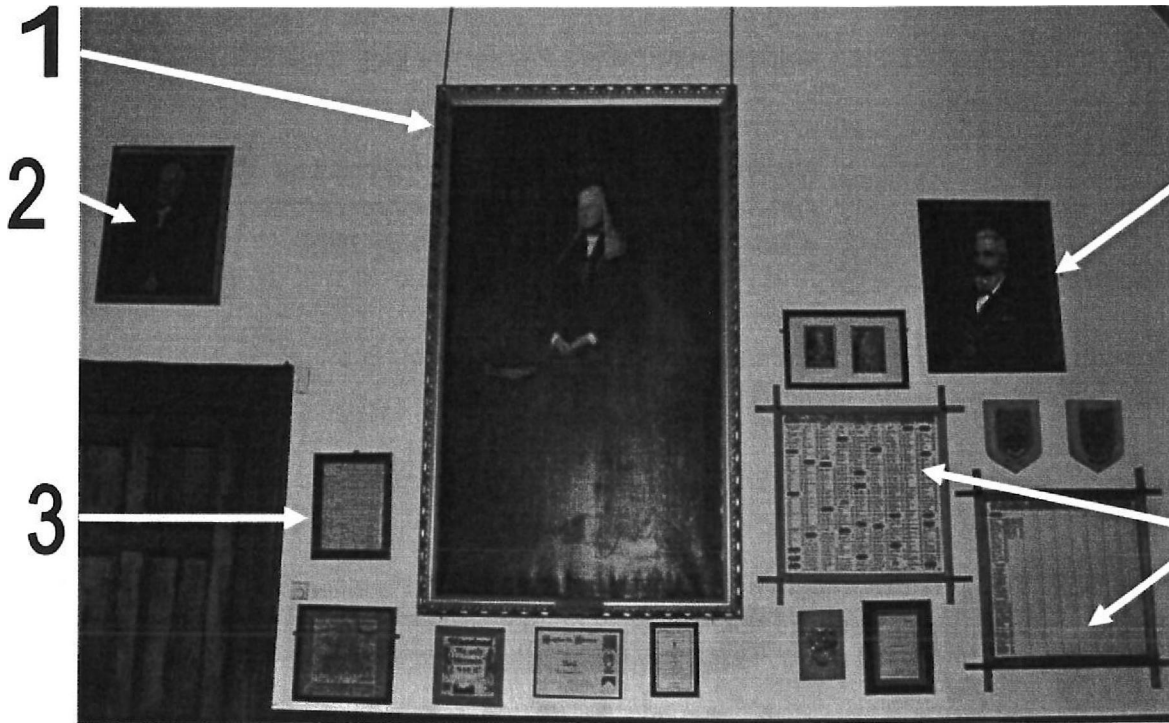
Wisbech & Fenland Museum 01945 583817 <http://www.wisbechmuseum.org.uk>

Wisbech Institute & Social Club <http://www.wisbechinstitute.org.uk/>

### **1. Henry Brand (1814-1892)**

**Artist unknown.**

Henry Bouverie William Brand, CCB, 1st Viscount Hampden, 23<sup>rd</sup> Baron Dacre, returned as MP for Cambridgeshire 1865, and continued until his elevation to the peerage in 1884. Also Speaker in House of Commons 1872-1884. This portrait was given by his son Arthur Brand, also MP for North Cambridgeshire.



### **2. Thomas Steed Watson (1803-1866)**

**Artist unknown**

Thomas Steed Watson was the Town Bailiff in 1830 and three times Mayor (1849, 1856, and 1857). This portrait was presented to the Town Council in 2005 by Mr Claydon Flint, grandson of Thomas Steed Watson.

### **3. Petition of 1791**

A petition from the merchants and traders of the town to the Postmaster General asking for an extension of the mail service to Wisbech and complaining that it takes a week to get a letter to London and back.

### **4. William Rust**

**W Vigard**

William Martin Rust was Mayor of Wisbech in 1883 and the first Mayor to wear the chain.

### **S. List of past Aldermen of the Guild, Bailiffs, and Mayors of Wisbech.**

A list from 1423 to date

Photographs of many Mayors of Wisbech throughout the 1900s and through to the present day can be found in the Mayor's Parlour; next to the Council Chamber.

**Abraham Jobson**

**Strutt [Jacob George?]**



The portrait by Strutt cost 30 Guineas which was raised by public subscription in 1823.

Abraham Jobson DD was made Vicar of Wisbech in 1802. He is remembered for his charity bequests to education and the church, and he was greatly involved in the provision of the Chapel of Ease, known as the Octagon Church, previously situated in the Old Market .



The objects in the corner of the chamber commemorate the links with local military past and present; including the Royal Anglian Regiment, and local cadet units.

The cabinet contains various cups from the time of Wisbech Borough Council.

**Jonathan Peckover (1835-1882)**

**Artist unknown**

Jonathan was the youngest son of Algernon Peckover, and grandson of Jonathan Peckover whose business enterprise created the Peckover Banking business: the first official bank in Wisbech. This expanded into Gurney, Birkbeck, Peckovers and Buxton. In 17954, the first branch in Wisbech moved into a wing added to the substantial Georgian house acquired that year on the North Brink, which became known as Bank House. Peckover House (built 1722), as Bank House is now known, is now the property of the National Trust.



In 1864, Jonathan Peckover set up a Working Men's Club and Institute as a temperance institute. This moved to its current location in Hill Street (Scrimshire's Passage) in 1867. The portrait was paid for by members of the Institute.

Jonathan was the only brother of Baron Alexander Peckover. It was baron Peckover who presented the mace to Wisbech Council at Mayor Making on 9 November 1907 to show his appreciation of the civic reception accorded to him on his elevation to the peerage that year.

**Coat of Arms**

Representation of the crossed keys of St Peter, emblem of Wisbech. These hang above the chair in which the Mayor sits to preside over Council meetings.

On this wall you can also see a picture of Octavia Hill (whose Birthplace House be viewed over the river at 7-8 South Brink).

Above Octavia Hill is a representation of the dinner of plum puddings, roast beef and Ale for the people of Wisbech given to celebrate the Coronation Queen Victoria on 28 June 1837.



can

of



**Richard Young (1809-1871)**  
**HF Creighton RA**

Richard Young was Mayor of Wisbech five times. The portrait of Alderman Richard Young JP DL, Mayor of the Borough 1858-1863, MP for Cambridgeshire 1865-1868, Sheriff of London & Middlesex 1871 by HF Creighton RA shows him as Sheriff of London & Middlesex. However, Richard Young died two days after receiving the honour and was never wore the robes and insignia.

This portrait was presented to the Mayor and Corporation in 1872 by the Rt Hon HB Brand, Speaker of the House of Commons.



The robes he is depicted wearing were given to Wisbech Town Council in 1883 by his widow. These can be seen in the adjacent cabinet.

These original robes are worn only once by each new Mayor when taking the office of Mayor at Mayor Making.

The Wisbech Mayoral Chain was also first worn in 1883.



It was made by Messrs Blanckensee & Sons of Birmingham and was purchased by subscription from previous Mayors and others. Initially it consisted of a central link and twenty other links, with the front pendant being the common seal adopted on the incorporation of the town in 1549. The charter made Wisbech a corporate borough for the first time, and gave the burgesses the right of perpetual succession and the use of a common seal.



This seal is now on the back of the chain and the gold and enamel pendant on the front was presented by Alderman AW Collett, Mayor of Wisbech, in 1935 to commemorate the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act 1835, and the Silver Jubilee of King George V.

The links name all Mayors from 1834 onwards. A link is named for each successive Mayor (those previously holding the office have the subsequent date(s) added to their existing link). There are other significant links: the Coronation of King George VI, Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and a Millennium Link for the year 2000.

