Wigmore

HISTORY TRAIL

by

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A guided Walk around the Ancient Village of Wigmore, with notes on History and Architecture.

Perhaps the first reference to Wigmore is in the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' under the entry for 921 when King Edward had a fortress at Wigingamere.

This was later attacked and withstood the Viking 'host'. If this is a correct identification the big earth banks, evidence of which can still be traced running north-east from the castle and the southern of which is continued in the northem hedge of Moor Lane, may well be what is left of that fortification.

Before this the Romans had built a camp on the western branch of Watling Street and its square shape can still be seen in the field east of the Bury Farm.

At the time of the Domesday Book, 1086, the Castle of 'Wigemore' was held by Ralph de Mortimer and it is recorded that it was built by Earl William (William FitzOsbern). Also there as a borough which paid £7. The name means either 'Wicga's Moor' or it may derive from he Welsh gwig maur, big wood. William FitzOsbem was succeeded by his son who made the mistake of joining in the revolt in 1074 against the King and this is why the castle and lordship passed to the Mortimers.

By the Laws of Breteuil, burgages were valued at ls. each; so £7 implies that there were 140 burgages. At an Inquisition Post Mortem of 1304 the borough had 140 1/4 + 1/6 burgages and a survey of 1772 recorded 140 + 1/6. In size these were the Herefordshire hop acre, about 2/3 modern acre, and on a big scale map they can almost all still be traced, most of them never having been built on.

The remains of a roughly rectangular grid of streets can still be seen west of the main street and plots still exist to the east of it and to the north of Ford Street.

There is walling of about the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) in the church and in 1100 it was a Minster Church having probably four priests who were also responsible for the churches at Leinthall Starkes, Aston and Elton. These functions were absorbed by the Abbey c. 1174.

The early castle is close to the borough, but in the 12th C. a shell keep was built on a great mound farther west from the town and this was greatly extended in the 14th C. It was almost certainly from here that Edward, Duke of York, marched out on 3 February 1461 to win the Battle of Mortimer's Cross and to become Edward IV.

In the 1150's or 1160's the Augustinian Priory which had been founded at Shobdon about twenty years earlier, moved to Wigmore and appears to have been situated just off Barnet Lane on the western side of the path still known as Jacob's Ladder.

The market/town hall stood on the Pavement in the triangular market place in front of the Old Oak Inn. It is shown on the Tithe Map of 1840 but it is not on a map of 1871. Probably it was demolished in 1848.

One of the old village pounds in which stray cattle were impounded and released on payment of a fine still remains on the main road north of and below the church. There used to be another at the eastern end of the village by the Bury Farm.

By 1304 there was a weekly market on Wednesdays and an annual fair. Also in the early 14th C. the south aisle was added to the church as a chantry chapel to St Mary, John Lenthall leaving money to maintain a priest to serve it.

After the Battle of Mortimer's Cross the castle passed to the Crown. In the 16th C. it was held on a lease from Queen Elizabeth by the Harley family of Brampton Bryan who bought it in 1601. During the Civil War the family deliberately slighted the castle in 1643 rather than let it fall into Royalist hands.

In 1658 a school was founded by William Allen in an already existing house. This later became almshouses, then a parish room and, after the Second World War, back into use as an additional classroom to the then all-age Primary School until 1963 when the new High School opened. The Primary School had been opened on 16 October 1860 having been paid for by public subscription on land given by Lady Langdale, a Harley, and continued in use until 1968 when it moved to its present site close to the High School.
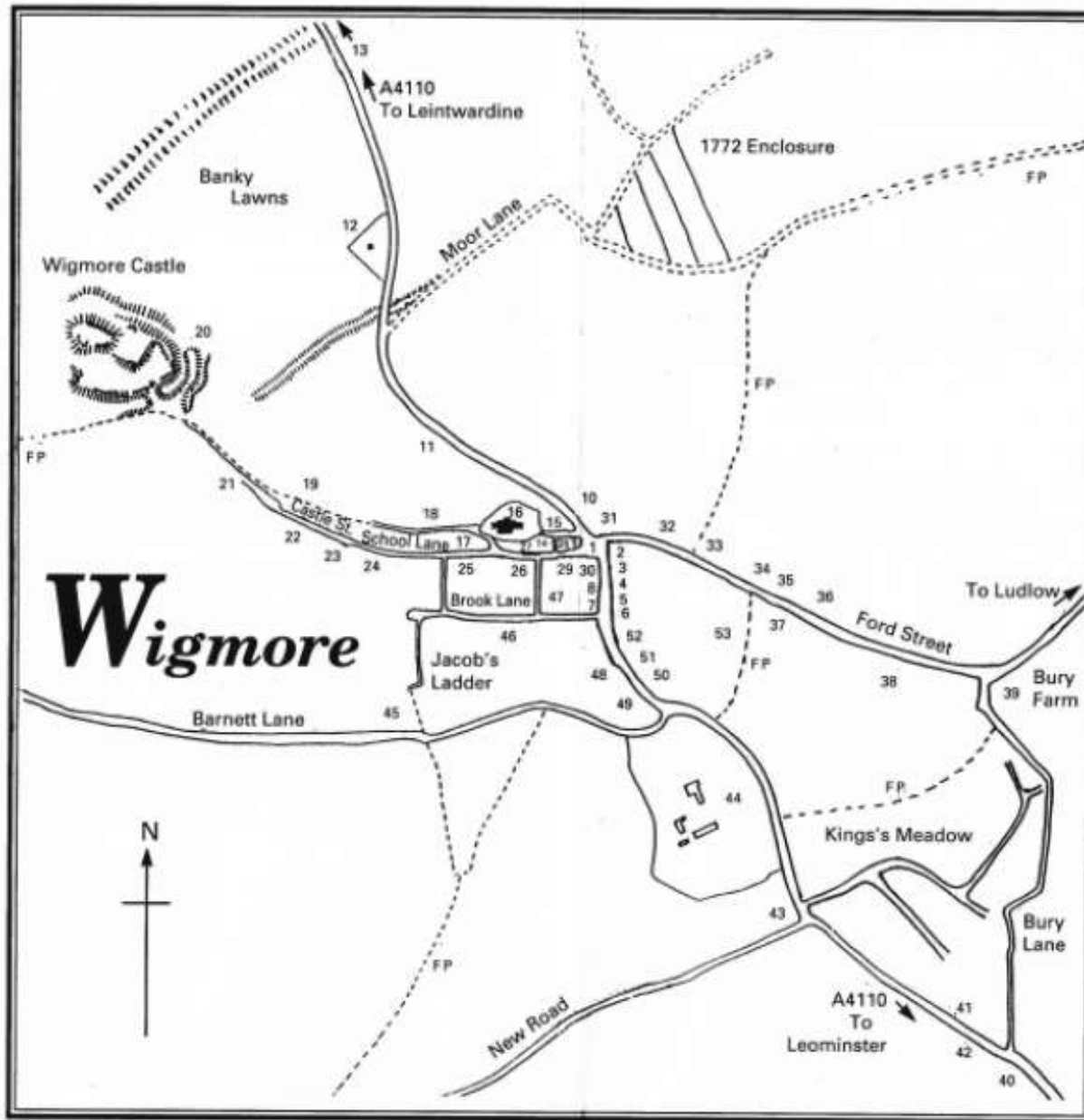

Wigmore was one of the first areas in the county to have an Enclosure Act. This is dated 1772 and the award 1774. The Enclosure was of the common on the moor and in the woods. The plots on the moor can still be traced with the drains dividing them and flowing into the Great Drain and so into the Teme, while in Barnett Wood and Wood Wood (now Woodhampton Wood) the earth banks dividing the plots still exist.

A further enclosure followed in 1828 after an Act of 1810. This enclosed the commons on Deerfold in the Limebrook township of the parish and much of this can still be seen today in the series of fields either side of Ongar Street and along the roads off it.

After the Local Government Act of 1894 Wigmore became the centre of the Wigmore Rural District Council with its offices in the village, but was joined with Leominster Rural District in 1930.

The Court House and Police Station were built in 1848 for a Superintendent, with the court and cells adjoining the house. The last court was held in March 1971 and the court room functioned as a branch of the County Library for a time in the 1970's, before becoming a private house.

The fairs on 6 May and 5 August continued well into the 20th century and the former was held on the Pavement as late as 1964.

1. **The Pavement**. Triangular market place, typical of towns on the Marches. Here stood the market hall (cf. Ledbury and Pembridge) until c. 1848.

Broad Street, on the east side working south are:

2. The Oak Wigmore Inn. Close-set vertical timber framing.

3. Rock Cottage. 17th C. timber-framed house, with oriel windows and cellar.

4. Oakley House. Of c. 1600 with cross-wing at north end. The main block still has its jetty carried on curved brackets and a moulded bressumer.

5. Brick House. Late 17th C. three storey, handmade-brick house with cellar. Plat-band at first-floor level. Some Windows are still the single mullioned, single transomed it type.

6. Burgage Farm. 17th C. timber-framed house refronted in brick in the 18th C. again with a plat-band between the storeys. The northern gable shows the heavy tie-beam with two struts to the collar and v-struts above. Central doorway has a flat canopy.

On the west side working north are:

7. Old Post Office. A late 161.11 c. timber-framed four-bay building now roughcast. It has a lobby entrance.

8. Old Post Office Cottage. Later timber-framing, probably late 17th C.

9. Stepps House. Probably a medieval site. 17th

C. brick house of two storeys, attic and cellar. Plat-band at first-floor level and another with one row of bricks set diagonally at attic level.

10. Court House. Early 17th C. brick house of English bond raised later in Flemish bond, still on the earlier plan type with a kitchen wing forming an L at the north end. Lunette in raised part and front windows have fine glazing bars of c. 1800 or a little later.

11. Bank Cottage. Much altered and renovated. Lobby entrance house probably 17th C. in origin.

12. Cemetery. Land bought and wall and chapel built in 1899.

13. Gotherment. 18 -19th C. farmhouse on much earlier site incorporating a timber-framed house of the 17th C.

Church Street, south side

14. Old School. William Allen's School.

North side -

15. House opposite above (north side) now rendered, appears to have been a single room plan timber framed house raised in the 18th and added to on the west in the 19th C.

Church of St. James. Early Norman collegiate church built soon after the Conquest: see herring bone north wall. Chancel lengthened, south aisle built early 14th C. North aisle was two bays now one. Tower 14th C. Porch 19th C. Nave roof early 15th C., aisle roof 14th C. Altar reused as west window sill of tower. 17th C. vicar's tomb under high altar. Piscinae - chancel, south wall at rood-loft level, south aisle, exterior wall on north side. Choir stalls with poppy heads. Commonwealth arrangement in choir. Tufa Norman window in south wall. From churchyard layout of old borough can be seen. Churchyard Cross. 14th C. base with niche for the 'host' during Holy Week. A Marcher feature. Also note tufa quoins on east wall of original nave.

School Lane

17. Old Primary School and School House: in the Tudor Revival style. Private house since 1968.

18. Callis Close. Later 17th C. four-bay timber- framed house with collar and tie-beam truss at east end. Was thatched until recently. Reroofed and dormers added.

19. Old Castle (site). Mounds of motte and bailey castle probably built immediately after Norman Conquest. Garden of house to east with its steep banks could perhaps be an additional bailey.

20. Castle. Parts of the wall of the shell keep are Norman of the 12th C. The north east tower is 13th C. and everything else dates from 14th C. when it became virtually a palace for the Mortimers. It was dismantled by the then owners, the Harleys, in 1643. It had been one of the largest and strongest castles on the Marches.

Banky Lawns. This 'field' from the big defences at the east end to the double moat and berm of the later castle at the west end gives good views north over the 1772 enclosure of the moors and away to the last site of Wigmore Abbey. A resistivity survey carried out in 1988 showed that there were buildings in this outer bailey.

Castle Street

As one walks down this street the lanes off to the south mark the streets of the old borough grid pattern to the east and south of the early castle.

21. Barn, Green Hill Farm. 17th C., four-bay timber framed, weather-boarded on rubble plinth. Collar and tie-beam with V struts. Wagon entrance in second bay. Was probably thatched originally.

22. Green Hill Cottage. Much altered timber-framed fronted building, rear wall stone with timber-framing above. Central part may have been small open hall.

Earlier paved floor beneath present floor in this part.

23. Yew Tree House. Timber-framed 17th C. house. Was single storey and attic, raised 18th C. Appears to have been of long house type.

24. Barberry Cottage. Early 17th C. timber-framed house with lean-to service rooms at rear. North end originally jettied. Straight braces in upper corner panels. Collar and tie-beam with V struts in apex.

25. Burnt House Barn. Timber-framed, weather-boarded. Late 17th C. Walls partly replaced in concrete block.

26. Old Vicarage site. Opposite bottom of School Lane. Foundations of building about 45 ft by 27 ft two-room plan exposed when present bungalows built match drawing in 'Vox Corvi', 1694.

North side. East of School Lane

27. Long House. Gable end to road. 18th/19th C. house with possibly earlier core.

28. Chapel Cottage. Built as an Independent Chapel in 1847. Bought by Primitive Methodists in 1853 for £95. Big brick blank arches. Now private house.

South side

29. Timber framed house. Probably 17th C., but incorporating earlier timber. Note cut-off moulding on big central post.

30. Smithy. Probably 18th C. workshop and 19th C. house of old smithy.

Ford Street, North side

31. Queen's House. 17th C. timber-framed hall and later cross-wing. Late 17th C. criss-cross framing in eastern gable. North wing probably 18th C.

32. Ford Farm. 17th C. timber-framed, partially roughcast. Stable at east, 19th C., but some evidence of this having been a long house.

33. Compasses Inn. Built and owned by Benjamin Pollard who was living in it in 1844.

34. Plough Farm and barn. Two-bay house with stone sides and timber-framed front. Roof has been raised. 17th C. three-bay timber-framed barn, weather-boarded. Probably thatched originally.

The Cottage. Probably 17th C. with heavy collar and tie beam gable truss. Now completely rendered.

Old Vicarage. Now a Residential Home. Typical Victorian brick middle-class house built in 1845.

South side

37. Ford Cottage. Early 17th C. house with main house to east, jettied and a collar and tie truss roof. Eastern end parlour end; whole main block - superior quality arrangement in its ceiling with beams and joists forming a chequer board pattern. Carpenters' assembly marks can be seen on some of the joints. Western end lower - probably 'workshop' end. Later a separate cottage. Whole - perhaps longhouse - big passage doorway at eastern end of main building now blocked.

38. High School. Opened in 1963 having been built on King's Meadow a name dating to the 14th C. when it was owned by a man of that name.

39. The Bury. Big 19th C. farmhouse on earlier site. In field to east is square of Roman fort, hence name Bury (fort). From Bury Farm Bury Lane leads east of the High School playing field to the main road. Just to the south of the junction is:

40. Perrywood. Farmhouse - mainly 17th C. timber- framing, two bays with big rubble chimney stack at south end, and an 18th C. bay at the north end. The roof has been raised.

41. Pear Tree Farm. 18th C. house of coursed rubble. Three storeys, brick eaves cornice, cambered window lintels. Some single mullion, single transom if windows. 17th C. rear projection of three bays, single storey plus attic now cased in 19th C. brick.

42. Opposite Pear Tree Farm. A single-cell one up, one down house occupied in the 19th C. Now derelict.

43. Farm Buildings at corner of New Road and main road. These are a block of late 18th C. brick farm buildings. Again the blank arches are a feature. Built into the south wall is some carved work from an earlier building. New Road is so called because it was part of the Wigmore Turnpike Trust of the late 18th C.

44. Wigmore Hall. Big timber-framed house. The central part 16th C. close-set and jettied. East wing square framing. Much 20th C. alteration and addition. Oriel window in east Wing.

45. Barnett Lane. About 300 yards up the hill a footpath runs down to the north to Brook Lane. To the west of the path some unevenness marks the short lived site of Wigmore Abbey 1160 - 1172. The steep path down to Brook Lane is Jacob's Ladder. The monks complained about the steep ascent from fetching their water.

Brook Lane

46. Brook Farm. 17th C. square panelled, timber-framed farmhouse. Lobby entrance. Good set carpenters' marks. Collar and tie-beam truss, V-struts in east gable. 19th and 20th C. alterations and additions. Now private house.

47. Brook House. Early 16th C. timber-framed house cased in brick in 19th C. Some good early 16th C. moulded beams in one room and a 16th C. truss in the roof.

Broad Street, West side, south of Brook Lane

48. Garage on site of Castle Inn, burnt out in the 1930s and last part finally demolished in 1966.

49. Old Court House and Police Station 1848.

East side

50. Oak Cottage. Timber-framed 16th C.; 17th C. wing. Roof raised - extra row of panels. Two windows arched - 19th C.

51. Primitive Methodist Chapel 1863. Brick, stone ashlar dressings. Ashlar string-course. West windows and doorway arched heads and traceried glazing bars. Ashlar gate piers and good cast iron gates and railings. Converted into house, 1983.

52. Pretoria House, Tannery House. 17th C. timber-framed, altered 19th and 20th Cs. Roughcast and stuccoed. Now divided into two dwellings.

53. Primary School. Opened 1968.