

# MEDIEVAL SHREWSBURY



*A Shrewsbury Civic Society Self-Guided Tour*



*This information document is intended to allow people in Shrewsbury, whether visitors or locals, to see and perhaps visit some of the many places in Shrewsbury that date back to medieval times. The entries are in alphabetical order so that the user of the document can determine their own itinerary. Please note that this list is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive. Shrewsbury Civic Society also publishes more detailed information on medieval Shrewsbury, which can be purchased at the Bear Steps Shop. We also have a printed self-guided tour which can also be bought at our shop.*

### **1: Barracks Passage**

Close to the Lion Hotel stands Henry Tudor House, which was built in the later Middle Ages, around 1430, though it was not known as Henry Tudor House until a later period. Under the arch by the modern-day pub is Barracks Passage, where the buildings date back to 1426. It is likely that the prominent landowner was Nicholas Clement, who was a brewer. Despite the medieval nature of the original buildings, the name comes from the use of the building's hall as a barracks in August 1485, when Henry Tudor's soldiers stayed there.



### **2: Bear Steps, St Alkmund's Place**

The Bear Steps complex forms the main part of medieval Shrewsbury. Bear Steps Hall, now an art gallery and free to enter, dates back to 1358 (according to dendrochronology) and may have originally been a parish guildhall. The Bear Steps as a name refers to the steps leading down to where there was once a pub called 'The Bear'. The area outside the gallery and around the two churches was where the market was held before it was moved to the Square. The Bear Steps is now the headquarters for Shrewsbury Civic Society.

### **3: Dominican Friary, St Mary's Water Lane**

The arches that can be seen in the walls by the river towpath may be the only remains of the former Dominican friary that once stood on the site of the modern-day apartments. It was the first friary in Shrewsbury, founded in 1230, which lasted until the Reformation of Henry VIII. In 1403, after the Battle of Shrewsbury, several badly wounded knights were brought here, some of whom died from their injuries. Several skeletons have been uncovered from the area where the friary once stood.







#### 4: Franciscan Friary, St Julian's Friars

The properties now close to Greyfriars footbridge are the only physical remnants of the former friary that was founded in 1245. The building was positioned on a flood plain and is thought to have been smaller than the Dominican friary. The Franciscan friary was dissolved in 1538. It is said to have originally housed the Jesse Window, which can now be seen in St Mary's Church. However, there is no conclusive evidence of this – though the window is well worth a look...

#### 5: Golden Cross Passage

This passage is a short cut between Princess Street and High Street and may date back to 1459. It may now pass through what was a sacristy, which was connected by means of a covered passageway to Old St Chad's Church. The 'Golden Cross' may be the oldest licensed pub in Shrewsbury, perhaps dating back to 1428. There is said to be a hidden tunnel leading to the pub that once allowed monks from the church to visit the inn in privacy.



#### 6: Grope Lane

References to this lane go back to 1324 and it leads from the early medieval market by St Alkmund's Church to the newer market in the Square. The name was once common in medieval towns and indicated the location for the 'oldest profession in the world', but Shrewsbury is now unique in keeping the name – most other councils have renamed their versions so as to spare the blushes of certain visitors. It is said that Grope Lane stands on the site of a former plague pit.

### EXTRA

Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery contains Vaughan's Mansion, which is the most intact medieval mansion in the town. Built in 1292, it can be seen from the museum's courtyard. It can also be visited as it is in a part of the museum that is free to enter.

## 7: Pride Hill

There have been shops along this street since the Middle Ages, and many of the frontages conceal fragments of medieval buildings. The western side of the street stands on the former town wall, which was terraced into a scarp face. Inside Number 2, currently a Pret a Manger coffee shop, are a fireplace and an archway. These are thought to be the remnants of Bennett's Hall, home to prosperous Shrewsbury merchants in the 13<sup>th</sup> century..



## 8: Shrewsbury Abbey

The one-time medieval abbey is now the Church of the Holy Cross, which is the main surviving structure from the time of the Reformation. It was founded in 1083 by Roger de Montgomery, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury, who is buried within the church. Huge Norman columns stand out inside the church. The bones of St Winifride were brought to the abbey in 1137, but her shrine was removed during the Reformation. The refectory pulpit has also survived and can be seen opposite the abbey.



## 9: Shrewsbury Castle

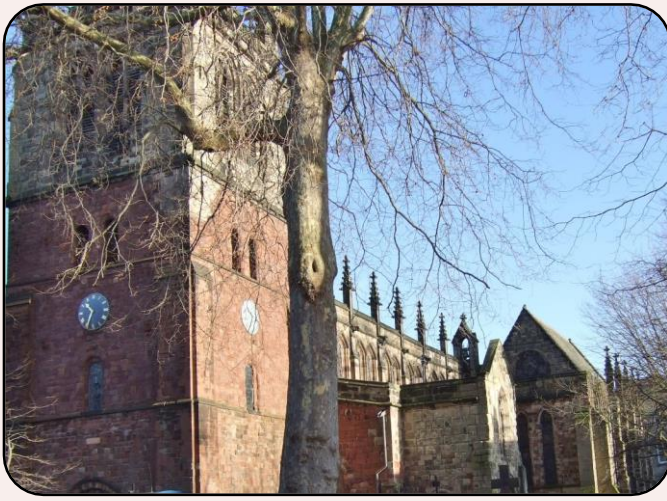
Built soon after the Norman Conquest, the initial purpose of the castle was to intimidate the local Anglo-Saxon population and to put down any rebellion. The first castle was a largely wooden construct, though it now has stone curtain walls that lie on top of the original Norman ramparts. The main building with its flanking towers is mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. The original keep stood on the mound where Laura's Tower is today.



## EXTRA

Shrewsbury Abbey was dissolved in 1540, though the church was permitted to continue serving the parish. The remaining parts of the abbey slowly decayed or were removed for use in other construction projects. The remnants of the cloisters were destroyed when Thomas Telford straightened out the road approach to the town as part of his A5 project.





## 10: St Mary's Church, St Mary's Place

This is the best-preserved medieval church in the town, and it also has one of the tallest church spires in the country. The spire is constructed from differently coloured sandstone, depending on when it was added. The extreme top of the spire was replaced in 1896 after the original top collapsed during a great storm in 1896. The 14<sup>th</sup> century Jesse window dominates the church, though there are many other impressive stained-glass windows.

## 11: St Mary's Watergate

The gate's purpose was to defend the entrance to the town from the wharf by the river. It once stood at the bottom of a lane that had walls on both sides until it met the main town wall, where a second gate was located. The gate is 13<sup>th</sup> century and is the only remaining medieval town gate, all the others having been demolished to cater for the increased traffic of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is also known as Traitor's Gate because this is where parliament forces entered the town in the Civil War.



## 12: Town Walls

The construction of town walls around Shrewsbury was ordered by Henry III. It followed the occupation of Shrewsbury by the Welsh in 1215. The main part of the walls ran from the high ground of the town to the two main bridges, both of which were protected by gatehouses. The length of the wall was 3.2 km. A series of watchtowers was built into the walls to guard the town, though only one of these has survived to the modern day.



## EXTRA

The surviving watchtower dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and was used to observe the river and the area to the south of the town. It survived the destruction that met the other watchtowers because it was being used as a workshop for a watchmaker. It is now preserved by the National Trust and can be rented as a holiday let.

