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Book Reviews



THE GUILDHALL, LUDLOW. By Madge Moran. Pp. xi and 56, Illus 58. Ludlow Historical Research Group, 2011. Price £11.95. ISBN 978 0 953611 38 6.

Mrs Moran will be well-known to many members of the Institute as the senior student of Shropshire's timber-framed buildings, promoter of their dendrochronological dating, and author of *Vernacular Buildings of Shropshire* (2003). In this attractive and well-produced pamphlet, which has good quality glossy paper with excellent, if small, illustrations, she delivers a rounded portrait of one of that county's finest buildings, Ludlow's Guildhall — curiously not mentioned by Alec Clifton-Taylor in his account of Ludlow in *Six English Towns* (1978).

Historical research, tree ring dating and modern architectural analysis, not least by Mrs Moran herself, have produced good understanding of the building's evolution, and of its place in the life of the town over exactly 600 years. Of two main phases, the first dates from 1411 when the members of Ludlow's rich and powerful Palmers' Guild (or to give it its proper title, 'The Brotherhood of the Palmers' Guild of the Blessed Mary and St John the Evangelist') invested in a fine new fully-aisled timber hall for their meeting and ceremonies. Thankfully this is no bald architectural survey, and a wide range of documentary sources brings to life the purpose and activities of the Palmers, and how their activities were funded. As for the aisled hall itself, although partially obscured and chopped around in the later eighteenth century, enough has survived to allow Mrs Moran, with some adept deployment of a jemmy to remove plasterwork, to reconstruct it. This is a structure slightly smaller than, but very comparable with, York's fifteenth-century Guildhall, with moulded aisle posts and an extravagantly cusped roof.

In 1551 the Palmers' surrendered their property, including an extensive rental portfolio, to Edward VI. A year later he granted it to Ludlow Corporation, which over the next two centuries used the former Guildhall's barn-like space for its trade guilds, a charity school and a temporary workhouse. Then, in 1766, with the state of the building giving cause for concern, the able local builder-architect Thomas Farnolls Pritchard, or TFP to modern *aficionados* in the Welsh Marches, was brought in to advise on the building's repair. This marked the start of a radical remodelling of not only the exterior, in high-quality red brick, but also the interior which was tackled from 1774. Here, Pritchard deployed his typical Strawberry Hill Gothic to good effect, to create the courthouse interior which survives today — although since 2011 it is no longer used by the magistracy, leaving the whole building's future uncertain.

Given its now functional redundancy, Mrs Moran's clear, detailed and engaging study of the building and its central place in Ludlow's history since the Middle Ages is timely.

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The text is well-supported by scholarly notes and references, and when reprinted a better index could be slotted in and a few slips corrected. Finding an appropriate and sympathetic new use for this important and attractive building is a priority; Mrs Moran's clear statement of its structural and functional history is an essential first step towards that.

PAUL STAMPER