

The History of the Grade II listed Market House (Town Hall) in Milborne Port



Grade II listed from 21st March 1961

- *Ham stone ashlar; Welsh slate roof between coped gables and behind low parapets.*
- *Two storeys; 3 bays long, 1 bay wide, with an early C20 extension across more than 2 bays on South side.*
- *Plinth, cornice, pilasters marking each bay with triglyph and guttae caps.*
- *Semi-circular arches to ground floor, with impost moulds and keystones: to first floor 9-pane sash windows in architraved surrounds: arches now ashlar filled, with small boarded door on East face, semi-circular 5 light windows to 2 upper arches on North side, and on South side the remaining exposed arch is blocked with boarding and a wicket door: East gable has a small open pedimented bell turret, and an octagonal clock face set in the gable: open shelter in South angle.*
- *The extension is in simpler detail, rendered on a lias stone plinth, with hipped Welsh slate roof.*



How old is this building?

We don't know! Some people think that it dates to as early as around 1720, others think that it dates to the mid 18th century.

It was probably paid for by one of the 18th century Medlycotts – James or Thomas.

When it was first built, the downstairs would have been open on 4 sides, supported by the arches that you can still see today. Market traders would have sold their wares from their stalls under the arches and outside.



Perhaps it looked a bit like this in its heyday!...

This is a painting by John Scarlett Davis depicting the Market House – with open arches - in Leominster (Herefordshire) in 1820; it was built in 1633!





Central to the village

What important features close to the building can you spot in this picture, drawn after 1839?

The First Extension

Can you see the diagonal line coming from the top of the arch (on the south side) down towards the drainpipe? This line marks the slope of the roof of the first extension, which can be seen in this drawing.



This semi-circular extension was built some time after 1839, and can be seen here after 1898. For some of its time it was used as a museum of natural history, collected and arranged by William Coles Paget Medlycott. Is it being dismantled here?

There were no doors built into the curved section; access would have been through the doorway built into the middle archway - you can see the top of it through the middle section of the rafters.



The most recent extension

We don't know when the first extension was removed nor when the current extension was added but we think at the turn of the century. It was designed to replicate the building that it was added to. Note the sash windows, the pilasters and the use of the keystone shape above the larger window. Even the shape at the top of the roof mirrors the original.



When were the arches blocked up?

Again, we are not sure but we *do* know that they were still open in 1770 when the Market House was the scene of an incident: one market day, Mr Scott was injured by a type of firework that was thrown by a Mr Shepherd. The arches had been blocked up before 1791 when John Collinson wrote about them being filled/closed up in his *History of Somerset*.



Why were the arches blocked up?

We think that the arches were blocked up by around 1785 because the market was not doing well. A chimney was then built and the western side turret was turned into a chimney pot.

The tiles that make up the hearth upstairs are probably Victorian.

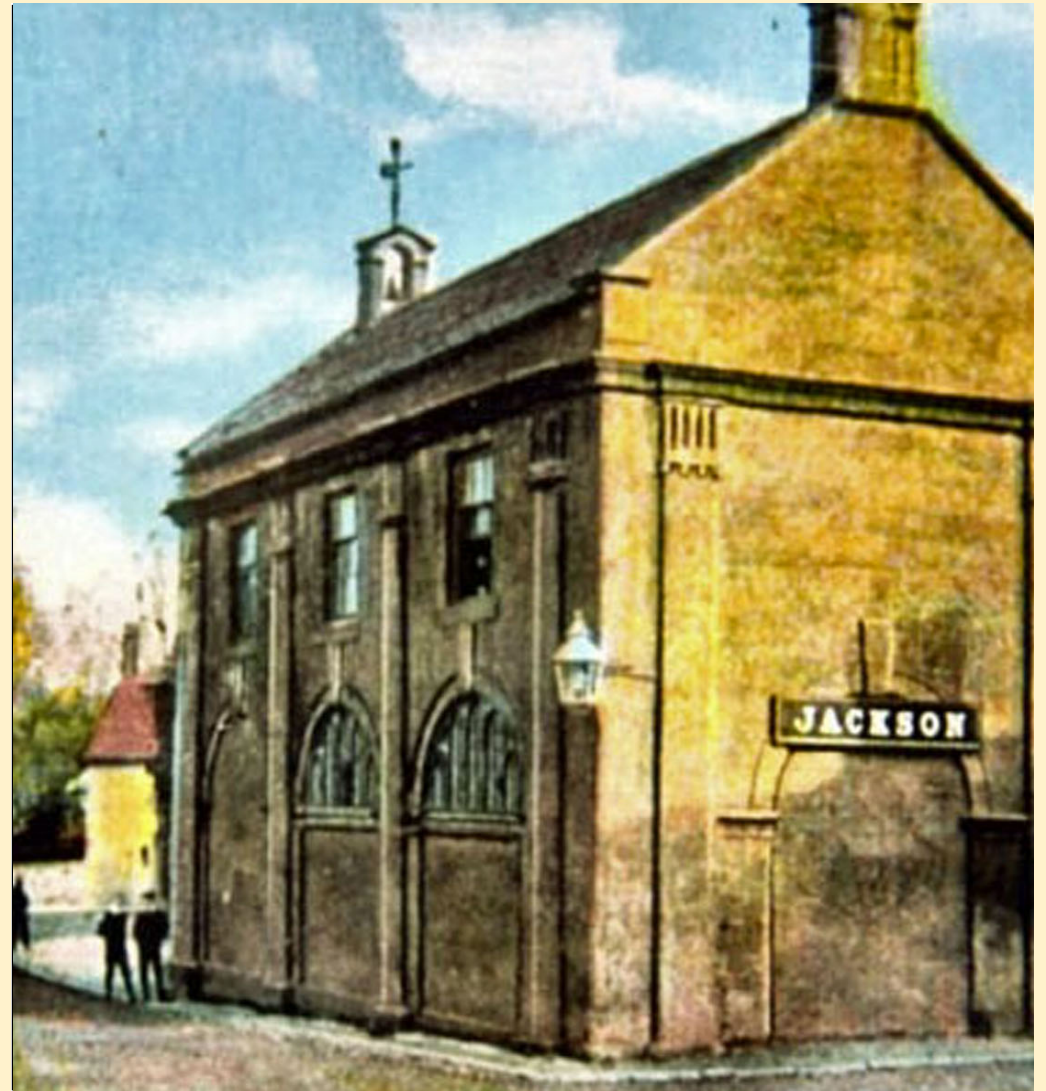


The picture can't be displayed.



What happened to the building in the 19th century?

The Medlycotts leased The Market House to the Marquess of Anglesey at one point, and it was also used as a warehouse, a theatre, a venue for meetings, a museum, a Sunday school and a Church of England Charity school from 1836, until the Medlycotts built the school at Gainsborough, now the Clockspire restaurant.



Was the old fire engine really kept here?

Some people think that the fire engine - bought for the village by Thomas Medlycott in 1733 - was stored here between about 1790 and 1830.

The fire engine – which belongs to the Parish Council - is now on loan to Taunton Museum and can be seen there.



What happened to the building in the 20th century?

It continued to be used for various activities, like Friendly Society dinners, a vet clinic, football club indoor training, Library, Ancient Order of Foresters, electrician's store, Jackson's butcher shop, Catholic Sunday meetings, Scouts and Girl Guide groups.

In 1949, Christopher Medlycott offered to sell the Town Hall to the Parish Council for £300. A further £300 was needed for furniture and £500 for repairs.



Use of the Town Hall by the Parish Council

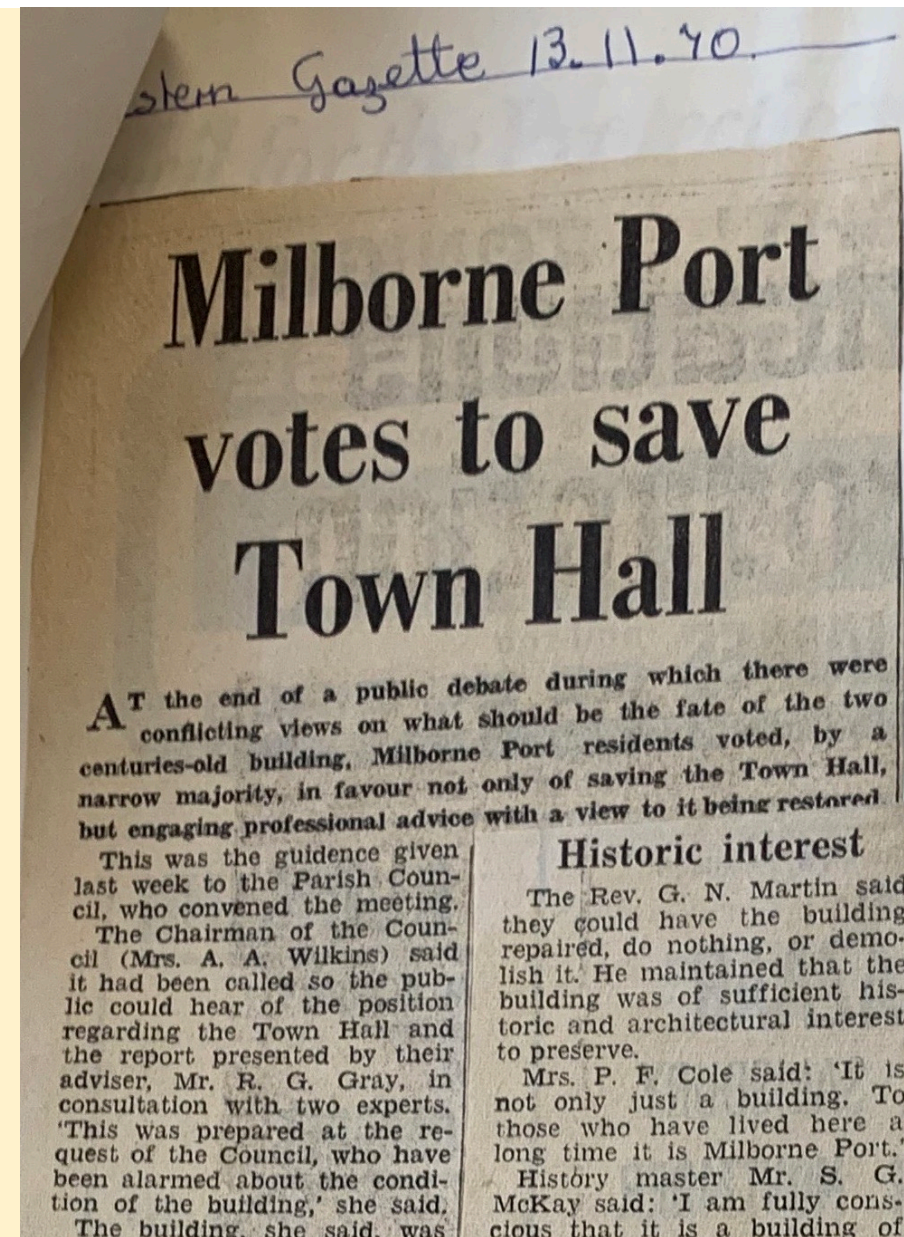
The first meeting of the Parish Council took place on 19th September 1950, known in the past as the Long Room. And the building's first loo was installed!



Saved from demolition!

By the late 1960s, the Town Hall was in bad shape. A meeting was held in November 1970 to decide on its fate. Various organisations, experts and local residents gave their views. The Clerk said that the Parish Council could not afford to install the required fire safety features.

Fortunately, the Town Hall was saved (but only just!) and it was agreed that the money should be found for its restoration.



The view from behind the clock face in the loft space

We think that the clock mechanism was removed in the 1990s and replaced with an electric mechanism which runs off the mains.



The view of the loft space facing west

You can see that the beams are relatively new, possibly dating back to the 1970s when the building underwent extensive repairs.



Some of the stonework in the loft space

We believe that an expert in old buildings would be able to accurately date the Market House from the stonework that can be seen in the loft space!



The Town Hall Clock

The clock now has electronic workings which were installed some time in the 1990s. The previous clock mechanism is now kept at the Chapel Museum on Wheathill Lane; it possibly dates from 1827 when the maker started working for Llewellyn & James in Bristol. This could have been P. Llewellyn's first clock as there is a record of Mr. S Game being paid six shillings for 'Cleaning the New Town Hall Clock' in 1827.



The clock mechanism

The mechanism of the clock that was in the Town Hall is now in the Chapel Museum. The maker is P. Llewellyn (Peter) of Bristol, who was a partner in Llewellyn & James c.1853-1870. The mechanism has a time-and-strike drive.





The clock mechanism would have sat in this frame – which is still in the loft space - with space for the pendulum below.



A close-up of the small clock face attached to the mechanism

What is unusual about this clock face? Why was it made like this?



Weather vane & bell turret

Have you ever noticed that the weathervane - made in 1820 - is in the shape of a pig's head? A north wind makes it point towards North Street, which was known as Pig Street when the Market House was built.

Restoration of the building, including the dismantling and rebuilding of the bell turret, was carried out in 1971.

What we don't yet know is how long the bell has been there for - perhaps since the new clock was installed with its time-and-strike drive.



The Secret Chamber!

In August 1950 - during repairs undertaken by the Parish Council - the underground brick-vaulted chamber was uncovered.

The water is fresh and the level changes according to the level of the water table.

There are different opinions about when it was created and for what it was used.

Locals say that Jackson the butcher stored meat there because it was cold, but where was the access? Experts in 1950 said that there had been an opening at the west end but that is not visible in the photograph that shows the Jackson sign.

The experts recommended that an access be created for air circulation and for future inspection, but this work was not carried out and a concrete floor was laid, making future access impossible – in theory...



The Secret Chamber rediscovered!

In the mid 1980s, local builder Alan King accidentally made a hole in the floor when he was putting in a new loo and the underground space was exposed again. A manhole cover is now in place to prevent accidents!



The Town Hall today

The building is now a much-loved, well-maintained and well-used village asset. The Parish Council operates out of the office in the extension, meetings are held in the Council Chamber upstairs, and the Community Room downstairs hosts the Library and The Glovelies!

