

SHREWSBURY DRAPERS COMPANY ALMSHOUSES



BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SHREWSBURY DRAPERS COMPANY

- The Shrewsbury Drapers Company was a trade organisation founded in 1462 in Shrewsbury. Members were wholesale dealers in wool or woollen cloth. The Company dominated the trade in Welsh Cloth for many years, holding a virtual monopoly from the 16th to the late 18th century. It lost its position when the roads were improved, making it practical for factors from Liverpool and elsewhere to travel into Wales and purchase cloth directly from the makers, and became irrelevant when the Industrial Revolution made trade guilds obsolete. Today it survives as a charity that runs **Almshouses in Shrewsbury.**

WHAT IS AN ALMSHOUSE?

- Some were called 'hospitals'
- In Middle Ages main function was usually religious
- For the very poor and needy and usually the elderly and frail
- Funded by social groups, wealthy merchants and members of the aristocracy.

ALMSHOUSE VERSUS WORKHOUSE?

- Numbers in Bridgnorth almshouses compared with the workhouse:

	<u>Almhouses</u>	<u>Workhouse</u>
1851 census	19	67
1881 census	22	119
1901 census	14	130

Almshouses versus Workhouses

- From the Bridgnorth census figures it can be seen that almshouses could not have made a major contribution to *housing the poor of the country*. A total of 292 people were living in almshouses in 1851 out of a total population in the country of 229,341. In 1881 out of 243,014 – 278 in almshouses and in 1901 272 out of 239,324.
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- Most almshouses were small and the Workhouses very large. Even where an almshouse existed there were various reasons why places were NOT open to any old and poor person in need of shelter. Most almshouses had criteria for acceptance based on the founders' wishes as to the type of person they wanted to help, i.e. Berwick almshouses, according to the census in 1851, appear to be have occupied by retired workers on the estate or in Berwick Hall – retired laundresses, gardeners, servants or ladies maids. Although none of these seemed to be paupers. Admission to almshouses was also determined by gender, with more places being available for women than men.
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Almshouses versus Workhouses

- Residents of almshouses were usually required to be honest, clean living and quiet in their demeanour. Drunkenness or refusal to keep their room clean were the most common reasons for ejection. Inability to look after oneself, particularly in the case of mental illness, would disqualify a resident when the workhouse, infirmary or asylum would have to step in.
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- Workhouses were a Victorian national response to the problem of the very poor. In 1834 Law established the Victorian Workhouse system. The system contributed to the splitting up of families, with people forced to sell what little belongings they had. The workhouse was intended to be act as a deterrent to the able-bodied pauper.
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- ON THE OTHER HAND - Almshouses established by an individual for philanthropic motives for a carefully defined group of people – THE POOR, BUT NOT THE POOREST.
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THE WORKHOUSE



WORKHOUSES IN SHROPSHIRE

- There were some 23 Workhouses (from Atcham to Whitchurch) with a further 12 for which the exact location was not identified.
- In addition there was also the Bicton Lunatic Asylum to which people were sent from all of Shropshire.

ABOUT THE DRAPERS COMPANY

Inside Drapers Hall



ABOUT THE COMPANY

- Shrewsbury Drapers Company is a long established Guild which was granted a royal charter in 1462. The Guild has been running almshouses continuously since 1444.
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- There are approximately 75 Freeman (members), all volunteers, who help run Drapers Hall (in St. Mary's Place) and the almshouses. In addition there are fund raising activities to support the almshouses.
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- It is one of about four guilds in the **country** that has been occupying its medieval Hall (completed in 1576) continuously from before the Great Fire of London. Some original oak furniture made for the Hall has been there since King Charles I.
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- The Guild is very conscious of the historical background and works to preserve two important buildings in Shrewsbury – Drapers Hall and Hospital of the Holy Cross adjacent to the Abbey Church in Abbey Foregate.
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- There are almshouses in Longden Coleham, Abbey Foregate, Wenlock Road and Horsefair.

Drapers Almshouses in 1444



The almshouses built in front of St Mary's Church in 1444

ST. MARY'S ALMSHOUSES 1444

- The first group of 13 timber-framed cottages, a common hall and warden's house, were built in the churchyard facing St. Mary's Street, then known as 'Ox Lane'. Each cottage was single-celled, probably with a 'croglofft' or sleeping shelf, in the Welsh tradition.

ST. MARY'S ALMSHOUSES FROM 1444

- In 1444 the Dean of St. Mary's granted a licence to the churchwardens and parishioners to build an almshouse for 13 poor, chiefly from St. Mary's parish but selection was to be made with the advice of Degory Watur.
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- Degory was the Warden and lived in the hall of the Almshouse with his wife. In 1468 he spent 53s 9.5p on various articles of clothing for the inmates.
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- During the 15th and early 16th centuries common inmates received stipends of 1d per week. Doles of clothing were not continued after Degory's death, but each inmate received a bushel of corn a month and a load of wood annually.
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- Rules for the government of almshouses drawn up in 1587 directed that married couples should be removed from all houses except the Hall. The latter was to be occupied by a couple. Candidates for admission were to be not less than 50 years of age and were required to bring with them a winding sheet with 4d tied up in one corner to pay for their burial.

ST. MARY'S ALMSHOUSES FROM 1444

- The cottages had open hearths, but the common hall was built complete with fireplace and chimney. In 1647 fireplaces with tall front chimneys were added to the cottages.
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- In 1808 the almshouses were said to be wretched, filthy and dangerously unwholesome. They were demolished around 1824 when the site was acquired for street widening and new almshouses were erected on the opposite side of the street, designed by John Carline the younger. These were brick-built in the Tudor style and comprised 18 two-storey apartments set around a quadrangle. The inmates received stipends of £1 2s 3d per year in the 1830s and the scale of the allowance was steadily increased later in the 19th century.
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- The right of St. Mary's to nominate inmates had lapsed by the 19th century and, as membership of the Drapers Company dwindled, it had become customary by the 1880s for members to nominate people for vacancies in rotation. The practice ceased after 1930 when the almshouses were constituted part of the Drapers Company General Charities.
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- A scheme to sell the almshouses and to rebuild them on a new site was under discussion in the 1930s, but was postponed on the outbreak of war. In 1964 new almshouses were finally built at Fairford Place, Longden Coleham, and the old ones demolished.
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- Wardens were almost invariably paupers after the time of Degory Watur.

DEGORY WATUR AND HIS WIFE



DEGORY WATUR

- An astute Shrewsbury Draper in the 15th century.
- Occupied the Warden's House
- Said to have put his own money into the St. Mary's Almshouses.
- Upon his death in 1477 left his estate to the Drapers Company "to find a priest and to sustain the poor in the Almshouses".

KATHERINE BONEL

- The widow of a wealthy Draper.
- Gave financial support to St. Mary's Almshouses.
- In 1461 she bequeathed rent charges totalling £4 7s 10d to Watur and the inmates for the support of the almshouses and to endow a priest.

HOLY CROSS



HOLY CROSS – ABBEY FOREGATE

- Holy Cross Hospital was founded by Daniel Rowlands in 1854 in memory of his brother who had been vicar of St. Mary's Church, to provide '5 comfortable dwellings for decayed gentlewomen' being parishioners of St. Mary's or Holy Cross.
- The buildings were designed by S. Poultney Smith in a Tudor Gothic style in red sandstone and are in the form of two two-storey gabled ranges at right angles to one another.
- The almshouses were run by various charities and trusts. In 1865 the Trust stated its aim was 'to provide convenient accommodation in a setting with allows residents to come and go as they please'. The residents being 'poor women aged 55 years and over who profess the Christian faith and who are resident in the Borough of Shrewsbury and Atcham.'
- The Drapers Company took responsibility for the 5 almshouses in 2010.

ST. GILES



ST. GILES, WENLOCK ROAD

- There was originally a leper hospital on the site, recorded in 1155. By the 16th century this had become an almshouse for four poor people.
- This medieval hospital is thought to have stood to the west of St. Giles Church where foundations were still said to have been visible in the early 19th century. A drawing at this time showed a terrace of small single-storey dwellings.
- This terrace has in recent years been replaced by four modern bungalows set round a private garden. Located set back from Wenlock Road, next to St. Giles Church.
- **In 1969** the Drapers Company became trustees for these properties. There is no resident warden but the almshouses are visited regularly by the warden from the Drapers Almshouses and trustees.

FAIRFORD PALCE, LONGDEN COLEHAM



FAIRFORD PLACE, LONGDEN COLEHAM

- Built in 1964, designed by Stanley Catterall.
16 No. studio flats at ground and first floor levels, with a warden living on the site.
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- The Drapers handsome carved stone coat of arms was transferred from the entrance tower of the 1824 almshouses to the new site.

DRAPERS PLACE



DRAPERS PLACE – ARTICLE FROM THE SHROPSHIRE STAR 2015

- The former unused site at Horse Fair, Abbey Foregate, is the location for the 25 homes being built for the Shrewsbury Drapers' Company charity.
- It is hoped the three-storey development, which will be known as Drapers Place, will be completed in October 2016.
- The development will have 21 one-bedroom apartments and four two-bedroom apartments, plus a room for community use and a full-time warden.
- It will double the number of Drapers' almshouses in the town and meet a fast growing need. They are the first new almshouses to be built for the Drapers' for 50 years.
- The complex is being built by Morris Property on land adjacent to the existing Holy Cross Almshouses, between the bowling club and a former plumbing merchants site.
- The Homes and Communities Agency, Shropshire Council, public donations and charities are helping to fund the scheme.
- The Hong Kong-based Bradbury Trust, named after a Shropshire-born benefactor, is making a significant contribution, and the community room will be named the **Bradbury Lounge** to recognise this support.
- Shrewsbury Drapers' Company has been active in the town since 1444 and currently has 25 almshouses on three sites.

CRITERIAL FOR RESIDENCY

- CRITERIA FOR RESIDENCY OF A DRAPERS ALMSHOUSE
- Apply via a confidential application form:
- Residential qualifications:
- Resident of Shropshire or Powys, OR with close connections.
- Approaching or have reached retirement age.

'Groups' of Almshouses in Shropshire today

- Almshouses, Sheinston Street, [Much Wenlock](#)
- Cludde Almshouses, 12 The Avenue, [Wrockwardine](#) (now private houses)
- Ercall Magna Almshouses, Shrewsbury Road, [Ercall Magna](#)
- Foxes Almshouses and Hosier's Almshouses, together managed as Hoyzers in [Ludlow](#)
- Mercers' Almshouses, [Shrewsbury](#)
- Millington's Hospital, [Shrewsbury](#), architect [John Hiram Haycock](#)
- St Leonard's, [Bridgnorth](#)
- [Shrewsbury Drapers Company](#) almshouses, Shrewsbury
- Town Almshouses, [Newport](#)

ALMSHOUSES TODAY IN ENGLAND

- It has been estimated that over 2,000 separate groups of occupied almshouses in England have survived to the present day, generally in groups of four to ten dwellings. Most towns of any size, and a great number of villages, have one or more groups, in many cases existing quite unnoticed by the general population.