

Much Wenlock by Ray Pearce

I first went to Much Wenlock in January 1958 when my employers Lloyds Bank moved me there as the junior clerk from Shrewsbury branch. The town is in Shropshire between Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth and currently has a population of 2,877. It had a railway station there in 1958 but this was closed in July 1962 and is now served by Arriva buses from Shrewsbury going on to Bridgnorth. Lloyds Bank was in the house of Dr. William Penny Brookes 1809/1895 and the founder of the Wenlock Olympian Games in 1850. It was a meeting between Dr. Brookes and a young French nobleman Baron Pierre de Coubertin that led to the modern Olympic Games. They both agreed that outdoor exercise was beneficial for one's health and, thanks to their efforts, the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896. Sadly Dr. Brookes did not live to see his dream come true. To this day the Olympic Games are held every four years apart from world wars and pandemics.



Let us now move on to 2012 when the games were held in London. To commemorate the Much Wenlock connection one of the Olympic mascots was called Wenlock. It was fitting that when the Olympic torch was being taken around this country it was taken through Much Wenlock and featured on the BBC news. Having seen the programme and recognised one of the torch bearers I



visited Much Wenlock the next day. The town was festooned with bunting and Union Jacks and it was a happy place to be.

During my time there I played cricket for Wenlock Town 2nd eleven. I also "trod the boards" appearing with the Wenlock Players in Murder at the Vicarage by Agatha Christie. It was a very complicated plot and at the end we were none too sure who had murdered Colonel Protheroe.

Other connections to the town include the collection of poems by A.E. Housman "A Shropshire Lad" including one starting 'Tis time I think by Wenlock Town". Another "On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble". Wenlock Edge is a limestone escarpment, 19 miles long running to Craven Arms. Also in the town is Wenlock Priory, a ruined Cluniac monastery, in very peaceful surroundings.

Famous people born in Wenlock include Prof. Mary Beard and John Major's wife Norma. The museum contains many Olympian artefacts. The film Gone to Earth, 1950, was made in the town with Jennifer Jones and Cyril Cusack, based to the novel by Mary Webb.



It was in March 1959 that the Manager of the branch told me I was being transferred to Wolverhampton. Good bye Much Wenlock.

Ray Pearce 24 Jan. 2022