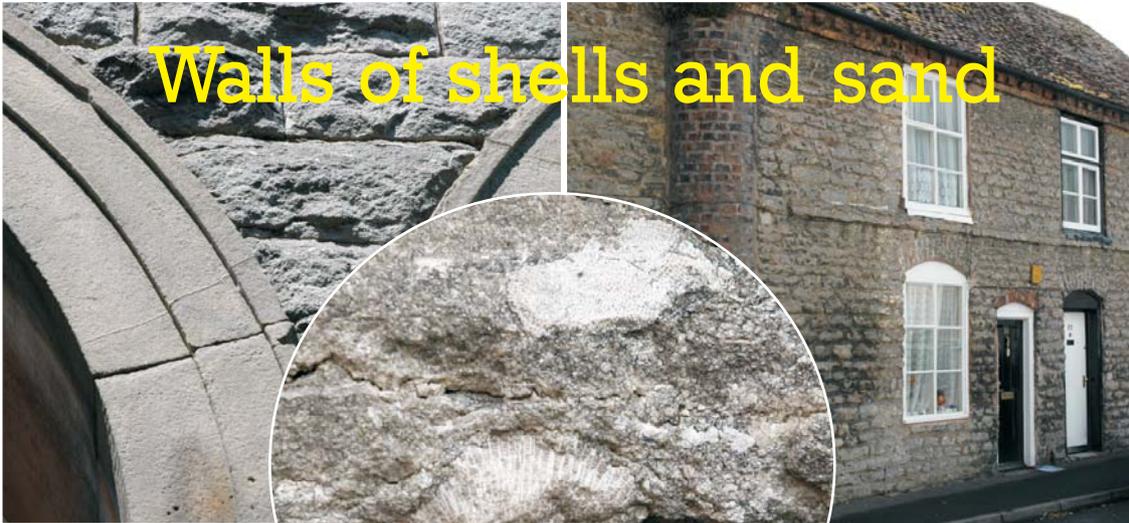
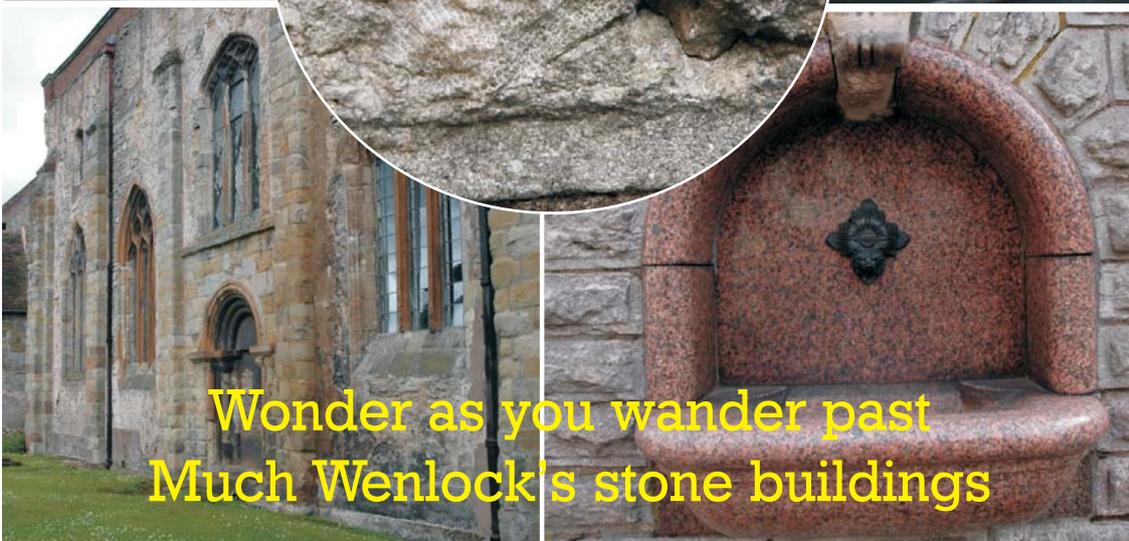


Walls of shells and sand



Wonder as you wander past
Much Wenlock's stone buildings



Welcome to stony Wenlock

Much Wenlock is the only Shropshire town in which extensive use of local stone for building gives a really distinctive character to the place. It's not as uniformly stone-built as Cotswold towns, but this short stroll will show you that many places from the medieval church to 18th century cottages, civic buildings and boundary walls make use of the local, rather rough pale grey stone.

The town has given its name to this: "Wenlock Limestone". It forms the ridge of nearby Wenlock Edge. Limestone is calcium carbonate, the substance that makes up much of the shells of sea creatures.

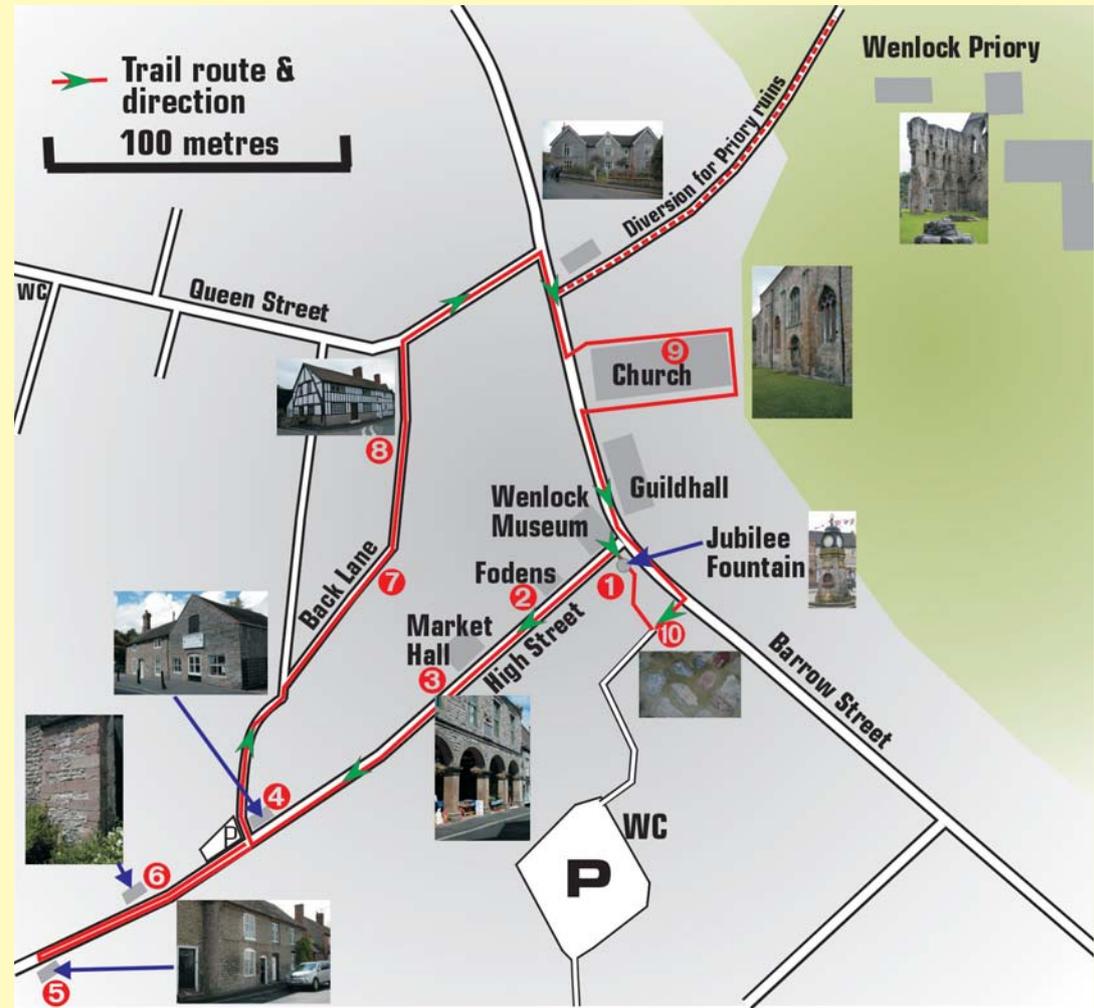
This limestone is made up from the skeletons of sea creatures that were living around coral reefs in a warm tropical sea over 400 million years ago.

Look really closely at some of the rougher stone. Many blocks are made of a mass of small crystals. These were once parts of the skeletons of so-called crinoids or "sea lilies": not plants, as the name suggests, but animals related to sea urchins and starfish. These animals all have a skeleton made of crystals of calcite, a form of calcium carbonate.

Other stones such as sandstones, are also found but most are local to the town.



Above: reconstruction of crinoids on a sea floor. On death the skeletal crystals break apart, accumulating in layers on the sea bed. Here they become cemented together as beds of limestone (below).



Jubilee Fountain

1 Appropriately for a trail written in 2012, we start with a Jubilee Fountain, a Victorian one, across the road from the Museum.



This shows three different stone types. The bulk of the structure is in local Wenlock Limestone, cut into regular blocks but with a rusticated finish. Many blocks contain fossil corals as well as crinoids (*below*).



Panels with wording and shaped surrounds are carved out of single blocks of a different rock: Grinshill Stone (*top right*). This is a sandstone made of wind-blown desert quartz sand. The rounded



sand grains are strongly held together by insoluble quartz cement. This 'white' stone is from North Shropshire.

The fountain basin is carved out of pink granite (*below*). Granite is formed from the slow cooling of molten rock below the Earth's surface. The interlocking crystals can be carved and polished to give a smooth, hygienic finish.



High Street - Fodens

2 The shops up the High Street are less dominated by Wenlock Limestone than the side streets. The oldest are timber framed, others are brick, whilst some modern shop fronts are in the style of the brand owners.



However, Fodens (the solicitors) is a fine example of the mix of Wenlock Limestone and Grinshill Stone. It shows the limitations of the limestone and structural advantages of sandstone. Window surrounds, doorways and corners are smoothly cut large blocks of Grinshill Stone (*left*).

The pillars show how Grinshill Stone can be shaped into long columns - each is only three pieces of stone.



A distinctive feature of Grinshill Stone, seen in several blocks here, is the presence of prominent quartz veins running through the rock.



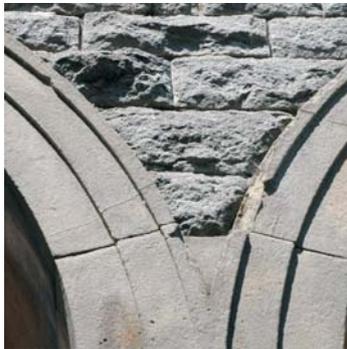
Wenlock limestone, with its more clearly layered structure, can be cut only into smaller rough blocks.

High Street - Market Hall

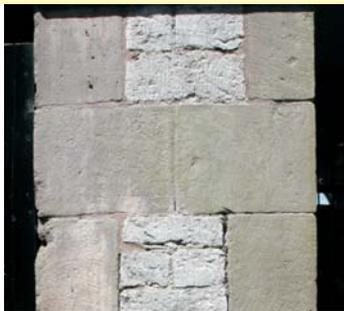
3 Built in 1852 the style clearly says “this is one of the most important buildings in Much Wenlock”; but it still uses mostly Wenlock Limestone.



The Wenlock Limestone is coursed (layered) but, unlike brick, the courses are not all of the same thickness. The blocks in the upper part of the building have rusticated (rough cut) outer faces.



Grinshill Stone has been used for all parts needing a smooth and accurately cut or carved face. Such carving is not possible with Wenlock Limestone.



Each of the main pillars is a single block of stone. For ornamental effect the end pillars mix the two stones (*above*).



The backs of buildings are rarely as smart as the front, as the Market Hall shows from Back Lane.

High Street

4 Beyond the shops are simpler 18th and 19th century Wenlock Limestone buildings. The Funeral Directors are in an old agricultural building. The stone is more random above the ground floor windows. Curved lintels are low brick arches, but the others rely on a course of flat limestone blocks.



5 Further up High St the cottages over the road have well coursed limestone blocks, but of variable thickness. These are very crinoidal.



6 At Ashfield Hall purple and green sandstone has been put in the chimney (*pic below*), probably from Corvedale.



Retrace steps to 4 and turn down Back Lane.

Back Lane



There are many examples of brick-built flues and chimneys, because heat breaks down limestone.



The older timber-framed buildings usually sit on a foundation wall of roughly coursed limestone as at St Owen's House.

Holy Trinity Church



Holy Trinity church tower: part limestone, part sandstone

9 At first glance the church seems to be yet more Wenlock Limestone. Look closer and you see that much of it is sandstone (*right*); but not the Grinshill Stone seen earlier. These blocks are weaker, smaller and more variable in colour - from grey or buff to brown - and more noticeably layered than Grinshill Stone. These sandstones are from the Ironbridge area, a closer source than the Grinshill Stone.

This sandstone formed in deltas as rivers entered very shallow seas about 300 million years ago. It is very variable in grain size, some being quite pebbly.

The brown colour is “rusty iron” (iron oxide)



that cements the quartz grains rather weakly, hence the faster erosion.

At the east end are blocks of red sandstone (*below*). They seem to be a repair, but in weak Bridgnorth Sandstone that has already eroded badly.



“Imported” stones

We have seen limestone and sandstones in our brief tour of Wenlock’s buildings that come from no further afield than Wenlock Edge, the Ironbridge Gorge or at most Grinshill.

But in the graveyard of the church you will find a number of more exotic types of stone. One such is the memorial stone to William Penny Brookes and his family, said to be of Cornish slate resting on Cornish granite (*below*).

This reflects the much



wider choice of stone available to monumental masons after the coming of the railway in 1862.

Cobble stones

On your return to the start of the trail if you go past the Fountain and turn right up Mutton Shut you will find it paved, rather roughly, with cobble stones. Probably these are not imported very far from a Shropshire quarry, but many of the cobbles themselves had a considerable journey here during the last Ice Age.

They were brought in from as far afield as Scotland and North Wales embedded in the ice of glaciers, and were deposited locally when the glaciers melted.

Many are large quartz

pebbles stained pink with iron oxide which may have travelled only a short distance from Cheshire or North Shropshire.



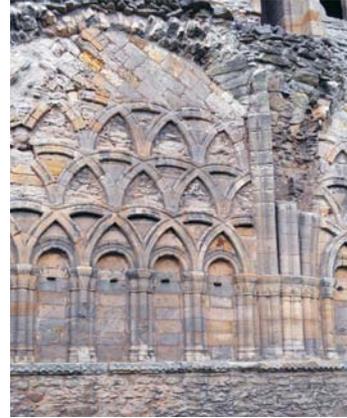
Others are crystalline granites and volcanic rocks. Granites are difficult to identify exactly when reduced to smoothed cobbles but each has a unique and restricted source. The volcanic ashes and lavas are widespread in the mountains of Snowdonia and the Lake District

Wenlock Priory

The Priory ruins deserve a visit but can only be clearly seen when they are open. It is a splendid example of the way in which the most easily accessible stones were used in medieval times.

There is a very clear distinction between the Wenlock Limestone used for rough walling, and the infill of thick walls and pillars, and the regular sandstone blocks from

the Ironbridge Gorge for facing and curved walls. This is seen spectacularly in the walls of the Chapter House (*below*).



The 15th century Prior's house (*below*) survives as a private dwelling. Its dark red and green-grey blocks of sandstone are from Alveley. Its roof is a fine example of graded sandstone tiles from the area around Harnage.



Further information

For more local geological information see the website of **Shropshire Geological Society** - www.shropshiregeology.org.uk

For opening times of the **Much Wenlock Museum and Visitor Information Centre** see the website - www.muchwenlockmuseum.co.uk or phone 01952 727679

For opening times of **Wenlock Priory** see the website - www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/wenlock-priory or phone 01952 727466

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