# CLUN TOWN HALL MUSEUM

# Condition Report
# January 2021

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# CLUN TOWN HALL MUSEUM
# CONDITION REPORT

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Postcard – circa 1905

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 THE BRIEF

This Condition Survey was commissioned in 2020 by Clun Town Council on the Clun Town Hall Museum. It assesses the condition of the building and makes recommendations for its maintenance and repair.

## 1.2 SCOPE OF THE REPORT

This report was written by Tim Ratcliffe (Architect), based on an inspection made in January 2021.

The inspection was visual and did not involve any opening up of hidden voids, and is based on findings made from the ground, internal spaces and ladder access where possible. Its scope is necessarily limited to such defects as may be observed by these means. Any area of concern requiring further investigation is referred to in the appropriate section of this report. Evidence of woodworm activity or rot is noted, but it is not possible to comment on the condition of every timber in the building.

## 1.3 LISTED STATUS

Listed: Grade II*
UID: 257273 List entry Number: 1054426
First listed 1st December 1951
Amended 5th June 1985

## 1.4 GENERAL DESCRIPTION & HISTORY

The building was built in 1780 as a Court House & Market Hall. It is built in coursed rubble stonework with ashlar dressings, and the slate hipped roof is topped with a cupola. The ground floor was originally open on one side.

In design the Town Hall followed the classical trend with its simple rectangular shape, hipped roof and symmetrical arrangement of windows. Equally stylish were the dropped keystones in the arches above the doorways and ground floor openings. The same sandstone was also used for the plinth courses on its 'public sides' facing the Market Square and main roadway, plus the string courses above the two lower windows, the lintels above the two upper windows, and the arch above the central, semicircular window. Siltstone was used for the rest of the building. The eaves were elaborated with a moulded wooden cornice. On the hipped, stone slated roof was a bellcote crowned with a pyramidal roof, finial and weathervane.

The upper room remained in use as a courthouse until 1949 and from 1894 it was also the meeting room of the Parish Council. The ground floor was used on Market Days until market traders ceased coming to Clun in the late 1920's. In 1932 the space was converted into Clun Museum. A stout chain, securely attached in one corner, is pointed out as proof it was once used as a jail.

The Town Hall became the property of Clun in 1928 when the 4th Earl of Powis handed the keys to the Parish Council. With the keys came ongoing responsibility for maintenance and renovations, which have been of community concern since. The 1990's saw considerable repairs, helped by funding from English Heritage and generous private donations. Some of the ashlar stonework was replaced in 1993. The south door, with its dangerous access to the Museum from a busy street, was closed permanently in 1995, and an entrance, with ramp, was made into the Museum from the west door. 1999 saw major work on the exterior of the building.

# 2.0 CONDITION SURVEY

## 2.1 STRUCTURE

Although the building is generally structurally sound, cracks in the internal plaster indicate localised movement.

Cracks above the central arched window in the south elevation seem to relate to slight settlement of arch voussoir stones. Cracking in the external render may relate to this.

The various cracks in the plaster and abutting joinery in the south and north walls at the west end, suggest slight outward movement of the west and north walls, primarily at the north west (staircase) corner.

The cracks between the skirting and wall at first floor level, close to the fireplace, has been filled in the past, indicating the movement has been on-going for a while. The movement seems to be caused by the fact that the wall is unrestrained at first floor level in this corner because of the stair. It is not an immediate cause for concern, but it would be worth filling the cracks to monitor the extent and speed of any further movement. Discrete tying could be added at first floor level if problems persist.

It is also possible the problem is exacerbated by the loading on the first floor. It would be worth checking with a structural engineer what weight the floor can carry and consider reducing the loading or add strengthening.

## 2.2 ROOF STRUCTURE

The roof structure is accessed via a hatch in the ceiling. Three substantial king-post trusses support purlins and rafters, all of which appear to be in a sound condition. The lower sections of rafters and the timber wall plates are hidden behind the vaulted ceiling, so could not be inspected, but there are no signs of movement or other problems.

There were some spots of white mould or mildew on the king-post to the middle truss which seem to relate to a leak from the clock turret/cupola above (see next page for notes on the cupola).

The old timbers seem to have been treated with some sort of brown stain in the past. Whether this was done to deal with woodworm or fungal decay is not clear. Small amounts of wood dust were noted, but this all seemed old, and there were no signs of recent activity.

The cupola structure is formed in relatively new oak, with plywood boarding forming the clockface and other panels. It seems to have been substantially rebuilt when the roof was relaid in 1999. Although the oak is still in a sound condition, staining on the southwest corner post, and a bucket under, indicate there is an active leak. This needs to be addressed before the damp causes damage to the oak. It seems likely some of the plywood will need replacing, and allowance should be made for full external access to facilitate this.

Discolouration on the southeast corner post suggests there may be some seepage here as well, which needs to be investigated and repaired.

## 2.3 ROOF COVERINGS

The four main roof slopes are covered in slates with lead rolls to the corner ridges. Breathable roofing felt, visible on the underside, indicates all the roof slopes have been relaid (presumably in 1999).

The slates and lead all look to be in a good condition and the only point to note is the lead tabs at joints are lifting, which suggests the lead rolls may have slipped very slightly. It would be worth dressing the tabs down, when there is next access to the roof, to discourage further movement.

The cupola is capped in lead, with a weathervane above. The ball at the base of the pole is losing its gold coating, and this and the weathervane would benefit from repainting and regilding to prevent further damage.

The sides of the cupola are painted white. There is some black discolouration on the bases of corner posts relating to the leaks noted inside. These need to be accessed and repaired and the panels supporting the clockfaces need repairing and repainting. The panels are plywood, and it is not clear how the lead upstands below them have been detailed. This detail may need to be reformed to give better weather proofing.

The door/hatch in the north (rear) face of the cupola could not be opened at the time of the inspection as it appears to have swelled and jammed. This needs to be released and eased in warmer and drier conditions.

## 2.4 RAINWATER DISPOSAL

The gutters and downpipes are cast iron and generally in sound condition, and well maintained. Repainting will be desirable in the next few years, as part of ongoing maintenance.


Localised damage to the paint on the render on the west (market square) elevation, and some plant growth, suggest the gutter on this side overflows regularly. It would be worth checking this in heavy rain and also seeing if water spills out elsewhere. The best option may be to install deeper section gutters. Gutters should be accessed and cleared annually.

There are drainage gullies below the downpipes on the south and west sides, in the pavement, and on the north side, in a private garden. These had some silt and debris in them and there were leaves on the grid on the north side. It is important these are checked and cleared on a regular basis, at least annually and ideally twice a year.

The downpipe on the east side empties directly onto the adjacent driveway. It would be worth installing a drain below this, as water feeding into the foundations will cause damp in the base of the wall & floor. The gulley pots below other downpipes should be also checked & repaired as necessary.

## 2.5 EXTERNAL WALLS

On the south and west sides, the walls are dressed sandstone at ground floor level, and roughcast render above the stone stringcourse.

Erosion and delamination of the string course stones is causing more weathering of the ashlar stones below. Replacement of the damaged string course stones is recommended, and localised defrassing & pointing to the stones below.

Plinth stones on the south side are quite eroded and some have been replaced at the left-hand end. This erosion is likely to be exacerbated by water and salt (from gritting) splashing up, but it is also worth checking that rainwater gulley pots and drains are not blocked or leaking. Removal of the cement pointing and localised repairs are recommended at the right-hand end, including to the windowsill.

Although the render looks in poor condition, closer inspection indicates a lot of the delamination is the modern paint bubbling and peeling, mainly in areas where the gutter has been leaking. The loose paint, and edges of render that are similarly affected, should be removed, as soon as possible, to prevent water being trapped behind and allow the condition of the render to be properly assessed.


In the slightly longer-term, it would be best to remove the rest of the modern plastic paint (possibly using a Doff steam stripper), repair the render and apply a breathable paint. The extent of render repair can only be assessed after the currently peeling paint layers have been removed.

The north (rear) elevation is coursed rubble stone, and the lower half of the east side elevation is the same, with render above. Both elevations are generally in good condition.

There was a small amount of ivy growth on the rear elevation, which needs to be kept cut back. The shed against this side does not seem to be causing problems, but slates on its roof are beginning to slip. Removal may be visually desirable, if the owner no longer wants to retain it.

## 2.6 WINDOWS & DOORS

The window frames in the two ground-floor arched openings look relatively modern. Water staining internally, below the frames, and surface erosion of the jambs at low level, indicate leaks under or around the bottom of the windows. This needs to be investigated and the sill detail improved, along with localised repairs to the bases of the frames.

The three first floor windows in the south elevation are all in reasonable condition. Some minor repairs, including filling cracks in sills and replacing small sections of putty, are recommended, plus sanding and repainting.

The window to the stair in the north elevation is also in reasonable condition and no work is required, apart from ongoing maintenance and painting.

The door now used as the entrance, in the west elevation, is a modern replacement and is in good condition. It appears to have been varnished, rather than oiled, and there is some minor blistering to the surface. When it needs redecorating, it may be worth removing the varnish and applying an oil finish (e.g. Osmo UV Protection Oil).


The original main entrance door on the south side was closed-up in 1995. The timber boarding is in relatively good condition and, being raised above pavement level and protected by the arch over, it should remain so.

The wrought iron gates in front of this door would benefit from repainting in the foreseeable future. They are currently painted the same colour as the door, so are relatively invisible. Thought should be given to painting them and the timber behind different colours.

The metal railings in front of the two ground floor windows would benefit from repainting at the same time.

## 2.7 INTERIOR

*Ceilings & Walls*

The walls at ground floor level are painted rubble stonework, with some areas hidden by display boarding. The ceiling is formed by plaster between primary joists. Apart from minor cracking at high level and paint loss at low level on window jambs, noted previously, no problems were observed.

The walls at first floor level are plastered, with a cornice around the top. Above this is coving up to the flat plastered centre, which has ceiling roses and a ceiling hatch. Decorative brackets visible below the coving are attached to the bottoms of trusses in the roof space. The plaster is generally sound, and no problems were noted with the laths & nibs on the top of the ceiling.

Cracking in the coving and cornice generally seems to relate to structural movement noted in section 2.1. Although not an immediate cause for concern, it would be worth filling these to monitor further movement.

A partition wall at the west end of the first-floor cordons the office and stair from the rest of the space. Although it seems sound, it is not clear how much strengthening was included when it was installed. It may be contributing to the cracking in plaster at this end (along with the weight of stored items), and no further loading should be considered unless a structural engineer advises otherwise.

*Floors*

The ground floor retains historic cobbles and paving, bedded on a solid base on the ground. It is inevitable some moisture will rise through this floor. This is not a problem, in itself, but it is important no additional water is fed into the ground (from leaking rainwater goods or drains).

The first floor is timber boarded and although it was not possible to inspect the whole floor, because of the displayed and stored items, it seems in reasonable condition.

## 2.8 SERVICE PROVISIONS

*Electrics*

The electrical wiring system was tested in November 2020. A NICEIC, or equivalent, electrical inspection should be carried out every 5 years, so the next inspection is due in November 2025.

*Heating*

The only heating in the building seems to be from free standing plug-in electric heaters. It is understood these are used to keep stewards warm during cooler months, and that the building is not heated through the winter.

*Other electrical services*

The stairlift was not inspected during this visit, and should be checked and maintained by a qualified person.

The hands to the three clockfaces on the cupola are turned by electrical clock mechanisms. One of the clocks was not working at the time of the inspection. Since then, all three have been replaced with new ones, by Smiths of Derby.

*Fire protection*

The fire extinguishers are checked annually. The last inspection was in December 2020, so the next inspection is due in December 2021.

There is no lightning protection system but, as the building is surrounded by other buildings, the risk of a strike is relatively low.

## 2.9 INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The internal environment is not ideal for a museum and dehumidifiers are used to reduce moisture levels. A building like this, used on an occasional basis, with no background heat, will be subjected to significant humidity swings, particularly over the winter. The best way to address this would be to provide low-level background heat, as maintaining a steady temperature can keep humidity changes within an acceptable range.

More immediately, the fact more water is collected by the downstairs dehumidifier suggests there are other problems with moisture being fed into the bases of walls. Issues noted, which should be addressed, are;

- Enlarge/improve gutters to prevent water spilling down the walls
- Ensure gulley pots and drains are not blocked or leaking
- Repair render and remove paint coating that is trapping moisture in wall
- Repair eroded stonework and point open joints

# 3.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## 3.1 URGENT WORK & MAINTENANCE ISSUES

- Check and clear all gutters and downpipes (annually)
- Check and clear all drain gulley pots (at least annually)
- Assess extent of water overflowing from gutters in heavy rain
- Remove peeling/loose paint from render
- Ensure ivy growth to rear elevation is kept cut back

## 3.2 WORK RECOMMENDED WITHIN 1 YEAR

- Access & repair cupola and improve detailing to prevent further leaks
- Dress down tabs to lead rolls on roof hips (when accessing cupola)
- Paint & regild weathervane (when accessing cupola)
- Repaint clock faces (when accessing cupola)
- Install deeper section gutters or consider other ways to prevent overflowing
- Fill internal cracks to monitor movement
- Consult with structural engineer about loading on first floor
- Liaise with neighbour about repair or removal of shed abutting rear wall

## 3.3 WORK RECOMMENDED WITHIN 2 YEARS

- Install rainwater drain on east side, & check & overhaul other drain gullies
- Replace eroded string-course stones & defrass & point stones below
- Replace cement pointing and repair plinth and sill stones
- Remove remaining modern paint, repair render & apply breathable paint
- Address leaks around ground floor windowsills & repair bases of frames

## 3.4 WORK RECOMMENDED WITHIN 5 YEARS

- Carry out minor repairs to windows, and repaint
- Repaint railings and gates to front (south) elevation
- Replace varnish on west door with external oil finish
- Overhaul and repaint gutters and downpipes
- Assess humidity levels once sources of damp have been dealt with
- Consider installing background heating

## 3.5 POTENTIAL LONGER TERM & DESIRABLE WORK

- Install structural ties in north west corner (by staircase)
- Consider strengthening first floor, depending on advice from engineer

## 3.6 ITEMS TO BE INSPECTED BY SPECIALISTS (aide memoir)

- Electrics (NICEIC inspection every 5 years)
- Fire Extinguishers (to be checked annually)
- Stairlift (as advised by manufacturer)
- Clocks (as advised by manufacturer)