Presteigne has had a turbulent history, starting with its capture by the Mercians from the Welsh, which accounts for its unexpected location on the English side of Offa’s Dyke. Besieged by Prince Llywelyn in 1262 and pillaged by Owain Glyndŵr early in the 16th century, by Tudor times it had recovered and was granted a weekly market. From then until the mid-19th century it hosted five annual fairs. Its position on the mail coaching road from London, Cheltenham and Gloucester to Aberystwyth made it a town of considerable importance. From the 16th century, the County Assizes were held in Presteigne, which eventually became the county town of Radnorshire. This status was lost in 1894 due to the rapid expansion of Llanidrindod Wells. The town trail is intended to give the visitor a taste of this historical and architectural heritage which still exists largely intact, and to introduce the quiet character of this unspoilt and picturesque town.

The Radnorshire Arms (15), an outstanding timber framed building, is dated 1816 over the doorway. Originally the house, or an earlier one standing on the same site, belonged to Sir Christopher Hatton, one of Elizabeth I’s courtiers. It passed into the hands of the Bradshaws, becoming an inn in 1792. It was soon the best known hostelry in the area, and the venue for many important social and political functions in the county. The present bar is noted for its 17th century panelling and elaborate moulded beams.

The High Street, known as The King’s Highway in the 16th century, still offers a wide range of traditional shops. The 18th and 19th century shopfronts, with ornately carved brackets are a rare and precious survival. As elsewhere in Presteigne these fronts conceal much older buildings. The Georgian front of the electrical store hides the Mansion House (16), the oldest house in the town, originally a large 15th century hall house built gable end on to the street, a feature of the king narrow medieval plots known as burgages. Number 47 displays a fine carving of The Green Man (17).

The Post Office (18) occupies the site of the Old Shire Hall, while the double-jettied construction of the shop opposite (19) is a reminder of the 16th century origins of this commercial area. The Radnor Buildings (20) displays Arts and Craft style applied timbers with ornate plasterwork and mosaic. Harford House (21) was the birthplace of Sir Harford Jones-Draycott, the East India Company nabob and one time British ambassador to Paris, whose estate was to become Clifton Park and one of the largest in the county.

The Assembly Rooms (22) dominate the crossroads and were built in Italianate Gothic style in 1869. The arcaded at ground level, now the Library, originally housed the Mechanics’ Institute, while the elegant room above still catsers for gatherings, concerts and exhibitions.

The Churchyard contains some fine monuments which tell tales of the town’s past, including that of the unfortunate Mary Morgan (8), who was hanged, aged 16, for the murder of her baby. The headstone relates the story. The entrance to the churchyard used to have a lychgate, and is known as The Scallions (7) thought to be a corruption of the Norse skallwega, which means ‘the way of the skull.’

The Bull (9) is a fine parish church. Mainly 14th century, it still contains vestiges of the original Saxon and Norman churches. It owns an outstanding 16th century Flemish tapestry. The tower, originally separate from the church itself, contains eight bells, dated 1707. Unusually, the curfew bell is still rung each evening, a practice dating from 1655, when a wealthy cloth merchant, John Beddows, made it a condition for the continuation of the Grammar School which he founded in the town in a small building (11) on the edge of the graveyard. Garnson House (13) was the former headquarters of the Radnor Militia and then the Royal Radnor Rifles. The Church Hall was formerly a school (10).

Other Buildings of interest are marked by blue plaques

This Town Trail constructed using the works of Mr Keith Parker, local historian and author of ‘A History of Presteigne’.