Henley's Forgotten Market Hall

Did you know that there was once a Market Hall on the north side of the Market Cross?
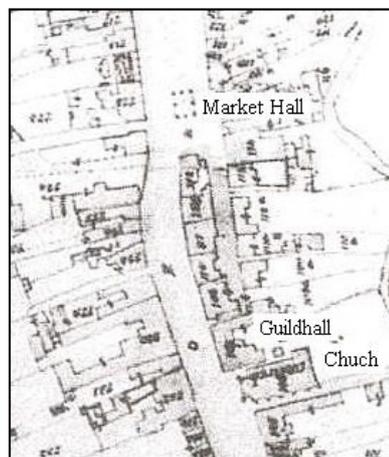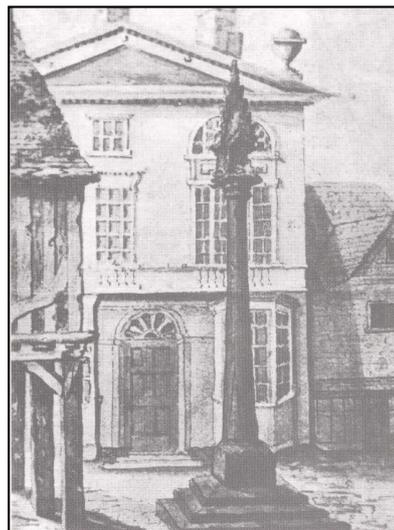
Henley was a planned market town created in the 13th century. As with many such planned towns the single street axis was swollen into a cigar shape in order to accommodate the market. However infilling took place as market holders left their stalls out and these became permanent structures. The Market place was also a legitimate place to build public buildings like a church, Market Cross or Hall.

Although markets were often held in churchyards, Beaudesert held its 1141 market in the castle. Henley's Market Charter for 1221 saw the creation of a specifically built market town for the De Montfort family. This small market town was relatively successful, as by the late 13th century we know that Henley had 69 burgesses.

The original Market Hall would have been built soon after 1221. Market Halls had an undercroft that gave some of the traders' protection from the elements. The upper storey of the Market Hall was where merchant law was administered before the bailiff. The hall stored the standard weights and measures including the borough steelyard. It was also the meeting place for the Manorial Court or Court Leet.

The Guild of Henley was founded in the late 14th century and received substantial money from its benefactors. This wealth was used to build the present Church and Guildhall in c.1450. The King seized the Guild in 1546 and the Guild Hall was subsequently sold. In 1623 it was in the tenure of William Smith, a tanner. The Court Leet continued to use the Market Hall as their meeting place until it was taken down in c.1793, for in 1610 the court records state "no inhabitant shall license or give leave to any players to play within the Town Hall".

The Court Leet was held at the Swan Inn during the 19th century. In 1915 Mr. Fieldhouse restored the Guildhall in which the meetings of the Court are still held.

Left – Stratford's Old Market Town taken down in c.1821

Right – Ledbury Market Hall   © Rosemary Lockie

Notes

W. Cooper, *Records of Beaudesert*, p.63
V.C.H. Warwickshire, Vol.3, p.205-212

The Oxford Companion to Local History
Aston & Bond, *The Landscape of Town*s

Jonathan Dovey, Feb 2005