From 1554 Warwick Borough had its own Quarter Sessions, held four times a year with a jury which could hear any offence not liable to the death penalty. The magistrates were the Mayor and senior Aldermen. The Court Room was stuffy and dark, with witnesses, solicitors and counsel all herded together in the back room. Prisoners came before the court along a passage in the wall.

Warwick was managed by officials of the Earls of Warwick until 1383 when two guilds were founded to assume some responsibility for town affairs. In 1545 Warwick Guild bought a Royal Charter from King Henry VIII so that the town could own property to pay for the upkeep of the churches, school and bridge.

By 1554 the chief citizen was a Bailiff and a charter of 1665 initiated the title of Mayor.

Activities at the Court House

The Court House was a fashionable venue for the winter social season. There would be music, dancing and cards in the anteroom. The large, well-equipped kitchen in the basement was used for catering.

At Warwick Races in September a ball would be held in St Mary Hall, but a set meal was given daily in the Court House ‘...consisting of every delicacy of the season.’

How Warwick was managed

This magnificent chest would have held a charity or corporation’s money, accounts and deeds. Each trustee held the key to a different lock so that it could only be opened when everyone was there. Oken’s chest had 8 locks; Eyffeler’s chest had 5 plate locks and 5 padlocks. This chest has 5 locks and 4 padlocks. So whose chest is it?

The Hunt Ball and the Dispensary Ball were patronised by the county gentry: Gentlemen’s tickets 8s, Ladies 6s. William Dadley, mayor, 1714–1715 and 1727–1728 Edward Greaves, mayor, 1840–1841 Kelynge Greenway, mayor, 1858–1859 and 1860 Elfrida Marjorie, Countess of Warwick, mayoress, 1929–1931 Sir Edward Montague Nelson, mayor, 1918–19 George Henry Nelson, mayor 1868–1870 and 1876–1878

Nicholas Eyffeler Born in Germany, Eyffeler came to England in 1538 to work at Charlecote Park creating armorial windows. He was a glazier and prospered in Warwick. Like Oken he too set up almshouses for the poor.

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There is evidence of a building on the Court House site from 1380 when Richard Algon gave two shops to his son William. By 1510 it is referred to as the Cross Tavern.

In 1510 it was referred to as the Cross Tavern. The Earl of Warwick will compensate the Corporation for giving him the Guild Hall by paying them a number of properties, including Shire Hall, Eastgate and the Cross Tavern.

The Corporation gradually assumed the use of this building and in 1581 it was described as “…the house right against the Cross, sometimes called the Cross Tavern and near the Court House with the shoppes and nores therto belonning.” By 1511 the Corporation held a weekly Wednesday meetings there.

On 5 September 1694 the Fire of Warwick destroyed a large part of the town centre. The Corporation found its Court House surrounded on three sides by rubble and ashes and with its own building somewhat vandalised. The decision to rebuild the Court House was taken in 1724. Designed and built by Francis Smith between 1725 and 1728 in line with the regulations for new buildings, the Court House is a two-storey, sandstone building with a basement which originally served as kitchens to the house. The building immediately became the centre of fashionable life, with balls, assemblies and public meetings.

By 1510 it is referred to as the Cross Tavern. In 1571 Robert Dudley, younger brother of Ambrose, Earl of Warwick, and the Queen’s favourite, visited Warwick on his way to Kenilworth. Dudley’s followers asked the Earl of Warwick to reappoint the Corporation that he should be welcomed in the town centre, then affected effrayed that he had not been met at the boundary. In compensation the Corporation had no option but to give him the Guild Hall for his Lord Leycester Hospital. As further compensation other properties were given to the Corporation: Shire Hall, East Gate and the Cross Tavern. This was in use as the Mayor’s Parlour or the Court House by the Cross.

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