



Leicester Guildhall

Medieval Venue & Museum

Self-Guided Tour



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Leicester
City Council



The Leicester Guildhall was built in 1390 by the Guild of Corpus Christi (a group of rich powerful men with links to the Catholic church).

Guilds made rules in relation to buying and selling, who was allowed to practice a craft, and what sort of standards should be kept.

The Guildhall is Leicester's oldest building still in use today.

Over the years it has had many uses, including a meeting hall, the Town Hall, a courtroom, and the home of Leicester's first police force.

Use the discussion prompts and questions on this trail to explore the Guildhall and its' interesting objects.



Leicester Guildhall

Medieval Venue & Museum

The Great Hall

Go to the Great Hall and have a good look around.

(The Great Hall is the room with the stone floor)

The Great Hall is the oldest part of the building.

It was built in 1390 and was used for meetings by the Guild of Corpus Christi, and for holding great banquets.



Look around at the architecture. Step back in time and imagine a banquet in the Great Hall with the fire roaring.

- What kinds of foods would be eaten at banquet?

Answer: Boars head, venison, fish, roast geese, wild fowl.

Imagine the atmosphere. What would the light and temperature of the room be like back in 1390?

In 1450 the hall was extended to almost double its size.

- Can you see where the extension was made?

Discuss where the newer section meets the older part of the building.

Clue: Look at the windows. The windows with diagonal lead were built in the extension.

Discuss the shapes of windows.

On the floor there is something that looks like a hatch.

- What do you think it is?

Is it:

- A secret underground passage?
- A sunken medieval fireplace?
- A safe?

Clue: Look up to the ceiling directly above.

Can you see where an air vent would have been?

Answer: It is a sunken medieval fireplace.



Leicester Guildhall

Medieval Venue & Museum

The Mayor's Parlour

Head to The Mayor's Parlour.

This room was built in 1563. In 1637 it was panelled in oak and the carved mantle was installed over the fireplace.



Stop and look at the beautiful decoration.

- Can you see the date carved into it, and the cinquefoil of Leicester?

The mayor (the head of the city) used this room for important meetings.

Look at the high leather chair he would sit on during meetings and discuss why the seat is placed high up.

Look closely at all the stained-glass windows. Some of the glass dates to the 1500's.

- Can you spot the graffiti in the plain panels, made by the glaziers?

Other things to find in the windows:

- A dragon
- 3 feathers
- Horses



Leicester Guildhall

Medieval Venue & Museum

The Library

Find the library on the first floor

This room became Leicester's first library, and it is the third oldest public library in the country.

Many books are still kept here, and they include several rare volumes.



Discuss how these old books look different to books nowadays.

- How many books do you think are on display?

Answer: 803

In Tudor times there were no banks, so people kept their money and valuables in chests.

Discuss how the contents of the chests in the library were kept safe from thieves.

Answer: Locks with keys.

- Do you have anything that you like to keep locked? A lockable diary, perhaps?



Leicester Guildhall

Medieval Venue & Museum

The Cells

Go to the cells on the ground floor.

In 1836 the new Police Force was established, and the Guildhall became Leicester's police headquarters. Prior to this, law and order was the responsibility of Night Watchmen and Ward Constables. As well as fines, public punishment and humiliation was used as a deterrent for wrong doers.



Find the criminal restraining items on display.

- What is a Scolds Bridle?

Answer: It was used mainly on women to prevent them from speaking. It was placed on the wearer's head, with the metal plate placed in their mouth.

Stocks were used as deterrent as they were designed to cause the wrongdoer physical discomfort and humiliation.

Hands, feet, and heads of the criminal were locked into a wooden frame whilst the public were encouraged to throw rotten food at them. They were used in the 16th and 17th Centuries.

- What would it feel like to be in the stocks?

Look for the gibbet.

- What is a gibbet?

Answer: A cage to display the dead bodies of criminals in public. This was meant as a deterrent - to scare people into obeying the law.

