

THE OLYMPIAN TRAIL

AROUND MUCH WENLOCK

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF
WILLIAM PENNY BROOKES





In May 2012, the Olympic Torch was carried by WOS President, Jonathan Edwards, and through Much Wenlock by WOS Vice President, John Simpson (pictured), on its way to the 2012 London Olympic Games.

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START



Start at the Wenlock Museum near the town square in High Street. The Trail begins and ends at the Museum, where a fine collection of Olympian artefacts are on display, illustrating the significant role of Much Wenlock in the revival of the modern Olympic Games.

Using this Trail Guide and map follow the bronze markers set in the ground. Discover the sites and buildings associated with William Penny Brookes, founder of the Wenlock Olympian Society, organisers of the annual Games since 1850. Learn of the benefits Dr Brookes brought to the town during the 19th century.



Parts of the Trail have limited access - please see Guide and Map. Walkers are advised that they follow the Trail at their own risk. The 2km (1 1/4 mile) route crosses roads, footpaths, fields and steps. Depending on walking pace, the Trail takes around one hour.

Wenlock Olympian Trail commissioned in 2000, completed 2001

1867

The first Wenlock Olympic Games were held in 1850 for 'every grade of man'. The 1867 programme (below) shows the range of athletic and country events staged at the Games. Some competitions were sponsored - a new idea!

Sometimes there would be a fun contest to amuse the crowds - for example a blindfolded wheelbarrow race!

PROGRAMME.

Order of Competition.	COMPETITIONS.	First Prize presented by—	1st Prize. £ s. d.	2nd Prize. £ s. d.	Entrance. s. d.
1.	FOOT-BALL, three goes, not more than 20 on a side; if not completed in half-an-hour to be deferred till the close of the Games. Winning side	The Society.	2 0 0		1 0
2.	FOOT RACE, 100 yards, for boys under 14 years of age, resident in the Parish of Wenlock	Ditto.	0 5 0	0 2 0	3rd 1 0
3.	FOOT RACE, 60 yards, for boys under 10 years of age, resident in the Parish of Wenlock	Ditto.	0 3 0	0 2 0	3rd 1 0
4.	FOOT RACE, 1 mile	R. Jasper Moss, Esq., M.P.	2 0 0	0 10 0	1 0
5.	RUNNING HIGH LEAP	The Lillshall Company	0 10 6	0 2 6	1 0
6.	RUNNING LONG LEAP	Ditto.	0 10 6	0 2 6	1 0
7.	STANDING LONG LEAP	Ditto.	0 10 6	0 2 6	1 0
8.	THROWING THE CRICKET-BALL in distance	Ditto.	0 10 6	0 2 6	1 0
9.	FOOT HURDLE RACE, half-a-mile, over 7 hurdles.	R. Jasper Moss, Esq., M.P.	3 0 0	0 10 0	1 0
10.	FOOT RACE, 200 yards, open to residents in the Parish of Wenlock	The Society.	1 0 0	0 5 0	1 0
11.	TILTING AT THE RING on horses	Ditto.	An eleven-shilling silver goblet, value 45s.	2 0 0	2 6
12.	GLEE SINGING: each competing party to select its own glee. All competitors will be required to join in singing the ode to the Victor in the Tilting Match immediately after that contest. Copies of the Ode and of the Music will be furnished on application to Mr. Geo. Yates, Much Wenlock, who will give any further information respecting this competition	J. M. Gaskell, Esq., M.P.	3 0 0	1 0 0	
13.	FOOT HURDLE RACE, 1 mile, over 14 hurdles	Lord Forester.	5 0 0	1 0 0	2 0
14.	FOOT RACE, half-a-mile, for farm labourers residing in the Borough of Wenlock, or within 7 miles of the Guild Hall, Wenlock	J. M. Gaskell, Esq., M.P.	2 0 0	0 10 0	1 0
N.B.	Competitors must satisfy the Judges, either by certificates from their masters, or by such other evidence as may be required, that they are farm labourers.				
15.	THROWING THE HAMMER. Open only to limestone quarry-men and lime-burners in the Parish of Wenlock	The Cannock Chase Co.	0 10 6	0 2 6	1 0
16.	PUTTING THE STONE. Open, &c., as above.	Ditto.	0 10 6	0 2 6	1 0
17.	FOOT RACE, 400 yards. Open, &c., as above.	Ditto.	0 10 6	0 2 6	1 0
18.	THROWING THE QUOIT in distance. Open, &c., as above.	Ditto.	0 10 6	0 2 6	1 0
19.	WRITING: for boys belonging to Wenlock National School	The Society.	5 books, or value 7	0 2 6	
20.	ARITHMETIC: for boys belonging to Wenlock National School	Ditto.	5	7 6	0 2 6
21.	KNITTING: for girls ditto ditto	Ditto.	5	7 6	0 2 6
22.	SEWING: for girls ditto ditto	Ditto.	5	7 6	0 2 6

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Following his visit to the Wenlock Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), wrote in the December 1890 edition of La Revue Athlétique;

"if the Olympic Games which Modern Greece did not know how to establish again is revived today, it is not to a Greek that one is indebted but to Dr W.P. Brookes."



Tilting at the Ring was the most popular and exciting event at the Wenlock Olympic Games. A rider used the tip of his lance to unhook a small ring which hung down from a cross bar.



Shown here is the 1887 Champion Tilting, Charles Ainsworth, crowned with olive leaves. William Penny Brookes can be seen to the right wearing his medals.

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Start and finish outside Much Wenlock Museum, follow the bronze markers in the ground (distance in metres).



The Corn Exchange was built in 1852 as a Public Reading Room and Library with a Librarian's residence and a small museum. Provision was made in the open space beneath for a free Corn Market. It was in this building that William Penny Brookes established the Wenlock Olympian Society. From here he spread the message of the benefits of physical exercise and promoted the revival of the Olympic Games far and wide.



In the Wenlock Olympian Games, boys under 14 years old ran a 100 yards race (about 92m) for a first prize of 5 shillings (25p).



At the second **Wenlock Olympian Games** held in 1851, a race of 200 yards was held. 'A foot hurdle race around the course over seven hurdles excited much interest, several of the competitors being reputed runners and jumpers....' and included competitors from Albrighton, Wolverhampton and Birmingham.



You are standing near the **Gaskell Arms**, the former coaching inn, outside which many of the opening day speeches were made by William Penny Brookes as a prelude to the Games.



The Games were surrounded by great pageantry with a band leading the procession of flag bearers, competitors and officials as they marched through the decorated streets to the Games field.



Read the **plaque** opposite on the wall of the Corn Exchange listing some of William Penny Brookes many achievements. His contribution to the founding of the modern Olympic movement is not mentioned. This was acknowledged in 2012 by a plaque unveiled in Holy Trinity Church, Much Wenlock.



On his visit to the town in 1890 Coubertin spoke at the **Raven Hotel**. After watching the Wenlock Olympian Games he was inspired to form the **International Olympic Committee**. The IOC held its first modern Olympic Games in Athens, 1896, just four months after the death of Brookes.



You have now walked about half a mile, and are standing under the **Guildhall** - built in 1540 - where Brookes, a JP, presided for over forty years. In 1848 the interior of the magnificent Council Chamber was transformed, being panelled and furnished with carved chairs, table and chimney piece, at his own expense, which you can see during your visit.

4, Wilmore Street is the house where **William Penny Brookes** was born in 1809. Having qualified as a surgeon in 1831, he returned to Wenlock, took over his late father's practice and lived here until his death. It was in 1890 that Brookes welcomed Baron Coubertin to his home on the occasion of his visit to the Games. When the old doctor died in 1895, sadly of his five children, only Adeline was alive, having cared for him in the family home.



You have now walked 900 metres from the start of the trail and are standing on the corner of the **Bull Ring**. Here you would have had a good view of the Games Procession as it passed through the town on its way to the Linden Field.



The 1000 metre marker has brought you to the last of the original gas street lights installed by Wenlock's Gas Company - Brookes was a co-founder. He was also a founder of the **National Olympian Association** whose Games were held at Crystal Palace in 1866. £1000 was the estimated income necessary to stage the event. The famous cricketer W.G. Grace won an Olympic gold medal in the 400 yards hurdles at these Games.

The 1100 metre marker has brought you near the old **Embankment** which once carried the railway through Much Wenlock. William Penny Brookes played a major role in bringing the railway to the town, and with it, the thousands who came by train to watch the Games.



The 1200 metre marker brings you near to the old railway station building where, in 1890, **Baron Coubertin** arrived for his visit to see the Wenlock Olympian Games. It was pouring with rain!



You are standing on the **Linden Field**. The windmill which you can see on top of the hill was struck by lightning in 1850. Some nine years later J. M. Gaskell Esquire MP, the new owner of the Estate, gave directions for the fitting up of the tower. He provided seats up on the hillside and from the summit "Excellent views may be obtained of the Games and the surrounding countryside"



1400 yards was the length of the Seven-Fold Foot Race staged in Athens 1859, when



Petros Velessarios, first honorary member of the Wenlock Olympian Society, won the Wenlock Prize of 281 drachmas (£10 in old money) and an olive crown.



In winning gold for Great Britain in the 1500m track race at the 1984 Olympics **Sebastian Coe** set a record of 3 mins 32.53 secs. The Wenlock Olympian Society President **Jonathan Edwards** (pictured) is an Olympic and World gold medallist and World Record holder in the Triple Jump.



You are now at Much Wenlock **National School**, opened in 1848. It is in this building where Brookes carried out simple experiments to demonstrate the benefits of physical education for children. Brookes devoted his life to campaigning for P.E. to be compulsory in all schools, his wish being granted by the Government shortly before his death.



You are now standing near the graves of Dr. William Penny Brookes and members of his family. The graves mark his tragic personal life as four of his five children, his wife and brother all died before him.



Congratulations, you have now completed the Olympian Trail.

In 2012 people came to Much Wenlock from around the world to celebrate the place where Baron Pierre de Coubertin found his inspiration for the creation of the modern Olympic movement and wrote in 1897:

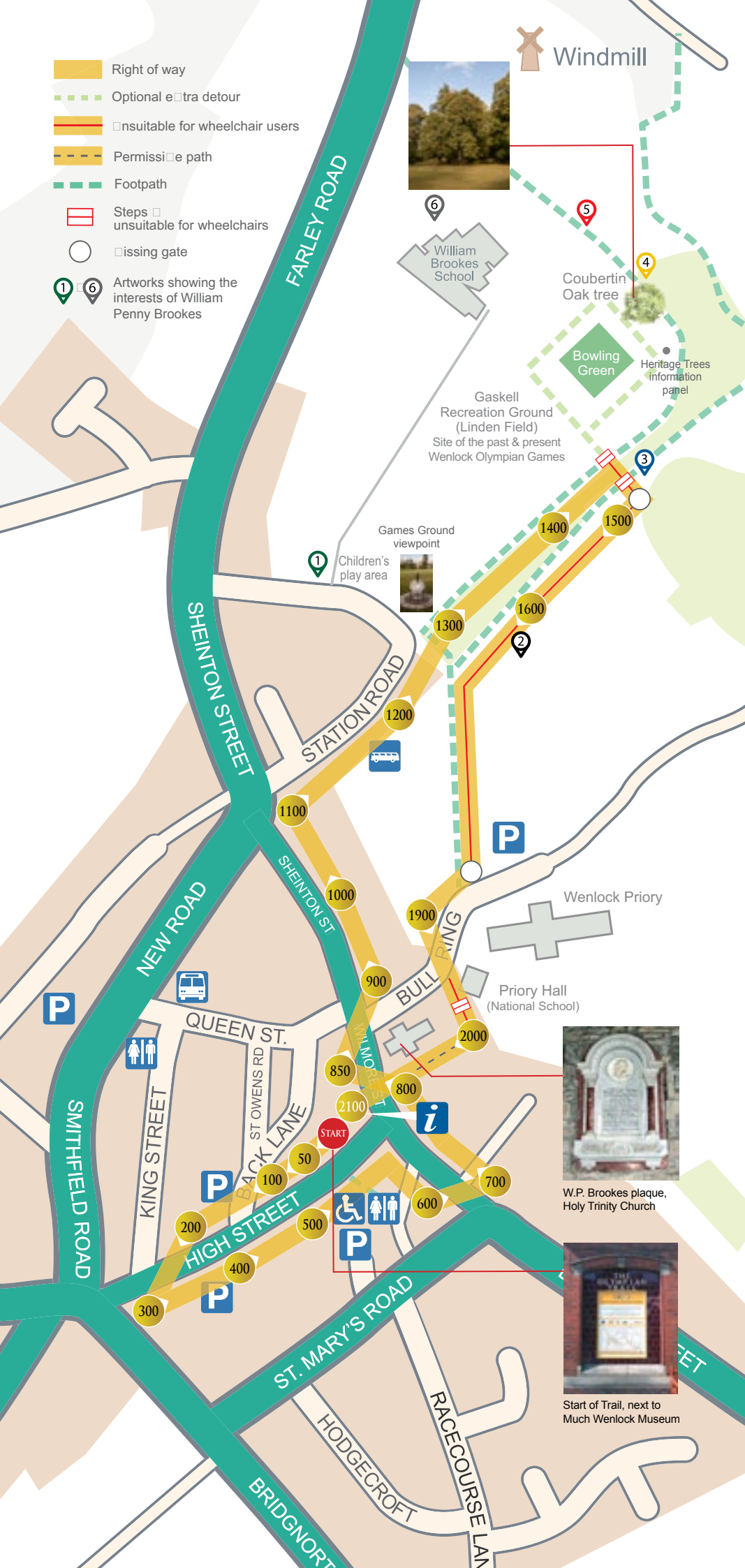
"The Wenlock people alone have preserved and followed the true Olympic traditions."

Why not become an Olympian? Come and take part in the Wenlock Olympian Games which are still held every year with events for 8 to 80 year olds!

www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk

'**Wenlock**', the mascot for the London 2012 Olympic Games, was named after the home town of the Wenlock Olympian Games.





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Much Wenlock has a long history dating back before AD 680 when an abbey was founded - later to be rebuilt as a priory. However, it is because of a Victorian son of Wenlock that the town can boast of its association with the international modern Olympics. Dr William Penny Brookes campaigned internationally for the revival of the ancient Greek Games.

Take the Wenlock Olympian Trail, discover the Guildhall, the Corn Exchange and Holy Trinity Church. Explore the High Street and nearby surroundings. Enjoy the town's ancient landscape setting close to Wenlock Edge.

Much Wenlock Visitor Information Centre
Tel: 01952 727679
www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk
muchwenlocktourism@shropshire.gov.uk

The Olympian Trail is open all day, every day.

A booklet - "William Penny Brookes and the Olympic Connection" is on sale in the Visitor Information Centre.

Educational material is available. For information contact:
info@wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk

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