



The Charter of Incorporation  
for the Borough of  
Wrexham, 1857

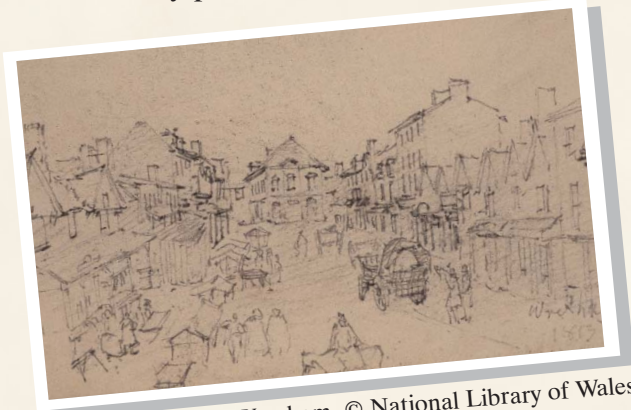




**wrexham**  
COUNTY BOROUGH  
BWRDEISTREF SIROL  
**wreccsam**

## Wrexham - A History of the Borough Council

Wrexham in the 1840s was an expanding prosperous market town, but the residents faced many problems.



High Street, Wrexham. © National Library of Wales

Sanitation in Wrexham was appalling. There were 600 pigsties, twelve slaughterhouses, countless privies and cesspools, and no sewerage system. Everyone feared a cholera epidemic. George Cunliffe, the Vicar of Wrexham, held a public meeting to establish a Sanitary Committee. The Committee tried its best to clean up the town, but it had few powers and little money.

The town was divided historically. The manorial courts of Wrexham Regis and Wrexham Abbot were ineffective. The Parish Vestry, another local government body, was no better. People outside the town objected to paying any rates to improve life inside the town.

Nonconformists objected to paying any rates to the Parish Vestry at all.



The Parish Church of St Giles, Wrexham.  
© National Library of Wales

Frustrated, the Committee petitioned the Board of Health to hold an inquiry in Wrexham and to recommend a way forward. In October 1849 George T. Clarke held the inquiry in the Town Hall, surveyed the town and in April 1850 published his report.

The report made sombre reading:

*The mortality rate, 29 per thousand, is excessive even for a town and is the highest in North Wales.*

*Abbot Street is the most unhealthy street in the town, death rate 56 per thousand.*

*Yorke Street, death rate 52 per thousand, here the refuse is thrown into the churchyard and drains down the public steps into Tuttle Street.*

*The local government is powerless for sanitary purposes and its responsibilities too much divided, to be conducted efficiently. Matters requiring practical knowledge, such as the construction of sewers and roads, are entrusted to unskilled persons whose tenure of office is besides too brief to allow any settled plan to be adopted.*

*Greater power, with direct responsibility, is what is needed. Such a government the Public Health Act will at once provide under the name of a Local Board, elected by the ratepayers.*

*George Clarke,  
Supt. Inspector of Health.  
General Board of Health, 1850.*





## How would the town respond?

### Countdown to the Charter

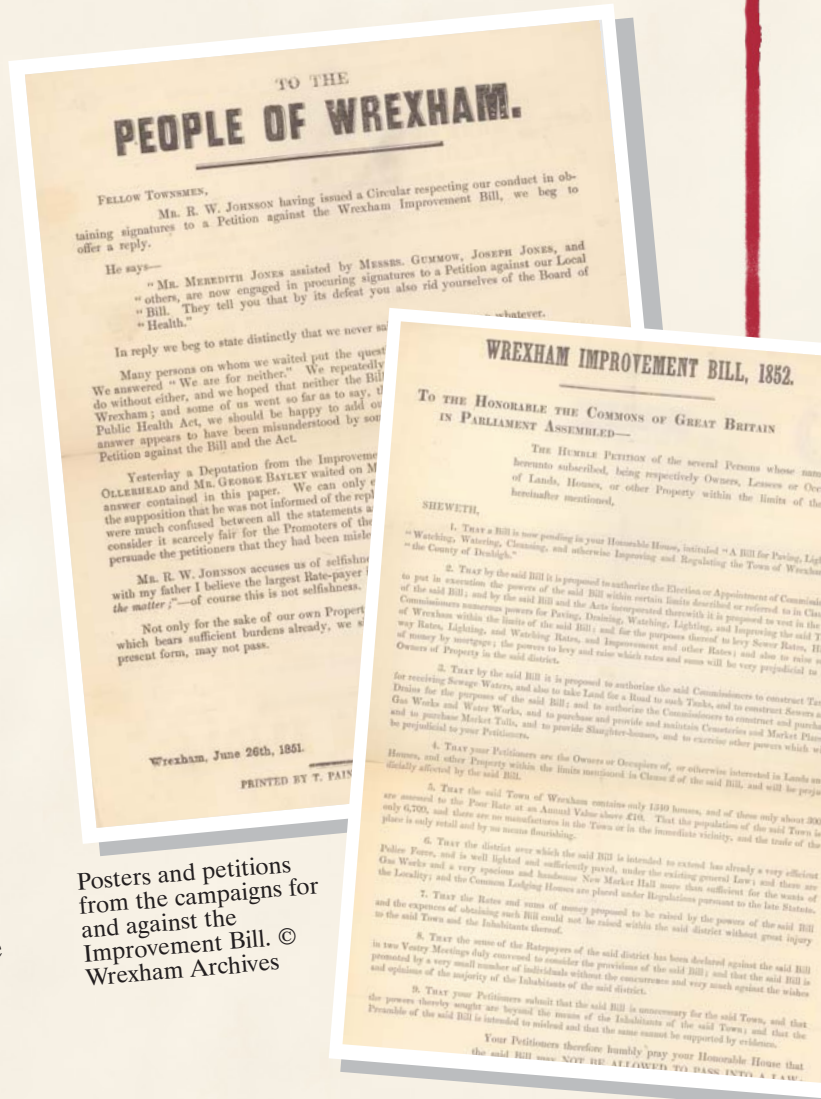
Wrexham's response to the Board of Health report was quick.

There were broadly three groups:

- The reactionaries - opponents of any change
- The Improvement Committee - they were keen to improve the town, but felt a Local Board of Health would cost too much and be an arm of central government in London.
- The Sanitary Committee - they supported the creation of a Local Board of Health to solve the town's social problems.

A public meeting at the Town Hall on 31st May 1850 backed the status quo. The meeting called on the Surveyors of Highways to levy an annual rate to improve sanitation in the town. The Surveyors levied the rate, only to discover they had no power to spend the money on sewerage and water supplies.

The Improvement Committee then took the initiative. In 1851 they presented a bill in parliament to establish the Wrexham Improvement Commission. This bill was opposed by both the Sanitary Committee and the reactionaries. Petitions were sent to Parliament appealing to MPs and peers to vote down the bill. The bill was defeated. Meanwhile Wrexham's problems worsened.



Posters and petitions from the campaigns for and against the Improvement Bill. © Wrexham Archives

In 1856, the Improvement Committee and the Sanitary Committee, by now reconciled, decided to petition the Privy Council for a Charter of Incorporation for Wrexham.

At the Inquiry in the Town Hall in early 1857, Thomas Edgworth, local solicitor and leading reformer, listed the many reasons Wrexham needed its own government: to improve the low moral and sanitary







## The Wrexham & Denbighshire Advertiser

Wrexham will not have to wait long for a decision on whether the town is to be granted a Charter of Incorporation. The Public Inquiry opened Thursday last at the Town Hall.

Mr Buckton detailed the case for change: the lack of a recognised head for the whole town, no unanimity amongst the public officers when appointed, Wrexham Regis is divided from Wrexham Abbot, the Lighting department is split into four districts. Pigstyes and slaughterhouses abound unchecked by a Nuisance Removal Committee that has no power to affect any change. Everything depends upon the exertions of private individuals, and

therefore is fitful and incomplete. Consequently nothing is done as it should be.

Mr Griffiths of Kings Mills opposed the Charter asserting that the expense to the ratepayers would be trebled and yet would still fail to solve the problems highlighted.

We feel the Charter will most unquestionably be advantageous to the town, but we doubt whether it will do away with the necessity of extra powers in an Improvement Bill, or through adopting the Health of Towns Act, if its supporters truly wish to clean up our town.

Editorial, Wrexham Advertiser, February 21st 1857

conditions in the town, to improve the roads, and maintain law and order. The local gentry sent their lawyers to ensure that their estates would remain outside the boundaries of the new borough.

In May 1857 news reached the town that Wrexham would have its own borough council with 12 councillors and 4 aldermen.

The town bellman announced the news about the granting of the charter.







# The Wrexham & Denbighshire Advertiser



Information was received on Wednesday last that the Privy Council has decided to grant a Charter of Incorporation to the town of Wrexham. The borough comprises the whole of Wrexham Abbot and Wrexham Regis

and part of Esclusham Below. Objections by Sir Watkin, Mr Yorke and others have been accepted: the Racecourse, land adjoining the railway and property around Kings Mills will be excluded from the borough.

Editorial, Wrexham Advertiser, May 16th 1857

## The Granting of the Charter

Arguments over boundaries delayed the official granting of borough status until September 23rd 1857. The charter reached Wrexham on September 25th. At a public meeting in the Town Hall on September 28th, the Corporation Committee presented the charter to the town. Elections to the town's first council were called for November 5th.



The official seal attached to the Borough of Wrexham's Charter of Incorporation, 1857

A transcript of the charter can be found after this history of the Borough Council.

## Going to the Polls

Electoral Appeal, Wrexham Advertiser, October 31st 1857



# The Wrexham & Denbighshire Advertiser

TO THE BURGESSES OF THE BOROUGH OF WREXHAM

GENTLEMEN - At the solicitation of many of the Burgesses, and being one of the largest Ratepayers of the Borough, I beg to offer myself as a Candidate in the forthcoming Municipal Election for Town Councillor.

I am no stranger amongst you, and should you deem me worthy of your confidence, I shall exert myself to the utmost to promote your interests, which are identical to my own.

The question of LOCAL TAXATION would receive my special attention and I should oppose the levying of any rate, which was not urgently and imperatively required. I am myself a sufferer from Income Tax, being called upon to pay more in proportion than any other Brewer in North Wales; I have, therefore, a personal interest in not being a party to lavish and wasteful expenditure.

I am opposed to the erection of WATER WORKS out of the ratepayers' money, and should strenuously oppose any proposition, which might be brought forward to effect that object.

I am no party man, but should you return me to the Council, I shall be anxiously solicitous to promote the prosperity and further the interests of the general Ratepayers of the Borough.

I am, Gentlemen, your obedient Servant,  
THOMAS ROWLAND  
Nag's Head Brewery, October 27th 1857





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## Municipal Elections

Electoral Appeal, Wrexham Advertiser, October 31st 1857



# The Wrex Denbighshire

**TO THE BURGESSES OF THE BOROUGH  
OF WREXHAM**

GENTLEMEN, I beg respectfully to announce to you that I am a Candidate for the honour of being one of your Representatives in your First Council of the Borough.

I have already filled the Offices of Guardian of the Poor of Wrexham Abbot, and Surveyor of the Highways of that Township as well as of Wrexham Regis, and it may therefore be presumed that I have some knowledge of the local requirements of the Borough.

I have in conjunction with many of my Fellow Townsmen assisted to relieve the Regis from the continued imposition of a TOLL, which is now no longer paid by those upon whom it was a burden.

There are other Monopolies in the Town, which will require the utmost energy on the part of the Burgesses to resist, and you may rest assured that I should give my most strenuous opposition to any undue influence being used in favour of such Monopolies.

Believing that Improvements beneficial to the Borough must be made with great consideration and due regard to economy, I shall (if elected) support only such measures as I believe to be for the benefit of ALL CLASSES.

I am, Gentlemen, your faithful servant,  
EDWARD GRIFFITH  
Bryn-y-ffynnon, October 29th 1857.

Editorial, Wrexham Advertiser, November 7th 1857



# The Wrex Denbighshire

## Glorious Triumph of the Liberal Party

### Eight Liberals Returned

The Returning Officer, James Buckton, announced the results for the first elections to the Borough Council. Mr Edgworth, the respected and consistent liberal topped the poll with 371 votes, while five other liberals joined him as the six most popular candidates. The four Conservatives were elected because they were known to be honest, talented and conscientious townsmen. 380 burgesses voted, out of an electorate of 640.

Wrexham was called on to elect its best men and this it has done. We may now surely safely state that Thomas Edgworth, leader of the Liberals in the town, will be the first mayor of Wrexham.'

The Councillors appointed John James as Town Clerk, John Jones as Town Crier, and David Higgins as Sergeant at Mace and as Inspector of Nuisances & Common Lodging Houses. There was much work for them to do.



*Salaries and Allowances to Municipal Officers*

*September 23rd 1857 to August 31st 1858*

	£	s	d
<i>The Town Clerk, for half year's salary</i>	40	0	0
<i>The Treasurer, ditto</i>	5	0	0
<i>The Sergeant at Mace</i>	4	0	0
<i>The Inspector of Nuisances &amp; Common Lodging Houses, for half year's salary</i>	10	0	0
<i>Mrs Martha Hughes, for half year's care and cleaning of Guildhall</i>	2	17	0



**Wrexham Incorporated**

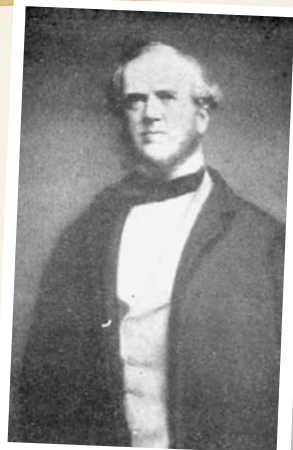
In 1857, 646 people were entitled to vote as burgesses<sup>1</sup> and 206 were entitled to stand as councillors, but the Borough Council's duty was to all the town's inhabitants.

<sup>1</sup>Burgesses were men with voting rights. You could become a burgess if you owned enough property or a business in the town.

The first year's accounts for the Borough of Wrexham, 1857:

*Abstract of the Accounts of Edwin Wgatt, Treasurer of this Borough September 23rd 1857 to 31st August 1858*

	£	s	d		£	s	d
<i>To Cash from Borough Rates</i>				<i>Rent of Guildhall and Music Hall, care of and Cleaning same</i>			
<i>From township of Wrexham Regis</i>	940	4	0		17	19	4
<i>From township of Wrexham Abbot</i>	299	14	0	<i>Salaries &amp; Allowances to Municipal Officers</i>	59	0	0
<i>From township of Esclusham</i>				<i>Minute &amp; Account Books, Postage Stamps, Printing &amp; Stationery</i>	20	3	2
<i>Below within the borough</i>	6	2	0	<i>Advertising Expenses</i>	6	10	0
<i>Total</i>	1246	0	0	<i>Miscellaneous Expenses</i>	22	1	1
<i>Per Contra</i>				<i>Total</i>	908	14	1
<i>Preliminary Expenses in Obtaining the Charter Of Incorporation</i>	413	14	0	<i>By balance in the hands of the Treasurer</i>			
<i>Expenses attending first Burgess Lists, Burgess Roll and first Elections under the Charter</i>	124	8	2	<i>Carried forward</i>	337	5	11
<i>Expenses attending Grant of Arms, Banner and Obtaining a Special Commission of the Peace</i>	162	3	6	<i>Total</i>	1246	0	0
<i>Expenses attending the Bye Laws, exclusive of Printing the Bye Laws</i>	6	19	10				



Thomas Edgworth, the first mayor of Wrexham



David Higgins, the first Sergeant at Mace.





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George Bradley, one of Wrexham's early mayors

*'No project was entered upon without the closest investigation as to the cost to the ratepayers, and careful regard for the healthy progress and advancement of the Borough.'*

Thomas Bury, second Town Clerk, writing in 1907

The Council's priority was to tackle the poor sanitation and housing in Wrexham. Between 1863 and 1867, the Council installed a proper sewerage system and the last cesspool privy was closed by 1894. The Council built an isolation hospital for people with infectious diseases, appointed a health visitor to advise mothers of new born children, and opened public baths (for washing as well as swimming!) on Tuttle Street.

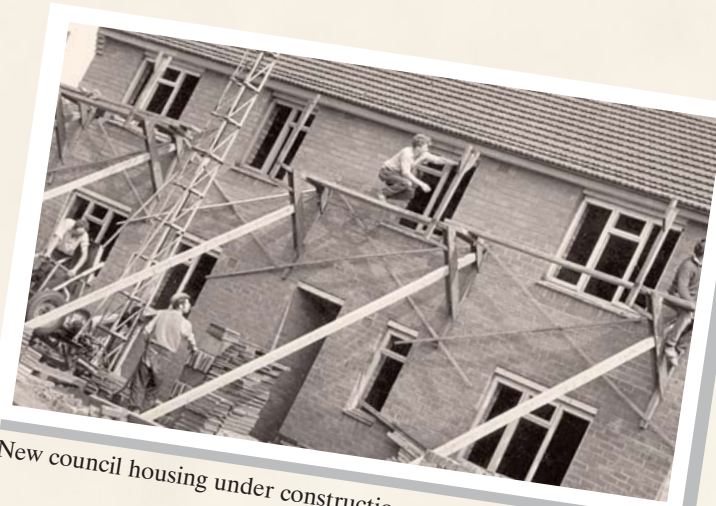
The health benefits were obvious. The town's death rate fell from 29 per thousand in 1857 to 11 per thousand in 1957. The health visitor helped reduce infant mortality from 152 per thousand in 1907 to 29 per thousand in 1957.



Condemned housing on Farndon Street



Wrexham's first Guildhall, Chester Street, 1914



New council housing under construction on Lorne Street





The Council's Medical and Sanitary Officers also worked to improve living conditions in the slums of Wrexham, often contrary to the moralising attitudes of the time. By 1907 the Council realised that improving life in the slums was not enough, they had to be cleared away and new housing built. Wrexham's first council estate, designed by the renowned architect, Patrick Abercrombie, was built on land in Acton Park in the 1920s. After the Second World War, Queen's Park was built as Wrexham's New Jerusalem in the Caia fields. The slums were cleared away, but ending poverty and social exclusion is a task that the Council still works to achieve today.



Mrs Milly Edwards-Jones, Wrexham first female mayor, 1927-30



The Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors of the Borough of Wrexham, 1907

The Council worked to improve the town in many ways. Streets were paved and widened and new roads built after 1879 using the Council's first ever steamroller. In 1895 the Council established the first professional fire brigade in the Borough after the ineffective local volunteer brigade had become the butt of too many jokes.

The Borough Council petitioned Parliament to support the construction of new railway lines to Wrexham and called on the railway companies to offer cheaper services. The Council supported economic development in many ways: successfully lobbying Parliament for the abolition of the expensive tollgates that surrounded the town, building a new cattle market off Smithfield Road, and modernising the town's fairs and produce markets; including the construction of a new Vegetable Market, and more recently the People's Market.



Children from Acton Park School help celebrate the extension of the borough, 1935.





Education and the well-being of children soon became a priority. The Borough Council opened a public library in 1878 and the Town Clerk applied to Carnegie for the money for the town's first purpose built library. The Borough Council helped to establish the town's School Board in 1871 and supported vocational education, a radical idea for the time, by opening the Wrexham School of Science & Art in 1888, even though schooling was not its responsibility. Now schools are the Council's responsibility and education has become one of the priority services of local government.

The Council, aided by donations from local people, transformed the Parciau into a public park and recreation ground. John Jones, the Island Green brewer, and William Aston, local businessman, donated Rhosddu Recreation Ground and Acton Park respectively to the town. The Council's Countryside Services continue this earlier tradition of providing open recreational space for local people today.



The Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors of the Borough of Wrexham, 1957



The old library - built in 1907



Princess Alexandra & the mayor at the opening of the new Guildhall, 1961



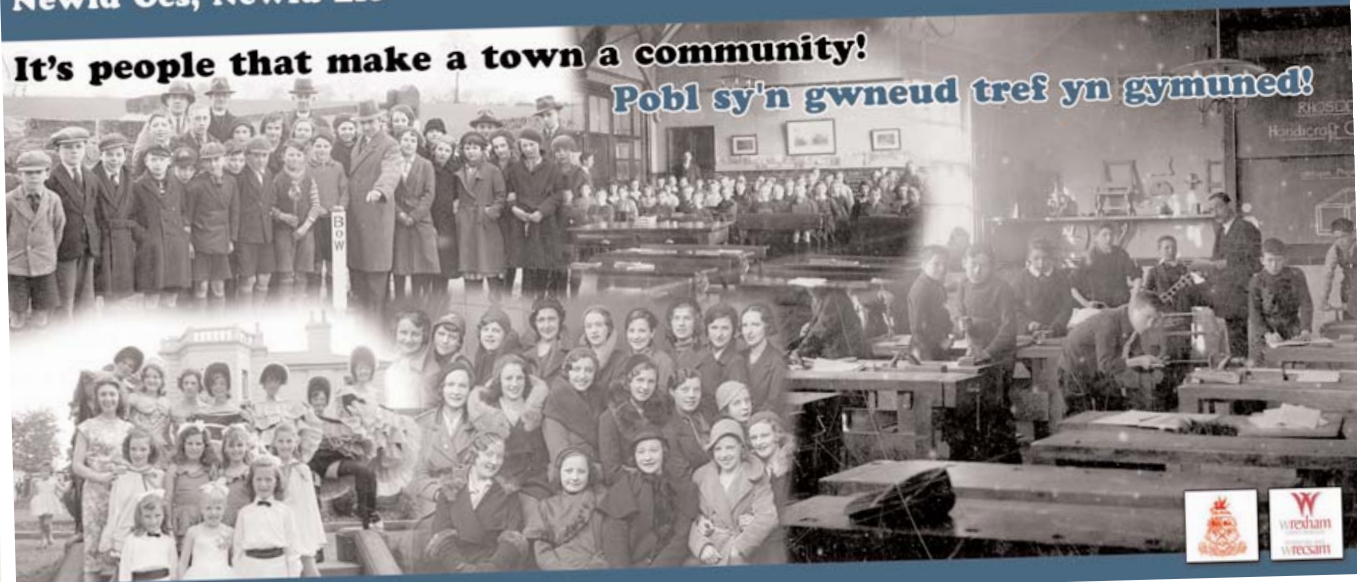




**Changing Times, Changing Places  
Newid Oes, Newid Lle**

**It's people that make a town a community!**

**Pobl sy'n gwneud tref yn gymuned!**



**Changing Times, Changing Places  
Newid Oes, Newid Lle**

**Wrexham: Labor Omnia Vincit**

**Wreccsam: Cymru Am Byth**







## Timeline

### History of the Borough Council

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1849 Board of Health inquiry into condition of Wrexham</p> <p>1851 Wrexham Improvement Bill</p> <p>1851 Wrexham population: 6,714</p> <p>1857 Wrexham receives its Charter of Incorporation</p> <p>1869 Borough Council opens new sewerage works at Hafod y Wern</p> <p>1869 Borough Council petitions Parliament for abolition of all toll gates in the borough</p> <p>1871 Wrexham School Board established</p> <p>1875 Council builds new Smithfield market</p> <p>1876 Borough Council opens Ruabon Road cemetery</p> <p>1878 Wrexham's first public library</p> <p>1883 Borough Council buy the old Grammar School on Chester Street and convert it into the Guildhall</p> <p>1884 Library moves to new Guildhall</p> <p>1888 Borough Council establish Wrexham Science &amp; Art School</p> <p>1894-95 Borough Council establish own Fire Brigade and build a fire station in Guildhall Square</p> | <p>1895 Grove Park County School for Boys established. Girls School established a year later</p> <p>1898 Borough Council purchase Market rights in Wrexham</p> <p>1901 Victoria Board Schools open on Poyser Street</p> <p>1901 First public swimming baths open on Tuttle Street</p> <p>1901 Wrexham population: 14,966</p> <p>1906 Thomas Bury, former town clerk, becomes first Honorary Freeman of the Borough</p> <p>1907 Borough Council buy the Parciau. Carnegie public library opens</p> <p>1920 Borough Council starts building in Acton Park, its first housing development</p> <p>1923 David Lloyd George becomes an Honorary Freeman of the Borough</p> <p>1930s Borough Council build Spring Lodge &amp; Maes y Dre housing</p> <p>1935 Borough of Wrexham extends to include Acton, Stansty and parts of the parishes of Gwersyllt, Broughton and Bersham</p> <p>1946 Royal Welch Fusiliers receive Honorary Freedom of the Borough</p> <p>1950 Building starts in Queen's Park (Caia Park)</p> |
|---|--|







- 1951 Wrexham population: 30,962
- 1951 Welsh language primary school opens in Wrexham
- 1953 Denbighshire Technical College opens
- 1957 Official opening of Memorial Hall, Bodhyfryd
- 1961 Princess Alexandra opens new Guildhall at Llwyn Isaf
- 1963 Wrexham's first Welsh language secondary school, Ysgol Morgan Llwyd, opens
- 1970 Twinning partnership made with Kreis Iserlohm, Markisher Kreis, West Germany
- 1970 Waterworld - Wrexham's new swimming pool opens
- 1972 Wrexham's secondary schools 'go comprehensive'
- 1974 New Wrexham Library opens at Llwyn Isaf
- 1974 Borough of Wrexham merges with Wrexham Rural District and Maelor Rural District to form Wrexham Maelor
- 1978 Trevor L Williams - last individual to become an Honorary Freeman of the Borough
- 1996 Wrexham County Borough Council established

- 2001 Wrexham population: 42,576
- 2002 Wrexham becomes the largest town in Wales



The official seal attached to the Borough of Wrexham's Charter of Incorporation, 1857







**Victoria, by the grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith. To all to whom these presents shall come greeting:**

*Whereas, it was enacted, that if the inhabitant householders of any town or borough in England or Wales should petition Us to grant them a Charter of Incorporation, it should be lawful for Us, if We should think fit, by the advice of Our Privy Council, to grant the same, to extend to the inhabitants of any such town or borough within the district, to be set forth in such Charter, all the powers and provisions of an Act for the Regulation of Municipal Authorities passed in the session of Parliament held in the fifth and sixth years of His late Majesty King William the Fourth.*

*... And whereas after the passing of the said Act, the inhabitant householders of the town of Wrexham (comprising the respective townships of Wrexham Abbot and Wrexham Regis, and such part of the townships of Esclusham below as is surrounded by those townships or one of them), in the county of Denbigh, did petition Us to grant to the inhabitants of the said town a Charter of Incorporation;*

*... And whereas afterwards Our Privy Council did proceed to consider the said petition, and having fully considered it, have advised Us to grant a Charter of Incorporation to the inhabitants of the said town of Wrexham, within the limits of the Parliamentary Borough of Wrexham, in the said county of Denbigh,*

*We do hereby grant and declare that the inhabitants of the said town within the said district, and their successors, shall be forever hereafter a body politic and corporate, in deed, fact and name, and that the said body corporate shall be called "The Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the Borough of Wrexham", ... And We do grant to the said body corporate ... all the Acts, powers, authorities, immunities and privileges, which are now held and enjoyed, done and suffered, by the several boroughs named in the Schedules to the said Act for regulating municipal corporations in England and Wales,*

*... And We further will, grant and declare that the said mayor, aldermen and burgesses of the borough of Wrexham, and their successors, shall and may for ever hereafter have a common seal to serve them in transacting their business; and also shall and may use and assume armorial bearings and devices, which shall be duly entered and enrolled in the Heralds' College: And We further will, grant and declare that the said mayor, aldermen and burgesses shall be able and capable in law to purchase, take and acquire lands, tenements and hereditaments and all other possessions whatsoever to any such mayor, alderman and burgess within the said district,*