

Lyme Regis Museum  
History of Lyme in Museum Objects  
**6. EARLY 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY - COUNTER OR RENT TABLE**  
Accession number: LRM 1993/169

By Max Hebditch



**The front of Counter Table, showing the cupboard door.**  
Two 18<sup>th</sup> century dry measures, from the Museum's collection  
of Lyme Regis Borough Weights and Measures, rest underneath.

### Context

This is an early 16<sup>th</sup> century joined table, similar to one of that date in the collections of Hull Museums. It shows the same construction method as that used for buildings and the panelling of rooms.

It would have been used by someone who could check weights and measures to avoid short measure in markets, impose dues or taxes, such as tolls on goods landed or traded in the town and secure official measures, records and money.

The table can be found in the first room of the Ground Floor Gallery

### Who had this status?

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century the **Mayor** was clerk of the market<sup>1</sup>. To help him he had a **cloth measurer** for this important Lyme trade, a **beam keeper** who looked after the weighing scales, **constables** and an **ale taster**.

### **Where would this table have been used?**

It is likely that the Market House would have contained the administrative office which would have included a safe place for taxes collected and a store for the weighbeam, official weights and measures and stamps to approve measures in use by traders. This table may have been there until the fire of 1844, when it probably moved to the Guildhall.

### **Description of the Counter table**

The table, which is unusually well preserved, has a moulded oak frame with mortise and tenon joints which are pegged to hold it together. The ribbed panels are held in rebates in the frame. There is a strong lock stapled through the plain door to secure the cupboard. On counter surface are two punch marks: LR with a crown above.



**The rear of the Counter Table**

### **How the table was probably used**

Inventories of the date refer to hutch tables (containing a chest) or to counters<sup>2</sup>. It would probably have been used for reckoning money from market dues probably on a chequered board or cloth to help counting. This is where the term 'counter' comes from, as in a shop counter.

The cupboard may have offered storage for money and accounting ledgers. The marks still visible on the top are those in use in Borough of Lyme Regis to validate weights and measures used by traders. The Weights and Measures Act of 1878 consolidated the law in this area and issued new numbers and stamp designs to the authorities. From 1879 the code for Lyme became the number 233 and its stamp had the letters “VR” for *Victoria Regina* and a crown above the number, rather than “LR” for Lyme Regis. An early

photograph of the table in the Museum shows it alongside a tripod for weighing beam with a bell-weight standing on it.



**Pre 1879 official stamp marks on the table surface, LR and Crown**

**For more information** on the Market House see Paper 8 in this series: the Town Bell.

### **References**

- Roberts, George 1834 *The history and antiquities of the borough of Lyme Regis and Charmouth* London Samuel Bagster (1996 facsimile edition for sale in Museum shop)  
Graham, J T 2008 *Weights and measures and their marks*  
Edwards, R 1954 *Dictionary of English furniture* vol. ii

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts pp337-359 *passim*

<sup>2</sup> R Edwards plate 47 fig 3

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