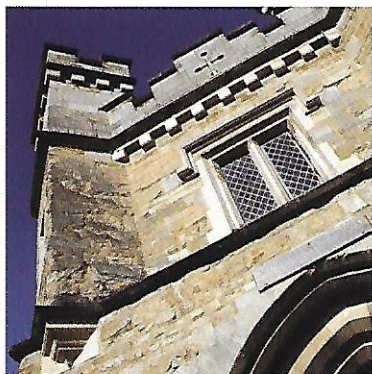


# Buckingham

## Town Trail Series Walk 1 - Historic Buckingham

Welcome to ancient, historic Buckingham. There was a Roman settlement nearby and Buckingham has played many parts throughout our history. It is generally accepted that Buckingham was created the County Town by King Alfred the Great in 886 AD; certainly it was a Royal Borough by the next century. A Royal Charter was granted by Queen Mary in 1553. The neighbourhood was staunchly Royalist during the Civil War but occupied by Oliver Cromwell's troops.



**The Old Gaol** ① with its splendid battlements dominates the town centre. Built by Lord Cobham in 1748, it recaptured the Summer Assizes, which had moved to Aylesbury after Buckingham was devastated by fire in 1725. Their return was short-lived and Aylesbury (after nearly 1000 years) finally sup-

planted Buckingham as the County Town in 1848. The south front of the Gaol, designed by the renowned architect, (Sir) George Gilbert Scott, (born in nearby Gawcott), was added in 1839 as a residence for the police superintendent cum Gaoler. The Gaol was condemned in 1892 but, following a concerted effort by the townspeople in the 1980s, it was restored to house the local museum and tourist information office.

Crossing the Moreton Road and entering High Street we see an interesting collection of old houses. First is **Market House** ②, a reminder of the weekly livestock markets held in the open space beneath the lime trees, formerly known as Cow Fair. No longer the scene of cattle markets, the area houses a bric-a-brac market on Saturdays and a multitude of fairground stalls during the October Charter Fairs.



Set just above the High Street is **Buckingham's Hospital** ③, probably the finest late Victorian building in the town. It's worth making the short climb to examine the carefully crafted vitreous brick façade in Jacobean style. It was designed by John Oldrid Scott, one of Sir George Gilbert's sons. In the early 1890s, this building housed the world's first conference

on rural health visitors - an immensely successful scheme devised by Dr De'Ath (try omitting his apostrophe!) and his advisor, Florence Nightingale, who regularly visited her family at nearby Claydon House.



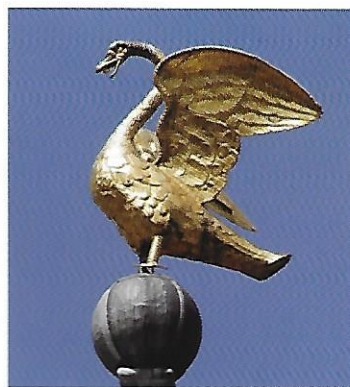
Marking the end of the High Street, **Wharf House** ④ and Wharf Yard indicate the terminus of the Buckingham arm of the Grand Union Canal. Built in 1801, this little known spur brought much activity to this north/east end of town. Along the south side of the High Street, you pass the entrances to Meadow Walk and Cornwall Place, new shopping lanes, mirroring the old burgage plots.

The **Post Office** ⑤, (now the Sorting Office), is a handsome purpose built building, constructed in 1939. How proudly this neo-Georgian building stands on its granite pedestal. Designed with attention to detail and with the finest materials, it is a pity that the roofline collides with the adjacent building.

Next door lies an intriguing building, **Christ's Hospital** ⑥. There is a memorial stone high up on the chimney (a little hard to read) but its inscription helps us to identify that it was founded in 1312, (originally we believe St Laurence's Leper Hospital), refounded by Queen Elizabeth in 1597 and finally rebuilt in its present 'Arts & Crafts' style in 1897 as a tribute to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

The **White House** ⑦, is a Georgian building with an eclectic history. Beginning life as a coaching inn, 'The George', it failed to keep up with its competitors and became a school that specialised in training surveyors. This enterprise also failed but it is an example of how buildings "learn", having accommodated the town's library, the Uthwatt family home and now a hairdresser!

A more successful Georgian coaching inn was **The White Hart** ⑧. Its early Victorian facade and Tuscan porch across the pavement were built when the original coach entrance was blocked up and a new drive-in created at the rear. Note the ostler's bell on the left of the porch.



Resplendent at the western end of the High Street is **The Old Town Hall** ⑨, surmounted by its gilded Swan weathervane. Like its counterpart, The Old Gaol, this imposing Georgian building erected in 1780, narrowly escaped demolition in the 1970s. It has been given a new lease of life as a conference and events centre,

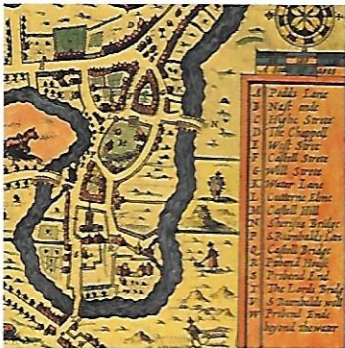
owned by the **Villiers Hotel** ⑩. Formerly a major coaching inn named 'The Swan & Castle', legend has it that Cromwell once held a Council of War within its parlours. 'Villiers' was the family name of the Dukes of Buckingham.

Standing in the heart of Buckingham at the meeting point of four major highways, it is easy to imagine the hustle and bustle in this great era of the coaching inn and the constant rumble of coach wheels as they stopped to change horses and refresh the weary passengers. Leaving the Market Square down Bridge Street, turn into Well Street. This principal route into Buckingham was ravaged by the Great Fire in 1725 and it was one of the first to be rebuilt. The Non-Conformists built a new 'Well Street' Chapel ⑪ in 1726. Built of local rubble stone faced with hand-made bricks, it is a charming example of local 18th century chapels. Originally set back from the street, swelling congregations led to its enlargement in the early 19th century. When the congregation moved elsewhere, it became a school and, later in the 20th century, a garage.

**The Woolpack Inn** ⑫ on the corner of Ford Street is one of Buckingham's most ancient hostels, having served travellers on this site for 600 years. Its name reminds us that Buckingham was an important centre for the wool trade. The Inn's yard was also the site of the Hog Fair. The pigs' bristles would be trundled up Hog Lane (now Elm Street) to Bristle Hill where they were turned into paint brushes.



Prior to 1805, Ford Street marked the principal route to London, crossing the river via The Sheriff's Bridge, as shown in Speed's map of 1610. Today, a footbridge allows you to pause and admire the views towards the church and the elegant arches of the **London Road Bridge** ⑬, which was built at the expense of the Marquess of Buckingham and dramatically changed the southerly highway. Until World War II disrupted Buckingham's rural customs, the area below the raised pavement opposite The Woolpack provided a replacement arena for the 'Horsefair'. Horses were tethered to the retaining wall from which vantage point, their finer points could be examined by the buyers.



Elm Street provides a direct route back to Castle Street, which also fell victim to the disastrous 1725 fire. Here several very fine Georgian elevations replaced the medieval buildings. The elegant façade of **Trolly Hall** ⑭ belies its former use. The original house was built by Henry Robinson as a high class brothel, and its name is a colloquial interpretation of 'Trollop'. We believe it was frequented by George Villiers.



On Castle Hill, you pass a different sort of architectural gem. The paraged **Coach House & Stables** ⑮ was built in 1875 by Edward Swinfen Harris. Note the quantity of sunflowers in the decoration - the emblem of the aesthetic movement.

Reaching the elevated green that surrounds the church, you are now on the spot where the Norman castle was built and, probably before them, the Anglo-Saxon fort or "burh". We know that Edward the Elder came to Buckingham in 918 AD and supervised the building of two forts on either side of the river. The river encircles the town on three sides, creating an ideal defensive site for the Anglo-Saxon settlement - and perhaps the Romans before them. From this vantage point, you will get a marvellous view of the town. Two magnificent copper beech trees were planted to commemorate the Coronation of Edward VII in 1901.

The **Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul** ⑯ was consecrated in 1780, built with stone from the old medieval church nearby. Its commanding position allows you to see the imposing spire from many miles away. In 1860, Sir George Gilbert Scott was called in to remedy structural defects. He added the chancel, porch and buttresses and other gothic features, although sadly destroyed a fine, distressed classical interior.

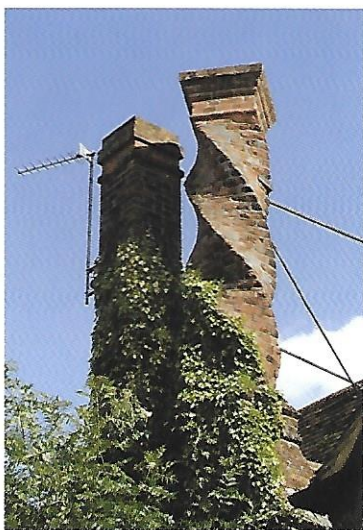
Descending from Castle Hill in a westerly direction, you reach the point where Well Street, Church Street and St Rumbold's Lane meet. On the corner stands the former **Congregational Church** ⑰, built in 1855. Now renamed 'The Radcliffe Centre', it is owned by the University of Buckingham and is used for lectures, concerts and meetings.

Thankfully, Church Street escaped the Great Fire. **Priory House and Trinity House** ⑱ remain as part of a 15th century range which housed the visiting Prebend's men on the occasion of the annual rent collection. **Walnut Yard** ⑲ is Buckingham's former vicarage and dates from circa 1445 when the prebendary of Sutton-cum-Buckingham decided that



the town's growth and prosperity merited a resident vicar. The name 'Walnut Yard' reminds us of an orchard of walnut trees that stretched down to the river Great Ouse. Walnuts were used to dye leather in the tanyards that lined Hunter Street. Nuts were also used as a purgative in medieval times.

Adjacent to Walnut Yard, sits **The Manor House** (20). This fine early Tudor house boasts another famous landmark in the townscape: the Twisted Chimney. It was here that Queen Elizabeth I once dined in great splendour. On its walls you will find a plaque dedicated to St Rumbold, the 'baby' saint of Buckingham. According to legend, he was born c. 650 AD, performing many miracles during the three short days of his life.



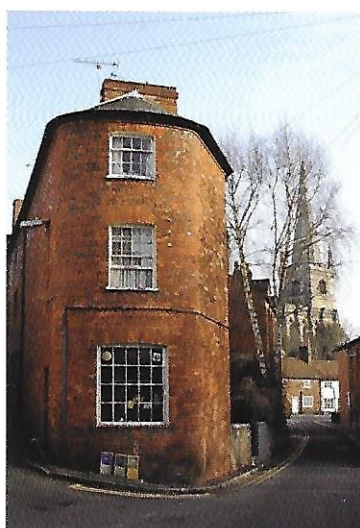
A few steps away is the **Old Churchyard** (21), the site of the original parish church that collapsed after a period of neglect in the 18th century. Within the body of the demolished church stood a shrine to St Rumbold - witness to the prosperity his cult brought to Buckingham. The recent memorial stone in the churchyard commemorates the probable historic position of the shrine. The fine specimen trees were planted in the 1850s when the burial ground was moved. They reflect the vogue for planting recently introduced species into Great Britain.

Just beyond the Old Churchyard is **Yeomanry House** (22), its early Georgian facade now resplendent once more since being renovated, along with the surrounding buildings, by the University of Buckingham. Sadly **Prebend House** (23) has not received the same treatment. Owned by a rich 18th century Buckingham woolstapling family, the Bartletts (whose tombs grace the churchyard), its no-longer elegant facade is a reminder that without vigilance and determination, buildings that tell a historical tale are quickly lost to the next generation.

Turning back towards the centre along Nelson Street, do look right up St Rumbold's Lane. A piece of pre-reformation **quatrefoil carving** (24) adorns one of the old houses. Walking along the opposite side of the street enables you to view the church from a different angle.

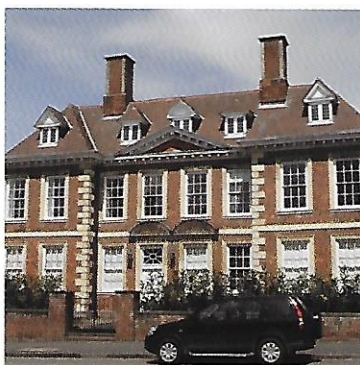


Turning into School Lane, you will find perhaps the best example of Buckingham's signature round corners at the junction with Bristle Hill. Two former schools, the **Infants School** (25) and the **National School** (26), are both now converted to private residences. Were you to pass through the archway, you would catch a pretty glimpse of the old mill race that fed the Castle Mill.



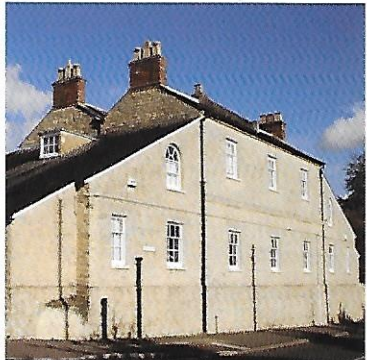
**West End Garage** (27) is a red-brick structure which began life in the 19th century as the Swan Brewery. A take-over in 1896 by the Aylesbury Brewery Company led to its closure and the manager was made redundant. Overcome with depression, he tragically murdered his wife before taking his own life. The brewery became Buckingham's 'Electric Light Works' when the town converted to electric street lighting in 1904. The present owner, a metalworker, has created an unexpected decoration to the chimney stack.

The unusual triangular area where School Lane meets West Street was the site of the original Horse Fair. The old market cross marked the place until 1844. It now forms part of the Museum's exhibits. Overlooking this lively scene is **Castle House** (28).

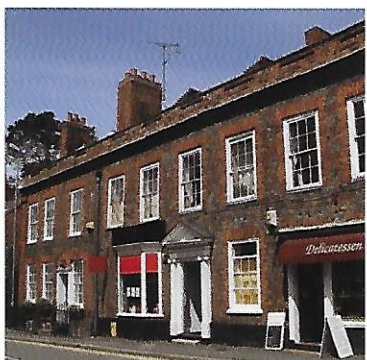


A house with a fascinating royal history, it was built around a courtyard. The oldest surviving wings are not visible from the street but the magnificent old hall in the west wing witnessed the presence of Catherine of Aragon in 1513 and Charles I in 1644. The Queen Anne facade facing the street dates from 1708.

A short detour westwards would bring you past a pretty **thatched cottage** (29) - the old toll house on the Banbury turnpike - to Stowe Avenue. The entrance is flanked by **The Barracks** (30), built at the expense of the Marquis of Buckingham in 1802 for his Royal Bucks Militia. The Marquis feared a republican invasion by Napoleonic France and the Barracks was the first line of defence for Stowe House! Recently restored, it has been divided into two dwellings.



Returning to the centre along West Street, note the interesting Georgian range with a filled in coachway arch. This was the former Cross Keys Inn. The building next door still has an arched entrance and began life as **The Cobham Arms** (31); a reminder of its connection with the grandees at Stowe. Travellers visiting the renowned gardens and grounds would be accommodated at



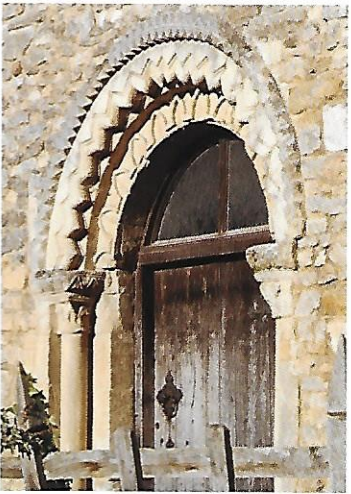


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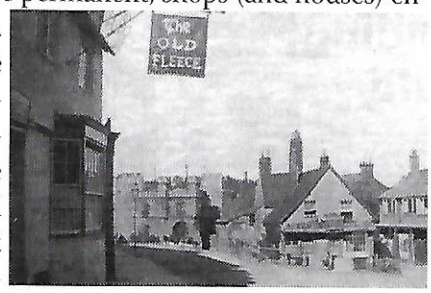
You could venture a little further afield and see more of the town if you followed either **The Riverside Walk** or **St Rumbold's Ramble**. Leaflets for both these walks and more detailed information about Buckingham can be found at the Tourist Information Office in the Old Gaol.

this inn, among them, quite possibly, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, future Presidents of the USA, who toured Stowe in 1786.

On Market Hill, is the **Chantry Chapel** (32). This is the oldest public building in Buckingham, its fine Norman doorway dating from 1268. At the Reformation, it ceased to be a chapel and became St. John's Royal Latin School, a role it fulfilled until 1907 when the school moved to Chandos Road and admitted girls for the first time. It then became one of the first National Trust properties in the country.



The Market Square was originally a much larger open space. Traders in the same goods tended to congregate together and, as the stalls became more permanent, shops (and houses) encroached on to the space. In the centre was the **Bull Ring** (33), now surrounded by shops and alleyways. Wool fairs were held in June - the Wool Hall stood behind what is now Barclays Bank - and a Sheep Fair in September. This later was only abandoned in the middle of the 20th century. We can still see Fleece Yard, part of the old Fleece Inn.



This concludes our trail around the historic heart of Buckingham. We hope you have enjoyed this brief look at some of the town's fascinating history.

**1801 Grand Union Canal**

**1904 Electric Light**