

Thame

OXFORDSHIRE

Historic Town Trail



A walk of about an hour around the centre of this historic market town

Introducing Thame

Thame (or Tame) originated as a Saxon settlement at a crossing of the River Thame and is mentioned in the Domesday Book. After the Norman Conquest it came under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Lincoln and in the 12th C he founded the "new" market town of Thame away from the river and the church and in the area we now recognise as the town centre. In 1215 he diverted the road from Aylesbury to Oxford so that it ran through his new town. The wide High Street and market place with narrow entrances at both ends date from this time and covered the area from the current site of the War Memorial in the east to the Museum in the west. The centre has, over the centuries, been in-filled with various buildings such as the Town Hall and those around the Bird Cage Inn.



Thame has always been a market town. The right to hold a weekly market was granted by Royal Charter in the 12th C and the large general market is still held every Tuesday. This is joined by a Farmers' Market on the second Tuesday of each month and the Cattle Market continues to operate every Wednesday and Friday. A main feature of the town centre is the conservation area with an almost complete absence of modern buildings and where examples may be seen of the building styles of just about every century from the 13th onwards.

The walk described in this leaflet guides you through the historic town centre.

Limited ability access

The walk is mostly on level pavements with good access for prams and wheelchairs. At the exit from the church yard **26** there are a few steps and restricted width. To avoid the steps: return to the High Street, carry on to the western end, turn right into Priestend and follow the path around the church yard wall.

Local Information



This historic market town of Thame is a great place to shop and a delightful area where you can enjoy good food and drink in one of the many pubs, cafes and restaurants.

i For information about places to eat, accommodation and attractions visit Thame Information Centre (Mon - Fri) in the Town Hall. Tel: 01844 212833 or go to www.visitsouthoxfordshire.co.uk

Markets

Weekly Market - every Tuesday
Farmers' Market - second Tuesday of each month
Cattle Market - every Wednesday and Friday



P **Long stay car parks** are shown on the map - please look at the parking signs for restrictions

B **Bicycles** - several places to park and secure your bike

WC **Public Conveniences** are near points **4** and **29**

18 **Thame Museum** in the High Street is certainly worth a visit and it also provides a lot of local information. Open Tues, Wed and Sat (10 - 4), Sun (12 - 4)

This is the first of a planned series of walks around historic Thame. **Enjoy the experience.**

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How to get here



By bus Thame is on the 280 service between Oxford and Aylesbury. It passes by Haddenham and Thame Parkway station. The 280 runs half-hourly during Mon - Sat daytimes. Less frequent at other times. The Arriva Line 40 is a Mon - Sat daytime service from High Wycombe via Stokenchurch and Chinnor.

Traveline 0871 200 2233 or visit www.traveline.org.uk

By train Thame is a short bus (280) or taxi ride away from Haddenham and Thame Parkway which is on the Chiltern Line between Marylebone and Birmingham Snow Hill.

Train information: call 0845 7484950 or visit www.nationalrail.co.uk

By car From the north leave M40 at junction 8a or junction 6 from the south. Follow signs to Thame. There is ample parking available in the town.

By bicycle The Phoenix Trail, part of National Cycle Network Route 57, passes through Thame from Princes Risborough. Route 57 continues to Oxford.

This leaflet has been produced by 21st Century Thame with the support of South Oxfordshire District Council



24 The **Tithe Barn** on the left is a long low building where a brick base supports a timber frame with lovely herring-bone brick filling and was used for the storage of the church dues or tithes. Called Court Barn in the 15th C it belonged to the now demolished Court House, where the manorial Court was held.



25 Go into the churchyard and turn along the avenue of limes that was planted in 1887, passing the parish church of **St Mary the Virgin** dating back to the 13th C. It is a large cruciform church with many interesting items inside including the altar tomb of Lord Williams and the tombs and brasses of the Quatremain family.



26 At the cross avenue, go straight ahead, down two steps and turn right. Prior to the planned town of New Thame the main traffic route from Aylesbury to Oxford followed this road and into Priestend. The Bishop of Lincoln obtained an order in 1215 to divert traffic through his market town of New Thame.

27 At the end of the path turn right, over the pedestrian crossing and again turn right. **Gable Cottage, Godbegot and Regency Cottage** form a lovely trio of ancient buildings set in an idyllic country scene opposite the cricket ground. Godbegot was much restored by the theatrical designer Herbert Norris in the 1930s. The cricket ground opposite is relatively recent having replaced the sheepfield in the 1960s.



28 Continue along Aylesbury Road, go left at the roundabout into North Street and second left into Moored Lane. A little way down is one of the many timber frame houses of Old Thame. The **Bishop's Palace** is a lovely blend of ancient structures; note the huge chimney stack. This was once the building used by the Bishop on his official visits.



29 Return to the corner of Moored Lane. The **Cattle Market** moved here in 1951 replacing the market garden which had occupied the site since Place House was demolished in late 18th C. Place House had been the manor house of Old Thame from the time of the Stonor family in 1419.

30 Go over the pedestrian crossing and follow the path through Waitrose car park. **Greyhound Walk** and parts of the car park have been built respecting the walls of the burgrave plots. These long narrow plots are aligned with the earlier medieval field boundary and bend to present their buildings square to the street. This kink in the plot line is evident in the building line and paving at the entrance to Greyhound Walk. Go through the passageway to return to the Town Hall.

Thame Historic Town Trail

Start and finish outside the Town Hall

1 There has been a Market Hall here since 1509 with the current **Town Hall** being the third building on this site. It was built of local brick in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.



2 Go to the side of the Town Hall by the passage to Waitrose. The English parliamentarian John Hampden died in **Hampden House** in 1643 from injuries he received at the Battle of Chalgrove Field. The building was then a private house and in the early 19th C it was the Greyhound Inn.

3 Continue into the narrow Butter Market which developed on the north (cooler) side of the Market. The buildings to the right are infill of the wide Market Place whilst those on the left follow the original building lines. The **Saracens Head** has changed much over the years but



behind the façade lies an early 14th C cruck built hall house and cross wing.

4 At the end of Butter Market cross over North Street into Montesson Square. The 18th C **Market House** has been a baker's shop, pub (Chequers) and a Countess of Huntingdon (Methodist) chapel – the last surviving one in England. The Upper High Street area was once occupied by the livestock market, the cobbled areas mark where the cattle and pigs were penned.



5 Further along the Upper High Street the **Swan Hotel** dates from the 15th C. Its Georgian façade conceals the timber frame jettied construction which is well worth a look inside, where there is also a 16th C painted ceiling. To the rear, Swan Walk is laid out within an original burgage plot. Each property or burgage of the new town included a long and narrow plot of land that was generally large enough to support one family.

6 Along the Upper High Street, pass by a range of Georgian houses and a neat 15th C cottage (Number 14) and cross the Upper High Street at the end of the car park. The recently renovated **Memorial Gardens** contain the War Memorial which was unveiled by the Prime Minister Lloyd George in 1921 and a lovely figure of a fish boy and ponds erected in memory of the Pearce family.

7 Returning towards the town centre pass the gates to "The Elms" to the site of George G West's bicycle workshop and later garage at **Number 34**. He was one of the first importers of Renault cars, personally travelling to Paris to collect them and drive them back to Thame. Elizabethan wall paintings were discovered in the room above the porch in 1968 which are now on display at Thame Museum.



James Figg

8 Carry on towards the town centre to **Christchurch**. Built of brick fronted with stone in 1871 this former Congregationalist chapel had seating for 450, a vestry and schoolroom below. A house on the High Street was demolished in 1906 to allow **Nelson Street** to be built.

9 The 15th C provenance of the **Nag's Head** can be seen in the timber frame west elevation. The pub was known as the King's Head until, during the Civil War, a supporter of Charles I was hanged from the sign by Parliamentary soldiers. The Wesleyan chapel next door dates from the 1870s.



10 Cross over Rooks Lane and then cross to **No 8 Cornmarket** (Sweet Surrender). This shop is the site of the first Post Office in Thame through which, in 1840, the letter with the very first Penny Black stamp ever issued was delivered to Mr George Waterman, High Street, Thame.



14 The projecting stanchion above **Woolworths** once supported the sign of the Fighting Cocks public house. Next door, where Cornmarket becomes High Street, the estate agent's office is on the site of the Red Lion inn. This was a popular venue for entertainment and the destination of Henry VIII and Ann Boleyn when they processed down the High Street at Michaelmas 1530.



15 Further along the High Street is the Co-op where once stood the **Mansion House**, built in 1572 and demolished in 1965. During its time it served as a private house, a refuge for 50 French clergy, Howard House boys' school and the Girls' Grammar school.

16 Along the High Street where the building line steps back, **Number 14** was at one time the centre for horse shoeing in the town and known as Smith's Court. The Congregationalists built a chapel here in 1827, the site is now the Masonic Hall.

17 The High Street narrows as the market area is left behind. On the left **Lancastrian Cottage** (Number 22) is a reminder of what lies behind many of the grand façades in the town. Cross over Southern Road and out of the Bishop of Lincoln's New Thame.



18 Across the road the County Court house with the royal coat of arms on the pediment was built from local brick in 1861 and 100 years later was altered to

accommodate the Magistrates Court. It was purchased by the Town Council in 2005 to house the much acclaimed **Thame Museum**.

19 **The Thatch** is made up from a charming group of cottages and was developed into a tea room many years ago. It became a popular restaurant and hotel, yet managed to preserve its 16th C origins and became more popular in 2007 as the prize in the TV programme "The Restaurant".



20 Further along the High Street, **The Cruke** is a beautiful timber framed house of box frame construction and dates from the 15th C. Note the medieval stained glass in the upper right window. The name is misleading as the cruck timbers are a remnant of a previous building.

21 Before Brook Lane, **Cuttle Brook House** (Number 42) was the home of Irish poet W B Yeats where his son was born in 1921. The house is a good example of an 18th C town house. Despite its mock-Tudor exterior the **Six Bells** has a lovely 15th C timber frame structure.

22 Cross the High Street to the corner of Church Road where the timber frame **Alms Houses** were a foundation of Richard Quatremain in 1447. Re-founded by Lord Williams in 1559, for five poor men and one poor woman, they are now privately owned and have turned their backs to Church Road. Opposite is an attractive row of 18th C cottages. Behind the Alms Houses the 19th C bandstand is a legacy of a grand ballroom.



23 Further along Church Road the **Grammar School**, founded by Lord Williams, was opened in 1570. It had many notable pupils including John Hampden. The school moved to larger premises in the late 19th C. The building was used as the Girls' Grammar School and then as a private house. The sympathetic conversion to an office complex won architectural awards in the 1980s.



11 Along Cornmarket, the picturesque double-jettied **Bird Cage** dates from the 14th C. Built originally as the Market House with an open lower storey, it has served as an inn since the 16th C. We now view the building from the side but it sits at the centre of the old market place and would have dominated the view from the western entrance to the town.

12 Cross to the other side of Cornmarket to the Georgian **Spread Eagle** which dominates this side of the street. John Fothergill the innkeeper from 1922-1932 was famed for his pompous attempts to take the inn upmarket and for erecting the massive signpost.



13 Further along Cornmarket is the **Abingdon Arms**. The prize-fighter James Figg was born in Thame in 1684 and used this inn, then the Greyhound, as his headquarters. Having made his name in Thame, by 1719 he had become the world's first boxing champion, winning many fights in his booth at Marylebone Fields, London.