

Highworth Town Trail



Highworth Town Trail

Welcome to the Highworth Town Trail which traces some of the town's rich historical heritage. Follow the numbered route on the plan which starts at the bottom of the High Street.

1 The Manor House is, in the main, 16th century with a 15th century wing at the back. In 1361 the manor was conveyed to the Bonhommes at Edington who, although never establishing a house there, held it for the next 178 years. It is this association which led to the property sometimes being referred to as the monastery and to the many stories told of ghostly monks and secret passages leading to the church.

2 To the right of the Manor House is the Saracen's Head Inn, once a fine coaching inn. The indentations either side of the main doorway were to allow passage for the wheel axles of the coaches which once passed through here to the rear of the building. The proposed blocking of the archway was opposed by John Betjeman in the 1950's. In 1784 the Florist's Carnation Feast, which had previously taken place at the Sun Inn, was held here.

3 The Trail continues across to the Market Square where you will find the Emporium. Once known as the Holy Lamb Inn in the early 17th century it was later renamed the King's Head. It became a grocer's shop run by the Curtis family and later the Boulton's. On the side of the building is a datestone showing the

date of AD 1566 and a trade mark. Up until 1769 a pond, pool or weir is known to have been on the north side of the building in Sheep Street. Can you see the blue plaque giving details of Highworth's market and fairs charter?

4 The heart of the town was the market place where a market house on pillars once stood opposite the entrance to Gilbert's Alley. This was built in the late 17th century by Thomas Freke of Hannington. By this time the market had become more specialised dealing in cattle and had become the greatest market for fat cattle in Wiltshire. The Podium marks the site of the old Rifleman's Arms Inn.

5 Near the bottom of Sheep Street is a lovely house now Highworth Hair and Beauty and County Dry Cleaners. An old coaching inn, it was called first the White Hart and later the Swan Inn. An outline of a heart can be traced in the cobbles in front of the entrance arch. It closed as an inn in 1860 and became home to a firm of builders initially owned by a Mr Thomas and then by the Chick family.

6 Continuing up Sheep Street you will come to a solicitor's office. Previously the Golden Ball, it later became the Red Lion until it closed in 1970. Beneath the windows can be seen the iron hoops to which the sheep pens would be fastened on market days.

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- 7** As you come to the churchyard gates stop and glance to your right at what is now the Brewer's House in Vicarage Lane. Built in 1778 by Jo Reynolds, by 1851 it had become Highworth's Post Office and is shown on the 1871 census as the Globe Brewery where Richard Ricketts, Master Brewer was living.
- 8** A place of worship has stood on the site of the parish church of St Michael's for over 900 years. Originally this was a cruciform minster church which was later enlarged to the pleasant perpendicular style building dating from the 15th century which you see today. To the left of the south door are the remains of two scratch dials. Note the large parish chest once used for storing vestments, parish records, and church plate. It is thought to date from the late 13th century. Over the south door can be seen the Anglo Norman tympanum dating to circa 1140. A jewel of St Michael's church, it depicts Samson fighting a lion. In the chancel are three misericorde seats dating to the 15th century. The seat carvings show a mermaid holding a mirror, the head of an angel, and a man's head. To the right of the Altar is the Warneford chapel. Once the family's chantry chapel dedicated to St Katherine it later became their mortuary chapel. Of particular note is the memorial to Sub. Lieutenant Warneford R.N. Another chantry dedicated to St Nicholas is known to have been established in the church possibly located in what is now the Cullerne Room.
- 9** Outside to the left of the West door on the wall is a depression made by a Parliamentary cannon ball during the brief siege of the Royalist garrison held by Major Henry Henne on 27th June 1645.
- 10** A short step through the archway, know as the Winding Hatch, brings you back into the High Street. The building to your left was once the Cross Keys Inn closing in 1891 it later becoming a Post Office.
- 11** Turning right move along to No 29. This was once the Bull Inn until 1881 where the skull of a giant was on display as far back as the late 17th century.
- 12** The Jesmonds of Highworth, formerly known as Prospect House, was once the home of S. B Burton Esq, famous for church repairs and architecture. To the right is the White House built in the early 18th century for George Farr, Maltster and Plummer. Note the Sun Fire Office insurance badge located about a foot below the eaves. Insurance then was 2/6 per £100.
- 13** Turning into Cricklade Road you will see on your right Westrop House built in 1818 by William Crowdy, solicitor, and Lord of the Manor. William Cobbett stopped here a week in 1827.

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- 14** Further along the Cricklade Road stands Westhill House built in the 1790's as the Highworth Workhouse. Sold in 1847 it was at one time the Vicarage and later the home of Sir Noel Arkell.
- 15** The Elms was once known as Puzzle Court because of the maze of narrow lanes and passages there. Simon Iles the Highworth Dwarf lived here.
- 16** Stroll back into the High Street where you will find on your right the United Reformed Church which dates to about 1825. Congregationalism first came to Highworth in 1777. During the early years the church suffered much abuse and services were constantly interrupted.
- 17** No 24 High Street - Inigo House - has a Queen Anne brick frontage, with a typical Tudor Cotswold style building at the back. It has a superb doorcase of fluted Corinthian pilasters, stone quoins and enriched cornice and parapet. There is a Phoenix Fire Insurance medallion dating from approximately 1820.
- 18** Nos 22 and 23 were once one building believed to have been the site of the Greyhound Inn in the 18th century. It is more famous for its role in the Wartime British Resistance when members reported there on their way to training at Coleshill House.
- 19** Finally we arrive at The King and Queen Inn parts of which may date from the 15th century. At the rear of the building is a datestone WL 1677. A room at the rear of the building served as the courthouse. By the mid 19th century it was the property of the Sun Brewery passing to Ushers and thence to the present owners. The pub is reputed to be haunted by the ghost of a man.