

EVESHAM TOWN TRAIL



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INTRODUCTION

This Town Trail has been produced by the Vale of Evesham Civic Society. It is designed to give the visitor a route round the most interesting features of the town, but it is also hoped that it will help residents to look anew at their town and perhaps take a greater interest and pride in their heritage.

The entire trail will take about one and a half hours and may be joined at any point.

A separate pamphlet, produced jointly by the Civic Society and the Simon de Montfort Society, recounts the story of the Battle of Evesham. Arrows set in the pavement in the High Street direct walkers to the site of the Battle at the top of Greenhill. The site itself is in private ownership, but a signpost at the top of Greenhill gives access to a Battle Trail, where there is a circular walk and an information panel describing the battle, the events leading up to it and its impact on English history.

All Society publications can be obtained from the Almonry Heritage Centre

Welcome to Evesham

THE ALMONRY HERITAGE CENTRE AND TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE



OPENING TIMES

March-October

Monday to Saturday 10am—5pm

November-February

Monday to Saturday 10am—5pm
Closed Wednesdays

(Last entry 4pm)

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THE ALMONRY A good example of medieval architecture. From here the Almoner distributed relief to the poor and visited the sick of the town. It is now a museum containing exhibits concerning the life, culture and history of Evesham and the Vale from prehistoric times to the day before yesterday. There are models of the Abbey and the battlefield and there is also the charter of 1605.

The building is well worth a visit and, with Merstow Green opposite, it formed the edge of the town until the Abbey Road bridge was built in 1928. Cross the road into

MERSTOW GREEN The old doorway of the cafe on the right has the Abbey arms and a worn inscription asking us to pray for the soul of Abbot Lichfield, who had erected the building to house the Abbey school. When the Abbey was dissolved in 1539 King Henry VIII allowed the school to continue and paid £10 per year for a school master. This was the only local school at the time. Under the charter of 1605 it was re-founded to become the first free grammar school of Prince Henry. This is now a large High School on a site north of the town centre.

The nearby restaurant is genuine Tudor, whereas the Trumpet Inn next to it is not. Numbers 15 and 16 are three storey Georgian houses with typical parapets, sash windows and fanlights over the doors. Pass Waitrose then turn left across the front of the Victorian school building. Turn right into Abbots Walk and Boat Lane.

BOAT LANE Approximately 300 metres past no. 17 on the left are remains of the Abbey Park wall, built by Abbot Chyryton in the 14th century, but decaying rapidly in recent years. In the distance Hampton church may be observed with Bredon Hill behind it. When the rope ferry is operating there is a pleasant walk to Hampton, but we will retrace our steps and turn left back into



Hampton Ferry

MERSTOW GREEN This was once really green! The annual mop fair is held here, in Vine Street and in High Street. This used to be the occasion when, at Michaelmas, agricultural labourers and domestic servants were hired for the following year.

As Evesham grew into an important trading centre, Edward the Confessor bestowed the privileges of a commercial town and the right to hold a market in 1055.

Retrace your steps to the main road turning left at “Ye Olde Red Horse”, a 16th century building with unusual corner struts, and walk along

VINE STREET This was once the pig market, the present name being a bowdlerisation of “swine”. Vine Mews is an attractive small shopping precinct. Look out for the Royal Oak, which presents three timber framed gables to the street at first floor level over a solidly constructed stone elevation to the ground floor. Adjacent are a restaurant and the former King Charles public house, which are both Georgian buildings. The former has fluted Ionic pilasters extending through the two upper floors on each side, while the latter is simple, even austere, though crowned with a heavy cornice supported by elaborately carved brackets or “modillions”.

Before crossing the road for a better look at the Market Place look out for the tablets set into the paving on the west side of the street highlighting events in Evesham’s history, including the Lady Godiva connection.



The Round House



Statue of Eof

MARKET PLACE The Market Place and Town Hall were improved and restored in 1989 as part of the approach to the Riverside shopping centre. The 16th century Town Hall originally had open arches similar to those in Chipping Campden and other Cotswold towns. The arches, which were Elizabethan, were closed in towards the end of the 19th century. Poultry and butter markets were held in the undercroft and the courthouse was above. In the 17th century the town jail was attached to the southern end of the building and was in use until the early years of the 20th century. Relics of the gaol can be seen in the Almonry Heritage Centre. The oldest part of the building is of Abbey stone, about 1586, and the clock turret was added in 1887 to celebrate Queen Victoria's jubilee.

The Round House, now the National Westminster Bank, was once divided into dwellings and small open shops. It was built about 1450. Major restoration has taken place in 1965 and 2022. A statue of Eof and associated information board near the Round House were erected in 2008.

Walk through Melsungen Allee, named after Evesham's twin town in Germany, to

BRIDGE STREET Before you cross look up at the oriel windows opposite and the attractive upper stories of the buildings on the right, on one of which hangs a sign stating that King Charles I stayed there when it was the home of the Langston family.

Cross into the Allée de Dreux, named after Evesham's twin town in France. You are now in



Dresden House

HIGH STREET Look above the shop windows to see the first-floor facades many of which are listed as of architectural merit, which give the town its character. High Street was the main market area for many years. Use the pedestrian crossing by Lloyds Bank and turn right . A building of note is number 51, Dresden House, with a large hood on wrought iron brackets over the door. It was erected early in the reign of William and Mary by a Worcestershire man, Robert Cookes. He was an attorney, twice mayor of the borough and a Justice of the Peace for over 45 years. The completion date of the house, 1692, can be seen on the lead rainwater head together with the initials RC and the Cookes family coat of arms. The name derives from one owner of the house, Dr. William Baylies, who ran into financial trouble and went to live in Prussia in 1744 as physician to Frederick the Great.

Look above the window of number 61 to see the crest of the bootmaker to the French royal family, who were in exile at Wood Norton, near Evesham, from 1857. The Duc d'Orleans and his relatives provided local employment, and visitors included the Kings of Spain and Portugal and members of the British royal family.

As you walk further along the High Street the shops give way to Victorian terraces and offices. Look out for more plaques set in the paving highlighting events in Evesham's history. Just past Avon Street cross at the traffic lights to





The Unitarian Chapel



Rynal Street

SWAN LANE The lane derives its name from the former Swan Inn on the right, now Ye Olde Swanne. On the left is the former Cross Keys inn, which is now commercial and only the sign set into the wall remains. When the inn was rebuilt in 1939 a document was found, which was a certificate issued in London in 1665 certifying that Mary Walker, her master's family and all the neighbourhood had been free of plague during the preceding months.

Along Swan Lane look up Rynal Street at the row of restored labourers' cottages on the right. Opposite the Masonic Hall turn into Chapel Street. Continue straight on into Cowl Street or take a short diversion to the right along Oat Street to look at the fine Unitarian Chapel built in 1737 and the modern library built on a difficult site. Its outward appearance belies a light, spacious interior.



Masonic Lodge



Cowl Street



COWL STREET contains a variety of buildings. Some, like number 19 are 16th century timber framed, others are of 18th century brick. Number 31 was meticulously restored by the Wychavon Building Preservation Trust, but others proved too far gone to be retained and, after an extensive archaeological dig, have been rebuilt by the housing association in a style sympathetic with the older buildings. In the 17th and 18th centuries Evesham was a hotbed of non-conformity and there are several places of worship. The Friends' Meeting House is particularly interesting with its attractive small garden.

Turn into

BRIDGE STREET Look above the modern shop fronts to see some of the fine buildings that were once private houses. The HSBC Bank is particularly fine and it is worth looking up at the windows of numbers 8 and 10 which are especially unusual.

Near the bottom of Bridge Street is the Crown Yard. The former coaching inn is of the 16th century and was an inn before the dissolution of the Abbey. Further down is Bridge Court with attractive half-timbered buildings.



A view from the former Town Quay in the late 18th century showing the mediaeval bridge and the type of vessel which carried the river trade

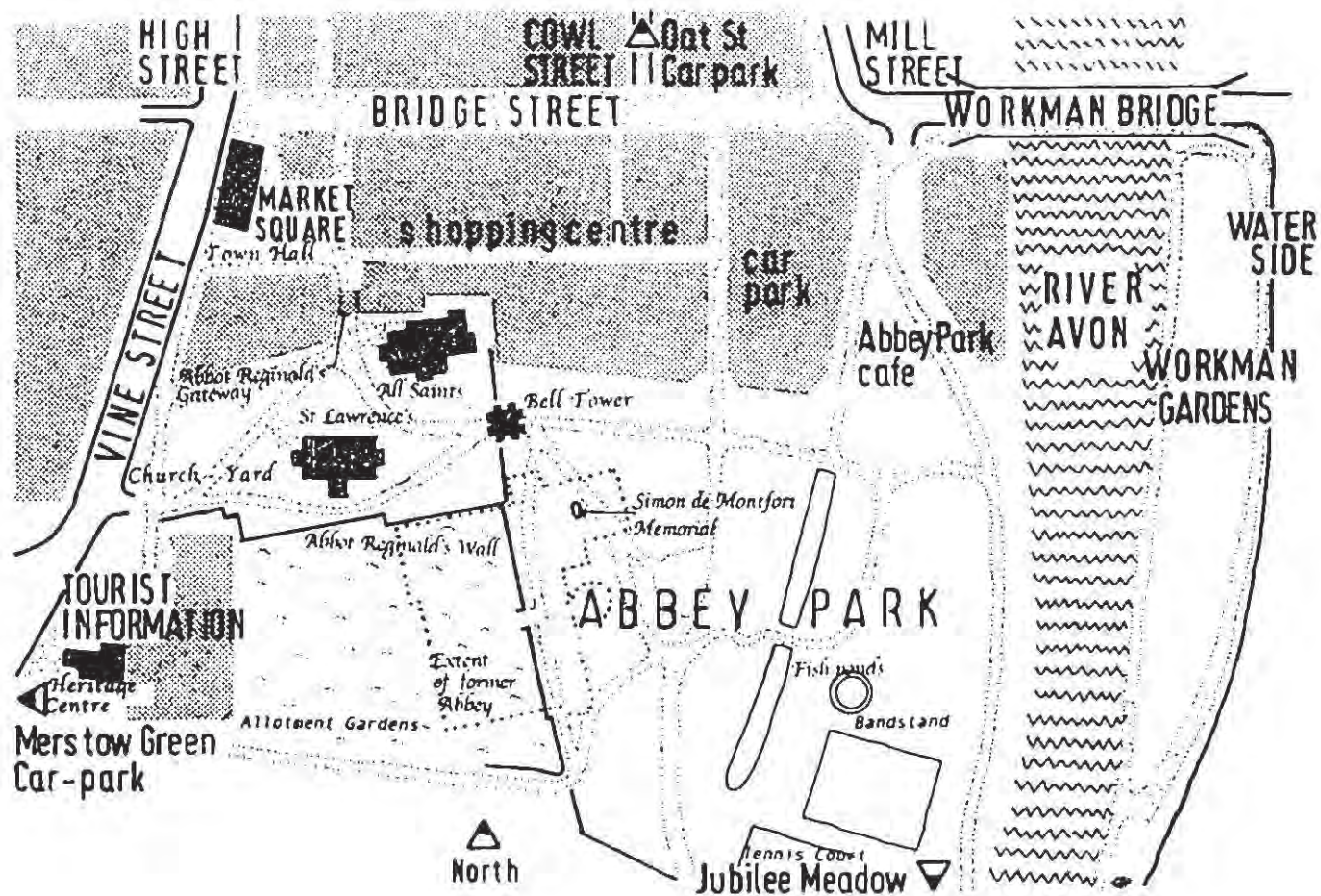
WORKMAN BRIDGE

Continue to Workman Bridge past Avonbridge House, one of the many listed buildings in the town. Until the middle of the 19th century this stretch of the river Avon was a marshy area and the river was much wider than at present. The south bank of the river was straightened and the present channel formed in 1856, when the bridge was rebuilt and the Workman Gardens created. Both the bridge and the gardens are named after Henry Workman, who was the mayor at the time and the rebuilding of the bridge was prompted by a tragic accident when a person was crushed by a wagon on the old narrow bridge.

On the Bengeworth side of the bridge there was once a castle belonging to the Earls of Warwick but this was destroyed by the Abbot's forces after constant raiding of their property and nothing remains but the street name. Also in Castle Street is the site of the old town quay, where the slipway has been restored and an information panel tells the story of the river trade which was of great importance to the town before the coming of the railways.

Return past Avonbridge House and turn left into Abbey Park.

THE RIVER BANK You are now standing in the attractively planted and landscaped Abbey Park. An information panel records that the pool and sunken garden were the location of the Abbey's fish ponds.





The Bell Tower

THE ABBEY Evesham used to be on the edge of the Royal Forest of Feckenham and legend says that in this woodland a swineherd named Eof saw a vision of the Virgin Mary. Ecgwin, Bishop of Worcester subsequently also saw the vision and persuaded Ethelred, King of Mercia, to endow an abbey after his recent conversion to Christianity. Evesham Abbey was founded in 700 AD with Ecgwin as the first abbot.

The foundations of the Abbey have been marked out in Abbey Park and interpretation panels show the Abbey as it is thought to have been immediately before the dissolution. The Simon de Montfort stone marks the site of the high altar and you must imagine an Abbey church larger than Gloucester cathedral standing high on the river terrace. After the dissolution in 1540 the buildings became a quarry from which many new buildings in Evesham were constructed. The cloister arch is the remnant of the passage between the chapter house and the cloister garth. Remnants of the walls have been repaired and the land that they enclosed has been opened up to public access.

THE BELL TOWER is a fine example of Perpendicular Gothic architecture. When it was built, shortly before the Abbey was dissolved, it was overshadowed by the tower of the Abbey church, but now that the Abbey has gone its 34 metres make it a notable landmark. The south side is undecorated as it was originally hidden by the transept of the Abbey church. The 14 bells are thought to be among the best half dozen rings in the world. The restored carillon can also be heard at intervals during the day.



All Saints Church

THE BATTLE OF EVESHAM was fought on 4th August 1265 on Greenhill just north of the town. Simon de Montfort's army had spent the night in the Abbey with their hostage, King Henry III. Simon expected to be joined by his son's army. Troops seen in the morning proved to be royalists under Prince Edward who had beaten young Simon at Kenilworth. De Montfort was caught in the U bend of the river and could only try to fight his way out. The battle was bitter with unusually high casualties, especially among de Montfort's knights. Simon's mutilated body was buried by the monks near their high altar where the memorial stone now stands. Pilgrims soon started to come to his tomb and miraculous cures were reported. Simon's influence continues to this day in the gradual acceptance that a King's power was not absolute.

continue into

THE CHURCHYARD The wall to your left was part of the north wall of the abbey church, which did not survive the dissolution. Evesham already had two parish churches, which have shared this precinct for centuries. St Lawrence's (13th century), to your left, is now officially redundant but is kept open. Enter All Saint's (12th century onwards), to your right through the Tudor porch with royal emblems over the entrance and a painted oak ceiling boss, formerly in the Abbey. Both churches have chantry chapels with fine vaulting.

Exiting the church look at



Abbot Reginald's Gateway

ABBOT REGINALD'S GATEWAY It can be seen that the Norman ground level was at least a metre below the present level, which explains why you have to walk down steps to enter All Saints Church. The Walker Hall, just through the archway to the left, is of the Tudor period, as is the half-timbered building opposite the church, which was once the vicarage. Walk diagonally across the churchyard through the avenues of trees. Beyond the church gate posts, on the left are a milestone, the stocks, Abbey Gate house and the Almonry Heritage Centre

THE MILESTONE This stone is thought to have stood originally at the top of Greenhill where the old Worcester to London road crossed the Evesham to Birmingham road. When found it was in a very neglected condition and an expert on carved inscriptions felt the letters with his fingertips in order to decipher them. The style of the lettering dates back to around 1730, making the milestone nearly 300 years old. The inscription has been expertly re-cut.

THE STOCKS are under a Cotswold slate roof and were brought here from the Town Hall.

ABBEY GATE HOUSE was built in the 18th century from part of the Abbey ruins and is the site of the main Abbey gate. You are now facing the Almonry Heritage Centre, your starting point.

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Map of the Abbey Park by G. Farquhar

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