

Chesham – Town Centre

Distance: 1 mile

Chesham Walks

13

Start Point – The Clock Tower, Market Square, Chesham HP5 1HG

Introduction

At first sight Chesham town centre is not unlike many other High Streets with its mixture of national chain stores and independent shops – with a higher proportion of the latter than usual. Though if you stand in the street and look above the shop fronts you can see that these are built into buildings of character and history. This walk highlights the history of not only the buildings but also of the various owners of the past and some of the unusual uses that the buildings have been put to. Imbibe the history and enjoy today's goods and refreshments.



MARKET SQUARE

The Market Square was laid out in 1257 after Henry III granted a Royal Charter for a market. The Earl of Oxford started a three day market once a year for servants and labourers. It was also the site

of a weekly cattle market. Many of the businesses here were originally houses adapted to become shops. The Vale Brook, a feeder to the River Chess, is culverted underneath the Market Square. It has been planned to open up the culvert.



The Clock Tower

The tower marks the site of the old market hall. Originally built in 1679, it was replaced by a Georgian one in 1856. Over the years it was used for various purposes: shops, a corn exchange, a magistrate's court, a fire station and a cinema, but it eventually fell into decay and was demolished in 1965. The clock tower was rebuilt in 1992 with the old clock, and the bell was reinstalled in 2014 to commemorate the start of WW1.

SHOPS & PUBS

Looking around the square:



No. 7 JPS Stationers - In

1900 there were 80 pubs for a population of 8000! In Market Square there were six within 50 yards. This was the site of the Bull and Butcher which later became Chesham's first Post Office. For over one hundred years it has been a stationers.

Lewins Yard - Note the pudding stones built into the corner base of the cobbled yard. These stones look like modern concrete but are a natural result of the Ice Age.

No. 13 Klass Kuts – The big support beams show the building's medieval origins.



Towards Church Street – Two shops were demolished to make way for the St Mary's Way bypass. One of them, Derricks Pork Butchers, had a traditional tiled front and carcasses hung on the front rails.

No. 18 Beijing Gourmet – This was the site of the Fox and Hounds pub which closed in the mid-19th century.

No. 12 Skipton Building Society – This was the Chequers pub, first licensed in 1756. After WWII it became the headquarters of the Chesham Building Society which, until taken over by Skipton, was the oldest building society in the world.

No. 8 Red Squirrel – was the site of the Globe pub which later served as a bakehouse as well.

From the Clock Tower head towards the High Street and walk its entire length.

HIGH STREET

The High Street was originally residential, home to the wealthy and professionals people. Most shops were in Church Street.



No. 1 Discount Shop – was the site of the much lamented Crown, a coaching inn and livery stable, dating from 1579. General Wolfe was reputed to have stayed here en route to fight the French in Canada, and it was the headquarters of Parliamentary forces during the Civil War.

No. 6 Pearces Hardware – Part of this shop was Bunkers, a haberdashers, selling silk shawls and poke bonnets. The owner died while on holiday in 1876 and the shop remained as it was with the blinds down for 60 years.



Francis Yard – is the site of the 17th century Angel Inn. The yard now houses one of Chesham's cafés and entertainment venues, The Drawing Room. Directly opposite the far end of the yard is the entrance to the

Grade II listed, Botley House. Next door was a barn that was the venue in the 1960s for The Trapdoor folk club. It was accessed up a wooden staircase and through a trapdoor into the loft. Paul Simon was once paid £7 to appear accompanied by his friend Art Garfunkel.

No. 12 – Arthur Liberty, Draper, Mercer and Haberdasher, had his first shop here. In 1850 the family moved to Nottingham. His son later settled in London and opened the famous Liberty store in Regent Street.



No. 14 The George and Dragon – dates from the 15th century. In the 1790s this was a stop for the stagecoach to London which took five hours.

No. 16 Sue Ryder – this house was designed for the Rumsey family by family friend George Gilbert Scott, who is famous for the Albert Memorial, St Pancras Station and many churches and workhouses. In the 1860s he redesigned the interior of Chesham's parish church, St Mary's. In 1809 Henry Wydebore Rumsey was born here and was a doctor who wrote standard text books on public health.



No. 23 Cox the Saddler – was originally called Lacey's but has been in the Cox family for over 100 years. Once a maker of saddles and bridles.



Nos. 28-30 Darvells – in 1838 William and Sarah Darvell established their first shop in Church Street. In 1906 the business moved to its present location. During WW2 a hall was built at the rear out of wooden food crates sent from the USA. This has long since been demolished.

No. 38 Diamond Nail – used to be The Stag pub. First licensed in 1853 it had no back entrance to the stables at the rear. Horses had to be led back and forth through the pub.



No. 42 Heroes – with No. 44 is Grade II listed. It was the premises of William Butts, Chesham's first professional photographer. It was later taken over by Edwin and Walter East, and then by Mr Hobbs.



Nos. 48-52 M & Co – the current shop was built for Waitrose and opened in 1969. On the site of No.48 stood The House of Tree, a drapery business.

No. 51 Jasmine Thai Kitchen – look above the door to below the roof to see the entwined initials of the original occupants, the Tring, Aylesbury and Chesham Bank.

Station Road – was cut through into the High Street in 1889 to give access to the newly arrived Metropolitan railway station and goods yard. At the top used to be Chesham's first purpose built cinema, The Empire Picture Hall.



No. 58 Boots – used to be the site of The Lamb pub. In the 1950's and 60's it was reputed to be Chesham's 'den of iniquity'. Closed in 1974 and later demolished.

THE BROADWAY

It was originally called Pillory Green and was the location of the town's stocks. Since 1921 the town's war memorial has stood here. The Broadway was the location for many meetings, demonstrations and fairs. In 1875 a secret gathering of people in a cottage in The Broadway led to the launch of the first local co-operative society. This turned out to be the most successful retail enterprise in the town with shops opening in Germain Street, Church Street, High Street, Upper High Street and a very large premises at Broadway Court, now Lennox. The Co-op building also contained the Equity Hall which was used for many functions including a meeting place for Chesham's suffragettes.



No. 65 Savers – the site of the Chesham Palace cinema between 1914 and 1929. It then closed and reopened as The Astoria, Chesham's first talkie. It closed in 1959 to become a Co-op furniture shop.

Nos. 66-68 Caffè Nero – here stood Chesham's first brush factory, Robert Webb & Co. in 1829. Chesham at one time had a dozen brush factories large and small.

UPPER HIGH STREET

No. 77 Generals Arms – at one time one of Chesham's many boot manufacturers had a showroom here. Chesham had some 16 boot factories at one time. The pub takes its name from the local football team.



No. 79 Lloyds Bank – This was the site of the Co-op Hall which served as the town's main function rooms for many years. It was commandeered during WWII as a 'British Restaurant' to ensure the people of Chesham were well fed during those difficult days.

No. 97 to 101A – Post Office onwards – Here stood Chesham's finest department store, the Co-operatives Central Premises which opened in 1935. It heralded a golden age for the movement which lasted for decades. Sadly, changes in legislation in the 1960's meant that the retail sector became much more competitive which led to the store closing and the building being demolished in 1984.

Nos. 130 & 132 Merchant House – were two large houses owned by wealthy families. One, no.130, belonged to Mr Hepburn who owned a tannery located on the current Sainsbury's site.

No. 152 – formerly the Waggon & Horses pub. There used to be a smithy next door from where the burning embers were taken to light the pyre of Chesham's martyr Thomas Harding. Further up White Hill stood the Chesham Brewery which made use of the local spring water. It was demolished in 1960s.



Return to the Broadway and turn right towards Blucher Street.

No. 90 Brandon Court – This magnificent building used to be Brandon's furniture store.

No. 78 Broadway Baptist Church – the current building was built in 1901. One of the foundation stones commemorates the first meeting place, known as the General Baptist Chapel, built in 1712.

BLUCHER STREET



Blucher Street – was formerly Bridge Street and renamed in honour of General von Blucher who came to Wellington's aid in 1815 at the Battle of Waterloo. The street contained many old buildings and pubs, most of which were demolished to make way for the St Mary's Way bypass.

Elgiva Lane – is named after Lady Elgiva, wife of King Edwy of Wessex, who left lands in Chesham in her will in the 10th century. The local theatre is named after her. On the site of the library stood the large Reynolds boot factory employing 120 people and in 1889 making 2000 pairs of boots a week.

At the end take the pedestrian crossing over St Mary's Way into Lowndes Park. Walk up to the main avenue and turn left along it.

LOWNDES PARK

The first record of the land relates to its ownership by the Sifrewasts in the 12th Century. It was later bought by the Skottowe family who owned Bury Hill House, which once stood where the Guide Hut is now located. William Lowndes, Secretary to the Treasury, who came to Chesham in 1687, bought the land, demolished Bury Hill



House and added the land to the grounds of his mansion, the Grade II listed The Bury. In 1953 the Lowndes family gave the park to the town.



Rue de Houilles – an avenue of elm trees was first planted by the Whichcotes in the 17th Century. The avenue is now named in honour of the French twin town, Houilles. The first English National cross country race was run in 1914, finishing in the park. The town donated the silver trophy, The Chesham Challenge Cup. This race and its trophy continues each year around the country.

Near the end bear left down the path or grass to the right-hand end of the lake. Turn right through the Archena Gardens.

Archena Gardens – is dedicated to Chesham's Spanish twin town, Archena. The gardens are maintained by the Friends of Lowndes Park.

Exit the gardens into Church Street. Cross over and continue directly ahead to take the pedestrian crossing over St Mary's Way. Turn left and immediately right into the lower part of Church Street.

CHURCH STREET



No. 7 Golden Ball – was the site of the Golden Ball pub which was established in the 17th century. Its landlord for many years was Harry Wing, who ran a knackers' yard at the rear. It closed in 1985 as and is now offices.

At the end turn right into the Market Square to finish the walk.

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Route Map

This series of history walks have been produced in conjunction with Chesham Museum and their walk leaders - www.cheshammuseum.org.uk

Current Chesham Walkers are Welcome walking routes:

- 1 The Chesham Heritage Trail (2 miles)
- 2 The Chesham Outer Ring (7.5 miles)
- 3 Tylers Hill, Ley Hill and the Chess (5 miles)
- 4 Chesham Bois and the Beech Hangers (4 miles)
- 5 Chartridge 'Hills and Vales' (8 miles)
- 6 Ashley Green 'Farms, Forts and Fighters' (8.5 miles)
- 7 Little Chalfont to Chesham (6 miles)
- 8 Chorleywood to Chesham (8.5 miles)
- 9 Great Missenden to Chesham (6.1 miles)
- 10 Amersham to Chesham (4.5 miles)
- 11 Chesham – Waterside (Historical)
- 12 Chesham – Old Town (Historical)
- 13 Chesham – Town Centre (Historical)
- 14 Chesham – Thomas Harding (Historical)

Visit www.chesham.gov.uk (click on the Walkers are Welcome tab) and www.chilternsaonb.org

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