

## Windsor & Eton Heritage Walking Trail

This trail (approx 1 mile) takes you from Windsor Castle, across the Thames to Eton College and touches on a few aspects of Windsor's 1,000 year history. Please use in conjunction with the map on page 5.

Starting from the Royal Windsor Information Centre in Windsor Royal Shopping (1), walk up the hill towards Windsor Castle and turn right onto the High Street. Stop outside Barclays Bank, at the junction with Peascod Street (2).

It might seem surprising, but the town of Windsor is considerably older than the castle; it dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, with royal ownership probably from the 9<sup>th</sup>. At first Windsor was located three miles away, but moved to its current site before 1110, changing its name to 'New' Windsor. Much as Bath is a planned town of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, so New Windsor is a planned town of the 12<sup>th</sup>. Note that the castle's lower ward, the market place (the area now occupied by shops, but originally an open space) and the parish church of St John the Baptist form an aligned row, with Peascod Street completing a 'T' shaped plan. Peascod Street (literally, pea-pod street), makes reference to the area's pea fields and the favourite medieval snack of buttered peapods, probably sold on this street from the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Now, using the pedestrian crossing, cross the High Street and walk up Castle Hill, to the junction with Church Street (3).

Windsor proved to be a particularly successful new town, and although at first its market place was filled with temporary stalls on market day (Saturday), by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century these had been replaced by permanent shops, covering an area much as they do today. The medieval market place, however, was not the genteel place we see now. The streets were unpaved until the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it was dirty, with putrid air owing to its many noxious trades. To minimise inconvenience, these trades were confined to fixed areas: fish sellers occupied Fish Street, now Church Street, and likewise the town's slaughterhouses and butchers ('the shambles') were located near the present day Guildhall. The medieval

town also had a 'red light' street, behind the market place. Only the poorest lived in this vicinity.

The wealthy lived on Peascod Street, while visitors used the town's inns, first recorded in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and they continue as a feature of the town's economy. These inns had names such as The Crown or The Angel - just as pubs and hotels are named today; more than 30 existed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At this date they particularly catered for the crowds of pilgrims visiting the tomb of Henry VI in St George's Chapel, a king popularly considered a saint. His shrine was widely venerated until Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1536. Although a small town, Windsor became one of the thirtieth wealthiest in the country, owing to its many visitors.

Now walk down Castle Hill towards the High Street, along Market Street (formerly Butchers Row) and stop between Windsor's Guildhall and the crooked house (4).

The Guildhall, extended in the 1830s, is largely the structure built in 1691, designed by Sir Thomas Fitz. It replaced Windsor's first Guildhall built in c. 1360, which faced the castle gates. By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century the royal preference was for the newer palaces closer to London, such as Hampton Court or Whitehall, with the result that Windsor Castle was ignored and neglected. This was a disaster for the town, as its economy was based on the castle. The commissioning of a new Guildhall - which the town could only just afford - was an attempt to breathe new life into its economy. Although it is often noted that this building is connected with Sir Christopher Wren, there is no clear evidence to support such a claim. His son, however, did provide the statue of Prince George (consort to Queen Anne, died 1714), which occupies a niche in the eastern elevation.

The strangely leaning 18<sup>th</sup>-century Market Cross house, previously a butcher's premises, then a beer shop, but now a tea-room, demonstrates the advantages of timber framed buildings: if built of brick, it would have fallen over years ago!

Now walk down the High Street, passing the statue of Queen Victoria, presented by the town to mark her Golden Jubilee in 1887 (5). Victoria is particularly associated with Windsor because following the castle's renovation between 1820-40, it became her principal residence. The renewed presence of the royal court in Windsor brought new prosperity and, linked with the arrival of the railways in 1851, the town was largely rebuilt, accounting for its appearance today.

Passing along the massive castle walls built in 1240, you have to imagine away the windows which now pierce them, in order to appreciate their original appearance - with one exception. Just before the corner (Clewer) tower notice the small iron barred window, mid way up the wall (6) - this is the last surviving original castle window, which lights a 'sally port' tunnel beneath the High Street. This was the means of escape should the castle be sieged - it was never used, as far as we know. The Clewer tower (7) contains the bells of St George's Chapel, held within a massive timber frame, originally planned as a spire for the chapel, but never installed. It is one of the largest and finest belfries in Britain.

Follow along Thames Street, passing Windsor Theatre and cross the road at the traffic lights, to reach Windsor Bridge (8). This iron bridge was built in 1822, and replaces a succession of timber bridges which date from c.1170. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century bridges were both rare and costly. Windsor Bridge was important because it brought trade to Windsor's market, underpinning the new town's economy. River and road tolls were collected at the bridge until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and claimed by the crown until the 16<sup>th</sup>, when ownership of the bridge passed to the town.

Now pass down Eton High Street. This is the main street of the separate community of Eton, and has remained unchanged for many years. Royal processions from Westminster to Windsor passed along this road, one of the most famous being the funeral in 1537 of Jane Seymour, the third wife of Henry VIII. Notice the Tiger Garden Restaurant (9), a typical example of 15<sup>th</sup>-century timber framed architecture. Part of this building was used as an inn in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, called The Adam and Eve. Its local name 'The Cockpit' dates from 1936, making reference to a rear slaughterhouse, incorrectly thought to be a cockpit. The post-box next to the restaurant is an early example of its type, dating from 1854.

Now reach Barnes Pool Bridge (10), recorded from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, although remade in iron in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Arrive outside Eton College (11). This is one of the oldest and most famous schools in the country, founded by King Henry VI in 1440. The college buildings are amongst the earliest brick structures in the country and are of exceptional architectural importance. The college chapel contains wall paintings of late 15<sup>th</sup> century, again some of the finest in the country, a chance survival only re-discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Eton School has educated nineteen British prime ministers, including David Cameron, and both Princes William and Harry.

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# Heritage Walking Trail Map

