



AAAHS

Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society

SEVEN WALKS LOOKING AT ABINGDON'S BUILDINGS

For the past seven years the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society (AAAHS) has been responsible for the history pages on the Town Council website:

<https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/partners/history>

These pages present the history of the town through short articles on individual buildings and important figures from Abingdon's past. We continue to add new articles.

The seven town walks take you to more than 40 buildings that you can look up on the website and to articles on people associated with them.

Scroll down to one of the walks on the following pages. It gives you the route and has links to articles on some of the buildings you will see and the people associated with them.

All the walks start from the Market Place and take you back there.

WALK 1) BRIDGE STREET AND ABINGDON BRIDGE

WALK 2) THE GUILDHALL AND THE ABBEY

WALK 3) EAST ST HELEN STREET AND ST HELEN'S WHARF

WALK 4) ST HELEN'S CHURCHYARD AND WEST ST HELEN STREET

WALK 5) STERT STREET, OUR LADY AND ST EDMUND'S AND BARTON COURT

WALK 6) THE HIGH STREET, THE SQUARE AND OCK STREET

WALK 7) THE ALBERT PARK AREA

You can access a map of Abingdon [here](#).

We'd welcome your comments on these walks. Please give your feedback [here](#).

Start from the Market Place which developed from the stalls that clustered round the entrance to the early medieval Abbey. Looking east, the archway you see between St Nicolas' Church and the Guildhall was the Abbey gateway. The south side is dominated by the late 17th century County Hall, now a museum. The buildings on the north side mostly date from a 1960s redevelopment. Many of the other surrounding buildings retain their timber framing, even if refaced. The market area was originally much bigger, but over time the space was encroached on by infilling.



Start walking down Bridge Street.

The [County Hall Museum](#) is on your right. It was built in 1683 to provide a covered market space at street level and to house the Berkshire Assizes on the upper floor.



The [Guildhall](#) is on your left, a much altered and extended development of the medieval Hospital of St John. It is used by the town council.



Just past the Guildhall you will come to [The Crown and Thistle](#), a former coaching inn built in the early 17th century.



On your right you will pass the [former County Police Station](#) and then the entrance leading to the [Old Gaol](#). Both have now been developed for housing.



Continue straight on and start crossing [Abingdon Bridge](#). The main part of the bridge was built in 1416 through the initiative of a town guild. A southern extension of the bridge was financed in 1429 by Maud Hales, a wealthy local widow.



On your left, as you approach the end of the bridge you will pass [Maud Hales Terrace](#), a row of mostly 19th century cottages.



Turn back to towards the town centre. On your left, across the river, you will see the the [Old Gaol](#) on the opposite bank (from a different angle to this view). It was completed in 1812 and served as a county gaol until 1868. For much of the 20th century it belonged to the [Matthews family](#) who ran a local company of seedsmen and corn merchants and who used it as a store.

Walk back up Bridge Street to return to the Market Place.

We'd welcome your comments on this walk. Please give your feedback [here](#).

Start from the Market Place (for details see Walk 1).



Walk towards [St Nicolas' Church](#). It was built by the Abbey just outside the Abbey precinct towards the end of the 12th century to provide a place of worship for Abbey servants and tenants.



Walk towards the arch between St Nicolas' and the [Guildhall](#), a much altered and extended development of the medieval Hospital of St John. It included a school room for the Grammar School that was re-founded in 1563 by John Roysse. (It is now Abingdon School.) The gateway at the Bridge Street corner of the Guildhall was built in 1811 as the entrance to the school yard. The external staircase was built in 1958.



The late 15th century arch was once the main [Abbey Gateway](#).



As you approach the arch you will walk over the [culverted River Stert](#). You can see the relieving arch over it in the Guildhall wall starting close to the former school gateway.



Turn right into Abbey Close. The Abbey Hall, a 1964 extension to the Guildhall, is on your right. It now houses a cinema.

[Old Abbey House](#) is on your left. The present building dates from about 1780. You then pass the entrance to the Abbey Gardens which include the site of the former Abbey church.



After a short distance turn right into Checker Walk. This takes you to the three surviving buildings that belonged to [Abingdon Abbey](#).

The [Unicorn Theatre](#) was originally a domestic building but was later used as a granary. It was converted into a theatre in 1953.



The [Checker](#) dates from the 1260s and provided a chamber (later divided) on the upper floor for the Abbey treasurer, heated by a large fireplace. There was vaulted storage underneath. It was later used entirely for storage.



The [Long Gallery](#), built in 1455, would have served as a high status guest house for the Abbey. It was later used for malting and brewing.

From shortly after the Dissolution, three generations of the [Blacknall](#) family owned the Abbey site.

To return to the Market place either retrace your steps or make a detour through the Abbey Gardens where the outline of the impressively large Abbey church is marked out on the ground.

We'd welcome your comments on this walk. Please give your feedback [here](#).

Start from the Market Place (for details see Walk 1).



[East St Helen Street](#) is one of the earliest Abingdon streets dating back at least to Roman times. It starts behind the [County Hall](#) Museum and leads from the Market Place to the parish church of St Helen, both with Saxon origins.



Start walking down the street. On your left you will pass the [King's Head and Bell](#). There was an inn on this site in the mid-16th century. The present building is mostly 18th century but was re-fronted in 1907.



[No. 20](#), also known as Twickenham House, dates from 1756. It is one of the three grand houses built in Abingdon by the [Tomkins](#) family, wealthy maltsters and prominent local Baptists.



[No. 26](#), built in 1431, is the most complete surviving medieval house in Abingdon. After falling into disrepair it was restored in the 1950s by the Abingdon historian [Agnes Baker](#). Note the 15th century window on the side of the right hand gable.



[No. 28](#), also known as Unicorn House, dates from the early 17th century. It was occupied during the 17th century by two prominent Abingdon lawyers, [Thomas Holt](#) and [Thomas Medlycott](#).



The Georgian facade of [No. 30](#), also known as St Ethelwold's, hides much earlier features and a mid-15th century rear range.



On your right is [No. 55](#). It is associated with the [Braunche family](#), prominent in the 15th and 16th centuries and still honoured by their American descendants.



When you come to the T-junction at St Helen's Church, turn left towards the river. [No. 60](#), also known as The Malthouse, is on the left. It was reconstructed in the early 20th century by the local architect [Harry Redfern](#). Earlier structures had served as a medieval dyehouse and later a malthouse



Turn right, along St Helen's Wharf towards [The Old Anchor](#) pub. The present building dates from 1884 when St Helen's Wharf was redeveloped.

Retrace your steps to return to the Market Place or, alternatively, continue with Walk 4.

We'd welcome your comments on this walk. Please give your feedback [here](#).

Start from the Market Place (for details see Walk 1). Walk down East St Helen Street to St Helen's Wharf.



From St Helen's Wharf [St Helen's Church](#) is on your right. It was built close to the confluence of the Ock and the Thames. It grew from a 13th century tower, nave and north aisle by the addition of further aisles, making it wider than it is long. The Lady Chapel has a remarkable medieval painted ceiling.



Walk along the river as far as the entrance into the churchyard next to [The Old Anchor](#) pub and enter the churchyard. [St Helen's Churchyard](#) is unique in containing three sets of almshouses.



[Long Alley](#) almshouses on the west side are the oldest and date from 1446. They were built by the Fraternity of the Holy Cross soon after it gained its charter. The thirteen rooms and central hall were accessed from an external gallery. The paintings are early 17th century and are by [Sampson Strong](#).



[Twitty's Almshouses](#) on the north side date from 1707. Charles Twitty, originally from Abingdon, left the money to build them in his will to house three men and three women.



[Brick Alley](#) almshouses on the south side date from 1718. They were built by Christ's Hospital, a major Abingdon charity, to replace much earlier almshouses on the same site and accommodated eighteen people. (The number of rooms is apparent from the windows overlooking the Wharf.)

All three sets of almshouses are still in use today though the accommodation has been modernised.



The [organ blowing chamber](#) is near Brick Alley. It was built in 1927 to house the electric fan that supplied air to the organ. The design by the Abingdon architect [J G T West](#) closely echoes that of Brick Alley.

Leave the churchyard by the archway entrance near the church tower and turn left up West St Helen Street. The area immediately to your left was once occupied by a major 19th century clothing factory owned by [John Creemer Clarke](#).



On your right you will pass [No. 48](#), one of the few surviving early houses in the street.

To return to the Market Place continue up West St Helen Street, then turn right into the High Street and continue to the County Hall.

We'd welcome your comments on this walk. Please give your feedback [here](#).

Start from the Market Place (for details see Walk 1). Walk up Stert Street.



[Stert Street](#) is one of the very early streets in Abingdon. Pre-Roman remains have been found in the area. It is named after the River Stert, a watercourse that is now culverted but originally ran along the east side of the street. The [culverted river](#) now runs under the pavement and part of the roadway on the east side of the street.



[St Nicolas' Church](#) will be on your right. It was built by the Abbey just outside the Abbey precinct towards the end of the 12th century to provide a place of worship for the Abbey's servants and tenants.



[No. 3](#), on your right, close to [St Nicolas' Church](#) and the Market Place, was originally built by Abingdon Abbey in about 1470 as part of a development just outside the precinct wall.

The blue plaque on No. 39 on your right (Masons) commemorates [John Alder](#) 'the lucky cooper' and his spectacular lottery win in 1767.

The Oxfam shop on your left was once the headquarters of the corn and coal merchants [R S Langford and Sons](#). Their name is still above the shop front.



On your left you will pass [No. 52](#) also known as The Knowl. The façade is an 18th century re-fronting of a much earlier building. It was the home and office of the architect [J G T West](#) for over 45 years from 1885.

At the T-junction turn right up the Vineyard. The name denotes the area that was once the medieval Abbey's vineyard. Hidden behind the buildings on your left is what is now the [Fitzharris Estate](#), a residential development built in the grounds of Fitzharris House, now demolished.

On your left you will pass St John's Almshouses, built in 1801 to replace the earlier building on the Guildhall site when that was taken over by the school.



The Catholic church of [Our Lady and St Edmund](#) is on the north side of the junction with the Radley Road, with the associated school buildings extending up the Oxford Road. The church, cloister and presbytery, which you can see from the Radley Road, were completed by 1865 and the first school buildings by 1862. The architects were [William Wilkinson Wardell](#) followed by George Goldie. [Sir George Bowyer](#) was the major donor.



To reach the ruins of [Barton Court](#), burnt down during the Civil War, turn right down the Radley road and right again into Audlett Drive. At the pelican crossing turn left down the footpath which soon opens into a carpark. Cross this bearing right and turn right by the notice 'Nos. 28 -45'. The ruins are in the green space to your left beyond the trees.

Retrace your steps to return to the Market Place. .

We'd welcome your comments on this walk. Please give your feedback [here](#).

Start from the Market Place (for details see Walk 1). Walk down the High Street.



On your right, at No. 15, you will pass the double gables of part of the [former Lion Hotel](#). The left hand bay has a remarkable roof structure that dates from 1291. The Lion was at one time a coaching inn and the place where traders met on market days. In the first decades of the 20th century it was run by the [Mayhead family](#).



The tall triple-gabled building at No. 19 was once the Free Library. It dates from 1895 and was designed by the local architect [J G T West](#).

Continue to The Square, an irregular area that was once the sheep market. The [former Congregational Church](#) (now a restaurant) is on the north side. It was built in 1862 and designed by J S Dodd. Next to it, on the right, are [2 and 3 The Square](#). This part of The Square was once associated with the [Pleydell](#) and [Knapp](#) families. The Barclays Bank building dates from about 1811. The gabled building on the the Bath Street corner is by [J G T West](#).



The south side of The Square, now [Regal Close](#), a residential development, was once occupied by the Regal Cinema. Earlier, it had been for three centuries the site of The Lamb, one of Abingdon's major inns.



Walk north up Bath Street. As you approach the point where the road is cut by Stratton Way, [Stratton House](#) is on your left. Samuel Westbrook built it in 1722 for the [Tomkins family](#), wealthy maltsters and prominent Baptists. It was the first of their three grand Abingdon houses.

The buildings opposite were once the home and office of [George Bowes Morland](#), a prominent citizen of Victorian Abingdon.



Return to The Square and walk down [Ock Street](#), the main route west from the town centre that became the area where manufacturing and craft industries were based. Housing expanded into courts behind the street frontage that were demolished through slum clearance in the 1940s.



On your left you will pass [No. 12](#), a late 15th century building.

[Nos. 22-28](#), known as The Clock House, was the second of the three grand houses built by the [Tomkins family](#). It dates from the 1720s and was probably also by Samuel Westbrook.

[No. 54](#), also on your left, was once Leach's printing works.



The [Baptist Church](#) and [No. 35](#), now the Church Centre, will be on your right. The church dates from 1841 when it replaced the chapel built in 1700. The architect was John Davies.

The residential development to your left along Cooper's Lane was built on the site of the former [Morland Brewery](#).



On your right you will pass [Tomkins' Almshouses](#), financed by a bequest of [Benjamin Tomkins](#) a prominent Baptist.

Further along, [Nos. 86- 92](#), built soon after 1823, will be on your left. This terrace of four houses for renting to more prosperous workers was built by Abingdon Corporation.



Retrace your steps to return to the Market Place. Or you could start Walk 7 at Conduit Road.

We'd welcome your comments on this walk. Please give your feedback [here](#)

Start from the Market Place (for details see Walk 1). Walk down the High Street and then Ock Street as far as Conduit Road.



Turn right up Conduit Road. Set into the wall of [Tomkins Almshouses](#) on your left is the Carswell fountain. It was built in 1719 in Ock Street, close to the other side of the almshouses, and water collected on the higher ground to the north was fed to it to [supply](#) this part of town. It was in use until 1874 and originally contained a tin-coated copper basin. The fountain was moved here in 1947. Carswell is an obsolete name for a watercress stream.



Continue up Conduit Road. On your left you will pass an infants' school built in 1865 and designed by the young architects Dolby and Spencer. [Trinity Church](#), on your right, was built in 1873 as the new Wesleyan Methodist church to replace an earlier smaller building in Ock Street. It was designed by the Reading-based architect W H Woodman.

Continue to the junction with Park Road. What you see ahead was open fields until 1859 and was largely in the ownership of Christ's Hospital, the major local charity. Now, across the road, you see the start of Albert Park on your left and the grounds of Abingdon School on your right. The development of this area followed a reform of Christ's Hospital's charter.

A school had been associated with the [Abbey](#). It was re-founded by John Roysse in 1563 with a schoolroom in what is now the [Guildhall](#) and moved to its present site in 1870 in buildings designed by Edwin Dolby.



Cross to Park Crescent ahead of you and continue a short distance to the [Conduit House](#) on your left. This small stone building once housed a cistern for collecting the water from one or more of the local springs. For over 150 years it fed the Ock Street Carswell fountain but it is much older than that. It had been owned by the Abbey, possibly for its own water supply.

Continue round Park Crescent with its Victorian villa residences built largely between 1860 and 1890, many designed by Dolby. The park itself is D-shaped and was laid out in the 1860s following a design competition. Continue to the entrance to the park at the top of 'D' and walk through the park to the memorial to Prince Albert, dedicated in 1863.



Continue through the park to [St Michael's Church](#) on Park Road. The church was built in 1867 at the instigation of the [Revd Nathaniel Dodson](#) to serve the growing population to the west of the town centre. The architect was G G Scott.

From the church turn left along Park Road and then left again at the junction with Victoria Road and Park Crescent. The rows of terraces on Victoria Road and the roads off it were developed at the same time as the villas around the park to provide good quality housing for 'artisans and labourers'. Turn left at Bostock Road and continue back to Conduit Road.

Retrace your steps to return to the Market Place.

We'd welcome your comments on this walk. Please give your feedback [here](#).