

Thame Historic Town Trail 2

Start and finish by Thame Museum

1 Cross into Southern Road where the Malthouse was once part of the Phoenix brewery complex and the Rising Sun was formed as a beer house from three jettied cottages in 1830. Southern Road forms the rear access to the burgage plots of the High Street, but much has been in-filled such as the row of cottages on the left hand side.

2 Continue along Southern Rd and enter **Mitchell Close** on your right. Although now a residential street, here stood the medieval Horse Fair and latterly the first Church of England school, the only remnant of which can be seen in a small section of railing embedded in the large beech tree at the end of the road.

3 The new **St Joseph's RC Church** is immediately in front. The current church replaced a smaller 1920s building in 1997.



St Joseph's Church 1920s

4 Turn left into Brook Lane and at the junction with Spring Path turn left again and soon on your right is the **Recreation Ground** that was given to the town in 1895 by trustees on behalf of the Hon. Francis Bertie.

5 Return along Spring Path to Brook Lane, and go down the sloping path where a number of springs can be seen, particularly after heavy rain. The **Spring** from which the path's name derives was said to be: "a fine pure spring of high repute for its many virtues" and was known for its particular ability to cure eye complaints. At one time known as **Court Well**, the name of the brook was corrupted from this into Cuttle.

6 On the left is **Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve** which was created in 1995. Before the bridge take the path on the left into the nature reserve. To avoid this, continue ahead and bear right into Beech Road and at the end turn left into Sycamore Drive. After approx. 80 metres turn right onto a footpath (Hackett's Lane) signposted 'Moreton'. Then, after approx 150 metres, take the path on the right into the school grounds to re-join at Point 13.

7 Keep alongside the brook and soon on your left is the Pond which was created in 1996 to give interest and a haven for pond life. There is even a pond dipping platform but please put the creatures back.

8 Further on, the path takes you by the **sedge beds**, where in this fragile environment you may see marsh marigolds or rare birds like the grasshopper warbler. To avoid the steps at Point 11 continue straight on along the path until you reach the Phoenix Trail then turn right.

9 Cross the **wooden bridge** which was designed by students from the local college. The bridge is popular for Pooh sticks. Turn left after the bridge.



10 Continue through the meadow and after the path junction, on your right is Cox's Wood. This was newly planted in 1995 with native species of oak, alder, birch, hornbeam, field maple and cherry. It is now a particularly good habitat for nesting birds, voles and shrews.

11 A short flight of steps takes you onto the line of the old railway, now the Phoenix Trail (Sustrans Route 57). Turn right and proceed for approx. 200 metres admiring the view of the Chilterns to your left.



12 Follow the path to the right through the barrier into **Hackett's Lane**. This ancient way was once part of a main route to / from the Chilterns and has recently been revived as a link to Sustrans Route 57. Half way along Hackett's Lane, take the path on the left into the school grounds.

13 A short walk will bring you to the Thame Leisure Centre where refreshments may be obtained at the Café. On the right is the new **Lord Williams's School** built in 1879 to replace the building in Church Road. This popular school is now one of the largest in Oxfordshire with over 2000 pupils. The original building is still in use as the administration block which can best be seen from the Oxford Road (Point 14).



14 Follow the path through the car park, and emerge onto the busy Oxford Road and turn right towards the town. **Town Farm** farmhouse (No. 8) on the left has its origins as a 15th C open hall house with a central hearth; the large chimney stack was added in the 17th C to form a classic 'lobby entry' house.



18 Further along, facing the High Street is **Striblehills**, one of the grandest of Priestend's yeoman farm houses. Its very striking location suits the mature mix of timber and brick. The current façade dates from 1647 and has recently been lovingly restored. Follow the wall on the left.

19 The eye-catching gateway on the left dating from the 1930s leads into the **Prebendal**. The Prebendal is a medieval ecclesiastical structure which housed the Bishop's representative. The building has been through many private owners including Robin Gibb of Bee Gee fame. Opposite the gateway, in the churchyard, is a small memorial stone to **Andy Gibb** who died in 1988 aged 30, whilst staying at the Prebendal.



20 Continue along the old Long Crendon road where the **Vicarage** is on the right. Here the antiquary Anthony Wood stayed as a boy during the Civil War. He excitedly records that in January 1644 about 80 royalist horsemen led by Col. Blagge were pursued along this road by 200 parliamentarians firing after them.

21 Further on, **the long low bridges** over the Thame valley once led traffic to Long Crendon, but now it is a quiet stroll to the county boundary: take care not to stray too far into Buckinghamshire! The huge flood plain has provided ideal grazing land for many centuries and it can be a delight to see swans and other wildlife on the river. Note the water level scale on the first bridge (metres above sea level).



Close to here, on the river bank, the **Thame Hoard** of ten silver coins and five rings was discovered in 1940. The main ring has been described as the finest medieval ring in England and is often on display in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. (There is a full description of the hoard in Thame Museum).



15 Continue along Oxford Road to the **bridge over Cuttle Brook**. The bridge replaced the ford that, whilst picturesque, was no longer practicable, although at times of flood this can still become a ford. Cross the busy Oxford Road at this point.



16 A little way up on the left are the octagonal gate houses of the **Thame Union Workhouse**. The workhouse was built in 1836 to a design by Witney-born George Wilkinson. It was designed to accommodate 350 people and cost around £7,000. When the workhouse closed in 1931 the building soon became home to Rycotewood College which had a high reputation for training young furniture makers and agricultural engineers. After college amalgamations in 2004 the building was converted for housing.

17 Opposite the gate houses, **No 2 Priestend** is a fine example of a timber box framed building. Many other buildings of the medieval farm houses can still be seen in this area.

Introduction

Thame (or Tame) originated as a Saxon settlement at a crossing of the River Thame and is mentioned in the Domesday Book. After the Norman Conquest it came under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Lincoln and in the 12th C he founded the “new” market town of Thame away from the river and the church and in the area we now recognise as the town centre. In 1215 he diverted the road from Aylesbury to Oxford so that it ran through his new town.

In medieval times farm land was distributed in piecemeal plots within the large field system and the farms were located in settlements. The “Enclosure Award” of 1826 changed the style of farming with new farms built away from the towns and villages to take advantage of the consolidated allotments of land. In Priestend and Old Thame many of the medieval farm buildings can still be seen.

This historic trail route explores the area of Priestend and Old Thame taking in the River Thame and Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve. It can be used as a stand alone walk or included in parts to extend the circular walk of Historic Town Trail Route 1.



Walk of approx 1¼ hours, a little shorter if you avoid the nature reserve. Start and finish by Thame Museum, 79 High Street.

Limited ability access

The walk is mostly on level pavements with good access for prams and wheelchairs. The pathway at Spring Path slopes slightly but is manageable with care. The paths in the nature reserve may be muddy and unsuitable for wheels. To avoid this use the diversion at Point 6

22 Return to the church and take the track to the left, keeping the church on your right. Prior to the planned town of New Thame the main traffic route from Aylesbury to Oxford followed this path and then round by the church into Priestend. This is the road that the Bishop of Lincoln closed in 1215.

23 Here two Georgian houses, **Lashlake House and Jasmine Cottage**, grace this private road and occupy a lovely spot overlooking the cricket ground. They are well proportioned and date from the mid 18th C.

24 At the end of the track turn right but note the entrance to **Pearce's Woolstaplers**. Wool stapling (or trading) has been part of Thame's heritage since medieval times. Until recently these warehouses were full of great stacks of wool which were shipped to London by train. Sadly the trade is no longer carried out from here.



25 Take the Aylesbury Road back towards town and on the left, **Gable Cottage, Godbegot and Regency Cottage** form a lovely trio of ancient buildings set in an idyllic country scene opposite the cricket ground. Godbegot was much restored by the theatrical designer Herbert Norris in the 1930s.

26 Take in the view of **St Mary's Church** across the cricket ground. The field was once sheep grazing and until the 1960s was part of Court Farm, the buildings of which (incl. the small dovecote) can be seen to the left of the church.



27 At the roundabout turn into **Bell Lane** with the thatched Corner Close Cottage on the right and another farm complex across the road. Beyond Bell Close the part thatched Brereton merits a glance and a little further, on the left, is the secluded timber framed building (Nº 12) once known locally as the Hovell, but now lovingly restored.

28 Before Bell Lane meets the High Street the modern office complex on the right sits where the bus garage used to be. The pleasing **Jacob House** is probably all that remains of the row of cottages which made this part of the road very narrow and more appropriate to its then name of **Old Town Lane**. The town houses at **Nos 81, 81a & 82** are splendid and add grace to this corner of the town.

29 At the corner of the High Street, Nº 80 was once the 17th C **One Bell Inn** from which Bell Lane takes its name. Next door is a neat complex of residential buildings now called **The Old Maltings**. In the 19th C these buildings housed the malting and brew houses of the Phoenix Brewery.



30 Finish your walk with a visit to **Thame Museum**. The County Court was built from local brick in 1861 and 120 years later was altered to accommodate the Magistrates Court. It was purchased by the Town Council in 2005 to house the much acclaimed museum.



Thame

• OXFORDSHIRE •

Historic Town Trail 2



A 2½ mile walk of approximately 1¾ hours exploring the older areas of the town and the nature reserve

Local Information



This historic market town of Thame is a great place to shop and a delightful area where you can enjoy good food and drink in one of the many pubs, cafes and restaurants.

i For information about places to eat, accommodation and attractions visit Thame Information Centre (Mon - Fri) in the Town Hall. Tel: 01844 212833 or go to www.visitsouthoxfordshire.co.uk

Markets

Weekly Market - every Tuesday
Farmers' Market - second Tuesday of each month
Cattle Market - every Wednesday and Friday



P **Long stay car parks** are shown on the map - please look at the parking signs for restrictions

Bicycles - several places to park and secure your bike

WC **Public Conveniences** are located at Upper High Street and the Cattle Market.

30 **Thame Museum** in the High Street is certainly worth a visit and it also provides a lot of local information. Open Tues, Wed and Sat (10 - 4), Sun (12 - 4)

This is the second of a series of walks around historic Thame.

Cover picture: Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve
This leaflet is printed on FSC certified paper

How to get here



By bus
Thame is on the 280 service between Oxford and Aylesbury. It passes by Haddenham and Thame Parkway station. The 280 runs half-hourly during Mon - Sat daytimes. Less frequent at other times. The Arriva Line 40 is a Mon - Sat daytime service from High Wycombe via Stokenchurch and Chinnor. Traveline 0871 200 2233 or visit www.traveline.org.uk

By train
Thame is a short bus (280) or taxi ride away from Haddenham and Thame Parkway which is on the Chiltern Line between Marylebone and Birmingham Snow Hill. Train information: call 0845 7484950 or visit www.nationalrail.co.uk

By car
From the north leave M40 at junction 8a, or from the south at junction 6. Follow signs to Thame. There is ample parking available in the town.

By bicycle
The Phoenix Trail between Princes Risborough and Thame is part of National Cycle Network Route 57 which continues to Oxford.

This leaflet has been produced by 21st Century Thame with the support of South Oxfordshire District Council

