TownTrail

Willis Museum Market Place George Willis’s Shop Laarsen’s Pub
Lesser Market Haymarket Theatre The Church Stone Barclays
Bank Zizzi’s Natwest Bank 13 London Street United Reformed
Church Mark Lane 26 & 28-30 London Street Thomas Burberry
Deane’s Almshouses The Triumphal Gates Pages Old Almshouses
Goldings and the War Memorial Park War Memorial and Bandstand
All Saints’ Church Fairfields School May’s Bounty Cricket Ground
The Wheatsheaf Pub Innovation Court Joice’s Yard London Street /
Winchester Street 21 Upper Church Street Carved Panels Blue Coat
Boy Statue Church Street Methodist Chapel St Michael’s Church
Church Cottage 8 Lower Church Street Chute House Entry to Festival
Place The Anvil Holy Ghost Chapel Ruins South View Cemetery
Cemetery Lodge Sailing by Stars Railway Station L’arc sculpture
Festival Place and Eastrop Link Eastrop Park
Introduction

Welcome to the Basingstoke Town Trail - a self-guided walk of the town centre starting in Basingstoke's 800-year old Market Place. As you follow the trail you will discover more about the town's history, from Domesday through to the modern day.

Explore the architectural features of many of the town’s buildings - and look behind the facades. Discover some of the town’s more famous residents - and find out about some of those who passed through.

Take the opportunity to learn more about Basingstoke’s town centre and how it has developed.

The full walk lasts approximately 90 minutes, although this can be followed in smaller sections.

The Trail has been researched and written by the Basingstoke Heritage Society, with support from Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.

Find out more about the society at www.bas-herit-soc.org/

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Since the 14th century a Mote Hall has been sited in Market Place, at the top of Church Street. It used to stand just east of what is now Lloyds Bank. It was rebuilt in 1657, and the present building dates from 1832. This has served as the Town Hall, Corn Exchange and Market House. The town’s magistrates used to sit here, and dances were held in the large room upstairs. It ceased to be the Town Hall in 1981 when the Civic Offices were built. Since 1984 it has been home to the Willis Museum. The building had a clock tower, the latest one being erected in 1887. It was donated by John May (Mayor and local brewer) to celebrate Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee, and was removed in 1961.

A market has been held here since at least the 13th century – probably earlier, as one is mentioned in the Domesday Book. In 1214 King John ordered that the market should be held on a Wednesday, and it has been so ever since. The ground floor of the former Town Hall (now the Willis Museum) was open to the front with pillars, which are still visible. This provided a covered area, which would have been used by people selling cheese, milk or meat. It was enclosed after 1864.

George Willis (1878-1970) had a watch-repair, clock and jewellery business on this site. He had a keen academic interest in botany and archaeology, and his collection formed the basis of the museum bearing his name. He was Honorary Curator of the museum for many years, and became the first Freeman of the Borough in 1954. Milestones Museum has a replica of Willis’s shop, with the original frontage, as shown above.
Known as ‘The Feathers’ since at least 1800, this was one of the town’s many coaching inns, dating in part from the 16th century. It is of timber-framed jettied construction with restorations. A china punch bowl (shown below), believed to have been used by a Jacobite club that met here, is on display in the Willis Museum.

Erected in 1864, it has a highly decorated scheme of stucco moulded fruit to link the newly built Corn Exchange with the contemporary enclosing of the open front of the Town Hall. A drinking fountain, set into the facade here, was moved from the alley linking Wote Street with Church Street.

This was built in 1864 to re-house the town’s Corn Market, which was previously held beneath the Town Hall, for local farmers to buy and sell crops. In 1951, the building became the Haymarket Theatre, having once housed the town’s first cinema. Cast iron pillars by Wallis and Steevens can be seen in the lower ground floor. Wote Street was known as ‘Mote Street,’ but by the 18th and early 19th centuries, was called ‘Oat Street’. The stained glass canopy over the main entrance was commissioned from artists Sasha Ward and Alan Dawson and installed in 1993.
This sculpture by Michael Pegler commemorates the site of the church of the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion, (Emmanuel Church), which stood here from 1802 until 1969.

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A plaque on Barclays Bank, opposite the Willis Museum, notes the site of the Assembly Rooms where Jane Austen (1775-1817) is believed to have attended dances when she lived at Steventon.

Jane and her sister, Cassandra, attended dances in the 1657 Mote Hall, just to the east of where Lloyds Bank now stands.

Designed by F. Chancellor in 1864, in the Italian palazzo style, this rather grand design is typical of bank buildings of the period.

One of the town’s coaching inns, the Exeter Post coach stopped here at 11 o’clock each night. The return was at 3 o’clock in the morning. It dates from the 15th century and was known as the ‘Hole in the Wall’. It had its own well and extensive cellars. For many years the building was known as ‘The George’ as shown below.

Formerly ‘The George’ Pub, 1 London Street

Market Place, site of former Angel Inn

Formerly ‘The George’ Pub, 1 London Street

Designed by F. Chancellor in 1864, in the Italian palazzo style, this rather grand design is typical of bank buildings of the period.
The plaque on this building notes the site of the Falcon Inn. Oliver Cromwell stayed here during the final days of the siege of Basing House, which fell on 14th October 1645. Basing House was a royalist stronghold and had been under a long siege. After the surrender, John Paulet, Marquis of Winchester, was stripped of his finery and held prisoner in the Bell Inn cellars (on the site of 6 and 8 London Street) before being sent to the Tower of London. Architect Inigo Jones was also held prisoner here after the siege.

This building dates from 1800. A plaque notes that John Curwen (who devised the tonic sol-fa method of teaching music - doh, ray, me etc) was minister here from 1838-1841. It is said that his efforts to teach children to sing and read music inspired him to develop this method. By this means, many were able to learn to sight read music accurately. A sculpture in front of the church, by Mike Smith, is titled ‘The Family’.

Almost opposite the Red Lion, this small lane was the site of a forge and smithy. From 1890 to 1967 the town’s police station was here.

The first floor of no. 26 contains substantial remains of a 3-bay timber-framed dwelling of about 1500, but the original jetty is missing. A property opposite of similar date still retains its jetty and has unusual mathematical tiles added to give the impression of brickwork. Nos. 28-30 has significant remains of a building of the 14th century and is the earliest surviving timber framing in the town.
Thomas Burberry

This building, which dates from 1892, was the showroom fronting one of several Burberry workshops in the town. Burberry established his business in Basingstoke in 1856 in Winchester Street, using a revolutionary technique to make garments. He had previously been apprenticed to a small country draper, and noticed that the linen smocks worn by the shepherds and farmers were, as a result of the lanolin absorbed from handling the sheep, windproof and waterproof. They were also cool in summer and warm in winter. He patented his cloth in 1888. The cloth was used to make army uniforms, as well as worn by explorers. One tent made of gabardine was left at the South Pole by Amundsen. King Edward VII referred to his ‘Burberry’, which made the product as well known as it is today.

Deane’s Almshouses

A plaque in the centre of these eight almshouses explains that they were endowed in 1608 as the gift of Sir James Deane. A pig market used to take place in front of the houses, which are still managed to this day by a group of Trustees.

The Triumphal Gates

This eye-catching modern sculpture by Peter Parkinson and Richard Quinell has stood at the entrance to the old town since 1992. The 16 decorative panels depicting local stories were cast at the Morris Singer Foundry.
These former almshouses were built in 1930. The original almshouses were erected in 1802 in Hackwood Road by Joseph Page. They provided housing for poor men and women belonging to “the congregation of protestant dissenters of the independent persuasion of Calvinistical principles, meeting at the chapel or meeting-house in London Street.”

This house, together with the houses next to it – numbers 3 and 5 London Road, date from about 1600, and were modernised in the 18th century. The two Venetian windows on London Road were added at this time. In about 1800, the main entrance was moved to its present location. A form of imitation brickwork, called ‘mathematical tiles’, was used to save money. By tapping the ‘bricks’ around the former London Road entrance, the mathematical tiles can be identified, as they sound hollow. Goldings contains some classical painted panels in the style of Robert Adam. In 1919 Thomas Burberry bought the house and park and held it for the town as a war memorial. The park contains a concealed ditch or ‘ha-ha’, which allowed the landscape to be enjoyed without the need for fences to keep animals away from the house. The Register Office now uses this house for marriage and civil ceremonies.

A winged Victory tops this fine war memorial by L.F.Roslyn which was erected in 1923 near the London Road entrance, on a plinth of Portland stone. Go through the park gateway and follow the path round to the right. The bandstand was a gift to the town in 1902 from brewer John May, and was previously in Fairfields Recreation Ground. In 1921 it was moved to the Park where it stood alongside tennis courts. In 2001 the parkland was restored to recall its 18th century appearance, and the bandstand moved to the Festival of Britain Gates entrance in Hackwood Road. Leave the park by these gates, cross the road and continue along Southern Road.
This fine building of Bath stone was designed in 1915 by Temple Moore (1856-1920), the last great architect of the Victorian Gothic period. He was articled to architect George Gilbert Scott Junior, and influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement. The bells were donated by John May - nine instead of the customary eight. A tenth bell was added in 2015 to mark the centenary of the church. The church houses a ‘Head of Christ’ in bronze, by Dame Elisabeth Frink, installed in 1986, and stained glass.

The Education Act of 1870 called for the provision of free elementary education for all children. This was the town’s elementary school from 1888, managed by a board of elected members. George Willis was among its first pupils. John Arlott attended this school from 1919-1925.

The Wheatsheaf was a coaching inn. In an adjacent field the town’s Michaelmas hiring fair was held, where men and women sought employment for the coming season. A connection with the Officers’ Mess of the 1st Airlanding Brigade and D-Day is explained in a blue plaque on the building. Winton House opposite is a fine example of a restored late Georgian town house of five bays, with an impressive portico of two pairs of Tuscan columns. Brinkletts farmhouse survives at 15 Winchester Road.
The life size bronze sculpture entitled ‘Father and Child’ by Diana Thomson was commissioned during the 1981 Year of the Family.

The name derives from John Joice, who started a carriage works here in 1880, which later built and repaired car bodies.

This was originally the coaching entrance to the Old Crown Inn. George Whitefield (1714-1770), a dissenting Anglican like John and Charles Wesley, is known to have preached here in 1739. The name derives from John Joice, who started a carriage works here in 1880, which later built and repaired car bodies.

Narrow, roofed alleyways were ancient pedestrian ways in and out of the town. Jacob’s and Caston’s Alley are examples, as is that next to number 17 Winchester Street, which is on the route of an ancient path from St Michael’s Church to Winslade (about two miles away). An inn called “The Maidenhead” stood here in the 16th century. In the 19th century it became a bank, and the town’s crest can be seen in the gable. On or near here, stood the house of Mr Kingsmill, where Catherine of Aragon lodged overnight on her way to meet her future husband, Prince Arthur, at Dogmersfield Park in November 1501. She was betrothed to Arthur, who died the following year. In 1509 she married his younger brother, to become the first of Henry VIII’s six wives.
This former inn, in existence by the early 18th century, still shows internal evidence of its original timber framing, and has an interesting carved wooden fire surround from about 1600. It was formerly known as ‘The Black Boy’ and later ‘The Hop Leaf’. The Black Boy sign was removed from the pub when the name was changed, and can be seen in the Willis Museum.

This work of Richard Kindersley dates from 1992 and refers to Basingstoke’s twin towns in Europe. One of the panels contains an analammetic dial. In this type of interactive dial the person reading the time acts as the gnomon. The person stands at a particular place to read the time dependent on the month of the year.

The representation of a Blue Coat scholar was put here by the Basingstoke Heritage Society in 1994. It is on the site of the Blue Coat School, founded by Richard Aldworth in 1646. He left money to the town, his mother’s birthplace, which is still used today to benefit those in need.

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A plaque in the floor on the pavement near the entrance to Festival Place marks the site of this church. It was damaged by bombs in the Second World War, rebuilt, and finally demolished in the 1960s’ town development, as shown above.
St Michael’s Church

According to the Domesday survey of 1086, the church was held by Walter, Bishop of Hereford, before the Norman Conquest. Afterwards it was given to the Abbey of Mont St-Michel in Normandy. The chancel is the oldest part of the building and was largely rebuilt in 1464. The late perpendicular style nave and aisles were completed about 1520, and the porch added in 1539. A recess above this door contains the remains of a sculptured group of the Annunciation, damaged either at the Reformation or during the Civil War. During the siege of Basing House, horses were stabled in the church.

Church Cottage

Opposite the west door of St Michael’s Church is the town’s most important surviving timber-framed house. The ailed hall, known as the “barn”, shows evidence of former agricultural or industrial use, possibly dyeing or brewing. Excavations have shown that water was diverted from the River Loddon to pass underneath. From 1865 the building housed the infant children of the National School, a charity school run by the Church of England before schooling became compulsory after the 1870 Education Act. On the wall outside can be seen the marks made by the slate pencils of children as they sharpened them against the brickwork.

Lower Church Street

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Church Square

Going north down Church Street this house dates from the reign of James I (1603-25). The north gable end shows rare decorated brickwork. This was the home of John Ring, Cabinet Maker and Auctioneer. In 1794 the Reverend George Austen bought from John Ring ‘a small mahogany writing desk with a long drawer and glass ink stand compleat’ as a gift for his daughter, Jane.
The gatepost of Chute House (the former Rectory) has a plaque to poet Thomas Warton, (1728-1790). He grew up here, and became Poet Laureate in 1785. His father, the Reverend Thomas Warton, was Rector of Basingstoke from 1723 to 1746 and had been an Oxford Professor of poetry – a chair to which both father and son were appointed. The River Loddon runs through the rectory gardens, under Church Street, and emerges to the east in Eastrop Park. In 1777 Warton wrote a poem to the River Loddon, describing it as his ‘sweet native stream’. Chute House is named after the Venerable Anthony W Chute, Vicar from 1936 to 1958, whose brother Charles Chute lived at The Vyne, Sherborne St John.

Across the road, near the steps leading up to Festival Place, is a plaque to Walter de Merton, a native of Basingstoke. Walter founded the hospital of St Mary and St John near this site, between 1240 and 1250, ‘for the support of the ministers of the altar of God, whose strength is failing, and the wayfaring poor of Christ’. Until the 1960s the site housed St John’s Church of England School. Walter de Merton became Bishop of Rochester and was virtual regent for King Henry III when the King was out of England. He was educated at Merton Priory and founded Merton College, Oxford (1262-74). He is buried in Rochester Cathedral and his tomb is shown here.
South View Cemetery

A plaque on the northern entrance to South View Cemetery describes the burial alive in 1674 of Mrs Blunden, wife of a local maltster. She was reputed to have taken poppy-water (opium) and, “being insensible”, was taken for dead, and buried. Schoolboys heard noises from her grave and she was exhumed, but too late! The town was fined £200 by Parliament for this negligence - a very large sum of money for the time. Another plaque records that Gilbert White (1720-1793), author of the ‘Natural History of Selborne’ (1789), played here during his schooldays. He wrote how the schoolboys plotted to blow up the ruins, setting an explosive charge, which brought down some masonry. He may have attended the grammar school here or, more probably, have taken his lessons at the Rectory with Thomas Warton and his brother Joseph. First World War Victoria Cross holder, Aidan Liddell is buried here.
Cemetery Lodge, built in Victorian Gothic style at the Chapel Hill entrance, was the birthplace of John Arlott, (1914-1991), cricket commentator, poet and broadcaster. His father was the cemetery keeper here. Re-trace your steps across the graveyard, and go under the railway bridge or through the subway to the Station entrance.

Just below the station you can see this sculpture of figures in a boat. Sculpted by Sarah Tombs, this was installed in 1990.

Opened in 1839, the line ran from London, and from 1840 on to Southampton. There was a junction with a line from Reading in the broad-gauge of Brunel's Great Western Railway of 1848. A plaque in the Information Point on platforms 2-3 notes the centenary anniversary of the Basingstoke to Alton Light Railway (the first authorised under the Light Railways Act of 1896). This was unique in that the lines were re-laid after World War I, having been removed to France. Two films were made on the line – ‘The Wrecker,’ near Lasham in 1929, and ‘Oh Mr Porter’, starring Will Hay, at Cliddestone Station in 1937. Branch lines ran into Park Prewett hospital, used as a military hospital in World War I, and to Thornycroft’s factory in Worting Road.
‘L’arc’ sculpture To the left, near the landmark yellow flats (Crown Heights), is ‘L’arc’, by David Annand. This work of 1999 seems to evoke the town’s industrial past, much of which was located nearby. Pass through Crown Heights Plaza, cross the pedestrian bridge over Churchill Way and descend into the bus station. Keep straight ahead for Festival Square. The entrance to the shopping area is on your right.

Alençon Link

Festival Place and Eastrop Link

Opened in 2002, Festival Place covers land once occupied by the wharf of the Basingstoke Canal. Art work includes representations in ceramic tiles of the Loddon Lily, light effects in neon and other designed works by various artists. Head towards the cinema, past the amphitheatre, and under the road to Eastrop Link, where the fountains are. The Basingstoke Canal passed close by here, and this is commemorated with a plaque. There are also representations of tokens that were paid to navvies when coin was in short supply during the Napoleonic Wars. The park is ahead, where the River Loddon re-emerges.

Eastrop Park

This park was provided for the town during the 1960s re-development. The River Loddon runs through it, and the route of the Basingstoke Canal can be seen, as the canal hedgerow survives. There is a footpath tracing the approximate line of the canal to Old Basing.
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