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Highbridge Heritage Trail

20th Anniversary Edition 2022



A WALK THROUGH THE HISTORIC MARKET
TOWN OF HIGHBRIDGE



1st Edition produced in 2002 by Councillor Mrs Joyce Beard
with the aid of a Millennium Award

1. OLD TOWN HALL this was erected in 1885 by the Highbridge Market House Company Limited a spacious building capable of seating 600 persons. It was in this building that the first Somerset County Council meetings were held in 1894. A commemorative oak table in room 1, was presented by S.C.C. on the event of their centenary coinciding with the completion of the new Community Hall 1994, some eight years after demolition of the Town Hall building by Sedgemoor District Council in 1984. The Community Hall is used extensively by many groups. Dance groups particularly, come from other areas because of the superb wooden floor and convenient position being near the railway station, bus stop and large municipal car park. The Hall is registered as a Charity and run by an elected management committee which holds monthly meetings

2. OLD MARKET SQUARE during the late 19th and early 20th centuries this area between the Cooper's Arms and the old Town Hall was used for trading and a regular street market was held for the selling of boots, clothes, fish and furniture. It was also a general place of assembly, for meetings and parades etc. Recently a local Farmers' Market has been established in the Community Hall, monthly on the first Fridays.

3. THE RAILWAY HOTEL was well established in the late 19th century and was used as a regular meeting place for many societies including the Masonic Lodge. Lawrence of Arabia met Stevens (landlord of the Hotel in the 1930's), whilst serving in the first World War, and was a frequent visitor. A local resident saw Thomas Lawrence coming away from the Hotel prior to his mysterious accident on his motor bike on his way home to Poole in 1935. Sedgemoor District Council now owns the property which has flats.

4. WALROW TERRACE it was in number 7 Walrow Terrace that Frank Foley was born on 23rd November 1884. He attended the Highbridge National School with his three brothers and sister and later joined the Army in the First World War. He died in 1958 on 8th May but it was not until forty years later that the amazing story of his secret life as "The Spy who saved the lives of 10,000 Jews" came to light and he was awarded, posthumously, the highest accolade given by Jews to a Gentile "Righteous Among the Nations"

5. THE HIGH BRIDGE once the River Brue flowed beneath this place where a very High Bridge was built over the tumpike road to allow traffic to pass on from Huntspill. It was this High Bridge that gave the Market Town of Highbridge its name.

6. ISLAND HOUSE this was the home of John Burnett, the Wine Merchant, and was so named because rivers flowed either side of the house. The Bonded Store nearby was used by the wine importers to put wines and spirits 'in bond' until the duty for bringing them into Britain was paid. Another building was used to store the bottles when the tax had been paid until they were bought.

7. STUCKEY'S BANK was the first bank in Highbridge, built in 1877 in Gothic Style and described as 'a handsome building of red brick, faced with Ham Hill stone'. This was extended in 1900 and had an adjoining residence for the Manager. It is thought that the first cheques were issued from this bank. National Westminster took the Bank over in 1971 and is now closed.

8. THE CREAMERY The West of England Creamery was a branch of the Chippenham Cheese Factory Limited, opened in 1902. It manufactured dairy products including butter, 'rich thick table' cream and cheese until its closure in 1963.

9. LOCK KEEPER'S COTTAGE 66, Clyce Road. Built early 19th Century. French prisoners of War were used to dig out this path for the river in 1801. For years the lock gates were opened and closed by hand but they now work automatically to stop the seawater going up the river, whilst letting the river water flow into the sea if the Brue gets too high.

10. PICTURE HOUSE 8-10 Regal Court, Church Street. This is the site of Highbridge's first 'Picture House' built in 1920. Previously films had been shown at the Town Hall where it was known as the 'Electric Theatre'. The Picture House was later re-named the Regent Cinema and then The Regal. The building is now converted into houses.

11. HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH In 1817 a small group of Baptist Christians formed a church in Highbridge and met in members' homes. In 1818 they purchased a piece of land, part of Highbridge Common, adjoining the Bristol to Exeter turnpike Road which is the site of today's church and hall. On 19th April 1819 a church building was opened which was the first place of Christian worship in the town. In 1868 the church was rebuilt; in 1894 the hall was extended; in the early 1990's the sites of numbers 1-4 Albert Cottages adjoining the hall were acquired and now form the church garden; between 1995 and 1997 the hall and church underwent substantial alteration and refurbishment to provide the building you see today which continues to be used as a base from which the Christian gospel is proclaimed.

12. HIGHBRIDGE NATIONAL SCHOOL The first school built in Highbridge was next to St John's Church and was very much part of the Church with regular visits from the Vicar and inspections from other Churchmen in the Deanery. It was built in 1861-2 and used for all children from 3-14 years. An infant school was built next to the old Vicarage in 1912 and a senior school opened in 1952.

13. THE OLD VICARAGE was built at 2 Burnham Road in conjunction with St. Johns Church in 1859 with money from Mr and Mrs Luttrell of Badgworth Court (total cost of £4,840). Included in the living was 31 acres of glebe with residence of Red sandstone and Bath Stone with polished marble. The first Vicar was Canon John Heyrick Macaulay M.A. of Trinity College Cambridge the last Vicar to live in the old Vicarage was Norman Wells. In 1984 a new modern Vicarage was built on the corner of Church Street

14. HUISH This must be the oldest building in Highbridge and was once the Manor of Huish, an ancient manorial court. The Court Leet survived (or had been revived) as late as 1807, when Richard Locke, as Lord of the Manor, held a Court along with his jury to appoint the constable and overseers and to present to the Court any nuisances which needed to be removed, stray cattle needing impounding, or rhines or bridges needing to be put in order.

15. THE ADULT SCHOOL was built in 1891 and was active until the 1930's with classes and meetings. During the Second World War evacuees had lessons there and concerts were held in the building. After the War the Juniors used the hall as extra classrooms. In the 1960's the County Library Service took over the building, using the front part as a library and the rear as a periodical store. Now the library has been closed.

16. SOUTHWELL HOUSE 1889 Although the original house must have been demolished, the name remains. Reginald Wade stands out as one of the most famous inhabitants of the old house. He is described as Surgeon, Medical Officer, Public Vaccinator for No's. 9a & 10 Districts Axbridge Union and Medical Officer of Health to the Highbridge Urban District Council as well as Certifying Factory Surgeon until 1930. His son Arthur Reginald was also at the house until 1930 when he moved to his new home St Necton (now Wade House) and took over his father's medical duties on his father's retirement.

KEY

1. Old Town Hall
2. Old Market Square
3. The Railway Hotel
4. Walrow Terrace
5. The High Bridge
6. Island House
7. Stuckey's Bank
8. The Creamery
9. Lock Keepers Cottage
10. Picture House
11. Hope Baptist Church
12. Highbridge National School
13. The Old Vicarage
14. Huish
15. The Adult School
16. Southwell House

