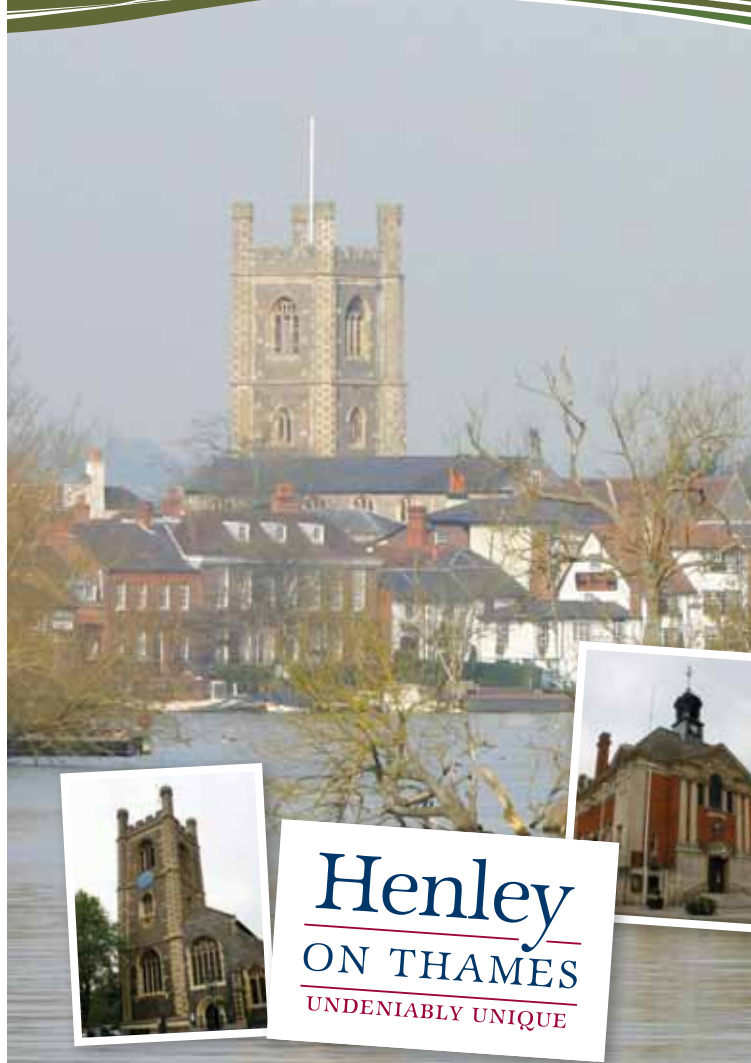


The Henley Trail



Henley
ON THAMES
UNDENIABLY UNIQUE

Enjoy a walk
around Henley

A circular walk, highlighting the main attractions and architecture of Henley.

1 The Town Hall, which houses the Henley Information Centre, is a grand Victorian building, designed by Henry T Hare and built to commemorate Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1901. The previous town hall was dismantled brick by brick in 1899 and rebuilt nearby as part of a private house by an enterprising Mayor who was also a successful builder.



Leaving the Town Hall, turn to the right and walk up Gravel Hill. Behind the Town Hall are 15th Century houses, and an area known as the **Upper Market Place, The Old Fire Station Gallery** is on the right.



At the top of Gravel Hill is a small public garden, which contains an example of a **pudding stone**, a relic of the last ice age. When commercially quarried and polished, the mottled red 'marble' was often used to make kitchen worktops. Rest awhile on the **Leichtingen Bench**.

Further up Gravel Hill is the gate house to **Friar Park**, a 120-roomed mansion built in 1899 as a weekend retreat for Sir Frank Crisp, an eccentric London solicitor. This is the home of former Beale George Harrison.



Now turn back down the hill, taking **West Street** on the left hand side of the garden. This street was once the site for destitute agricultural workers and their starving families. Tramps used to gather each night outside the workhouse gates opposite the Row Barge Public House, hoping to be admitted to the casual ward and given a meal and an overnight stay. It was not until the 1850s when public sewers with running water were installed that the appalling living standards slowly started to improve.



Cross the road and turn into **New Street** which heads towards the river. It was named New Street as it was not part of the original medieval town. There are many interesting half-timbered houses and fine 18th century buildings here, made from local brick. **Barnaby Cottages** were built as two houses between 1450 and 1500 and contain high quality timber framing and substantial floor joists. The **Kenton Theatre** was built in 1804 on the site of the workhouse and is the country's fourth oldest purpose-built working theatre. A glance at **Anne Boleyn Cottage** (number 58) shows many blocked keyholes in the door which testify to the age and value placed on locks. It was



Walking down the Market Place to the main crossroads turn left into Bell Street (previously called North Street). The oldest known surviving house in Henley is on the right, **the Old Bell Public House**, tree-ring dated to 1325. It is probably the remaining wing of a larger house. At the far end on the left hand side is **The Bull Inn**, one of the oldest inns in Henley, with walls up to a metre thick. It is supposedly haunted by the ghost of a young woman and the smell of tallow candles. There are two plaques on the front of the building, one for The Royal Exchange and one for Sun Insurance. Until 1868 Henley had two fire brigades, each requiring their own plaque before they would put the fire out. This owner was obviously taking no chances!



There has been a market in Henley since the 13th century when a Thursday market was recorded, thereby avoiding direct competition with other local markets. The market would have sold grain and items brought up the river from London, as well as leather, metal and textiles produced in the town. The current market has been held here since 2000 when the road was pedestrianised.



As you walk down West Street and just before you are level with the steps of the Town Hall, walk through the entrance beside No. 34. Across the courtyard you will find **Kings Arms Barn**, dated by its timbers to 1602.



Princess Anne being taken up the regatta course in 1977 in a replica of a royal barge that was built for the film 'A Man for all Seasons'.



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Continue to walk up **Hart Street** and try to imagine what this street would have looked like when commercial coaches would be clattering up the street. There was a constant need, both day and night, for food for horses and travellers and by the 1790's there were daily scheduled services to London. On the right is Blandy House, the site of which was home to widowed solicitor Francis Blandy who also served as town clerk for many years. His unmarried daughter Mary gave her father a lethal dose of arsenic following a disagreement about a dowry. Mary was hanged at Oxford Castle, but her body was returned to Henley to be buried in the family vault. A little further along the street on the left is 20-22 Hart Street which probably began as an open hall with two stories and a cross-wing. The hall on the right still has a medieval cross-passage at the entry. The east wall contains Henley's earliest known timber window dating from about 1400 which is now blocked by an adjoining building. On the right is The Old White Hart which still retains its 1530's courtyard area with stabling for 80 horses available in its heyday. The main coaching inns were the Red Lion, the White Hart and the Catherine Wheel. It was so busy and coaches were travelling at such a dangerous speed that the council threatened to prosecute coachmen who passed through the town if they did not slow down. Opposite the Catherine Wheel, at number 18, is a large 18th Century silver-grey brick building which is grade II listed, built by a wealthy businessman who had made his fortune in the malting trade. The kiln and the two 90 foot malting towers were in use until 1895 and still stand behind the house.



Continue up Hart street and turn left into **Duke Street**. Since the 1640's this street was barely wider than a single carriage but was widened in 1870 when the whole western side containing medieval shops was demolished. The street used to be nicknamed Duck Street as there was a stream marking the parish boundary which crossed on its way to the Thames. Although it now runs underground, in those days it was open and beloved by ducks.

There are a number of interesting shops along the street, not least of which is **Tudor House** near the corner of Friday Street which is an original Tudor building. Continue on the Reading Road until, on the right-hand side you arrive at Christ Church, noticing the blue plaque on the right by the gates before you reach the church. In 1748 Humphrey Gainsborough, brother of the famous portrait painter, was appointed Minister. He was not only a cleric but also an engineer and inventor. Sadly, he did not patent his ideas for a steam driven water pump, allowing James Watt to patent the invention in his own name.



completed in April 1786. There was great debate about where this bridge was to be sited, with the Lord of the Manor demanding that it should be at the bottom of New Street as he would be able to see it from his drawing room at Fawley Court! The original bridge of 170 was wooden and had been badly damaged in the Civil War. It was built slightly upstream and its stone abutments are still standing in the beer cellar

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Henley was once the fourth largest internal port of the British Isles, shipping grain, malt, wool and local timber to London. The boats returned with basics like salt, but also luxuries like glass, silk and fine wines for wealthy families and the colleges of Oxford. The barges were flat-bottomed, suitable for heavy loads whilst able to negotiate river shallows. The journey from London typically took four or five days. As late as the 1830s more than 20% of the town's male population were still working as bargemen. The riverside buildings were constructed in 1889. The ornate plasterwork on the exterior is by a local craftsman called Cook whose work can also be seen in Queen Street. Take a glimpse through the courtyard entrance of the Red Lion to see the timbered pale yellow **Chantry House**.



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At the bottom of New Street, the full glory of the **River Thames** is revealed. On the opposite bank is **Leander Club**, founded in 1818, the home of British rowing and one of the oldest rowing clubs in the world. The Royal Regatta, held during the first week of July, continues to be one of the great sporting and social occasions of the year. Read about the history of the Regatta on the information board. Walk towards the bridge.



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common practice in those times to take locks and keys with them when owners moved! On the right-hand side of New Street was where the malt house and stables for the dray horses of the brewers **Brakspear** that once owned 150 pubs and supplied beer to hundreds of others. These buildings have now been converted into apartments. Across the road was the brewery which housed a 200 ft deep artesian well that provided 38 million gallons of crystal clear spring water annually. The building is now a hotel. Beside 88 New Street is a path leading to the churchyard and is another route to Hart Street. This path was used when Thameside was flooded.

Take a while to walk over the bridge and marvel at the views of this English market town. The **Henley Royal Regatta headquarters** is on the right hand side of the bridge. The building was designed by Henry Farrell and opened by Her Majesty the Queen in April 1986. The county boundary runs through the middle of the river, so by the time you reach the far side you will have walked from Oxfordshire into Berkshire.



Turning back towards the town, you will see the **Red Lion Hotel** on the right hand side, a major coaching inn since the 1600s, catering for the gentry. The hotel has had many famous guests including King Charles I and Oliver Cromwell. The Prince Regent, later King George IV is reputed to have eaten 14 of their lamb chops at one sitting. In order to connect the town to the new bridge, a 'commodious avenue' (Hart Street) was constructed resulting in the demolition of various medieval buildings, the south graveyard of St Mary's Church and the original almshouses.



Walking up Hart Street you will pass **St Mary's Church**. This is 12th century in origin but enlarged and largely rebuilt in the early 15th century, with further alterations in the 1840s. There is detailed information about the church inside. In the churchyard there is a memorial to the singer **Dusty Springfield**. Some of her ashes were placed here, as she lived in the town at the end of her life.



Behind St Mary's Church is the **Chantry House**, the only Grade 1 listed building in Henley. It was thought to have been built around 1450 by a wealthy merchant, and may have originally have been used as a granary. There is an information board here explaining the history of this building which was completely renovated in 2003. The row of almshouses on the west side of the churchyard were a gift of Bishop Longland in 1547, rebuilt here in 1830 having been moved from the other side of Hart Street. The red brick almshouses on the east side were originally given in the 1660s and rebuilt in 1884.



Coming back into Hart Street on the left-hand side is **The Speaker's House**, where it is thought William Lenthall was born. He was the Speaker of the House of Commons during 1640 - 1653 (the Long Parliament) and openly defied the King, but was later pardoned.



This is an excerpt from the Henley town map, showing only the areas covered by this trail



22 A little further along the road, turn left into **Station Road**. The Great Western London to Bristol railway opened in 1841 and as a consequence by 1850 river traffic had fallen by half. The commercial coaches also decreased - from 26 coaches to only one daily service. The town looked set to become an inconsequential backwater. The Henley branch line was opened in 1857 and immediately the town began to capitalise on its reputation as an attractive resort on one of the finest reaches of the Thames.



glory of Henley can be appreciated from the river. For a riverside walk turn right at the bottom of Station Road and take in the delights of the river on a stroll down to Marsh Lock about three quarters of a mile away. You will pass playgrounds, bowling greens, picnic areas and wildlife areas on your way and this is also the site of the internationally renowned **River and Rowing Museum** which is a treat to visit for both young and old.

23 The wide grassy space in the middle of Station Road was used as the turntable for trains. The information board on the park gives information on this site.



25 If you want to stay close to the town turn left into Thames Side. **The Old Granary** at number 10 is a fine 16th/17th century building that is featured in Siebrerecht's 1690 painting of Henley which hangs in the River and Rowing Museum at Mill Meadows. Granaries and storehouses would once have been all along the river frontage, both north and south of the bridge.



24 At the bottom of Station Road at the river, rowing boats and small motor boats may be hired. There are also pleasure cruises departing from here and within a short trip the full



26 If you continue along Thameside you will come once again to the Bridge passing Singers Park on the right where there are plenty of benches to rest and watch the world go by on the river. Or...



27 On the corner of Friday Street and Thames Side lies **Baltic Cottage** which dates back to 1438. Its ground floor lies 1.5 feet below the modern street. It may once have adjoined the river frontage before the east wing was added around 1800. Number 67-73 Friday Street show the later remains of earlier granaries from the early 14th century. Heavy goods would be stored on the first floor level with the ground floors being for residential use. Friday Street probably derives its name from the medieval fishponds that used to lie at the eastern end of the street, Friday traditionally being the day when fish replaced meat on the menu. Walking down Friday Street (which has a variety of small shops and a café) you can turn right which will take you back into the centre of the town stopping on the way to sample the many shops and restaurants. You will have earned a rest and hopefully will return to Henley again to discover what other delights the town has to offer.



Further copies of this leaflet and other tourist publications can be found at the Town Information Centre inside the Town Hall or look on www.southernoxfordshire.com/henley.php

