River Walk

Welcome to the Stratford-upon-Avon walking guide. The sights in our historic town are best appreciated on foot and our short walks give you a chance to experience some of ‘hidden’ Stratford that might otherwise be missed. The Blue Route will lead you through the town and focus on the many ancient buildings that can be enjoyed. Both are circular walks of just over two miles.

Stratford-upon-Avon is an ancient market town famous not only as the birthplace of William Shakespeare but also for its half-timbered buildings. It has many other interesting buildings too which tell the story of the town’s growth and development over the centuries.

The town’s present street plan, a regular grid pattern, is the result of an early town planning decision by the Bishop of Worcester around 1196. His ‘new town’ was situated close to the river crossing used by the Romans. The line of the Roman road can still be traced today through Bridge Street, Wood Street and Greenhill Street. The older settlement, centred around Holy Trinity Church, then dwindled away.

Some of the historic buildings within the town provide an insight into the lives of William Shakespeare, the world’s most famous playwright, and other members of his family. Of the five Shakespeare houses owned and cared for by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, three are in the town centre and within easy walking distance. These are his Birthplace, where he was born on 23rd April 1564, Nash’s House which includes the site of New Place where he died on 23rd April 1616, and Hall’s Croft, the house of Dr John Hall who married Shakespeare’s daughter Susanna in 1607. There is a frequent bus service to the other two houses - Anne Hathaway’s Cottage in the village of Shottery, where Shakespeare courted his future wife, and the childhood home of his mother Mary Arden in the village of Wilmcote. Stratford-upon-Avon is also home to the Royal Shakespeare Company, one of the most renowned ensemble acting companies in the world. The RSC is currently undergoing a major transformation of its Stratford home in a project that will create the best modern day playhouse for Shakespeare in the world. During the construction work, due for completion in 2016, you can see the company perform on stage in the temporary award-winning Courtyard Theatre on Southern Lane. Tours of the building take place each week, fees of charge. If you would like to take a book behind the scenes please ask for details at the Courtyard Theatre.

We hope you enjoy your visit to our much loved town and that you will come back again.

Key to Map

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If you find this text in this leaflet difficult to read we can supply it in a format better suited to your needs. Telephone 01789 260645.

Sources of further information

If you would like more information on the town’s built heritage visit the Public Library in Henley Street, or the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, adjoining Shakespeare’s Birthplace, which has the best collection in the world of books and pamphlets relating to Stratford as well as an immense archive of photographs and documents relating to the town. A recently published book, Stratford-upon-Avon: A History of its Streets and Buildings, by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s former Head of Archives, Robert Sawers, is designed as a guide to the Town’s history through a careful examination of its surviving features.

Useful contacts for further information about the town, its past, present and future:

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust – www.shakespeare.org.uk
Stratford Society (the local Civic Society) – stratford@coventry.co.uk
Stratford Town Trust – www.stratfordtowntrust.co.uk
Town Management Partnership – www.visitstratforduponavon.co.uk
South Warwickshire Tourism – www.shakespeare-country.co.uk
Warwickshire County Council – www.warwickshire.gov.uk
World Class Stratford – www.worldclassstratford.org.uk

More details about the town can also be found at the following websites:

www.shakespeare-country.co.uk
www.visitstratforduponavon.co.uk
www.shakespeare.org.uk
www.warwickshire.gov.uk
www.warwickshire.co.uk

For people with disabilities. However, if you would like further assistance to the walks please telephone 01789 200000.

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Try by Jenny Froggatt, Lovers’ Leap, Arden Surveys
Robert Sawers, Patricia McFarland
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In Partnership with
Historic Walk

This is a circular walk of just over 2 miles. The walk begins and ends on Waterside and takes you through the busy market town past buildings that record the history of the town from the 12th to 21st century.

Start by the Swan Fountain, designed by Christine Lee in 1996 to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the town’s first charter granted in 1116.

Walk up Sheep Street, once the site of a sheep market dating from 1265, a pretty street with shops and restaurants housed in a variety of buildings dating from the 16th century to the present day. To the right, note No. 40 Street, once a 17th century merchant’s house. Note the wide side return, through a range of original outbuildings.

On the left No. 4, dated 16-492, now a wine bar, has an original interior but the front was rebuilt in 1900.

The present Town Hall stands on the site of the first market hall, built in 1564, damaged during the Civil War and rebuilt in 1767. David Garrick, the foremost Shakespearean actor of his age, helped to celebrate the opening of the Town Hall by presenting a statue of Shakespeare and leading a three-day festival in 1769 which marked the beginning of Stratford Tourist Industry.

The small open space opposite the Town Hall has a complicated history. It was a medieval trading centre, referred to as the Corn Market in 1811. The Victorian Corn Exchange building on this site was demolished in 1954.

To the left on the corner of Ely Street stands a fine example of High Victorian architecture built in 1883. Note the fine terracotta frieze depicting scenes from Shakespeare’s plays.

On the opposite corner stands a half-timbered building, now a restaurant. In 1600 this was the home of the Worshipful, one of the wealthiest local families. Close by stands the Manor House with its carved timber dated 1596 and the initials of its builder, Thomas Roger, a wealthy local butcher. Note the curved bell’s head. Thomas was the grandfather of John Harvard founder of Harvard University, USA.

The Garrick Inn next door has a reconstructed façade over an original 17th century interior.

Turn left and walk past the Manor House, once a single house, dates from the 17th century and was the home of the wealthy local families. Close by is Nash’s Place Gardens. This was the site of the splendid 5-gabled house bought by Shakespeare for his retirement. He died here in 1616. The house was demolished by an aggrieved resident in 1789, much to the anger of the townpeople.

On the corner of Scholar’s Lane is No. 16 Church St., a building where you can see the early 18th century timber back and the later doors facing with ogie window; dating from 1768. The parapet and cornicements were added in 1846.

The Guild Chapel was begun in 1269 by the Guild of the Holy Cross. The nave and the tower date from 1490, paid for by Hugh Clpton, a native of the town who later became Lord Mayor of London. Enter to see the remains of medieval wall paintings and learn more about the Chapel’s history.

The Almshouses were also Guild properties, built in 1423 to house the aged and infirm of the town. They are still lived in today.

On the corner of Sheep Street is No. 8, a house said to be the only one remaining from a row of timber framed, brick fronted cottages taken down to make way for the Head Offices of the National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance. It was built in 1727 and remained the home of two substantial Regency Villas stood in what were the gardens of the original College of Holy Trinity. Turn right into College Lane.

Further down the road on the left is The Windmill Inn.

The Windmill holds the longest unbroken licence in Stratford, dating from Shakespeare’s time. This house was built in 1599 and became an ale house a year later.

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Opposite is No 1 Church Street, noting church. It was built c. 1690 by tobacconist William Warn, as a speculation.

Opposite is a gift to the town from a millionaire Philadelphian, George W. Childs.

The houses in Old Town are elegant, Nos 1, 2, 3, and 4 can be dated from 1760. No 5 Old Town Place is a particularly fine building, its doors dating from 1643 as do Nos 17, 18 and 19. These were the homes of well-to-do town gentry.

Hall’s Croft, a fine timber building of the early 17th century, was home to Susanna, Shakespeare’s daughter and her husband Dr John Hall.

To see the 19th century domestic extension of the town and 20th century additions turn right into College Street. The 20th century developments on the east side stand in what were the grounds of the original College of Holy Trinity. Turn right into College Lane.

From College Lane turn right into Bid Street where the houses were originally the tenements of poorer people but are now highly desirable town centre properties. Turn left into Chestnut Walk where the houses facing the Paddock, were home to more prosperous citizens.

Barclays Bank was built in 1821 as a market hall to replace the medieval market cross.

Opposite is the Shakespeare Centre, built in 1964 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth, and extended in 1981. Houses a fine library, exhibitions and the local archive.

Close by is Shakespeare’s Birthplace, a substantial property where the Shakespeare family lived. Shakespeare’s father was a successful glover and local court figure until he fell on hard times in the late 1570s.

Walk down Henley Street to the library, scheduled for demolition in 1961, but restored through the efforts of Marie Corrill and the American millionaire Andre Carnegie, using original timbers where possible.

The Civic Hall built in 1830 as two substantial Regency Villas has been a Roman Catholic Chapel, a nursing home, a children’s hospital and now a Civic Hall.

The wide space here was the site of the cattle market from the 13th century. On the corner of Rother Street and Greenhill Street stands the last remaining thatched building in the town.

Cross the road to the White Swan, originally a farmhouse. The interior dates from the mid-15th century. There is an interesting wall painting in the room to the right.

Walk through the Minories to Henley Street.

The Shakespeare Centre, built in 1964 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth, and extended in 1981. Houses a fine library, exhibitions and the local archive.

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