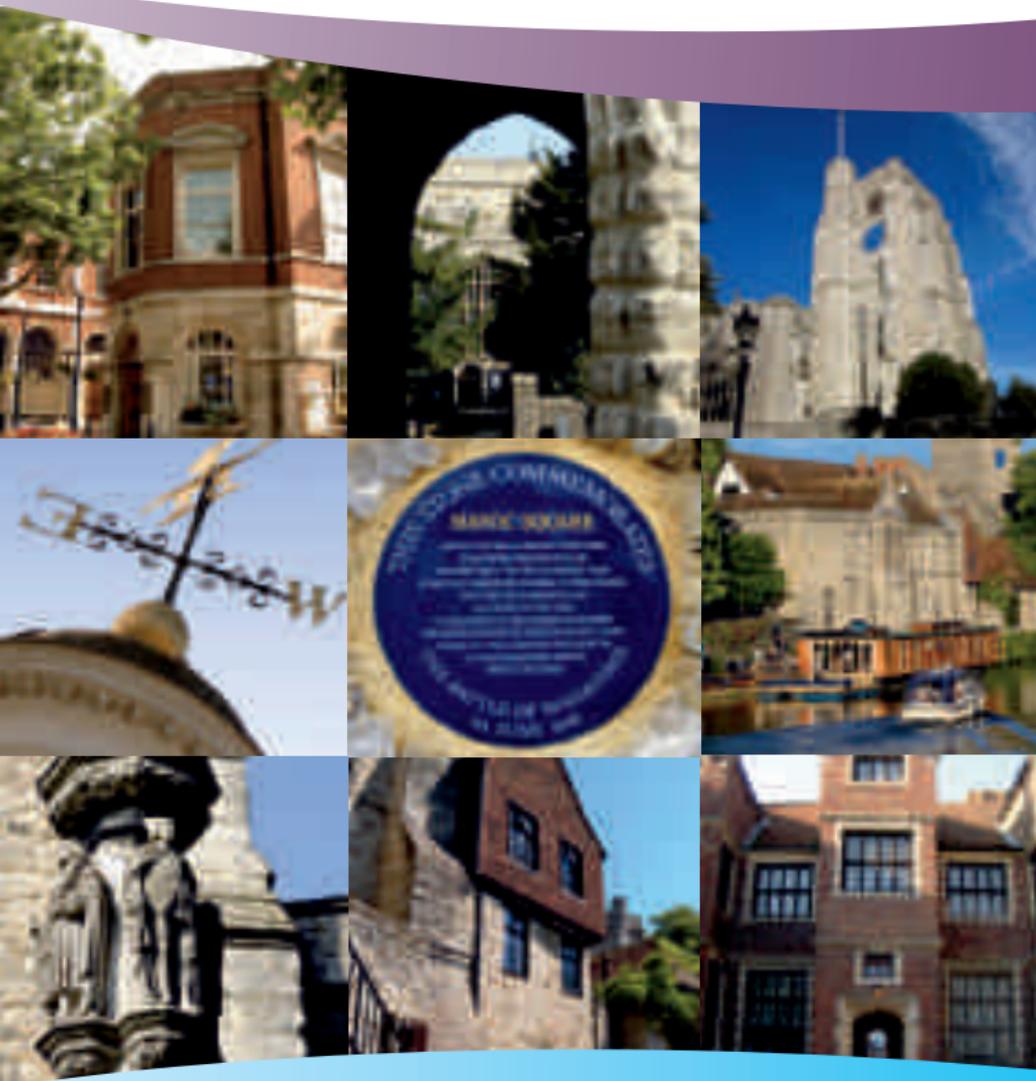


A Walking Tour of Historic Maidstone



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In Maidstone, hundreds of years of English history are still visible around you. You just need to know where to look. Follow this short walking tour to discover more about the hidden history of Maidstone, Kent's County Town. You will see a number of historic plaques on your walk which provide more details.



Your walk starts from the Visitor Information located at Maidstone Museum & Bentlif Art Gallery in St. Faith's Street (pictured above).

1 - Maidstone Museum & Bently Art Gallery

Largely housed in Chillington Manor, Maidstone Museum & Bently Art Gallery is one of the most interesting of the many old buildings in the town and a fine example of the domestic architecture of the late Tudor period. The core of the present house was built between 1561 and 1577 for local M.P. Nicolas Barham. In 1855 the Manor's then owner bequeathed his collection of antiquarian objects to the town, which purchased his house and opened a museum to the public in January 1858. Chillington Manor was then extended to provide purpose built galleries housing the collections of Maidstone's many Victorian benefactors. Don't miss the Kissing Chair used by Henry VIII at Allington Castle. Henry's grandmother was Queen Elizabeth Woodville of Mote Park, wife of King Edward IV. Entrance to the Museum is free.

Exit the museum and walk up St Faith's Street.

2 - Brenchley Gardens

These quiet municipal gardens, once the grounds of Chillington Manor, were opened in 1871 as Maidstone's first public park. The War Memorial was designed by Sir Edward Lutyens. Sir John Banks who lived at The Priory in Aylesford donated the row of Georgian almshouses in St Faith's Street in 1700, which are still occupied under special license today.

Continue up St Faith's St, turn right into Week St.

3 - Week Street

Week Street lies along the line of a Roman road linking Rochester with the ironworking areas of the Weald and the port of Lympne. Foundations of a Roman building were found here in the 1960's. The street also provides some notable examples of pargetted houses (no's 55-57), which date back to 1680. Pargetting, a term describing the use of

external lime plaster in a decorative manner with incised or moulded surfaces, became common when the wattle and daub of the half-timbered Tudor houses began to fall into decay.

Turn down into Earl Street

4- Earl Street

A concert hall was erected here in 1869 and is known today as the Hazlitt Theatre, after William Hazlitt, born in nearby Rose Yard, who found fame as an essayist, art critic and artist. Constructed in 1882 as the Conservative Club, 32 Earl Street features over its entrance a carved head of Benjamin Disraeli, once MP for Maidstone. In 1837, the year of the Queen Victoria's accession, Disraeli was first returned to Parliament for the Borough of Maidstone and lived, as Lord Beaconsfield, to be the Queen's trusted Prime Minister.

Turn left into Market Buildings



Hazlitt Theatre



Market Buildings

5 - Market Buildings and Corn Exchange

From at least the year 1261 until the 1820's, the High Street was the original market-place of Maidstone. New market buildings were erected in 1825 and in 1835 a new Corn Exchange was built. This area is now the site of several specialist shops and cafes.

Turn right into the entrance to Royal Star Arcade.

6 - Royal Star Arcade and High Street

Now an exclusive shopping arcade, The Royal Star was once Maidstone's leading hotel, frequented by the gentry during the town's Georgian heyday. Princess Victoria stayed here in 1836. In 1837 on winning his first seat in Parliament as the town's M.P, Benjamin Disraeli addressed the electors from its balcony overlooking the Town Hall on the High Street.
Cross the High Street to Jubilee Square.



Jubilee Square and the Town Hall

7 - Town Hall

A fine Georgian building dating from 1763, the Town Hall served many purposes as market space, magistrate's court, council chambers and gaol. The gaol was located in the loft and can still be visited today; its walls covered in 18th century graffiti. The statue of a young Queen Victoria dates from 1862, and stands on the site of the ancient market cross.

Walk past the Queens Monument to the corner of Gabriel's Hill.

8 - Gabriel's Hill

Gabriel's Hill was the site of the climax of the Battle of Maidstone, fought on the 1st June 1648 during the English Civil War. Described as being one of the most fiercely contested battles in the whole Civil War, Parliamentary forces commanded by General Fairfax of Leeds Castle clashed with Royalist troops. After hours of fierce hand-to-hand fighting Parliamentary forces were finally victorious. 300 Royalists were killed here on one night and 1300 taken prisoner. The Golden Boot, with its distinctive Wellington boot trade sign, has been run by the same family since 1790, and is believed to be the oldest shoe shop in the country. At the top of Gabriel's Hill is a plaque commemorating Samuel Pepys, the diarist who visited Maidstone in 1669.

..."Thence to Maydstone, which I had a mighty mind to see, having never been there; and walked all up and down the town, and up to the top of the steeple, and had a noble view, and then down again: And so, having walked all round the town, and found it very pretty, as most towns I ever saw, though not very big, and people of good fashion in it..."

Return to Bank Street, alongside the Town Hall.



Golden Boot



Bank Street

9 - Bank Street

Bank Street retains a typical medieval street layout, with many shops dating from the 15th-17th centuries. Notice four white statues set into niches in the first floor above no.89-90. From left to right are; Lord Avebury, Sir Lawrence Washington, William Caxton and Archbishop Courtenay, all of whom have played an important part in shaping the town's history. In 1395 Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury was granted a royal license by Richard II to build All Saints Church and the College of Priests alongside the Archbishops Palace. William Caxton was England's first printer, who published "The Dictes and Sayinges of the Philosophres" in 1476, the first book printed in English. Lawrence Washington was a lawyer and ancestor of George Washington, who was buried at All Saints Church in 1619. Lord Avebury introduced Bank Holidays in 1872.

Continue to the corner of Mill Street.

10 - Lower High Street

On January 28th 1554 Sir Thomas Wyatt, Protestant son of the famous poet of Allington Castle, rode into the High Street and called on the men of Kent to aid him in preventing Queen Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain. He found ten thousand men ready to protest against this unpopular foreign match. Like previous Kentish uprisings, the revolt failed, Wyatt was executed and Maidstone lost its Royal Charter.

The Russian Gun "the Cannon" was captured in battle during the Crimean War and was presented to the town in 1858 by Lord Pamure, the Secretary of War.

Walk down Mill Street to the crossing of the Len River.

11 - Mill Street



Until 1900 there were two mills here that originally served the Archbishops' Palace. You can still see the ancient millpond formed by a dam on the River Len. One of the oldest structures in Maidstone is the 13th century stone bridge which still stands under the modern road junction.

You can see the old bridge from the foot of the steps inside the Palace gardens to the right of the ancient Gatehouse. Outside the Gatehouse is a map by local artist Graham Clarke illustrating Maidstone's historic town centre (*pictured above*). ***Cross the busy A229 carefully.***

12 - Carriage Museum

Originally named the "Tithe Barn" this building was where the visitors to the Archbishops' Palace lodged their servants and horses. The stone work and buttresses may well be of the same date as All Saints Church (1397). Today the Archbishop's stables are home to the Maidstone Carriage Museum, (below), opened in 1946 by the eccentric Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake, 12 times Mayor of Maidstone. It houses his unique collection of horse-drawn vehicles, widely regarded as the finest in Europe.

Cross the road carefully.



Carriage Museum

13 - Archbishops' Palace

This site was described in the Domesday Survey as land held by the Archbishop of Canterbury at "Maddestane." As Lords of the Manor, the Archbishops were responsible for maintaining law and order and had their own gaol. Among its inmates was John Ball, the so-called "Mad Priest of Kent" whose preachings infuriated the church hierarchy. Kent was one of the main centres of rebellion during the Peasants Revolt in 1381. Rebels led by Wat Tyler released John Ball, then stormed the Tower of London and beheaded the Chancellor. Confronting King Richard II, Wat Tyler was stabbed and killed by the Mayor of London.



The Archbishops' Palace (above) was originally built in 1348 as one of a string of five Archbishops Palaces between Canterbury and Lambeth in London. King Henry VIII stayed here, appointed a Maidstone man as Royal Physician to treat his painful gout, and later expropriated the property for the Crown. It was bought by the people of Maidstone to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee and is now used as a Register Office. The Palace is open to the general public during Heritage Open Days in September.

14 - Infirmerer's Garden

The Garden in the grounds of the Palace is an authentic medieval herb garden maintained by the Kent Garden Trust, and may be visited by the public. Note the Dove of Peace statue.

15 - All Saints Church

Maidstone's main parish church is built on the site of the 7th century Saxon church called St Mary's, but was rebuilt in the 14th Century by Archbishop Courtenay to become the "grandest Perpendicular church in England." The church was completed in 1398 and externally has remained largely unchanged, although it did

formerly possess a wooden spire, which was destroyed by lightning in 1730. Set into the south wall of the church is a 17th century memorial to local man Lawrence Washington, great-uncle of the famous George Washington. The memorial (left) bears the Stars and Stripes of the Washington Family, which were subsequently adopted in the flag of the United States of America.



Don't miss the 15th century wall painting behind the choir-stalls, which still bears the scars of the sword-slashes of Cromwell's soldiers, who tried to destroy this religious image in 1648 during the Civil War.

16 - College of All Saints

This building formed part of a complex of medieval architecture which remains one of the most complete and impressive in England.

The College was built in 1395 by Archbishop Courtenay to house the priests attached to All Saints Church. This was an important spiritual and intellectual centre for the whole County in medieval times and Erasmus' friend Grocyn was Master of the College. King Henry VIII dissolved the college in 1546 and the property was much neglected until the late 17th century when it came into farming use. It is now leased as private offices.

Walk down Knightrider Street to the river's edge.

17 - Maidstone Millenium Rjver Park

One of the largest projects in the South East to mark the new Millennium, Maidstone's Millennium River Park opened up access to the River Medway along a 10-km path from Teston to Allington. Opened in October 1999, the award-winning Lockmeadow Millennium Bridge (below) is one of the landmarks of the new park.



Millennium Bridge

This modern structure occupies the site of a 14th century ford, once the main crossing point for the River Medway. On the opposite bank is Lockmeadow, home to Maidstone Market (held Tues and Sat mornings) and The Stag. This 21ft tall aluminium sculpture was erected in London in 1963 and now forms part of the River Art project which also includes the Dove of Peace and the Totem positioned alongside Maidstone's central bridge.

Turn onto the riverside path, keeping the river on your left.

18 - Maidstone Bridge

The first bridge to occupy this site was probably built in the 14th century to provide a more direct route to the commercial heart of the town than the ford located further upriver. One of a number of similar crossings constructed of local ragstone during medieval times at Aylesford, East Farleigh and Teston, the original bridge was finally declared unsafe in the 1870's. The current bridge was built in 1879 by Sir Joseph Bazalgette, the engineer responsible for the Thames Embankment and the London sewage system. ***Walk under the bridge.***

19 - Riverside

The riverside was once a hive of industry. Local ragstone was shipped down the River Medway to build the Roman wall of the City of London, and later the Tower of London. After 1739 upriver navigation was enhanced to enable Maidstone to trade with the whole of the Weald. River traffic was still considerable in 1900, but as roads improved river transport went into terminal decline. Today, the River Medway is used for recreation and visitors can enjoy the beautiful scenery on board a river boats.

Then turn right to cross through the underpass.

20 - Fairmeadow

Fairmeadow became notorious during the persecution of Protestants by Queen Mary, when seven Protestant martyrs were burned at the stake here in June 1557. These executions may have accounted for the Puritan backlash in the town in succeeding decades. A tree-lined embankment was laid along the Medway in 1699, making Fairmeadow a fashionable place to stroll and providing one of the first public walks outside of London. ***Turn left and walk towards the new Fremlin Walk shopping complex.***

21 - Corpus Christi Hall

This 14th century building was originally owned by the Corpus Christi Fraternity, a society of local tradesmen who regulated business, observed certain religious services and provided for elderly and infirm members. The Fraternity lasted until 1547 when it was seized by the crown during the suppression of religious guilds. The town then bought the hall and it served as Maidstone Grammar School from 1549-1871. The medieval hall is now leased to a private business.

Turn right up Earl Street.

22 - Earl Street

The street (below) takes its name from Earl's Place, a major medieval town house with grounds that once occupied the whole area. A double-fronted town house (no's 31/33) was owned by Andrew Broughton, Mayor of Maidstone. Broughton was Clerk to the High Court and signed the death warrant of King Charles I in 1659. When the monarchy was restored in 1660, Broughton was charged with regicide. He fled and spent the rest of his life in exile in Geneva.

Turn left into Fremlin Walk.



Earl Street

23 - Fremlin Walk

Fremlin Walk shopping centre (below) is built on the site of Fremlin brewery, owned by Ralph Fremlin, who by 1861 was Kent's largest brewer. Fremlin's connections in East India were symbolised by his trademark elephants and weathervane, examples of which will be on permanent display in the shopping centre.



Climb the steps under the arch and cross through the shopping centre and return to Maidstone Museum and Visitor Information.



Maidstone Visitor Information Maidstone Museum & Bently Art Gallery

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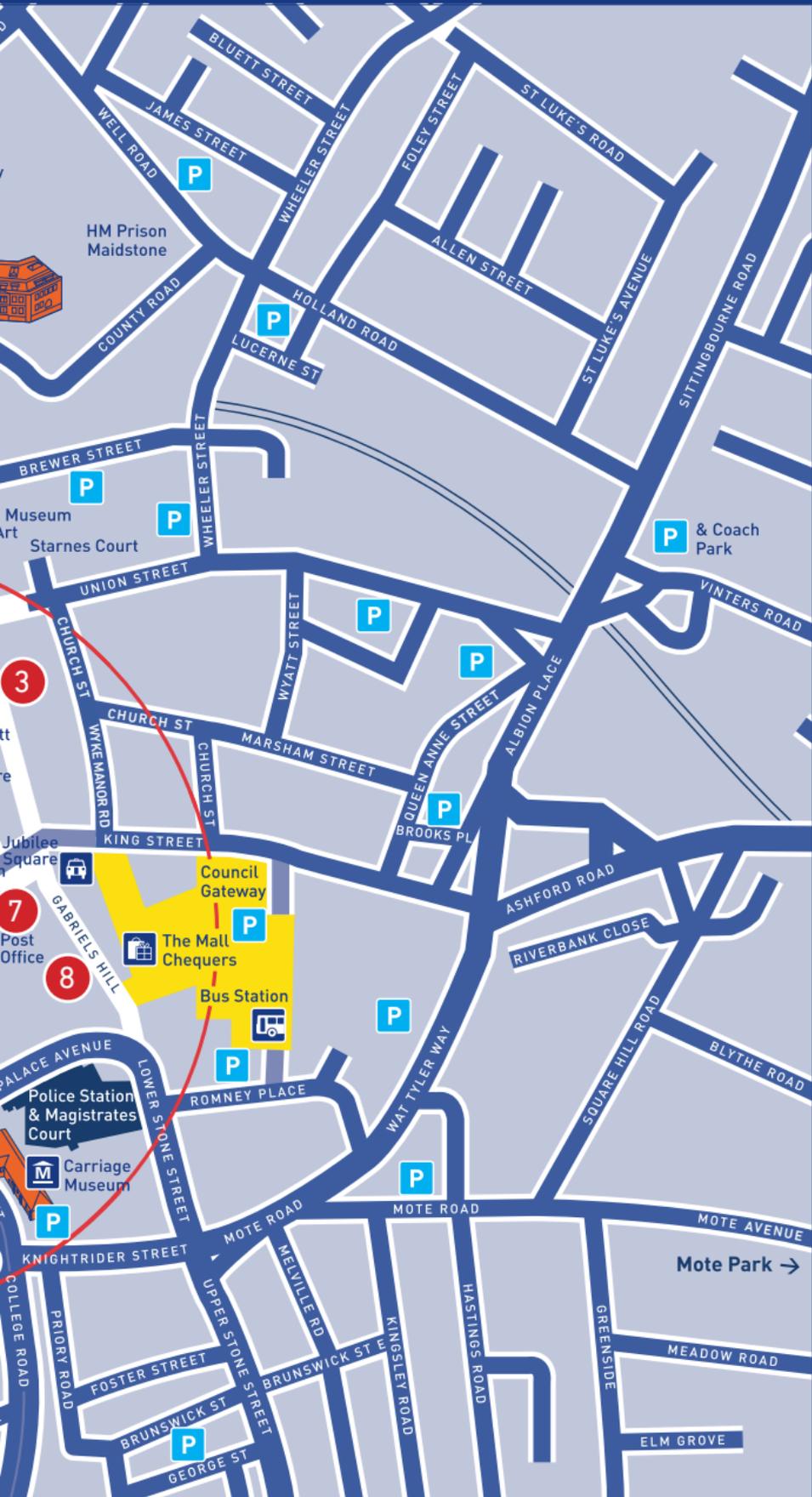
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- Restricted Vehicular access
- Pedestrian area/path
- Underpass

- P Car Park
- M Railway Station
- M Museum
- T Taxi Rank
- B Bus Station
- S Shop
- L Library
- I Visitor Information
- F Food
- P Post Office



Museum
 Shopping
 Post Office
 Library
 Football Stadium

-  River Cruises & Boat hire
-  Church
-  Historic house
-  Theatre



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