

DISCOVER
ASHBOURNE

Town Walk 1:
Georgian Buildings (1710 to 1830)

Editors note – we will be producing a version of this walk with a map and photos but don't have funding for this at the moment – if you enjoy this walk and would like to donate, please follow the link on DiscoverAshbourne.com.

Ashbourne has one of the best collections of Georgian buildings in Derbyshire and, thanks to some excellent work by Adrian Henstock and the Ashbourne Local History Group, they are well documented. On this walk, we will see how local building styles developed, looking at buildings in a roughly chronological order. The walk starts in the Market Place and will take about one hour. There are some uneven surfaces and road crossings, so please take care.

DIRECTIONS

We start by looking at two buildings from before the Georgian period. Standing by the prominent memorial at the top of the Market Place, you are in a medieval marketplace, which would have originally been surrounded by two storey timber-frame buildings – some of these still survive. Look down the Market Place to the Fish and Chip shop, which was recently dated to 1420. Originally it would have had a thatched roof. Wooden thatched buildings were very vulnerable to fire, and Ashbourne suffered some serious fires in the late 1600s. This, combined with increased wealth in the town, led to a redevelopment using bricks made from local brick pits.

The oldest brick building in the Market Place is probably No 12 (now used by the Nottingham Building Society), built around 1690. It has splendid 'long and short stone' quoins on the corner of the building, red and blue bricks, heavy stone copings on the gable ends of the roof with projecting stone kneelers, and an oddly off-centre chimney. Turn around to walk down the Market Place to the left of Ye Olde Vaults pub to enter Victoria Square. Look at The Horns on your left. Ignore the date of 1535 on the front of the building, the Horns is a good example of the town's Queen Anne period buildings (circa 1710) with a third storey lit by dormer windows. Some twenty new buildings were built in Ashbourne around this time leading to a comment in 1715 that Ashbourne was 'now an extraordinary good market town and much improved in buildings.

Continue to the bottom of Victoria Square, and look across at the Green Man Inn. Slightly out of our chronological sequence, this was Ashbourne's premier coaching inn built around 1750 to service the growing coaching trade from London to Manchester and Glasgow, which passed through

Ashbourne. Walk away from the town centre, crossing Dig Street into Church Street, and stop by Vine House, (Bagshaw Estate Agents). Look across the road at No 24-26 (Hulme's Fish Shop). Built around 1710, it has 'long and short' stone quoins, and wonderful pilasters (ornamental columns projecting from the wall) topped by ionic capitals and oval medallions. This extravagant Baroque style would soon start to be replaced by a much plainer style with fewer decorative features and an emphasis on symmetry.

The change can be seen by looking at the next house, No 28 – Antique Centre & House of Beer – built only 10 years later in 1720 but with a very different frontage. It is plain in comparison, with seven bays of uniform windows with key blocks, a brick parapet with blank panels on the roof line, and a fine shell canopy over the central door. Now look at Vine House. Built around 1735, this house has many of the features associated with the new Palladian style. It has a symmetrical front with a raised first floor reached by stone steps leading to a classical portico serving as a porch to the front door. It has a roof parapet and the windowheads are made of bricks laid at an angle either side of a key stone, although the original 12-pane Georgian sash windows have been replaced by Victorian 4-pane ones. The house sits on a half-sunken basement, which features a Tudor mullion window from an earlier building on the site.

Head towards the Church with its prominent spire and cross over the old railway bridge to reach No 51, Chantry House. This is a good example of how some houses were 'improved' in the middle of the 1700s. Originally built about 1710 as part of a typical Queen Anne Terrace (see Nos 53-57) it was made into a small townhouse for a 'respectable' family around 1750 – possibly the Fletcher family who

had made their money as iron mongers. It adopts the Palladian style to a smaller house with sash windows, an ornamental plaster cornice, and a pedimented doorcase approached by steps with railings.

Further along Church Street is the Grey House, an imposing stone-faced house with possibly the best Georgian frontage in Ashbourne. The house was originally built in brick in about 1750 but, only some ten years later, a new owner had the front remodelled in stone. The central bay has steps leading to a doorcase with a fanlight protected by a classical Doric portico. Above the door is a Venetian window on the first floor and a Diocletian window on the second. At roof level there is a triangulated pediment and a balustraded parapet. There are two projecting full-height bays either side of the doorway. It is generally believed that the new front was one of the earliest works by Derby architect, Joseph Pickford. If so, it is one of his most successful street facades, blending Elizabethan features – the bays on either side of the front porch – with Palladian principles. It blends in well with the Elizabethan Grammar School building next door.

Almost opposite is the Mansion, the largest house in town and probably the oldest surviving brick building. Originally built in the 1680s – possibly around an earlier timber-frame building – it was a H-shaped mansion with projecting wings facing the garden and the road. In the late 1760s, it was remodelled and the H-shaped front filled in with a grand entrance. The work was probably intended to rival the Grey House but does not compare in quality. The brick front is almost always in the shade and lacks the impact of the stone of the Grey House. Interestingly, when an octagon was later added to the rear of the Mansion, it was built in stone. The octagon with its copper dome can be glimpsed over the garden wall from School Lane, which starts by the Church Gates. The Mansion's new front is also believed to have been undertaken by Joseph Pickford featuring his characteristic porticoed doorway with Venetian and Diocletian windows above, topped by triangular pediment and balustraded parapet. The red brick wall with seven blind arches to the left of the house was the back wall of an orangery.

Return back along Church Street to the Ivies, built around 1785 for Robert Dale, a member of a minor gentry family who invested in local cotton spinning mills. Generally, by the 1780s, the strict Palladian style had mellowed under the influence of such architects as Robert Adam, who introduced more decorative features. However, there is little exterior evidence of Adam's influence in Ashbourne,

despite his local work at Kedleston Hall. The Ivies continued with Palladian principles: a raised entrance over a sunken basement with steps leading to a large pedimented doorcase, and an attic with square windows. Note the speaking tube on the left of the door to enable a visitor to announce their arrival.

In the late 1700s, Ashbourne was well established as a fashionable resort, but fashions change. By the 1820s, wealthy families were building their houses elsewhere and one of the few larger properties in town from this period is No 27, Hamilton House, with its Regency style arched doorway with fanlight above, and cast-iron balcony. Continue to walk back along Church Street and stop by Vine House, to look across the road at a block of four houses grouped around 3 sides of a courtyard behind railings.

These are the Clergy Widows' Almshouses, built between 1768–70 to the designs of William Harrison of Derby. Although not in our chronological sequence, they are interesting in that their very urban design would be more appropriate in London's Lincoln Inn than in a small county town. Nicholas Spalden had left money in his will of 1710 to build: 'four neat and pretty houses for entertaining the widows of four clergymen of the Church of England'. A legal dispute over his will at the Court of Chancery delayed their construction.

If you have time before returning to the Market Place, there are two other buildings of interest from the Georgian period. From the traffic lights, walk down Dig Street to cross the bridge over the Henmore to come to Compton House, now Lloyds Bank. Built in the late 1760s for Francis Beresford, a rising young lawyer and industrialist. This is another house believed to be by Joseph Pickford with a stone front featuring some of his design characteristics: rusticated pilasters supporting an open pediment over the door, flanked by Venetian windows. It is unusual in that it is an extravagant house built in in the poorer part of Town.

Return back to the top of Dig Street and walk along St John's Street (the continuation of Church Street) to the street junction. Cross the road and look back at No 42, – Vision Express. Above the shop front you can see the Venetian and Diocletian windows favoured by Joseph Pickford. However, the facade lacks his style and is probably the work of a less skilled architect.

That concludes our short tour of Georgian Ashbourne, but there is much more to see and enjoy – so go and explore.