

DISCOVER
ASHBOURNE

Town Walk 2:
A Tour of Ashbourne Yards and Alleyways

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.

The walk will take about one hour and includes some uneven surfaces, steep slopes and steps. Please take care.

Ashbourne is well known for its impressive Georgian buildings but, at heart, it is a medieval market town. Developed in the early 1200s as a large triangular marketplace, this original layout can still be seen on the ground today along with several surviving timber-framed medieval buildings. Exploring the town's yards and alleyways is a great way to familiarise yourself with Ashbourne and get better acquainted with some of its most historic buildings.

DIRECTIONS

We start in the Market Place by the Wright Memorial (1) near the pedestrian crossing. Crosses were common in marketplaces to remind traders that God was watching. However, this monument to Francis Wright is a Victorian addition. Wright came from a Nottingham banking family, which had married into local gentry. He was the principal shareholder and director of the Butterley Company at Ripley, which had provided the ironwork for London's St Pancras Station. Wright was an evangelical Christian who believed "busy hands keep the devil away". As Chairman of the Town's Magistrates, he tried to impose his strict moral principles on the Town. He put a stop to the Town's annual fairs and tried to stop the Shrovetide Football game. As a result, he was not as popular as the memorial inscription would suggest and he was known locally as the "President of the Poke-your-nose-into-everybody's-business Society".

Look down to the Marketplace Fish & Chip Shop (2). This is one of the original timber-framed buildings in the Town, possibly the oldest as it was recently dated to 1420. In the distant past it was the Brown Lion public House. Walk down the marketplace alongside the main road and immediately after the Flower Café, turn right into a narrow alley – the Middle Cale (3). This is a medieval alley created as houses were built in the centre of the marketplace. Look for the bricked-up doors on the side of the Flower Café building. On emerging from the alley turn right to pass behind the Millennium Clock and right again to head into The Gallery (4) – another medieval alley, probably named after a medieval galleried house that stood here.

At the end of The Gallery turn right to look at the side of the Leek Building Society (5) with its painted faces on the lintels above the windows. Then head uphill back into the marketplace, past Coral bookmakers, above which you can see one of the few sundials left in Ashbourne. If the sun is shining you can check its accuracy! Cross over the marketplace and walk through a "tunnel" entry between Elliotts of Ashbourne and the Bear Patch into Frith's Yard (6). This is one of many Ashbourne yards built as the population increased in the late 18 and 19th Centuries. Originally,

the space behind the houses would have been crofts (gardens), but as the population increased, cottages and workshops were built on these gardens. Many of the yards are entered through a "tunnel" and were an important part of the close-knit working-class community in the town centre. In 1851, there were about 25 yards in Ashbourne, housing around 750 people, about a quarter of the Town's population.

After climbing to the top of Frith's Yard, look to your right over the wooden railings to see Spencer's Bakery (7), where Ashbourne gingerbread – a local delicacy since the early 1800s – is still produced. Walk uphill along the alleyway through the gap between the buildings and turn left onto Union Street. Immediately after Boswell Court, turn left this time going downhill, into another alley. This is Shakespeare's Yard (8), named after a butcher who had a shop by the yard's entrance on the marketplace. He was an accomplished musician and poet who claimed he had inherited his talents from the Bard. After passing through the tunnel in the building, you will see a surface drain running down the centre of the yard. This came from the slaughterhouses on the right side of the yard. Cattle would be herded up the yard from the marketplace to be slaughtered. Just before entering the tunnel at the bottom of the yard, look to your left to see an interesting window and some ornamental brickwork. The building on the right just before the tunnel was a butchers shop into the twenty-first century and has only recently been converted.

You are now in the lower part of the Market Place, originally known as The Butchery (9) as it was the site of the Town's butcher shops – served by the slaughterhouses behind, their meat would have been displayed on wooden boards or 'shambles' in front of the shops. Turn right and, after the Lamplight Restaurant (10), turn right again to enter Tiger Yard, named after the Inn which once stood at its entrance. The Lamplight building is another of the Town's surviving timber-framed buildings. It is a good example of how buildings were modernised to keep up with building fashions. From the Yard, you can see its Tudor timber and brick construction; recently some timbers were dated to 1493.

In the 18th Century, a brick front was added whilst, in the Victorian period, the front was rendered, and decorative bargeboards installed. Finally, in the 20th Century, a large glass window was added for an Italian Restaurant. Now walk uphill from the back of Tiger Yard to exit onto Union Street between some mid-twentieth century flats.

Behind the brick wall opposite, and just visible through the trees, is Dove House (11). Now a care home, it is an early 18th Century brick house – although the large central chimney may indicate that this house was built around an earlier one. Turn left and walk carefully around the steps to No 24 Union Street (12). Built around 1770, the outside is virtually unchanged and is a good example of a provincial builder's response to national trends in domestic architecture. It has been owned by some of the Town's prominent entrepreneurs: Barbara Ford who successfully ran her husband's malting business after his death in 1788; and later Richard Cooper, who set up Cooper's Corset Factory in 1864.

Continue along Union Street and enter Belle Vue Road and look across the road to see a water pump (13) on the pavement opposite. Not in its original position, this pump was placed here as a memorial to Captain Holland (RN), who lived in Ashbourne Hall between 1852 and 1858. At a time when there was no piped water and public water supplies were often contaminated, Captain Holland was instrumental in providing clean water by street water pumps for the townsfolk. The author Elizabeth Gaskell (*Cranford & North and South*) was his cousin and came to stay with him at Ashbourne Hall.

Walk past Vine Cottage at the entrance to Vine Yard – a modern yard with new houses that continues the tradition of building on gardens in the Town centre – and continue alongside a row of Victorian workers' cottages to reach a large red brick building at No 42 – the Old Gaol (14). Built in 1844 as the Town Lock-Up with cells to accommodate four prisoners under the control of a full-time keeper – the Town's first policeman. To the left of the Old Gaol is a driveway and path. Walk down the path (not the drive to 40A & 40B), to enter Smith's Yard (15). This yard housed higher-status families than most of the other yards in the Town. It gives a good view over the roofs of the houses on Church Street, and you pass a garden on the west side of the Yard, once the site of a brass foundry and clock manufacturer.

Continue downhill and exit the Yard onto Church Street. The timber-framed antique shop on your right was once the Old Bear Inn (16). On the other side of the road is the Methodist Chapel (17), built between 1879 and 1881 to replace an earlier Chapel in Compton. The new chapel has a distinctive renaissance-style front decorated with terracotta panels and friezes. It was the work of architect John Wills, whose Derby practice specialised in non-conformist chapels and produced lavish designs where money was available. Not everyone appreciated his design: the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner described the chapel as a "pretentious eyesore".

Cross the road carefully and turn left back towards the town centre, to pass Tyler & Coates Yard (18). Look down the yard to see a garage made from railway trucks – a reminder of the time when Ashbourne had a railway station. Continue along Church Street to the Clergy Widows Almshouses 1768-1770 (19), which are grouped around a courtyard behind a set of railings. These were built under the will of Nicholas Spalden for "the widows of 4 clergymen of the Church of England". A legal dispute over his will in the Courts of Chancery delayed their building for over 50 years. It is now six flats.

The White Hart (20), now offices, was one of Ashbourne's coaching inns with stabling for horses and a malthouse in its narrow yard. It was also the site of a cockpit, where cockfighting would take place. Local gentry would gamble, often large sums, on the outcome. On the corner with Dig Street is the Corner House now Avanti Jewellers. Note the Corner House Clock (21) which uses the name of the building rather than numbers. In 1822, Arkwright Toplis and Co – who already had a bank in Wirksworth – converted the building into a bank. The son of inventor and entrepreneur Richard Arkwright, Richard Arkwright Junior's interest lay mainly in banking, investments in government bonds and the accumulation of land. In 1804, he became a partner in the Bank and, in 1829 after the death of John Toplis, he took complete control. It was a small but highly profitable business. When he died in 1843, he was believed to be the richest commoner in Britain.

Cross Church Street at the Traffic lights and continue to the bottom of Victoria Square (22). Look across the road to the Green Man Royal Hotel (23) and its gallows sign. The Green Man was built in the 1750s to service the growing coaching trade in Ashbourne and was the Town's premier coaching inn. In the 1830s, Princess (later Queen) Victoria stopped here for a comfort break on her tour around Britain. The railways brought a final end to the coaching trade, but the Green Man continued to be a centre of social activities until its closure as a hotel in 2012. It has recently been redeveloped as a bar and a restaurant.

In Victoria Square, look for the mounting block (24) used to help people into carriages or onto horses. The nearby lamp post (25) was originally erected at the bottom of Buxton Hill when gas lighting was introduced in the 1840s. It was moved to its present position when the road was widened and now, powered by electricity, is a memorial to the local businessmen who founded the Ashbourne Gas Company.

Walk up the slope to return to your starting place. We hope you enjoyed your tour. If you have the time, there is plenty more to see and do in Ashbourne – interesting buildings, more hidden yards & alleyways, and independent shops, along with cafes and pubs – so go and explore.