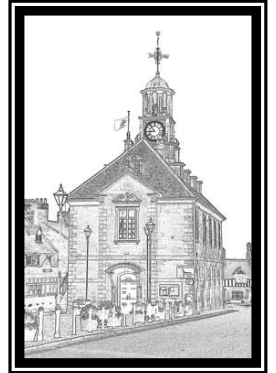


Stop 1 The Town Hall

The Town Hall was built in 1706 at a cost of £200 by a member of the Egerton family, the first Duke of Bridgewater who sold it to the town of Brackley for one shilling. The ground floor was originally open on all sides to allow for market stalls to trade there, first in wool and then later in the 19th century, in corn, brought in from the surrounding farms. In order to build this market house, the Earl had knocked down the largest of the three stone crosses which belonged to the town. The upstairs of the building was, and still is, used for council meetings, political dinners, election meetings, country balls and dances. The Manorial court first met in the new building in September 1707 and all the burgesses, with the Mayor and the Alderman were expected to be present, all being announced by the Town Crier. The Town officers were also expected to attend, even though they were unpaid – the three constables; the inspector of rawhide skins; the examiners and sellers of leather; the ale tasters; the bread weighers; the clerks of the market; the Bellman and the Crier.



Stop 2 The Red Lion pub to the left of the Town Hall



The Red Lion was a 17th century coaching inn serving the needs of travellers to Brackley, all of whom at that time travelled by road in horse drawn coaches. It was one of the more important inns of the town and in 1883 an auction was held there to sell off parts of a mill in Syresham. But it was the Reindeer Inn, which later became Barclays Bank, now closed, which was the first inn in Brackley in 1789 to have a daily coach service to London.

Stop 3 Magdalen College School

Walk up the High Street from the Red Lion pub away from the Town Hall

Magdalen College School was originally built in 1150 as a hospital by Robert le Bossu (hunchback). He was the son of one of the followers of William the Conqueror, Robert le Beaumont, who came to England in 1066, fought bravely at the Battle of Hastings, became the Earl of Leicester and eventually was given the lordship of Brackley. Very little now remains of the original hospital buildings because they were so badly looked after and in 1484 the land and buildings were sold to the new Magdalen College at Oxford. They used the hospital buildings as a refuge for their scholars when there was plague in Oxford and it was not until 1548 that Magdalen College Free school was established on the site. It has remained a school ever since and is now part of the state secondary school in



Brackley. The oldest building on the site goes back to Tudor times and there was an underground passage connecting it to the Chapel which the scholars could use when they went to attend services in the Chapel. It was probably dug after the Reformation to allow Catholic priests to move around in secret. It is within living memory that this tunnel was found to be unsafe and the entrances to it were bricked up. According to Brackley folklore, this part of Brackley is riddled with old underground tunnels. This belief in an underground network of tunnels was given considerable credence in the 1970s when a new sewer system was being dug in the High Street. There were a lot of problems because every time they built a trench, it either flooded because of the underground springs or it fell into a hole. "There you are," said the locals, "it's



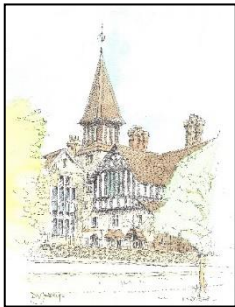
fallen into one of the tunnels.” Certainly, this one tunnel does exist but our local historian, Professor John Clarke, is very dubious about the likelihood of there actually being a network of tunnels.

Stop 4 Magdalen College School Chapel

The Chapel of St John was also built by Robert le Bossu, the 2nd Earl of Leicester, in 1160 for use by the people in his hospital but it was used later by the towns people and the scholars of Magdalen College. In 1160 it formed one side of a range of cloisters but it was almost completely rebuilt by the Victorians. The large stone altar was discovered in the 1930’s in the Tudor fireplace of the college house and taken back to St John’s.



Stop 5 Feed My Lambs building on the opposite side of the road



“Feed my lambs” is the local name for this building which was original home of Brackley’s Church of England Primary school. It gets its name from the carving of these words on the lintel. It opened in the 1870’s and had separate entrances for the boys and the girls as was the custom in those days. It remained a junior school until 1968 and there are many older residents of Brackley who remember attending this school and having their dinners in a small hall which used to stand at the other end of Hill Street. The slightly Tudor look of black and white remind us of Brackley’s association with the Egerton family’s home area of Chester and of the puritan religious background of Elizabeth 1st. The Anglicans had refused to work with the Methodists in the building of this new school as they were determined to undermine the influence of an earlier but smaller Methodist school.

Walk up to the traffic lights, cross the Buckingham Road and up the High Street, past the Plough Inn and the Old Fire Station Cafe

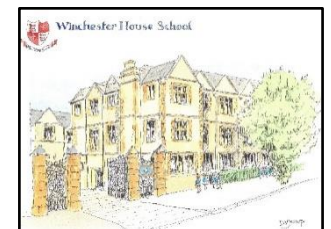
Stop 6 Brackley Park

This park was once part of the lands belonging to the Manor House, now Winchester House School, but it was not sold in 1915 when the rest of the Manor House estate was auctioned off. At some time later, it was bought by a Mr John Collingham. It was he who very generously signed over the land to the National Trust in February 1928 in order that it would be for all time preserved as an open space. He wanted it to be used as a playground for young children, as a space where young mothers could take their tea and where old people could go and rest when the weather was kind. Mr Collingham had come to Brackley around 20 years before to enjoy the hunting. He had leased from the Earl of Ellesmere a house overlooking the park and he considered the view from this house over the park to be one of the most beautiful it was possible to find. So, it is due to his generosity that Brackley Park is still owned by the National Trust but leased to the Town Council on the understanding that it should be preserved as an open space for the use of the Brackley people for all time.



Stop 7 Winchester House School across the road opposite the park

In 1862 the third Earl of Ellesmere, Francis Charles Granville Egerton, became Lord of the Manor of Brackley aged only 15. Almost all previous Lords of the Manor had been absentee landlords but Lord Francis had rural tastes and had come to know and care about his estates in Brackley. He preferred to live here rather than in the Egerton family home which was on the outskirts of Manchester and



surrounded by the spoil tips of the Egerton coal mines but there was at that time no building in Brackley which could be considered appropriate for one of the richest noblemen in England.

In 1733, Scroop Egerton, 1st Duke of Bridgewater, then Lord of the Manor of Brackley, had bought an attractive but modest early 17th century house on the High Street in Brackley, known as the Tithe House, because it was an extension of an original Tudor Tithe house. For nearly 150 years, the house had been let to a succession of tenants, often mere farmers but a fire at the end of the 1860s gutted the old house. Francis Egerton seized the opportunity to rebuild on an appropriate scale and with all modern conveniences. The new Manor House was built between 1875 and 1878 in a generally Tudorbethan style. The only original bit which remains is the Tudor doorway which opens onto the High Street and there is a legend associated with this doorway which states that this Tudor door may only be opened for a queen. At last Brackley had a resident Lord of the Manor who spent a lot of time and money in the town but in July 1914, the Earl died and in 1915 the new Earl put all his holdings in Brackley up for auction. The Manor House first became a girls' school but later was taken over by a school for boys, Winchester House School. This school still occupies the old Manor House but as a co-ed preparatory school.

Now cross the road and walk back towards the Town Hall passing the Methodist Church on the corner of Hill Street. Cross over Hill Street and look across the road at the house on the corner of Buckingham Road opposite the Plough inn.

Stop 8 The Master's Lodging on the corner of the Buckingham Road on the same side of the High Street as the MCS Chapel

This is now called the Master's House because it was once the home of the Master of Magdalen College School (and the boys' boarding house) but in 1740 it was known as Northgate House and was the scene of a notorious murder. The Reverend Doctor Littleton Burton lived in the house at the time. He dismissed a young serving man called Henry Kerwood for being "saucy" but the servant hid in a barn. When he was discovered, he was again told to leave the premises and to encourage him to do so, he was hit with a stick. At this, Kerwood picked up a pitchfork and struck the Reverend on the head, killing him. He fled the scene and although there was a 10 guinea reward offered (a huge sum in those days), he was never caught. There is a memorial to Reverend Burton in the College Chapel.



Walk on down the hill, passing the Feed My Lambs building and looking across the road at the MCS Chapel and old school buildings

Stop 9 The Old Hall Bookshop

The Old Hall Bookshop is a very old building with an early Georgian facade, but it is unusual in that it was built with red bricks. It was established as a bookshop in 1977 by John and Lady Juliet Townsend.



Stop 10 The Crown Inn



The Crown Hotel was originally built in the 16th century as a coaching inn and in 1649 it was the site of a major fire. The Inn was repaired and became an important coaching inn but it is said to be haunted by the ghost of a nurse who died in the fire whilst trying to save the children who were in her charge. The children were later found unharmed. The Duke of Bridgewater stayed at the Inn in 1713 and Marshall Bloucher, the commander of the German army which fought alongside Wellington to defeat Napoleon, was a guest there in 1813. The Inn was also used as an excise office in the late 18th century.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRACKLEY

People have lived in or close to present day Brackley for a very long time. There is considerable evidence now of Iron Age settlements and the Romans definitely settled here just behind where St Peter's church now stands in what is now known as the Roman estate. The Romans left sometime in the 5th century when the Empire was disintegrating and the Saxons were invading. But the Saxons didn't initially settle in Brackley. They went past and settled in what is now the little village of Halse just to the north of Brackley. It was not until sometime in the 7th century that a man called Bracca left the settlement at Halse and came to make a clearing around the area where St Peter's now stands. So, his settlement would have been known as Bracca's clearing but since the Saxon word for clearing is ley, they would have said Bracca's ley which over the years has become Brackley. Thus Brackley became part of the Manor of Halse and is so recorded in Domesday Book when, about 400 years later the Normans arrived in Britain, by which time Brackley had be far outstripped the original settlement at Halse in both size and prosperity. But the Normans settled almost a mile away to the south where they built a castle to protect the new road they were building from Oxford to Northampton. Over the years, the two settlements gradually expanded and grew together to make the present town of Brackley so that the centre of present day Brackley is now around the present large marketplace, leaving the church of St Peter's and the remains of the castle on its edges.

In the reign of King John, in 1215, a large number of barons came to Brackley to meet and discuss their grievances. They presented their demands to the King who was then at Oxford. The King was furious and refused to make any concessions but only a few months later, the same barons forced the King to accept their terms and to sign the great document of Magna Carta at Runnymede.

In 1217, Henry 111 gave Brackley permission to hold a weekly market, originally in Goose Green beside the present Locomotive pub and every Wednesday, farmers and villagers would come into the town to sell livestock and other produce. It was moved to the present market square in the 13th century when a much larger space was needed to cope with the ever expanding wool trade which brought Brackley much wealth and prosperity.

In 1547, Brackley was given the right to have two members of Parliament and in 1601, John Donne the poet, was made an MP for Brackley but he never even visited the town. However, in 1784, John Wesley did visit and he preached outside the Town Hall. He complained that he might as well have spoken in Greek as nobody seemed to understand what he was saying but one listener apparently said that he looked and spoke like an angel.

The railway came to Brackley in 1850 and wealthy families would use the train to travel there to enjoy the hunting. They built themselves hunting lodges in the High Street with large stables at the rear.

In 1913, George V came to Brackley to inspect the troops. The Americans established a base in the neighbourhood during the Second World War and in the 1960's Brackley expanded rapidly with new housing and a larger population. Livestock markets no longer take place in the Market Square but every year, (except in pandemics) the town hosts a carnival, a soapbox derby, a music festival, a festival of food, a beer festival, a festival of motor bikes and there is a small Friday market on the Piazza outside the Town Hall every week. There are no more Members of Parliament for Brackley, but the town has its Mayor, its Charter and its Town Hall. The two railway stations have closed but the Brackley by-pass has enabled the town to retain its peaceful centre, its elegant, wide 18th century High Street and many of its historic buildings.