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# Stourbridge

## Town Trail



### u3a day - Stourbridge Trail

The purpose of this trail is to celebrate the town that our u3a represents. There are many beautiful and interesting streets in Stourbridge - this is just a glimpse of a few of them. Take the time to look up, above the shop fronts and appreciate the architecture of the town and the wealth of red brick buildings, decorative brickwork and windows. Many of the family names mentioned as contributing to buildings or living in them have been recognised in the street names around the wider town.

The trail is around 4 miles and is designed as a walking trail using our well maintained pavements and remembering to use pedestrian crossings where you can. The trail is a circular route so can be started at any point. Why not take the opportunity on the trail to keep our town beautiful and litter pick?

#### Market Street, Stourbridge,

Next to the back of WH Smith, opposite the church is a passageway leading to the Rye Market office. Walk down there and round to the right. You will see the rear of Carlisle Hall on the left (located in Victoria Street). The hall was purchased in 1922 by Ernest Stevens for his wife to use as a temperance centre. On her death a stained glass window was added referring to the aims of temperance. Of the three woman depicted in the stained glass one is the image of Mary Stevens. The window can be seen from this location. This building is now the James S. Webb Freemasonry Centre.

Walking back into Market Street our next stop is St Thomas's Church, built in 1728. There was found to be a need to have a church built in the town as the residents were finding Oldswinford church too far. The church was licensed to The Church of England and owned by the people. It was not fully taken over by the Church of England for another 130 years. Not being a typical church the minister in the early days was chosen by election.

Walk across the junction with Bell Street and keep on Market Street. On the left is the frontage of The Stourbridge Institute. The aim of the institute was a learning environment for the working class (mechanics in actuality). The site was first occupied in 1857 on the site of an old Inn and was extended in 1937 with the new Art Deco frontage. Although this entrance is no longer used to aid its preservation, opportunities to see the beauty of it can be seen when attending any meetings inside.

The Town hall can't be missed, an imposing red brick building with tower built to mark the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. It was first opened in 1887 and combined the corn exchange, the council chamber, the municipal offices and the fire station. The building was on the site of the old corn exchange and was funded by public subscription.

Continue to the end of Market Street and turn left. There you will see the town clock, made of cast iron which was cast at the Stourbridge Iron Works, and erected in 1857. The mechanical clock was wound twice a day and it became an electrified mechanism in 1972. The entrance behind the clock was the Market Hall, no longer existing although the entrance has been retained.

### Lower High Street.

On the corner of Lower High Street is the Mitre Public House. This was built in 1934 on the site of an older pub. The style is thought of as Brewers Tudor.

Walking down Lower High Street, you will see the facade of a cinema on the left. This was built as The Scala cinema in 1920, in classical style, the remains of the name can be seen if you look up. The cinema became ABC in 1942 and even though refurbished in 1978 was closed in 1982. Towards the bottom of lower High Street you will see the Presbyterian/Unitarian chapel built in 1788. The walls of the chapel have plaques for two major families of the area, the Scotts who were in the woolen trade and the Parkes who were chemists.

Cross the road and look at numbers 6 and 7 which were built in 1770 at the height of the Georgian period. At one time it was the home of the Foster family, connected to iron works. The style is Strawberry Hill Gothic after Sir Horace Walpole's house in Strawberry Hill, Twickenham. The windows are gothic style, the window mouldings have a double curve ending with a fleur de lis. The house next door, Stourhurst, was built in 1760.

Further up Lower High Street and opposite where you saw the cinema is King Edwards VI College. It started as chantry in 1430 where the priest educated a few children, in 1552 there was charter granted by King Edward VI that it should be a grammar school (It was Stourbridge Boys Grammar School) it remained as so until 1976 when it became a sixth form college. The most famous pupil of the school so far was Dr Samuel Johnson, compiler of the English Dictionary. The remaining buildings are post mid-nineteenth century. The Tower and hall were designed by a prominent Stourbridge architect Thomas Smith (1869)

At the top of Lower High Street at the junction with Coventry Street is the site of the old pig market, Coventry Street was previously called Pig Street. The building that stands on this corner is now Nicholls and Perks Wine Shop. The current facade of this building, originally a house, dates probably from the early seventeenth century. Wool and cloth merchants, the Baker family lived in the house at this time until the nineteenth century. Stourbridge was a centre for the wool trade and a sheep representing this trade is shown on our coat of arms. Behind the house was a tiny chapel for dissenters, built by Richard Baker in 1698, it was burnt down in a riot in 1715, although rebuilt it was later abandoned when the Congregational chapel was built nearby. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Baker became bankrupt and the house became commercial, first as a grocer, then as an Inn, it became a wine shop in 1968.

### High Street

Walk up High Street and look to the right, there is the Talbot Hotel. The first reference to this Inn is in 1685 but it is thought that the history is much older. The Name Talbot locally is a reference to the family name of the Earls of Shrewsbury who have lived locally in Whittington Hall and Stourton Castle. Parts of the structure of the building is half timbered the staircase is seventeenth century giving the building much architectural credence.

The building of the current Mary Stevens Hospice shop was previously occupied by a stationer, Mark and Moodys. The ground floor frontage is very interesting being Ruskin-esque, have alternating coloured bricks and an arcade front. Designed by Thomas Robinson.

Pass the red brick building of the post office, another of Robinsons buildings (1885)

Further up High Street is the current Wilkinsons. This was built on the site of the Owen and Owens Department Store (previously Stringers). However prior to this it was the site of a neoclassical/art deco building called The Scala Theatre built in 1929, changing to the Odeon cinema in 1938. Having a spectacular interior of the age and a horseshoe balcony it closed in 1973.

At the junction of Foster Street is Bordeaux House, yet another example of Robinsons design (1892). Look up at the pediments and the windows.

### Foster Street

Turn left into Foster Street, taking a look at the building occupied by Barclays Bank. Although extended and modernised the Georgian style can still be seen. It was built late eighteenth century.

Before using the underpass take a look at the floral planting undertaken and maintained by u3a volunteers in our yellow and blue theme.

Cross under the ring road and turn right, walk to Hagley Road.

### Hagley Road

On the corner of Church Street is the old library and art college. A grade 2 listed building, netherlandish and renaissance style. Built in 1905 much of the funding was a gift from Andrew Carnegie. The library moved out in 1984 and the building is now converted to apartments.

Walk up Hagley Road and look across at Oldswinford Hospital School. The school was founded by Thomas Foley in 1667. Foley was a local iron master. When founded the school took 60 boys from 20 local parishes and was known as the Blue Coat School. Although much extended the original building fronting Hagley Road can still be identified.

On the same side as the school is a parade of shops. The first one has a tower (number 80 Hagley Road), this was a home 1845-1850 designed by and for the previously mentioned architect Thomas Smith.

At the crossroads cross over and turn left down Glasshouse Hill, then turn right into Church Road.

### Church Road, Oldswinford

Take notice of the early nineteenth century houses on the right with gothic style windows. Opposite these is Oldswinford Castle home of the Hickman family until the mid nineteenth century. It was possibly built in the sixteenth century but has been altered many times. In 1955 it was converted into flats.

You will then see St Mary's Church, much changed over time including removal of the spire. An important worshiper at this church was Ernest Stevens who paid for many improvements including the entrance. The rectory next door was built in 1700, replacing the existing Tudor structure

Opposite the church is Swinford Old Hall, now flats and houses. Built in Georgian style, it was the home for troops in the war, renovated in 1957 and then became an old peoples home.

Walk into the church grounds. Overlooked by the rear of the church, maintained with a flower border you will see the grave of Ernest and Mary Stevens. A visit to this churchyard is worthwhile. There are many graves of distinguished Stourbridge families here, including the Ruffords, Fowkes, Grazebrooks and Evers families.

Walk past the back of the church and turn left to walk through the graveyard to the exit gate and turn right.

Mary Stevens Maternity home was built by Ernest Stevens to honour his wife who lost a baby a few days after giving birth. It was built on Whitehall Farm, the farm building being demolished. It opened in 1931 after a deed of gift and operated until 1984. It is now the home of some local authority departments and Mary Stevens Hospice has been built in the grounds.

Follow the drive and exit the gates onto Hagley Road. Turn right. Notice the small cottages laid back opposite. Cross the road at the pedestrian crossing near The Retreat and walk to the Oldswinford crossroads. Turn Left walking down Heath Lane and then turn left into Corser Street.

## Corser Street

Here there are many nineteenth century terraced houses with interesting brickwork, showing the wealth of the area from the local industries. At the end of Corser Street you are in a small conservation area. Cross over Love Lane and enter the park by either the first or next gate.

## Mary Stevens Park

Many believe this was the home of Ernest and Mary Stevens but this is not so. They actually lived in Prescott House on the corner of Wollescote Road and Grange Lane (now demolished). The park contains Studley Court, previously known as Heath House. It was the home of many local industrialists including the Ruffords (brick and coal), Cochranes (Iron) Turneys (leather) and Webbs (seeds). In the first World war it was used as a military hospital. By 1918 it was owned by Lady Grey of Enville. The estate came up for sale and many feared it would be developed into housing. However our great benefactor, Ernest Stevens, bought it for £15,000 in 1929 and he gifted it to the people of Stourbridge for the benefit of recreation and for children. The Park was named in honour of his lost wife. Studley Court is now used by the local authority but the deed of the gift means that the park is maintained as Ernest Stevens intended.

Look at the back of Studley Court, up the steps opposite the bowling greens and you will see the statue of a seated man. This is Frank Foley 1884-1958, known as the British Schindler. He is honoured for saving over 10,000 Jews in the Holocaust.

He worked in passport control in Berlin but was in fact a British spy working for MI6. He used his cover to give safe passage for Jewish people threatened by the Nazis. He left Germany in 1949 and joined his wife in a rented house in Eveson Road, near to her sister where he lived until his death. In 1959 a grove of trees was planted at Kibbutz Harel, outside Jerusalem. Each of the trees had been paid for by someone he had saved from a concentration camp. (if you are interested in the Frank Foley Story read 'Foley' by Michael Smith, published by Hodder and Stoughton).

Leave the park by the main gate which were paid for by Ernest Stevens, and cross the road using the zebra crossing, walk around the Plough and Harrow pub and Worcester Street will take you back into the town centre.



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