

Amersham has been an important place in its time, returning two members of Parliament for more than 200 years. It has many connections with the Quakers and other religious dissenters and its importance as a staging post in the days of stage coaches accounts for many of the arched entrances which are still one of its attractive features with the pleasant views glimpsed through them.

Most of the Old Town is a Conservation Area and many of the buildings are listed as of historical or architectural interest. Several have remains of early wall paintings, the best preserved of which is a group of the Nine Worthies, dating back to Elizabethan times.

#### LONDON ROAD AND BROADWAY

Turning left from the Car Park (1), brings Bury Farm (2) into sight, on the far corner of the Beaconsfield Road, Gore Hill, said to be so named from a battle against the Danes. Dating from mid-fifteenth century, Bury Farm was in the 1660's the home of the Quakers, Isaac and Mary Pennington, and it was here that William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, came courting Mary's daughter, Gulielma Springett, who became his wife.

Cross the main road carefully and read the notice on No.60 London Road (3) threatening dire penalties to ballad mongers and other vagrants. At one time this was the first house on the edge of Amersham, the other premises beyond Bury Farm, centred around the old water mill, now the 'Mill Stream' restaurant, being a separate hamlet known as Bury End.

Continuing towards the centre of the town, the road widens opposite the car park and immediately on your left are two picturesque half-timbered 17th century houses, Nos.46 and 48. Notice the quaint roofline of the buildings across the road. Passing a 17th century timber-framed building on your left, now housing a supermarket and a café, you come to the Griffin Hotel (4), once an important staging post. Older than it looks from the front, which was altered in the late 17th century, a better impression of its age can be obtained from the back, which is Elizabethan. A garrison of Cromwell's troops is said to have been stationed here during the Civil War. In 1665 it was the scene of a shameful act in the persecution of the Quakers when a funeral procession was broken up, the coffin left lying in the road all day, and the bearers sent to gaol.

#### MEMORIAL GARDENS AND THE CHURCH

Cross by the pedestrian crossing and go straight ahead into the Memorial Gardens (5) laid out by the local council to commemorate those who died in the two world wars. The building to your right (6) is an old Malthouse, 15th century, originally belonging to the monks of Missenden Abbey. On your left is an excellent view of the Parish Church covered in local flints, well worth a visit, with some interesting monuments (especially in the Drake Chapel) and a fine east window. Parts of the church date back to the 13th century. It was much restored externally in 1890 and internally recently.

Leave the Memorial Gardens at the far end and bear slightly left to a bridge across the Misbourne. The track to the right

here leads past the cemetery to a footpath rising across a field (see map) up to the Martyrs Memorial commemorating the six Amersham men and one woman who in the early years of the 16th century died for their faith, being burned at the stake as Lollards. If you have 20 minutes to spare this makes a pleasant walk with excellent views across the town to the handsome Georgian manor house of Shardeloes. Built in 1758-66, the work of Robert Adam, it was for about 200 years the home of the Tyrwhitt-Drake family.

#### CHURCH STREET TO BARN MEADOW

However, our trail takes you left, beside the river to Church Street. The building on your right (7) is now occupied as a cosmetics factory, but for over 150 years operated as a brewery which gave employment to a large proportion of the men in the town, until it closed down in 1929. Cross Church Street and turn right. There are attractive buildings on both sides of the road, many of which served the brewery for one

purpose or another. The block on your left with blank arches comprised the stables with storage over. Further along on the right, opposite School Lane, notice the charming house 'Three Gables'. There is speculation whether it originally served as the tithe barn; it was used for storage in the time of the brewery.

Turning left along School Lane, through the hedge on your right you have a good view of the splendid south front of the old Rectory, at the top of Rectory Meadow. It was built about 1725 by the then Rector, Benjamin Robertshaw. Enter the recreation ground, Barn Meadow, on your left. This was once brewery property and the long low building over to the left (8) was the maltings, now used for light industry. On your right is the local church school, built in 1873 but considerably extended. Make your way to the far corner of Barn Meadow, noticing the charming view of the backs of the small houses in the High Street, each with its little wooden bridge across the river.



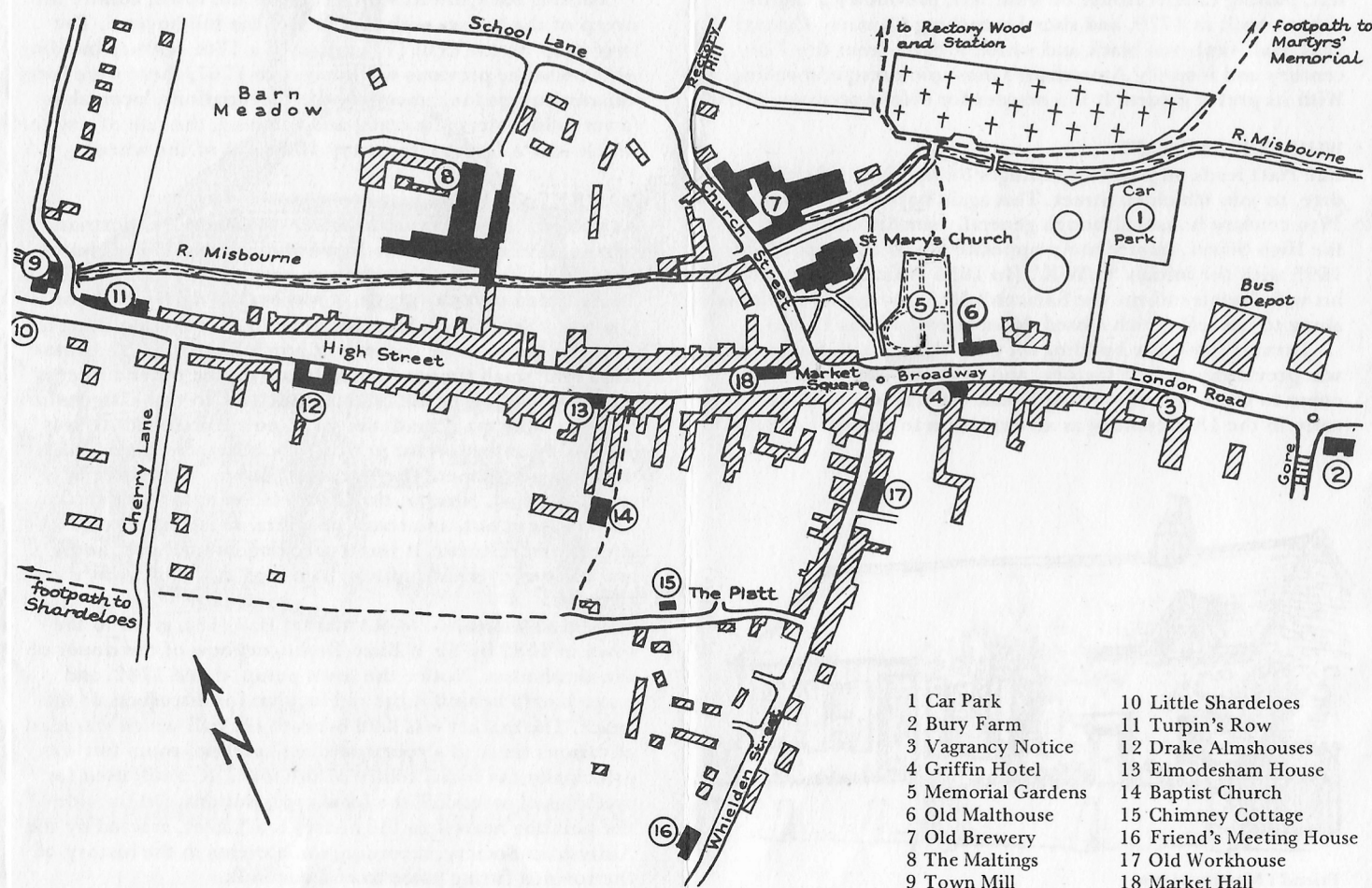
Town Mill

#### THE HIGH STREET

As you leave the field by the footpath beside the river, the building immediately in front of you is Town Mill (9), early 17th century, and still operating as a corn mill up to 50 years ago, having previously been a paper mill. Opposite the Mill-house, across the main road, hiding behind a high brick wall, is Little Shardeloes (10), also Tudor in origin, but much extended and altered. It is believed to have been the manor house of Amersham Manor before this was united with the manor of Shardeloes in 1637, being purchased by William Drake. It was subsequently used by the Drake family as the Dower House.

Turning back towards the centre of Amersham, you now have before you the splendid vista of the broad High Street, an excellent example of community life in the old days, with imposing wealthy merchants' houses cheek by jowl with the small cottages of the peasantry. Immediately on your left are twelve small cottages known as Turpin's Row (11) and dated 1678 – no connection with the highwayman despite local legends. 100 years ago these cottages and many like them in the alleys leading off the High Street would have been the scene of much straw-plaiting, the means by which the women, and children too, helped out the meagre wages of the men.

As you walk along, most of the houses have their charm and interest but we can pick out only a few for comment. On the right, Hinton House is a typical Georgian town house, and Piers Place dates from Queen Anne's period. Just beyond the Swan Inn (1671) are the Drake Almshouses (12) erected in 1657 by the same William Drake already mentioned, by then a baronet, to house six poor women of the parish, widows over fifty years of age. Amongst the other benefits to which they were to be entitled were 'a gown of London brown at Christmas each year for the first three years and alternate years thereafter; a pair of shoes, a pair of stockings and a shift twice a year at Christmas and Easter; and a load of billets four feet in length each year for firings'.

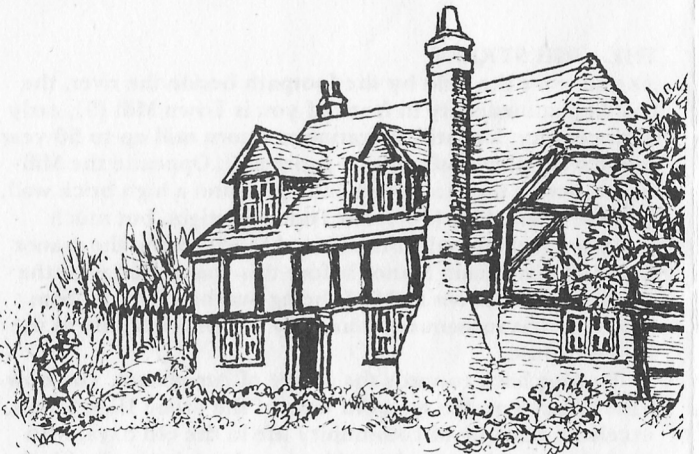


- |                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Car Park         | 10 Little Shardeloes      |
| 2 Bury Farm        | 11 Turpin's Row           |
| 3 Vagrancy Notice  | 12 Drake Almshouses       |
| 4 Griffin Hotel    | 13 Elmodesham House       |
| 5 Memorial Gardens | 14 Baptist Church         |
| 6 Old Malthouse    | 15 Chimney Cottage        |
| 7 Old Brewery      | 16 Friend's Meeting House |
| 8 The Maltings     | 17 Old Workhouse          |
| 9 Town Mill        | 18 Market Hall            |

# AMERSHAM A WALK AROUND THE OLD TOWN



Almost opposite is the smallest house in Amersham, No.129, for many years known as 'Wee Oaks', contrasting with several houses on your right, so large that each is now subdivided into two or more dwellings. Notice especially, opposite



Chimney Cottage

the 'Elephant and Castle' (early 17th century), Nos.56/60, a splendid Tudor mansion with fine chimneys.  
You are now approaching on the right, the largest house in the town, No.42, now occupied as council offices and known as Elmodesham House (13) from the name by which Amersham was recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086. It was formerly an imposing Georgian town house and, last century, was used as a very successful non-conformist boarding school, Ebenezer West's Academy. Again notice the comparatively tiny house it has as neighbour.

**BAPTIST CHURCH AND THE PLATT**  
Just ahead is the attractive half-timbered front of the Kings Arms, dating back to the 15th century and incorporating one of the oldest houses in Amersham. However, before reaching that, take the track on the right beside No.38, leading to the Baptist Church (14). This imposing building, with its glazed lantern, was built in 1783 of unusual design, being practically

square with a large balcony. It still, in 1975, contains many of the original wooden pews. It was extended in 1842 to accommodate the British School.

Continuing in the same direction, leave the old burial ground by a gateway in the end wall to reach a lane called the Platt, believed to be the oldest road in Amersham. Here turn left, passing Chapel House on your left, previously a Baptist chapel, built in 1779, and shortly reaching Chimney Cottage (15). Half-timbered black and white, it dates from the 17th century and is surely Amersham's most picturesque dwelling. With its pretty garden, it is a magnet for colour photographers.

**WHIELDEN STREET**

The Platt leads on past two cottages on the right, of similar date, to join Whielden Street. This again has many 16th and 17th century houses although generally smaller than those in the High Street. Immediately opposite you is a plaque dated 1695 with the initials 'H/W/K'. (In 1694 William Hailey and his wife Kathleen kept the Saracen's Head, an inn a few doors along to the left which closed down as recently as 1974.)

Turning right, the building on your right, Little Summeries, was previously a chair factory, and in about 100 yards you come to the Friends' Meeting House (16). It was built very early in the 18th century as an extension to an older cottage.



Friend's Meeting House

Behind it is a burial ground for which, no doubt, the disrupted funeral procession of 1665 was bound. Just beyond here is Amersham Hospital which incorporates the Workhouse built in 1838 to the design of Gilbert Scott. It is difficult now to appreciate the effectiveness of the original design, so cluttered and surrounded is it by later additions.

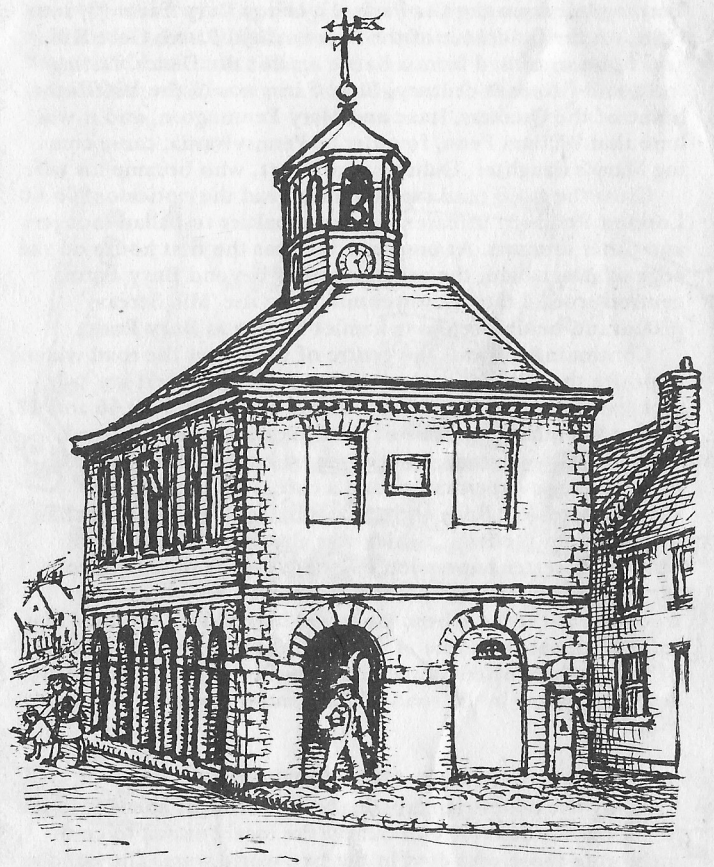
Turning back towards the centre of the town, admire the sweep of the houses with the view of the hill beyond. The large shop on the right (17) is part of a 17th century building which was the previous workhouse. In 1767, there were forty inmates engaged in, amongst other occupations, lacemaking (a very old Amersham craft) and spinning, the rate of pay for which was 'a farthing for every 100 turns of the wheel'.

**MARKET SQUARE**

As you reach the main road again, cross by the pedestrian crossing and turn left. The first building beyond the church path dates from the 16th century and was the Church House. As indicated over the porch, it was here that Dr Challenor's Grammar School was founded in 1624. Continuing along the row, the shop on the corner of Church Street is 17th century whilst the small timber-framed house on the other corner is one of the oldest in the town dating back to the 15th century.

Across the main road, the shop, now a pharmacists, was previously an important printing establishment from which the local newspaper 'The Buckinghamshire Advertiser' was first published. Nearby, the Crown Hotel dates back to the 16th century but, as a result of several fires, has been much altered and restored. It was a coaching inn and post house, and has some remains of wall paintings as well as a royal coat of arms.

And so we reach the old Market Hall (18), given to the town in 1682 by Sir William Drake, nephew of the donor of the almshouses. Notice the town pump, dated 1782, and immediately behind it the old lock-up for disturbers of the peace. The market was held beneath the hall which was used at various times as a courtroom and a school-room but was principally the social centre of the town. It is still used for meetings of several of the local organisations. On the side of the building nearest to the houses is a Tablet, erected by the Amersham Society, recording some events in the history of the town, a fitting place to end our walk.



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