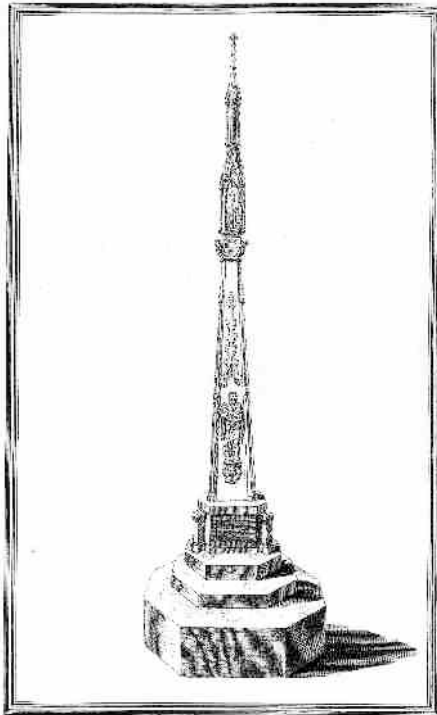


Stalbridge History Trail



Produced by Stalbridge History Group
Dorset

Stalbridge History Trail

Neolithic, Roman, Saxon, Medieval, Georgian and Victorian: all these layers make up the ancient town of Stalbridge. According to the Dorset Historic Towns Survey of 2011, our town “has real potential to inform” and “the archaeological potential...is judged to be high” in most of the town! On the western slopes of a hard Jurassic ridge above the Vale of Blackmore, Saxon *Stapulbridge* or *Stapulbreidge* began to grow in AD 860. Earlier remains suggest previous settlements but more extensive excavations are needed. Known as *Staplebridge* in the Domesday Book of 1086 to *Stalbrigg* or *Stapleford* in Medieval times, our town takes its name from a bridge on posts (stapuls), now long gone. From the 19 villagers listed in the Domesday Book, the Stalbridge population grew to 500 in Tudor times, 1700 in Victorian times and now in the C21st is heading towards 3000. Yet it remains the smallest town in Dorset and has an ancient core of many Grade II and II* listed buildings with the prospect of enormous untapped historical potential waiting to reveal its secrets!

The Oxford Clay of the Blackmore Vale used to be forested, but gradually dispersed farmsteads appeared and finally when the great oaks were felled for ship building, especially in Henry VIII’s reign, this opened up the Vale into the beautiful landscape you see today. Forest Marble, the natural local stone, has been quarried here for hundreds of years. Throughout Stalbridge you will see houses built in this grey-gold, hard shelly limestone. Natural streams rise from the slopes of Stalbridge and four pumps still exist which used to supply water to the town, once these streams went below ground.

Informal commerce in Stalbridge began in the Saxon period but Royal Charters were granted formally for various markets and fairs from 1209. These continued to grow from the Medieval up to the Georgian periods. Dairy and arable farming were major occupations with ale production and other hospitality services for traders and visitors. Later, major cattle markets developed here. The Georgian to the Victorian period saw smaller household industries grow alongside these. There were up to 50 private ale and cider houses, but most importantly the highly successful silk trade providing stockings and later leather gloves maintained an excellent reputation.

In the C10th, an Anglo-Saxon King of Wessex granted the Manor of Staplebridge to the Church and by 1086 it was owned by Sherborne Abbey. Various notable families have owned the lands of Stalbridge since then including the Seymours, Audleys, Boyles (notably Robert Boyle the famous C17th scientist), Pagets (later Uxbridge then Anglesey) and Grosvenors (related to the Dukes of Westminster). Most of the Stalbridge Estate was broken up and sold to private buyers in 1918. The original Church and Manor house were built on the higher slopes above the spring and streams to the north of the present town and the Saxon and Medieval settlements began to grow below it to the south. Evidence for this can be found in the internal structures of the cottages in Gold Street (one of the original east-west ancient trackways that linked London to Exeter), High Street and Church Hill and also in the remains of their high ancient walls of burgage-style plots (rented strips of land). Most of Stalbridge was designated as a Conservation Area in 1978.

BEGIN at the Hub and Library Car Park!

This walking tour is approximately 2 miles in length. Please respect and do not disturb the privacy of residents. The whole route is assisted wheelchair friendly except for pavement kerbs.

① **STAND ON THE CORNER of Station Road** (once Guggleton Street). You can hear an underground stream rushing under your feet from the nearby drain: see also ⑮ and ⑳. To your right you will see the beautiful Blackmore Vale up to Shaftesbury. Across the road is the *C19th Drill Hall* and to its right are the old *C17th Guggleton Farm* buildings, now the Guggleton Farm Arts Project. Further down near the site of the once very busy *Railway Station*, that served the route from Bath to Bournemouth, industries such as the famous Thomas J. Fudge's Bakery are now located. To your left is *C18th Well Cottage* where the well was built inside the house.

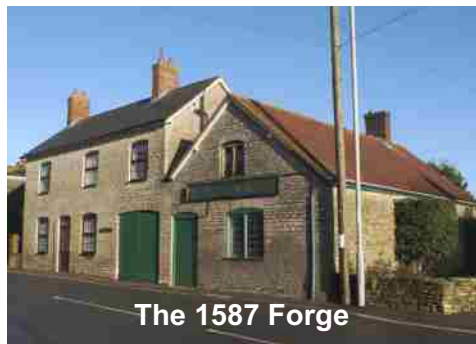
② **TURN LEFT** and walk up to the *C19th Congregational Church*. Looking across the road (to the left of The Maples) is the original town *1885 Pump House*. Its arched appearance is because it was once the entrance to the original Congregational Chapel. The green iron Pump itself is now on **The Ring** ⑥ and was designed by the renowned S.Owens of London. The *C19th buildings* to the left mark the southern edge of the Medieval core of Stalbridge to the north which you will explore later.

③ **WALK to the crossroads** with the Post Office opposite you. This marks an ancient Saxon intersection of travellers' routes (one of two going E-W linking the Abbeys of Sherborne and Shaftesbury). The N-S route of **High Street, Ring Street and Lower Road** linked the important Somerset trading routes to Dorset market towns and ports. This area later became the heart of a thriving *C19th & C20th town*. Opposite on the corner of Station Road was a large general store called Meaders, founded in 1873 by a jeweller who was able to source anything a customer requested. On top of 'normal' goods, they even sold petrol, airguns, medicines, hymn books, insurance policies and pig troughs!

④ **TURN LEFT** into **Ring Street**. Ahead you can see the spread of Stalbridge in Georgian and Victorian times and then *C20th* after that. This first narrow stretch has *C18th housing* to the left which later converted into shops: *Half Moon Cottage* was an ale house and *Purbeck Cottage* a sweet shop – both have remnants of old stone tile roofs. Not using thatch, these and later Welsh slate tiles protected many of Stalbridge's historic houses from the spread of fire. Many other examples are shown on this trail ⑨, ⑫, ⑯ and ⑰.



⑤ CONTINUE south (past Dike's Supermarket across the road), go past the former *C19th Methodist Church*, **Stalbridge Close** (which can still be remembered as the site for a C20th fairground and previously as a very prosperous cattle market) and arrive at *C17th Anvil House*. To its right is its *1587 Forge* with two original furnaces, ships' timbers construction and Tudor flagstones. This was run by the Jeans family (one of many Stalbridge names still in the area) throughout its time as a forge, and *Anvil House* and *C18th Laburnham House* a little further on are still their family homes – look for the huge stone slab used as fencing, towards the back of the latter property (also seen in Gold Street ⑬). Next on the left is their old cider barn.



⑥ APPROACH **The Ring** (site of a former Bull Ring) with **Lower Road** going off to the left. This original main road has been superseded by C19th **Thornhill Road** on the right, once just a C17th track to *C17th Thornhill House* 1 mile south. Ahead is the gothic style *Pump* described earlier ②. This whole area was open fields with beautiful views before the C18th and the site of annual fairs and circuses, now mostly covered with C20th housing estates. East of the green are the pretty *1840 Anglesey Cottages* and further down on the right is the *early C19th Stalbridge Arms* public house. To the west are the *C19th Westminster Cottages*, Anglesey and Westminster referring to the previous landowners of Stalbridge as is C20th **Grosvenor Road**.

⑦ ON THE LINKING ROAD between **Lower Road** and **Thornhill Road** the old 1760 *Poor House* can be seen, now called *1 & 2 Ringtree House*. A post was once dug up outside, to which people were tied while waiting to be deported. No 1 used to be the laundry for the Poor House. On the green opposite this house is another *pump*, in its original place but with an old very stern warning if you damage it! A beautiful Lime tree was planted here for the 1937 *Coronation* and is still the site for celebration in the form of an open-air carol service held each year to switch on the wonderful Christmas lights decorating the tree.



⑧ RETRACE YOUR STEPS on **Thornhill Road** towards the town centre.

⑨ RETURNING TO **Ring Street** you will pass *C18th Fernley* - attached to its right is the old Gaol, near where the old stocks used to be. More old stone roof tiles can be seen on *C17th Runaways* and *The Thatched Cottage* as well as remains of a third cottage, its fireplace clearly visible.

⑩ ARRIVING at *Dike's Supermarket* you may like to take a break and pop into William's Cafe! On the corner, where the expanded 1909 store used to be, is a new block of flats and houses each named after past Rectors of Stalbridge.

⑪ LEAVING DIKE'S go via **The Cutting** to arrive in **Barrow Hill** opposite **Grove Lane**, either side of which are the former sites of two smaller Forges. (Here you can extend the Trail by going west up **Barrow Hill**: Towards the end is **Wood Lane** on the left, whose ancient field systems at the end have shown Roman occupation debris and other prehistoric finds. If you continue on the main road you will begin to follow the southern walls of **Stalbridge Park** and will see beautiful views towards Bulbarrow. On your return, you will pass C20th **Pond Walk** on your left where Roman settlement remains were found as well as adjacent in **Grove Lane Close** off **Grove Lane**.)

⑫ Between C17th *Harmony Cottage* and *Old Cider House* is another example of old stone roofing.

⑬ WALK UP **Grove Lane** (once known as Back Lane). At *No.1* a Witch's Bottle was found, an old custom to protect the house from evil. Like the Ring Street area behind you, this area was developed in the C17th but many houses are dated C18th but with possible older foundations. As you go up this lane you will begin to see the many old Forest Marble high drystone walls that are a distinctive feature of old Stalbridge. Their layout is strongly suggestive of Medieval and Saxon origins and design. Although some have been restored they remain in their original positions and are of major significance in understanding the historic layout of our ancient town.

⑭ Here are some more houses in **Grove Lane**:

100 yards up on the right is *Lydden Cottage* from which the young Douglas Adams witnessed in 1975 the demolition of the old cottages in **Silk House Barton**, which inspired the opening scenes of his book *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*. Further on the left another water pump can be seen.

C18th *Dormers* were 'modernised' in the Victorian era with a new front with brick-edged windows, so a much older cottage hides behind this, but before that it was a barn. This 'new' Victorian style can be seen around Stalbridge especially in **Church Hill** and **High Street**.

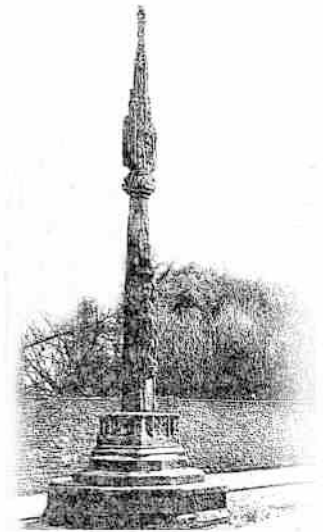
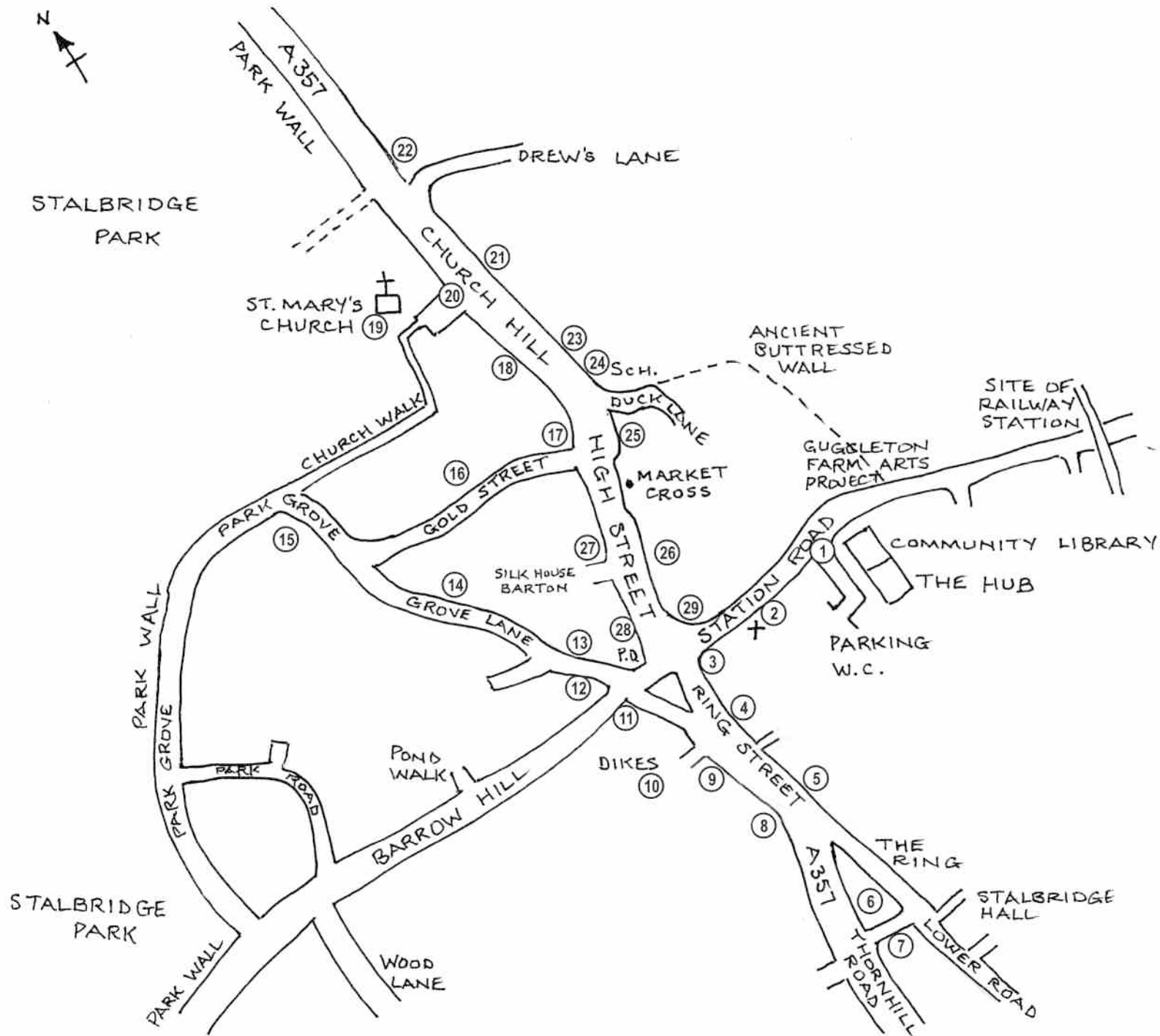
C16th *The Cottage* at the top of Grove Lane where recent renovation revealed an old Elizabethan silver penny buried in an original wall (said to bring abundance to the inhabitants) and this has backdated the house by another hundred years!

⑮ BEARING LEFT you enter **Park Grove** ahead and can sometimes hear an underground

stream rushing in the two drains on the left. To the left is C19th *Grove House*, a classic villa built by Royal Academy architect George Aitchison, complete with stables, gardener's privy, glasshouse foundations, extensive period gardens and several wells. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Lambe GCB, CVO was born here in 1900. He served with distinction in WW2, being Mentioned in Despatches three times, and became First Sea Lord in 1959.



Grove House



Overhanging its wall on the corner is a Horse Chestnut tree, reputed to be the oldest and largest in Dorset. Across the road are the high stone walls of Stalbridge Park. (From here you can detour to the Church via the footpath on the right.) Otherwise retrace your steps and look down the hill of **Gold Street**, an ancient part of Stalbridge where many buildings are listed.

⑩ **Gold Street:** This is part of the original Saxon and Early Medieval area of development. The houses here are mainly C18th (although many have much earlier foundations or hidden structures) but their original high drystone walls remain in place between each property and are in a typical Medieval plot boundary layout. Also, at either end of **Gold Street** two Roman burials have been found suggesting this ancient route was on the edge of a much earlier settlement.

Here are just some of the Grade II listed houses in **Gold Street**:

C18th *The Old Cottage* has always had a thatched roof, unusually for Stalbridge, and has a listed upright flagstone boundary wall.

C17/18th *Knapp House* has been used as a boy's school and doctor's house. Note the old fire insurance sign on its wall.

C17/18th *Stanton Cottage & No 9 (formerly Hobbs Cottage)* original stucco walls, front doors, fanlights and mouldings plus stone roof tiles.

C18th *Little Talland* possibly has the oldest foundations in **Gold Street** – note its early leaded windowpanes.

C18th *Snowdon House* classic Georgian design hiding an earlier building. Note the boot



scraper, one of many still in place; also an LSWR railway bullhead rail re-used as a lintel above the garage with a very early British Standards Kitemark. The next area was once a farm and the buildings have become private dwellings.

C21st *Prideaux House* is part of a modern development on the site of Prideaux's Milk Factory, which became famous for its Dorsella milk powder during

WW2. Note the old horse tethering in the wall, a reminder of the days of horse drawn carts.

⑪ **High Street North:** At the bottom of **Gold Street**, TURN LEFT into **High Street**. This is the one known edge of the Late Medieval market place. It is marked by *The Old Bakehouse* C15/18th, named after its early C19th bread ovens, but the front half was probably a medieval Chantry (connected to Sherborne Abbey). Note the original intact medieval Forest Marble roof tiles. It is exactly aligned with *Silk Hay* and *Fernwood* ⑫ and marks the west side of the Medieval street line of Stalbridge where these buildings were built encroaching onto the once huge old Market Place. The next few houses have more fine examples of stone roofing. In early C20th Stalbridge they housed more shops and a bank. C17th *Dumbledore* was an inn and brewhouse and still has its original roof tiles and brewhouse range.

⑱ **Church Hill West side:** PASSING several old cottages of mixed origins, the road rises towards the Church. At the bottom is another old water pump. Ahead is the glorious Church Hill Wall which is heavily festooned with purple Aubretia. This draws photographers here every Spring.



Aubretia on Church Hill

⑲ **St Mary's Church C14/16/19th Grade II*:** FOLLOW the wide pavement up to the Church. On the left are C18th Church Hill House & April Cottage which were once one large house. Go

to the church gates and see another lovely view of the Blackmore Vale. The little stone building near this is the old funeral Bier House and inside is a spring and a collapsed ancient well mentioned in the Domesday Book. A full history of the Church is inside, but



Cadaver effigy tomb

note the rare C15th cadaver effigy tomb and the Medieval nave and arcades. Some medieval stone footings and floor tiles were found during repairs to the vestry suggesting more awaits discovery. In the porch is a list of Rectors. The first one arrived in 1160 suggesting an earlier church existed then. Sir James Thornhill, famous for his painting of the dome of St Paul's Cathedral and the Painted Hall at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, is buried in the crypt, but the precise location there became lost during later Victorian alterations to the Church.



War Memorial

The Churchyard is a peaceful place to see the graves of all the old families of Stalbridge, many of whom still live here today. One notable person is Rev. William Douch, tutor to the famous Irish C17th scientist Robert Boyle when his family lived at Stalbridge Park. Boyle inherited the Manor of Stalbridge from his father 1st Earl of Cork and lived here as a boy and later in his late teenage and early adult years, already developing his command of science. Also in the Churchyard is the fine War Memorial commemorating the 30 Stalbridge men who gave their lives in two World Wars. Finally, an old legend says that if you go around the Church three times at midnight a ghost appears!

⑳ RETURN to the main road and note the waterspout below the Churchyard wall pouring vigorously from the spring under the Bier House – it rarely dries up and continues noisily under the road. Where you see the postbox there used to be a thin lean-to cottage depicted in an old drawing that pre-dates the Victorian tower extension.



②① Across the road is CC Moore Agricultural Feed Merchants, a family business which started at West Mill in the mid C18th and moved to this C17th farm complex in the early 1930s.

②② CROSS OVER but continue north until you reach the C17th *Stalbridge Park Gate Piers* opposite. The house was pulled down in 1823 but its 5 mile estate perimeter walls remain and were reputedly rebuilt by Napoleonic prisoners of war as they are in the northern French style. Beside you is *The Old School 1832*, the original boys' school. It has an OS Datum Point carved in its front wall at a point 84.08 metres above the Newlyn Datum.

②③ GO BACK DOWN towards Stalbridge, where, at the top of the drive to *The Shippen*, a C20th conversion of a C18th Cow Stall, you will find the oldest building in Stalbridge, a small barn with interior features indicating its probable use as a Grain Store in Saxon times.



②④ AT THE BOTTOM of the hill you will pass the early C19th *Old Red Lion* (now Red Lion Court divided into homes) which used to be a large hotel, complete with Ballroom, with its original carriageway arch, as well as an Inland Revenue Office. The 3 acre field behind it was owned by the Army in WW2 and was filled with Nissen huts, latrines, a cookhouse and incinerator. Next door at the junction of **Duck Lane** (previously known as Farm Lane) is a double fronted cycle shop, listed as C18th but it has blackened medieval timbers from a once central open fire (before the invention of chimneys) and follows the traditional Medieval Dorset Longhouse shape. The land behind it was once an orchard with old fashioned trees such as Medlar, Mulberry and Walnut. Further down **Duck Lane** on the right is the C18th *Home Farmhouse*, the remnant of a larger farm site - the reason for its original road name. (If you detour down the footpath by the school playground you can see an ancient stone buttressed wall, the original purpose of which remains a mystery.)

②⑤ REJOINING **High Street** going south you pass *The Old Rectory 1699* with its wall and flat porch hood over the gate (possibly from the original front door). Ahead is the famous C15th *Grade II* Market Cross*, the finest in Dorset. Believed to be in its original position, it marks a possible lost crossroads and centre of the Medieval *Market Place*. Wesley preached here in 1766. Behind most of the properties on the east side of **High Street** are very high drystone walls as found in **Gold Street**, thought to be late Medieval and early Tudor. Most of the buildings have later frontages but have early Georgian or Tudor internal structures. All would have been involved in commercial enterprises for the Georgian markets such as C17/18th *York House* (originally The Hind Inn, but later the Reading Room and then a tea room) and especially C18th *The Swan (Hotel)* which included lodging, but many acted as small ale-houses and dwellings.

The Swan has a large older stable block behind it (now a skittle alley) which once housed a forge, and there were pigsties, cart sheds, a coach house and stabling for 17 horses. This area with Gold Street was the hub of business and trade from Medieval times until late Georgian. Gradually houses were converted into shops, offices and alehouses up until the C20th, but now in the C21st many have reverted to being private homes again. On several occasions during WW2 retailers and residents remember watching the **High Street** grow dark with swarms of German bombers overhead, making their way towards Bristol.

②⑥ The older dwellings in **High Street** are C17/18th with C19th frontages but have early Georgian or Tudor internal structures. Much older sections at the back follow the original street line from Medieval and Tudor times, see also ②⑦. Many are now faced with yellow brick-edged windows and doors added by the owners of the Stalbridge Estate in Victorian times. Note a now rare Stalbridge Estate boot scraper outside the offices of *C19th Manchester House*. Next door is *early C17th Wayside* (now an electrical shop and house but all one before 1961) which is constructed with an internal cross passage plan and is much older at the back than the front, despite the mid-Victorian windows and C20th shop frontage (see also ①④). Behind this notable property are old hunting stables, a coach house and a cobbled yard where, before WW1, Lord Stalbridge's horses and polo ponies were stabled.

②⑦ ACROSS THE ROAD is **Silk House Barton**, once the site of the renowned silk industry of Georgian Stalbridge and its gloving industry much later. This is the site described at ①④ in connection with Douglas Adams. On the corner is *C15th Silk Hay* which together with *Fernwood*, 23 & 25 *High St.* were once all one house, set back following the original Medieval street line. This was a Hall House probably built by a prosperous merchant, but there are vestiges of an earlier Norman house. The front wing of *Silk Hay* with its half-hipped roof, which juts forward, is Tudor and was later a Victorian shop and it shows how the street line had begun to narrow by then. Internally are many original and interesting structures, including a verified crude sketch of a Crusader Knight. *Fernwood* is the only surviving part of the Medieval house that was not extended forwards into the street so its external walls marking the ancient street line are still visible.



②⑧ Further on next to the Post Office is the *C17th Old Curiosity Shop*, now a private house with its wide old front door of studded planks. Finally, the *C18th Post Office* has the usual Victorian frontage but is believed to have a much earlier core.

②⑨ AT THE JUNCTION turn left again into **Station Road** and make your way back to the Hub and Library Car Park, completing your tour.

The ancient town of Stalbridge is on the A357 between Templecombe and Sturminster Newton

The Stalbridge History Group hopes you have enjoyed your walk around Stalbridge and will come back soon! We are proud of the rich layers of history we have here, but are only too aware that a great deal more is still to be uncovered. The information in this pamphlet has been thoroughly researched to the best of our knowledge at the time of printing but we acknowledge opinions can vary and memories may conflict. We will be happy to make amendments in future publications when any new information is given to us.

Contact us via the Community Office in the Hub in Station Road.

Finally, we are enormously grateful for the funding and support of this History Trail from Stalbridge Town Council.

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NOTES

Further Reading:

1. "The Stalbridge Inheritance, from Roman times to the late Eighteenth Century" by Irene Jones. Published in 2009 by the Dovecote Press. ISBN 978 1 904 34971 6
2. "The Stalbridge Inheritance 1780-1854" by Irene Jones. Published in 1993 by Larkwood Publishing. ISBN 0 9522 323 0 8
3. "Silk Hay - One Woman's Fight for Architectural Heritage" by Hilary Townsend. Published in 2012 by Matador. ISBN 978 1 78088 146 1
4. "Blackmore Vale Childhood" by Hilary Townsend. Published in 2006 by The Dovecote Press. ISBN 1 904349 50 1
5. www.dorsetforyou.com "Dorset Historic Towns Survey: Stalbridge" Published in 2011.
6. www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk.