

Historic wall plaques

1. Fletcher’s House (now The Oxfordshire Museum) In 1279 there was a house and a forge here. Records show the Fletcher family living here from 1468 – when tax was sixpence a year – until at least 1526. Around 1609 a wealthy alderman Thomas Browne built a large house here, calling it Fletcher’s. In 1780 the Duke of Marlborough bought the property but five years later it transferred to his agent Thomas Walker, also Town Clerk in Woodstock and Oxford. Initially Walker let the property as a girls’ boarding school but in 1797 started reconstruction. Today’s façade is Georgian in style but some of the 1609 house can be seen from the Museum garden.

FLETCHER’S HOUSE remodelled 1795-1800 by THOMAS WALKER Town Clerk of WOODSTOCK on land occupied since 1279

2. Samson’s Press. Joan Shelmerdine and Flora Grierson ran their press in 13 Park Street from 1937 – moving next door to number 11 in 1944 until 1967 after Flora’s death. They commissioned and printed a wide range of illustrated works, now highly prized collectors’ items, including wood engravings, lino-cuts and drawings from artists such as Iain Macnab and Gwenda Morgan and work from Edwin Muir, a noted poet. The press archives and equipment are now owned by the Weston Library in Oxford.

The SAMSON PRESS moved here from No.13 in 1944 & started here in 1937



3. The Bishop’s House was built in 1686 by Dr John Fell, Bishop of Oxford, Comptroller of Oxford University Press, Dean of Christ Church and Vice Chancellor of the University, to encourage the Rector of Bladon cum Woodstock to spend time in the busiest section of his parish. Dr Fell spent £600 on the building. Edward Strong, chief stonemason at Blenheim and owner of Taynton quarry, lived here in the 1720s, making the Vanbrugh style tower-like additions to the cruciform building.

The BISHOP’S HOUSE built by Dr FELL BISHOP of OXFORD 1686

5. Ancient Mariner’s House. Brothers Robert and Simon Hatley rebuilt numbers 6 and 8 in 1708. SMH on the downpipe records Simon and his wife Mary. By then Simon’s son, another Simon, was at sea. In *A Voyage around the World by Way of the South Sea*, his Captain, George Shelvocke, records Second Captain Hatley shooting an albatross (with gun not crossbow) during storms in the Southern Ocean. Wordsworth and Coleridge discussed this event when walking in Somerset in November 1797. That evening, at Watchet Inn, Coleridge began *The Rime of the Ancyente Mariner*.

SIMON HATLEY Coleridge’s ANCIENT MARINER lived here 6&8 HIGH STREET

4. Town Hall. George Spencer, 4th Duke of Marlborough, paid over £1000 in 1766 to construct the Town Hall as the Corporation spent money intended for this purpose on (unsuccessful) lottery tickets. The Duke’s coat of arms is under the pediment and the town’s above the main door. The ground floor open market area was enclosed in 1898 to create council chamber and offices. A fire bell still hangs high on the eastern side of the building above where the fire apparatus was originally kept. The sheep and sacks of wool depicted on the plaque recall the commercial importance of the wool trade in the Cotswolds.

WOODSTOCK TOWN HALL BUILT IN 1766 WHEN THE GROUND FLOOR WAS AN OPEN MARKET & FIRE ENGINE HOUSE

EDMUND WEBLEY’S GLOVE FACTORY ONCE A FLOURISHING TRADE

6. Webley’s Glove Factory at 62 Oxford Street was one of ten glove factories in Woodstock in the late 19th century. Woodstock was famous from medieval times for its sheep and deer hide gauntlets and gloves. Originally leather was prepared and cut in backyard workshops and sewn together by women at home. 19th century mechanisation led to glove factories developing in backyards where leather was prepared, cut and, after stitching by women in neighbouring villages, packed and despatched to London by rail. Webley’s factory closed in the 1950s.

1626 JAMES & HUMPHREY KEENE BELL FOUNDRY

8. In 1626 James and Humphrey Keene’s **Bell Foundry** was near 52 Oxford Street. In 1628 James Keene cast a new bell for Woodstock’s St Mary Magdalene church for 30 shillings in exchange for admission as Freeman of the Borough. St Mary’s bells were recast much later but Keene bells survive in many other churches. James and Humphrey cast Great Tom at Christchurch around 1625 but James’ son Richard failed to recast a heavier Great Tom in 1678/9. The Keene foundry disappears from history around 1700.

9. Eldridge’s Cut Steel Jewellery Factory. 18th century Woodstock was a centre of cut steel (whitesmith) work. Small pieces of steel nails, faceted like diamonds, were screwed into frameworks for buckles, chatelaines, sword handles etc... The Eldridge family of skilled whitesmiths, ironmongers and glovers had a shop here before 1733. In the 1760s George Eldridge was appointed jeweller to Queen Charlotte, George III’s consort. With cheaper machine-made jewellery flooding the market in the 19th century, Woodstock’s trade declined.

GEORGE ELDRIDGE polished STEEL jeweller to QUEEN Charlotte

10. Number 28 High Street, named **Cromwell House** in the 19th century, was part of the 16th century Great House extending from present day number 24 to 30 Park Street. Some of Cromwell’s army billeted here when besieging Woodstock Palace. Cromwell himself never visited. In the early 17th century this was the site of an alehouse. James I, ambitious to develop the English silk trade, decreed that significant alehouses should plant mulberry trees as food for silkworms. The garden retains a mulberry (not the original one). The 18th century porch hood came from the Marlborough Arms in the 20th century.

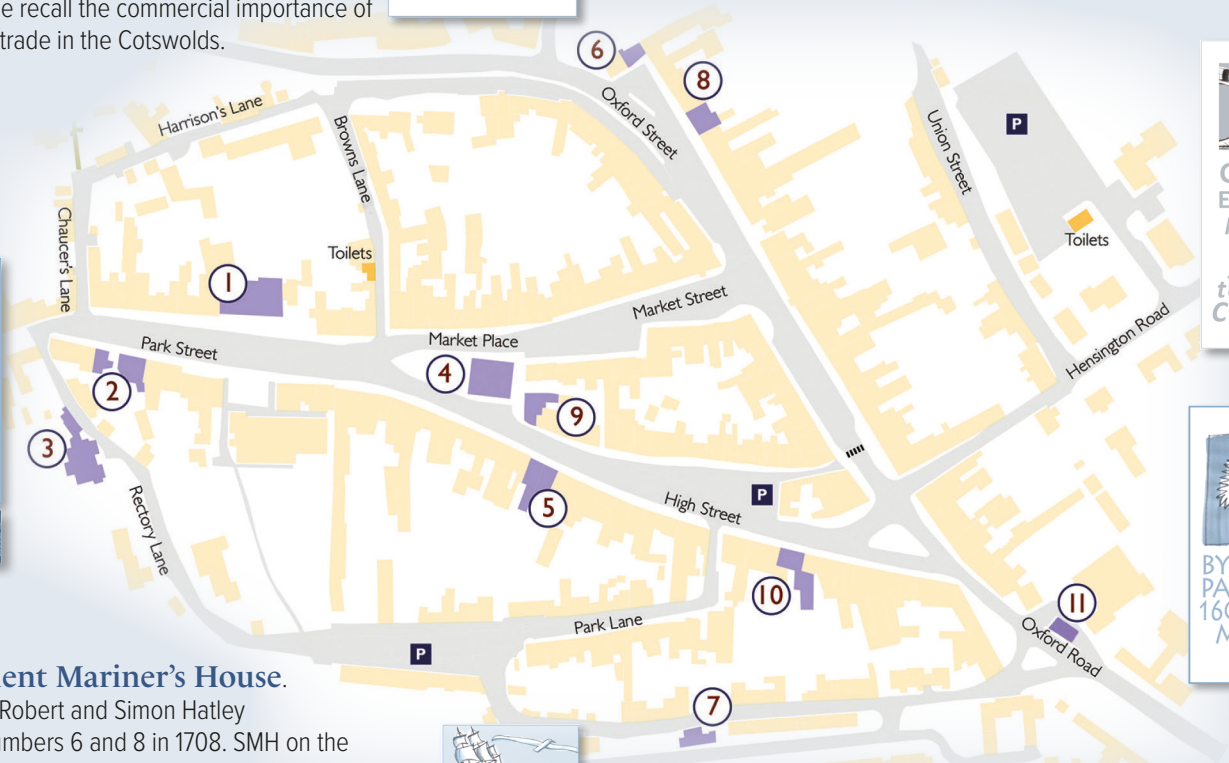
BY ACT OF PARLIAMENT 1603: ONE MULBERRY TREE

7. The Pest House, now Apple Tree Cottage 23 Rectory Lane, was built for £60 in 1719. Smallpox cases were cared for in six identical rooms. The intention was to isolate the infectious sick from healthy citizens but, by 1765, the hospital was recognised as too close to the town centre. A lease exchange between the Corporation and the Duke moved the Pest House to Shipton Road until 1881 when patients with dangerous infections were sent to the County isolation hospital. The property was sold in 1943 for £175.

THE PEST HOUSE ISOLATION HOSPITAL 1719

11. The Railway Station: The long low building at the front of Ashford Close is all that remains of Blenheim & Woodstock Railway Station. The Woodstock to Kidlington Branch Line ran between 1890 and 1954, created it was said so the Tsar of Russia and the German Kaiser could come to Blenheim by train. When the Kaiser did visit in 1901, he gave the longstanding Stationmaster Thomas Ashford a gold tie-pin in gratitude for his care and attention. Some, watching the last train in 1954, recalled their trip on the first train as schoolchildren sponsored by the Rector.

BLENHIM & WOODSTOCK RAILWAY STATION 1874 • 1952



Historic Woodstock

Woodstock dates back before the time of King Alfred (848-899 CE) as a royal hunting lodge across the lake (then the river) from today's Blenheim Palace. In 1110 Henry I built a seven mile long stone wall around the Hunting Lodge/Royal Manor House to contain the strange animals presented to him by foreign potentates. Old Woodstock - north of the river – developed with residents evicted from the walled area.

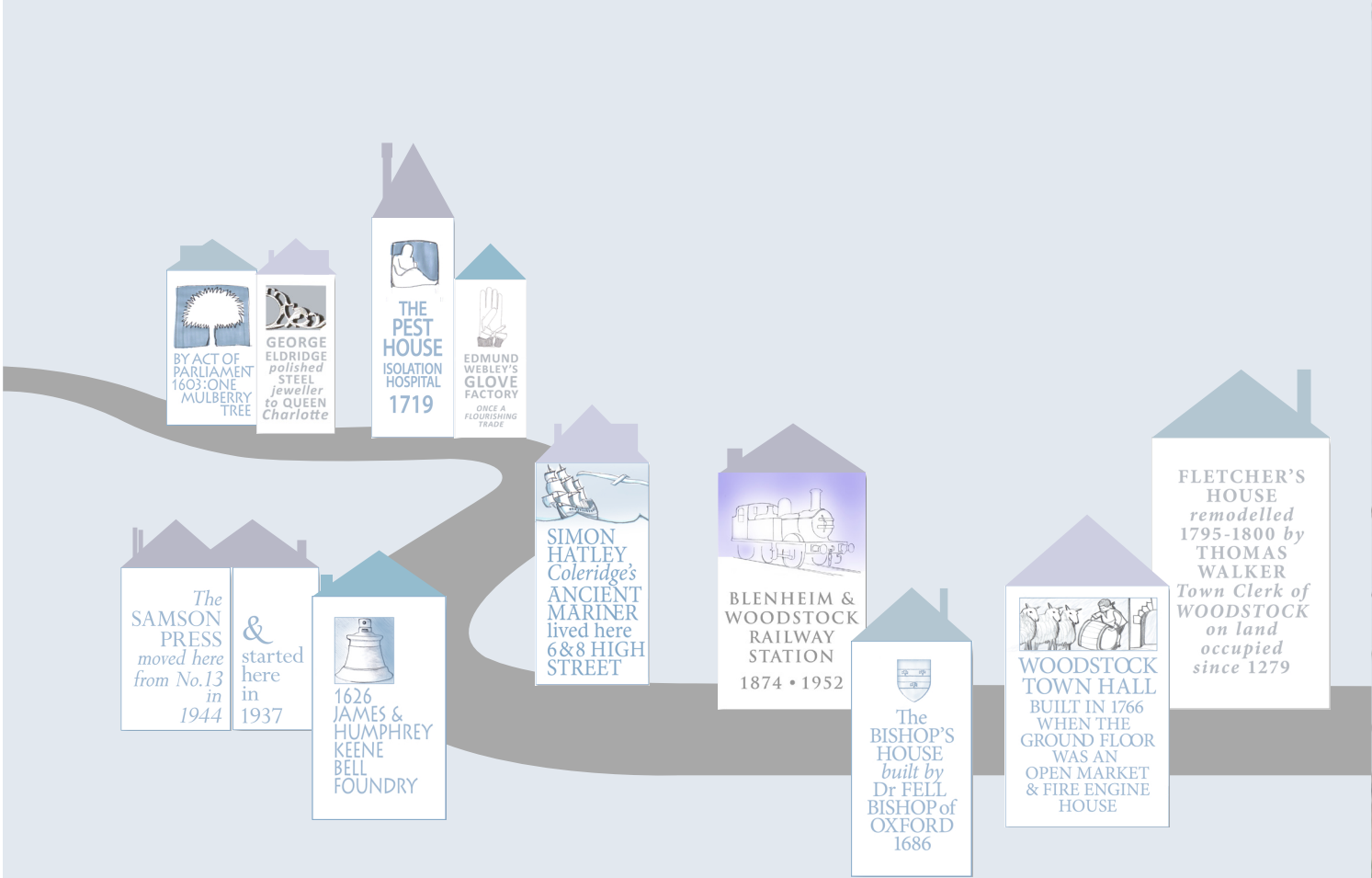
New Woodstock – the main town today - dates from around 1185 when Henry II needed accommodation for courtiers and tradesmen attending Woodstock Royal Manor House/Palace.

The town expanded further in the 18th century when the derelict Woodstock Palace, Park and several surrounding villages, were given by a grateful Queen Anne and Parliament to the first Duke of Marlborough for his successes in the War of the Spanish Succession and the construction of Blenheim Palace began.

The wall plaques

Many buildings in the town have fascinating stories. The wall plaques were commissioned from Oxfordshire sculptor Giles MacDonald, in 2011, to highlight a few of these stories and bring the history of Woodstock to life. Giles worked in Portland limestone, the classic building material of this country. This weathers over time to a silver-grey colour which contrasts gently with the Cotswold stone buildings.

The plaques cover a wide range of interests: domestic; early industrial; literary; antiquarian. Enjoy discovering the plaques around the town.



For further information, contact Woodstock Town Council
info@woodstock-tc.gov.uk

Woodstock Historic Wall Plaques Trail is an initiative of Woodstock Town Council in partnership with West Oxfordshire District Council. The original project was funded from private sources including developer funding. This revised leaflet is funded by the government Welcome Back Fund. Linda Glees, Carol Anderson and Elizabeth Poskitt collated the historic material for this and the original leaflet.

Published by Woodstock Town Council, Town Hall, Market Place, Woodstock OX20 1SL
Printed by KMS Litho, Railway Bridge House, Station Road, Hook Norton OX15 5LS



Woodstock

Historic Wall Plaques



Follow the trail to discover
the history of some of
Woodstock's fine buildings...