

# BICESTER

## HISTORIC TOWN GUIDE



### OLD PLACE YARD

There are few visible signs remaining of the Augustinian Bicester Priory, founded on this site by Gilbert Bassett in c.1182 and dissolved in 1536. It consisted of a priory church, chapter house with cloisters, hospice, prior's lodgings and a farmyard. Once a pilgrimage destination dedicated to St Edburg.

- 1 THE DOVECOTE – mainly 17th Century. Grade II listed**  
Thought to occupy the site of the original dovecote for the Priory. This would have provided food for the monks. A two-storey building since 1967 when an external concrete staircase and Perspex flèche (on the roof) were added.
- 2 ST EDBURG'S CHURCH – c.12th Century. The oldest and only Grade I listed building in Bicester**  
Bicester's parish church is dedicated to St. Edburg (see carving over the south door) and probably replaced an earlier Saxon church. The cholera stone in the churchyard is a memorial to the 64 victims of the 1832 epidemic.
- 3 THE OLD VICARAGE – c.16th Century. Grade II\* listed**  
Probably the oldest dwelling in Bicester. The original house appears to have been L-shaped and of a design referred to as a 'hall house'. A vicarage until the retirement of Canon Trebble in 1974.
- 4 CHURCH TERRACE – Mainly 17th Century. Grade II listed**  
Includes: a former charity Blue Coat school (no.1), Crick House (no. 3), Tysul House (no. 5), the former Six Bells public house (no. 7), a former bakery and shop (no. 9 and no. 11). The former Swan Inn (no. 13) lodged prisoners in the early 19th century.
- 5 HOME FARM HOUSE – c.1700 (but possibly 16th Century)**  
Probably constructed as three cottages and amalgamated into one farmhouse sometime before 1881. One of several properties in the manor of King's End which operated as 'bough houses', selling beer during sheep fairs.
- 6 BICESTER HOUSE – c. 19th Century**  
On the site of the mediaeval manor house of the Nuns of Markyate, the former home of the Coker Family (Lords of the manor of King's End from 1584), was rebuilt in a Georgian style following a fire in the 1820s.
- 7 22 CHURCH STREET – Early 17th Century**  
One of only two thatched buildings in Bicester. A 'cross passage' house allowing access to the rear of the chimney stack which formed one wall of a passage so people and animals could avoid entering the main living area.
- 8 20 CHURCH STREET (The Limes). c. mid-18th Century**  
Altered in the 19th century. Previously Bicester's original Post Office, a ladies' seminary, home to a small community of Catholic priests, a small private school and now a family home.
- 9 THE OLD POLICE HOUSE & COURTHOUSE – 1857 (only a year after the County and Borough Police Act)**  
A courtroom was added in 1873. The imposing original gates lead into the yard where cells, charge room and part of the superintendent's lodgings were located. Window bars and cell doors have been retained inside.

- 10 CAUSEWAY**  
Reputedly laid by monks from Bicester Priory, linking King's End and Market End manors, and providing access to the market. Evidence of the original burgrave plots can still be seen to the rear of the present 17th to 19th century buildings. No. 8 (1676) is timber-framed with a jettied first floor.

### MARKET SQUARE – Established in a charter granted by Henry III in 1239

Typical mediaeval, triangular-shaped market square, playing a defensive role in the absence of a town wall. Once included a town hall, slaughterhouse and meat market, stocks and whipping post (formerly the 'Shambles'). A drinking fountain, weighbridge and air-raid shelter were later additions.

- 11 17 MARKET SQUARE – 17th Century**  
Timber-framed, gable fronted, formerly Jagger's Veterinary Shoeing Forge with original cobbled path to rear yard for horses. The refurbished bay window conceals a grill which is an indication of the large cellars which existed under these old buildings.
- 12 46, 48 & 51 MARKET SQUARE (Island Block) – Late 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries**  
Nos. 48 and 51 were probably built as one two-storey house with attic, whilst no. 46 is a slightly later addition. Rare six-light window in no. 51 is probably early 18th century indicating its long-term use as a shop.

### 47 MARKET SQUARE – 1698

Striking, former merchant's house and business premises indicating wealth and status. Notice the oval windows under the turret (the front one of which is blind), the ball pinnacle and the weather vane with its running fox.

### SHEEP STREET – Dating from the grant of a Friday market in 1441, probably for cattle and sheep

Formerly known as St John the Baptist Street, with street plan little altered since mediaeval times. The entrance to Crown Walk is on the site of The Crown Hotel coaching inn. Pevensey House is a late 18th to early 19th century gem.

- 13 THE OLD COURTHOUSE, Sheep Street – 1864**  
Former county courthouse in the mediaeval Gothic revival style with 13th century style stone tracery and 15th century style lower windows. The archway over the main entrance door is modelled on those at Caernarfon Castle.
- 14 WESLEY HALL – 1863**  
Methodism in Bicester dates back to 1814 when a room in a farmhouse in Sheep Street was adapted for worship. This building was rebuilt in 1863 as a meeting hall and used as a chapel for the Bicester United Methodist Free Church and later by the Wesleyan Methodists (naming it Wesley Hall). Sold to Woolworth's in 1955 and later used as a furniture shop.
- 15 THE BELL INN, Sheep Street – c.1629**  
Previously known as The Rising Sun and later the Hobgoblin. In the 18th century clockmaker Edward Hemins ran a bell foundry to the rear of the pub. His workmanship is in many local churches and Oxford colleges.

- 16 METHODIST CHURCH – 1927**  
Bicester Methodist Church, the "Grainger Hargreaves Memorial Church", replaced a row of cottages fronting Sheep Street. Revd Grainger Hargreaves was an early Christian missionary in China, and the Methodist Minister from 1921-1923.

- 17 THE PENNY BLACK, Sheep Street – 1914**  
Dated by its rainwater hoppers, Bicester's first purpose-built post office was built in a late-Georgian style. It housed the telephone exchange, the sorting office and accommodation for the postmaster. It closed in 1992.

- 18 ASHTON CLUB YARD (alleyway to right of 26 Sheep St)**  
Former site of a carriage house, brewing house and homes. Ashton House, at 26 Sheep Street was the Blue Boar Inn in the 18th century. Datestone over the doorway inscribed 'IRM 1689'. The Ashton Club (1924) is a working men's club.

- 19 THE BEAR/LONDON HOUSE – 48-50 Sheep Street**  
The Bear was once one of the foremost inns of Bicester. Purchased around 1900 by Tom Druce, a Congregationalist with strong temperance principles, who owned the drapery shop next door. He was delighted to be able to buy the pub and put it to 'better' use.

- 20 HOMETREE HOUSE, London Road – Early 19th Century**  
Formerly Bicester Hall, the hunting box of the Earl of Cottenham, Master of Bicester Hunt. Used as a convalescent hospital run by the Red Cross from 1914. Later, Bicester County (then Grammar) School from 1924-1963.

- 21 GARTH HOUSE – 1875**  
Built as a hunting lodge with a mixture of architectural styles. Bicester Town Council (and its predecessor Bicester Urban District Council) have been based here since 1946.

- 22 THE KING'S ARMS – 18th Century and earlier**  
A timber-framed building is concealed behind its much-altered façade. Formerly one of the principal coaching inns of the town, and later hosting public meetings and as the centre for the Bicester Hunt.

- 23 30 MARKET SQUARE – 1751**  
Formerly the Black Boy public house and also the County Court (c. 1751 to 1870). An annual dinner was held here for the poor women of Bicester in the 19th century and dances and parties after the Second World War.

- 24 CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL – 1729**  
Opened as a centre for nonconformists, with a large schoolroom added in 1867 and modernised in 1873 at a cost of £500. Later used as an overflow classroom, Register Office and snooker club.

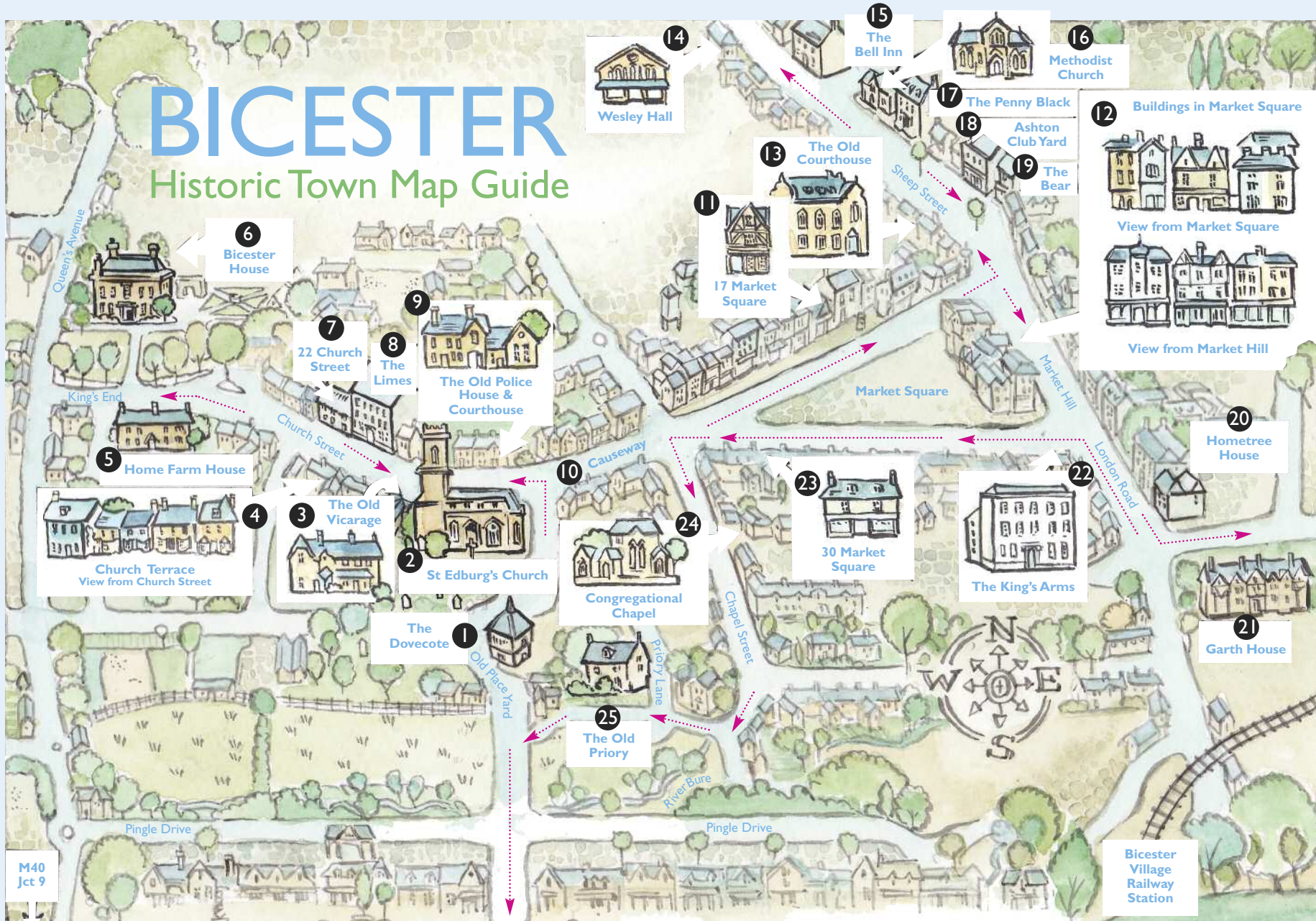
- 25 THE OLD PRIORY – Early 16th Century. Grade II listed**  
Believed to be on the site of, and built of demolished stonework from, the hospice or guesthouse of the Augustinian Priory. A cobbled path in the grounds may originally have led from the Priory precinct to the hospice.

### RIVER BURE

The Saxons first settled on land near the river (comprising the Town and the Back Brooks). It was widened adjacent to the bridge for people to do their washing or bring horses to drink. Back Brook served as the monks' mill stream.

# BICESTER

## Historic Town Map Guide



ROUTE TO BICESTER VILLAGE



4. Church Terrace



5. Home Farm House



7. 22 Church Street



8. 20 Church Street (The Limes)



9. The Old Police House & Courthouse



11. 17 Market Square



16. Methodist Church



12. View from Market Square



13. The Old Courthouse



20. Hometree House



22. The King's Arms



25. The Old Priory

This is a circular walking route which can be started at any point. Please respect the privacy of residents by viewing from a polite distance.

## A Brief History of Bicester

VISIT BICESTER LIBRARY to learn more about the history of Bicester and watch out for the new illustrated timeline

We hope that this town trail provides a glimpse into the long and rich history of Bicester, a flourishing Oxfordshire market town since the Middle Ages. Originally named Bernecestre, 'fort of the warriors' or 'of Beorma', an Anglo-Saxon warlord, Bicester was founded by the Saxons in about 600 AD alongside the River Bure.

The core of the modern street plan in the town centre was established in mediaeval times and many of the buildings date back to the late 16th to 18th centuries. The railway came to Bicester in 1850 (LNWR) and 1910 (GWR), further stimulating trade. Bicester has connections to horse racing, the hunt, and the military following the RAF station established in 1917 and the Ordnance Depot in 1941. Now famous for "Bicester Village" shopping outlet, there is still a range of independent shops, a bustling Friday market, an annual Bicester Festival and regular events in Garth Park.



This leaflet can be downloaded at Bicester Local History Society [www.blhs.org.uk](http://www.blhs.org.uk)

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