



Discover Downham Landmarks Trail

DOWNHAM MARKET is known as the Gingerbread Town because of the characteristic local carrstone used for buildings since medieval times. St Edmund's Church is a good example. Sadly many other beautiful buildings were demolished in the late twentieth century.



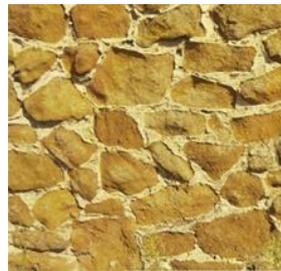
1. THE LANDMARKS TRAIL starts at Discover Downham, formerly the old Fire Station and home of the Fire Chief for over seventy years. It was converted from the cottages of Raven's Row. As you walk up the road notice the walls and terraces of carrstone "gingerbread" cottages with chimneys, windows and corners finished with locally made white bricks. The shade of ginger depends on the amount of iron oxide in the sandstone base. Because of variations in hardness it does not lend itself to carving or finer work. Carrstone work can be seen in buildings as coursed, random or galletted carrstone seen below



Coursed



coursed



random



random carrstone with galleting

or

2. At the top of the road is the C17th Priory House which gives the road its name, although there is no evidence of a priory in Downham. This is one of the oldest houses in the town. It has distinctive crow-stepped gables and octagonal chimney.



Priory House

3. The war memorial stands at the junction of London Road and Church Road. It was dedicated in October 1921 to the dead of World War One. It was paid for by public subscription and built by Mr H J

Long, a local stonemason. The memorial originally commemorated 73 local servicemen who fell in the First World War with the names of the dead of World War Two added later. In 2005, Evelyn Irene Murrell, who died in 1918, a member of the Women's Royal Air Force, was belatedly added to the list of names. The memorial bears the crown and arrows symbol of the town and of the martyred King St. Edmund of East Anglia to whom the church is dedicated.

Nearby the town sign erected in 1965 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Women's Institute also has the crown and arrows surmounted by horses to show the importance of the annual St Winnold horse fair. Held until World War Two, it was the third largest horse Fair in Europe. St Winnold is depicted on the northern face and legend of schoolboy Horatio Nelson sailing toy boats on the southern face.

Further along London Road is the white painted old Court House where magistrates dispensed justice in the Clackclose Hundred from 1849.



Old Court House

- Next to the Court House, the short road leads to Court Gardens on the site of the Union Workhouse, built 1837, demolished 1969. This attractive carrstone building was designed by William John Donthorn (1799–1859), one of the founders of what became the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). All that remains are the two gatehouses. Adjacent to the gatehouses is the National School, built 1841, and attended by children at the workhouse.



The Union Workhouse

- As the trail continues up Howdale Road you will pass the front entrance to the old National School and then St Dominic's Roman Catholic church. This was established in the stables of the Towers – a substantial property destroyed by fire in 1965. Howdale road opens into the common land of The Howdale, for many years the scene of fairs, carnivals and the annual town festival.
- At the top right is the carved stone obelisk which is all that remains of the town pump which once stood on the town square.



Town pump in situ on Town Square

7. When you walk across the Howdale you join the path between the two old cemeteries with Anglicans buried on the right and Nonconformists on the left. The cemeteries have been left to nature in a planned policy for the encouragement of wildlife. At the entrance there are two chapels of rest on the left and the path on the right leads through to St Edmund's Church. Downham's only Grade One listed building, it stands in a dominant position overlooking the flat fenlands to the west. The Church like the town was probably an Anglo-Saxon foundation but rebuilt in the 13th century (Early English period) and extensively altered in the 15th and 16th centuries (Perpendicular and Tudor periods). The roof was originally thatched.



St Edmund's Church

8. Going down the steps one can see the old Wesleyan Chapel opposite. This was one of seven nonconformist congregations in the town



Wesleyan Chapel built 1864

9 . At the junction with Paradise Rd stands the C17 Castle Hotel with its distinctive battlemented parapet. In the past visitors stayed here for hunting, shooting and fishing in the local area. The hotel had its own transport to and from railway station, and out on shooting parties.



The Castle Hotel c.1910

10. Walking along the High St. towards the town clock you pass the old Regent Cinema reputedly haunted by a women murdered long ago in nearby Sounding Alley. It opened in 1928. It closed on 2nd October 1976 with Julie Andrews in "The Sound of Music".

The Swan Hotel is where, in an older building on this site, King Charles I hid from Cromwell's forces for 3 days in 1646 whilst his companions negotiated his safe delivery to the protection of the Scottish Army at Newark. However, after nine months the Scots sold him back to the Parliamentarians for £100,000.



Regent Cinema



Swan Hotel

Beyond the clock one can see Dutch influence on the stepped Dutch gables of Outdoor Antics and WNDA shops, reputedly influenced by the presence of Dutch engineers responsible for the draining of the fens in C17.

11. The iconic cast iron clock was given to the town by grocer James Scott in 1878. It was originally lit by gaslight, it chimes on the hour. The clock was made of cast iron by Messrs Benson & Son of London. Originally it was bronzed and relieved on the prominent parts with gold, later painted bottle green, and its current attractive finish applied at a more recent restoration.



Town Clock



Town Hall



Crown Hotel

12. The Town Hall, on the opposite side of the old Market Hill, was built by public subscription in 1887/8. Like many of the surrounding buildings it is constructed from locally made white bricks and carrstone. It was formerly the town's Corn Exchange, home of the Urban and Rural District Council's and the centre of the town's social events.

13. Opposite the Town Hall is the coaching inn, The Crown Hotel. Just inside the arched entrance are steps leading to a mounting block for horsemen. Before the Court House was built, magistrates met here. In 1816 it was the scene of the Bread Riots when the magistrates were besieged by angry, starving agricultural labourers demanding a living wage of two shillings a day and the release of poachers.

14. Continuing down the main shopping street, one passes the homes and businesses of leading tradesmen and professional people of the C18 and C19. Most of these are now converted into shop premises.

Towards the end of Bridge Street stands the old Mount Tabor Chapel with its imposing frontage and, on the opposite side of the road, The Whalebone, so called because the inn sign hung from a whale's jawbone gleaned from the area's whaling industry. The Lighthouse at the junction was formerly the Queen's Head Inn. Travellers from the west would be greeted by the image of the queen's head above the door as they entered the town. In 1912 it was one of 88 fully licensed houses, 54 beer houses, 3 off licenses.



Mount Tabor Chapel



The Queen's Head at the Lighthouse

15. Beyond this point is Railway Road, much of which developed after the arrival of the railway in 1846. However Dial House on the right has a much older history. Its name derived from the sundial painted high on the wall. This used to be a private school.



Dial House

16. The Railway Station has attractive buildings and the traditional signal box is a listed building. The railway brought with it the growth of industrial development.



Signal box



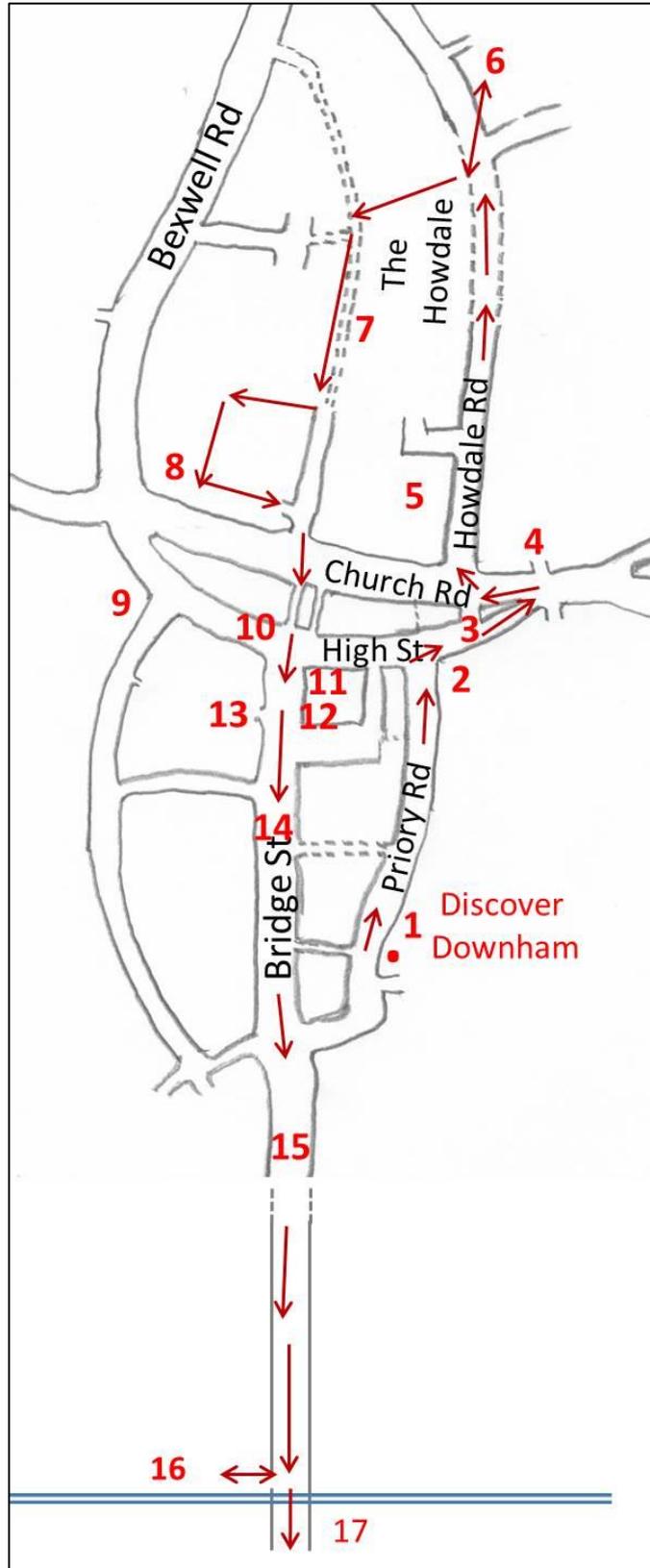
Railway Station

17. Beyond the railway line is Heygate's Mill built in 1851 by Jacob Mason Bird. At a time when almost every village had its windmill this was a steam driven mill at the forefront of milling technology. Known as the Eagle Roller Mill, the eagle can still be seen above the doorway. The mill is now owned by Heygate's and is powered by electricity today.



Heygates Mill

Discover Downham Market Landmarks trail map



Starts at Discover Downham, 30 Priory Road, Downham Market, PE38 9JS and ends at Heygates Mill, PE38 9EP