

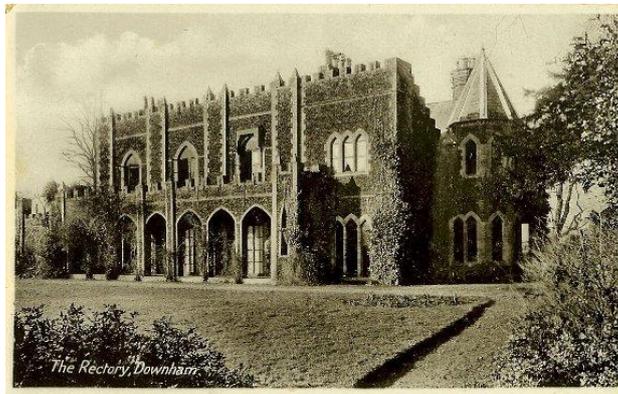


Discover Downham

Notable People Trail

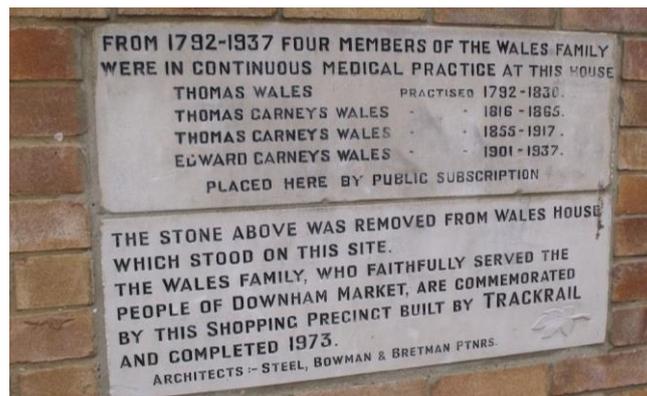
THE NOTABLE PEOPLE TRAIL takes you past locations associated with them in the more central parts of Downham Market. However, some lived and worked outside the limits of this walk, such as Joseph Harrison, nurseryman at the site of the Memorial Playing Field and publisher of the first gardening magazine in the mid-19th century. There are others whose addresses are unknown eg Alfred Priest fellow member of the Norwich School of Artists with John Sell Cotman; Dr Golding Bird, a great authority on kidney diseases, renowned for his pioneering work on electrotherapy and inventor of a stethoscope.

1. THE trail starts at Discover Downham, formerly the old Fire Station. Walk up Priory Road past the old carrstone cottages and walls with corners strengthened by local white brick. Unfortunately the most important examples carrstone buildings were demolished in second half of the twentieth century. This included the old carrstone Rectory which was once on the site of the supermarket. This was the home from 1847 - 1850 of **Rev. Charles Boutell**. An expert on heraldry, his books are standard texts, published in many editions and revisions for well over 100 years – most recently as Boutell's Heraldry in 1983.



2. The alley from Priory Road leads into Wales Court. You are walking through the former gardens of the home, from 1792-1937, of four generations of the Wales family who were in continuous medical practice here. This was once one of several splendid private gardens in Downham – a town noted for their excellence. It was in these gardens in 1816 that magistrate John Dering of Crow Hall hid from the food rioters shouting “ Bread or Blood.”

In 1803 **Dr Thomas Wales** plunged from the Bridge into the Great Ouse river to rescue innkeeper Thomas Farrow from drowning. The Norwich Mercury reported “We too often read of medals awarded, and dignities conferred for deeds of little import —but what honour is not due to that man who at the, imminent peril of his own life, nobly preserves that of a fellow - creature.”



3. A walk along London Road takes you to the Police Station where opposite, on both sides of Park Lane was the site of **Jim Russell's** garage and International Racing School which trained Emerson Fittipaldi & Jacques Villeneuve at Downham and at Snetterton. Between 1953 and 1959 Jim Russell won 64 Formula 3 races, 11 Formula 2 races, 6 sports car races and was three times F3 champion.

4. From London Road and turn into Howdale Road to the Roman Catholic Church of St Dominic and its presbytery. This was the home of **Fr. Oswald Baker** who attracted national attention in 1975 when he insisted on using only the traditional Tridentine Latin Mass. The Catholic Church was converted from the stables of The Towers, home of **James Scott** who donated the iconic clock tower to Downham Market. During World War One the House served as a Red Cross Hospital. It burnt down in 1965. Only that part with the billiard room survives as a home.



Howdale Road leads to The Howdale, open common land and scene of fairs and carnivals

5. The narrow path leads through to Bexwell Road. As you walk down the road you will pass Number 80 the home of **Captain Richard Woodget** and his family. It was whilst he had his home in Downham Market that he captained the world famous, record breaking, tea clipper Cutty Sark. All ten of his voyages to Australia were faster than any other ship on the route.

6. Number 46A Bexwell Road was once the Tridentine Mass centre run by **Fr Oswald Baker**. After twice refusing to obey his bishop's orders to celebrate the new English language rite or to resign, he was formally suspended as parish priest of St Dominic's by a decree of removal. Benefactors bought this house to serve as his chapel. From here he continued his ministry and intensified his fight against the Vatican II reforms. The congregation included the film producer and actor Mel Gibson.



St Edmund's Church

7. High above the corner of Bexwell road and Church Road stands the parish church where **Cpt George Manby** tested his ship to shore lifesaving apparatus and prototype of the breeches buoy. The church is dedicated to **St Edmund the martyred King of East Anglia**. Inside are memorials of notable parishioners including the **Wales family** of doctors.

Thomas Batchcroft of the Bexwell family was appointed Master of Caius College Cambridge. He died in 1662 and left £100 for the churchwardens of St Edmund's Church Downham, Wimbotsham and Stow Bardolph to purchase 100 acres of reclaimed fenland. The rents were used for the benefit of the poor of the three parishes.

8. Church Road was formerly the site of Downham's renowned bell foundry owned by **Thomas Osborn** and later **William Dobson**, his grandson. St. Peter's Church, Wisbech has a complete set of ten Osborn bells cast in 1823. They are the fourth oldest complete ring of ten in the world cast by one foundry. Bells made in the Foundry were tested in narrow

9. Sounding Alley. Until the 21st century there were high walls on both sides – ideal for testing the sound of bells.

10. Sounding Alley opens into High Street next to the Swan Hotel. For 3 days from April 30th to May 2nd 1645 **King Charles I** stayed in the older building of the Swan on this site. He had escaped from the besieged city of Oxford. He was hunted by Cromwell's men. The port of King's Lynn was closed. His only escape was across the fens to Newark and the protection of the Scottish army. Whilst in Downham he had his hair cut and bought a hat to complete his disguise as a clergyman. Legend has it that he was guided across the wild fens by Mucky Porter of Southery.



Swan Hotel



Town Clock

11. On the Town Square is the iconic clock donated to the town by **James Scott** in 1878. His initials JS can be seen on the tail of the weather vane. 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.

For many years the Town Square was the site of Downham's ancient market. It was the here where in about 1790 **William Howlett** led his wife to market in a halter and sold her.

12. The Town Hall built in 1887 occupies the opposite side of the Town Square. Money for building was raised by public subscription and the foundation stone laid by SW Norfolk MP **William Amherst Daniel-Tyssen** of Didlington Hall where he built a museum for his rapidly growing Egyptian collection



Town Hall and market square c 1900

13. Opposite the Town Hall is the Crown Hotel where magistrates met before the Court House was built. This was the focus of the Bread Riots in May 1816. The magistrates were trapped by looting and rioting agricultural labourers demanding work with a living wage of 2 shillings a day. After two days of rioting, suppressed by the Upwell Yeomanry, rioters were sent for trial at Norwich assizes. Rioters **Daniel Harwood** and **Thomas Thody** were hanged at Norwich Castle several others were transported to Australia.

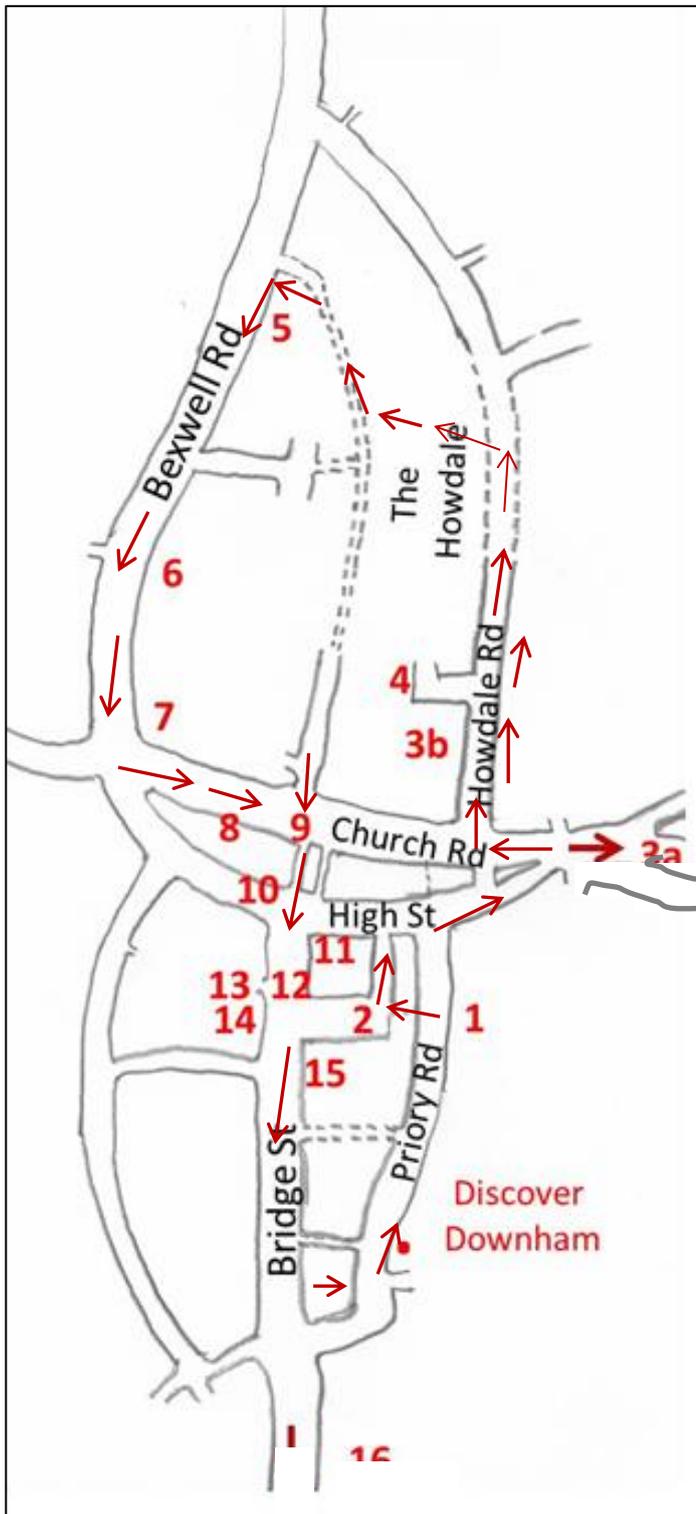
14. As you walk down Bridge Street you will pass the Conservative Club with a distinctive eagle on the single story extension. This was once the home of **Frederick Bird**. The early steam driven mill founded by Frederick's father **Jacob Mason Bird** in 1851 has an identical bird over its door. Bird's Mill (now Heygates Mill) is near the level crossing at the railway station. The last family member to run the mill was **Algernon Bird** who, as a pilot in WW1 survived a lengthy attack and was commended for his skill by the notorious **Red Baron von Richthoven**.

15. Further down Bridge Street on the left is Reed's department store, founded by **Harry Reed** in Railway Road in 1906 and later moving to the present site at Nelson House. The house was named after **Admiral Horatio Nelson**. Local legend suggests his early school days were spent at Thomas Noakes School in this house where Captain George Manby claimed to be a fellow pupil. Manby was responsible for many of the traditional stories about Horatio Nelson's schooldays in Downham Market. However, at the time that the five-year-old Manby started school in Downham Market, Nelson, older by seven years, was a pupil at Paston's School in North Walsham, which he left shortly after to join the Royal Navy.



Bridge St looking West with Reed's store, Nelson House and Bank House on the left c1900

Discover Downham Market's Notable People Trail Map



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

*Produced by Downham Market U3A & Downham Market
District Heritage Society Shared Learning Project*