25th April 1599. William the Conqueror.

Welcome to Huntingdon

A brief history of Huntingdon

There is evidence of early people in the Huntingdon area from stone age times. The Romans settled by the River Great Ouse, but the first mention of the town of Huntingdon is a mention in the Domesday Book of 1086.

In 921, Edward the Elder recovered the settlement from the Danes and made the burgh the shire town. Over the next 200 years, coins were minted in Huntingdon and a Norman Castle was built around 1066 on the orders of King William the Conqueror.

By the 13th century, the town had 16 churches and six religious foundations. These included the Priory of St Mary and the Nunnery of St James at Hinchingbrooke. The Black Death in 1348 saw an end to the town’s early fortunes. In the 16th century, the Priory and the Nunnery passed into the hands of the Cromwell family, who lived in the magnificent house at Hinchingbrooke. Hinchingbrooke was subsequently the home of the Earls of Sandbach.

During the Civil War, Huntingdon was one of Oliver Cromwell’s headquarters. Royalists entered the town in 1645 and Cromwell’s Civil War Headquarters, now known as Cromwell’s House, is on the north side of Market Hill.

In the late 17th and early 18th century, Huntingdon developed into a major coaching centre in the 16th and 17th centuries. The opening of the Great Northern Line in 1850 meant that rail travel superseded travel by road, and this, coupled with the agricultural depression, led to a period of decline.

In recent times, rapid growth has again taken place, but the centre of Huntingdon retains its character as a county market town, and has 155 properties listed as being of Special Architectural or Historic Interest.

Oliver Cromwell, ‘Lord Protector of the Commonwealth’ from 1653 until his death in 1658, was born in Huntingdon on 25 April 1599.

Tourist Information

HUNTINGDON

Princes Street, Huntingdon PE29 3PH
Tel: 01480 388788
Fax: 01480 389357
Email: Hunts.TIC@huntsdc.gov.uk
Opening Hours:
Monday - Friday: 9.30am - 5.30pm
1st April - 30th September
Email: Hunts.TIC@huntsdc.gov.uk

Getting Here...

Located 70 miles north of London and 20 miles south of Peterborough, Huntingdon can be reached by road from the A1 and the A14.

There are regular bus services from Cambridge, Peterborough, St Ives and St Neots.

Huntingdon has its own railway station. West Anglia Great Northern connects Huntingdon with London Kings Cross by a frequent 50 minute service. It is also well connected to Peterborough by West Anglia Great Northern and onto the North and Scotland by the Great North Eastern Railway.

There is a Tourist Information Centre in the square of Town Hall.

For details of accommodation vacancies, contact either of our Tourist Information Centres or call the Huntingdonshire Association for Tourism’s Vacancy Line on Tel: 0870 2254858 (national rate call).

Drift Through Time...

HISTORIC TOWN WALK

A large print version is available. Please call the Tourist Information Centre for details.

Huntingdonshire District Council 2010

While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy in this publication, no liability can be accepted by the District Council for any amendments or omissions.

Notes on the Walk

For the benefit of visitors with access needs, please note that some elements of the capture and indexing process may not be accessible to people who are blind or partially sighted.

Electronic Tourist Information Kiosk

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A short distance further along the High Street is ST MARY’S CHURCH. The church dates from Norman times, but it was almost completely rebuilt in the 13th century and its fine west tower was the last major addition in the following century. Opposite the church stands CASTLE MILL HOUSE, set behind a small lawn. It dates from 1787 and is typical of that period with a fine entrance. The former garden at the rear now contains Pathfinder House, named after the Pathfinder Force Headquarters, which was situated here during the Second World War.

Continue down the High Street, to an archway on the left leading to Orchard Lane, which was the site of THE OLD COUNTY GAOL & DEBTORS’ PRISON. As you walk through the archway, the prison was the building on your left. Some of the iron-grated openings at ground level, which lit the condemned cell, are still visible. The house opposite, which flanked the prison yard, has heavily ironed windows on the ground floor, which prevented prisoners from escaping.

Retrace your steps back to the High Street and continue until you reach the Ring Road. On the opposite side of the road to your left is THE RIVERSIDE PARK. Cross the Ring Road using the pedestrian crossings and pass in front of the Old Bridge Hotel to reach THE OLD RIVER BRIDGE. The bridge, carrying Ermine Street over the Great Ouse, was built of stone in 1332 with six arches. It is considered to be one of the finest of its kind in England and was constructed from each bank by the appropriate town. Fortunately, the two parts joined in the middle.

On crossing the pedestrian bridge, the former HOSIERY MILL comes into view. The mill was originally constructed in the 1850s as an oilcake mill and is said to be the oldest remaining factory in the old county of Huntingdonshire. The main elevation with its rows of arched windows has a tunnel at water level and faces onto the river. After several years of neglect, the Mill underwent major restoration and was converted into almost a hundred flats and maisonettes.

Turn back towards the town passing THE OLD BRIDGE HOTEL, a late 18th century building covered with ivy. It has panelled rooms and riverside moorings. Keep left following the Ring Road for a short distance before turning left again into a hilly grassed area. Note the Armada Beacon on your left, erected in 1968 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

You are now on CASTLE HILLS. This is the site where Huntingdon Castle once stood, built in about 1068 under William the Conqueror’s instructions. The Domesday Book implies that a large part of the Saxon town was destroyed in the process. The castle was built of wood and was a fine example of a motte and bailey defence system. Now only the mighty earthworks remain, though sadly mutilated by the former railway to Cambridge and more recently by the by-pass. It is worth climbing to the top of the castle mound, now crowned with a circle of trees, to take advantage of the view. Descend the other side of the hill and bear right to rejoin the footpath as it enters a short cul-de-sac known as Castle Hill. At the end you will see MILL COMMON.

During the 1960s, excavations on Mill Common uncovered evidence of a Roman Villa, a cemetery containing over 400 skeletons believed to be of Saxon date, and the remains of a gallow.

Turn right along the footpath and left once on the Ring Road. Use the pedestrian crossing by the bus station and follow the path behind the bus station to bring you back to Princes Street and the Tourist Information Centre.