



# Romsey Heritage Trail



A walk  
through  
Romsey's  
history

## 1. Church Place and Romsey Abbey



Our trail begins at the Romsey Visitor Information Centre (VIC), originally the premises of a cutler and gunsmith, Mr Moody.

This building also houses the Moody Museum. King John's House and Garden sit behind the VIC and we will return here to finish our trail.

### **Cross over Church Street to Church Place.**

In front of you is Romsey Abbey. Between the 14th and 16th centuries, the Parish Church occupied the northern part of the Abbey. Church Place was the road along which people went to church. The road used to have houses on the north side (to your right as you face the Abbey), where the Council Offices now stand.

Also to your right is The Charter Stone, erected in 2007 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Romsey receiving a borough charter. It was unveiled by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Carved upon it are the names of all the town's waterways and bridges, both ancient and modern.

Romsey Abbey is full of interesting historical facts and you could spend much more time here. To keep on track with our trail today have a walk around the church and take in the points of interest including the gates, the North Transept, Saxon remains, The Abbess's doorway and rood and the Waterloo Memorial. You can hear more about these on the audio guide.

## 2. The Abbey (road)

**Walk through the gates to the right hand side of the Abbey.**

Keeping the Abbey to your left you will see the former vicarage called Folly House. It was built in the 1850s and is very similar in style to the Abbey School building which sits to its right hand side, which was built at a similar time. The logo of the bishopric of Winchester can be seen on the wall of the House.



**Now walk down the road to your left (called the Abbey).**

On your left you will see a charming terrace of houses with a Regency façade on buildings that are of a much older period concealing medieval structures in places. Just around the corner to the left again, you'll see the Temple Buildings. The copper flashings and sundial were added in the 1920s. Temple was the name of the Palmerston family.

## 3. La Sagesse

Opposite the Temple buildings you'll see the walls to La Sagesse. The Daughters of Wisdom were originally a French order of Catholic Sisters known as Filles de la Sagesse. They came to Romsey in 1891 and have since, at various times, provided an orphanage and a school. They now provide a nursing home in their grounds. It is pure coincidence that the town has housed two quite separate orders of religious ladies.

Within the gates you'll find Abbey House, the home for those Sisters who live in Romsey. This is the site of a miraculous healing of a sister in 1927. The labyrinth is to the right within the gates of Abbey House. The Labyrinth can be walked around for those who want peaceful contemplation.



When the Sisters came to Romsey there was no Roman Catholic Church in the Town. By 1913 they had built St Joseph's Church in the Arts and Crafts style, and made it available for Catholic worship by the laity.

## 4. Abbey Meads

**Return through the gateway and turn left down The Meads.**

To your right you will see the Bartlett's almshouses. Dr Bartlett lived in Romsey but worked in Salisbury Infirmary and in Winchester. He provided almshouses for six poor widows in 1807. Originally these were in Middlebridge Street but had to be demolished to make way for the by-pass and were rebuilt, in the same style, here in Abbey Meads

**Continue down The Meads towards the bridge, known as 'White Bridge', and cross over the road to see the entrance to War Memorial Park, our next stop.**



Keep a look out for the floor markers to make sure you are on the right path

## 5. War Memorial Park



Romsey created a War Memorial Park in 1920 as a way of remembering those killed in the First World War. In order to improve the drainage on a very wet field, hard core was brought in from the nearby Remount Camp where horses had been trained throughout the war. The camp was no longer needed after the war was over and its buildings were demolished, so much of them are to be found under the lawns of the park. The camp lay to the south-west of Romsey on Pauncefoot Hill. The park was the inspiration of Charles Moody, whose former shop now houses the VIC and the Moody Museum

Originally the park was fenced and the gates locked at nights. Fencing and gates were taken away in 1941 when metal was collected for the war effort. Both have been restored, but the gates are only locked when flooding makes the park unsafe.

As a way of commemorating the contribution made by horses and mules in the First World War, a statue was commissioned with funds from voluntary donations. It is a rare example where the soldier is an adjunct to the horse instead of the other way round. The statue, in bronze resin, was sculpted by Amy Goodman and unveiled by the Princess Royal, HRH Princess Anne in 2015.

Interesting things to see within the Park boundary are The War Memorial and The Japanese Gun. The memorial was designed by Charles Dyson who was Surveyor of Romsey Rural District Council. It was unveiled by General 'Jack' Seeley, Lord Mottistone, on 21 June 1921. He had been a cavalry officer and his horse Warrior was the inspiration for Michael Morpurgo's 'Warhorse'.

The 150mm field gun was presented to the town in 1946



by Lord Louis Mountbatten, who had accepted the surrender of the Japanese in his role as Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia. He kept five of the Japanese guns, the remainder being destroyed.

**A café and public toilets are available in the Park.**

## 6. Sadler's Mill

Saddler's Mill, circa 1903. © The Francis Frith Collection



**Follow the footpath accessed to the right of the Café that leads to the town's beauty spot Sadler's Mill.**

This path crosses another branch of the River Test at a bridge that used to be known as 'Black Bridge'. Keep an eye out for our heritage trail markers on the ground to make sure you are on the right route. You will also pass through a kissing gate.

The River Test is one of Hampshire's renowned chalk streams and is noted for both trout and salmon fishing.



River Test, circa 1932. © The Francis Frith Collection

The main water channel is here, to the west of Romsey, and until the water flow was altered in the 1990s, the mill race at Sadler's Mill attracted crowds of visitors every autumn who came to see the salmon leaping through the rushing water as they made their way upstream to spawn.

Sadler's Mill was bought by the first Lord Palmerston in the 1740s. In the 20th century corn milling was replaced by an electric generator so that Broadlands had an electricity supply even if the mains supply failed. The building is now converted into private residences. Mr Sadler was the miller in the late 18th century. On the right between the cottage and the former farm house, there is a public footpath that leads across the meadows to Squabb Wood.

**From Sadler's Mill follow the river along the Causeway that joins the Mill and adjoining houses to the main road.**

The house on the right at the main road was for some years a public house called Bridge Tavern which closed in 1911. The bridge

at the end of the causeway is called Middlebridge and beyond it is the beautiful Broadlands Park, which is the home of the Earl and Countess Mountbatten.

This bridge takes the A3090 across the Test. It was designed to match the remodelled Broadlands House in the 1780s and rebuilt by Hampshire County Council in 1931. It is thought that there was a small battle at this site during the Civil War in 1643.

## 7. Middlebridge Street



**Turn left and walk along Middlebridge Street, heading towards the Three Tuns public house.**

There are records of the Three Tuns as far back as the 18th century. A tun is a vessel for holding 216 gallons of beer (about 982 litres).

In the Middle Ages there was a street beside the pub called Eny Street that went south into the Broadlands Park area. This street had gone before 1800.



Further along on the left side of the road is **Bath House**. Built in the 19th Century, this was the home of a stone mason, A.F. Ellery, who decorated it to look as though it were built of Bath stone; he added examples of his carving skills around the windows.

Opposite Bath House you will find **Watermill Studios**, a wool warehouse for well over 200 years. It has a very solid timber frame with an extension to take it across the stream. In the 1920s the building housed the Elite cinema which closed in the 1930s. It was then used as a builder's yard and is now a photography studio and private house.

Further down the road on the left you'll come across an unusual flint faced building. In 1718 John Nowes died and left land to provide money for the education of boys in Romsey, Yeovil and Salisbury. By 1843 the charity had accumulated enough capital to build the **Nowes Charity School** with accommodation for the Master and his assistant. The School was closed in 1876 when its funds were invested in a new Boys' National School that had opened in Station Road. That building is now the Library.

Next door is **21 Middlebridge Street**, one of the surviving 15th century buildings in Romsey. As was typical of its time, the upper storey projects over the ground floor, to give a jettied structure. In the 1870s a tailor, Harry Newman, worked here in the window of his shop, and would frequently rescue boys who fell into the unfenced stream opposite.

Opposite is the little chapel of **Elim Church** that was built by the Primitive Methodists in 1895 at a cost of £774. In 1927 the various strands of Methodism re-united and in Romsey it was decided to keep the Wesleyan Methodist church in The Hundred. This building was sold to the Elim Pentecostals whose descendants have it to this day.



**Oddfellows Chambers** next to No 21, was home to the Order of Oddfellows known to be a friendly society. Although the Romsey Lodge no longer exists it was once flourishing. Inside the building there was a hall with a stage and a gallery above. During the 1930s, they held regular dances and one of the musicians was Horace King, who later became Speaker of the House of Commons.

Directly opposite the end of Middlebridge Street is Broadwater House, the home of the miller at Town Mill which, from medieval times, lay behind the house. In the 20th century the mill took the name of its owner and became Duke's Mill. Originally the house was only one room deep, but in the late 20th century an additional set of rooms was built behind thus doubling the available space. Until the 1960s Banning Street houses came right up to Broadwater House on the south side so it did not stand alone as it does now.

Turn left here and head for Bell Street with the pedestrian crossing.

## 8. Bell Street



From here Bell Street leads towards the Market Place and together with Newton Lane is thought to form the earliest settled area in Romsey. Bell Street was called Mill Street before the 18th century, and then adopted the name of the coaching inn, the Bell Inn, that was near the mill. It had been the start of the medieval road to Southampton from Romsey.



Bell Street, circa 1955. © The Francis Frith Collection

The western branch of the Fishlake ran down behind the houses in Bell Street thus providing them with an open sewer until 1931. The eastern branch of the Fishlake runs behind the houses on the other side of Bell Street and powered the town mill at the bottom of the street.

The two houses on the right were originally a brewery (on the right) and the Bell Inn (on the left). In the late 17th century the owner of the Bell Inn was a man called John Hack. He commissioned a very fine bracket for his inn and after the inn was closed in the 19th century, the bracket was moved to the Market Place. The brewery was bought by David Faber in 1886 and became an outpost of Strong's Brewery. By the Second World War, brewing had ceased here and the site was used for soft drink production.



Further up the road on the right is the Baptist Church. Originally the Baptists used a house in Middlebridge Street for their meetings. In 1811 they bought this site and built their church here.

Follow Bell Street up towards the Market Square but turn right near the top into the Corn Market.

## 9. Corn Market

The Corn Market was only created as a separate street once buildings were erected in the centre of the Market Place, thus cutting it off from the rest of the market area. Until the 19th century the street was called the Pig Market.



The Corn Market, circa 1955. © The Francis Frith Collection

Walk along the cobbles on the right and you'll come to The Tudor Rose, built in the late 15th century by the Guild of St George. This was a religious friendly society whose members subscribed to pay a priest to say masses for their souls, and acted as a provident club supporting members in difficulties. The beams inside the building are close set which was typical of the period in which it was constructed.

On the left is The Corn Exchange, built in 1864.



The Old Corn Exchange, circa 1932. © The Francis Frith Collection

Originally it had windows like those on the Town Hall, but its façade was altered in the 1920s. In front of it is a drinking fountain provided by William Cowper Temple, Lord Mount Temple, the owner of Broadlands, in 1886.



## 10. Market Place

The stream at the eastern end of the Market Place marked the eastern edge of the borough, beyond which was Romsey Extra, or Romsey outside the bridge. The bridge crossed the stream which

now flows under the road between Superdrug and Boots. It can be seen in the bus station and is part of the Fishlake.



The Hundred, circa 1955. © The Francis Frith Collection

**Continue round to the left and head up towards the Market Place.**

On the right you'll see The White Horse Hotel, once a coaching inn with medieval origins. Within the hotel there are some fine oak beams which you can see through the windows. Some of the interior walls are painted with Tudor decorations.



In the centre of the Market Place stands the statue of Lord Palmerston who was Prime Minister from 1855 till his death in 1865. His great-grandfather had bought Broadlands in 1736, and he, the third Viscount, enlarged the Broadlands estate greatly during the 19th century. His statue is decorated from time to time with a top hat or other items when the town is in celebratory mood.

**From here walk clockwise around the Market Place.**

The Town Hall, built in 1866 by Romsey Borough Council now houses Romsey Town Council office. The Romsey Local History Society has its headquarters here and it houses an extensive archive about the town in the basement.



Tucked in the far left corner is the United Reformed Church (URC) that was built in 1886, although its mock-medieval style confuses some visitors.

The archway is on the site of the gateway to the medieval abbey. Before this stone church was built, the Congregational Church, as it was then known, was built of brick.



The stream in Abbey Water runs around two sides of the URC. The first building in the street used to be a builder's yard and has very attractive iron glazing bars. This window cuts into a faded sign that advertises the builder's services. A whitesmith was a metal worker, particularly one who dealt with tin.

The building of the Conservative Club is in the far right corner of the market place and was the Swan Inn; there are records of it back to the 1400s. It closed in 1894 and David Faber, the owner of Strong's Brewery made it available to the Conservative Working Men's Club. Outside it is the bracket that started



Conservative Working Men's Club, circa 1903. © The Francis Frith Collection

life in the late 17th century outside the Bell Inn.

**Now head along Church Street and look out for Pinchpenny House on the left.**



Pinchpenny House looks as though it was once a chapel but has always been a house and a shop. Its 19th century owner, Mr Crosbie, was responsible for the windows and inside at the back of the ground floor are some more church-like windows. The little doorway at the right-hand side of the building leads to a narrow passage to the stream and provides access for maintenance. The name was given to the premises when it was used by a tax collector.

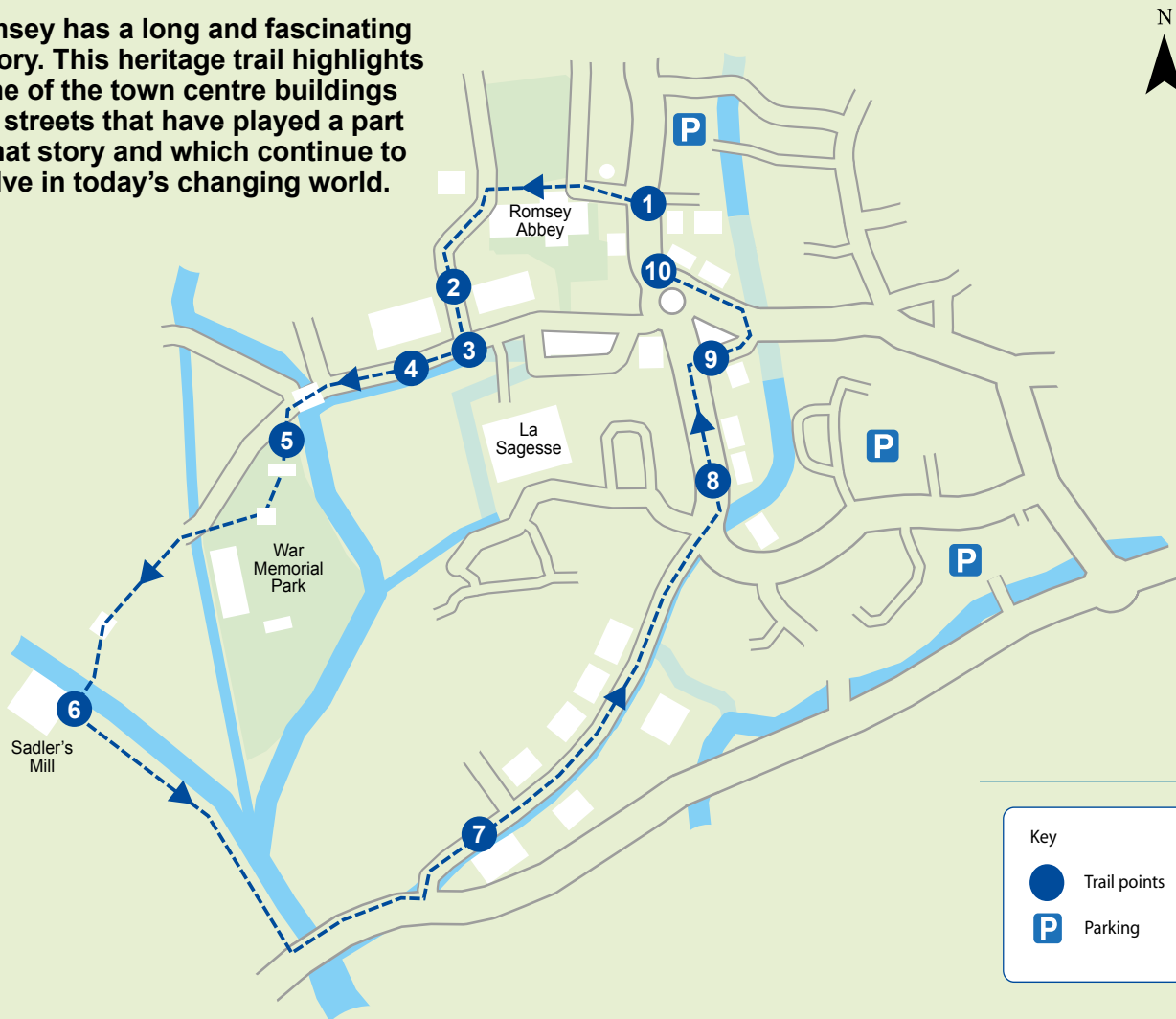


**We conclude our trail at King John's House & Gardens. King John's House is a 13th century hall house and is well worth a visit.**

It was built some 40 years after King John died, and so is misnamed. Romsey Abbey owned it when the nunnery was dissolved in 1539 but for how long and how it was used is open to speculation. The side of the building that you can see from the street is the 16th century addition called Tudor Cottage. The main entrance to the museum and tea rooms are from this building.



Romsey has a long and fascinating history. This heritage trail highlights some of the town centre buildings and streets that have played a part in that story and which continue to evolve in today's changing world.



Key

- Trail points
- P Parking



### Map Guide: Trail points

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- 2** The Abbey (road)
- 3** La Sagesse
- 4** Abbey Meads
- 5** War Memorial Park
- 6** Sadler's Mill
- 7** Middlebridge Street
- 8** Bell Street
- 9** Corn Market
- 10** Market Place



**Romsey can be found in the heart of Test Valley surrounded by beautiful countryside. The town dates back to the 8th century when workers were smelting iron on the slope below the current Town Hall. Its name is derived from Rum's Eg meaning Rum's area of dry land surrounded by marshes.**

In the 10th century, the Benedictine abbey was founded and became one of England's leading abbeys of nuns. Henry VIII closed the abbey in 1539 but the townsfolk bought their church for £100.

Meanwhile the town of Romsey flourished, its markets being a regular feature by the 11th century. The many watercourses through the town enabled woollen-cloth working to become a specialist trade in the town, both fulling and dyeing woven cloth.

In 1607 King James I granted the town borough status, thus giving the town more autonomy under the leadership of a mayor and corporation. Later turnpike roads were established and a canal linking Southampton Water to Andover was opened, the increased number of travellers leading to a rise in the number of pubs and inns to cater for them.

The town started to grow in the first half of the 20th century and after the Second World War, many people realised how nice a place Romsey is. It is now a thriving market town bursting with shops, businesses and events. There's so much to explore...



This leaflet is accompanied by an audio trail which can be picked up using a smart phone by scanning the Romsey Heritage Trail QR Code.



**For further information about the Romsey Heritage Trail please visit our website: [www.testvalley.gov.uk/romseyheritagetrail](http://www.testvalley.gov.uk/romseyheritagetrail)**

**For further information on the history of Romsey, visit:**

**Romsey Local History Society: [www.ltvas.org.uk](http://www.ltvas.org.uk)**

**King John's House and Heritage Centre: [www.kingjohnshouse.org.uk](http://www.kingjohnshouse.org.uk)**

**For further information about visiting Romsey please visit: [www.visitromsey.org](http://www.visitromsey.org) and [www.visit-testvalley.org.uk](http://www.visit-testvalley.org.uk)**



Our thanks go to LTVAS for their significant contribution to the guide. While every care has been taken to ensure the information contained in this publication is accurate, it is not always possible to publish information on which every historian or expert agrees.

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