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The market town of Ross-on-Wye sits above the beautiful river Wye and below the hills of Chase and Penyard. At the time of Domesday it was a village and a manor of the Bishops of Hereford. In the 12th century King Stephen granted a charter to establish a market here.

In the 17th century the town suffered from the plague and the Civil War. From the 1750's Ross developed as a popular place for those seeking the picturesque scenery of the Wye.

Today the town remains a busy market and tourist centre serving a community of around 11,500. Over double the population of 100 years ago.



Ross-on-Wye Heritage Trail

The route of two miles starts from the Market House. It passes sites of historical and architectural interest which were identified and marked with blue plaques erected by the Mayor's Project. This Heritage Trail leaflet was researched and written by local historian Heather Hurley for the Ross-on-Wye & District Civic Society.

1. The Market House was built of red sandstone c.1650, on the site of the former Booth Hall. On the east wall is a white stone medallion of Charles II. Before 1862, there was a row of old buildings beside the Market House called Underhelle, Underhill or Behind Hill, which was dismantled by the Improvement Commissioners. An augmented reality representation of Underhill can be viewed in the Museum Without Walls app (museumwithoutwalls.uk). Beside the Market House stands the black and white timbered house of the Man of Ross where John Kyrle (1637-1724) lived. In 2013 RCS published: In Search of John Kyrle: Man of Ross by Jon Hurley, available at Rossiter Books.



2. King George's Rest in the High Street was previously an inn where George IV rested while returning to London from Ireland in 1821. His journey to London was delayed by a cart blocking the narrow Old Gloucester Road and, due to this incident, the present Gloucester Road was built in 1825.



3. The Wool Warehouse
In 1672, William Lloyd was recorded as a woolcomber and stapler in Copse Cross Street. This building was later run by Wood, Panter & Lloyd Woolstaplers as a wool warehouse valued at £350, with utensils and stock worth £2000, in 1787.



Now head down Old Gloucester Road to the almshouses which were re-established in 1605, by Thomas Perrock a Ross mercer. The almshouses were restored by Thomas Blake in 1889. Continue along Old Gloucester Road to the former Blue Coat School



4. Walter Scott (1716-1786), left money in his will to revive the former Blue-coat Charity School. He was educated here before leaving Ross to make his fortune in London as a master plasterer.

Now follow the footpath opposite alongside the Community Garden (left side), and the Community Hospital (right side), formerly the Ross Union Workhouse established in 1836. Turn right and before crossing Copse Cross Street glance right to see Thomas Webbe's almshouses.

5. Thomas Webbe was a carpenter from Monkton in the parish of Llanwarne, who endowed this row of almshouses in Copse Cross Street.



They provided homes for seven poor people from the borough of Ross and were built within four years of Webbe's death in 1612. He also paid £200 to free Wilton Bridge of tolls and left money to replace the Booth Hall.

6. Copse Cross Toll Gate was erected by the Ross Turnpike Trust, which maintained the main routes through Ross from 1749 to 1873. Eleven roads were turnpiked by the first Ross Road Act of 1749, several of which have become main roads.

Tolls collected ranged from 1d to 20d, depending on how many horses were drawing a cart, whether it was laden and the width of the wheels.



Now walk along Old Maid's Walk towards the churchyard.

7. James Wallace Richard Hall (1799-1860), was a solicitor, banker and benefactor in Ross during the 19th century. Hall played an important role in setting up the Ross Dispensary and the British and Foreign School, together with the formation of the Hereford-Ross-Gloucester Railway, which opened in 1855. He donated these churchyard gates in 1857. His memorial monument of 1860, was re-erected in 1992, by the Ross Civic Society near its original site in Station Street.



Enter the churchyard and visit the parish church of St Mary the Virgin dating from the 13th century. From summer 2022, you can see an augmented reality representation of the rood screen that once formed part of the interior in the Museum Without Walls app. Afterwards visit the Prospect; laid out by John Kyrle in 1696 and given to the town by Thomas Blake in 1870. There is an augmented reality representation of the fountain that once stood at the centre of the Prospect in the Museum Without Walls app.

From the Prospect is the famous view of the River Wye's horseshoe bend and Wilton Castle, which dates back to Norman times. It was built to defend an important ford and ferry crossing replaced by Wilton Bridge shortly after 1597.

In front of the church, under the yew tree, lies the tomb of James Baker (1764-1836), a native of Ross who made his fortune in London as an ironmonger and marine store dealer. The poor of Ross benefitted from the £26,000 he left. Nearby stands the Plague Cross in memory of the 315 inhabitants who died in 1637. Across the road in Church Street, you will see the attractive almshouses repaired and renamed by William Rudhall (1554-1609), whose monument is inside the church.

8. The National School was established in the early 1800s, on a site in the churchyard where a Latin grammar school had stood in the 16th century. This was in ruins when re-endowed by the lord of the manor in 1709, and then the school became derelict again. The brick building is now St Mary's Hall.



Leave the churchyard by the gateway to the left of the former National School and walk past the Phoenix Theatre, which was converted from an old fire station in 1983.

9. The Bishop's Palace was a timber structure built by the Bishops of Hereford in the 12th century but in ruins by the 16th. In 1837, when James Barrett was building his Royal Hotel, a curious dungeon was discovered but later destroyed.



Barrett's hotel became a successful coaching inn, posting house and a favourite place to stay for the popular Wye Tour.

10. The Mock Gothic Town Walls and Gazebo Tower were built in the picturesque style by the Ross Turnpike Trustees in 1833, after the cutting of Wilton Road.

This new and easier route into Ross from Wilton Bridge was proposed by Thomas Telford in 1824-5 to replace the steep, dangerous ascent up Wye Street.



Continue down to Wilton Road, which you should cross and follow until you reach a steep path that takes you right and onto Banky Meadow. When you reach the bottom turn right on Wye Street, formerly Dock Pitch.

11. Climbing up Wye Street you will come to the The British and Foreign School.



Built between Wye Street and Wilton Road, it was set up to educate the children of farmers, tradesmen and labourers from different backgrounds and denominations. The foundation stone was laid in April 1836, and the building was completed in 1840.

Near the top of Wye Street, turn left down some steps through Thomas Blake Memorial Gardens.

12. The Riverside was a busy scene in the 18th & 19th centuries. Boat building, basket weaving, rope making were carried out on the riverbank.



Horses towed barges up and down the Wye carrying goods to Hereford, Monmouth and Chepstow, and pleasure boats took visitors downstream to admire the Wye gorge. You can view an augmented reality representation of a riverside scene from the Hope and Anchor Dock in the Museum Without Walls app.

From behind the Hope & Anchor Inn, go right along Rope Walk.



13. Sir Frederick Burrows (1888-1973), lived in the unusual house Thrushes Nest. He worked as a railway porter and became president of the NUR. He went to India where he became the last Governor of Bengal in 1945.

Turn right along the Rudhall Brook past the former site of One Mill. Before crossing Trenchard Street, look right and see Rev. William Pye's almshouses. He was a vicar at Foy who died in 1615, and left money for 4 poor parishioners. Other almshouses given by Philip Markye in 1654, were demolished in 1961.

Continue opposite along the footpath beside the brook behind the swimming pool. At Greytrees Road turn right past Fontaine Court, built on the site of the 17th century Brookend Tanyard.

14. The Friends' Meeting House tucked away in Brampton Street was built in typical Quaker style c1668, by James Merrick, a Ross tanner. The burial garden dates back from 1675; here two important and well-respected Quakers are buried - Nathaniel Morgan, and draper Henry Southall.



Continue along Greytrees Road to the Fiveways junction and railway garden. Here you can see an augmented reality representation of a train crossing the railway bridge in the Museum Without Walls app. Turn right into Brookend Street, passing the Town Mill erected in 1857, to produce flour for the townspeople.

15. Dr James Cowles Prichard (1786-1848), was born at Millbrook House, the son of a quaker family. He qualified as a doctor in 1810, and specialised in diseases of the nervous system.

In 1809, he joined the Church of England and when he died in 1848, he was buried at Sellack where his son-in-law was vicar.



Continue up Brookend Street, past Station Street where a brewery was established by Joseph Turnock in the mid-1800s. This was to become the Alton Court Brewery Company. The Maltings have been converted into shops, but the brewery was demolished in 1992.

16. Thomas Blake (1825-1901) was a Liberal MP, non-conformist and magistrate; he began as a post office clerk and became a very successful businessman and a generous benefactor to Ross in the 19th century.



Continue up Broad Street but before reaching the Market House turn right along New Street.



17. The Lock-Up was built in 1838. It had two thick-walled cells and was only used until 1844, to house prisoners waiting to be taken to Hereford or Gloucester jails. In 1844, this building was replaced by a new one in Brampton Street.

18. Lord Nelson and a party of guests arrived in Ross on 25th July 1802. They walked through Walter Hill's gardens at Merton House to the River Wye to embark on a pleasure boat to Monmouth.

From Merton House proceed left along Edde Cross Street to the top of Wye Street. Here, from summer 2022, you can see an augmented reality representation of this area as it was prior to the creation of Wilton Road and the Mock Gothic Town Walls, in the Museum Without Walls app.



Cross the road into High Street, on the corner of which is the Swan Hotel of 1867, now converted into flats.

Continue along High Street

19. The Swan and Falcon Inn was formerly a coaching inn where Lord Nelson breakfasted in 1802, before journeying by boat to Monmouth. The Hon. John Byng stayed here during his tour of South Wales in 1787, which he recorded in his Torrington Diaries.

20. The Corn Exchange was opened in 1862, as a butter and poultry market with an assembly room above. Before it was burned out in 1939, the building was used as a theatre and cinema.



The Ross Heritage Trail ends where it began – at the Market House.

This edition of the Ross-on-Wye Heritage Trail was made possible by the generous support of Morris Bricknell Estate Agents, Ross-on-Wye & District Civic Society, Ross-on-Wye Business Association, Ross-on-Wye Town Council and Ross-on-Wye Tourism Association. Historic information was provided by Heather Hurley and additional text and photographs by Caroline Utting.