

## HALSTEAD HERITAGE DISCOVERY TRAIL

Starting point: Townsford Mill, The Causeway, Halstead CO9 1ET

- 1 In 1825 Samuel Courtauld converted **Townsford Mill** from a corn mill to a silk winding mill. It was one of three 'manufactories' in the Braintree district at that time and later brought early water-powered weaving to the town. It survives as an antiques centre. Attached to the right of the mill is **Mill House**, home to factory managers and their families. On the edge of the parking area is the factory gatehouse (Community Fridge), and the stables opposite it (JCB Petcare).
- 2 The steep, straight sides of the **River Colne** and the sluice gates to the left of the building indicate how Courtaulds' engineering harnessed the water's force. The result was a mirror like surface on which the mill was reflected. Over recent years, the river level beside The Causeway has been allowed to fall, vegetation has taken root in the river bed, so the lovely reflection of the mill has gone. Look in the river though, and you'll probably see wagtails, moorhens, sometimes a little egret, and occasionally the turquoise flash of a kingfisher.
- 3 Overlooked by the factory's "steam factory" or power loom shop (now part of the Co-op store) and **blacksmith's workshop** (a former teashop). The green sward used to be the factory orchard.
- 4 Now Grade II listed, the properties of **The Causeway** were built by Courtaulds for their overseers in 1883. Nearest to the Mill is the Royal British Legion clubhouse, once the company's dining room.
- 5 Courtaulds built three-storey **Factory Terrace** for their workers in 1872. They are Grade II listed. Production still took place at Townsford Mill during the time of construction, but a new complex of buildings, including a huge weaving shed, was later built in front, and a chimney raised between the two terraces. The looms fell silent in 1982, and the main buildings were demolished in 1986.
- 6 Part of the wall in front of Factory Terrace survives, and the arched doorway to the canteen can be seen in the **gable end**. Several other industrial buildings still lie on the former Courtaulds' site, with more retail units on the river, a cavernous boiler house, and a rare but hidden group of 16 WWII industrial air raid shelters. All of them are on Braintree District Council's local heritage list.
- 7 The early 20<sup>th</sup> century facade of **31 High Street** (Daniel Robinson) hides older parts of The Croft, once home to Charles Portway, foundry owner, and inventor of the slow combustion Tortoise Stove, a product that was once exported around the world.
- 8 **St Andrew's Church** is Halstead's only Grade I listed building and has changed enormously over the centuries. A church is believed to have existed here since the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. However, much of the current building dates from the 14<sup>th</sup>. Inside are tombs for one of Halstead's most illustrious families, the de Bouchiers, who were prominent in national and local life until the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. A war memorial can be seen in the north of the churchyard and a small road opposite the path leads to Chipping Hill, a name believed to derive from the old English word for market.

- 9 The **Jubilee Fountain** was donated by George Courtauld in 1887 to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Several listed buildings can be seen in this area, including the 15<sup>th</sup> Century coaching inn, the White Hart, across the road.
- 10 Whispers, now a wine and tapas bar at **26 High Street**, was licensed as a chantry in 1412 under the will of Bartholomew Lord Bouchier. It is one of the town's oldest buildings.
- 11 The pavement passes under the upper floor of **Billson Opticians** at 82 High Street. It was a butcher's shop when a preservation order was slapped on the 16<sup>th</sup> century building in 1973. It was even suggested that it might have been the old guildhall, but information showed that the guildhall had almost certainly been next door - and already been demolished. It is now W.H. Smith.
- 12 In the car park is a replica **Tortoise Stove** - located in the area between the huge site of Portway's Foundry, where the stoves were made, and the old railway line, which closed at the end of 1961.
- 13 Further along Butler Road is the **Empire Theatre**, Halstead's first purpose-built theatre and cinema, which opened in May 1915. Over a hundred years later, and after a face lift or two, it still provides entertainment to audiences.
- 14 **Colne Valley Cinema** was Halstead's second picture palace and opened in 1916. It was renamed **The Savoy** in the 1950s, but closed in the early 1960s. For many years it was a Chinese takeaway, then briefly a play centre, but planning permission to be converted into apartments was granted in 2017.
- 15 Industrialisation spurred a growth in Halstead's population during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so a need for a second parish church was identified. Mary Gee, a local benefactress, commissioned the renowned architect, Sir George Gilbert Scott, to design **Holy Trinity Church**, which was built between 1843 and 1844.
- 16 **Halstead Public Gardens** were funded by public donations with large gifts of money and services given by local businesses and industrialists including, George Courtauld, Portways (providers of the bandstand), and Adams, the local brewery, whose premises were on Trinity Street opposite the pond. A committee commissioned the gardens to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. They were opened in May 1901, a few months after the monarch's death.
- 17 **Library** - This building opened as a corn exchange in 1866, but with Halstead Station just behind it, the railway company soon adopted it as a storage depot. It became a technical school in 1903 and a porch and public conveniences were added to the front. The WCs were removed in 1969 when it became a library.

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