

What is the Harborough Town Trail? You may have seen coverage in the local press and hopefully copies for sale in local outlets, such as the Library, Harborough Museum or Quinn's bookshop.

The trail, however, has a history of its own and is unique in many aspects. These include:

- a collaborative venture between local teachers and the local education authority
- a free guide to every pupil in the locality as they pass through key stage 2 (which many of you will remember as 'Junior' school)
- a guide that can be utilised by local people and visitors to the town to quickly assimilate local history relating to trade and commerce
- a means of comparing past and present through photographic comparisons and observation.

HARBOROUGH TOWN TRAIL

A 'hands on' guide that lets you discover clues to the history of the town

David Wheway



The trail was originally conceived by local teachers in the early 1990's and supported and financed by the Local Education Authority (LEA). The team of local teachers included Andrea Knox (Little Bowden Primary School), Maggie Mutton (Great Bowden Primary School) and Jan Wilson (then at Mowsley Primary School), supported by Judy Dunning (L.C.C. city history and geography adviser).

The prime aim was to link a local study with the newly introduced National Curriculum for History. The team gathered photographs and used their teaching skills to present local history in a way that would be accessible to children between the ages of eight and eleven. Maps of the trail were produced to guide school parties safely round the centre of the town.

The intention was that school parties would begin the trail by the Old Grammar School. They would take in views around the church, Church Street and the High Street; then go via Little Street to the Three Swans and the old malt house. They would compare the old market sites to the current market place and then return along Adam and Eve Street, learning about Thomas Cook and Symingtons. Attention was drawn to local businesses such as Hobbs the Fishmonger, Bates the Butcher and Falkner's – now Joules, as well as to local landmarks including 'tofts', the 'back-lands' and the 'shambles'. At various points children would be encouraged to observe in detail, and ask questions such as: 'Why is this building here?', 'Why is it built this way?', 'How has it changed over time?', 'How does the present day view differ from the view in the old photograph?' The trail would be a 90-minute journey through Harborough's past and present.

The group decided every school should have its own copy of the Harborough Town Trail book – for teachers to use when embarking on the trail with their children.

Then suddenly, everything went quiet! The LEA (partly in its wisdom, partly under duress), devolved much centrally held finances to schools, and as a result the impetus and finance for such projects was lost. The trail sat in a dark room somewhere in Leicester, no one knowing where it was or how to retrieve it.

When I took over as 'Network Manager' for the local schools, I heard of the trail and, to cut a long story short – successfully tracked it down. With the help of the local teachers, we blew off the dust and re-assessed the trail's potential as an exciting learning tool. The materials were impressive and I felt they had real commercial potential. With careful editing and good designing and printing, the materials could be sold to the public. This in turn might raise money to give all children their own personal copy, to use and keep as a memento for the future. In this way we could support local children in valuing as well as developing knowledge of their heritage.

By now interest in the work of the local group of teachers had grown, and their meetings regularly attracted local historians, members of the museum staff (local and regional), and interested members of the public. We decided to rename the group 'The Market Harborough Local History Group'.



THE UPPER HIGH STREET,
1897-1903.

We applied to the national lottery 'Awards for All' for funding, and the local schools' group (Development Group 15) supported the process of editing and gathering additional material. This group of 21 schools included schools from the town, surrounding villages (from Tugby in the northeast to Mowsley in the west), Kibworth schools, Fleckney and Great Glen. We were supported further by generous donations from the Three Swans and Travelsphere.



THE UPPER HIGH STREET,
2001.

The award from the lottery, the Three Swans and Travelsphere covered the costs of designing, editing and printing the first batch of 2000 copies, with additional funding from local schools to cover the transitional period whilst funds were raised through sales.

The end result should have wide appeal. Design and Co. have applied their customary quality, with an appealing cover and clear historic photographs.

For the children, the trail booklet will in time become an historic document in its own right – something they can pass on to the next generation. They will become local people with a shared knowledge of Harborough's heritage.

So who else should the trail appeal to? For local adults it will offer the opportunity to become impressively knowledgeable within a short walk. I know this to be true from personal experience. Recently I invited an Australian doctor of music and his wife (who were staying at the University of Leicester), to come for a visit and stay for supper. After meeting them off the train at Harborough Station they asked if we had time for a quick car tour round Harborough. I pointed out the local landmarks with interesting background information. They were very impressed at my local knowledge, which fortunately never needed to stray beyond details gleaned from the trail.

The trail will also appeal to visitors and tourists to the town. The local hotels are already interested and intend to keep copies for reference and to sell. One local hotelier said he is always being asked for information on local places of interest, and this guide would broaden his own knowledge and be something he could offer to guests. Hopefully visitors with children will while away a pleasant couple of hours, observing and completing the questionnaire incorporated into the guide.

For your own copy of the Harborough Town Trail, contact:
Harborough Museum,
Pen Lloyd Library, or
Quinn's Bookshop.



BUYING AND SELLING IN THE SQUARE C. 1900.