



Huntingdon Town Trail

A brief history of Huntingdon

Huntingdon is situated on Ermine Street, a Roman road from London to York, where it crosses England's third longest river, the Great Ouse. Godmanchester, just south of the river, was the major settlement, with the Roman name of Durovigutum, while Huntingdon had a villa that overlooked Portholme meadow.

The name Huntingdon is derived from the Old English 'Huntedun', meaning Hunta's Hill. Edward the Elder, a Saxon king, captured Huntingdon from the Danish Vikings about AD 921, and it became the county town of Huntingdonshire.

By 1066 Huntingdon was a Royal Borough with a mint which issued its own coinage. A Royal Charter was granted in 1205.

By the 13th century the town was prosperous with about 15 churches, three monasteries and three hospitals. Following the Black Death of 1348-9 and the decline of trade on the river, the town's population decreased drastically.

Hinchingbrooke Priory closed in 1536, passed to the Cromwell family, then became Hinchingbrooke House, the home of the Earls of Sandwich.

Oliver Cromwell, 1599 to 1658, the Lord Protector was born and brought up in Huntingdon. During the Civil War, Huntingdon was held by Parliament and to the detriment of the town, King Charles briefly held Huntingdon in 1645.

Located on the Great North Road, Huntingdon became a major coaching centre in the 17th and 18th centuries, and until 1800 Huntingdon was a linear settlement. In the second half of the 19th century, after the arrival of the railway, the town gradually began to expand.

After 1960 Huntingdon grew substantially with the development of new estates which encouraged people and businesses to relocate from London. Over the last 30 years there has been more growth on the western side of town. The town centre has seen many changes since 2000 and continues to evolve whilst preserving the best of the old Huntingdon.



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With generous support in both time and grant funding from

Huntingdon Town Council
Tel 01480 388688
www.huntingdowntown.gov.uk

The Cromwell Museum
Tel 01480 375830

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/cromwell • www.olivercromwell.org

Huntingdon & Godmanchester Civic Society
www.civicvoice.org.uk/society/huntingdon-godmanchester-civic-society

and a team of expert historians, led by David Hufford.

The following websites also provide further information about Huntingdon, the surrounding area and accommodation

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk • www.cambridgeshire.net
www.visithuntingdonshire.net • www.huntingdon-accomodation.org.uk

The montage on the front cover is entitled "A Bridge Through Time" by Sue Martin and Alan Akeroyd, 2009. A large wall mounted version of this artwork can be found on the wall of Huntingdon Library, Princes Street (first floor).

Every care is taken in compiling the information for this town trail.

HTP assumes no responsibility for errors or changes.

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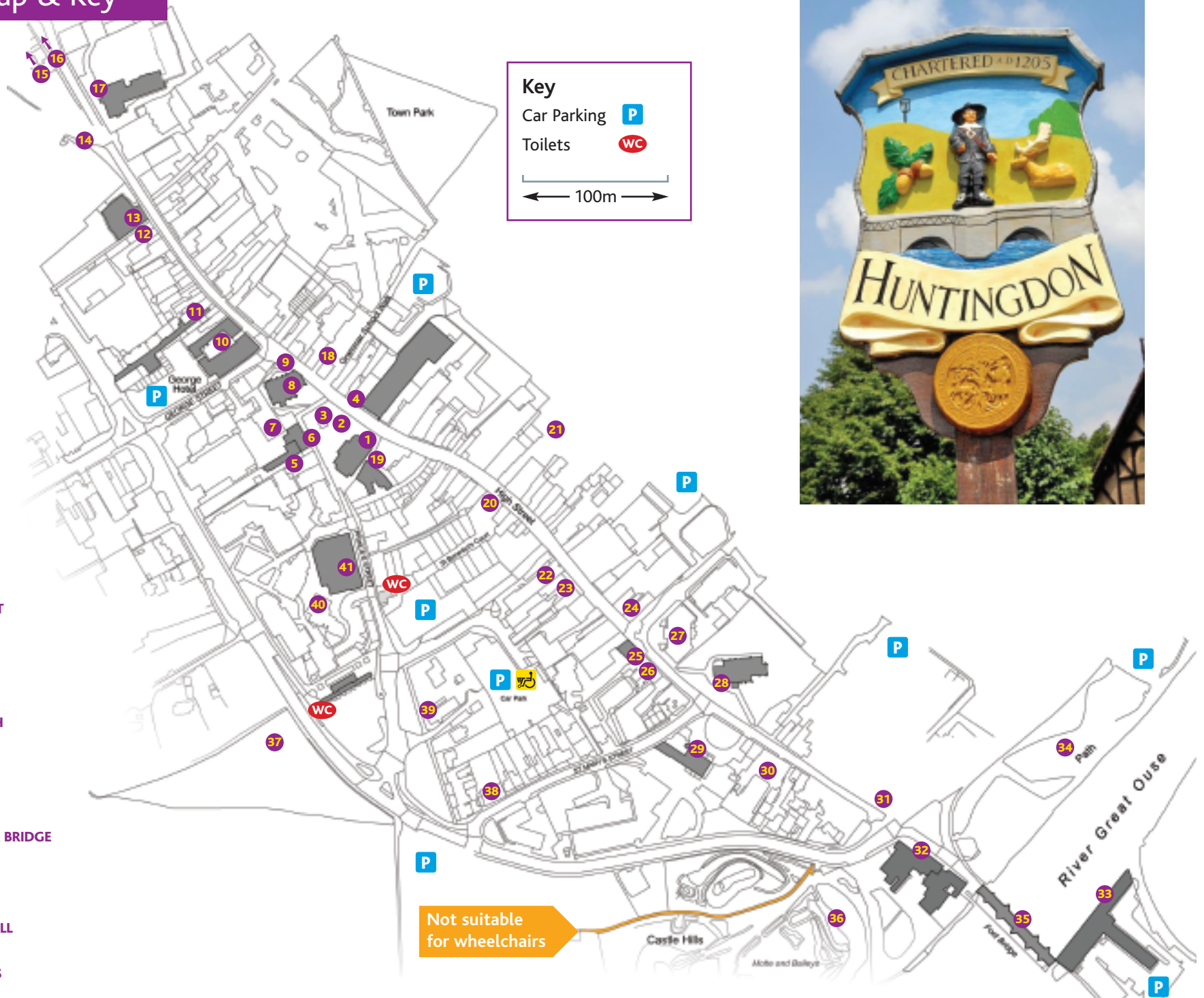
Huntingdon Town Trail



"A Bridge Through Time" by Sue Martin and Alan Akeroyd, 2009

Huntingdon Map & Key

- 1 TOWN HALL
- 2 MARKET HILL
- 3 WAR MEMORIAL
- 4 FOUNTAIN HOTEL
- 5 FALCON INN
- 6 WYKEHAM HOUSE
- 7 WALDEN HOUSE
- 8 ALL SAINTS' CHURCH
- 9 SOUTH AFRICAN MEMORIAL
- 10 THE GEORGE HOTEL
- 11 ROYAL OAK PASSAGE
- 12 THE DARJEELING RESTAURANT
- 13 ST JOHN'S CHURCHYARD
- 14 WHITWELL HOUSE
- 15 MONTAGU HOUSE
- 16 77-79 ERMINE STREET
- 17 CROMWELL HOUSE
- 18 THE CROMWELL MUSEUM
- 19 MARKET INN
- 20 ST BENEDICT'S COURT
- 21 CHEQUERS COURT
- 22 COMMEMORATION HALL
- 23 36, 37 & 38 HIGH STREET
- 24 THREE TUNS PUBLIC HOUSE
- 25 COWPER HOUSE, 29-30 HIGH STREET
- 26 28 HIGH STREET
- 27 SAXONGATE CENTRE
- 28 ST MARY'S CHURCH
- 29 CASTLE HILL HOUSE
- 30 HUNTINGDON METHODIST CHURCH
- 31 THE COUNTY & BOROUGH GAOL
- 32 THE OLD BRIDGE HOTEL
- 33 RIVERSIDE MILL
- 34 RIVERSIDE PARK
- 35 HUNTINGDON & GODMANCHESTER BRIDGE
- 36 CASTLE HILLS
- 37 MILL COMMON
- 38 ANTIQUE CENTRE
- 39 THE ARCHDEACONRY LIBRARY & HALL
- 40 LAWRENCE COURT
- 41 HUNTINGDON LIBRARY & ARCHIVES



Key

Car Parking **P**

Toilets **WC**

100m



Not suitable for wheelchairs

Huntingdon Town Trail

Distance approximately 1 1/2 miles
Time approximately 1 hour 15 minutes

Start outside the **TOWN HALL** 1, which was built in 1745 and has been modified many times since. The interior has two early 19th century law courts, a council chamber and a ballroom containing many fine portraits.

The Town Hall dominates the south side of **MARKET HILL** 2. At the centre of the square is the 'Thinking Soldier' **WAR MEMORIAL** 3, sculpted by Kathleen Scott, the widow of 'Scott of the Antarctic'. It was unveiled in 1923 and is considered to be one of the nation's top 100 war memorials.

The memorial faces an attractive façade, dated 1727, next to the former **FOUNTAIN HOTEL** 4. Note the central Venetian style window that lit the 18th century ballroom. In the coaching era this inn competed with its main rival the George Hotel.

On the opposite side of the square are some of the town's most distinguished buildings, including the 16th century **FALCON INN** 5, with a broad oriel window. It was reputedly a headquarters for Oliver Cromwell during the Civil War. Next door is **WYKEHAM HOUSE** 6, the first home of the London and County Bank (which became Westminster Bank). Set back by the church is the 17th century **WALDEN HOUSE** 7, home of Sir Lionel Walden, founder of the local Green Coat charity school; in the First World War it was a hospital for soldiers.

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH 8 is on the north side of the square and is one of only two surviving medieval churches in the town. All Saints' has some Norman stonework, but with a lot of later alterations. It contains a font, from St John's Church, believed to be that in which Oliver Cromwell was baptised. Members of the Cromwell family are buried in the church. The Victorian organ chamber by Sir G Gilbert Scott has some excellent carvings.

From Market Hill, turn north up the High Street, noting on the east wall of the church a memorial to Thomas Jetherell, a bankrupt maltster, which is worth reading.

On the corner of George Street stands a rare outdoor memorial to the **SOUTH AFRICAN WAR** 9, unveiled in 1903. If you walk



On the other side of the High Street is **CROMWELL HOUSE** 17, built about 1830 on the site of an earlier house where Oliver Cromwell was born in 1599; note the plaque and Cromwell family coat of arms.

Retracing your steps along the High Street, observe the oriel window over the newspaper shop on the corner of the very narrow Ambury Road, at no 91 the fine pair of ram's head corbels, and next to it the three-storey bank of about 1870 with fine capital heads. Next door, a much restored timber frame shop front hides a 19th century forge and warehouse.

THE CROMWELL MUSEUM 18, a seat of learning for both Oliver Cromwell and Samuel Pepys, has a varied history. It was originally the western end of a long infirmary hall that had two aisles and a chapel. This belonged to the Hospital of St John the Baptist, founded by David, the Scottish Earl of Huntingdon, in the second half of the 12th century. The Borough of Huntingdon took control of the Hospital in the 14th century and the hall was later reduced in size. From 1565 the building was in use as the Borough's Grammar School. In 1877 the entire structure was completely rebuilt under the direction of Robert Hutchinson; the famous Irish Playwright Dion Boucicault largely paid for the restoration in memory of his son.

The Cromwell Museum was established in the old school in 1962, and displays a great collection of Cromwelliana, including paintings.

Return to the Market Square. At the rear of the Town Hall is the **MARKET INN** 19 situated in one of the few remaining networks of passages left in the town. The main entrance in Raitt's Passage has a timber frame upper storey.

Continue south of Barclays Bank where much of the High Street has been rebuilt in the past fifty years.

ST BENEDICT'S COURT 20 on the right, a paved area with seats and a fountain, was once a churchyard. St Benedict's foundations lie under an adjacent shop; its tower was pulled down in 1804 and the dressed masonry used to build the Barley Mow public house in Hartford's Main Street, about 1.5 miles away. On the left is the entrance to **CHEQUERS COURT** 21 shopping precinct, built 1960-1966 and added to since; this incorporates part of the town's largest brewery, which ceased brewing in 1954.

The **COMMEMORATION HALL** 22 was built in 1842 as the Huntingdon Literary & Scientific Institute. The façade has a replica Statue of Minerva. The Institute had public rooms, library, museum

preached in 1776. Note the ancient milestone on the car park wall - 'To London 59 miles'. From the Methodist Church south to the ring road the houses on the west side are mainly timber framed, those on the east being Georgian brick buildings from no 150 onwards.

The last house on the left is 156 High Street, beside a low archway leading into Orchard Lane. The offices on the north side of the lane were formerly used to house **THE COUNTY & BOROUGH GAOL** 31 for felons and debtors. One of the iron grated openings at ground level was the condemned cell. The iron bars at 156 were to stop prisoners escaping from the prison yard.

Crossing the ring road to the traffic island, the Georgian house on the corner is the oldest part of **THE OLD BRIDGE HOTEL** 32. The hotel bar in the centre was the banking chamber of the private banker FD Veasey, whose family lived in the oldest part of the hotel.

Cross to the riverside, where the present office block was a warehouse. Stand by the river and look across to view the **RIVERSIDE MILL** 33, built in the mid 19th century by Charles Veasey for use as an Oil Cake Factory. Used as a military clothing depot in the First World War, it became a Hosiery Mill, operational from 1924 to 1972, and is now apartments.

Behind the Riverside Mill was Brown and Goodman's Flour Mill and Godmanchester Railway Station, from where the line ran to St Ives and Cambridge. The station yard is now a public car park.

From here the **RIVERSIDE PARK** 34 extends to the old village of HARTFORD. View the downstream side of the old stone bridge then cross the road by the traffic island to the path by the Hotel. Walk on to the footbridge, built 1965-66.

HUNTINGDON & GODMANCHESTER BRIDGE 35, completed about 1332, is a unique monument to the rivalry between the 'twin towns' who built it, with six arches, each slightly different. Two of the upstream arches on the Huntingdon end have decoration. The central portion of the bridge is wider than its approaches, because the builders failed to agree on correct alignment. The most obvious differences are the cutwaters; Huntingdon's are v-shaped and Godmanchester's semi-hexagonal.

From the footbridge **PORTHOLME MEADOW** may be seen beyond the A14 road bridge (1973-75). The meadow is bounded by the Alconbury Brook at its confluence with the Great Ouse river, which is navigable from Bedford to King's Lynn.



up George Street other points of interest are the Crimean War Memorial, (a cannon, which stands adjacent to the former County Hospital), the Railway Station, a former Victorian chapel next to the home of Charles Windover, a 19th century coach manufacturer, later converted to the town post office; and Hinchingbrooke House, which is now a school.

THE GEORGE HOTEL 10 was Huntingdon's most important coaching inn. Badly damaged by fire in 1865, the wings facing the street were rebuilt by the town's distinguished architect Robert Hutchinson. The courtyard, built in the 17th and 18th century, houses a fine gallery, staircase, and clock to time the coaches. This is the venue for the annual summer productions of 'Shakespeare at the George'.

ROYAL OAK PASSAGE 11 is one of the numerous alleys and passageways that led off the main street. Walk on past buildings that conceal older timber frame construction that you can see through the window, particularly at no 61. Note the Implement Depot lettering up above no 65, and the red brick Falcon House, no 68. **THE DARJEELING RESTAURANT 12**, originally the offices of Jenkins and Jones 'Falcon Brewery'.

ST JOHN'S CHURCHYARD 13 was the site of St John's Church, damaged in the 17th century Civil War, and demolished about 1660. Pass 18th century Ferrars House, on the corner of Ferrars Road, where a metal plate on the pavement refers to an iron foundry that used to stand in nearby St John's Street. This was close to the old rubber factory, located at the end of Ferrars Road. It was originally built on the site of Portholme Aircraft works where Sopwith fighters and armoured lorries were built in the First World War, and where the Edison Bell company made gramophones and records in the 1920s.

Here can be found Huntingdon's finest Georgian townhouses facing down the High Street, **WHITWELL HOUSE 14**, built 1727, with a splendid gate and railings of wrought iron, and **MONTAGU HOUSE 15**, on the opposite side of the ring road.

Noting the early 19th century bowed shop windows on the left, continue and look over the ring road. To the right of Montagu House, are three terrace houses, nos **77-79 ERMINE STREET 16**, built in late 18th century of yellow brick, each with a fanlight over the door.



and billiard room, and also a bowling green in Grammar School Walk. It closed in 1954, was renovated and re-opened in 1960 as the Commemoration Hall, now a multi-use venue.

36, 37 & 38 HIGH STREET 23 are early 19th century buildings with fanlights over the doors. Walk on to the **THREE TUNS PUBLIC HOUSE 24** on the corner of Hartford Road. This was one of twenty seven public houses in Huntingdon in 1901.

At **COWPER HOUSE, 29-30 HIGH STREET 25**, an impressive early 18th century front hides a 16th century timber frame interior. A plaque at 29 records the poet William Cowper lived here 1765-67. Note the massive chimney stack, fake gable window and fine doorways.

28 HIGH STREET 26 has a pillared portico and ogee glazing bars, while no 27 High Street has a mansard roof with a break in its slope, the lower part being steeper than the upper, a common feature of older properties in Huntingdon.

On the opposite corner are the **SAXONGATE CENTRE 27**, where in 2005 archaeologists discovered the foundations of a late Saxon gateway which probably marked the extent of the town before the Norman Conquest.

Along the High Street from no 27 and opposite St Mary's Church the range of buildings up to St Mary's Street are mainly timber frame cottages with brick fronts.

ST MARY'S CHURCH 28 is a Saxon foundation with some Norman work, but was mainly rebuilt in the 13th century. Part of the late 14th century west tower fell in 1608, destroying the north aisle and damaging the nave and south aisle, which were rebuilt 1608-20.

CASTLE HILL HOUSE 29, built in 1787, was home of the Veasey family from 1837-1916, with, until 1918, a large garden that included Castle Hills. The garden is now occupied by the local District Council's offices, Pathfinder House, which derives its name from the RAF Pathfinder Force Group HQ, who were based in the old house and garden 1943-45. The Pathfinder Operations Room is visible on the opposite side of the ring road by Castle Hills and is used by a funeral service. Locally based Pathfinder Squadrons led the RAF bomber attacks on Europe.

Further down the High Street is **HUNTINGDON METHODIST CHURCH 30**, built in 1878 by Robert Hutchinson. The first Methodist Chapel was in a barn in Castle Hill Lane, where John Wesley

Return to the Old Bridge Hotel and follow the road to **CASTLE HILLS 36** the site of Huntingdon Castle. The great earthworks were built over part of the Saxon Town by order of William the Conqueror in 1068. The castle had a stormy career, and after the siege of 1174, King Henry II had the timber walls destroyed.

The site remained the seat of the Honour of the Earls of Huntingdon, and had a great hall, chapel, small stone gatehouse and a county gaol. During the 17th century Civil Wars the castle was remodelled as an artillery fortification. Later, a windmill stood on the large hill with pine trees. By the 19th century it was part of a garden, through which a railway link from Godmanchester was cut in 1851. The railway closed to passengers in 1959, and the Huntingdon Bypass was built on the line of the railway 1973-75, later becoming the A14 highway. This site is home to the town's beacon.

From the castle, follow the footpath behind the hill past a row of houses to a small car park. **MILL COMMON 37**, is Mill Common Road, where during the 1960s excavations evidence was uncovered of a Roman Villa, a Saxon cemetery with over 400 skeletons, a chapel, gallows and two windmills. Before returning to the town centre you may take a detour from the car park turning left on a road leading under the A14 to the Gasworks Bridge, where paths cross Portholme Meadow, leading to Godmanchester, Brampton and the long-distance Ouse Valley Way. Portholme is said to be the largest water meadow in England. It was a racecourse until 1896, and an aerodrome for pioneer aviators between 1910 and 1913.

Before crossing the ring road towards the bus station, note the **ANTIQUÉ CENTRE 38** in St Mary's Street, which was once a maltings and in 1912 became the town's Territorial Army Depot. The Tudor style building along The Walks East is **THE ARCHDEACONRY LIBRARY & HALL 39**, built in 1890, also by Hutchinson.

From the pedestrian crossing, proceed behind the bus station to Princes Street, passing **LAWRENCE COURT 40** an 18th century grade two listed building on the left and the new **HUNTINGDON LIBRARY & ARCHIVES 41**, opened in 2009, before returning to the start in Market Hill.

