



Wigton Heritage Trail







Wigton Heritage Trail

Welcome to Wigton, a bustling market town in the heart of the Solway Plain.

First inhabited as early as the 7th century, the town's name is derived from 'Wicga's tun', 'tun' being the Old English term for a townsted or village. Wicga is believed to have been an Anglo-Saxon leader who settled here.

The town is steeped in heritage, from St Mary's Church that dates back to medieval times, to the Kings Arms Hotel where authors Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins recovered after a gruelling walk on Carrock Fell in 1857.

Around the town you will see Georgian buildings and a thriving High Street and King Street. See the variety of shops - some general, some specialist and a range of hairdressers.

This heritage trail will guide you to the landmarks of the central parts of Wigton (and there is much to see beyond if you wish to explore further).

We hope you enjoy the 2021 edition of Wigton's history trail and find it informative.

The walk should take between 60 and 90 minutes and there is much to take in along the way.

Each point has been given a number to match the plaques on the walls of the areas of interest to help you understand how each landmark has contributed to the culture and history of the town. The full route is shown on the map at the start of this booklet.

If you would like to learn more about the history of Wigton, there are several books such as:

The History of Wigton – T W Carrick (1949, republished 1992)

A New Illustrated History of Wigton - John Higham (1993)

Greetings From Wigton : A Celebration of Wigton and its People – Sue Allan (1999)

Wigton Through Time – Trevor Grahamslaw (2010)

We start at the Market Hall (1), just opposite Water Street car park. This is the spot where Sir Walter de Wigton, a former Baron of the town, was granted its Market Charter by King Henry III in 1262 on the payment of a sum of gold. The Market Hall café is named twelve62 to commemorate this important event.



Follow Church Street down to your left (past the entrance to Café twelve62) and find St Mary's Church (2), one of the first sites to have been developed in Wigton.

There has been a building on the site since 1100 and St Mary's was first built using stones from the nearby Roman Fort.

It fell to ruin and was rebuilt in 1788 then again in 1881 as the Georgian building that stands before us, for the sum of just £1,500

The Reverend John Ford, the father of broadcaster Anna Ford, gave the church another makeover in the 1950s, laying the gravestones flat and painting the interior of the church. Inside you will find beautiful stained glass windows, carved stones from the original 12th century building, and three later windows donated by author and broadcaster Melvyn Bragg, Lord Bragg of Wigton, as a thank you to his hometown for the memories that inspired his work. It was designed by local artist Brian Campbell of Waverton, a former teacher at Nelson Thomlinson School and the driving force behind the Fountain Gallery on the High Street.

Step outside and take in the Corn Market (3), the cobbled area in front of the church where you will see the letters W

for wheat, O for oats and B for barley on the stones. Weather permitting, a monthly craft and country market is held here.

To the north side of St Mary's is a row of cottages, known as the Widows' Hospital. A plaque on the front of the building tells how they were built in 1723 by a bequest from the Rev John Thomlinson, Rector of Rothbury. The executors of his will arranged for them to be built for the widows of six Protestant clergymen from across the county of Cumberland.



Carry on past the church to Proctors Row

(4) which is lined with traditional Georgian cottages built in the late 1700s. If you venture down the alley you will see carved stones set into pre-existing walls from the 12th century.

Continue down High Street and you will come to Victoria Place (5) on your left. Now the offices of Bendles Solicitors, this was the home of Thomas Sheffield, brother of the famous portrait painter George Sheffield Senior and



uncle to his son, George Sheffield Junior, a landscape and marine painter who would have learned his art there.

He was born in Wigton in 1839 and went on to become one of the most celebrated artists of the 19th century.



Cross over and turn right to head back up High Street and you will see Thomlinson Junior School (6) set back from the road. Built by John Westmorland in 1807, it was once a grand family home

and remained in the family until 1876 when it was purchased by Issac Pattison. Following his death it was bought by the Nelson Trust, the legacy of Joseph Nelson, a successful local draper, in 1898 and after much uproar at the suggestion of it becoming a mixed school, it became the Thomlinson Girls Grammar. It was a further 50 years before boys and girls could study together. The area in front of the school is called the Goose Market.

Along the road on the left hand side is Wigton Methodist Church (7) which was built in 1883. The theologian John Wesley first preached in the Market Square in Wigton in 1757 to a receptive crowd, and came to the area on several more occasions on journeys to and from Scotland. The Methodist Church was totally modernised inside in 2005 and hosts many activities.



Carry on along High Street to Redmayne Bespoke and Custom Tailors (8), which has a Royal Warrant, and see the nimble fingered seamstresses working in the window, just as they did in the business founded by Samuel Redmayne in 1868. His workers made uniforms for soldiers in the First World War and classic



tweed jackets still feature in the window today. In 1986 television presenter and designer Jeff Banks filmed an episode of

The Clothes Show there, interviewing managing director Michael Wigglesworth, the great-great-grandson of Samuel Redmayne.

Next we have Wigton Library (9) opened in 1975 by Lord Bragg. It stands on the site of the Half Moon Inn, where the famous Wigton philanthropist George Moore would go for a drink after working as a draper's apprentice.

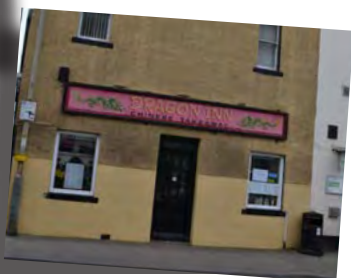


Opposite on the first floor facade you can see carved heads and other ornaments that go along several buildings.



Then you will see what was formerly the White Swan Inn, and is now the Youth Station (10), a club for the children and young people of the town.

Next to this is Dragon's Inn (11). Currently a Chinese restaurant, this is believed to be one of the oldest buildings in Wigton, belonging to the monks of Holm Cultram and dedicated to St Mildred, an access from the 8th century. It later became the Kings Head Hotel.





Look ahead to Market Place to take in what was the Kings Arms Hotel (12), a former coaching inn where authors Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins stayed on The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices during the wet winter of 1857.

They didn't much enjoy the town, with Collins falling on Carrock Fell and twisting his ankle. When the pub was renovated in 1987, wallpaper was peeled back to reveal Dickens had put his autograph on the wall.

To your left is West Street where you will see one of the oldest pubs in Wigton, the Hare and Hounds. Further along is the Friends Meeting House, built in 1830, and Arlosh House, a listed building with spectacular stone carvings above the door.

In the middle of Market Place is one of the most magnificent pieces of the town's heritage, the George Moore Memorial (13). This fountain was dedicated to his first wife Eliza Ray and built in 1872. On each of the four sides is a sculpture by the pre-Raphaelite sculptor Thomas Woolner showing scenes of the Acts of Mercy, these being 'visiting the afflicted,' 'clothing the naked,' 'instructing the ignorant,' and 'feeding the hungry,' with Eliza's face above each one.



Walk along to the right of the



monument down King Street and this is where the town's first newspaper, the Wigton Advertiser, was printed in the shop that is now Trotman Opticians (14). Set up by Thomas

McMechan, the first edition was printed in 1857, cost just a penny and covered stories about a dentist coming to town, tips on making tea and an advert for a boy aged 10 to 12 required to help care for horses and cattle.

Continue down King Street walking away from the fountain and take a left down Station Road to see the John Peel Theatre (15), named after the same Mr Peel featured in the well-known song 'D'ye ken John Peel'.



Peel was a farmer and his friend, John Woodcock Groves, who was brought up in Wigton, sang his children to sleep with a tale he created about his pal and the pack of hounds which he took hunting.

Further along is the former home of Wigton sculptor Irving Ray and on the walls you can see his carved figureheads.

Go back up Station Road, take a left onto King Street and you will pass the Throstle's Nest pub (16). Wigton's nickname is the Throstle's Nest - throstle meaning thrush. The author William Wallace, who lived in the town until his death in



1896, wrote a book, Warblings from the Throstle's Nest, and it's also claimed the name came about when a soldier, returning

from the First World War, came over the hill, saw the town and cried: "Away lads, it's the throstle's nest of all England."

Continue down King Street and you will see the Black-A-Moor Pub (17), the childhood home of Lord Bragg. It was a pub for folk with hunting dogs and Bragg has fond memories of living there with his dad Stanley and mum Ethel, who he says had only two sips of sherry a month.



Next door is the former Wigton Free Grammar School, founded in 1714. This is now a private home. Further down is the site of Hodgson's Brewery, marked by an archway with a horse's head on which was carved by Irving Ray. Turn right from King Street and this will take you on to Market Hill.

Market Hill (18) is now a car park but was the original medieval livestock market in Wigton. Horses, cattle and sheep were sold, with the Lord of the Manor taking a proportion of the money for each sale. The open space was also the traditional venue for cockfighting. Chartist disturbances took place here in 1842 with 11 arrests.



Continue down Market Hill and on your left is the Wilkinson Joinery Building on the site of the Old Corn Mill (19). On the side of the wall are three original mill stones and a bronze plaque explaining its history, with the first wind-powered mill on this site dating back to 1328. The building that stands today was rebuilt in



1775 and served as a mill until the late 1920s, powered by water from the nearby Speet Gill.

Take a right turn up a set of steps to Birdcage Walk and here you will see Donaldson House (20) which was built in 1805 and still retains its stunning Georgian grandeur. It is believed to have been the home of John Donaldson, son of the town's watchmaker Alexander Donaldson, who ran a brewery in Wigton with his brother Thomas.

Walk along until you reach the Old Cotton Mill (21), now home to the Free For All environmental charity, which once housed workers for the town's thriving cotton industry in the 18th century. The area behind the mill, powered by water from the Wiza Beck, is known as 'Tenters', named after the tenterhooks used to stretch the cloth out so it could be bleached by the sun.

At the end of Birdcage Walk turn right down Water Street and you'll find yourself back at the start of the trail and our final stop, The Pump and The Lamp (22). Folklore has it that 'midnight conversations' could be heard between them, according to the Wigton Advertiser, satirising local town politics. They were originally put in Market Square to replace a cross with a bell that was rung each market day.

During a bonfire to mark Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, the cross burned and the Pump and the Lamp took its place, before being taken down to make way for the George Moore Memorial. They were reunited again at their current spot in Water Street in 1998.



We hope you enjoy this 2021 edition of Wigton's History Trail. The walk should take you between 60 and 90 minutes.

But there is more to see in Wigton and beyond the central area that it covers.

Walk south and you will see on the horizon the magnificent tower of Highmoor Mansions along with the house.

Walk west and you will see the building that was the Friends' Meeting House.

Walk north and you will see the factories that produce a huge variety of plastic products and the renovated railway station.

Walk east to the Catholic Church and you will see also the buildings that were the Convent that played an important part of life of Wigton until the 1990s.

This revised leaflet has been produced by Allerdale Borough Council and Wigton Town Council

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