

A Tudor walk around Old Amersham

LOCAL
STORIES
AT
THE
AMERSHAM
MUSEUM



Does this house look Tudor?
Appearances can be deceptive – see Tudor Point A

A 2¼ mile walk around the streets, lanes and footpaths looking at Amersham's Tudor history

Amersham Museum Walks

This guide is one of several self-led walks created by Amersham Museum.

Go to www.amershammuseum.org to find more.

This walk mostly follows the route of a Guided Walk organised by the Amersham Museum and includes some of the information given out by the costumed guides (see the photo for Tudor Point F). So, if this walk whets your appetite, do join us on one of the guided walks to learn much more. The Museum offers a programme of themed guided walks. Others include the movers and shakers of Amersham Old Town, Arts & Crafts architecture, Modernism and drovers' routes. Go to <https://amershammuseum.org/events/guided-walks/> for details of dates and how to book.

Amersham Museum

Amersham Museum is an award-winning accredited museum, sharing the stories of local people and places. The museum is housed in part of a Grade II listed medieval hall house in the heart of Amersham, a historic market town. The museum has a beautiful physic garden, next to the River Misbourne.

The museum runs a wide range of activities for people of all ages, including reminiscence groups, singing, art and literature workshops and an accredited art club for children. It is brilliantly supported by a team of 125 volunteers and a Friends group.



Tudor hall house, now part of the Amersham Museum - see Tudor Point A

www.amershammuseum.org

A Tudor walk around Old Amersham

This walk starts at the Amersham Museum (49 High St, Old Amersham, HP7 0DP). It is about 3.7 km (2¼ miles), say, 1 hour + reading time. It goes along streets and lanes in the town and footpaths and field paths. Usually, the paths are clear but may occasionally be muddy in a few places and there is one steep climb.



Car parking: Cars can be parked in most of the Old Town but if busy use the paying car park off The Broadway.

Buses: There are buses stopping in Old Amersham from Chesham, High Wycombe, Aylesbury, Slough & Watford. See <https://bustimes.org/localities/old-amersham>.

Trains: Amersham station is served by the Metropolitan Line from Aldgate and Baker Street and the Chiltern line from Marylebone and Aylesbury. There are buses or taxis from the station to the Old Town.

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A Tudor walk around Old Amersham

Start

Start at the Amersham Museum (49 High Street). Look around you at this medieval town, Tudor point **A**

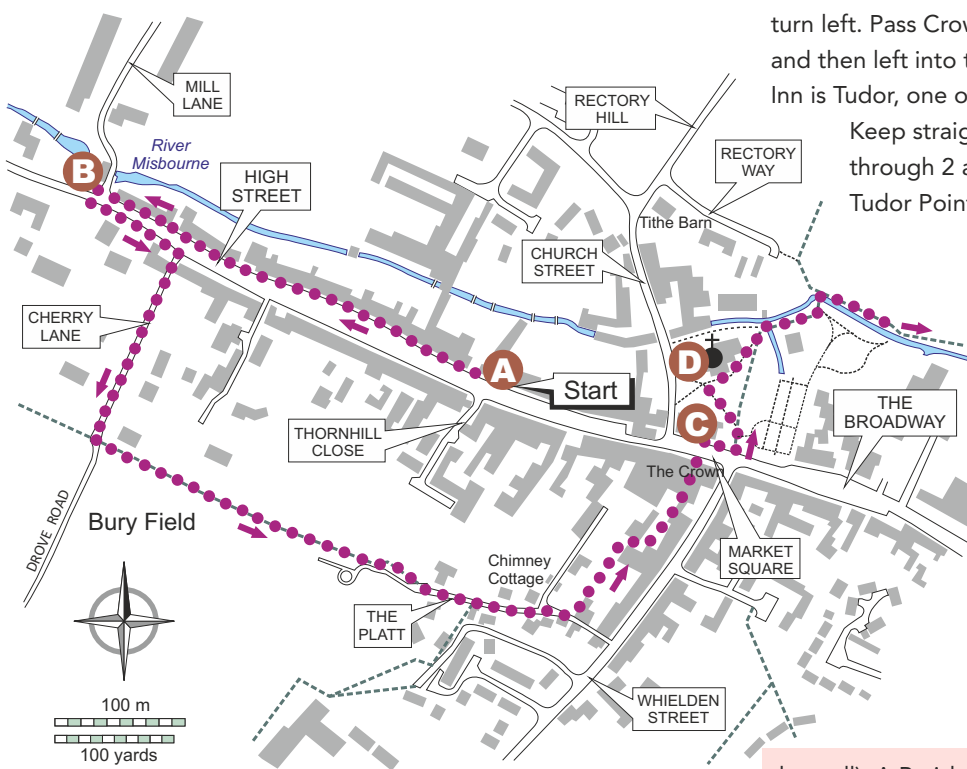
A A planned town

Agmondesham (Amersham) is a planned town, dating back to a charter of 1200 when King John sold the right to hold a market to the Lord of the Manor. The wide High Street allowed for a profitable market. In 1544 John Leland described Agmondesham as 'A right pretty Market Towne on Fryday of one Street well built with Tymber ...'. The museum is situated in a 15th century hall house (see picture on introductory page). Glancing up and down the street you may think most of the buildings look more Georgian than Tudor. Don't be deceived! Most are older but were 'improved' by having a brick front put on them in Georgian times. Look down the sides, under archways - the timber frame is still visible in many cases.

Turn right out of the Museum and walk west along the High Street. Which houses do you think were built in Tudor times? Look for the clues, eg, timber frames possibly hidden except down the sides. Stop when you reach Mill Lane, Tudor Point **B**

B Sibley's Mill (Town Mill)

In the Domesday Book, Amersham had three mills, including one here. The Museum's painting of the mill is probably mid-18th century.



turn left. Pass Crown Meadow on the right and turn right and then left into the car park of The Crown. The Crown Inn is Tudor, one of its bedrooms has Tudor wall paintings.

Keep straight ahead into the courtyard and through 2 arches to emerge onto Market Square, Tudor Point **C**

C Market Square / Fraternity of St Katherine

There was a regular market in Tudor times, where townspeople sold their produce. There would be pedlars and travelling merchants with packhorses, selling wool, cloth, hats, gloves, candles, feathers, salt, fish, etc. The Market Viewer opened/closed the market at set times, checked weights, measures and quality. It was illegal to sell goods except at the market; that was 'forestalling' (before it came to

the stall). A Parish Constable kept law and order, watching out for drunks, vagrants and cutpurses. Some of the trials of those accused of heresy are believed to have been held in The White Hart Inn, on the site of The Crown. Heretics were often required to do their penance in the market place.

The Fraternity of St Katherine was a charity set up ca. 1450 by the town's burghers to support its members during hard times. It paid the salary of a priest to say masses for their souls when they died and probably teach boys to read. The building was erected in about 1490-



1500 and comprised a first-floor thatched hall with an open under-croft. A large part of it survives within nos. 1-9 Market Square.

Cross the High Street and head back 100 m to Cherry Lane, turn right (south) up the lane. This is believed to be a drover's road, used to take cattle to their summer pasture on Wycombe Heath. Go uphill until you reach a cross-path (The Platt) at the end of the houses. The distance (about 150m) from the High Street to The Platt is the length of a burgage plot, the land behind each merchant's house for keeping animals and growing food. Turn left (east) along The Platt. On your right-hand side is Bury Field, Upper Bury Field and Lower Bury Field, comprising three of the great fields. These were divided into strips, with each family having strips in each field. Crops were rotated in successive years, grains (eg, barley) one year, then legumes (peas, beans) and fallow (no crops). This great field stretches to the hill top from Cherry Lane all the way to where you will leave The Platt. The path widens near the cemetery. Continue until you pass Chimney Cottage then Sunnybank on the left, there

Carefully cross the road – beware of traffic coming around corners. Head towards St Mary's Church, following the path going diagonally left. Check discretely to see if there is a service in progress. If not, enter and sit in one of the pews to the left, Tudor Point **D**

D St Mary's Church and graveyard

The church was built in the 13th century and the inside looks much as it did in Tudor times, except you can now see directly to the alter but 500 years ago it would have been hidden by the Rood Screen. The walls would have been covered with colourful paintings of Bible stories and above the Rood Screen a Doom painting, showing sinners descending into hell and the virtuous climbing up to heaven, helped by angels. There would have been no pews - you had to stand for the whole, Latin service. Few people understood Latin, but a group of dissenters, contemptuously known as Lollards (they called themselves Known Men), thought the Church was corrupt, denounced its wealth and believed the Bible was the source of truth, not the Pope. Amongst other things, they wanted to say prayers and read the Bible in English. They were followers of John Wycliffe (ca. 1320 – 1384), an Oxford scholar. They were feared by the King and Church, and were persecuted throughout the 15th century and well into Tudor times (see later).



The graves are a reminder how short the life span was in the past. Many women died in child birth or when their long shifts caught alight in the open fires used for cooking and heating. Children drowned in mill ponds. Some monasteries had their physic gardens (like the Museum's) for treatment but most people would rely on a local Wise Woman for health care (like Agnes in Maggie O'Farrell's tale Hamnet).

Come out into the graveyard. (The next part of the walk involves a steep climb through fields, so you could end here.) To continue, turn left. When you reach the River Misbourne, continue in the same direction, downstream, and in a few metres come to a bridge, said to have Roman foundations. Over the bridge turn right along a path between the river on your right and a cemetery on the left. When the cemetery ends turn sharp left and then left again following the wall of the cemetery. (Ignore a path going diagonally right across the field.) In a few metres leave the cemetery wall turning sharp right on a path between two fields. Climb steadily upwards. Pause two thirds of the way up and turn round to get your breath back and enjoy the view, Tudor Point **E**

E The Misbourne valley

Amersham is almost unique in that the medieval town plan is largely undamaged by later development. At the bottom of the hill, to the right (west), you can see a white timber frame building, with three gables. Close to the church, this was the tithe barn. Everybody was required to pay 1/10th of their income to the Church.



On the opposite side of the valley (south) can you see Bury Field, Upper Bury Field and Lower Bury Field, which you passed earlier? There were more of these great fields directly opposite, now bisected by the busy road, Gore Hill, and a further set over to the left.

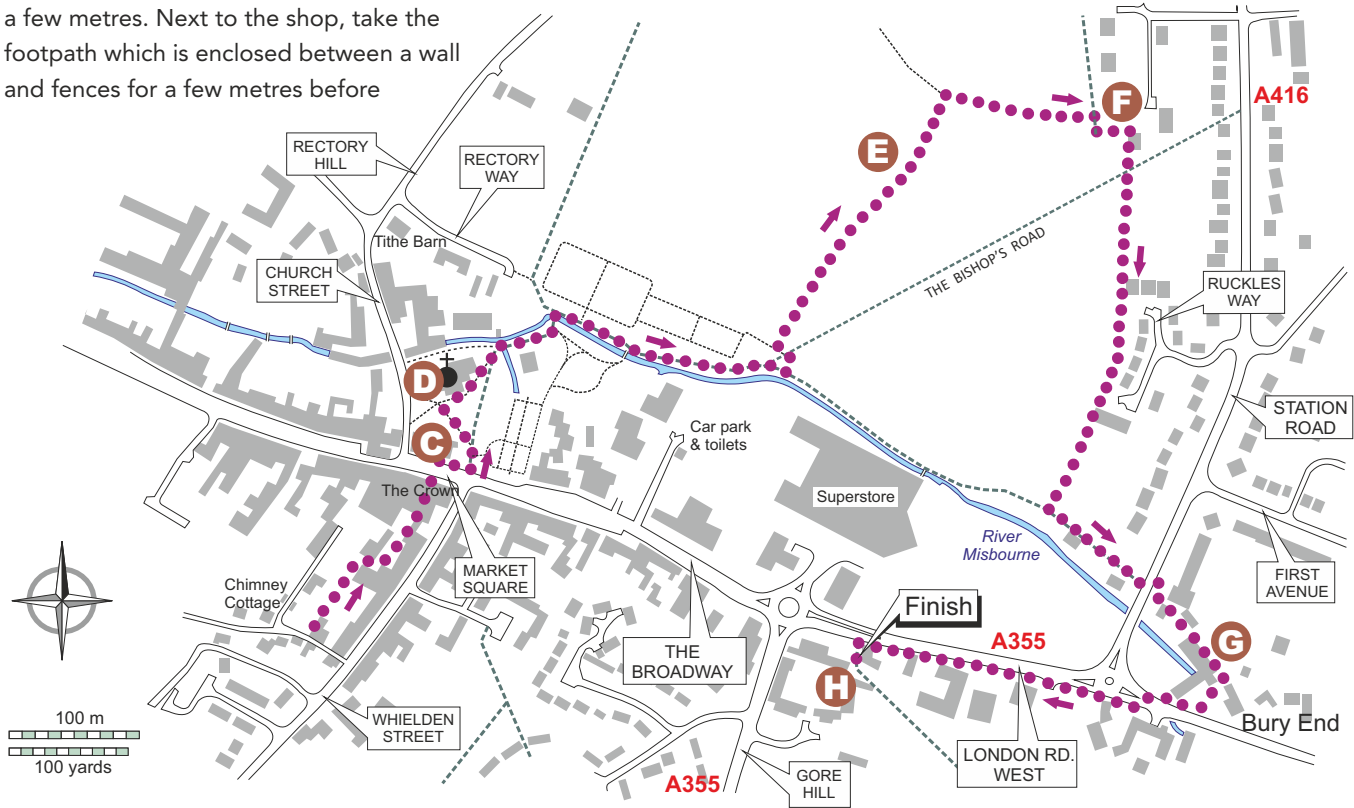
When you reach a T-junction, turn right along a level path. When the path reaches a hedge, turn right – be careful this can be slippery. After a couple of metres follow the hedge round to the left and in 3 m go through the gap in the hedge to stop at the Martyrs' Memorial. Carefully read the inscription on three sides of the monument, Tudor Point **F**

F The Martyrs' Memorial

The Museum's Curator, in 2006, found a document in Lincoln Cathedral archives excommunicating William Tillesworth in 1511, so we now think he was burnt in 1511, not 1506 as stated on the Memorial. About 60 townspeople were charged with heresy at this time. By 1521 a new Bishop was in post, John Longland, confessor to Henry VIII. He was a staunch traditionalist who suspected back-sliding amongst those who had recanted in 1511 and set up a fresh enquiry. In all, about 200 people were charged, perhaps a third of the population. The Memorial names six people who were condemned to be burnt but for only John Scrivener and Robert Rave do we know the sentences were definitely carried out. It is said that Bishop Longland came to the burning and preached a vehement sermon on the dangers of reading the Bible in English. Those attending a burning would bring a bundle of faggots (sticks) for the fire; the church gave them 40 days off purgatory for doing so. Hilary Mantel, in Wolf Hall, gives a graphic account of a 'loller' burning. Other punishments included branding on the cheek, going on a pilgrimage (eg, to the College of the Precious Blood at Ashridge or to Lincoln Cathedral), or wearing a badge. The 1534 Act of Supremacy made Henry VIII head of the Church, and many Lollard beliefs became doctrine. In 1538 the Great Bible (in English) was put into every church. Were they heretics, justly punished for threatening church and state, or martyrs who wanted freedom to worship God in their own way?



When you leave the Memorial turn left and follow the hedge round the corner to the right. Ignore the crossing path (the Bishop's road or old Roman road to Verulamium) and follow the hedge on the left with houses behind it. At the bottom you reach a T-junction. Beside the path is a small-holding next to the river, usually with chickens, pigs and various vegetables. This is pretty much the same size as the burgage plots behind the High Street but Tudor crops would not have included potatoes or tomatoes - they had not yet arrived from the Americas. You can take a short cut back by turning right. Otherwise, turn left and continue beside the small-holding until you reach the main road. Turn left and in 3 metres use the pedestrian-controlled lights to cross, then turn right for a few metres. Next to the shop, take the footpath which is enclosed between a wall and fences for a few metres before



opening out into a car park. Go between buildings to emerge into the car park of The Chequers Inn and Ambers, Tudor Point **G**

G The Haunted Inn

You are in the hamlet of Bury End, almost a kilometre outside Amersham. On the night before they were burnt, martyrs were imprisoned in a house here, much more secure being well outside the town. The Chequers Inn is said to be haunted by a man (one of the guards?) or by a woman in white (Joan Clarke who lit her father's pyre?).



Ambers was once one of Amersham's three mills. In Tudor times, it belonged to the Lord of the Manor. You can still see water flowing in the mill race through the window at the righthand side of the door.

From the car park turn right along the busy road. Cross the road at the bollards just before the roundabout and turn right again, to continue in the same direction for about 400 m. Just past no. 6 London Road step into the gravel driveway of Bury Farm, Tudor Point **H**

H The Bury (Bury Farm)

On the left (east) side is Bury Farm Cottage (6 London Road West) where Lollards held their conventicles – secret meetings to read the Bible and say prayers in English. On the right side (west) is the Manor House of the Manor of the Borough (Bury) of Amersham. From ca. 1450 to ca. 1630 The Bury was occupied by members of the Saunders family, who rented it (for 84 bushels of malt) from the Lord



of the Manor. They were prominent Lollards. Richard Saunders, who had a dyeworks in Uxbridge, was the richest man in Amersham according to tax records and paid a large fine (or bribe?) to be allowed to 'wear' his badge in his purse! Despite outward appearances this is a Tudor building, being rebuilt in the mid- to late 16th century.

This marks the end of the walk. Turn left (west) out of the driveway to return to the town.