

# HISTORY OF ASHFORD



ASHFORD HIGH STREET

In the heart of the Kentish countryside, Ashford is a forward-looking town with a strong sense of its past. Whether it's a rich history and culture, the excellent shopping and leisure opportunities, or the stunning natural setting, Ashford has something for everyone.

With evidence of settlement dating back to the prehistoric times, Ashford's history spans several millennia. First recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 as having a church, two mills and 21 'households' – large by medieval standards – Ashford was well on its way to becoming the large and diverse borough it is today.

In 1243, Ashford's history as a market town began, becoming one of Kent's most important by the 1600s. Initially based in Middle Row and the High Street, the Ashford Cattle Market Company Ltd was formed to relocate it in



1856 to Elwick Road as it had outgrown its site. Now located in Orbital Park and used by over 5,000 farmers, it remains one of the top 15 markets in the UK.

The arrival of the railway and its manufacturing works was a defining moment in Ashford's modernisation, when the town became an important passenger junction and centre for the rail industry. Although all the works were finally closed by 1993, Ashford experienced a revival with the introduction of international services in 1996. This was followed by the arrival of Hitachi's first UK depot servicing the high-speed Javelin trains that have linked Ashford to London in just 38 minutes since 2009.

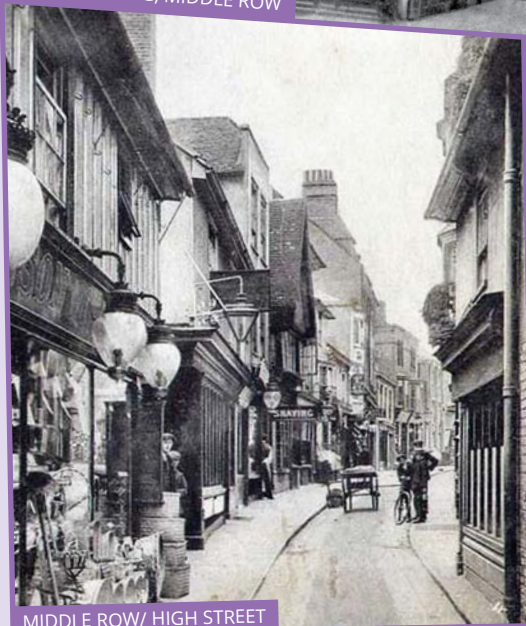
This trail guides you around the historic town centre of Ashford, from its first mention in the Domesday Book to its Victorian transition to a bustling modern town.



ARRIVAL OF THE TANK, AUGUST 1919



THOMPSON'S BUILDING, MIDDLE ROW



MIDDLE ROW/ HIGH STREET

All black and white photos © Ashford Museum.

## LEISURE TIME



### ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE

Ashford's High Street boasts a vibrant mix of modern brands, with something for everyone! At the heart of the town centre, County Square Shopping Centre brings a whole world of shopping all under one roof, and Park Mall has the best in independent shopping and boutique fashion. Don't forget to check out the regular programme of music on the town's recently refurbished bandstand.



### ASHFORD DESIGNER OUTLET

The McArthurGlen Designer Outlet is a striking complex designed by Sir Richard Rogers and stacked high with big-name brands, offering up to 60% off every day.

### MARKET DAYS

There is a street market every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday in the Lower High Street and a Farmers' Market on the first Sunday of each month with seasonal themes, chef demonstrations and plenty of delicious local produce to sample.



HUBERT FOUNTAIN PRESENTATION, 24 JULY 1912

### DISCOVER MORE

If you've enjoyed this heritage trail why not visit our website [ashfordsheritage.uk](http://ashfordsheritage.uk) which is packed with lots more facts, photos and ideas for exploring Ashford's past.

For more suggestions on things to do and places to visit see our website: [visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk](http://visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk)

#### Tourist Information

Ashford Gateway Plus, Church Road,  
Ashford, Kent, TN23 1AS Tel: 01233 330316



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Thank you to the Ashford Borough Museum & Sue Davison for their valuable input and use of historical photos.

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[thedesignpractice.co.uk](http://thedesignpractice.co.uk)

Disclaimer: All historical information has been checked and is correct to the best of our knowledge. Maps not to scale.

## LEISURE TIME



### REVELATION ST MARY'S

Revelation St. Mary's is Ashford Town Centre's unique and award-winning music and arts venue, hosting concerts, exhibitions and events throughout the year. Awe-inspiring and intimate, this Grade I listed venue welcomes local and internationally renowned artists.

[revelationstmarys.co.uk](http://revelationstmarys.co.uk)

### WILLESBOROUGH WINDMILL

Willesborough Windmill, built in 1869, is one of the largest smock mills in the South of England. The Grade II listed structure ground corn until it was converted to a private dwelling in the 1950s. Curious visitors can now experience the working mill and explore life in the Victorian Miller's Cottage.

[willesboroughwindmill.co.uk](http://willesboroughwindmill.co.uk)



### ASHFORD BOROUGH MUSEUM

Ashford's first grammar school, a Grade II listed building, is a fitting setting for the Ashford Borough Museum. Immerse yourself in artefacts from the prehistoric era to the modern day. Key moments in Ashford's past come to life with interactive displays on the railway, the borough at war, and much more.

[ashfordmuseum.org.uk](http://ashfordmuseum.org.uk)

## FAMOUS FACES

### H.G.WELLS

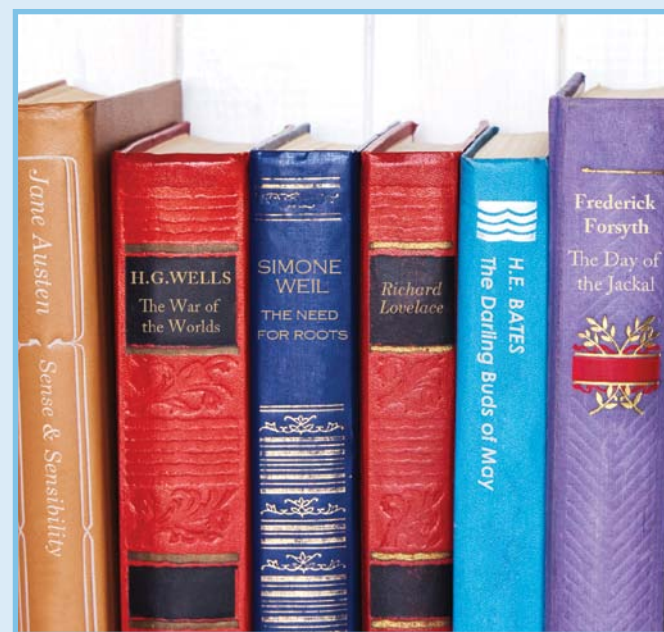
The local author of *The War of the Worlds* is mostly known for science-fiction, but in his fantasy story *Mr Skelmersdale in Fairyland*, Aldington Knoll in Ashford reveals its secret – it's a home of elves!

### JANE AUSTEN

With her brother Edward having the sense (and sensibility) to live in nearby Godmersham Park, Jane was a frequent visitor to assembly balls in the town's Saracen's Head coaching inn.

### SIMONE WEIL

Renowned philosopher Simone joined the French Resistance, and later succumbed to tuberculosis in Ashford after refusing to eat more food than the residents of Occupied France received. She is buried in the Old Ashford Cemetery and is known today as one of the most globally-influential writers on religion.



### FREDERICK FORSYTH

Best known for gripping thrillers, Forsyth grew up in his parents' North Street furrier shop with the Battle of Britain raging above. After becoming the youngest pilot in the RAF, Forsyth joined Reuters as a war correspondent before writing bestselling novel *The Day of the Jackal*.

### RICHARD LOVELACE

A Cavalier poet and member of the Lovelace family of Bethersden, he gave Ashford its motto '*With Stronger Faith*'. Coming from the 1649 poem '*To Lucasta, Going to the Warres*', it was chosen to represent the determination of the Borough.



*With Stronger Faith  
Tell me not (Sweet) I am unkind,  
That from the nunnery  
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind  
To war and arms I fly.*

*True, a new mistress now I chase,  
The first foe in the field;  
And with a stronger faith embrace  
A sword, a horse, a shield.*

*Yet this inconstancy is such  
As you too shall adore;  
I could not love thee (Dear) so much,  
Lov'd I not Honour more.*

### H.E. BATES

Fans of the TV series *The Darling Buds of May* will recognise Buss Farm as the home of Pop Larkin. Bates lived in Little Chart and, whilst visiting the village shop in neighbouring Pluckley, came across 'in high spirits, a remarkable family' – the inspiration for the lovably roguish Larkin clan.



### STEPHEN HILLS

Noted architect Stephen Hills, who was born in Ashford in 1771 and emigrated to America, designed the original Pennsylvania State Capitol building.

### DR. JOHN WALLIS

Mathematician John Wallis, who is given partial credit for the development of infinitesimal calculus, was born in College Court in 1616, his father being the Vicar of St. Mary's. He served as chief cryptographer for parliament and the royal court between 1643 and 1689 and is credited with introducing the symbol for infinity!



### ANNIE OAKLEY

Immortalised in the musical '*Annie Get your Gun*', American sharpshooter Annie Oakley stayed at the 'Royal Oak' hotel in the Lower High Street where she gave shooting displays to the public.

### SIR NORTON KNATCHBULL

A member of parliament for Ashford during the reign of Charles I, he founded Ashford's first grammar school modelled on the lines of Eton and Harrow colleges.

# ASHFORD

## HERITAGE TRAIL

*enjoy a walk through  
Ashford's past*



[visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk](http://visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk)

## START OF TRAIL

Start at Ashford Borough Museum and face the entrance to St Mary's Church.

### 1 ST MARY'S CHURCHYARD

With Norman foundations, St Mary's Church has borne witness to almost 1,000 years of history. Enter the church to view the final resting place of many of Ashford's nobility including Sir John Fogge, once treasurer to Edward IV. Today the church remains an important feature of the community, a popular place of worship that also regularly hosts arts performances.



#### Did you know:

In the C17th, the windows of St Mary's were destroyed by Parliamentarians during the Civil War, a bold move considering that Kent was primarily Royalist! The windows are now a folly in a house wall in Park Street.

Facing the entrance of the church, turn right and walk around the Churchyard, passing College Court, birthplace of John Wallis, until you reach a small passage leading towards some Tudor-style buildings.

### 2 MIDDLE ROW



These medieval buildings and narrow streets were known as the Butchers' Shambles and are some of the oldest in town. This is the original site of Ashford's market, and if you look closely you'll see hints of this period, such as the hooks on the wall where the butchers' meat was hung.

At 1 Middle Row, you'll find the former market house where commercial activity was controlled and tolls were collected. Beneath this building is 'The Cage', the town's former gaol which imprisoned 'Lollard' John Brown for insulting a priest by sitting on his robe on a barge trip.

#### Did you know:

A Lollard was a follower of a Christian reformist movement led by John Wycliffe that opposed the bureaucracy and excessive wealth of the Catholic Church.

### 3 LOWER HIGH STREET

Pass the High Street fountain featuring a reclaimed steam train wheel, a celebration of Ashford's railway past. Further on is a friendship stone, a symbol of Ashford and Bad Munstereifel's twinning in 1964. Both are also twinned with Fougères in Brittany.



#### Option 1: Martyrs' Field

Down East Hill, once connected to the Lower High Street, you'll pass the East Stour Flour Mill, which opened in 1901 and was a key employer in the town until it closed in 1972.

Crossing Mace Lane, you'll come to an entrance to Queen Mother's Park known as Martyrs' Field. 'The Martyrs' Seat', which was erected in 1974 commemorates those who were executed for heresy against the Catholic Church under the reigns of Henry VIII and 'Bloody' Mary I.

### 4 NORTH STREET



Face the splendid Georgian and Jacobean buildings of North Street. On the left-hand corner stands the site of the Saracen's Head Inn, which counted celebrated C18th bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu among its patrons. Dating from the C14th, it developed from lodgings provided for stewards of the Lord of the Manor, eventually becoming a community hub until the C19th when it was sold and finally demolished in c1860.



13 North Street was the home of Capt. Francis Eppes, founder of Hopewell, Virginia, which he named after the ship that carried him over the Atlantic in 1635. At the far-right end of the road is the Masonic Lodge, which holds a secret – it is the birthplace of Sir John Furley, who founded St John Ambulance in 1877.

### 5 UPPER HIGH STREET

Returning to the High Street, pass the oak-beamed George Hotel. Ashford's oldest public house, it began as a coachmen's staging post and was first referenced in a will of 1533 as a bequest from John Burwashe to his wife Idev. If you look to the building skyline to your left, you will notice that many buildings are emblazoned with their opening date. How many can you spot?



Just past the George is the town bandstand which features motifs of Ashford's heritage across its design. See if you can find emblems of markets, the River Stour, St Mary's Church, the railway and oast houses.

#### Did you know:

Oast houses, which were used for drying hops for beer, pepper the Kent landscape and underpinned the local economy throughout the 19th Century.

### 6 CASTLE STREET / NEW STREET



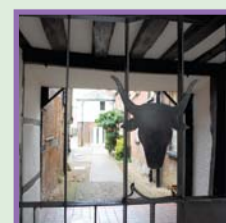
On Castle Street lies Ashford's most distinctive landmark: our WWI Mark IV tank. She was presented to the town in 1919 by the Army Council as thanks for residents' enthusiastic response to the National War Savings scheme. A 'female' variant, at over 26 tons, the tank could move at only 7 mph – but she was a formidable weapon. Upon retirement she briefly housed an electricity substation; this post-war service ensured she wasn't scrapped like so many others and she is now the only one on public display in the entire country!

#### Did you know:

In 1842 plans were made to provide electricity to Ashford but it took until 1926 for this to happen.

### 7 BANK STREET

Look for a black gate with bulls heads detailed into the design. This is Bull Yard Passage and was one of the original cattle driving routes to market. At the end of Bank Street is Ashford's 'shared-space', the UK's first desegregated road scheme that



since 2008 has given pedestrians and motorists equal priority. Previously, this site was for many years home to the Cattle Market and the adjacent Corn Exchange, before it made way for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

#### Option 2: Victoria Park

Across the railway footbridge is Victoria Park, which Ashford Urban District Council purchased in 1898 from the prominent Jemmett family who owned a bank in the town centre (now Lloyds Bank). The park's Hubert Fountain was commissioned for the Great International Exhibition of 1862 held in the RHS Gardens in Kensington. Afterwards the fountain was installed in the gardens of Olantigh Towers in Wye, until a fire destroyed the house in 1903. Local antiques dealer George Harper gifted the fountain to the borough on condition that it be celebrated annually on his birthday, a tradition still upheld on the 23rd July each year.

### 8 QUEEN STREET / CHURCH ROAD



Queen Street, despite lying only a short distance from the town centre, exhibits natural calm and tranquillity. The houses, built in 1863 on a former Saxon burial ground, marked Ashford's growth as an important hub for East Kent as it transitioned through the Industrial Revolution. Stop at Ashford Gateway and pop into the TIC to plan your next visit.

## TIMELINE

### 893AD

First mention of 'Essetesford', the original Saxon name for Ashford (ash by the ford).

### 1066

Hugo de Montfort is given lands from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

### 1086

Ashford recorded in the Domesday Book as a manor with 2 villagers, 15 smallholders, 3 slaves and 1 priest.

### 1243

Henry III granted a town charter allowing Ashford a weekly livestock market and annual fairs.

### C15th

Sir John Fogge paid for a tower to be added to the C13th St Mary's Church.

### 1450

Cade's Rebellion saw hundreds of commoners marching on London in protest against high taxes and losses in the Hundred Years War. Leader John 'Jack' Cade of Ashford, described by Shakespeare as 'a headstrong Kentishman', is executed by the Sheriff of Kent at Rippers Cross Farm in nearby Hothfield.

### 1517

John Brown, a Lollard, was burned at the stake for heresy on the orders of the Archbishop of Canterbury. This was not the last execution at the newly-named Martyrs' Field.

### 1625

A third of the town's population died from the plague.

### 1635

Ashford Grammar School founded by Sir Norton Knatchbull for literate local boys.

### 1826

Ashford was the second Kent town to have a fire brigade.

### 1853

Ashford railway station opened as the terminus on the South Eastern Railway route from London Bridge. The Ashford Railway Works at Newtown helped the population quadruple within 60 years. The works opened in 1847 and Alfred Town or Newtown was built in 1849.

### 1856

Local agriculturalists formed the oldest surviving registered company in England & Wales: the Ashford Cattle Market Company Ltd. The market moved from Lower High Street to Elwick Road.

### 1914

WWI was declared on 4 August and on 8 August 800 men signed up from the Railway Works.

### 1917

Six bombs dropped over South Ashford on the 25 May with the aim of hitting the Railway Works, but instead falling on homes with several casualties and one death.

### 1942/43

During WWII 6 people were killed at the Railway Works in Oct 1942 and 45 people killed and 141 injured on the 24 March 1943.

### 1996

Ashford International welcomed its first passengers travelling through the Channel Tunnel to France.

### 2000

Ashford Designer Outlet opened its doors for the first time.

Opposite lay the Memorial Gardens, which were purchased by local families in 1924 in memory of those who fell in WWI. Originally vicarage glebe land, it now belongs to the town and no new buildings may be built; the avenue of pin oaks instead providing a peaceful area of rest and reflection.

### 9 THE MUSEUM

Returning to the churchyard, you have now reached the end of the trail. While you're here, this is a perfect point to visit the Ashford Borough Museum to learn even more about Ashford's past. As you walk around, look out for the original schoolboy graffiti on the walls, observe the old headmaster's chair, and reflect on over 4,000 years of Ashford's history.

