



A MEDIEVAL TRAVELLER

Stony Stratford has a long and interesting history owing to its position at the crossing point of the River Ouse.

This was the first major river north of the Thames encountered first by pre-historic travellers and later by roman engineers who created the first paved roads.

The name Stony Stratford derives from the Saxon 'Stani' or 'Stone Street' - referring to the ford on the stone street



Stony Stratford Medieval Bridge

Two thousand years ago the river valley was wide and marshy. The 'bluff' of higher ground north of the river at Old Stratford and the spit of gravel at the north end of the High Street offered firmer ground for a crossing.

ELEVATION.

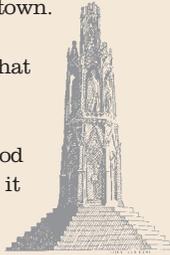


The Bridge - completed in 1835

The Middle Ages

A settlement grew up alongside the road to serve travellers, and developed into a thriving market town.

The stone cross that was dedicated to Queen Eleanor (in 1290) also stood in the road, until it was demolished in the Civil War.



The street pattern of the old town was laid out in the Middle Ages, facing the main 'spine' of the High Street. The shops, inns and other properties here have long, narrow strips of land at the rear, known as '**Burgage Strips**'. These extend to the 'back lanes' of Vicarage Road and Silver Street, giving rear access.

The earliest houses were built of timber-frame and thatch. Later buildings were more substantial - brick and tile or the local limestone from quarries nearby at Calverton and Cosgrove.

There are many records of Royal visits and progresses through the town, amongst them Queen Eleanor, and the young King Edward V, one of the 'Princes in the Tower', whose stories are revealed on the Walk.

The Coaching Era

Stony Stratford's "golden age" came early in the 18th century with the arrival of the horse and carriage as a means of long-distance travel. The first turnpike in the country was created on Watling Street between Stony Stratford and Hockliffe, in an Act of 1706 to raise funds to maintain the highway.



BIRMINGHAM STAGE-COACH,

In Two Days and a half; begins May the 24th, 1731.

A large number of inns and taverns grew up, such as the Cock and the Bull. Stony Stratford was a convenient half-to one day's journey north of London and travellers could rest and take refreshment here - and tell tales, hence the saying a 'Cock and Bull Story'.

The coaching era brought prosperity and with it some re-building in the newer styles. A series of fires in the 18th century caused considerable damage, so much of the High Street we see today dates from this period.

A small section of an early road map
BRITANNIA DEPICTA
1720

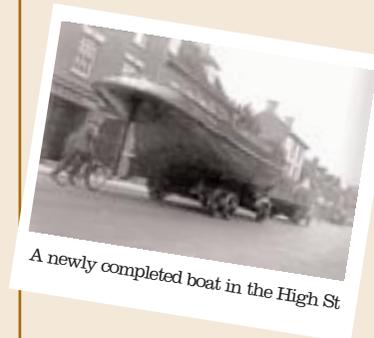
Illustrations from 'Stony Stratford - The Town on the Road', by Dr Oliver Brown

remain, but when coaches were superseded by the much faster steam trains through Wolverton in 1838, business declined. On the walk you can pick out buildings that once upon a time served as coaching inns.

The 19th century - Era of Industry and Growth

The 19th century was a period of rapid expansion of the town, with the demand for homes and services for the workers at the Wolverton Rail works. New roads (eg York Road), schools and small businesses sprang up. A huge steam tram conveyed passengers to and from Stony to Wolverton - running from near the present-day bus stops.

Other industries that were significant were the leather works, lace-making, and even boat building at Hayes boatyard on London Road.



A newly completed boat in the High St

When Watling Street became the A5 Trunk Road, Stony Stratford's position mid-way from London to the Midlands brought more trade to the hotels, only to decline once more when the M1 was completed in 1959.

Stony Stratford today

In 1967 Stony Stratford became part of the New City of Milton Keynes. This had a profound effect on the town, with new shops such as Cofferridge Close, and substantial house-building, mainly to the south of the town. The town centre was created a Conservation Area in 1975 to protect its character and appearance.



Christmas Lights in the High Street

Stony Stratford is close to farmed countryside and parkland through which there are footpaths and cycle ways. The Riverside walk runs from the west of the town at Calverton End along the river through the Millfield and around to Wolverton.



Stratford Arcade

Some further reading in the local studies collection of the Town Library:

'**Stony Stratford Past**' by R. Ayers and A. Lambert

'**History of Stony Stratford**' by F. E. Hyde and F. Markham

'**The Town on the Road**' by Dr. Oliver Brown



This house used to be a popular inn used by travellers on the highway.

To extend the Town Walk, walk down the High Street to the Ouse Bridge (10mins).

Eleanor Cross

The road widens near No 157 High Street - possibly where the first markets were held. And in the road stood one of the 13 stone crosses built by King Edward I in memory of his wife Eleanor, who died in 1290 in Lincolnshire. Her coffin was taken to Westminster Abbey, and at each resting-place on the route a cross was erected so pilgrims could pray for her soul. Three remain, the nearest being in Hardingstone, Northampton. A plaque on No 157 commemorates the cross.

Ouse Bridge

The River Great Ouse, which loops around Stony Stratford forms the boundary with Northamptonshire. There have been a number of bridges here. This bridge, built of Millstone Grit in 1835, replaces earlier less sturdy structures.

Return to St Paul's Court (Feature Number 10 on the walk map)