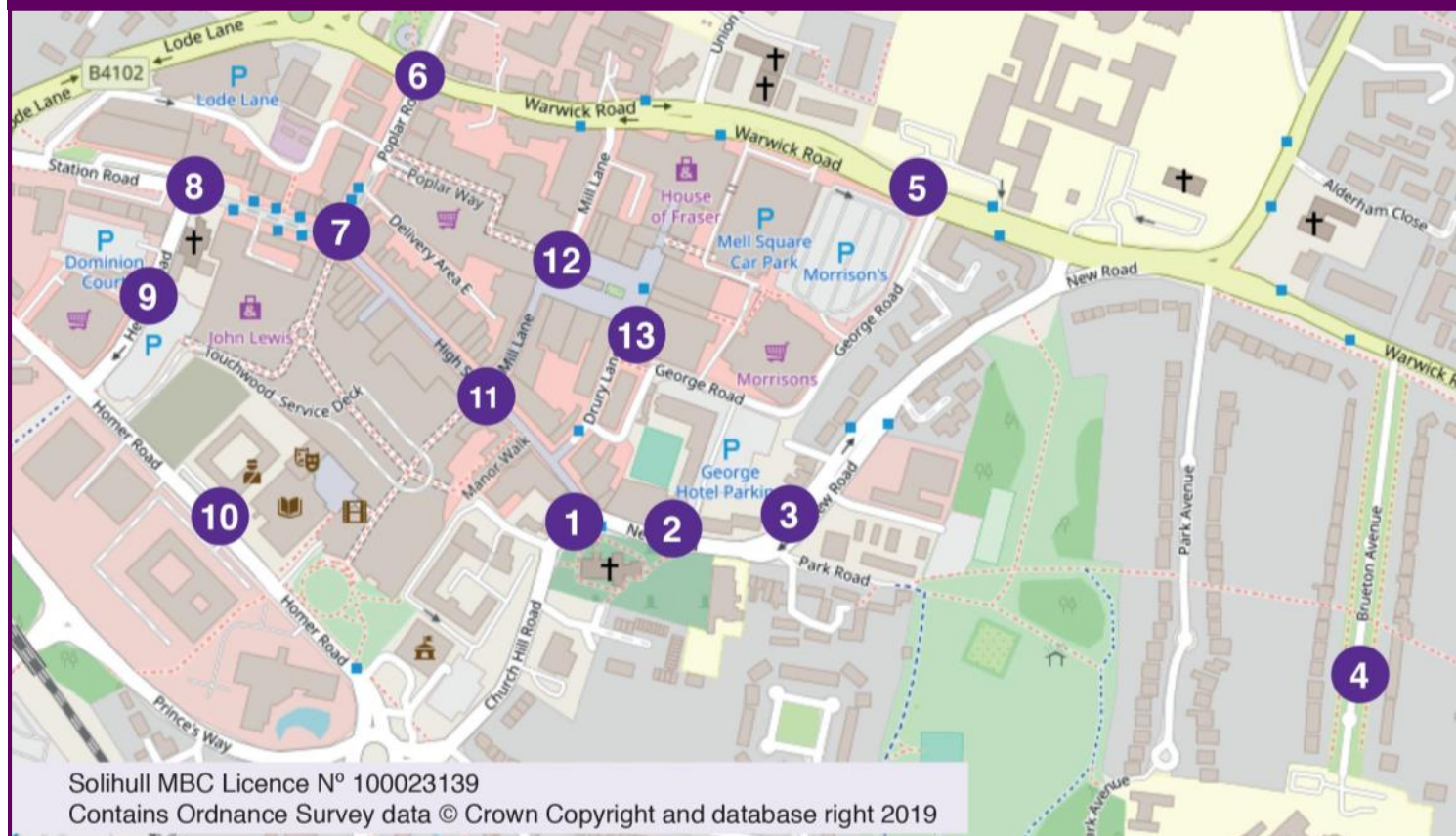


# Solihull Town Centre Heritage Trail



This 3km (1.85 mile) circular walk takes in the historic heart of the old Solihull village and should take about two hours to complete at a moderate pace. The route is mostly flat and is paved throughout.

## 1 The Square

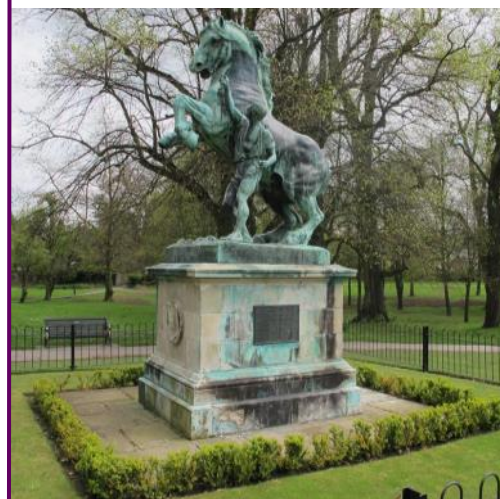
The Square is the heart of the historic village where the High Street meets Church Hill Road, the muddy (sōl in Old English) hill that gave the village its name. The grade II-listed George Hotel is believed to date from the 16th century and was once a coaching inn. The hotel's bowling green reputedly dates from 1693. St Alphege Church was founded c.1180 and completed in 1535. The stonework around the West Door shows arrow-sharpening marks from the 14th/15th centuries. The war memorial was unveiled in 1921 and was originally in the centre of the road. It was moved to its present position in 1994 when the High Street was pedestrianised.

## 2 Park Road and Malvern Park



Solihull Job Centre occupies the site of what was once one of Solihull's largest employers — vehicle body manufacturers, Wilksdon & Co. The firm started in 1892 as a wheelwright and blacksmith. It moved to Lode Lane industrial estate in 1959 and closed in 1994. St Alphege Infants' School is on the site of Park Road National School, which was established in 1850 as an elementary school for boys. Girls were admitted from 1862.

Near to the school is a footpath leading to Malvern Park, once part of the deer park of the Malvern Hall estate. At the end of the path, beyond the park gates, is the bronze horse and horse tamer statue, created in 1874 by sculptor, Joseph Edgar Boehm. The statue was previously at Tudor Grange.



### 3 New Road

New Road was so named in 1829 when the road was realigned. It was previously further east in Malvern Park and was variously known as Powke Lane, Glazewell Lane, and Butte Lane (after the village butts where men were required to practise archery in the 15th and 16th centuries).

On the corner of New Road and Park Road is Malvern House, previously the Free Grammar School from the 16th century until its move to Warwick Road in 1882.

Solihull's first police station was built in New Road in 1851, being both a home to the police officer and his family, and having two cells for prisoners in custody. The lock-up was extended in 1857 to provide more room for cells and an exercise yard.

The police station moved to Poplar Road in 1892. The lock-up had become a pair of shops by the 1940s. The restoration of the building in the early 2000s is commemorated by a plaque.

The photograph below shows the old lock-up in November 1982 when the building housed two shops—a hairdresser's and an antiques shop. The post box can still be seen in the same position today!



### 4 Brueton Avenue



Brueton Avenue was laid out in 1926 and named after Horace Brueton, who owned Malvern Hall. The site of the road was previously open parkland on the Malvern Hall estate. The road and the hall now form one of the Borough's 20 Conservation Areas.

Malvern Hall is situated at the end of the avenue and was built c.1690 for Humphrey Greswold. The house was remodelled and wings were added in 1784 by Sir John Soane. It was reduced from three storeys to two in 1896, when bow windows and balustrading were also added.

Artist John Constable visited Malvern Hall in the early 1800s and produced several paintings of the building, one of which now hangs in Tate Britain.

From 1931-1974, Malvern Hall housed Solihull High School for Girls. With the introduction of a co-educational system of comprehensive education in 1974, the school became Malvern Hall School. From 1989 until August 2020 the site has been occupied by Saint Martin's School, an independent girls' school that was previously in Station Road from 1941. From September 2020 it will become the Saint Martin's Campus of Solihull School and will house Solihull Preparatory School.

### 5 Warwick Road

The junction of Warwick Road and New Road was previously called Maids Cross, and was probably the site of a former wayside Cross.

On the opposite side of the road is Solihull School, originally the Free Grammar School, which moved to this site from Park Road in 1882. School House, the first of the school buildings on the new site, still stands and was designed by the notable Birmingham architect, J. A. Chatwin (1830-1907).

Further along from the school is a row of three-storey offices, now called Elite House. This building was the first Solihull parish workhouse, opening in 1742, and was able to accommodate up to 60 inmates. The workhouse moved to Lode Lane (now the site of Solihull Hospital) in 1838.

No. 681 Warwick Road, previously known as the old doctor's house, was built in the 18th century and was the home and surgery of at least six doctors from c.1761 until 1976. It was named Quinet (pronounced Kee-nay) House after doctors Paul and Doris Quinet who practised in Solihull from the 1920s until the 1970s. The picture below shows crowds on Warwick Road for the visit of Princess Margaret on Solihull's "Charter Day" 1954.





## 6 Poplar Road



The public house on the corner of Warwick Road and Poplar Road was originally called the Limerick Castle before being renamed the Barley Mow. It marked the entrance to the village of Solihull and was an important coaching inn.

Lloyds Bank opened in 1877 with two staff. It was Solihull's first bank and catered for those wealthy enough to have a bank account.

Next to the bank is Yates's Solihull—previously the Assembly Rooms pub. This building has been a pub since 1999 but was originally the Public Hall and was built in 1876. It was used for social and charitable events.

From 1937-1967 the Public Hall was Solihull's Council House. Huge crowds saw Princess Margaret's appearance on the balcony of the building in March 1954 when she visited Solihull to present the town with its Charter of Incorporation as a Borough.

The postcard below shows Poplar Road in 1949.



## 7 The Parade



At the junction of Poplar Road with the High Street and Station Road is a row of shops known as the Parade. The shops were built in the 1920s on land that previously formed the gardens of the 18th-century Silhill House (pictured below), which was situated at the end of the High Street until its demolition in 1926.

For many years Silhill House was the home of the Chattock family. Around 1840, Miss Mary Jane Chattock fell in love with the curate at St Alphege Church, Rev. Thomas Nash Stephenson.

The couple exchanged messages between their homes by means of candle signals and the opening and shutting of windows. However, Mary Jane's father, Thomas, was opposed to the match and declared that he would rather see his daughter "marry a toad." In the face of his opposition, the romance was doomed and they both went on to marry other people. Rev. Stephenson was the Vicar of Shirley 1843-1867.



## 8 Station Road



Station Road was originally just part of the High Street. Solihull Railway Station, which gives the road its name, was opened in 1852 on the Great Western Railway's Oxford & Birmingham branch.

The original station was closer to Streetsbrook Road but it moved to its present position in the 1930s.

The row of shops pictured above opened in 1957 on the site of a late-Victorian detached house—Sutton Grange (pictured below)—which was demolished in 1956.

Solihull Girls' School occupied a three-storey building known as "Southend" and situated opposite Silhill House. It was here that Miss Edith Holden taught art to the top form every Friday in the early 1900s. She encouraged the girls to keep nature notebooks of their sketches of wildlife and kept her own notebook too. This achieved international success when it was published in 1977 as the *Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*. "Southend" was demolished in the 1930s.



## 9 Herbert Road

## 10 Homer Road and Touchwood



Herbert Road and Homer Road were cut through the fields between St Augustine's Catholic Church and the railway station in the mid-19th century.

St Augustine's was designed in the perpendicular style by A. W. N. Pugin and opened on 6th February 1839 with Pugin as cross-bearer. In 1932 a Lourdes Grotto was erected in the garden.

St Augustine's witnessed history in the making on 26th April 1897 when Edward Albert Day married Irma L'Hollier. They became the first couple ever to leave their wedding in a motor car —described as the "first autocar wedding."

Homer Road was named after the Homer family who held much of the land in the area in the 19th century. From 1913-15, the family of Dr George Auden, including his future poet son, Wystan Hugh, lived at no. 13 Homer Road (now demolished).

In the 1980s, a 12-acre site in Homer Road was developed as offices. Many of the buildings were designed by local architect, Stanley Sellers (1933-2013). He also designed Solihull Central Library & Arts Complex (now The Core), which backs onto Homer Road, and which opened in 1976.

Touchwood and Golden Jubilee Gardens were built on the site of Solihull Civic Hall (pictured below), which was opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1962. She visited 40 years later during her Golden Jubilee tour and officially opened the new gardens.

Construction of Touchwood started in 1999 with the new shopping centre opening for business on 5th September 2001. Architect Eric Kuhne (1951-2016) had the design vision to emphasise the storytelling quality of architecture, which can be seen in the art work and quotations used throughout the centre. Look up to see the civic art, including the "Solihull Sonnet" along the Crescent Arcade, and the village water carrier — James Hastings ("Jimmy Crump"), pictured below— in the Mill Lane Arcade. He lived in Mill Lane and collected soft water from the Streets Brook, which he sold for ½p per bucket. He died in Solihull Workhouse in 1882.





## 11 High Street and Mill Lane



The timber-framed shop that now houses Joules is believed to date from the 15th century. Just visible in the centre of the photo of Mill Lane (above), it was known as Harborne House in the 19th century and housed a corn chandler and seed merchants from the 1920s. It was the Raison d'Etre wine bar before closing in 2000 for the development of Touchwood.

Although there has been much development at street level, many of the High Street buildings retain original features above shop fronts.

The Manor House (pictured below) was built by the Greswold family in the late 15th century and was known as Lime Tree House by the 19th century, after the nine lime trees planted outside in 1720. It was a doctor's surgery before being sold to a brewery in 1936. The Second World War halted plans to convert it into a pub and it was bought by a charitable trust in 1946 after a fundraising campaign to raise the £12,000 needed.



Twins Annie and Ethel Blizzard (below) ran the family fruit and greengrocer's shop, established by their father in 1901, in premises now occupied by the Cancer Research shop. There was a garden at the rear and, if a customer requested a twist of parsley, it would be picked on demand from the garden.

In the 1920s about one-third of the buildings on the High Street were private houses but almost all had become shops by the 1950s.

The centre of the village was almost entirely circled by green fields as recently as the 1920s. Cobble stones were taken up in the early 1930s and the High Street was pedestrianised in 1994.



This PDF document has been adapted from our published Town Trail leaflet so that it is convenient for A4 home printing.

A short video — *"Solihull Town Centre: then and now"* - contains more information than could be fitted in this leaflet. See <https://youtu.be/GOQ0YnnNy-0>

Contact [heritage@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:heritage@solihull.gov.uk) if you have any questions about Solihull's history.



## 12 Mell Square



The first shops opened in summer 1966. The new shopping centre was named after W. Maurice Mell, Solihull's Town Clerk from 1946 until his death in 1965. He was instrumental in Solihull's elevation to a County Borough in 1964. The fountains in the centre of the square were removed in 1987/88 when Mell Square was finally pedestrianised. Many Solihullians recall washing powder and washing-up liquid ending up in the fountains at the end of school terms!

## 13 Drury Lane

Before the redevelopment of the 1960s that created Mell Square, Drury Lane (originally Dog Lane) was a narrow road lined with houses and cottages.

The row of shops on the left of the House of Fraser store entrance are the approximate location of Touchwood Hall (pictured below) which was built c.1712 and demolished in 1963. The front door was reportedly left open to allow weary travellers to rest in the hall!

