

The Historic Heart of Sittingbourne

Sittingbourne High Street and East Street are part of the London to Dover Road, along which Roman soldiers would have marched. In the Middle Ages the number of houses, and especially inns, increased to accommodate the many travellers who needed a meal, or somewhere to stay for a night.

Sittingbourne was a popular stopping place for Kings and Queens, and other notables including Henry V, who dined at Sittingbourne in 1415 when he was on his way back from the Battle of Agincourt. In 1518 Cardinal Campeggio stopped in the town, attended by five hundred horsemen, and in 1522 King Henry VIII had a meal at the Red Lion. After Queen Elizabeth I visited Tunstall, the town was awarded charters giving the citizens more rights. In 1825 Princess (later Queen) Victoria stayed here overnight. Imagine the excitement this caused! The Rose, where she stayed, was at the time described as 'perhaps the most superb [Inn] of any throughout the kingdom'. In 1840, Prince Albert, with a much smaller entourage, heading for London to marry Victoria, stopped only for refreshments.

In Medieval times the journey from London to the coast took five days, but by the 18th century the 'Flying Stage Coach' took just two days, and Sittingbourne was the only overnight stop. The size, and quality, of the inns reflect the importance of the town. Many of the buildings that were used by travellers are still there. You just have to look up above the modern shop fronts, or down the side alleys at the backs of the buildings, to see them as they once were.



This pamphlet has been produced as a joint venture between the Historical Research Group of Sittingbourne (HRGS), and Baileys Coffee Shop, and printed with the assistance of Swale Borough Council.

HRGS is a not-for-profit organisation, its members share a passion for history, in particular for our local heritage. We run group research projects and support members with their individual research. Many of our members are actively involved with archaeology, and we hold various events and digs throughout the year.

'The Heritage Hub', which is run by volunteers, showcases the results of our research into World War One and local archaeological digs.

Find us at: **The Heritage Hub**, Unit 17, The Forum, Sittingbourne, ME10 3DL

Open Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4pm.
www.hrgs.co.uk

Baileys Coffee Shop and Sandwich Bar

For great sandwiches, yummy cakes, wonderful coffee, and a warm welcome at:
22 High Street
Sittingbourne Kent ME10 4PD
01795 470995

Open Monday to Saturday 8am to 4:30pm.



Free leaflet - please take one

Historic Sittingbourne's Cat Trail



This is Florence and Thomas Gisby, who lived in Sittingbourne at 9 Cockleshell Walk (now a car park) around a hundred years ago. They owned 15 cats, which roamed the town. Each cat had a favourite place to sit. **Find them all and collect your sticker.**



Go to The Forum to start the Historic Sittingbourne's Cat Trail

4: Now cross over the road, to the building that used to be the Police Station and Court House, then go back towards the High Street. You will find **Brenda** at the Baptist Church, which was built in the 1860s. There used to be three grand houses next to it, one was used during WW1 to make clothes and bandages for the soldiers who had been wounded.

3: Turn right into West Street and walk past the Ypres Tavern, (Sittingbourne is twinned with Ypres in Belgium). Find **Robert**, looking up Park Road at a house with a room in a turret. The first owner, Daniel Wills, used to sit there to watch his ships sail up Milton Creek.

2: You will find **Thomas** in one of the premises, he is looking at the Railway Station, which was built when the railway opened in 1858. Now walk towards the church at the end of the road. You will see a large building on the left hand corner, this was opened by comedian Ken Dodd as a Co-op Department Store in 1974.

1: Start your discovery trail in The Forum where you will find **Henry** at the Heritage Hub. Inside you can find out about local men who died in WW1, see archaeological displays, and find out more about the history of the town. Leave The Forum at the main exit signposted to the car park and station. Walk round the car park to the shops on the opposite side.

15: Carry on back up the High Street until you find **William**. He never realised that one day his owner's Great Granddaughter would own and run a Coffee Shop here. Congratulations, you have found all fifteen cats.

Collect your sticker from Baileys Coffee Shop, the home of William.

14: The Bourne used to lead to Crown Quay, one of the many places on Milton Creek where sailing barges docked to collect the paper and bricks. Walk up the High Street, to the 11th century church of St. Michael. Look near the door to find where **Dorothy** is hiding. The church was extended in the 13th and 15th centuries, and in the 1960s a pilgrim's shrine was discovered on the outside of the building.

12: Go back towards the High Street, look for the Sittingbourne Heritage Museum, where you will find **Adam**. If you can, go inside to find out more about the past of the town, including the paper and brick-making industries.

13: Head back to the cross-roads. On the other side you will find **Mickey** looking out of part of the art-deco style cinema. They had a lot of problems building it, because the Bourne stream flows under the road here, and used to flood the buildings.



5: As you go along the High Street the pavement gets wider, that is where the Post Office was 100 years ago. Find **Peter** at number 93. This is a Regency style house, and the cellars underneath were an air raid shelter in WW2. He is looking at Burtons, a 1930s art-deco building.

6: Turn right at the next junction, and walk past the Crescent Hall. You will find the war memorial and a plaque to our local Victoria Cross hero, Donald Dean. Cross over to find **Ernest** in the library, opened in 1955 by H E Bates, the author of 'The Darling Buds of May'.

7: Go back to the High Street and turn right past NatWest, which is where the Town Hall used to be. Find **Daphne** at Brenchley House, which is where the Girls' Grammar School was until it moved to Highsted Road. She is looking over the road at the Red Lion, which King Henry VIII visited in 1522 with Emperor Charles V.

8: Walk along the road past 'The Bull'. There used to be a cattle market where Sainsbury's car park is now. You will find **Penny** looking up above the shop fronts at the building on the other side, built as 'The Rose Inn', which Queen Victoria visited when she was a young princess, as did Prince Albert.

9: Soon you will find brothers **Wilson** and **Charlie** at a Regency double-fronted house. One is looking at The Pet Shop, which used to be the Three Post Boys pub, the other is looking towards the path that leads to the Methodist Church - the original building was bombed during WW2.

10: Go down the hill past the grand building next to The George, where Kings George 1st and 2nd used to stay. Cross Bell Road, and go along East Street until you find Number 26, where **Betty** is visiting a 'hidden' living history museum. If you can, go inside to find out more about the 1940s.

11: Continue along the road and, after you pass the junction to West Lane (on your left) cross over to see **Major**. You will find him close to a white building, now used as a church. A hundred years ago this building was the Drill Hall, where soldiers went to enlist to join the army to fight in WW1.