

RICHMOND'S PLAQUE TOUR – walking the history of the town

Apart from Richmond's great Norman Castle, the Georgian Theatre and other historic buildings there is much to see in this ancient North Yorkshire town. Richmond and District Civic Society has erected **plaques** to identify places and links with famous people about which both residents and visitors might otherwise be unaware.

The suggested tour starts at The Green, but, if you wish to avoid the steep climb up Cornforth Hill, you are advised to start from the Market Place or even reverse the order of the tour. Each plaque is identified by a number on the map, and anyone wishing to walk only a section of the route should find their way without difficulty.

The Green

The only entrance into Richmond from the south used to be over the Green Bridge which was rebuilt in 1788-89 close to the site of an earlier bridge. On the south side of the bridge there is a plaque (**No. 1**) describing the Good Intent Inn which served the nearby hamlet of Slegill, travellers crossing the bridge and copper miners working in Billy Bank Wood. In the 1830s The Green was said to be the abode of the worst ne'er-do-wells in Richmond. The houses were rickety and neglected, the haunt of vice and disease. Today, The Green is an attractive part of Richmond. At the north-east corner is the entrance to Bridge Street. Here you will see a building (**No. 2**) dated 1689 which has two complementary sundials. Walking up Bridge Street, you pass No.15 where Theophilus Lindsey, founder of the Unitarian Church, lived. Opposite is a plaque (**No. 3**) on the house of the late Peter Wenham, a great Richmond historian and writer. A few yards higher up the street there are two further plaques (**No.s 4 and 5**), one indicating an early wrought-iron lamp standard originally lit by oil, but operated by gas from 1830. The other plaque shows the site of a water point dating back to 1782. Water was piped here from the Market Place to supply the people in this part of Richmond.

Cornforth Hill

To the right of these two plaques is Cornforth Hill. As you climb up and walk through the postern gate in the Town Wall which dates back to 1312, spare a thought for those medieval traders pushing their wares up to the market. Look out for the next plaque (**No.6**). The postern leads to a narrow lane known as The Bar, which gave access to the Market Place for pedestrians and packhorses.

Castle Walk

After passing through the postern gate, turn immediately right and climb up the steep pathway until you reach the Castle Walk, where you can enjoy a rewarding view of the Swale valley and the Green Bridge. Turn left through the stone bollards in the direction of the Market Place, and pause to take in the iconic view west towards the Culloden Tower, built to commemorate the battle of Culloden in 1745. After a short distance look for two further plaques (**Nos. 7 and 8**). The one on the right serves as a reminder of the time in 1782 when the Castle Walk was built as a fashionable promenade. The other is sited a few yards to your left and relates to the drama players of Richmond and

to the year 1652 when, acting being forbidden, four Richmond players were arrested and punished by whipping.

The Market Place

Continue along Castle Walk and, as you enter Richmond's cobbled Market Place, you will see to your right the dominant figure of Bishop Blaize depicted on the sign of the hotel which bears his name. Look for a plaque by the hotel entrance (**No. 9**). Bishop Blaize was the patron saint of the wool combers and he was martyred because of his Christianity by the Romans in A.D. 317. The hotel was closely linked with the wool trade of the 16th and 17th centuries when Richmond was a 'staple town' and for many years a centre for wool dealing. Many wool towns at that time held Bishop Blaize carnival processions and travelling players performed in this hotel's long room before the Georgian Theatre was built in 1788.

On the left as you enter the Market Place you will see Thomas The Baker's Shop where there are two plaques on the door frame, one bearing the name of a great man of Richmond, James Tate (**No.10**). Born in a yard nearby, he was educated and became Headmaster at Richmond School. Later he was to become a Canon of St Paul's Cathedral in London where he is buried. The other plaque (**No. 11**) indicates where several old firms of Richmond printers operated for over 200 years.

In the centre of this high end of the Market Place stands the Obelisk erected in 1771. Beneath it was sited a large reservoir for drinking water to supply the town centre.

Across the 'listed' cobbles of the Market Place is Holy Trinity Church which now houses the Green Howards Museum. On your left you will see The King's Head Hotel built as a private house by Sir Charles Bathurst in the heyday of lead-mining. On the opposite or south side of the Church and above the lower rose bed is a plaque (**No. 12**) remembering John Acrige, priest of a chantry housed in the church, who became a Catholic martyr. In 1569 he joined the Catholics in their 'Rising of the North' and was later imprisoned in Hull where he died. Nearby, another plaque (**No.13**) remembers Francis Blackburne, Rector of the town (1739-87) and Archdeacon of Cleveland. While you are outside Holy Trinity Church you will be able to walk the Timeline to learn more about the town's history.

Opposite the church is the Town Hall on which a plaque (**No.14**) has been placed near the entrance. This building dates from 1756 and is on the site of a medieval guildhall. A little further down the Market Place you will find a plaque (**No.15**) on the Y.M.C.A. building which is on the site of the old Unicorn Hotel where, after the Battle of Marston Moor in 1644, Prince Rupert rallied the defeated Royalist army.

If you continue walking down to the bottom of the Market Place you will find another plaque (**No.16**) on Burgage House, which is occupied by a firm of solicitors. This was the birthplace of John Laird Mair Lawrence who earned the title 'Saviour of India' in the mutiny of 1857 and later became Governor General of India.

The Great Channel

Leave the Market Place at the north-east corner, passing the TSB bank, and you will see to your right a plaque (**No. 17**) indicating Frenchgate Bar, a gateway through the Town Wall which was pulled down in 1777. You are now in what is known as The Great Channel, named after the water that used to rush through this low ground to the Swale below. You should look for two plaques (**Nos. 18 and 19**) sited near the entrance to Swale House. This building was the residence of two headmasters of Richmond School, and several famous pupils boarded with them here including 'Lewis Carroll'. Later it became the home of the Pease family, Quaker industrialists, and, more recently, the offices of the Richmondshire District Council. Opposite Swale House is **Plaque 20** marking the home of Christopher Clarkson, the town's most famous historian who published his History of Richmond in 1821

Frenchgate

Continue up Frenchgate and, on the left, you will see a plaque (**No.21**) on a fine Georgian house known as The Grove, built by Caleb Readshaw, a wealthy Richmond resident who developed a lucrative trade exporting locally knitted woollens. Up the attractive cobbled street of Frenchgate a plaque (**No. 22**) on No.24 commemorates Robert Willance, whose name is linked with the story of a miraculous escape when his horse went over the cliff at Whitcliffe Scar near Richmond. If you walk down left to St. Mary's churchyard, you will find his grave and plaque **No. 23**. Further up Frenchgate you reach 83 Frenchgate (**No. 24**), the birthplace of John James Fenwick, founder of Fenwick's stores in Newcastle and London. You can investigate the original shop in the Richmondshire Museum (see below)

Flints Yard

A short distance before Fenwick's house is a small passageway. Walk along this for some 100 yards and you will see a plaque (**No. 25**) on the wall by Bradwell's Cottage. This plaque serves as a reminder of James Flint and Joseph Bradwell, whose iron foundries flourished here in the nineteenth century.

Richmondshire Museum

You are now coming to the main Queens Road, leading into the centre of Richmond. From here you can take a short detour to Quaker Lane where a plaque (**No.26**) marks the site of a WWII air crash. Alternatively, walk down to the second roundabout, turn left into Ryder's Wynd, and continue until you reach Richmondshire Museum. There you will see two plaques (**Nos. 27 and 28**), one marking the Victoria drinking fountain that used to be sited in the lower half of the Market Place and the other a medieval 'cruck' house. A visit to this award-winning Museum is strongly recommended.

After the Museum, retrace your steps to Queens Road and, keeping straight on after the roundabout, you will soon reach the famous old Georgian Theatre Royal with its fascinating museum. Here, turn left into Friars Wynd and, before you come to the gateway and the Market Place, you will see a plaque (**No. 29**) on the wall of the Georgian Theatre explaining why there are tram lines in the Wynd and recalling that

the Theatre Museum is on the site of a Quaker Meeting House (c1677-c1750). Passing through the gateway you will see another plaque erected by Richmondshire District Council. Continue along the Wynd and then turn right into the Market Place, then right again into Finkle Street where you will find a further plaque **(No. 30)** marking the site of the Finkle Street 'bar' or gateway.

Newbiggin

Walk on into the ancient cobbled street of Newbiggin and on your right is a plaque **(No.31)** on the Unicorn, an old coaching inn in which is preserved an early post box. To your left, is a plaque **(No.32)** noting the place where John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, is said to have preached in 1774. From here, continue to the end of Newbiggin where, on the left, is the final plaque of your tour **(No.33)**. It marks the site of the old Richmond Gaol, where Protestant martyrs Richard and John Snell were imprisoned in 1558. Richard Snell was burnt at the stake nearby in September of that year.

To return to The Green, walk back along Newbiggin and turn right down Bargate, which will lead you back to your starting point.

David I. Morris

Revised by John McDonald 2015

© Richmond and District Civic Society