

walk
town
TRAIL

march

Town
Trail &
Riverside
Trail

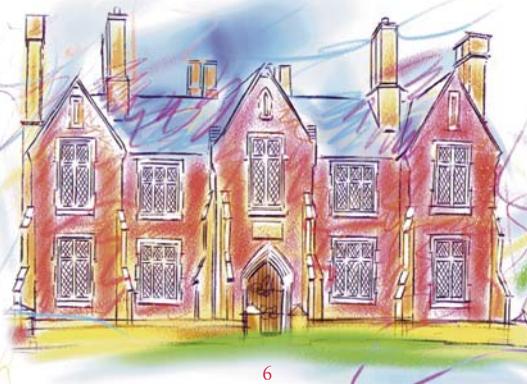




During its long history stretching back more than 1000 years, March has served many roles; refuge of saints, monastic estate and place of pilgrimage, stronghold of the Fen Tigers and in more recent years thriving market town.

March originally developed as two places, 'Merche' around St Wendreda's Church and Mercheford by the river. The two were linked by a canal 'The Hythe' which ran into the river. High Dyke, a towpath cum roadway ran alongside the Hythe.

The Town Trail leaflet is divided into two walks. The Town Trail and the Riverside Trail, both of which highlight the older more interesting buildings in March and the stories behind them. The two trails can be linked to form a single walk.



March Town Trail

- 1 The Town Trail starts at March Museum in High Street, which was built as a Girls Grammar School in 1851 on the site of ancient almshouses. It has been the Town's museum since 1976 and is open on market days.
- 2 Cross into Chapel Street which is part of the original main street, High Dyke. On your right where the road rejoins High Street is a beautiful old farmhouse known as 'Audmoor House', now a Registry Office. The extensive barns and outbuildings of the farm were on the western side of Chapel Street. The house and gardens faced the old canal (The Hythe). High Dyke gave access at the rear. The main buildings, of grey gault brick, are late 18th century but parts of the house may be much older.

- 3 Trinity Church was built on part of the garden of Hythe House. In the 1880's Mr John Burrows, a Methodist himself, gave the local congregation the choice of either £100 or a section of his garden for a new church (Note the initials and names on the foundation stones of the benefactors who sponsored its building).

The Garden of Rest next to Trinity Church was an old Baptist burial ground closed in 1855. It was made into a garden in the 1960's.

- 4 The Hythe turned westwards into Gas Road. The Hall on the right at the first bend was March's first Wesleyan Chapel, built in 1829, and used for sixty years. Later it became the drill hall for the 4th Suffolk Regiment (G. Company) of the Cambridgeshire's. The roadway going north behind the warehouse is another section of the old High Dyke.

As you continue southwards note the openings called 'jetties' that connect Gas Road with the east front of the buildings on your left. Before 1850 these 'jetties' connected two wharves, one on your right and the other on the left of the main road (The Causeway).

These were 'docks' for the barges. The one in Gas Road was filled in after the terrible cholera epidemic of 1847 to accommodate the town's new gas works.

- 5 The Stone Cross was erected on what may have been the site of a Saxon market. In the early 16th century Wayfarers used it as a preaching cross. Legend says that this was the first site for St Wendreda's Church. Many attempts were made to build it here but each time the workmen returned, they found the previous day's work destroyed.
- 6 Continue south along the Avenue to the Almshouses, 'Jenyns House' which was built in 1851 by March Consolidated Charities. The previous almshouses were built on the Museum site in 1672 with money left for the benefit of the poor of March by Roger Jenyns. They were deemed to be uninhabitable in 1836.

7 Continue to Church Street (part of the original road) where you will see the unique church of St Wendreda. Famous for its double hammerbeam roof with a collection of 120 carved angels, the church was said by Poet Laureate Sir John Betjeman to be, 'worth cycling 40 miles in a head wind to see'. The area around the church was originally known as 'Merche'.

8 Church House, built in the 18th century, had no windows on the ground floor and has a steeply pitched roof which was originally thatched.

9 Return to the main road through the small lane beside the churchyard and opposite you will see the Neale-Wade Community College. Old 'Eastwood House' at the front, has been incorporated into the college. During the war it housed prisoners and afterwards became a children's home.



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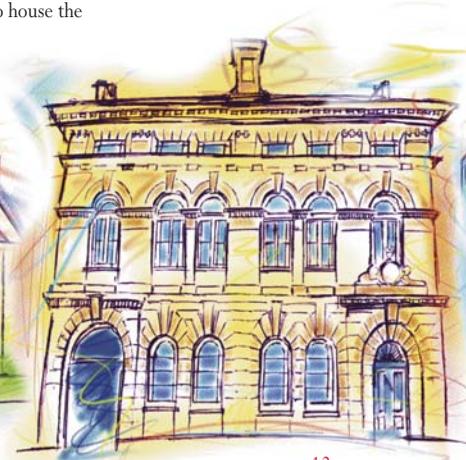


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11 Next door the Maze was once the curates' house. In 1836, it was bought by Firmin Fuller, a local vet, who set about creating an exotic garden on the 1½ acre site. It had a long rectangular lake with a Chinese style bridge over connecting several attractive walks. At one end of the garden there was a bandstand where concerts were regularly held and on certain days was open to the public free. A notice on the front of one of the stables stated 'All welcome except dogs and policemen'.

12 The old Courthouse was built in Italianate style in 1875. Sittings were held twice a month and the Magistrates held Petty Sessions on the third Tuesday each month. March Police Station was at the rear and also the office of the Chief Constable for the Isle of Ely
(Note the Royal Coat of Arms above the recessed archway).

13 Looking at Nos. 78-82 High Street it is difficult to believe that the building has such an important history. It was formerly the town's Guildhall, built on the site of an earlier Guildhall in 1827. Later two wings were added to house the first March National School. It was also used as the town library.



12

The area to the right of the college is known as Town End Pits. Under the Enclosure Award 4½ acres were set aside for pasture. Later it was excavated for gravel to maintain the roads and then abandoned to become waterlogged. About half an acre of the original area remains.

10 Returning along High Street on the opposite side of the road you will see Norland House (No.110) an imposing property, built around 1770. To the rear there was stabling and a coach house. The gardens once extended from the Hythe at the front to Elwyn Road at the rear.

14 Built by the Reform Church in 1868 and then bought by the Salvation Army in 1871, this building is to be developed for private business.

The Baptist Church was the site of the town's first non-conformist church built in 1799. In 1870, it was demolished and a new one built. In 1959, fire gutted it and it was rebuilt again.

15 St Peter's Church, founded in 1868, was built on the site of Phillips Brewery. It was the largest of the three new parish churches built at this time. The completed building cost £11,000. The statue over the west door is of St Peter and the book in his hand has faint writing - the first verse from St Paul in Latin. The clock on the west front was taken from the old public hall on the market place and was originally bought in 1795.

16 Numbers 34-38 High Street are an attractive group of buildings. No. 36 which was built in 1790 had a fine cast iron porch added in the early 19th century.

17 The Griffin Hotel was a coaching inn and dates from the 16th century. In 1686 it became the 'posting house' and the mail coach would have driven straight through the archway that once graced its front. Many famous people have stayed there, including Charles Dickens and Samuel Pepys.

18 The Corn Exchange on the Market Place was built in 1900, in the renaissance style, and replaced an earlier public room and fire engine house that had been erected in 1839. The tower is 110 feet high and topped by Britannia. The Clock was paid for by public subscription to celebrate the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria. In 1912, it became the Town Hall. In the 1970's it was converted at a cost of £80,000 for use as a Magistrates Court. The building has now been gifted back to the people of March to become a community/arts/venue. The cafe is an ideal place to stop for refreshment once you have completed the Town Trail.



In March 2000 a time capsule was buried in the refurbished Market Place to mark the Millennium, a plaque marks the spot.

The first part of the Town Trail ends here on the Market Place, but you may continue to the Town Bridge if you would like to follow the Riverside Trail.

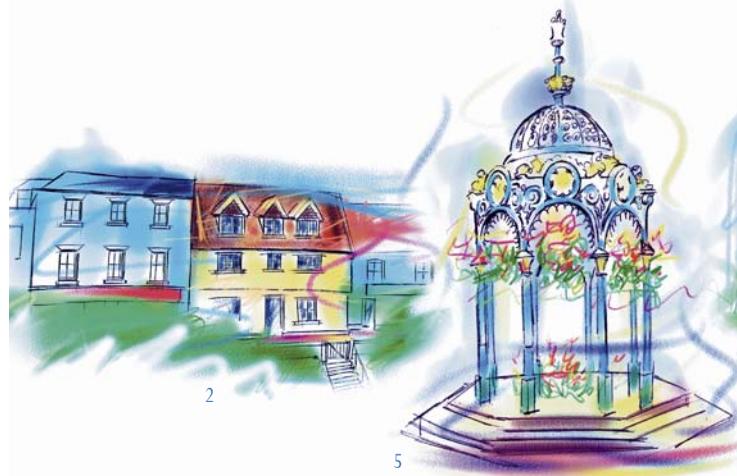


The Riverside Trail

The river, the old course of the Nene, is the hub of the town and the reason for the town's development.

In the 16th century March was a minor port with 8 vessels. Until the mid 19th century all goods came in and out of the town by barge. There were many pubs and businesses along its banks including a tannery, limeworks and several mills.

1 The Riverside Trail begins at the Town Bridge which was built in 1850 at a cost of £600, to replace the former decaying timber bridge.



2 To your right at the top of Nene Parade, is the Ship Inn, which may be part of a much larger and more ancient hostelry. During the mid 1800's it was known as 'The Railwayman'. Extensive renovation during the 1930's revealed exquisitely carved beams which were subsequently dated to around 1500. They also show that the building had been part of a much larger one, possibly the White Hart.

3 Cross over the Bridge and look ahead of you into Broad Street. It is hard to imagine that this was once the 'village green' overlooked by large houses on the northern and eastern sides. On the western side was a brewery, maltings and the Chequers pub. A 'cut' from the river allowed the movement of goods by barge from the brewery.

4 The War Memorial was erected in 1920 and now commemorates those killed in both wars. The obelisk is 18 ft high and cut from Cornish granite. The soldier is carved from a single block of Italian Carrara marble.

- 5 The Fountain at the far end commemorates the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911. It was originally a drinking fountain, flanked by horse and dog troughs, made by Scottish engineers at Possilpark at a cost of £400.
- 6 Turn left into West End. After a few yards you will come to Gray's Lane - which was named after Nathan Gray who owned the brewery business in Broad Street. It was his bankruptcy in 1839 and the subsequent selling of the property which saw the development of the town centre as we know it today.
- 7 Bank House, on the corner of Gray's Lane was renovated in the Jacobean style in the 1840's for the National Provincial Bank. More recent restoration revealed a much older building to which a stone façade and chimney heads had been added.



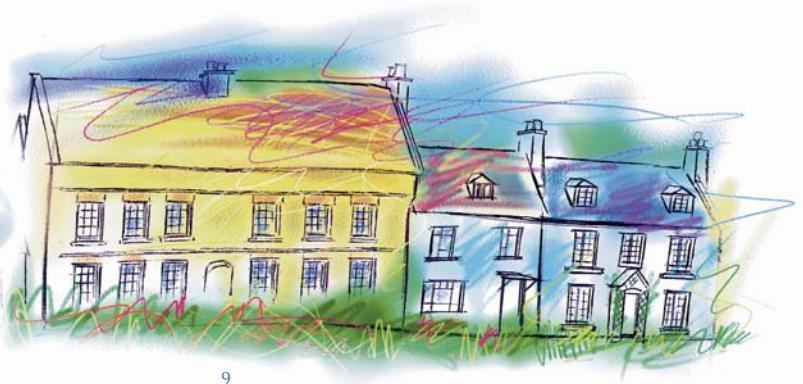
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The older building had much smaller windows and a steeply pitched thatched roof. It may be one of the oldest buildings in March.

- 8 Continue along West End past several old cottages. At one time there was also a number of shops along here. (Note the Barnock Stone in the Foundations - perhaps purloined from passing barges)
- 9 The impressive building at the end of Rookwood Road is now the British Legion Club. It was built in the late 18th or early 19th century from local gault brick and was originally known as Rookwood House.
- 10 The house next to the Health Centre, No. 38 West End, is one of the oldest properties in March. Dated 1626, it is Elizabethan with a Georgian extension. Inside, the house has elaborately carved wooden beams, one depicting the 'Tree of Life', the other grotesque heads and fantastic animals.

Cross over the footbridge and stroll back towards the town along the river path. This gives the opportunity to look back across the river towards the properties along West End.

- 11 To your right the new Library has been built on the site of Acre Mill and Wharf. The old granary was regularly supplied with corn by fleets of barges. In 1840 John Smith from Nottingham purchased the granary for his son Joseph who demolished it before erecting new buildings. In 1847, when the railway came to March, he installed the town's first steam mill enabling flour to be sent all over the country.
- 12 Walk through Acre Road, which was part of the old High Dyke towards the car park.



9

This area was once known as Little London with George Street and City Road encircling it. It contained a conglomeration of tiny houses; many one up and one down accessed by a ladder. In 1850, it was described as "full of squalor and filth", so much so that it was deemed to have caused the outbreak of cholera in which 441 people died. The houses contained no sanitation or drainage. The alleyways were quagmires and it was the custom to accumulate human excrement in chamber pots and throw it into the Hythe. As a result the Hythe became very contaminated. Out of 1215 houses in the town 664 were affected. During the mid 1960's the remaining houses were demolished and City Road car park came into being.