

Historic Woodstock

Woodstock reaches back well over 900 years.

'New' Woodstock was founded around 1185 by King Henry II to house his retinue when he stayed in the Royal Palace of Woodstock.

The town expanded in the 18th Century during the building of Blenheim Palace which replaced the Royal Palace.

The wall plaques

Many buildings in the town have a fascinating story to tell. A series of stone wall plaques was commissioned (in 2011 and 2014) to highlight a few of these stories to make the history of Woodstock come alive for visitors and residents alike.

The plaques were commissioned from Oxfordshire sculptor, Giles Macdonald.

Giles worked the plaques in Portland limestone, the great classic building material of this country which weathers over time to a silver-grey colour, offering a gentle contrast to the Cotswold stone of Woodstock.

The plaques cover a wide range of interests, whether domestic, early industrial, literary or antiquarian.

We hope you will enjoy discovering the plaques around Woodstock.

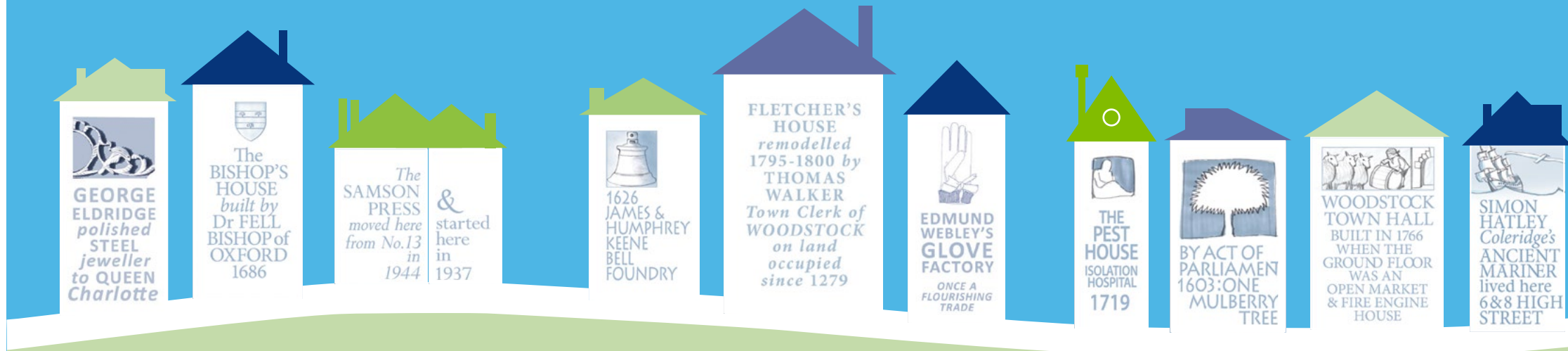
For further information contact Woodstock Town Council on 01993 811216.

Woodstock Historic Wall Plaques is an initiative of Woodstock Town Council in partnership with West Oxfordshire District Council. The project has been funded entirely from private sources, including developer funding.

With the help of...

- Woodstock Town Council in partnership with West Oxfordshire District Council.
- Linda Glee, Carol Anderson and Elizabeth Poskitt for historical material.

Woodstock Historic Wall Plaques



Follow the trail to
discover the history of
some of Woodstock's
fine houses...

Historic wall plaques

Fletcher's House ①, in 1279 there was a house and forge here. Records show that the Fletcher family lived here from 1468 - when tax was sixpence a year - until at least 1526.

Around 1609, a wealthy alderman, Thomas Browne, built a great house here, and called it Fletcher's. In 1782 the Duke of Marlborough bought the property but five years later he sold or gave it to his agent, Thomas Walker. Walker served as the Town Clerk in Woodstock and Oxford. Initially he let the property to a girls' boarding school but in 1797 he started rebuilding. Although remnants of the house built in 1609 still remain, the façade is Georgian in style.

The Samson Press ②, 11-13 Park Street, was founded by Joan Shelmerdine and Flora Grierson and run from these buildings from 1937-1967. They commissioned and printed a wide range of illustrated works which have since become highly prized collectors' items.

Artists such as Iain Macnab and Gwenda Morgan were commissioned to produce wood engravings, lino-cuts and drawings and Edwin Muir was a noted poet published by the Press. The press archives and equipment are now owned by the Bodleian Library.

The Bishop's House ③ was the first rectory in Woodstock. It was built in 1686 by Dr John Fell, the Bishop of Oxford. He bought the land and built the rectory for £600, enabling the Rector to move closer to the busier part of his parish.

Dr Fell, who was also instrumental in founding Oxford University Press, oversaw the construction of many buildings in the county, including Tom Tower at Christ Church.

The Town Hall ④ was built by George Spencer, the 4th Duke of Marlborough, in 1766. His coat of arms is above the main entrance.

The ground floor of the original building was open under the arches. A market was held under here and in the Victorian era the town's fire engines parked here. In 1898 the arches were filled in to create a council chamber and offices.

Glove Factory ⑥, 62 Oxford Street was a large, prosperous glove factory. Woodstock was a noted centre for the manufacture of sheep and deer hide gloves. These used to be sewn by women working at home but from the late 19th century small factories developed in backyards. At one time there were up to ten factories in the town. Named after master glove-maker Edmund Webley, Webley Terrace was an established glove factory until it closed in the 1950s.

The Bell Foundry ⑧, located at 52 Oxford Street was founded in 1626 by James and Humphrey Keene. The bells cast here still ring in many local churches.

The Steel Jewellery Factory ⑨, many rural crafts used to be undertaken by skilled craftsmen and women in small rooms and courtyards behind the shops. Woodstock steel jewellery was highly prized with an international reputation. Items included buckles, scissors, buttons and sword hilts.

From before 1733 this site was owned by the Eldridge family who were whitesmiths, steelmakers, ironmongers and glovers. In the 1760s George Eldridge was appointed jeweller to Queen Charlotte, the consort of King George III.

Cromwell's House ⑩, at 28 High Street was built as an inn in 1640 and originally encompassed houses 26-30 High Street.

This is where Oliver Cromwell stayed during the siege of Woodstock Manor, according to rumour, but there is no written record of this.

The ancient mulberry tree still growing in the garden was planted in compliance with a 1603 Act which required inns of a certain standard to plant mulberry trees as a condition of their licence.

The Pest House ⑦, now 23 Rectory Lane, was the old isolation hospital for infectious diseases. It was built in 1719 on what was then the perimeter of the town.

Victims of smallpox were cared for here in six separate rooms although the protection of healthy townspeople was probably more important than the care of the sick. The property was sold in 1946 for £175.

