



# Mortimer Heritage Trail

## Walk 1: Stratfield Mortimer 3.75km (2.5 miles)

This is the first of two moderate walks identifying interesting properties and places. This trail focusses on **Stratfield Mortimer**, the original part of the village. The walk starts at the **Community Centre car park** (1), marked on the blue route on page 4, at the edge of the Mortimer Common Fairground, a centrally located historic open space amenity. Once used for horse fairs it became designated as a fairground in 1802. From the car park (1) walk along the pavement towards the War Memorial. At the junction with Hammonds Heath, the pond contains two small brick walls. From one, a culvert leads eventually down to Foudry Brook, near the railway station.

Turn left into Hammonds Heath. Almost immediately on your right is **Chestnuts** (2), built around 1805 as two cottages by the Hunter family for their employees. They were some of the first houses to be built adjacent to the newly-enclosed common. After about 150 yards take the footpath on the right through the woods. At the far edge of the woods bear right onto a path that has a fence to its right and a hedge to its left. Pass through three “kissing gates”, noting the location of the path to the left at the third gate, but continuing ahead. On your right, you will see **Abbeycroft** (3), built as a vicarage at the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to replace Saddlers at the foot of the hill. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Abbeycroft became a preparatory school for Eton College and was adapted to provide accommodation and classrooms for up to 20 pupils.

Retrace your steps to that third kissing gate and turn right. Go through the wooden gate, bear right through Wheats Farm, between buildings and continue down the track, forking right at the junction. You'll see Wokefield Park in the distance to your left. Formerly an approved school (borstal) for the London Borough of Brent, it is now a hotel, golf and conference centre. When reaching the road, you will see **Wern Cottage** (4) on the left, originally a pair of cottages owned by Eton College until sold with the rest of the Rectorial Glebe (church land that provides an income to the vicar) in 1879. Its records go back to 1612.

Cross straight to the footpath at the end of which is a timber clad house on your right called **Saddlers** (5). This was the vicarage in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and beside it stood the tithe barn. Later it was the home of Walter Long who was a famous harness maker and saddler.

Turn right and walk towards the mini roundabout. To your left is the white **Pumping Station** (6) that supplies Mortimer's drinking water from a borehole that goes down to the chalk 250 metres below. If you look across the fields behind the pumping station, you can just make out the roof of the Great Barn at Great Park Farm. This was a stud farm for the breeding of heavy horses during the Wars of the Roses. It was part of the Manor of Mortimer that Henry VIII gave to each of his six wives in turn as part of their dowry. Not many of them lived to enjoy it. At the roundabout turn left and walk up the hill to the **Railway Station** (7) on your right.



*Figure 1; Mortimer railway station*

This is the last known surviving example of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's design for a small station. The Duke of Wellington, when given the Stratfield Saye Estate, that lies next to Mortimer, by a grateful nation, decided he didn't want the railway near his house so Mortimer became his local station. The Duke did however use the station frequently for his visits to London. Tri-ang, makers of model railways, made a station based on its design. Dr Who's assistant Sarah Jane Smith (Elizabeth Sladen) is seen arriving here in 1974's 'Planet of the Spiders'.

Return to the roundabout. Opposite you is the original **post office** (8). Turn left up the Street past the old post box. The **Cinnamon Tree** (9) on your right is the oldest pub in the village living through many names in its long life from The Horne to the Railway Hotel, when the railway arrived, to The Fox and Horne and is now an Indian restaurant. At the rear, the village bowls club had a three-rink green. To its left stood a wheelright. Further along **Harris House** (10), formerly Mr Harris' bakery, is where the culvert, fed from the pond at Hammonds Heath, exploded in 2007 creating a flood. This was one of the principal shops when village life was in this part of the village. The next house is Foudry House the striking large pink Grade 2 listed property.

Take the gravel track on the left which leads to **St Mary's Church** (11), thought to date from the 15th century but completely rebuilt between 1866 and 1869. It is thought to be the sixth church on the site. Inside you will see the Saxon tombstone, which was unearthed during the re-build. Leave the churchyard and bear right to **Foudry Brook** (12) which runs over the remains of a hydraulic ram, which used to pump water up to the **Manor House** (Church Farmhouse) (13) that is visible beside the church gate.

The ram is on the site of a 13<sup>th</sup> century watermill. Note how the stream has been straightened to form the leat (a watercourse) for the mill. Cross the stream and look along the drive leading to **Ladyfield** (14).

Return to The Street and continue up the hill. On the corner of **Mortimer Lane** (15), in the field is a 'pill box' strong point (guard post), now overgrown, installed in the Second World War. Lime Cottage, on the other side of the lane was a dame (private preparatory) school before national education came to Mortimer.

Further up the hill on the left **St Mary's School** (16) was started in the 1860s by applying liberal coats of lime wash to the walls of the old poor house to address the bug population. This was soon knocked down and a proper schoolroom and house for the headmaster was built by 1868, complete with a clock tower.

Next to the school is **The Old Police House** (17). On its right side you can see the cell where villains were kept until they were transported to Reading on the train. One tried to be difficult by overnight systematically destroying all his clothes. But he was outwitted by the Mortimer constable who went to the farm and fetched a sack. He cut three holes in it and pulled it over the villain's head and off he went to Reading. Continuing up the hill, at the school children crossing sign is a building on your left, which was the **Fire Station** (18) built when the Brigade first obtained a fire engine. The building behind was used for many years as the postal sorting office.

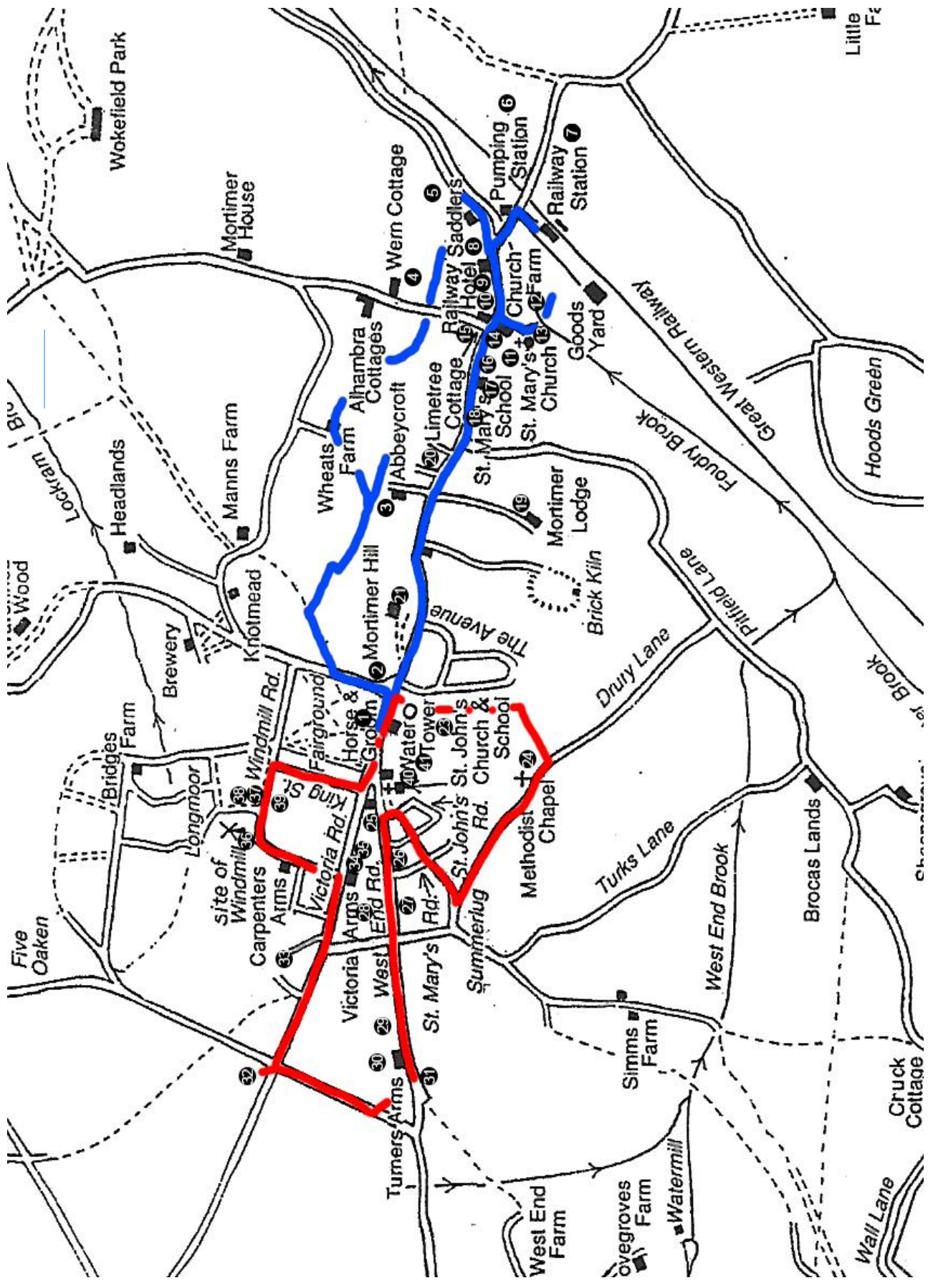
Passing Pitfield Lane, you will come to the entrance to **Mortimer Hall** (19) on your left, a place that's had many uses including a home for the blind, a school, a dormitory and now apartments.

Across the road next to the drive to **Abbeycroft** (2) was Thorp's shop at **Paices** (20) (now Abbots Lodge) which served as tuck shop for the schoolboys attending Canon Lovett Cameron's boarding school at Abbeycroft. Continue up the hill, with Abbeycroft itself visible in the distance on your right. At the brow of the hill, the road suddenly bears left. This was done to take the public road away from the frontage of **Mortimer Hill House** (21) the last big house in the original village settlement, the gardens of which were once a fruit farm, now an appropriately named housing estate.

Having passed through Stratfield Mortimer, the original village settlement, Walk 1 is complete. Walk 2, also starting at the car park (1) takes you round Mortimer Common the newer part of the village.

Note: all access is by public roads or footpaths NO private land consents have been obtained. Some of the properties on the map have changed name or no longer exist.

*This trail is produced by the Parish Council with thanks to Mortimer Local History Group who provided most of the content. There is more information in their book "Mortimer in the Nineteenth Century" available in Budgens and the Library. If you have any feedback or suggestions to enhance this guide please call the Parish Council office on 0118 9331955 or email [admin@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk](mailto:admin@stratfield-mortimer.gov.uk)*



Walk 1 – blue route (nos. 1 to 21). Walk 2 – red route (23 to 41)

Map provided by Mortimer Local History Group. Route artwork: James Carter