

# Riverside Heritage Trail

## Further information

### Websites

stratfordhbt.co.uk  
stratfordsociety.co.uk  
shakespeare.org.uk

### Books

**The Buildings of Stratford-upon-Avon**  
Richard K. Morriss & Ken Hoverd, 1994

### Stratford Canal

Nick Billingham, 2002

### The Stratford and Moreton Tramway

John Norris, 1987

### The Dillen:

**Memories of a Man of Stratford-upon-Avon**  
Edited by Angela Hewins, 1981

### Credits

Trail written and edited by Chris Rice  
Colour photography by Chris Rice  
Historic images courtesy of the  
Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

This trail is dedicated to the memory  
of Joan McFarlane, 1931-2017

# Riverside Heritage Trail



## STRATFORD HISTORIC BUILDINGS TRUST



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# Stratford-upon-Avon Riverside Heritage Trail



Aerial photograph of Bridgefoot, c1929

## THE HISTORIC RIVERSIDE

Today most people visit Stratford-upon-Avon because of its association with William Shakespeare. However, for many visitors a key part of the town's appeal is its attractive riverside location.

What is perhaps less well-known is that although now a leafy tourist destination, the riverside was once a hive of commercial and industrial activity.

Although historically the upper part of the River Avon was never a major transport route it did attract commercial traffic. This increased significantly following the construction of the Stratford Canal in 1815 and the Stratford to Moreton Tramway in 1826. These developments were accompanied by the creation of two busy canal basins lined by wharves and warehouses around the area known as the Bancroft.

The arrival of the Great Western Railway on the western side of Stratford in 1859-60 prompted the gradual relocation of the industrial centre of the town away from the river. The opening of the new Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1879 was also a factor in the 'improvement' of the character to the riverside. Even so, a significant number of wharves and warehouses survived along Waterside and Bridgefoot until the beginning of the 1930s.



Memorial Theatre fire, 1926 Courtesy of The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

In 1926 the Memorial Theatre was gutted by a fire. This proved to be the catalyst to complete the transformation of the riverside area for leisure use. The construction of Elizabeth Scott's substantial new theatre, completed in 1932, was accompanied by the removal of all of the remaining wharves and warehouses and the creation of public gardens in their place.

Today, the only physical remains of this once busy industrial area are one of the canal basins, Cox's Yard and the Tramway Bridge, all of which are now used for leisure purposes.

## THE RIVERSIDE HERITAGE TRAIL

The purpose of this trail is to allow visitors to discover the many different aspects of Stratford's riverside history, as well as its Shakespearean connections.

It is a pleasant circular walk which will take between 1 and 2 hours. The route can be shortened by using the town's unique chain ferry to return across the river.

The Riverside Trail connects with the Historic Spine Trail at Holy Trinity Church. If visitors prefer they can follow the Historic Spine Trail's pavement plaques back through the town centre to Shakespeare's Birthplace.

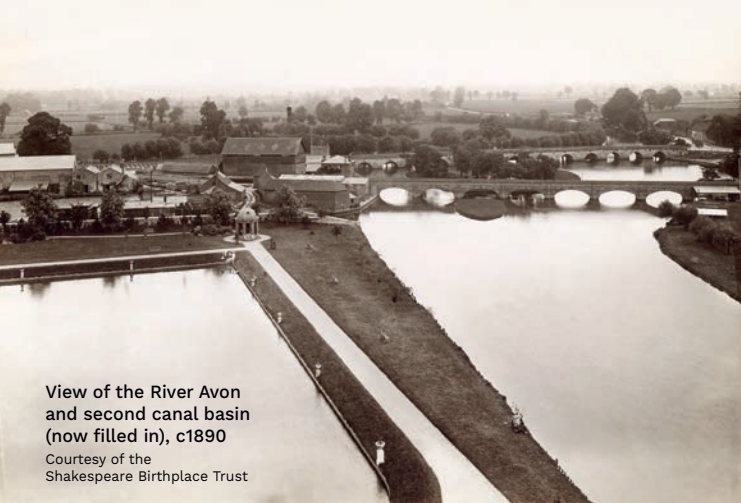


The River Avon today



# 1

## Bancroft Gardens



View of the River Avon and second canal basin (now filled in), c1890

Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Prior to the 19th century the Bancroft was an area of common land used for grazing livestock.

Following the arrival of the canal in 1816 it became a busy commercial area with two canal basins and numerous wharves dealing in coal, lime and timber.

One of the canal basins was filled in in 1903, having originally occupied the area of lawn in front of the theatre. The remaining wharves were swept away as part of the landscaping of the Bancroft that accompanied the opening of the new theatre in 1932.

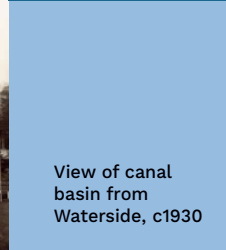
Right: 1851 Board of Health Map showing the two canal basins and connecting tramlines

Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



# 2

## The Stratford Canal



View of canal basin from Waterside, c1930



View from the same location, 2016



Opened in 1816, the Stratford Canal was built primarily to provide a direct route between the Black Country coalfields and South Warwickshire and the Cotswolds.

In 1838 the freight transported on the canal peaked at over 181,000 tons per annum.

However, the opening of the Great Western Railway in 1859-60 had a catastrophic impact on canal traffic.

Although the canal continued in use until after the First World War it finally closed in the 1930s. After years of neglect it was restored and reopened for navigation in 1964.

Coal wharf on Waterside c1930  
Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



3

## The Gower Memorial



The Gower Memorial today

The famous statue of Shakespeare surrounded by Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, Sir John Falstaff and Prince Henry was designed by Lord Ronald Gower in 1888.

The memorial was originally located in the gardens to the south of the old Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

It was moved to its present location in 1933 as part of the major landscaping works that accompanied the rebuilding of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

Above right: the Memorial in its original location

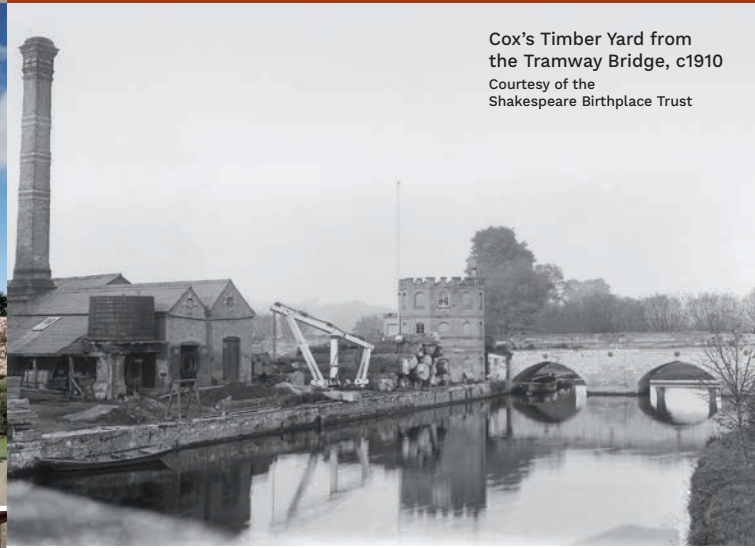
Right: the present site of the memorial was previously occupied by the warehouse of Scott & Co.

Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



4

## Cox's Yard



Cox's Timber Yard from the Tramway Bridge, c1910  
Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



In 1839 James Cox moved his timber yard next to the River Avon. The new location was ideal as it was where the road, river, canal and tramway all met, ensuring the most efficient means of moving timber into and out of the town.

The business continued to thrive and in 1873 a steam engine shed complete with distinctive chimney was constructed in the middle of the yard.

Cox's timber yard remained in business until the 1980s. The present pub and restaurant complex was opened in 1998.

5

## The Old Toll House



The Old Toll House was constructed in 1814 to collect tolls from traffic using Clopton Bridge.

Tolls ranged from one shilling and sixpence for a coach drawn by six horses to a penny for a horse and rider.

In 1839 the charging of tolls ceased and James Cox leased the building as the office for his timber business. It continued to be used for this purpose until the 1980s when the timber yard finally closed.

The building was restored by Stratford Historic Buildings Trust in 2017.



Above: Toll House following restoration  
Left: New Toll Board showing original charges

Below: The Old Toll House, c1930s

Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



6

## The Old Tramway Bridge



Tramway Bridge today



Left: The Old Tramway in Stratford  
Above: Restored tramway wagon outside Cox's Yard

Opened in 1826, the Tramway Bridge marked the terminus of the Stratford to Moreton tramway.

The tramway enabled coal from the Stratford Canal wharves to be transported down into South Warwickshire and the Cotswolds. The tramway originally operated horse

drawn wagons, one of which has been preserved outside Cox's Yard.

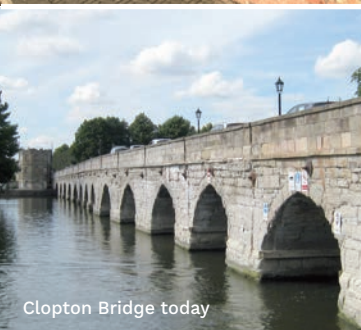
The coming of the railways around 1860 led to the decline of the tramway. Although not officially closed until 1926, it had to all practical purposes ceased to operate by 1900.

7

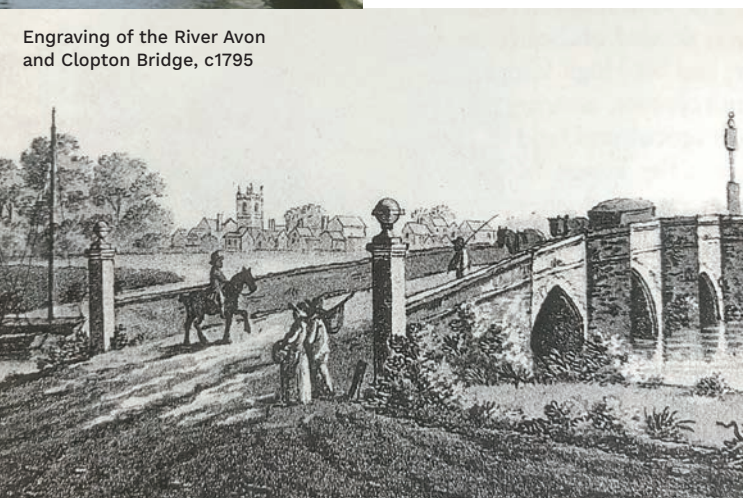
## Clopton Bridge



18th century garden pavilion



Clopton Bridge today



Engraving of the River Avon and Clopton Bridge, c1795

Stratford's splendid 14-arched medieval bridge was constructed around 1485.

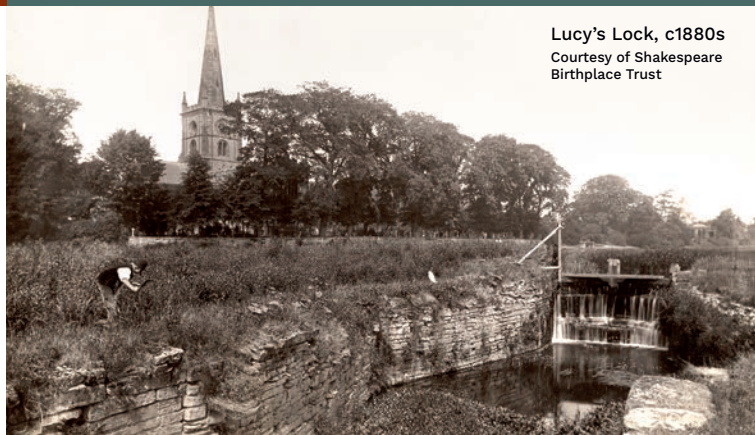
It was named after local merchant Hugh Clopton, who would later become Lord Mayor of London. It replaced a timber bridge which was constructed around 1313 on the site of an earlier ford.

The small building on the traffic island at the southern end of the bridge is an 18th century garden pavilion.

It was originally located in the gardens of Alveston Manor but got cut-off when a new carriage way was added in the 1960s!

8

## The East Bank



Lucy's Lock, c1880s  
Courtesy of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Stratford upon Avon Boat Club was founded following the town's first annual rowing regatta in 1874. The club's black and white boathouse was built in 1897 at a cost of £404.

A few hundred metres down the river is Stratford's unusual manually-operated chain ferry. Built in 1937, it was the last of its kind to be made and used in Britain.



Stratford upon Avon Boat Club

Further along still is the Colin P Witter Lock, originally called Lucy's Lock. It was renamed after the benefactor who paid for its rebuilding in 1974.



9

## Lucy's Mill and Footbridge



Lucy's Mill, c1900  
Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



Lucy's Mill Bridge, 1867  
Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



Lucy's Mill apartments today

The mill at Stratford was mentioned in Domesday in 1086 when it was valued at 10 shillings and 1,000 eels!

It continued in use throughout the ages and was rebuilt on a number of occasions, the last time in 1941 following a major fire.

By the late 1960s the mill was derelict and it was finally demolished around 1973. The present apartment block was built in 1974.

The original mill watercourses can still be seen below the new buildings.

The present Lucy's Mill footbridge was built in 1934 but there has been a bridge here since at least Tudor times.

10

## The Old Railway Bridge

The Old Railway Bridge was built in 1873 to carry the Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction Railway line which connected Broom in Worcestershire with Towcester in Northamptonshire.

The line was originally served by its own station, Stratford Old Town. The remains of the station platform can still be seen alongside Seven Meadows Road a few metres to the north of the bridge.

Unfortunately the line struggled to generate sufficient business and it finally closed to traffic in 1952. Today the refurbished bridge carries the town's Southern Relief Road.

Right: Stratford Old Town railway station platform. Below: Detail from Ordnance Survey map, 1885

The Old Railway Bridge



Steam train near to Lucy's Mill



11

## Holy Trinity Church



Holy Trinity Church  
from the River Avon



Left: William Shakespeare's  
memorial bust

Holy Trinity Church is best known for being both the place of baptism and burial for William Shakespeare. Visitors can view his famous memorial bust in the 15th century chancel.

Although a church has existed on the site since Saxon times, the earliest parts of the present building date from 1210. It was enlarged in the 14th and 15th centuries and the spire rebuilt in 1767.

Other architectural highlights include the Clopton Family Chapel, the Sanctuary Knecker in the porch and the fine set of misericords in the chancel.

12

## Avonbank Gardens



Engraving of the Georgian  
Avonbank House

Avonbank Gardens were originally the grounds of a Georgian country house.

Between 1822 and 1859 the house was used as a girls' boarding school. One of its pupils was Elizabeth Stevenson, later better known as the writer Mrs Gaskell.

In 1860 the house was purchased by local brewer Charles Edward Flower, who completely rebuilt the house and remodelled the grounds. It was eventually demolished in 1957 and the gardens opened as a public park.

An attractive Georgian Orangery building can still be seen, which formed part of the original 18th century gardens.



Left: Charles Edward Flower  
rebuilt the house in 1868

Below left: The Victorian gate piers  
Below right: The Georgian Orangery



13

## Southern Lane & Waterside

The Other Place



The Dirty Duck



The Old Ferry House



Waterside, c1900



Across the road from Avonbank Gardens is the RSC's studio theatre, the Other Place. Located on the site of the original 1974 'tin hut', the present building was opened in 2016.

Where the road passes the ferry landing stage, Southern Lane becomes Waterside. The latter boasts a row of attractive 18th and early 19th century houses, including the Black Swan pub (better known as the Dirty Duck), The Ferry House and the Malt House, which was originally a granary.

14

## The Royal Shakespeare Theatre

Completed in 1879, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was Stratford's first purpose-built theatre dedicated to performing the works of Shakespeare.

The Victorian theatre was gutted by a fire in 1926. It was replaced by Elizabeth Scott's new Art Deco theatre, completed in 1932, and renamed the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 1961.

The South-Western corner of the original theatre escaped the fire and was incorporated into Scott's 1932 building.



The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, c1890

Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Today this splendid Victorian structure houses the

entrance to the Swan Theatre and *The Play's the Thing* exhibition gallery.

