

1836-7AD Dickens visits Saracens Head and reflects on his stay in Pickwick Papers

The Saracen's Head dates from the 18th century. Charles Dickens stayed here often, and wrote in the Pickwick Papers "that a very good little dinner could be got ready in half an hour". The name was changed to the Pomfret Arms in the 19th century but later changed back.

1876AD First horse race at Towcester Racecourse

Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress of Austria, paid a visit to England in 1876 and rented Easton Neston House, with its fine stabling for her horses. During this visit she established a race meeting of her own; a course was laid out in Easton Neston Park and a stand erected for guests. After she had left Towcester, a meeting at the Pomfret Arms decided to repeat the steeplechase meeting and Sir Thomas Fermor-Hesketh gave a 51 year lease to hold Easter Monday races at Easton Neston Park. The course is still used for race meetings and corporate events.

1948AD First motor race at Silverstone Airfield

Silverstone Airfield was built at Luffield Abbey Farm during WW2. After the war the concrete runways were used for motor racing. In the early days there were no pits at the Silverstone circuit and so the racing cars were serviced and fuelled in Towcester.

Further Information

Further information on the project can be found on the Moat Lane website www.moatlane.org

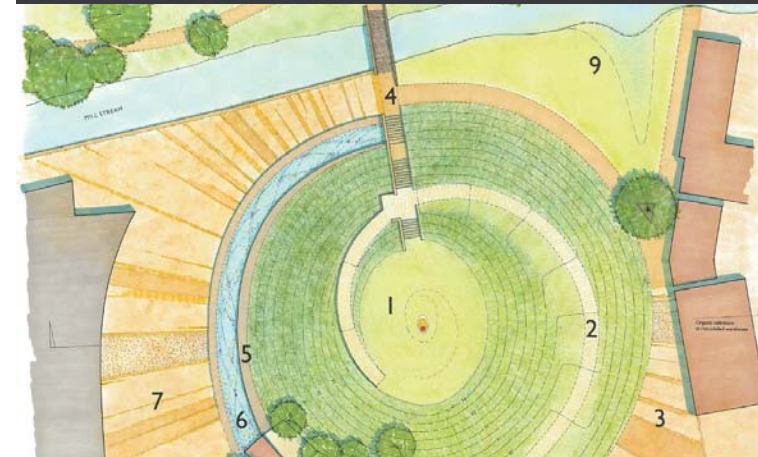
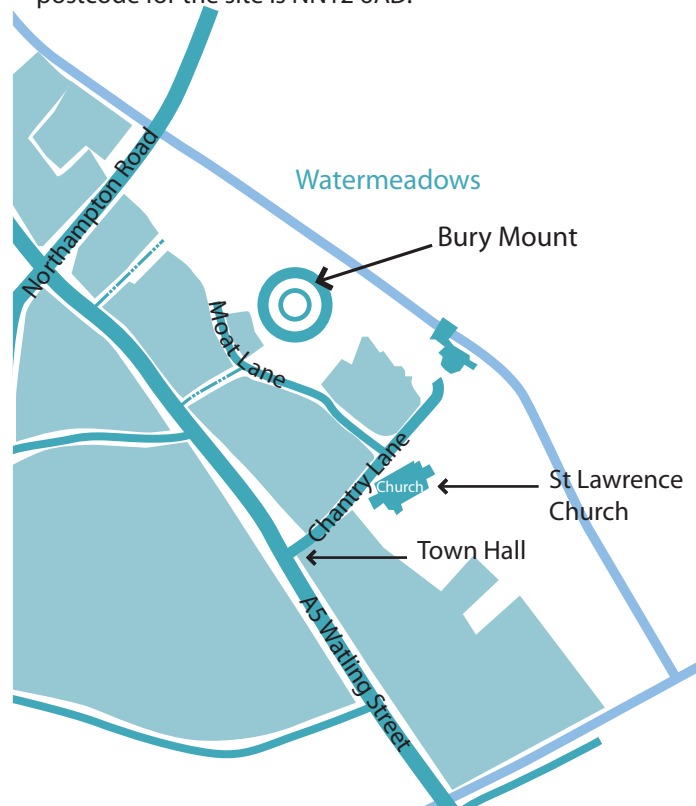
2009AD Bury Mount restored at the heart of Towcester

In April 2010, Bury Mount was opened to the public after a year long restoration programme.

How to get there...

Bury Mount is located on Moat Lane, off Chantry Lane and Watling Street (A5) via Bakers Lane. Parking is available on Northampton Road.

Adjacent to Bury Mount is the Watermeadows, covering over 30 acres of restored parkland also now open to the public. The postcode for the site is NN12 6AD.



Bury Mount

Moat Lane, Towcester

This leaflet is a guide to Bury Mount, located in the centre of Towcester, in an area known as Moat Lane. It provides practical information such as how to get to Bury Mount and detailed information on the history of the site. It has been compiled by South Northamptonshire Council and partners in conjunction with The Towcester and District Local History Society as part of the Moat Lane regeneration project.

Timeline & Plan...

917AD Vikings attack Saxons in first Battle of Towcester

Following the treaty of Wedmore in 884/6 between the Vikings and the Saxon King Alfred of Wessex, Watling Street became the frontier. Alfred's son, King Edward the Elder of Wessex, reinforced the frontier by building a network of fortified towns, called "burhs", defended by timber faced banks and ditches manned by a local levy of one man per 4ft of wall. In 917 A.D. the Danish armies from Northampton and Leicester attacked the "burh of Towcester", but the people of Towcester fought bravely all day and managed to defend the town until help arrived, and the Vikings went away.

1139-55AD Normans build Bury Mount motte and bailey

The Normans (1066-1155) built a motte and bailey castle at Towcester. What remains of it is known as Bury Mount.

1448AD Archdeacon Sponne founds Towcester Chantry & Grammar School

Archdeacon Sponne purchased the Tabard Inn with adjoining lands in 1440 and in his will left the income to found a chantry and school in Towcester, help the poor and repair the footways in the town. The school is now called Sponne School; the Tabard Inn is now called the Sponne Shopping Centre; and the Chantry House still exists.

1505AD Towcestrian Richard Empson is unpopular Chancellor of Exchequer and executed by Henry VIII

Sir Richard Empson, born in Towcester, was a lawyer, MP for Northamptonshire, Speaker of the House of Commons, Knight, High Steward of Cambridge University and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. With his colleague Edmund Dudley he raised taxes for his master, King Henry VII, using extortion, harassment, and other dubious, but legal, means. This made him very unpopular, but made the king very rich. When Henry VII died and Henry VIII became king he arrested the two men. They were sent to Northampton, tried on a trumped up charge of treason and were beheaded on Tower Hill on 17th August 1510. At the time of his arrest he was quite wealthy, owning the Manor and Hundred of Towcester, the manors of Easton Neston, Hulcote, Alderton, Stoke Bruerne, Shutlanger, Bradden, Cold Higham, Grimscote, Potcote and Burton Latimer and lands in other parts of the country.

1605AD Gun Powder Plotters flee London through Towcester

In November 1605 a certain Ambrose Rookwood made preparations for a rapid journey from London to Dunchurch by placing relays of horses at the chief posting houses on Watling Street, including Towcester. It turned out that this was to speed the escape of the gunpowder plot conspirators from London to Catesby's house at Ashby St Ledgers. Guy Fawkes and seven other conspirators were later executed.

1633AD Reverends Shepard, Cotton, Hooker & Stone leave Towcester for the New World and helped found Hartford Connecticut and Harvard University

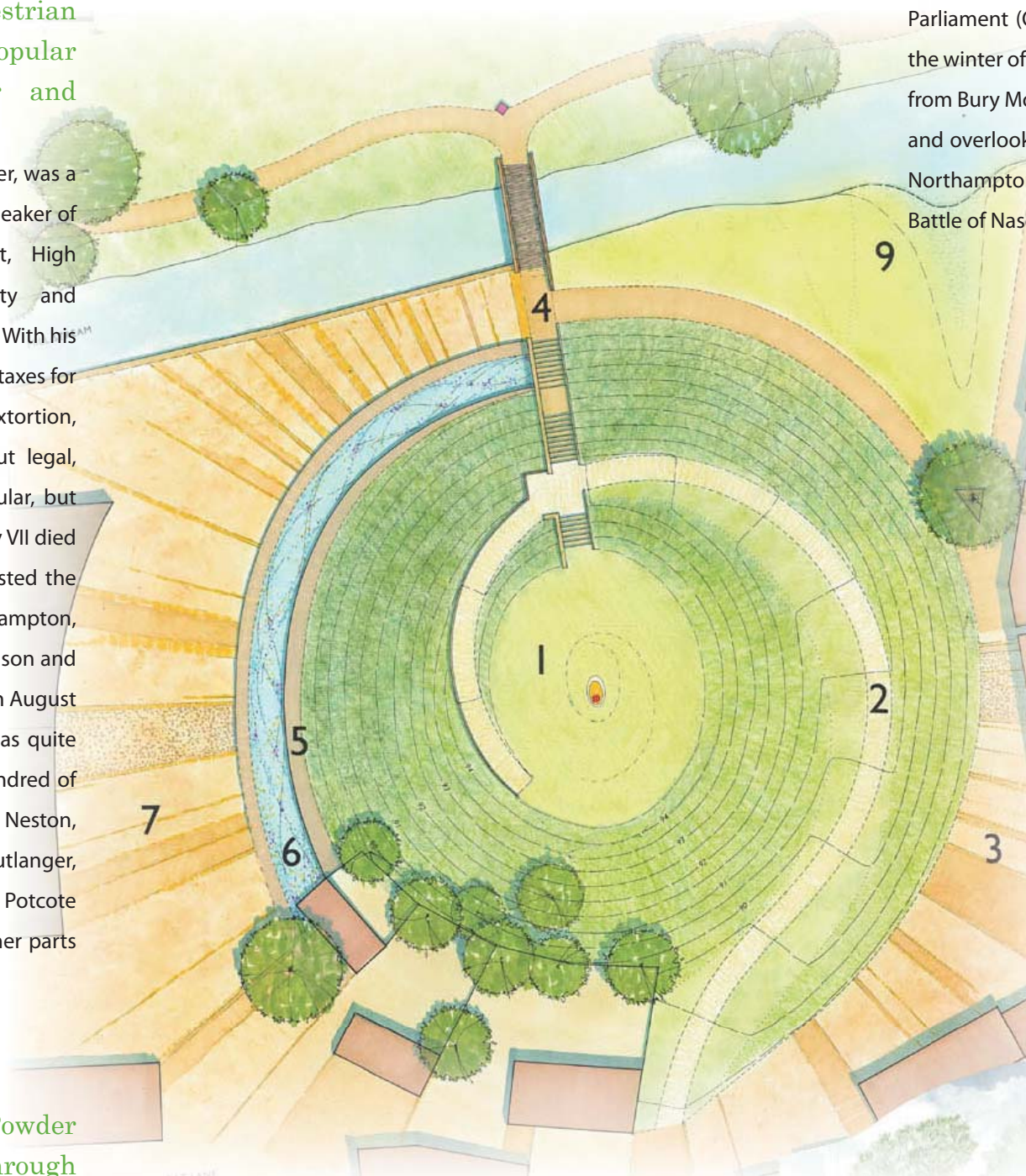
Rev. Thomas Shepard, born in Towcester and educated at the Chantry School (now Sponne School), together with Thomas Hooker and other non-conformist ministers - Samuel Stone and Rev. John Cotton - left Towcester for the New World. They took part in the foundation of Harvard University and, with the family of Thomas Lord, also born in Towcester, the city of Hartford, Connecticut.

1643AD Towcester becomes Civil War garrison town. Prince Rupert installs two cannons on Bury Mount

The English Civil War was between King (Charles I) and Parliament (Oliver Cromwell). King Charles's army spent the winter of 1643-1644 at Towcester, which he defended from Bury Mount which was probably taller in those days and overlooked both the Watling Street and the road to Northampton. King Charles was later defeated at the Battle of Naseby and was beheaded at Whitehall in 1649.

1702AD William Fermor commissions Hawksmoor to build Easton Neston House and park

Nine years after the execution of Richard Empson (1510) his lands in Towcester were bought by Richard Fermor, and they remained in the possession of the Fermor Hesketh family until 2005. In 1671 William Fermor, who had inherited the estates, married Jane, a cousin of Sir Christopher Wren. In the later 1680s he decided to rebuild Easton Neston. The two wings were built first, and one still survives, its design reflective of the design of the Office of Works under Wren. Nicholas Hawksmoor, Wren's brilliant assistant, designed the main house. Work started in the 1690s; the main fabric was completed in 1702; and the work complete in the late 1720s.



Key

1. Top of the Motte, with seating
2. Spiral path, with timelines
3. Future phase, cafe seating area
4. Bridge to the Watermeadows
5. Sandstone seating wall
6. Future phase, mosaic moat
7. Future phase, outdoor performance space

1780AD Golden age of Coaching Inns: Saracens Head, White Horse & Tabard thrive

Towcester thrived as a coaching town until the coming of the railways when coach travel ceased. The Tabard Inn, which provided lodgings from before the 15th century until the 20th century, is now the Sponne Shopping Centre. The George Inn existed in 1708, but after a fire in 1749 it and an adjacent inn were rebuilt as the White Horse Inn, now called Museum Court. Towcester had other large coaching inns, including The Angel next to The Tabard, now a private house, and also many smaller inns. The coaches entered the inns through archways many of which still exist.

Sources:

Towcester Museum Information; Towcester - The Story of an English country town, Towcester and District Local History Society, 1995; Illustrated Towcester History Cards, J.D.Wilcock, 2009; Iain Soden, Jim Brown. Report on the Archaeological Excavation, July-September 2007; Various internet sources including Wikipedia; Coaching Days and Coaching Ways, W. Outram Tristram; Article on the History of Easton Neston in the Sotheby's sale catalogue, May 2005; A Towcester Trail, Towcester Local History Society, 1983

Welcome to Bury Mount

The restoration of Bury Mount has created an important and welcome addition to the public green spaces in Towcester and has ensured the protection of this important monument for future generations to enjoy and study. Bury Mount and the area around it provides space for a wide variety of events and uses.

Bury Mount is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and has been at the heart of Towcester since medieval times. It is thought that the original motte and bailey castle was constructed in the early 12th century as a strategic fortification. The castle would have been a symbol of power and would have had a number of uses. These are likely to have included acting as the residence of the lord of the manor's bailiff, an encampment for troops during periods of hostility as well as providing hospitality to the lord and his entourage whilst travelling. However, over time the site fell into a state of disrepair and in 2001 was declared by English Heritage as a 'monument at risk'.

Restoration

Bury Mount was refurbished in 2009 and 2010. The project was designed by Camlin Lonsdale, a leading landscape architecture practice. This project:

- stabilised the Scheduled Ancient Monument structure
- created a new access to the top of the mount via a ramp and stairway
- provided seating
- installed an historic timeline running up the spiral path depicting key dates in Towcester's history.



Bury Mount restoration in progress, 2009



Bury Mount prior to restoration, 2008

Timeline

The timeline running up the spiral path on Bury Mount details the following events in Towcester's history:

0AD Catuvellauni tribe ritual burial site close to River Tove

Under the Watermeadows (between Bury Mount and the river Tove) is an important iron age ritual burial site.

43AD Romans build Watling Street & Alchester Road

Roman Towcester probably began as a staging post for officials on two Roman roads, Watling Street, which joined the Legionary forts at Dover and Wroxeter, and the early road to Alchester, where it joined the Akeman Street. The Alchester Road eventually extended to Winchester, and ran a similar course to the modern A43.