



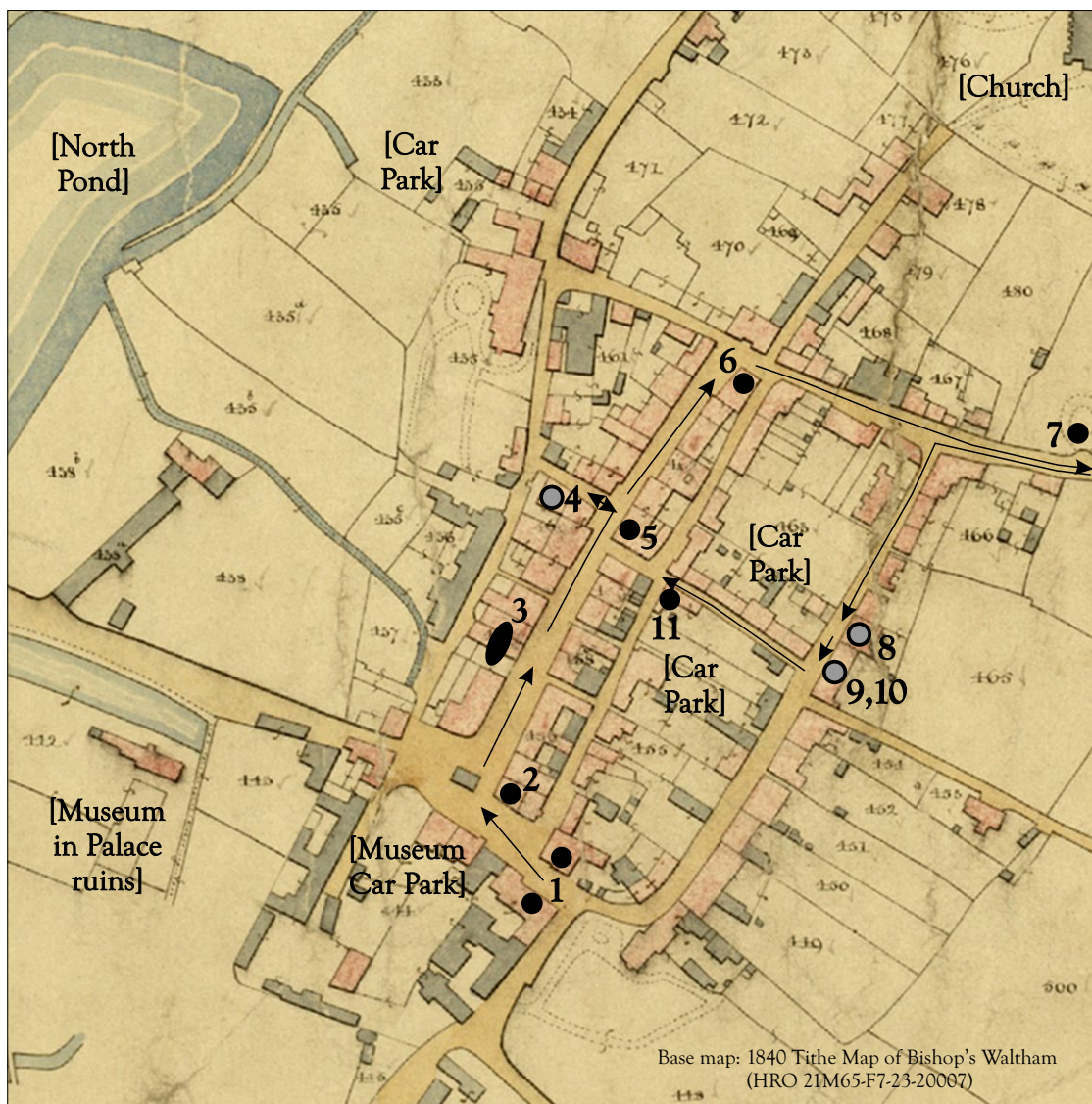
BISHOP'S  
WALTHAM  
MUSEUM

# Our Town: Bishop's Waltham Walking Tour

*"Wilt thou take a walk with me, reader, through our town?"*

In 1834, under the pen name of Peregrine Reedpen, "*Our Town; or, Rough Sketches of Character, Manners, &c*" was published. This book invites the reader to take a stroll through Bishop's Waltham town, introducing them to various residents with thinly veiled pseudonyms - so thinly veiled that the people of Bishop's Waltham quickly began to attempt to buy up any copy they could find to prevent the spread of such gossip. Luckily for us however, they were not entirely successful.

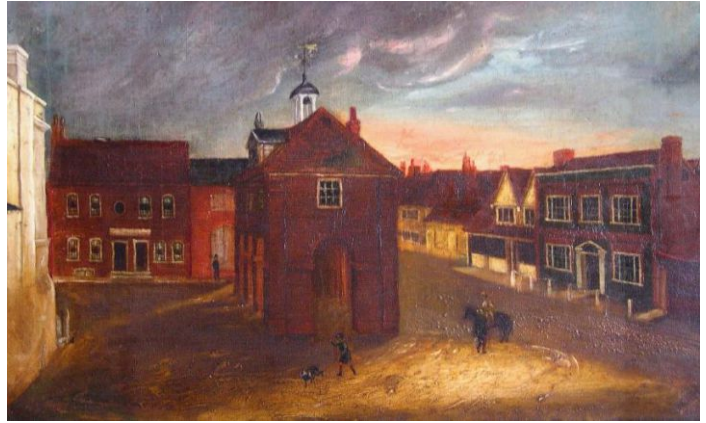
*Our Town* provides a unique insight into daily life in early 19th century England, as well as an invaluable window on the history of Bishop's Waltham town. Today, we invite you to retrace the steps of Peregrine Reedpen, and rediscover some of the many colourful characters who once lived here, through the words of Bishop's Waltham's most infamous gossipmonger.





## 1. The Crown & The King's Head

We begin our journey with The Crown and The Kings Head. Reedpen describes how their proximity to one another damages business, and a great rivalry has developed between them. Reedpen describes the landlord of The Crown as “somewhat aristocratic in his notions a pert, insolent upstart, [who] looks with supreme contempt upon his opponent”. By comparison, he sees the landlord of The Kings Head as a quiet man, but with a wife who “keeps him in hot water!” Fond of fine lace and frivolity, “She wears all the flesh from his bones; and while he wanders about long, thin, and haggard, she fattens on his misery”. Whilst Reedpen paints a more sympathetic picture of The Kings Head, it is The Crown which has withstood the test of time. The Kings Head once stood in the white building, across the street, now a restaurant. If you look at the paving in front of this building, you can see patching up where the steps of the King's Head once stood.



*The Square, 1840. The saddlers is ahead, the Crown to the right of the market hall (Unknown artist, Bishop's Waltham Museum)*



*The view up Houchin St, showing the old staircase to The King's Head, c.1961 (John Bosworth, Bishop's Waltham Museum)*



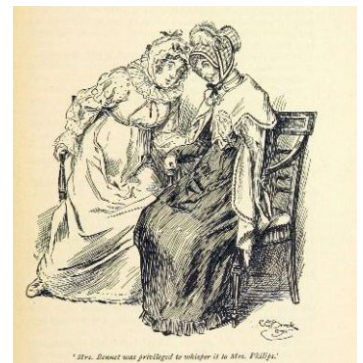
*18th century tavern (Rowlandson, 1806 [www.famsf.org](http://www.famsf.org))*



*Eddolls Saddler's, The Square. The saddler's wife's shop was the first part to be rebuilt as a bank. (Bishop's Waltham Museum)*

## 2. The Saddler & Wife

As we continue into the Square we come across Lloyd's Bank. This site once was the Saddler's. The two windows are split between his business as the Saddler, and his wife's shop where she sells “Crockery-ware, sweetmeats, toys, brushes, with a variety of other articles too numerous to be inserted.” Reedpen brands the Saddler, perhaps hypocritically, as “the most inveterate newsmonger and gossip that ever lived in this or any other town.” The shop is described as constantly filled with those who enjoy scandal and idle gossip. His wife is a tall woman who “dresses fine and talks finer”. She and her friend, the mistress of The King's Head, are full of airs and graces, and look down upon the Head Schoolmaster's wife for being “born and bred in a shop” Reedpen brands this as hypocrisy, as both women themselves had once been ladies maids!



*C. E. Brock, 1895, for Pride and Prejudice. Courtesy of British Library*



### 3. The Clark Brothers

We now enter the High Street and find ourselves outside Josie's. Reedpen describes this shop with great enthusiasm: "You may get anything in that shop, from a child's shoe to your own coffin!" -there is nothing that they do not sell. He speaks highly of the owners whom he refers to as "The Foxhunter and Brother". Their names were, in fact, George and Thomas Clark, and they lived either side of their store. Reedpen describes "The Foxhunter", as a good-natured man, with a good-natured wife and a great many children. The family is joyful, "dancing, leaping, hallooing, and roaring", and the Foxhunter is a keen sportsman, with horses named "Buffalo" and "Rhinoceros"! His brother however, is quieter, more of an "indoor man" but together they have "more irons in the fire than anyone can keep track of!"

### 4. The Cooper

Further up High Street and into Cross Street is a much more miserable story. The Cooper is described with great disdain as "an indefatigable drinker, a dissolute sot, whose delight is to pass as much time as possible in the low public houses and beer-shops." He has eight children who live in terrible conditions, unfed and beaten. His wife, Reedpen claims, died from his mistreatment. He now has a new mistress, a widow with her own large family. Between their previous offspring, and their new illegitimate ones, they now have 22 children. The good housewives of the town have reached out with support for the lady, but she claims it is impossible to leave her lover - something Reedpen does not understand, for "Go not near him, reader, or thou wilt never breathe again!"



Probable cooper's workshop in Cross Street, by L. A. Phipson, 1899. demolished after being hit by a lorry in 1917 (Portsmouth Museums)



An invoice from Thomas and George Clark to W. Gunner, 1846. (Bishop's Waltham Museum)



The Clark's shop in the early 1900s when occupied by Heavers. (Bishop's Waltham Museum)

### 5. The Chemist

Back on the High Street, near the corner of Red Lion Street, we come across the Chemist. A "deport of medicines for man and horse" is run, according to Reedpen, by a Navy lieutenant, now on half-pay. Reedpen claims he is idle in his duty - having "never seen a shot fired in anger" - and idler still in his role as Chemist. He seems entirely unsuited to the position, supposedly not being able to read a word of Latin. For this, he has hired a "junior usher" from the school, which has led to some unfortunate mistakes! An old lady, who lives nearby, was given a prescription for her muscle spasms with the translated label reading "This draught to be given to the thing born whenever it is troubled with wind." Reedpen however points out that there have been much more serious errors, one of which resulted in the death of the Doctor's newborn child. This prompted open hostility between the Doctor and the Chemist - although Reedpen claims neither have the constitution to maintain a rivalry, being at heart "lamb-like men".



A label for laudanum from the chemists, D. Morpew, 1840. (Bishop's Waltham Museum)



## 6. The Hairdresser

As we reach the top of the High Street, on the corner of Bank Street there is a barber's. In the 1830s, this was a hairdresser's. Peregrine Reedpen is not a fan of the "terrible whiskers" of which ladies were so fond. And if you couldn't or wouldn't grow them, "a very good pair of mustachios costs about eighteen pence". However, human hair was not the barber's only speciality - he was also a taxidermist. As peculiar as this combination may seem, taxidermy became an increasingly fashionable statement piece in the 18th and late 19th centuries, with headpieces decorated with entire stuffed animals, often birds, from peacocks to owls. So, if you were not happy with your haircut, you could at least cover it up with a freshly stuffed bird!



A coiffure of Mr Ball, London. 1830  
(Wellcome Library V0019869)



Hairdressers on the corner of Bank Street and High Street, 1912 (Bishop's Waltham Museum)

## 7. Holmoak, Bank Street (now Roman Row and other buildings - look for the Blue Plaque)

We are now on Bank Street, renamed from French Street once the bank opened here in 1809. It would go on to be one of the last privately owned banks in England. William Gunner, who Reedpen refers to as Mr Shooter, "the solicitor" or "head attorney", set up the bank with Fox, Steele and Seymour and lived here when he married Lucy Ridge, daughter of a banker and local squire in 1815. Lucy's brother, Major Edward Jervoise Ridge, had made a name for himself serving in the army in India (this is likely to be the "Yellow Major" referred to by Reedpen. The Gunner family were horrified by their unflattering descriptions (e.g. their "saucy little minx of a daughter") and burnt as many copies of "Our Town" as they could find! These two rich and powerful families had built their fortunes on slavery in sugar plantations in Grenada. The 1771 will of Captain William Ridge lists his assets - with enslaved people listed after the buildings, lands and tenements, and before the cattle, horses, mules, asses and farm equipment. This is a grim reminder of the horrors on which some of our society was built.



Left:  
Holmoak, Bank Street,  
(artist unknown).  
The building to the  
right was the banking  
premises and still  
survives

Right:  
William Gunner,  
1777-1857 (Bishop's  
Waltham Museum)





## 8. The Professor

Retrace your steps up Bank Street until you turn down Basingwell Street. Somewhere close to Little Shore Lane lived **the Professor**. He had been for some time the Parish Clerk, but, finding it not to his liking, he instead turned his attentions to finding a wealthy wife. For this he went to Bath, where he began to go by "**Mr. - Professor of Languages and the Belles Lettres**". This title, along with the black servant he had hired to wait on him, deceived the people of Bath into believing he was a man of means. His plan to marry above his station was successful and he wed a young woman who he believed to have money. On their return to Bishop's Waltham, his new wife was horrified to find his "**shattered old house, the soiled furniture**" and "**above all**" that she was the wife of a Parish Clerk. **The Professor** then went to great expense to try and make his wife happy, throwing parties and hosting dinners, racking up ever-growing debts. It was only once he had buried them in debt did he discover that his new wife in fact had no fortune at all! The pair "**both had tried to deceive, and had been deceived.**" Reedpen notes that the couple had agreed to secrecy to save being laughed at, but reminds us that "**servants have ears and tongues...**"

## 9. The Postboy

Next to **the Professor** lived the Currier in "**a house divided into three portions**", renting out two parts to **the Postboy** and **the painter**. **The Postboy** for the Crown Inn occupied lodgings here. Reedpen describes him as having designs on the sister of the mistress of the Crown Inn, much to the mistress's disapproval. Reedpen says that despite being forty years old, "**any man who condescends to ride a post-horse, is a "boy," for the rest of his life.**" Despite her sister's disapproval, the match went ahead. However Reedpen records that the marriage broke down over beer - the Postboy was not only fond of drinking, but, along with the Currier, brewing. Unfortunately he could "**ride better than he could brew**" and soon turned sour along with his beer.

Top:  
Bath society, as infiltrated by The Professor (Thomas Rowlandson 1798 Yale Center for British Art)  
Bottom:  
Basingwell Street c. 1910 (Photographer unknown).



Changing Horses to a Post-Chaise outside the 'George' Posting-house, Charles Cooper Henderson (1803\_1877) Tate Museum. Post boys were also postilions for coaches, seen here in red and blue jackets.

## 10. The Painter

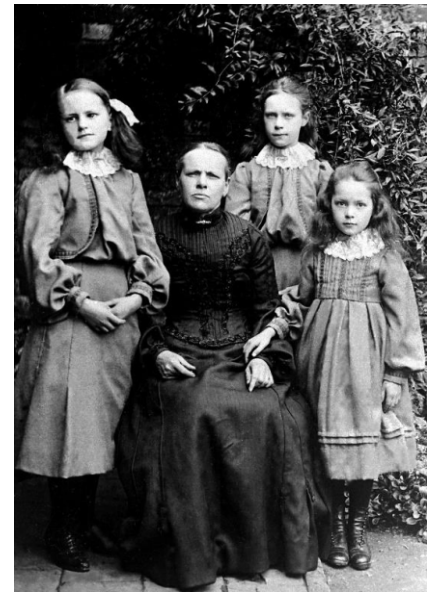
**The Painter**, Reedpen tells us, has "**a great itch for spoiling good canvas, and...is too much of a "genius" to submit to the influence of 'rules'**". He is critical of the Painter's use of bold, block colours, and creates the image of a man much too pleased with his own work. Of the Painter's wife, however, Reedpen is particularly scornful. She, along with the wives of the Postboy and the Currier, he accuses of being "**a perfect nuisance to the neighbours**" with their quarrelling. He claims that the Painter has reached his wits' end with them, and has plans to move alone to the High Street. Here he plans to paint a mural to show the world what a great artist resides in this town...

## 11. The Blacksmith's

From Basingwell Street, cross over the car park formed from the demolished houses and backyards of both Houchin and Basingwell Streets in the early 1970s. Red Lion Street used to continue from the High Street to Basingwell Street and in 1834 this corner of Houchin Street was the site of Richards' Blacksmiths. Reedpen speaks of the "the second Solomon" (using his actual name) with the utmost adoration, going so far as to describe him as "the oracle of this place". When he spoke, we are told, everyone stopped to listen. Reedpen draws attention to his work for the poor, as "There was nothing he could not do, and would not do for them, if requested". This was not limited to his craft as a blacksmith, but extended into medical aid - so much so that it put the Doctor to shame! His funeral was well attended by all those he helped, and by Reedpen's estimation the ceremony was the best sermon their curate had ever given. The blacksmith's was taken over by his nephew, who whilst boasting that he had "never pricked or lamed a horse since he has been in business" seems not to have impressed Reedpen as much as his uncle.



*Richards' Ironmongers, 1972 (John Bosworth, Bishop's Waltham Museum). A medieval timber framed building with later brick walls, demolished to form the car park.*



*Mrs Emma [Solomon] Richards and her daughters, great grandchildren of the earlier Solomon (Bishop's Waltham Museum)*

It is here, as we pass through Red Lion Street back into the heart of High Street, that we leave you, with a fresh perspective on the lives of those who walked these streets before you, and the gossip that surrounded them...



And Peregrine Reedpen himself? He is thought to be Charles Fitz Adderley whose wife ran a school in Basingwell Street for a time, but he himself had a rather colourful career including a spell in prison for fraud...



If you've enjoyed this, why not visit **Bishop's Waltham Museum** in the Palace ruins that Peregrine liked to say: "give an air of antiquity and respectability to this shabby place". Our website has more information on the town, Palace and all things Bishop's Waltham.  
[bishopswalthammuseum.com](http://bishopswalthammuseum.com)