ASHFORD TOWN CENTRE

Ashford's High Street boasts a vibrant mix of modern brands, with something for everyone! At the heart of the town centre, County Square Shopping Centre brings a whole world of shopping all under one roof, and Park Mall has the best in independent shopping and boutique fashion. Don't forget to check out the regular programme of music on the town's recently refurbished bandstand.

ASHFORD DESIGNER OUTLET

The McArthurGlen Designer Outlet is a striking complex designed by Sir Richard Rogers and stacked high with big-name brands, offering up to 60% off every day.

MARKET DAYS

There is a street market every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday in the Lower High Street and a Farmers’ Market on the first Sunday of each month with seasonal themes, chef demonstrations and plenty of delicious local produce to sample.

HISTORY OF ASHFORD

In the heart of the Kentish countryside, Ashford is a forward-looking town with a strong sense of its past. Whether it’s a rich history and culture, the excellent shopping and leisure opportunities, or the stunning natural setting, Ashford has something for everyone. With evidence of settlement dating back to the prehistoric times, Ashford’s history spans several millennia. First recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 as having a church, two mills and 21 households – large by medieval standards – Ashford was well on its way to becoming the large and diverse borough it is today.

In 1243, Ashford’s history as a market town began, becoming one of Kent’s most important by the 1600s. Initially based in Middle Row and the High Street, the Ashford Cattle Market Company Ltd was formed to relocate it in 1856 to Elwick Road as it had outgrown its site. Now located in Orbital Park and used by over 5,000 farmers, it remains one of the top 15 markets in the UK.

The arrival of the railway and its manufacturing works was a defining moment in Ashford’s modernisation, when the town became an important passenger junction and centre for the rail industry. Although all the works were finally closed by 1993, Ashford experienced a revival with the introduction of international services in 1996. This was followed by the arrival of Hitachi’s first UK depot servicing the high-speed Javelin trains that have linked Ashford to London in just 38 minutes since 2009.

This trail guides you around the historic town centre of Ashford, from its first mention in the Domesday Book to its Victorian transition to a bustling modern town.

ASHFORD’S HIGH STREET

In 1856 to Ebleck Road as it had outgrown its site. Now located in Orbital Park and used by over 5,000 farmers, it remains one of the top 15 markets in the UK.

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H.G. WELLS
The local author of The War of the Worlds is mostly known for science-fiction, but in his fantasy story Mr Skelmersdale in Fairyland, Aldington Knoll in Ashford reveals its secret – it’s a home of elves!

JANE AUSTEN
With her brother Edward having the sense (and sensibility) to live in nearby Godmersham Park, Jane was a frequent visitor to assembly balls in the town’s Saracen’s Head coaching inn.

SIMONE WEIL
Renowned philosopher Simone joined the French Resistance, and later succumbed to tuberculosis in Ashford after refusing to eat more food than the residents of Occupied France received. She is buried in the Old Ashford Cemetery and is known today as one of the most globally-influential writers on religion.

RICHARD LOVELACE
A Cavalier poet and member of the Lovelace family of Bethersden, he gave Ashford its motto With Stronger Faith: Coming from the 1649 poem To Lucasta, Going to the Wars’, it was chosen to represent the determination of the Borough.

FREDERICK FORSYTH
Best known for gripping thrillers, Forsyth grew up in his parents’ North Street furrier shop with the Battle of Britain raging above. After becoming the youngest pilot in the RAF, Forsyth joined Reuters as a war correspondent before writing bestselling novel The Day of the Jackal.

WILLESBOROUGH WINDMILL
Willesborough Windmill, built in 1869, is one of the largest smock mills in the South of England. The Grade II listed structure ground corn until it was converted to a private dwelling in the 1950s. Curious visitors can now experience the working mill and explore life in the Victorian Miller’s Cottage.

ASHFORD BOROUGH MUSEUM
Ashford’s first grammar school, a Grade II listed building, is a fitting setting for the Ashford Borough Museum. Immense yourself in artefacts from the prehistoric era to the modern day. Key moments in Ashford’s past come to life with interactive displays on the railway, the borough at war, and much more.

REVELATION ST MARY’S
Revelation St. Mary’s is Ashford Town Centre’s unique and award-winning music and arts venue, hosting concerts, exhibitions and events throughout the year. Awe-inspiring and intimate, this Grade I listed venue welcomes local and internationally renowned artists.

FAMOUS FACES

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DR. JOHN WALLIS
Mathematician John Wallis, who is given partial credit for the development of infinitesimal calculus, was born in College Court in 1616, his father being the Vicar of St. Mary’s. He served as chief cryptographer for parliament and the royal court between 1643 and 1689 and is credited with introducing the symbol for infinity!

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Start at Ashford Borough Museum and face the entrance to St Mary’s Church.

**ST MARY’S CHURCHYARD**

With Norman foundations, St Mary’s Church has been a tower for almost 1,000 years of history. Enter the church to view the final resting place of many of Ashford’s nobility including Sir John Fogge, once treasurer to Edward IV. Today the church remains an important feature of the community, a popular place of worship that also regularly hosts arts performances.

**MIDDLE ROW**

These medieval buildings and narrow streets were known as the Butcher’s Shambles and are some of the oldest in town. This is the original site of Ashford’s market, and if you look closely you’ll see hints of this period, such as the hooks on the wall where the butcher’s meat was hung.

At 1 Middle Row, you’ll find the former market house where commercial activity was controlled and tolls were collected. Beneath this building is ‘The Cage’, the town’s former goal which imprisoned Lord John Brown for insulting a priest by sitting on his robe on a barge trip.

**LOWER HIGH STREET**

Pass the High Street fountain featuring a reclamed steam train wheel, a celebration of Ashford’s railway past. Further on is a Friendship stone, a symbol of Ashford and Bad Munstereifel’s Ashford’s heritage across its design. See if you can spot their opening date. How many can you spot?

**NORTH STREET**

Face the splendid Georgian and Jacobean buildings of North Street. On the left-hand corner stands the site of the Sacarons Head Inn, which counted celebrated C18th blues musician Elizabeth Montagu among its patrons. Dating from the C-14th, it developed from lodgings provided for stewards of the lord of the Manor, eventually becoming a community hub until the C19th when it was sold and finally demolished in c1860.

**UPPER HIGH STREET**

Returning to the High Street, pass the oak-beamed George Hotel, Ashford’s oldest public house, which began as a coachman’s staging post and was first referenced in a will of 1533 as a bequest from John Bunwease to his wife Ide. If you look to the building skyline to your left, you will notice that many buildings are emblazoned with their opening date. How many can you spot?

Just past the George is the town bandstand which features motifs of Ashford’s heritage across its design. See if you can find emblems of markets, the River Stour, St Mary’s Church, the railway and oat houses.

**CASTLE STREET / NEW STREET**

On Castle Street lies Ashford’s most distinctive landmark: our WWII Mark IV Tank. She was presented to the town in 1919 by the Army Council as thanks for residents’ enthusiastic response to the National War Savings scheme. A female variant, at over 20 tons, the tank could move at only 7 mph – but she was a formidable weapon. Upon retirement she briefly housed an electricity substation; this post-war service ensured she wasn’t scrapped like so many others and she is now the only one on public display in the entire country.

**Option: Victoria Park**

Across the railway footbridge is Victoria Park, which Ashford’s history. The houses, built in 1863 on a former Saxon burial ground, marked Ashford’s growth as an important hub for East Kent as it transitioned through the Industrial Revolution. Stop at Ashford Gateway and pop into the TIC to plan your next visit.

**Did you know?**

In the C17th, the windows of St Mary’s were destroyed by Parliamentarians during the Civil War, a bold move considering that Kent was primarily Royalist! The windows are now a folly in a house wall in Park Street.

**Option: Martyrs’ Field**

13 North Street was the home of Capt. Francis Eppes, founder of Virginia, which he named after the ship that carried him over the Atlantic in 1635. At the far-right end of the road is the Masonic Lodge, which holds a secret – it is the birthplace of Sir John Furler, who founded St John Ambulance in 1877.

**Option 1: Martyrs’ Field**

A Lollard was a follower of a Christian reformist movement led by John Wycliffe that opposed the bureaucracy and excessive wealth of the Catholic Church.

**Did you know?**

In 1842 plans were made to provide electricity to Ashford, but it took until 1926 for this to happen.

**Did you know?**

Crossing Mace Lane, you’ll come to an entrance to Queen Street, despite lying only a short distance from the town centre, exhibits natural calm and tranquility. The houses, built in 1843 on a former Saxon burial ground, marked Ashford’s growth as an important hub for East Kent as it transitioned through the Industrial Revolution. Stop at Ashford Gateway and pop into the TIC to plan your next visit.

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Ashford International welcomed its first passengers traveling through the Channel Tunnel to France.

2000

Ashford Designer Outlet opened its doors for the first time.

**THE MUSEUM**

Returning to the churchyard, you have now reached the end of the trail. While you’re here, this is a perfect point to visit the Ashford Borough Museum to learn even more about Ashford’s past. As you walk around, look out for the original schoolboy graffiti on the walls, observe the old headmaster’s chair, and reflect on over 4,000 years of Ashford’s history.

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