

A Short History of Chipping Barnet

A thousand years ago Barnet was a wooded area with small scattered settlements. (The name *Barnet* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *baernet*, probably meaning a *place cleared by burning*.) In around 1100 a main road north out of London was constructed and Chipping Barnet grew up alongside this at the junction with Wood Street. (In later centuries, part of this road and a new branch north at Hadley became the Great North Road.) The town became known as *Chipping* Barnet to distinguish it from the settlement to the south-east (East Barnet). The name reflects the importance of the market, with the name *Chipping* probably coming from the Anglo-Saxon word *cheap*, meaning *market*. King John granted a market charter in 1199, although the market probably existed before this.

In 1471 the Battle of Barnet was fought to the north of the town. One of the final battles of the Wars of the Roses, it was between the Yorkist king Edward IV, and the Lancastrian Earl of Warwick (the 'Kingmaker'), fighting on behalf of Henry VI. Edward's victory, along with Warwick's death, helped to consolidate Edward's position as king. A monument to the battle was erected in 1740. It stands at the junction of Hadley Highstone and Kitts End Road.

In 1588 Elizabeth I granted a charter for Barnet Fair (a horse and cattle fair, which soon became accompanied by a pleasure fair). It became well known (*Barnet Fair* became the Cockney rhyming slang for *hair*) and prosperous, with animals coming from all over Britain. In the mid nineteenth century Barnet was said to be the biggest cattle fair in England. By the mid eighteenth century the fair had also become a significant horse racing venue. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were many attempts to close the fair (thought to be vulgar and encourage petty crime), but it managed to survive, and is now held in early September.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth, Barnet became famous for its Physic Well, a mineral water spring thought to have therapeutic qualities. Diarist Samuel Pepys visited it in 1664 and 1667 ("got to the wells at Barnett by seven o'clock [morning] and found many people a-drinking"). The Physic Well is just off Wellhouse Lane; the present building is from the 1930s.

Situated on the busy main road from London, Chipping Barnet catered to the needs of travellers, and this trade was an important part of Barnet's livelihood. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before the arrival of the railway, there were around 150 coaches daily, as well as carts and animals. There were dozens of inns with stabling for hundreds of horses, as well as associated trades. Inns also provided locations for social and civic functions, such as post offices and courts.



Barnet Museum & Local History Society

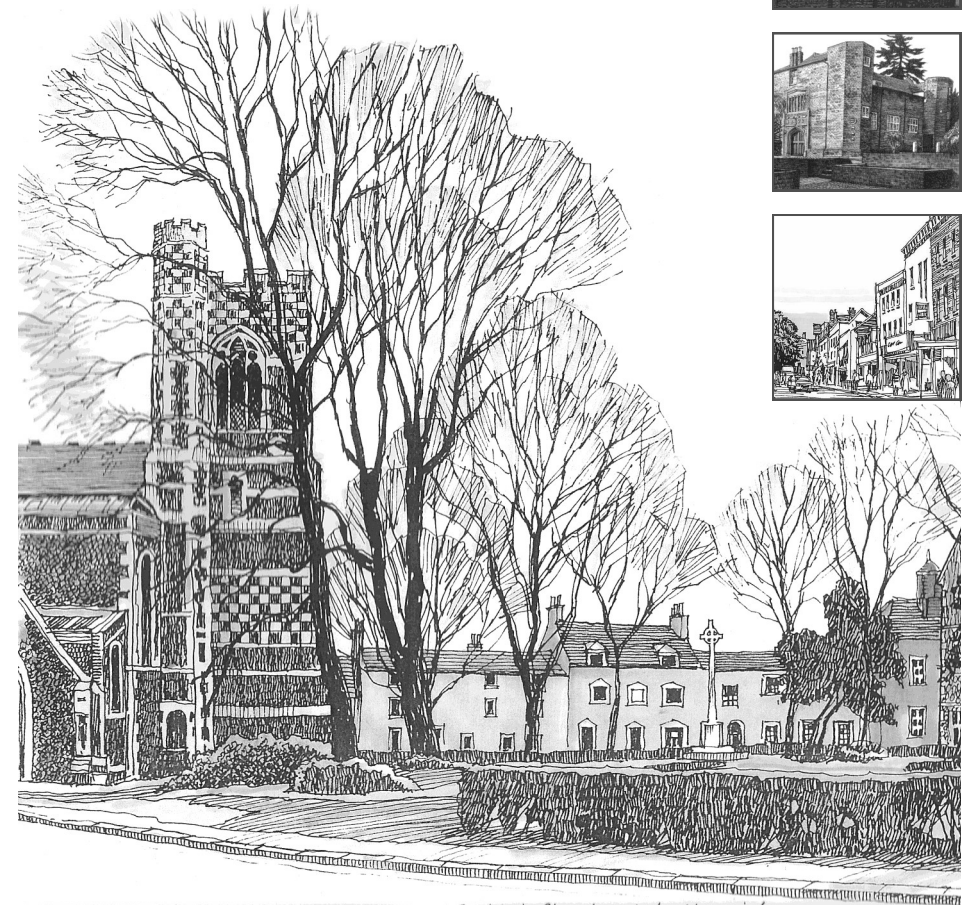
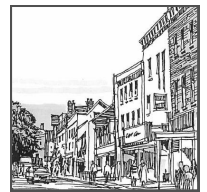
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Front page main illustration: High Street and St John the Baptist Church, looking towards Wood Street

A Walk around Chipping Barnet 1

Barnet Hill



Exploring Barnet's history

Barnet Walks Series, No. 3 (Chipping Barnet Walk 1: Barnet Hill)

Text: Gillian Gear & Fiona Jones; Illustrations: John Sanders

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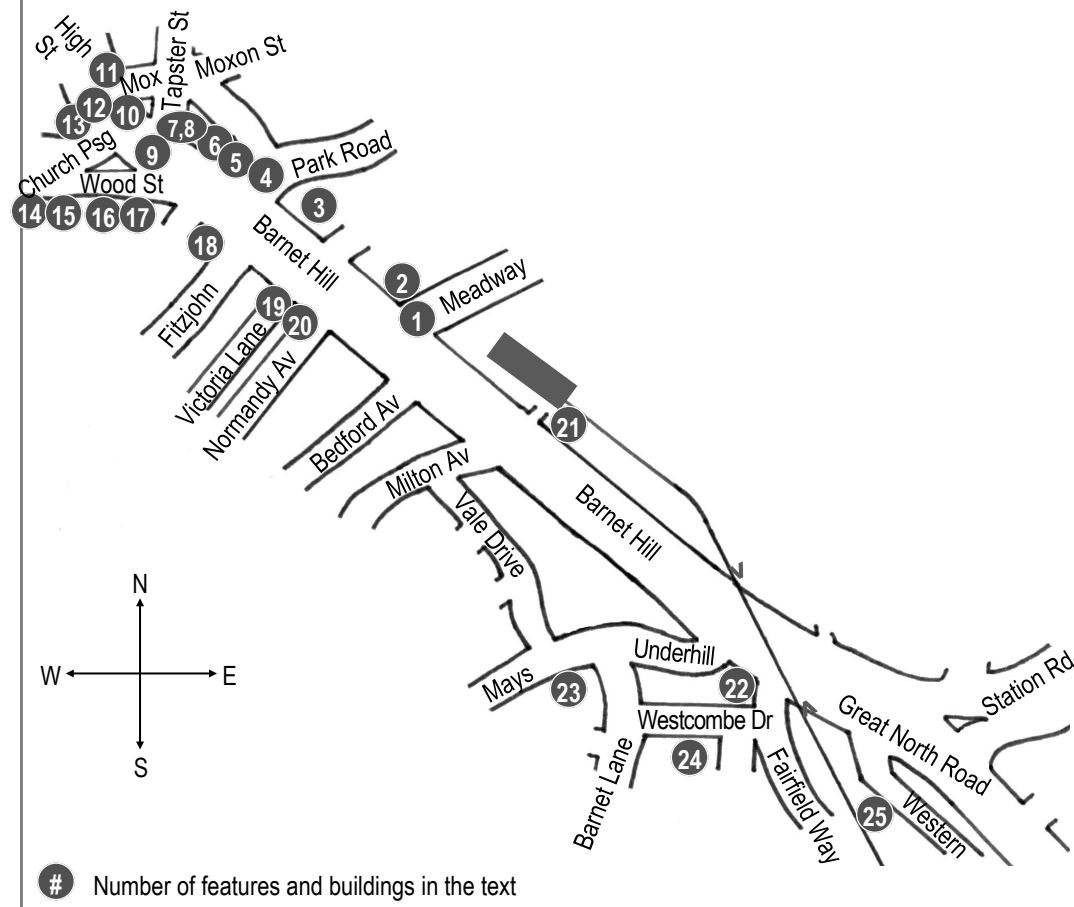
The description of this walk begins at Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School at the junction of Barnet Hill (A1000) and Meadway. (The walk includes some steep sections and there are some main roads to cross – at the time of writing there are crossings or traffic islands on these roads near to the route of the walk.)

Numbering of features and buildings in the text corresponds to those on map (p.7).

1. Meadway was originally a public footpath between Barnet Hill and St Mark's Church, Barnet Vale, and was later useful as a route between Chipping Barnet and the station at New Barnet. Around 1930 it was developed into a road. In 2004 a sword was found during work by Three Valleys Water, which Royal Armouries Leeds dated to around 1611. The sword is now on display at Barnet Museum.
2. Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School opened in 1888 with 40 girls. Most of the current buildings have been constructed since then, including the main hall, which had to be rebuilt after a fire in 1991.
3. Continue up the hill to the Police Station. First built in the 1860s, it was replaced by a new station next door in 1915 and rebuilt again in 1974. A previous building on the site was Jackson's forge.
4. Further up the hill on the right is Park Road. Birt Acres, a pioneer of moving pictures, lived at Clovelly Cottage (no. 19), and his film of his wife coming out of the house with his assistant and a maid, is one of the earliest (and possibly first) moving pictures ever made in this country. Later that year he filmed the Oxford and Cambridge boat race and the Derby, effectively inventing the sports newsreel. In January 1896 Acres gives Britain's first projected film show to the Lyonsdown Photographic Society. Acres was general manager at the photographic suppliers Elliott & Son based behind Park Road, at that time one of the country's leading photographic companies.
5. Continue on to The Mitre Inn, which dates from the mid seventeenth century and was formed when three earlier inns joined together. Still partly timber framed, it is the oldest surviving coaching inn in Barnet, although is now a third of its former size. Dr Johnson visited the Mitre at least once, and General Monck is thought to have stayed here when he stopped overnight in Barnet in February 1660 on his way to London to restore the monarchy after the Commonwealth period under Cromwell.
6. Further along on the same side is The Bull Theatre. Formerly an inn, it was refurbished as an arts centre and theatre (then known as the Old Bull Theatre) in 1975.
7. A little further up the hill is a narrow road called Tapster Street. It was laid out in the 1820s-30s, and was one of the first roads to be developed off the High Street. It was named after the Tapster family who had owned land on which it was built for many years.

Map showing the route of the Walk

Scale: 3.5cm = c. ¼ mile



Sources

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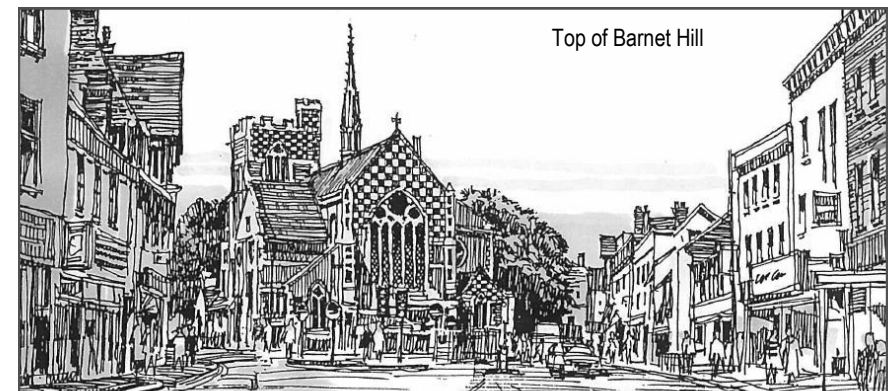
Barnet station was built in 1850 to the south east of Chipping Barnet (and New Barnet grew up around it). High Barnet Station opened in 1872. Originally a steam railway, it became part of London Underground in 1940 when it was electrified. The station was built on the site of Barnet Racecourse, part of Barnet Fair (see p.8). In the mid eighteenth century Barnet was a significant racing venue, although by the time the railway arrived, the races were already declining.

22. Continue down the hill and turn right into Underhill road. The group of houses to the left is the site of the former Old Red Lion pub, which was sold in 2015. An inn of this name was licensed here in 1750, although the owner had been running a cottage alehouse since 1725. Before Barnet Hill was rerouted the inn would often provide an extra pair of horses to help vehicles up the steep Barnet Hill.
23. Carry on to Mays Lane, which is one of the oldest roads in Chipping Barnet. It's first mentioned in the fifteenth century, and was probably named after Geoffrey le May who lived in Barnet in the thirteenth century.
24. Turn into Barnet Lane and then into Westcombe Drive. On your right is Underhill, Barnet Football Club's former ground. The first known Barnet club was founded in the late nineteenth century. For a time there were two, and at times three, football clubs in Barnet, until 1912 when the remaining two merged. Until they turned semi-professional in 1965, Barnet FC were regarded as one of the best Amateur clubs in the country, winning their league a number of times and the FA Amateur Cup in 1946 in front of a crowd of over 53,000 at Stamford Bridge. (The match ball and captain Lester Finch's boots are on display at Barnet Museum.) Lester Finch played for Great Britain at the 1936 Olympics.
25. At the end of Westcombe Drive, turn left into Fairfield Way and out on to Barnet Hill. Walk under the railway bridge and a little way down on your right is the Everyman cinema, which opened in 2015. Previously it was an Odeon, which had opened in 1935 on the site of Underhill House. Its facade is an example of 1930's Art Deco architecture. Odeon opened its first cinemas in the 1930s (a decade when many cinemas were built in this country).

Also available in the Barnet Walks series: *East Barnet; New Barnet; Chipping Barnet 2 (Wood Street & High Street)*

Barnet Museum has further information about much that is referred to in this Walk, and you can also see the objects mentioned. The Museum's collection covers many aspects of life in Barnet, from ancient times to present day, including objects relating to the Battle of Barnet, both World Wars, domestic life, shops & pubs, sport & leisure, costume and health, as well as temporary exhibitions. The museum has an extensive archive, and is a centre for family and local history research. Founded in 1938, the museum is a charity run by volunteers. Admission is free. Group visits outside opening hours are available by appointment. *Contact details & opening times p8.*

8. The buildings either side of Tapster Street (72-6 High Street) used to be The Red Lyon inn, which was established by at least 1551. The archway over the entrance to Tapster Street may have been the entrance to the yard behind which there were stables. On the first floor was a room known as the Great Room (which can still be seen behind the four arched windows). Samuel Pepys came here in 1667 when he visited the Physic Well (see p.8). He recorded in his diary, "went up to the Great Room and there drank, and ate some of the best cheesecake that ever I ate in my life". The inn closed in the early eighteenth century. It was later known as The Assembly Rooms (providing food and accommodation), and in the early nineteenth century the Great Room was briefly converted into a theatre. Part of a wooden arch from this room (which possibly came from over the stage) was recovered when the building was being modified in the 1950s and is now displayed in Barnet Museum alongside an 1830 playbill.
9. The area in front of the church, which now forms part of the road junction, used to be known as Middle Row, a short row of buildings, including a Market Hall. This made the road either side very narrow in places, and after the buildings were badly damaged in a fire in 1889 they were taken down. The market (see p.8) had already moved to a different site. In 1874 it moved to its present location in St Albans Road. In the early twentieth century this area in front of the church was where trams and later trolley buses turned round. Trams first came up the steep Barnet Hill in 1907.
10. Continue along and on your right is The Kings Head, which has existed since the seventeenth century (the king referred to is Henry VIII). The area of road in front of it is locally known as the Bottleneck. During excavations here in 1953 a shoe was dug up, which the British Museum dated to the early fourteenth century. It is now on display at Barnet Museum.
11. Continue along the High Street, and on the left is Moxon Street, which was laid out in the 1820s/30s, and is thought to be named after local apothecary Thomas Moxon.



12. Cross over the road and walk along to Church Passage. In 1555 William Hale was burnt at the stake near here for being a Protestant. He is the only person known to have been martyred in Barnet.

On your left is the Parish Church of St John the Baptist. First established in the mid-thirteenth century (c.1250), it was rebuilt in the fifteenth century (c.1420), and (as a rapidly increasing population outgrew the old building) redeveloped and enlarged in 1875 by the architect William Butterfield. In the First World War there was a listening post on the church tower. During the Second World War a bomb destroyed parts of the main west window. A glass medallion formed from fragments of the glass was given to Barnet Museum. Chipping Barnet War Memorial, commemorating those who died in both World Wars, stands between the church and Church Passage. It was unveiled in 1921 and originally stood in front of the church.

13. On the opposite side of Church Passage is the Hyde Institute. It opened in 1904 (following a bequest from Mrs Julia Hyde in 1888) as the Hyde Institute and Reading Room, with a free reading room and subscription library. In 1929 it merged with the county library which had opened four years earlier, and in 1991 moved to Staplyton Road. The building is owned by the Hyde Foundation, and is now used by Barnet and Southgate College.

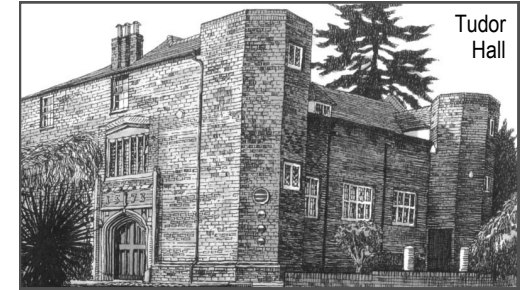
14. Come out into Wood Street and cross the road. To your right is Barnet Museum. The Museum's local history collection was started in 1927 by the Barnet Record Society (now Barnet Museum and Local History Society), a group of local people who were concerned that Barnet's heritage shouldn't be lost. In 1938 the Museum was opened to display the collection.

15. The building next door (29 Wood Street) is the Coroners Court. It was previously Barnet Registry Office and before that Barnet Brewery. The master of the brewery lived in the house next door (31 Wood Street).

16. Next to 29 Wood Street is the entrance to Old Court House Recreation Ground, which opened as a public park in 1924. The land was previously part of the Old Court House Estate, and included pasture, stables and some of the houses on Wood Street. The name Old Court House reflects the fact that before the days of court buildings, the magistrates court met here for a while.



17. Walk down the road towards Barnet Hill. On your right you can see Barnet and Southgate College's Wood Street campus. Barnet College and Southgate College merged in 2011, and are now one of the largest colleges in North London. The large red brick building is Tudor Hall, one of the oldest buildings in Chipping Barnet. It was originally built to house Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School for boys, founded in 1573 following the granting of a charter by Queen Elizabeth I. (This was a time when many schools were being founded, partly to replace monastic provision after the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII.) The school (now called Queen Elizabeth's School) moved to a site in Queen's Road in 1932. Between 1939 and 1954 Tudor Hall was the office for food rationing coupons. In 1968 it was restored and refurbished and became part of Barnet College.



18. Continue along the road and down the hill. On the corner of Fitzjohn Avenue is The Red Lion pub. There has been a pub on this site from at least the fifteenth century, earlier names including The Cardinal's Hat and The Antelope. It took the name The Red Lion around 1720 when an earlier inn of that name in Barnet closed (see no.8), and the model of a lion mounted high on the wall has been a feature since Victorian times. At the height of the coaching era, the inn had stabling at the rear for 100 horses, and had a fierce rivalry with the Green Man up the road. Charles Dickens dined here with his wife, and he made references to Barnet in *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist* (Oliver met the Artful Dodger in Barnet). In the 1900s Fitzjohn Avenue was built on land belonging to The Red Lion, reducing the inn to about half its original size.

19. Further down the hill is Victoria Lane which marks the old route of Barnet Hill. This road had a very steep gradient which in winter could be very dangerous to climb. Two of the leading road engineers of the day, Thomas Telford and John MacAdam, put forward a scheme and MacAdam's was chosen. It was completed in around 1828, having taken four years and costing £17,000, and made the road straighter and less steep. The previous route of the road went via Underhill and round to what is now Victoria Lane, where it rejoined the present road.

20. The building on the corner of Normandy Avenue used to be Barnet Court House, which was built in 1916.

21. About half way down Barnet Hill on the left is High Barnet Station. In the nineteenth century railways were being built all over the country, but opinion was divided over whether it would benefit Chipping Barnet (especially the potentially detrimental effects on the coaching trade). There was also the practical difficulty of getting a line up the steep hill, and in the end the first