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Berkhamsted Audio Trail

Audio point 1: Castle

- Berkhamsted castle, a designated Scheduled Ancient Monument is owned by the Duchy of Cornwall, and managed by English Heritage. Admission is free and information panels in the Visitor Room tell the castle's story.
- The history of what you see today begins with Duke William of Normandy.
- After the defeat of Harold at the battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066, William marched with his army through southern England, pillaging as he went. Crossing the Thames at Wallingford, he reached Berkhamsted.
- Here he was met by Edgar Atheling (chosen King by the people of London after Harold's death), Archbishop Ealdred, the Bishops of Worcester and Hereford, Earls Eadwin and Morcar, and the chief men of London, who swore allegiance to him, and offered him the crown.
- William proceeded to London where he was crowned king on Christmas Day 1066.
- William granted the Manor and Honour of Berkhamsted to his half-brother Robert, Count of Mortain. who was mentioned in the Domesday Book entry for Berkhamsted, and who constructed a Motte and Bailey Castle (a type of castle introduced by the Normans in the 11th century) on the site.
- Much of the surviving original Norman earthworks can still be seen, except for the outer sections which were destroyed when the railway and roads were made. The railway viaduct was built on the line of the outer moat as were the houses in Brownlow Road to the west of the castle later in 1930.
- Tower Hill (the motte) is the castle's most prominent feature, today as well as in its heyday. Local historian Percy Birtchnell comments: "As a reward for the climb there are splendid views, and if the broken walls seem small, the earthworks look impressively large. Not to wander round the moats is to miss the most interesting short walk in the district".
- Nowadays, the wildlife of the castle's natural setting is, perhaps, rather more interesting to modern eyes than its architecture.
- The inner moat is part damp with standing water in places. The vegetation at the bottom of the inner moat is of tall swamp including, notably, Flowering Rush.
- The outer moat is less damp and supports Common Nettle, Thistles and occasional aquatic vegetation; mature Beech trees have been planted around its side.
- There is Bugle on the grassy banks between the two western moats and abundant Hart's-tongue in the Keep Well. Early Purple Orchid was recorded in 1983.
- The pasture to the east of the Castle supports a good mix of wild flowers and there are some large Hornbeam standards on the southern boundary.

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- There is a Common Lizard colony to the south-east of the castle. See if you can spot any as your route on leaving the castle takes you along beside the railway embankment and under the next railway bridge, where you will see the Crystal Palace pub facing you on the opposite side of the road. Cross the road and join the canal towpath.

Audio point 2: Canal [Crystal Palace pub to Ravens Lane Bridge No 142]

- First, a potted history of the Berkhamsted stretch of the Grand Union Canal. In 1798 the Grand Junction Canal, as it was first called, opened from Brentford, on the Thames in West London, to Tring, and the entire route to the industrial Midlands was completed in 1805.
- The Berkhamsted section was costly. In the few miles between Boxmoor and the Cow Roast, it was necessary to construct 20 of the 55 locks which were required to raise barges from the Thames to the Chiltern Gap.
- The canal formed the first major transport link from London to Birmingham, which helped the industrial revolution transform Britain two centuries ago. Its heyday was the first half of the 19th century, and investors reaped handsome rewards in return for all that upfront expense.
- However, the canal suffered from competition from the railway, particularly in the second half of the 19th century. Then, with improvements in roads and vehicle technology in the early part of the 20th century, lorries became increasingly significant competitors. The canal's decline led eventually to the effective cessation of commercial traffic some time in the 1970s.
- Today it leaves us with an important habitat for wildlife and a great place to spend time walking, cycling, fishing and boating.
- With your back to the Crystal Palace pub look across to the opposite (South) side of the canal. This stretch, between Castle Street and Ravens Lane, is known as Castle Wharf (previously Castle Docks). This was the centre of Berkhamsted's canal trade and boat building activities. Coal and timber were delivered here to supply the many factories and works.
- One former boat builder's yard was located just by the Castle Street bridge. In 1910 it was turned into a timber yard run by William Key and Son, timber merchants and importers, and in 1963 the business was taken over by J Alsford Ltd. Through their links with Canada in the timber trade they acquired the handsome totem pole, which was erected at Alsford's wharf in 1970 and still stands, rather incongruously, beside the block of flats which now occupies the site.
- Turn left and follow the towpath away from the Crystal Palace pub and shortly you will see, on the opposite bank, an unusual house that adjoined the 'Bridgewater Boats' boatyard, demolished in February 2011. The wharf at the canal's edge is all that now remains as a reminder of all the busy industrial activity that used to take place beside this stretch of the canal. It is understood that the boathouse is to be rebuilt as part of a redevelopment project for the site. Perhaps, like its predecessor, it will once again display a sign proudly

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identifying it as the Port of Berkhamsted.

- As you approach Ravens Lane bridge, you will notice the lock-keeper's cottage (lock 54) on the opposite bank, which is now a listed building. The west side of the bridge still bears the old name, Grand Junction Canal.
- Look out for the information panel (one of eight along the Berkhamsted stretch of the canal) sited beside the lock. These were placed by the Canal and Riverside Partnership (CARP). The partnership is formed between The Town and Borough Councils, British Waterways and a number of environmental and community stake holders, to promote interest in the canal's heritage and encourage people to make greater use of its recreational possibilities.

Audio point 3: Canal [Ravens Lane Bridge No 142 to Lock No 55, beside Rising Sun pub]

- As you go down the steps and under Ravens Lane Bridge it's worth noting that commercially too, Ravens Lane and the surrounding streets once thrived thanks to the traffic on the canal. Bargees could find all the services they needed including cobblers, greengrocers, butchers, newsagents, post office and smithy, all conveniently situated about one day's travel from London.
- If you glance back, the telephone lines (just two today) over the bridge have an unexpected tale to tell. The first telephone exchange in Berkhamsted was in Chapel Street, just round the corner, and as every telephone had a wire back to the exchange, a lot went over this bridge. This was a little unfortunate as swans used to take off from the Bridgewater Boats area to get over the lock and bridge into either the Ravens Lane basin or, more likely, over the Rising Sun lock. As a result, many didn't see the wires and flew into them. The cunning solution by the General Post Office was to put corks on the wires so they could be seen and this resulted in far fewer accidents.
- You have now reached the Raven's Lane Basin. This area was used for waiting until a boat came in the opposite direction. The boats rarely emptied a lock to enter it. They generally saved water (their livelihood) by using the locks only to raise or lower the boats. Remember, this was a busy highway, so waiting time was not for long.
- The next lock (No 55) is by the Rising Sun pub and just beyond the lock you will see where the River Bulbourne rejoins the canal. It actually runs in and out of the canal during its travels through the town.
- Pause a moment to browse the information on another CARP plaque, beside lock 55.

Audio point 4: Canal [Lock No 55 to Bullbeggars Lane Bridge No 144]

- Across from the lock, on the opposite side, you will see a substantial modern housing development, which runs all the way from London Road to the canal-side. This was formerly the main manufacturing site of Cooper, McDougall & Robertson Ltd, sheep dip manufacturers originally founded by William Cooper in 1843. Familiarly known to locals as "Cooper's", the name lingered on even when control

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of the company passed to the Wellcome Foundation Ltd and from them, ultimately, to AgrEvo. The site finally closed on 31 July 1997.

- Continuing the walk and still focusing on the opposite bank, the River Bulbourne branches off to make another detour, this time to Lower Mill, which was one of two mills powered by the river. (The other, Upper Mill, long gone, was located in Mill Street, just beyond Castle Street.) The overshot wheel still exists, but it is located behind the Old Mill (Pub), the roof of which can be seen in the distance between the car park and Old Mill Cottage. Two mills earned a mention in the Domesday Book entry for Berkhamsted. The river then passes alongside Bank Mill Lane, which is just beyond Old Mill Cottage.
- You have to use the next bridge (No143) to cross over the canal as the path changes sides. This was to give the towing horses the opportunity of a rest and to prevent over-strain on one side. Take care as you rejoin the towpath as the steps are uneven both in width and height.
- *Now you have an opportunity to shorten the trail, turning it into an optional 4 mile walk, by leaving the canal just before the next bridge (Bullbeggars Lane Bridge No144). For walkers choosing the complete 6 mile trail, your commentary continues at **Audio point 6: Canal [Bullbeggars Lane Bridge No 144 to Sharpes Lane Bridge No 146]***
- The Oxford English Dictionary defines a bullbeggar, rather prosaically, as a scarecrow or bogey, but Chambers Dictionary prefers the more poetical 'hobgoblin'. Whatever, do not be alarmed, there have been no recent sightings reported.
- ***For those taking the shorter 4-mile option take the narrow path to bring you out into Bullbeggars Lane. Turn right and keep the small parking area on your right as you go over the River Bulbourne at Bank Mill Lane Bridge. [Audio point 5: River Bulbourne] Continue up the slight slope to the junction with the A4251. Turn left and after 75 yards cross the A4251, by way of the traffic island, to join Garden Field Lane. Your commentary continues at **Audio point 8: Garden Field Lane*****

Audio point 5: River Bulbourne

- The River Bulbourne is a chalk stream that rises in the Chilterns' Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty at Cow Roast and flows through the centre of Berkhamsted. It runs beside the Grand Union Canal for seven miles to its confluence with the River Gade at Two Waters.
- The river used to support a vibrant watercress industry and remnant watercress beds still remain. If you choose the longer version of the walk (the Sugar Lane Loop) you will catch a glimpse of these shortly, located south of the canal beyond the river.
- Chalk streams are a globally rare habitat. With their clear waters and generally

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stable conditions, they are able to support many plants and animals, including rare species like the water vole.

- Chalk streams are fed from 'groundwater'. This is stored in the 'aquifer' - layers of chalk which soak up water like a sponge. At various points the water emerges as springs which feed the streams.
- The town takes its water from the aquifer too; Berkhamsted residents can do their bit to help protect the River Bulbourne and its wildlife by using water wisely in their homes.
- A river restoration project has been implemented on the River Bulbourne at Berkhamsted. Groundwater abstraction has now ceased. This will mean higher levels of groundwater in the chalk under the river and therefore more water escaping into the river. This is good for wildlife, increasing the chalk stream habitat many species rely on.

Audio point 6: Canal [Bullbeggars Lane Bridge No 144 to Sharpes Lane Bridge No 146]

- The canal now leaves the town behind and takes on a more rural character, although the peace and quiet is punctuated from time to time by the rush of passing trains on the West Coast mainline. The canal's travelling companion along the Bulbourne valley runs in particularly close proximity in this section of the walk. Fortunately the local wildlife is not deterred and if you are lucky you might spot a heron or even a kingfisher.
- As you approach the next bridge (Little Heath Lane Bridge No 145) look out on the right for an overflow that takes water from the canal into the River Bulbourne. You are likely to hear the rushing water before you see it. Although the view is slightly obscured by the hedgerow along the edge of the canal, you will be able to make out, beyond the River Bulbourne, an area of water that was formerly at the eastern extremity of a line of watercress beds, extending back as far as Bullbeggars Lane Bridge, fed by the River Bulbourne. These were one of the centres for the commercial growing of watercress that enjoyed its heyday in the 19th century.
- Percy Birtchnell records that large scale operations started in Victorian times and by 1883 the beds at Bourne End were producing two tons of watercress daily, with similar quantities from other sites elsewhere in Berkhamsted and in Chesham. The watercress travelled by rail to London, where it found a ready market. F. G Sharp and Son were growing cress at Sharpes Lane (a misspelling by the original sign writer) for many years. There was even a tramway laid down to aid harvesting and packing.
- The former watercress beds are now a haven for wildlife. The deeper pools support rich marginal aquatic vegetation such as abundant Water Starwort, while the shallower areas have fast flowing water over a gravelly bottom. This range of features helps to support aquatic invertebrates and a good variety of birds.
- The pools are surrounded by semi-natural marshy grassland which in places is

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species rich. Scrub around the margins of the site includes Willow scrub with some mature Willow and Ash trees (often as old pollards) lining the original watercourse. There are some planted trees with the occasional Alder along the river and canal edge. Many of the cress beds have been deepened and merged for use as a trout fishery lake. In 1992 a planning application for a trout farm on John Sharp's cress beds was granted, but this ceased as a viable business some years ago. It then became a private fishery.

- The next reach of the canal is truly peaceful, as the railway is now routed further to the north and you can enjoy views of open paddock across the canal to your left. Leave the canal at the next bridge (Sharpes Lane Bridge No 146), turn right and follow Sharpes Lane southwards to its junction with the A4251, taking care as there is no footpath. About half way along the lane you cross the River Bulbourne. [**Audio point 5: River Bulbourne**]. At the A4251 turn right and follow the footpath for about 200 yards, where you cross the road to Sugar Lane. Take special care when crossing and use the traffic island. Your view of approaching traffic is restricted by bends in the road in both directions.

Audio point 7: Sugar Lane

- Sugar Lane (take the left hand fork) begins with a steady climb up a metalled road, but do not let that put you off because the flanking houses soon give way to hedgerows and the road itself changes its character completely, as tarmac gives way to softer walking underfoot. Look out for the signpost Public Highway Long Green 1, and pause to enjoy the view across the Bulbourne valley northwards towards open rolling countryside.
- The name Sugar Lane has nothing whatsoever to do with sugar. Rather surprisingly, it turns out to have much more in common with the name of another local road that also runs in a westerly direction along Berkhamsted's southern edge - Shootersway. This is the western continuation, in the direction of Tring, of the line of the modern Kingshill Way.
- In the 18th century, Shootersway was known as Sugarsway and Sugar Lane and Shootersway were once one and the same continuous road, starting from Bourne End (where you crossed the A4251), and continuing, along the line of the walk, via Long Green, Sandpit Green and Brickhill Green.
- The big advantage of Berkhamsted's first southern bypass (pre-dating the A41 by several centuries) was that this drovers' way provided a reliable all-weather east-west route that avoided the risk of being stranded in the valley bottom when the River Bulbourne flooded. At one time this was, apparently, a regular winter occurrence. The downside (fortunately not shared by its 20th century successor) was that its loneliness and remoteness from the town led to its becoming frequented by robbers. Perhaps the earlier names - Shokersweye (1357) and Shokerswaye (early 1600s) - made this connection.
- Look out for a section of the hedgerow to your left which includes an old row of hazel coppice. In this area these would probably have been harvested to make hurdles for penning sheep or cattle.
- From time to time, as the path gently climbs up the ridge, gaps open up in the hedgerow affording wonderful views of open countryside both to the north and

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the south.

- As the path begins to level out towards the top of the ridge you can catch a glimpse through the hedgerow to your right of the Broadway Farm orchards.
- The orchards were once part of Lane's nurseries, a business founded in 1777 by Henry Lane. Percy Birtchnell records that in the 19th century Lane was among the town's largest employers. Not only were the nurseries known throughout the UK they even exported grapevines to France, Germany and other wine-growing countries.
- **[For those following the 6-mile circuit, your commentary continues at *Audio point 9: Long Green.*]**

Audio point 8: Garden Field Lane

- At the start of Garden Field Lane look out for a signpost Public Highway, Long Green ½. You approach Long Green by way of a steady climb along the lane which begins as a tarmac single track road and then peters out into an unpaved path.
- The lane marks the eastern edge of Berkhamsted's residential development, with open fields glimpsed through the ancient hedgerow to your left.
- Mid-20th century demand for housing prompted development right up to this boundary. The houses to your right, at the beginning of the lane date from the 1950s and the ones further up and on the other side of the hedgerow are part of the 1960s development of the top section of the Hall Park Estate. A path to the right, just before the large field, marks the extremity of Berkhamsted's development southwards, in the immediate area.
- The path now runs between fields and as you climb higher, you will see across the River Bulbourne valley behind you a fine vista towards Potten End, Bourne End and the northern side of Hemel Hempstead, including Buncefield (the site of the huge explosion in 2006), and the Bedmond TV mast at the top of Rucklers Lane.
- To your right, across the field, you will have your first view of the boiler block chimney and chapel clock tower of Ashlyns School and, slightly to the left of that, Ashlyns Hall.

Audio point 9: Long Green

- At the top of the ridge Sugar Lane enters the narrow strip of woodland known as Long Green. Look out on your right for a cast iron Foundling Hospital estate boundary post. This has a lamb on it, the symbol of the Foundling Hospital.
- Long Green is a mixed broadleaved woodland, dominated by Oak, Wild Cherry and Sycamore, together with some secondary woodland. The woodland understorey includes saplings of these, together with Hazel, Holly and Hawthorn.
- Along with the more familiar Bluebell, Bracken and Gorse, wild flower enthusiasts may be lucky enough to spot Dog's Mercury, Wood Melick and Oxlip.

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- **[For those following the 4-mile circuit:** At the end of Garden Field Lane you have a choice of routes through Long Green.
- The path straight ahead could be the better option in wet weather. It leads towards footpath BK51 (Sugar Lane - public highway). After about 100 yards, the path forks. Take the left hand one to join Sugar Lane. Turn left again and after about 20 yards on your left you can see a cast iron Foundling Hospital estate boundary post. Now retrace your steps, keeping to Sugar Lane in a westerly direction towards Swing Gate Lane.
- The more peaceful option, at least initially, is to take the path to the right at the field end, following the edge of the field (BK50). This puts off taking you closer to the A41 for a bit longer, until it leads into the Sugar Lane path, eventually bordering the A41, where the blast of traffic noise is not for the faint hearted.]
- As you reach the end of Sugar Lane, at its junction with Swing Gate Lane, there is a small planted area. The planting was done in 2002 by children attending the Thomas Coram School in memory of Dr. Ken Harbord. Ken was, in his retirement, woodland warden for several areas of woodland in this area and he is commemorated on a small wooden plaque.

Audio point 10: Swing Gate Lane to Chesham Road via Sandpit Green

- As you leave Long Green bear right to join Swing Gate Lane.
- **Anyone wishing to shorten the walk at this point,** turn right and follow Swing Gate Lane, downhill all the way, to its junction with London Road (A4251). Turn left and follow London Road to St Peter's Church, where you rejoin the main route of the trail at ***Audio point 15: St Peter's Church.***
- The trail itself continues by way of a left turn, towards the bridge over the by-pass (A41). Keep your eyes open for badgers, muntjac, foxes and rabbits. Wildlife tracks have been recorded in this area and are available to be viewed on the dacorum.gov.uk website.
- Cross the bridge and just beyond, to your left, pause at the metal field gate to take in the view of the valley which lies immediately to the south. This is the Bourne Gutter, which earns the following Audio point to itself ***[Audio point 11: Bourne Gutter]***
- Turning to your right, look out for some metal barriers. These mark the entrance to footpath BK40, which you follow all the way to Chesham Road. The signpost reads Public Bridleway Chesham Road $\frac{3}{4}$ via Underpass.
- The bridleway takes you through another narrow strip of woodland known as Sandpit Green. This is secondary semi-natural broadleaf woodland, covered with mainly Oak with Ash and Sycamore. There is an understorey of Elder and Holly together with Elm regeneration. Cherry, Beech and Hawthorn are also present.
- Towards the end of the path, look out for the entrance to the pedestrian tunnel under the by-pass (A41) to your right. Go through the tunnel. Take the tarmac road going left up the slope to join the top of Chesham Road with Ashlyns Farm on

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your right. Cross over the road by way of the traffic island to the corner of the Berkhamsted School playing fields and continue in the same direction along Kingshill Way. To your left on the opposite side of the road is a small woodland area known as Brickhill Green [*Audio point 12: Brickhill Green*].

Audio point 11: Bourne Gutter

- On the far side of the ridge, to the south, lies a valley known as the Bourne Gutter, unexpectedly rich in literary associations. In a memoir recalling his youth in the Chilterns, nature writer Richard Mabey refers to “a valley with a woe-water, supposed only to flow in time of trouble”.
- When the stream is flowing it is a tributary of the River Bulbourne. It rises from a spring on Spring Meadow Farm, just over the border in Buckinghamshire and flows down the valley, under the A41 and into the village of Bourne End where it joins the River Bulbourne.
- We know that it flows only during a lengthy period of very wet weather - over 32 inches in 12 months. The Bourne Gutter is, therefore, usually dry and perhaps that is all to the good.
- So, what times of trouble have earned it the designation of woe-water? It is said that when it flows it foretells specifically war and expensive bread. Excessively wet weather would be bad for crops so the expensive bread bit may well be true. But war? Graham Greene, no less, evidently gave some credence to the story: “There was one dried stream-bed, half hidden in the bushes, called the Woe Water because the stream only ran before a war. It ran before the Boer War and in July 1914. I visited it during the crisis of Munich and it was dry, but I failed to return in September 1939.”
- Records for the 19th Century show it flowing on nine occasions. More recently it flowed in November 2000 and in May 2001 and ran for 3 miles. This was prior to, and during the Foot and Mouth epidemic in which much of the countryside had to be closed. That spelled trouble, by any measure!
- As you stand at the metal field gate mentioned at Audio Point 10, look half right towards the middle distance, letting your eye follow the line of the Bourne Gutter. Just to the left of a pylon, you will see a tree, with an unusually broad trunk, standing on its own in the middle of a field. That is one tree that particularly impressed Richard Mabey. “The highly distinctive appearance of Black Poplars meant that they were also employed as landmark trees. One ancient, weatherbeaten tree (c.200 years old), in the Bourne Gutter near Berkhamsted, marks the intersection of parish, manor and county boundaries.”

Audio point 12: Brickhill Green

- The route of the trail does not pass through Brickhill Green, but, if you have the time, this little patch of ancient woodland is well worth a detour. The mixed secondary woodland features many ancient woodland indicators and a woodland pond.
- The woodland is composed mainly of Oak, Beech, Birch, Ash and Sycamore with

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an understorey of Holly, Elder, Blackthorn and Hawthorn.

- The western section of the wood is dominated by Bracken with Bluebells in the ground flora.
- The pond and numerous dell holes suggest that minerals have been dug in the past, possibly clay for brick making. An earlier version of the name is, indeed, Brick Kiln Green.
- Sadly, part of the woodland structure was lost for ever when it was cut back to accommodate the new junction of the A41 bypass.

Audio point 13: Chesham Road to Berkhamsted Town Centre via Playing Fields & Butts Meadow

- At the corner of Chesham Road and Kingshill Way, looking northwards down Chesham Road, immediately to your right is the entrance to Ashlyns Farm and beyond that, the imposing main entrance to Ashlyns School.
- With the sports ground to your right and Brickhill Green to your left, walk along Kingshill Way until you come to a gate in the fence to your right with a signpost Town Centre $\frac{3}{4}$. Pass through the gate and the footpath roughly follows the line of trees (perhaps an ancient field boundary line) straight across the playing fields.
- Look out for numbers on the trees as you cross. These are their ID tags. The numbering is understood to be part of a national database to record the location of notable trees throughout Britain and Ireland. The database is maintained by The Tree Register, a registered charity (<http://www.treeregister.org>). You will see later that most of the trees around Butts Meadow also have ID tags.
- Just before you leave the playing fields there is a good view of the Ashlyns School entrance and chapel to your right, through the line of trees bordering Chesham Road, [**Audio point 14: Ashlyns School**]
- At the end of the playing fields pass through the gate, along the fenced-in footpath and down the steps into Tompkins Meadow, where a panoramic view opens up of the town in its valley setting. Tompkins was a prominent butcher in 19th century Berkhamsted and this is where he grazed his delivery horses.
- To your left now is the complex of buildings forming Berkhamsted School Kings Campus.
- As you continue downhill, Tompkins Meadow opens out into Butts Meadow. The Butts in the name Butts Meadow refers to a place where targets were set up for archery practice. It is said that archers based at Berkhamsted castle once honed their long bow skills here. Shooting nowadays is confined to the football pitch.
- At the bottom (north side) of Butts Meadow your route takes the path to the left of Victoria School (now properly Victoria First School and Nursery) and continues in the same direction along Prince Edward Street to its junction with High Street.

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- The oldest part of the Victoria School buildings that you see today was opened in 1897. But the school has a much longer history. It was founded as the National School in 1838, and its first home was the Court House, the 16th century building you will pass later beside St Peter's Church.
- In 1875 the children from the Bourne Charity School, founded in 1737 by Thomas Bourne for twenty boys and ten girls, vacated their school (now the Britannia Building Society), and joined the children in the Court House.
- The link with the Bourne Charity continues to this day. The charity now provides grants to children who have attended Victoria School (or Potten End School) for help in further education.
- Cross the the High Street and turn right to St Peter's Church.

Audio point 14: Ashlyns School

- Ashlyns School occupies Grade II listed buildings in the Georgian style which were erected in 1935 for the Foundling Hospital.
- The Foundling Hospital was founded in 1740, by a sea captain, Thomas Coram, and from its beginnings was renowned for its chapel services. During the 18th century Handel was a frequent visitor and benefactor, and Londoners heard his "Messiah" at the Foundling Hospital after its first performance in Dublin.
- It therefore comes as no surprise that the 1935 chapel occupies such a prominent position at the centre of the school premises in Berkhamsted.
- Hertfordshire County Council bought the buildings together with an estate of 40 acres (remember the estate boundary post noted as far away as Long Green) from the Foundling Hospital in the mid-fifties and Ashlyns School has occupied the site since then.

Audio point 15: St Peter's Church

- St Peter's was originally built at the beginning of the 13th century, possibly on the site of an even earlier church, but was restored in 1820 and again in 1870 which is when most of the external stonework dates from.
- Today, it is the oldest surviving building in Berkhamsted and, architecturally, the most important. It is in the Early English style, with clustered columns typical of the period. The church has a cruciform framework with a crossing tower. Original 13th Century windows survive in the old chancel and north aisle but most of the windows are of 14th century date.
- The tower has a ring of eight bells re-cast in the Whitechapel Foundry at various dates between 1838 and 1946. The Church clock by Thwaites & Read of Clerkenwell dates from 1838. The principal organ is by Peter Collins and was introduced during the reordering of the church in the 1980s. The church also houses a small Bryceson pipe organ and has recently acquired a Kawai 7' concert

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grand piano. There is seating for around 450 in the congregation.

- Throughout the church there is a good selection of Victorian stained glass and brasses from as early as the 14th century. There is also a medieval coffin top tomb (c.1200) with floriated cross in St Catherine's Chapel near the south door. The font by the west door is made of marble and was introduced in to the church in 1870 whilst the pulpit's carved angels date from 1910.
- The Lady Chapel on the north side of the church is a lovely vaulted space and was probably part of the original 13th century building.
- The churchyard, closed in the nineteenth century, is an attractive area of lawn, on the north side of the church, with several mature trees (Cedar, Common Lime, Silver Lime) and bounded on the north side by the original Berkhamsted School building of 1541-4. A Yew tree, probably about 350 years old, stands within the churchyard by the junction of the High Street with Castle Street.

Audio point 16: Castle Street

- Over the centuries Castle Street was one of the most important streets of Berkhamsted, leading directly from the town centre to the main entrance of the castle.
- After the coming of the railway the viaduct blocked off access to the castle, but 19th century Castle Street retained its importance as it now linked the town centre to Berkhamsted's first railway station, sited directly opposite the end of the road.
- In its heyday Castle Street was a busy shopping street - you will see along the right hand side some of the few shops still remaining. Graham Greene recalls, "The School House stood in the street called Castle Street which ran down to the canal. On the opposite side were rather inferior shops, not up to the High Street standard..." He lists a sweet-shop, a jeweller's, a stationer's and a pawnbroker's, "where I once tried to pawn a broken cricket-bat, but the broker wouldn't accept it."
- Several former shops have been turned into private houses, as have two former pubs - The Carpenter's Arms and The Boote.
- As a commercial hub Castle Street dates its gentle decline from the end of the 19th century when Lower Kings Road was built connecting the town's developing west end to the new, enlarged, railway station, re-sited, together with its goods yard, to its present location.
- Castle Street is dominated by the buildings of Berkhamsted School Castle Campus, which take up the left hand side almost completely and also occupy premises on part of the right hand side.
- The school was founded in 1541 by Dean Incent, whose house with its handsome sign is still to be seen in the High Street.

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- The School's oldest building - Old Hall - which dates from 1544, is in Tudor brick and faces the churchyard.
- The entrance to the school courtyard is particularly striking, “the ludicrously romantic lychgate to my old school”, as Richard Mabey described it.
- At the canal end of the street, on your left, the former Castle Hotel has been extended and converted into flats. Most of the original hotel frontage, with its delicate iron work balcony, facing the canal, has been carefully retained.
- At the end of Castle Street cross the bridge over the canal and the railway station is in view to your left. The original Victorian frontage has been preserved and spruced up. The single story extension to the left, the former parcels office, is now a fish & chip restaurant and the handsome red brick building that stands adjacent is the former Station Master's house, now offices.