Caversham Heritage Map

A guide to historic sites in and around Caversham

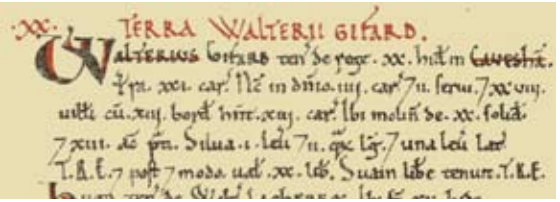


Detail from *View of Caversham through the Abbey gateway*, 1791. On the left is St Peter's Church, the old bridge and a group of houses and boat builders' workshops. Lower Caversham, which was known as East Thorpe, is over to the right.

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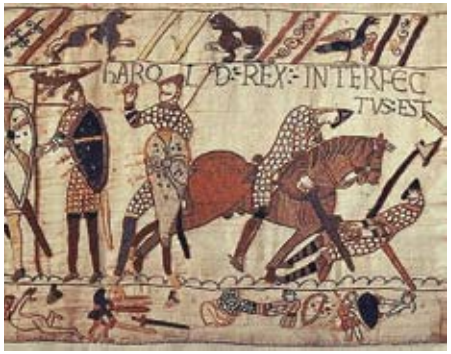
The early history of Caversham

Archaeological finds show human activity in Caversham from Palaeolithic through to Roman times. Gravel excavations at Dean's Farm uncovered what may have been an early Christian baptismal font.


TERRA WALTERII GIFARD.

1 'Cavesha' as it appears in the Domesday Book

According to the Domesday Book, Caversham was held by the older brother of King Harold II, Swein, who died in 1052. The Saxon Manor valued at £20 was based in the region of Dean's Farm. After 1066 William granted Caversham and other lands to his kinsman Walter Giffard.



2 The Bayeux Tapestry. Some historians claim the knight on horseback is Walter Giffard, cutting off King Harold's thigh

In the following century Caversham passed to William the Marshal, who was made Regent of England for the young King Henry III. The first evidence of a bridge at Caversham comes soon after William's death. Around the same time Caversham Park was laid out and fenced as a hunting park, including the land now occupied by the BBC site and Caversham Park Village.

Wartime conflicts continued when the Manor passed to the Earl of Warwick – 'the King Maker' – who was killed in the Wars of the Roses. He was to be the last Lord of the Manor to reside at the house by the river.



3 Caversham Bridge before it was rebuilt in 1869

Caversham Bridge was a crucial link between London and the hinterland and, consequently, the site of many conflicts. During the Civil War it lay between the Royalist forces in Oxford and the Parliamentary forces in London. Responsibility for the bridge was split between Reading and Oxfordshire. Built in different sections and only wide enough for one wagon, the ancient bridge was often in need of repairs.

In around 1600 the old Manor House was pulled down and a grand new house built at Caversham Park. The area around the bridge grew in importance as a base for barge traffic, while Lower Caversham, or East Thorpe, was largely devoted to agriculture.

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Growth from 1850

The coming of the railways brought rapid economic growth to Reading and to the Oxfordshire village of Caversham. As employment opportunities grew, housing was built close to the village centre for workers and on the heights for the more affluent. Along with the housing came traders, schools, churches and a new cemetery. The boatyards on the Thames switched from building working boats to leisure craft as boating and swimming became more popular. Caversham's riverside became a tourist attraction, spawning hotels and services.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Thames-side Caversham was a thriving commercial centre of 105 shops, with its own library and police station, and a population of over 9000. Traditional crafts continued to thrive, but transport was still mainly horse-drawn.

Caversham, a separate Urban District Council, needed the better utilities and services that Reading could provide, as well as a replacement for the iron bridge – too narrow even when it was built in 1869. Reading, in turn, needed building land for expansion. In 1911, the Reading Extension Order was enacted and Caversham became part of Reading.



4 The iron bridge which opened in 1869, *c.* 1900

Reading Bridge was built in 1923 and a new Caversham Bridge opened in 1926, opening the way for even more rapid growth in the twentieth century. Engineering and light industry, sited mainly between Gosbrook Road and the river, gained in importance, reaching their height during World War II.



5 Prospect Street around 1900

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1 Caversham Library

Built in 1907, Caversham Library was one of over 300 public libraries in the UK funded by the Carnegie Trust. The site, which had been the playground of Caversham House Academy, was donated by a local benefactor. Designed in 'Free Renaissance Style' there is a quirky mix of different elements. The tower is topped by the swan weather vane and underneath the clock is the winged figure of Old Father Time. To mark the centenary in 2007, the clock face was illuminated once more.



2 The Prince of Wales public house

Extended to its present form in 1889, the Prince of Wales stands at the junction called Little End, the terminus for the horse bus to Reading. Below it were two thatched cottages which burned down in 1907. One housed a village school.

3 Balmore Walk



Before 1834, the road from Little End to Emmer Green was a track across unenclosed arable land known as Balmers Fields. In 1643, Royalist troops retreated here suffering heavy losses, leading to the local saying that 'Balmers Fields ran red with blood.' Balmore House was built in the 1850s, set in 25 acres of pasture and ornamental grounds. The owner, General Radcliffe, hosted the village celebrations for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887.



4 Hemdean House School

Frances Knighton was the Principal of Caversham House Academy for boys in Church Street. He started a girls' school to be run by his daughters. Its success led to a new building which was completed in 1862. Local people nicknamed it 'Emdean Bottoms' after the name of the lane. Caversham House Academy continued until the First World War. The elegant Georgian house fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1966 to make way for St Martin's precinct.



5 The Holy Well of St Anne

Dating back to medieval times, the mineral spring waters, with their reputation for healing, drew many pilgrims. The well was then lost until workmen uncovered it in 1906. In 1908, a memorial drinking fountain and a cover were built and officially dedicated. This holy well and the medieval 'little Chapel on the Bridge' were both dedicated to St Anne, patron saint of women in childbirth.

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6 St Peter's Church and Caversham Court

The oldest surviving building in Caversham, St Peter's Church, dates from 1162 or earlier. A house was built on the adjacent site for the Canon but later leased to laymen who were responsible for providing a priest. The area was damaged in the Civil War. In the nineteenth century, the church was enlarged and the house remodelled into a gothic mansion. It was demolished in the 1930s and the gardens opened as a public park.



7 The Caversham Court gazebo

The seventeenth-century gazebo served as a fashionable summer house with views along the river. After the demolition of the main house it fell into disrepair, and local campaigners fought to save the last example of its kind on the River Thames. In 2008–9 it was fully restored, along with the many other historic structures in the gardens.



8 Buckside

Buckside led to the quiet backwater of the Thames protected by an island, later removed, and to the eel bucks. Made of willows cut from the withy beds along the Thames, these were large wicker traps on a wooden frame. The old Griffin Inn, which was rebuilt in 1906, had the rights to the eels caught. The track was an important access to the river for local trades and even thirsty elephants from the visiting circus.



9 Caversham Bridge

The twelfth-century bridge housed the little Chapel of St Anne, a stopping point for pilgrims until the Dissolution of the Monasteries. With the building of the iron bridge in 1869, Ferryman Piper's cottage on the island had to be moved to the east by hydraulic and screw jacks. The iron bridge was soon inadequate for the growing demands and, under the terms of the Reading Extension Order in 1911, a new bridge was planned. Construction was delayed by the First World War, and the existing bridge was opened by the Prince of Wales in 1926.



10 Church Street cottages

In the early 1900s this group of houses, mainly from the seventeenth century and originally thatched, housed a grocer's shop with two horse-drawn delivery vans and, next door, a photographer's studio. Earlier, there was a smithy and wheelwright behind and a harness and saddle maker opposite. A wooden signpost outside gave directions to Bath and Southampton.

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Caversham Heritage Map









TO EMMER GREEN & CAVERSHAM PARK
SURLEY ROW
ROTHERFIELD WAY
OAKLEY ROAD
HEMDEAN ROAD
BALMORE DRIVE
PEPPARD ROAD
KIDMORE ROAD
ALBERT ROAD
THE MOUNT
PRIEST HILL
ST PETER'S HILL
STANNES ROAD
HENLEY ROAD
CAVERSHAM PARK VILLAGE
DONKIN HILL
LOWER HENLEY ROAD
NORTH
W
E
S
CHAZEY FARM & MAPLEDURHAM
CHURCH ROAD
CHURCH STREET
PROSPECT STREET
WESTFIELD ROAD
SOUTH VIEW AVENUE
WASHINGTON ROAD
ARDLER ROAD
ST JOHN'S ROAD
BRIANT'S AVENUE
STAR ROAD
AMERSHAM ROAD
GOSBROOK ROAD
CAVERSHAM BRIDGE
BRIDGE STREET
WOLSEY ROAD
CHRISTCHURCH MEADOWS
PLAYGROUND & TENNIS COURTS
FRY'S ISLAND
READING BRIDGE
GEORGE STREET
QUEEN'S ROAD
MILL ROAD
PADDOCK ROAD
THE CAUSEWAY
DEAN'S FARM
HILL'S MEADOW
VIEW ISLAND
KING'S MEADOW
WEIR (CLAPPERS)
CAVERSHAM LOCK
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

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11 War Memorial

Unveiled in 1928, the memorial holds 216 names from the First World War. With additions from later conflicts, there are now 367. Nearer to Caversham Bridge were the homes and workshops of two families of boat builders: Arthur Cawston was on Piper's Island and the Freebody family were based on the backwater behind the island. Both families also ran swimming lidos for mixed bathing.



12 Christchurch Meadows

The meadows take their name from their previous owners, the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church Oxford. In 1542, holdings around Caversham belonging to Notley Abbey were transferred to King Henry VIII College in Oxford which was refounded as Christ Church in 1546. Reading Corporation bought the meadow in 1902 for public recreation. Significant trees include a county champion white poplar and a rare surviving English elm.



13 Reading Bridge

Seen here from Christchurch Meadows, Reading Bridge was built to replace the Clappers footbridge and support increasing vehicle traffic. This was part of the agreement in the Reading Extension Order in 1911, when Caversham became part of Reading. Built in 1923, the bridge was the longest single span of its kind in the country and was weight-tested by a procession of steam rollers, traction engines and loaded lorries.



14 Caversham Lock

The first pound lock, built in its present position in 1774, was replaced in 1875 and the weir built in 1884. Although steam barges gradually replaced horse-drawn barges, goods traffic declined in the nineteenth century, while leisure trips became ever more fashionable. The Clappers footbridge nearby was a busy pedestrian crossing and the site where the notorious Mrs Dyer drowned seven babies in her care.



15 Mill cottages

These cottages are all that remain of the buildings on Mill Island which were demolished in the 1970s, when the island was renamed Heron Island. Grain for the mill was delivered by barge until 1840, and the mill was still in use in 1910 before the building came to be used by British Metal Powders and later as a cork factory. An earlier mill, possibly on the same site, is recorded in the Domesday Book.



16 Dean's Farm

Fragments of an early Christian font from 360 AD were uncovered here in 1980 near the Saxon settlement which then made way for the early manor house. The most prominent owner was William the Marshal, Earl of Pembroke and Regent of England during the minority of Henry III. The present buildings date from the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The farm formed part of the Caversham Park estate until 1920.



17 West View Terrace, Star Road

Briant's Farm, a homestead of 50 acres between what is now South View Avenue and Gosbrook Road, was bought for development in 1890 by the People's Investment Company. Joseph Morris, a local architect and founder-director of the company, designed a terrace of eight houses in Star Road in 1897 using Reading grey bricks. Another example of his work in Caversham is the terrace on the east of Westfield Road.



18 Ardler Road Methodist Church

Joseph Morris designed the new Ardler Road Wesleyan Chapel with the unusual Dutch stepped gables and gothic windows and buttresses. The church opened in 1899. The ornamented tower originally had a spire which was taken down in the 1950s. The first Wesleyan Chapel there was built in 1881 of corrugated iron and replaced in 1891 by the current hall, designed as a school chapel, also by Joseph Morris.



19 St Anne's Church and the Shrine of Our Lady of Caversham

Pilgrims flocked to the Shrine of Our Lady of Caversham, dating from 1100, to see the wooden statue of the Madonna and Child, richly decorated with royal gifts. Thought to have been near Deans Farm, the shrine was pulled down in 1538 during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. In the 1950s, a medieval statue was installed in the Lady Chapel of St Anne's Church and stones from the Chapel of St Anne on the Bridge were built into the altar.



20 West Memorial Hall

Built in 1865–6 as the first Baptist Free Church, it became the British School when the existing church opened across the road in 1877. Both churches were designed in the Gothic style by the well-known architect Alfred Waterhouse, who also designed Reading Town Hall and the Natural History Museum.

Further afield

The Heritage Map includes twenty sites in the village centre but there are many other areas of interest. Running parallel to the Thames, The Warren links St Peter's Church to Chazey Court Farm, which dates from medieval times and includes a Grade I listed Tithe Barn on the English Heritage at Risk Register. From there, you can walk or cycle to Mapledurham, Hardwick and on to Whitchurch.



6 The Warren Lodge

Surley Row

Surley Row was one of the main routes out of Reading and still has houses dating from the early sixteenth century through to the late eighteenth century – many of them listed. A conservation area and no longer a through road, it gives a glimpse of Caversham before the Industrial Revolution.



7 Tudor Cottage and Grove Cottage, Surley Row

There are many natural springs nearby, including the chalybeate spring in the grounds of Springfield House. These were thought to have medicinal properties, and in 1805 you could buy a season ticket to Caversham Spa to take the waters.

Emmer Green

Adjacent to Caversham, Emmer Green has its own rich history and grew as a separate village until development from the 1930s onwards closed the gap. The Emmer Green of today is marked by its postcode and by the village sign next to the pond.



8 The Black Horse, *c.* 1910

Many of the houses were originally built for estate staff at the large houses, including Caversham Park, Rosehill House and Caversham Grove – now part of Highdown School.

As well as work on the farms or in Service, several small brick kilns provided employment. Chalk was mined to line the kilns, and there is an extensive area of chalk caves on Kiln Road which provided safe storage in war time.

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Caversham Park

The story of Caversham Park is central to the history of Caversham, though the house and grounds are not open to the public. The estate was owned in turn by five different families.

In 1542 Francis **Knollys** was granted the right to pull down the manor house by the river and build a new house on the hill. It was a lavish design to entertain and impress royalty. Francis did not live to see this, but his son entertained Queen Elizabeth I, King James I and Queen Anne of Denmark.

Lord William **Craven**, a Royalist, had the estate confiscated but returned to him in 1660 and restored by the architect William Winde, known for his work at Cliveden. The next owner, William **Cadogan**, rose to fame under the Duke of Marlborough and was made Baron Cadogan and Viscount Caversham. He created magnificent gardens to rival Blenheim Palace.

The estate was then purchased by a colourful character, Major Charles **Marsack**, who made his fortune in India and was reputedly the illegitimate son of George II. His son gambled away his inheritance.



9 A print of Caversham Park, published in 1825

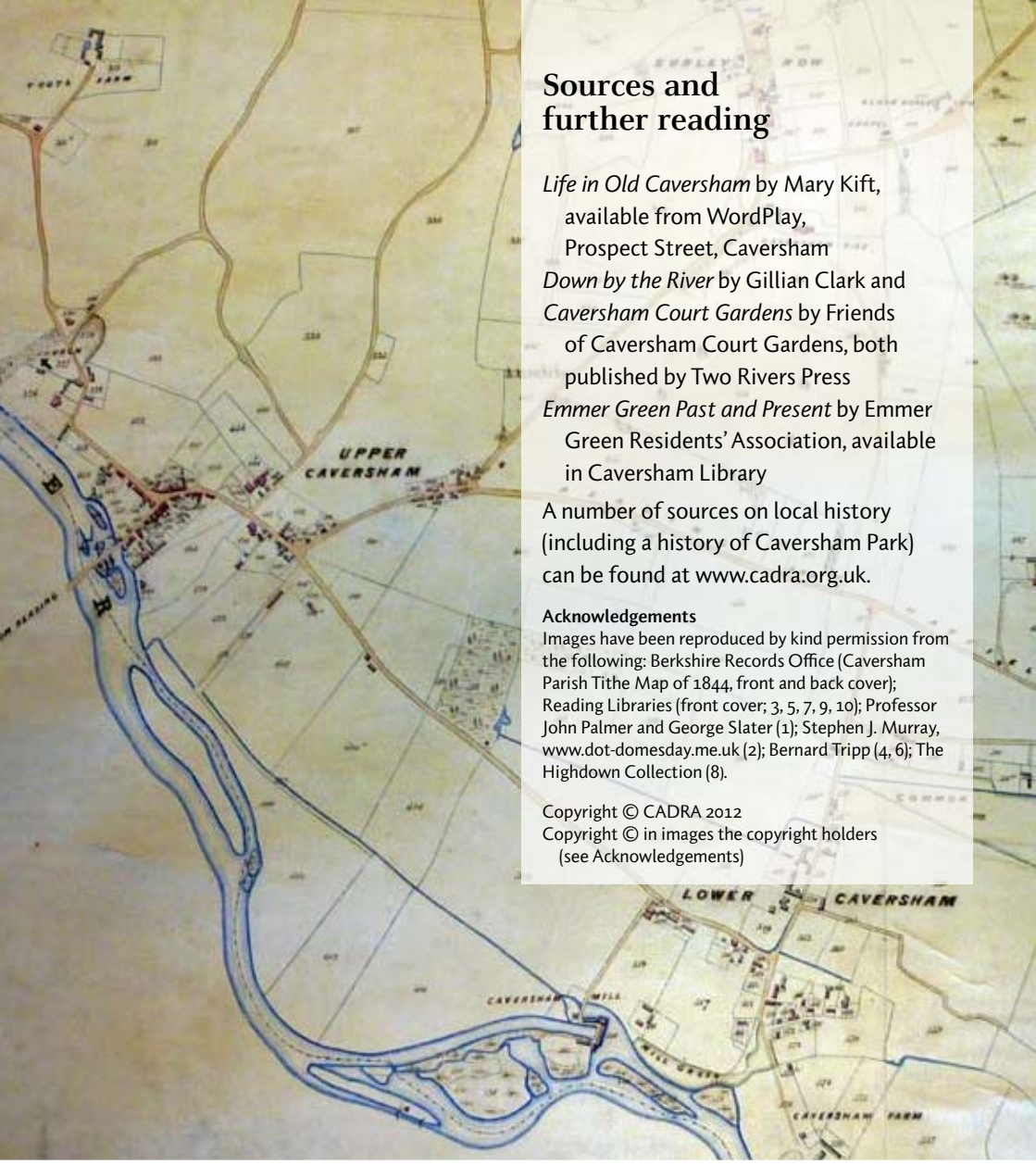
Finally, William **Crawshay**, iron magnate in Merthyr Tydfil, bought the estate, which was by then in a poor state. A fire in 1850 burned it to the ground, and he built a new mansion on an iron frame with a classical exterior but modern facilities. After the death of William's grandson in 1918 the house and park were sold and the estate split up. The Oratory School bought the house and park and remained there until 1942, when the school moved to Woodcote House.

Caversham Park is now the home of BBC Monitoring, whose service has played a major role in the BBC's reporting of international events and the development of Britain's foreign policy. In the 1960s parkland was sold to build Caversham Park Village.



10 Caversham Park from the south, *c.* 1910

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Sources and further reading

Life in Old Caversham by Mary Kift, available from WordPlay, Prospect Street, Caversham

Down by the River by Gillian Clark and *Caversham Court Gardens* by Friends of Caversham Court Gardens, both published by Two Rivers Press

Emmer Green Past and Present by Emmer Green Residents' Association, available in Caversham Library

A number of sources on local history (including a history of Caversham Park) can be found at www.cadra.org.uk.

Acknowledgements
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Caversham 100 Years On

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