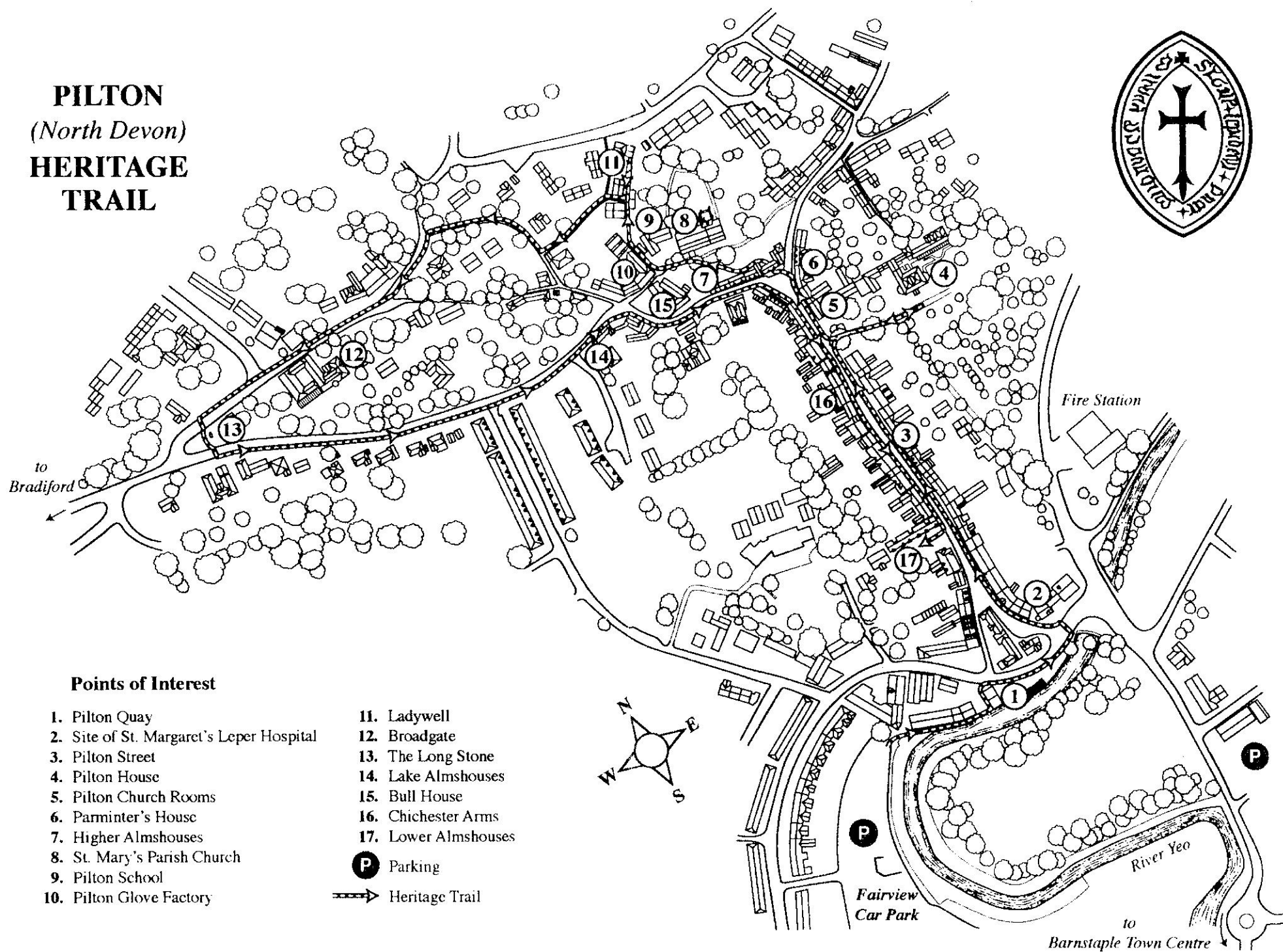
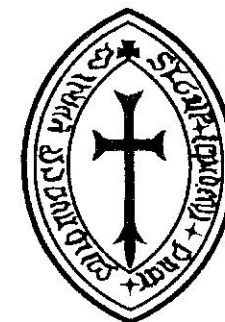


PILTON HERITAGE TRAIL



(NORTH DEVON)

PILTON (North Devon) HERITAGE TRAIL



Points of Interest

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. Pilton Quay | 11. Ladywell |
| 2. Site of St. Margaret's Leper Hospital | 12. Broadgate |
| 3. Pilton Street | 13. The Long Stone |
| 4. Pilton House | 14. Lake Almshouses |
| 5. Pilton Church Rooms | 15. Bull House |
| 6. Parminter's House | 16. Chichester Arms |
| 7. Higher Almshouses | 17. Lower Almshouses |
| 8. St. Mary's Parish Church | |
| 9. Pilton School | |
| 10. Pilton Glove Factory | |

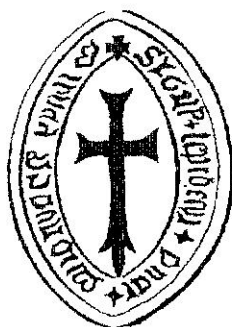
P Parking

Heritage Trail

Pilton

Heritage Trail

(North Devon)



Beautiful Pilton – the ancient suburb of Barnstaple, which has its own distinct history and still maintains a peaceful “Village” atmosphere

This booklet was produced by Terry Chaplin by means of a grant issued by the Tarka Country Millennium Awards using lottery money through the Millennium Commission, and with the kind assistance of Mrs Margaret Reed (Author of “Pilton – its Past and its People”)



Cover shows ‘Higher Almshouses, Pilton’
by Gill Jones, a local artist from Braunton

INTRODUCTION

Historic Pilton

Pilton is that "jewel" on the edge of the Ancient Borough of Barnstaple, which in turn are both set amongst the "rolling" green hills of Devon and close to the beautiful countryside of Exmoor.

Pilton has changed much over the 1000 years of known history but it still contains examples of architecture from many of the last five centuries. If you have the chance to look beyond the modern facades you will see many fine examples of the craftsmen's ancient work. Much is still very visible in the Parish Church and in buildings such as Bull House (c 1440). Many styles of houses are evident from just wandering the main street.

Maintaining the Past

Buildings, like people, have to adapt to survive, so much is being replaced and lost. However, many buildings are now listed and much of the area is designated as a conservation area. So it is hoped that the "uniqueness" can be maintained for future generations.

Following the Trail

It takes about an hour to walk the Trail at an easy pace including internal inspections where this is possible. Many buildings mentioned can be recognised by the "Heritage Trail" plaques.

During much of the day the traffic is fairly light but please be very aware of the narrow pavements and busy roads in certain places. Please take care.

A POTTED HISTORY OF PILTON

Pilton (or Pylton) name probably originated in Saxon times, where a "tun" was a stockaded farmstead and a "Pill" was a creek (or small river). So, it means "farm by the creek". The earliest evidence of occupation is a hill fort at Roborough (approx 1 mile to the North East of the Church). This is probably from the Iron Age (500 BC – 50 AD) and would have been used as a retreat by the Dumnonii (People of the Land) when attacked by invading forces. Higher land was easier to defend.

By the 9th century, Pilton had been created as one of 4 Burghs (or fortified sites maintained by local people) by King Alfred against attacks from the Danes. By 955, however, it had been supplanted by Barnstaple as the defensive capital of North Devon.

The Domesday Survey of 1086 recorded 4 "Manors" in Pilton with several hundred acres of land under cultivation or pasture.

Soon after the Norman Conquest the Benedictine Priory of St Mary, Pilton was founded as a cell of Malmesbury Abbey with the church being built (or re-built?) in 1259 and dedicated to St Mary the Virgin.

Between 1100 and 1350 farming practices expanded and the cloth-making industry became an important source of income.

"Prior to 1199" saw the creation of the Leper Hospital at the bottom of Pilton Street.

In 1344 the Fair and Market Charter was issued to Pilton by Edward III and the population grew and prospered but....

Between 1348 and 1360 the Black Death ravaged the population back to the levels of 1100. Imagine, losing half the population over a ten year period!! Hardly any family was untouched.

During the fifteenth century a number of people became rich on the wool trade (Bull House was built in 1440) and the Guild of our Blessed Lady showed that the community was well organised. Most

homes had some involvement with aspects of the trade (combing, carding, spinning, weaving, dyeing, racking etc). "Common" people would be living in cob-walled homes with straw roofs whilst wealthy merchants had their stone homes complete with wooden stairs. Most homes were at right angles to the road (to face the sun) and would have had their own pigs, chickens and cow in the garden.

With the Dissolution of Pilton Priory in 1536, priory properties moved into private hands and many small tenements were destroyed.

Despite plague, Civil War and national unrest, the 17th and 18th centuries saw the wealthy merchants become even more wealthy, but many cottage industries were lost to the industrial factories. Numerous local mills (Raleigh, Playford etc) were switching between grinding corn and fulling cloth.

The 19th and 20th centuries saw the rise (and fall) of many industries including the Raleigh Cabinet Works and Pilton Glove Factory. Wool and leather continued to pay an important part in the economy. Boat building was also important from about 1766 to 1820 with production of many ships (up to 246 tons) at Pilton Quay.

These are just a few matters that have created the colourful history of Pilton. For fuller details and much more please refer to "Pilton – Its Past and its People" by Margaret A Reed.



PILTON c.1830

PILTON HERITAGE TRAIL

Start at the bottom of Pilton Street and observe the River behind you

1. **PILTON QUAY** This empty quay was for centuries a busy place, with ships from South Wales and Bristol Channel ports bringing coal, limestones, gravel, slate and other heavy goods. A shipbuilder had his yard here centuries ago, and a lime kiln processed the limestones on landing, but when Rolle Quay and Rolle Bridge were built downstream c.1830, the main river traffic was concentrated there, and Pilton Quay became a deserted backwater.

Facing up Pilton Street note the terrace of houses on the right hand side, also the Yeo Dale Hotel which contains 3 centuries of architecture.

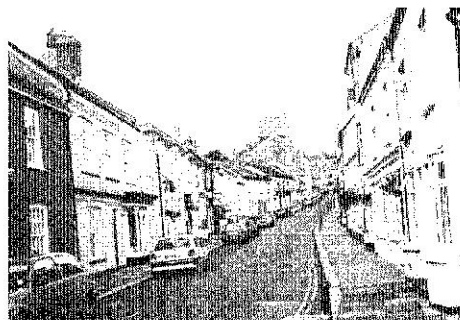
2. **ST. MARGARET'S LEPER HOSPITAL** The little turret incorporated into no: 122 St Margaret's Terrace, Pilton Street, and the tiny patch of garden there, commemorate St Margaret's Leper Hospital, which occupied this site over 800 years ago. A small



group of cottages housing the inmates clustered around a garden, and there was a chapel with a bell turret. Lepers and others with serious and unsightly skin complaints were housed there – not to be cured, but to be separated from society, and the accent was on prayer and simple care administered by a brother, sister and priest. By 1637 it was leased as a private dwelling, with the chapel being used as a coal store. In the 1880s the white brick terrace known as St Margaret's Terrace was built here by Pilton United Charities. They still administer the funds of the charity for the benefit of Pilton people, which was set up eight centuries ago.

Make your way up the right hand side of the street noting the tiny houses and terraces that lay at right angles to the road, to face South and the Sun.

3. **PILTON STREET** This stretches from the bottom of the hill to the top, and comprises a wide selection of architectural styles, mixing shops, houses and little courtyards with cottages, which have



Modern Pilton

evolved over the centuries. The frontages often belie what lies behind – especially as one nears the top of the hill. Old oak panelling, moulded plaster ceilings and ancient beams are sometimes hidden behind Georgian sash windows and stucco facades. This is a Conservation Area of which the residents are very proud.

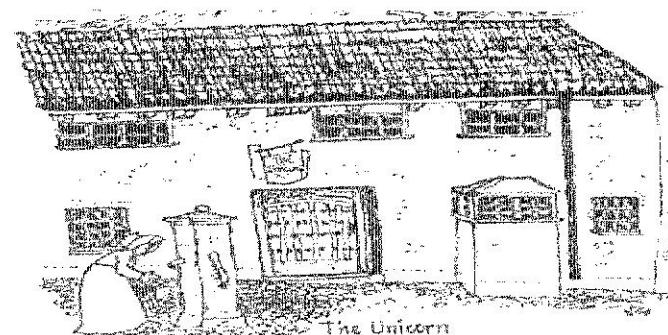
Near the top is Pilton House. Although private property, the owners have no objection to sightseers observing the fine façade from the driveway. If you have time, have a look at Rotary Gardens (in front of Pilton House).

4. **PILTON HOUSE** The present house was built almost 300 years ago, but on the site of a more ancient building, and there



were grounds of 20 acres of Georgian architecture, when symmetry and graceful proportions with an entrance lodge in Pilton Street. This represents the heyday were as important as a splendid view. Once the home of local gentry, it has for the last 60 years been a residential home for the elderly.

Next to Pilton House is an ancient building currently operated by the Church.



5. PILTON CHURCH ROOMS This building, anciently a public house known as The Unicorn, once had a village pump outside. The ridge tile on the roof in the shape of an animal may well be an attempt at a unicorn, now much worn with age, as it was the badge of the Bassett family, who owned the inn in centuries gone by. In Victorian times this was turned into a temperance reading room and coffee bar, but never really caught on, and at the beginning of the last century Pilton Church Council bought it as a hall for the community, and later added further accommodation at the rear. The central door and particularly the frame, are very old, and there is a 17th century moulded plasterwork frieze in the room to its right.

Just above the Church Rooms note the substantial stone buildings extending from number 78 to 83 and including at No 80:-

6. PARMINTER'S HOUSE This substantial house built about 500 years ago was once part of the property of Pilton Priory, and was for much of the 17th and 18th centuries the home of the Parminter family, who were wealthy merchants in the wool trade. The house was much restored some years ago revealing a wealth of ancient oak beams and panelling.

*Now cross to the Archway between the Higher Almshouses.
Be very aware of the traffic - from several directions..*

7. HIGHER ALMSHOUSES Also known as Feoffees Cottages, these Victorian almshouses, with the central arch, form a



striking group at the head of the street. They replace earlier cottages, and the cobbled path under the arch leads to the churchyard and the church.

Go through the archway and visit the ancient church of St Mary's

8. ST. MARY'S PARISH CHURCH This church, which 500 years ago combined as the Benedictine Priory Church of Pilton, was once surrounded by other priory buildings, long since demolished. The church in its original form was probably Saxon, and was rebuilt in the 13th century, and enlarged twice in the following two hundred years, and the earliest mention of the priory is in the 12th century. Although the main door is often locked on weekdays, access may be available at the chancel door. The nave is separated from the chancel by a 15th century screen, which has been partly restored to reveal some of the ancient paintings of saints on the lower panels and remnants of colour on the spandrels. The pulpit has an iron hand which once held a large hourglass for the timing of sermons – now sadly stolen. The tomb of Sir Robert Chichester who died in 1627, his two wives and three children, stands to the left of the altar in the chancel, and in the Raleigh Chapel there is a large monument to Sir John Chichester who died in 1569, and his wife Gertrude. The Chichester family were lords of the manor of Raleigh in the east of the parish from the 14th to the 17th century. Other ancient tombs and floor brasses commemorate past residents of Pilton, and detailed church guides are usually available at the crossing aisle.



Just to the west of the Church and seemingly attached to it is...

9. **PILTON SCHOOL** This church school was built in 1841 to replace an earlier one held near the almshouse arch, which became too small for its purpose. This new school in turn ceased to be used



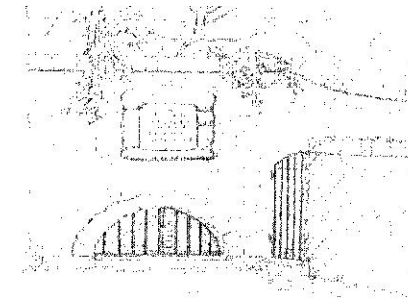
for the purpose in 1954, when a replacement was built in nearby Abbey Road. The old playground and internal features are very little changed, and the building is now used as an arts centre and architect's office.

Down the steps to the left is the site of the Pilton Glove factory

10 **PILTON GLOVE FACTORY** This site has been used for centuries in the leather tanning, wool-stapling, woollen and glove manufacturing trades, which were the bedrock of the local economy, with rack-fields nearby used to dry the skins and fleeces. In 1937 Dent Allcroft, the premier glove manufacturers in the country, bought the site and rebuilt the factory, opening another smaller one in Barnstaple. They employed a total of 700 indoor and outdoor workers, with many women machining gloves at home - a vital part of their own economy in hard times. In 1967 the factory closed, and the building is now divided into separate commercial units.

At the bottom of the steps turn right along the lane as far as you can go to Ladywell.

11. **LADYWELL** This natural spring was known as 'Our Lady's Well' centuries ago, when it was an important place of pilgrimage and noted for its healing waters. An archaeological excavation held nearby in the 1960s revealed that this well was close to the earliest dwellings yet found in Pilton, occupied over a thousand years ago.



Backtrack along the lane and follow the road to the right. Proceed to the top (next to Medelpad) and turn right along "Dark Lane". At the top turn left along the narrow road. Be aware of the traffic as there are no pavements.. Approx 100 Mtrs on the left is the site of:.....

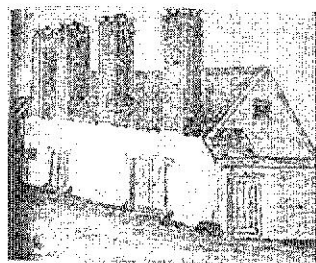
12. **BROADGATE HOUSE** The ancient 'broad gate' is all that remains of a large mansion set in extensive grounds which dates back over 500 years, and was owned by the Barnstaple Cluniac Priory of St. Mary Magdalene in pre-Reformation times. Having then passed through the hands of various wealthy merchants, it was rebuilt in Victorian times to accommodate the Hibbert family, who moved in high social circles, entertaining royalty and other notables. H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge was a guest here in 1895. After the 1914/18 war the property was sold off in lots and later split into units, leaving the old gateway as the only visible sign of its more affluent past.

Continuing past the large gateway, look to the right to Bellaire. The properties known as Fairfield and Fairmead were, from 1872, the home of the Munro family. H H Munro (or "Saki") was a well known author in the 1920s. Further along see the Menhir known as

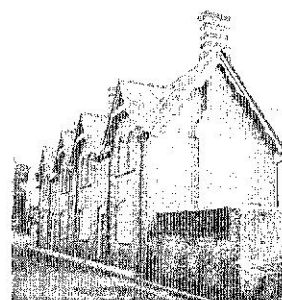
13. THE LONG STONE This eight foot standing stone of banded limestone was excavated in 1967 when it was moved slightly to the west to accommodate road improvements, but no conclusions were possible as to age or origin, although it was agreed that it was local to the site rather than brought from elsewhere. There is no doubt that it has been a feature of this part of Pilton for many centuries.

At the Longstone turn left back towards Pilton on the lower road.

14. LAKE ALMSHOUSES There have been four almshouses on this site for over 500 years, originally belonging to the pre-Reformation Guild of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Pilton for the elderly of the parish. Later known as Lake Almshouses, they were completely rebuilt in 1863 and modernised a hundred years later.



Before



After

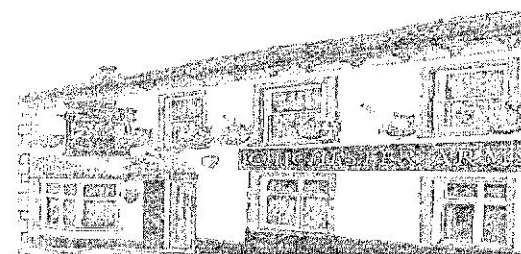
Follow the road round to the right being careful of the narrow pavements. Bull House can be seen on the left hand side just beyond the high wall.

15. BULL HOUSE This fine example of a late mediaeval house dates from 1440, with some extensions soon after 1500. It was originally the house of the Benedictine Prior of Pilton, and therefore part of the priory which was dissolved in 1535, and then became a secular home. Later it sadly fell into industrial use in the wool-stapling and gloving trades, and was split into separate units, before being gradually brought back into one ownership and restored to its original state by the present owner. This is possibly the finest mediaeval hall house in north Devon, retaining most of its original mediaeval features including garderobes, panelling, beams and open fireplaces.



Now walking back down Pilton Street, Chichester Arms is on the right hand side.

16. CHICHESTER ARMS A remnant of the days when the Chichester family were resident in Pilton, this ancient inn retains much of the atmosphere of the past, with its low ceilings and flagged floors. Little is known of its origins, but the outhouses remain at the rear, where once the landlord brewed his own beer, as was common in earlier times.



Further down the Street note the beautiful block of small homes set at right angles to the road

17. LOWER ALMSHOUSES Here is another set of almshouses for the senior citizens of Pilton. This was the site of the parish workhouse until Victorian times, when six almshouses were



built here with gardens laid out in front. Just over a hundred years later, a further block of flats were added, called St Margarets Gardens (visible at the back of the site).

On the way back to your start point just take a few moments to look at some of the other houses at the lower end of the street.

Nos 13 and 14 (before being demolished and rebuilt) had been a pub known as The Ring of Bells.

Nos 9 and 10. Although the façade was built in about 1870 the main structure (set at right angles to the road) can trace its deeds back to 1662

The Reform Inn was a Beer House from about 1830 then fully licenced from 1867.

The little triangle of houses (Nos 4 to 8) were properties belonging to the St Margarets Leper Hospital

This is the end of the tour of the village of Pilton and we hope that you have enjoyed the experience. Please drive carefully and we hope to see you again sometime.

OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST WITHIN A FEW MILES OF PILTON

South to Barnstaple:

Barnstaple is also an ancient Borough (incorporated in 1557) and as such has a considerable history of its own. The Heritage Trail compiled by the North Devon Conservation Society is well worth following – starting at the Heritage Centre on Queen Anne's Walk.

North to Raleigh:

Site of the Iron Age Fort (at Roborough) – The oldest known Settlement in the area, site of Raleigh Manor – mentioned in the Domesday Survey and also site of Raleigh Cabinet Works – which were destroyed by fire in 1888.

West to Bradiford:

Bradiford was a Domesday Manor and contains a number of large houses, such as Lion House (built 1876) and Bradiford House. It is also the site of a hamlet which dates from 1825, when 10 little homes were built. In 1851 the Census Return recorded 76 people living in those properties! Bradiford Mill has a history dating back to at least 1374.

East to Pitt Farm:

Part of the Parish of Pilton this farmstead probably dates from the 14th or 15th century. The house is a typical two-storey barton farmhouse of the 17th or 18th century with many later additions. This area also contains Raleigh Cottages and Raleigh Mills, once part of the Domesday manor of Raleigh.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following:

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Members of the Devon Record Office for other material.

Mr R W Forward for his advice and knowledge.

Tarka Country Millennium Awards whose grant has enabled this brochure to be produced.



Members of the Pilton United Charities Board, who own (and operate) many of the properties on the trail, and are custodians of much historical legacy.

Illustrations have been provided by:

Mrs Margaret A Reed

Mr Ethan Danielson (Graphic Designer)

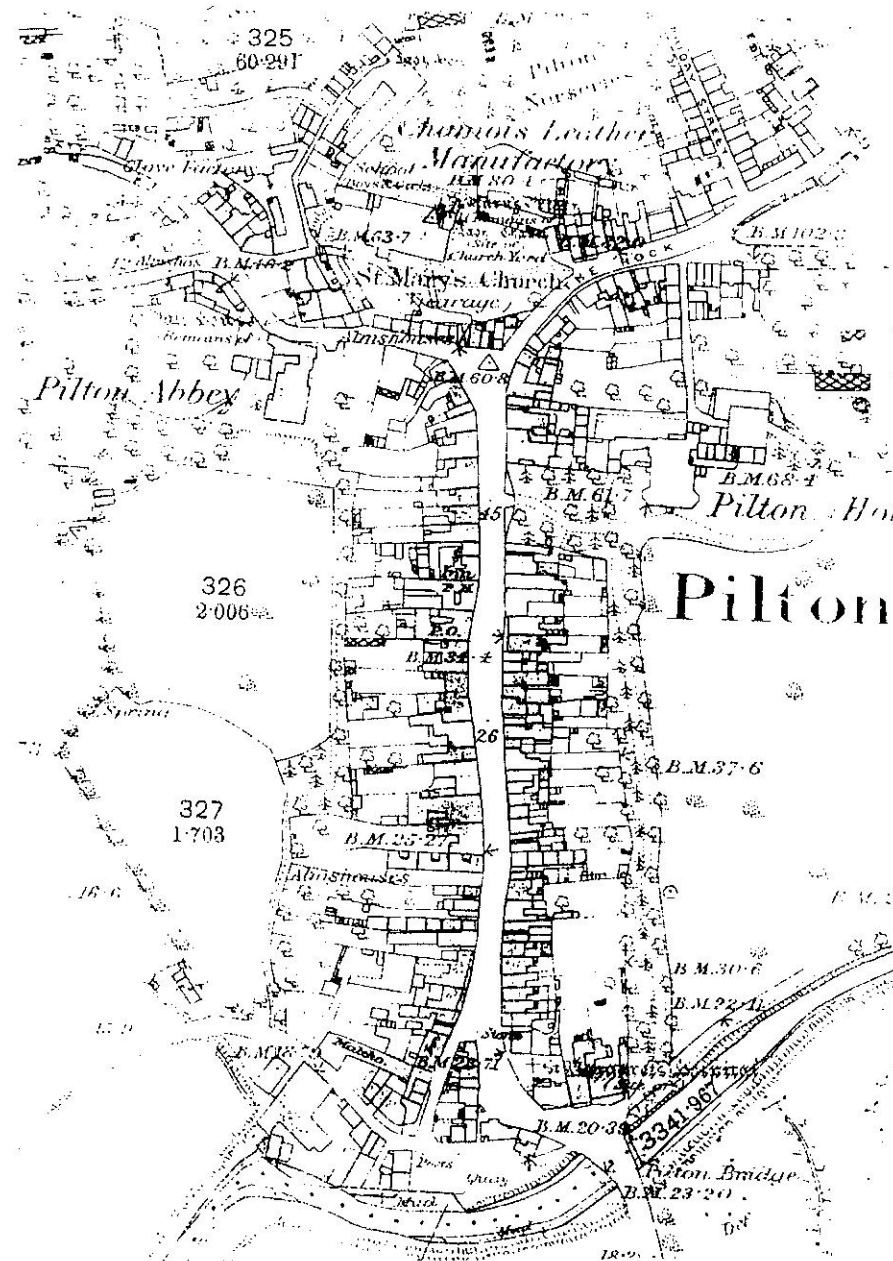
Devon Record Office

Compiled by Mr Terry Chaplin

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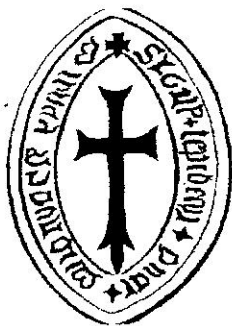
A point of interest.

This is a copy of an Ordnance Survey map of Pilton dated 1890. Although well over a hundred years old the heritage trail is still highly visible, as are most of the properties in the main street. Note the little side alleys - they are still there today! How many other streets are still the same after 100+ years? Enjoy the trail.

There is a small charge for this booklet merely to allow it to be reprinted for future visitors. The project is not expected to create profits.

If, however, you would like to give a donation towards the maintenance of the village history, please send your contribution to: Pilton United Charities, c/o Terry Chaplin, Little Orchard, Braunton Road, Barnstaple, Devon, EX31 1GA. Mr Chaplin is Clerk to the Trustees.

Donations may alternatively be sent to the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Pilton, c/o the Vicar.



*The seal of the Hospital of
St Margaret de Pilton*



Charge for brochure £1

