

# The A-to-Z of Yeovil's History

by Bob Osborn

## Historic Walks around Yeovil No 4 - Light Industry

This is the fourth in a series of short Historic Walks around Yeovil. This walk features tanneries, glove factories, a light engineering works, a dairy products manufacturer and the press.

The walks are designed to be printed and carried with you on your walk. The various walks may be undertaken individually or grouped together. None are of any great distance and times will vary depending on the amount of time looking at each key point. [Walking directions are given in blue.](#)

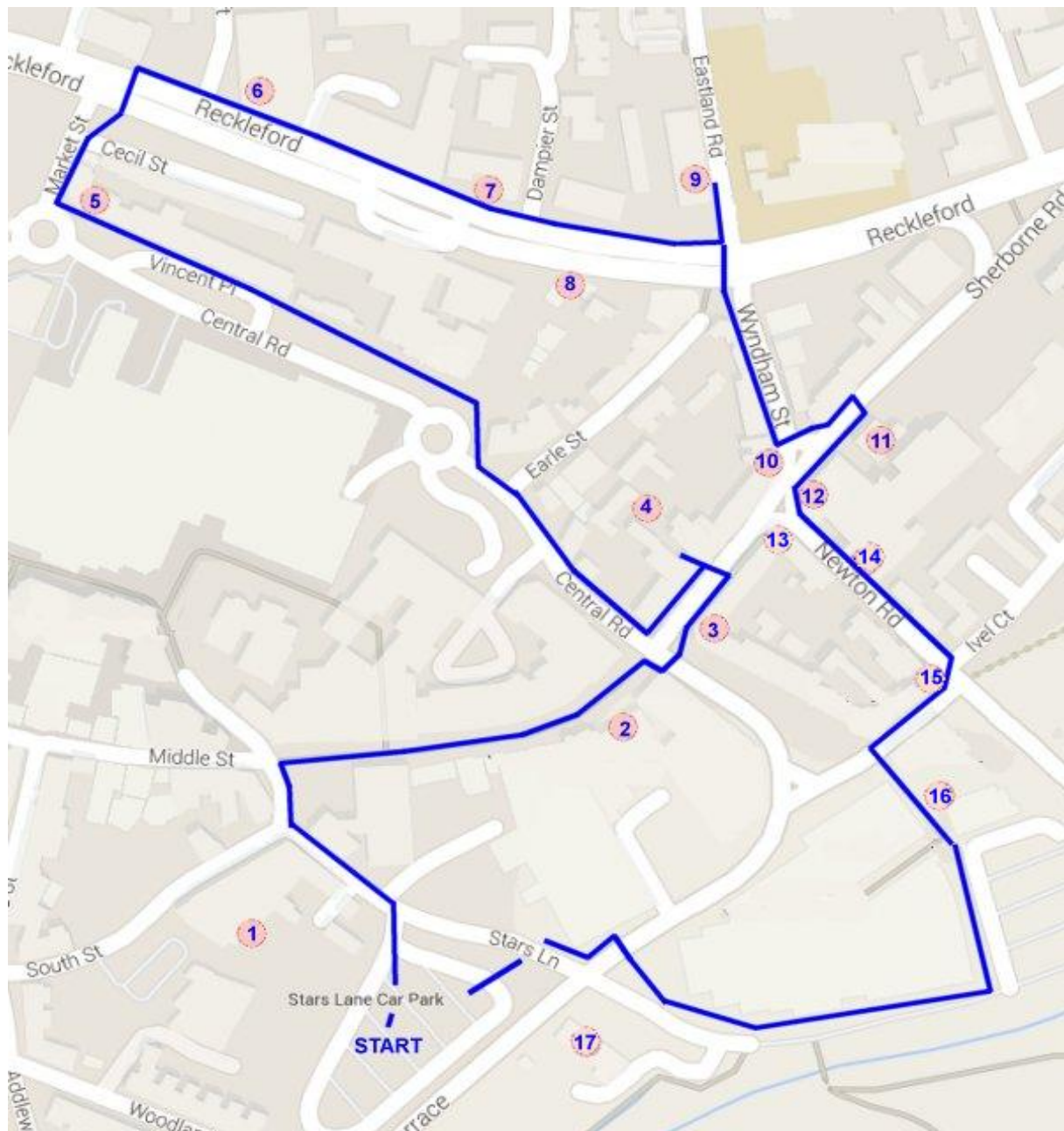
Key points on the walk are highlighted along the route and key facts are included. Most key points may be researched in greater depth on the A-to-Z of Yeovil's History website ([www.yeovilhistory.info](http://www.yeovilhistory.info)), either before or after your walk.

**Walk 4:** Light Industry

**Distance:** One and a quarter miles

**Time:** 40 to 60 minutes at a slow amble.

**Gradient:** Mostly flat (for Yeovil)



**START - Stars Lane Car Park**

From the car park notice, to the north -

**Key Point 1 - The Old Gaumont Palace Cinema** During the Second World War the Gaumont Palace was camouflaged by painting it to look like residential buildings. The camouflage remains to this day on the southern elevation facing Summerhouse Hill. It is visible from the Stars Lane car park but for a closer look walk around the old cinema and view it from the South Street car parks.



**Commence Walk** - Proceed to Stars Lane, turn left into Middle Street then proceed east along the pedestrian precinct to -



**Key Point 2 - Gas Works Offices** The Town Gas Works, occupying a site from Middle Street to Yeovil Town station and from Stars Lane to the coal yard in Station Road, were built by the Yeovil Gas & Coke Company and completed in 1833 on the site of a drained withy bed. Complete with retorts and gasometers. By 1856 it was producing 28,000 cubic feet of gas daily and supplied gas to the Corporation's 124 street lamps. The enterprise was eventually acquired by the Corporation itself, under a local Act of Parliament in 1899, and continued to

illuminate the town until the close of the Second World War. The gas works closed in 1957 and the site cleared in the early 1960s. The gas works offices, and originally accommodation for the gas works manager and his family, remained and are now occupied (albeit with some modification, especially to the roofline) by the St Margaret's Somerset Hospice shop.

Continue east along Middle Street as far as Central Road. In front of you is -

**Key Point 3 - Fernleigh Temperance Hotel** The London Commercial Temperance Hotel, with 11 bedrooms, was built on the corner of Middle Street and Station Road, in the mid-1860s to catch the passing trade of railway travellers. By 1898 it had been renamed the Fernleigh Hotel, still a temperance establishment and owned by Alderman William Mitchelmore (Mitchelmore Road is named for him). For many years after the Second World War the building was the offices of the Southern National bus company. Its most recent use was as an Indian restaurant but has now been empty for nearly two years. The photo at right dates to about 1900.



Turn left into Central Road and continue as far as Market Street.



**Key Point 4 - Phillips & Co Glove Factory** Phillips & Co were a small company of glove manufacturers, run by EA Phillips and WW Leworthy, located in Vincent Street, on the corner with Market Street. As well as an office the small factory, described as "commodious and well-lighted", comprised a cutting shop, webbing room, machine room, ironing room and a banding and finishing room. By 1954 the company had moved to premises in Goldcroft. The glove factory building still exists and is now converted to shop premises.



Turn right into Market Street and cross Reckleford at the pedestrian crossing. Turn right to -



**Key Point 6 - Nautilus Works** Around 1881 James Bazeley Petter founded the Nautilus Stove Co, making grates and kitchen ranges. Initially these were made at the Nautilus Grate Works in Hendford but later moved to Vicarage Street. After Queen Victoria installed Nautilus fire grates at Balmoral Castle and Osborne House, demand for them grew substantially. Within a few years Petter and his two sons Ernest and Percy began making oil engines, and production of these also grew steadily such that a new factory was needed. Named the Nautilus Works

in commemoration of his Nautilus grate invention, the factory was designed by James Petter's son John, a Yeovil architect, and his partner Percy Warren. Used for many years as a bus depot, the former factory is now for sale.

Continue east along Reckleford.

**Key Point 7 - Reckleford Board School** Yeovil's first board school, Reckleford Board School, or to give it its full name, the Reckleford Infant and Elementary Schools, opened in 1876 with an initial intake of 33 children. The school, with a capacity for 300 pupils, had three separate entrances, one each for boys, girls and infants. It initially consisted chiefly of one large room with a couple of small additional classrooms and two cloakrooms. It was heated by coal stoves and enjoyed gas lighting. On the front of the former school, now the Yeovil Centre, a large yellow 'S' is still just visible indicating the location of a Second World War public air raid shelter. To the right, the words '13 Persons' can still be made out and, just below, is a concrete structure that may cover steps into the shelter itself.



Further east, and on the other side of Reckleford notice....



**Key Point 8 - Former Glovers Arms** The former Glovers Arms was originally a 17th century farmhouse at the bottom of Reckleford Hill and was the home of the Isaac family until the death of Yeoman Samuel Isaac in 1849. The building was certainly a pub since the 1850's but closed around 2005 following several fires and has now been converted to flats.

Continue east along Reckleford to Eastland Road, turn left.

**Key Point 9 - Bide's Leather Dressing Factory** Around 1828 William Bide Snr, a prominent leather and glove manufacturer, built the large leather dressing factory with a four-storey leather dressing warehouse on the corner of Kiddles Lane (now Eastland Road) and Reckleford. This, one of the town's last links with its industrial past, was originally four storeys, the lower three storeys built in stone while the top storey, now removed, was in timber for ventilation. Internally brick piers ran up through the full height of the building. The floors were broad elm boards except at attic level, where small boards alternated with spaces between the joists. This wooden upper storey was used for drying the wool from the skins, and these gaps, coupled with louvres in the timber infill of the outer walls, assisted the process. Today it is, sadly, derelict. The photograph is from the 1960s.



### [Cross Reckleford and walk the length of Wyndham Street](#)

**Key Point 10 - The Elephant & Castle** The Elephant and Castle Hotel was a purpose-built public house / hotel that opened in 1860. The building is of three storeys, built in rendered brickwork under a Welsh slate roof. Wide string courses and wide, flat pilasters break the elevation into a visual grid pattern. It is known that the inn contained "a bar, smoking room, coffee and commercial rooms, ten bedrooms, good kitchens and offices". In 1862 the first landlord, Job Osment, committed suicide by leaping from a window of the Elephant and Castle and landing on the pavement. The Elephant and Castle closed in 1977.



### [Walk a few yards east along Sherborne Road to view....](#)



**Key Point 11 - Osborne House** Now a dental practice, Osborne House was built in the Regency style but slightly later, around 1830 (it is shown on Watts' map of 1831). It is of two storeys and three bays with a roughcast render finish under a hipped Welsh slated roof with wide soffits. It has a fine central projecting porch (sadly, now painted), set on five steps, with fluted Ionic columns and attached columns supporting a full entablature. By 1871 Osborne House was owned by Earle Vincent, owner of the Royal Osborne Brewery which was located alongside

Osborne House to the east. By 1897 it was the home of draper Norman Buchanan. In 1916 Buchanan, Yeovil's mayor at the time, died at home here on New Year's Eve 1916 by falling down the stairs!

### [Return to the corner of Sherborne Road and Newton Road.](#)

**Key Point 12 - Western Gazette offices** In 1863 a reporter on the Bridport News called Charles Clinker moved to Yeovil and founded his own newspaper - 'The Western Gazette'. The newspaper proved extremely popular and its growth in circulation caused a move to purpose-built premises in Sherborne Road (see next key point) in 1870. By the turn of the century the paper's continued growth, combined with the need for improved printing presses, necessitated a move to new premises. These new premises were built on the opposite corner of Newton Road. The offices were officially opened in 1906 (the illustration dates from this time). The building, in the Renaissance style, was constructed using 600,000 bricks on a steel-girder framework and features honey-coloured Bath stone dressings. The building closed in 2010 and is being converted to flats.



### [On the opposite corner of Sherborne Road and Newton Road.](#)



**Key Point 13 - Old Western Gazette offices** As mentioned in the previous key point, the early Western Gazette newspaper proved extremely popular and its growth in circulation caused a move to these purpose-built premises in Sherborne Road in 1870. The rapidly expanding newspaper required new premises within thirty years as it also produced the Pulman's News group of newspapers.

After the Western Gazette vacated the premises it became the Salvation Army Temple for many years. The building is now flats.

### [Walk down Newton Road.](#)





**Key Point 14 - Aplin & Barrett** In 1888 James Shorland Aplin and William Henry Barrett merged their wholesale dairy businesses together for the purpose of creating and marketing cheese, cream and butter. Around the turn of the century Aplin & Barrett acquired some two acres of land on the eastern side of Newton Road and their factory and office buildings were constructed by 1901. Much of the Aplin & Barrett premises were demolished after the premises closed in 1973. The present remaining building, a tiny fraction of the original factory - a modernist edifice in concrete and brick - was built in 1931 and 1932 as witnessed by these dates incorporated into the various rainwater hoppers around the building.

Continue down Newton Road to the junction with South Western Terrace.

**Key Point 15 - Penstile Toll House** In 1753 Turnpike Commissioners were appointed for "repairing and widening the roads" of Yeovil. The Commissioners ordered that a stop gate be erected "on or near the entrance of the road leading from Pen Stile to Newton" and John Gregory was the first collector of tolls, appointed in 1753 at a salary of 2s 6d a week. The job of collecting tolls must have been lucrative since in 1773 the Pen Style Gate was let for £9 a year. The Penstile Toll House, with its stop gate, had originally been sited at Pen Style - the junction of Newton Road and Lower Middle Street (hence its name) but in the latter part of the 19th century it was re-built in its present position on the corner of Newton Road and South Western Terrace. It is now named Newton Lodge.



Continue to the pedestrian crossing, cross, and just beyond the first building is....



**Key Point 16 - the remains of Yeovil Town Station** Yeovil Town station (which once stood where the car park is in front of you) opened in 1861 and was a joint station built by the London and South Western Railways Company (L&SWR) and the Great Western Railway Company (GWR). For many years Yeovil Town station was well known for having two Station Masters, one for each of the railway companies operating through it.

The "Beeching Cuts" refer to the closure of much of Britain's rail network. Yeovil Town station closed to passenger traffic on 3 October 1966 but freight and parcels traffic continued to use the station until 9 October 1967 when these services were also withdrawn. The foundation stone, mounted in a flower bed, is the last vestige of Yeovil Town station.

Continue walking south through the Yeo Leisure Centre car park, turn right on passing the last building and continue walking west.

**Key Point 17 - Foundry House Glove Factory** The leather glove factory, now known as Foundry House, was built in the early 1870s for the glove manufacturers Ewens, Johnson & Co Ltd. It is of red brick with Hamstone and brick dressings under a slate roof. Note the external cast-iron tie plates to the main floor joists on the piers between the windows, bearing the initials 'E' and 'J' for Ewens and Johnson and the main front doors of the building with large hinges in the form of 'E' and 'J'.



Cross the road at the traffic lights and return to the car park.

I hope you enjoyed this walk and don't forget that full details and photographs of all the Key Points mentioned may be seen on the A-to-Z of Yeovil's History website - [www.yeovilhistory.info](http://www.yeovilhistory.info)