



# Exploring



# where we live

**BSANA  
Urban  
Trail**



**Baker Street Area  
Neighbourhood  
Association**



Produced in 2017 by  
BSANA (Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association)

Based on coursework by Kathy Tytler and Jane Richardson, B.Ed. students at  
Bulmershe College of Higher Education 1983–1987

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Blended image of Castle Street on facing page by Chris Lee

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## Introduction

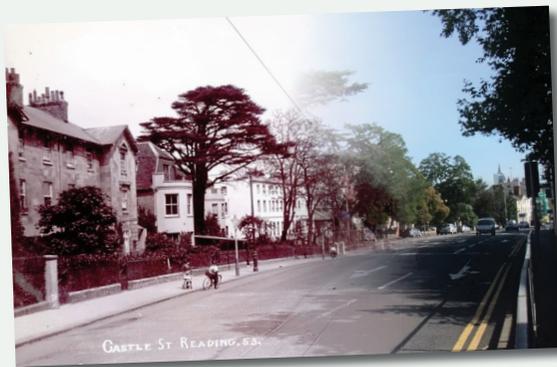
Welcome to the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Trail!

You're about to discover a whole lot more about this part of Reading, by following this walking trail and looking carefully at the buildings you see. There are all kinds of interesting places in this very neighbourhood that maybe you didn't know about previously.

Along the way, you'll see a number of different architectural styles, and you'll be able to compare them and discuss your opinions when you're back in the classroom.

The area of this trail falls mostly within the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area, which was designated a Conservation Area on 4 April 1974. Reading Borough Council and BSANA are looking into placing the Conservation Area on the 'At Risk' register with Historic England, which would give the area further protection and even improve its appearance.

It's best to follow this trail as a small group, or at least in pairs. Or you might wish to walk the trail with an interested adult. Either way, always make sure that an adult knows where you are. Lastly, be very careful when you cross the road – there are a number of points where you have to cross a road to continue the trail on the other side.



Castle Street in the 1920s (left)  
and what it looks like now (right)



1

## JUNCTION OF HOWARD STREET/BAKER STREET

Look across the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) to a group of twentieth-century buildings. This includes a hotel; a shopping centre (originally named The Butts Centre, now Broad Street Mall); the Hexagon Theatre; and the Police Station and Magistrates' Courts. Building on this site began in 1969 and the shopping centre opened in March 1972.

Before 2015 there were also Civic Offices, the base of Reading Borough Council, which opened in February 1974. You can see them in the photo above. The building contained a lot of asbestos and was expensive to maintain, so in 2014 Reading Borough Council moved their offices to Bridge Street, near to the Oracle Shopping Centre. Demolition of the old Civic Offices started in 2015.

Your view will be different today.

- These buildings are all modern. What do you think was there before they were built?
- Make a rough sketch plan of the buildings and label them.
- Do you think it was a good idea to have all these buildings on one site?

When you get back into the classroom discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of the twentieth-century redevelopment of this area.

- Look down Howard Street. There are houses on only one side of the street. What do you think it was like before the Inner Distribution Road was built?
  - When do you think the Inner Distribution Road was built?
- ▶ *Walk along the pavement, up Body Road alongside the IDR, past the Carey Centre and the Salvation Army Hall. Turn right at the roundabout into Castle Hill. The Castle Tap is a small public house on your right.*

## 2 THE CASTLE TAP PUBLIC HOUSE, CASTLE HILL



There has been a public house on this site since 1699. Until 2014 it was known as ‘The Horse and Jockey’. It had links with Reading’s horse racing venue – at one time it was where the jockeys registered for the races.

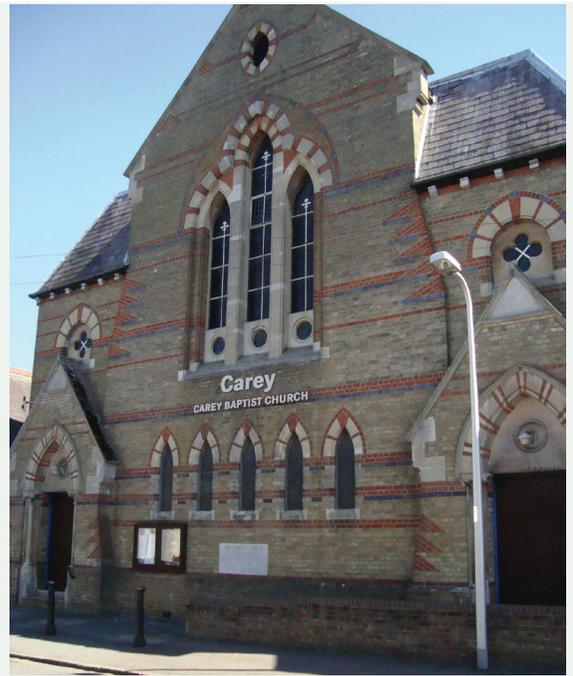
The Horse and Jockey is a common old name for pubs.

- Many pubs have changed their names. Do you think the original, historical names should be preserved?
- ▶ *Continue up Castle Hill and take the first turning on your right into Carey Street. Walk down Carey Street. Carey Baptist Church is on your right.*

### 3 CAREY BAPTIST CHURCH

This is a Victorian building of patterned brickwork.

- How many colours of brick are used in this building? What are they?
- Are there any clues as to when this church was built?
- Look out for other examples of patterned brickwork on this trail.
- You may notice several other places of worship on this trail. Make a note of their names.



- *At the bottom of Carey Street turn left into Baker Street, and then left into Jesse Terrace.*

### 4 JESSE TERRACE



Look at the main features of these houses.

This street was planned and built in the second half of the nineteenth century by Mr Thomas Jesse (a rich businessman) and until late in the twentieth century most of the houses were still owned by the Jesse Estate.

In 1817 Thomas Jesse sought permission for a large development of property in this area. Later he advertised his plans for the houses in this street.

## TO THE RESPECTABLE INHABITANTS OF READING

I, Thomas Jesse Esq, hereby announce my intention to build a residential square in the manner of the town of Bath, as befits the status of the town of Reading as a commercial centre.

The area chosen takes advantage of the salubrious air on higher ground and escapes from damps and fogs, yet lies within reach of the conveniences of the town.

- How far do you think that the buildings you see fulfil Thomas Jesse's intentions?

▶ Continue up Jesse Terrace to Castle Hill. On the corner of Jesse Terrace and Castle Hill you find Heritage Court on your right.

### 5 HERITAGE COURT – 144a–152 CASTLE HILL



This was built in the early nineteenth century, originally as three or four houses, and was part of Thomas Jesse's estate. Later, part of the building was used as a Convent School and the rest was divided into rented flats. The building was renovated in the mid 1980s and converted into 23 flats and maisonettes for sale.

- Do you think dividing large houses into flats is a good idea?
- Do you think the renovation and sale is a good way of conserving the building?

- *Turn right into Castle Hill and go past Heritage Court to the next large building.*

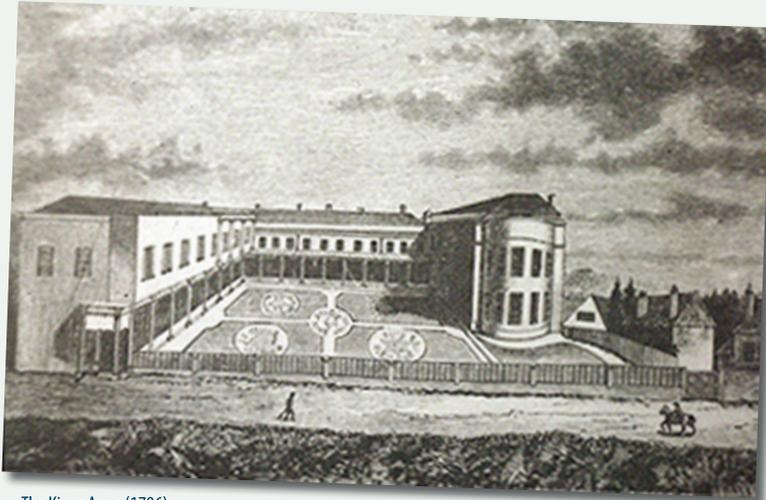


## 6 154–160 CASTLE HILL

Part of this is probably the oldest building you will see on this trail. The house has been altered and extended many times since it was built.

The first known record was in 1643 when an original part of the house was called ‘The New Inn’ and was outside of the town. A few years later, during the English Civil War, it was called ‘Forlorn Hope’. In 1660 it became ‘The Kings Arms’. At this time people began travelling more than they had ever done before, and one of the main routes was from London to Bath. They would travel by coach and horses which took a very long time, so the travellers would stop and rest at inns overnight.

This house was positioned on the main road out of Reading to Bath so it was an ideal place for an inn. It remained an inn until 1750



The Kings Arms (1796)  
Reading Library Collection No 1330756

when it was taken over by the government. In 1789 it was used to house refugee Catholic priests escaping the French Revolution.

In 1802 'The Kings Arms' was taken over by Mr Thomas Jesse who used it as his house and then started to rent out part of the building. Records show that the rent was very high and one man who lived there paid two guineas (£2.10) a week to live there. The average worker only earned six shillings (30p) a week at this time. Part of the building was used by his wife as a private girls' school.

Within the Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area, both the house and the tree have special laws protecting them so they cannot be changed without permission.

- In the old picture you cannot see the large cedar tree that stands here today so it is thought to have been planted after 1796. How old do you think the tree is?
  - The building has now been split into four different parts. What do you think it is used for?
- **Walk to the top of Castle Hill (by the traffic lights). Stop and look back down the hill towards town.**



This view of Castle Hill dates back to 1823.  
Reading Library Collection No 1142417

## 7 CASTLE HILL VIEW

- Can you recognise any of the buildings today that appear in the old picture?
- What changes have there been?

► *Turn right and then right again into Russell Street.*

## 8 48 and 50 RUSSELL STREET

These two houses on the left were built in the 1830s in the Georgian style of architecture. They are two of the oldest buildings in Russell Street. The building material is Bath stone, which is different from most of the other houses in this area, although there are other houses in Reading built of Bath stone.



- Why do you think this stone was popular?
- How do you think it was brought to Reading? (The Kennet and Avon Canal linking Bath and Bristol with Reading was completed in 1810.)
- What are most of the other houses in this area built of?
- What are the similarities and differences between these two houses and the other Georgian houses in this area?

The other houses on this side of Russell Street – downhill from the junction with Baker Street, towards Oxford Road – were built about 10 years later.

- How do these buildings differ from numbers 48 and 50?

► *Turn right into Epping Close.*

## 9 EPPING CLOSE

Epping Close is a modern development, built in 1979. There are 25 two-bedroom flats and four two-storey terraced houses on this site.



These were built on the site of an old orchard which was owned by the Jesse estate. Many of the people who live in this area wanted to keep the land as a park so that they could all use it.

- Are there many parks or other open spaces in this area?
- Do you think it is better to have flats or a park?
- When you get back to school you can discuss the different interests involved in this question.
- If you were a member of the local council, what decision would you have made?

► *Turn back into Russell Street and turn right, going downhill. At the crossroads turn left into Baker Street.*

## 10 THE PRESBYTERY



This is on the other side of the road, and is the vicarage for Holy Trinity Church, which you will see later on our walk. If you look up at the top window overlooking the street corner you will see horizontal bars across the window. This was the old nursery. The bars were to stop the children falling out!

## 11 61–79 BAKER STREET

These houses were built after 1840 in a simple Georgian style.

- Can you see any differences between these houses and the other houses in Baker Street?

► *Continue along Baker Street.*



## 12 36–48 BAKER STREET

On the right-hand side of Baker Street opposite is a terrace of houses of a different design. There were built a few decades later and are an example of Victorian housing.

- ▶ *Branksome Court is on your right, just before you reach Prospect Street.*



## 13 BRANKSOME COURT

There are 45 flats on this site.

- What do you think was here before the flats were built? Where can you find out?
- Do you think that this is a good use of the space available?
- There are many families with children living here. Is there enough space for children to play in?
- If you were designing homes for families with young children what are the main things that you would consider?
- When you get back to school you can draw the plan for your design for homes.



- ▶ *Turn left into Prospect Street. Walk to the top of the road and Somerstown Court is on your left.*



## 14 SOMERSTOWN COURT

These are modern houses built in Georgian style, often referred to as mock-Georgian houses.

- What are the similarities and differences between these houses and the other Georgian houses you have seen?

- ▶ *Turn around and look at the view from the top of Prospect Street. In the distance you will see the Thames river valley and Caversham on the other side of the river. Walk back down Prospect Street to the crossroads.*

## 15 PROSPECT STREET/ ARGYLE ROAD

On the corner is a small detached house. It may have been a gatehouse to a larger house, Sidney Lodge, which was set back from the road. Part of the larger house still exists and can be seen from an alley entrance further down Prospect Street.



The small house has Gothic-style windows which are pointed at the top. This was a style that originated in the Middle Ages and became popular in the nineteenth century. It is likely to have been renovated in Gothic Revival Cottage style when it became popular around 1880 as part of the Arts and Crafts movement.

- Can you find any other examples of Gothic architecture?

► *Continue down Prospect Street.*

Notice some decorative features between the ground and first floors on some houses on the left near the bottom of the street.

- What is the style of these houses?
- When were they built?

There is a new building (2016) which has a design feature of bricked-up windows on the side.

There are other examples of this on the trail.

- Look out for them. Are they old or modern properties?

In very old properties, there was a reason for bricking up windows. It was to avoid the Window Tax (from 1696–1851).

- What do you think of a property tax based on the number of windows?
- Why do you think new buildings have this design?

► *Continue to the junction with Oxford Road.*

## 16 OXFORD ROAD SCHOOL

This is a Victorian school building. If this is not your school, compare this building to your own school.

This school does not have its own playing field. It has a playground and there is a nearby park for outdoor PE.



- Do you think it is important for a school to have a lot of outdoor space?
- What is it needed for?

Dorothy, who was born in 1927 and lived in Reading until 1937, attended Oxford Road School, walking there from her home in Chatham Street along the back streets. She remembers being fascinated by the crane at the stonemason's on the corner of Bedford Road and Battle Street. The stonemason's yard is still there.

- ▶ *Turn right into Oxford Road. Walk along to the large building on your right on the corner of Russell Street.*



## 17 PAVILION CHURCH



This building has been renovated and opened as a church at Easter 2013. Prior to this it was used as a snooker hall for several years. The building was originally opened in 1929 as the Pavilion Cinema. There are some Art Deco features inside the building which was a design popular at this time.

- Do you know any features of Art Deco design?
- Do you think that the building has been preserved well?

## 18 HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

On the opposite side of Oxford Road is a more traditional church, the Holy Trinity Church.

Holy Trinity Church was consecrated in 1832 and became the parish church for this area in 1875. It is built on land purchased in 1825, where gravel had been dug out to make the road which was Pangbourne Lane (now Oxford Road).

Because of this large ready-made hollow, catacombs could be built in the pit under the church and sold for the luxury burial of the dead.

During World War II local families used the catacombs as a bomb shelter.

► *Turn right into Russell Street.*

## 19 THE NAG'S HEAD

The Nag's Head is a pub built in the late nineteenth century by Morlands Brewery. The first and second floors are in mock Tudor style.

- **What is the main feature of this style?**

Currently it is a CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) award-winning pub, serving a large selection of ale. The pub and its customers are active supporters of Reading Football club, and they provide a refreshment table of beer for runners on the Reading Half Marathon.

► *Turn first right into Goldsmid Road.*





Goldsmid Road was originally known as Junction Road, and that name can still be seen on the wall of the house on the corner of Russell Street. It is named after Sir Francis Henry Goldsmid who was an Anglo-Jewish barrister and MP for Reading from 1860 until his death in 1878.

- *Follow the road around and you will find the Synagogue on the corner of Clifton Street.*

## 20 THE SYNAGOGUE, GOLDSMID ROAD



This was built in 1900.

- What is this building used for?
- Around the door there is some writing in a different language. What language do you think this is? (Hint: the sign gives you a clue.)
- Sketch the designs over the door and windows.
- Perhaps your teacher will discuss different religions when you get back to school. What other religions can you think of?



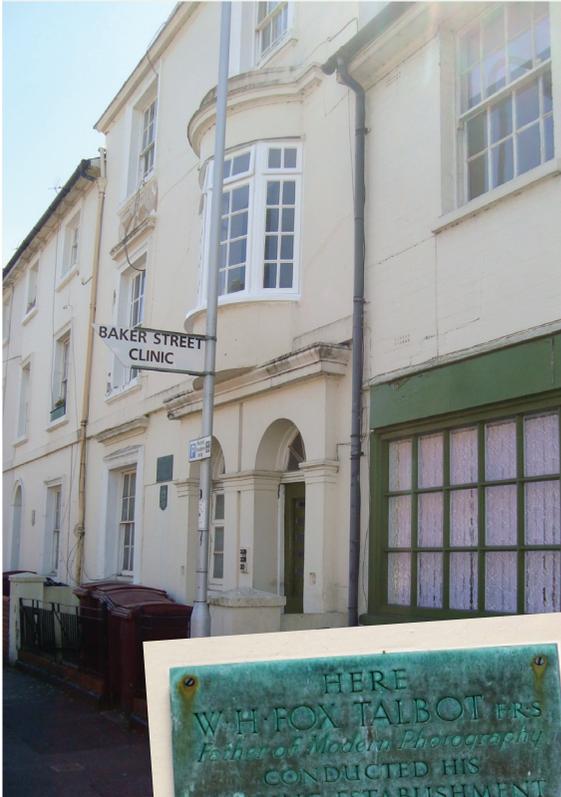
## 21 CLIFTON STREET AND FRANKLIN STREET

- Half of each of these streets are made up of late Victorian terraced houses. What features do you recognise in this type of building?
- Although the houses are in the same style they were not all built at the same time and there are differences in design. What differences can you see?
- The other side of both streets has a mixture of houses. When do you think the other houses in Clifton Street were built? And in Franklin Street?



- Walk to the top of Clifton Street, turn left into Baker Street, cross Russell Street, and stop at the first house on the right.

## 22 TALBOT HOUSE (ORIGINALLY THE FOX TALBOT STUDIO)



Some of the first photographs ever taken anywhere in the world were of Reading. For two years, from 1844 to 1846, it was the home of what has become known as William Henry Fox Talbot's 'Reading Establishment'. He was one of the early inventors of photography.

Talbot experimented with and developed various methods of capturing images on paper. In 1841 he patented the Calotype Process. Calotype had the significant features of pre-digital photography: the use of light-sensitive paper to produce a negative image that can be developed using chemicals to produce multiple copies on paper.

It was in Reading that the first book ever to be illustrated by photographs was produced: *The Pencil of Nature*.

Note the plaque on the wall at the front of the building. The studio was at the back of the building.

- ▶ *Continue along Baker Street, crossing Jesse Terrace and Carey Street.*

## 23 THE OASIS

The Oasis is on your right on the corner of Baker Street and Carey Street. It was originally a public house called The Eagle. It is now a church-owned community meeting place.



This building has patterned brickwork and decorative features that you have seen on other buildings on your walk around the area. There is also a large decorative tile showing an artist. You will have seen one of these on another building on your walk.

## BSANA STREET PARTY

This is the area where the BSANA Street Party is held in the summer. How different it looks without traffic and with the bunting across the street!

- ▶ *Carry on down Baker Street, back to the junction with Howard Street, which is where you started.*

We hope you enjoyed this walk around our neighbourhood and that you found it interesting.



## Assess the buildings and streets against each criterion

	Choice of materials	Choice of colours	Quality of design and detail
<b>2</b> The Castle Tap			
<b>3</b> Carey Baptist Church			
<b>4</b> Jesse Terrace			
<b>5</b> Heritage Court			
<b>6</b> 154–160 Castle Hill			
<b>8</b> 48 & 50 Russell Street			
<b>9</b> Epping Close			
<b>11</b> 61–79 Baker Street			
<b>12</b> 36–48 Baker Street			
<b>13</b> Branksome Court			
<b>14</b> Somerstown Court			
<b>15</b> Gatehouse, Prospect Street/Argyle Street			
New building, Prospect Street			
<b>16</b> Oxford Road School			
<b>17</b> Pavilion Church			
<b>18</b> Holy Trinity Church			
<b>19</b> The Nag's Head			
<b>20</b> The Synagogue			
<b>21</b> Clifton Street and Franklin Street			
<b>23</b> The Oasis			



## Welcome to the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Trail!

Did you know...

- where refugee Catholic priests escaped from the French Revolution?
- where jockeys for Reading's horse racing used to meet?
- where iron bars prevented children falling out of a nursery window?
- where the pioneer of photography had his studio in the 1840s?

You're about to discover a whole lot more about this part of Reading, from the fascinating history of many local buildings to the varied architectural styles of this neighbourhood.

Enjoy!



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Neighbourhood  
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