

HISTORICAL CHELTENHAM SELF-GUIDED TOUR (PRINTABLE VERSION)



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The online version of this tour, with photos and the kids February half term trail competition, can be found at www.visitcheltenham.com/self-guided-tour

1, 2 & 3 - Montpellier

Montpellier Walk, Cheltenham GL50 1SH

There are an extensive number of historic and iconic buildings in Montpellier; from Cheltenham's first pump room 'Montpellier Spa' which is now home to the Ivy Montpellier Brasserie, to the curved facade

of Montpellier Wine Bar. Spot the stone sculptures known as Caryatids (modelled on the Acropolis in Athens), which add to the continental feel of the area.

The development of Montpellier Spa and estate was carried out at the beginning of the 19th century by Henry Thomson on a site originally known as Trafalgar Field. In 1809, Thompson built the first pump room, a rather primitive structure which was pulled down in 1817 and replaced by the existing building designed by George Allen Underwood. Eight years later the architect, John Papworth, added the domed circular room which became known as the Rotunda. The interior was used as a ballroom, graced by the presence of the Duke of Wellington and many of his distinguished contemporaries.

4 - Montpellier Gardens

24 Montpellier Spa Rd, Cheltenham GL50 1UL

The gardens were originally developed as pleasure gardens to provide an appropriate setting for the pump room and for society to meet and promenade. Although open to the public on payment of an admission fee, the gardens were mainly frequented by those 'taking the waters.' By the 1830s, the gardens were home to a glass house filled with exotic plants, a Chinese pagoda with integral bandstand and an ornamental fountain.

The change towards public ownership in the late 19th century saw pleasure gardens become places of public amusement, recreation and resort. In 1864, the bandstand was constructed, quickly becoming a popular facility which held regular concerts. The proscenium building, built at the turn of the 20th century, provided a venue for theatrical and other cultural events. Sports facilities, including lawn tennis, archery and croquet, were also introduced. Six all weather tennis courts remain today, although the Cheltenham Croquet Club moved to its own grounds in 1920.

In 1893, Cheltenham Borough Council purchased Montpellier Spa and its gardens for £7,400. The history of the gardens during the 20th century was dominated by World Wars 1 and 2 when they were used for the war effort for training, exercise and cultivation as part of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign.

By 1955, the gardens were laid out in their present form and few changes occurred until the early 21st century. The rotunda was restored by the council and Lloyds Bank in the early 1960s then by The Ivy in 2017. In 1994 the Civic Society initiated restoration of the Bandstand.

Extensive restoration and development of the gardens was made possible in 2006 by the award of a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund's Public Parks Initiative programme and a significant contribution from the borough council. The restoration has ensured that Montpellier Gardens will continue to play an important part in the lives of residents and visitors alike well into the 21st century.

The gardens are part of the Cheltenham Central Conservation Area which, at over 600 hectares, is one of the largest in the country. *Source – Cheltenham Borough Council.*

5 - Queens Hotel MGallery

The Promenade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 1NN

Built in 1837 as a tribute to Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne, this stately Regency building dominates the southern end of the Promenade. An increase in the number of wealthy visitors to Cheltenham's famous spas meant that the old inns and small hotels of the town could no longer cope. This hotel was opened in the first year of Queen Victoria's reign and named in her honour.

Designed by Cheltenham architects RW and C Jearrad. Many important visitors to Cheltenham have stayed here, including Charles Dickens. It was originally going to be called the Royal Victoria Hotel. The

beautiful wallpaper surrounding the staircase inside the hotel is the original. Designed by AW Pugin, it is the same as in the Houses of Parliament.

In 2020 the Queens - MGallery was awarded the TripAdvisor's Travellers' Choice Awards, placing it in the top 10% of hotels worldwide! This special accolade was awarded for the hotels exceptional and consistent customer reviews and ratings.

6 - Imperial Gardens

Imperial Square, Cheltenham GL50 1QZ

The Imperial Gardens are located at the rear of Cheltenham Town Hall. The formal style you now see was laid out just after the Second World War. Each year, approximately 25,000 bedding plants are used to produce the magnificent floral displays enjoyed by thousands of locals and visitors every year.

This beautiful garden was originally landscaped and planted as a pleasure garden for the wealthy users of the Sherborne Spa (later Imperial Spa) which was built and opened in 1818 on the site which is now the Queen's Hotel. The gardens still retain some of the original Regency features including the fountain.

The gardens are flanked by extensive Regency facades, with the Regency terrace townhouses encompassing three sides. Many have now become offices, although some remain intact as houses and apartments. Look out for the Regency ironwork and imposing front steps. Of course The Queen's Hotel is not from the Regency Period, rebuilt in 1837 at a then, whopping cost of £47,000, but is very fitting of the era and location. During the summer months, Imperial Gardens becomes host to many outdoor events and festivals including the Jazz and Science.

7 - Cheltenham Town Hall

Imperial Square, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 1QA

Built in 1902-1903 as a venue for social events, it replaced the Assembly Rooms on the High Street, which had been demolished to make way for a bank. Interestingly, unlike most Town Hall's, this grand building in Cheltenham was not built as the seat for a Borough Council, which is instead found in the Municipal Offices across the road on the Promenade.

The site of the Town Hall was originally part of Imperial Square and Gardens, the former pleasure gardens of the then Sherborne Spa. The imposing facade faces Regency terrace townhouses to the front, and the Imperial Gardens at the rear, giving it a green and leafy location.

The building was designed by Gloucester architect, Frederick William Waller, in the fashionable Baroque style during the reign of Edward VII. The cost of the building is believed to be £45,000 and it was opened on the 5th December 1903 by former Chancellor of the Exchequer Sir Michael Hicks Beach MP who has many connections with Cheltenham.

In 1906, in an attempt to revive Cheltenham's fortunes as a spa town, a new Central Spa serving four different kinds of medicinal waters was installed at the Town Hall.

The building itself featured a coved ceiling over the main ballroom hall, measuring 92 x 52ft. This central room, around which the rest of the building radiates, can seat 1,000 people. The smaller chambers, running parallel to the main room, have a multitude of uses, and have their own architectural features. Just to the left of the entrance hall, there is a small chamber which features an octagonal counter with mounted Doulton ware urns, all of which are still in use to dispense the Cheltenham Spa Waters.

In 1916, statues of Edward VII and George V in coronation robes were both cast in plaster, and placed in the alcoves at either side of the main stage. The stage also featured an organ gifted in 1928. All three of these ornaments were donated by wealthy Cheltenham families.

8 - The Playhouse Theatre

47-53 Bath Road, Cheltenham, GL53 7HG

Take a short detour to view the Playhouse Theatre. The Playhouse, which is a Grade II listed building, is owned by Cheltenham Borough Council and leased to a registered charity led by a board of trustees and supported by over 100 volunteers. It began life circa 1806 as Henry Thompson's manufactory for The Real Cheltenham Salts and over the years was enlarged to incorporate slipper baths, a swimming pool, a steam mill and bakery and medicinal spa, whilst also being used for dances, an indoor cricket school, cycling lessons and gymnasium. After operating as an Air Raid Precautions Centre (ARP) during WWII it was converted to a theatre in April 1945.

In recent years the Playhouse has become a venue for a wide variety of local and touring performers, not just theatre but live music, comedy, dance, poetry, burlesque, improv and film. In 2019 it was given the green light to undergo a multi-million pound redevelopment, to transform it into a cutting-edge hub for performing arts communities. Source – Cheltenham Playhouse.

9 - Pizza Express

Belgrave House, 7 Imperial Square, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 1QB

Turn back upon yourself towards The Promenade. The building which currently houses Pizza Express (Belgrave House) was built in 1820 and in 1845 it was Haydon and Shaw's boarding house for fashionable visitors to the spa. In 1850, Rowe wrote his Cheltenham guide and noted it as 'Mesdames Haydon and Shaw's Boarding House which occupies a conspicuous position at the corner of Imperial Square.' It was altered to shops in 1876-99. The building is Grade 2 listed. It became Pizza Express in 1993 but was another popular Italian taverna called Eventos before this.

10 - The Promenade Verandas

Promenade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 9SA

The buildings built as Promenade Terrace in 1834, they were probably a Henney/Harward development, with different builders for each house. They had gardens originally and they all retain their wrought iron verandas and railings. The roofed verandas contain a star and lozenge pattern and uprights with double headed anthemion motif. Many still contain original features inside including dogleg stairs and wreathed handrails. The Under the Prom club takes up three of the basements. They now house a number of businesses including CGT Lettings and Elliot Oliver Estate Agents.

11 - Cheltenham Ladies College

Bayshill Rd, Cheltenham GL50 3EP

Founded in 1853, Cheltenham Ladies' College was established to provide "a sound academic education for girls." Initially, there were just 82 pupils, almost all of whom were day girls. In 1858, Dorothea Beale was appointed as Principal. Only 27 years old at the time, Miss Beale devoted nearly 50 years of her life to

College and it was under her leadership that College began to prosper. In 1873, College moved to its present location, the site of the original Cheltenham Spa. Initially the site consisted of only a boarding house (previously boarders had resided with private landladies), the Lower Hall and a few classrooms, but as years went by the growth of the school and the need for specialised facilities prompted further expansion, including classrooms, music rooms, a library and laboratories.

Miss Beale introduced subjects such as maths and science, despite parental opposition that these were not suitable or necessary for girls, and promoted the fact that her pupils could gain qualifications. Today, Eve Jardine-Young, the Principal, continues to lead with a pioneering approach to girls' education as it has been led for the past 160 years. Source – Cheltenham Ladies College.

12 - The George Hotel

St George's Road, Cheltenham GL50 3DZ

Formerly known as 7-11 Bays Hill Terrace. From 1841 - 43 Cheltenham College rented three of the buildings, prior to moving to their purpose-built premises at their present Bath Road site. The terrace then continued as lodging houses. In the early 1800's Miss Emily Eales used the premises as a boarding-house for 12 Cheltenham Ladies College pupils. (Prior to opening a CLC boarding house at Lansdown Villas).

By 1900 the terrace and its lodgers had become 'slightly less grand' and the buildings were deteriorating. In 1908 George Dimmer, the then Mayor, bought some of the terraces. In 1920 the centre of the terrace was opened as the Bayshill Private Hotel by a Mrs Pinkerton, the other terraces became boarding houses or apartments. After the war, under new management, the Bayshill Hotel was still advertising in 1949 - 'en pension or partial board' (meaning a boarding house offering full & part board). In 1958 The George Hotel was opened at 41-49 St George's Road and in the 1960's it expanded to full No's 41-55, which premises it still occupies. Source - Jill Waller from the Cheltenham Local History Society.

The George Hotel has recently undergone a massive renovation to become the first and flagship Cult Hotel by the Lucky Onion Group, owned by Julian & Jade Dunkerton.

13 - Neptune's Fountain

Promenade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 9SA

Worth a visit all year round; whether water flows from its faucets or not, the fountain is a monumental statuesque piece depicting Greek god Neptune in a shell-chariot, being drawn by four sea-horses and heralded by conch-shell blowing merman. Neptune sits proudly, clothed in a mantle while clasping a Trident as a symbolic representation of his dominion over the seas, while the horses are depicted in motion. The entire fountain is enclosed by sculpted balusters and vases filled with flowers.

Purported to have been modelled as an ode to the Trevi Fountain in Rome, Italy (although that has never been historically verified) The Neptune Fountain sits outside the Municipal Buildings on The Promenade. Other sources place its inspiration as Bartolomeo Ammannati and his fountain in Piazza della Signoria in Florence, Italy, although again, this has been disputed!

Unveiled in 1893, it was designed by engineer Joseph Hall and carved from Portland Stone by sculptor Richard Lockwood Boulton and his sons. It is fed from the River Chelt, which flows beneath the Fountain in a culvert which diverts the River through the Town to emerge in Sandford Park. At night, it is beautifully lit, creating an eye-catching focal point on The Promenade.

According to archives of the Birmingham Daily Post, upon its unveiling in 1893 by the then Mayoress Mrs J. C. Griffith, the commissioning of the fountain was all part of rejuvenating and beautifying The Promenade. The Newspaper stated "The Mayors in inviting the Mayoress to open the fountain, explained that this work

is only part of a scheme for beautifying the Promenade, and that the long garden in front of Promenade Terrace was about to be converted into an Italian garden, with ornamental railings and with a pretty bandstand in the centre. The Mayoress then declared the fountain opened, and turn on the water. Hearty cheers were given as the stream shot into the air, and the Town Band played the National Anthem. A large crowd witnessed the ceremony.”

The Fountain is cleaned, maintained and cared for by Cheltenham Borough Council, and underwent a full restoration in 1989. Source: *Birmingham Daily Post - Tuesday 31 October 1893 (British Newspaper Archive)*

14 - Municipal Offices

Promenade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 9SA

The town's finest early 19th Century terrace. Designed by George Underwood in the Classical style, the terrace was built as private houses in 1823-35. Originally known as Harward's Buildings after Samuel Harward, one of the developers of Sherbourne Spa and Promenade. In 1915 its five central houses became the Municipal Offices which by 1958 had expanded to occupy 13 of the terrace's 19 houses. By the mid-19th century most of the buildings were used by professional or business establishments.

Today, the Grade II listed building, is headquarters of Cheltenham Borough Council. Works of art in the Municipal Offices include a portrait by Sir Oswald Birley of General Lord Ismay, who was Chief of Staff to Winston Churchill during the Second World War and who lived in Wormington near Stanton, Gloucestershire.

15 - Long Gardens, Edward Wilson Statue & War Memorial

In front of the Municipal Offices terrace is the Long Garden, once private to residents but now the site of several of the town's statues and memorials including a commemorative statue of explorer Edward Wilson, built in 1906. Edward was born in Cheltenham in 1872, son of a local physician, he died on Captain Scott's ill-fated Antarctic expedition of 1910-12.

A principal aim of the expedition was to reach the South Pole, which no one had ever done before. Wilson was one of five men chosen to make the journey. They set out from the Antarctic coast in November 1911, and arrived at the Pole on 17 January 1912, only to discover that the Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen, had reached it a month before.

Their journey back was dogged by terrible weather, food and fuel shortages, and sickness. By mid-March, two of the party had died, and the remaining three, including Wilson, were marooned in their tent by a nine-day blizzard. There they died, during the last days of March 1912, their bodies being discovered eight months later, on 12 November 1912. Source – Wilson Art Gallery & Museum.

Directly in front of the main door of the Municipal Offices is the imposing cenotaph of Cheltenham's War Memorial. The inscription reads – *“Remember the men of Cheltenham who gave their lives for you in the Great War 1914 – 1919. If they were strangers to one another here in their common home, they served and wrought and died in many lands near and far as a Band of Brothers. Learn from them so to live and die that, when you have followed them and are no more seen, you may, like them, be remembered and regretted.”*

16 - The old Gap building and White Stuff

102 - 104 Promenade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 1NB

Originally three houses built in 1820-40 with 1930s-50s shop fronts. They have Ionic and Doric columns of classic architecture. The building also fronts what was once Cheltenham's manufacturing chemist - Beetham & Clark Dispensing Chemists – It was established in 1846. Mr. Beetham's wholesale trade was started with Capillary Hair Fluid, other hair preparations, and Beetham's Corn Plaster. To these were added, as time went on, Beetham's Glycerine and Cucumber and the Larola skin tonic series. By 1880 the Glycerine and Cucumber was being advertised internationally. Following this, the buildings behind were home to Gloucestershire Dairy & Creamery until 1993.

17 - The Promenade

Cheltenham's famous Promenade dates back to 1818 at the height of the Regency period, when the avenue of elms and horse chestnut trees was first planted. In its early days, the Promenade was reserved for subscribers only.

It was initially a marshy, boggy track near some of the natural springs common to the area, until the much heralded Sherborne Spa (later Imperial Spa) was built for wealthy guests, at the site where the Queen's Hotel** now resides. The spa was surrounded by pleasure gardens (most of which are still preserved as the Imperial Gardens), and the Promenade was transformed into a tree-lined avenue as a place to 'Promenade' and be seen.

Initially, the tree-lined avenue was undeveloped, but by 1820, building had started in earnest with what we now know as the Municipal Buildings. The Cheltenham Promenade now has a reputation as one of the best preserved and most beautiful thoroughfares, and is now a nostalgic modern hub with smart cafes and shops blending in with a historic facade.

**The Sherborne / Imperial spa itself was modelled on the Temple of Jupiter in Rome, by local architects the Jearrad Brothers. It was dismantled in 1947 when the spa ran out of water, and the Queen's Hotel was built in its place and opened a year later at a cost of £47,000.

18 - Everyman Theatre

Regent Street, GL50 1HQ

Take short detour down Regent Street to admire the spectacular Everyman Theatre which will celebrate its 130th birthday this year! We are proud that this theatre has been serving the county and beyond since 1891. The main auditorium is an architectural masterpiece designed by the famous architect, Frank Matcham, an inspirational man responsible for designing over 90 theatres.

In 2011 the Everyman charity undertook a £3.2million restoration project to return the interior decor as much as possible to Matham's original design.

19 - HSBC

2 The Promenade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 1LR

Built in 1880 as the Worcester City and County Bank, it then became the London City and Midland Bank at the end of the 1800's and then the Midland Bank around 1925. So, it's always been a bank. You'll see the Latin Mottos 'Cum Prudential Sedulus' inscribed half way up the building which means 'with diligence and prudence and 'Labore Omnia Florent' meaning 'All things prosper by industry.'

20 - Superdry

1-7 Clarence St, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 3JL

We are proud that the world-renowned clothing brand, Superdry, was established in Cheltenham as a creative collaboration between entrepreneurs Julian Dunkerton (the owner of the Lucky Onion Group including No 131, The Tavern and No 38 The Park) and James Holder in 2003.

Julian started his career in fashion with a clothing stall at the Cheltenham market. This evolved into the brand Cult Clothing, which sold vintage-looking, Americana inspired clothing in towns/cities including Cheltenham, Oxford, Birmingham and Edinburgh. Meanwhile, James experimented with design and screen printing, eventually founding the skate wear brand Bench. When the two met, they quickly bonded over their obsession with product, progression and pushing boundaries. By combining Julian's passion for incredible tailoring, high quality fabrics and vintage washes along with James's love of typography and graphics, Superdry was born following an inspirational trip to Tokyo.

Superdry is now sold in more than 100 countries worldwide; the headquarters is still here in Cheltenham. From an initial collection of five t-shirts, the brand has grown to offer collections comprising thousands of items and over 500 distinctive logos.

Today, with Julian as the CEO, Superdry are a global community and have developed a cult celebrity following. The company is listed on the FTSE 250, making them as one of the biggest fashion retail success stories in recent times. The first flagship store was opened on London's Regent Street in 2011. Now there are over 500 Superdry branded stores across the globe.

21 - Martin & Co

19 The Promenade, Cheltenham, GL50 1LP

The story of Martin & Co, a local jewellers based on The Promenade, is a fascinating one. During George III's reign, a clockmaker named Samuel Martin opened a business on The Strand in Cheltenham in 1806. Queen Victoria presented Martin & Co with a royal warrant in 1838. Three years later, the company moves to its present site on The Promenade. In 1890, George Dimmer, mayor of Cheltenham and founder member of the Rotary Club, acquires the business and changes the name to Martin & Co. Interestingly, in 1912 Martin & Co became one of the first limited companies in the country and in 1935 the jewellers created the Cheltenham Gold Cup for the first time. They have since gone on to hand make a new trophy every year since for Cheltenham Racecourse! Source - Martin & Co.

22 - The Wilson Art Gallery & Museum

Clarence Street, Cheltenham, GL50 3JT

Part of the Cheltenham Trust. The Wilson houses an internationally significant museum collection and changing displays of crafts and fine art collections. The building is also home to The Open Archive with fascinating archives relating to Antarctic explorer Edward A. Wilson, Cheltenham's history and the Emery Walker Library.

In 1898 the third Baron de Ferrieres, a former Mayor and MP for Cheltenham, gave 43 important paintings, mostly from Belgium and the Netherlands, to the town, together with £1000 towards the building of a gallery in which to house them. This was opened in 1899. The first real increase in space and visitor facilities came in 1989 when HRH The Princess Royal opened an extension to the Art Gallery & Museum. This is the building in which the main entrance is sited.

After a major new build Cheltenham art gallery and museum re-opened to the public on Saturday 5 October 2013. The renovation project also included re-branding the museum with the current name - The Wilson.

23 - Cheltenham High Street

The High Street, or the lower High Street to be exact, is Cheltenham's oldest district and home to some of the oldest buildings in town. The history of this area dates back much further than the Regency period. According to the "Local Development Framework: Lower High Street Area Appraisal and Management Plans" published by Cheltenham Borough Council, the lower high street was once the only street in Cheltenham during the Medieval period. During this time, Cheltenham was as an Anglo-Saxon village, its name meaning 'village under the cliff'. It is recorded in the Domesday Book (1086) as having a population of fewer than 200.

Due to this, many referred to Cheltenham as "Cheltenham Street" during the 17th and 18th centuries. In addition to the main high street, Cheltenham had few narrow lanes which ran off including Henrietta Street, Grove Street, North Street and St George's Place, which was once known as Stills Lane.

24 - The Brewery Quarter

Henrietta Street, Cheltenham, GL50 4FA

The Brewery Quarter prides itself on being a 'one-stop shop where you can shop-dine-stay and play!'

It can be found at the end of the High Street and is a hub of things to do and see including leisure attractions, restaurants, bars and shops.

Founded in 1760 when it was known as Gardner's Brewery, the company was registered as The Cheltenham Original Brewery in 1888 and became Whitbread Flowers Brewery in 1963. Brewing ceased in 1998.

It was Cheltenham's first proper brewery when it was founded in 1760 by local maltster and baker, Thomas Gardner. Gardner's Brewery flourished and expanded and in 1888 was registered as Cheltenham Original Brewery Ltd. However, people had been brewing their own ale and malt since medieval times because it was safer to drink than disease-borne water.

The Brewery Quarter has been an entertainment and leisure venue since the early 2000s and was revamped and reopened in 2017.

25 - The Holst Birthplace Museum

4 Clarence Road, Cheltenham, GL52 2AY

The Holst Birthplace Museum is where composer Gustav Holst was born in 1874. Today the house is a time capsule of 19th century life with a working Victorian kitchen, Victorian bedroom, scullery and nursery for visitors to enjoy.

Holst attended Cheltenham Grammar School (now Pate's Grammar School) and, when he was twenty one years old, he held his first concert at the Montpellier Rotunda (now Lloyds TSB). He then studied music composition at the Royal College of Music in London and became a music teacher at St Paul's Girls' School in London. Whilst working as a music teacher, Holst wrote many pieces of music. His most famous was The Planets suite, written between 1914 and 1917, composed on a piano which is still in his Music Room within the museum. The Planets consisted of seven very different pieces of music, each representing

the different 'personalities' of the planets. The most famous piece is Jupiter: Bringer of Jollity, a section of which is used as the theme for Rugby world cups. Source – The Holst Birthplace Museum.

26 - Pittville Gates

Just across from the museum you come to the final stop of our historical self-guided walking tour of Cheltenham. These impressive and elegant gates were built in 1833 as a grand entrance to the Pittville Estate. The original gateway consisted of two openings for carriages and two for pedestrians with a lantern on each pillar, lit for a few years by oil and then gas. Robert Stokes (1809-80) designed the gates. This creative man also designed the facades of many of Pittville's terraces and villas, living for a time at 7 Pittville Lawn. The gates looked unloved for a few years but fortunately were restored by the Friends of Pittville in 2012. The voluntary group also replaced the now flower planter.

We will end our self-guided tour of Cheltenham with a question... Can you guess what this planter would have been in the 1800's?

We hope you've enjoyed this free self-guided historical tour of our Regency town. Of course it's not the same as taking a tour with a professional blue badge tour guide! Once lockdown is over we thoroughly recommend you book on a guided tour with Anne Bartlett from www.tourandexplore.com.

For other lockdown daily exercise ideas check out the Visit Cheltenham website - www.visitcheltenham.com/things-to-do. Until then, stay safe and help us to protect Cheltenham by following the COVID government rules.

Kind regards,

The Visit Cheltenham Team

