

Supporting Document 13 - Historic Environment

1. The Town of Eye is situated in the north of Suffolk on the River Dove. It lies approximately two miles south of the River Waveney which forms the Norfolk / Suffolk border. It is surrounded by a cluster of satellite villages which look to Eye as their natural centre for shopping etc. The main industry in the area is arable farming though a large established industrial estate to the north of the town continues to develop and expand.

A History of Eye

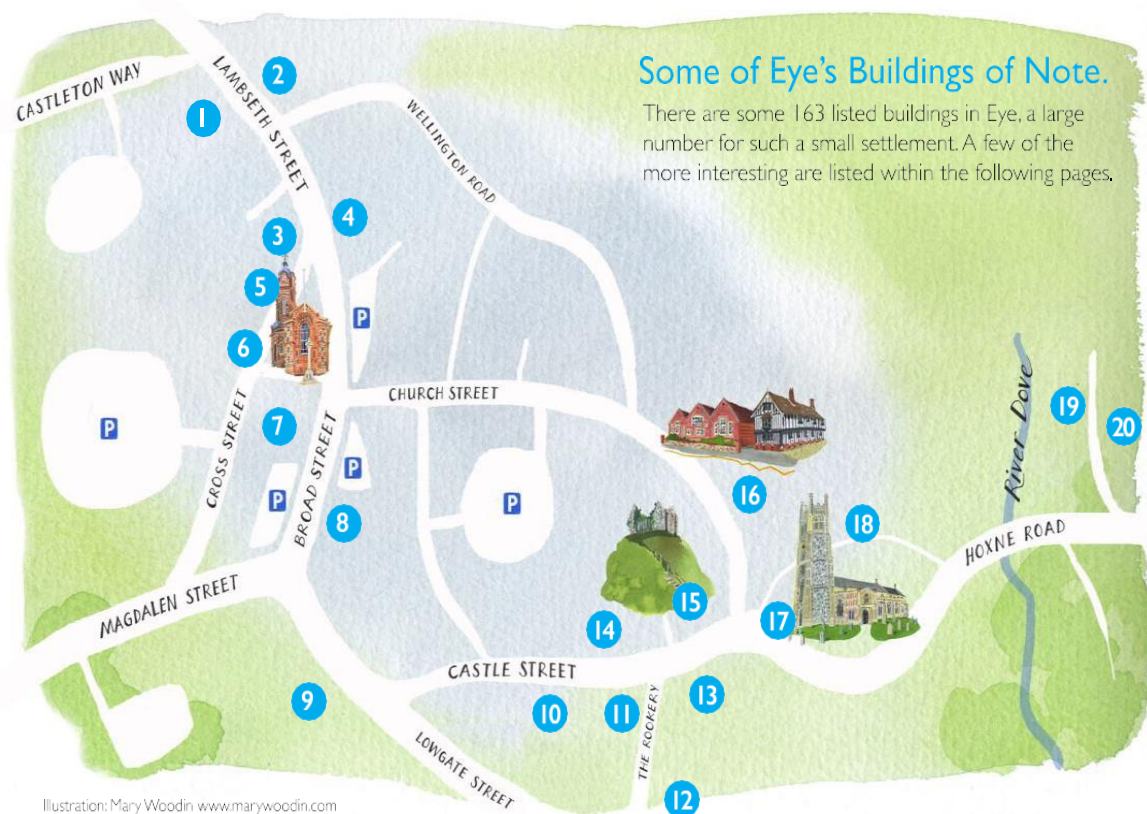
2. The town of Eye derives its name from the Saxon word for 'island'; it is believed that the first settlement on the site would have been on the higher ground and almost entirely surrounded by water and marshland formed by the River Dove to the east and southeast, its tributary to the north and by the low land which now includes the Town Moor to the southwest. Even today the whole area is still prone to flooding close to the River Dove.
3. There have been numerous archeological finds in and around Eye. The earliest is an Acheulean hand axe, while a Paleolithic small hand axe, Mesolithic worked flints, Neolithic flint blades and cremations and a Bronze Age hoard and cremations. Evidence of settlement in the town centre dates from the Roman period, and includes buildings and coins dated circa 365.
4. A recent excavation at Hartismere High School identified evidence of occupation from the earlier Neolithic until the post Medieval Period. However the most significant evidence of an early Anglo-Saxon settlement which consisted of two earth-fast post hole buildings and at least eighteen Sunken Featured Buildings, the centre bisected by a tract way. Sixteen shallow rectangular flint burning pits were also found. Four late Neolithic/early Bronze Age cremations were found and an undated crouched inhumation (rare) in the east half of the site is suspected of being the same date. There were two groups of later Bronze Age/ early Iron Age pits and two round houses probably of the same date. There was also some evidence of Roman occupation restricted to stray finds such as coins.
5. The possible Roman settlement at Eye was connected to the new road (the present-day A140) built by the Romans between Colchester and Caister St. Edmunds.
6. A large Anglo-Saxon cemetery (including many urns cremations and some furnished inhumations in use during the 6th century) was excavated near the Waterloo Plantation, Eye, in 1818.
7. In 1781, some labourers unearthed a lead box by the river at Clint Farm, just South of Eye, The box contained about 600 Roman gold coins, and was the largest hoard of Roman gold coins ever discovered in Britain, similar in content to the Hoxne Hoard.

8. Before the Norman Conquest, Eye was one of the numerous holdings of Edric of Laxfield, a wealthy and influential Saxon and the third largest land holder in Suffolk.
9. After the Norman Conquest, the importance of the town was firmly established in the region when the Honour of Eye was granted to William Malet a Norman Lord; the Honour continued to be held by royal or noble families until 1823.
10. Between 1066 and 1071, Malet constructed a castle occupying the higher ground to the East end of the Island with a large bailey (approximately 2 acres) stretching westward. To do this he almost certainly flattened the centre of the old Saxon town to make a large open area on which to build his Castle. Similar destruction of an existing Town centre was carried out in Norwich though on a much larger scale. The shape of Eye Castle is still visible today, with the lines of the Castle being marked by Church Street to the North and East, Castle Street to the South, and Broad Street with the entrance to the Outer Bailey and the Market Place to the West. Malet established his military and administrative headquarters, and started a highly successful Saturday market in about 1070, initiating the urbanisation of Eye.
11. The Market was situated to the west of the Castle bounded by Broad Street and Cross Street. Over the centuries, however shops and houses have encroached on the original Market Place which greatly reduced its size and importance.
12. Later in 1086-7, William's son, Robert Malet, founded the Benedictine Priory of St Peter, a cell of the Abbey of Bernay in Normandy. The Priory was well endowed with land and benefices, and also received revenue from Dunwich and the properties of Robert Malet. Dunwich, later overrun by the sea, housed the beautiful St. Felix book of the Gospels - the 'Red Book of Eye' - which was brought to the Priory for safety, and on which people took the oath. Tragically this irreplaceable book has since disappeared and it is believed to have been used to provide game tickets!
13. Eye Castle began to lose its strategic importance after 1173 when it was attacked by Hugh Bigod, 1st Earl of Norfolk; this was during the rebellion against Henry II, and later during the Second Barons' War of 1265; after this, it never regained its former status. Its prison continued in use until the early 17th century despite a programme of demolition of most of the castle buildings during the 14th century.
14. A windmill, built in 1561–62, stood on the motte until the circular mock keep was built by General Sir Edmund Kerrison in 1844. He built the walling that remains and, in addition, a cottage to accommodate his Batman who had saved his life at Waterloo.
15. Through the centuries, Eye remained a relatively small settlement, although not insignificant; it prospered as a market town with an annual Whit Monday Fair. Local industry in the town included two breweries, several slaughter houses, an iron and brass Founders, and a Gas works. There was also a flax works and two Retteries for the process of flax. While trade included blacksmiths, wheelwrights, coopers, clock makers, milliners, tailors, printers, butchers grocers and banks.

16. Over the years Eye has also had a Deer Park, a Leper Hospital, a Gaol/Prison, a large work house, a David Fisher Theatre, a Coaching Inn with Pasting establishment, a working men's hall and reading room, a Grammar School and lastly twenty pubs(including Beer Houses)
17. However the earliest mention of industry in Eye records that, in 1673, 'the women's employ in this town is making of bone lace' and, in 1830, 'the humbler class of industrious females employ themselves in lace making'. The last lace maker in the town died in 1914.
18. Eye was once the smallest borough in the Country, and borough status was not discontinued until 1974 after government reorganisation. Thereafter, Eye became a civil parish, but retained a Town Council, its insignia and a Mayor. From 1571 to 1832, Eye returned two MPs, and then, following the Reform Act 1832, a single MP until 1983, after which the Eye Constituency became the Suffolk Central constituency. At the time of abolition, Eye was the constituency with the smallest eponymous town, with only around 1500 voters actually living in the town of Eye.
19. In 1846, Eye Borough Council failed in its attempt to route the new London-Norwich railway line through Eye. The line, completed in 1849, went instead through Diss, ensuring that town's growth in prosperity and population, while the importance of Eye waned. Eye railway station, located at the end of a branch line from Mellis, closed to passengers in 1931 and to freight in 1964.
20. Eye airfield, to the north-east of the town, began as RAF Eye occupied by the 490th Bomb Group of the USAAF's VIII Bomber Command during World War II.
21. A large industrial estate to the north of Eye is situated mainly on the old airfield and associated areas.
22. At present Eye has a hospital. Heath Centre, 2 schools, three Churches, a Library, a Fire Station, a Town Hall and a Country Market as well as many other shops and businesses. The Town Moors and Community Centre and the Woodland area coupled with the Pennings Picnic Site are recreational areas for the town's people to enjoy.
23. Eye Town centre has some 139 listed buildings including three Grade 1, The Guildhall, St Peter and St. Paul's Church and the Castle and a further 7 Grade 2 Stared. In all there are some 157 listed buildings within the parish.
24. Eye was declared a Conservation Area in 1970 which has meant that the Town Centre's appearance has changed very little over the last fifty years apart from some minor infilling. However some shops and most of the twenty plus Pubs and Inns have become private houses though there has been little change in their outward appearance.

25. In September 2011 a Conservation Area Appraisal was carried out by Mid Suffolk District Council to appraise Eye's built environment in conservation terms.
(See <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/documents/Eye2011CAA.pdf>)
26. Eye continues to develop in the 21st century with a large Housing Estate planned to the north of the town, a new gas fired Power Station and one of the largest food processing factories in Europe.

Some of Eye's Building



PLEASE NOTE: This information is based on the author's local knowledge and reference to the register of listed buildings held by English Heritage and Mid Suffolk District Council and other sources. Inclusion in the directory does NOT mean that a residential property is open to be viewed by members of the public, and readers are asked to respect owners' privacy.

1. Chandos Lodge (Grade II)

Along the Lambseth Street frontage to this property is a splendid example of an 18th century crinkle-crankle or serpentine wall. As well as giving a pleasing appearance, the design incorporates very high strength for a wall of only single brick thickness, and it aids stability in areas prone to high winds and shelter for espalier fruit trees etc. In large ornamental grounds, the house was originally built by Dent Hooper for John Wythe in 1811, with extensions to the right and left in 1820. It was once occupied by Sir Frederick Ashton, the famous choreographer and Director of the Royal Ballet.

2. Bedingfield Almshouses (Grade II)

Built by Nicholas Bedingfield in 1636, these timber-frame buildings have some original leaded casement windows, very ornate chimneys, and fish-scale tiles. The Almshouses were rebuilt in 1850. The cottages were erected for the free habitation of four poor widows who had to be local inhabitants of Eye. In his will, Nicholas Bedingfield left an endowment providing each of the women with two shillings monthly, a new gown of grey cloth every two or three years, and an annual cartload of firewood.

On the front of the almshouses, you can see the inscriptions 'Believe Right', 'Doe Well', 'Avoid Ill for Heaven, Amen', 'Povertie', 'Humilitie', 'Patience' and 'Charitie'.

3. White House (Grade II)

Formally the Mansion House, this is an 18th century timber-framed and plastered structure with a later balcony which is now refaced with white painted rendering.

Previously was once occupied by the Tacon family. Sir Charles Tacon was mayor for ten successive years and his brother, Sir Thomas Tacon, for eight. Charles bequeathed £700 to the Borough in 1910, the interest thereon to provide coal for the poor.

It was used as a private school started by Miss Gambriel in 1926. The house has now been converted into flats.

4. Linden House (Grade II)

Set back from the road behind a row of Lime trees, this red brick house was built circa 1600 as a village farmhouse. The front block was added in the early 18th century. The eight-panelled door is situated between a pair of fluted Doric pilasters.

For about 30 years the house was occupied by the six Thompson sisters. They were mostly teachers, and two were involved in the Suffragist movement. Margaret Thompson, a militant suffragette, had three spells of imprisonment with Emmeline Pankhurst and Mrs Pethick-Lawrence between 1909 and 1912.

5. The Red House (Grade II)

Originally, timber-framed and plastered with a rear wing built in the 16th century, the building now has a red brick 'front-range'. Its third storey was removed in the 1950s leaving a flat roof that has now been enhanced with a new pitched roof. The house was for many years the family home of the Tacon family. The large brewery that used to stand where Tacon Close now is, was owned by the family, and provided a large source of employment for the town.

6. Town Hall (Grade II*)

Eye Town Hall was designed by Edward Buckden Lamb, known as the rogue architect, and was opened in 1857. It replaced the old Corn Hall, which had become inadequate for the needs of the day. A large part of the cost of the new building was donated by Sir Edward Kerrison, and it incorporates some interesting design features. It housed a large meeting hall, or Corn Hall, a Reading Room (part of which is now the kitchen), and a council chamber which was also used as the Magistrates Court with a lock-up in the clock tower.

It is constructed mainly of red brick with lozenge panels of small flints that create the shape

of an 'E' for Eye, and a slate roof. The clock tower has an ogee roof with cupola and vane, and it contains the Angelus Bell, previously housed in the Priory; it now strikes the hour. Note the Eye Coat of Arms over the entrance; this was given to the Borough, as it then was, by Queen Elizabeth in 1952. The motto 'Oculus in Coelum' means 'An Eye to Heaven', and the flowered cross with four martlets is the insignia of Edward the Confessor.

7. Kerrison Memorial

Built of granite, this Gothic memorial was erected in 1888; it was designed by James Colling of London in memory of Sir Edward Kerrison, Baronet and a local benefactor. Kerrison was Member of Parliament for Eye from 1852 until 1866. The stone monument has a square base and a tall octagonal fleche with crocket finial. The sides show the arms of the Kerrison family, those of Eye, and the arms of Gibraltar (where the Suffolk Regiment distinguished itself in battle).

8. The former White Lion Hotel

Built mainly in the 15th century, the White Lion Hotel was Eye's most distinguished public house. It is timber-framed, and has been lime plastered and painted. Above the main entrance, with double doors, plasters and entablature, is a white sculptured lion. The ground floor has a jettied coach entrance with a Bessemer beam. It closed in 1986 and is now apartments and houses. The inn was a posting establishment for many years and the converted stables can be seen through the carriageway. In the first half of the 19th century, this was a main stopover point for Norwich to London journeys.

The wing to the left of the courtyard was a ballroom dating from 1738, and it has an Adam-style ceiling and a small musicians' gallery. For a time, it was used as the location for the Eye Theatre.

9. Harwen House (Grade II)

This impressive 1844 double-winged house with Dutch gables on either side once provided a charity financed by the rents received. Each Christmas, 50 shillings were given to the 'poor widows and maidens in Eye'. During the early part of the 20th century the house contained a large dressmaking and millinery business that employed women from the town.

10. Stanley House (Grade II)

This long, narrow 16th century building is timber-framed and plastered. A mullioned blocked window to the front and gable windows in the attic are still visible from this period. A two-storey 17th century stair turret under a pyramid roof is to the south side of the property. There is a short Georgian crinkle-crinkle wall in the rear garden. From the 1870s it was a girls boarding and day school for almost 40 years, run by Martha Notley the daughter of Reverend Charles Notley, Vicar of Redlingfield and one-time master of Eye Grammar School. He also lived at the house in his later years. For about 30 years the house was occupied by the artist Cavendish Morton who was elected mayor on several occasions.

11. Willow House (Grade II)

Originally a merchant's house, Willow House has a 15th century rear wing. In about 1740, it was bought by the Cornwallis family as their Eye residence, and was greatly enhanced.

The main house was updated in the Georgian style, including a fine Italian staircase and tower. The front was altered again in the 1820s, and the four impressive bay windows were inserted. In the 1890s it was used as a 'Cottage Home' for the children of people in the Hartismere Union Workhouse, as well as others from the area that were transferred once they reached school age. The home was closed in the 1930s, and later became a doctor's surgery for a time.

12. 53, Lowgate Street

In 1802, the road from Woodbridge to Eye via Debenham was turnpiked, requiring a Toll House at the road's entrance into Eye. In Suffolk, toll houses were often rectangular in plan, and of one or two storeys with windows in the gable ends for looking up and down the road: no. 53 is a rare surviving example of this particular type.

13. Stayer House (Grade II*)

The c1820 front to Stayer House is built onto a mainly 18th century structure, although the half-timbered wing at the rear is the remains of a much larger medieval Hall House. In about 1600 the house was called 'Fetchetts'; for many years, it was the home of the D'Eye family. It was bought by the French family early in the 19th century. An additional small wing was added to the house as a banking hall for a private bank owned by Thomas French.

Note the wooden porch with four Ionic columns. Next to the house is the stable block, once used as an ale house.

14. Castle Hill

During the 1830s, the Hartismere Union Workhouse was constructed on this site, which was originally the inner bailey of Eye Castle. The workhouse provided a home for the sick, the poor, the handicapped and unmarried mothers of Eye and the surrounding villages.

Run by the Board of Guardians, one representing each village, the workhouse accommodated as many as 350 people. When the new Poor Law Institution (now Hartismere Hospital) was built, the inmates were transferred, and the workhouse was used to house prisoners from the First World War.

In 1979, the buildings were pulled down to allow the development of the award-winning scheme seen today, designed to echo the old castle walls. It adds to the prominence of the mound and bailey as a focal point of the town.

15. Eye Castle (Grade 1)

There may have been an Anglo-Saxon mound and motte to the west of this site; however, the actual fortifications were commenced by William Mallet and completed by his son Robert. Robert then lost the castle after being banished for plotting against William Rufus, the King. At this time the outer defences of the castle were constructed from wood.

In 1156, when he was granted the Honour of Eye, Thomas-a-Becket was given the castle by Henry II. This remained the case until 1164, when he lost favour with the Crown. The castle defences were further strengthened in 1173, but it was besieged and sacked by the notorious Hugh Bigod in the same year. Eye Castle was sacked again in 1265 during the Second Barons' War; it became redundant, the remaining buildings being used as a prison

which had been referred to as early as 1215. By the 14th century, Eye Castle lay largely in ruins, although parts continued to be maintained as a prison.

In 1556, several Protestant martyrs were held in the 'Eye Dungeon' before being burnt at the stake at Bury St Edmunds and Beccles. A windmill was built on top of the motte between 1561-2, while in the 1830s, a workhouse and a school were built inside the castle bailey. In 1844, the then owner, Sir Edward Kerrison, demolished a later windmill that had been built on the motte, and replaced it with a domestic house.

Kerrison had the dwelling built for his batman, who had saved his life at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The house resembled a shell keep, and was built of flint, and it had living quarters built into the walls on the south and west. The building, which had housed a small museum until the 1900s, fell into ruins, being damaged in high winds during 1965 and collapsing further later that year.

The mound and some stone fragments of the original castle still remain intact, and the site is now a scheduled monument. The castle mound viewing platform affords an excellent panoramic view of Eye and the surrounding countryside.

See Eye Castle Heritage Trail www.eyecastle.co.uk

16. Eye Grammar School & Guildhall (Grade 1)

Built in the 15th century, the Guildhall is a two-storey timber-framed building with an exposed half-timbered frame, plaster infill, and a jettied first floor. The whole building was considerably – but carefully – restored in 1876. Its original appearance has been retained, although very little of the early work can now be seen.

On the south side, there are some Victorian heraldic carvings, but the Archangel Gabriel on the southeast angle post corner is original. The Grammar School was founded in 1495 to teach seven sciences – grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy. Until 1566, it was run by a Chantry priest appointed by the Bailiffs. As he was also the schoolmaster, the school was held in the Guildhall next to the church, which also later served as the Headmaster's House until 1965. In 1911, new buildings adjacent to the Guildhall were erected, and these form the basis of the present school. This ceased to be a Grammar School in 1965, and later became the St Peter and St Paul Church of England Aided Primary School.

17. The Church of St. Peter & St Paul (Grade 1)

There has been a church in Eye since 1066; however, the semi-circular churchyard is indicative of a very early Christian site. The present church is one of the finest in Suffolk, built in a mixture of Early English, decorated and Perpendicular styles, showing it was constructed in several stages, and over a long period of time.

The earliest visible work is the Early English doorway reused from an earlier building as the south door of the aisle. The main body of the church dates from the 14th and 15th centuries when the nave was heightened, and given the present clerestory, roof, and new window in the Perpendicular style. Inside can be seen the splendid Rood Screen of 1480, painted with the figures of saints. Above these panels is a beautifully carved and gilded rail, surmounted by a loft and Rood designed by Ninian Comper, who also designed the font cover.

The magnificent 101-foot high tower, completed by 1479 at a cost of £40, is an excellent

example of flush work. This consists of a pattern of stone panels filled with flint, and is considerably more economic than building entirely with dressed stone, particularly as good building stone cannot be found in East Anglia.

<http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/eye.htm>

18. The Old Vicarage (Grade II)

The older north-south wing on the east (garden side) dates back as far as the mid-15th Century. The medieval presbytery was repurposed as the kitchen to the Georgian vicarage. In 1723/24 the Reverend John Burgate added the long elevation facing the churchyard.

In 1733, the Rev. Doctor William Broome, a minor poet and classicist, embellished this wing with sash casements, front door and panelling inside and out. His will mentions the bread oven which still exists, and a provision that benefits those attending his memorial, along with noting that his prized snuff will in a box on his desk! Broome, vicar from 1724 to 1745, appears in Doctor Johnson's Lives of Poets, and collaborated extensively with Alexander Pope (1688-1744) on the translations of Homer's Odyssey. Of that work, he was responsible for six of the books as well as all the notes, and is buried in Bath Abbey.

19. Abbey Hall (Scheduled Ancient Monument)

This red brick building, originally two storeys, dates from around 1500, and was built on the site of an 11th century building; it has a fine range of single and double light windows with a central doorway on the west side. Its use is uncertain but it could well have been built as bake and brew-house for the Benedictine monks.

The interior and roof were badly damaged by fire, but there is evidence of a fine chamber on the first floor at the southern end, with stone mullion windows and a niche. The building has been restored in partnership with English Heritage.

20. The Abbey (Grade II)

A tall 17th century building faced with red brick; it includes part of the prior's lodgings rebuilt after 1385. The east wall of the house is the west wall of the Priory Cloister, while the timber-framed rear or north wing is the remaining part of the prior's lodgings. A south-facing transitional window of timber still survives within the house. In the grounds are the fragmentary remains of the original priory buildings.

There are several monastic fish ponds and water features remaining to the north of the house.