

## Lymington High Street – Large Print Labels

### Lymington High Street

Lymington's future as a port and economic centre for the south of the New Forest was established around 1200 when it was granted a charter by William de Redvers, the lord of the manor. In return for an annual fee and property rents the new burgesses of Lymington were exempted from paying tolls and customs duties anywhere on de Redvers lands. This provided commercial advantages for their business and trading interests and encouraged people to settle in the new town.

Perhaps most importantly the charter laid out a new borough centred on a long straight street – the High Street. This was lined with long, narrow burgage plots each 5 ½ yards wide, a measurement still found among the shopfronts at the bottom of the hill. The houses were set right on to the street and the end of their plots backed on to fields. Here the burgesses could live and set up businesses to sell and trade goods in return for an annual rent of sixpence.

## Plan of the Town of Lymington, 1841

John Wood

This map shows the narrow burgage plots and long gardens of many of the High Street's buildings, as well as the Town Hall standing prominently in the middle of the road. Many of the buildings' owners or occupiers are listed, including Charles St Barbe at No 48 and James Monroe at No 50. Over the years the High Street has played host to at least 15 different schools, although only one is visible on this map. Also shown are five of the High Street's pubs. The boundary of the borough is shown in yellow.

## The High Street

Drawing by B Ferrey, engraved by L Haghe

The High Street in about 1832 with the Town Hall top centre. William de Redvers' charter of 1200 laid out a new borough based on this long street, wide enough for market stalls and traffic. The children of Edward Hicks, who was later mayor, are shown on the far left on the pavement outside their house at No 1. The building at the bottom of the hill on the right, No 139, was demolished in about 1908 to improve access to Gosport Street.

## **The Medieval High Street**

The High Street's medieval houses were mostly timber-framed with plastered wattle and daub panels. Although designs changed over time, these were the usual materials until the late 17th century. Some buildings were roofed with thatch, others with tiles or slate. The gardens provided space for growing fruit and vegetables, stables, wells for water and cess pits for waste. With the weekly markets, the movements of livestock and no sewerage system, the medieval High Street would have been a dirty and smelly place.

Evidence of the High Street's medieval origins survive in several properties. This, combined with the lack of records, is the key reason local historians such as Jude James refute claims that Lymington was burned by the French. At Osbornes (Nos 26-27) the front is Georgian but inside are the remains of a medieval timber-framed building from around 1480-1500. Plastered wattle and daub panels can be seen on the right hand wall and just inside, above the shop window, are the wooden beams of a jetty (projecting beams that allowed the first floor to overhang the street and provide more space inside). Jettied frontages like this can be seen in surviving medieval buildings in places like Winchester, York and Canterbury.

## Old Houses in Lymington High Street

T T Colborne

These two drawings of the Tudor Cottages on the corner of Ashley Lane depict the same scene but with subtle differences. Admiral Arthur Phillip rented one between 1798 and 1803, when he was commander of the Hampshire Sea Fencibles – a defence force of 300 local men ready to go to sea if Napoleon invaded. Arthur is best known for raising the flag for a colony which became known as Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788. This date is celebrated as Australia Day but to many aboriginal groups is known as Invasion Day.

## Lymington Market

From at least the 1250s, Lymington was given the right to hold a weekly market and two annual fairs, its wide straight High Street an ideal place for the stalls. People from the surrounding towns and villages could bring their animals, produce and fish to sell and trade and buy more specialist goods provided by Lymington's makers and craftspeople. The market mainly sold live and dead stock from wooden stalls called shambles. Fish was also sold 'wet', salted, dried or smoked. Other stalls offered cloth, clothing, pots and pans and leather goods. Gradually demand for such services on a more than weekly basis led to the creation of permanent shops selling goods all week round. The mayor and burgesses were responsible for regulating the market. Standard measures were introduced in England in 1215 and in Henry VII's reign an act required officially approved and stamped (sealed) measures to be provided for use in every town. In 1652 John Colchester was fined 3s 4d for using 'unjust', that is unsealed, weights.

According to David Garrow, writing in 1825, the market was well attended and *"amply supplied with meat, poultry, butter, vegetables and other necessaries, at reasonable prices. The only defect experienced here is fish, the want of this commodity is severely felt and generally complained of. At certain seasons, we have mackerel, herrings, plaice, hake and flounders; but salmon,*

*cod, turbot and other choice fish are very rarely to be met with and when so, at exorbitant prices."*

St Thomas Church and the Market

Howard Letty

Watercolour sketch of market stalls in front of St Thomas Church, shown at the "Small is beautiful" exhibition at St Thomas Church Hall in 1998.

Market Day, Lymington

Barbara Brettell

Pencil and ink drawing of a busy market day in 1976, showing

Market Traders

Bob Coles

stalls at the top of the High Street.

Five of Lymington's market traders: Alan Veal of Southampton, Eric Drennan of Wimborne, Peter Frape of Efford, Terry Knight of Southampton and Graham Brown of Poole.

Poster declaring that from 5 January 1867, Lymington market will be held on Saturday instead of Monday.

## The Eighteenth Century

Lymington's High Street did not change radically for several hundred years until the Georgian period, which saw great changes in its appearance. The town was prospering, particularly because of the local salt industry and many buildings were either re-fronted or rebuilt in brick. This newfound prosperity is reflected by surviving buildings such as Bellevue House (now the offices of Moore Barlow) built around 1760 as an elegant and prestigious private residence. Banker Charles St Barbe lived there from 1828. Another impressive Georgian mansion is Grosvenor House (now home to Millets and Age UK), built around 1831 for James Monro, who served as Lymington's mayor.

The range of shops and goods available increased greatly during the 18th century and Lymington became an important shopping destination in its own right, serving the south of the New Forest. By the end of the century the High Street was home to various trades including grocers, drapers, mercers, milliners and watch makers.

Once goods had been displayed on tables outside the shops, as seen in Thomas Rowlandson's drawing of a Lymington fruit shop from the 1780s. These were open to the elements, to dust and mud from passing traffic and to the light-fingered. The development of the shop window provided an indoor space to

display goods and a lighter interior for the shop. Bay windows became popular, providing a bigger display area. As glass-making techniques got better and glass became cheaper the individual panes became larger too.

### The High Street

Painting by JM Gilbert, engraved by L Haghe

A view of the High Street with Grosvenor House standing prominently on the left. This was one of the scenes in 'Views of the Principle Seats and Marine and Landscape Scenery in the Neighbourhood of Lymington', published by Lymington Grocer Richard Grove.

### Fruit Shop, Lymington

Thomas Rowlandson

Thomas Rowlandson drew this picture of a Lymington fruit shop on his visit to the area in 1784. According to the trade directory of that year, the only fruiterer was William House, so that must be the shop shown here. The goods are displayed on tables on the pavement outside.



## **The Nineteenth Century**

In the 19th century growing urban populations and better transport links created more customers and demand for High Street shops, which also now had a wider range of goods to sell. No longer just produced locally, these were now transported in by ship and train. The Victorian High Street featured largely independent shops run by local families. Many goods were made on the premises and some shops had workshops attached where items were made.

By this time permanent shops were really coming into their own, offering a week-round supply of goods that the market could not match. The age of the High Street as a shopping street had been born. The road was now gravelled and there were paved walkways and crossing points, saving pedestrians' shoes and clothing from the worst of the dust or mud. Luxury goods were available from watchmakers, jewellers, glass and china dealers and booksellers. Grocers, butchers, haberdashers, ironmongers and dressmakers provided the essentials while solicitors, banks and insurance companies served the population's legal and financial needs.

A few businesses of this era survived well into the 20th century including Rand & Son and Elliotts, which is still going strong today. Charles King established his bookselling, bookbinding and printing business in Lymington in 1805 and it was to

flourish for almost two centuries. Klitz's music shop was a feature on the High Street for three centuries, after being founded in 1789. Many others only appear fleetingly in the records, which shows that competition for customers has always been strong on the High Street and less successful businesses did not survive.

J Topp had an open shopfront, as can be seen in this photo from about 1900 where he is standing in the doorway with two assistants and a boy, possibly an apprentice. Carcasses were hung from meat hooks under the awning and displayed on tables in front of the shop, with sawdust strewn on the pavement below to soak up the blood.

Draper Badcock can be seen on the far right with the two bank buildings a little further on. Across the road, children are playing outside furniture seller WS Good in this photo taken in the 1890s.

49 High Street

Robert E Groves

A view of the High Street by Robert Groves, later overpainted with watercolour, showing James Bailes' shop at No 49 with the old sign for E Stone's tailors still showing on the side of the

building. There appears to be a fruit shop next door, at No 50, while the Mew Langton sign above the Waltham Arms can be seen at No 51.

Edward King, on the far left, stands outside his shop in 1877 with Charles King in the doorway and Richard King by the window. Printers Meadows, Loader and Gatrell are to the right of the building. Edward was elected a councillor and an alderman and was three times mayor of Lymington in the 1870s. He also became very interested in the history of the town and in 1879 published 'Old Times Revisited in the Borough and Parish of Lymington Hants'.

This photograph from the 1880s shows F Dale, tailor and habit maker at No 86, G Elliott & Co at their first shop at No 87 and Klitz's music saloon at No 88 High Street.

## **Events on the High Street**

Since Lymington received its charter in the 12th century the High Street has been the beating heart of the town. As well as being home to the market, shops and businesses that helped the town thrive, the High Street has also provided the setting for processions and ceremonies that marked local traditions and nationally significant events.

Every Whit Sunday, for example, nearly everyone in Lymington used to turn out for the Hospital Sunday parade. It was held to raise money for Lymington Hospital and members of the public were urged to donate to the cause. One local boy, Charlie Doe, went round with his collecting tin tied to the end of a long pole, from which there was a fabric chute to a receptacle at the bottom, so people watching from their windows could make contributions too.

Following the Second World War, Lymington carnival became a major event, with local organisations and businesses keen to get involved and provide floats that advertised their services.

The High Street has also played host to street parties, circus processions, civic announcements, Jubilee celebrations and Remembrance days - many of which continue to this day.

## Packing up after a Country Ball

Caroline Bowles

Dating to the 1820s, this drawing looks like a scene from a Jane Austen novel. It shows guests changing into cloaks, pattens (to protect their shoes from the mud) and calash bonnets (to save their elaborate hairstyles from wind and rain) before leaving a ball at the Assembly Rooms. These were on the first floor of 109 High Street and once ran the full length of the building, with windows at both ends and a small gallery for musicians at one side. Dances, balls and card parties, as well as concerts, once took place there.

## Events on the High Street

The High Street has played host to numerous events over the years, including peace celebrations, circuses and carnivals.

Procession to celebrate the end of the First World War, with horse-drawn carriages travelling down the High Street and the firemen providing a guard of honour for the mayor, who is leaving the town hall (117-118 High Street). The postillion on horseback, at the front of the photo, wears a jacket similar to the one we have on display.

Crowds gather outside St Thomas Church (then covered in ivy) to celebrate the rehangings of the bells in 1901. St Thomas' vicar, Canon Benjamin Maturin, is in the front centre of the photo – with a white beard and stick.

Crowds line the High Street to greet Queen Elizabeth II on her visit to the town on 15 July 1966. The first car is just about to pass the Anchor and Hope at 96 High Street.

## **The Twentieth Century**

The 20th century brought great changes to Lymington High Street. Many local shopkeepers no longer prepared their own goods, instead stocking popular and heavily advertised brands. There was a matching decline in the skills needed to produce such goods locally. Chain stores that might be found on any High Street in Britain also arrived in ever-greater numbers. This was bad news for local family-run businesses who could not compete with the buying and selling power of national businesses that offered lower prices and a wider range of stock.

In the early 20th century when few people had refrigerators there was a need to shop daily for fresh produce, which brought more footfall to the High Street and made it the thriving centre of the town. Before supermarkets this meant visiting a number of shops such as bakers, grocers, butchers and dairies. After the Second World War the rise of supermarkets saw the introduction of self-service shopping. The loss of personal service and social contact with the shop staff was compensated for by greater speed and convenience and lower prices. The success of the supermarket would put many of these individual stores out of business.

The High Street had also been home to a range of tailors, drapers, milliners, bootmakers and haberdashers and for many

local people these were the only places to buy clothing save for an expensive and time-consuming visit to the department stores of Bournemouth or Southampton. As rail and road transport became more convenient these large town and city shops began to compete with local suppliers. As such the late 20th century saw the demise of many longstanding family businesses, such as Rand's, Klitz's, Bennett's, Doman's and King's, as well as many smaller stores.

## The Lower High Street

Alick D Summers

During the Second World War, art teacher Alick Summers and his students were evacuated to Brockenhurst from Portsmouth. While here, Alick painted many views of local scenes, including this ink and watercolour of Nos 1-9 High Street.

View of the High Street taken by Myles Cooper in 1962 showing Dawson's garage on the left. The Bugle Hotel at No 82 is just visible towards the centre right of the photo.



## The Twenty-first Century

High streets were once the bustling focus of many towns and cities: a place to buy your essentials and meet people. Today many are in decline, the competition from online shopping, out of town supermarkets and retail parks resulting in empty shops and declining visitor numbers. In Lymington individual food shops have been replaced by supermarkets, clothing shops are mostly national chain stores while practical supplies shops like ironmongers are largely represented by major chains at Ampress industrial estate. There are still pubs and hotels but now also numerous cafés and restaurants.

While there were once plenty of grocers, fruiterers, dairies, bakers, butchers and fishmongers on the High Street, there are now very few. Food shops today include takeaways and frozen foods, a supermarket and a discount store. Chemists, watchmakers and jewellers, bookshops and stationers, banks, florists, estate agents and hairdressers remain, but there is less variety than before. The High Street now hosts 23 clothing stores, 11 cafés or restaurants, 10 charity shops, seven estate agents, five banks, four opticians as well as more modern trades including phone shops and computer repairs, travel agents and a tattooist.

The number of wholly residential properties has fallen to 4% of High Street premises, from 10% in 1859. However, today there

are 15 vacant properties and recent planning applications suggest that in the future more premises are likely to become residential dwellings, replacing shops and offices.

Many of the national stores which replaced family-run businesses have also disappeared in recent years. Today high street shop closures are largely attributed to four issues: competition from shopping centres and retail parks, the growth of online shopping, bank closures, and unaffordable business rates. COVID lockdowns also favoured online sellers. This has made the future of our high street very uncertain.

## **The Future**

The crisis facing our high streets reflects a collapse of the shopping-focused identity of many town centres. This had resulted in too many shops competing with each other and the crowding out of alternative uses for high street premises. High land and rental values for town centre commercial areas have also made survival impossible for some small businesses and even established retail chains when competing against the much lower overheads faced by out-of-town and online shopping companies. The rise of internet shopping with its vast range of products and choices, low overheads and economies of scale has proved to be the tipping point in the decline of many town centre shopping areas. The move to online banking and the cost-saving closure of bank branches also gives people less reason to visit their local high street.

Concern about the future of high street retailing and its implications for the economic and social health of our towns has led to a number of reviews and reports: a 2018 'Plan for the High Street', the creation of a High Streets Task Force in 2019 and the Future High Streets Fund recently being increased to £1 billion.

The future could see a move towards more residential properties in town centre shopping areas, particularly in more wealthy and attractive locations like Lymington. There is also

more interest in high streets as important places for social interaction and civic activity which could spark a move away from streets completely dominated by shopping and a return to the model from previous centuries.

Perhaps this has also led to a glimmer of hope for a recovery of our high streets. People's desire for something unique, local and with a more direct connection to makers and producers has led to successes for independent stores that can provide something different, more tailored and personal. Surveys have found a greater emphasis on public leisure and entertainment facilities (pop-up stalls, street performers, hospitality) is now more appealing than the opening of new shops. Perhaps this is the future for Lymington High Street?