



Fundamental to the mythology of Helston is its naming story involving the Archangel St Michael.

Michael is known for being the chief opponent of Satan and local legend says that he fought an airborne battle with his foe in the skies above the town.

Some say the stone was St Michael's weapon and sent the devil into Loe Pool, others that the devil had carried the stone from hell to crush the town.

Either way Michael emerged victorious and became the patron saint of Helston, with the church on the hill named for him. For centuries a large, flat stone lay in the rear courtyard of the Angel Hotel (see Page 8). It's said by some that this was the 'hell stone' of Helston's naming story. Unfortunately in the late 1700s the stone was broken up and used as building material for the rear extension of the hotel – it is still visible in the wall either side of a window beyond the Cellar Bar. Tests have proved that it is not meteoritic.

Did you know? You can watch the story of St Michael played out alongside other local myths and legends during the Hal-an-Tow dance on Flora Day, Helston's annual celebration of the coming of Spring. The identity of the masked devil is apparently a closely guarded secret even amongst those who take part!



Signing your way

As you follow the trail you will find numbered signs like this one on the buildings and corresponding with the numbers in this leaflet.

The signs each feature Helston's symbolic flower, the Lily of the Valley.

1 The Guildhall

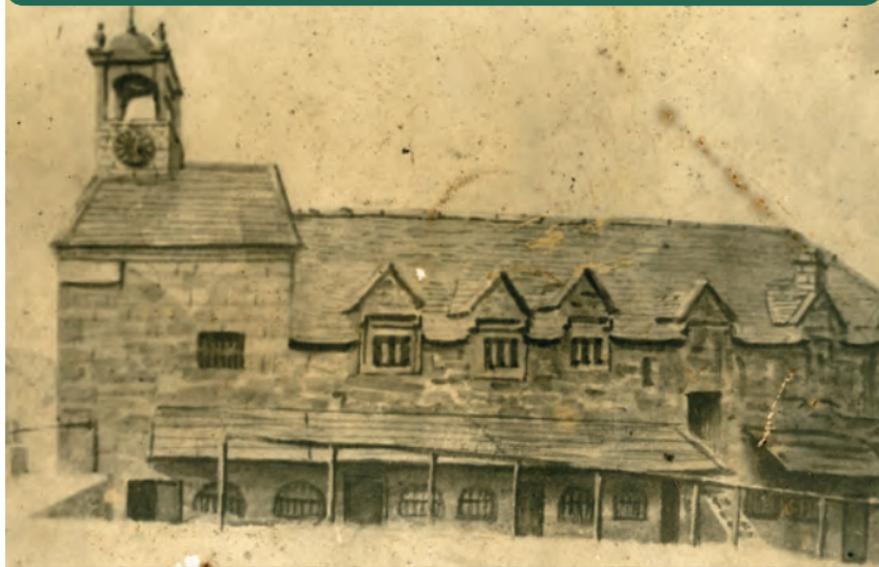
The present Guildhall opened in 1839. It stands on the site of the town's old market house, which stood here from 1576.

Today the building houses the Council Chamber (formerly used as a court) and Mayor's Parlour and is registered for weddings. The ground floor, which now hosts regular local markets, was once the town's Corn Exchange - you can see the dated foundation stone of the original building in here. On Flora Day this building is the centre of attention. Bedecked with gorse, greenery and bluebells, the Guildhall marks the beginning of most of the dances.

Summer is a Come-O and Winter is a Gone-O

Helston's most famous event is the wonderful Flora Day when dancers snake through the streets from dawn till dusk. The midday dance, in particular, is a sight to behold as ladies in their finest frocks and hats and gentleman in top hat and tails dance to the town band, winding their way in and out of shops and houses. The dances are performed to the same famous tune, played by Helston Town Band.

Flora Day always takes place on May 8th, unless this falls on a Sunday or Monday (traditionally Market Day) in which case the preceding Saturday is chosen. The origins of the dance are unknown, but it's thought to be an ancient celebration of the coming of spring.



Did you know? You'll find this image of the market house, which used to stand here, in Helston Museum (no. 2 on the trail). Beneath it is a clock face which was discovered being used as an ornamental goldfish pond on a nearby farm. It's believed this is the clock face from the old market building — making it over 400 years old.

2 Museum of Cornish Life, Helston

Walk down the steps to the right of the Guildhall onto Church Street.

On your right, housed in what were the butter and meat markets from 1837/8, you'll find the Museum. This impressive record of Cornish life was founded by the Helston Old Cornwall Society in 1949 with Mr William Dalton, licensee of the Beehive, as its first honorary curator.



Outside you'll see a cannon retrieved from the HMS Anson, wrecked off Loe Bar in 1807.

Peer through the archway at the side to spy the old market bell, which would have rung out on Saturdays for 100 years between 1837 and 1937 to announce market day. In later years the bell was used to summon the town's fire service.

Step back in time: Imagine yourself on a market day in the 1850s. The street would be a hubbub of activity - barrow boys unloading horse drawn wagons, crates of geese and chickens, housemaids scurrying off towards the big houses of Cross Street with their purchases, and farm lads sneaking off to nearby taverns.

Inside the museum you can peer through the glass of an original 17th century window found during renovations to a former bakery on Meneage Street - and even come face-to-face with a dragon!

You'll also find a remarkable record of Cornish domestic life, the local fishing, agricultural and mining trades, as well as memorabilia from lost Helston gems including the fire station and railway.

Did you know? The water channels down the side of the streets are known as **kennels**. No one really knows quite how old they are but the one on Church Street has hardly changed in over 600 years. The kennels once helped purify the town's air and streets. Old photos show rakes propped at the side of the roads for pushing horse dung and sewage into them. People also washed their clothes and their fish here and from the deeper parts people would draw drinking water in buckets before mains water was piped to the town.

Extend Your Stay

Entry to the Museum is **FREE**. It's worth popping back to have a good look round.

3 The Well

Facing the Museum, turn left and walk a little way along Church Street to Number 15, once the site of the New Inn (see photo) and thought to have witnessed one of the bloodiest incidents in Helston's history.

It's quiet now, but in 1548 the King's Commissioner William Body met his end close by here at the hands of an angry mob. Body had been sent to oversee the dissolution of the monasteries and had stripped the church at St Keverne of its Catholic artefacts.

When he arrived in Helston he met a baying crowd who dragged him out into the street and stabbed him to death.



The mob then rioted and Helston was a no-go zone for days until the magistrates, led by Sir William Godolphin, rounded up the ringleaders, including the St Keverne priest. They were taken to Tyburn and hung, drawn and quartered.

Now go back up the road and turn down Five Wells Lane on your right.



Once a cobbled service road leading to the rear of the businesses and fine houses on Coinagehall and Cross Street, no-one really knows how this lane got its name as there have never been five wells here. The single well you can see, down the cobbled steps, has been here since at least 1703. It would have been a vital meeting place for washing clothes and filling buckets with the clear well water.

Across from the well you'll see two cobbled alleys. Helston is full of these small 'opes' and within the steps of the one on the left (Wheelbarrow Lane) you'll see additional sloped stones added to help the barrow boys down to the well.

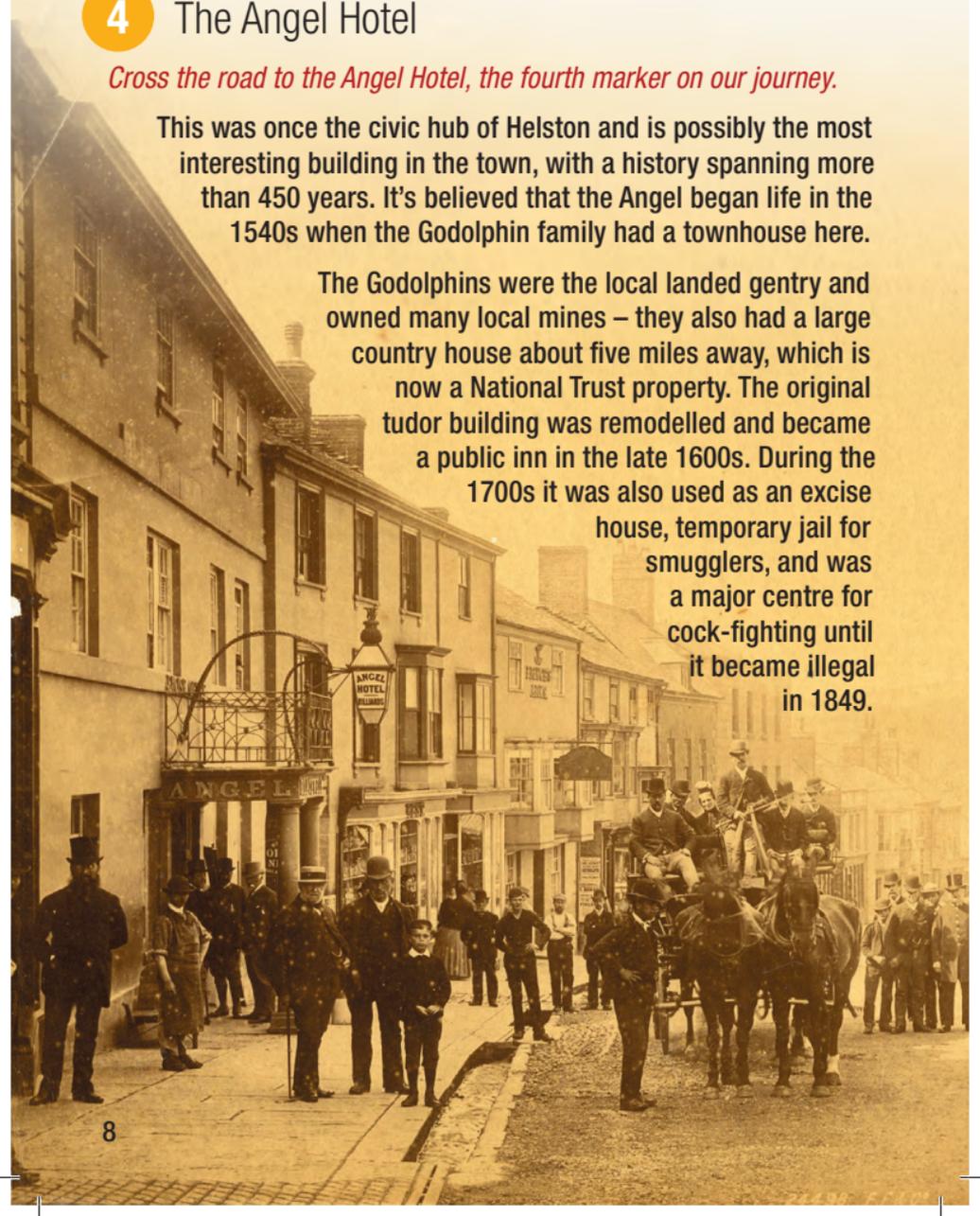
Walk up the right-hand alley, Cobbled Ope, and you'll emerge onto Coinagehall Street. Please note: this part of the route involves steps. For an accessible route, retrace your steps along Five Wells Lane, turn right along Church Street and right at the junction onto Coinagehall Street.

4 The Angel Hotel

Cross the road to the Angel Hotel, the fourth marker on our journey.

This was once the civic hub of Helston and is possibly the most interesting building in the town, with a history spanning more than 450 years. It's believed that the Angel began life in the 1540s when the Godolphin family had a townhouse here.

The Godolphins were the local landed gentry and owned many local mines – they also had a large country house about five miles away, which is now a National Trust property. The original tudor building was remodelled and became a public inn in the late 1600s. During the 1700s it was also used as an excise house, temporary jail for smugglers, and was a major centre for cock-fighting until it became illegal in 1849.



In the 1800s it did a stint as an Inland Revenue Office and even acted as a temporary Ecclesiastical court. In the early 1900s it was a major centre for the new sport of cycling and the crest of the Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC) can still be seen on the exterior.

This was Helston's only true coaching Inn (defined as such because the Royal Mail came here twice daily) and it may be the oldest Posting Inn in Cornwall. Other pubs would have provided horses, which anyone could hire and drop off at a similar pub in another town.

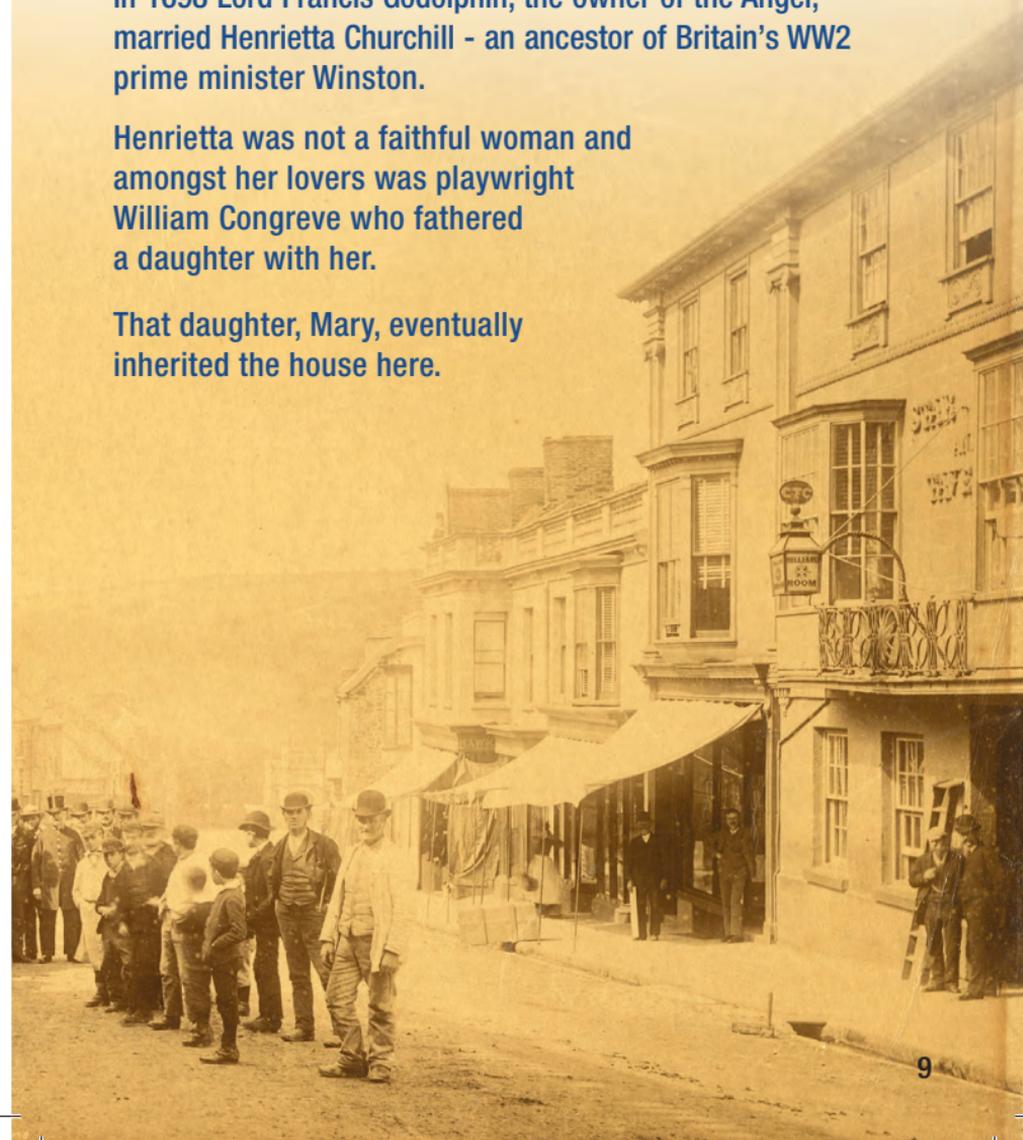
***Helston stories:** An appalling incident took place at The Angel in 1975 when Michael John Lawson, who had been drinking heavily, was sent to bed by the landlord, Valentine Ohlenschlager. Lawson brought a pistol into the crowded bar and fired eight or nine shots. Ex-naval lieutenant, Ohlenschlager bravely moved to protect the barmaids and was struck by five of the bullets. 'Val' died en route to the hospital and Lawson was imprisoned for manslaughter.*

Did you know?

In 1698 Lord Francis Godolphin, the owner of the Angel, married Henrietta Churchill - an ancestor of Britain's WW2 prime minister Winston.

Henrietta was not a faithful woman and amongst her lovers was playwright William Congreve who fathered a daughter with her.

That daughter, Mary, eventually inherited the house here.



4a The Methodist Chapel

Facing The Angel, turn to your right and walk down Coinagehall Street towards the Grylls Monument at the end.

Methodism came to an unwilling Helston when founder John Wesley preached numerous sermons in the town between 1755 and 1789. At first Wesley's appearances were not well received and it's reported he was greeted by vegetable and grass-throwing mobs! He described Helston as a 'storm centre', a 'hard-drinking town' and a home of 'rebels and persecutors'.

The town was very resistant to the new religious fervour and the last town in Cornwall to convert, but by 1780 it had been tamed. In 1773 John preached on the main street for the first time and wrote, "How changed is this town since a Methodist could not ride through it without hazard of his life."

In 1798 the first Wesleyan meetinghouse was built here – this is now the Epworth Hall which stands behind the current chapel. At that time the cottages and a blacksmith's shop stood between the chapel and the Coinage Hall, which would have been behind you in the middle of the road. In 1804 a small Baptist meeting place was built in front, but by 1887 a new building was needed for the Methodists to continue to run their Sunday School and other meetings.



Take a closer look:
The interior decoration was completed after the original building in 1895 and restored in 1995.

It's well worth a look inside to see one of the finest painted ceilings of any chapel in Cornwall.

The Methodist Chapel you see today was built in 1888/9 by Helston-born building contractor, surveyor and engineer, W J Winn. Winn was a Methodist himself, and built many other local buildings including Porthleven Methodist Chapel, Cury Chapel and the Mullion Cove Hotel.

As part of the construction works over 60 'guinea stones' were laid. This involved each donor laying a stone carved with their initials, with a guinea on top. These memorials of faith can still be seen on the outside of the west wall.

The chapel was declared unsafe for public use in 1988 and the congregation moved back into the Epworth Hall until 1995 whilst it was restored.

5 The Blue Anchor

Continue along the road and you'll reach one of Helston's great institutions, the Blue Anchor.



Once a monks' rest house for pilgrims on their way to St Michael's Mount, there has reportedly been an alehouse here since the 15th Century. Step inside today and you'll find the traditional layout with multiple bars and side rooms has been retained. At the back they brew several different strengths of Spingo ale (see photo).

When you step back out onto Coinagehall Street it's worth stopping to imagine the view you'd once have had.

In medieval times this was known as Lady Street after the Chapel of Our Lady that stood in the centre of the road in front of you and dated back to pre-1283. From the Reformation in 1546 until 1810 this became a row of buildings in the middle of the thoroughfare that included the Duchy Officer's House, Gaol and original Coinage Hall.

Did you know? The Coinage Hall was where miners brought their tin to be assayed for quality, weighed and valued prior to auction. Three or four day coinage sessions were held twice a year, during which Helston became a carnival town filled with miners, carriages and merchants from as far away as the Mediterranean. The quality of the tin was assayed by cutting a corner from the ingot – hence the term coinage which comes from the French *coin*, meaning corner.

Helston stories: The Blue has seen its fair share of drama. In 1791 landlord James James had his head fractured by a bayonet in a dispute with two soldiers (who were later hanged at Bodmin Gaol) . In 1828 a man fell to his death in the well and in 1849 local hairdresser Thomas Ridsen hanged himself in the skittle alley.

6

Grylls Monument

Walk to the end of the road and cross the street to the impressive Grylls Monument. This was built in memory of a great Helstonian - Humphry Millett Grylls.



Humphry was a Helston banker and solicitor who acted to keep the local Wheal Vor tin mine open during the recession of 1820, saving 1200 jobs. He was also an alderman of the borough and four-times mayor. He died in 1834 at the age of 45 and it's reported that his funeral procession snaked for two miles from his home at Bosahan to Helston Church – the biggest funeral Helston has ever seen. 2,386 people gave money for this neo-Gothic archway to be built.

You can find out more about Humphry and the monument on the information boards and talking history post [here](#).

Did you know? In the mid 19th Century Wheal Vor was one of the biggest and richest Cornish tin mines, covering almost four square miles.

Behind the monument is Helston's bowling green, founded in 1760 and one of the oldest in the country. Earlier in the town's history this was the spot where the short-lived castle stood, standing guard over the Cober Valley and seaward approach. The earliest references claim it was built by Edmund, Earl of Cornwall between 1272 and 1300 but was in ruins by the late 1400s.

At this point in the trail you can choose whether to stick to the core route or go to page 17 to follow Spur A down to the old Cattle Market and the ancient area of St John's.

To follow the core trail route, cross to the opposite side of Coinagehall Street from the Blue Anchor and take the first alley - Lady Street, formerly called Pig Street.

On the first corner to your right is Leslie House, built in 1810 for a wealthy tin merchant and used by the Women's Land Army and service personnel during WW2. On the opposite corner the curved upper room of Number 8 was Mr Odger's school for boys and girls. Up to 60 pupils would have squeezed in here in the 1800s and so good was Mr Odger's teaching of penmanship that the Local Grammar School sent their boys here to learn from him – there is still a path connecting the house to the back of the former Grammar School on Coinagehall Street next to Chymder House.

Further along you'll pass Tanyard Lane, named for Cunnack's tannery, which stood on the corner here from around 1893, having previously been long established in Meneage Street.

Continue up Penhallaz Road and Hill, turning right at the top past the Masonic Hall, originally built in 1799 as a mathematical school.

7 Lismore

You are now on Cross Street, once Helston's finest thoroughfare, where the wealthy built their houses. On your left you'll pass the entrance to the impressive Penhellis House, built for solicitor Frederick Hill in the 1840s. It was designed by Plymouth architect George Wightwick who was also responsible for the Grylls Monument, Guildhall and Grammar School as well as other private houses.

Further along on the right, Lismore was built in the 1800s for Glynn Grylls who was a solicitor, seven times mayor of Helston and brother of Humphry for whom the Grylls monument was built. Lismore was sold out of the Grylls family in 1910 and is now privately owned.



Lismore's four acre garden has changed little over the years and is often opened up to the public on Flora Day (May 8th) for the dancers to follow the traditional route and take a halfway break on the lawn

Did you know? Outside Lismore is an old iron water pump with the date 1844. Water did not come to many homes in Helston until the mid 1930s. Previously a number of these pumps, located throughout the town, would have supplied the population with pumped well water.

8 Great Office

Across the road from Lismore you'll see the Great Office.

Built in the 1700s, this was the base for Helston's earliest banks, looking after the accounts of local mines. Humphry Millett Grylls would have once worked here. It has also housed solicitors for over 200 years but is now privately owned.

Step back in time: Imagine yourself here on a busy day in the past. This distinguished street was once cobbled and lit by gas lamps. Carriage men would have watered their horses and swapped stories here whilst their bosses did deals in the Great Office.

Continue to the corner and No.1 Cross Street.

This house has stood here since at least 1815 when an illustration shows it standing alone in a sparsely populated Cross Street with fields around the church behind. The style of the house is mainly Georgian but dating it more accurately is difficult. There are beams in the cellar and stone flagging inside that are at least a century older, indicating a previous building probably existed on the site. For over 30 years this was the home of Emily Trevenen - an independent Victorian woman of means and friend to Headmaster Coleridge of the Grammar School. As a benefactor, Emily contributed much to Helston, including loaning the town £2000 in 1837 to build the market house that now houses the Museum.



© Estate A H Hawke

Did you know? Outside No. 1 Cross Street is the cross after which the street is named. The Ancient Monuments Listing describes it as a "Preaching cross. Probably pre-conquest. Wheel-based granite monolith with incised flared Latin cross set into a roughly hewn granite base." It's believed this cross dates back to the earliest period of Christianity in Cornwall and may even reflect echoes of a previous religion.

9

The Willows

Across Church Street, The Willows began life as a grand house. Thomas Glynn Junior, a lawyer at the Great Office, was probably the building's first occupant - we know he died here in 1794. The building was also the home of R.G. Rows who was the chairman of the County Education Committee and is credited with bringing Cornwall's first County secondary school to the town in 1905.

Sir Henry Toy, held by many to be Helston's finest son, bought the building in 1926 and died here in May 1939.

He dedicated his life to town and county and to the expansion of the borough. He was awarded a knighthood in George VI's birthday honours list in June 1938.

After Sir Henry's death The Willows was sold to the local council and became their offices and the local Registry Office for births, marriages and deaths, before being split into the private residential apartments here today.

Cross back over and carry on up the hill.

You'll walk by two former National Schools, built to provide free education to the children of the poor.

The one on the right was built in 1894 as a Boy's School and the one on the left earlier in 1828. Both were in use until the late 1950s.

Walk past the church entrance and up the single track road beyond and just past the white house you'll find a boundary stone on the side of the road that is over 800 years old.



When Helston's charter was granted in 1201 the four corners of the borough were marked by these stones. And they still witness an ancient tradition – the Beating of the Bounds.

Since the charter of Queen Elizabeth in 1585, before maps existed, boys have had their heads bumped at these markers so they wouldn't forget the ancient boundary lines.

The practise still takes place ceremonially today on the day before ascension day.

Walk back down the hill and you'll arrive at the final stop on the central part of our trail, St Michael's Church.

Named for the patron saint of the town, the original church was thought to have stood on this site from 1208.

It was struck by lightning in 1727, splitting the tower from the steeple. Worship was still carried out in the building for almost 30 years, until the inhabitants made a special plea to Francis, Earl of Godolphin (the last of the male Godolphin line). He provided the funds to build the church you see now which opened in 1761, having cost £6000.

The main window is certainly worth a mention - it depicts angels dancing the Flora Day dance and includes the opening bars of the famous tune set in notation. This piece of stained glass was created by Kruger Grey in 1938. It replaced a previous window that now hangs inside the church, above the entrance door and is a very fine example of 18th century glass. A 20th century request by the V&A museum to borrow this window for display had to be turned down owing to the potential of damage in transit.

In the churchyard you'll find a granite memorial to those who died in the two world wars, the grave of Herbert Kingsley (brother of the novelist Charles) who died at the age of 14, and the grave and a monument commemorating Henry Trengrouse, a cabinetmaker who lived on Meneage Street and invented equipment that saved thousands of lives.



Henry Trengrouse: lifesaver

After witnessing the appalling wreck of the Anson on Loe Bar in 1807, Trengrouse invented a rocket apparatus for shooting a rescue line to a stricken vessel to which was affixed a chair which would carry survivors to shore. You can find out more and see the prototype of the apparatus in the Museum.

The invention saved thousands of lives and, although the tsar of Russia awarded Trengrouse a diamond ring for saving his countrymen, he was never honoured in Britain and died penniless.

You have now finished the core trail. To follow Spurs B on page 18 and C on page 20 walk back down Church Street and up to the Museum to pick up the trail there.

Spur A Cows and monks.

From the Grylls monument, turn to the right and walk around the Bowling Green.

The building behind the wall was built as the town's new Coinagehall but only operated from 1812 to 1837, when coinage ceased in Cornwall. It's now a private residence. Pass the new shelter at the back corner, which features dancers from the Flora Day midday dance, and descend the steps to the left. These steps are believed to be very old, possibly as old as the castle. They lead down to an area known as Castle Green.



Step back in time: On Mondays what is now the car park was home to Helston's impressive cattle market. Imagine the hubbub of the day with large crowds, the rap of the auctioneers gavel and the occasional escape of an animal causing excitement. The market moved across the road in 1955 and closed in 2001 after the foot and mouth crisis.

Cross the road at the traffic lights for a closer look at the new Old Cattle Market Building, opened in 2012 as offices and a community space. South Kerrier Alliance own the building, along with the adjacent Coronation Boating Lake, which was originally built on water meadows to celebrate the coronation of King George V and opened in 1912.

Go back across the road at the crossing and go along St John's Road to the left of the car park.

You're now walking through one of the oldest parts of Helston. A monks' priory and hospital stood in this area from around 1220 until Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1540s. Here the prior and his brethren cared for lepers, the poor and gave rest to weary travellers. You'll find some of the old stones from the hospital in the Museum.

Turn right along Almshouse Hill, walk all the way to the top to the Grylls Monument and re-join the core route on page 13.

Extend Your Stay

A stroll around the lake is a pleasant way to while away some time. And don't miss the chance to hire bikes or walk in the beautiful Penrose Estate just across the road.

Spur B

Schools, prisons and world champions.

*Face the Museum and walk to your left and walk down the hill.
Take the first turning on your right up Penrose Road.*

13 John Passmore Edwards building / CAST

You'll soon reach a large building on your right that had its first section built in 1897 on land that formed part of the gardens of the old Grammar School. This was originally the John Passmore Edwards Science and Art School.

The Education Act of 1902 required that secondary schools be opened across the country to provide education for fee-paying and scholarship students. This led to frantic activity in Helston, long regarded as a seat of learning, and the building was extended to provide Cornwall's first secondary school in 1905.

A further extension was added in 1913 and the building was used as a school until 1972, when it was made redundant with the introduction of comprehensive education. For some time it was used as a community centre, but in 2012 it was sold by Helston Town Council and it is now owned and managed by the Cornubian Arts and Science Trust (CAST), providing artists' studios, a programme of public events and a café.



Continue up Penrose Road until you reach the junction with Wendron Street. Cross the road and you'll be in front of a thatched house with a plaque claiming it as the birthplace of World Champion boxer Bob Fitzsimmons.

Bob Fitzsimmons: World Champion

Boxer Robert Fitzsimmons was boxing's first triple-crown champion, successively winning the heavyweight, middleweight and light-heavyweight championships between 1891 and 1903.

He is regarded as one of the hardest punchers in boxing history and was born in Helston.

Walk up Shute Hill until you reach the junction with Parc-An-Dower. Here you'll find Helston's old gaol.