



Podcast by
Windsor & Royal Borough Museum

Victorian Windsor

Intro

[Intro music- suspense/mystery]

Becky: Hello and welcome to another episode of Windsor & Royal Borough Museum's Out and About podcast series in which we tell you the hidden histories and stories behind the buildings and landscape of the Royal Borough.

In this episode, we'll be taking you on a journey around Windsor to discover what the town was like in the Victoria era.

But before we do that, let me paint you a picture of the town in the 19th century.

[Music transition]

In 1831, 6 years before Queen Victoria took to the throne, the population of Windsor was approximately 5650. By 1891, this increased to around 18,893.

Between those years, the town saw rapid development. In 1845, the State Apartments at Windsor Castle opened to the public for the first time. The number of people wanting to visit the town dramatically increased, and to accommodate them, not one, but two railway stations came to town in 1849

[train horn]

However, as well as being a tourist town, Windsor was also a military town. At the end of the 18th Century two barracks were built, one for cavalry soldiers now called Combermere Barracks, and one for infantry soldiers later named Victoria Barracks. They brought more people to town, especially as soldiers lived with their families at the Barracks.

The close proximity to the Castle offered employment opportunities for many residents. Some worked in the Royal Household, while others worked in shops or businesses that supplied goods to the Castle. There was also a major brewing industry in town which provided lots of jobs.

There was, however, a great disparity of wealth. In the late 1840s, the houses that occupied the area around the castle walls, known as the Castle ditch, were



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in a dilapidated state with their inhabitants living in poverty. Queen Victoria believed the houses threatened her privacy and had them pulled down. Other slum areas, however, remained and for those living in extreme poverty and facing starvation, the Windsor Union Workhouse was often their only option. This was first located on Sheet Street and then moved to Crimp Hill in Old Windsor.

All in all, Windsor was a bustling military and tourist town in the Victorian era, which like many other places across the country was undergoing rapid social, infrastructural and technological change.

Now, with that in mind, it's time to commence our journey across town. We're going to be starting outside Windsor Guildhall, home of Windsor & Royal Borough Museum.

[Music transition]

Guildhall

Since its completion, the Guildhall has been used for council and town meetings but in the Victorian times, the Guildhall also served as a magistrate's court, hearing all sorts of different cases: from truancy and corruption to the attempted assassinate of Queen Victoria, but we'll get to that later.

During the reign of Queen Victoria, children as young as six years old stood trial at the Guildhall. Some children were even tried multiple times, mostly for stealing things. Sometimes they did this out of boredom but often it was a means of survival.

On 23 December 1848, George Howick, aged 9, David Howick aged 6 and Harriet Howick aged 14 were charged with breaking into a shed at the Britannia beer house in Keppel Street and stealing three dozen clothes pegs, a bag and a hat. They were sent to prison for 14 days and the boys to be well flogged.



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George had already been in prison previously, David has 6 previous convictions and Harriet had previously spent 3 days in prison for stealing 12 walnuts from a neighbour's garden.

On 25 July 1846, John Bright, a boy aged no more than 7 who lived on Clewer Lane was tried before the magistrates. His crime was going on a boat ride. His mother had sent him out with 3s to pay the baker's bill, but he had used it to hire a boat and spent the day on the river. She then brought him before Windsor Borough Police to be disciplined. He was sent to prison for 3 days.

Children from poorer families did not have leisure time like today. They were sent to work from a very young age to support the family's income. Often they worked in factories, or as street and chimney sweepers. John's family were likely living in desperation and 3s to them was a lot of money. This is why his mother would have reacted so severely to him spending the money of a leisurely boat trip rather than using it to pay the baker's bill.

[Music transition]

Queen Victoria Statue

Now, if you walk along from the Guildhall towards the Castle you will come across a statue of Queen Victoria. It was placed here in 1887 as part of her Golden Jubilee celebrations and was paid for by subscriptions from the people of Windsor. Many local people, and others from much further afield, gathered to see its unveiling. Queen Victoria was there too and watched from her carriage.

Peascod Street

Queen Victoria's statue looks toward Peascod Street. As you might remember from our previous episode about Windsor's shops, Peascod Street means Pea pod Street and takes its name from the pea fields that were in the area in the medieval times.



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But back to the 19th century and, Peascod street was at the heart of the town and THE place for shopping and socialising. By the end of the century, there were about 150 small shops there, including butchers, fishmongers, tanners, drapers, milliners, photographers, hairdressers, tobacconists, tailors, watchmakers, chemists, coffee taverns and of course, many pubs. Employees usually worked 14 hour days and shop owners typically lived above or behind their shop.

With such varied business lining the street, you can imagine the assortment of smells that would have lingered in the air. With at least six baker on the street, the smell of fresh bread may have been one of the more pleasant smells that greeted you. Along with the aromas radiating from the several Sausage and mash shops where soldiers could get a cheap meal, and the metal barrows in the streets which, in the winter, sold baked potatoes or roast chestnuts.

That having been said, there was no main sewage system in Windsor until 1852 and many streets in Windsor were open sewers. The stench must have been overwhelming. As late as 1883, one-third of the town's population were still without a piped water supply. The situation, however, did begin to improve in 1888 when the council took control of the supply. Though, even after that, numerous horses continued to go up and down the street day and night, no doubt creating a bit of a stench.

So having established that the smells of Peascod Street certainly would have been a mixed bag, let's think for a minute about what you would have heard along the street.

Deliveries were made to the shops and pubs by horse and wooden cart. The streets were cobbled so the carts certainly would have loudly clattered as they went up and down.

[sound of horse and carts on cobbles]

Then of course there was the sound of horse hooves and the hustle and bustle of a street that was trading all day.

[sound of street trading]



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The town was often rowdy at night with soldiers from the rival barracks getting into fights. Pubs were open from six o'clock in the morning until midnight.

[Sound of raised voices outside pub]

Peascod Street was surrounded by courts and passageways. One of these was the alleyway next to Superdrug that connects Peascod Street to Windsor & Eton Central Station, what is now called Goswell Hill.

George Street area

As you walk along the cobbles of Goswell Hill, you'll notice the street has quite an old feel, although this dramatically changes as you walk up the steps into what is now Windsor Royal Shopping.

Previously it was called George Street and the area was full of common lodging houses and crowded tenements. The population was described as 'vicious' and as living in 'dens of infamy'.

A prison was built here in 1806 after George III asked for the old one close to the castle to be removed. It was said that he was fed-up with the prisoners staring at him through the bars of their cells and crying 'God Save the King! Please release us your Majesty!' as he came down from the Castle.

The new prison consisted of two cells (ten feet square) which held up to sixteen prisoners. Well, I use the term 'hold' loosely, as prisoners did regularly escape from their cells. Walk a line of 10 steps and you'll see just how tiny the cells were.

[Sound of jail door slamming and being locked]

In consecutive government inspections during the 1830s, the Gaol was harshly condemned. One continuous issue was the ability of prisoners to freely communicate and wander from one another's cells.

The inspectors report of 1839 stated 'an instance of the evils arising from this association came under our notice during our inspection. We observed upon



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the floor of the cell, in which the boys were confined, a gaming board, freshly chalked, with the pieces of wood with which the game is played lying about...We ascertained that [an] adult prisoner...had drawn the gaming board, and was teaching the boys the game, as he said, 'for a pasttime'. Thus the time intended to be devoted to the instruction and reformation of the prisoners was misemployed in teaching young offenders the art of gaming'. Well, can you imagine if they had Pokemon Go!

More seriously, the report noted that some prisoners, for no reason, were selected by the guards for ill treatment and were kept for over a week in a punishment cell called 'the cage'. The inspectors described it as being in a 'filthy and disgusting state' and said 'a place more disgusting or more unfit for the confinement of a prisoner....can hardly be imagined'.

By 1840, the inspectors were losing patience with the Mayor and Borough magistrates for failing to address their recommendations. The report that year declared that there was an urgent need for a new prison to be built as 'numerous bad characters are constantly attracted to the town'. They went on to say 'the London thieves frequent it in the hope of plunder from its numerous visitors; and there is no town in which a good prison and faithful and attentive officers are more required'. Quite the statement really!

The poor conditions at the prison led to an outbreak of typhus. It was closed in 1842 and prisoners were temporarily sent to the workhouse which, at the time, was located next to Victoria Barracks. A new Borough Gaol was subsequently opened on Sheet Street.

[music transition]

Ticket office

If you go up the steps from Goswell Hill, you'll see Windsor Tourist Information Office. Anyone making enquires there today may note that it is housed in rather elaborate and ornate surroundings. This is because it is located in the former booking hall of the Great Western Railway station, which was rebuilt in grand style in 1897 to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

The previous ticket office was little more than a shed and by the 1890s the original, much smaller station, built in 1849 to Isambard Kingdom



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Brunel's design, was thought inadequate and unsuitable for Royal patronage. The company therefore decided on a complete replacement and the new structure still stands today.

Replica Train/ Royal Waiting Room

If you've ever caught a train from Windsor and Eton Central Station you might have wondered at the large replica train that sits opposite the platform. Known as The Queen's Train, it is a full-size replica of a GWR Locomotive, that was one of a number of royal trains built for Queen Victoria's use. This replica was built as part of Madame Tussaud's 'Royalty and Empire' exhibition, which was held in the Station between 1983 and 1997.

Queen Victoria frequently travelled by train. Apparently, she didn't like them but nonetheless saw their necessity. She was the first British Monarch to ride a train in June 1842 when she travelled from Slough to London on the Great Western Railway. She was driven by Daniel Gooch, an Engineer and Chairman of the GWR, who lived in Clewer, Windsor.

Queen Victoria would arrive and depart the train at Windsor through a Royal Waiting Room which was located where the All-Bar-One Restaurant now is.

A particularly infamous event took place at the Station in 1882. As Queen Victoria returned home to Windsor from London on 2 March, a man called Roderick Maclean stepped forward from the crowd that had assembled to see her and fired a single shot in her direction.

[sound of gunshot]

The Queen and everyone present were unharmed and the would-be assassin was immediately detained. We have a video that explores the event in more detail and explains how it led to a change in British law. We will link it in the podcast description.

[music]

Conclusion

We've only highlighted a few of the hidden Victorian histories behind Windsor's street and buildings, but there are many more to discover, so make



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sure you look out for some of the many Victorian remnants that lay about the town.

Ever wondered, for instance, why there are iron hoops on the kerbs of Thames Street, right outside the Castle? Well, they were used to prevent horse-drawn cabs from slipping down the hill while waiting for customers. Horse-buses waited here on Race days to take people to Ascot. Who knew?!

And if you've ever been to Windsor and Eton Riverside Station, you'll notice the many high arches in the Station's side wall. The high arches were incorporated into the Station's design to allow horses from the household cavalry easy access into the Station, particularly as the regiment acted as Queen Victoria's official bodyguard.

[music transition]

Gateways to the past are all around you. Look up, look down, look to the sides, and if you have an inquisitive enough mind, you'll almost hear the buildings and streets whispering their secrets.

Thank you for listening and look out for the next instalment in our series, when we will again be going about the Borough in search of hidden histories.

In the meantime, follow us on twitter [@windsor_museum](https://twitter.com/windsor_museum) and find us on Facebook to have your regular fix of local history. You can also find more content from us on our website windsormuseum.org.uk

[Music fades out]

The end.