

Clevedon Town Guide



THE OFFICIAL GUIDE OF CLEVEDON

Published with the approval of CLEVEDON TOWN COUNCIL
and with the assistance of Clevedon Civic Society



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INTRODUCTION TO CLEVEDON

Today's Clevedon, with a population of around 22,000 people, is a small thriving coastal town set into the very rural landscape of hillsides and moors around the Bristol Channel. Its location beside this Channel gives the seafront the second highest tidal range in the world, with a rise and fall of 12 metres – often a spectacular sight if there are high winds behind a high tide!

The seafront still retains its Regency and Victorian character, and is classified together with its Grade I Listed Victorian Pier as having 'heritage' status. There are many interesting walks, through and around this pleasant coastal part of the town, with breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape. Also Clevedon has a long established and active Sailing Club, which often provides added colour and interest to the seafront.

Clevedon Court, the baronial seat of the Elton family is on the eastern boundary and administered by the National Trust. There are a number of historic churches within the Town, of fine architectural merit and interest. The Clock Tower, in The Triangle, originally built to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1897 and incorporating now famous Eltonware tiles, is still marking time after more than a century – the original mechanism still being wound each week by successive generations of the same family who originally performed this task.

Readers will see in the next section of this booklet the positive influence on the town of the expansion of the late Victorian years. By the same mechanism the 1960-80 period saw the town nearly double in population. The newcomers heralded a new dynamism in many aspects of modern life.



The main shopping area is based very much around the heart of 'the village' (as it is still sometimes called) in and around The Triangle. Modern Clevedon also now has as its focal point (built on the site of the former railway station) Queen's Square, which is still developing, here you will find a good mix of high street shops, a supermarket and bars. The area is used for many community activities, such as festivals and fun days. A General Market is held every Thursday, with a Farmers' Market taking place on the last Saturday of each month.

Another shopping area is Hill Road where there are many very attractive specialist shops and restaurants, which regularly draw many people from other parts of the South West.

There is an excellent Library which also has considerable internet access provision, along with visiting Inland Revenue and Pension consultants on set days in the week. In a building next to the Library is the Registrar, enabling various such arrangements to be made in the town, without having to attend at the main office in Weston super Mare.

Across the road from the Library is the Curzon Cinema. This is actively supported by local people, as it shows a wide range of 'new release' films and has a Film Club for 'art house' style films. Special events showing 'silent movies' and 'golden oldies' attract interest from both young (as a new experience) and older generations (remembering). It is hoped, in the coming years, to restore the 1920's building, which is the oldest, purpose-built, continuously operated Cinema in the Country (some say in the World) as it was constructed over the original 1912 cinema known as the Picture House. Also the auditorium has pressed tin-plate panelling on the walls and ceiling (an early form of fire protection) making the building unique in national and international terms.

Clevedon Community School situated in the picturesque Swiss Valley maintains high standards of education provision. It also provides out of school leisure facilities for all.

The Community Centre, in Princes Road, caters for nearly 50 local clubs in its various public rooms. The building also includes a large community hall with a theatrical stage, this enables the local music and drama groups to display their various talents and the public to enjoy their personal performances.

All sports are also well catered for with excellent facilities for sailing, cricket, tennis, bowls, rugby, grass and all-weather pitches for football (junior & senior) and hockey. There is also a superb 18 hole golf course with spectacular views over the Bristol Channel.

Clevedon is easily accessible by road, with its location close to the M5 Motorway, and has good access roads from the east and south. A mainline Railway Station is located just 10 minutes drive from the town and Bristol International Airport is just 30 minutes drive.

The town is twinned with Ettlingen in Germany, Epernay in France, and Middelkerke in Belgium and active links are maintained between these communities on all levels. Within Local Government administration, Clevedon is part of the Unitary Authority of North Somerset and maintains good working relationships with neighbouring towns and villages.

Clevedon is truly a place where you can enjoy the Victorian ambience with the needs of modern living.

BRIEF HISTORY OF CLEVEDON

Clevedon has grown enormously since building plots measured out along The Beach and Hill Road were first advertised in 1820. Until then, it had been a quiet, agricultural village, sprawling piecemeal across the levels. The three most important buildings for the villagers of two centuries ago would have been St Andrew's Church, Clevedon Court and Highdale Farm.

St Andrew's, perched on the cliffs at the West End of Old Church Road, is believed to have Saxon origins. To those interested in old carvings, a number of corbels on the outside of the south wall have distinctly Celtic roots, depicting ravens, two-faced men, a shiela-na-gig (mother goddess) and horses heads.

Clevedon Court, since 1709 the home of the Elton family, is now owned by the National Trust. It is one of the oldest manor houses in England, the tower to the east dating from the thirteenth century. The Eltons played a large part in the responsible development of Clevedon from a small farming community to a select Victorian resort. They provided sites for the hospital, schools and churches and campaigned vigorously for improvements to sanitation and drainage. Through Sir Charles Elton, Tennyson and Thackeray came to know Clevedon. His grandson, Sir Edmund, was the maker and designer of Elton Ware pottery. Elton Ware decorates the Clock Tower in The Triangle, given to the town to commemorate the jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Highdale Farm, below Christ Church, dates back to 1297, when the Chantry Chapel there was first mentioned in ancient records. The Chapel vanished after the Dissolutions of Tudor times, but the farm was from the time of Domesday the home of the Stewards of the Clevedon Manor, whose duty it was to manage the farm and cottage leases and collect rents. The house has been rebuilt.

With the growth of the town, the most prominent places came to be the new hotels, the railway stations and the Regency and Victorian houses on the Hill. The hamlet of 334 inhabitants at the beginning of the nineteenth century had grown to be a small town of 5,000 people by the end of that century. New roads had been built, the Great Western Railway and the Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway now brought visitors from further and further afield; even better, in 1869, the Pier opened and steamers could land their passengers from South Wales and Devon.

The Pier was constructed from eight spans made of curved Barlow rails from Brunel's surplus material from the South Wales railway. Elegance and strength were ideally combined in its fabric, and it was used for promenading, fishing and steamer trips. As late as 1969, it was used by 50,000 people, but the following year saw its collapse under weight testing with the loss of two of its spans. Thanks to strenuous campaigning by both the Pier Preservation Trust and Piers Supporters, the Pier reopened on the 27th of May 1989, a hundred and twenty years after its first opening. Work remains to be done, but for a small payment, visitors may still promenade there, or embark on the steamer trips on the Balmoral or the paddle-driven Waverley. The old Toll House stocks souvenirs and hosts art exhibitions in its upstairs gallery.

Nearby stands the Old Market Hall, where a celebratory supper was held on the opening of the Pier. The Market opened a few days afterwards, its 21 stalls for small local fruiterers, greengrocers, butchers and fishmongers destined to prevent street hawkers from pestering householders. The building was designed by Hans Price, an excellent Weston-super-Mare architect responsible for a number of our public buildings. After it ceased to be used as a Market Hall, it housed a local brewery and then a factory. It was restored and re-opened in recent years.

The growth of the town brought great benefits for the local people. Carpenters, tilers and masons were swift to buy plots on the pieces of agricultural wasteland first used for the Regency houses. Their wives let rooms and apartments in these houses, providing work for large numbers of servants. Along Hill Road, owners were quick to build shops onto the fronts of their villas to supply the needs of the inhabitants of New Clevedon. Hotels vied with each other in providing the best service for visitors; coffee rooms with separate entrances for ladies so that gentlemen could play billiards in peace; regular services from the railway station; the very latest London journals; the list is endless. Private schools proliferated, educating the children of the upper middle classes employed abroad in the diplomatic service, by the East India Company, in the Navy and the Army.

Clubs and societies sprang up to entertain and provide for the townsfolk. Prominent doctors, solicitors and professional people appear repeatedly on their committees, and on the list of members of the Local Board of Health, set up in 1852 and destined to become the Urban District Council in 1894. The minutes kept by this august body give us a fascinating record of the work it took to make Clevedon a respectable place. The Board supervised the construction of houses and public buildings, the improvement of drains - fiercely resisted by slum landlords - and even inspected the donkeys at the Beach for fleas.

The Clevedon Mercury was set up in 1863 to communicate national news and local happenings, providing a directory of visitors invaluable to local historians. It continues to record the unfolding story of our town.

By courtesy of Clevedon Civic Society



FEATURES OF CLEVEDON

CLEVEDON COURT On route B3130, this once fortified manor house has been the home of the Elton family since 1709. It contains the Elton Ware pottery collection and a display of Nailsea glass. Now owned by the National Trust, it is open to the public on certain days of the week during the summer months.

CHURCH OF St. ANDREW The 12th century parish church, is approached from Old Church Road. Many of its medieval features have survived numerous restorations; built on Celtic foundations it stands high on the headland overlooking the Channel.

POETS WALK Approached from the promenade this coastal path named after the poets with Clevedon associations, leads to the parish church and over Wain's Hill with lovely panoramic views taking in the Welsh mountains.

THE PIER As early as 1829, plans were put forward for the building of the elegantly designed Pier in Clevedon. Clevedon Pier is the first pier built on mathematical principles to cope with the second highest rise of tide in the world. The Pier also has the distinction of being opened three times; when newly built in 1869; with a new Pierhead in 1894; and in 1989 after 20 years of dereliction. Steamers once again use the Pier for sailings up and down the Channel, thanks to hard-working preservationists. Grants were obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund and North Somerset Council to complete the works to the landing stage and reinstall the end of pier buildings.

LADYE BAY This secluded cove much loved by summer visitors is approached by the coastal path beyond the Pier known as Lovers' Walk, or by steps leading down from Bay Road.

VILLAGE HALL In Old Street, the hall was built in 1868 as a Charitable Trust to provide a Workingman's Hall or Village Institute. In 1908 the Trust was extended to include; Reading Room and meeting place for Friendly Societies. 1913 it was again extended to educational use and became an annex to a nearby school – woodwork being taught at one end of the room and cookery at the other! From the early 1970's it was used by the Town Council as an office and meeting room. Currently it is mostly used for Adult Education.

COUNCIL HOUSE The Council offices have moved to the newly refurbished premises, formerly St Andrews School, renamed The Council House – which is situated a bit further along Old Street from the Village Hall. Since refurbishment this is now the meeting place of the Town Council, also providing rooms available for hire and community facilities.

THE OLD MARKET Opened in 1869 in Alexandra Road, the unique pagoda-like structure was built to satisfy the need of the town for a market where the produce of the farmers and market gardeners could be bought and sold. After falling into disrepair it has been restored and is now a Health Centre and cafe.

BANDSTAND Built in 1887 on The Green Beach.

WALTON CASTLE One of the landmarks of Clevedon on the hill top overlooking the golf course, was for a long time just a ruin, now it is a family home having been restored with meticulous care.

CRAFT CENTRE Well sign posted from the M5 and local roads, the many studios, art space workshop and pottery gallery are housed in the outbuildings of a 17 century Somerset 'long farm' which was once part of Clevedon Court. The Centre is a free all-year-round attraction with plenty to see and do, such as; jewellery, leatherwork, painting, glass, pottery, garden fountains and guitar making – even feeding the farm ducks, chicken and geese.

HERITAGE CENTRE On The Beach, has an exhibition illustrating the history of the town in words and pictures to stimulate interest in its past for visitors and residents and as an educational resource for children.

COMMUNITY CENTRE The Community Hall in Princes Road provides excellent facilities for music and drama. It also caters for private functions. The main building has several rooms available for casual bookings.

PARKS AND GARDENS These are situated at Alexandra Road, Herbert Road, Princes Road and Pier Copse off The Beach and opposite the Pier.

SHOPPING AREAS Clevedon has two main shopping areas. These are situated in and around Hill Road area and The Triangle (near to the recently developed Queens Square). Major supermarkets have outlets in the town, also there are many smaller local shops and post offices distributed throughout the town – Millcross, West End, Strode Road, Alexandra Road, Ilex Avenue. Souvenir shops and tea rooms can be found off The Beach road area. Many different styles of pubs, cafes and restaurants are dotted around the town.

BUSINESS CENTRES There are a great many businesses situated in and around Clevedon. The main business and trading estates are; Hither Green just off the motorway on Northern Way. The Tweed Road, Kimberley Road, Britannia Way and Concorde Business Park all situated off Strode Road. Clevedon Hall off Victoria Road. There is a new Windmill development on the road out of town towards Kenn.



A WALK AROUND OLD CHURCH ROAD - IN SEARCH OF COLERIDGE

*Extracted from the Clevedon Civic Society's booklet
'Ten Clevedon Walks'*

*"...My spirit shall revisit thee, dear Cot!
Thy jasmine and thy window-peeping rose,
and myrtles fearless of the mild sea air."*

*'Reflections on having left a place of retirement'
by Samuel Taylor Coleridge - 1795*

The paths that make up this town walk deserve to be better known. They are diverse and yet string together well - and they lead to one or two surprises.

Walk distance: 2.7 miles (4.3 kilometres)

Start & Finish: The promenade bandstand on Elton Road


Terrain: Mostly easy walking, metalled paths – though fairly steep near the start on Poets Walk. The grassy track along the Land Yeo river can get muddy.

Description: A chain of paths off the beaten track, leading past the Marine Lake, St Andrew's Church, Land Yeo river, Old Church Road and the Donkey Path.

Map: Route marked on the Street Map in the Guide, eg (1) in text = (1) on map.

Parking: Salthouse Fields Car Park - off Old Church Road. (You can start the walk here. Poet's Walk begins nearby at the end of the promenade.)





At the bandstand (1) on Elton Road, with the pier behind you, walk towards the Salthouse Hotel (2). After passing some famously windswept trees and a pebbly beach you soon come to Salthouse Fields and, on the other side of the sea wall, the Marine Lake.

The route now follows Poet's Walk for a while. So, at the end of the promenade, start to climb the board steps in front of you. After the first few steps, turn right along the wide path through the trees - still above the Marine Lake. Within 100 yards (90 metres) you come out of the trees and reach a viewpoint. Turn left to climb up more steps and a steep cliff path. After a further 50 yards (45 metres) or so you reach a second viewpoint. You then proceed to round Church Hill.

On reaching St Andrew's churchyard, leave Poet's Walk by taking the path which forks left (3). This path skirts the churchyard on your right. At a junction in the paths, bear right to reach a gate leading to the church entrance (4). At this gate turn left down the road (spot the horse mounting block) and cross Old Church Road to St Andrew's Drive beyond (5).

At the end of St Andrew's Drive (6) cross a small bridge onto Marshall's Field and, keeping to the left of the fields, follow the river - the Land Yeo. The field gives way to a strip of grassy riverbank. (7) Cross the busy Southern Way and continue to follow the river into a further field to reach Strode Road.

Turn left up Strode Road (8). After a short while, just before reaching Westbourne Avenue on your left, take the path over a bridge which appears on your right (9). Again follow the river, still the Land Yeo, with a field on your right.

You soon reach the solid semi-detached houses of Coleridge Vale Road North which runs to your left. At the far end of this (10) you come to Old Church Road where you should turn right. Cross almost immediately to a cottage which sports a large plaque announcing boldly that the poet Coleridge spent his honeymoon there. This may be true!

A little further on turn left up Hillside Road (11), past the library, and soon left again into St John's Avenue. Another surprise, the tall house at the end fronts two roads - the lower floors are on St John's Avenue and the upper floors are on Jesmond Road. (12) Climb to Jesmond Road by following the path which snakes round from the end of the Avenue.

At the top of this path follow Jesmond Road straight down to Coleridge Road and then turn left to reach Victoria Road. Turn right and shortly take the Donkey Path (13) on the left, opposite Albert Road, to return to the promenade and the bandstand (1).

