

Welcome to the Winchelsea E-Guide project



What is the Winchelsea E-Guide?

The E-Guide to Winchelsea is a set of multimedia tours of the Town that will be carried on a handheld electronic device equipped with a high-definition screen and high-quality sound.

As a visitor wanders around the Town with one of these devices, microchips hidden at about 30 historic locations will remotely activate the device to display contemporary photographs of each location. The visitor will simultaneously hear an audio commentary about the location.

Thirteen of the locations are the sites of ancient buildings. The visitor will be able to overlay the photographs of these buildings with professional reconstructions of the buildings as they would have looked when they were built, giving the visitor a vivid image of historic Winchelsea.

The E-Guides will be hired to visitors at the Community Office and possibly from other locations in the Town. There will be different tours for different types of visitor (eg general tourist, historical enthusiast and school party).

The technology

The handheld electronic device on which the E-Guide will be carried is a “personal digital assistance” (PDA), basically a small computer, manufactured by Dell. It can be operated by means of the buttons on the front and a stylus. Each unit will be provided with headphones and will have a protective and waterproof casing. There is special provision for the hard-of-hearing.

Each PDA has a port which senses the infrared signals from microchips embedded in small “tags” located at each point on the tour. Each tag has a distinct signal, allowing the PDA to distinguish between sites. A signal will trigger visual displays and audio commentary for a particular site.

The software for the E-Guide is produced by Hypertag Ltd of Cambridge. The software is written in HTML, the language of the Web. As this requires very little memory, the PDA can carry a very large amount of information (up to the equivalent of 24 hours of video). It also makes it easy to update.

The Hypertag system has been tried and tested in museums and in a national park.

Why do we need an E-Guide?

The aims of the E-Guide project are:

- to encourage visitors to Winchelsea to visit all its places of interest including the Museum and Church
- to encourage visitors to Winchelsea to stay longer in the Town and make more use local facilities such as shops, tea rooms, pubs
- to raise awareness outside Winchelsea of the richness and importance of Winchelsea's heritage in order to ensure that the conservation of that heritage has broad public support
- to actively involve residents of Winchelsea in the management of its heritage
- to make the important recent advances in the archaeology of Winchelsea more accessible to residents and visitors

Will the E-Guide increase the number of visitors?

Probably, but not much.

The E-Guide will not change the fact that Winchelsea lacks the mass attractions of places like Rye and is only visited by those who are prepared to make the effort.

Those likely to be attracted by the E-Guide will be visitors interested in history and archaeology, not exactly an unruly element.

Who thought of the E-Guide?

The proposal for the E-Guide was made by the Winchelsea Archaeological Society (WAS) in the Winchelsea Town Plan Business and Tourism Working Group.

The WAS wanted visitors to Winchelsea to be able to see more than a picturesque Sussex village with a few ruins. The opportunity to offer visitors a vivid insight into the medieval town was the result of two developments: the consolidation of the archaeological record of Winchelsea by English Heritage; and the availability of new technology.

The technology for the project was discovered by James Turner of Hidden Britain who came across PDAs being used in museums and other visitor attractions.

Who is organising the project?

The E-Guide project is an initiative of the Winchelsea Town Plan. It is being managed on behalf of the Town Plan's Business and Tourism Working Group by the Winchelsea Community Office in partnership with external and local organisations. The financial management of the project is being supervised by a committee appointed by the local partners and consisting of Richard Comotto, Steve Turner and Alan McKinna.

The Community Office will own the E-Guides, and is likely to be the principal location from where they will be hired out. The Community Office will provide the IT facilities needed to develop and maintain the project and will also take on the responsibility of maintaining and covering the future running costs of the E-Guides.

Who is doing the work?

The tour has been designed by the Winchelsea Archaeological Society.

Many of the photographs featured in the tour are being taken by members of the Winchelsea Digital Photography Club.

The reconstructions of historic locations for the E-Guide are being produced by the Winchelsea Archaeological Society with the expert assistance of Dominic Andrews of Archaeo-Art Ltd, a company based in Lewes that specialises in this sort of work.

The audio commentaries on the E-Guide will be written by members of the Winchelsea Archaeological Society and Winchelsea Literary Society. The commentaries will be performed by individual residents, members of the Literary Society and children from St Thomas's School and recorded at the Community Office.

External Partners

Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS)

East Sussex County Council

Department for Rural Affairs (Defra)

Hidden Britain

High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

National Trust

Rother District Council

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

1066 Country

Tourism South East



Local Partners

Court Hall Museum

St Thomas's Church

St Thomas's School

Winchelsea Archaeological Society

Winchelsea Community Office

Winchelsea Corporation

Winchelsea Digital Photography Club

Winchelsea Literary Society

Winchelsea Town Plan

Local businesses

Who is paying for the E-Guide?

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Defra Rural Enterprise | £1,500 |
| Interreg IIIa | £15,000 |
| Lottery Heritage Initiative | £22,217 |
| | <hr/> |
| | £38,717 |

There may some additional funding.

Local organisations will provide match funding in kind.

None of the grants for this project were available for other purposes in Winchelsea. If they had not been secured for the E-Guide, they would have been spent outside the Town.

The budget

| | |
|---|---------|
| 10 PDAs, 30 tags, ancillary equipment | £17,150 |
| Software, programming | £500 |
| Software licence & maintenance package | £1,500 |
| Insurance | £450 |
| Aides for the hard-of-hearing | £300 |
| Equipment for recording commentaries | £140 |
| Archaeological reconstructions | £4,100 |
| Leaflets | £575 |
| Souvenir postcard books | £1,325 |
| Workbooks for school parties | £585 |
| Information boards | £1,965 |
| Interpretation boards | £4,425 |
| Volunteer training | £800 |
| Marketing | £1,600 |
| Electronic noticeboard for the Community Office | £300 |
| Subscriptions, stationery, etc | £3,002 |

Other elements of the project

In addition to the E-Guide itself, the project will be producing:

- an accompanying brochure
- a souvenir book of postcards
- visitor information boards
- interpretation boards
- an electronic noticeboard for the window of the Community Office

The project may commission large 3-D scale models of some of the reconstructed medieval buildings.

The involvement of the school

St Thomas's School will assist in the production of the E-Guide by helping to prepare and test a special tour for school parties and an accompanying schools workbook (which will be available free to visiting school parties).

Children from the school will perform in the audio commentaries and it is hoped that material in the E-Guide can be incorporated in the school's curriculum.

Locations on the E-Guide tour

Strand Gate

The Lookout

Tower Cottage

Barrack Square

Spring Steps

High Street (looking west)

Periteau House

The Church from the NE

The interior of the Church

The Church from the SW

Friars Road cottages

Little House

Glebe

Little Shop

Firebrand House

Town Well

The Armoury

Salutation Cottages

Jamie Wickens

Chelsea Cottage

Kings Leap

Brede Valley from School Hill

Ferry Gate

Blackfriars Monastery

Windmill site

New Inn

Blackfriars Barn

Wesleys Chapel

Wesleys Tree

Town Sign

Court Hall

Museum

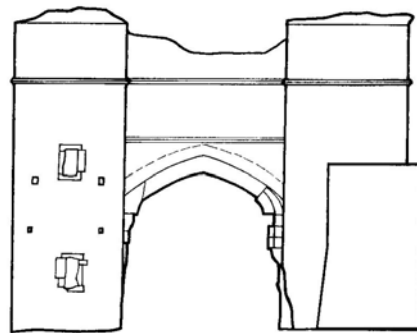
What is being reconstructed?

| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Strand Gate | 1300 |
| Barrack Square | 1810 |
| High Street (looking west) | 1520 |
| Periteau House | 1520 |
| Firebrand House | 1300 |
| The Armoury | 1300 |
| Brede Valley from School Hill | 1300 |
| Pipewell/Ferry Gate | 1410 |
| Blackfriars Monastery | 1410 |
| Blackfriars Barn | 1320 |
| Court Hall | 1400 |
| The Church from the NE | 1320 |
| The interior of the Church | 1320 |
| The Church from the SW | 1320 |

Reconstructing the Strand Gate 1

The Strand Gate was chosen to be the subject of the pilot reconstruction for the project because of its emblematic status. It has always been the main gateway into the town, leading directly up from the harbour, and was the most elaborately constructed.

The reconstruction shows the Strand Gate in about 1300, just a few years after its completion. The process of reconstructing the gate in the comprehensive detail required for the E-Guide has expanded our knowledge of the original structure. In some ways, reconstruction has proved to be a form of 'experimental' archaeology.



Reconstructing the Strand Gate 2

The surviving part of the Strand Gate is only about two thirds of its original height. The upper floor has been lost and most of the ornamental stone mouldings around the openings have been “robbed away”. The “robbing” of stone from old buildings has been common throughout history: derelict structures were convenient sources of stone for new buildings. This is the main reason why most surviving medieval structures are now ruined and incomplete.

Today, the gateway of the gate looks larger than it was originally. Not only are the original mouldings missing, but the gateway has been widened near the ground to allow traffic through. The road surface has also been eroded away over the centuries.

The gate has undergone a certain amount of “restoration” over the years, including the blocking of the tower doorway and the portcullis slots.

Reconstructing the Strand Gate 3

The present upper floor of the gate was once part of an enclosed room where the winding gear for the two portcullises was installed. This room probably also served as a lodge for the gatekeepers.

The gate would originally have had a lead or slate roof over this room, surrounded by a narrow open walkway. The walkway would have been surrounded by crenellations, probably pierced with arrow-loops, as was the fashion in military architecture when the gate was built.

At the top of the remains of the four drum towers are pieces of stone moulding. On closer inspection, they are polygonal in plan, suggesting that the missing upper parts of the towers were also polygonal rather than circular. This architectural style was popular at the time the gate was built and can also be seen in the towers of Caernarfon Castle in Wales and, closer to home, in the towers of the keep at Lewes.

Reconstructing the Strand Gate 4

The walls of medieval stone buildings were nearly always plastered and whitewashed. This gleaming white finish would have made the gate visible from several miles away. The internal decorative stonework of the vault of the gate and the lintels around the doorways would have been picked out in bold colours such as red, ochre and blue, in contrast with its plain stone appearance today.

The purpose of the lime plaster was to make the walls waterproof and to smooth out rough stonework. The whitewash enhanced the appearance of buildings and stabilised the plaster. Bare stone at this time would have been considered very uncivilised!

The walls of the gate are dotted with numerous small square holes, called 'putlog holes'. These are common in medieval stone buildings and were made during the construction of the gate, when they held timber beams that formed part of the scaffolding. When the building was completed, the timbers would be removed and the holes were blocked (probably with pieces of wood) and plastered over. Over the centuries, the fillings have fallen out.

Reconstructing the Strand Gate 5

The Strand Gate was equipped with a set of double doors that opened inwards. These would have been made of oak and reinforced with iron bands.

In front of the doors was a portcullis, again made from oak, which would have been sheathed in iron. A second portcullis hung inside the rear arch of the Gate.

Reconstructing the Strand Gate 6

Nowadays only the north east tower of the Strand Gate can be accessed. You can stand inside and see the sky. When in use, however, there would probably have been two or three floor levels in each of the towers, connected by ladders. The south west tower contains a spiral staircase that provided access to the first floor of the gate and the open roof. The other two towers were only accessible from the first floor and may well have been used for storage.

The main room above the roadway is likely to have been used as a lodge. One must imagine it free of weeds, whitewashed, with a small table and a couple of stools, and a fireplace of some sort. On opposite sides of the room would be windlasses for raising the portcullises which would be suspended in their slots by ropes and pulleys.

The Armoury

Surprisingly, the Armoury is one of the best preserved 13th century buildings in the town. Even though it has been extensively altered, the walls are essentially original. Nevertheless, the 19th and 20th century additions make it a challenge to picture the medieval house. Another problem is that the house was originally part of a continual series of frontages, rather than standing detached as it does today.

However, stripping away the chimneys, windows and later architectural decorations, we have the basic shape. We know that there was originally a range to the rear of the building, which was demolished and replaced by another range, which itself was removed in later centuries.

We also know that, like virtually all stone building at this time, the Armoury would have been plastered and whitewashed. The roof was probably made of slates and, instead of chimneys, there were probably glazed ceramic smoke vents in the roof. All of the doors and windows were framed by Gothic mouldings and we can guess where they were by looking at the changes in the surviving stonework. No decoration survives, but there are many similar examples across the country which offer us good clues.

St Thomas's Church 1

Although still an impressive structure, the church is a shadow of its former self. There has been much debate over whether it was ever completed, but it is almost certain that it was. In a large town of at least 5,000 people, the three churches had to have enough capacity for everyone on a Sunday morning. At this time, attending mass every Sunday was the only way to save one's immortal soul. Even allowing for several masses, St. Thomas's needed to hold at least 700 or 800 people.

Enough survives of the original church to give us a good idea of its appearance. There is also some information in the Town Seal. We know the likely plan of the building. It was twice as long as it is now, extending almost to the west wall of the churchyard. It had a massive central tower and, on one corner, a detached bell tower. The walls would have been plastered and whitewashed and the windows filled with stained glass. The west front would have been adorned with life-size statues of the patron saints of the town. Inside, the walls would have been covered with frescoes in glorious colours, the ceilings panelled and painted, and the gold-encrusted altars and icons lit by hundreds of flickering candles.

St Thomas's Church 2

The reduction of the church to its current size has traditionally been blamed on French raids during the Hundred Years War. However, much of the church survived that period. A map of 1572 shows the central tower was still standing at that time. Its demolition was probably carried out by the church authorities during the 16th and 17th centuries in order to reduce the burden of maintenance on the impoverished parish and the materials were sold off. The remains of the original nave were demolished by Rev. Drake Hollingberry in 1777. Hollingberry did the same in 1790 to the bell tower.

Because of the scale and importance of the church, it will be the subject of three reconstructions in the E-Guide: one looking from the northeast corner; the other from German Street; and the third inside the original nave.

Blackfriars Barn

We know that this building *was* a barn for many years, although it was never used by the Black Friars (Dominicans). Close examination of the archaeological evidence reveals that the barn was a very grand building.

The original building would, unusually for the period, have had glazed windows and, like other stone buildings of the 13th century, the walls would have been plastered and whitewashed. The roof was slate and there were chimneys, another rarity at this time, instead of louvre roof vents.

Possibly the most interesting feature of the building is its three-chambered cellar, with windows, elegant vaulting and fireplace. Unusually, the cellars have two fireplaces --- suggesting they were not used for the storage of wine --- and the building had an unusually large cesspit --- suggesting it had some sort of public function, maybe a guildhall or perhaps even the original court hall.

We know that the building passed out of use during the medieval period. Perhaps, it suffered from one of the French raids. Its heyday was in the early 14th century, when it was part of a busy street, with rows of timber houses and shop fronts on each side. This is the date chosen for our reconstruction.

The Harbour

The harbour of Winchelsea was the source of its wealth and the *raison d'être* of the town. The port flourished for only 150 years, but this was equivalent to between six and eight generations of great prosperity. The peak was the late 13th and early 14th century.

The reconstruction in the E-Guide will show the harbour at about this time as seen from the town walls near the Pipewell Gate. We have little evidence for the appearance of the harbour, other than basic data: the arrangement of the plots, the extent of the salt marshes beyond and the line of the quay itself. But from these cold facts, we can paint a fairly accurate picture: a ramshackle row of warehouses, shops, offices, taverns, sheds, yards and more dubious premises, the air ringing with a continual loud babble in many languages. Behind the warehouses and sheds, the timber quay, with several merchant ships loading or unloading, dock cranes worked by men on treadmills creaking and swivelling back and forth.

The Court Hall

As it is now, the Court Hall, like the church is much reduced and also much altered. So little survives of the original 13th century building that we can only really envisage its 14th century appearance. However, from comparisons with similar townhouses across Britain, we can produce a good reconstruction.

We know that, at this time, the Hall had shops on the ground floor and accommodation upstairs. There may have been a balcony around the first floor. The present garden was itself a hall and there was also a large range to the north, which may have been timber-framed.

Pipewell/Ferry Gate

Whilst it now stands ruined, and isolated by the busy A259, the Pipewell or Ferry Gate was once an important feature of the town's defences, visible to any ship mooring at the quayside and providing access to the ferry across the Brede to Udimore and Rye.

The Gate was originally built at the turn of the 13th century, but after being damaged during a heavy French raid, it was repaired around 1400. Although it has probably changed little in appearance, it has been decided that the Gate should be reconstructed as it was in the 15th century. By this time, the field to the south west had been taken over the Black Friars, who built a substantial priory on the site.

In the early 15th century, the town walls were rebuilt around a smaller defensive perimeter. The reconstruction will reflect this by showing the turn of the wall in the distance, where there stood a windmill, which may well have been the post-mill that famously scared King Edward's horse.

Periteau

The Georgian appearance of this L-shaped house is deceptive. It actually dates from 1500 and was originally a spectacular three-storeyed timber-framed Tudor building with the first and second floors overhanging the street. The house was built for one Richard Barkley, probably a rich merchant, and demonstrated that there was still money in Winchelsea as late as the early 16th century. The Georgian appearance of the house dates from the 1760's, when the house was modernized by Arnold Nesbitt MP. The third storey was replaced by a tiled roof and a brick façade built around the Tudor core.

With its close-set timber frames, the original Tudor building must have required hundreds of oak trees and would have cost a fortune to build. Much of the original timber framing survives inside the Georgian house. This and reference to similar buildings allows to make a good attempt at reconstruction.

Firebrand

When it was built, Firebrand would have been equivalent to a large medieval manor house. It occupies two of the original building plots laid out when New Winchelsea was founded and is on an important corner site. It would therefore have been the home of an important citizen of the new town.

However, the main reason for including it in the list of reconstructions is that, underneath its weatherboarding, it is one of the three or four most complete houses dating from the foundation of Winchelsea. Much of the original structure remains. It is built around a central hall that would originally have been open to the roof. At either end of the hall was a two-storey block. At the western end were private quarters and at the eastern end the kitchen and other domestic services.

Firebrand was partly rebuilt in the Tudor period and this is the period chosen for reconstruction. The first floor and an internal chimney stack were added to the hall in the 18th century.

The High Street

Behind the Georgian brickwork and 19th century shop fronts, the present High Street preserves a line of 15th and 16th century houses. Detailed archaeological surveys on these buildings has revealed much about their appearance in the Tudor period.

Because of this unique understanding of the whole row of houses, the High Street is ideal for the reconstruction of a street scene from the later period of Winchelsea's medieval history.

Barrack Square

This block of houses was built in the early 1760s. The previous name of “Factory Square” reveals their original purpose: homes and workshops for the manufacture of lawn, cambric and Italian crepe by the *English Linen Company*.

The current name dates from the Napoleonic War, when the buildings were used as billets for the garrison and their families. This is the period chosen for reconstruction. While the building’s appearance has changed little, the atmosphere would have been very different, with large numbers of soldiers will have been milling around, marching, drilling and flirting with local women. The reconstruction will be colourful and noisy.