

The Silchester Trail:

An attractive circular walk of up to 8 miles which is waymarked along its route.
(shorter circuits are available) Allow up to 3 hours to complete the entire circular walk.

This is one of three Basingstoke Heritage Trails

For the more direct route to the Roman wall, turn right after crossing the small footbridge ahead.

Clappers Farm

A 17th Century map of Silchester shows a substantial farmhouse was already in existence on the site by 1653. Its name derives from the ford across Silchester Brook. A 'clapper' was a rough bridge of raised stones or a plank laid across running water to enable pedestrians to keep their feet dry.

To your left of the kissing gate is a small 13th century moated site, restored fish ponds and water-meadows. This site is believed to have been the residence of the Keeper or 'Parker', an important manorial official of the Manor of Silchester. Nothing of the building survives, but the fish ponds and water-meadows, now planted with cricket bat willows, have been restored with the help of the Countryside Commission (and are open to the public).



▲ Clappers Farm ford (photo: P Hughes/www.silchesterlife.org)



▲ Remains of mediaeval moat (photo: P Hughes/www.silchesterlife.org)

Park Pale

The Trail takes you across the middle of the mediaeval park. In 1204 the Lord of the Manor paid the price of a palfrey (a small saddle horse) for a 'Licence to Impark' from his friend King John. The boundary, or park pale, was a substantial earth bank topped by a wooden paling fence and inside ditch. This contained gates and deer-leaps which enabled the deer to jump into the park, but not out! The original park pale can still be traced for much of its length and you will walk through it on the way to the Church.



▲ Illustration of a Park Pale

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- The English Heritage site of Calleva Atrebatum.
- Short cuts to create walks of either, 3 or 4 miles, with an alternative path back to Bramley Station.

Interpretation panels are located at key points along the trail which describe the various features of interest en route.

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The Parish Church

St. Mary the Virgin was first built in the mid-12th century. Much earlier this was a sacred site for the Roman townspeople, as two temples lie beneath the Church and the churchyard. Do take time to go inside. The early 16th century screen, one of the finest in Hampshire, was hidden in the times of the Reformation and the Civil War, but found and restored in the 1860's.

Roman Amphitheatre

After visiting the Church proceed north up the road to see the remains of the Roman amphitheatre. You will be able to return to the route by passing through the kissing gate beside the road to the rear of Manor Farm House.



▲ Church of St Mary the Virgin (photo: P Hughes/www.silchesterlife.org)



▲ Chimney of Old Manor House (photo: P Hughes/www.silchesterlife.org)

Old Manor House

The Old Manor House, on your right, dates from the late 16th/early 17th centuries. Evidence of the existence of a much earlier house, possibly from the 13th century, is indicated by an entrance to the Church being on the north side and the blocked-up door to the Chancel. Such a door into the Church would have been for the use of the Priest and the Lord of the Manor only. King John visited Silchester in May 1215, a month before he signed the Magna Carta, and would have been entertained at the earlier Manor House. The massive brick chimney of the house is notable for its unusual design.

Rye House

As you walk round the Roman Town Wall, before you reach the path to the main car park, you will see Rye House to your right. The present house is 17th century, but was built on the site of the hospice or convalescent home for the Monks of Reading Abbey. They would be sent here to recover from illnesses or perhaps to die. It is not known why the Monks chose this site, but material from the Roman Town was used in the building of Reading Abbey, founded by Henry I in 1121.

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Silchester Village Hall

The Village Hall was built on land given by a local resident in 1926, and then cost £1,767. It opened with a pantomime on the 21st December 1926. With the later addition of the 'Club Room', paid for by The Working Men's Club, the Hall has been in permanent use for the benefit of the local Community.

It is run as a Charitable Trust with a Management Committee to oversee activities.



▲ Silchester village, featuring The Calleva Arms
(Photo: P Hughes/www.silchesterlife.org)

The Calleva Arms

Today's public house was built as 'The Crown' by Rector John Coles in 1837. The Rector installed as Landlord his tenant whose farm had served as the local ale-house. The Calleva Arms is a central feature of the Village now, but in the norman and mediaeval period, the settlements were grouped around the Church and at The Pound. Increasing population in the 15th century led to clearance on the common and a settlement shift away from the Church.



▲ Old gravel workings on the Common
(Photo: P Hughes/www.silchesterlife.org)

Silchester Common

The Common on which you are standing, is one of the few remaining areas of acid heathland in north Hampshire. Owned and managed by Silchester Parish Council since 1978, it covers approx. 164 acres and was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1951. 29 houses have registered Rights of Common. The common is partly fenced and grazed by a small herd of hardy Dexter cattle.

As you cross the Common, notice the old gravel workings to your right, often filled with water. More extensive, deeper, workings over the Common may represent gravel extraction for the Roman Town. The streets of Calleva Atrebatum and major roads would have needed a huge supply.

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Site of Roman Road

A Roman road ran just inside the entrance to this field. Nothing visible remains now, but this road was the main route to Winchester and Southampton leaving Silchester by the south gate of the Roman wall.

Alternative route back to Bramley Station, via Bramley Frith

To return to Bramley Station by a different and slightly shorter route, continue down Church Lane until you come to The Pound (also known as Three Ashes). This hamlet may be of Saxon origin. As its name suggests it was the village pound, or pinfold, which is where stray animals were kept. The owners of the animals had to pay a fine before the animals could be taken away.

From The Pound, the route is waymarked, taking you over Silchester Brook again and across the open fields to Bramley Frith. (Please note that in wet weather the path adjoining Bramley Frith can be very muddy).



▲ Silchester Roman Wall, from the south gate

Bramley Frith

Bramley Frith is a relic of ancient woodland, but now a National Grid Electricity sub-station dominates this wood. Once part of the forest which once covered the south of England, Bramley Frith still supports an impressive array of wildflowers, including carpets of bluebells, many rare insects and mammals such as the dormouse. An iron-age earthwork survives on the northern boundary. A steep earth bank and ditch encloses much of the woodland, dating back at least 1000 years, and is easily seen from the boundary footpath.

From the Frith the Trail returns to Bramley Station by way of local lanes.



▲ Bluebell wood (photo: Stephen Hodgson)

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A Short History of Bramley

What we now see of this village, the houses, the fields and roads, lanes, ditches, gardens and trees, all in their own way carry something of the history of Bramley. The essence of a village lies in the people who, for all sorts of reasons, happen to be living here – over a period of perhaps a thousand years this place has been recognisably Bramley.

You can see a bit of the first millennium here – Bullsdown, on the left as you come into Bramley from Sherfield – a ten acre fortification which would have been quite a substantial settlement at the time. There's evidence of an Iron Age fort at the north tip of Bramley Frith, and of course the Romans built their roads through the village, on their way from Winchester to Silchester.

By the time the Domesday Book, around 1084, Bramley boasted one church, two mills, 14 villagers, 14 smallholders and eight slaves, and was valued at £9 – whereas Sherborne St John was worth £15. Both villages were owned by Hugo de Port, who lived at Old Basing. This family held the village until 1428; it then passed to the Paulets for 200 years, after which it passed to the Pitts who ran it with their Stratfield Saye estate, into the nineteenth century.

One major influence on Bramley was the Beaurepaire Estate, centred on Beaurepaire House, towards the south west of the village. The landowners were the Brocas family, who built a moated house probably in the mid 14th C. Many houses built for the Beaurepaire estate employees can still be seen, with the typical cast iron hexagonal 'Beaurepaire' window casements.

The time-span can be glimpsed when you walk round St James's Church. Parts of the present building were raised in 1150, and there was a Saxon church here before that, some of the construction material appears to have been relocated from Roman Silchester. The Brocas Aisle was designed by famous architect Sir John Soane, who was a local man. Perhaps the most fascinating remnant in the church is the picture of Thomas a Becket's murder by the four knights in Canterbury Cathedral, probably painted within fifty years of the infamous 1170 deed.

Towards the end of the First World War some 1,000 acres of Bramley and Sherfield were commandeered to accommodate a Prisoner of War Camp and Ammunition Depot; the latter under some secrecy, though it had 30 miles of railway track. It was run down after the war, until the RAOC came to base their School of Ammunition there in 1922. In 1939 the camp was ringed with anti-aircraft guns, and operations built up again as the main ammunition depot in the South. There were up to 4,400 stationed there, dealing with 1,000 tons of ammo per day.

The village, then, is both unique and ordinary. There's the ancient and the brand new – what makes it interesting is how change has been absorbed.

Text researched by Rev. RC Toogood
Photos by Jon Stubbs



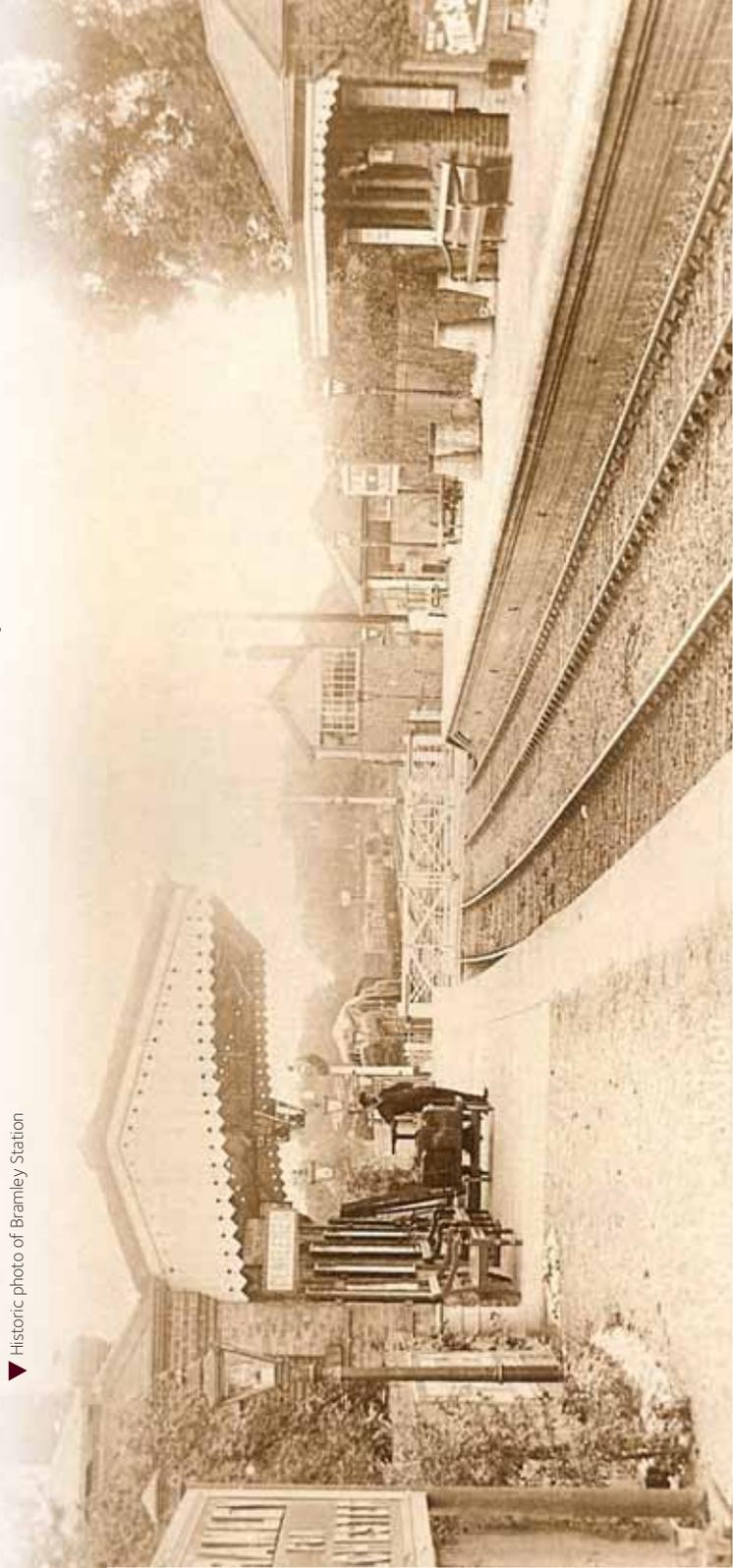
▲ The old Post Office, built 1884, now a private house



▲ St James' Church



▲ The Granary



▼ Historic photo of Bramley Station

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The walk from Bramley Station to the Roman Site of Calleva Atrebatum is approximately 3 miles.

Bramley Station

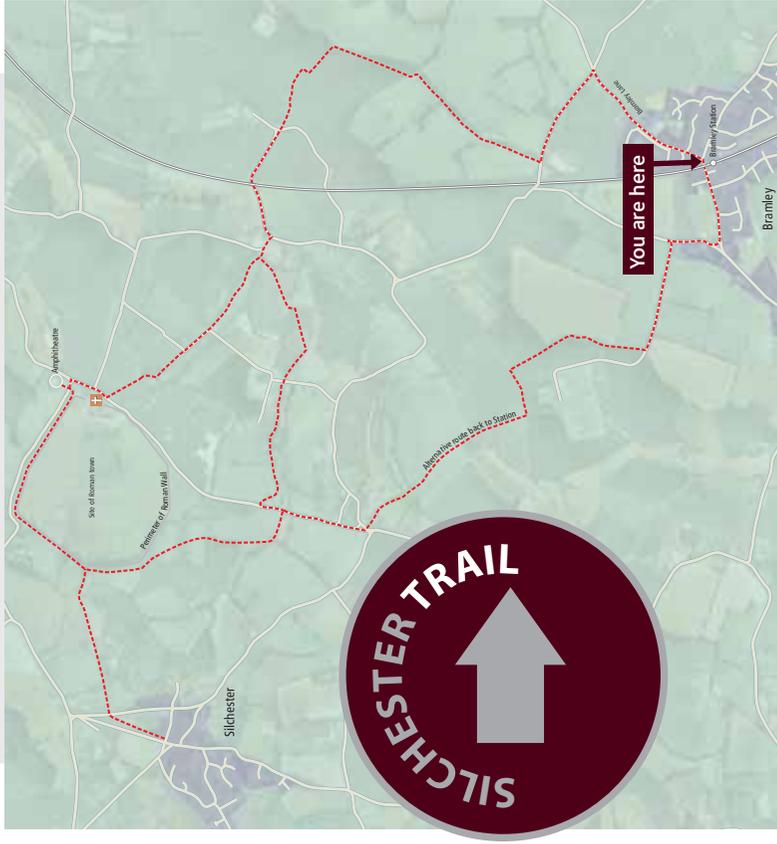
The railway has run through Bramley, between Reading and Basingstoke, since 1848 but it was not until almost fifty years later, on 1st May 1895, that the station opened. The Six Bells Hotel (now The Bramley) was opened in 1896 having been built to accommodate travellers. In the first 12 months of operation 11,245 passengers were served by the station. In 2009 the line and station remain in constant use. In 2008 the number of journeys between Reading and Basingstoke was in excess of 1 million a year and 203 trains pass through the village each day.

Stratfield Saye Road

The trail to Silchester follows down Bramley Lane, once named Stratfield Saye Road. Today this lane is very different from the rural track pictured below in 1910. This lane was one of the first to be tarmaced running from Bramley crossing to Stratfield Saye. Arthur Wellesley, the 1st Duke of Wellington, was gifted the Stratfield Saye estate from a grateful nation in 1817. Now this lane is flanked by houses and is home to Bramley C of E Primary School, which was opened by the 7th Duke of Wellington in 1959.

Silchester Halt

En route to Silchester you will leave the tarmac road and use footpaths until you reach a farm track that passes under the railway line. This was once Silchester Crossing. A house was built for the Crossing Keeper, whose job it was to enable the farm traffic to cross the tracks safely. Some trains would stop to drop off or take on passengers. The last Crossing Keeper retired in 1962 and the house was demolished. Pedestrians were able to cross the line until the late 1980's, but the line is now fenced off and farm traffic and walkers pass underneath.



▼ Stratfield Saye Road in 1910, now Bramley Lane

PLEASE KEEP DOGS UNDER CLOSE CONTROL

