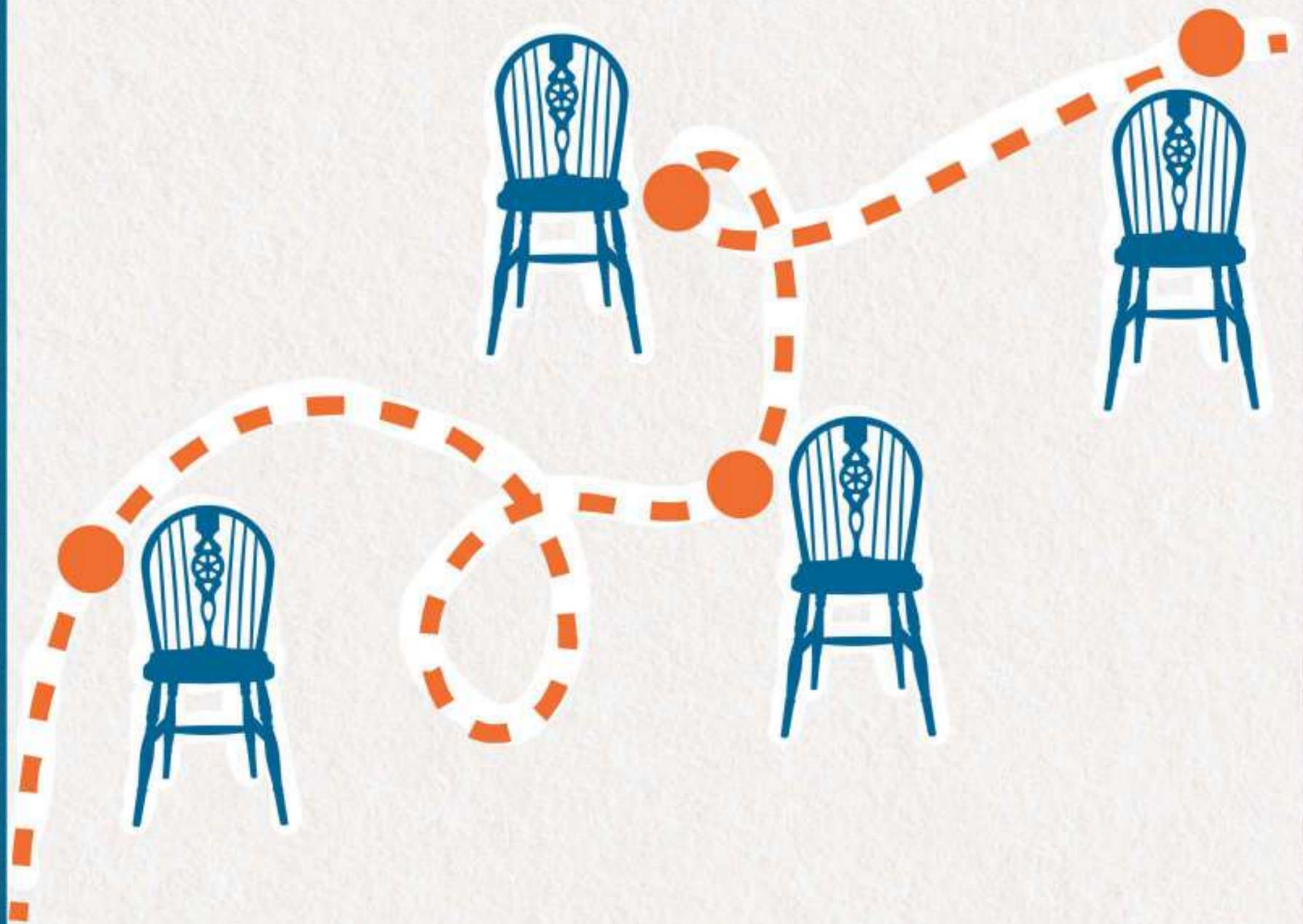


Here, Chair & Everywhere

High Wycombe Town Centre
Heritage Walking Tour



Introduction

On this walking trail, discover sites where Wycombe's chair heritage was made.

Visit historic sites, including Wycombe's first chair factory, furniture showrooms, chair arches, and an original, still-standing traditional factory building.

This trail is made by Wycombe Museum. Known to many as The Chair Museum, entry to the museum and gardens is FREE for all. The Museum inspires learning and discovery through our furniture-making specialism, our remarkable collections, and as a vital local charity.

Route

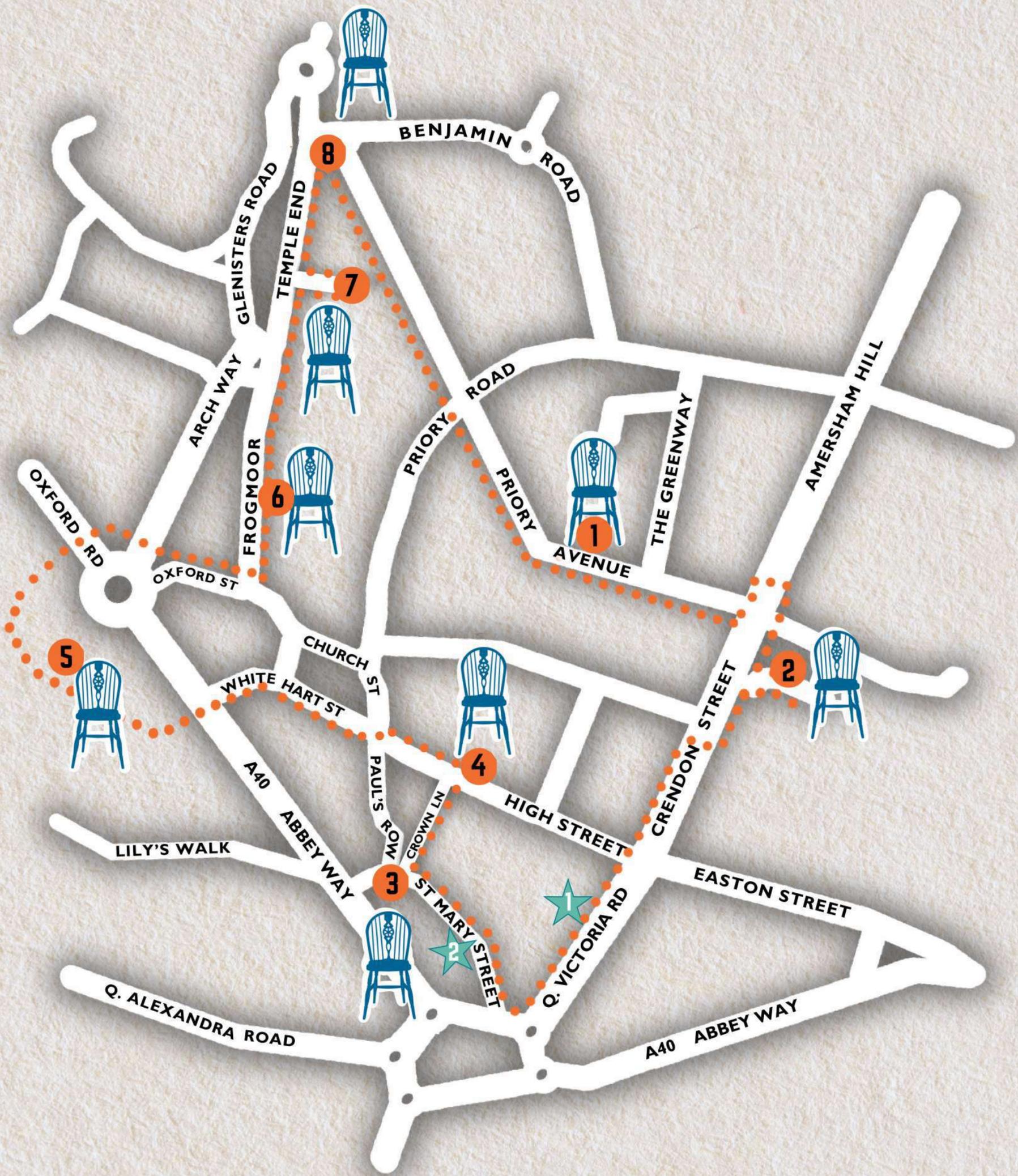
The route is a 1.7 mile long circuit and takes around an hour on foot.

This trail is a stair-free route. There are a few moderately steep hills, and several road-crossings where there are some standard height pavement kerbs. There is parking at Wycombe Museum during opening hours, and road-side parking on surrounding roads at all other times.

Scroll to see a map of the trail.

Parts of the route do not have road signs, so please use the map along with written directions. It shows names of all the streets you will use. The route is highlighted, with trail points marked.

The Route Map



1. Wycombe Museum
2. Railway Station
3. The First Furniture Factory
4. High Wycombe's Chair Arches
5. Furniture Factories Galore
6. Parker Knoll Showrooms
7. A Traditional Chair Factory
8. Glenister's Furniture Factory

The Trail

1 Wycombe Museum



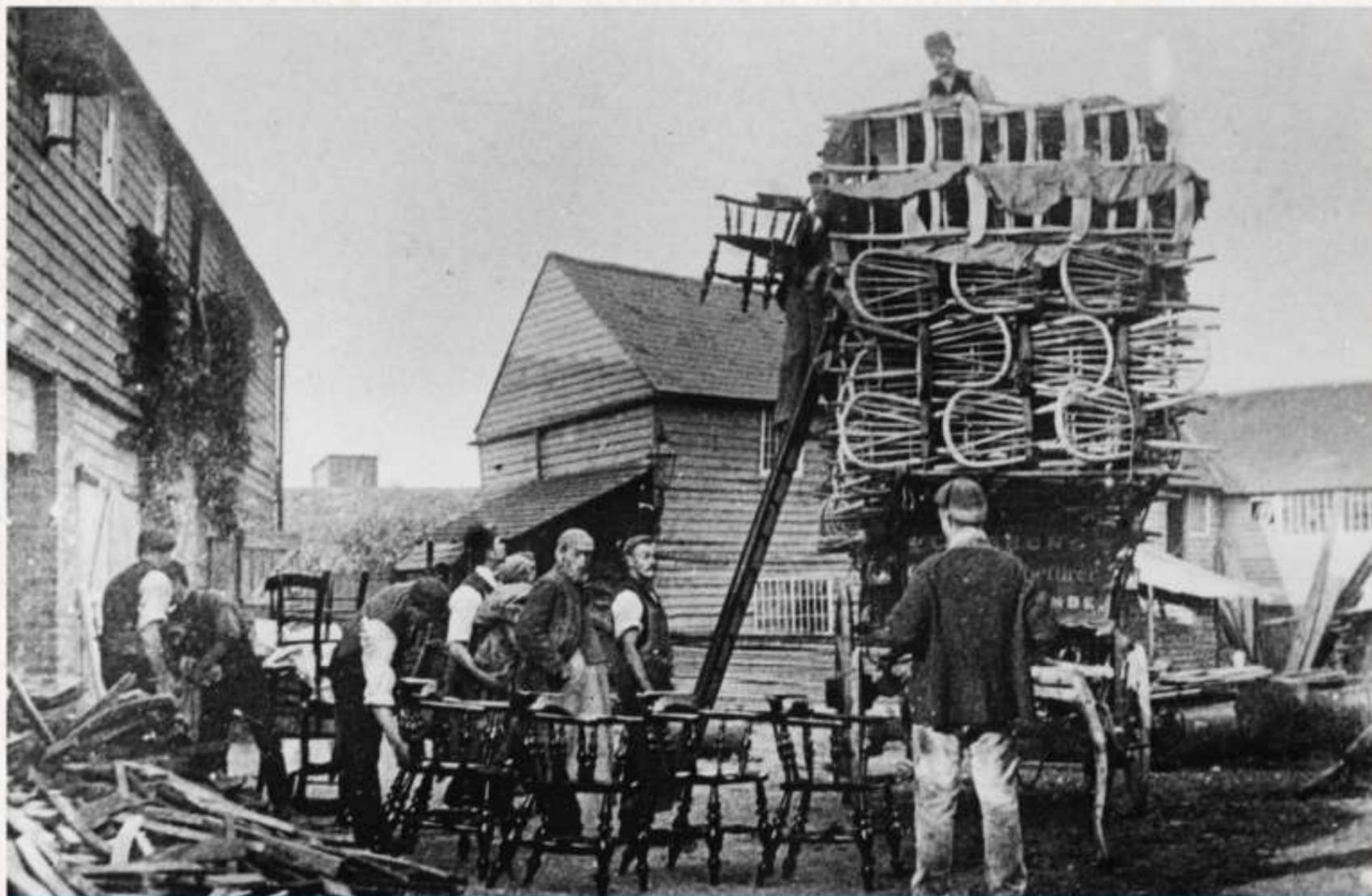
Come inside to see the furniture galleries, and enjoy our timber trail in the garden. In the furniture galleries, you will find chairs made in some of the factories on this trail and much more. Don't forget to visit the local history and art galleries too, plus our cafe and shop!

 *Go left out of the museum, take a left at the end of Priors Avenue to the crossing on Amersham Hill, and then down to the Railway Station, either via the steps or the ramp. Look towards the station building.*

2 Wycombe to the World: Chairs by Rail

The Great Western Railway branch line passed through High Wycombe from the 1850s, and soon it was used by furniture manufacturers to transport chairs to shops and retailers. Before the railway, chairs were transported by road, or by boat on the Thames into London.

The railway was faster, cheaper and helped manufacturers keep up with demand.



Chairs being loaded onto a wagon at Gibbons chair factory, off Oxford Rd, High Wycombe, about 1895.

Image reference: MFW35161

Wagon loads of chairs, packed with straw for cushioning, continued to be a common sight on High Wycombe's roads. Some would stay on the roads, but more often, they were going to the railway station to continue their journey by train.

The chair manufacturers were not always happy with the rail service. They sometimes complained in the local newspaper, *The Bucks Free Press*, about late arrivals, lack of covered storage space, damaged chairs and lost or stolen chairs.

 *Go back onto Amersham Hill. Head down the hill, crossing the road using the pedestrian crossing. Use the next pedestrian crossing on your right to cross Crendon Street.*

At the crossroads, use the pedestrian crossing to cross the High Street, and continue along Queen Victoria Road.



Point of interest – the Old Library Building. This was opened in 1932 as High Wycombe Library and Museum. The museum was upstairs in this building until it moved to the current site in 1965.



Pass the Town Hall and Police Station (right). Turn right at the end onto St Mary Street. Keep walking, with the Fire Station on your left and Wycombe Swan theatre on your right. At a safe point before the Swan car park entrance, cross the road to the Fire Station side. Continue with the river on your left, pass the entrance to the car park and bear left. Face the underpass, and look above it to the university buildings.



Point of interest - the river was culverted in the 1960s. This is a rare part of the town centre where it can be viewed.

3 High Wycombe's First Furniture Factory

This site is rich in local furniture history. It is the location of Widginton's, the first chair factory in High Wycombe. Set up in around 1805, Widginton's factory made wooden chairs, and in 1851 employed 10 men and 5 boys. The site was later taken over by Nicholls and Janes furniture manufacturer.

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This factory site was very close to Bucks New Uni which has a long history in training furniture designers and makers. The old factory building was demolished in 1959 as part of the slum clearances, and to make space for extensions to the college.

Nicholls and Janes moved to Queen's Road where they continued to trade until 1968. Nicholls and Janes made chairs and other furniture, and were known for the high quality of their carving work.

The factory was close to where Bucks New University's Gateway building is now.



Nicholls and Jane's furniture factory with the then new college building behind it, in 1957. Soon after this photograph was taken, the factory was demolished, and

the flyover was built. The college building in the photograph is now one of the oldest parts of Bucks New Uni.

Image reference: BFP:33510

 *With the underpass behind you, walk down the alley (Crown Lane) to the High Street. Cross the High Street and turn left to face the Guildhall - the large building with arches and white pillars.*

4 High Wycombe's Chair Arches

When Queen Victoria visited High Wycombe in 1877, she was just passing through on her way to Hughenden Manor to visit Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. The fact that she was not planning to stop in the town did not stop local people from wanting to welcome her and showcase the local furniture industry.



Wycombe's first chair arch, on the High Street near the Guildhall, to welcome Queen Victoria in 1877.

Image reference: MHW:46389

With only one day's notice the chair manufacturers worked through the night to put up this impressive arch of chairs to welcome the Queen. In 1884, another chair arch, with even more chairs was put up in the same location to welcome the Prince and Princess of Wales to Wycombe Abbey. Now a boarding school, Wycombe Abbey was the home of the aristocratic Carrington family.



Chair arch, 1884, to welcome the Prince and Princess of Wales to High Wycombe. The Prince of Wales became King Edward VII in 1901, with his wife becoming Queen Alexandra.

Image reference: MHW:46388

 Walk towards the Guildhall. Pass the Eden shopping centre entrance, and go towards the blue millennium clock. Walk down White Hart Street to the end, and into Eden. Turn right towards the library, using the shopping centre's signage. Stop outside the library.

5 Furniture Factories Galore

The area that is now the Eden Shopping Centre, was once home to many small and medium furniture factories and workshops, as well as poor quality housing. The Eden development restructured the old street layout and re-used some of the old street names.



The yard of Woodbridge's Temple chair factory. The man outside is probably the owner. Denmark St, High Wycombe, 1880s.

Image reference: MHW:35259

James and William Woodbridge were at 17 Denmark Street between about 1875 and 1895. They were a typical small manufacturer, in existence for no more than

one generation and with the very typical local furniture factory design of brick ground floor and wooden first floor.

When Woodbridge were trading, High Wycombe was producing 4,700 chairs every day, many of them in small factories like this one.

 *Continue to follow around the Library building to the main road (Oxford Rd). Cross Oxford Rd at the crossing, then turn right. Cross Arch Way at the crossing. Continue straight on, cross the road, then turn left into Frogmoor. Continue along Frogmoor until the pub is on the left. Turn to face the pub from across the road.*

6 Parker Knoll Showrooms on Frogmoor

Frederick Parker began furniture making in High Wycombe in 1898. Their firm made high quality furniture, including for ocean liners. They were one of the first High Wycombe factories to make upholstered furniture. In 1929, Frederick Parker went into partnership with Willi Knoll. Knoll had invented a new form of sprung furniture, with a coiled steel wire system on both the seat and the back.

Parker Knoll became a household name, and supplied BBC Broadcasting House and Trusthouse hotels.

Production moved to Chipping Norton in the 1990s, and they have been based in Nottinghamshire since 2016.

Frederick Parker's archive of chairs, carvings and documents is held at London Metropolitan University.



Parker Knoll showrooms, Frogmoor, 1975. The Parker Knoll factory was at Temple End, alongside the Glenister factory. The site of Glenister's factory is also featured on this trail (Point 8).

Image reference: BFP:74322

 *Continue along Frogmoor, into Temple End and under the railway bridge. Continue straight on until you pass Temple Gate apartments on your right. Immediately after passing, turn right into Temple Gate. Walk to the very end of Temple Gate and look to your left, towards the brick and wood building.*

7 A Traditional Chair Factory Building

This is a rare surviving example of a traditional small Wycombe furniture factory. The main part, a two storey brick and timber chair workshop, was built in 1888. A machine shop for cabinet furniture making added in around 1900.

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This photograph of an unknown factory gives an idea of how the inside of Forward and Donnelly might have looked in the 1920s and '30s.

Image reference: MHW:28289

W Davis Ltd took over the site in the 1960s. They made dining furniture, church chairs and furniture for government departments before closing in 1980.

Pervisell, who made computers and telephone equipment were then based in the building from 1981 until 2023.

 Retracing your steps, exit Temple Gate, and turn right onto Temple End. Continue along Temple End until Benjamin Rd. Walk up Benjamin Rd to the corner with Priory Avenue. Turn around to face back down the hill, toward the supermarket, where Glenisters used to stand.

8 Glenister's Furniture Factory, Temple End



View of Glenister's from the bottom of Benjamin Road, 1990s. The factory buildings extended past the right edge of the photograph.

Image reference: RHW:15140

Glenister's was owned by several generations of the same family, from the 1830s until closure in 1990. Their factory began as a sideline to a pub in Queen's Square, called The Lion in the Woods.

By 1851, Glenister's was the largest factory in town, employing 50 people. They moved to Temple End in 1879.

Glenister's was much larger than most other High Wycombe factories. They had their own stables, their own water supply, and their own woodland along the Lane End Road. During the Second World War, a nursery was built in the grounds for working mothers.

In the 20th century, Glenister's made all types of furniture, and supplied the government, providing barracks, libraries and hospitals with furniture.



Men working in the framing shop of Glenister's chair factory, where chair parts were assembled into finished chairs. Temple End, High Wycombe, about 1900.

Image reference: MHW:01454

 *Turn left onto Priory Avenue. Continue until the crossroads. Cross Priory Road, and continue back to Wycombe Museum to end the trail.*