A brief history of St Neots

The town of St Neots grew up around a Benedictine Priory, which was built in the parish of Eynesbury in the early 12th century, with the Priory church being dedicated in 1113. This Priory superseded a smaller establishment established by Anglo Saxons, in which were housed the houses of Saint Neot, a revered Saxon monk. The pilgrims who came to pay their respects to this relic brought trade to the community, and after the monks were granted a market charter in about 1180, St Neots built its own parish church and gained separate parish status.

After the dissolution of the monasteries, between 1536-39, the Priory was abandoned and demolished, but by then St Neots was a flourishing market town.

There was much rebuilding of the town in the 17th century, and in the 18th century the river was dredged and sluices built, enabling goods to be brought by in boats. Merchants and manufacturers set up businesses such as corn milling and brewing and the town expanded further. The stage-coaches and later the railway increased prosperity in the 19th century, but the greatest expansion took place in the 20th century. Developments in the 1960s brought more industry into the town and with the absorption of Eynesbury, Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon, St Neots became the largest town in Cambridgeshire, with a population, at present, of around 28,000.

The Riverside Park is the hub of this expanding town, yet the central area of St Neots still retains much of its country market town character. The jewel mosaic on the Market Square reminds visitors of the enterprise of the Saxon founders of the town and reflects the desire of the present generation to build on their heritage.
built in the early 19th century, is nearby. Several fine 18th century merchant houses are located on the south side of the Market Square and parts of other buildings, including the former OLD FALCON are 16th and 17th century.

In the centre of the fine Market Square, which is one of the largest in the country, is the DAY COLUMN. This cast iron structure was erected in 1822 by John Day, a local brewer, to enhance the Market Square and to provide lighting. The Market Square has been used since before 1135, when the monks of The Priory (which stood to the north) were granted a market charter. The group of monks in the centre of the Square surrounding the Day Column, remind visitors of the forerunners of the present shops and inns. Continue to walk across the Market Square, towards the bridge. If you look down at your feet, you will see the MOSAIC OF THE KING ALFRED JEWEL, with its reputed image of St Neot. He was a Cornish monk, who had been well regarded by the King and who died around AD 875. Cross the road past the former Old Falcon, towards THE BRIDGE. The modern bridge replaced an early 17th century stone bridge which itself replaced a timber structure dating from the 16th century. In 1648, it was the scene of a skirmish between Royalists and Roundheads, culminating in a victory for the latter. The original bridge across the Ouse was a timber one that served medieval pilgrims. This building has a 17th century timber frame and is faced in 18th century brick. It may be seen on your left and is the descendant of an inn that served medieval pilgrims. This building has a 17th century timber frame and is faced in 18th century brick. It was a coaching inn before the arrival of the railways, when St Neots acted as a key staging post for horse drawn carriages on their way to London or the North. The Market Square contained several other inns where travellers could rest and refresh themselves. Its layout, together with the yards and alleys behind archways, reflect the original narrow medieval burgage plots. Turn left into the High Street and turn left into New Street.

Now finish the trail at the Museum or continue north to the junction of Tan Yard and New Street. Notice the former BAPTIST CHAPEL built in 1816, was one of the first buildings in New Street. On the walls of both chapel and garden are some interesting old memorials. Note the blue disc on the building opposite, which commemorates the St Neots Quads, born in 1935.