

Southampton - Old Town American Trail

Map references are to the Central Southampton map

Southampton has very important historical and modern connections with the United States of America and this trail visits some of the places concerned. In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers were here, RMS *Titanic* began her maiden voyage from Southampton in 1912 and in the Second World War Southampton was selected as the US Army's 14 Major Port of Transportation in preparation for the invasion of Normandy. Southampton's Tourist Information Centre stocks the book, 'Southampton and D-Day' (£8.99 plus postage £1.50), which tells the story of Southampton, its people and the American troops in the build up to D-Day and during the months that followed.

In following this route, please take great care as some parts under foot are rough and uneven, there are busy roads that have to be crossed and there are flights of steps. Please use pedestrian crossings wherever possible. The total length of the walk is approximately one mile (1.6 km). Actual walking time is in the order of 50 minutes but the time in each case will depend on individual circumstances and the amount of time spent at each location.

Start just below the city centre pedestrian precinct on the south side of Hanover Buildings

Map reference C4

Look down Hanover Buildings and you will see a roundabout. Just the other side of that roundabout is Hoglands Park, once part of the medieval field system close to the town centre but since the mid 1850s pleasure parkland for the inhabitants of Southampton and visitors. The entrance to that park by the roundabout was, in the Second World War, the way in to the Head Quarters of the 14 Major Port based here from July 1943.

Look at, and walk through, the Bargate

Map reference C4

This medieval gateway into the Old Town, parts of which date from around c.1175, was a feature of the town well known to American servicemen and women who were here in the Second World War. At that time, the archway and openings were sealed up as protection from bombing as the Bargate was one of the old buildings used as an air raid shelter. There are photographs taken at the time, showing US personnel here. Although the walls on either side of the Bargate had been demolished for traffic purposes before 1939, those driving tanks still found it difficult to negotiate their way around the medieval building. The Bargate itself escaped serious damage during the war, unlike the area to the north that was devastated. Look at the number of modern buildings and at the plaque outside the Bargate Shopping Centre that gives details of the damage and loss of life suffered by Southampton and its people in 1940 and which records the American presence here in the Second World War.

The statue in the niche above the arch on the south side is a depiction - in the style of the Roman Emperor Hadrian - of the British King George III, who was king at the time of the Boston Tea Party and the War for American Independence from Britain.

Walk down the High Street, keeping on the left hand side and you will come to a hotel with a balcony. This is

The Star Hotel

Map reference C5

The US 14 Major Port Transportation Corps came to Southampton in July 1943. From 1 May 1944, until July 1945 the US Naval Advanced Amphibious Branch was based here at The Star Hotel. They provided logistical support for US naval forces in the area in co-operation with the Royal Navy.

Walk on down from the Star Hotel, passing the Dolphin Hotel with its large bow windows, and you will come to a ruined church. This is

Holy Rood Church

Map reference C5

As a result of the heavy air raids on Southampton on the night of 30 November/1 December 1940, the medieval church of Holy Rood was left in ruins. Some restoration works were carried out here in 2005 and by the chancel entrance is a 'talking post' where visitors can listen to recorded information about the history of the church. Many of Southampton's blitzed buildings were demolished and the brick and stone used as rubble for the Hards that were built for the loading on to landing ships of the vehicles and personnel destined for the invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944. Despite the church being badly damaged, the ruins of Holy Rood were left as they were and the church is now a memorial to the Merchant Navy. Just inside the church gate is a memorial to the crew, stewards and firemen of RMS *Titanic* which left Southampton on its maiden voyage on 10 April 1912 and sank in the North Atlantic five days later after colliding with an iceberg. Here, too, is a 'talking post' with recorded information about the effect the loss of *Titanic* had on Southampton.

Continue on down the High Street, crossing Bernard Street, Briton Street and the entrance to Gloucester Square Car Park. Take the next left turn into Winkle Street and walk along this road taking great care as there is two way traffic and, for much of the way, no pavement. At the end of Winkle Street is an archway. Walk through that archway to the other side and ahead of you now are the Eastern Docks from which RMS *Titanic* left in 1912. Turn and look at the stone tower in the building adjoining the arch through which you walked. This is medieval

God's House Tower

Map reference C6

Located at the south east corner of the medieval town and fronting on to the linking road between the Town Quay and the Eastern Docks, God's House

Tower was well known to troops who passed by this point. Photographs exist showing a column of American troops with the Tower in the background. Once a prison, the building now houses Southampton's Archaeology Museum. With the main Town Quay Road to your left, walk back in the direction you came but this time outside the medieval buildings. To your right is the Platform Tavern. In the Second World War, the area to your left, on the other side of the road, was Platform Quay. Continue walking and, when you reach the pedestrian crossing, cross over to the left to the other side of the road. You are now at

Town Quay

Map reference C6

Ahead of you is La Marguerita Italian Restaurant. Just to the right of the entrance to the restaurant, on the wall of the building facing Town Quay Road, are plaques recalling the use of the area in connection with D-Day. Parts of the Mulberry Harbours built at Arromanches (Gold Beach) and at St-Laurent (Omaha Beach), after the D-Day Invasion, were constructed in the Docks at Southampton and one segment that was never taken to Normandy remains, part sunken in the water, near the Red Funnel Car Ferry departure point. Inside the Red Funnel Car Ferry offices at Town Quay is a small plaque recording the building of three Hards for landing craft. The Hards at and near Town Quay were designated S2 and S3. Wartime photographs show American army vehicles here with the Harbour Board office (now Harbour House Casino) in the background. In another photograph an American lorry is seen being driven on to a landing craft at Town Quay with Platform Tavern in the background, the then Platform Quay being S4 Hard. Stay on this side of Town Quay Road and walk away from Town Quay towards a building with a white domed roof. This is

The Royal Pier

Map reference B6

The area by the Royal Pier was a point for off loading German Prisoners of War brought from France and can still be recognised from wartime photographs.

Continue past Royal Pier and you will see the entrance to

Mayflower Park

Map reference B6

Mayflower Park was another of the Hards, designated S1, and in this area of the Docks some sections of the Mulberry Harbours were constructed and kept ready to be moved across to the Normandy coast.

Come out of Mayflower Park at the main gates where you entered and cross the road to your left using the light controlled pedestrian crossing. This brings you to an old stone building with a red tiled roof which is

Southampton Maritime Museum

Map reference C6

Admission (2009) Charges apply:

Adult £2.50; Over 60s £1.50; Child 7-16, student, unwaged £1.50; under 7s free; Family (2 adult + 3 children), £5.50

Opening times: Monday – Friday 10.00am – 4.00pm

Saturday – Sunday 11.00am – 4.00pm

Tel: 023 8063 5904

E-mail: museums@southampton.gov.uk

The Museum, housed in a building once used in medieval times as a wool store by the monks of Beaulieu Abbey, has on the upper floor an exhibition telling the tragic story of Southampton's connections with RMS *Titanic*. Over a third of those who died, when *Titanic* sank, came from Southampton as many members of the crew signed on here for the maiden voyage.

On coming out of the Museum, turn right, cross Bugle Street and keep on the pavement in front of the tall white building with railings in front of it. This was once the Royal Southern Yacht Club. Stay on this pavement and after a short time you come to a tall, slender monument on your right which is the

Mayflower Memorial

Map reference C5

This memorial to the Pilgrim Fathers, usually called the *Mayflower* Memorial, dates from 1913 and commemorates the departure of the Pilgrims on the *Mayflower* in 1620. There are plaques on the monument recording family and individual connections with the Settlers of 1620 including John Alden. There is also a plaque presented by the 14 Major Port referring back to the Pilgrim Fathers.

Go up the slope behind the Mayflower Memorial, bear left and under a concrete bridge. Just to the left you will find a flight of steps taking you up to the top of the Old Walls or, just to the right, is a slope that will take you up on to the concrete bridge. The Docks in front of you, looking out from the Old Walls, are the Western Docks. Between Mayflower Park, on the left and the Holiday Inn on the right, there is a brick gateway in to these Docks. This is

Dock Gate 8

Map reference B5

There is no public access to the Docks. The berths in the Western Docks are used today by cruise ships but in the Second World War, troops destined for Gold Beach at Normandy left from here. On the right hand pillar of Dock Gate 8, visible from Herbert Walker Avenue, the road between the Holiday Inn and Mayflower Park, is a plaque presented by 14 Major Port to Southern Railway, who operated the Docks during the war. One of the Second World War Prisoner of War Camps was at Southampton and the entrance was at Dock Gate 8, which is only a short distance from the Royal Pier. It was used as a transit camp and photographs from September 1944 show it as such.

Come back down the steps and bear left, or back down the slope and bear

right, towards an old building with timber cladding on the side facing you. This is

Tudor Merchants' Hall

Map reference C5

This medieval building once stood in front of St Michael's Church in the Old Town but was moved in 1634 to its present site. In World War II it was used by the Americans as a temporary mortuary for the bodies of US troops brought back from Normandy before being taken back to the USA.

Just beyond Tudor Merchant's Hall is an archway in the Old Walls. This is

West Gate

Map reference C5

Go through the gate to the outer side. Before reclamation work began to build the Western Docks in the mid 1920s, the water came up to the old walls.

Through this medieval town gate in 1620 went the Pilgrim Fathers to be rowed out to *Mayflower* and *Speedwell*, both of which ships were at Southampton. It was from here that the Pilgrims had planned to commence their journey to the New World and it was only the leaky nature of the *Speedwell* that caused an unscheduled stop at Plymouth in Devon. In the Second World War, troops marched through this gateway to the places where men and materials were loaded on to the invasion craft.

Cross to the other side of the road and in front of you is

The De Vere Grand Harbour Hotel

Map reference C5

Embarkation through the Docks for American servicemen was dealt with by a unit of 14 Major Port operating from the site of the modern hotel.

Just to your right, after you have crossed the road and are facing the De Vere Hotel, is a short section of brick wall known as the

American Wall

Map reference C5

Some of the graffiti scratched into this brick wall dates from the Second World War and was made by soldiers, mostly from America, waiting in Southampton to embark for Normandy.

Walk up the road back towards the city centre, past The Quays Swimming and Diving Complex and with the Old Walls on your right. Near the top of the road, just before WestQuay Shopping Centre, is a flight of steps to your right. The tower in the wall immediately to the left of these steps is Catchcold Tower. By going up the steps to the top of the wall, then along to the left, it is possible to go up on to the top of Catchcold Tower. Alternatively, to reach the area of the walls by the top of the tower, go on towards WestQuay Shopping Centre where there is a ramp to the upper level outside Waterstone's Bookshop. The ramp continues to the right, under the road, and when you reach the top, turn back to your left and use the light controlled pedestrian crossing to cross the road. Go under the small gateway below the footbridge joining two sections of

the wall and there is then a ramp on the right leading down to the car park just within the walls. Taking great care with traffic using that car park, cross over to the top of the wall by Catchcold Tower.

Catchcold Tower

Map reference C4

In the Second World War, there was a Hotchkiss machine gun on the top of this medieval tower as shown in a 1945 photograph and the site of the gun can still be seen on the upper floor of the Tower, accessed by steps. In the Second World War, the Southampton factory of the cable makers, Pirelli, stood outside the Town Walls on the land immediately opposite. Bombed at the end of 1940, this factory was rebuilt and became operational again within six months. Pirelli's factory at Eastleigh was involved with manufacturing cable for the Pipe Line Under The Ocean (P.L.U.T.O.) used to convey fuel from Hamble on Southampton Water, across to the Cherbourg Peninsula after D-Day to support the Normandy Invasion.

From Catchcold Tower (upper level) walk across, taking great care with traffic in the car park and on the roads, towards the footbridge over the road. Go through the gap in the old walls and away to your right you will see the Bargate.

An alternative route back towards the Bargate – but one that involves steps – is to visit

Arundel Tower

Standing with your back to Catchcold Tower, you will see the taller Arundel Tower to your left. There are steps up to a platform then more steps to the top of the tower. It is then possible to go down steps to the bridge over the road and descend a flight of steps, to ground level, at the far end. By going through the gap in the walls at this point then bearing right, you will come back to the Bargate.