

# A Story Around Every Streetcorner: Explore Winchester's Vibrant History

**Intro:** Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts and enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

**Julie:** Winchester has so much to offer. History and heritage are all around you, wherever you go, you just need to look. This week, we are speaking with Miss Winchester about her Instagram page and we delve into some fun facts about a city that keeps on giving.

So first of all, welcome. We love to have you here. Can you tell me a bit more about you and when you started this page and what gave you the inspiration?

**Miss Winchester:** First, thank you so much asking me to take part in this podcast, I'm so excited to be here.

So, I'm Miss Winchester. I'm a blogger who runs the Instagram account miss\_winchesteruk. My account is about everything Winchester, from food, drinks, fitness, shops, activities, people, and of course, the history of this amazing city. In my day job, in the before times, I got to meet lots of people and I would often talk about how lovely Winchester was. So much so, this one person said I sounded like I was Miss Winchester as I spoke so passionately about the city. This is actually where the name and the idea came from to create the account. I started my account during the first lockdown as I was now working from home, like so many other people, and I had a lot more free time. I've actually loved being at home more often as it has given me more time to explore and learn about the amazing city where I live.

Now, even though I've pretty much lived here all my life, it really has opened my eyes to look at where I live and question why is that there? Or what is the history behind that? This has helped me find out so many interesting facts and stories. I walk around the city and see something interesting and get the urge to learn more. It has even started to rub off on my friends and family as they now join in too.

After listening to one of your previous podcasts, "*In Plain Sight*", which was all about post boxes, it's inspired me to learn more about the history behind them. Such as the initials on them that refer to when it was made and under which Monarch. In Winchester, not only do we have an old Victorian post box near the Wykeham Arms, but also a very rare Edward VIII post box outside the Golden Lion. I even went on an eight-mile run around Winchester to visit these post boxes and many others to see all the differences. This reel can be found on my Instagram page.

I love learning about the history and city for all my discoveries. And after Christmas, I decided to add a new series to my Instagram page called Fun Fact Friday. This is where I could share some of those great facts I discovered whether it was historical or just not very well known about Winchester. My first fun fact post actually started when my boyfriend was playing a video game. In the game, he was roaming around a reconstruction of medieval Winchester in the time of King Alfred.

Today in Winchester, we have a beautiful cathedral, but in that game, and in that time of King Alfred, the cathedral was not yet built. In its place stood another building, which was called the Old Minster. This led me to do a little bit more research about this. So the Old Minster was the most important royal church of the Anglo-Saxons, with many important people being buried there, including Kings.

During the reign of King Alfred, there were plans for new building to eventually replace the Old Minster named the New Minster, which was not very original. It was actually built as a mausoleum

for him and his family upon their deaths. Unfortunately, Alfred died before it been finished, although his body was eventually laid to rest in the new church when it was completed. The cathedral today was built over the top of the New Minster and partially over the Old Minster. What was fantastic to find out and something I had never seen before was to the left of the main entrance of the cathedral, there are actually brick paths which highlight where the Old Minster once stood before it was demolished in 1094. I posted about my discovery on my Instagram page, and I got such a great response I decided that I would start to share more fun facts every Friday.

**Julie:** That's absolutely amazing. I do love that you can actually see the outline on the side of the cathedral. And I don't think a lot of people actually notice it because it's fenced up, which is quite sad.

**Miss Winchester:** Yes, absolutely. There's, there's even boards and signs that talk a little bit more about the Old Minster, but unless you actually walk over there, I don't think people notice.

**Julie:** So have you got any more facts from any other unusual places?

**Miss Winchester:** Yes. For my book club last month, we read Tracy Chevalier, *A Single Thread*. I would highly recommend this book. It's fantastic, all about Winchester and its history. In it, she mentions the gravestone in the cathedral grounds. So naturally I had to see if it existed. The gravestone is for Thomas Fletcher and on his gravestone, there was this rhyme:

*Here sleeps in peace a Hampshire Grenadier,  
Who caught his death by drinking cold Small beer,  
Soldiers be wise from his untimely fall  
And when ye're hot, drink Strong or none at all.*

This is an unusual rhyme which makes this gravestone quite famous. And I was delighted to find it's still located in the cathedral today. I then decided to do a bit of research about Thomas. Sadly, not much is known about him apart from his fateful tale of warning. He died at 26 in 1764, since then, the gravestone has been replaced twice once in 1802 and again in 1966. And the fact that it's been replaced several times means that that story will keep on being with us.

**Julie:** Absolutely amazing. So what have been some more fun things that you have found out?

**Miss Winchester:** Oh, yes, have you heard about the windows at St. John's house? There is something very unusual about them. So St. John's house is located at the bottom of the High Street, near King Alfred's statue. The white building was built in 14th century as an extension to the St John's hospital. In the 18th century, they decided to raise the roof of the building by seven feet to create an elegant assembly room for balls, dances, and concerts, think of Jane Austen times. But when the building was altered, they decided that there was enough light coming from the existing bottom windows. So therefore, decided to paint imitation windows into the recesses on the second floor. So now, if you look at the windows, you will realize the top ones are all fake. In addition, the artist left his paint pot on the open window, which is located second from the right.

Another one of my favourite fun facts, which not many people know about, is about the Victorian lampposts located on Great Minster Street. It is actually a rare sewer destructor gas lantern. It was designed to enable biogas to escape from the sewers below preventing a potential hazardous build-up. The escaped gases would reach the burner at the top of the lantern, where it would provide light continuously for the street operating 24/7. Originally designed in 1895 and refurbished in 2017, it is the only lamppost of its type located in our city.

**Julie:** I'm learning so much. I feel like I've walked past this every day. So, I'm going to have a look later today as well.

**Miss Winchester:** From that, I would just say, that's what I love about these fun facts, is that these are things you've walked past every day, but you've probably have not looked at or second guessed about them or not even really thought about them. And this is what I love doing is highlighting something which seems very ordinary, like a lamppost, and then seeing the history behind it. Cause now I bet you're going to go and find that lamppost.

**Julie:** So was there anything that you walk past every day that you didn't necessarily think about?

**Miss Winchester:** Absolutely. Initially, this is something that I looked into extremely recently, so everyone knows the Butter cross, located on the High Street, however, I have never thought to think why is it there? So, the Butter Cross, also known as the High Cross, was actually given to the city by Cardinal Beaufort in the 15th century. Cardinal Beaufort was a Bishop of Winchester from 1427. He served as a Lord Chancellor to three Kings, Henry IV, V and VI, and was extremely wealthy. He continued to contributing to the erection and expansion of public buildings in Winchester. One of these was the Butter Cross. The Butter Cross is 30 meters tall and if you look carefully, has 12 figures featured on it. It most likely got its name from the traders who used to set up and sell the goods, including butter, on and around them.

**Julie:** So that explains the name. So are there any other buildings in Winchester which have an interesting story?

**Miss Winchester:** Yes. One of my favourites is about the hospital of St. Cross, which is located south of the centre by the Itchen Water Meadows. It is one of the oldest charitable institutions in the UK and was founded in 1136 by Henry of Blois, I hope I pronounced that right, Bishop of Winchester and grandson of William the Conqueror. So the story goes while walking in the Meadows, a peasant begged Henry to save their people from starvation after the Civil War. Henry was very moved by their plight, and shortly after he came across a ruin of a religious house. Henry took this as a sign to build and create an institution to help the poor. The hospital began to support 13 poor men and feed a hundred men at the gates every day. Those 13 men went on to become the first 13 brothers of St Cross. So today they continue the unique and ancient tradition of providing the Wayfarers Dole for travellers, which is bread and a horn of beer.

However, not all of Winchester's history is as lovely as that. The jail house on Jewry Street is not surprisingly the site of an old prison, which is thought to date from 1228. Public executions didn't take place outside the jail, but rather a mile away on Gallows Hill, now the Jolly Farmer pub. Between 1735 and 1819, huge crowds would gather to watch hangings, burnings, and tortures.

The last lady that died here was Mary Bailey in 1784. Convicted of murdering her husband, she was sentenced to being drawn on a hurdle from the jail house to Gallows Hill before being burned with fire. All pretty gruesome. However, being in the jail itself was also pretty horrible. Conditions were so terrible the jail got completely rebuilt in 1805 and it became a new prison for debtors. The section of the jail which is currently the Wetherspoons pub was once the Governor's House. I have heard that in the cellar, there are still some steps that once led to a set of gallows.

In 1849, a new prison opened on Romsey Road and so this old jail closed. The building then became a library, an ironmongers, a furniture store before becoming the pub we know today. However, this is not the only pub with a dark past.

The Eclipse Inn is a beautiful building and pub located just off The Square and dates back to the 1540s. Originally a private residence it became an inn in the early 1800s. On the 2nd of September 1685, the Eclipse Inn was the location of Lady Alice Lisle's execution. Lady Alice had provided shelter to two refugees from the Battle of Sedgemoor, which ended the Monmouth Rebellion.

Unknown to her, one of the men was a wanted fugitive, a traitor, and the punishment for sheltering traitors in that time was death. Before her death, Lady Alice spent her last night in the upper room of

the Eclipse Inn before she was beheaded, right outside in the square. It has now been said, that a ghostly figure now walks the upper corridor of the building. A tall elegant lady in grey has been seen and heard in numerous locations in the Inn.

**Julie:** It's so interesting that in the centre of Winchester, we have this gruesome place, which is actually quite lovely.

**Miss Winchester:** I did also hear that actually the stocks were used to be in The Square in Winchester. So very different time then than it is today.

**Julie:** Yeah. Today it's full of life and you just sit outside, you have a cup of coffee, you have a cocktail, it's so different. So maybe Lady Alice is walking around, being a bit jealous.

**Miss Winchester:** I don't know, I think I've always adored ghost stories and history. So I'm like one of those people who would love to see if I could go in there and actually see if I could see her. But I'm not sure if - when it actually came to happen, it might be pretty terrifying, but yeah, I'd be interested to know if any of your listeners have actually worked in the pub or actually have seen Lady Alice themselves or heard her.

**Julie:** Exactly. So if any of our listeners, if you have seen Lady Alice or worked in the pub and have some stories, please share on social media, because we would love to hear it.

**Miss Winchester:** Absolutely.

**Julie:** Yeah. So are there any other buildings in Winchester, which have an interesting history?

**Miss Winchester:** Definitely. The God Begot House, which is currently ASK Italian has loads of history. In 1012, a huge manor occupied the north side of the High Street. The manor was given to Emma at the time married to King Ethelred II. She would then later marry King Cnut. So as the Manor was not under the control of the Mayor of Winchester or the King, it therefore became its own trading centre with its own laws and taxes. It was known as the Manor of Goudbeyete or Godbiete, which could mean house granted by God or goods getter.

Emma died in 1052 and gave the God Begot Manor to St. Swithun's Priory as in her last will, she asked the building to be tax-free and toll-free forever. The Priory kept the building until Henry VIII took it and all its possessions as part of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Luckily for us shortly after, Henry changed his mind and gave a house back to the City of Winchester.

The current building originally dates back to 1462. However, it has been rebuilt and altered many times over the years. However, they did keep the name from Emma's old manor, God Begot House. You can actually also see Emma's old church that used to be part of the manor, located right behind God Begot house. If you walk down the Royal Oak Passage and look to your right, you can see the red brick outline of the church on the floor. The small church was called St. Peter's in Macellis. And I think that's how you pronounce that one.

Another restaurant, the Chesil Rectory, has also got a connection to Henry VIII. The Chesil Rectory was originally built by a wealthy merchant in the Middle Ages between 1425 and 1450. It is one of the best-preserved buildings from this time in the city and the oldest commercial property. During the 1500s, Henry VIII owned the building, giving it as a gift to his daughter, Mary Tudor. She in turn gave it to the City of Winchester as part payment at her very expensive wedding at Winchester Cathedral to King Phillip II of Spain. In the 1800s, the Chesil Rectory was so deteriorated, it was almost demolished. Fortunately, it was bought and saved in 1892 by Thomas and Co restoring it to how you see it today.

**Julie:** Oh, that's so great. So do you have a couple of final fun facts that you want to share?

**Miss Winchester:** Yeah, absolutely. I've got a couple of my favourites. So, if you've walked down Winchester High Street, you will have seen the clock located outside Lloyd's bank, which was hung there since 1713. The city clock was donated to Winchester by Lord William Paulet and was the first clock in Southern England to be lit by gas. The clock itself hangs over the street, but the bell mechanism is located in a white bell tower above the building. This bell tower also contains a curfew bell. This was a bell that rang at 8:00 PM each evening, signalling the city's curfew. At this time, the Winchester residents had to extinguish all home fires, not to be lit again until the next morning. The curfew bell is still actually supposed to be rung out to Winchester residents at 8:00 PM every evening. So if you are in Winchester at this time, you need to make sure you listen out for it.

Lastly, the Discovery Centre on Jewry Street is currently our library, but the building was originally built as a Corn Exchange in 1838. These buildings would be common in most cities as they were where merchants would exchange grains before trade became more centralized in the 20th century. At this time, the building went into decline and its use kept on changing. It has been a dining hall, a roller skating rink, sports hall, theatre, cinema, and even a tea lounge. In 1936, the city council spent money on the building to move the public library here, and in 2007, after more work on the building, it became the Winchester Discovery Centre that we know today. But what I really love is that underneath the car park, to the rear, is actually a large network of tunnels used as air raid shelters for World War II. They were fitted out with many bunks and essentials, so people could stay below ground for a reasonable duration. You can still see the old access to the tunnels by steps on the left-hand side of the building. I would love to have a tour of those tunnels. It would literally be so exciting. At one time, the steps led down to some toilets, so that kind of blocked off, I believe, the entrance to the tunnels but somewhere in Winchester, there must be access to these tunnels. Can you just imagine what a great guided tour that would be?

When you go to any sort of National Trust property or anything like that, you always want to go into that hidden room or the hidden door, just to know what's behind it. And I think what I like doing is trying to find out those things and hopefully sharing them with my Instagram followers so then they can find out more things, but I just think sometimes it's you go down a rabbit hole. See, now I've learned more about the Discovery Centre, and now I want to know more about the tunnels under the Discovery Centre.

**Julie:** Exactly. It's like the Old Chesil Railway Station. You have the tunnel but you can't go through it any more, because there's a wall because of the shooting range at the other end.

**Miss Winchester:** That is one of the things I would love to go for another tour and something that I would like to write. I feel that fun fact is definitely coming soon, cause I'm pretty sure some people don't know that Winchester had a second railway station. And that actually kind of came up in the book that, the Tracy Chevalier book, *A Single Thread*, it mentioned her using that railway line coming into Winchester from Southampton. And yes, I would love to know more information and my goodness, hopefully at one point there's going to be a tour that we can actually get into that tunnel because I'd love to see it.

**Julie:** Yeah. We actually had an episode in season three about that railway station and the history of it. And we were lucky enough to have a tour guide from Winchester Tour Guides, speak to us about it, and she's had tours there. So that might be a way in

**Miss Winchester:** As soon as they start again, I'm signing up.

**Julie:** Yeah.

**Miss Winchester:** The Tourist Information Centre and the Winchester Tour Guides, they do so many tours and lots of things, as well as part of, like the heritage um, in September. If you want to learn more information about Winchester, then absolutely get yourself on a guided tour, 'cause I think that's

the best way to find some more information or just read some of my posts and just walk to those places and then you have a little mini Tour.

**Julie:** Exactly. So I just have a question, before we wrap up. So how do you come up with these ideas? And can you tell us a little bit about the responses you have to these posts? Are people surprised about these fun facts? Are these things that they don't notice in their everyday lives as well?

**Miss Winchester:** Yeah, absolutely. So I get my ideas from everywhere. So I've mentioned that one of my ideas was from a video game. One of them was from a book and even talking to people it's actually really interesting and I think once you start, you kind of don't stop seeing, and I also do another feature, which is Where in Winchester? And it's kind of the same response until you start really opening your eyes to what's around you, that's kind of when you can start thinking, actually, why is that there? And, there's so much in Winchester. We're so lucky to live in such a historical place that I could probably carry on for many, many months to come with all these kinds of unusual facts.

And what I love doing is sharing them because I mean, even today I've shared another one and I get very similar responses, which is I never knew about that. How have I never known about that? I walk past it all the time. I've never think to look at it or I've walked past that place all the time and they've never even seen it. Yeah, it's a fantastic response from people who are just interested to know about history, want to learn more. And as if people are still wanting to learn more, I will keep putting them up there until obviously, everything is completely used up. And this is the one reason why I do my page is generally the response I'm getting from people. Everyone seems to be very kind and interested in what I have to say. And you know what? If I can just make one person just smile and enjoy the facts and enjoy learning about history well, then, you know what? I feel that what I'm doing is fantastic.

**Julie:** Absolutely. And I do love the fun facts and I do try myself on Mondays, like Where in Winchester? And I'm like, I feel like I've seen that, but I can't pinpoint it. And then I have to wait a week for the answer, which is ... but yeah its quite fun.

**Miss Winchester:** Even the one this week, which I did about a Winchester water fountain, I have never seen that before. I have walked down that street so many times and I have never seen it, never seen it. I think it was actually one of my family or friends who pointed it out to me and said, have you done this one for your Where in Winchester on Monday? And I was like, no, where is that? And it's really funny. And until you see it, you do not see it. But it's really nice, like how much my family and friends are kind of helping me out and getting involved in this page, as well as knowing they are not allowed to eat or drink any of their food until I've taken loads of photos of it.

**Julie:** I do love that. Oh, amazing. Okay.

**Miss Winchester:** If you haven't been before, I really would recommend going to the Winchester Heritage Open Days. I think they're absolutely fantastic. They are free for everyone and you get to learn so many different things about Winchester. So definitely sign yourselves up for that.

Thank you so much for having me. It's been fantastic to be here and I absolutely just love sharing the discoveries I've made along the way. If you love to explore Winchester with me then please follow me on Instagram @miss\_winchesteruk, let me know your thoughts, let me know what you want to investigate, and let's just explore Winchester together.

**Outro:** We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you would like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, [www.winchesterheritageopendays.org](http://www.winchesterheritageopendays.org), or click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.  
Thank you.