

# Olney Town Centre Willow Sculpture Walk - and a little bit of History

The 3 sculptures in Olney Town Centre were made by Martin Keeley of Rutland Willows.

**WHERE TO FIND:** On the corner of Market Place opposite the Cowper and Newton Museum

'*William Cowper and his Pet Hare*' was first sited at Cowper Memorial United Reformed Church for the first 'Olney in Flower' in 2013. In its current position on Market Place, the 'Olney Runners' sponsor the surrounding flower bed.



William Cowper, one of England's favourite poets, lived from 1768 to 1786 in the house which is now the Cowper and Newton Museum. He was great friends with the former slave trader John Newton, who was curate at St Peter and St Paul Church in Olney, and author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*.

William became associated with the hare when his letter to THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE (June 1784) was received with great acclaim. More information at [www.cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk](http://www.cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk)



**Walk towards High Street, keeping Market Place on your right.**



**WHERE TO FIND:** On High Street by the pelican crossing

'*Pancake Runners*' was commissioned by Olney Town Council and installed for the 2014 Pancake Race. The race starts here and finishes at the parish church of St Peter and St Paul.

Olney's World famous race is run every Shrove Tuesday and tradition dates it back to 1445. The story goes that it began with a townswoman, who when hearing the church bell and knowing she would be late for the Shroving service, rushed to get to the service on time with her frying pan and pancake still in her hand...

To compete in the race today you must be female, wear a headscarf, skirt and apron. The pancake is tossed once on the start line then again when crossing the finish line.

More information about the race can be found at [olneypancakerace.org](http://olneypancakerace.org)



**Sculpture Walk** Continue along High Street, keeping Market Place on your right (walk continues on the next page)

**Pancake Race Route** Continue along High Street, keeping Market Place on your left to follow the route to the church of St Peter and St Paul (walk cont. next page)



# Willow Sculpture Walk



Leaving Market Place, continue along the right hand side of High Street until you come to the Cowper Memorial United Reformed Church.

## WHERE TO FIND: In front of the Cowper Memorial URC

Christ the Shepherd was commissioned by Cowper Memorial URC and installed in 2014. Count the flock - it continues to multiply ...

More information at [www.cowperurc.org.uk](http://www.cowperurc.org.uk)



## Pancake Race Route to the church of St Peter and St Paul



After keeping Market Place to your left, cross over Market Place road. Continue walking along High Street.

Look out for:-

### ◇ Thomas Wright's Cowper School on your left

Thomas Wright was a local schoolmaster, a prolific author, Honorary Secretary of the William Blake Society and the driving force behind the establishment of the Cowper and Newton Museum in 1900. He was also its first Custodian. More information about Thomas Wright can be found on the [Olney and District Historical Society](#) website.



Carry on along High Street until you come to Church Street. Turn down here to follow the Pancake Race route, walking through the landscape which John Newton would still recognise today. More about the church of St Peter and St Paul [here](#)



If you cross Church Street at the junction with High Street and carry on a short distance, you come to Olney Bridge.

- ◇ The **Battle of Olney Bridge** was on November 4, 1643. 'The Parliament forces held Newport Pagnell, and Olney was one of its outposts. Prince Rupert held Northampton for the King and marched on Olney intending to continue on to Newport. Prince Rupert and his troops took the Olney forces by surprise and the Parliamentarians retreated to the bridge where they made a defiant stand.

The Royalists could have won decisively, had it not been for a rumour that Cromwell's reinforcements were seen coming from Newport. The Royalists retreated and the battle was over.'

[ODHS website](#)

