There is also a walking 'Cockle' trail around the central portion of Poole Old Town. 26 www.yellowbuses.co.uk run to Poole Town Centre, from where the route can be joined. Many Wilts and Dorset Buses, www.wdbus.co.uk and the Yellow Bus numbers 1b, 1c and 1d for the route. Parking charges may apply. Car parks at Upton Country Park, Whitecliffe Park, Baiter, and Poole Park are convenient. Hamworthy Station is a short cycle from the Upton Country Park terminus. Poole Railway Station, on the London Waterloo to Weymouth mainline is on the route, and cycleways across the conurbation is available.

A circular route between Upton Country Park and Poole Town Centre.

A cycle ride of approximately 7½ miles, visiting places of historic interest.

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Contacts: Poole Agenda 21 see website Borough of Poole Cycling Office 01202 262066 Further information on cycling in Poole at www.boroughofpoole.com
There was also an isolation hospital in use until 1936. The National Cycleway continues towards Poole Park (Photo E), Lilliput, and the Route 2 linking Bournemouth to Swanage and the Purbecks via the train ferry, but we retrace our tyre tread at the foundations of what may have been the powder house. At low tide, the outline of the first public swimming pool can be seen (near 5). Built in 1890, salt water and tidal, it was replaced by one in Poole Park in the 1930s.

BAITER PARK

Turning right at the end of Green Road, the cycleway leaves the road, and you can explore the open land of Baifter. Historically, Baifter was a narrow peninsula. (Photo D) The ancient maps of the area show a windmill (near 5) on Baifter and the town archives refer to a storehouse for gunpowder at a safe distance from the Old Town (6).

FISHERMANS DOCK

Returning towards the town we pass through the hard of Fishermen’s Dock. Here are the modern inheritors of a tradition that goes back over 2000 years. Opposite is Brownsea Island off which an Iron Age logboat (dated 2) was discovered in 1964. Next we pass Poole Old Lifeboat Station (7) built in 1882. It now houses the retired lifeboat – the Thomas Kirkwright – which served Poole from 1939 to 1962 and participated in the Dunkirk evacuation. The museum is open daily. Close by is a memorial plaque to the United States Coastguard at the foundations of what may have been a fisherman’s cottage.

THE QUAYS

Poole Pottery, known around the world, used to stand on the site of Dolphin Quays on our right. This is followed by the Fish shambles, a modern reproduction, but a covered market historically stood on the same site. Now we are on Poole Quay a delightful mix of historic pubs and warehouses punctuated by narrow alleys. Ahead rises the modern sculpture, Sea Music (8), by Sir Anthony Caro. Opposite are the boatyards and Quays of Hamworthy reminding us that Poole is still a working port. Steel, timber, oil and gravel are of importance to the port of Poole. Vast fortunes were made by families such as the Lesters who built the Mansion House (11) and the Slades who built West End House (12) at the far side of the square.

LEAVING THE OLD TOWN

Cross the main road (New Orchard), and through the gap to Hill Street and left into Durney Lane. We see ahead the Blue Bear pub (16) once the home of the Adye family of wine merchants. Cross Dear Hay Lane to reach Market Close passing the Lodge of Amity on the left – home of the oldest Masonic Lodge in Dorset. Further up the close, on the right, is Sir Peter Thompson’s House (17) – Dorset’s finest Georgian town house built in 1749, and used as the Town Hall before 1923.

MANSIONS OF OLD POOLE

Thames Street takes us into the heart of Georgian Poole. If we pause at the junction with Church Street we can see a group of buildings that form a testament to the prosperous days of Poole’s dominance of the Newfoundland trade in the 18th and early 19th centuries. This trade saw goods and men shipped from Poole across the Atlantic. Off Newfoundland the most prolific fishing grounds in the world were exploited for millions of cod which were dried and salted. Poole ships then took the salt cod to the West Indies to feed the slave plantations and to the Catholic countries of southern Europe. Back came wine, salt and olive oil to the port of Poole. Vast fortunes were made by families such as the Lesters who built the Mansion House (11) and the Slades who built West End House (12) at the far side of the square.

Returning right to go up Church Street we have St James Church (13) on the left. This was built in 1820 to replace a medieval church. Inside the structure is supported by giant pillars made up from the trunks of massive pine trees brought back from Newfoundland. On the other side of Church Street is the old Church School bombed in the Second World War. Church Street is a delight of Georgian domestic architecture with occasional medieval buildings such as St George’s Almshouses (14) with origins in the 15th century. We pass seamlessly into Market Street (now a one way street) to be faced by the Guildhall (15) an elegant Georgian building of 1761. (Photo G) Originally the arches under the Guildhall were open and the ground floor used for market stalls. The impressive room above was used for Council meetings and courts, and then when the town fell on hard times, the building was rented to a farmer to store hay. It has now been restored and put to good use as the Poole Registry Office.

We fork right at the Guildhall steps and follow the side of the building to the corner by the main road. This is the site of the assassination of Alderman Horatio Hamilton, a one-time mayor of Poole, shot by a discontented water pilot in 1886. The sunken garden to the right contains the town maypole – a modern revival of an old Poole tradition, also in early May, Market Street hosts the Poole Cockle Festival.

Note: If following the route in reverse, you are advised to continue to the High Street, turn right and right again into New Street. Pause at the junction with Market Street to admire the Guildhall, then turn left towards the church.