

Stoke Golding Heritage Trail

The village of Stoke Golding is best known for its association with the Battle of Bosworth, 22nd August 1485, which marked the defeat by Lancastrian Henry Tudor of Yorkist Richard III, the last Plantagenet King of England and the last English King to die in battle. The battle brought an end to the civil strife of the War of The Roses, “the battered circlet,” worn by Richard when he fell, was said to have been found under a hawthorn bush, taken to a nearby hill and placed on Henry’s head by Sir Richard Bray, surrounded by the King’s scattered troops. The hill on which Henry’s impromptu coronation took place lies on the western edge of the village and has since been known, appropriately, as Crown Hill. This was the birthplace of the Tudor dynasty which was to rule England for the next 118 years.

The origin and meaning of the name Stoke Golding has never been satisfactorily established but we know that a family called “Stoke” or “de Stoke” were living in the village in 1150 and the Hinckley Manor Court Rolls referred to it as “Stoke” for many years after 1570. The name “Golding” appears to have been added around two-hundred years later.

Of the nine villages surrounding the newly discovered site of the Battle of Bosworth Stoke Golding is the largest. This wasn’t always the case but it has suffered, or benefitted, according to one’s point of view, from much more housing development than its neighbours, and now has a population rising from 730 in 1930 to nearly 2000 today. Fortunately, while some of the old village has been destroyed parts of it remain.

Stoke Golding is a ridge top settlement, established in the Anglo-Saxon period and overlooking rolling countryside. There is a Saxon burial ground in the grounds of Park House, near the centre of the village. Park House, which still contains a great deal of old stonework and ancient brick, was built on the site of a much older Mansion House and Parke and the fields adjoining it, now private land, contain moats and a tumulus mound some seven feet high.

The moats, now drained, were used for skating by villagers in cold winters as recently as the 1950s. They are well formed and enclose 2 fish ponds which were made in medieval times. Excavations in 1931 of the Burial Mound resulted in Anglo Saxon bronze discs and a ring being found (The booklet ‘Blue Plaque Walk of Historical Stoke Golding’ provides detail of both the Moats and the Tumulus.)

A visitor would find the village centre, once called “the Bull Ring” and in the 1940s and 50s “The Top Town,” on the junction of High Street, Main Street and Station Road, a suitable starting place for a visit. “The Wake,” an ancient village festival took place in the Bull Ring around the Festival of St. Margaret in July until the change of date in the calendar of 1752 when it moved to early August.

The Church Walk, branching off the “Top Town” between the George and Dragon and the Three Horse Shoes leads to the 13th century Church of St. Margaret of Antioch, without doubt Stoke Golding’s outstanding feature which is listed as a Grade 1 building.

St. Margaret’s Church has been described by Sir Nikolaus Pevsener, Sir John Betjeman and W.G. Hoskins respectively as “One of the most beautiful churches in Leicestershire,” “A building of exceptional perfection showing decorated design and carving at its best” and “The arcade is worthy in its detail of a Cathedral.” Simon Jenkins includes St. Margaret’s Church in his best seller ‘England’s Thousand Best Churches and awards it 3 stars – one of 274 in 1000 to achieve this grading. It has been claimed to be one of the most beautiful and dignified village churches in the country, certainly of the ‘Decorated’ period with special regard to its window tracery and lavish arcade.

Near the Church entrance gate is Blacksmith’s Yard once, as the name implies, home to the village blacksmith and the inhabitants of the cottages surrounding it. This is the only “Yard” of a number that once existed in Stoke Golding that remains in more or less its original condition. Yards linked the buildings in the village with the farmland and open countryside around the settlement.

The Crinkle Crankle Wall – was a feature of the garden of the Old Hall but unfortunately was demolished in the 1960s to make way for an expansion of St Margaret’s Primary School. The Old Hall built by Sir Henry Firebrace was a grand building opposite the Church with gardens and a set of stone steps were thought to have lead to the Church. The Old Hall was demolished in 1850 and on the site Robert Baxter built a Workman’s Hall and a Reading Room for the benefit of the villagers. In 1866 the building was used as the village Elementary School. Today ‘the Baxter Hall’ is still used for many community purposes.

Education in Stoke Golding

Formal education began in the village in 1678 when Mistress Hester Hodges gave £500 to buy land to build ‘a free Grammar School’. Mistress Hester Hodges was the aunt of Sir Henry Firebrace’s wife. It is believed that this first school was what is now known as ‘the Old Grammar School’ in Station Road although the building has seen considerable change over the years.

In 1866 the school moved to the Workman’s Hall and Reading Room opposite the Church. A private school for girls was established in buildings vacated by ‘the free grammar school’. Today both boys and girls are educated at St. Margaret’s Primary School opposite the Church.

Industry in Stoke Golding

While agriculture was the main stay of employment in the village the hosiery industry rose to prominence and by the end of the 17th century was well established. Initially framework knitting was carried out in cottages in the village but in the 19th century hosiery became fully factory based. In Stoke Golding there were three small hosiery factories. There remain the buildings of one of these businesses in Station Road which now has been converted into private apartments. Today all remains of the once important hosiery industry in Stoke Golding has disappeared.