

Witherley heritage trail

The village of Witherley sits in the south west corner of Leicestershire on the border with Warwickshire. The county border is the A5 which is the old Roman Watling street running from London in the South East to Holyhead in the North West. On the south eastern edge of the village lies part of the old Roman fort Manduessedum after which the neighbouring village of Mancetter is named. Many Roman artefacts have been found in and around the area including in the river Anker where it used to ford the Watling Street. It is thought that it was at this ford or very nearby that Queen Boudica fought her final battle.

The church of St Peter sits on the east bank of the river Anker and is a Grade 1 listed building. It was built in the 14th Century although it is believed that it has been the site of a religious establishment since the 1100s. There are still pieces of medieval glass which can be seen in the south windows. These consist of a Madonna and child, a piper within a roundel and a heraldic shield. The 48-metre-tall steeple was struck by lightning in the 1920s causing extensive damage to both the steeple and the church. In the porch can be found deep cuts in the stones either side of the windows. These are said to have been caused by the army of Henry VII sharpening their weapons on their march to the battle of Bosworth. However, it is more likely to have been the result of farm workers sharpening the tools of their trade.



Witherley is the home of Atherstone Hunt which has been in existence since 1815 when the kennels were established in the village. The author and war poet Siegfried Sassoon visited the hunt in 1913 to stay with his friend and the then Master of the hunt, Norman Loder. He recounts his visit in his novel 'memoirs of a foxhunting man' which is believed to be a slightly fictionalised autobiography but in which he refers to the Atherstone Hunt as Packlestone Hunt.

Witherley Hall was built around 1840 probably on the site of the old manor house and was formerly the rectory. In 1900 a ballroom was added and was opened by Queen Victoria's harpist. In the grounds is an ice house, one of only 2 in Leicestershire. In 1940 the Hall was requisitioned for use by the army and was used to house Italian prisoners of war.

