

Ashby Canal and The Battlefield Line Railway

The **Ashby Canal** and **The Battlefield Line Railway** offer an excellent recreational opportunity to experience the rural character of the borough and explore other sites of great interest.

Ashby Canal meanders for most of its length through peaceful countryside from its junction with the Coventry Canal close to Bedworth to its terminus at Snarestone. It was opened in 1804 to transport goods from the coalfields and sites of heavy industry in North West Leicestershire to lucrative markets via Coventry. The canal tells the story of the development of the art of canal

civil engineering and has many interesting archaeological features along its length including single arch bridges, two aqueducts and a tunnel. Yet, it has no locks – built to follow the contours of the land to save costs. Many stretches of the navigation possess all the attractions of a natural river rich in flora and fauna and the canal offers a valuable recreational facility for boating, fishing, walking and cycling.

In 1846 the Ashby Canal was purchased by the Midland Railway Company, this followed the normal strategy for expanding railway companies to buy out their

canal competitors. A line from Ashby to Nuneaton was opened in 1873. The Royal Train went to **Shackerstone** on its first outing in 1902 conveying the Royal family on their way to visit **Gopsall Hall**. The line closed in 1965 but trains still operate as part of the **Battlefield Line Railway** with stations at **Shackerstone (CV13 6NW)**, **Market Bosworth (CV13 0PE)** and **Shenton (CV13 6DJ)**. Each station comprises a complex of interesting historical buildings and include various facilities including tea rooms and museum at **Shackerstone**.



Hallelujah for Gopsall Hall!

The Gopsall Estate near **Twycross** was the home of Charles Jennens, a friend of the composer George Frideric Handel. Jennens was his librettist writing the words for six of Handel's works. Most famous of these works is 'The Messiah' premiered in 1743, reputedly written by Jennens at Gopsall; Handel must almost certainly have visited.

Charles Jennens lived an affluent life style and in 1750 had the previous Jacobean mansion replaced with the opulent **Gopsall Hall**, thought to be the finest house in Leicestershire, Handel provided the specification for the organ for this hall. Sadly after WW2 the hall was demolished and all that remains is a Temple in the grounds. It is located in **Race Course Wood (CV13 6NQ)**, accessible via a permissive footpath: From **Congerstone** take the Shackerstone Road. Fork left at the school and follows the signs to **Gopsall Temple**.



The landscape shows the scars of other significant local industries – **mining and quarrying**. Winding wheels remind us of mines at **Bagworth, Desford** and **Nailstone**. Regeneration of the landscape following the legacy of coal mining is ongoing as part of **National Forest** initiative. Active quarrying for aggregates remains around **Stanton Under Bardon**. Granite and slate was quarried around **Groby** and **Markfield**. However extraction has ceased leaving a legacy of woodlands and nature reserves such as those at **Hill Hole** and **Billa Barra**. The need for improved transport to these extractive industries led to the construction of the **Leicester to Swannington Railway**, completed in 1832 by **Robert Stephenson**, at that time being one of the earliest steam railways in the country. The line closed to passengers in the 1960s but is still used to transport quarried stone. The booking office remains as what is now **The Railway Inn** at **Ratby** and other related structures remain scattered in close proximity to the line.

Hinckley itself was known as the "cradle of the hosiery industry" with Rev William Lea's stocking frame having arrived in the town in 1640 thanks to William III. The frame spawned a cottage industry which operated in many villages surrounding the town, helping it to be the second largest producer of stockings in the UK after Leicester. Fine examples of framework knitters cottages and workshops can be seen in **Earl Shilton, Groby, Hinckley** and **Ratby**.

Hinckley was the centre of the **textiles trade**. From the 1860s production was moved out from Leicester to surrounding villages such as **Barwell** and **Earl Shilton**. Initially working in "yards" or at homes such as **Chaisea Row** in **Earl Shilton**, by 1896 both villages were dominated by boot and shoe production with 23 factories. With exports as far as Russia, supplying the military in WW1 and WW2, the industry peaked in the 1950s. Why not follow the **Boot & Shoe Trails** (via the Council website) to hear the echoes of this trade in the buildings which have found new life?

Our working history



John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of the Methodist movement along with the name the "Apostle of the North," and builder of chapels, earning him There he was an energetic preacher for the rest of his life in Manchester. here is an area of the village once known as **Dog Yard**, where Fox's are acknowledged with a monument at the junction of **George Fox Lane** and **Old Forge Road**. Not far from his ministry in the Midlands to serve after its opening **Gadsby** gave up opposite the **Blue Bell Inn**. Five years attractive garden on the **High Street**, **Desford**, opened in 1800, is now an Church, so he preached outside in **St Michael** and **All Angels** Parishes that there was often not enough room established congregations at **Desford** and **Hinckley**. The site of the former and preacher and a High Calvinist, **William Gadsby** (1773-1841), a visitor to **Markfield** during the C18. So many people came to hear him

his brother **Charles**, was a frequent **William Gadsby** (1773-1841), a visitor to **Markfield** during the C18. So many people came to hear him established congregations at **Desford** and **Hinckley**. The site of the former and preacher and a High Calvinist, **William Gadsby** (1773-1841), a visitor to **Markfield** during the C18. So many people came to hear him

in Christian worship. **George Fox** (1624-1691), founder and leader of the Quakers was born and grew up in **Fenny Drayton**. His connections with the village are acknowledged with a monument at the junction of **George Fox Lane** and **Old Forge Road**. Not far from here is an area of the village once known as **Dog Yard**, where Fox's family house once stood. An excellent heritage walk leaflet for **Fenny Drayton** can be downloaded via the Council website.



George Fox, the Quakers and origins of non-conformism

My kingdom for a horse

The **Battle of Bosworth**, close to the **Fenn Lanes**, was one of the most significant battles in English history. The death here of **Plantagenet King Richard III** on the morning of 22nd August 1485 ended the Wars of the Roses and saw the birth of the Tudor dynasty. The fascinating **Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre (CV13 0AD)** tells the story in inspiring detail, yet several other key sites can be visited. Walk the battlefield from **Sutton Cheney Wharf (CV13 0AL)** or **Shenton Station (CV13 6DJ)**.

While the body of King Richard was thrown over a horse and taken to Leicester, at **St James the Greater** church in **Dadlington (CV13 6JB)** you can take time to remember the hundreds of soldiers slain who were buried there.

As for the victor, his troops assembled at **Crown Hill, Stoke Golding (CV13 6HD)** (best seen from the Ashby Canal, information boards have been erected on the marina bridge) where King Henry VII was crowned immediately. The villagers had watched the fight from the battlements of **St Margaret of Antioch's** church. Outside the church are grooves on windowsills reputedly ground by the sharpening of swords in preparation for the battle.



The first computer programmer - Ada Lovelace

Daughter of the "mad, bad and dangerous to know" poet Lord Byron, **Ada Lovelace** was brought to **Kirkby Mallory** to distance her from her father's dubious influences. She lived with her grandparents at **Kirkby Hall**, the stable block of which remains at **Mallory Park (LE9 7QE)** racetrack.

Ada's mother insisted on a rigorous education in science and mathematics. Luckily, **Ada** had a bright intellect and was fascinated with machines. As an adult she socialised with the likes of **Charles Dickens** and **Florence Nightingale**. But her work with **Charles Babbage** showed her intellectual ability as she realised in 1842 that his "Analytical Engine" could do far more than compute mathematical equations; it could compute other tasks. She is now recognised as the first computer programmer.

A memorial to **Ada** stands in the churchyard of **All Saints Church (LE9 7PE)** in **Kirkby Mallory** inscribed with one of her poems – she was her father's daughter after all.



Legend has it that...

The C18 gentleman highwayman **Dick Turpin** lived near **Fenny Drayton** on the **Fenn Lanes**. He would hideaway in the chimney of the **Cock Inn** at **Sibson**, one of the oldest inns in the country, with his horse 'Black Bess' kept in **Lindley Wood** or the pub's cellar. He bought the locals alcohol in return for their silence!

Lady Godiva reputedly rode naked to Coventry from **Wellsborough** down what is now the **A444**, to persuade her husband, **Earl Leofric of Mercia**, to lower taxes. The Earl owned **Wellsborough Manor**.

The saying "**The House that Jack Built**" originated in **Higham on the Hill**. Having decided to build his own home **Jack Brown**, toiled by collecting the bricks in hand

cart loads from **Wilnecote** 10 miles away. The iron window frames required him to make a 42 mile round trip to **Birmingham** for each one. Eventually the Parish Council paid for a roof but he never completed the house and after his death the building became a **Methodist Chapel**.

The saying "**Topsy Turvey**" is linked to **Bilstone**. **John Massey** was a champion wrestler who defeated opponents by throwing them over his head, inspiring the nickname. Following a violent row he murdered his wife by throwing her into the village water mill race. He was hanged for the crime and his body displayed on a gibbet post on **Gibbet Lane**, around half a mile south of the village

In 1745 **Bonnie Prince Charlie** and his army of Scottish Highlanders swept down the country as far as **Derby**. The Prince broke off hostilities in order to visit his friends, the **Knowles**, residing at **Elmside Farm** in **Nailstone**, to ascertain what support to expect from the area. The conclusion was not positive so the decision to retreat was made. **Charlie** was defeated at the **Battle of Culloden** the following year.



Conflict and Commemoration

There are various memorials and monuments located throughout the borough to commemorate the valiant efforts of servicemen and women in conflicts including the two World Wars. Green plaques for **Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey Rice DFC RAF VR** and **Tommy Brown GM** are located within **Burbage** and **Earl Shilton** (see the plaque trail overleaf). More information on the location of war memorials can be found as part of the **Leicestershire County Council War Memorials Project**.

A memorial marks the dedication and sacrifice of the **Churchill brothers, Walter DSO DFC, Peter DSO and Oliver**, and those involved with the **JJ Churchill** factory which relocated from **Coventry** to **Market Bosworth** during WW2. The cairn is located on **Station Road** outside the factory, which still operates today.

On the edge of **Stoke Golding** is a rebuilt above ground **Royal Observer Corps** monitoring post. Originally constructed in 1937, the post was manned 24 hours a day throughout WW2 by local volunteers. During the height of the Cold War the **Royal Observer Corps** became increasingly involved in the system for reporting on any fallout following a nuclear attack. For this purpose an underground post was constructed on the site in 1960 and has been sympathetically restored. The posts are accessible via a public footpath to the south of **Wykin Lane** cemetery.



There is so much more to discover...

We can't fit it all in.

Download these local trails at www.hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk/heritage

Barwell Boot & Shoe Trail (please note an updated trail for **Earl Shilton** was produced in 2018)

The Bosworth Battlefield Trail Walk (including access to the **Ashby Canal** and the **Battlefield Line Railway** at **Shenton**)

Burbage Heritage Trail

Earl Shilton Heritage Trails (including a **Boot & Shoe Trail**)

Market Bosworth Town Trail

Markfield Village Trail

The Lost yards of Ratby

Stoke Golding Blue Plaque Walk

George Fox and Quakers Walks

Enjoyed our rural trail? Follow our urban **Hinckley History Trail** (produced by **Hinckley BID**)

Produced by

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

In partnership with

Hinckley & District Museum

More fascinating facts about our rural heritage can be found at: www.hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk/heritage www.hinckleydistrictmuseum.org.uk



Uncover our fascinating pioneers, history and legends

Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Samuel Deacon 1

Baptist Chapel, Main Street, Barton in the Beans CV13 0DJ

Clockmaker known as "Clocky Deacon", Samuel started his clock making business - "Deacon Barton" in 1771 and his relatives continued making fine watches and clocks until 1951 when the workshop, papers and tools were donated to Leicester Museum. He was also a committed Baptist Preacher compiling the popular Barton Hymns collection.



Barwell Meteorite 2

Chapel Street, Barwell LE9 8RB

On Christmas Eve 1965, one of the largest meteorites recorded in British history landed on the unsuspecting village of Barwell. Despite arriving with a lightning-like flash and a loud bang, the first official report of the meteorite was only on 27th December. The largest piece weighed 103 lbs. The third largest fragment is displayed in the National Space Centre.



George Canning 3

Burbage Constitutional Club/Canning House, Church Street, Burbage LE10 2DE

Politician and Prime Minister in 1827. The shortest-serving Prime Minister, for only 119 days, Canning nevertheless had a long political career. He moved his family here in 1811 as his son was under the care of a local doctor. Despite having written that Hinckley was the "nastiest town, in the dirtiest country" they stayed until 1814.



Geoffrey Rice 4

The Sycamores Inn, Burbage LE10 2EF

Flight Lieutenant Geoffrey Rice DFC RAF VR Dambuster pilot. Enraged by the sight of Coventry on fire during the Blitz, Rice left his family home in Burbage to join the RAF. Taking part in the 'Dambusters Raid' on 17th May 1943, he returned safely to base to fly other dangerous operations across Germany before being captured in 1944.



Molly Badham & Nathalie Evans 16

Twycross Zoo CV9 3PX

Co-founders of Twycross Zoo. Twycross Zoo was opened by Badham and Evans on Sunday 26th May 1963, with the vision that with the support of visitors they could make a difference to the conservation of endangered species. Under their leadership the zoo developed as a primate centre of international importance. Today it is home to some of the most endangered species on the planet.



The Railway Inn 15

The Railway Inn, Station Road, Ratby LE6 0JR

Originally the Booking Office for the Leicester to Swannington Railway. It was one of the first steam railways in the country and was promoted by George Stephenson. His son Robert Stephenson was the engineer with the line being essential to coal and quarrying industries and transforming the area. Its use for passengers was somewhat of an afterthought.



William Worthington 14

The Unicorn Inn, Main Street, Orton on the Hill CV9 3NN

Founder of the Worthington's brewery. Worthington was born in this small farming village, leaving in 1844 to work as a cooper in Burton-on-Trent where he established his now famous brewery.



John Wesley 13

41 The Green, Markfield LE67 9WD

Founder of Methodism. Wesley stayed here on his first visit to Leicestershire, eventually preaching 13 times in St Michael's. So many people attended that the church was full and he had to preach outside. The popularity of Non-Conformism in Markfield led to the establishment of Wesleyan, Bourne and Congregational chapels which still stand.



Lady Florence Dixie 12

Bosworth Hall Hotel, Market Bosworth CV13 0LP

Author and campaigner for women's rights. Lady Dixie, who lived at Bosworth Hall, was a renaissance woman ahead of her time. She was appointed war correspondent for the 'Morning Post' of London to cover the Anglo-Zulu War and wrote a feminist novel in which she prophesied that by 1999 the nation would be peacefully led by a woman! She also played a key role in the development of women's football.



Davey Graham 11

Bosworth Hall Hotel, Market Bosworth CV13 0LP

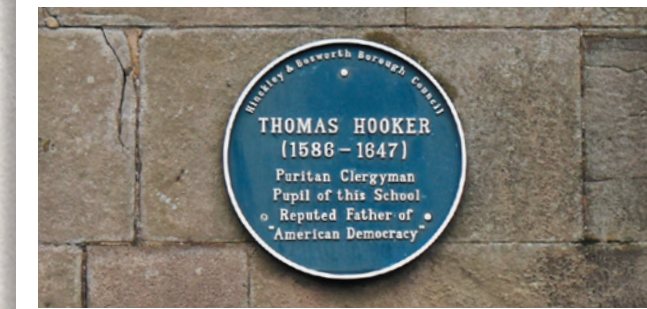
Influential musician and composer. Born at the Hall when it was an infirmary in 1940, Graham was a pioneering folk and world music guitarist and composer. Perhaps best known for the song 'Anji' which he wrote aged 19 he also devised the DADGAD guitar tuning style.



Thomas Hooker 10

Dixie Grammar School, Station Road, Market Bosworth CV13 0LE

Puritan religious and colonial leader. In the 1630s, as a prominent Puritan preacher, Rev Hooker emigrated to America establishing the colony (now State) of Connecticut. He devised a written constitution for the colony, emphasising that Government must answer to the people. Thought to be a world first, this has led to him being seen as the Father of American democracy.



Ada Lovelace 9

Kirkby Hall now Mallory Park LE9 7QE

Pioneering mathematician. The daughter of Lord Byron, Ada was brought to her grandparents' home to distance her from her father's influence. Her pioneering mathematical work with Charles Babbage in 1842-3 led to Ada now being recognised as the first computer programmer. A memorial to Ada stands in the nearby churchyard of All Saints Church.



- Key
- A Road
 - B Road
 - Motorway
 - Ashby Canal
 - Railway Line
 - Places of Interest

Hinckley & Bosworth's Rural Blue & Green Plaque Trail

If you enjoyed this why not follow local blue plaque trails in Burbage, Hinckley and Stoke Golding.

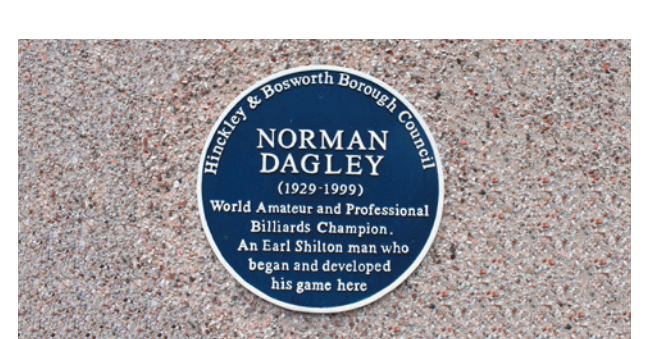
Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Hinckley & District Museum

Norman Dagley 5

Earl Shilton Institute, Station Road, Earl Shilton LE9 7GA

World Champion Billiards Player. Growing up in Earl Shilton, Norman perfected his Billiards skills here against champion amateur Reg Wright. He went on to be English Amateur Champion a record 15 times and World Professional Champion twice. Billiards and snooker remain popular at the Institute.



Trevor Storer 6

121b High Street, Earl Shilton LE9 7LR

Founder of Pukka Pies. Starting as Trevor Storer's Home Made Pies in 1963, Trevor and his wife Valerie baked their first pies here selling over 1000 in the first week. By 1964 they had renamed the growing company Pukka Pies. Their inspired marketing of properly good pies has made it the no. 1 pie brand.



Tommy Brown GM 7

42 Station Rd, Earl Shilton LE9 7GA

WW2 Sailor. In 1942 aged just 16, Tommy Brown helped rescue the Enigma machine and code book from a sinking German submarine by swimming back and forth to HMS Petard. This was vital to code-breakers at Bletchley Park and undoubtedly shortened the war. His bravery only came to light 55 years later when Official Secrets Act restrictions were lifted. He died in a house fire in 1945.

