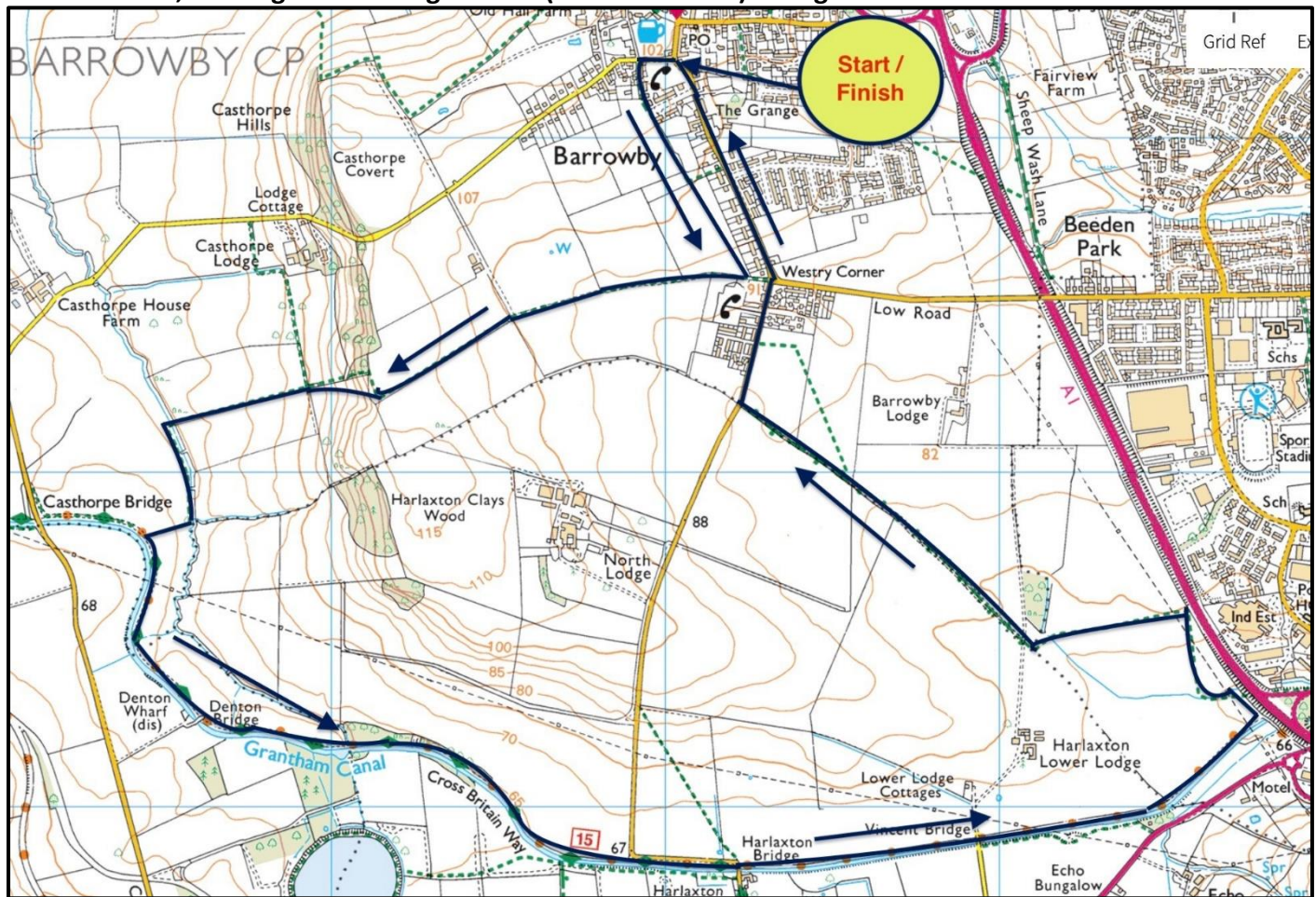


HERITAGE WALK 2

Vistas, viewpoints and history.

Distance: 6.5 miles, on roads and footpaths, suitable for families used to walking. Parts can be muddy.

Circular route, starting at the Village Green (Stevens Gutter) facing the Butchers.



From Steven's Gutter, walk along Casthorpe Road for 100m until you reach The Old Smithy on your left. Turn left into Mill Row. The current row of garages immediately on your left was the village blacksmith's workshop – in the 1820s it was the home of ironworker Richard Seaman and his apprentice, Richard Hornsby, who became a noted Grantham industrialist.

Continue along Mill Row and follow the footpath going straight ahead. On your right was the site of a village windmill which was disused by 1916 and demolished by the Second World War. There is no trace of the windmill to be seen today, but there is a photograph in the Barrowby Reading Room. There was a second, earlier, windmill on the other side of the A52 at the top of Barrowby Hill, called Mill Hill on some maps.

At the end of the jitty, pass the new Sports Pavilion and follow the sports field track to the car park. In 1762, this area was part of the 'Great Low Field' belonging to the Duke of Devonshire (who owned 50% of the parish) and the name has remained in use for the sports field.

At the end of the car park, turn right onto the public footpath and follow this to the end of the first field. In 1764 the field on your left was called 'Cunigree' on the Devonshire Estate Map which suggests medieval rabbit farming had taken place in the area. Rabbits were very valuable both for their meat and their fur.

Follow the path up the hill, ignoring the private track to New Barn Farm on your right and keep to the right of the hedge. As you come over the crest, the vista unfolds. Known as 'Surprise View', you can see Belvoir Castle ahead and Casthorpe to your right. On a fine day Nottingham can be seen on the horizon.

Belvoir Castle's history dates back to the eleventh century. It is the ancestral home of the Duke of Rutland, where the family have lived for almost a thousand years. Crowning a hill, the Castle's turrets and towers rise over the Vale of Belvoir like an illustration in a fairy-tale. Four castles have stood on this spot since 1067 and the current castle looks old, but actually mostly dates from the 19th century.

Today Casthorpe is little more than a few scattered farms, but in medieval days it was a separate village, with its own entry in the Domesday Book.

Descend the wooden steps and cross the stile, and then walk downhill to the right-hand corner of the field. Continue straight ahead with the hedge on your left, ignoring the footpath to the right. At the end of the field follow the path through the trees to cross the Old Beck by a footbridge. The Old Beck rises in Harston and Croxton Kerrial, and Denton Reservoir was formed when the stream was dammed. We will cross the stream again later in the walk.

Turn left and follow the edge of the field to the next marker. Here, look left to the hedge coming down from the hill and see if you can spot a slight bank in the middle of the hedgerow – this marks Barrowby's Parish Boundary – the walk meets another bank marking the boundary later. Then turn right to cross the field to the canal tow-path. At the canal if you turn right this takes you towards Woolsthorpe-by-Belvoir. This Heritage walk turns left.

The Grantham Canal runs for 33 miles from Grantham through to West Bridgford, where it joins the River Trent. It is a contour canal – it follows the contours of the landscape to minimise the number of locks needed. This is why it winds sinuously through the Vale of Belvoir, although it still needed 18 sets of locks. Opened in 1797, it was built primarily for the transportation of coal to Grantham. Affected by the coming of the railways, it was finally closed in 1936. As it was then used as a water supply for agriculture, much of it remained in water after closure, although some bridges were lowered. Since the 1970s, the Grantham Canal Society have been working to restore it and the stretch we will follow is now navigable for small vessels.

One of the features of this canal are the cast iron mileposts. Note the 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ milepost (indicating 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles from Nottingham) as when you reach Denton Wharf (which is further away) there is another milepost saying only 29 miles from Nottingham! The slipway at Denton Wharf was opened in 1990 to allow boats to be launched on the canal.

Continue along the towpath to the 30-mile milepost – on the other side of the canal bank you see the feeder stream from Denton Reservoir which still feeds in water to maintain the canal level, and 100m further on is a winding hole. This is a widened area of a canal where canal boats can be turned. The canal then crosses the Old Beck where there is also an overflow channel should the level of the canal become too high.

Shortly after this the towpath rises noticeably and there is the abutment of a former bridge. This was not one of the original canal brick bridges, but a low concrete bridge built in 1962 to carry a metalled lorry road connecting a planned ironstone quarry south of Low Road, Barrowby to a rail loading point on the branch line at Denton. The road and bridge were built, but the quarry was never opened, and the bridge was demolished in 1972.

After a further 750m, there is a path sloping up to the left – if you want to return to the car park on the Drift and then back to Barrowby, go up here or you can continue on to Harlaxton Wharf bridge and pick the Drift up there to return across the fields to Barrowby. This Heritage walk continues along the towpath towards Grantham.

The road between the canal and Barrowby was built in the 19th century after the opening of the canal. Have you ever wondered why the road makes a 90 degree turn when it reaches the canal, to then follow the canal for 300m to cross Harlaxton Bridge? This is because it had to follow the existing field boundaries until the canal was reached – otherwise too many fields would have been cut in two!

There is a legend that in the early sixteenth century ‘a gold helmet set with stones and mouldering writings’, and reputedly belonging to John O’Gaunt, was discovered buried in a brass pot in a field somewhere near here! Legend says it was sent to Spain, but no trace of any such discovery has ever been made.

The canal is now in a noticeable cutting and, at 1.5 miles in length, the Harlaxton Cut was probably the most substantial engineering work on the canal. Not long after the canal was opened, it was realised that the cut that had been made was too narrow to allow wide beam craft to pass each other - an obvious commercial handicap. Two passing places were dug in 1801, followed some years later by the widening of the whole cut. Harlaxton Wharf was one of several wharves along the Grantham Canal, used for supplying coal, and other goods, to local villages. After the canal closed to navigation the wharf was used as a refuse tip. Following restoration work, it was re-opened in 2010.

You pass under Vincent Bridge and after 300m on the left note a different type of stone milepost stating it is 2 miles to Grantham. Man has lived in this area for thousands of years - aerial photographs and crop marks have shown the ghost of ancient field boundaries in some of the fields, and prehistoric flints have been found.

The A1 is now in sight ahead. When the Grantham By-Pass section of the A1 was built in 1962 the canal was ‘truncated’ with a culvert under the embankment to the canal on the other side. Noting the pontoon installed by the Canal Society for boat trips, you turn left at the end and follow the path through the trees at the foot of the embankment for 100m. When you reach the Mow Beck you cross it and then immediately cross the other ditch to follow the Mow Beck on its right-hand bank. After 130m, turn right and walk north across the field towards and past the first Electricity Pylon. Beyond this, before you reach the A1 boundary, turn left and walk across the field to the left-hand corner of the small copse called Myers Wood.

The reason the last section was complicated is because when the A1 was built, the footpath – which used to run direct in a straight line to the roundabout where Swingbridge Road and the A1 South slip road are – was simply truncated and now has to connect to the canal tow-path.

Myers Wood is the source of one of the two arms of the Mow Beck, which is itself a main tributary of the River Witham whose course through Grantham is now mainly underground in culverts. Walk past the bee hives and ‘dog leg’ left following the waymark. At this point you may be able to see faint traces of medieval ‘ridge and furrow’ in the field ahead. Turn sharp right at the second waymark to follow the route indicated by the arrow.

Follow the path along a clear and wide ‘track’ between the fields. This used to be the main road between Barrowby and Harlaxton and follows the parish boundary. It is named as “Harlake Hedge Road” on the 1762 Enclosure Map. It fell out of use after the ‘new’ road to the canal was built in the 19th century. After 700m, at the end of the field on your right-hand side, ignore the footpath sign pointing right and continue straight ahead on the ‘Restricted Byway’. If you look carefully, you can see signs of a bank in the hedge – this is still the parish boundary. There is also a noticeable height differential between the fields on the Harlaxton side of the boundary and those on the Barrowby side.

When you reach The Drift, turn right and walk towards Westry Corner past the Allotments. Until the houses were built in the 20th century, this was an area of small fields called West Row Closes. These names indicate small fields on the western boundary of a parish - which is exactly what they were! Over time 'West Row' has become corrupted to Westry.

When you reach Westry Corner, turn left along Low Road. Just after Hedgefield Road, on your left is a jitty that leads to Low Field. Until the end of the 19th century, this was the location of the village pinfold where, in medieval times, stray animals were impounded until a fine was paid. Continue on, noting The Cedars, a stone house dating from 1800 on the left-hand side, followed by the early 18th century Grange Cottages on the same side of the road. Note that the alignment of the cottages is slightly different to that of Low Road, suggesting that the road has moved its alignment since they were built.

Opposite the cottages is The Grange, a stone and brick house and stables, with a datestone of 1656 although little can be seen from the road. It is known there was a grange in Barrowby belonging to Newbo Abbey and it is possible this refers to an earlier house on this site.

From here Steven's Gutter can be seen ahead.

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