

Foxton Village

This walk takes you around much of Foxton showing how the arrival of the canal two hundred years ago altered the structure and life of the village, and then on to the historic Foxton Locks area.



The walk is mainly along footpaths, bridleways and the canal towpath with some hills. Strong shoes are recommended. Some sections are accessible by wheelchair but some are not, due to stiles, narrow pathway or unsuitable surface. Please telephone the museum for advice about such sections.

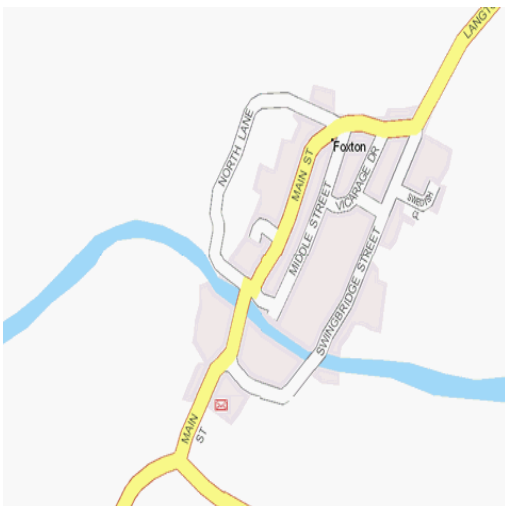
Public Transport

Is available to Foxton Village from Market Harborough town centre and railway station. Bus No. 44 operates an hourly service each way from 7am to 7pm Mon. to Sat. Call Travel Line on 0870 6082608 for timetable details. The walk can be done as a continuous circuit from the village to the locks and back or sections can be traversed according to capability and time available.

Foxton Village and some history.



The village of Foxton has existed at least since Saxon times and it is believed that the name is associated with the presence of numerous foxes in the area when it first became settled and which are still plentiful today. When the village expanded from the original hilltop settlement around the church and manor house onto the more sheltered lower ground, a ring form of street layout was arranged and several early documents refer to the 'Ring Town of Foxton'. Much of the early ring road, or 'back lane' as locals refer to it, still exists and the ring form of the settlement is easily discerned on early maps. Parts of this lane and its connecting streets and footpaths are traversed in the village part of this walk.



The walk commences in the car park of the Village Hall situated in Middle Street. where vehicles may be left courtesy of the Trustees of Robert Monk's Foxton Charity, who have responsibility for the hall and its surrounding recreation grounds.

Robert Monk, whose family had lived in Foxton for several generations, was a great benefactor to the village in the early part of the 20th Century. He had left the village as a young man and eventually made his fortune as a publican in Leicester. His only daughter was brought up in the village by her grandparents but died at quite a young age and when Robert died in 1916 a considerable sum was left under his will to provide amenities for the community of his birthplace.

Before leaving the car park spend a few moments in front of the Memorial mounted on the outside wall of the village hall which commemorates the Crew members of a Lancaster Bomber who lost their lives when it crashed in the village shortly before the end of WWII.



On returning from a mission over Germany, due to fog at its home base, the bomber was diverted to land at the wartime airfield situated on the high ground above the village on the Market Harborough side,. Possibly due to an error in instrumentation the aircraft collided with the ridge at the edge of the airfield before crashing in the grounds of Foxton Vicarage causing the deaths of all the crew, whose names are now recorded on the memorial plaque erected in 2002.



Should your walk take place on a Tuesday, coffee and biscuits, etc are available in the village hall at nominal charge, from 10.45 am to 12.15pm and visitors are always welcome. Refreshments are otherwise available at the two public houses in the village and at the various establishments at the Locks.

From the RMH car park follow the footpath across the village recreation ground into Swingbridge Street. Across the grass to your left (through the Trees) may be seen the 'Old Vicarage' and site of the wartime bomber crash. On passing through the gate into Swing Bridge Street, turn left and then very shortly right into SoftWell Lane about 50 yds down.

This lane, which is signposted as a footpath and bridleway, takes its name (not at present displayed) from a famous well which provided the village with an excellent supply of soft water, much used in local laundries, until the village was connected to the mains supply some 50 years ago. Older villagers can still recall pumping water from the well and it is probable that the crews of passing canal boats also obtained their drinking water from it in earlier times. In due course it is hoped that a replica 'Soft Well Pump' can be erected on the site of the ancient well to add to the village scene.

The premises to the rear of 'Dale Cottage', which is the house at the right hand corner as you enter the



SoftWell Lane from Swingbridge Street, were formerly used as a 'Mushroom Catsup' factory some 100 years ago. This early form of pickle was prepared from wild mushrooms using vinegar and spices. Many of the local lanes have wide grass verges dating from the 1770 Foxton Enclosure which required all carriageways to be left 60ft wide. A scattering of dung from the many passing horses used for transport in those days would have helped produce an abundance of mushrooms at certain times of the year. The gathering of these by local tramps and villagers for the Spriggs Family, who made the famous 'catsup' would have provided a welcome additional income for the poorer people.

About 100yds along the lane the footpath continues, over a stile and across the fields, to Market Harborough but our route follows the bridleway instead.

Just before the stile, on your left, is the site of the former Soft Well at the entrance to what was a section of the village 'back lane', once known as Langton Lane. This used to lead to the bottom, or north end, of the village connecting with a footpath leading to West Langton, now part of the 'Leicestershire Round'. Many years ago this part of the 'back lane between the Soft Well and Schofield Farm became disused and is now private property forming a wildlife and nature reserve. Access for organised groups may be arranged by contacting the owner Mr Derek Lewin on 0116 2478574.

Instead of taking the footpath across the fields bear right at the stile opposite the Soft Well site and follow the bridleway which leads through a gate to a bridge over the canal known as 'Clarke's Bridge (Bridge No.4), after the farmer of the adjacent land.

The bridleway existed as one of the roads from Foxton to the turnpike road between Harborough and Leicester before the canal was cut, so a substantial brick bridge was provided by the canal company at this crossing. A section of the early road runs parallel to the canal for a short distance and again once formed part of the village 'back lane'.

Leave the bridleway at the bridge and, joining the canal towpath, turn right towards Foxton Village.

After a short distance you will pass some moored boats just before arriving at Foxton Swingbridge (Bridge No.3). When the canal came to Foxton around 1808 it cut across the four village streets then known as Westgate Street (now North Lane), Crossgate Street, (now Main Street), Woodgate Street (now Middle Street) and Flagon Street (now Swingbridge Street). Only one brick bridge (the Black Horse Bridge, No.2) was built to provide a crossing for what became Main Street. New sections of road parallel to the canal were constructed to allow connection of the lower portions of both North Lane and Middle Street to this bridge. The cut off upper sections of these two streets gradually fell into disuse and have all but disappeared from view. The short section of Middle Street between what was once called 'New Road' and the canal has recently been named 'Woodgate' in commemoration of the earlier street name.

There was already a link road between Westgate Street (North Lane) and Crossgate Street (Main Street) at the time of canal construction but this lay on the line of the canal and had to be replaced by the present short section of road running parallel to the canal to join with Main Street. Flagon Street (later becoming known as Swingbridge Street) was the principal street of the village in earlier times, (for a time it was called High Street instead), and is the site of many of the former prosperous local graziers' homes. However, it would have been difficult and expensive to build a hump-backed brick bridge to take this road over the canal due to the lie of the land so only a 'swivel bridge' was provided at the crossing. For many years this bridge was kept locked across the canal and boatmen had to obtain the key from a Mr Chapman who lived in one of the nearby cottages before they could open the bridge and take their craft through. Mr Chapman was paid £2 - 10s per year by the canal company for looking after the 'swivel bridge' and in the 1840's he kept a 'Beer House' at his cottage called the 'Red Lion'. After a 2 shillings per annum increase in his wages in 1844 his salary then remained the same for almost 50 years! The early 'swivel bridge' was replaced in the late 1800's by the present form of swing bridge and the name Swingbridge Street came into use around 50 years ago.

You can take a short detour to the right and see the cottage which was once used as a tea shop, a little further down the road on the right is the building believed to be the oldest in the village. Look out for the lead plaque on the wall.



From the towpath turn left over the swingbridge and follow present day Swingbridge Street round past the Manor House and Church.



Foxton Manor House belonged to the Palmer family at the time the canal was planned. Sir John Palmer strongly objected to the canal going through the village and the Leicester Northants Union Canal Company were forced to consider a different route and a tunnel to avoid the village. This line was never built and Sir John became a shareholder in the canal. The house also has links with John O'Gaunt and has vestiges dating back to 1397. Prior to the cutting of the canal the then Woodgate Street continued through the manor grounds and across the fields towards the modern Foxton Primary School, then on to Lubenham. Spare a moment to enter St. Andrew's Church and see some of the interesting features within. These include the remains of what is believed to be a Saxon preaching cross found on the

site many years ago, an early church clock mechanism which used to be in the tower and the new Millennium Window depicting scenes from Foxton History and the village's connection with the canal. In the churchyard may be found the gravestone of John Joseph Allen who died in Dec. 1899 as a result of an accident during the construction of the Incline Plane Lift at Foxton Locks. Opposite the church, at the entrance to Mount Farm on the other side of Main Street, is the spot where Westgate Street used to come out before the canal was cut. The piece of road which was cut off by the canal had been known as 'Church Hill' and remained as a bridleway into modern times, even though it came to a dead end at the canal. The properties which used to lie on this section of road, including Stain's Farm, which will be mentioned again later, gradually fell into disuse and although shown on early maps of the village have long since disappeared.

From the church turn right into Main Street and you will pass the Black Horse Inn, where refreshment may be obtained. The Inn which is on your left as you walk downhill towards the canal once more.

Just before the canal bridge is the property now called 'Forge House' which pre-dates the canal but became the coal wharf with a blacksmith's shop after the canal came through the village. These businesses were run by the Saddington Family for many years and the original weighbridge still lies behind the modern entrance gate. The white building at the roadside, immediately before the bridge, is the former smithy. Immediately after passing over the canal bridge, once known as 'Loafers' Lump' because unemployed villagers gathered there in earlier times when seeking employment from the Parish Vestry under the 'Poor Laws', you will come to the point where both North Lane and Middle Street come out onto Main Street. This junction was constructed when the canal was cut in order to allow the truncated

Westgate and Woodgate Streets to connect with the bridge and may have been a satisfactory solution for the canal company some 200 years ago but has led to traffic problems with modern motor vehicles. Continue down Main Street past the entrance of North Lane until you reach the lane on your left leading to the 'Shoulder of Mutton'. At this point you may return to the car park at Robert Monk Hall by turning right and crossing the road into Dalby's Lane, a footpath linking Main Street to Middle Street. Dalby's Lane takes its name from an old Foxton Family who were millers and bakers in the village for several generations and whose bakehouse was situated in the building on the corner with Main Street, now forming Roselands Residential Home.

On reaching Middle Street you will find the village hall and car park a few yards to your right on completion of Part 1 of this walk.

Circular Walk between Foxton Village and Foxton Locks.

From Main Street turn left into the lane leading to the Shoulder of Mutton, where refreshments are available if required.



This inn pre-dates the coming of the canal by many years but the paddock in front was useful as grazing for the boat horses whilst cargoes were being unloaded at the wharf just up the road. Benjamin Goodrich, one of the publicans in the 19th C. was well known as a local horse dealer and this activity would have been important in the era of horse drawn boats. He also ran the first village post office from premises at the inn.



Before you leave the pub yard take a look over the wall at the former graveyard for the Foxton Baptist Chapel, (Now a private residence.) The cottage at the end was the preachers residence, and the chapel is behind it. If you wish you can visit the graveyard by retracing your steps to Main street and turning left, follow the sign at the side of the old chapel.

Continue across the pub car park to the right of the buildings and follow the footpath leading to North Lane.

This is part of the route from Foxton to Debdale which would have seen much use during the time when the canal terminated at Debdale Wharf in 1797 before being continued through Foxton to reach Market Harborough twelve years later. Turn left when you enter North Lane from the footpath. This lane is also part of the early 'ring road' or 'back lane' of the village. (To the right, a short distance down the lane, the footpath and former road to Debdale continue across the fields.)

Continuing left up the lane for a short distance Westleigh Farm comes into view where the footpath may be taken to join the canal towpath on the way to Foxton Locks. Alternatively continue along North Lane and join the towpath on the right just before Main Street is reached.

Just beyond Westleigh Farm another footpath to the left takes you over two stiles and across a paddock back to the Shoulder of Mutton. Whichever route is taken, on joining the towpath turn right and continue

alongside the canal to the junction below Foxton Locks. If you have followed North Lane round to Main Street you will join the towpath opposite the former Foxton Coal Wharf and shortly, as you overlook the bend in North Lane, you will pass the spot where this lane used to continue up to the church until the road was cut off by the coming of the canal. The cut off section of this earlier road, known as 'Church Hill' is now the site of equestrian training facilities but was formerly occupied by 'Stain's Farmhouse' and other dwellings. A short distance further on, the canal narrows at the site of the now demolished Stain's Bridge (No.1) which used to carry an old road from Foxton to Gumley. This bridge was the site of the 'Stain's Bridge Murder' in 1825. A local woman, Hannah Read, née Packwood, murdered her husband by pushing him into the canal under the bridge, using a stick to prevent him from getting out until he drowned. She was apprehended and tried in Leicester on 3rd August, 1825 where she was found guilty and sentenced to be hung and her body dissected. As she confessed and showed repentance whilst awaiting execution only the hanging part of the sentence was carried out!

If you have taken the footpath from Westleigh Farm on North Lane you will join the towpath just beyond the site of Stain's Bridge but will be able to see the narrowing of the canal where it used to be on looking left as you cross the stile by the canal.

The next section of the towpath has a solid concrete edge constructed when improvements were made to the canal in the 1930's under a scheme sponsored by the government to provide work for some of the many men who were unemployed in those days. In the field on the other side of the canal can be clearly seen the 'ridge and furrow' pattern of the ground caused by the ploughing methods used under the three field system prior to enclosure and conversion to grassland in the late 1700's. When you reach the junction you will see the flight of locks for which Foxton is famous.

Cross the bridge (Rainbow Bridge No. 62), where the towpath changes side, and you will be able to explore the locks area.



Refreshments may be obtained at various establishments by the bottom and top of the locks and you may wish to visit the museum halfway up the flight to learn more about the canal and see a working model of the Incline Plane Boat Lift which was built just over 100 years ago to bypass the locks. The vestiges of the lift can still be seen and there are hopes that it may be restored to working order at some time in the future.

By crossing over the locks you will be able to join the bridle road from Gumley in order to return to Foxton Village. The bridle road passes in front of the Foxton Locks Inn which occupies some of the early canal buildings and then crosses over a short arm of canal that was built to enable boats to enter the bottom of the lift.

This bridge dates from the end of the 19thC. and is in a typical Victorian style with prominent straight parapets and blue engineering bricks used in construction rather than the all red brick curved form of the earlier canal bridges. Aerial view of Foxton locks before the restoration works commenced. When you are ready to leave the locks area cross over this bridge and follow the bridle road around the temporary workshop facilities of Foxton Boat Services. The old workshop has become part of the Foxton Locks Inn complex and the bridle road diverted to allow for building of new boatyard facilities in due course. The road also passes new car park facilities and the junction with a new access road from the Gumley Road for motor vehicles before becoming gated and restricted to horse and pedestrian use only.

The gated route will take you back to the top of Foxton Village above the church.

The property to the left just before you reach Main Street was formerly the site of a brickworks run by the Brown Family who made bricks used in building the canal and also in the construction of St. Pancras Railway Station. In 1809 the John Brown who owned the brick works also became the publican at the Shoulder of Mutton. On leaving the bridle road turn left down the hill and cross the canal once more at the Black Horse Bridge. You can reach the car park at the village hall either directly along Middle Street, to your right just below the bridge, or by following the towpath towards the Swing Bridge and joining Middle Street down Woodgate which meets the canal next to the former Foxton Board School, recently used as a Field Centre by the Local Education Authority. The largely unchanged village school, a rare survivor.