

The Bricklayers is the scene of a recently restored local agricultural tradition last seen in the early 1900s. On Plough Monday, the first Monday after Twelfth Night, the plough was prepared for a new season by decorating it in ribbons and pulling it through the local villages, stopping off at pubs on the way. The men pulling the plough, Plough Bullocks, painted their faces and they were accompanied by Molly Dancers, a kind of Morris dancer. Woe betides the landlord if he failed to provide either a donation or free beer: his drive would be ploughed up. Traditions such as these drew some judicious remarks from one local historian as quoted in an 1812 publication, describing them as producing 'at least a week of idleness and intoxication.' The same historian also pokes fun at the peculiar dialect of the people of this area: 'the letter h comes in on almost every occasion where it ought not' and 'the words like and such frequently occur as expletives,' giving the example of 'If you don't give me my price like.'

➤ After The Bricklayers turn right down The Green then left into Poors Meadow. Leave the green and take the Leicestershire Round footpath to the right that runs past the River Soar. Enter Fosse Meadows and follow the main wooden edged path. Where the path ends turn left on a new path that leads to the car park.

5 Fosse Meadows



This 20-acre site was opened in 1993 with grasslands, woodlands, ponds and a small lake with bird hides. Here, you will encounter your first 'Blaby District Fox' on your walk, one of 19 foxes located at key points around the district and complementing the 25 located at Fosse Park Shopping Centre (Walk 11).

But why foxes? Leicestershire County Council's logo features a fox as do the badges of Leicester City Football Club and Leicestershire Cricket Club. The county has a long association with the now banned 'sport' of fox hunting, dating back to the foundation of the Quorn hunt in 1696. The gently undulating countryside made an ideal place to hunt with hounds and the majority of hunts are to be found in and around the county of Leicestershire with the Quorn and Belvoir to the north and northeast, the Cottesmore to the east, the Fernie in the south east and the Atherstone in the west.



Roman Roads

The Romans quickly established a network of roads after their initial invasion of 43 AD. Roads were essential for moving troops and their supplies quickly across the country as they expanded their empire. The surveyors would find the highest ground and then plot the road directly between the high points, a process that resulted in the long straight roads that we still see today. They would often follow existing tracks and pathways as was the case with Watling Street. The local Britons would have been put to work, using local materials to create a domed embankment topped with cobbles to a depth of half a metre. At regular intervals along the roads there would have been military outposts and other settlements. By 180 AD, most the network was complete and, although the roads fell into disrepair once the Romans left, they still form the basis for many modern day roads. On these walks you will travel along the Fosse Way again on Walks 8 and 11 and cross it a few times as well, in addition to crossing the road from Ratae (Leicester) to Manduessedum (Mancetter on Watling Street) somewhere on Walks 5 and 6.

With Thanks to...

Our thanks to Eddie Smallwood and Michael Dix for creating the walking routes and uncovering the heritage stories. And to Graham Luker for the illustrations.

This series of heritage walks have been designed to inspire walking across the District – we hope that you enjoy them. We welcome feedback and you can get in touch with us by emailing leisure@blaby.gov.uk. The walk uses footpaths, bridleways, permissive paths and some roads. Please respect the landowner's property and stay on the indicated paths. Please follow the countryside code. Take care when walking on roads and follow the Highway Code for pedestrians. You are advised to use the route in conjunction with the OS map for the area. This guide has been created with funds from the European Regional Development Fund and HM Government.



Find this walk, all 12 heritage trails and more on the **GoJauntly app**. Simple photo guides help you navigate while nifty tips point out things of interest and places to eat.



For more information on this walk and for other walks in the series visit our website:
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Let's go!
Blaby
District

1

Heritage Walks

Route One

6 miles
9.7 km

This walk is one of a series of 12 heritage trails plus a long distance perimeter route around the whole District, see the website visitblaby.org.uk for more information.

- Fosse Meadows
- High Cross
- Wigston Parva
- Sharnford



Supported by Welcome Back Funding





1 Park at Fosse Meadows in the second car park and begin your walk by heading back through the car park entrance gate and turn right onto the road. This follows the course of the Roman Fosse Way. Keep going straight on as the road becomes a track that becomes a footpath. Turn right when you emerge onto a road.

2 High Cross



High Cross lies at the point where two major Roman roads, the Fosse Way and Watling Street, cross. As the Roman Empire expanded, there was a need to construct efficient routes for their military. The Fosse Way, fosse meaning ditch, ran along what was probably an early frontier between Lincoln and either Axminster or Exeter after the Roman invasion of AD43.

Watling Street began on the Kent coast and crossed the Thames at Westminster before traversing the country to Wroxeter, near to Shrewsbury. The monument on your left was erected in 1712 to commemorate the peace of Utrecht and replaced a beacon that had itself replaced an earlier cross. It originally had an orb and a cross mounted on four Doric columns but only the base remains after it was struck by lightning in 1791.

There was a Roman settlement here called Venonis (or Venonae) which covered the area where the two roads crossed. Several archaeological finds have been made including coins and Roman pottery. Several skeletons have also been unearthed in the vicinity of the monument, but these may well be the bodies of felons whose executed bodies were displayed in gibbets at key locations over the centuries as a warning to others.



High Cross



Fosse Meadows



Bumblebee Lane



Fosse Meadows

High Cross Monument

➤ Stay on this road and after 1km take the farm drive on your left to Bumblebee Farm. Keep straight on through the farmyard to the field. You may have to step over and under wires. Pass through a gap in the far hedge and then skirt the large field by the right-hand hedge, keeping the hedge on your right. Cross the stile and continue diagonally across the next field to Wigston Parva.

3 Wigston Parva



The settlement is hidden from major roads in the area, with a small number of buildings, clustered around the village green. The chapel, sited on slightly higher ground and dedicated to St. Mary is one of the smallest in Leicestershire and dates from at least 1160. The land surrounding the church belongs to one of the villagers so there is no graveyard, the dead of the village being buried at nearby Claybrook or Sharnford.

Shortly after the Roman invasion, a small fort of about two acres was constructed south of the hamlet on an ancient trackway. Built of wood, it was surrounded by raised banks and ditches. When Watling Street was constructed, the fort was demolished as it lay in the line of the new road.

Bumblebee Farm, which you came through, probably got its name from the bees that inhabited the mud walls that surrounded it when it was known as Bumble-bee Hall. According to an 1890's publication, there was a story told in Sharnford about a shepherd boy on the farm who overheard some thieves planning a burglary. He informed his master, and the thieves were apprehended but in revenge they skinned him alive.

➤ Follow the road out of the village and cross the B4114 through a gap in the hedge. Follow the hedge on your left until you see the footpath sign in the far-right hand corner of the field. Cross the bridge and the grassy mound. Cross another bridge and head towards the right-hand side of a small wood looking for a footpath sign in the hedge to your right. Keep following the signs until you reach Sharnford. Once you see houses, keep the hedge on your right. Turn right then left and follow the main road round the one-way system, crossing the road at The Bricklayers.

4 Sharnford



The Soar Brook passes through the village where a ford on the Leicester to Coventry road crossed it. The church of St Helen's, on the hill leading out of the village to the north, is mainly 15th century although it has been recently restored after a fire in 1984. The village once boasted three public houses of which the Bricklayers, formerly The Countryman and originally the New Inn, and the Sharnford Arms, previously the Old Star Inn, remain, the Blue Bell, opposite the Sharnford Arms disappeared some time ago and has been replaced with a village garden complete with village sign. White's 1863 directory mentions a meadow for the poor. The rent from the meadow went towards providing bread for those in reduced circumstances. Pools Meadow still exists and is now owned by Sharnford Parish Council who maintain it for the benefit of residents.