

Walk No 5: Wilford Village and Clifton Bridge

22nd May & 4th June 2020

The full walk is about 11km but can be shortened by returning from Wilford Village via the south side of the Trent.



From Musters Road, the route follows Walk No3 (option A) along Eton and Rugby Roads, turning right at the road to Rushcliffe Arena and then down the path to the left just before the Arena car park, then right and next left towards the first pond.

In early June, works were underway to build a new viewing platform and a new path around the back of the pond – always something new to see when out walking!



Continue along the path, going right and left over the little bridge and then cross Compton Acres road to the second pond – and yes, I had to stop and see how the goslings (seen on Walk No3) were doing.....they look very well and getting bigger!



After Lyme Park, cross the tram line at Compton Acres tramstop and go straight over the recreation park to Ruddington Lane and turn right.

A few houses along Ruddington Lane we come across another wild creature, asleep in a tree.....

The father of the household told me that, some time ago, his children and friends had a party in the front garden, to which Tiger was invited. He stayed outside overnight and unfortunately there was heavy rain and Tiger was too wet to be allowed into the house – so he has stayed in the tree ever since.



Continue along Ruddington Lane and cross Wilford Lane and onto Main Road, Wilford, and shortly we pass an interesting house – Hunters' Farm, a Grade II Listed building which dates to 1724.

Wilford has a number of interesting properties to look out for.

Wilford village was originally on both sides of the Trent – the Ancient Parish of Wilford included Wilford Village, Silverdale, Compton Acres, part of West Bridgford (mainly west of Loughborough Road) and parts of the Meadows. It takes its name from its principle founder and the ford (somewhat to the west of the existing crossing) connecting the two halves. The Domesday Book of 1086 lists the village as ‘Wilesforde,’ (or *Willan ford*, the ford of Willa) later corrupted to Wilfrid’s ford, a confusion resulting from the dedication of the parish church to St Wilfrid. At that time the land was owned by William Peverel of Nottingham Castle; it passed to the Clifton family in the 13th century.

Wilford’s history goes back much further, probably as a river crossing point since prehistoric times, with evidence of a Roman paved ford discovered in 1900. Because of the crossing, it would have been one of the first places of settlement in Nottingham – at a time when Nottingham was known as Snotingeham (and other spellings) or the earlier name of Tig Guocobauc (the dwelling of caves).

In 1877, by an Act of Parliament, the part north of the river was annexed to the Borough of Nottingham, leaving the old parish south of the river with the name Wilford (or South Wilford).

[For more history go to nottshistory.org.uk or nottinghamhiddenhistoryteam.wordpress.com]

As we continue along Main Road we pass, on the right, another interesting house (No36) with magnificent chimneys and its date in large roman numerals above the door - 1828



At this point we turn left, along Bell Lane, to the river and turn right alongside the flood bank/wall.

There are good views across the river, with empty fishing stands (the close season for coarse fishing on rivers runs from 15 March to 15 June). We will walk along there later.



Generally, this is a quieter section of the Trent than by Victoria Embankment but there is some activity - birds (more goslings) and boats (well, a board on this occasion)



Where the path re-joins Main Road, the flood defences are rather oppressive but are somewhat improved by the use of bee shapes in the fencing



The village regularly suffered from flooding and hence the need for protection. The wall and fence are relatively new but the bank, along which we are walking, is a much earlier flood defence. It is known as the Bee Bank, as indicated by the title of this old postcard; so named, it is said, because of the many bees that could be seen on the wild flowers that grew on the top of the bank. The most ancient ford crossed the river was at this point.

The white building on the right of the picture is Carter House, named after the Reverend Benjamin Carter, Rector of Wilford 1694-1732, and a great benefactor for the local community.



An endowment by Rev. Carter established Carter's Educational Foundation, the first priority of which is the running of South Wilford Endowed C of E Primary School. The Old School House is next door to Carter House.

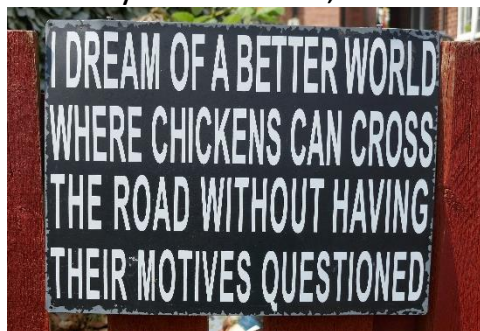


A little further along Main Road we pass, on the right, the Grade II Listed Dorothy Boot Homes. Paid for by Jesse Boot and named after his daughter, they were built in 1908 and consisted of 11 almshouses with a clubroom and library. Initially, residents were veterans of the Crimean War and Indian Mutiny and later (1920s onwards) mainly retired long-serving employees of Boots. They are now private homes.



A few yards further on we come to the village green and go left along St. Wilfrid's Church Drive – but first, take a look at the property on the right hand corner of the green – the front garden full of quirky items....

I particularly like this one, on the fence.



Turning down St. Wilfrid's Church Drive we pass other buildings associated with the Rev. Benjamin Carter. First, the Church Hall and Benjamin Carter Memorial Hall, named in his honour.





And then, to the right of the church, the Old Rectory, built by Carter in c.1720, with its barn, stables and dovecot.... all mainly hidden behind high walls and gate....so I must copy an old photo.



Saint Wilfreds Vicarage- Photo Credit: The Paul Nix Collection.

Through to St. Wilfrid's Church (sometimes written Wilfred) which is considered to have been founded by Gervase de Wilford in the late 14th century.



Go around to the left of the church, past a gazebo or summerhouse, built in 1757. At the time it had fine views across the River Trent, now hidden by trees. The basement was at one time used as a mortuary for river drownings.



The poet, Henry Kirke White (1785-1806), lived in Wilford in a now demolished cottage at the Wilford Lane /Ruddington Lane crossroads (near the Co-op). He drew inspiration for much of his poetry from Wilford and the surrounding area and wrote many of his poems in the gazebo, including this one:-

Here would I wish to sleep, this is the spot
Which I have long marked out to lay my bones in.
Tired out and wearied with the riotous world,
Beneath this yew would I be sepulchred.

He couldn't fulfil this wish as he died, aged just 21, whilst studying at Cambridge where he is buried; however, St Wilfrid's Church features two memorials to him - a marble plaque inside the nave and a memorial stained glass window. Also, a street in The Meadows is named Kirke White Court.



As you may have seen on a recent BBC East Midlands Today, another person buried in the churchyard was Captain John Deane, an adventurer and mercenary, who lived in the village. His ship The Nottingham Galley sank off the coast of Boon Island, New England in 1710. Deane and his crew, trapped on the island, were forced to cannibalise a corpse shortly before being rescued. Deane subsequently served in the Russian navy under Peter the Great, and retired to Wilford in 1736.

Exit the churchyard onto the track (Rectory Drive) leading to the Ferry Inn which has been a pub since the 18th century. It originated as a 14th century farmhouse and briefly operated as a coffee house during the 18th century fascination with coffee which swept Britain.



Not sure why cars were parked outside, as the current restrictions meant the pub was closed, so, sadly, no stop for a quick pint!

But, on the subject of parked cars, the car park diagonally opposite the Inn was built as part of the tram works. Hidden under the car park is a surface water run-off reservoir for use when the Trent is in flood – it comprises a honeycomb of hundreds of plastic moulds, like huge egg boxes piled 6 or 7 deep.

For those who have seen enough for one walk – a quick return can be made along the south side of the river....

...but for those who are content to continue, along a very different but interesting circuit, before returning, we must cross the river over Wilford Toll Bridge, locally referred to as the 'Halfpenny Bridge' from the original toll for pedestrians.

Before the bridge was built there was a ferry (hence the Ferry Inn), a little way upstream, given a charter during the reign of Edward III. The ferry moved to the present crossing location in the 16th century. It was a kind of flat-bottomed punt, originally hauled across the river by a system of ropes and pulleys attached to both banks, later adapted to using iron chains.

Due to increasing demand, a bridge, sanctioned by an Act of Parliament in 1862, was built and the old ferry stopped running on September 18th, 1864. The poet Henry Septimus Sutton wrote about the new bridge: *"an 'upstart' toll bridge opened in Wilford today ending 400 years of ferry crossing across the Trent at Wilford"*. He clearly felt strongly as his poem *"Wilford Boat"* (the ferry) includes:

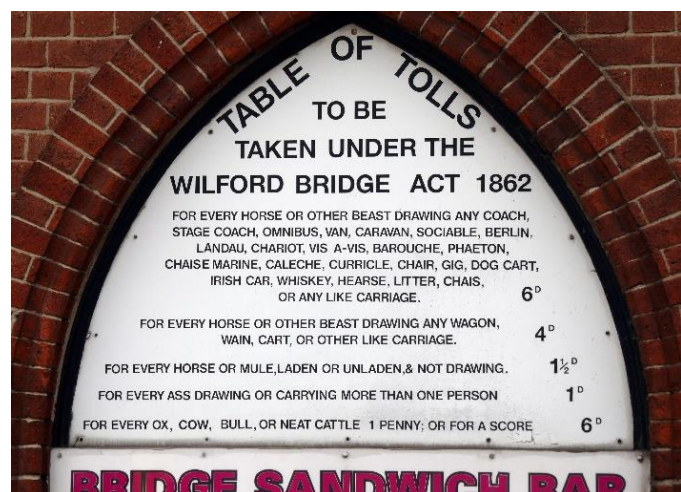
*Still an engine to convey
 Me across Trent's watery way?
 Still a moving bridge to glide
 Steadily from side to side?
Us with other voice than bell:
 So bid we this Boat farewell. —
 Farewell ! Aye, and dear to me
 Memory of this Boat shall be, —*

And the much repeated phrase:
*And the fates its final date
 To old age procrastinate ;
 Guarding safe its privileges
 From upstart usurping bridges.*

This first bridge was made of wood but was soon replaced by a cast iron bridge, completed in 1870 and paid for by Sir Robert Jukes-Clifton for traffic to his colliery being dug on the north side of the river (Clifton Colliery) – he didn't live to see the bridge (or the colliery) open, dying from typhus in 1869 – it is his statue that stands on the opposite embankment.



The cast iron bridge deteriorated over time and was closed to traffic in 1974. In 1980 the centre span of the bridge was demolished and replaced by a narrower foot bridge, of steel girders with an in-situ reinforced concrete deck slab. In 2014 NET required widening of the central portion from 5.65 metres to 12.2m and strengthening to allow a two-way tram system and a pedestrian and cycle path. The original rounded brick portals bearing the Clifton family moto 'Tenez le Droit', the arched abutments and toll house remain.



Today, the table of tolls displayed on the toll house does not include a charge for pedestrians which, according to the Act, was “*for foot passengers – ½ d*” – hence the 'Halfpenny Bridge' (about 25p in today’s money). Perhaps this is hidden by the new sign for the Sandwich Bar.

Once over the bridge, turn left on Riverside Way and left again at Queen’s Drive. Fifty years or so ago we would be walking along Colliery Road, alongside railway tracks. As we now pass the Riverside Retail Park we are passing the location of Clifton Colliery and the North Wilford Power Station



Clifton colliery and Wilford Power Station during the 1947 floods.



Clifton Colliery, in 1926 during the miners' strike.
Photos from a NottinghamshireLive article (8/7/2018)

Clifton Colliery was sunk in the mid-1800s by Sir Robert Jukes-Clifton, whose family owned a large estate, centred at Clifton Hall, since the late 13th century. Sir Robert gambled away much of the family’s fortunes and was forced to flee to France to escape his debtors. He eventually came home and followed in the family tradition of politics, standing for parliament and being elected MP for Nottingham in 1861. His financial position was improved when coal was discovered beneath the estate and in 1868 he began the building of Clifton Colliery ... but died before it opened. The pit thrived, especially with the opening, in the 1920s, of Wilford Power Station which would become its major customer. In 1947, because of its proximity to the power station and the need to maintain a continuous supply of fuel, Clifton Colliery became the first in the Notts coalfield to be nationalised.

The underground works spread over a wide area, including much of West Bridgford, and the possibility of subsidence became an issue for property owners as far away as the higher parts of Musters, Harrow and Repton Roads; I recently saw a property Deed dated 1924 with reference to a “Deep Hard Seam of Coal”, rights to mine for The Clifton Colliery Co Ltd and matters regarding subsidy and compensation. In the 1950s, some houses in West Bridgford suffered severe damage as a result of coal subsidence. The pit closed in July 1968 but North Wilford Power Station continued to serve the national grid for another decade before it was demolished in the 1980s.



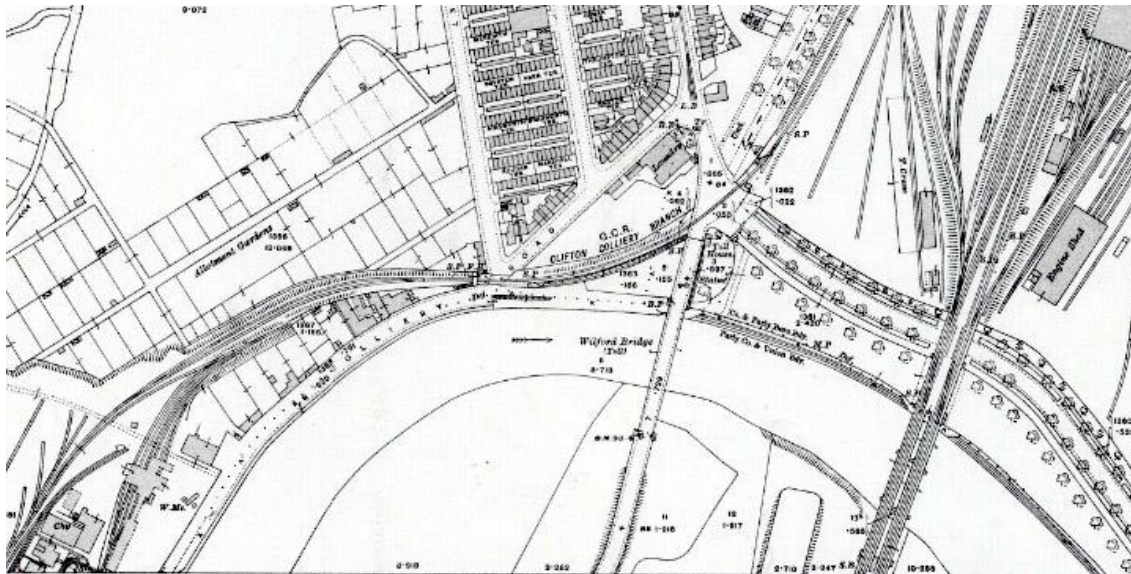
This aerial photo from 1928 shows Wilford Power Station, Clifton Colliery and Wilford Church. At the top right is Wilford Toll Bridge. Although much of the colliery output went direct (on a conveyor belt) to the power station, there were also rail links for transporting the coal elsewhere.

Photo: Britain from Above

Railways dominated this part of Nottingham, with the colliery linked (in a northwest direction) to the line to Derby and (to the northeast) to the Great Central Railway which, until the 1960s, crossed the Trent just east of Wilford Toll Bridge on its way to Nottingham Victoria Station



Map 1950



Map 1913

The industrialisation of the north bank of the Trent would have significantly changed the view from the gazebo at Wilford church – which might have upset Henry Kirke White had he been alive. Perhaps the changed view resulted in the planting of many trees around the church and village, which now obscure our view across the Trent towards the village -



At this sign for The Big Track, turn left along a path close to the river.



This path is part of the Trent Valley Way which extends for 84 miles

through Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire and which the Trent Rivers Trust hopes will eventually extend to 170 miles from the Trent's source near Stoke on Trent to the Humber – so if you want a longer walk!



Once on this path, traffic noise fades and our view is trees and the river



And then we reach Clifton Bridge, which was formally opened on June 5, 1958 by Princess Alexandra. A second, parallel bridge, to the west, was opened in 1972, thus making the crossing dual carriageway. When built, the first structure was the longest (275ft) pre-stressed concrete bridge in the country.



First bridge under construction 1957....

Photos from a NottinghamshireLive article (7/2/2020)



...and the second bridge and flyovers under construction 1972....

....and now

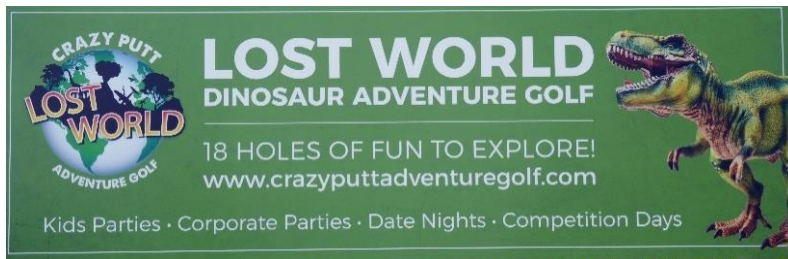


Looking the other way, the view is less elegant, due to the ongoing repair works to corroded steelwork.



When these urgent works started in February, lane restrictions over the bridge caused serious traffic delays. Many commuters and others looked for alternatives – bus and tram use went up as people decided these modes were better than the car – a positive move for the future?...but then, Coronavirus, lockdown and ‘social distancing’ – oh dear!

Our walk turns right under the bridge, along Lenton Lane, past Restaurant Sat Bains (currently closed) on the left, then past the road to a golf course, the sign to which seems to sum up the situation...



...lockdown meant **golf**, **parties** and **date nights** were all banned; just an **adventure** from a **lost world**, all was **crazy** and you feel a bit of a **dinosaur**!

Just before the roundabout, go sharp right, up the cycle and pedestrian path and....

...onto the path across the bridge – seen nowand how it was in 1958



There is a great view up the Trent from the bridge – Sat Bains’ building showing through the trees on the right and Clifton in the distance on the left.



At the other end of the bridge, the path goes down to Clifton Lane. Go right at the bottom, under the bridge, and continue along Clifton Lane, past Wilford House, the Grade II Listed building from 1781, now offices. According to Wikipedia, Wilford House was built by Samuel Smith, one of six sons of Abel Smith II, a wealthy Nottingham banker and MP and grandson of Thomas Smith, the founder of Smith’s Bank, believed to be the first UK bank to be formed outside London. All six of Abel Smith’s sons have been described as “wealthy Nottingham banker and MP [for various constituencies across the UK]”. The 3rd son, Robert, later becoming Baron Carrington.



To complete the walk back to Musters Road, continue either via Wilford Lane and Melton Road or back through Compton Acres.