

This walk is one of 20 described in a book by Brian Waites "Village Walks in Leicestershire and Rutland" Published by Countryside Books, 1998 ISBN 1 85306 525 0

Shackerstone means literally 'the settlement of the robbers'. Certainly, even today, there is a sense of isolation about the place. The headwaters of the river Sence flow from east of the village and in that area there are now no roads. To the west, the Gopsall Hall estate has also isolated the village. Access is from Congerstone in the south and Newton Burgoland in the north. The arrival of the Ashby de la Zouch Canal in the 1790s and the railway in 1873, though linking Shackerstone with the outside world, nevertheless maintained the isolation on the eastern side by cutting off local contacts there. Now these once busy thoroughfares are quiet. The Ashby Canal is devoted to leisure pursuits and the railway is limited to use as the Battlefield Line to Shenton, near the Bosworth Battlefield. Yet in Saxon times this area may have been more regionally important, for Congerstone means 'king's town' and nearby is Carlton, 'ceorls tun' ('freeman's town'). There may have been a royal palace in Congerstone, with the king's freemen living at nearby Carlton. Just south is Wellsborough with its temple sites, and Gopsall means 'serfs' hill', showing how even today Saxon social structure may be reflected in place-names.

Shackerstone is well worth a stroll around, with the original 15th-century tower of St Peter's and the nearby Rising Sun together forming a lovely scene. The view from the road bridge over the canal marina should not be missed. You will see from this vantage point a large mound which may be the remains of the castle. The railway station served Gopsall Hall and many famous people, including Edward VII, arrived there for the hunting or shooting seasons. Now it is the start of the Battlefield Line. The Hall, one of the finest Georgian houses in the county, was built between 1747 and 1760 by Charles Jennens, also known as 'Solyman the Magnificent' because he was so rich and had such a lavish lifestyle. There had been a village and church here which disappeared - perhaps when the Hall was built? Amongst the many well-known visitors was Handel, who composed part of the *Messiah* here. Arthur Mee commented on the 'glorious avenue of beeches and chestnuts from the village to the Hall'. Gopsall Hall was demolished in 1951.

The walk starts in Shackerstone and follows the Ashby Canal towpath for about 2½ miles. A diversion may be made to Congerstone, if you wish. It is a pretty village, and St Mary's was restored by Earl Howe of Gopsall Hall in the 1830s. The route touches the edge of Carlton, where the church of St Andrew was rebuilt in brick on a stone plinth in 1764 and 'gothicized' by Goddard in 1867; it was described by Hoskins as 'an ugly Victorian building of no merit'. The walk crosses the fields to Shackerstone station, with good views over the railway from the bridge there.

THE WALK

1. Pass the Rising Sun on your right and go to the end of the road. Turn right to reach the canal bridge. Take the path on your left to join the towpath. Walking south along the Ashby Canal is most pleasant -you will see narrow boats and gentle countryside in every direction. The route follows the canal for about 2½ miles. If you wish, you can make a diversion to Congerstone at bridge 49.

2. Continue on the towpath until you reach bridge 44. Turn off the towpath to the right, onto the road. Turn left over the bridge along the lane past the junction and under the railway bridge ahead on the road to Carlton.

3. Fifty yards beyond the 30mph signs, turn left over a stile at a footpath sign. Cross to the gate opposite and then make for the marker post ahead. Cross a stile and walk 20 yards right to another stile (on the Leicestershire Round). Cross this stile and then continue ahead alongside a hedge. Cross a stile and plank bridge, then walk ahead to the next marker post and stile. Bear left through a gap into a field, then right to a marker post, a stile and a plank

bridge. Go ahead across an arable field to a stile, then follow a well-marked route via stiles to the edge of the wood to your left, which is on the road to Barton in the Beans.

4. Cross the road, bearing left over the next field to the corner of a wood (marker post). Then cross a stile and turn left over the next stile ahead. The railway station is in front of you. Go to the marker post at the bridge. Cross over the bridge, then turn right to follow the wide track alongside the canal. At the main road turn left back to Shackerstone.