



Rutland Discovery Trails

7. Forgotten Rutland Trail

Although Rutland itself is such a small area, it still has its forgotten corners. If you live in the east, around Great Casterton or Clipsham perhaps you consider that Caldecott, Braunston and Whissendine are almost in a foreign country. Do you ever reach these places? Why should you? Our idea of Rutland may well be determined by where we live.

Most Raddlemen, however, live west of the Great North Road or A1, and so to them the extreme east is unknown Rutland. They should venture there more often for this sub-region, only six miles long and four miles wide has many remarkable features.

First, it's landscape is different and, indeed, rather more scenic than many other parts of Rutland. Rolling hills, set close together with large patches of old woodland like Pickworth Great Wood, Clipsham Park Wood and Woolfox Wood provide an attractive aspect. To the south, the rivers Gwash and Glen glide gently through Great and Little Casterton, Ryhall, Belmesthorpe and Essendine. Not far away are the flat Fens which are a contrast. Centuries ago in the time of Hereward the Wake, Lord of Bourne, the coastline would reach almost to Essendine.

Secondly, remote Rutland is steeped in history, as its landscape shows. The Roman fort can still be deciphered in the fields opposite Casterton College and, of course, here was the original line of Ermine Street, now after several fluctuations, called the A1. Essendine has the motte and bailey of a castle hiding behind the church, once perhaps the so-called Woodhead Castle south of Pickworth. In 1543 'the manor there hath heretofore been a proper house standing upon high ground and wholesome soil, moated round about... the said manor house or place is now in great ruin and decay'.

Lost villages are freely scattered around and there may be more for you to discover. Woodhead was a settlement but how and why did it vanish? Hardwick Farm and Hardwick Cottages are the memory of a lost village of that name, close by the A1. Was it really destroyed never to recover after the Battle of Losecoat Field in 1470? Legend says that Pickworth and Horn too may have gone at the same time. However, this was also the great period of desertions due to enclosure for pasture and sheep farming. It is likely that already shrunken villages were just finished off by the battle.

Today, Pickworth is a large Parish with little in it. Manor Farm, the 19th Century church and a few houses are all that remains of a larger village. The arch in the field gives testimony of a disappearing heritage. Stocken Hall too, beyond Stretton, lies in a large park on the site of a lost village. Was the Hall and park the cause of the vanishing village? Built in the 17th century it is now several residential properties.

Bloody Oaks (between Tickencote and Horn) marks one of our very few battles, fought between Edward IV and Rebels during the Wars of the Roses. So anxious were the latter to escape that they left their coats behind, seeking a quicker departure. Woolfox Lodge and Wood remind us of the World War II airfield once located there. The landscape has levelled 1470 and 1940.

The Clipsham Yew Tree Avenue, along with the main line railway striking through Essendine corner and brilliant Stamford only a few miles away all ass to the variety of remote Rutland. Our land between the Great North Road and the Fens deserves a visit...

Take the A606 out of Oakham towards Stamford. At the top of Barnsdale hill turn left towards Exton. Along this road you will see a sign for Rutland Falconry and Owl Centre and pass Barnsdale Gardens, great excursions for all the family. **Take the right after Barnsdale Gardens towards Exton.** Before reaching the village, go down to the church in the grounds of the park. On Church Lane, note the ruin of the old hall burnt down in 1810. Inside the church see some of the most renowned monuments in all Britain, including a Grinling Gibbons marble carving.

Exton Hall stands splendid behind in its beautiful parkland. Look around the beautiful thatched village, call into the Fox & Hounds if in need of refreshment. North of the village you will find Queen of Bohemia's Avenue of trees, a reminder of her link with the Harington's, Rutland's most important family of the 16th century. [Sir John Harington was created Baron Harington at the coronation of King James I of England. This elevation became a mixed blessing when he was made guardian of James' daughter, Elizabeth. The high cost of entertaining her, without a suitable allowance, ruined him. He minted his own money, made of brass, but this was valueless, leading to the saying "not worth a brass farthing". The princess married the Elector Palatine to become "Queen of Bohemia". Lord Harington accompanied her to Bohemia, but died on his way back. The avenue of trees, still known today as the "Queen of Bohemia's Ride", is in the historic Tunneley wood and leads to Fort Henry, a magical mock-gothic fishing folly.]



Back out of the village and take a left on the bend an then the first left making your way to Tickencote. Keep going straight over the cross roads until you get near the A1. Turn right for Tickencote to see one of the finest chancel arches in England.

Go back out the village and right for Great Casterton (if you want to take a look at the land markings depicting a Roman fort take a left up Ryhall Road and stop by the college, then come back on yourself to continue the trail). The Church of St Peter and St Paul has some interesting carvings and medieval wall paintings, this was where local poet John Clare was married in 1820.

John Clare and Patty Turner of the Vale met in this country, at Brig Casterton (the former name of Great Casterton). She was a black-haired daughter of the smallholder of Walkherd Farm. John had spent some time working in the Pickworth, Ryhall, Casterton area as a lime burner. We might fittingly apply his words to remote Rutland:
*'Hail, scenes obscure! so near and dear to me,
The church, the brook, the cottage and the tree
Still shall obscurity rehearse the song, and hum your beauties as I stroll along.
Dear, native spot! Which length of time endears'*

Continue out of the village and take a left for Little Casterton, when you get to the village T junction, take a right. Even in this small village we can find another treasure, Tolethorpe Hall, set in lovely grounds and home to The Stamford Shakespeare Company and their excellent open-air productions every summer.
Continue out of Little Casterton and take a left then right for Ryhall.

Drive through Ryhall which also has a beautiful church **and take a right by the pub onto Bridge Street** crossing the Grade II listed bridge over the River Gwash. **Turn right then left at the T junction to Essendine.** Drive to the end of the village to find St Mary's Church, which was originally the chapel for the nearby castle (see the earthworks and motte behind). The chancel is unusual as it is taller than the nave, due to it having been rebuilt in the early 19 century. The superb south doorway has a Norman arch with a carved tympanum with a motif more usual in France than in England. **Drive back through the village and take a right to Pickworth and follow the signs to Clipsham** (if you wish to visit Pickworth, do this first then onto Clipsham).

Quarries and world-famous stone at Clipsham made that name well-known far outside our own boundaries. Though those days of glory may be gone forever, the signs in the landscape to the south of the village are there to be seen. So too are the wonderful buildings in the village and in other settlements in the area. Nowadays Clipsham is well known for the Michelin Starred gastro-pub 'The Olive Branch'. Why not stop and have a stroll down Clipsham Yew Tree Avenue, there are more than 150, 20ft yew trees clipped to commemorate occasions, animals and people.



Go west out of the village towards Stretton and follow the signs back to Oakham to complete the trail.

Useful Contact Information:

Bloody Oaks nature reserve: <http://lrwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/bloody-oaks-quarry/>
Follow the A606 for about 3 km towards the A1. The reserve is east of the road at the northern edge of a large block of woodland adjoining the road. Cars should be parked on the wide roadside verge opposite the reserve entrance.

Clipsham Yew Tree Avenue: www.forestry.gov.uk

A remarkable collection of clipped yew trees. The car park is set in a quiet open area on the edge of the wood, providing year round parking and access to the avenue. One mile north-east of Clipsham village

Rutland Falconry & Owl Centre: www.rutland-falconry.com

This little corner of British countryside, has become a sought after location for all manner of wildlife, home to over 200 birds of prey, plus much more. Open every day from 10am (closed from 4pm in the winter).

Barnsdale Gardens, Exton: 01572 813200 www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk

Built by Geoff Hamilton for BBC Gardeners World, the selection of over 38 beautiful gardens are open 363 days a year (closed December 24th & 25th).

Tolethorpe Hall, Little Casterton: www.stamfordshakespeare.co.uk

A wonderful theatre experience, the stage being open to the elements but the audience are covered. The house is not generally open to the public.

The Olive Branch, Clipsham: 01780 410355 www.theolivebranchpub.com

A popular pub with many awards, pre-booking is recommended. Open every day.

