

RUTLAND HERITAGE TRAIL

ROMANS, ROSES

DISTANCE: Allow three to five hours for the longer walk (10½ miles), two to three hours for the shorter route (4½ miles).

START & FINISH: The longer walk begins and ends in Great Casterton. For the shorter route, start and finish in Pickworth.

TERRAIN: Mixture of road walking and bridleways through fields (generally firm walking surfaces).

REFRESHMENTS: The Crown in Great Casterton

Woolfox Golf and Country Club

The Horse & Jockey, Manton

MAP DETAILS: This route is covered by the Ordnance Survey Explorer Series Numbers 15 (234) & 224.

TO THE NORTH-EAST OF RUTLAND, CLOSE TO THE BORDER WITH LINCOLNSHIRE, THE ROADS AND BRIDLEWAYS OF PICKWORTH AND GREAT CASTERTON ECHO WITH THE SOUND OF THE FOOTSTEPS OF PAST TRAVELLERS – A HISTORY OF ROMANS, ROSES AND POETS.

Nearly two thousand years ago, the invading Roman army made its way northwards along the route of Ermine Street, pausing in Great Casterton to build a camp to protect a strategic bridge over the River Gwash.

Many hundreds of years later, soldiers were to march this way again. Two medieval armies, bearing the red and white roses of Lancaster and York, met at the **Battle of Losecoat Field**.

The Wars of the Roses came to Rutland in March 1470 when King Edward IV's Yorkist

army, travelling along the Great North Road to put down a rebellion in Lincolnshire, encountered an army of Lancastrian rebels as he neared Stamford.

Following a barrage of Royal cannon, the rebel army broke ranks and fled, whereupon they were followed and cut down by the King's men. Many of the Lancastrian soldiers were wearing distinctive uniforms or surcoats and their hurry to discard these identifying garments as they fled is the origin behind the battle's name – that of 'Losecoat Field'.

Legend says that the medieval village of Pickworth was destroyed following the nearby battle. Records from the time do show that it was a large village in the 13th and 14th centuries, but by 1491 it was 'empty'. It is more likely however, that Pickworth had already been depopulated due to the great land enclosures of the time, and that the nearby battle was simply the final nail in the coffin.



AND POETS

At the beginning of the 19th century, an army of a different kind made its way to the quarries and limekilns of Pickworth. Labourers and limeburners came from far and wide to work here, and included the Northamptonshire 'peasant poet' John Clare.

The tower and steeple of the medieval church remained standing until the early 1700s. Today the site of the village is marked by an isolated medieval arch set amongst irregular bumps and hollows to the east and south-east of Pickworth's **All Saints' Church**, which was built in 1821.

THE WALK

These directions assume you choose to begin and end this figure-of-eight walk in **Great Casterton** (a distance of just over 10 miles). Also shown is a shorter route visiting **Pickworth** and **Losecoat Field** battle site.

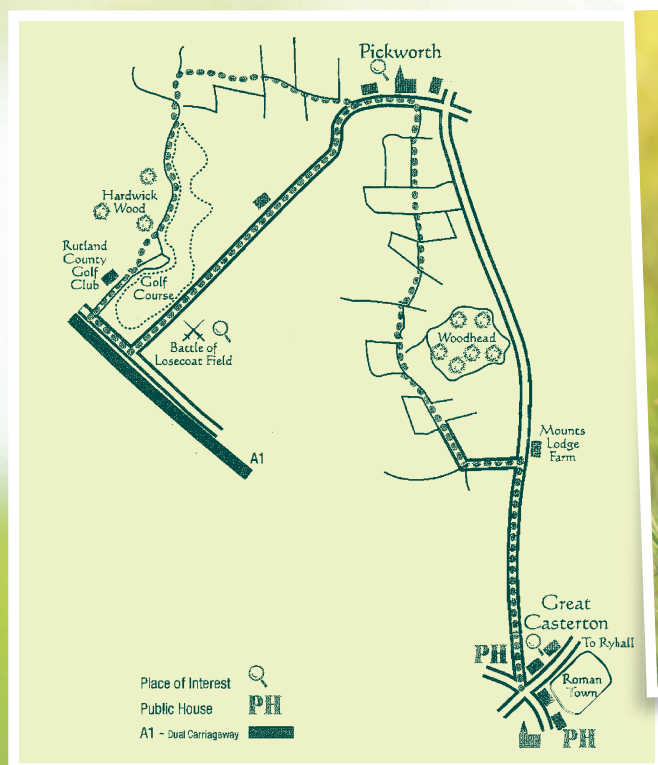
Take Pickworth Road out of Great Casterton and once past the houses, walk along the road, heading slightly uphill for about a mile until you reach Mounts Lodge Farm to the right. Take the brideway opposite, continue for a short distance until you take a right turn to stay on the brideway rather than carrying straight along a farm track. From here on, the brideway varies between grassy tracks and stony paths, with the trees of **Woodhead** visible to your right.

As you continue along the brideway, to your right are the heavily overgrown remains of Eayres Lodge. You may spot the apple trees that were once part of its gardens.

Shortly after this, the stone path becomes a grassy track once more. Keep the field boundary/hedge to your right and leave the trees of Woodhead behind. Continue along the track keeping the hedge line to your right. Veer slightly to the left and follow the brideway round the left-hand side of the field.

WOODHEAD CASTLE

To the south of Woodhead are the remains of a defended medieval moated site called **Woodhead Castle**. Described in the 1600s as *'Woodhead, formerly a village and chapel, now only one house and that in ruins'*, the surviving earthworks include a roughly square moat surrounding a wide platform containing substantial building foundations. Please note that this is Private Property.



RUTLAND HERITAGE TRAIL



Pickworth's limestone houses will start to come into view ahead of you now; another break in the hedge takes you onto the final stretch of bridleway down into the village, where you emerge into the road opposite All Saints church. You may wish to explore this 19th century building before continuing your walk.

For those wanting a shorter walk, this is where you start:

From Pickworth church, head west out of the village, following the road. Once you have passed the Manor House, look out for a small clearing (on the right) that contains the restored limekiln where the 19th century 'peasant poet' John Clare worked as a limeburner in the early 1800s

(he also worked in Great Casterton). In 1820, John Clare married a local girl, Patty (Martha) Turner, in Great Casterton church.

Continue along this road, climbing upward and across a cattle-grid into open pasture fields. On the right are the earthwork and stone remains of the small hamlet of Top Pickworth, abandoned in the 1920s. Cross another cattle grid to return to the hedged roadway that leads to the A1; the Great North Road. After another mile and a half, with the golf course on the right, you will reach a junction. To your left is the site of the **Battle of Losecoat Field**.

At the junction, turn right (walking along the grass verge) and follow the signs for Hardwick Farm and Woolfox Lodge. After 500 yards, turn right into the

Woolfox Golf and Country Club. Continue past the golf club buildings to a tarmac lane with houses on the left.

After the last house, head left through a gateway and walk diagonally across this field, towards the golf course. The track skirts the edge of the golf course with hedges and trees to your left.

Continue until you reach the top left-hand corner of the golf course, where you need to look out for a gate in the hedge line to your left. Go through this into the field and then turn right following the field boundary on the right. Once you reach the end of the hedge line, continue straight ahead, following the grass track through the field.

BLOODY OAKS

On the other side of the Great North Road is a woodland known as 'Bloody Oaks'. There is a legend that this wood is so-called because of the bloodshed that took place here as part of the Battle of Losecoat Field. However, on a map of 1645 the wood is shown as 'Royal Wood'. More probably, the wood became known as Bloody Oaks following the execution of John Bowland, a highwayman, at Empingham corner in 1769.



"LOOK OUT FOR A SMALL CLEARING THAT CONTAINS THE RESTORED LIMEKILN WHERE THE 19TH CENTURY 'PEASANT POET' JOHN CLARE WORKED AS A LIMEBURNER IN THE EARLY 1800S"

As you approach a marker post, there is a bridleway to the right, cutting straight across the field. Take this, keeping **Pickworth Great Wood** on your left until you reach the field boundary. Here the bridleway curves to the left. At a gap in the hedge line, take the stone trackway to the right. With the field boundary on your left, follow this path back to the roadway where you should turn left to return into Pickworth village.

End of shorter walk

From here, you can return to Great Casterton by retracing your steps along the bridleway opposite the church or by continuing through the village to the crossroads and taking the right-hand turn to walk back along the Pickworth Road. Either route will take you back to your starting point.

In Great Casterton, take some time to view the substantial remains of the Roman town. The earthwork remains of the town defences can be seen in the fields next to Bridge Farm, about 200 yards along Ryhall Road on the right-hand side. Excavations have revealed the extent of the fort and town as well as the existence of a villa to the north, the finds of which are in **Rutland County Museum** in Oakham.



ROMAN CASTERTON

The Romans erected a fort at Great or Bridge Casterton shortly following the invasion of A.D. 43. It protected a strategic crossing of the River Gwash and lay alongside the Roman Road, Ermine Street. The fort was in use for around 30 years, after which a Roman staging post or 'Mansio' was established.

The first civilian settlement probably grew up to serve the needs of the fort and then served as a local market town. In the late 2nd century, the town was enclosed by a great stone wall and ramparts. The site was re-defended with new corner bastions and a deeper ditch in the second half of the 4th century, and occupation of the town continued well into the 400s.

SAFER WALKING

- Be prepared – wear suitable clothing and sturdy footwear, take refreshments and directions
- Respect the countryside – take care in crops and be considerate of livestock
- Take care when crossing or walking on roadways and walk facing oncoming traffic
- Fasten all gates, keep dogs under close control and guard against fire
- Please show consideration to village residents by parking cars responsibly and making sure all dog mess is appropriately cleared away
- Remember to take nothing but photos and leave nothing but footprints!

