

# Bilborough's Story

St Martin's Lane, c.1920

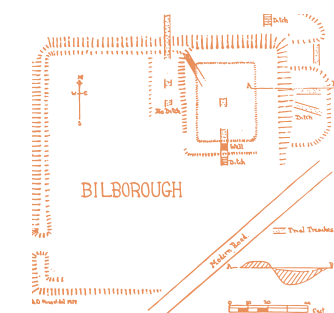
Welcome to Bilborough, where you'll discover an amazing hidden history tucked away amidst modern housing estates. This leaflet will be your guide as you explore our streets and our fascinating past.

Bilborough has very deep roots. Our story stretches back into the mists of the Dark Ages, when Saxon settlers founded a village close to a spring. The village developed gradually over hundreds of years until suddenly, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it

became a suburb of Nottingham. But despite all the changes in recent decades, Bilborough retains a distinct identity and a strong sense of community. Some of Bilborough's historic landmarks and buildings survive amongst modern developments, whilst others have disappeared completely. But if you know where to look it's still possible to catch glimpses of the old village, and to imagine what life was like here all those years ago.

## NORMAN NEWCOMERS

In 1066 the Normans seized control of England. Twenty years later, in 1086, Domesday Book recorded that a Norman, William Peverel, held Bilborough as a tenant-in-chief of the king, William the Conqueror. He commanded nine men in Bilborough, and held eight acres of meadows. Medieval Bilborough was part of Sherwood Forest. Domesday Book doesn't mention a church in Bilborough, so perhaps the villagers were still worshipping outdoors in 1086 or the church wasn't paying any taxes. We know that Martinmass was a special festival in Bilborough in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, and by 1200 Bilborough had its first recorded

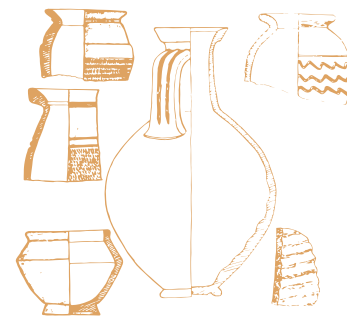


Bilborough medieval manor house

priest, known simply as Hugh. There may have been a wooden church at that time.

The Strelley Family at Strelley Hall may have built the fortified manor house that stood just to the north east of the church in the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and now lies buried beneath the 1960s housing estate. An excavation in 1939 revealed a fortified rectangular building within a rectangular earthwork enclosure.

## THE ROMAN ROAD



Roman pottery finds from Broxtowe

Around 2,000 years ago, Roman soldiers tramped along a military trackway that ran from a fort at nearby Broxtowe, through Bilborough, to a strategically important crossing of the River Trent near Attenborough.

The trackway is believed to have passed just south of where St Martin's Church stands today, possibly behind the houses on Chingford Road.

The Romans invaded Britain in AD 43. The Roman fort at Broxtowe seems to have been built not long afterwards around AD 50-75. The fort protected the trackway and the nearby river crossing from guerilla attacks by local Celtic tribespeople, the Corieltavi, and enabled the Romans to control this area.

The site of Broxtowe Fort was discovered in 1937, during the building of Broxtowe Housing Estate. Archaeologists excavated the fort and found many Roman artefacts, including coins and pottery. The remains of a Roman villa with a hypocaust (an underfloor heating system) were also found at the top of Beechdale Road.

## SAXON SETTLERS

The Roman army withdrew from Britain in around 410, leaving the island undefended. Slowly at first, and then in greater numbers, Saxons from northern Europe began to cross the North Sea and settle in what we now call England. They settled in Bilborough in around the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

The Saxons probably chose this spot because they found a spring that provided a reliable supply of fresh water. They were pagan farmers, craftsmen and warriors who believed in many gods, and they gave their new village the name it still has today. Bilborough means 'the fortified settlement of the Billa' or 'Billa's people'.



The site of the hidden spring

The natural spring and pond remained until the 1960s housing estate was built to the North of the church, they are now buried beneath grass and shrubs on St Michael's Ave. Water from this stream still runs into the cellar of the old Farmhouse

Around the 8<sup>th</sup> century the people of Bilborough probably abandoned their pagan gods and converted to Christianity. They may have worshipped outdoors around a stone cross.



## DISCOVER HIDDEN TREASURES A WALK THROUGH BILBOROUGH'S HISTORY



## VILLAGE LIFE



Thomas Barber 1738 – 1818

The medieval part of St Martin's Church was built between around 1350 - 1450, using sandstone that was probably quarried to the west of today's Woodhouse Way in an area known as Stonepit Plantation. The church stood on the highest ground in the area, making it a prominent landmark for many miles around.

Bilborough was an important coal mining area. You can still see remains of the old bell pits on undeveloped

areas of the estate and the outline of the raised embankment that carried the first horse drawn railway from Strelley, through Bilborough to Wollaton.

Life in Bilborough changed very little for hundreds of years. The villagers continued to farm the land and coal mining continued under the Barber Family. The black metal bars on the forge, the Sheila Russell Centre and the Farmhouse possibly prevented the buildings from becoming unstable due to mining subsidence.

In 1853 there were 255 inhabitants and a village school with a small playground was founded in 1872.

## FROM SLEEPY VILLAGE TO CITY SUBURB

The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought huge changes to Bilborough. By 1921 its population had fallen to 188, but all that was about to change, as thousands of new homes were built on the outskirts of Nottingham, and the city began expanding to the west.

In the 1940s residents of Bilborough Village were moved to new council houses, their small cottages used to billet American servicemen. Although the Forge and Church Farm remained in use until the early 1950s this marked the end of village life in Bilborough.

Thousands of new homes were built in Bilborough between the late-1940s and the mid-1960s. Farms became community centres, first Manor



Chingford Road

Farm, then Church Farm became the Sheila Russell Centre. The 'centre' of Bilborough moved to the new shops, library and pub on Bracebridge Drive.

In the 1980s the Player School playing fields on Strelley Road disappeared under the Bridge Green bungalows and a new supermarket. A new industrial estate was built on the site of Chilwell Dam Farm.

## HIDDEN TREASURES BILBOROUGH HISTORY WALK



- Car Parking is available at St Martin's Church
- The church is a short walk from a bus stop. Catch bus number 77 or 35 and get off at the Rose Pub
- Find us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/stmartinsbilborough](http://www.facebook.com/stmartinsbilborough)
- Follow us on Twitter @StMartinsBilb
- St Martin's Church, St Martin's Road, Bilborough, Nottingham, NG8 3BH
- [www.stmartinsbilborough.org.uk](http://www.stmartinsbilborough.org.uk)



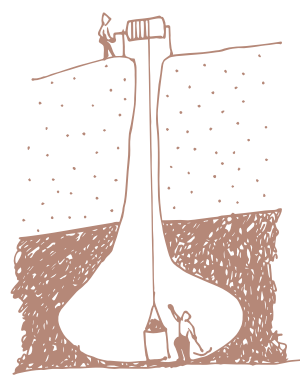




Courtesy of Nottinghamshire County Council & www.picturethepast.org.uk

## 8. PILGRIMS' ROUTE

Strelley Road was probably a Saxon trackway. After Lenton Priory was founded in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century pilgrims or monks may have used this route, travelling from Nottingham to Dale Abbey in Derbyshire.



## 9. FILLED-IN 'BELL PITS'

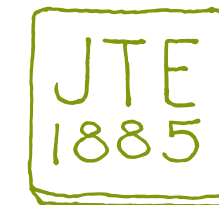
'Bell pits' were large bell-shaped craters where people used to mine coal by hand. This kind of coal mining was first recorded in 1545, but probably began in Nottingham as early as 1300.



Courtesy of Reg Baker & www.picturethepast.org.uk

## 10. FORGE COTTAGE

Forge Cottage was probably built before 1800. It was the smithy where Bilborough's village blacksmith had his workshop. From this location he could serve both the local community and travellers on the road between Nottingham and Strelley.

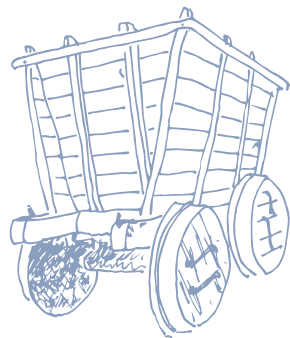


## 11. A FARMING VILLAGE

See if you can find the Elms off Moor Road. Nearby, cowsheds formally stood on the site of the Rose Pub. Further along Strelley Road notice The Mount Cottages and Manor Farm. Manor Farm still bares the plaque of the former landowner, T. W. Edge, who resided at Strelley Hall. Return to Bilborough over Chingford Field (turn at Westbury School).

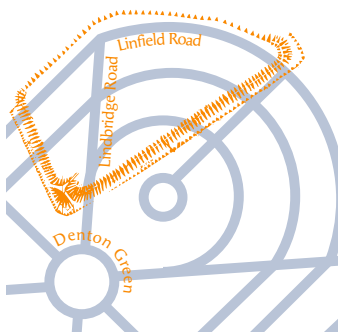
## 12. THE FARMHOUSE & TOWLE MEMORIAL GARDEN

As you return to St Martin's Road, enjoy the quiet of this lovely garden named after the family who lived at Church Farm, many of their names recorded on gravestones in the churchyard.



## 7. BRITAIN'S FIRST RAILWAY

Between 1604 and 1618 coal mined in Strelley was transported in horse-drawn wooden wagons along a two-mile length of wooden track through Bilborough to Wollaton. This was the first 'railway' in Britain, invented by Huntingdon Beaumont.



Position of the Roman fort at Broxtowe

## 6. COVENTRY LANE

Coventry Lane originally followed the line of a Roman military trackway. Its surface was uneven, and carts often got bogged down in bad weather. In the early 1800s the land was enclosed into fields, and Coventry Lane was diverted to a more reliable route now known as Bilborough Road.

## 5. POST-WAR HOUSING

Bilborough changed forever after the Second World War. Thousands of new brick and prefabricated homes were built here, rapidly turning the old village into a suburb of Nottingham.



Courtesy of Reg Baker & www.picturethepast.org.uk

## 4. ST MARTIN'S VICTORIAN RECTORY

The Victorian rectory was built in 1842 as a home for the Rector (Priest) of Bilborough and Strelley. Priests continued to live here until 1979, when a modern rectory was built.



Courtesy of Reg Baker & www.picturethepast.org.uk

## 3. THE MANOR HOUSE

Opposite the church and either side of the path beside the council houses. (see Norman Newcomers)

## 2. ST MARTIN'S COTTAGES

St Martin's Cottages are the earliest surviving homes of Old Bilborough. They were built of Flemish-style brickwork in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the roofs were probably originally thatched.



## 1. ST MARTIN'S CHURCH

The medieval church is the oldest building in Bilborough, it was built between 1350 - 1450 There was a

major restoration in 1887-89 and a modern extension added in 1972. The medieval church was restored between 2011 - 2014. Revealed Annunciation murals by Evelyn Gibbs show Church Farm in 1946. Thomas Helwys of Broxtowe Hall, founder of the Baptist Church and friend to the Pilgrim Fathers, was married at St Martin's.

## HIDDEN HISTORY KEY

- ❖ Site of Chilwell Dam Farm
- ♣ Old Police Station
- ✕ Location of spring & pond
- ◆ Site of Stonepit Plantation
- Route of Wagenway
- Route of Roman trackway

