

North Muskham Stroll

(St Wilfrid's Church [OS Ref: SK798586] to Dickinson's Way [Ref: SK797595])

As the school holidays approach, I thought it might be fun for readers to have a little adventure around North Muskham, observing things that might have passed you by. The stroll is a circular walk and stretches from St Wilfrid's Church on Main Street to the wildlife lake at Dickinson Way, taking the riverside route. The return is along Main Street, pointing out various features. The way is all fairly level, even, and easy going.

Start on Main Street, outside St Wilfrid's church, walk up the church path, straight past the door, and down the gentle slope to the field beyond. As you go, ponder why the graveyard is at the front of the church rather than the more normal location behind and beside. You could further ponder why graveyards tend to be at a higher level than the surrounding land, though that is a little macabre.

At the field edge, you should be on a mown pathway with a stream beyond. You will be turning left, towards the Muskham Ferry Inn.

This pathway is the south end of Ferry Road, leading to the point where the last ferryman rowed passengers across the river to Holme. Before you head off, look to the right where a small bridge crosses the stream. That bridge is on the line of the traditional gravel road from Marsh Lane, across Burr ridge Marsh, to the riverbank where gravel was collected to mend the village roads.

The stream besides Ferry Road, known as 'The Fleet', drains the western side of the marsh and joins the Trent 50 yards before the pub, flowing under another bridge and through a non-return valve. Fleets are believed to be old courses of river in days of yore, this one, much straightened.



'The Fleet' (often dry) and the bridge carrying the gravel road from Marsh Lane to the river.



Palaeochannels across Burr ridge Marsh (not as clear on the photograph as when you look).

Walk north towards the Muskham Ferry. As Ferry Road widens at the end of the marsh, pause and look back over Burr ridge Marsh. Note the slight wavy nature of the field surface as you look towards the far hedge. Each dip marks an ancient river channel, or Palaeochannels, showing how the River Trent has meandered across the landscape over millennia.

Now carry on north, passing or pausing at the pub. As you go, admire that wonderful view across the river towards St Giles church at Holme village, a view which, in summertime, could be painted by Constable.

Note that the houses built along the west bank of the river are on top of a bank which is much higher than the path. This is one of the highest parts of the village and, hundreds of years ago, carried the Cromwell Footway, the riverside path along the east side of the Trent. Further north, it goes to the left and crosses through some gardens on Manor House Drive and Dickinson Way, as it headed off to Cromwell village. Beyond North Muskham village, that route is lost in the mists of time.

After the next junction, where Mackley's Lane meets the riverside path (Ferry Road) there are a couple of newer bungalows, still sitting high on the bank. Just after them, observe the ancient field hedge on the left. This hedge is hundreds of years old, certainly back to the 1770s in places, possibly to the 1600s. Note the signs of long-ago hedge laying where the layered branches have become fairly mighty timbers parallel to the ground. There are plenty of examples to look at.



Examples on ancient hedge laying along the old field hedge.

As you pass Trent Farm House you go up a slight slope. At the top is where Ferry Road ended and, in the past, there was a gate into the North Marsh. From here, Ferry Road changes from public highway to, what was, the Haling Path, now, normally referred to as a Tow Path, which took the riverside route to where Cromwell Lock was built in 1911.

Keeping to the riverside path, a few yards after Manor House Drive, is the point where the ford left the Muskham shore to Holme. In the 1770s, the ford crossed to a fairly large island, big enough to be farmed, before the final leg to the Holme marsh and village beyond. The wildlife lake to the left has grown into a great village asset from an inauspicious start when the landowner extracted gravel, without consent, and sold it to the contractors building the A1 dual carriageway near Tuxford.

At the end of the lake follow the path to the left. You immediately come to a dip in the path, another old river channel. The path continues round the north side of the lake to meet Dickinson Way. Turn left and follow Dickinson Way towards the junction with Manor House Drive. Just before the last house on the right, No 1, there is a public footpath on the right which leads to Main Street, by the Muskham Cross [see separate article] and the substantial Georgian House, 'The Shades'. This path is the route of the ancient route, Trent Ford Road. To the west it would have headed for Caunton, east, to the ford, Holme, and beyond.

At Main Street, turn left. As you head back towards the church, you pass a charming part of the village with some of the older buildings. On the left is a run of cottages, now known as Manor Cottages, one of which has a Gambrel, or Mansard, (double pitched) roof. This, probably, had some link to the original house of Trent Farm, which had a similar roof style, and could have dated back to around 1700.

A hundred yards or so further south, on the right-hand side, is the old Kemp Charity Almshouses, badly overgrown but interesting all the same. You can see bricked up remains of doorways and some existing window openings.



Left: Old river channel in wildlife path.
Right: The Kemp Charity Almshouses



Heading on down Main Street you come to a crossroads. Mackleys Lane on the left, Walton's Lane on the right. Mackleys Lane has an unusual kink in it and, opposite most of the houses there is a 'lane width' of grass. This is said to be the old lane but, when they wanted to build the houses, no one knew who owned it, so they built a new lane beside it. The left hedge is an ancient field hedge, the other side of any lane has been long removed.

Walton's Lane takes its name from the Walton family, now shed manufacturers of Sutton on Trent. Early in the twentieth century, they had a beehive making factory on this lane.

Carrying on along Main Street you will return to the church where your stroll began.