

Rotherham Town Circular Walk 'Cannons'



Walk summary: A short, mostly flat historical walk through Rotherham town centre, passing some of the oldest buildings in the town including an original 15th century merchants house. Find the musket ball marks left during the English Civil War and visit the river and canal, the source of Rotherham's wealth.

Distance: 1.8 miles / 2.9 kilometres

Duration: approximately 1 hour not including stops

Terrain: Mostly flat pavement walking involving some road crossings. Some steady inclines.

Nearest Car Park: Pay and Display, George Street, S60 1EY

1. Rotherham Train Station

With your back to the train station entrance, turn left and then immediately right to cross the bridge over the canal and River Don. On the left hand side of the second bridge, past the Bridge Inn is the Chapel of our Lady on the Bridge. Carefully cross over to the chapel and take a look.

2. Chapel of our Lady on the Bridge

The chapel is one of only three surviving medieval bridge chapels still standing in the whole of England. The chapel was used by travellers to give thanks for a safe arrival or pray for a safe journey. Rotherham Bridge was built on the site of an old ford, possibly on the site of an older narrow packhorse bridge. The bridge is believed to have been a toll bridge: the priests levying a charge to cross in return for the upkeep. In 1483 The Chapel of Our Lady was built as part of the rebuilding of the bridge. The chapel was richly decorated but in 1547 the chapel was suppressed by Henry VIII and anything of value removed but the chapel survived because it was an integral part of the bridge. The building was passed in to the

care of the Feoffees of the Common Lands of Rotherham, who converted it to an alms house in the late 16th century. During the English Civil War in 1643, a battle was fought on the bridge, between the Earl of Newcastle's Royalist troops and the townspeople with thirty boys from the Grammar School led by a Colonel Gill of Carr House for the Parliamentary cause. The Roundheads lost and the town was occupied by the Royalist army who subsequently sacked it. Small round dents in the chapel walls show where the Royalist musket balls hit the chapel. By the 1680's the Chapel was in ruinous condition and, apart from minor repairs, remained that way for most of the next century. In 1778 the building was converted into the town gaol; two cells being formed in the crypt underneath whilst the Chapel became the Deputy Constable's quarters. In 1826 the town built a new Courthouse and gaol and the chapel was then used as a dwelling house until 1888, when it opened for business as a tobacconist and newsagents shop. In 1901 a petition signed by almost 1000 Rotherham residents called for the restoration of the Chapel. In 1913 the building was acquired by Sir Charles Stoddart, and in 1924 it was restored and re-consecrated as a chapel. In 1975 a new stained glass window was installed. It charts the history of the Chapel and town, and incorporates many family crests and the initials of people associated with the history of the Chapel through its many changes of use. The Chapel is used for worship every Tuesday morning at 11.00 am when a service of Holy Communion is held.

At the end of the bridge take the second right, opposite the Rotherham Interchange, and head up to the top of Bridgegate. All Saints Square will be on your left.

3. Rotherham Minster

In front of you stands the impressive Rotherham Minster, known as All Saints Parish Church. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, scholar of history of art and, especially, of history of architecture, described it as *"one of the largest and stateliest churches in Yorkshire"*.

There has been a church on this site in Rotherham since the 10th Century though the fabric has been through many extensions, re-builds and restorations. The Saxon population of Rotherham built the first Christian church on this hilly site well clear of the flood plain of the Rivers Rother and Don about 937AD. The Saxons usually built in wood so little of this church remains. At some time there must have been a rebuilding in stone as part of the fabric in the present day church is of late Saxon origin. The church was further developed through the Middle Ages as the town became richer and more populous. The late 11th century Norman Church, built in 'Rotherham Red' the local red sandstone had a nave, chancel, north and south transepts and a short central tower. The Norman Font erected about 1190 can still be seen. Much of the present building dates from the 15th Century including the Chapel of Jesus founded by Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York in 1480.

In early Victorian times the graveyard above the Square came to be regarded as a public disgrace, with skulls and bones clearly visible on the surface, and in 1854 it was closed to new burials. Most of the existing burials and memorials in the churchyard were moved and reburied elsewhere however grave stones to cholera victims can still be found here.

Over the centuries, changes and additions were made to the church but a complete restoration took place in the 1870s under the direction of the architect Sir Gilbert Scott, using sandstone from the nearby Canklow quarries. During the restoration the font which had stood outside for about 200 years, and was known locally as the 'Round Stone' was moved back inside. The minster includes 15th Century Chancel stalls which have two misericords and several Poppyheads, the oldest examples of carved woodwork in the Church. Look for a memorial to the 50 children who lost their lives in the Masbrough Boat Accident in 1841, when a ship keeled over while being launched from Chambers' boatyard on the River Don. The Parish Church was Granted minster status in 2004.

Pass around the right hand side of the Minster. At the top of Church Street you will reach the Edwardian Imperial Buildings, pass the Minster gardens on the way.

4. *Imperial Buildings*

The Grade II listed Imperial Buildings were built in 1907 in the Jacobean Revival Style and some of the shops retain almost complete Edwardian shop fronts. This building replaced the Shambles of the old market. The area occupied by butchers is usually known as the 'Shambles' and Church Street was originally called Ratten Row, no doubt as a result of being rat infested due to the proximity of the Shambles.

Continue ahead up Moorgate Street into an open square.

5. *Rotherham Town Hall*

This was the site of the town's cattle market until it was moved to a new site in Corporation Street. This occurred at the same time as the construction of the police station and court house, now used as the Town Hall. The council moved into the building in 1985 and it is a working building not usually open to the public. At the front of the town hall stands a large cannon. This was made in Rotherham at the Walker brother's iron foundry. Walker cannons were found on board HMS Victory and indeed to this day there are still some of the Walker cannons on-board Victory in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Walker cannons saw action at the battle of Trafalgar where Admiral Nelson defeated the French and Spanish navies as well as in the Napoleonic wars and the American war of independence.

At the far end of the Town Hall turn left in to The Crofts.

6. *The Bluecoat pub*

The Bluecoat pub is a Grade II listed building that takes its name from the uniform worn by the children that attended the Feoffees' charity school in this building. An account of the town from 1841 mentions that 28 boys and 20 girls are educated and instructed in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Above the main door to the pub there can be found a panel inscribed '*This charity school was erected by the Feoffees in the year 1776*'.

The Feoffees of the Common Lands of Rotherham were established as a board of trustees headed by a 'Greave', responsible for using the Common Lands of Rotherham for the benefit of the inhabitants of the town. They were first granted

common land in 1584 by Elizabeth I, and were given official recognition through a Royal Charter of 1589, however, the organisation had been in operation for a considerable period before this date.

Originally, the Feoffees performed a role similar to that of a town council; maintaining and repairing roads, gates, and wells, paying the 'bylawmen', clerk of the market, clothing the waits & beadles (town musicians), providing education, and to some extent improving the town's public health by protection from nuisances. It was not until the establishment of local authorities that this role began to gradually diminish, and the Feoffees started to become known more as a charity. The charity's objectives are for the relief of aged, impotent and poor inhabitants of the county borough of Rotherham. In practice grants are made to local people and charities, and small scholarship awards are made to local students to assist them in continuing their studies

To the left of the Bluecoats is Quarry Hill. **Follow Quarry Hill around the pub and then bear left** down a cobble path keeping the small area of grass to your right. At the bottom of this short hill you will arrive on to Wellgate.

7. Wellgate

Turn right. On the left-hand side of the road you will find the Masonic Hall and next to it the Temperance Hall which became home of the Rotherham temperance society in 1895 having been built as a Methodist chapel in 1851. As you walk up Wellgate keep an eye out for the oldest street lamp in Rotherham, it is located on top of a stone wall on the left hand side of the road opposite the junction with Mansfield Road. This is the last remaining early 19th century oil lamp standard.

Further along Wellgate, on the right hand side, stands the 19th century Old Hall.

8. Old Hall

This Grade II listed building was industrialised by the mid-19th Century with a small chemical works erected in its grounds for the processing of dyes and pigments. By then much of the land around here had been developed as high density terraced and courtyard housing. This housing was cleared in the 20th century. The Hall occupies an important manorial site and contains used timbers from an earlier building which have been tree-ring dated to 1479. **Continue along Wellgate and turn left up Clifton Terrace. Continue round to the left up Albany Street. At the top of Albany Street you will come to Clifton Park and the museum.**

9. Clifton Park Museum

Rotherham Museum is an 18th century house, designed by John Carr and built for Joshua Walker in 1783/84. The design of Clifton House is in the Palladian style popular at the time, drawing on Greek and Roman influences. There is a very good view across Rotherham from here. Set in a 70 acre estate which is similar to the present day Clifton Park (there was also a paddock on the other side of Clifton Lane which is now housing), the house had a servants' wing, stables, icehouse, formal and kitchen gardens. Only the house and part of the servants' quarters remain.

The Walker family owned the property until 1864 when it was purchased by local industrialist William Owen. After he died in 1891 the Municipal Borough of Rotherham (now Rotherham Council) bought the house and the estate for £25,000. The park was opened to the public in 1891 and the Museum in 1893. Clifton House is a Grade II* listed building. The museum houses exhibits on the history of Rotherham. It sits in the 23 hectare Clifton Park and is well worth a visit.

Facing the museum, turn left and walk through the park bearing left on the path. You will pass the Coronation Beech, planted in 1838 to celebrate the coronation of Queen Victoria the previous year. **Carry on down the path until you reach the Cenotaph. Exit the park and bear left, crossing over Clifton Lane at the crossing and continuing down Doncaster Gate to reach Civic Centre on the right hand side.**

10. Rotherham Civic Theatre

Rotherham Civic Theatre is a converted chapel. Doncaster Gate Congregational Chapel was built in 1867 and a total of £30,000 was spent converting the chapel into a theatre which opened on 7 March 1960.

Page | 7

Carry on to the bottom of Doncaster Gate and cross over into High St.

11. Rotherham's first bank

At the bottom of High Street on the corner with Wellgate is the first bank in Rotherham, built by the Walker family. Above the door of the bank in High Street in gold is 'Old Bank Founded 1792'. Above this sign is the coat of arms of Sheffield with the sheaf of arrows and sheaves of corn – a nod to the origin of the name of the River Sheaf which gives Sheffield its name. Also there is the old coat of arms of Rotherham with three cannons, a nod to the Walker family.

As you walk up High Street on the right towards the top of the street is Hambleys Antiques which is an original fifteenth century merchant's town house which in the early 17th century became the Three Cranes Inn. In 2011 after many, many years of neglect and ruination the building was bought and restored. The building is open to the public, with the upper floors retaining the original features. Don't forget to sign the visitor book!

Head up to the top of High Street

12. Top of High Street

Walking on the right side of the road walk straight down to the main road, Corporation Street. Cross over the main road on to Domine Lane. This is where the medieval market place was situated and Lane takes its name from a well – 'Domine Well' - meaning the Lord's well.

Walk down Domine Lane and cross the road at the bottom where you will see a bridge across the river and on to Forge Island. Cross this bridge, noticing the weir to your right.

If you look back the way you came you will see artwork by Phlegm on the bricked up arches to the right of the bridge. Forge Island isn't really an island it is a spit of land that has the canal on one side and the river on the other. The weir is a

remnant from the town's corn mill which was owned by the lord of the manor. The water power of the River Don was used to drive the mill where the lord of the manor required all the tenants of the manor to grind their corn. The Walker family leased the site from the Earl of Effingham and converted part of the mill into a water powered tilt mill, used in the iron industry. So important were the family to the town that that cannons were part of the town's emblem which can be seen above the old Bank on High Street and are also featured on the Mayor's chain and mace.

The Walkers couldn't use the water from the Don without ensuring that the corn mill had sufficient water to power it. The mill was eventually bought in 1780 by the Don Navigation to ensure a sufficient depth of water in the canal (to your left) and converted into a flax mill in 1835. A steam engine was installed in the 1860s and the outflow of hot water made the river below the mill a popular bathing spot for the local boys. Industry was continuous on this site from the Walkers first setting up production in 1754 through to completion in 1981 when the River Don Stampings finally ceased business.

A great tragedy took place here at Forge Island on 5th July 1841. The 'Masbrough Boat Disaster' as it was known occurred when a Billy Boy type boat used on the rivers and canals but also for hopping around the coast of Yorkshire was launched from Chambers' boat yard on Forge Lane. The custom at this yard was to allow people on deck as the boat was launched so that they could experience the 'rush' of the boat as it went in to the water. Upwards of 100 people, mostly children were on board for the launch and as the boat was launched sideways in to the cut everyone rushed to the side to see the splash as the boat hit the water, but the weight of everyone on one side of the boat made it overbalance, pitching everyone on deck in to the water. Sixty four people drowned in the narrow cut, most of whom were children. A memorial can be found in the Minster to the 50 young people lost on that day.

Bear left in the car park and you will see a stone pedestrian bridge over the canal and locks. Cross the bridge and turn right, passing the Magistrates Court on your left. The path will bring you back to Rotherham Train Station.

References

- Archives & Local Studies Section Central Library (1994) 'A walk around Rotherham: The town centre', Rotherham Central Library.
- *British Newspaper Archive* [online], Available at: www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/, Accessed [2016]
- *Clifton Park and Museum*, History of Clifton Park Museum [online], Available at: http://cliftonpark.org.uk/cpm/homepage/83/history_of_clifton_park_museum, Accessed [2016]
- *National Churches Trust*, Chapel of Our Lady on Rotherham Bridge [online], Available at: www.nationalchurchestrust.org/explore-churches/chapel-our-lady, Accessed [2016]
- *Rotherham Cannon Heritage Society* (2010) Rotherham and the Battle of Trafalgar [online], Available at: <http://cannons.yolasite.com/>, Accessed [2016]
- *Rotherham Family History Society*, About the Feoffees [online], Available at: www.rotherhamfhs.co.uk/content/feoffees-and-greaves-common-lands-rotherham, Accessed [2016]
- *Visit Rotherham*, History of Rotherham [online], Available at: www.visitrotherham.com/history-of-rotherham, Accessed [2016]