

# Rotherham Circular Walk

*'A Meeting of Two Rivers'*



**Walk summary:** A flat walk through the town centre and up a steady incline to the highest point of Rotherham with substantial views of Rotherham and Sheffield. Find out what the Boston Tea Party has to do with the town and the connection to New York.

**Distance:** 2.7 miles / 4.3 kilometres

**Duration:** approximately 1.5 hours not including stops

**Terrain:** 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 almshouse in the late 16<sup>th</sup> 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 937. 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. 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.

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**From the Town Hall carry on walking up Moorgate Street which turns into Moorgate Road.**

### ***6. Moorgate Road***

This was a principle route into the town from the mid-18th century when the road was turnpiked. Despite this, Moorgate saw little building development before the 19th century. Between 1850 and the beginning of the 20th century, a flurry of building and construction occurred along Moorgate Road creating a highly prestigious residential area with many of the finest Victorian houses occupied by the town's most prominent people.

**Continue ahead until you have crossed over the crossroads at Hollowgate / Alma Rd.**

### ***7. The Florence***

Just ahead to your right you will see a building set back from the road called 'Modern China @ The Florence'. This building was originally part of the Rotherham Workhouse which had been situated on Alma Road from 1840 until it was demolished in the late 1980s. The workhouse was of a considerable size and could accommodate up to 300 people. After 1930 the workhouse became Alma Road Public Institution before becoming Moorgate General Hospital. The hospital closed in 1980.

**Carry on walking up Moorgate for several minutes. After passing Tesco, turn right into Boston Castle Grove.**

### **8. Thomas Rotherham College**

Thomas Rotherham College was formed as a Sixth Form College in 1967 but its origins date back to 1483 when what became Rotherham Grammar School for boys was founded by Thomas Rotherham, a local scholar who had risen to be Archbishop of York, Chancellor of England and Chancellor of Cambridge University. Page | 5

The college is a Grade II Listed building and was built as a theological college training ministers for Congregational churches. The site was bought in 1870 for £3,200 with the foundation stone eventually laid on 23 April 1874. The building was executed in the style known as "collegiate Gothic" at a cost of £23,000, and it was opened on 20 September 1876.

**Carry on up Boston Castle Grove until you reach Moorgate Cemetery on the right side of the road**

### **9. Moorgate Cemetery**

After outbreaks of cholera in Rotherham in the early and mid 19th century, it became clear that Rotherham was in great need of a new burial ground. The old church yard at Rotherham Parish Church was overflowing and was regarded as a public disgrace with half buried bodies but there was no room for expansion around the church for further burials. Medical students from nearby Sheffield were taking advantage of the dreadful situation by stealing bodies for research purposes.

In 1832, the Board of Health approached the Earl of Effingham for permission to use Boston Hillside for the burial of victims of the cholera epidemic. Lord Effingham indicated that he was willing to grant a piece of land, which now forms part of Boston Park, free of charge. This was overruled, due to fears of the town citizens that the water from the springs on the hillside would be contaminated thereby increasing the number of deaths in the area. In the 1840s in order to provide the town with a new burial ground, Rotherham Public Cemetery Company was formed. For the sum of £499 they bought 3 acres of land off Moorgate at the back of Boston Castle for the purpose of laying out a new burial ground for the town.

**On exiting the cemetery back on to Boston Castle Grove turn right and head through the gates of Boston Park to reach Boston Castle.**

## **10. Boston Castle**

In 1773 Thomas Howard, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Effingham decided to build a hunting lodge on the south side of Rotherham. The chosen location was on the hillside of Rotherham Moor and the house was completed in 1775. The views from this hill above Rotherham are extensive, even today. Page | 6

The lodge was first referred to as ‘the house upon the common’ but later that year a group of men disguised as Mohawk Indians boarded ships at Boston Harbour, Massachusetts, and emptied 342 chests of tea into the water. This became known as “The Boston Tea Party” and was seen an act of defiance against the British, who had imposed a tax on tea on the colonists without representation in the British Parliament.

Soon the American War of Independence between the British Army and the Colonists was in full swing, incidentally, using cannon forged in by the Walker family in Rotherham. Thomas, as Captain in the 22nd Regiment of Foot, was ordered to America to fight against the rebels. Despite his desire to serve king and country in battle, he resigned his commission in the army in support of the colonists and to show that he felt the war was unjust he renamed his hunting lodge ‘Boston Castle’.

By the early 19th century the Castle ceased to be a hunting lodge and was instead occupied by local quarry owners and then from 1876 by the Park Keepers. From the late 1950s, until 1996 it was occupied by the borough’s park staff and their families.

You can request a visit to the roof for a small charge. From the rooftop viewing platform you can enjoy expansive views of Rotherham and Sheffield.

Boston Park covers just over eight hectares and was Rotherham’s first public park. It was opened on the 4 July 1876 to mark the centenary of the American Independence. The park was originally laid out with extensive gardens, a cricket ground, a bowling and croquet lawn and an open area for gymnastics.

From the castle head through the small car park and follow the tarmac path to the bowling green. On the way can you spot the stone archway that was once part of the entrance to Rotherham College of Jesus. It was placed in the old quarry face near

the bowling green. Carrying on past the bowling green you will arrive at the entrance to Canklow Woods.

There were three sandstone quarries in Canklow Woods, from where Rotherham Red Sandstone which has a distinctive pink and red colouring comes from. It is often called "Rotherham Red". Boston Castle was made from Rotherham Red sandstone, as were many older buildings in the local area. It was also used in many of our prominent local buildings including the Rotherham Minster, Chapel on the Bridge and Thomas Rotherham College.

### **11. Canklow Woods**

At 83 hectares, Canklow Woods is one of the largest ancient woodlands in Rotherham. Canklow Woods is of national importance for archaeology as the summit of the site is occupied by the remains of a Bronze Age settlement. As a result of its continuity of ownership by the Dukes of Norfolk and their predecessors, the Earls of Shrewsbury, the history of the site is very well recorded.

Having previously been in the ownership of the Duke of Norfolk, Canklow Woods was purchased by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council in April 2000. There are waymarked paths in the woods if you would like to spend some time exploring.

**You must return the way you came, travelling back down the left hand side of Moorgate Road. At the crossroads of Alma Road and Hollowgate, take a left down to the bottom of Alma Road where you'll see the road ahead snakes left then right.**

### **12. Old Sheffield Road**

The S bend ahead is **Old Sheffield Road. Follow it to join Sheffield Road.** This is where the River Rother and the River Don meet, the joining of two rivers known is known as a confluence. To your left is the stone bridge over the Rother.

**At this point turn right, heading down Sheffield Road towards Rotherham.** Look out for the New York Tavern, so named along with Rotherham United's Football Ground because stadium is built on the site of a foundry that made New York's distinctive fire hydrants and 'New York' is the historic name for the area.

You should also look for the Cutlers Arms on the left side of the road. This is the Chantry Brewery Tap on Westgate and is a Grade II listed Edwardian Pub described by CAMRA as the most 'ornate surviving Edwardian Pub in Yorkshire.' Original features include leaded stained glass windows, original tiles and parquet floor and bar. The Alma Tavern next door dates from 1909 but is sadly in a state of disrepair.

**Carry on until you come to Main Street, turn left and then right on to Market Street.**

### **13. The Old Market**

The large brick building on the corner was the main Post Office and telephone exchange, built in the Victorian era. This is the site of the old market. Rotherham, during the medieval period was the market centre for a wide rural area, due to its location at a key crossing point of the River Don. King John granted the first charter for an annual fair in 1207. The first Market Hall was erected here in 1879 to replace the open market but burned down in 1888, a replacement was opened in 1889 only being replaced in 1971 when the new Centenary Market was opened.

**On the left hand side of Market Street you will see a bridge across the river and on to Forge Island. Cross this bridge noticing the weir as you cross.** If you look back the way you came you will see artwork by the Sheffield muralist and artist 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 here. 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 (seen on 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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.