

Digital Editions

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Travel Publishing

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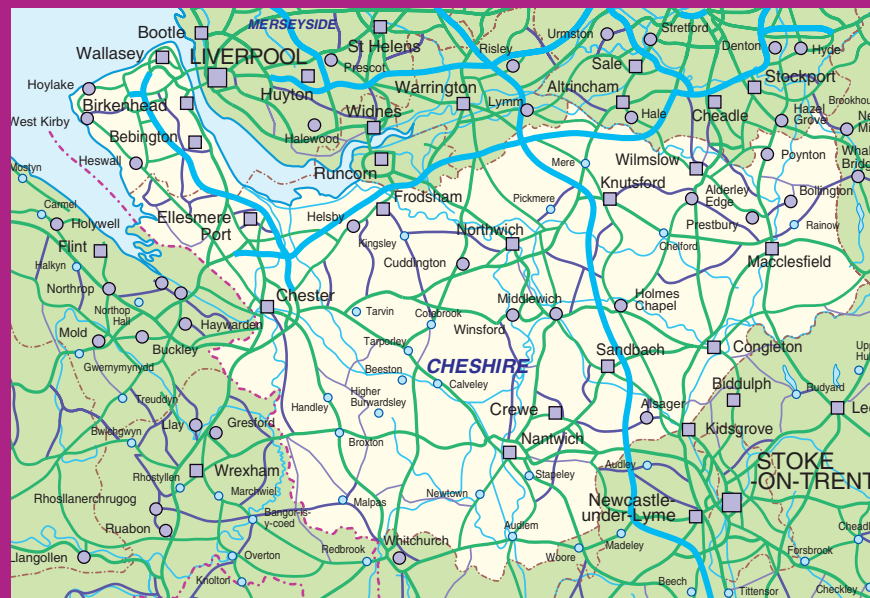
Guide to Rural England

CHESHIRE



WHERE TO GO | WHAT TO SEE | WHAT TO DO
WHERE TO STAY | WHERE TO EAT | WHERE TO BUY
Fully illustrated with detailed directions and maps

LOCATOR MAP



Towns and Villages

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Cheshire

Cheshire has received a bad press from writers such as Jeremy Clarkson and AA Gill who have portrayed the county as a kind of *Footballer's Wives* territory, packed with Porsches, bloated with bling and mindlessly devoted to conspicuous consumption. It's certainly true that more millionaires live in this captivating corner of the country than anywhere else in England. Britain's richest peer, the Duke of Westminster, with an estimated wealth of £5600 million, lives on a large estate just south of Chester. And more champagne is quaffed here than anywhere else in the UK.

But that's only a tiny part of the county's 2000-year-long story, which effectively began with the arrival of the Romans. But even before the 20th Legion established the garrison of

Deva in AD70, Cheshire was famous for its salt mines. By the time of the *Domesday Book*, the salt towns, or 'wiches' - Nantwich, Northwich and Middlewich - were firmly established. The process at that time involved pumping the salt brine to the surface and boiling it to produce granular salt. In 1670, huge deposits of rock salt were discovered and these are still being mined, mostly for use in keeping Britain's roads free from ice.

In the early 1700s, in the course of his *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, Daniel Defoe came to Chester by the ferry over the River Dee. He liked the city streets, "very broad and fair"; admired the "very pleasant walk round the city, upon the walls", disliked its cathedral, "built of red, sandy, ill-looking stone", but had nothing except praise for its "excellent cheese". Cheshire cheese has been famous for generations. John Speed, the well-known Elizabethan map-maker and a Cheshire man himself, noted: "The soil is fat fruitful and rich....the Pastures make the Kine's udders to strout to the pail, from whom the best Cheese of all Europe is made". Later, some enthusiasts even promoted the idea that the name Cheshire was actually short for cheese-shire.

One thing that visitors don't get to see is the county's best known character, the grinning Cheshire Cat. The expression 'to grin like a Cheshire cat' was in use long before Lewis Carroll adopted it in *Alice in Wonderland*. Carroll spent his childhood in the Cheshire village of Daresbury and would have regularly seen the local cheeses moulded into various animal shapes, one of which was a grinning cat.



BARON FINE ART

68 Watergate Street, Chester CH1 2LA

Tel: 01244 342520

e-mail: info@baronfineart.com website: www.baronfineart.com

Over 500 paintings on line

Housed in a lovely Georgian building in the heart of the city, Baron Fine Art was established in 1990. Occupying two floors, the gallery has a very diverse stock of 19th, 20th and 21st century oil paintings, watercolours, drawings and etchings.

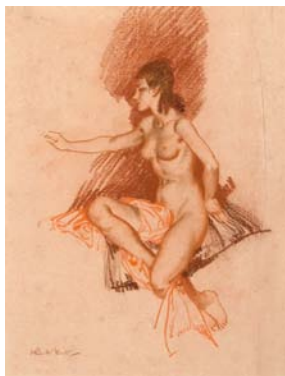
Baron Fine Art is a regular exhibitor at Antique and Fine Art Fairs throughout the country.

The gallery is open:

Monday to Saturday - 9.30am to 5.30pm
Sunday and most Bank Holidays - 1.30pm to 5.15pm



Alfred de Breanski 1852-1928
Lochnagar oil on canvas
 20 by 30 inches



Sir W R Flint 1879 - 1969
Seated Nude,
 crayon drawing 11 by 8 inches.



Charles Edward Dixon 1872 -1934, Tower Bridge 1899, watercolour 10.5 by 27.5inches

historic building museum and heritage historic site scenic attraction flora and fauna

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Chester

King Charles Tower	Chester Cathedral
Dewa Roman Experience	Grosvenor Museum
On The Air	Chester Toy and Doll Museum
Chester Military Museum	The Rows
Eastgate Clock	Amphitheatre
Chester Zoo	

“Small enough to explore easily on foot, but big enough to be wonderfully cosmopolitan”, say Chester’s tourism people. This pleasing old city occupies a strategic site on the River Dee close to the Welsh border that was important even before the Romans arrived in AD70. They based a large camp here and called it Deva after the Celtic name for the river. It was during this period that the splendid city walls were originally built – two miles round, and the most complete in the country.

In Saxon times ‘Ceastre’ became the administrative centre of a shire, and was the last major town in England to fall to William the Conqueror during his dreadful Harrowing of the North. William pulled down half of Chester’s houses and reinforced the message of Norman domination by building a castle overlooking the Dee.

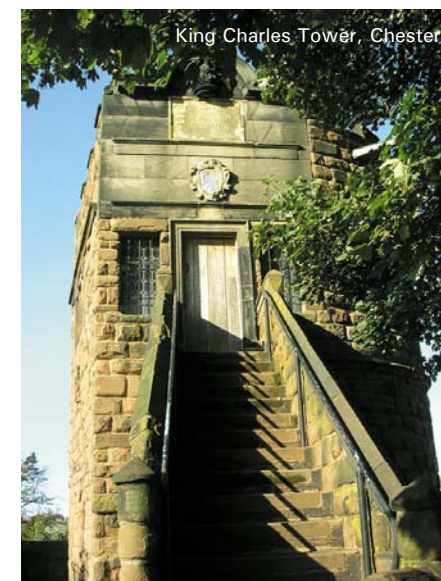
Subsequent Earls of Chester (the present Prince of Wales is the current one) were given a free, firm hand in dealing with the local Saxons and with the still rebellious Welsh who continued to make a nuisance of themselves right through the Middle Ages. In return for its no-nonsense dealing with these problems, Chester received a number of royal privileges - borough status, a licence for a market and, around 1120, the first commission in England for a Sheriff, long before his more famous colleague in Nottingham received his.

The problem with the Welsh was finally resolved in 1485 when a Welsh-based family, the

Tudors, defeated Richard III at Bosworth Field and Owen Tudor claimed the throne as Henry VII. For more than 150 years Chester enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity. Then came the Civil War. Chester supported the king but Charles I had the galling experience of watching from the city walls as his troops were defeated at nearby Rowton Moor. For two long years after that rout, the city was under siege until starvation finally forced its capitulation. The **King Charles Tower** on the wall is now a small museum with displays telling the story of the siege.

James Boswell, Dr Johnson’s biographer, visited Chester in the 1770s and wrote, “I was quite enchanted at Chester, so that I could with difficulty quit it.” He was to return again, declaring that, “Chester pleases my fancy more than any town I ever saw.” Modern visitors will almost certainly share his enthusiasm.

Probably the best introduction to this compact little city is to join one of the



stories and anecdotes famous people art and craft entertainment and sport walks

frequent sightseeing tours conducted by Blue Badge guides. These take place every day, even Christmas Day, and leave from the Chester Visitor Centre. The Centre can also provide a wealth of information about the city, including a full calendar of events that range from the Chester Regatta, the oldest rowing races in the world, and Chester Races, the oldest horse races in Britain, to the Lord Mayor's Show in May and the Festival of Transport, featuring an amazing parade of vintage cars, in August.

Towering above the city centre is **Chester Cathedral**, a majestic building of weathered pink stone, which, in 2012, will celebrate its 920th birthday. It was originally an abbey and is one of very few to survive Henry VIII's closure of the monasteries in the 1540s. The cloisters are regarded as the finest in England and the

monks' refectory is still serving food - although nowadays it is refreshments and lunches for visitors. There's a fine 14th-century shrine to St Werbergh, the princess/abbess who founded the first church on this site in Saxon times, and some intricately carved quire stalls almost 800 years old, which are reckoned to be the finest in Britain. It was at Chester Cathedral, in 1742, that George Frederick Handel personally conducted rehearsals of his oratorio *The Messiah* before its first performance in Dublin: a copy of the score with annotations in his own hand is on display.

Chester is famous for its outstanding range of museums. At the **Dewa Roman Experience** visitors can re-live the sights, sounds, and even the smells, of daily life in Roman Chester. A superb array of artefacts

Grosvenor Museum

27 Grosvenor Street, Chester, Cheshire CH1 2DD

Tel: 01244 402008

website: www.chester.gov.uk/museums

At the **Grosvenor Museum** you can explore Roman life and death, domestic life of the 17th – 20th centuries, natural history and geology, social history and costume, art and silver, along with an exciting programme of special exhibitions and events. The natural history collections tell an important story about how the flora and fauna of Cheshire has changed over time. The Museum holds specimens from three sections of natural sciences; botany, geology and zoology and are displayed to be accessible to all age groups.

The social history of the City is told through Number 20 Castle Street, a typical example of a gentry townhouse. Within its walls there are period rooms showing life from Stuart times to the 1920s. It also houses the important Bressan recorders and a changing costume exhibition.

Chester is an important City in the history of silver and had its own assay office which tested all Chester made silver objects and marked them to show that they met the legal standard for the purity of the metal. The Museum houses a nationally important collection of Chester silver. In relation to fine arts; displayed in the Art Gallery are paintings connected with Cheshire, either by subject or by artist. There are also two special exhibition galleries with an exciting changing exhibition programme, along with related event and activities.



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from Chester and elsewhere in the Roman Empire is on display and kids love dressing up in replica suits of Roman armour. In the **Grosvenor Museum** (see panel opposite) are furnished period rooms, the Timeline Gallery travelling back through the city's history, the Natural History Gallery, the Silver Gallery featuring the Chester race cups, and a gallery of paintings by local contemporary artists. **On The Air** broadcasting museum chronicles the world of radio and television from the pioneering 'Cat's Whisker' days of BBC radio, to satellite and digital TV, while the **Chester Toy and Doll Museum** is a nostalgic treasure house of antique playthings. The **Cheshire Military Museum**, located within the Castle, recounts the story of the county's military history using computers, tableaux and hands-on exhibits to show the soldier's life through the past 300 years.

Quite apart from its historical attractions, Chester is also one of the major shopping centres for the northwest and north Wales. All the familiar High Street names are here - often housed in much more appealing buildings than they usually inhabit - along with a great number of specialist and antique shops. A unique shopping experience is provided by the world-famous, two-tiered galleries of shops under covered walkways known as **The Rows**, which line both sides of Bridge Street. The Rows are an architectural one-off: no other medieval town has anything like them. Many of the black and white, half-timbered frontages of The Rows, so typical of Chester and Cheshire, are actually Victorian restorations, but crafted so beautifully and faithfully that even experts can have difficulty distinguishing them from their 13th-century originals.

Close by is the **Eastgate Clock**, erected in 1897 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. It is a beautifully ornate construction



and one of the most photographed timepieces in the world.

Chester's famous City Walls were originally built by the Romans to protect the fortress of Deva from attacks by Celtic tribes. Nowadays, the two-mile long circuit - an easy, level promenade - provides thousands of visitors with splendid views of the River Dee, of the city's many glorious buildings and of the distant Welsh mountains. Here, during the summer months, Caius Julius Quartus, a Roman Legionary Officer in shining armour, conducts a patrol around the fortress walls and helps to re-create the life and times of a front-line defender of the Empire. At one point, the wall runs alongside St John Street, which has a curious history. In Roman times it was the main thoroughfare between the fortress and the **Amphitheatre**, the largest ever uncovered in Britain, capable of seating 7000 spectators. During the Middle Ages,

Chester Zoo

Cedar House, Caughall Road, Upton by Chester, Chester, Cheshire CH2 1LH

Tel: 01244 389461

e-mail: j.benn@chesterzoo.org

website: www.chesterzoo.org

Chester Zoo is the UK's number one charity zoo, with over 7000 animals and 400 different species, including some of the most endangered species on the planet. With more than one million visitors every year, the zoo – a conservation charity – is an all-year round favourite attraction for kids of all ages!

The 110-acre Zoo is open all year, except Christmas Day and Boxing Day, from 10am. Last entry and closing times vary with the seasons. Car parking is free. Restaurants, shops, monorail and summer time boat bus. Facilities for disabled visitors, including self-drive electric scooters and wheelchairs.



however, this highway was excavated and turned into a defensive ditch. Over the years, the ditch gradually filled up and by Elizabethan times St John Street was a proper street once again.

No visit to Chester would be complete without a trip to **Chester Zoo** (see panel above) on the northern edge of the city. Set in 110 acres of landscaped gardens, and the brainchild of George Mottershead, it's the largest zoo in Britain, caring for more than 7000 animals from some 400 different species. The zoo also provides a refuge for many rare and endangered animals that breed freely in near-natural enclosures. What's more, it has the UK's largest elephant facility and is the only successful breeder of Asiatic elephants in this country. The zoo has more than a mile of overhead railway providing a splendid bird's-eye view of the animals and the Roman Garden. Other attractions include the Rare Penguin Breeding Centre with windows enabling visitors to see the birds 'flying'

underwater; a Forest Zone with spacious homes for buffy-headed capuchin monkeys; and special enclosures for the black rhinos and red pandas (Lushui and Lushan are great favourites with visitors). And in the award-winning Spirit of the Jaguar enclosure are the spotted jaguars Sofia, Carlos, Salvador and Ebony. Offering more than enough interest for a full day out, the zoo is open every day of the year except Christmas Day. Children can romp happily in the Fun Ark, and recently added attractions include a Dragons in Danger exhibit.

Around Chester

TARVIN

5 miles E of Chester off the A54 or A51

Baker Way

In the *Domesday Book*, Tarvin is recorded as one of the larger manors in Cheshire, and by the 1300s was the centre of an extensive

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parish. The present church was begun at this time and boasts the oldest surviving timber roof in Cheshire. The village came to prominence in the Civil War when General Sir William Brereton made it his headquarters during the siege of Chester. In August 1644 there was fighting around the church and bullet marks can still be seen around its west door. One of them penetrated a brass by the chancel in memory of a former Mayor of Chester and remained there for many years until a Victorian vandal prised it out and made off with it.

Tarvin is about halfway along the 13-mile-long **Baker Way**, which runs from Chester Station to Delamere Station at the edge of Delamere Forest Park. The trail follows the Shropshire Union Canal from Chester to Rowton Bridge, thence to Hockenhull Platts, Tarvin, Ashton, Brines Brow and Delamere Forest.

ASHTON

8 miles E of Chester on the B5393

Delamere Forest

A couple of miles to the northeast of Ashton stretch the 4000 acres of **Delamere Forest**, a rambler's delight with a wealth of lovely walks and many picnic sites, ideal for a peaceful family day out. In Norman times, a 'forest' was a part-wooded, part-open area, reserved as a hunting ground exclusively for royalty or the nobility. There were savage penalties for anyone harming the deer, even if the deer were destroying crops, and household dogs within the forest had to be deliberately lamed to ensure that they could not harass the beasts. By the early years of the 17th century, many of the great oaks in the forest had already been felled to provide timber for shipbuilding – as well as for

Cheshire's familiar black and white half-timbered houses. Since the early 1900s, Delamere Forest has been maintained by the Forestry Commission, which has undertaken an intensive programme of tree planting and woodland management. Delamere is now both an attractive recreational area and a working forest, with 90% of the trees eventually destined for the saw mills.

TATTENHALL

8 miles SE of Chester off the A41

Cheshire Ice Cream Farm

Tattenhall is a fine old village within sight of the twin castles of Beeston and Peckforton perched atop the Peckforton Hills. It has some attractive old houses and a Victorian church with a graveyard, which gained notoriety during the 19th century because of the activities of a gang of grave-robbers. They lived in caves in the hills nearby and, once they had disposed of the bodies to medical gentlemen, used the empty coffins to store their booty from more conventional thieving. At that time Tattenhall was a busy little place. The Shropshire Union Canal passes close by and the village was served by two railway stations on different lines. Today, only one railway line survives (and no stations), the canal is used solely by pleasure craft, but the village is enjoying a new lease of life as a desirable community for people commuting to Chester, a short drive away.

Brown tourist signs on the A41 point the way to **Cheshire Ice Cream Farm**, where real dairy ice cream is made in more than 30 different flavours, including rhubarb and custard, Cointreau and orange, and a seasonal sherry trifle. Visitors can watch the cows being milked, and a video shows the whole process

THE PHEASANT INN

Higher Burnwardsley, nr Tattenhall,
Cheshire CH3 9PF

Tel: 01829 770434

e-mail: info@thepheasantinn.co.uk

website: www.thepheasantinn.co.uk

Enjoying magnificent panoramic views across north Cheshire from the Peckforton Hills, **The Pheasant Inn** is a classic English country inn, some 300 years old and complete with beamed ceilings, open fires and a flower-filled courtyard. The bar keeps 4 real ales on tap and stocks a great selection of renowned wines from around the world. This is also a good place to eat, with a menu featuring good, honest wholesome food using fresh, local produce. During the winter months, you can enjoy your meal around open fires, whilst in summer you can dine al fresco and marvel at those superb views. The Pheasant also offers quality accommodation in 12 en suite rooms with modern facilities such as complimentary wireless broadband internet. Whether you stay in the main building or in the ivy-clad stable wing, you'll find the same attention to detail.

The area surrounding the inn is a rambler's and hiker's paradise and, for those with an interest in heritage, Beeston and Peckforton Castles are both nearby. Other attractions within easy reach include the Cheshire Candle Workshops, Cheshire Fishing and, if you have a sweet tooth, Cheshire Farm Ice Cream.



GROSVENOR PULFORD HOTEL & SPA

Wrexham Road, Pulford, Chester CH4 9DG

Tel: 01244 570560 Fax: 01244 570809

e-mail: enquiries@grosvenorpulfordhotel.co.uk

website: www.grosvenorpulfordhotel.co.uk

Standing in its own grounds in the quaint and peaceful village of Pulford, **Grosvenor Pulford Hotel & Spa** occupies a beautiful 19th century building which has been tastefully and expertly extended to incorporate a vast range of facilities and accommodation - all just a 5-minute drive from Chester city centre and a stone's throw from the Welsh border. High quality dining is a priority here and Ciro's Brasserie, a magnificent Mediterranean style restaurant, serves modern European cuisine based on top quality local produce, and offers an excellent selection of wines from around the world. For less formal dining, Nelson's Bar with its two open fireplaces and soft leather seating provides a relaxed atmosphere in which to enjoy freshly-prepared gastro-pub style food, traditional ales, premium brand spirits and a good selection of wines.

The hotel has 73 superbly comfortable bedrooms, all with en suite facilities, direct dial telephone, flat screen digital television with 87 channels and radio, free wireless internet access, modem point, trouser press, hairdryer, hospitality tray, night porter service and 24-hour room service.

The hotel also boasts the North West's most exclusive, opulent and award-winning Spa which provides natural, holistic and organic treatments to re-invigorate mind and body.



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of making ice cream 'from cow to cone'. Young visitors can romp in the Playbarn, and the farm is home to many rare breed animals (alpacas, miniature donkeys, pygmy goats, Jacob sheep), rescued birds of prey and hedgehogs. Also on site are outdoor play areas, the Country Kitchen Café, gift shops and a viewing area where visitors can watch the cows being milked.

BELGRAVE

4 miles S of Chester on the B5445

The Grosvenors

Belgrave is hardly large enough to qualify as a hamlet, but it has given its name to the London area known as Belgravia. Both are owned by the Duke of Westminster, Britain's richest landowner, whose family home, Eaton Hall, stands beside the River Dee a couple of miles west of the village. The duke's family, the **Grosvenors**, were well established in Cheshire by the 1300s, but it was acquisition by marriage of a large estate to the west of London that brought them huge riches. As London expanded westwards during the 18th and 19th centuries, their once rural estate was developed into elegant squares and broad boulevards, many with names reflecting the duke's Cheshire connections – Eaton Square, Eccleston Square, Grosvenor Place and Chester Row.

The Grosvenor's vast Victorian mansion near Chester suffered badly when it was occupied by the military during World War Two. In the 1970s it was demolished and replaced by a more modest concrete structure, which has divided architectural opinion as to its merits – one writer described it

“as modern as a 1970s airline terminal”. The house is not open to the public but its gardens occasionally are.

The Wirral (partly in Merseyside)

Ness Gardens

Two Old English words meaning heathland covered with bog myrtle gave The Wirral its name, and well into modern times it was a byword for a desolate place. The 14th-century author of *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight* writes of

*The wilderness of Wirral:
few lived there
Who loved with a good heart
either God or man.*

The Wirral's inhabitants were infamous for preying on the ships tossed on to its marshy coastline by gales sweeping off the Irish Sea. It was the 19th-century development of shipbuilding at Birkenhead that brought industry on a large scale to the Mersey shore and also an influx of prosperous Liverpool commuters who colonised the villages of the Caldý and Grange Hills and transformed the

Ness Botanic Gardens



former wilderness into leafy suburbia. The 1974 Local Government changes handed two-thirds of The Wirral to Merseyside, leaving Cheshire with by far the most attractive third, the southern and western parts alongside the River Dee. Tourism officials now refer to The Wirral as the Leisure Peninsula, a fair description of this appealing and comparatively little-known area. One of its major attractions is **Ness Gardens**, a 62-acre tract of superbly landscaped gardens on the banks of the River Dee. Founded in 1898 by Arthur Kilpin Buley, a Liverpool cotton broker, the gardens have been developed into one of the country's leading botanic gardens. Ness is now run by the University of Liverpool as an Environmental and Horticultural Research Station and provides magnificent displays all year round. There are children's play and picnic areas, well-marked interest trails, a visitor centre with weekly summer exhibitions, a gift shop and licensed refreshment rooms.

ELLESMERE PORT

8 miles N of Chester on the A5032

 Stephen Hitchin  Boat Museum

 Blue Planet

An interesting eight-and-a-half mile trail for walkers and cyclists runs along the Shropshire Union Canal between Chester and Ellesmere Port. It passes through communities and countryside, and along its route are 10 sculptures that mark important gateways to the canal. Local artist **Stephen Hitchin** designed each sculpture to reflect the character of its location and to provide directions along the route. Among the places of interest on the trail are the Backford Gap, marking the southern end of the Wirral Peninsula, and Caughall Bridge, constructed

by Thomas Telford. The northern end of the canal lies within the Mersey Community Forest, a network of small woodlands with public access. Railways gradually replaced the canals in the 19th century, and the Shropshire Union had more or less ceased its working life by the 1920s. Since the 1960s, this and many other canals have found a new role supporting the leisure industry. The history of the canal can be explored at the **Boat Museum** set in Ellesmere Port's historic dock complex. The museum has the world's largest floating collection of canal craft along with working exhibitions of restored steam, diesel and gas engines in the Power Hall and Pump House. Porters Row re-creates the dockworkers' cottages of 1840, 1900, 1930 and 1950. Boat trips run most days throughout the summer.

Ellesmere Port's other major attraction is **Blue Planet**, billed as Britain's biggest and best aquarium adventure. From the moving walkway that runs through the 70-metre long, underwater safari Aquatunnel, visitors can see rays, sharks and more than 1000 other fish and marine life at close quarters. The piranha exhibit is one of the largest in Europe, and among the many other attractions there is a display of amphibians, as well as shark feeding and regular special events.

Boat Museum, Ellesmere Port



EASTHAM

10 miles NW of Chester off the A41

In 1854 the American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne, at that time United States consul in Liverpool, visited Eastham and declared it to be "the finest old English village I have seen, with many antique houses, and with altogether a rural and picturesque aspect". It is still a pleasant place, a little oasis with a church and old houses grouped around the village green. The yew tree in the churchyard is reputed to have been in existence since 1152.

A mile or so from the village, Eastham Woods Country Park is a 76-acre oasis of countryside amidst industrial Merseyside and enjoys considerable status among bird-watchers as one of the few northern woodlands with all three species of native woodpecker in residence.

NESTON

11 miles NW of Chester off the A540

Right up until the early 19th century, Neston was the most significant town in the Wirral, one of a string of small ports along the River Dee. In Tudor times, Neston had been one of the main embarkation points for travellers to Ireland, but the silting up of the river was so swift and inexorable that by the time the New Quay, begun in 1545, was completed, it had become useless. Visiting Neston in the late 1700s, Anna Seward described the little town set on a hill overlooking the Dee estuary as "a nest from the storm of the ocean".

PARKGATE

12 miles NW of Chester via the A540 & B5134

 John Wesley  George Frederick Handel
 JMW Turner  Emma Hamilton
 Mrs Fitzherbert

After Neston port became unusable, maritime

traffic moved along the Dee Estuary to Parkgate, which, as the new gateway to Ireland, saw some notable visitors. **John Wesley**, who made regular trips to Ireland, preached here while waiting for a favourable wind, and **George Frederick Handel** returned via Parkgate after conducting the first public performance of *The Messiah* in Dublin. The great artist **JMW Turner** came to sketch the lovely view across to the Flintshire hills. A little later, Parkgate enjoyed a brief spell as a fashionable spa. Lord Nelson's mistress, **Emma Hamilton** (who was born about 1761 at nearby Ness where you can still see the family home, Swan Cottage), took the waters here in an effort to cure an unfortunate skin disease. The daughter of a poor labourer, and baptised Amy, she worked as a nurse girl in Hawarden and then in London, where her beauty captivated many famous men. In 1791 she married Sir William Hamilton, British Ambassador in Naples. She met Lord Nelson in 1793 and again in 1798, and bore him a child in 1801. Another visitor was **Mrs Fitzherbert**, already secretly married to the Prince Regent, later George IV. When Holyhead developed into the main gateway to Ireland, Parkgate's days as a port and watering-place were numbered. But with fine Georgian houses lining the promenade, this attractive little place still retains the atmosphere of a gracious spa town.

BEBINGTON

12 miles NW of Chester off the A41

 Port Sunlight  Sunlight Vision Museum
 Lady Lever Art Gallery

Much of the Wirral's Merseyside is heavily industrialised but a dramatic exception is **Port Sunlight** near Bebington. This model village was created in 1888 by William Hesketh Lever,

later 1st Viscount Leverhulme, to house the workers in his soap factory and was named after his most famous product, Sunlight Soap. Leverhulme wanted to provide “a new Arcadia, ventilated and drained on the most scientific principles”. Some 30 architects were employed to create the individually designed rows of rustic cottages. The history of the village, which is now a Conservation Area, and its community is explored at the **Sunlight Vision Museum** where there are scale models of the village, a Victorian port and Sunlight House, original plans for the building and displays of period advertising and soap packaging.

The jewel in the crown of Port Sunlight is the **Lady Lever Art Gallery**, which houses a magnificent collection of pre-Raphaelite paintings by Millais, Ford Madox Brown and Rossetti, portraits by Gainsborough and Reynolds, dramatic landscapes by Turner and Constable, an impressive Wedgwood collection, and some superb pieces of 18th-century furniture. The gallery also has a gift shop and a popular tearoom, the Lady Lever Café. Lord and Lady Leverhulme are buried in the graveyard of Christ Church.

HESWALL

14 miles NW of Chester on the A540

Set on a steep hillside, Heswall was an important port before the silting up of the River Dee. After decades of decline, the town flourished again as a choice retreat for Liverpool commuters following the opening of the railway tunnel under the Mersey in 1888. If you take the road down to the beach from the town centre, there are outstanding views across the Dee estuary to the hills of Wales. Heswall's most famous son is the cricketer Ian Botham.



Houses at Port Sunlight

BRIMSTAGE

14 miles NW of Chester via M53 and A5137

Brimstage Hall

The most striking building in this tiny hamlet is **Brimstage Hall**, a medieval pele, or fortified tower. It's not known why such a tower, more appropriate to the lawless border regions, should have been built in peaceful Cheshire, nor when – estimates range from 1175 to 1350. A pile of human bones found at the bottom of a long-forgotten well in 1957 failed to resolve any of these questions. There is another puzzle too: Could the stone carving of a smirking domestic cat in the old chapel be the original of Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat, which was wont to disappear leaving only its grin behind? Today, the old courtyard is home to a cluster of craft and speciality shops, and an excellent tearoom and restaurant.

THORNTON HOUGH

14 miles NW of Chester via the A540 & B5136

The huge village green at Thornton Hough, covering some 14 acres and surrounded by half-timbered black and white houses, was one of the most picturesque spots in Cheshire until the village was relocated to Merseyside in 1974. The village boasts two churches, one of

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which has no fewer than five clocks – the fifth was installed by Joseph Hirst, a Yorkshire mill owner who also built houses here and wished to see a church clock from his bedroom window.

WEST KIRBY

18 miles NW of Chester on the A540

West Kirby Marine Lake **Hilbre Islands**

Wirral Way **Hadlow Road Station**

Set beside the Dee estuary and looking across to the Welsh mountains, West Kirby was just a small fishing village until the railway link with Liverpool was established in the 1880s. Today, it's a bustling seaside town with some 28,000 inhabitants. A big attraction here is the **West Kirby Marine Lake**, a 52-acre man-made saltwater lake. With a maximum depth of five feet it offers a degree of safety unobtainable on the open sea. Courses in sailing, windsurfing and canoeing are available at the Wirral Sailing Centre.

West Kirby is well known to birdwatchers and naturalists because of the **Hilbre Islands**, ‘part-time’ islands that can be reached at low tide across Dee Sands. Permits (free) from the Wirral Borough Council are required to visit the main island, where there is a resident warden. Two smaller islands, Middle Eye and the tiny Little Eye, do not require permits. The latter is notable for its impressive number of wader roosts.

West Kirby is also the starting point for the **Wirral Way**, a 12-mile-long linear nature reserve and country park created mostly from the track bed of the old West Kirby to Hooton railway. When it was opened in 1973, it was one of the first Country Parks in Britain. The local council has also produced a series of circular walks based around the former stations along the line. One of these,



Hilbre Island

Hadlow Road Station, a short distance from the centre of Willaston, is especially interesting. The station hasn't seen a train since 1962, but everything here is spick-and-span, the signal box and ticket office apparently ready for action, a trolley laden with milk churns waiting on the platform. Restored to appear as it would have been on a typical day in 1952, the station's booking office still has a pile of pre-decimal change at the ready, including sixpences, half-crowns and eight-sided threepenny pieces.

BIRKENHEAD

20 miles NW of Chester off the M53

Wirral Museum **Birkenhead Heritage Trail**

Shore Road Pumping Station **Birkenhead Priory**

Birkenhead Park **Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm**

Williamson Art Gallery and Museum

If you were asked, where is the largest group of Grade I listed buildings in England?, Birkenhead would probably not be your first guess. But they are to be found in Hamilton Square along with the Town Hall, now the **Wirral Museum** - although that only merits a Grade II rating. Opened in 1887 by John Laird, this grand building houses an exhibition telling the story of the famous Cammell Laird



Wirral Museum, Birkenhead

shipyard, a model of the Woodside area in 1934 when King George V opened the Queensway road tunnel under the Mersey, a collection of delightful Della Robbia pottery and mayoral and civic silver. Also within the Town Hall are an art gallery, theatre, cinema and concert hall.

The **Birkenhead Heritage Trail** guides visitors around the town's various attractions and includes trips on a genuine Hong Kong tram and a beautifully restored Birkenhead tram of 1901. The trail takes in the **Shore Road Pumping Station** with its Giant Grasshopper steam pump. It was one of several used to extract water from the Mersey railway tunnel – Europe's very first underwater rail tunnel. Other attractions along the trail include an Edwardian Street scene display, a unique historic transport collection, and the Pacific Road Arts and Exhibition Centre. Just along from Pacific Road is Egerton Bridge, which offers a bird's-eye view over the docklands and has models and information

about the Birkenhead Dock system.

Moored alongside East Float Dock Road are two historic warships, now museums. Both the frigate *HMS Plymouth* and the submarine *HMS Onyx* served during the Falklands War and are now preserved as they were in the 1980s. *HMS Plymouth* saw action throughout the campaign and while carrying out a lone daylight bombardment was hit by four bombs. *HMS Onyx* was the only non-nuclear submarine to take part in the conflict. She carried 20 men from the SAS and SBS in addition to her own full crew, and was so crowded that she fully deserved her nickname, The Sardine's Revenge. Also on display is a German U-boat, *U534*, whose sinking marked the end of the Battle of the Atlantic in May 1945. The submarine was recovered after lying on the seabed for 50 years. The latest addition to the Birkenhead fleet is *HMS Bronington*, a Ton class minesweeper launched in 1953. The 'Tons', the last wooden warships built for the Royal Navy, were all named after towns and villages listed in the *Domesday Book* whose names ended with 'ton'. HRH Prince Charles commanded *HMS Bronington* from February 1976 until 15 December of that year, the final day of his active service in the Royal Navy.

Birkenhead Priory, a Benedictine monastery established around 1150, is the oldest standing building on south Merseyside. The site contains museum displays, concert space and a chapel dedicated to *HMS Conway*. A climb up St Mary's Tower is rewarded with magnificent views across Birkenhead to the Welsh Hills, and across the Mersey to Liverpool.

Birkenhead Park, to the east of the town centre, is a remarkable example of an early Victorian urban park with two lakes, a rockery, a Swiss bridge and formal gardens. This vast parkland was designed by Sir Joseph Paxton,

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architect of London's Crystal Palace, who also designed the spectacular main entrance that is modelled on the Temple of Illysius in Athens. Interestingly, Birkenhead Park became the model for an even more famous park – Central Park in New York.

Just out of town is the purpose-built **Williamson Art Gallery and Museum**, which exhibits a wealth of local and maritime history, a permanent display of Victorian oil paintings, tapestries by Lee and English watercolours. It also hosts a full programme of temporary exhibitions.

On the outskirts of the town, **Tam O'Shanter Urban Farm** is centred around a thatched cottage and has a collection of farm animals, a nature trail, play equipment and an activity room, as well as a café.

The Welsh Borders

Awake or asleep, the medieval Lords of the Marches made sure their swords were close at hand. At any time, a band of wild-haired Welshmen might rush down from the hills to attack the hated Normans who had dispossessed them of their land. A thousand years earlier, their enemies had been the Romans and the centuries-old struggle along the Marches only ended when one of their own people, Henry Tudor, defeated Richard III in 1485 and ascended the throne as Henry VII.

Conflict was to flare up again during the Civil War when the Welsh supported the Royalist forces against mainly Parliamentary Cheshire, but nowadays the valley of the Dee is a peaceful and picturesque area, and nowhere more so than around Farndon on the Denbighshire border.

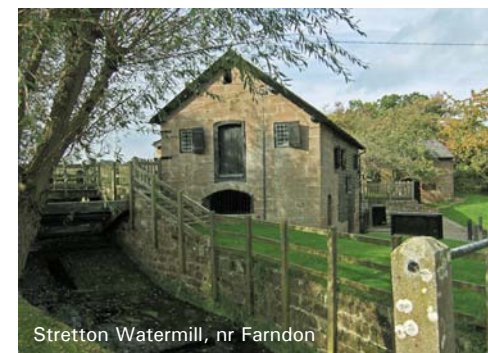
FARNDON

7 miles S of Chester off the B5130

John Speed Stretton Watermill

Built on a hillside overlooking the River Dee, Farndon is literally a stone's throw from Wales. Most travellers agree that the best approach to the principality is by way of this little town and its ancient bridge. Records show that building of the bridge began in 1345, and it is one of only two surviving medieval bridges in the county, the other being in Chester. From Farndon's bridge, riverside walks by the Dee extend almost up to its partner in Chester. During the Civil War, Farndon's strategic position between Royalist North Wales and Parliamentary Cheshire led to many skirmishes here. Those stirring events are colourfully depicted in a stained glass window in the church, although only the Royalist heroes are included.

One Farndon man who deserves a memorial of some kind but doesn't have one, is **John Speed**, the renowned cartographer, who was born here in 1542. He followed his father's trade as a tailor, married, had 18 children and was nearly 50 before he was able to devote himself full time to researching and producing his beautifully drawn maps.



Stretton Watermill, nr Farndon

Fortunately, he lived to the age of 87 and his 54 maps of England and Wales were the first really accurate ones to be published.

Close to Farndon, and well signposted from the A534, stands **Stretton Watermill**, a working corn mill in a lovely peaceful setting. Visitors can see the two waterwheels driving the ancient wooden mill machinery and turning the millstones. The miller demonstrates the whole skilled operation of transforming grain into flour. Also on the site are an exhibition, small shop and picnic area.

MALPAS

14 miles S of Chester on the B5069

 St Oswald's Church

 Cholmondeley Castle Garden

With its charming black and white cottages and elegant Georgian houses, Malpas is one of the most delightful old villages in Cheshire, though its Norman-French name, meaning bad passage, implies that it once lay in difficult terrain. Of the Norman castle that once protected this hilltop border town only a grassy mound behind the red sandstone church survives.

Approached through 18th-century gates attributed to Vanbrugh, **St Oswald's Church** is lavishly decorated outside with a striking array of gargoyles, but is most notable for the splendour of its interior. The nave roof is brilliant with gilded bosses and winged angels, all created around 1480, and there are two magnificent chapels separated from the nave by delicately carved screens. The Brereton chapel dates from 1522 and contains an



alabaster effigy of Sir Randal Brereton in the armour of a medieval knight, together with his lady.

Across the aisle, the Cholmondeley chapel commemorates Sir Hugh Cholmondeley who died in 1605. The Cholmondeley family owned huge estates around Malpas and it was they who built the town's attractive old almshouses and a school in the 18th century. They lived at Cholmondeley Castle, a few miles to the northeast. The Gothic-style castle of 1801 is not open to the public but the 500 acres of **Cholmondeley Castle Garden** are. The gardens are planted with a variety of acid-loving plants including rhododendrons, hydrangeas, magnolias, camellias, dogwoods, mahonias and viburnums. There's a lovely Temple Garden with a rockery, lake and islands, and a Silver Garden planted with distinctive silver-leafed plants as a commemoration of Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee. The paddocks are home to rare breeds of farm animals, including llamas and African pygmy goats.

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Cheshire Peaks and Plains

To the east rise the Peak District hills, while westwards gently undulating pastures and woods drop down to the Cheshire Plain. This is an area of sudden and striking contrasts. Within half a mile you can find yourself travelling out of lowland Cheshire into some of the highest and wildest countryside - acres of lonely uplands with rugged gritstone crags, and steep-sided valleys watered by moorland streams. Here, too, is the old salt town of Middlewich, and Sandbach with its famous Saxon crosses, along with a host of quiet, attractive villages. The two major towns of South Cheshire are Nantwich, with a history stretching back beyond Roman times, and Crewe, with no history at all until 1837. That was when the Grand Junction Railway arrived and five years later moved all its construction and repair workshops to what had been a greenfield site.

Congleton

 The Bridestones  Town Hall

 Congleton Museum  Lion and Swan Hotel

 Congleton Park  Jubilee Gardens

Some residents have dubbed this thriving old market town the 'Venice of the North' because of the number of nearby man-made lakes such as Astbury Mere and Brereton Country Park, both of which offer a wide range of recreational activities. Set in the foothills of the Pennines, Congleton was an inhabited place as long ago as the Stone Age. The remains of a 5000-year-old chambered tomb known as **The Bridestones** can be seen beside the hill road running eastwards from the town.

In Elizabethan times, the townspeople of Congleton seem to have had a passion for bear-baiting. On one occasion, when the town bear died they handed 16 shillings (80p) to the Bear Warden to acquire another beast. The money had originally been collected to buy a town bible and the disgraceful misappropriation of funds gave rise to the ditty: *Congleton rare, Congleton rare, sold the bible to buy a bear*. Known locally as the 'Bear Town', Congleton was the very last town in England to outlaw bear-baiting - the town's emblem is still an upright chained bear.

Congleton's impressive **Town Hall**, built in the Venetian Gothic style in 1864, contains some interesting exhibits recalling the town's long history, including some fine civic regalia. **Congleton Museum** has displays recording the work of such ancient civic officials as the swine-catcher, the chimney-looker and the ale-taster. Another display concerns an aid to domestic harmony called the brank - a bridle for nagging wives that the town jailer would activate for a small fee. A metal framework was fitted over the offender's head and a metal tongue acted as a gag, making speech almost impossible. Other exhibits include a prehistoric log boat found in 1923 at Ciss Green near Astbury, prehistoric tools and pottery, coin hoards and cannonballs from the Civil War, as well as more recent acquisitions covering the Industrial Revolution and the World War Two. Congleton did not play a big part in the Civil War (due in part to an outbreak of the plague in 1641), but it was a former mayor of Congleton, John Bradshaw, who was president of the court that condemned Charles I to death; his signature was the first, even before Cromwell's, on the death warrant.

One of the oldest buildings in Congleton is the **Lion and Swan Hotel**, a 16th-century

coaching inn on the old Manchester to London route. This grand old building with its superb black and white half-timbered frontage has been fully restored to its Tudor glory, complete with a wealth of exposed dark oak beams and elaborately carved fireplaces, as well as the oldest window in town, dating from 1596. Another ancient hostelry is Ye Olde Kings Arms, whose pink-washed half-timbered frontage leans picturesquely to the left as if exhausted with the weight of years.

During the 18th century, Congleton developed as an important textile town with many of its mills involved in silk manufacture, cotton spinning and ribbon weaving. In Mill Green, near the River Dane, part of the very first silk mill to operate in the town can still be seen. Nearby is the entrance to **Congleton Park**, a popular amenity with mature tree-lined avenues set beside the river. Within the park is the Jubilee Pavilion, built in 1887 to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee and now housing a café/bar and restaurant. The creation of the **Jubilee Gardens** to the designs of Edward Kemp was, rather oddly,

actually in commemoration of the Coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.

In the Community Garden, a life-size bronze statue has recently been erected to commemorate Congleton's war hero, Sgt George Harold Eardley, who won the Victoria Cross while serving with the King's Shropshire Light Infantry in Holland in October 1944.

Around Congleton

BIDDULPH

5 miles SE of Congleton on the A527

 Biddulph Grange Gardens

Biddulph Grange Gardens are imaginatively divided into a series of enclosed areas bounded by massive rock structures, hedges, stumps, roots and moulded banks. A trail leads through a superb Chinese garden to an enchanting Scottish glen, while other areas reproduce the magic of Egypt or the tranquillity of rural America. The shop is packed with gardening books, Victorian plants, cards and quality souvenirs, and a pleasant tearoom serves local specialities and homemade cakes.

ASTBURY

2 miles SW of Congleton on the A34

 St Mary's  Little Moreton Hall

 Mow Cop  Rode Hall

The pretty little village of Astbury, set around a triangular village green, was once more important than neighbouring Congleton, which is why it has a much older church, built between 1350 and 1540. Arguably the finest parish church in the county, **St Mary's** is famous for its lofty recessed spire

Lion and Swan Hotel, Congleton



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(which rises from a tower almost detached from the nave) and the superb timberwork inside: a richly carved ceiling, intricate tracery on the rood screen, and a lovely Jacobean font cover.

Just three miles down the A34 is an even more remarkable building. Black and white half-timbered houses have almost become a symbol for the county of Cheshire, and the most stunning example is undoubtedly **Little Moreton**

Hall (National Trust), a 'wibbly-wobbly' house, which provided a memorable location for Granada TV's adaptation of *The Adventures of Moll Flanders*. The only bricks to be seen are in the chimneys, and the hall's huge overhanging gables, slanting walls and great stretches of leaded windows create wonderfully complex patterns, all magically reflected in the moat. Ralph Moreton began construction in 1480 and the fabric of this magnificent house has changed little since the 16th century. A richly panelled Great Hall, parlour and chapel show off superb Elizabethan plaster and woodwork. Free guided tours give visitors a fascinating insight into Tudor life, and there's also a beautifully reconstructed Elizabethan knot garden with clipped box hedges, a period herb garden, a yew tunnel and an orchard planted with traditional trees of apple, pear, medlar and quince, which blossom in May.

About a mile south of Little Moreton Hall is the Rode Hall estate. It was an 18th-century owner of the estate, Randle Wilbraham, who built the famous folly of **Mow Cop** (now in the care of the National



Little Moreton Hall, Astbury

Trust) to enhance the view from his mansion. This mock ruin stands atop a rocky hill 1100 feet above sea level, just yards from the Staffordshire border. On a clear day, the views are fantastic: Alderley Edge to the north, the Pennines to the northeast, south to Cannock Chase and Shropshire, and westwards across Cheshire. **Rode Hall** itself, home of the Wilbraham family since 1669, is a fine early 18th-century mansion standing within grounds created by three of the most notable landscape designers. Humphry Repton drew up the plans for the landscape and Rood Pool in 1790, and between 1800 and 1810, John Webb constructed the Pool, a 40-acre lake, along with the terraced rock garden and grotto. In 1860, William Nesfield designed the formal garden, which remains to this day much as he planned it.

SANDBACH

6 miles W of Congleton on the A534, 1 mile SW from Junction 17 of the M6

 Saxon Stone Crosses

Sandbach's former importance as a stopping place for coaches (both stage and motor) is

THE BEAR'S PAW

School Lane, Warmingham, Sandbach, Cheshire CW11 3QN
Tel: 01270 526317

e-mail: info@thebears paw.co.uk

website: www.thebears paw.co.uk

Enjoying an idyllic location in the picturesque village of Warmingham in the heart of Cheshire, **The Bear's Paw** is a delightful 19th century character inn with antique oak floors, open fires and more than 200 pictures adorning its oak-panelled walls. The bar serves six real ales from local micro-breweries and also stocks a fantastic selection of wines from around the world. The inn has retained its traditional charming character but with a stylish contemporary twist. This is also true of the cuisine on offer here - home-cooked, wholesome and based on the freshest and most seasonal produce which is locally sourced wherever possible.

The same high standards evident throughout the inn are also found in the luxurious en suite bedrooms with their exquisite décor and furnishings. All 12 rooms are equipped with modern day amenities such as flat screen HD television, complimentary WiFi and media hubs. Visitors to the Bear's Paw will find plenty to see and do in the area. Nearby Sandbach, set beside the Trent & Mersey Canal, is filled with historic buildings and has a market dating back to Elizabethan times. Other attractions within easy reach include the Palms Tropical Oasis and the mysterious Hack Green Secret Nuclear Bunker.



evident in the attractive old half-timbered inns and houses, some of them thatched, which line the main street. The town's handsome market square is dominated by its two famous **Saxon Stone Crosses**, 16 and 11 feet tall. These superbly carved crosses (actually only the shafts have survived) were created some time in the 9th century, and the striking scenes are believed to represent the conversion of Mercia to Christianity during the reign of King Penda. A plaque at their base notes that they were restored in 1816 "after destruction by iconoclasts" - namely the Puritans. The restorers had to recover fragments from here and there - some had been used as street paving, some as cottage steps and some in the walls of a well. Somehow they fitted the broken stones together, like pieces of a jigsaw, and the result is immensely impressive.

MIDDLEWICH

10 miles W of Congleton on the A54, 2 miles W of Junction 18 of the M6

Roman Middlewich Trail

Middlewich Boat & Folk Festival

St Michael's Church

A bustling market town with good motorway links, Middlewich has doubled its population in the past 40-odd years. The Romans called their settlement here Salinae, meaning saltworks. Excavations have revealed outlines of their long, narrow, timber workshops, brine pits and even a jar with the word AMYRCA scratched on it (Amurca was the Latin name for brine waste, which was used throughout the Empire as a cleansing agent). Middlewich Town Council publishes an informative leaflet detailing the **Roman Middlewich Trail**, a one-mile circular walk that reveals the history and layout of the

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Roman town and shows how Middlewich would have looked in those days.

In more recent times it was the need for Cheshire's salt manufacturers to get their cumbersome product to markets in the Midlands and the south that gave a great impetus to the building of canals in the county. Middlewich was particularly well provided for with its own Middlewich Branch Canal linking the town to both the Shropshire Union and the Trent and Mersey Canals. Today, most of the canal traffic comprises traditional narrow boats, some of which can be hired for holiday trips.

The **Middlewich Folk and Boat Festival**, held in June each year, is now firmly established on the folk circuit and it is estimated that 30,000 people visit the town during the festival weekend, along with 400 boats.

During the Civil War, Middlewich witnessed two of the bloodiest battles fought in the county. In March 1644, Royalists trapped Cromwell's men in the narrow lanes and alleys of the town and slaughtered 200 of them. A few managed to find refuge in **St Michael's Church**. The church has changed greatly since those days but still has some notable old carvings and a curiosity in the form of a carved coat of arms of the Kinderton family of nearby Kinderton Hall. Their crest shows a dragon eating a child, a reference to the occasion on which Baron Kinderton killed a local dragon as it was devouring a child. The incident apparently took place at Moston, near Sandbach, and a lane there is still called Dragon Lane.

HOLMES CHAPEL

5 miles NW of Congleton on the A50/A54

Brereton Heath Country Park

In the mid 18th century, the little village of Holmes Chapel was stirred by two important

events. In 1738, John Wesley came and preached outside St Luke's Church. Fifteen years later, on 10 July 1753, a disastrous fire swept through the village. When the flames were finally quenched, only two buildings had survived the blaze - St Luke's Church and The Old Red Lion alongside.

About three miles southeast of Holmes Chapel, **Brereton Heath Country Park** is a popular beauty spot where the heath land and flower meadows are criss-crossed by a network of many footpaths. The former sand quarry provides a congenial habitat for a range of species, details of which can be obtained from the park ranger at the visitor centre. The lake here is used for angling, canoeing and windsurfing.

GOOSTREY

7 miles NW of Congleton off the A50/A535

Goostrey Arts Festival

The village of Goostrey is a quiet little place on a minor road just north of Holmes Chapel, but famous for its annual gooseberry shows where competitors vie to produce the plumpest berries. The name of the village actually has nothing to do with gooseberries but derives from a personal name, Godhere, and the Saxon word for tree.

Goostrey Arts Festival, which has been affectionately dubbed Goosfest, is a week-long series of events held in October. Involving both professional and amateur practitioners, the festival embraces stand-up comedy, classical, folk or contemporary music, poetry, paintings, photography, pottery and sculpture.

LOWER WITHINGTON

7 miles NW of Congleton on the B5392

Jodrell Bank

Visible from miles around, the huge white

dish of the world-famous **Jodrell Bank** radio telescope has a good claim to being the most distinctive building in the county. The Observatory came into service in 1957 and was used by both the Americans and the Soviets in their exploration of space. Jodrell Bank offers visitors a fascinating guide to exploration of the universe with its 3D theatre and exhibition centre.

Operated by Manchester University, the telescopes allow astronomers to watch the birth and death of stars, new planets outside our solar system, super-massive black holes at the heart of other galaxies, and trace the origin of the universe in the Big Bang.

Outside, there's a superb 35-acre arboretum planted with 2000 species of trees and shrubs, each one helpfully labelled, and an Environment Discovery Centre, which explains the importance of trees to the natural environment. The site also contains a picnic area, play area, café and shop. A fairly recent addition is an Observational Pathway stretching around the Telescope.

Crewe

-  Queens Park  Crewe Heritage Centre
-  Lyceum Theatre
-  Lakemore Country Park Animal Kingdom
-  Sandbach Flashes  Winterley Pool

In 1837, the Grand Junction Railway arrived at what is now Crewe, and five years later moved all its construction and repair workshops to what had been a greenfield site. A workforce of 900 had to be housed so the company rapidly built cottages, each one shared by four of the lowest paid workers, and detached



Jodrell Bank, Lower Withington

'mansions', which accommodated four families of the more highly skilled. At one time, seven out of every 10 men in Crewe worked on the railways.

Later, in 1887, the railway company also provided the town with one of the most splendid parks in the north of England, **Queens Park**, some 40 acres of lawns and flowerbeds, together with an ornamental lake. Between 1946 and 2002, Rolls-Royce's engineering works brought further prosperity, but it is as a railway centre that Crewe is best known. Its railway station, about a mile from the town centre, is still one of the largest in the northwest with 12 platforms in use.

Crewe Heritage Centre offers a fascinating insight into the town's place in railway history with hands-on exhibits, steam locomotive rides, model railway displays and a children's playground. Also worth a visit is the **Lyceum Theatre**, built in 1902 and with its glorious Edwardian opulence undimmed.

A couple of miles north of Crewe, **Lakemore Country Park Animal Kingdom** is home to a wide variety of animals – wallabies, llamas, miniature donkeys, owls and many other unusual and rare breeds. Children can feed the farm animals, visit the pets corner and enjoy both the indoor and outdoor play areas. Within the 36-acre site are five fishing

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lakes and a log cabin coffee shop. A pleasant country walk using footpaths, towpaths and old drovers' roads starts at Moss Bridge, on the western outskirts, and takes in **Sandbach Flashes**, one of the best places for bird-watching in Cheshire. Waders and wildfowl gather in large numbers in winter, attracting predators such as merlin and sparrowhawks, and the salty conditions resulting from the local industry are ideal for plants usually only found in coastal areas, such as sea club-rush, lesser sea-spurrey and sea aster. Further along the walk, **Winterley Pool** is a refuge favoured by mute swans. Nearby Haslington Hall (private), a fine black and white Tudor house, was built by Admiral Sir Francis Vernon in 1545. Sir Francis had the task of dismantling ships from the Spanish Armada and some say that timbers from these ships were used in later extensions to the hall. In the early 1900s the hall became the home of Mrs Watts, the founder and first President of the Women's Institute.

Nantwich

-  Elizabeth I  Churche's Mansion
-  Cathedral of South Cheshire
-  Rev Joseph Priestley  Nantwich Museum
-  Stapeley Water Gardens
-  Bridgemere Garden World
-  Hack Green Secret Nuclear Bunker

Several disasters have befallen Nantwich down the centuries. In the 11th century the town was totally destroyed except for a single building. King Henry III ordered the destruction to prevent the Welsh using the town as a base and also exploiting the amenity of the salt spring. The most disastrous event fully recorded was the Great Fire of 1583,

which consumed some 600 of the town's thatched and timber-framed buildings. Fanned by constant winds, the blaze raged for 20 days and the fire-fighting operations were more than somewhat hampered by the escape of four bears from their cage in the town's bear pit behind the Crown Hotel. (Four bears from Nantwich are mentioned in Shakespeare's comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.)

Elizabeth I contributed the huge sum of £1000 to the cost of rebuilding and ordered her Privy Council to arrange collections throughout the land to augment the funds; she also donated quantities of timber from Delamere Forest to assist in the building work. A grateful citizen, a builder by the name of Thomas Cleese, commemorated this royal largesse with a plaque on his new house at No 41 High Street. The plaque is still in place and reads:

*God grant our ryal Queen in England
longe to reign
For she hath put her helping hand
to bild this towne again.*

The most striking of the buildings to survive the conflagration, perhaps because it was surrounded by a moat, is the lovely black and white house in Hospital Street known as **Churche's Mansion** after the merchant Richard Churche who built it in 1577. Astonishingly, when the house was up for sale in 1930, no buyer showed any interest and the building was on the point of being transported brick by brick to America when a public-spirited local doctor stepped in and rescued it. The ground floor is now an antiques centre, but in 2009 the house was put up for sale and its future is uncertain at the moment.

The Great Fire also spared the stone-built 14th-century church. This fine building, with

HARVEST INTERIORS

6 Pepper Street, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 5AB

Tel: 01270 627776

e-mail: paulsharkee@aol.com

website: www.harvestinteriors.co.uk

Harvest Interiors is a family-run business that has been established for over 15 years and specialises in high quality wood furniture. Kitchens and furniture can be made to customers' requirements, so providing a truly bespoke service. Owner Sandra Sharkey prides herself on being more exclusive than the large furniture retailers by offering high quality products at affordable prices. The shop also stocks mirrors, clocks, basket ware and "East of India" collectable giftware. Also on sale are prints of Nantwich street scenes by local artist Haydn Jones. Located in the heart of the town, Harvest Interiors is open from 9.30am to 5pm, Monday to Saturday.



an unusual octagonal tower, is sometimes called the **Cathedral of South Cheshire** and dates from the period of the town's greatest prosperity as a salt town and trading centre. Of exceptional interest are the magnificent chancel and the wonderful carvings in the choir. On the misericords (tip-up seats) are mermaids, foxes (some dressed as monks in a sharp dig at priests), pigs, and the legendary Wyvern - half-dragon, half-bird - whose name is linked with the River Weaver, 'wyvern' being an old pronunciation of Weaver. An ancient tale about the building of the church tells of an old woman who brought ale and food each day from a local inn to the masons working on the site. The masons discovered that the woman was cheating them by keeping back some of the money they put 'in the pot' for their refreshment. They took revenge by making a stone carving showing the old woman being carried away by Old Nick himself, her hand still stuck in a pot. A plaque in the church remembers the **Rev Joseph Priestley** (1733-1804), who was a minister here. A writer on education, philosophy, government and science, he is best known today as the discoverer of oxygen.

During the Civil War, Nantwich was the

only town in Cheshire to support Cromwell's Parliamentary army. The town was frequently besieged by Royalist troops and, after a particularly long siege, the Royalist forces, under Lord Byron, were finally defeated on 25 January 1644. The people of Nantwich celebrated by wearing sprigs of holly in their hair and hats, and the day became known as Holly Holy Day; every year, on the Saturday closest to 25 January, the town welcomes Cromwellian pikemen and battle scenes are re-enacted by members of the Sealed Knot. There are records of the Civil War in the **Nantwich Museum** in Pillory Street, which also has exhibitions about the town and its dairy and cheese-making industries.

Close to Nantwich Lake, on the edge of town, is a memorial linked with a later war. First Lieutenant Arthur L Brown, an American pilot, crashed here in 1944, staying with his blazing Thunderbolt fighter to avoid coming down on the town.

It was salt that had once made Nantwich second only in importance to Chester in the county. The Romans mined salt here for their garrisons at Chester and Stoke where the soldiers received part of their wages in 'sal', or salt. The payment was called a 'salarium',

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hence the modern word salary. Nantwich remained a salt-producing town right up to the 18th century, but then it was overtaken by towns like Northwich, which enjoyed better communications on the canal system. But a brine spring still supplies Nantwich's outdoor swimming pool.

Within a few miles of the town are two notable gardens. A mile south, off the A51, is **Stapeley Water Gardens** (see panel below), which attracts nearly 1.5 million visitors each year. The 64-acre site includes the National Collection of Nymphaea (more than 350 varieties of water lilies), a comprehensively equipped garden centre, an angling centre, a pet centre, a restaurant, two cafés and a gift shop. In The Palms Tropical Oasis are a

vibrant fountain and koi pool, blue and gold macaws and Amazon parrots. The Zoo room is home to a family of cotton top tamarin monkeys, water dragons, box tortoises, scorpions, tarantulas and a cayman crocodile. There are frogs of all kinds - poison arrow frogs, tree frogs, South American cane toads - in the World of Frogs, while in the tropical house piranhas, catfish and pacus are shaded by the enormous leaves of the Giant Amazon water lily. The stingray pool, the Tunnel of Underwater Life and the blacktip reef sharks are other attractions not to be missed at this brilliant family venue, which is open throughout the year.

About six miles further south along the A51, and straddling the Staffordshire border,

Stapeley Water Gardens

London Road, Stapeley, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 7LH

Tel: 01270 623868

e-mail: stapeleyng@btinternet.com

website: www.stapeleyng.com

Located just south of Nantwich and set within 64 acres, **Stapeley Water Gardens** makes a great day out. It has become the world's leading and largest water garden centre and is a delight to wander around. The ponds and the small lake here are filled with an enormous variety of water lilies which bloom at their best during the summer months. A range of water fountains accompany them. Everything you could possibly need for your own garden can be found here and experts are on hand to assist.

The Palms is an indoor tropical oasis with exotic flowers, lush foliage and stately palms. Catfish lurk beneath the leaves of the Giant Amazon Water Lily and Giant Gouramis swim amid the coral reef, whilst, in the Zoo Room you will find macaws, tarantulas and Tamarins. There is a changing exhibition of photographs, paintings and poster graphics on wildlife and nature to be enjoyed, along with video and slide shows.

Stapeley is also a paradise for anglers with a vast selection of rods, poles, seatboxes and indeed everything the fisherman could want.

The garden centre is full of products for the home and garden but be sure to visit the 'Idea Display Garden' created in conjunction with *Garden Answers* magazine. In addition there are a further two gift shops and a superb restaurant.



Bridgemere Garden World provided the location for BBC TV's *Gardeners' Diary*. This is just one of 22 different gardens, among them a French rose garden, a woodland setting, a cottage garden and a rock and water area. The extensive glasshouses contain houseplants of every description and the garden centre is stocked with everything a gardener could possibly need. There's also an aquatics house with some splendid fish, a specialist food hall, a flower arrangers' centre, a bookshop, HobbyCraft arts and crafts shop, a restaurant and a coffee shop.

A few miles south of Nantwich, just off the A530 Whitchurch road, is **Hack Green Secret Nuclear Bunker**. For 50 years this vast underground complex remained secret, built as the centre of regional government in the case of a nuclear war, but it was declassified in 1993 and is now a unique attraction open to the public. Visitors pass through the massive blast doors into the chilling world of the Cold War. The tour includes the Minister of State's office, life support area, communications centre and decontamination facilities. Cinemas show once

secret films, and children can have fun as secret agents, following the Soviet Spy Mouse Trail. A trip can end with a visit to the bunker's NAAFI-style canteen to pick up survival rations, and a browse through the shop for a souvenir.

Around Nantwich

WILLASTON

2 miles E of Nantwich between the A534 and A500

World Worm Charming Championships

The thriving village of Willaston has at its heart a large green with a fine copper beech tree planted in 1935 to mark the Silver Jubilee of King George V. The village gained an entry in the *Guinness Book of World Records* after one of the most unusual world records was established here in 1980. Some 200 competitors had gathered at the Primary School for the annual **World Worm Charming Championships**, now in their 30th year. The prize goes to whoever induces the greatest number of worms to poke their

heads above a small patch of playing field aided only by a garden fork and strategies such as playing a saxophone.

Each contestant is allowed half an hour and the current world champion, Mr T Shufflebotham, charmed 511 out of the ground - a rate of more than 17 wriggles a minute. The secret of his wonderful way with worms has never been revealed.



Worm Charming, Willaston

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WYBUNBURY

5 miles S of Crewe on the B5071

St Chad's Church

Wybunbury Moss National Nature Reserve

South Cheshire's answer to the Leaning Tower of Pisa is the 100ft tower of **St Chad's Church** in Wybunbury. It was built in 1470 above an unsuspected ancient salt bed. Subsidence has been the reason for the tower's long history of leaning sideways by as much as four feet before being straightened up, most recently in 1989. Once given the title of The Hanging Steeple of Wimberie, it now rests on a reinforced concrete bed and is unlikely to deviate from the vertical again. The tower stands alone, surrounded by a graveyard: the body of the church, once capable of holding a congregation of 1600 people, collapsed on no fewer than five occasions. In 1972, the villagers finally decided to abandon it and build a new church on firmer ground. The tower is still used for bell ringing, with a fine set of bells rung on special occasions. In the fields near the church can be seen the remains of two medieval moated houses that were used as 'safe houses' for visiting clergy. In the 15th century the Bishop of Coventry leased two gardens to a hermit called Nicholas Baker on condition that they were kept only by fit



Beeston Castle Gateway

priests or honest hermits.

A pleasant walk from the tower takes in **Wybunbury Moss National Nature Reserve**, where the mossland habitat is home to rare plants such as sundew, bog asphodel and bog rosemary. The boggy area at the western end of the Moss is what remains of the well that supplied the village in the Middle Ages.

BEESTON

8 miles NW of Nantwich on a minor road off the A49

Beeston Castle Peckforton Castle

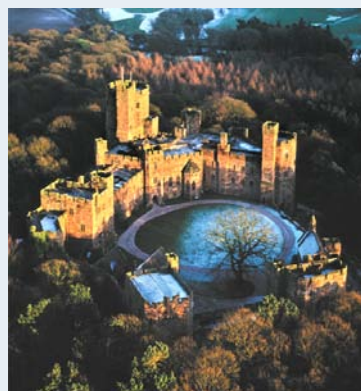
A craggy cliff suddenly rising 500 feet from the Cheshire Plain, its summit crowned by the ruins of **Beeston Castle** (English Heritage), Beeston Hill is one of the most dramatic sights in the county. The castle was built around 1220 but didn't see any military action until the Civil War. On one rather ignominious occasion during that conflict, a Royalist captain and just eight musketeers managed to capture the mighty fortress and its garrison of 60 soldiers without firing a shot. A few years later, Cromwell ordered that the castle be 'slighted', or partially destroyed, but this 'Castle in the Air' is still very imposing with walls 30 feet high and a well 366 feet deep. An old legend asserts that Richard II tipped a hoard of coins, gold and jewels down the well, but no treasure has ever been discovered. The castle hill is a popular place for picnics, and it's worth climbing it just to enjoy the spectacular views that extend across seven counties and over to a 'twin' castle. **Peckforton Castle** (private) looks just as medieval as Beeston but was, in fact, built in 1844 for the first Lord Tolemache who spared no expense in re-creating features such as a vast Great Hall and a keep with towers 60 feet tall. The architect Gilbert Scott later

Peckforton Castle

Stone House Lane, Peckforton, Tarporley,
Cheshire CW6 9TN
Tel: 01829 260930

website: www.peckfortoncastle.co.uk

Peckforton Castle is the realisation of the dreams on one man. John Tollemache, MP of Cheshire, built this breathtaking castle between 1844 and 1851. Standing on top of a wooded hillside, its dramatic silhouette can be seen for miles across the Cheshire Plains. Today it is a magnificent Grade I listed building and architecturally recognised as the UK's truest representation of a medieval castle.



praised Peckforton as “the very height of masquerading”. Its authentic medieval appearance has made the castle a favourite location for film and television companies, as well as for conferences and weddings.

Beston town is best known for its weekly livestock market, held every Friday.

North West Cheshire

The northwestern part of the county contains the pleasant rural area known as the Vale Royal, as well as the more industrial environs of Warrington and Runcorn. It was Prince Edward, later Edward I, who gave the area its name and founded the great Abbey of Vale Royal in fulfilment of a solemn vow made in dramatic circumstances. He was returning from the Crusades when his ship sailed into a violent storm. The Prince made a pledge to the Virgin that if his life were spared he would found an Abbey for 100 monks. Lo! the ship was tossed ashore, and the Prince and his companions waded through the surf to safety. In 1277, Edward, now King and with his young wife Eleanor of Castile by his side, honoured his vow by placing the first stone of

Vale Royal Abbey. “No monastery,” he decreed, “shall be more royal than this one in liberties, wealth and honour, throughout the whole world.” Vale Royal Abbey, about three miles south of Northwich, indeed became the largest and most powerful Cistercian Abbey in England, a building reputedly even more glorious than Tintern or Fountains. Unlike those abbeys, however, barely a stone of Vale Royal now remains in place. The abuse by the medieval abbots of their vast wealth, and of their unfettered power of life and death over the inhabitants of the Vale, may partly explain why their magnificent building was so quickly and completely destroyed after Henry VIII's closure of the monasteries. Over the centuries, the county has lost many fine buildings unnecessarily, but the deliberate destruction of Vale Royal Abbey must take prime place in the litany of crimes against sublime architecture.

Northwich

Salt Museum

Dock Road Edwardian Pumping Station

The Vale Royal is now a district borough centred on the old salt town of Northwich,

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GILROY WILSON SHOES

7-9 Market Street, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 5BD
Tel: 01606 42577

website: www.gilroy-wilson-shoes.co.uk

The Wilson family have been involved in footwear manufacture and retail in mid Cheshire since the late 1800s. The business started with the manufacturing of clogs and evolved into selling shoes.

Gilroy Wilson Shoes have traded in Northwich for over 50 years. They were originally in premises at the top of Crown Street then moved to the newly built 9 Market Street in 1965, and added 7 Market Street a few years later.

Comfort and fit are what Gilroy Wilson Shoes aim to provide for you, and they stock the best brands to achieve this. In the ladies there are Hotter, Padders, Rieker, Birkenstock, Merrell, and Fitflops - “shoes with a built-in gym”. For men the range includes Hush Puppies, Padders, Rieker, Loake, Grenson, Merrell, and Brasher. And for the children there are Clark's, Hush Puppies and Superfit.

If you are unable to visit personally, then log onto Gilroy Wilson's informative website where you can browse and buy at leisure.



which is now the only place in Britain where salt is produced on a large scale. Even before the Romans arrived, Cheshire salt was well known and highly valued. But production on a major scale at Northwich didn't begin until 1670 when rock salt was discovered in nearby Marston. Salt may seem an inoffensive sort of product, but its extraction from the keuper marl of the Cheshire Plain has produced some quite spectacular side effects. In Elizabethan times, John Leland recorded that a hill at Combermere suddenly disappeared into underground workings, and Northwich later became notorious for the number of its buildings leaning at crazy angles because of subsidence. Even today, the White Lion Inn in Witton Street lies a complete storey lower than its original height. The arrival in the 19th century of new processes of extraction

brought different problems. In 1873, John Brunner and Ludwig Mond set up their salt works at Winnington on the northern edge of the town to manufacture alkali products based on brine. The ammonia process involved cast an appalling stench over the town and devastated vegetation for miles around. On the other hand, Brunner and Mond were model employers; they paid their workforce well, built houses for them and were among the first firms in the country to give their employees annual holidays with pay.

The long involvement of Northwich and Cheshire with salt production is vividly recorded at the **Salt Museum**, the only one of its kind in Britain. It stands about half a mile south of the town centre in London Road (A533) and occupies what used to be the Northwich Workhouse. Like so many of those

COOKSONS JEWELLERS

8 Witton Street, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 5EB

Tel: 01606 42827

A jeweller's shop has occupied this site since 1750 and was owned by the Elam family who specialised in watches and clocks. Derek Cookson took over the shop when he was demobbed from RAF in 1948, and on his retirement Michael and Judith Wolf took over the shop in 1991. Since Michael died in 2006, Judith has run the business, still continuing to sell where possible British made jewellery, clocks, silver wear and pewter. Cooksons pride themselves on customer relationships and continue to carry out jewellery and watch repairs, specialising in mechanical watches. Valuation days are offered regularly but appointments are necessary.



dreaded institutions, it is an exceptionally handsome late-Georgian building, designed by George Latham, the architect of Arley Hall. With its unique collection of traditional working tools and displays that include working models and videos, the Salt Museum recounts the fascinating story of the county's oldest industry. One of the displays, Made from Salt, explores some of the 14,000 uses of salt, from mummies to polythene.

The Water Heritage Trail concentrates on the industrial archaeology and water heritage of Northwich, and takes visitors to docks, locks, bridges and warehouses. One of the highlights is the **Dock Road Edwardian Pumping Station**, a fully restored sewage

pumping station where the noise and splendour of the working machinery create an atmosphere of power and tradition.

Around Northwich

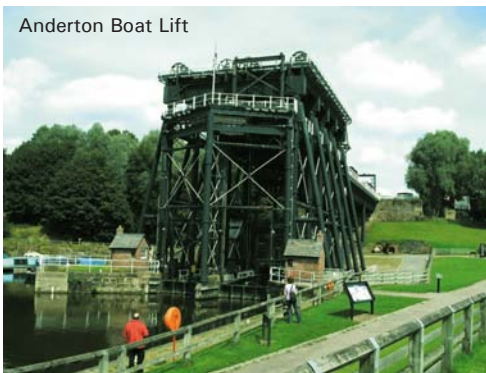
ANDERTON

1 mile N of Northwich on minor road off the A533

- Anderton Boat Lift Anderton Nature Park
- Marbury Country Park

One of the most stupendous engineering feats of the canal age was the **Anderton Boat Lift**, built in 1875 and recently comprehensively restored. This extraordinary construction - known as the Cathedral of the Canals - was designed by Edwin Clark to transfer boats from the Trent and Mersey Canal to the Weaver Navigation 50 feet below. Two barges would enter the upper tank, two the lower, and by pumping water out of the lower tank, the boats would exchange places. Thousands of visitors come every year to marvel at this impressive structure, and to take a trip through the lift on the *Edwin Clark*, converted from a maintenance craft that once worked on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. Also here

Anderton Boat Lift



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are an exhibition centre and operations centre. A six-mile circular trail - the Victorian Trail - visits the Boat Lift, the Lion Salt Works and Great Budworth, providing an insight into the area's industrial heritage and also into its rural character.

For nature lovers, another trail runs through **Anderton Nature Park**. This wildflower trail introduces visitors to the varied plant life that thrives in the prevailing soil conditions (salt, lime, ash clinker), and markers along the trail show the best places to look for particular plants.

About a mile north of Anderton, **Marbury Country Park** was formerly part of a large country estate but the area is now managed by Cheshire County Council whose wardens have created a variety of habitats for plants, trees and animals. The Park lies at the edge of Budworth Mere and there are attractive walks and bridleways around the site, which also has an arboretum, picnic area and garden centre.

ANTROBUS

5 miles N of Northwich off the A559

Just a couple of miles from the magnificent Arley Hall and its world-famous gardens is the pleasing little village of Antrobus, the only place in Britain to bear this name. Even the *Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names* is baffled by Antrobus: "Unexplained" it says curtly, adding as its excuse, "Hardly English".

MARSTON

1 mile NE of Northwich on a minor road

- Lion Salt Works Museum

In Victorian times, the Old Salt Mine at Marston was a huge tourist attraction. About 360 feet deep and covering 35 acres, it even brought the Tsar of Russia here in 1844. Ten thousand lamps illuminated the huge cavern

as the Emperor sat down to dinner with eminent members of the Royal Society. By the end of the century, however, subsidence caused by the mine had made some 40 houses in the village uninhabitable, and one day in 1933 a hole 50 feet wide and 300 feet deep suddenly appeared close to the Trent and Mersey Canal. Happily, the village has now stabilised itself, and at the **Lion Salt Works Museum** volunteer workers keep alive the only surviving open pan salt works in Britain. It ceased production in 1986.

GREAT BUDWORTH

3 miles NE of Northwich off the A559

- St Mary and All Saints Arley Hall and Gardens
- Stockley Farm

A charming small village nowadays, 'Great' Budworth was accorded that designation at a time when it was the largest ecclesiastical parish in all Cheshire, the administrative centre for some 35 individual communities. The imposing church on the hill, built in the 14th and 15th centuries, reflects its importance during those years. **St Mary and All Saints** attracts many visitors to its host of quaint carvings and odd faces that peer out at unexpected corners - some with staring eyes, others with their tongues poking out. A man near the pulpit appears to be drowsing through some interminable sermon. Under the roof of the nave you'll find a man with a serpent, another in mid-somersault, and a minstrel playing bagpipes. The distinguished 17th-century historian, Sir Peter Leycester, is buried in the Lady Chapel, and the Warburton Chapel has a finely carved Tudor ceiling and 13th-century oak stalls, the oldest in Cheshire. During the 19th century, Great Budworth was part of the Arley Hall estate and it is largely due to the energetic Squire Egerton-Warburton, a



Arley Hall, Great Budworth

conservationist well ahead of his time, that so many of the attractive old cottages in the village are still in place.

Cheshire can boast many grand houses and many fine gardens, but at **Arley Hall and Gardens** one of the grandest houses and one of the finest gardens are in perfect harmony. The present Hall was completed in 1845, a few years after Rowland Egerton-Warburton arrived at Arley with his bride, Mary Brooke. The newly-married couple took possession of a dilapidated old mansion, infested with rats and with antiquated drains from which an unbearable stench drifted through the house. Understandably, Rowland and Mary soon demolished the old hall and in its place rose a sumptuous early-Victorian stately home complete with (bearing in mind those drains) such state-of-the-art innovations as 'Howden's Patent Atmospheric Air Dispensers'. Rowland and Mary were both ardent gardeners and it was they who master-minded the magnificent panoramas of today's gardens. Rowland is credited with creating what is believed to be the first herbaceous border in England; his descendant, the present Viscount Ashbrook, has continued that tradition by cultivating The Grove, an informal woodland garden planted with spring bulbs, flowering shrubs

and exotic trees, a pleasing contrast to the more formal design of the main gardens.

Other attractions at Arley include a tearoom housed in a beautifully converted 16th-century barn, a shop and a plant nursery offering a wide selection of herbaceous and other plants.

Also within the Arley estate, **Stockley Farm** is a 400-acre organic dairy farm that provides a great

family day out. A visit begins with a tractor and trailer ride to the farm where there are always baby animals for children to handle and feed. Adult animals include an 18-hand shire horse, Star, a lovely big pig called Olive, and Kate, the Highland cow. There are miniature tractors to ride, pony rides, an adventure play area, a souvenir shop and the Willow Barn Tea Room. At weekend afternoons and on selected days during school holidays, there are Birds of Prey displays.

PICKMERE

3 miles NE of Northwich on the B5391



The delightful village of Pickmere commands superb views of the Cheshire Plain, extending from the Dee estuary to the Pennine hills. The nearby **Pick Mere**, from which the village takes its name, is popular with windsurfers and yachtsmen, and boats are available for hire.

LACH DENNIS

4 miles SE of Northwich on the B5082



The small village of Lach Dennis derives its name from the Old English laecc, meaning a bog, and the Dennis family who once had an estate here. A mile or so to the east,

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PLANTATION GARDEN CENTRE & COFFEE SHOP

Lumley Moor Road, Plumley, nr Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 9SB

Tel: 01565 722315 e-mail: info@visitplantation.co.uk

'Plantation' is a family business, owned and run by award winning garden designer Andy Yates. Located in the heart of the Cheshire countryside but just 10 minutes from junction 19 of the M6, the site has been in the Yates family since 1935.

Following significant investment, Plantation now boasts a fine Plantarea and a new, very popular coffee lounge where hearty, homemade food is the order of the day. It was during the recent renovations that seed chests were uncovered, dating back to the early 1900's and containing all sorts of artefacts including beautifully written company ledgers, old packets of seeds and pictures of Old Trafford football & cricket grounds showing the quality of turf produced by the family's grass seed mixtures! These now take pride of place in our Colonial Cafe.

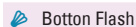
Plantation is first and foremost a plant centre, over half of our plants are grown here on site and those we don't grow, we source locally wherever possible – our bedding and vegetable plants are supplied by neighbouring growers. Drawing on Andy's garden design experience we have tried to provide ideas and inspiration by building themed displays, putting together planting combinations and using landscaping materials in garden settings, to show how plants and products could be interlinked with each other as they would be in the garden. We also run a range of talks, demonstrations and events to fill you with even more inspiration – check our website for further information.



Shakerley Mere Nature Reserve is host to a diverse range of wildlife with Canada Geese, herons, mute swans and mallards a common sight. Cormorants fly here from their breeding grounds on the coast to feast on the fish, and more exotic species arrive at different times of the year.

WINSFORD

6 miles S of Northwich on the A54



Winsford is another of the Cheshire salt towns that expanded greatly during the 19th century, swallowing up the old villages of Over and Wharton on opposite banks of the River Weaver. Two legacies of those boom years should be mentioned. One is Christ Church, which was specifically designed so that it could be jacked up in the event of subsidence. The other is **Botton Flash**, a

sizeable lake caused by subsidence but now a popular water recreation area for the town.

SANDIWAY

5 miles SW of Northwich on the A49



A popular attraction at Blakemere Craft Centre on Chester Road is the **Cheshire Waterlife Aquatic and Falconry centre**. The water life includes marine fish and invertebrates, koi carp and tropical fish. Falconers fly several different species of birds of prey, supplying a running commentary on each bird, and visitors can also take a guided tour of the aviary complex – home to several species of rare owls – and take lessons in bird handling and falconry. The centre has a pets corner, with rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters and caged birds, and also houses marine fish and invertebrates, koi carp and tropical fish.

CUDDINGTON

5 miles SW of Northwich off the A49

Whitegate Way

Cuddington is at the western end of the **Whitegate Way**, a pleasant rural walk of about five miles, which follows the track bed of the old railway that used to carry salt from the Winsford mines. There is a picnic site and car park at the former Whitegate Station.

COTEBROOK

7 miles SW of Northwich on the A49

Cotebrook Shire Horse Centre

Set in 50 acres of rolling countryside, **Cotebrook Shire Horse Centre** is home to the internationally renowned Cotebrook Shire Horse Stud. In addition to some 30 of these mighty beasts, the Centre has miniature Shetland ponies, pigs, goats, ducks and hens, foxes, red deer, red squirrels and birds of prey. Open daily all year, the Centre also has a nature trail, picnic area and gift shop.

LITTLE BUDWORTH

7 miles SW of Northwich on a minor road off the A49 or A54

Little Budworth Common Country Park

Little Budworth Common Country Park is a pleasant area of heathland and woods, ideal for picnics and walking. The nearby village enjoys splendid views over Budworth Pool, but will be better known to motor racing enthusiasts for Oulton Park racing circuit a mile or so to the south.

TARPORLEY

12 miles SW of Northwich on the A51/A49

Tarporley is one of the larger Cheshire villages and is well supplied with a wide range of antique, curio, craft and fashion shops. In

the days when most of this area was part of Delamere Forest, Tarporley was the headquarters of the verderers, or forest wardens. It was from Tarporley in the early 17th century that John Done, Chief Forester and Hereditary Bow-bearer of Delamere, entertained King James to a hunt. The chase was, he reported, a great success: “deer, both red and fallow, fish and fowl, abounded in the meres”. A grateful king rewarded his host with a knighthood.

UTKINTON

10 miles SW of Northwich off the A49 or A51

During the Middle Ages, the verderers had their own courts in which they meted out rough justice to offenders against the forest laws. One such court was at Utkinton, and in an old farmhouse stands a column formed by an ancient forest tree, its roots still in the ground. When the court was in session, the wardens would place on this tree the symbol of their authority, the Hunting Horn of Delamere. The farmhouse is not open to the public but the horn, dating from around 1120, has survived and can be seen at the Grosvenor Museum in Chester.

CROWTON

4 miles W of Northwich on the B5153

Crowton has many times been voted the Best Kept Village in Cheshire and its 18th-century hostelry, The Hare and Hounds, enjoys a particularly picturesque position in this appealing village.

ACTON BRIDGE

4 miles W of Northwich off the A49

Weaver Valley Way Hazel Pear Trees

The bridge here crosses the River Weaver, a waterway whose scenic merits have been

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largely unsung. The Vale Royal Council has developed the **Weaver Valley Way**, which allows walkers to enjoy some lovely stretches, particularly those between Weaver Bridge and Saltersford Locks, and the six mile route from Northwich to Winsford Marina.

During World War One, Acton Bridge made an unusual contribution to the war effort. Near the village was a plantation of **hazel pear trees**, whose fruit is quite inedible but whose juice provided the khaki dye for soldiers' uniforms.

HATCHMERE

8 miles W of Northwich on the B5152

In medieval times the village of Hatchmere was surrounded by the Forest of Delamere, the largest of Cheshire's three major woodlands. It stretched from the Mersey to Nantwich, and although there were small areas of pasture and arable land, its status as a royal forest meant that the prime duty of those in charge of it was the preservation of the 'beasts of the chase'. It was not until 1812 that Delamere was officially 'disafforested' and today Delamere Forest covers little more than an area about two miles long and one mile deep. From Hatchmere attractive trails lead through the woods and around Hatch Mere, the sizeable lake that gives the village its name.

Warrington

Town Hall Museum and Art Gallery

Mad Hatters Tea Party River of Life

St Elphin's Church Holy Trinity Church

Victoria Park

Lying at an important bridging point of the River Mersey, Warrington claims to enjoy Britain's most convenient location. It stands

midway between the huge conurbations and ports of Manchester and Liverpool, and on a pivotal point of communications close to where the M6, M62 and M56 motorways intersect, and where the West Coast main railway line links London and Scotland.

Warrington is North Cheshire's largest town – an important industrial centre since Georgian and Victorian times and with substantial buildings from those days to prove it. Its imposing **Town Hall** was formerly Lord Winmarleigh's country residence, built in 1750 with all the appropriate grandeur: windows framed in painfully expensive copper, and elaborately designed entrance gates 25 feet high and 54 feet wide. Along with its 13 acres of parkland, the hall provides a dignified focus for the town centre.

A major Victorian contribution to the town is its excellent **Museum and Art Gallery** in Bold Street, dating from 1857 and one of the earliest municipal museums. “An uncommonly dignified building” was how Pevsner described it. The exhibits are remarkably varied and include shrunken heads, a unique china teapot collection, a scold's bridle, Egyptian mummies, a Roman actor's mask and other Roman artefacts discovered in nearby Wilderspool. There are some fine paintings as well, most of which are Victorian watercolours and oils, and a rare Vanous still life.

In Golden Square is a large granite sculpture by Edwin Russell of the **Mad Hatters Tea Party**. This statue was unveiled by the Prince and Princess of Wales in 1984 and commemorates the area's connection with Lewis Carroll who lived in nearby Daresbury. The **River of Life** in Bridge Street is a memorial to the victims of the 1993 terrorist bomb, which killed two young boys and injured dozens of citizens. Artist Stephen



Mad Hatter's Tea Party, Warrington

Broadbent worked with local children to design 12 bronze plaques, each with an inscription chosen by the children - self-control, joy, peace, forgiveness, encouragement, reconciliation, patience, justice, love, hope, friendship and faithfulness. There is more public art in Market Gate with its 10 Guardian Pillars and the Well of Light, while in nearby Horsemarket Street are some lively action fountains.

Also worth visiting is **St Elphin's Church** with the third highest spire in the country, a 14th-century chancel and memorials celebrating the Butler and Patten families.

Holy Trinity Church, built in 1760, is a fine example of a typical 18th-century Georgian church complete with galleries and box pews. It also has an impressive chandelier rescued from the old House of Commons in 1801.

The town's premier leisure site is **Victoria Park**, purchased by the Corporation in 1897 and named to commemorate Queen Victoria's jubilee. The park is a good starting

point for exploring the area, following the Mersey Way along the river or joining Black Bear Park and the Trans-Pennine Trail. An interesting curiosity at Bridge Foot nearby is a combined telephone kiosk and letter box. These were common in the early 1900s but Warrington's is one of the few that has survived.

Two well-known names associated with the town are the television presenter Chris Evans, who was born here, and

the durable comedian and ukulele player George Formby, who is buried in the Catholic section of the town's cemetery.

Around Warrington

DARESBURY

5 miles SW of Warrington on the A558

Lewis Carroll

There has been a church at Daresbury since the 12th century, and the present church of 1870 has many interesting features including



Lewis Carroll Memorial Window, Daresbury

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17th-century carvings, a 16th-century font and an 18th-century hair picture - a beautifully embroidered picture of the church sewn completely in human hair. The church also has a unique Green Man, and stained glass windows by Geoffrey Webb in memory of **Lewis Carroll** who was born in the village in 1832 when his father was vicar here. The windows depict Lewis Carroll and characters from *Alice in Wonderland*. The church is open daily from 9am to dusk and a small gift stall sells cards and souvenirs.

WIDNES

6 miles SW of Warrington on the A557

Spike Island Catalyst Science Discovery Centre

Described in the 1860s as "a quiet industrial village", Widnes now has a population of around 60,000. It stands on the north shore of the Mersey, linked to Runcorn by a remarkably elegant road bridge.

A popular attraction is **Spike Island**, which provides a landscaped walk from where the superstructures of ships passing along the Manchester Ship Canal can be seen gliding past. Widnes has a popular family attraction in the **Catalyst Science Discovery Centre**, where four galleries and more than 100 hands-on exhibits make sense of the chemical industry.

RUNCORN

8 miles SW of Warrington on the A557

Norton Priory Museum and Gardens

Runcorn is one of Britain's best-known post-war new towns, developed around a much older town bearing the same name.

Norton Priory Museum and Gardens is always a delightful and intriguing destination for a family outing whatever the weather. Despite being located close to junction 11 of the M56, it is a peaceful oasis, with 16 acres of

beautiful woodland gardens running down to the Bridgewater Canal. The Augustinian priory was built in 1134 as a retreat for 12 "black canons", so called because they wore a cape of black woollen cloth over a white linen surplice. Recent work by the Norton Priory Museum Trust uncovered the remains of the church, chapter house, cloisters and dormitory. These finds are informatively explained in an audio-visual presentation in the museum. Also within the site are a sculpture trail, an award-winning Walled Garden, which contains the National Collection of tree quinces, a coffee shop, retail area and temporary exhibitions gallery. A programme of exciting events takes place throughout the year with something for everyone, from medieval festivals to make-your-own scarecrow days.

FRODSHAM

11 miles SW of Warrington on the A56

Church of St Laurence Francis Gastrell

This is an attractive town with a broad main street lined with thatched cottages and substantial Georgian and Victorian houses. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, Frodsham was an important coaching town and several fine coaching inns survive. Built in 1632, The Bear's Paw, with its three stone gables, recalls the bear-baiting that once took place nearby.

Of the Earl of Chester's Norman castle only fragments remain, but the **Church of St Laurence** (an earlier church here was recorded in the *Domesday Book*) is noted for the fine 17th-century panelling in its exquisite north chapel.

The vicar here from 1740 to 1756 was **Francis Gastrell**, a name that is anathema to all lovers of Shakespeare. Gastrell bought the poet's house, New Place, at Stratford and first

DUNHAM MASSEY HALL & PARK

Located close to Altrincham, Dunham Massey Hall & Park has a number of old buildings and farms with locally made products. The Bridgewater Canal is close by, the first canal built in England, linking Manchester to the Mersey Estuary.

GINGHAM AND ROSES

The Lavender Barn, School Lane, Dunham Massey, Cheshire WA14 4TR
Tel: 0793 222 98821

A new addition to the Lavender Barn, **Gingham and Roses** offers an eclectic mix of bespoke, hand-painted furniture, fabrics, soft furnishings and gift ideas. Using traditional Farrow and Ball colours as well as high quality, fantastic fabrics, including those from Laura Ashley, Cath Kidston and Kate Forman, each piece is hand-made, exclusive and unique. Owner Janet Quick is always on the look-out for outstanding items so there are new arrivals every week. The shop also sells a tempting selection of exquisite gifts for the home, including cushions, lavender hearts and mirrors.



DUNHAM MASSEY ICE CREAM

Ash Farm, Station Road, Dunham Massey, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 5SG
Tel: 0161 928 1230

Occupying a former farm building on the National Trust's Dunham Massey estate, **Dunham Massey Ice Cream** was established in 1998 when it offered a range of just 5 flavours. Today, customers have the choice of some 20 different luxury ice creams. They are all hand-made from whole milk and double cream by owners Ann Pennington and her daughter Dianne Ogden. They also sell their delicious product at food shows and farmers markets across the region. The shop is open from 12 noon until 6pm, seven days a week.



THE LAVENDER BARN TEA ROOM

School Lane, Dunham Massey, Cheshire WA14 4TR
Tel: 07535 127517

Located within the National Trust's Dunham Massey estate, **The Lavender Barn Tea Room** is well-known for its wonderful home-made cakes and scones. Also on the menu are sandwiches, paninis, soups, teas, coffees and soft drinks which can be enjoyed either inside or outside at tables overlooking rolling countryside. Owner Sue Walsh also offers customers a selection of bespoke vintage painted furniture, soft furnishings, and gifts which of course include a range of lavender products. The tea room is open from 10am to 4pm, Tuesday to Sunday, and on Bank Holiday Mondays.



D.R.B. JEWELLERS

25 Church Street, Frodsham, Cheshire WA6 0PN
Tel: 01928 731695
website: www.drjbjewellers.co.uk

Located in the heart of the charming town of Frodsham, **DRB Jewellers** offers all the traditional manufacturing jeweller's services of design, manufacture and repair of all jewellery, and also stocks a superb selection of diamond rings, rings, necklaces, bracelets, ear-rings, watches and gifts. Noted brands on sale include Chamelia, Sekonda, Betulla Campo, Stahl, Fiorelli and Tiangus Jackson bracelets. Owner David Buckley has some 30 years experience in the jewellery trade and he is supported by friendly and knowledgeable staff. Free valuations are available.



incensed the townspeople by cutting down the famous mulberry tree. Then, in order to avoid paying the Corporation poor rate, he pulled the house itself down. The outraged citizens of Stratford hounded him from the town and he returned to the parish at Frodsham that he had neglected for years.

HELSEBY

13 miles SW of Warrington on the A56

There are seven Iron Age forts scattered across Cheshire but only the one at Helsby, maintained by the National Trust, is open to the public. The climb out of the village along pretty woodland paths to the red sandstone summit is quite steep, but the views across the marshes to the Mersey Estuary and Liverpool repay the effort.

LYMM

7 miles E of Warrington on the A56

During the stagecoach era, Eagle Brow was notorious, a dangerously steep road that dropped precipitously down the hillside into the village of Lymm. To bypass this hazard, a turnpike was built (now the A56), so preserving the heart of this ancient village with its half-timbered houses and well-preserved village stocks. The Bridgewater

Canal flows past nearby and the church is reflected in the waters of Lymm Dam. Popular with anglers and bird watchers, the dam is a large man-made lake, part of a lovely woodland centre linked to the surrounding countryside and the canal towpath by a network of footpaths and bridleways. The village became an important centre for the fustian cloth (corduroy) trade in the 19th century, but is now best known simply as a delightful place to visit.

Lymm stands on the sides of a ravine and its streets have actually been carved out of the sandstone rock. The same rock was used to construct Lymm's famous landmark, the ancient cross crowned with a huge cupola that stands at the top of the High Street.

DUNHAM MASSEY

14 miles E of Warrington on the B5160

🏠 Dunham Massey Hall and Park

Dunham Massey Hall and Park (National Trust) has 250 acres of parkland where fallow deer roam freely and noble trees planted in the late 1700s still flourish. A fully restored 17th-century sawmill can be seen in working action, and there are splendid walks in every direction. The Hall, once the home of the Earls of Stamford and Warrington, is a grand Georgian

mansion of 1732 with a sumptuous Edwardian interior displaying an outstanding collection of furniture, paintings and Huguenot silver.

Knutsford

 Elizabeth Gaskell  Richard Harding Watt

 Penny Farthing Museum

 Knutsford Heritage Centre

 Tatton Park  Tudor Old Hall

Knutsford and its people were the heroes of one of the most durable of Victorian novels, **Elizabeth Gaskell's** *Cranford*. This gently humorous, sympathetic but sharply-observed portrait of the little Cheshire town, and the foibles and pre-occupations of its citizens, was first published in 1853 and is still delighting readers today. Elizabeth was scarcely a month old when she came to Knutsford. Her mother had died shortly after her birth and her father sent her here to be brought up by an aunt who lived in a road that has now been re-named Gaskell Avenue. The motherless child grew up to be both strikingly beautiful and exceptionally intelligent. Early on she evinced a lively interest in the town's characters and its history: she was intrigued, for example, to find that in the house next door to her aunt's had once lived a notorious highwayman, Edward Higgins, hanged for his crimes in 1767, and she wrote a story about him. Marriage to William Gaskell, a Unitarian pastor in Manchester, took her away from Knutsford, although she returned often and for long periods. She died in 1865 and was buried in the grounds of the Unitarian Chapel, where her husband and two of her four daughters also lie.

The Knutsford that Elizabeth Gaskell knew

so well and wrote about so vividly has expanded a great deal since those days of course, but in its compact centre, now designated an outstanding area of conservation, the narrow streets and cobbled alleys still evoke the intimacy of a small Victorian town. Two parallel roads, Toft Street and King Street, form a rectangle surrounding the old town. But Mrs Gaskell would surely be astonished by the building erected in King Street to her memory by **Richard Harding Watt** in 1907. A gifted entrepreneur, Mr Watt had made a huge fortune in Manchester as a glove manufacturer, but what really aroused his enthusiasm was the flamboyant architecture he had seen during his travels through Spain, southern Italy and the Near East.

On his return, he spent lavishly on trying to transform Knutsford in Cheshire into Knutsford-on-the-Med. At the north end of the town, he built a laundry complete with Byzantine domes and a minaret. A vaguely Ottoman style of architecture welcomed serious-minded artisans to his Ruskin Reading Rooms. In Legh Road, he erected a series of villas whose south-facing frontages are clearly in need of a really hot sun. And in King Street, as homage to the town's most famous resident, Richard Watt spent thousands of Victorian pounds on the Gaskell Memorial Tower. This tall, blank-walled building seems a rather incongruous tribute to the author who was herself so open and down-to-earth.

But it is eccentrics like Richard Watt who make English architecture as interesting as it is. He was so proud of his contribution to the town's new buildings that, travelling on his coach to the railway station, he would rise to his feet and raise his hat to salute them. As he did so, one day in 1913, his horse suddenly shied, the carriage overturned, and Richard

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Watt was thrown out and killed. What other changes he might have made to this grand old town, had he lived, we can only imagine.

An unusual exhibition and well worth visiting is the **Penny Farthing Museum**, located in the Courtyard Coffee House off King Street. These bizarre machines were in fashion for barely 20 years before the last model was manufactured in 1892. The collection includes a replica of the famous Starley Giant with a front wheel seven feet in diameter, and a sign outside the coffee house promises a free tea to anyone arriving on a penny-farthing.

Close by, in King Street, a striking sculpture by Philip Bews of a Green Man greets visitors to the volunteer-run **Knutsford Heritage Centre**. The Centre houses a permanent exhibition, with displays and a video on the story of Knutsford, detailing the town's famous names, areas, associations and periods. The Gallery Exhibition Centre, a separate building to the rear of the Centre, presents a changing array of exhibitions and events.

The Heritage Centre is housed in a restored 17th-century timber-framed building, which was a smithy in Victorian times. During the restoration the old forge and bellows were



Knutsford Heritage Centre

found in a remarkable state of preservation. The wrought-iron gate in front of the building was specially created for the Centre and depicts dancing girls taking part in Knutsford's famous Royal May Day celebrations – Royal because in 1887 the then Prince and Princess of Wales honoured the festivities with their presence. Every May Day the town centre streets are closed to all traffic except for the May Queen's procession in which colourful characters such as Jack in Green, Highwayman Higgins and Lord Chamberlain, Morris dancers, maypole dancers and many others take part. One curious tradition whose origins are unknown, is the practice of covering the streets and pavements with ordinary sand and then, using white sand, creating elaborate patterns on top.

A colourful Knutsford character was Trumpet Major Smith, who sounded the Charge into the Valley of Death at the Battle of Balaclava. He is buried in the grounds of the Georgian parish church.

Sweeping up to the very edge of Knutsford are the grounds of **Tatton Park**, 2000 acres of exquisite parkland landscaped in the 18th century by the celebrated Humphry Repton. This lovely park, where herds of red and fallow deer roam freely, provides a worthy setting for the noble Georgian mansion designed by the equally celebrated architect Samuel Wyatt. The combination of the two men's talents created a house and park that have become one of the National Trust's most visited attractions. Tatton's opulent state rooms, containing paintings by artists such as Canaletto and Van Dyck, along with superb collections of porcelain and

furniture, provided the television production of *Brideshead Revisited* with a sumptuous setting for Marchmain House.

More than 200 elegant pieces of furniture were commissioned from the celebrated cabinet-makers, Gillow of Lancaster. Particularly fine are the superb bookcases in the library, constructed to house the Egerton family's collection of more than 8000 books. By contrast, the stark servants' rooms and cellars give a vivid idea of what life below stairs was really like.

The Egerton family built Tatton Park to replace the much earlier **Tudor Old Hall**, which nestles in a wood in the deer park and dates back to around 1520. Here, visitors are given a guided tour through time from the late Middle Ages up to the 1950s. Flickering light from candles reveals the ancient timber roof of the Great Hall, supported by ornate quatrefoils, while underfoot, the floor is strewn with rushes, providing a warm place for the medieval Lord of the Manor and his servants to sleep.

There's much more to see at Tatton Park: Home Farm is a working farm, working as it did in the 1930s, complete with vintage machinery. Traditional crafts (including pottery), stables and many farm animals provide a complete picture of rural life some 60 years ago. Tatton's famous gardens include a Victorian maze, an orangery and fernery, a serene Japanese garden, American redwoods, and a splendid Italian terraced garden. There's also a busy programme of educational activities for children, an adventure playground, shops and a restaurant. You can



Japanese Garden, Tatton Park

even get married in the sumptuous mansion and hold your reception either in the house itself, in the Tenants Hall, which can cater for parties of up to 430, or in a marquee in the magnificent grounds. With so much on offer it is small wonder that Tatton Park has been described as the most complete historic estate in the country.

Around Knutsford

MOBBERLEY

2 miles E of Knutsford on the B5085

George Mallory

The main glory of this scattered village is the spectacular woodwork inside the church: massive roof beams with striking winged figures, and one of the finest rood screens in the country, dated 1500. The screen is covered with a rich tracery of leaves and fruit, coats-of-arms, and religious symbols. Two generations of the Mallory family held the rectorship here, one of them for 53 years. He is commemorated in the east window. Another window honours his grandson, **George Mallory**, the mountaineer who perished while

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making his third attempt to climb Mount Everest in 1924.

LOWER PEOVER

4 miles S of Knutsford on the B5081

St Oswald's Church Peover Hall

General George Patton

The village of Lower Peover (pronounced peever) is effectively made up of two hamlets. One is grouped around the village green on the B5081, the other is at the end of a cobbled lane. It's a picturesque little group. There's a charming old coaching inn, The Bells of Peover, which during World War Two numbered Generals Patton and Eisenhower among its customers. The American flag still flies here alongside the Union Jack. Nearby are a handsome village school founded in 1710, and a lovely black and white timbered church, more than 700 years old, with a massive Perpendicular tower built in 1582. **St Oswald's** is notable as one of the few timber-framed churches in the country still standing, and probably the oldest. Inside, there is a wealth of carved wood – pews and screens, pulpit and lectern, and a massive medieval chest made from a single log of bog oak. At one time local girls who wished to marry a



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farmer were required to raise its lid with one hand to demonstrate they had the strength to cope with farm life.

About three miles east of Lower Peover is **Peover Hall**, a fine Elizabethan house of 1585 very much hidden away at the end of a winding country road but well worth tracking down. During World War Two, **General George Patton** lived for a while at the Hall, which was conveniently close to his then headquarters at Knutsford. There's a memorial to him in the church nearby, but many more to the Mainwaring family whose fine monuments crowd beside each other in both the north and south chapels.

TABLEY

2 miles W of Knutsford on the A556

Tabley House Tabley Cuckoo Clock Collection

Tabley House was the home of the Leicester family from 1272 to 1975. Mrs Gaskell often came to picnic in the grounds of the last of their houses, a stately Georgian mansion designed by John Carr for the first Lord de Tabley in 1761. This Lord de Tabley loved paintings and it was his son's passion for art, and his hunger for others to share it, that led to the creation of London's National Gallery.

TREE TOPS NURSERY

Holmes Chapel Road (A50), Over Peover, nr Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 9RD

Tel: 01565 722450

e-mail: mike67713@aol.com

website: www.treetops-nursery.co.uk

Conveniently located on the A50 about 5 miles south of Knutsford, **Tree Tops Nursery** is a family-run business now in its third generation. The nursery stocks a huge selection of high quality plants at fantastic prices. Amongst them are hundreds of perennials, lots of unusual echinaceas, delphiniums and some 80 varieties of acers, ranging in height from 2ft miniatures to 12ft high specimens. In addition to the extensive display of plants, the nursery also stocks a vast variety of pots, tools, DIY equipment and materials, and much, much more.



His personal collection of English pictures, on display in Tabley House, includes works by Turner (who painted the house several times), Lely, Reynolds, Opie and Martin Danby, along with furniture by Gillow, Bullock and Chippendale, and fascinating family memorabilia spanning three centuries. Through various activities, the Friends of Tabley House raise funds for the restoration and refurbishment of the house; recent undertakings have included the redecoration of the grand entrance hall and the restoration and re-hanging of the 18th-century hall lantern. The 17th-century chapel next to the house looks perfectly in place, but it was originally built on an island in Tabley Mere and only moved to its present site in 1927.

Also in Tabley, at the Old School, is the **Tabley Cuckoo Clock Collection**. Brothers Roman and Maz Piekarski are well-known

horologists and clock restorers, and over the past three decades they have sought out and renovated some of the rarest and most notable examples of this 300-year-old craft. Also on display are some mid-19th century cuckoo clocks, which include complex musical movements to reproduce popular tunes of the day.

MERE

3 miles NW of Knutsford on the A50/A556

 Dick Turpin

Back in the 18th century, one of the more notorious guests at the Kilton Inn in Mere was **Dick Turpin**. The intrepid highwayman made the inn the base from which he plundered travellers along the Knutsford to Warrington road (now the comparatively safe A50). After one such robbery (and murder) Turpin, on his famous horse Black Bess, “galloped to the

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PRIMROSE HILL NURSERIES

Warrington Road, High Legh, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0SQ
Tel: 01925 752635 Fax: 01925 755621

Primrose Hill Nurseries are located just off the A50, northwest of Knutsford and a short drive from the M6 and M56. Popular with plant-lovers and gardeners throughout the locality, the Nurseries are run by the Jackson family, who with their staff create a nice happy atmosphere that makes every visit a pleasure. Primrose Hill specialities include wallflowers, primroses and pansies, many grown on site, along with bedding plants, spring bulbs, hanging baskets, pots, planters and seasonal trees and flowers. The nurseries stand next to the National Trust's Tatton Park, 2,000 acres of stunning Humphry Repton parkland surrounding a fine Georgian mansion.



Kilton and, altering the clock, strolled on to the bowling green and proved an alibi by the short time he took to cover the four miles”.

Macclesfield

 Silk Museum  Paradise Mill Museum
 St Michael & All Angels
 Charles Frederick Tunnicliffe
 West Park Museum  William Buckley

Nestling below the hills of the High Peak, Macclesfield was once an important silk manufacturing town. Charles Roe built the first silk mill here in 1743, beside the River Bollin, and for more than a century and a half Macclesfield was known as *the* silk town. It's appropriate then that Macclesfield can boast the country's only **Silk Museum** where visitors are given a lively introduction to all aspects of the silk industry, from cocoon to loom. The Museum is housed within the Heritage Centre, built in 1813 as a Sunday school to provide education for the children who worked in the silk mills. An award-winning audio-visual programme traces the development of the silk industry in Macclesfield and there are fascinating

exhibitions on the Silk Road across Asia, on silk cultivation, fashion and other uses of silk. The Heritage Centre also has some interesting displays on Macclesfield's rich and exciting past.

The silk theme continues at nearby **Paradise Mill Museum**. Built in the 1820s, and in commercial use until 1981, it is now a working museum demonstrating silk weaving on 26 Jacquard hand looms. Exhibitions and restored workshops and living rooms capture the working conditions and lives of mill workers in the 1930s. It is also possible to buy locally-made silk products here.

In pre-Saxon times, Macclesfield was known as Hameston, the homestead on the rock, and on that rock is set the church founded by King Edward I and Queen Eleanor. From the modern town, a walk to the church involves climbing a gruelling flight of 108 steps. **St Michael and All Angels** was extended in the 1890s but its 14th-century core remains, notably the Legh Chapel built to receive the body of Piers Legh, a soldier who had fought at Agincourt and died at the Siege of Meaux. Another chapel contains the famous Legh Pardon brass, an example of the medieval practice of selling pardons for sins past and,

ROSTHERNE COUNTRY HOUSE

Rostherne Lane, Rostherne, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6RY
Tel: 01565 832628

e-mail: info@rosthornehouse.co.uk
website: www.rosthornehouse.co.uk

Set within beautifully maintained secluded gardens, **Rostherne Country House** is a beautiful, 4 star, Grade 2 listed, Victorian dwelling which retains many original features. The service offered here is entirely professional, but you'll still find a real, 'home from home' which provides every conceivable comfort to enable you to rest, relax and unwind. Settle down with a glass of wine or a locally-brewed beer in front of the roaring open fires.

The accommodation here is outstanding - each of the rooms is furnished in its own unique style, with each bed featuring an impressive hand-carved headboard, whilst the mattresses are chosen with the comfort of guests in mind. Complimentary tea and coffee are provided in the centrally-heated rooms, which are also equipped with Wi-fi / Broadband and colour television. A hearty breakfast is included in the tariff and evening meals are available by arrangement. Prices from £65.00 single or £85 double including ensuite.

Rostherne also offers residential and non-residential courses on topics such as cookery, gardening, art, yoga and holistic therapies, and even if you are not attending a course you'll find a huge range of local activities including golf, cycling, riding, falconry, polo, bird watching, with fishing and sailing at nearby Tatton Park. Tours to the Potteries and Food Producers of Cheshire can be arranged.



even more conveniently, for sins not yet committed. The inscription on the brass records that in return for saying five Paternosters and five Aves the Legh family received a pardon for 26,000 years and 26 days. The Savage Chapel and other parts of the church contain many memorials to the illustrious Savage family whose numbers included Sir Thomas, who became Archbishop of York towards the end of the 15th century.

One of the area's most famous sons is **Charles Frederick Tunnicliffe**, the celebrated bird and wildlife artist, who was born at the nearby village of Langley in 1901. He studied at the Macclesfield School of Art (now the Silk Museum) and first came to

public attention with his illustrations for Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter* in 1927. A frequently changing collection of Tunnicliffe's striking oil paintings, watercolours and etchings can be seen at the **West Park Museum** (see panel below) in a public park on the northwestern edge of town. This purpose-built museum, founded in 1898 by the Brocklehurst family, also includes exhibits of ancient Egyptian artefacts acquired by Marianne Brocklehurst during visits to Egypt between 1873 and 1891. The collection features a mummy case, and the afterlife displays examine the process of mummification and the objects buried with the dead. Incidentally, the park boasts

West Park Museum

77 Prestbury Road, Macclesfield,
Cheshire SK10 3BJ
Tel: 01625 619831

e-mail: info@macclesfield.silk.museum.co.uk
website: www.macclesfield.silk.museum

West Park Museum was donated by Marianne Brocklehurst and her brother, Peter Pownall Brocklehurst "for the education, refinement and pleasure of the people for all time to come."

In 1894 scandal ensued over the choice of designs for the Museum. Marianne Brocklehurst withdrew her offer after an insulting letter from "a Town Councillor", causing much disappointment among the people of Macclesfield. After four years Miss Brocklehurst relented and the Museum was finally opened on the 3rd of October 1898. The design of the interior was based on a room at the Whitworth Art Gallery.

The Museum is located in one of the earliest public parks, which opened in 1854 and was funded by voluntary subscriptions. The park boasts the largest bowling green in England. Over the years the amenities in the park have developed to match changing leisure activities.

West Park Museum's Collections comprise a wide range of fine and decorative art material and objects relating to local history. This includes the famous Giant Panda. The paintings date from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Local history displays include Law & Order and the life of Charles Roe, an 18th century Macclesfield entrepreneur.



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what is thought to be the largest bowling green in England.

A less well-known figure is **William Buckley** who was born in Macclesfield around 1780 and later became a soldier. He took part in a mutiny at Gibraltar against the Rock's commanding officer, the Duke of York, father-to-be of Queen Victoria. The mutiny failed and Buckley was transported to Australia. There he escaped into the outback and became the leader of an aboriginal tribe who took this giant of a man, some six feet six inches tall, as the reincarnation of a dead chief. For 32 years Buckley never saw a white man or heard a word of English. When the explorer John Bateman, on his way to what is now Melbourne, discovered him, Buckley had virtually forgotten his mother tongue. He was pardoned, given a pension and died in Hobart at the age of 76.

Around Macclesfield

PRESTBURY

3 miles N of Macclesfield via the A523/A538

Norman Chapel

A regular winner of the Best Kept Village title, Prestbury is a charming village where a tree-lined main street runs down to a bridge over the River Bollin, ancient stocks stand against the church wall, and old coaching inns and black and white buildings mingle with the mellow red brickwork of later Georgian houses. The Church of St Peter, dating from the 13th century, still maintains a tradition that began in 1577. Every autumn and winter evening at 8pm a curfew bell is rung, with the number of chimes corresponding to the date of the month. Close by is a building known as the **Norman**

Chapel, which has a striking frontage carved with the characteristic Norman zig-zags and beaked heads. Even older are the carved fragments of an 8th-century Saxon cross preserved under glass in the graveyard. Opposite the church is a remarkable magpie timber-framed house, now a bank, but once the vicarage. During Cromwell's rule, the rightful incumbent was debarred from preaching in the church by the Puritans. Undaunted, the priest addressed his parishioners from the tiny balcony of his vicarage.

ADLINGTON

4 miles N of Macclesfield off the A523

Adlington Hall

Adlington boasts a fine old house, **Adlington Hall**, which has been the home of the Legh family since 1315 and is now one of the county's most popular attractions. Quadangular in shape, this magnificent manor house has two distinctive styles of architecture: black and white half-timbered buildings on two sides, later Georgian additions in warm red brick on the others. There is much to see on a tour of the Hall, with beautifully polished wooden floors and lovely antique furnishings enhancing the air of elegance and grandeur. The Great Hall is a breathtaking sight, a vast room of lofty proportions that set off perfectly the exquisitely painted walls. The beautifully preserved 17th-century organ here has responded to the touch of many maestros, none more famous than George Frederick Handel, who visited the Hall in the 1740s. Opening times are restricted but guided tours for groups of 20 or more are available by prior arrangement.



White Nancy, Bollington

BOLLINGTON

4 miles NE of Macclesfield on the B5091

Middlewood Way White Nancy

In its 19th century heyday, there were 13 cotton mills working away at Bollington, a little town perched on the foothills of the High Peak. Two of the largest mills, the Clarence and the Adelphi, still stand, although now adapted to other purposes. The Victorian shops and cottages around Water Street and the High Street recall those busy days. A striking feature of the town is the splendid 20-arched viaduct, which once carried the railway over the River Dean. It is now part of

the **Middlewood Way**, a 10-mile, traffic-free country trail that follows a scenic route from Macclesfield to Marple. The Way is open to walkers, cyclists and horse riders. During the season cycles are available for hire, complete with child seats if required. Just as remarkable as the viaduct, although in a different way, is **White Nancy**. This sugarloaf-shaped, whitewashed round tower stands on Kerridge Hill, more than 900 feet above sea level. It was erected in 1817 to commemorate the Battle of Waterloo and offers sweeping views in all directions.

DISLEY

10 miles NE of Macclesfield on the A6

Lyme Park Country Park Lyme Park

The small town of Disley lies close to the Macclesfield Canal and little more than half a mile from **Lyme Park Country Park**. At the heart of the spectacular 1400-acre moorland park where red and fallow deer roam freely stands **Lyme Park** (National Trust), home of the Legh family for more than 600 years. The elegant Palladian exterior of this great house

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encloses a superb Elizabethan mansion. Among the many treasures on show are carvings by Grinling Gibbons, tapestries from Mortlake, and a unique collection of English clocks. The house featured many times in the BBC's 1995 production of *Pride and Prejudice* when it represented the exterior of Pemberley, the home of Elizabeth Bennet's curmudgeonly lover, Mr Darcy. It also appeared in Granada's *The Forsyte Saga* - some of the costumes from that production are on display.

Amenities at the park include two shops, a restaurant, a tearoom and a children's play area. From Easter to October, Lyme Park hosts a varied programme of events, from plant fairs and outdoor performances of plays, to art exhibitions and a Morris Minor Owners Club Rally.

SUTTON

2 miles S of Macclesfield on a minor road off the A523

Raphael Holinshed

This small village, close to the Macclesfield Canal, is honoured by scholars as the birthplace of **Raphael Holinshed**, whose famous *Chronicles of England, Scotland & Ireland* (1577) provided the source material for no

fewer than 14 of Shakespeare's plays. As well as drawing heavily on the facts in the *Chronicles*, the Bard wasn't above adopting some of Holinshed's happier turns of phrase.

BOSLEY

6 miles S of Macclesfield on the A523

Macclesfield Canal

To the east of Bosley town centre runs the **Macclesfield Canal**, one of the highest waterways in England, running for much of its length at more than 500 feet above sea level. Thomas Telford was the surveyor of the 26-mile route, opened in 1831, which links the Trent and Mersey and the Peak Forest canals. Between Macclesfield and Congleton, the canal descends over 100 feet in a spectacular series of 12 locks at Bosley, before crossing the River Dane via Telford's handsome iron viaduct. Other unusual features of this superbly engineered canal are the two 'roving bridges' south of Congleton. These swing from one bank to the other where the towpath changes sides and so enabled horses to cross over without the tow-rope having to be unhitched.

GAWSWORTH

3 miles SW of Macclesfield off the A536

Gawsworth Hall



Macclesfield Canal, Bosley

Gawsworth Hall is a captivating sight with its dazzling black and white half-timbered walls and lofty three-decker Tudor windows. The Hall was built in 1480 by the Fitton family, one of whose descendants, the celebrated beauty Mary Fitton, is believed by some to be the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's sonnets. The Bard would no doubt approve of Gawsworth's famous open-air theatre, where performances range from his

RED OAKS FARM

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website: www.redoaksfarm.co.uk

Nestling in the foothills of the Peak District, yet just a couple of miles from Macclesfield and Intercity rail services, **Red Oaks Farm** is a fully working farm offering quality bed & breakfast en suite accommodation with a 4-star Silver rating from Visit Britain. There's a pretty garden where guests can enjoy a hot or cold beverage while enjoying the views. At breakfast time you'll find fresh eggs from the farm's own poultry and packs of traditionally reared lamb and beef are available ready for your freezer.



historic building museum and heritage historic site scenic attraction flora and fauna

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own plays to Gilbert and Sullivan operas, with the Hall serving as a lovely backdrop. Surrounded by a huge park, Gawsworth, to quote its owner Timothy Richards, is “the epitome of a lived-in historic house”. Every room that visitors see (which is virtually every room in the house) is in daily use by him and his family. And what wonderful rooms they are! Myriad windows bathe the rooms in light, the low ceilings and modest dimensions radiate calm, and even the richly-carved main staircase is conceived on a human scale. The beautifully sited church, and the lake nearby, add still more to the appeal of this magical place. The Hall was the scene, in 1712, of a famous duel when Lord Mohun and the Duke of Hamilton fought over the estates; both were killed. The country’s last professional jester, a certain Samuel Johnson, lived in the house and is buried in a nearby spinney.

CAPESTHORNE HALL

5 miles W of Macclesfield on the A34

 **Capesthorpe Hall**

The home of the Bromley-Davenport family for generations, **Capesthorpe Hall** dates back to 1719 when it was designed by the Smiths of Warwick. It was altered in 1837 by Blore and, following a fire in 1861, was remodelled and extended by the celebrated architect Anthony Salvin. The present building presents a magnificent medley of Elizabethan-style turrets and towers, domes and cupolas, while inside the house is a wealth of portraits and artefacts collected by family members during the course of their Grand Tours throughout Europe, America and the Far East. The Queen Anne Room features a monumental fireplace, while the



Gawsworth Hall, Gawsworth

Box Room has a fascinating collection that ranges from a Victorian oak letterbox to antique hat boxes and cigar boxes. In medieval times the head of the Bromley-Davenport family held the post of Chief Forester of Macclesfield Forest, which gave him authority to mete out summary justice to anyone who transgressed the savage forestry laws. As a reminder of their power, the family crest includes the severed head of a felon. One of these crests, on the main staircase built in the 1860s, was commissioned by the staunchly Conservative Bromley-Davenport of the time and the felon’s head is instantly recognisable as the Liberal leader of the day, William Ewart Gladstone. In the grounds, near the Georgian family chapel, the 18th-century Italian gates open on to lakeside gardens.

NETHER ALDERLEY

6 miles NW of Macclesfield on the A34

 **Nether Alderley Mill**  **Church of St Mary**

Nether Alderley Mill is a delightful 15th-century watermill that has been restored by the National Trust. The red sandstone walls are almost hidden under the huge sweep of its stone tiled roof. Inside is the original

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Elizabethan woodwork and the Victorian mill machinery, which is still in working order, with two tandem overshot wheels powering the mill. The 14th-century **Church of St Mary** is almost a private mausoleum for the Alderley branch of the Stanley family - monuments to dead Stanleys are everywhere. Living members of the family were provided with an unusual richly carved pew, set up on the wall like an opera box and reached by a flight of steps outside.

ALDERLEY EDGE

6 miles NW of Macclesfield on the A34

 **Hare Hill Gardens**

Alderley Edge takes its name from the long, wooded escarpment, nearly two miles in length, that rises 600 feet above sea level and culminates in sandy crags overlooking the Cheshire Plain. In Victorian times, this spectacular area was the private preserve of the Stanley family, and it was only under great pressure that they grudgingly allowed the ‘Cottentots’ of Manchester access on occasional summer weekends. Nowadays, walkers can roam freely along the many footpaths through the woods, one of which will take them to **Hare Hill Gardens**, one of the lesser-known National Trust properties. These Victorian gardens include fine woodland, a walled garden themed in blue, white and yellow flowers, and huge banks of rhododendrons.

WILMSLOW

6 miles NW of Macclesfield off the A34

 **St Bartholomew’s Church**  **Romany’s Caravan**

The oldest building in Wilmslow is **St Bartholomew’s Church**, built between 1517 and 1537, and notable for its magnificent ceiling, some striking effigies, and for the fact

that Prime Minister-to-be Gladstone worshipped here as a boy. A hamlet in medieval times, Wilmslow mushroomed as a mill town in the 18th and 19th centuries and is now a busy commuter town offering a good choice of inns, hotels and restaurants.

Claiming to be the smallest tourist attraction in the country, **Romany’s Caravan**, or Vardo, stands in its own special Memorial Garden in Wilmslow. Its interior has been restored to what it was like when used by traveller Romany and his family when on holiday in his beloved North Country. It is open to the public on the second Saturday of the month from May to September.

STYAL

7 miles NW of Macclesfield, on a minor road off the B5166

 **Styal Country Park**  **Quarry Bank Mill**

 **Styal Village**

Cared for by the National Trust, **Styal Country Park** is set in 250 acres of the beautifully wooded valley of the River Bollin and offers many woodland and riverside walks. The Park is open to the public from dawn to dusk throughout the year, and is a wonderful place for picnics. Standing within the Park is **Quarry Bank Mill** (see panel on page 286 - National Trust), a grand old building erected in 1784 and one of the first generation of cotton mills. It was powered by a huge iron waterwheel fed by the River Bollin. Visitors follow the history of the mill through various galleries and displays within the museum, including weaving and spinning demonstrations, and can experience for themselves, with the help of guides dressed in period costume, what life was like for the 100 girls and boys who once lived in the Apprentice House. The Mill stages a full

Quarry Bank Mill & Styal Estate

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website: www.quarrybankmill.org.uk

Quarry Bank Mill and Styal Estate once belonged to the wealthy Greg family who founded the Mill and gave the property to the National Trust. The water-powered Georgian mill still produces cotton calico, sold in the Mill Shop.

Hands-on exhibits and demonstrations show how traditional spinning and weaving was transformed through the ingenuity of early textile engineers. The most powerful working waterwheel in Europe and two mill engines help to bring the past to life through sight, sound and smell. At the Apprentice House you can discover what ‘home life’ was like for the pauper children who worked in the Mill in the 1830s by exploring the dormitories, kitchen, schoolroom, parlour and attic.

The adjoining garden contains traditional varieties of vegetables, fruit and herbs, as well as geese and hens. Visitors should allow at least 1.5 hours to visit the Mill. Guided tours of the House take about 45 minutes.

Styal Village was built by the Gregs to house the mill workers and is still a thriving community. There are two chapels, the school, allotment gardens and cottages. The village and the estate of farmland and woodland walks along the River Bollin provide a delightful contrast to the grandeur of the Mill.



programme of events throughout the year. Also within the park is the delightful **Styal Village** (National Trust) which was established by the mill’s original owner, Samuel Greg, a philanthropist and pioneer of

the factory system. He took children from the slums of Manchester to work in his mill, and in return for their labour provided them with food, clothing, housing, education and a place of worship.

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