

## A Walk Round Ashby-de-la-Zouch

Ashby-de-la-Zouch is one of those places which you seem to pass through, rather than visit. In fact with the bypass, and the A42, nowadays you mostly don't even need to go through it. Yet if you do take the time to stop, you will find a market town with an interesting history.

The full name of the town seems to date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, though the Ashby part is thought to go back even further to Saxon times, being a combination of 'AESC', which means Ash, and 'BYR', which means a habitation. The de-la-Zouch part was added when Alain de Parrhoet la Zouch, a Norman Nobleman, became Lord of the Manor.

The walk starts from the Tourist Information Centre, which is to be found in North Street, along with the Library, and Ashby Museum. There is a car park next to the building, but if that is full, there are a number of car parks around the town.

Walk to the road which runs past the Tourist Information Centre, and turn left on to it. Cross over to the other side of the road, and follow it as it bends round to the right, this will take you past the Venture Theatre.

The theatre used to be the church hall of St Helen's Church (you will be visiting that later in the walk). The Ashby Dramatic Society acquired it in the 1970's and spent the next few years changing it into a theatre, finally opening in 1981. Since then, not only is it the home of the society, but it has played host to many amateur theatre groups and professional theatre companies. They also host very popular jazz nights.

At the junction just beyond the theatre, turn right onto Market Street.



The first house you come to is St Helen's House. The house was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. From 1889 to 1902, it was home to Ashby Girls Grammar School. The girls' school eventually became overcrowded and moved to larger premises. They merged with the boys' grammar school in 1972.

Continue along Market Street to walk past the Queen's Head Hotel, which in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was one of the town's Posting Inns, and on to the Bulls Head Public House, which is said to be the oldest pub in Ashby.



The main part of the pub is a 16<sup>th</sup> Century timber frame structure, the stucco was added at a later date in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Parts of the building do date back to much earlier. It is thought they go back to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. It was popular with the Parliamentary army as a drinking place in the Civil War.

At the pedestrian crossing, cross over to the other side of the road, and then turn left to walk back along Market Street. It is only a short distance to the Market and Town Hall.

This building replaced yet another drinking establishment known as the Bear Inn. The council now have a new building In South Street, so the market and other businesses have expanded into the upper floors. If you walk round you will notice the glass roof to the market. It is Victorian which blends nicely with the rest of the building which was built in 1856. It was given a grade II listing in 1977.

A few paces further along the road is the White Hart pub.

There is a story that Dick Turpin, the notorious highwayman used to drink in the White Hart. It is possible this was the case as the front part of the building is certainly old enough. Renovations were made to the building in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, which is when it was enlarged to the size it is now. There is a bear pit which can still be seen inside the pub, in fact it is believed to be the last place in Ashby to stage Bear-baiting. I understand the bear did full fill another function, that of evicting customers who had overstayed their welcome. Not surprisingly the pub was once known as the bawdiest public house in the Midlands.

Carry on along Market Street until you reach Lower Church Street, which will be on your right hand side. The building on the corner is a rather good example of a Georgian building.

Turn into Lower Church Street. In the corner on the left, as the street turns right, you will find St Helen's Church.

This is the second church to be erected on this site, the first being built in the 11th Century. This present church dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. It appears to be open during the day, so you should be able to visit. There are quite a number of interesting features to see, from a number of excellent stained glass windows, to a finger pillory, which I understand may have been used to punish those who misbehaved in church.

At the corner where the church is located, Lower Church Street changes into South Street. Carry on along South Street and you will very quickly come to the entrance for Ashby Castle on the left.

The castle was originally a Manor House, dating back to Norman times, which was converted to a castle in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. During the Civil War it was occupied by the Royalists who managed to endure a year long siege by the Parliamentarian Army before surrendering, after apparently negotiating very good terms. In order to stop it becoming a centre of resistance again, a lot of it was blown up, leaving the ruins you see today.



However there is a tunnel to explore and if you feel energetic you can climb the 98 steps to the top of the tower. You will be rewarded with a great view of the surrounding area. The castle does have a fictional connection. It was used by Sir Walter Scott in his novel 'Ivanhoe'. The site is now under the care of English Heritage, so there is an entrance charge.

When you have finished looking at the castle walk back to South Street, and turn left to walk in the same direction as previously.



When you reach Priory Park Road cross over and stop in front of the light coloured building. This group of buildings was built about 1830, and from 1894 until 1897 it was used as a Cottage Hospital. The blue plaque which you will find a little way along the building even gives the name of the Matron.

Just a little further along South Street, on the right hand side, you will find you will find Ivanhoe Terrace.

The terrace was built in the early 1800's, and is a good example of Georgian architecture. There is a blue plaque at the side of the front door of number 11. It mentions Robert Chaplin as the builder. He was also involved with other buildings you will be passing shortly.

At the end of the road is the Loudoun Memorial. It is in memory of Edith Maud Rawdon-Hastings, who was the 10<sup>th</sup> Countess of Loudoun. Built by Sir Gilbert Scott, who is well known for his designs for many buildings in London, and also cathedrals and churches throughout England and Scotland, the memorial was unveiled in 1879.



If you look across to the other side of South Street (the road you have just walked along), you will see what looks like the entrance to a park. Walk through the entrance. You are now in The Bath Grounds.

When you first enter, you would think you were entering a park, it certainly has that sort of feel to it. In fact, The Bath Grounds is the home of Ashby Hastings Cricket Club, and the bowls club. The ground did at one point find a certain amount of fame as between, 1912 and 1964 they hosted a number of first class games between Leicestershire and other county cricket clubs. Sadly Leicestershire didn't do too well as out of a total of the 42 games they played here, they lost 18, 15 were drawn, and they managed to win just 9.

As well as cricket and bowls, the grounds play host to a number of festivals throughout the year.

The name of The Bath Grounds comes from the fact that in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, this area of the town was the site of the Ivanhoe Baths. The design of the building was by Robert Chaplin who was mentioned a short time ago. He designed the building in a Grecian style. As there wasn't a spring nearby, the water was transported from a spring in the nearby village of Moira by train. The baths closed in 1884, and seem to have been left abandoned until they were demolished in the early 1960's.

Follow the pathway through the grounds. The path bears round to the right as it passes the cricket pavilion, and keeps on until you reach the gates that exit on to Station Road. At the exit, look along the road to your left, and you will see a railway bridge, and on the other side of the road, just slightly to the right of the bridge, you can see what used to be Ashby railway station.

Although the line still carries freight, it ceased to carry passengers in 1964, 121 years after it started. For many years there has been a plan to restore passenger services between Leicester and Burton upon Trent, with a station at Ashby. So far nothing has happened.

Turn right onto Station Road Shortly you will walk past The Royal Hotel.

When it was built in 1826 the hotel was called The Hastings Hotel, again Robert Chaplin was involved. Its original purpose was to accommodate the ever increasing amount of visitors to the spar. It has an English Heritage grade II listing.

Follow the road as it bears round to the right, again passing the Loudoun Monument, and on to its junction with Market Street. Turn right onto Market Street and walk to the Pedestrian crossing. Cross to the other side of the road, and turn right. Turn left into Brook Street, the War Memorial is on the corner, and at the other end of the street, right into North Street, which will bring you back to your starting point of the Tourist Information Centre.

Next door to the Tourist Information Centre is Ashby Museum. It's well worth a visit to find out more about the history of the area.

The walk is just over 1.5 miles.