

“

*The name meaning “Bill’s Hill”
was first applied by the early
Anglian settlers...*

”

Enjoy our historic village trails
in beautiful south Leicestershire



BILLESDON

(NOT TO SCALE)



Located nine miles east of Leicester within open rolling countryside, Billesdon has existed for over a thousand years as an agriculture-based community.

The name meaning “Bill’s Hill” was first applied by the early Anglian settlers to the prominent hill nearby. The burial site there yielded three Saxon brooches now in the Leicester Jewry Wall Museum collection. The village took the name and was written as “Billesdone” in the Norman Domesday Book in 1086.

Agriculture followed the three-field pattern in which all the villagers had long narrow strips in large communally farmed fields. Today the ‘ridge & furrow’ field pattern which can be seen in the meadows around the village is evidence of this early form of cultivation. Hedges were compulsory and most fields were put to grass producing the ideal hunting country – a major influence on Billesdon for a hundred years.

The traditional building styles are varied as Billesdon incorporates both the stone and brick traditions of Leicestershire. However, some humble outbuildings, walls and cottages were built of mud or ‘cob’.

The walk starts from the Market Place, a central location with parking spaces.

1 The ancient **market cross**, with a more recent finial, predates the weekly Friday market which came into being in 1618 along with two annual fairs. Alongside is the war memorial which was replaced by the War Department after the original had been demolished by an American tank which had become detached from its carrier.



2 To the north of the square is a three-storey building. This was the “**Old Greyhound**” which was the oldest pub serving this area of the village until it ceased to be licenced premises in 1916.

3 Around 1800 the road traffic called for a coaching inn and the **White Hart** was built. The daily stage coach between Leicester and Stamford stopped here night and morning for a change of horses.

QUEEN ADELAIDE’S TEAPOT - On the 8th August 1842, a carriage containing the Dowager Queen Adelaide stopped in order to change horses. Here, she was approached by ‘several aged females, the foremost having in one hand a teapot ornamented with ribbons and a nosegay of flowers in the other’. A petition, the content of which is not known, was presented to the Queen. Before her carriage drove away, she deposited a sovereign in each of the proffered teapots. The Queen left Billesdon amidst the laughter and cheers of the assembled villagers.

4 On the same side of the road the 1930’s semi-detached houses on ‘The Bank’ were built of the bricks of the old **Billesdon Union Workhouse** which was demolished in 1935. They were some of the first houses in the village to be built with a bathroom. The Workhouse, which opened in 1847 was a substantial building with accommodation for 100 inmates and was used for many purposes including a hospital for wounded soldiers in the First World War.

5 At the edge of the village, turn left down the signposted footpath. This is known locally as ‘**Muddy Lane**’. Turn left before the brook. Before forking right along a narrow footpath, notice the buildings in West Lane. These exemplify the traditional building materials of Billesdon – mud, brick, and stone.

6 The footpath leads through ‘**Bradley Square**’ which was the village’s centre for the hosiery framework knitters.

7 In Church Street, formally Front Street, most of the oldest houses in the village are to be found. The ‘**Queen’s Head**’ was once a dwelling house but for over 200 years has been selling drinks and is the oldest surviving pub in the village.

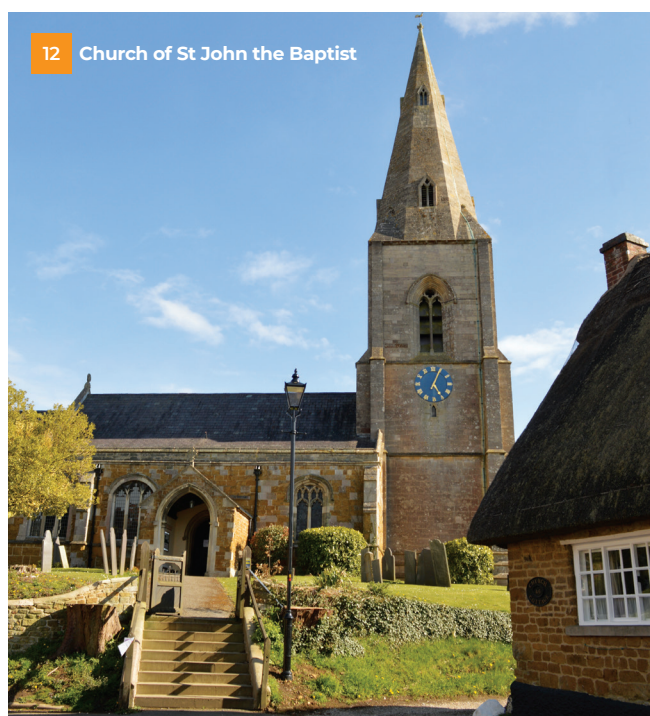
8 Nearby, the brick-built house end on to the road has a date tablet of 1769 and has many features of that date.

9 Next door is a shop with a very odd history; originally a dwelling house it was converted into a **Methodist Chapel** in 1859. It was disused by the start of the Second World War and was pressed into service as a Fire Station.

10 The L-shaped **Manor Farmhouse** is one of the oldest houses in the village. In 1798, of the owner Miss Mary Heard, it was written: 'a plain and single lady supposed to be worth £100,000. Bred up with industrious parents, she continues to add something to her immense fortune yearly by farming some part of the land'.

11 On the other side of the road is the entrance to the '**Quadrant**'. This is part of the rich history of hunting in the district.

12 **The church of St. John the Baptist** was probably founded in the 11th century and was given to the Abbey of Leicester in 1162. The present building was built in the 13th century and, unusually, the ironstone contains a large number of fossils. The bell tower, the oldest part of the church, has eight bells, the largest and oldest weighs 12cwts. A fine collection of Swithland slate tombstones are to be found in the churchyard. Just beneath the clock, the numerals are just visible of a previous one. Inside, the font cover dates from c1607.



12 Church of St John the Baptist

13 To the north of the church, '**Tithe Cottage**' was originally a 17th century barn in which was stored the vicar's portion of the crops and stock produced by the inhabitants.

14 The '**Old Vicarage**', because a new one was built in 1991, was started in the early 17th century and has appropriate moulded stone mullioned windows and transoms. The brick built west wing is also an 18th century addition.

THE ELOPEMENT - In the 19th century a vicar's daughter is reputed to have eloped from a window in the Vicarage.

15 The **Old School** was built in 1650 of ironstone with a sundial on each wall and was originally thatched. The incumbent was also the schoolmaster and the Revd. Anthony Cade (1599-1638) is particularly remembered for the quality of teaching and preparation of scholars for higher things. George Villiers, (of Brooksby Hall) who was later to become the Duke of Buckingham, was a pupil of Cades until aged about 13 and was 'taught the principles of music and other slight literature'.



15 The Old School

16 The use of mud as a building material was once extensive. Elsewhere known as 'cob', these walls are of unbaked clay bound together by straw.

17 Close by, the **Manor House** started as a small ironstone house in the 17th century, was enlarged in the 19th century and frequently occupied by keen huntsman because of the proximity of the kennels and stables. About 1919 further development took place adding the bays and a new entrance. From 1939 and throughout the war it was the home of a girls boarding school evacuated from Nottingham.

THE HUNT IN BILLESDON - Billesdon's first associations with the hunt began when Lord Suffield, Master of the Quorn, built new kennels and stabling between Church Street and Brook Lane in 1838. Suffield's kennels were used by Mr Hodgson the succeeding Quorn Master, but he only lasted two seasons. Sir Richard Sutton of Quorn Hall assumed the Mastership in 1847, taking the hunt back to Quorn. Mr William Ward Tailby of Carlton Curlieu Hall came forward to hunt the southern portion and made his headquarters at Billesdon. Sir Bache Cunard took possession of Tailby's hounds on 8th April 1878 for £2,100 and built new kennels at Medbourne to house them. The kennels and stabling at Billesdon were never used to house any hunt again.

18 Suffield Terrace was built by Lord Suffield to house the hunt servants. The row of nine two-storey brick cottages is largely unchanged from when it was constructed in 1838.

19 The three-storey brick house close to Baptist Chapel was built early in the 19th century and became a boarding school for boys from nonconformist families.

20 In the autumn of 1812, the pastor of the Old Baptist Church in Friar Lane, Leicester decided the time had come to establish a **Baptist Church** in Billesdon. Funds were raised, land bought, and the church built. The first service took place on the following Easter Monday. The building was refurbished in the late 19th century and the windows with their coloured glass are typical of that period.

21 The White Hall was for several generations the home, surgery, and dispensary of the village doctors.

22 The builders of the elaborate **Village Hall** left enduring evidence of origin in the stonework on the front and on the pillars either side. It was built by the 'Court Billesdon Coplow' of The Ancient Order of Foresters Friendly Society in 1870 for £489. During the war, the hall was the school for children evacuated from Islington, London, as many lived with families in the village.

23 The substantial 17th century ironstone building with the sundial on the front was for nearly 100 years used as a general store. Most of this time it was run by the Smith family – hence its local name '**Smith's Shop**'.

24 On the opposite side of the road, Nos. 12 & 14 Uppingham Road, '**The Maltings**' is a Regency house with elegant windows and front door. There used to be a malting floor at the rear of the building where barley was prepared. Most large houses had their own brew and there were 14 pubs and beer houses in the village in the early 19th century.

25 Close by Nos. 6 & 8 Uppingham Road is a tall brick residence with side wings. The original Regency bay windows to the wings are distinctive whilst the provision of a round chimney is most unusual.

26 "Potters Cottage" was the home of two well-known taxidermists – Thomas Potter (c1830-1900) and his son Frank (1869-1944). Here fox heads, birds, fish and once a pig with two heads were stuffed and mounted.



27 Back in the Market Place the '**New Greyhound**' raises questions about the name. It has been called that since it opened in the 1840s when the older 'Greyhound' on the other side of the square changed its name to the 'Old Greyhound'.

28 **'The Gables'**, Church Street, was the home of the famous horse breaker Thomas Tomblin. He has been described as 'the cleverest rough-rider in the world', who could 'reduce to tractability the most spirited and obstinate animals, where other breakers have failed'.

29 **'Doone Cottage'** (Long Lane) is one of the oldest surviving cottages in the village. It is a traditional local cottage thatched and is of mud construction on an ironstone rubble base which dates from the 17th century.

30 Just over a mile along Coplow Lane is the distinctive hill **'Billesdon Coplow'**. The name 'Coplow' is of Old English derivation meaning the summit and mound. A short distance to the east of the Coplow is Life Hill where Roman and earlier remains have been found and small-scale quarries have produced the ironstone for village buildings.

THE FIRST CROSS-COUNTRY RACE - In 1829, Captain Becher, known as the 'Father of Gentleman Riders', had his original mount in the first 'marked out' cross-country contest in England. This was from Nosely Wood to Billesdon Coplow.

The race was won by Mr Field Nicholson on Sir Harry Goodricke's 'Magic'. Captain Becher was unplaced, but his name will always be remembered in connection with the famous brook on Aintree's Grand National course.



Scan this QR Code to download more Heritage Trails



Make the most of your visit and explore more things to do, places to stay and places to eat in the Harborough district. Go to visitharborough.com

This leaflet has been prepared by Harborough District Council with support from Billesdon Local History Group. Thanks to **RJ Brand Design** for design and photography (rjbranddesign.co.uk).

Discover more in our Heritage Trail Series:

visitharborough.com

© Harborough District Council 2021

All the information in this leaflet is correct at time of printing.

