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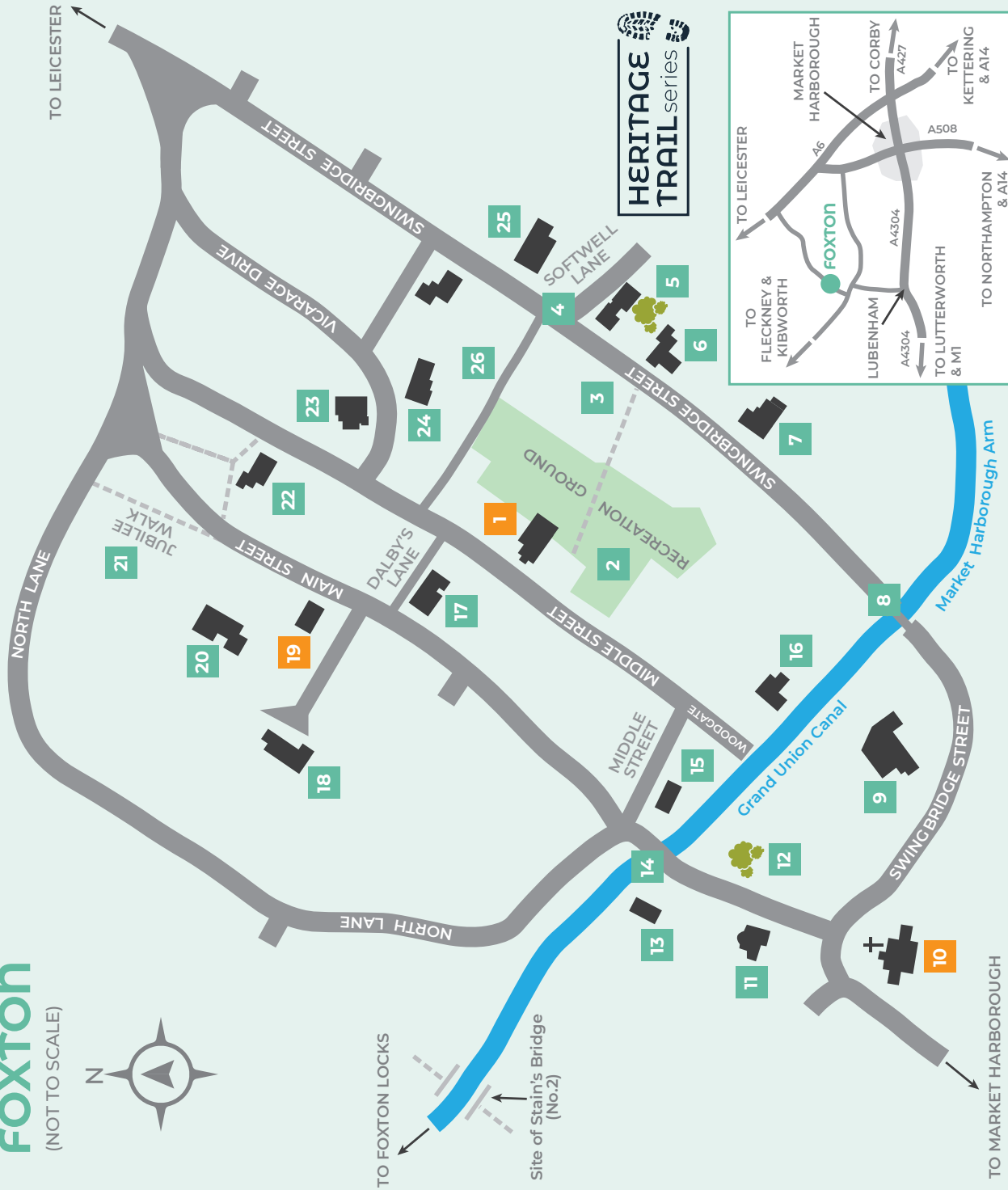
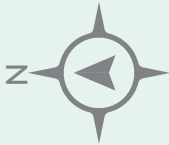
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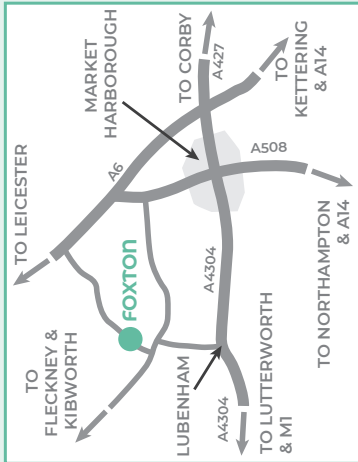


FOXTON

(NOT TO SCALE)



HERITAGE TRAIL series



TO FOXTON LOCKS

Site of Stain's Bridge (No.2)

Foxton was originally a hill-top settlement, most likely founded in Saxon times. It is situated in the upper Welland Valley in a landscape fashioned in the ice age.

The village gradually moved down the valley side, and following the Norman Conquest, Judith, niece of William the Conqueror held a manor there. The name is thought to come from the large number of foxes which inhabit the area. Resulting features of the local countryside are the spinneys and coverts providing habitat for a large variety of wildlife.

Originally a farming community, the village was worked on the open three field system until it was enclosed in 1770. This resulted in the majority of the new fields being laid down to pasture and raising cattle for market became the main activity of farmers. During WWII much of the land was put under the plough as wheat and other cereals were needed.

By the middle of the 18th C. Foxton had a well-developed cottage textile industry.

The continuation of the canal from Leicester, which had terminated at Debdale in 1797, through the village in 1805-6, brought improved communications and resulted in construction of a wharf with a weighbridge in Foxton which can still be seen today.

Foxton is still home to a thriving school, pubs, and a church.

Visitors should use the central car park where the trail commences. Village roads are narrow and parking on them can cause inconvenience. Alternatively, walkers can reach the village by towpath via picturesque Foxton Locks from another car park on the Gumley Road (1 mile approx.). There is a surrounding network of footpaths, clearly waymarked.

1 The Robert Monk Hall is a stone-faced building which opened in 1931. Robert Monk was a native of Foxton who later made a fortune as a landlord of the Robin Hood Hotel in Leicester. He left a legacy from which the hall was built, and a trust fund set up for its upkeep, and to assist Foxton people. This survives to this day.



2 The recreation ground behind was part of the “Play Close”, traditionally used as an area where village lads could play.

3 One of Foxton’s many narrow ‘lanes’ leads to **Swingbridge Street**. Legend says that this was once called Queen Caroline Street because it was said that the Queen passed along it on the way to her coronation in 1820. Unlikely, but a nice story.

4 Turn left and the bridleway to your right is **Softwell Lane**. As its name suggests, it led to a well which was likely a main source of Foxton’s water supply until the mains came in the late 1940s. There are many springs in the parish, and the soft water meant that laundering for the local gentry was one of the village trades. The site of the well has been restored and laid out as a nature reserve including a replica of the original pump.

5 The trees behind Dale Cottage and the Old Manse are the **‘Rodney Oaks’**. In 1780 Admiral Rodney led a campaign to plant oaks to provide planks for the Royal Navy ships.

6 The Old Manse was the residence of the Baptist Minister. The Baptists were the descendants of the Foxton puritan congregation, some of whom fought on the Parliamentarian side during the Civil War. In the days when religion had a lot of power in village life, the Baptists and the Anglicans jostled for equal sway.

7 On the left are good examples of **graziers' houses**. Graziers were farmers who produced cattle and sheep on the rich pastures of the Welland Valley. The animals were marketed in London and this made them very wealthy – a status reflected in their homes. Several have stone foundations topped with locally made bricks, date stones in the gable ends and Swithland slate roofs. A fine example is Foxton Lodge dating from 1602 with Georgian and Victorian additions.

8 **The Swingbridge** which gives the street its modern name is the latest of several designs and is operated by the boaters. For a long while a windlass was necessary to work it and one hung in the porch of a nearby cottage.

The Canal - The 'Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Union Canal', now part of the Leicester Section, Grand Union sliced through the village in 1805-6 despite earlier opposition from local landowners including Sir John Palmer. When originally planned to come through the village in 1792 they declared the "village springs would be cut" and "incommodious damps and fogs" would kill off all the old people.

The plan then approved by parliament in 1793 to continue the canal to Northampton through a tunnel to be built near the present Foxton Locks was revised, and a second Act of Parliament obtained in 1804 to allow continuation of the canal from Debdale, through Foxton village instead, before terminating at Market Harborough Basin. Its arrival brought trade and employment but was the equivalent of a modern motor way, changing the face of the village.

9 The present **Manor House** is an 18th century farmhouse on the site of an old Norman Manor. Note the ancient stone foundations, Swithland slate roof and "bishop's mitre" chimney pots. Manor and church were re-furbished by John O'Gaunt in 1397 and a date stone is mounted over the old coach house door.

10 **Parish Church of St Andrew -**

The location of the church has probably been a site of worship before the coming of Christianity. The first church was most likely a wooden building, later replaced by a stone structure, progressively enlarged to form the building today. According to the list of vicars displayed inside the church, the first incumbent was installed in 1198 when Richard I was on the throne. Inside is a Norman font and a Saxon preaching cross (circa 800AD). Details can be found in a separate guide, obtainable from inside the church.

Entering the church yard, on the left is an ancient mud wall. Ahead, adjacent to the porch runs an old sunken footpath. This led to Church Hill, a section of the 'back lane' cut off by the canal which continues on the lower side as present day North Lane. Approaching the front gate, pause to look under the yew tree on the left for a slate headstone in memory of Richard Rathbone "who drowned in the Union Canal June 23rd, 1814, in the 7th year of his age".



Civil War - Hearsay has it that after the battle of Naseby in 1645, King Charles I took shelter in the church. This is unlikely but a large chest of recovered Civil War weapons was once housed there. In the last century, the vestry held a church school, and the children were sometimes allowed to play "battles". The eccentric vicar (who used to announce hunting fixtures during services) sold the weapons after he was confronted by a small boy with a large sword.

11 **The Black Horse** replaced an old thatched inn in 1900 catering for trade from the canal when the inclined plane boat lift was built alongside the flight of locks. Then extended in 1963 to cater for new trade from pleasure boats. The name derives from the big black horses bred in Leicestershire to work and hunt on heavy clay land.



12 Opposite, between the pub and the bridge, lie the private grounds of the **Manor House** where there is one of the village's last remaining apple orchards. Although there is only one tree visible from Main Street, several apple trees can be viewed from the gateway leading to the Manor grounds opposite the church on Swingbridge Street. Foxton once had many such orchards, boasting its own variety "Foxton Pride", a few trees of which still exist.

Foxton Brickyard - Foxton once had a flourishing commercial brickyard. Many local buildings were made with Foxton bricks, and they were shipped out by canal; it is said that some were used in the construction of London's St. Pancras station.

13 A horse and cart weighbridge forms the entrance to **Forge House**. Here was a wharf where coal was stacked like a dry-stone wall on the canal side, whilst bricks and agriculture produce were loaded for distribution.

14 **Bridge 3 - "Black Horse Bridge"** is a typical humpbacked canal "accommodation" bridge with the original brick parapets replaced by railings for better visibility. In the early 1800s, when many of the village men were unemployed and needed 'parish relief', it was a gathering place for locals seeking work organised by the Overseer of the Poor, and became known as "Loafers Lump". It is not advisable to linger on the bridge today, but follow the towpath under the bridge. Continue your journey following the towpath under the bridge.

Murder! - Stain's Bridge (No 2) was the scene of an infamous murder. Hannah Reed, intending to dispose of her husband, pushed him into the canal as they walked beneath the bridge, then fatally clubbed him with a branch as he surfaced. Her brother-in-law, suspecting the worst, found the body. Hannah was tried at Leicester Assizes, found guilty and hanged in Infirmary Square, Leicester in August 1825. Because the crime was an act of petty treason, Hannah was sentenced to be drawn and quartered. As she confessed and asked for forgiveness whilst awaiting execution, this was not carried out. Her body was taken to the Leicester Infirmary for dissection purposes instead.

15 **Bridge House garden** once housed "The Tearooms", a popular venue which catered for fishermen as well as visitors. Many came by pony and trap from East Langton railway station and there is a report of an early Cyclists Touring Club outing to Foxton in 1909.

16 Woodgate originally led up to the "**Foxton Moor**" which was hunted by John O'Gaunt. However, the road was cut by the canal, which left a piece of the former 'Play Close', purchased to build the Board School in 1875. Many generations of Foxton Children were taught in this building before the coming of Gartree Prison and estate in the 1960s necessitated a bigger establishment being built on the hill. The Grade II Listed Building is now a private residence but the original unusual 'Star of David' design circular window in the gable end wall can still be seen from the canal towpath.

17 Retrace your steps to the bridge and continue down **Main Street** – originally called CrossGate Street, as being the ‘way to the church’ before becoming Silver Street at the time of the 1841 Census and then Bridge Street pre-WW2 - to Roselands, which was a bakery run by the Dalby family, who gave their name to the adjacent lane.

18 Originally an 18th century farmhouse, ‘**Hogget**’, the former Shoulder of Mutton Inn, got its original name from the famous Leicester Longwool sheep bred at Dishley Grange by Robert Bakewell. Although the pub pre-dates the canal by over 50 years the large front paddock was used for the overnight grazing of canal boat horses.

19 **The old Baptist Chapel** (pictured overleaf), built in 1865 of Foxton Brick, is a good example of ‘Victorian Gothic’. Now a family residence, it stands on the site of the original meeting house of 1716, one of the oldest of that denomination in the Midlands. The great Baptist Missionary William Carey often visited.



20 **Spring Cottage** was originally several dwellings. It once housed a flourishing laundry.

21 **Jubilee Walk** leads to North Lane, once Back Lane, part of an old lane which circled the village in a recognised “ring settlement” pattern. Just inside North Lane was another forge which was also the village undertakers. Although agriculture was the predominant industry for many years other village trades in the past, besides the textile workshops and brickyard, were a mushroom ketchup “factory”.

22 **The Old Court House** held the Court Leet where local matters such as encroachments on highways were decided

on behalf of the Lord of the manor. In front is the old village green, part of which became allotments many years ago. An ancient path cuts through here to Middle Street. On the right another mud wall is home to many bees.

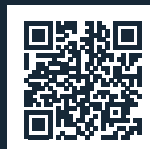
23 **Orchard House** on the corner of Vicarage Drive was most likely originally a Manor House or a Reeve’s house. The oldest Government office was that of Reeve, to ‘supervise villeins’. Eventually ‘Shire Reeve’ evolved into Sherriff.

24 The impressive old **Georgian vicarage** with courtyard and stables is now in private ownership. The modern house next door is now the ecclesiastical accommodation.

25 Turn right to Swingbridge Street. Some of the larger houses are typical 19th century “**Hunting Boxes**” with yards, stables, and hay lofts. Examples are “The Grange” and “The Chestnuts”.

26 Behind the gardens of these large houses is another lane which leads through to **Middle Street**. The Old Vicarage gardens to the right were the site of a fatal wartime air crash. Foxton Moor became a WW2 airfield, mainly for the Wellington Bombers, and afterwards a refugee camp. It now houses Gartree Prison, so named because the area is in the Gartree Hundred.

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

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

