

NORTHFIELD HERITAGE TRAILS

Further Information

BOOKS

Pauline Caswell

Images of England - Northfield (1996)

Martin Hanson

Images of England - Northfield Vol II (2003)

Jean & John Smith

Northfield Past & Present (Sutton, 2001)

Jean & John Smith

Northfield Memories (Sutton, 2003)

CREDITS

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Historic images courtesy of Birmingham Archives & Heritage

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NORTHFIELD

Heritage Trails



Northfield picture map by Bernard Sleight and Ivy Ellis c1920. This was commissioned by Birmingham Civic Society who successfully campaigned to preserve the historic village of Northfield after the First World War.



NORTHFIELD
Revealed



NORTHFIELD
Revealed

Northfield Heritage Trails

Both trails are pleasant circular walks which should take between 1 and 2 hours to complete. If you are feeling energetic you can do both as a single walk!

In addition to the featured stops there are plenty of other quirky and unexpected things to see along the way. Many of the early 20th century terraces boast attractive architectural details including name plaques – and don't forget to look up above the modern shop fronts for a glimpse of the earlier buildings that lie behind!

Key

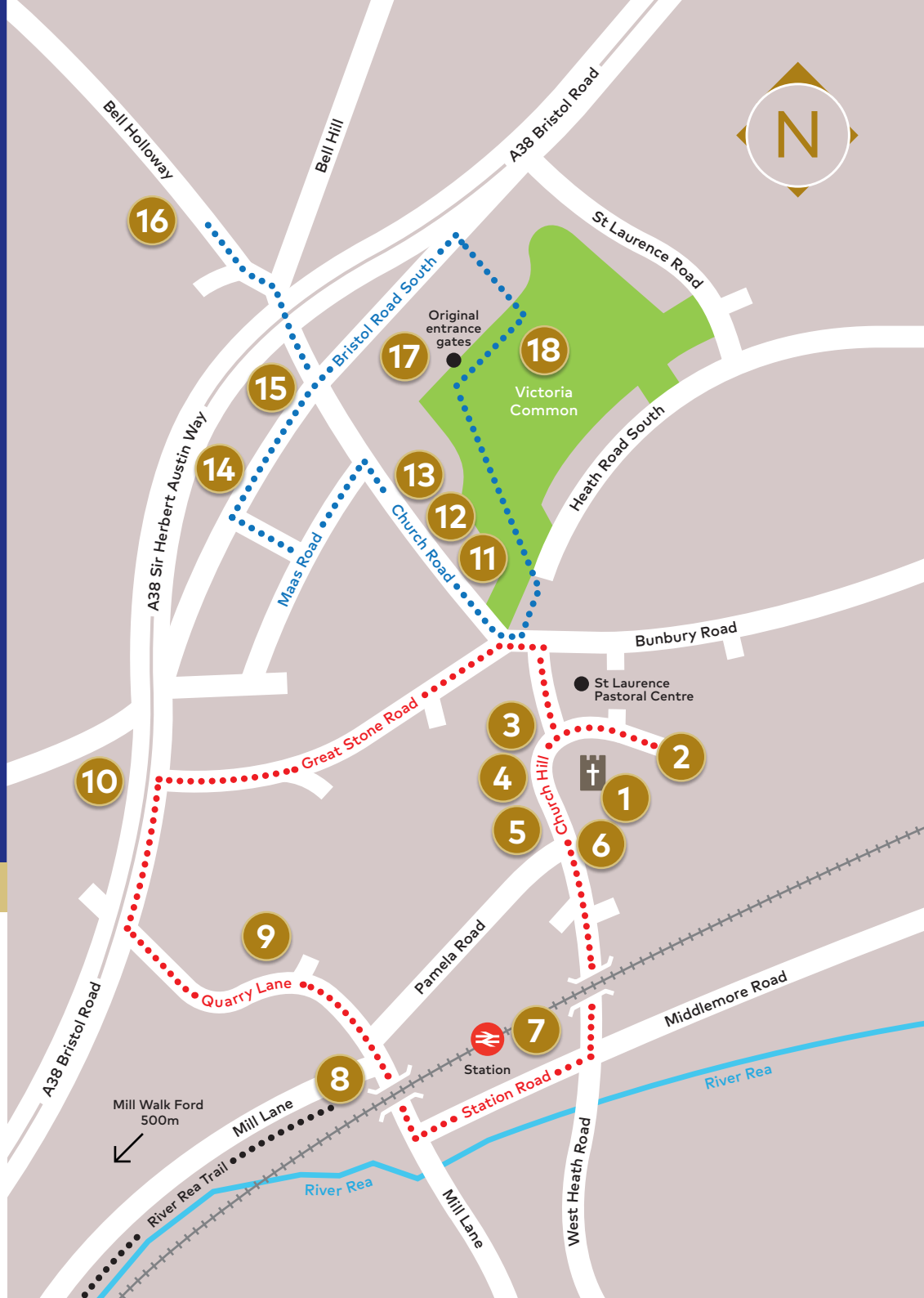
Walk 1 Old Northfield



Walk 2 20th century Northfield



Please note this map is an approximate guide to the relative sites listed within this publication and is not drawn to scale.



NORTHFIELD HERITAGE TRAILS

A brief history of Northfield



St Laurence Church and the Great Stone Inn c1900

Northfield has a long history of settlement dating back to the Iron Age.

The origins of the name Northfield is from the Anglo-Saxon *Nord feld* meaning open land to the north of an existing Saxon settlement.

In the Domesday Book of 1086 the manor of Northfield was described as having a priest which suggests that there was already a church here before the Norman conquest. The present Church of St Laurence was built in the 12th century and sat at the heart of the old medieval village.

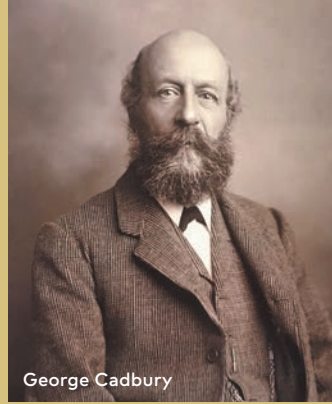
For much of its history Northfield was part of rural Worcestershire. The village's main industry was farming and there were a number of water mills along the banks of the River Rea where locally grown corn was ground. Farm workers also supplemented their wages with income from nail making and a sizeable cottage industry developed in the area during the 18th century.

Northfield was on the main route from Birmingham to Worcester (now the Bristol Road) and in 1762 this became a turnpike (toll road). The development of the turnpike led to the commercial hub of the village shifting northwards to the junction of Bell Lane and Church Road.

A further impetus for development came with the building of the Birmingham to Gloucester railway line and the opening of Northfield station in 1870. The railway brought new industries to the area from the centre of Birmingham and also enabled more people to buy homes locally and commute into the city.



Bristol Road South c1915



George Cadbury

In 1878 George and Richard Cadbury moved their chocolate business to Bournville, less than two miles from Northfield. Fifteen years later in 1893 they established a garden village which began in Bournville and eventually stretched all the way down to Northfield.

Herbert Austin founded his Austin Works in Northfield in 1905. This became the Longbridge car plant which at its peak employed 25,000 people. The Kalamazoo paper factory was another significant business which set up in Northfield in 1908.

The arrival of these major employers, together with the improvements to the transport network and the rapid growth of Birmingham (of which Northfield became a part of in 1911) led to the transformation of the area. The previously rural landscape was replaced with substantial new housing estates. These included Allen's Cross and Frankley Beeches, constructed in the 1930s, and Ley Hill, West Heath, Bunbury Road and Vineyard Road in the 1950s and 60s.

Although Northfield has witnessed enormous change over the last hundred years, today it is a popular neighbourhood in which to live and work. And tucked away from the modern centre the old village survives - with the Norman church of St Laurence at its heart - as a reminder of Northfield's long history.

Northfield Heritage Trails

These two heritage trails are intended to help residents and visitors to discover Northfield's rich and varied history, including some of its lesser known people and places.

Old Northfield (trail 1) focuses on the pre-20th century heritage of the area and takes in the old village and the southern part of Northfield. This trail is 2.5km long.

20th century Northfield (trail 2) explores the more recent past and focuses on the present day commercial centre including Church Road, Bristol Road South and Victoria Common. This trail is 2km in length.

3

The Great Stone Inn and Village Pound



School children next to the Great Stone c1950s

Originally built as a timber-framed 'hall' house, the Grade II listed Great Stone Inn dates from the 15th century. It became an inn some hundred years later and was reclad in brick during the 18th century.

Next to the inn is the Village Pound which was used as a temporary enclosure for farm animals that had strayed. The red sandstone structure dates from the 17th century.

The Pound is now the home of Northfield's Great Stone, a glacial erratic boulder that was deposited in the area during the Ice Age. The stone originally stood on the corner by the inn but was relocated in 1954.



Above: The Great Stone Inn and The Village Pound

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Number 6 Church Hill



Number 6 Church Hill

Number 6 Church Hill was originally two separate nail makers' cottages. The date of their construction (1750) and the initials of their builder (AJW) are inscribed in darker bricks on the east gable end.

The chimneystack contains a four-tiered dovecote – the meat from the birds would have been a useful supplement to the diets of the house's inhabitants.

Number 6 and the row of workers' cottages behind it form part of the Northfield Village conservation area which was created in 1969.



Dovecote



Construction date in gable wall

5

St Laurence School



St Laurence Church and School c1920s



Old Classroom

The origins of St Laurence Church School date back to 1714 when the rector, Dr William Worth, established a charity school for 20 boys in the church.

The first purpose-built schoolhouse was constructed in 1837 at a cost of £288. Two classrooms and another teacher's house were added later. The school buildings were converted into houses in 1972 when the school moved to a new site on Bunbury Road.



Partially hidden by a tall hedge, the original schoolhouse with its AD MDCCCXXXVII (1837) date stone can also still be seen.

6

Nailmakers' Cottages

Church Hill features an attractive row of nailmakers' cottages dating from around 1800.

Up until the middle of the 19th century Northfield was a centre for nail-making which was carried out in cottages and small workshops around the old village.

In 1831 there were 122 men recorded as being employed

in the trade. However, as the century progressed the industry declined and by 1884 there were only 23 nail-makers still working locally.

Beech Tree Farm originally stood across the road from the cottages but this was demolished in the 1930s to make way for new housing.



Below: Church Hill c1920s



Nailmakers' cottages

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Northfield Station



Located on the Bristol and Birmingham Railway, Northfield Station opened in September 1870.

The arrival of the station was the main catalyst for the development of the Northfield area as a dormitory suburb for Birmingham commuters. The station was enlarged in 1892 when an additional central platform was added.

The blocked up access doorway to this can still be seen under the railway bridges.

A local businessman by the name of Charles Pegram built the houses for railway workers on Station Street. He also constructed a temperance hotel (which survives) and a roller skating rink (sadly now lost) on West Heath Road.



Left: Blocked entrance to 1892 central platform. Above: Former Temperance Hotel (now the Station Fish Bar)

8

The River Rea

Rising in the Waseley Hills near Rubery, the course of the River Rea meanders 14 miles through Birmingham before joining the River Tame close to the M6 motorway at Spaghetti Junction.

From the Middle Ages the river boasted numerous watermills along its course. The mills were used for both agricultural and industrial purposes. Northfield Mill (sometimes called Digbeth Mill) and nearby Hawksley Mill were both corn mills.

Northfield Mill continued to be used until 1908. It was demolished in 1958 and today only the remains of the mill wall and wheel pit survive.

A ten minute diversion along the nearby River Rea Trail leads to another local landmark, Mill Walk Ford.



Top: Remains of the mill wheel pit
Right: Mill Walk Ford



Northfield Mill c1929

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Quarry Lane



Royal British Legion Garden of Memory

Quarry Lane was the site of an old quarry which supplied the sandstone for St Laurence Church and some of the area's other early buildings.

The site of the quarry is now occupied by Northfield Royal British Legion Club which boasts an attractive Garden of Memory.

The Garden overlooks the side of Quarry Farm, constructed in the 18th century partly from the local stone.

Across the road from the quarry there originally stood a large mansion, Quarry House, which was demolished to make way for new housing in the 1930s.

10

The Black Horse

Designed by Francis Goldsbrough of C E Bateman architects, the Grade II* listed Black Horse is an outstanding example of the Arts and Crafts-inspired 'Brewer's Tudor' architectural style.

Completed in 1929, the substantial timber-framed building replaced an older and smaller pub. Although a comparatively modern structure, it was deliberately designed to give the

impression of being an ancient building that had evolved over centuries.

The Black Horse was originally commissioned by the Birmingham-based Davenport's brewery as a 'reformed' pub. These were designed to provide a welcoming environment for families unlike the disreputable establishments which only catered for working men!



Carved wooden bracket and pub interior

11

Northfield Library



Northfield Library

Opened in 1906, Northfield Library was funded by the famous philanthropist Andrew Carnegie.

On the night of 12th February 1914 the library was destroyed by a major fire. The fire was believed to be the work of militant suffragettes as a note with the slogan *Give Women the Vote* was found at the scene. A parcel containing a book by Christabel Pankhurst with the inscription 'to start your new library' was also found nearby.

The library was rebuilt in 1914 and remains a well-used community venue to this day.



Library interior
c1920s



Newspaper cutting covering the arson attack on the Library in 1914

12

Priory Telephone Exchange & Friends Meeting House

The Priory Telephone Exchange dates from the early 1930s. In spite of an unsympathetic 1960s extension the original exchange is a good example of an Art Deco industrial building.

Tucked away down the narrow lane beside the Telephone exchange is Northfield's Friends Meeting House.

This was constructed in 1929 on land donated by George Cadbury. It was designed by the Quaker architect Ernest Hickman and cost £3,400.



The Priory Telephone Exchange



The Friends Meeting House



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Northfield Institute



Northfield Institute c1910



Left: George and Elizabeth Cadbury's entwined initials on the exterior of the building. Right: Northfield Institute today



Northfield Institute was built in 1892 by George Cadbury as a community and adult education centre for local people. It still fulfils this function today, although operated by Birmingham City Council since 1951.

When originally laid out the building contained a coffee tavern, known as the "Cyclist's Arms", an assembly hall,

a schoolroom, a billiard room and a double skittle-alley. It also housed the Friends Meeting House until a separate building was constructed in 1929.

The single story building to the right of the Institute was originally a post office. Today it is home to Northfield Eco Centre and Oulsnam's estate agents.

14

Bristol Road South

Northfield was on the main road between Birmingham and Worcester (today known as the Bristol Road).

In 1762 the route became a turnpike (toll road) and a tollgate was built opposite what is now the junction with Lockwood Road.

The improvement of the main road as a result of the income from tolls led to an increase in traffic and prompted the development of a separate settlement to the north of the old village.

Most of the original Georgian and Victorian buildings were swept away during the 20th century. However, a few have survived, including the Malthouse Buildings of 1895.



Malthouse Buildings date plaque



Toll House on Bristol Road South c1900



The Malthouse Buildings today

15

Bell Lane



Bell Lane cottages



Bell Hotel c1980

The new village originally grew up around the crossroads where the Bristol Road met Bell Lane and Church Road. The Bluebell Inn on Bell Lane was a coaching station for travellers until a new Bell Inn was built on the Bristol Road in 1803. This was replaced by yet another version in 1904 which was itself demolished in 1984.

Three late 18th century cottages survive on what remains of Bell Lane. The distinctive clock tower originally belonged to Huin's shoe shop and dates from 1907.



Huin's clock tower

16

Bell Holloway

On the other side of the A38 Northfield Bypass and surrounded by 20th century suburban housing estates is an extraordinary survival, Bell Holloway

Shrouded by trees, Bell Holloway is an ancient sunken lane, worn down through constant use over centuries. The depth of the lane below the modern ground level indicates that it must date back to at least medieval times.

Bell Holloway and nearby Merritt's Hill are a reminder of Northfield's long – and predominantly rural – history.

The survival of these lanes also reflects the Cadbury-influenced approach to new housing developments which deliberately incorporated green corridors and 'parkways' to provide additional outdoor space for residents.

Old Bell House (formerly the Bluebell Inn) stood at the junction of Bell Holloway with Bell Hill



Bell Holloway

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Northfield Shopping Centre

Northfield Shopping Centre



Northfield Shopping Centre was built in the 1974. Originally known as the Grosvenor Shopping Centre, its construction required the demolition of a significant number of old buildings and also the relocation of the main Bristol Road entrance gates to Victoria Common. The complex was renamed the Northfield Shopping Centre in 2005.

Across the road from the Shopping Centre is the best surviving row of 19th century buildings in the centre of Northfield.

For those willing to make the climb, the roof level of the Shopping Centre car park provides fine views across Northfield and Birmingham.

The Bristol Road South



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Victoria Common

Victoria Common was originally known as Bradley Field. This was one of the shared open fields worked by the villagers of Northfield from the Middle Ages.

In 1897 the land was laid out by the City Council as municipal recreation area to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. However, the landscape works were not actually completed until after 1904. Most of the land on which the park is located was gifted by the Cadbury family in 1905 and 1913.



The original entrance gates are now located behind the Shopping Centre



Detail of the 1939 OS map showing the original Bristol Road entrance to the Common



View of the Common