

Northfield Revealed

Evaluation of NLHF funded project

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NORTHFIELD
Revealed



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Contents

1	Northfield Revealed	3
1.1	About Northfield	3
1.2	A brief history of Northfield	4
1.3	Northfield Revealed: what the project proposed to do	4
1.4	Project management and budget	6
1.5	The impact of Covid	6
2	What the project achieved: outputs and outcomes	7
2.1	Internal glass porch in the church.....	8
2.2	Heritage Trail.....	9
2.3	Interpretation panels	12
2.4	Schools project.....	13
2.5	Community Tapestry Project	17
2.6	Events programme.....	22
2.7	Local History Films	26
2.8	Training volunteers	27
3	Project summary and success.....	28
4	Appendices.....	29
4.1	Appendix 1 – Project finance	29
4.2	Appendix 2 – Fun fact postcard	30

Images front cover (clockwise from left):
Great Stone Inn and St Laurence Church c.1940, Guided walking
tour in historic Northfield, The Great Reveal - tapestry project,
Family Day at St Laurence Church.

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1 Northfield Revealed

The NLHF supported project *Northfield Revealed* received funding approval late 2019 and started in January 2020 finishing late March 2022. The project original finish date was May 2021, but the delivery timeframe overlapped with the Covid pandemic, including three national lockdowns. Project elements either adapted to online delivery or were postponed until 2021. *Northfield Revealed* was led by St Laurence Church and delivered with the help of local community organisations and heritage specialists. This report describes what the project set out to do, what it delivered and its impact on residents and visitors.

1.1 About Northfield

Northfield is a suburb of Birmingham about 6 miles southwest from the city centre. For much of its history Northfield was surrounded by farmland but the area rapidly developed after the First World War. Large new housing estates, built between both world wars and again in the 1950s and 1960s, changed the agricultural landscape and transformed the area. Northfield's modern town centre runs along the Bristol Road (A38). Many of its shops have been modernised or were demolished and new buildings erected after the Second World War. A large and distinctive new indoor shopping centre, the Grosvenor Centre now known as Northfield Shopping Centre, was built in 1974.

The Bristol Road is a major route into Birmingham and to relieve Northfield of traffic, a bypass was completed in the 1990s. The town centre became more pedestrian friendly and although the area is still busy with shoppers, it has suffered the same problems as many other suburban high streets. There are fewer independent shops and a growing number of charity shops, low-cost supermarkets and betting shops.

The historic village of Northfield lies distance away from the modern town centre and the busy traffic on the A38 and bypass. The historic village was saved from development in the 1920s and was designated a conservation area as early as 1969. At its heart is St Laurence Church, which dates to the 12th century and is grade I listed. The conservation area also has a village pub, village school and several old cottages.

The main ethnicity in Northfield is white British and when compared to Birmingham as whole, Northfield is less diverse, but the area is becoming more mixed. Based on the government's 7 indicators of deprivation (income, employment, education, health, crime, housing and living environment) there are pockets of multiple deprivation in Northfield.



Figure 1 - St Laurence Church and Northfield Shopping Centre.

1.2 A brief history of Northfield

The project researched the history of Northfield and published a richly illustrated walking trail. More information about Northfield's history, taken from the walking trail leaflet, can be found in figure 2.

NORTHFIELD HERITAGE TRAILS
A brief history of Northfield

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.

St Laurence Church and the Great Stone Inn c1900

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.

Figure 2 - A brief history of Northfield.

1.3 Northfield Revealed: what the project proposed to do

The aim of *Northfield Revealed* was to engage as wide range of people as possible with the heritage of the historic village of Northfield. The project aimed to raise awareness and appreciation of Northfield's rich heritage among Northfield residents and people from the wider Birmingham area and create a sense of local pride. The project focussed on St Laurence parish church and the surrounding conservation area, but also looked at the history of wider Northfield to highlight the historic links between the old and modern centre.

To achieve these aims, the project proposed to do the following:

Output	Proposal
Construction of glass porch	Construction of a new internal glass porch in the church to allow the main external doors to remain open during the day. Open doors are welcoming and inviting, encouraging people to walk in and see into the building and discover Northfield's history.
Heritage trail	Produce a Northfield heritage walking trail leaflet, linking the church with the rest of Northfield.
Interpretation panels	Install indoor and outdoor interpretation panels around Northfield, in the historic village and in the wider Northfield area
Community tapestry project	Deliver a bespoke community heritage tapestry project.
School history project	Deliver a bespoke history and heritage project with local schools.
Events programme	Deliver a public activity programme, including open days, talks & tours, guided walks and family events.
Short film	Commission a short local history film.
Volunteer training	Training in archive use and guiding walking trails

Figure 3 - Proposed outputs for Northfield Revealed.

The title 'Northfield Revealed' was chosen because it succinctly summarises the main aim of the project; to reveal Northfield's hidden heritage and history. Informal conversations with residents¹ and visitors to events, confirmed that there is a lack of awareness about the historic village and other local heritage buildings. The *Northfield Revealed* project therefore focussed on telling Northfield's history and increasing awareness and appreciation of the area.



Figure 4 - Norman door St Laurence Church & Northfield Library

The St Laurence Church team developed the content of the project with Chris Rice (independent heritage consultant) in consultation with the Birmingham Civic Society. The church also sought advice and from a variety of heritage organisations and practitioners including the NLHF, the City Council's Heritage Champion, Birmingham Civic Society, Moor Pool Heritage Trust, Mrs History, Northfield Library and Suzanne Carter (Woolly Mammoth CIC).

¹ Conversations with residents at events and during door-to-door delivery of *Northfield Revealed* leaflets.

1.4 Project management and budget

The *Northfield Revealed* project developed from an exchange of ideas between Revd Cannon Janet Chapman and the Birmingham Civic Society. The Civic Society's interest in Northfield stemmed from its involvement in the 1920s in saving the historic core of Northfield from proposed demolition and development. Revd Canon Janet Chapman chaired the *Northfield Revealed* steering group including church representatives, church volunteers, BCS representative and heritage professionals. After initial in-person meetings, the group met online to coordinate activities.

The various project elements were delivered by local community organisations, church volunteers and freelance heritage professionals. Research and production of the heritage trail leaflet and interpretation panels and project coordination was completed by Chris Rice, freelance consultant. Education professionals Mrs History developed the schools' programme while community engagement specialists Woolley Mammoth CIC devised a locality specific tapestry project. Project evaluation was completed by Irene de Boo, freelance heritage consultant.

Participating local community organisations included Northfield Arts Forum, EcoBirmingham, Northfield Library, Rea Valley Conservation Group, Northfield BID & Northfield Community Partnership. Local schools taking part were St Laurence Junior and Infant Schools, Bellfield Primary School and Edge Academy.

The project budget totalled £86,000. This was funded by a generous NLHF grant (£65,700) and successful fundraising by St Laurence Church provided a further £17,550. Smaller awards were received from WA Cadbury Trust (£750) and Edward Cadbury Trust (£2,000). The final costs for the internal porch were higher than envisaged but additional costs for porch construction were absorbed by St Laurence Church and did not have an impact on the overall project budget. Project expenditure is detailed in appendix 1.

1.5 The impact of Covid

The project overlapped with the Covid pandemic and project partners responded pro-actively by adapting the way activities were delivered. The community stitching project 'Home is where the Arch is' switched from stitching in small groups at local community venues to sending stitching packs to people's homes for a home-based activity during lockdown. Because schools were closed during lockdown online resources were provided but once the schools had gone back, in-class teaching resumed. Covid did impact on the events programme which, with many face-to-face activities, was postponed until Covid rules relaxed in 2021.



Figure 5 – The impact of Covid. Messages on St Laurence Church Facebook page

In between lockdowns, restricting Covid restrictions continued to have an impact on visitor numbers to events. For example, guided walking tours could only be attended by 6 people (6-person rule) while people were also reluctant to attend events for fear of catching Covid. The cancellation of Northfield Carnival in 2020 and again in 2021 was disappointing because this would have been an opportunity for the project to reach out to a large number of people.

2 What the project achieved: outputs and outcomes

Northfield Revealed project outputs (see figure 3) are described individually below. Each section sets out what was proposed, what was delivered and summarises NLHF outcomes. Qualitative information was gathered using interviews with stakeholders, visitor questionnaires, participant observation and informal conversations as well as spontaneously provided feedback. Quantitative analysis as a measure of success proved less appropriate to use, because Covid reduced the number of people attending in-person events.

Interviews were held with the chair of the *Northfield Revealed* Steering Group, Revd Canon Janet Chapman, Mrs History (schools project), Woolly Mammoth (tapestry project), Naomi Wood (Northfield Arts Forum) and Chris Rice (heritage trail). Further feedback was obtained from church volunteers and visitors to events while participants in the tapestry project expressed their views in written feedback collected and collated by Woolley Mammoth. Social media also provided useful feedback on the project.

The project also provided a high-quality guidebook about the Northfield Conservation area. This guidebook was not part of the original proposal, but research into the history of Northfield provided a wealth of additional information now included in the guidebook to Northfield Old Village. The will be followed by a second companion guidebook about St Laurence Church, researched and written by church volunteers, to be published in 2022.

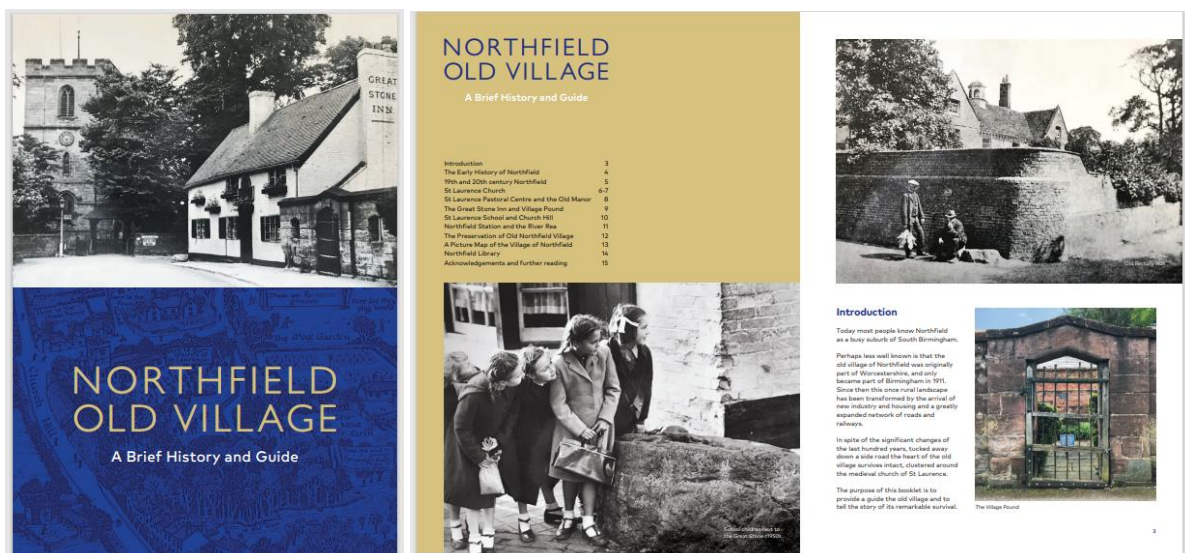


Figure 6 - New guidebook to Northfield Old Village

2.1 Internal glass porch in the church

What was proposed

The *Northfield Revealed* project proposed the installation of a new internal glass porch inside the main entrance to the church. The idea behind this is that it allows the large external doors and metal gates to stay open during the daytime, thus encouraging more people to come inside to have a look and discover the building and the history of the area.

What was delivered

The global pandemic combined with a nationwide shortage of building materials and supplies, delayed the construction of the internal porch. Rising prices of materials increased the cost of the porch but this increase was shouldered by St Laurence Church and did not impact the approved project budget. The porch completed in February 2022.

St Laurence Church is a grade I listed building and archaeological recording was undertaken in preparation for the internal porch. The south aisle, where the new porch was to be inserted, dates from the 13th century and is known to be a replacement of an earlier structure. Under the current floor level, a cobbled stone footing was exposed in the doorway area. It is believed that this relates to the earlier church and confirms there was an earlier structure. A small number of human bones were also found and these were bagged for reburial. No other significant finds were made. The archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Warwickshire Archaeology and a full report² on the findings is available from St Laurence Church website.



Figure 7 – External porch and cobbled footing inside the doorway (Photo - Archaeology Warwickshire Report2110).

The design of the internal glass porch is modern but sits comfortably in the existing church interior. As an obvious new feature, the glass porch does not ‘confuse’ the different historic building phases of the church. Installation of the porch was overseen by Nick Joyce Architects, accredited architectural conservation practice. Specialist conservation contractors, Croft Building & Conservation Ltd, completed all building work on site.

With the glass porch in position, the main heavy wooden entrance door can remain open, inviting people to come and have a look inside. People can walk in even when the church is locked. The porch ensures the church interior is less cold and draughty. Because the space is now more comfortable it is possible to extend the use of the church and introduce more community activities. The porch will reduce energy use but due to its recent completion date (February 2022), data to

² Coutts, C M, 2021 St Laurence’s Church, Northfield, Birmingham, Archaeological Recording, Archaeology Warwickshire Report no 2110

demonstrate energy savings are not yet available. Lower energy use aligns with the Eco ethos of St Laurence Church. The church received a Bronze Eco Church award in 2021 and is hoping to gain a Silver Eco Church award in the future.

The porch project has given the church team and church volunteers useful project management experience as well as insights in conservation building practice. The church team it now feels that the next project, a full upgrade of electrics and new interior church lighting, is less daunting and can be supported by in-house knowledge and experience.

'The project, and the new porch, has given us confidence to go ahead with other work and push on with the lighting project.' (Revd Canon Janet Chapman, January 2022).



Figure 8 - Porch frame and after completion with glass panels

NLHF outcomes

The internal porch is a sensitive intervention in a grade 1 listed building and transforms the church into a more comfortable space and more user-friendly building. Increased indoor comfort has already resulted in more planned events and will increase the use of the building, including by people from the local community. Higher footfall will create greater awareness and 'local ownership' with more people advocating and promoting the heritage of the church and the wider Northfield area.

2.2 Heritage Trail

What was proposed

The aim of *Northfield Revealed* was to engage people in the history of Northfield. The Northfield Heritage Trail leaflet and interpretation panels were key elements of the project. After initial research by freelance consultant Chris Rice, it was decided to split the route in two and the trail leaflet therefore contains 2 self-guided walks. One walk explores the Northfield Conservation Area while the other walk takes visitors on a tour around parts of Northfield not usually considered 'historic' but equally important in the history of the area.



Figure 9 - Fold out Northfield Heritage Trails leaflet describing two walks.

What was delivered

In total 7000 copies of the Northfield Heritage trail were printed. The text is richly illustrated with photographs, archive material and maps.



Figure 10 – Pages from the illustrated Trail leaflet

Feedback to the Heritage Trail leaflet has been extremely positive.

'Beautifully illustrated and informative content. When I get home, I will look at some old maps of the area.' (Heritage enthusiast attending guided walk, September 2020)

'Very nicely designed. And all in Northfield. Can I take a few more for the family?' (Visitor to 'Admire the Arch' event, Northfield Shopping Centre, September 2021)

'The walking trails are very well presented and informative. They will stand the test of time and could be reprinted. Timetabled walks could be part of future Heritage events.' (Roy Pouncett and Stuart Andrew, Church Warden and Tour Guide trainer, February 2022).

The images and text in the trail leaflet link historic information to heritage buildings still visible in the modern city scape. Many of the historic buildings and features described are on busy roads, in shopping areas or local parks. Comments showed that the Heritage Trail had made people more aware of local heritage and history.

'I just picked up this (Heritage Trail leaflet) and noticed the bit on Victoria Park. I walk through there, it is my shortcut to the shops, but I never really noticed the gates. They are over 100 years old! They don't look it.' (Visitor to 'Admire the Arch' event, Northfield Shopping Centre, September 2021)

'What we have here (in Northfield) is quite good. You just don't think about it much when you live here.' (Comment made by resident during door-to-door delivery of Heritage Trail leaflets, June 2021)

'This (walk) is such a surprise. I never knew this was here. I must show my husband. I can use the leaflet and walk it with him.' (Visitor from Bournville taking part in guided walk of Old Northfield, September 2021)

In addition to printed leaflet the Heritage Trail was also made available as a PDF online. To reach as wide an audience as possible, trails were distributed via traditional cultural venues like local libraries but also through less usual venues like pubs (The Great Stone Inn, The Black Horse), local eateries (fish and chip shop, Indian restaurant) and Northfield Shopping Centre. Leaflets were also delivered door to door and were distributed through children's school bags (participating schools). School bags were an effective way of reaching many local families. Heritage Trail leaflets were also handed out during events. The Heritage trail leaflet was promoted on social media (Twitter, Facebook) and featured on large outdoor posters in the Northfield area, promoting the trail leaflet to passers-by.

By February 2022 nearly 4000 trail leaflets were distributed locally. It is anticipated that the remaining paper copies will suffice for another 2 years. Once hard copies run out, PDF copies will remain available from the St Laurence website. The trail leaflet will therefore last well beyond the duration of the project.

The Heritage Trail has provided church volunteers and congregation with historic information.

'Northfield Revealed has equipped us (church volunteers and church congregation) with local knowledge. We now know we have something precious to reveal. We are more confident in inviting people into our indoor and outdoor spaces and show them around.' (Revd Canon Janet Chapman, January 2022).

NLHF outcomes.

Research for the trail identified less well known local heritage in Northfield and the trail leaflet clearly and accessibly explains the history of the area. Through imaginative distribution the trail leaflet reached a wide range of people, including those who might not normally be interested in heritage. Through the heritage trail more people will have learned about Northfield's history.

2.3 Interpretation panels

What was proposed

The project proposed to install interpretation panels in prominent locations. The following locations were chosen - St Laurence Church (2), Northfield Library (3), The Great Stone Inn (1), St Laurence pastoral centre (1) and Northfield station (1). All display panels include a QR code which, when scanned, links to more information on the *Northfield Revealed* webpage.



Figure 11 - Interpretation panels in Northfield

What was delivered

Because historic Northfield and St Laurence Church are 'off the beaten track', it is important the outdoor display panels are in busy locations and in areas with high foot-traffic. Their visibility prompts passers-by to stop and read.

'The church is in the wrong place now, the village has moved on, there is no footfall, we could do with a presence in the high street. People just drive past; younger people do not even know where the stone is. It is very good that panels have gone up, at the station, the library and on the pub.' (Roy Pouncett, Church Warden, September 2021)

Visitors to the pub frequently stop to read the panel on their way in and informed the project team that "everyone in the Great Stone thinks that what you have been doing is marvellous". The panel at Northfield train station resulted in positive feedback to the ticket office, including an enquiry where the poster could be bought, and the team reproduced it as a one-off gift.

An extra panel was produced to explain the history of the recently discovered millstone, now located in the carpark of the pastoral centre. The millstone was found in the river Rea and hauled out of the water and moved to a more prominent location.

The panels are of durable quality but if they were to suffer from vandalism and graffiti, replacement panels can be easily produced because the digital copies remain with St Laurence Church.

NLHF outcomes

The outdoor panels positioned in places with high footfall like the station and outside the library, alerted passers-by to local heritage buildings they might otherwise have walked past. Due to the panels being in busy areas, a wide range of people learned about heritage. The panels provided passing pedestrians with an unexpected opportunity, while on the go to somewhere else, to learn something new about familiar surroundings. The panels identified local heritage treasures and explained them in an historically accurate but accessible way.

2.4 Schools project

What was proposed

The project proposed that heritage education specialists Mrs History work with schools in Northfield to design and deliver a bespoke local history project³ consisting of classroom teaching combined with outdoor walks to explore and discover Northfield's past. The classroom sessions are active and hands-on and include dressing up in period clothing, historic object handling, quiz challenges and games. The historic content focussed on local spaces and places that the children and young people were most likely familiar with through their daily walk to school, shopping trips and family days out.

What was delivered

As with other parts of the *Northfield Revealed* project, the Covid pandemic impacted on the schools' programme. However, the programme responded by providing online learning materials for teachers and parents to access. These resources were not part of the original proposal and have added substantial long-term value to the overall project outcomes.

Face-to-face teaching resumed when schools re-opened their doors. Schools taking part in the project were St Laurence Infant School, Bellfield Primary School and the Edge Academy. The Edge Academy is a secondary school providing alternative education for 11- to 16-year-olds outside mainstream schooling. *Northfield Revealed* in-school activities and historic content were specifically tailored to the needs of pupils in the Academy's referral unit.

Face-to-face teaching

The first in-person primary school lessons at St Laurence took place in May 2021 when Mrs History went on a short walk with 90 year-1 children. Divided in small groups they explored the local area. This was followed, a week later, with in-classroom lessons. Children from Bellfield Primary went on walk in the local area in November 2021. Because the children were older, year 5, they went out longer and explored further afield.

³ Mrs History, Heritage Education specialists – Jane McArdle & Rachel Hunter Rowe - <http://www.mrshistory.org.uk/>

'Year 1 children are still very young and we went on a very short walk from school to the village and church and back, but it was a rainy day and they all got very wet. During the walk there was a lot of talk about getting wet. When we went back the following week, we were amazed how the rain was forgotten and how much history they remembered.' (Mrs History, interview 04.02.2022)



Figure 12 - Year 1 pupils on a history walk and follow-up postcards made in class 'My visit to Northfield'.

The programme for students at the Edge Academy was tailored to meet their interests. In total 12 young people took part in object handling sessions, small discussion groups and a heritage walk around Northfield. While exploring the area, students were interested in St Laurence churchyard. This theme was therefore further explored and included research into a Commonwealth war grave in the churchyard.



Figure 13 - Object handling and small group sessions at the Edge Academy

'Thank you for giving us this opportunity, the students really engaged well and got a lot out of it.' (Edge Academy teacher, November 2020)

'Northfield Revealed did succeed in reaching out to a very difficult to reach group of young people.' (Revd Canon Janet Chapman, January 2022)

New Learning Resources

To avoid delaying the project when schools closed, Mrs History produced a teacher's pack. Schools therefore have access to *Northfield Revealed* content which can be used at any time during the school year and made to fit around schools' teaching plans. Teacher's packs were hand delivered to all participating schools as well as nine other schools in the Northfield area. Therefore, 12 local schools now have access to the *Northfield Revealed* learning materials, including walking routes, work sheets, classroom activities and teachers' notes. The historic information in the packs will remain relevant for many years to come and creates an ongoing opportunity for more children and local families to learn about Northfield's history.

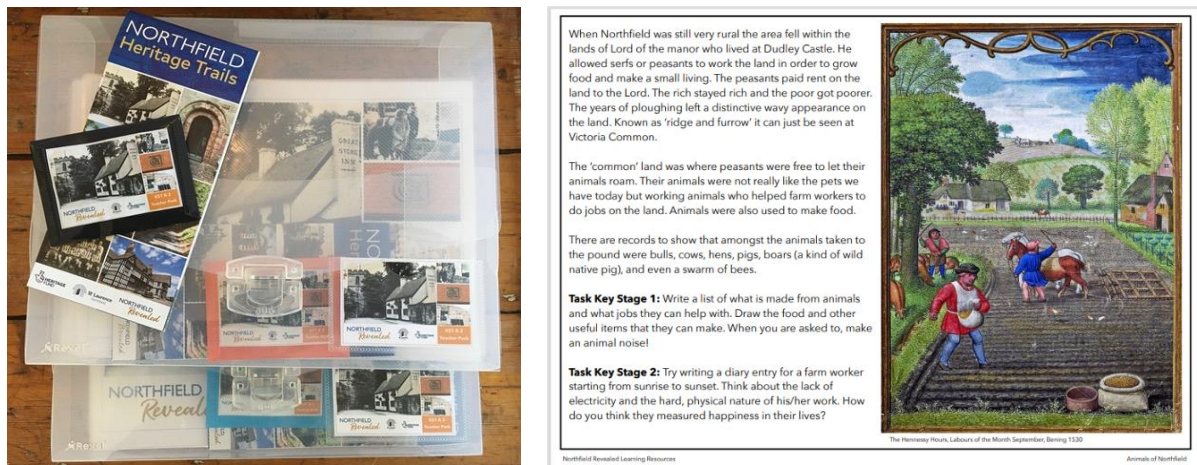


Figure 14 – Teacher's packs were delivered to 12 local primary schools.

The online home learning materials consist of a narrated PowerPoint presentation on YouTube and 6 worksheets for KS1 and KS2 children, each one linking to a curriculum subject area. Parents received links to the resources via school email correspondence. Learning materials will remain available from the St Laurence Church website until well after the end of the project.

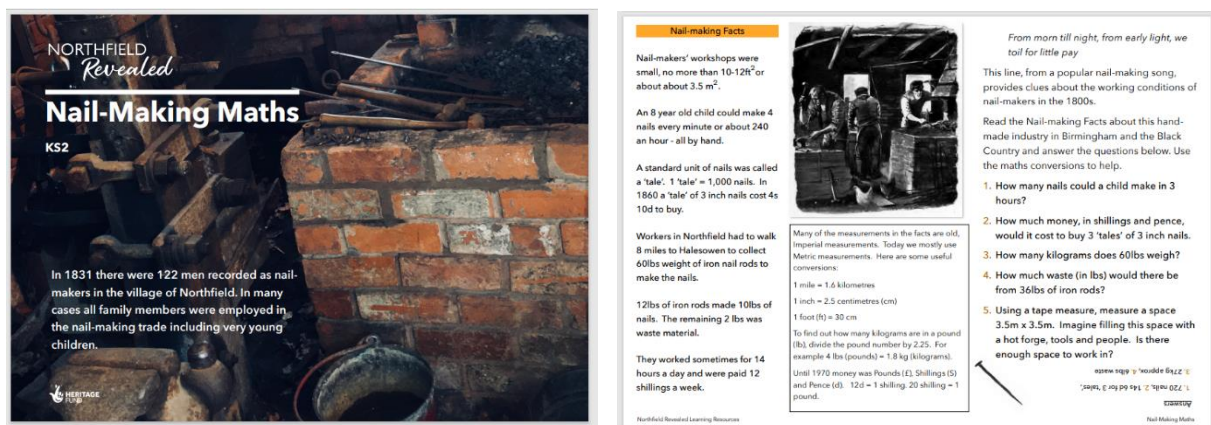


Figure 15 – One of 6 learning resource sheets, Nail-Making Maths

In addition to home learning materials, a fun and active family walking trial was devised to give young families something outdoors to do during lockdown. Printed copies of the family trail proved very popular on event days and the trail is still available from the St Laurence website (PDF).

NORTHFIELD *Revealed*

Use this family trail to discover parts of Old Northfield village to reveal its rich, diverse and hidden heritage.

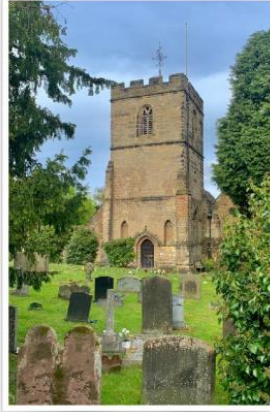


Figure 16 - Family trail leaflet

'The online resources produced by Mrs History are phenomenal, this is a great legacy going forward.' (Revd Canon Janet Chapman, January 2022).

Online home learning resources developed as part of the project can be found here:

YouTube PowerPoint -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZenUuMY9PA>

Learning resource sheets (x6)-

https://www.stlaurencenorthfield.org/northfield_revealed.html

Family explorer/walking trail -

https://www.stlaurencenorthfield.org/uploads/6/4/4/1/6441792/northfield_revealed_family_trail_low_res.pdf

Schools programme - Engagement summary

Output

In-person delivery of bespoke local history lessons and guided walks for primary and secondary school pupils | teacher's packs to 12 schools | 1 YouTube narrated PowerPoint | 6 online home learning resource sheets | 1 Family walking trail - downloadable PDF |

Engagement

90 primary pupils - year 1 | 90 primary pupils - year 5 | 12 secondary school pupils | classroom lessons engaged 110 pupils | outdoor guided walks engaged 200 pupils | 200 parents received links to online resource materials |

Figure 17 - Schools project - output and engagement summary

NLHF outcomes

The schools' project took a fresh look at Northfield's local history and explained it engagingly to children and young people. Online learning resources were designed with inter-generational learning and home education in mind. The programme reached a wide range of people in the local area. Nearly 200 families received information about Northfield's heritage in children's schoolbags as well as links to online resources in email correspondence from school. The *Northfield Revealed* schools' programme pro-actively engaged with a wide range of pupils of different ages and different backgrounds, including harder to reach young people at the Edge Academy.

2.5 Community Tapestry Project

What was proposed

The tapestry project aimed to connect local communities with the history of Northfield and St Laurence Church and to connect local people with each other. The original proposal was for participants to work together in small groups thus reducing loneliness and increasing people's wellbeing. The community artwork, in the shape of a large tapestry inspired by Northfield's heritage, was to be publicly displayed. The community tapestry project was created and delivered by Woolly Mammoth Stitch Works CIC⁴.

What was delivered

In response to the Covid pandemic the tapestry project adapted and was delivered in a new way. The original idea had been to get groups of people together over a cuppa, creating connections through a shared stitching experience and to raise awareness and appreciation of the history of the area at the same time. However, group-based, in-person activities could no longer take place during lockdown. To avoid delays to the project and at the same time provide people with a home activity to help them through lockdown, 355 'stitch kits' were given to people or sent out in the post. The tapestry project aimed to be as inclusive as possible, and packs were distributed through St Laurence Church, B30 Foodbank, Northfield Arts Forum, Fairway Day Centre, Birmingham Youth Offending Team and Royal Orthopaedic Hospital.

'The community tapestry was a brilliant lockdown project. It offered something for people to do from home when there was a clear need for this. How it was adapted and delivered during lockdown was simply outstanding.' (Revd Canon Janet Chapman, January 2022)

The stitch kits contained a 'how to stitch' guide, canvas, plastic needle and wool. Also included was a fun historic postcard listing 'did you know' facts about Northfield history on the reverse (appendix 2). The instruction booklet summarised the stitch project and how it linked to Northfield:

We are interested in your connections with Northfield and what makes it special to you. We would like you to stitch that onto a brick! That might sound a bit strange, but it is inspired by the fact that Northfield is home to the oldest piece of architecture in Birmingham, a Norman arch at St Laurence Church, built with 850-year old stone bricks. We thought it was time to be creative and build a new one! Every brick contributed will be linked together to form a full-size 3D tapestry archway.

The project was renamed 'Home is where the Arch is' and in total 195 stitched bricks were returned. These were collated into a 3D arch by Woolly Mammoth. Instead of an in-person launch event as originally envisioned, the 3D tapestry arch was revealed at a live Facebook stream during Birmingham Heritage Week (September 2020 / 1.9K views). The film captures Revd Canon Janet Chapman's reaction when she sees the arch for the first time. The camera zooms in on the individual stitched 'bricks', all clearly identifiable, while commentary explains the inspiration behind the designs. A Facebook 'Heritage Special' walkabout through Northfield accompanied the launch of the tapestry arch and further explored the history and heritage of the buildings and places that inspired stitchers (September 2020 / 400 views).

⁴ Woolly Mammoth Stitch Works CIC, Suzanna Carter & Tina Francis, <https://woollymammothstitch.works/>



Comments on Facebook during reveal event

Looks lovely, proud to have taken part in this.

Saw mine there, but they are all lovely.

Really great to see it all come together and see different people's inspiration of Northfield.

Looks fantastic and I have spotted my two bricks.

It's really lovely and the booklet looks fabulous.

Figure 18 - Tapestry arch and reveal event

During 2020/2021 the tapestry arch was displayed in St Laurence Church but was displayed at Northfield Shopping Centre during Birmingham Heritage Week the following year for a community launch (September 2021). Situated in the main thoroughfare of the indoor shopping centre, 60 people came specially to see it, while many passers-by stopped and took away the 'Home is where the Arch is' magazine as well as Heritage Trail leaflets. Displaying the tapestry arch in the busy shopping centre ensured that a wide range of people did see it and learned about the *Northfield Revealed* project.



Figure 19 - Twitter engagement community tapestry arch display in Northfield Shopping Centre.

Online output can be watched here:

The Great Virtual Reveal	Home Is Where The Arch Is! The Virtual Reveal - YouTube.
'Home is where the Arch is' magazine (PDF)	https://woollymammothstitch.works/home-is-where-the-arch-is-northfield-revealed/
'Heritage Special'	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ini_cilO0Y8&t=359s
Community display of Arch	That's my brick! The first public display of the arch in Northfield - YouTube
Stitch project introduction	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW5hWgocPGw

Figure 20 - Home is where the Arch is - online output

All participants in 'Home is where the Arch is' received a blank postcard on which people were asked to write to a Northfield resident 100 years in the future. This proved to be an effective way to collect people's thoughts about Northfield. Many people used the opportunity to reflect on the unprecedented experience of living through lockdown and a global pandemic. Over 100 quotes were collected and together they form a remarkable community history archive for Northfield in 2020.

The quotes, personal reflections and photos of all stitched bricks (195) were captured in a high-quality 50-page magazines of which 300 copies were printed. They were distributed to all participants and handed out at events. The magazine will remain available in PDF format from the Woolly Mammoth Stitch Works website.

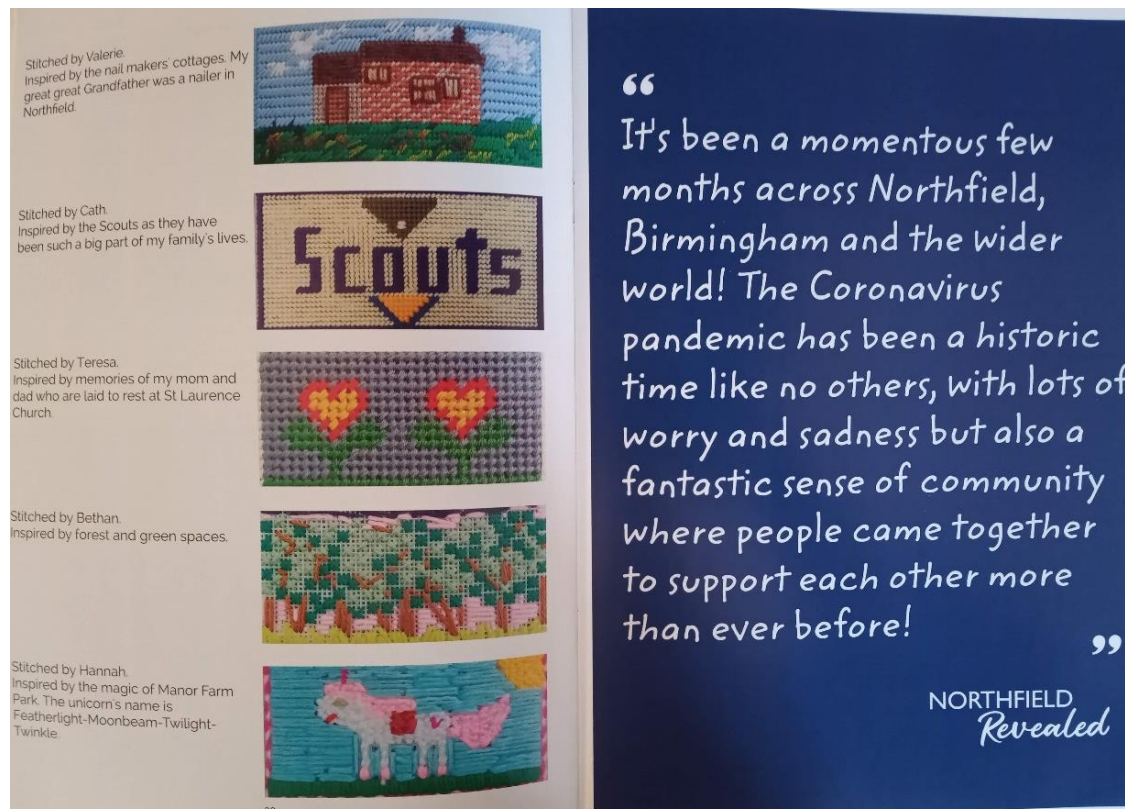


Figure 21 – Double page in 'Home is where the Arch is' magazine.

Feedback on the magazine was extremely positive.

'The magazines produced were of such good quality. We included them in the Christmas goody bags. They were not like something people normally receive. Very different, it generated a real interest and lots of comments.' (Revd Canon Janet Chapman, Jan 2022)

'I enjoyed reading the magazine, particularly people's thoughts about this area. The artworks were all so different and all very good.' (participant, Woolley Mammoth project evaluation feedback, Dec 2020)

'It's really great to see all the tapestry bricks together. I liked that in the magazine you could see the bricks clearly and what they were inspired by.' (participant, Woolley Mammoth project evaluation feedback, Dec 2020)

'I think that the arch is amazing in its diversity and textures. The magazine is a fab idea because it makes every sewer feel really special and valued.' (participant, Woolley Mammoth project evaluation feedback, Dec 2020)

Learning new things and new skills

The stitch packs contained a feedback form and 128 participants responded to the question 'have you learnt anything new about the history of Northfield because of taking part in this project?' 75% of respondents (96 people) said they had learnt something new while 25% (32 people) said they had not. Interestingly, there were 27 people who had lived in Northfield for a very long time, over 40 years, and over half of them (59% - 16 people) – responded that they had still learnt something new about the history of the local area.

The heritage and history theme of the stitch project acted as an eye opener and changed people's perceptions. It even made people change their behaviour and some went out to visit local places they had learned about but had never visited before. Feedback included:

'I went and had a good look around the churchyard and Norton Close. Never looked so close at them before.'

'It encouraged me to go and visit historic sites in Northfield - the Great Stone and the Church.'

'It was interesting to read the fact file and I will now visit Northfield and look at historic features.'

'It is good to know we have great places of history on our doorstep.'

'Really made me think about Northfield. Thoroughly enjoyed - gave me a focus during lockdown.'

'I did not realise that Northfield had such a depth of history. Very interesting to discover.'

Stitchers were also asked if needlework was a new skill. 138 stitchers responded to the question 'is this the first time that you have done tapestry needlework?' For nearly half (63 people - 46%), stitching had been something new and they learned a new skill with the help of the instruction booklet.

'Really enjoyed my first attempt at tapestry and learning lots of facts about Northfield.'

'I have enjoyed doing something new. I have learned to observe my local community more.'

'It was my first attempt. A good project during lockdown.'

'It was special doing something new and finding out something of the history of Northfield.'

For 75 people (54%) stitching was something they were already familiar with. However, comments show that the project often revived a skill people had not used for many years or provided a challenge to improve their skills or use new techniques.

'Haven't done any tapestry for 30 years, thoroughly enjoyed it and may do more.'

'It has been fun. It has challenged my limited sewing skills. Good to take part in a living history project. First time in decades I have done tapestry needlework.'

'Have enjoyed sewing again – not done any for years.'

'It was a great project. Learnt some new ways of designing and stitching.'

'I really enjoyed being part of something creative and local. First time I designed my own tapestry!'

Finally, many comments relate to the enjoyment of being part of a larger community project.

'Interesting to be part of a larger project.'

'Enjoyed being part of a bigger project that was so local.'

'Good to be part of a Northfield project.'

'It's the first time I've taken part in a community project. Thank you.'

'Home is where the Arch is' - Engagement summary

<p>Output</p> <p>1 Tapestry arch 1 Film 'Great reveal' launch (Facebook) 1 Film 'Heritage Special' (Facebook) 300 Printed magazines 'Home is where the Arch is' (also PDF) 1 Community display in Northfield Shopping Centre </p>
<p>Engagement</p> <p>355 stitch packs posted or given to people 162 people stitched a brick (or two) for inclusion in the artwork 190 bricks in artwork 850 people received History Fact File postcard, including primary school children 100 participants wrote message to a future resident 2.3K Facebook views 300 printed magazines posted to all stitchers and remainder distributed at events </p>

Figure 22 - Home is where the arch is - output and engagement summary

NLHF outcome

'Home is where the Arch is' was inclusive from the start when the stitch packs were distributed through various local groups, not just groups associated with St Laurence Church and reached a wide range of people, many of whom might not normally engage with heritage. Through the tapestry project, people learned a new skill. Feedback also showed that those already familiar with needlework still learnt new skills because they were challenged to use new techniques or create new designs.

The heritage content of 'Home is where the Arch is' was communicated with a light but effective touch. People learnt about the history of Northfield through the fact file postcard and online videos. 'Home is where the Arch is' increased awareness and appreciation of local history and heritage buildings in the Northfield area. 'Home is where the Arch is' made people think about, and visit, local places.

Even more people learned about Northfield heritage when the tapestry arch was on display in Northfield Shopping Centre. Saturday shoppers learned about the project and took information, like the magazine and Heritage Trail leaflets, home.

2.6 Events programme

What was proposed

The *Northfield Revealed* project proposed to deliver a year long public activity programme including open days, talks, tours and family events

What was delivered

Covid restrictions impacted delivery of events in 2020 but despite Covid, a varied programme of events was delivered. This included family days, pop-up drama, local heritage walks, nature days in the churchyard, guided tours of St Laurence church and an unveiling of a historic millstone, recently discovered and retrieved from the river Rea. The Northfield Revealed events programme has given the St Laurence team ideas about how to develop their events in the future.

'The events programme has shown us that we can be more creative in what we (St Laurence Church) do. We will develop new trails that go in the churchyard that look beyond faith and contemplation. During Covid we utilised the outdoor space and developed a tranquillity trail in the churchyard, but we will develop further outdoor trails with a wider interest like wildlife, trees, genealogy and architecture.' (Revd Canon Janet Chapman, January 2022)

The family event 'Go Wild in the Churchyard' was delivered in partnership with Eco Birmingham and looked at wildlife in the churchyard and ecological values of urban green spaces. Restriction in place meant that tickets had to be pre-booked which reduced spontaneous 'drop-ins' on the day. In total 36 people attended, half of whom were children. All families lived locally and walked or cycled in. People stayed for well over an hour and feedback reflected on the quality of the event, as well as surprise at the size of the churchyard and the abundance of nature that could be found locally.

'We were surprised to see how big the churchyard is'

'It was great to be outdoors with the family and learning about different types of trees, birds, flowers and bugs. All in the churchyard.'

'I discovered nature in the churchyard today. I hadn't realised there was so much to see and the children had so much fun looking for insects and bugs.'

'It was great to go and explore with the children and see them enjoying nature. It was nice to walk around in a safe environment'.

'The children liked using the small bug collecting jars and magnifying glasses'.

'A lovely friendly welcome and a chance to take part in outdoor activities in our own neighbourhood.'

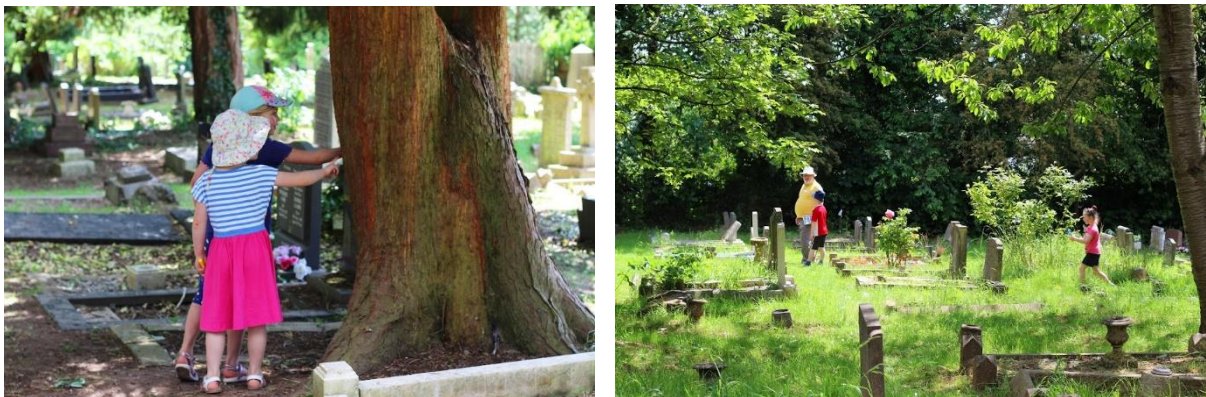


Figure 23 - Family event 'Go Wild in the Churchyard'.

The 'Go Wild' event made visitors appreciate that the churchyard is a safe place, open to all and its nature well worth cherishing and looking after. Parents and carers also commented that they planned to do comparable activities when at home or when out and about. Mentioned were bug hunts in the garden, taking a checklist on walks (trees, flowers, bees) and organising a treasure hunt in the woods.

A second family event, the *Northfield Revealed* Family Day, looked at the heritage and history of the church and churchyard. Activities included stained glass craft activities, brass rubbing, short 10-minute tours and pop-up drama performances in and around the church. The event was attended by young families (20 adults and 18 children) from the local area and everyone stayed for the full duration of the event. In feedback, adults commented on the friendly welcome and the quality of the event.

'A lovely friendly welcome and nice activities for the children. Weather helped as well, lovely afternoon.'

'It wasn't busy and the children got so much more out of it, there was no hurry, no pushing in by others. I learned about stained glass, there were some very old pieces on display. Nice to be able to hold them and have a good look'.

'I enjoyed doing some brass rubbing again' (parent).

'I went on a 10-minute tour while my children did some craft. A very beautiful building.'



Figure 24 – Family day craft activities

The public events programme included pop-up drama delivered by Northfield Arts Forum (NAF). St Laurence Church volunteers and historians worked with NAF actors on the scripts which were well researched and historically accurate⁵. Performances took place ‘on location’ in various places in Northfield with additional performances in the church and churchyard. Visitors met with historical characters in places where the real events happened in the past. The costumed actors recited monologues about their character’s personal lives and Northfield’s past. The performances brought unknown local histories vividly to life.

*‘Suffragette action here in Northfield, the library burning down, I did not know about that.’
(Visitor, Family Day, September 2021)*

‘I knew about nail making in Northfield and the nail makers cottages, but women and children doing it, that was new.’ (Visitor, Family Day, September 2021)

Northfield Arts Forum worked with volunteer actors from their existing network but also recruited volunteers who were new to acting. Particularly for people who had not performed in public before, doing this in front of a live audience, offered a unique opportunity to try something new.



Figure 25 - Promenade performances telling the stories where it happened in Northfield.

⁵ St Laurence Church volunteer scriptwriters - Stuart Andrew, Revd Canon Janet Chapman, Lauren-Jansen Parks and Alan Green. Naomi Wood (NAF).

In 2019 a millstone was discovered in the river Rea just downstream from where Northfield Mill once stood, thus revealing – literally – an important part of Northfield’s past. Volunteers from the Midland Mills Group assisted the *Northfield Revealed* team and the Rea Valley Conservation Group with recovering the heavy mill stone from the river. To mark this new discovery, an unveiling ceremony took place on the banks of the river Rea as part of *Northfield Revealed*. Over 50 people attended and listened to speeches from the miller’s descendants and learned about the working of Northfield Mill from expert members of the Midland Mills Group.



Figure 26 - Millstone unveiling alongside the river Rea

After the unveiling, St Laurence Church team and members from the Rea Valley Conservation Group worked with the parks department of Birmingham City Council to find the mill stone an appropriate new long-term home. After much discussion it was decided that the stone would be safest – from a vandalism point of view – not in a public park as was the original intention, but near the church pastoral centre. The millstone was moved by the council and the project produced an additional interpretation panel in the same style as the other *Northfield Revealed* interpretation boards. The millstone is now on permanent display at the entrance to the pastoral centre car park, at the heart of historic Northfield and clearly visible from the road.

‘I pointed out the millstone in its new position in the Pastoral Centre carpark to a man who had just left the pub the other afternoon. He was SO excited. He says he has done some of the walks we’ve organised and that “everyone in the Great Stone” thinks that what we have been doing is marvellous.’ (Revd Canon Janet Chapman, January 2022)

‘Would be nice if the mill stone that was discovered is displayed near the pastoral centre, it is a new bit of history that reveals Northfield’s past!’ (Roy Pouncett, churchwarden, September 2021).

As part of the wider events programme, guided walking tours of historic Northfield as well as church tours were delivered. Walking tours were for small groups and fully booked (Eventbrite). Guided church tours were also well attended with 35 participants on each tour. The Broomdasher Folk Singers, with a musical repertoire based on the diary of locally born Edith Holden, performed in church attracting about 40 visitors.

Northfield Revealed Public Programme In-person visits	No
Guided walks Old Northfield	30
Guided tours St Laurence Church	70
Family days	70
Mill stone unveiling	55
Pop up drama	65
Country diary – music and readings in church	40
Home is where the arch is – display	60
	390

NHLF outcomes

The activities programme was varied and explained important local heritage. The events were inclusive and different from what normally is on offer in the church and the Northfield area. The events were free to attend thus removing any pay barrier. Feedback at events showed that visitors were impressed by the quality of the events and pleased to have learned new things about Northfield’s heritage, architecture and wildlife.

2.7 Local History Films

What was proposed

The project proposed to commission a short (3 to 5 minutes) local history film.

What was delivered

Northfield Arts Forum was commissioned to produce 5 short films were based on *Northfield Revealed* drama performances. Actors delivered their monologues and dialogues in front of the camera and material was edited into 5 short films. The films look at topics like Suffragette militancy in Northfield and the miller and vicar share their thoughts on old Northfield. ‘Mrs Doors’ and ‘Mrs Windows’ explain architectural features of St Laurence church in a fun and accessible way. The films can be accessed from the *Northfield Revealed* webpage and Northfield Arts Forum website and will remain available beyond the end of the project.



Figure 27 - Northfield Revealed produced 5 short films.

NLHF outcomes

The content of the local history films aligns with the themes and walking routes in the Northfield Heritage Trail. The films bring history to life. The content is well researched and sheds light on often forgotten snippets of local history. The monologues and dialogues dig deeper into local history and provide another layer of historic information. The films will remain available on the *Northfield Revealed* website after the project is finished.

2.8 Training volunteers

What was proposed

The project proposed to train volunteers to guide tours of the church. The project also proposed to provide training in how to access local archives for historic research.

What was delivered

From the start of the project, gaining more volunteers to deliver guided tours was an important outcome for St Laurence Church. Prior to the project, there were simply not enough guides and the task could not be shared and became the responsibility of only one or two people. Face to face guide training in the church was made more difficult by Covid but two church volunteers attended training sessions, delivered in-house⁶. Since the ending of Covid restrictions (March 2022) more volunteers have come forward. Therefore, compared with the start of the project the guide team has doubled from 2 to 4 and is soon likely to expand because since the relaxation of Covid restriction more tour guide volunteers have come forward. There will soon be enough volunteer tour guides to provide regular tours of the church on Saturday mornings.

Regrettably, the Introduction to archive sessions organised by Birmingham Archives did not take place because none of the volunteers were able to attend due to illness.

NLHF outcomes

Despite the impact of Covid, guide training did take place. There are more volunteers available who now have the knowledge and skills to deliver guided tours and the history of the church and conservation area will continue to be shared with visitors, particularly on Saturday mornings and for booked visits.

⁶ Delivered by St Laurence church historian and expert guide Stuart Andrew.

3 Project summary and success

The *Northfield Revealed* project reached a wide range of people and delivered an exciting programme during the Covid pandemic. The project produced a legacy that will last well beyond the lifetime of the programme. Long term legacy items include the newly built glass porch and printed material like heritage trail leaflets, guidebooks and teachers' packs. There are also interpretation panels, the Arch (on long term display in the church), films and a wide range of online learning materials that will remain available to download. Long term outcomes of a softer nature include new relationships between St Laurence Church and community organisations that will be nurtured in the future, people with new needlework skills and more church guides.

The new **glass porch** will benefit St Laurence church, its congregation, and the local community for years to come. The porch has created an inviting entrance, the building is less draughty and a more comfortable space to be in. The St Laurence Church team are therefore in a good position to continue to engage as many people as possible in Northfield's history and heritage after the end of the project.

The **heritage trail** was launched in May 2020 with a print run of 7,000 copies. Over half of these have been distributed and feedback has been very positive. The **tapestry project** 'Home is where the Arch is' was delivered during Covid and completed in November 2020. It was delivered in an online format with people stitching at home and returning their needlework creations which was then collated into a final community artwork and revealed at a virtual Facebook launch. Following relaxations of restrictions there was a community launch in Northfield Shopping Centre. Eight **interpretation panels** were produced and installed in prominent locations in Northfield. A **guidebook** to Old Northfield was also published. The **schools project** included classroom sessions and local walks with pupils from the Edge Academy (secondary) and Bellfield Primary School and St Laurence Primary School. The challenges of lockdown meant that alternatives to face-to-face teaching were provided, including teacher's packs sent to 12 local schools, online learning resources and a family focussed heritage trail. As a result of Covid the **events programme**, which was largely face-to-face, could only be delivered after relaxation of restrictions. The programme included family days, church tours, outdoor walks and promenade theatre. The promenade performances focussed on people and events in Northfield's history and the monologues were captured in five **short films**. *Northfield Revealed* provided **training** in delivering guided tours and created opportunities for people to learn new skills like needlework and acting.

The project has been inclusive and involved a wide range of people in heritage through the heritage trail, interpretation panels, schools programme, community tapestry project and events programme. The project reached different audiences by distributing material via the usual cultural channels (library, museum, partner organisations) but also more unusual venues and organisations. The heritage trail also went to local pubs, restaurants and the Northfield shopping centre and the community tapestry project distributed stitch packs using a local foodbank, day centre, hospital and council youth offending team. The schools programme reached local children and their families irrespective of background or where they lived in Northfield.

There is no doubt that the project activities reached a wide range of people many of whom might not normally be interested in heritage. The project identified and interpreted local heritage in Northfield. The Heritage Trail leaflet, family trail, schools programme, 'Home is where the arch is' tapestry project and events programme have all contributed to local people's knowledge and understanding of their local heritage.

4 Appendices

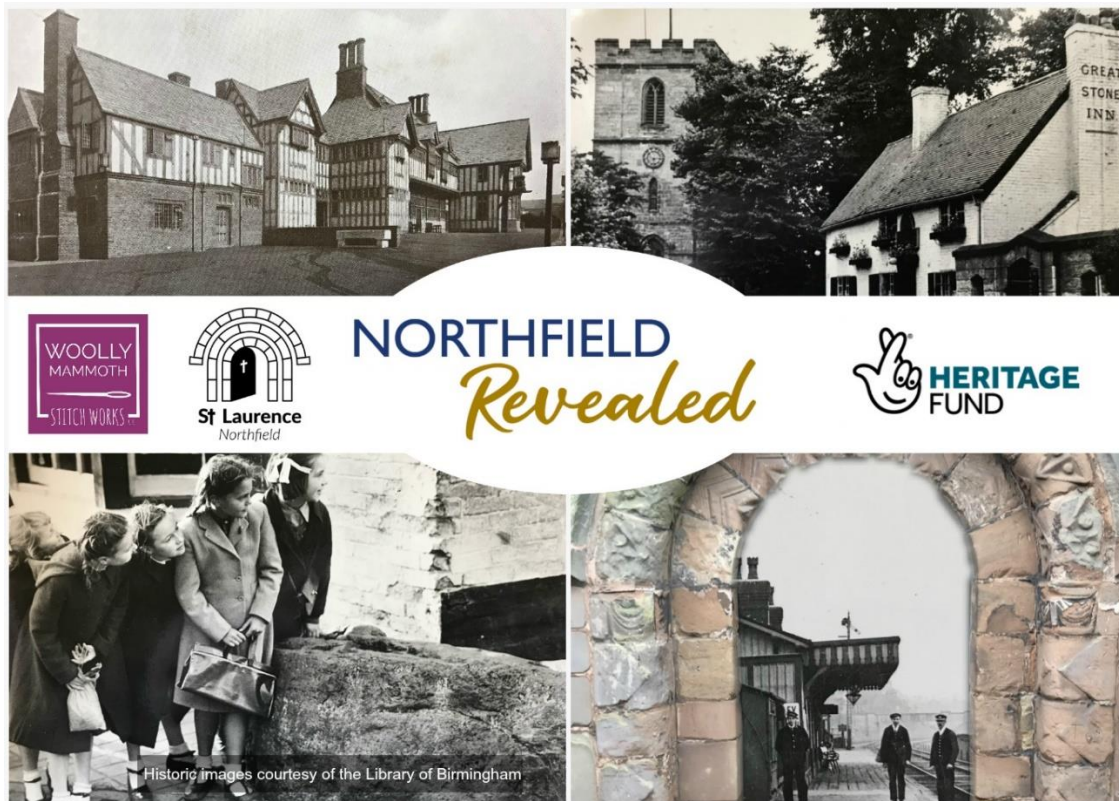
4.1 Appendix 1 – Project finance

Project costs

Cost Heading	Description	How much (£)	VAT (£)	Total (£)
Professional fees	Project Co-ordinator, Schools Heritage project consultants, community heritage project consultants	19,000		19,000
Repair and conservation work	Installation of new conservation quality internal porch	30,000	6,000	36,000
Digital outputs	Local History Film	2,500	500	3,000
Equipment and materials including learning materials	Writing, photography, design and production of interpretation panels and heritage trail	15,000	1,600	16,600
Training for volunteers	Archival training at library of Birmingham, tour guide training	1,500		1,500
Event costs	Events and activities programme	4,000	400	4,400
Evaluation	Evaluation consultant	2,000		2,000
Contingency	General project contingency	3,500		3,500
Total project costs		77,500	8,500	86,000

Figure 28 - Breakdown of project costs

4.2 Appendix 2 – Fun fact postcard



FACT FILE

TOP 10 FACTS ABOUT NORTHFIELD'S HISTORY

Ranked by Woolly Mammoth in order of WOW-ness!

- #1** Northfield has the **oldest piece of architecture** in the whole of Birmingham! You can find this at St Laurence Church (Church Hill) which features an 850-year-old arched Norman doorway.
- #2** The Great Stone Inn next to the church is the **third oldest pub in the city** and has been serving beer for over 400 years.
- #3** Northfield has an **ice age stone!** This Great Stone is a glacial erratic boulder and was deposited by an ice sheet up to a possible 400,000 years ago. The Church and Inn were built alongside it.
- #4** The Black Horse pub (Bristol Road) was only built around 90 years ago. It was **designed in the style of a Tudor building** to look 300 years older than it was.
- #5** Northfield has a **surviving village 'Pound'** (Church Road). This was built to look after stray farm animals around 350 years ago – but you had to pay a fee to get your animal back!
- #6** Northfield Library had to be rebuilt in 1914 after it was burnt down – allegedly in an **arson attack by militant suffragettes**.
- #7** Station Fish Bar (Station Street) was originally built as a 'temperance' hotel in the late 1800s – basically, an alcohol-free alternative to the pubs. Was this **Northfield's first coffee shop?**
- #8** Below modern ground level, just off the A38 Northfield Bypass junction with Bell Hill there is an **ancient sunken lane** called Bell Holloway which dates back to medieval times.
- #9** During the 1800s Northfield was a **centre for the nail-making industry**. You can still see some cottages on Church Hill which were built for the nail makers over 200 years ago. One has the date 1750 in the brickwork.
- #10** The name Northfield originates from the Anglo-Saxon phrase **Nord field**.

NORTHFIELD

Revealed

DISCOVER MORE! PICK UP A FREE HERITAGE TRAIL OF NORTHFIELD!