

ECCLESHALL PARISH COUNCIL

HERITAGE WALK

A STROLL AROUND ECCLESHALL
TOWN CENTRE IN 1871



Heritage Walk through Eccleshall in 1871

To follow this walk you need to imagine yourself back in the year 1871.

It is 1871, Queen Victoria has been on the throne for 34 years and you are at the Holy Trinity Church in Eccleshall. So before exploring the High Street, let us visit the Church.

There has been a church here since Saxon times, it is thought that it was given with the estate of Eccleshall to St. Chad, first Bishop of



Lichfield, by King Wulfhere of Mercia in the 7th century, and is mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086. The Church has been part of the diocese of Lichfield from the 11th century. On both sides of the vestry window are fragments of a Saxon Cross with a carving believed to be St. Chad. It has just been restored by G.E Street,

the architect, following the fire in 1868. He added the north and south vestries and rebuilt the porch, but the west tower and the long chancel are Early English. Two years ago John Lonsdale was interred joining four other Bishops of Lichfield, Richard Sampson, 1554, Thomas Bentham, 1578, William Overton, 1609, and James Bowstead, 1843. The current Vicar is Charles Patten Good and the Lord Bishop of Lichfield is George Augustus Selwyn, who was previously the first Bishop of New Zealand. Behind the Church is the Town Meadow and beyond that is Eccleshall Castle, the historical seat of the Bishops of Lichfield, but sold four years ago. Local gossip is that there is a tunnel between the Church and the Castle, perhaps originally built as an escape route for the Royalist defenders of the Castle in the Civil War against Charles 1st.

Leave the Church via the Church yard (*the current Lychgate was built in 1892*) to view the north side of the High Street to your left. The street is cobbled and the space between the cobbles and houses is raked gravel. Travellers on horseback and horse drawn carts fill the street, with the occasional coach leaving the public houses. The houses are built on burgage plots that extend to the town meadow.



Photo: Pat Trevor collection

First, we come to an imposing building of four bays, **Nos.80-82**, Holly House, built in the late 18th century, a boarding school for boys aged between ten and fifteen. The schoolmaster, John Hargreaves lives on the premises which also boasts a French Teacher M. Bone, from Paris. The building behind the house used to be a malthouse, but with the decline of the brewing industry has been converted to a private dwelling.

Next No.78, Ivy Mount, is a three storey house with four bays and a doorway with moulded pilasters and was built at the same time as Holly House. It is the residence of the headmaster of the boarding school, Joseph Bernard. His mother is the school housekeeper.



Photo : Staffordshire Past Track

No.76 is much older, the interior dating from the late 16th or early 17th century. The exterior was reworked in the late 18th century. The owner of this drinking establishment is Francis Tunnicliffe who lives above the shop. Probably avoided by well to do visitors as it caters for the many tradesmen and farm workers.

You might meet Jane Astbury sitting outside **No.74**, built about 20 years ago in engraved stucco, with overhanging eaves and ornamental tiles on the roof. Jane is an annuitant (pensioner) and probably the source of local gossip as she doesn't welcome visitors.

Now walking down to **Nos.70-72**, which are three tradesmen's cottages, (*shortly to be demolished by Frederick Greatrex and replaced by two houses, Church Lodge and Church Lodge Cottage, which were eventually combined into one, Church Lodge*). **No.70** is the home of William Hodson, a bricklayer and at **No.72** is a plumber, William Sale.

The next large building, **Nos.54 & 56**, has a carriage entrance and was built about 50 years ago. Not so long ago this was a public house, called The Ship. Now **No.56** is occupied by Thomas Webb, a cordwainer, who makes shoes and is one of the declining number of people in this trade, due to the invention of the sewing machine in



Photo: Staffordshire Past Track

the USA and the growth of factories in Stafford and Stone using them. Shoemaking has been a big part of the life of Eccleshall, but now it is increasingly hard to make a living in the trade.

You will now see an impressive building, **Nos.46 & 48** built around 1696 for John Harrison, as one building. It has a carriage entrance and outbuildings behind, which were once used as a malthouse, a cart house and a back house. The house straddles Perle Brook that runs in a culvert under the High Street and provides water for livestock. The house is now two dwellings; **No.48**, The Mercers House, is occupied by Joseph Moreton, an Inland Revenue Officer, probably not the most popular man in town! **No.46** is the home and practice of a Surgeon, James Nance. He is well known because of his testimony at the trial of George Bentley for the murder of John Poole in 1866 - *"I am in practice at Eccleshall and was called today by Dr. Swift to see the deceased John Poole"*

No.44, behind No.46, is Samuel Yates' wine and spirits merchant's, founded in 1831.

Following the Revenue Officer's and Wine merchant's houses is the dwelling of the local Police Sergeant, Frederick Robinson at **No.42**. This rough cast building dates from about 50 years ago (*early nineteenth century*).

Appropriately **Nos.38 & 40**, three storey houses about 50 to 70 years old, are the home and practice of Richard Dempster, a Solicitor.



Photo : Staffordshire Past Track

The next noteworthy building, **No.36**, is one of two Chemists, run by James Ellis and selling a bewildering range of goods and potions. He dispenses patent medicines and sells veterinary products and household goods. Only the well to do can afford to consult a doctor so the Chemist helps the working class with their ailments.

Moving on down the High Street the white painted London House, **No.28**, catches the eye! Built by the Snelson family, in 1717, this is occupied by Eiljah Thomas, a Saddler, always busy looking after the needs of the horses that plough, pull carts and carriages, and transport people. This house has three storeys and a cellar. Locals believe that ghosts of armoured men sword fight and the sound of a cannon can be heard.



Photo: Pat Trevor collection

The Drapers shop next door, **No.26**, (*not numbered now*) provides a wide variety of cloth for running up clothes at home, as well as making dresses and men's clothes to order. William Talbot will sell you your choice of fabric by the yard or to your specification, as well as the sewing items needed to complete the item of clothing that you are working on. Interesting to see the semi-circular tripartite window on the third floor. This house is about 50 years old, built in the early part of the nineteenth century.

Another shop in **No.24** (the building is of a similar age to No. 26) and is occupied by William Ward, a Tea Merchant. His merchandise

is no longer brought from India by glamorous Tea Clippers, but by steamers using the faster route through the new Suez Canal. Strong Black Tea is preferred by the working class as it is cheaper than the lighter, more delicately flavoured teas favoured by the wealthy.

Passing by **Nos.22 & 20**, a Tinker Merchant and a Booksellers', we come to another Chemist, Edgar Smith, at **No.18**, an eighteenth century house and shop, adjoining the Blue Bell Hotel (*now the Bell*) at **No.16**. Thomas Whitehouse, the proprietor has seen a significant drop in trade since the Mail Coaches stopped coming through town due to the new route via Thomas Telford's improved road to Holyhead and both the railway and the canals bypassed Eccleshall. He still has extensive stables, but many are empty and the hotel is more of a drinking establishment.

At **No.14** (*now the Olive Italian Restaurant*), built about 1820, is Sarah Reynolds School for young ladies, one of three private schools in the High Street. The Staffordshire Advertiser carries advertisements for these schools, attracting pupils from a very wide area, not just Eccleshall.

Next is the Town Hall, **No.12** (*sadly demolished in 1938, now the site of the Arcade*), built in the early part of the century. Its frontage has fine brick arches and it is the centre of civic life. An impressive building which hosts many political and trade dinners. Only 3 years ago, during 1868, an election when the Second Reform Act had increased the electorate by around 80%, campaign dinners at the Town Hall were held by both the Liberals and Conservatives. The Liberals had the majority in the town, but overall, the Eccleshall district went to the Conservatives, under the party leader, Disraeli. The Town Hall also housed a school run by the National Society, but this has now moved to larger premises in Church Street.



Photo: Staffordshire Past Track

Between the Town Hall and the Market Hall is the Grocer's, **No.8**, run by Henry Wallers (*now Eccleshall Pharmacy*). Another building dating back to the early part of the century, it is a simple two storey brick building with a shop and living accommodation above. It is remembered as the site of The Cleaver public house.

The most striking building on this side of the High Street is **No.6**, the old Market Hall. Built over the pavement, this gives the Butter Market shelter. This building is not destined to last as planning for a new more spacious building has begun (*the present Market Hall was built in 1884 by public subscription, with its decorative, reclaimed, external timbers designed to give it an older look!*). Its current occupier is Charles Barratt, a builder and Ironmonger.



Photo: Staffordshire Past Track, Pat Trevor collection

The Ironmongers business extends to **No.4**, and the last building, **No.2**, Shaftesbury House, is the bakers, run by George Turner. It is thought that this was the site of the Moot Court up until the mid 1600's where the Lord of the Manor held the law court. The building now on this site was built about 50 years ago, in the 1820s.

Just across the road is the George and Dragon public house on the corner of Castle Street, whose proprietor Joseph Gardener, will welcome you to partake of some refreshments. He is both a victualler and maltster, brewing his own tipples. The pub was established in 1739 and coaches to Stone and Market Drayton can be taken from here. The building also contains a Drapers, run by Henry Vyle.

Turn right and cross Chebsey Lane (*Now the Stone Road!*) into Stafford Street, arriving at

No.1 Doctor Wynnes general practice surgery, (*Unfortunately now demolished*). **No.3**, is a simple two storey house, this is the home and premises of Thomas Sillitoe, the Saddler, well situated near to all the coaching inns. They have a constant demand to help keep the coach horses' tack, reins, bridles, etc in good condition, as well as serving the farmers and local gentlemen. The work has declined from the days of the Mail Coaches and Coaches to the North West that used to come through town, but still a good living!



Photo: Staffordshire Past Track

No.5, is a larger property with bay windows set either side of the central doorway. The current occupier is Frederick Boulton, a joiner, who both lives here and has his workshop on the ground floor.

The row of cottages between No.5 and **No.11** are the homes of various tradesmen. A Police Constable, Edward Foster, occupies **No.13** and another Police Sergeant, Thomas Blakely, is next door in **No.15**, the Police station. Perhaps located here because the public house next door is a constant source of their attention. (*Nos 7 to 15 have been replaced by the Co-op, see an original fire engine from the late nineteenth century, Eagle, in the display window*)



Photo : Staffordshire Past Track

No.17 Stafford Street is the Kings Arms Inn, once called the Unicorn, run by George Pritchards. Eccleshall was a Royalist town in the Civil War so the name reflects that history. The building is Elizabethan, late 16th or early 17th century, although with a more recent façade in the Elizabethan style. This establishment rivals the Royal Oak, but tends to serve the farmers rather than tradesmen. To the right of the main building

is a single storey entrance for coaches, the extensive stables are at the back. Like the Royal Oak it lost the long-distance Coach routes, when they moved to the improved road built by Thomas Telford, but it replaced this business by housing the Official Inland Revenue Office and staging Auctions. The rooms are comfortable, and maybe a little less expensive than the Royal Oak, if you are planning to stay tonight. Outside the Inn is a milestone giving the distance to Stafford and to Woore.

Beyond the carriage entrance archway, is Stafford House, an 18th century building with a projecting porch and square columns. The first part of the house that you come to is occupied by the business of James Kitley, a Nursery and Seedsman. His Nursery is behind the house in the extensive grounds. The other side of the house is his home. The size of this impressive building is an indication of the wealth of its owner who supplies the surrounding farmers, and those beyond. *(now Perrys the butchers)*



Across the Stafford Road, at the junction with Horsefair is Southwell House, the most expensive house in Eccleshall! It is the home of Myra Wallers the wife of an obviously very successful commercial traveller. The house has nine bedrooms, large gardens and was built earlier this century.



Now cross Horsefair back to Stafford Street. The first house, **No.22**, that you come to is one of the last Shoemakers in Eccleshall, John Talbot. He is still making shoes from parts supplied by the big factories in Stafford and Stone, but struggling to compete using home workers versus the factories and their newfangled sewing machines.

The row of cottages before reaching the High Street are occupied by various owners, the most notable of whom is George Hewitt, the

National School Headmaster who lives at **No.2**. He has to walk the length of the High Street to get to the School, but this gives him the opportunity to spy any children that are avoiding the classroom!

Now turn left back into the High Street, but staying on the south side this time. If dusk is falling do not expect much street lighting, the gas works was established in 1854, but only serves the well to do houses and businesses.



Photo: Staffordshire Past Track

On the corner of Stafford Street and the High Street is **No.1**, (*now an estate agents*) where Francis Gardner has his Grocery, selling produce from the surrounding countryside. The house was built earlier this century around 1820.

Next door **No.3**, quite a new house, is one of the remaining shoe manufacturers, Henry Lindop. Shoe making (or parts for shoes) used to be one of the main occupations in Eccleshall, but that is now mainly in the big factories in Stafford and Stone.

Built together with No.3 is **No.5**, where the milliner, Eliza Reynolds lives, who will gladly sell you a hat or make one for you! (*now a bakers shop*)

This recently built row of shops continues with a hairdresser, John Hurlstone in **Nos.7/9**, a bookseller, William Durrard, in **No.11** and the ironmongers, in **Nos.13 & 15**, run by Lionel King Porter.

Nos.17-21, (*now numbered 19*) is an impressive building, recently re-fronted. It has two storeys and an attic, and five bays, the middle three under a pediment containing a bulls eye window. Also under the pediment is a centrally located doorway with stuccoed surround and corniced hood. It is the premises and home of a draper, Henry Garlick.

The Crown Inn (*now the Crown Surgery*) is **No.23** and is one of the oldest buildings in Eccleshall. The building interior with its cruck frames, dates back to the 16th century. The frontage was rebuilt earlier this century when the first floor was extended over the pavement to provide two meeting rooms and a covered arcade to accommodate the market. The formidable Eliza Walters is the landlady, who recently catered for the harvest dinner for around 200 farmworkers! Although the Crown no longer has the coaching trade to cater for, the stables at the back are still available for visitors' horses. Lord Stafford's estate annual rent dinners are held here every year. The arches at the front provide cover for the local market.



Photo: Pat Trevor collection

Crossing Small Lane, The Royal Oak commercial hotel occupies **No.25**. It was called The Garland, then in 1670 it was renamed The Three Tuns finally named to commemorate the future Charles II, and his adventures during the Civil War hiding in an oak tree to evade capture. The Royal Oak was Eccleshall's premier coaching inn,



Photo: Staffordshire Past Track

with extensive stabling behind the main building, and although the London to Holyhead post coach trade has now gone, coaches still run to Market Drayton, Stone and Stafford. A very popular regular service runs to meet the trains at Norton Bridge. Travellers can also obtain fresh horses and accommodation or hire a carriage. Just over 10 years ago, in 1860, the Assembly Hall was built on the west side above the coaching area. The Court of Petty Sessions were held here until the Town Hall was built and is the venue for the Farmers and Traders Ball, on Boxing Day. The Royal Oak brews its own beer and since the local police are very tolerant you are welcome to try a few glasses! You may meet the landlady, Emma

Perry, serving behind the bar. The weekly market is held under the arches at the front, sharing it with the Crown.

Walking from the Royal Oak you will come to **Nos.27 & 29**, the Grocers, run by Henry Ward. This building dates from the late 18th century and has three storeys. Next, **No.31**, is a small public house, the Kings Head that has extensive outbuildings, stabling and a garden. It is a respectable place to have refreshment if the Crown and Royal Oak are too busy for your taste.

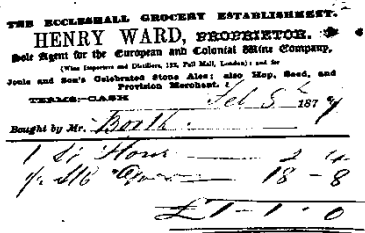


Photo: Pat Trevor Collection

Nos.33 & 35 are occupied by the butcher, Abraham Key, who sources his wares from the surrounding farms. No.35 dates back to the Tudors and is possibly the oldest building in Eccleshall. Next door is **No.37** an unmistakable building, the Old Fire Station. Erected about 20 years ago, around 1850, it relies on local volunteers and has no space for one of the modern engines. Two horse drawn hand pumps are used, the horses being stabled behind a neighbour's house. A fire bell on the roof is used to summon the volunteers. Negotiations are underway with the owner of No.35 to extend the building to create a larger building to house more modern fire engines. (*Old Fire Station was expanded in 1891 and a 'modern' fire engine is on display in Stafford Street*)



Photo: Staffordshire Past Track

Then onto **Nos.39-43** which date back around 100 years to the late 18th century, and is the premises of Emmanuel Noake, a plumber and glazier. This roughcast building has three storeys and three bays and you can buy a wide range of useful products for your house as well as the services of Mr. Noake.

This next building, (*now Peel House*), **No.45**, is notable as it is another surviving shoe manufacturer, under Charles Ankers. He

also employs local workers to make up shoes from parts that are supplied from the big factories in Stafford and Stone. Many of his workers do their work at home (*see Cobblers Cottage in Kerry Lane*) and are paid by the quantity they produce. This industry used to be a significant occupation in Eccleshall, before the sewing machine was invented in America and large factories were established.

Moving on past **Nos.47 & 49**, the first is the house of Ann Hawthorne, a landowner, the second is another grocer, Harriet Barratt. We then come to a row of three houses converted into shops. **Nos.51 & 53** are a butchers owned by William Watkin and Elizabeth Cumberbatch. Then an archway between No.53 and **No.55** which is the home of Thomas Williams, a journeyman saddler, whose employer will give you the best price for repairing horse tack. After few more years' experience, he will become a Master Saddler, and set up his own business.

After passing **No.57** the Red Lion public house (*demolished to build Lonsdale Court*) you will come to **No.63** (*now Hamlet House*), the home of Sarah Meakin. This simple two storey house was built during the town expansion earlier this century (1800-1830).

The adjoining row of cottages are occupied by tradesmen (*demolished to build Lonsdale Court*)

Continuing past Sherrifs Way we near the end of our stroll, but it is worth mentioning the residence of the Rev.

Charles Good at the Old Vicarage opposite the Church. This rather grand building was built in 1703 in the Queen Anne style and is listed as **No.87**, (*changed many years later to 4, Church*



Photo: Pat Trevor Collection

Street). Past the Old Vicarage is a pond called the Wash Pit, that has been used for sheep dipping by the local farmers but has fallen into disrepair. The water from this pond was used to fight a fire in the Church three years ago in 1868.

A short distance along the road is the National School, on the corner of Kerry Lane. This building was designed by G E Street, in the Gothic style and built in 1862. George Hewitt is the Headmaster who is also the choirmaster at the church. Not surprisingly the Vicar is a regular visitor to the school and is the School Secretary. The Education Act last year (1870) set up School Boards and the Agriculture Act of



Photo: Pat Trevor Collection

1867 prohibited children under 8 being employed, so the school is well populated, except at Harvest time! The annual treat for the children is no longer at the Castle, which has now been sold by the Bishop of Lichfield, but at Johnson Hall home of the Lyon family.

Now return across the road to the church where your horse and carriage are waiting to take you back to the train station at Norton Bridge.

If you enjoyed your walk through Eccleshall's past you might like to try further afield using our Circular Walks Guide, or our Bench to Bench Walks Guide.

In compiling this walk the help given by the Eccleshall Historical Society was valuable. Photographs have been supplied by Staffordshire Past Track and Pat Trevor.

Contributors

Chris Wilkins, Eccleshall Parish Councillor (author)
Stacey Worden Parish Clerk, Eccleshall Parish Council
Ros Taylor, Chairman, Eccleshall Parish Council
Lester Stuart

Sources:

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The Ecclian Society
Eccleshall Parish Council
Mr Pat Trevor
Staffordshire Past Track



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