

Places in Leicester associated with wartime

Start location: Town Hall Square, Horsefair Street, Leicester, LE1 9BG

Time taken: 60 minutes (approximately)* **Distance:** 2 miles 3.2 km **Circular route**
Allow additional time for information stops.

Description:

This walk jumps between different periods of history to take in some city-centre locations associated with Leicester's wartime past, including the English Civil War, Boer War and the World Wars.



-  Main route
-  Alternative route
-  Stage / waypoint
-  Point of interest

*Time is calculated at a steady pace of 2mph, if walked without stopping. Allow extra time to look at points of interest and read the information.

This route was developed by staff and volunteers for Leicester City Council:
www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walks



Walk starts:

From Town Hall Square, Horsefair Street, Leicester, LE1 9BG

Safety tips:

Take care crossing roads, use pedestrian crossings where present.

There are some uneven sections, including the cobbles in Castle View.

Watch for cyclists throughout the city centre, including pedestrianised spaces, pavements and cycle lanes.

Remember to observe the guidance on social distancing.

Route directions:

1. Take a moment in Town Hall Square to reflect on its wartime associations.

(A) Town Hall Square

When the First World War (1914-1918) broke out, the part-time soldiers of the Leicestershire Regiment Territorial Force and the Leicestershire Yeomanry were mobilised. However, many more men were needed. The Town Hall was used as a recruitment centre to enlist soldiers. Recruitment parades were organised and public meetings well attended. Around 50,000 men from Leicester and Leicestershire served in World War I. In 1917 a temporary war memorial was erected in the square between the fountain and Every Street. A permanent memorial was unveiled in Victoria Park in 1925, the 'Arch of Remembrance'. It was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyans, well known for other war memorials including The Cenotaph in Whitehall, London.

Historically, women have been an important part of Leicester's industrial workforce and even more so during World War I, when more women went into industry to replace the men who had enlisted. Others supported the war efforts in other ways. Some women trained as nurses for the military hospitals, both here and abroad. The 5th Northern General Hospital was a military hospital based near Victoria Park, treating wounded servicemen. It is now the Fielding Johnson Building on Leicester University's campus. Other women joined civilian organisations such as the Women's Land Army - created in 1917 to encourage women to work in agriculture, replacing the men who had been called up. The Women's Land Army were photographed on parade here in Town Hall Square during World War I. The organisation disbanded at the end of the First World War but reformed in 1939 during the Second World War (1939 – 1945). Producing food to feed the nation during wartime was a concern, as imported supplies were in jeopardy.

From Town Hall Square, turn left on Horsefair Street, crossing side roads with care. Continue ahead onto Millstone Lane. At the end, follow the road around to the right. Turn left at the junction with Friar Lane to reach the busy main road.

2. Cross Southgates via the multiple pedestrian crossings. Turn right on the far side and continue. Turn left into Castle Street.
3. Pass the grounds of St Mary de Castro church and bear left onto Castle View. Continue ahead and take care to watch for traffic where the pavement ends. Pass beneath the black and white timber building and pause in the pedestrian space near (B), the Great Hall of Leicester Castle - now De Montfort University's Business School.

(B) Leicester Castle

Here in the old castle area of Leicester is a (tenuous) link to the Norman Conquest of 1066, in which King

Harold was defeated by the Duke of Normandy - 'William the Conqueror' - at the Battle of Hastings. To help control the kingdom, William confiscated lands and granted them to his followers to build castles in military strongpoints throughout England. A 'motte and bailey' castle was first built here in Leicester around 1068. The timber defences of the first castle were then later replaced with stone after 1107 by the First Earl of Leicester. Today all that remains of Leicester Castle is the Great Hall, St Mary de Castro church, some outer walls and the Turret Gateway. The original castle mound can still be seen nearby, accessible via steps from Castle Yard or Castle Gardens.

Resume your walk along Castle View and pass under the Turret Gateway.

(C) Turret Gateway

The 'Siege of Leicester' took place in 1645. It was one of the battles of the English Civil War between the Parliamentarians (the 'Roundheads') and Royalists (the 'Cavaliers'). Leicester was a Parliamentary stronghold. The Parliamentarian's fired through gun loops in the town walls at the attacking Royalists who were led by military commanders, including Prince Rupert. The Royalists overcame the town defences here and gained entry to town via the Turret Gateway, which was subsequently named Rupert's Gateway. The Royalists went on to defeat the town's people.

4. At the end of Castle View turn left onto The Newarke. Pause by (D), Newarke Houses Museum, then turn to look at the gateway (E).

(D) Newarke Houses Museum

The museum has information about the Royal Leicestershire Regiment, a light infantry regiment of the British Army. With a history going back to 1688, the regiment saw service for three centuries across numerous wars and conflicts, including both World Wars. Information about the regiment is also on the Story of Leicester website. The museum also has a representation of a World War I trench. The museum is comprised of two Tudor buildings together: the Chantry House (built c.1511) and Skeffington House (built 1560-1583). The Chantry House was damaged when a bomb fell in the garden during a World War II air raid. Fortunately the building survived. If you visit the museum, take a stroll into the garden to see a section of the old town wall with gun loops still visible.

(E) The Newarke Gateway or Magazine.

This gateway was built around 1400 as an impressive entrance to a religious precinct here called The New Work (or Newarke). In the 17th century it was used to store arms and munitions during the English Civil War. Since then it has often been referred to as the Magazine or Magazine Gateway. The Magazine was used as a World War I recruiting station until a recruitment centre was set up at the Town Hall. Magazine Square was also used to drill the enlisted soldiers.

Resume your walk towards and past the Magazine. Use the pedestrian crossings (and island) to cross Southgates/Oxford Street junction and walk ahead along Newarke Street. The troops of the Leicester Regiment marched along here in 1914.

5. At the top of Newarke Street use the multiple crossing and island to cross Welford Place. Enter New Walk (the pedestrian path between buildings). On reaching the open pedestrianised space and the junction with King Street, continue ahead on New Walk until just before the Catholic church.

6. Turn left on Park Street and right on Wellington Street. Pause for information about (F) on corner of Wellington Street and Dover Street.

(F) Former J Pick & Sons factory, corner of Wellington St and Dover St

Footwear and hosiery were two of Leicester's key industries at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. This building was once a hosiery factory for J Pick and Sons. It produced large quantities of underwear, socks, hats and cardigans for the military during World War I, as did another well-known Leicester company – Corah. Stepping back further in time to the 19th century, J Pick & Sons manufactured the cardigan popular for the military during the Crimean War of 1853-56 at their Wimbledon Street factory. We pass close to Wimbledon Street later. J Pick and Sons' business peaked by 1939. The outbreak of World War II was a setback for the knitting industry with workers leaving to join the forces or other occupations. When the war ended in 1945 there was a shortage of knitting yarn and clothing continued to be rationed for some time. In the early 1980s the company briefly fulfilled garment orders for the Ministry of Defence for the Falklands War. They finally closed in 1991 and the building is now apartments.

Then turn left on Dover Street. Turn left on Granby Street and continue to the junction with Rutland Street.

7. Turn right to cross Granby Street and walk along Rutland Street. Cross ahead Charles Street via the pedestrian crossings and continue on Rutland Street, crossing side roads with care. This is the Cultural Quarter, once the location for many manufacturing businesses in Leicester. Pass the churchyard and continue past the Curve theatre to pause opposite Alexandra House (G).

(G) Alexandra House

Alexandra House (1897) was built for Faire Brothers Ltd as a warehouse to store bootlaces. The company was established by two brothers from Derby and it became one of the largest boot and shoelace manufacturers and exporters in the world. The company had several buildings in this area: headquarters on Rutland Street, a warehouse on Southampton Street (to the right of Alexandra House); St Georges Mills factory on nearby Wimbledon Street and Alexandra House. Elsewhere around the country they produced suspenders, braces, garters and belts. During World War II the company supplied products for the war effort, including 21,500,000 yards of parachute cords and 9,000,000 boot and shoelaces. Their Leicester premises suffered bomb and fire damage during World War II but the firm continued to operate from their office on Rutland Street. The London office and warehouse were destroyed in the first serious air raid on the city. After these events the company purchased a Spitfire and presented it to the RAF Fighter Command. It was named 'St George' after Faire Brothers' trademark.

Leicester's industries during WWI

Leicester's clothing and footwear manufacturing industries were required to supply the army. Many men and women were employed manufacturing army boots. As the First World War progressed more munitions were needed and many Leicester's factories were given over to arms production, which included Howitzer shells. After the war, in 1919 Leicester was legally recognised as a city once more. This was partly due to the contribution of Leicester's industries to the British war effort.

8. Continue on Rutland Street to reach Humberstone Gate. At the junction, note the building to your right (H) which is under redevelopment.

(H) Freeman Hardy and Willis factory

Between 1876-1877 the footwear manufacturer Freeman Hardy and Willis built a factory here on this site. By 1914 the company had expanded to 460 shops and was claimed to be the largest boot and shoe dealers

in the world. However, in 1940 during a World War II air raid the factory was bombed and fire broke out. In the mid-1950s the company built a modern office block, Enterprise House, on the site. It was later converted to the Leicester International Hotel for refugees in the 1970s. It has been mostly derelict since 2009 and in need of regeneration. The site is being redeveloped into student accommodation and shops.

Turn left on Humberstone Gate. At Charles Street cross ahead at the pedestrian crossing and continue towards the Clock Tower (I).

(I) The Clock Tower

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the National Service (Armed Forces) Act 1939 came into effect to conscript young British men aged between 18 – 41 years into the armed services. In that year, a large advertising board was displayed here at the Clock Tower. There were some exemptions to conscription such as medical grounds or working in essential industries, or clergy. Conscientious objectors could be assigned to civilian work (such as farming, forestry or non-skilled hospital work) or non-combat roles such as the Royal Medical Corps. By 1942, the age for men was increased to 51 years and conscription included British women aged 20-30 years old. Married women and women with children up to 14 years of age were exempt. After the Second World War ended, a peacetime version of the National Service came into effect from 1947 until 1963 (see additional information at the end).

During 1938, ahead of the outbreak of the Second World War, the Air Defence Cadet Corps (ADCC) was established to train young men in aviation-related skills. Previously, during the First World War young men were sent into air combat having only received a few hours of training and fell victim to well-trained enemy aviators. So with this in mind, in 1938 the idea of an aviation cadet corps was conceived. The aim of the ADCC was to set up squadrons of cadets in as many towns and cities as possible. The City of Leicester Squadron was their founder squadron. The Corps proved popular with thousands joining. In 1941, by Royal Warrant, the ADCC was formally established as the Air Training Corps (ATC), training young men with the skills required for the Royal Air Force or Fleet Air Arm.

The Clock Tower was also the location for Leicester's VE Day (Victory in Europe) celebrations in 1945. The event celebrated the Allies' formal acceptance of Germany's unconditional surrender of its armed forces on the 8th May 1945. The act of military surrender was first signed on 7 May at Reims, France. A slightly modified document was then signed on the 8th May in Berlin. Interestingly, the term 'VE Day' existed as early as September 1944, in anticipation of victory.

9. Turn left on Gallowtree Gate and right on Horsefair Street. Pause at the corner of Every Street for (J).

(J) Boer War Memorial.

This memorial commemorates the residents of Leicestershire who gave their lives in the Anglo-Boer War (or South African War) of 1899 - 1902. It was funded by public subscription and unveiled in 1909. The central figure represents peace and the figures at each end represent grief and war.

The walk finishes back in Town Hall Square. We hope that you have enjoyed this short introduction to some of the places associated with wartime in Leicester. You may also be interested in the Remembrance Trail in Victoria Park, available to download from the Choose How You Move website: www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk

Additional Information:

National Service

When the Second World War was over, Britain still had military commitments abroad but was faced with a shortage of personnel. From 1947 until 1963 National Service was used as a form of peacetime conscription for all able-bodied young men between the ages of 18 and 30 to recruit them into the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. They initially served for 18 months although this increased to two years in the early 1950s during the Korean War. Following training, the men were often posted abroad. By the late 1950s Britain did not have the same requirement for its armed services overseas and there was increasing demand for young people to support the workforce and economy at home. The last National Serviceman was de-mobbed in 1963. The University of Leicester conducted interviews with some local men who completed the National Service and these can be heard in their special collections [here](#).

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Tyler Barton for researching this route.

References:

General information

Book - *But for these things: Leicester and its people in WWII*, by Vincent Holyoak

The Story of Leicester website is a great resource for an overview of Leicester's history:
<https://www.storyofleicester.info/>

Leicester during the First World War:

<https://www.storyofleicester.info/civic-affairs/leicester-during-the-first-world-war/>

There is a useful information section about Leicester on [Wikipedia](#)

Air Defence Cadet Corps:

Forces War Records - <https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/units/503/air-training-corps>

Royal Air Force Air Cadets - <https://www.raf.mod.uk/aircadets/who-we-are/history/>

Air Training Corps (Wikipedia) - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_Training_Corps

Boer War Memorial:

<http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Leicestershire/LeicesterBoer.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Boer_War

Conscription & National Service

The National Service - National Army Museum website -:

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/what-was-national-service>

Conscription in the United Kingdom:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription_in_the_United_Kingdom

Page 6.

This route was developed by staff and volunteers for Leicester City Council: www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walks

The National Service & Civil Defence – University of Leicester special collections. Includes some interviews with men who completed national service:

<https://leicester.omeka.net/exhibits/show/postwar/civil>

Freeman Hardy and Willis - The Leicester Blitz:

<https://www.storyofleicester.info/a-working-town/freeman-hardy-and-willis-leicester-blitz/>

Newarke Houses Museum:

<https://www.leicestermuseums.org/newarke-houses/>

The Chantry House and Skeffington House:

<https://www.storyofleicester.info/a-place-to-live/chantry-house-and-skeffington-house/>

The Royal Leicestershire Regiment:

<https://www.storyofleicester.info/civic-affairs/the-royal-leicestershire-regiment/>

Leicester Castle:

<https://www.storyofleicester.info/civic-affairs/the-castle-motte/>

<https://www.storyofleicester.info/civic-affairs/leicester-castle/>

J Pick & Sons Ltd:

<http://www.knittingtogether.org.uk/behind-the-scenes/the-companies/j-pick-sons/>

Alexandra House:

<https://www.storyofleicester.info/a-working-town/alexandra-house/>

The Magazine:

<https://www.storyofleicester.info/civic-affairs/the-magazine/>

The English Civil War and The Siege of Leicester:

<http://www.thiswasleicestershire.co.uk/2012/11/when-civil-war-came-to-leicester-may.html>

Women's Land Army:

<https://www.womenslandarmy.co.uk/world-war-one/>