

Welford Road Cemetery Walk - Leicester Women

Start location: Welford Road Cemetery, Welford Road, LE2 6BB.

Time taken: 30 minutes* **Distance:** 1 mile 1.6 km **Linear route**

Allow additional time for information stops.

Description:

On this short walk through Welford Road Cemetery we consider the lives of some of Leicester's extraordinary women of the 19th and 20th centuries, who are at rest here. Some stand out for their courage, service to others, championing women's rights or for literature, while two lost their lives in tragic circumstances.



— Main route — Alternative route ● 1 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



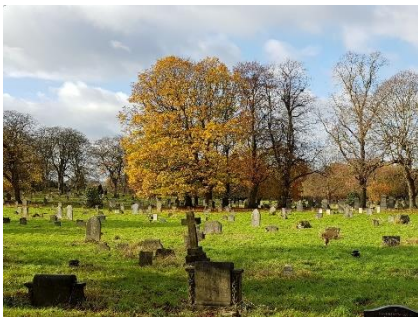
Walk starts from: The War Memorial within Welford Road Cemetery.

The main entrance to Welford Cemetery is off Welford Road, but there are also two pedestrian gates on University Road, either side of the former gatehouse (now the University of Leicester's chaplaincy). Whichever gate you enter by, make your way to the War Memorial (1.) to start the walk.

Safety tips:

- Keep to the paths in Welford Road Cemetery. The ground and the old monuments may be unstable in places.
- Tread with care. Some paths are on a slope or may be uneven in places. Watch for seasonal slip hazards such as moss and leaves. This route includes steps.
- Remember to observe the guidance on social distancing.

About Welford Road Cemetery:



Following the industrial revolution and changes in the way people worked in agriculture, people started to move into the cities to live and work, including Leicester. By the 1840s Leicester's city churchyards and non-conformist burial grounds became full. The graveyards were overcrowded and 'smelly'. The situation was similar in cities across the country and serious health concerns were raised. It led to Parliament passing a series of Acts from 1852 until 1885 to reform burials. Land on this site was purchased by the council and Welford Road Cemetery opened in 1849 as the city's first municipal cemetery.

Leicester's city graveyards were closed in 1855. Until Gilroes Cemetery opened in 1902, Welford Road Cemetery was the only place people from the city were buried, so from rich to poor all came here. The cemetery also provided a site for recreation, walking and enjoying open space as there were no public parks in Leicester until later (Abbey Park opened in 1882). The cemetery is 32 acres and there are over 213,000 people buried here in around 40,000 graves. Only around 10,000 of these have headstones. These days Gilroes and Saffron Hill (which opened in 1929) are the main working cemeteries in the city but around a dozen or so people are still buried here in Welford Road Cemetery each year, in family plots. There are some ornate headstones and memorials within the cemetery with hidden symbolism. You can read about some features to look out for and what they represent in *Additional Information* at the end.

In this self-guided route we provide a short history of some of the women of Leicester, who were interred here in the 19th and 20th centuries. The walks starts from the War Memorial.

1. The War Memorial

The War Memorial forms part of a separate cemetery within the cemetery, as the area enclosed by low hedges is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Opened in 1923, it commemorated servicemen and one woman, Kathleen Brennan. These service personnel served during World War I and died in Leicester hospitals, including the 5th Northern General Hospital, situated where the University of Leicester now stands. The 5th Northern General was set up as a military hospital in 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War, in a vacant building which was formerly the 'lunatic asylum'. Casualties began arriving in Leicester in September 1914 and continued until June 1919. A total of over 74,000 admissions, 7,808 operations and 514 deaths were recorded through this period. Of these, 286 casualties are buried in individual Commonwealth War Graves – 152 in the War Cemetery and 134 around the cemetery including seven Canadian, six Australian and ten Belgians. The main cemetery also holds 46 Commonwealth War Graves from the Second World War.



The War Memorial and Kathleen Adele Brennan (uO1.198)



Fielding Johnson Building. Formerly the 5th Northern General Hospital.



The War Memorial wall.

1. Kathleen Adele Brennan

Kathleen was born in Sydney on 15th November 1882 and died of Spanish 'Flu at the 5th Northern General Hospital, Leicester on 24th November 1918 while serving as a member of the Australian Army Nursing Service. Kathleen was the eldest of the five children of William and Elizabeth Brennan who were both born in Sydney. Her grandparents were all free Irish settlers who emigrated in 1839-40. All the children wanted to fight in the First World War but agreed that two should stay behind. Kathleen and her brother William both died – William in Palestine serving with the famous 12th Australian Light Horse. Kathleen was part of a special Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) of probationers recruited to serve in British Hospitals. Her funeral was attended by one of her brothers and many VADs and members of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC).

2. Louisa Upton

Louisa Upton was the matron of Nottingham General Hospital when The Leicester Royal Infirmary proposed a major revision of the dietary requirements for its own patients. Leicester staff went to the Nottingham hospital to see what was being done there. Louisa was appointed Matron at Leicester Infirmary in 1855. She worked there for four years, then in October 1859 she became suddenly terribly ill. She was nursed by doctors at the hospital but died after a two-week illness, possibly due to cholera, aged 43. Her grave is the freehold property of the Infirmary. A memorial was erected on the site topped with a broken column, an indication of a life cut short.



Louisa Upton (cG.466)

3. Fanny Fullagar

Fanny Fullagar was born in 1847, the daughter of a doctor. She was a member of the Women's Liberal Federation, the National Union of Women Workers, and a campaigner for the proper training of midwives. She became the first woman in Leicester to be appointed as a Poor Law Guardian when she was elected in 1889 as the Charity Organisation candidate for All Saints parish (later known as Newton Ward). She remained a guardian for 15 years until she was defeated by one vote in 1904. She decided not to stand again. However, she carried on campaigning. She founded the Leicester branch of the NSPCC, the RSPCA, the Leicester Society for Indigent Old Age, and the St John Ambulance. She was committed to the campaign for women's suffrage and held a post in the Leicester and Leicestershire Women's Suffrage Society.



Fanny Fullagar (cH.56)

4. Nora Emily Payne

During the years of the Second World War, Nora Emily Payne was the unfortunate victim of a crime in Leicester. In May 1944 Nora was a 32-year-old clerk at the Petroleum Board offices on Springfield Road. She had been seeing William Cowle, a painter and decorator from Liverpool, for some three years, as a friend in her mind but as something else in his. Cowle had a history of mental illness and had been discharged from the army as medically unfit the year before. Nora had become increasingly disturbed by William's advances and tried to finally end the relationship by letter (Cowle was living in Norwich at this point). Cowle travelled to Leicester on 17th May and stabbed Nora to death just before 2pm in a passageway on Springfield Road. His defence of insanity was bolstered by several expert witnesses who identified him as a 'Manic Depressive', but the jury was not swayed, and he was found guilty and sentenced to death. An appeal on 24th July failed and Cowle was hanged at Leicester prison on 8th August 1944.



Nora Emily Payne
(cM.608)

5. Alice Hawkins

Leicester's most important suffragette and a true working-class heroine, Alice was born in 1863 in Stafford but moved to Leicester in 1876. She worked as a shoe machinist in the Leicestershire Cooperative Boot and Shoe Manufacturing Society – better known as The Equity shoe factory. The Equity was organised as a worker's cooperative and actively supported workers in pursuing political work. Alice soon became involved in organised labour but by the early 1900's she had become disillusioned with the male dominated trade unions and in 1907 she attended her first meeting of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Hyde Park. During the march on Parliament that followed, the crowd was charged by mounted police and Alice was arrested and imprisoned for the first of what was to be five times in total. Alice's experience only radicalised her further and she became part of the newly formed Leicester section of the WPSU inviting Sylvia Pankhurst to speak in the town. In June 1908 came perhaps Alice's finest hour when she was one of the main speakers in front of 200,000 at Women's Sunday, a mass rally in Hyde Park. She was always supported in her fight by her husband Alfred, who could often gain entry to public meetings when women were banned, including in 1909, a rowdy meeting in the Palace Theatre addressed by Winston Churchill. Both were arrested on that occasion and Alice chose to serve 14 days in Leicester prison rather than pay the fine. Political meetings often ended violently at this time and Alfred successfully sued the Liberal Party for £100 after having his leg broken when ejected after a protest in Bradford. The First World War meant a suspension of most suffragette activity and votes for women followed in the years after 1918. Alice worked on in the labour movement up to her death in 1946 aged 83. Her grave was unmarked until September 2012 when surviving members of her family raised the memorial, outlined in suffragette colours, that you see today.



The Equity Shoe Factory, Western Road



Statue of Alice Hawkins, Green Dragon Square (formerly New Market Square)



Alice Hawkins (uM.1042)

(H) Headstones from Leicester Cathedral

To the side of the visitor centre there are headstones that have been brought up from Leicester Cathedral following the work carried out there in 2014 to transform the grounds and create a public open space. None of the burial plots at the Cathedral were disturbed, but a number of the headstones were relocated here or to Saffron Hill Cemetery.

6. Betsy Islip

Betsy Islip was Headmistress of the Collegiate Girls Grammar School in Leicester. The school began as a small, ladies boarding school in Kibworth Harcourt where Betsy's husband was a Minister. After the death of her husband in 1866, Betsy moved the school to College Street, Leicester and set about expanding the property over the following years by purchasing the former Boys Collegiate School which was next door. The school took children from age 5 and then just girls from 7 years. In 1922 the school was taken over by the Leicester Education Committee as a grammar school. By 1981 only a sixth form remained, and it combined with Wyggeston Girls Grammar to form Sixth Form College which was renamed Regent College in 1995.



Betsy Islip
(UB.802)

7. 'Sister' Mary Foster Coy

Mary was born in Enderby in 1858, the daughter of John Coy a draper who had a shop in Market Place Leicester. She spent some time in Nottingham training to be a nurse however gave this up to look after her father following the death of her mother Sarah Augusta in 1885. She was a Wesleyan Deaconess (providing support in the community) and was called the little sister, a title that remained with her. In 1901 she was elected a Poor Law Guardian for Latimer Ward, triumphing over the independent Labour candidate. Like many of the female Guardians she was also committed to the National Union of Women Workers and the Prison Aid Society and striving to raise Local and National awareness of the need to train and register midwives. It was because of the strenuous efforts of Mary Coy, Charlotte Ellis, Fanny Fullagar and Emily Bosworth that the MP Lord Cecil Manners took up the cause and successfully piloted the registration of Midwives Bill through Parliament. The Midwives Act was given Royal assent on 31 July 1902 shortly before she died in October 1902.



Mary Foster Coy
(uA.80)

8. Eleanor Russell

Eleanor lived at 84 West Cotes Drive and went to St Hilda's Oxford to read History. She later worked at Woolwich Arsenal and Hayes Filling Factory before serving as a VAD, Women's Auxiliary Army Corps and in the Queen Mary Army Auxiliary Corps during the First World War. She was in the first list of Queen Mary's Administrators (Administrator was the equivalent of an officer in the Army). Eleanor never served overseas and died in the great flu epidemic of 1918-19 which killed 20 million worldwide including 1,600 in Leicester. There were three main outbreaks: June/July 1918; November 1918 and then February/March 1919. Eleanor caught the flu in the final wave.



Eleanor
Russell
(uD.390)

9. Dorothy 'Dot' Cain (uD.84)

Dot was killed in 1926 after her parachute caught on the undercarriage of a plane that was offering the public the chance to parachute. The tragedy was witnessed by a large crowd which had gathered at the Blackbird Road Stadium. Dorothy was only 25, married and living in King Richard's Road. Her parents kept the Empire Hotel in Fosse Road North. She had been impressed by another woman who had recently made a jump and when Captain Muir (an experienced pilot, who made the first solo flight from England to Sweden) stayed at her parents' hotel before an exhibition flight, she made sure that she was picked to parachute from his plane. 40,000 people, including her excited family, gathered in and around the Royal Show Ground, Anstey Lane, and Abbey Park to see the exhibition. At 1,000 feet Dot jumped clutching a bunch of white heather for luck. However, the parachute caught on the undercarriage and she slipped out of her harness and fell to earth. The Illustrated Leicester Chronicle described spectators rushing "in all directions and some ran away" and her husband "in a state of collapse" as her Father-in-Law Arthur Richard Cain was first to reach her body.



Dorothy Cain
(uD.84)

10. Dr Mary Royce

Founder of the Royce Institute, and Leicester's first female doctor. She died having caught an infection while attending a patient. Daughter of Alderman George Royce, Mary qualified as Leicester's first female doctor in 1890 at the age of forty. She first commenced her studies in 1879, travelling home to Leicester from London every weekend to teach Sunday classes at Gallowtree Gate Chapel. In April 1892, Mary stood for election as Poor Law Guardian in St Margaret's Ward. She was elected unopposed. She died in October 1892, after contracting an infection whilst visiting a patient in the Workhouse. After this, Guardians were no longer permitted to visit the Workhouse or Cottage Homes during outbreaks of infectious diseases. A fellow Guardian, Charlotte Ellis pointed out that her friend had sacrificed her life for others whilst Fanny Fullagar explained: *'Few had an idea what her work was, because she would never allow it to be noticed in the newspaper, or spoken about...'*



Mary Royce
(uA.483)

To reach the final plot exit the cemetery by the pedestrian gate near the old gatehouse (now the Chaplaincy) on University Road. Continue a short distance past the building and re-enter via the pedestrian gate on the left.

11. Alice Beer

Alice Beer had published three poetry collections: "Facing Forward, Looking Back" (Poetry Monthly 1999); "Talking of Pots, People and Points of View" (poetry pf, 2005) and "Window on the Square" (Soundswrite 2009).

Alice was born to an Orthodox Jewish family in Vienna in 1912. By the 1930s she felt unsafe in Vienna and fled for Britain. She was based in Leicester having married Franz Beer in 1938. After his death in 1979 Alice began writing poetry seriously after taking a poetry course taught by U A Fanthorpe.



Alice Beer (Un)

We hope you have found this route interesting. You can download other self-guided routes in Leicester from the Choose How You Move website: www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walks

Additional Information:

Symbolism to look out for on the way around...

<i>Clouds of Heaven</i>	- Symbolic of a veil which conceal God from his worshippers.
<i>Gates of Heaven</i>	- Door ajar to peep through to the next life.
<i>Ivy</i>	- Symbol of everlasting life. i.e., immortality. It may also signify friendship.
<i>Broken column</i>	- The tragedy of a life cut short, especially when the person dies young without issue, breaking the family line.
<i>Dove</i>	- The parting soul a manifestation of the Holy Ghost. With a twig in its mouth hope and peace.
<i>Five-pointed star</i>	- Symbolic of the life of Christ - the five wounds of Christ.

Acknowledgements:

Route developed by Walk Volunteer Aud Jones for Leicester City Council.

Headstone photos: Aud Jones; Barbara Boulter (FOWC).

With thanks to Barbara Boulter from Friends of Welford Cemetery for information.

[The Friends of Welford Cemetery](http://www.friends-of-welford-cemetery.co.uk) deliver talks and events from time to time. Information can be found on their website.

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References:

Material provided by the Friends of Welford Cemetery.

Other sources:

Welford Road Cemetery:

Friends of Welford Road Cemetery: <https://www.fowrcl.org.uk/history/>

Leicester City Council: <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/births-marriages-and-deaths/funerals-burials-and-cremations/cemeteries/welford-road-cemetery/>

Fanny Fullagar and Mary Royce:

The Who's Who of Radical Leicester: <https://www.nednewitt.com/whoswho/F.html>

Forward Sisters, Local Women in Politics: <http://www.recordoffice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Forward-Sisters-Lady-Guardians.pdf>

Betsy Islip:

<https://www.facebook.com/135750843292826/posts/about-the-school-the-school-began-as-a-small-young-ladies-boarding-school-in-the/829405453927358/>

The Collegiate Girls School: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/leics/vol4/pp328-335#h3-0007>

Alice Beer:

<https://emmalee1.wordpress.com/2011/04/28/alice-beer/>

Wesleyan Deaconesses:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/the-diaconal-order/the-history-of-the-methodist-diaconal-order/>