

Footsteps Around the Park Eureka Park's Past



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Footsteps Around The Park

Eureka Park's Past

This short gentle walk three quarters of a mile in length from the Delph, Swadlincote's Market Place. DE11 9DA

The route is graded as easy and should take less than an hour to complete. The route is 1½ miles if starting from Sharpe's Pottery and ¾ mile if walking from Newhall Road. (Start at paragraph 8 if choosing this option to make a circular route.

The walk celebrates the History of Eureka Park. Discover why the park was created, the reason for its name and the changes that have taken place since its inauguration.

Do visit Sharpe's Pottery Museum which opened in January 2003 before or after your walk. The complex was founded in 1821 by Thomas Sharpe. His son, Edmund, patented the world's first flushing WC rim in 1855. Household pots and utensils were manufactured and sold throughout the British Empire, Russia, Germany and Holland. The works eventually closed in 1967.

Leave the Market Place locally called The Delph. Pass the steps of the Town Hall noting the clock face 'Time the Avenger' then turn left down Midland Road. Cross Civic Way at the pelican crossing in front of the fire station. Turn right and almost immediately take a gap that leads to the road below the blue brick wall – part of the original railway bridge. At the end of the wall cross Midland Road with care and stop at Eureka Park gates to study the memorial plaques.

1 The Great War Memorial Gates

These were designed by a Mr Brewhill and completed in 1926. They were not dedicated until 1933. The memorial plaque has been restored recently as part of the Great War Commemoration. The Wragg brothers - Major Fred Wragg and Lieutenant Norman John Wragg are listed on the plaque along with others who lost their lives.

Major Fred Wragg - In 1916 Fred Wragg, John's son, went to France in command of the Swadlincote Company of the Sherwood Foresters regiment. He had recently been promoted to Major when the family heard the sad news of his death on 4th July. Along with Captain Kerr of Melbourne Hall he had worked for the formation of the Melbourne & Swadlincote Company of the Sherwood Foresters. Fred was believed wounded following an attack at the German front line. Captain Kerr 'went over and along with two other officers were the only ones to get back safely'. Fred was hit and knocked out as he rested in a shell hole according to an eye witness. It had taken 4 days for the news to be relayed from the front. The Brigadier General had these words to say in his letter to his father, Mr Wragg – 'It will be, I am sure, some small comfort to you to know that he fell gallantly leading his men even after he had been wounded. He is a great loss to the battalion, and will, I know, be much missed by his men.' The letter appeared in the Burton Mail on 12th July 1916.

Lieutenant Norman John Wragg served in the 3rd Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. He died of wounds aged 26 on 18th July 1916. He is buried in St. Sever Cemetery near Rouen. The Wragg family had lost 2 sons in 18 days. Their memorial windows are in Emmanuel Church.

Midland Road was home to a number of men who served in the Great War. On 24th June 1915 The Burton Chronicle announced the death of Private James Holden who served in the 1st Battalion of Grenadier Guards. He had died of wounds. Alfred Holden, his brother, was serving with the local Territorials at the front. Their nephew P. W. Parker was serving in the Inniskillin Fusiliers. Mrs Holden must have found life hard to bear at the time. Her brother was serving with the 5th Sherwood Foresters and he was in hospital in France. Private Percy Read also of Midland Road was 23 when he died. He had served his apprenticeship at the engineering firm Warren, Stacey & Co which was the next building beyond Shoddy Pit, shown on the photograph top left opposite.

Please spend a moment to think about the thousands of others who lost their lives not only in the Great War, but in the wars since. "At the going down of the sun and in the morning



we will remember them". (From *The Fallen* by Laurence Binyon, first published in *The Times* on September 21st 1914). The war shattered lives, changed society and altered how we think about conflict.

Pass through the gates and spend some time in the Memorial Garden to the right of the path. When you are ready return to the path and look at the open space in front. This is the site of the former Shoddy Pit.

Shoddy Pit

2

"Owd Shoddy" pit was developed in 1880 to mine coal seams associated with the South Derbyshire Coalfield. Swadlincote is on the exposed coalfield, the seams being close to the surface. It is clear to see the 'pit bonk' to the right of the winding gear on the photograph above. The chimney was part of the complex too which had a number of names – Oldfield Colliery, New Hall Fields and Cartwright's Colliery named after the owner, Moses Cartwright and known by locals as Shoddy Pit. It was given this name because of its poor condition in comparison to others in the district. It was very difficult to work because of flooding, faults and short seams. The pit shaft also collapsed.

A Co-operative was formed by the miners who called it Brotherhood mine. This was because the colliery was operated by a consortium of workmen or brotherhood. They were paid in tokens that they could use to buy provisions from The Tommy shop across the road. This was owned by the mine. The practice was illegal as they should have been paid in cash! The venture failed in 1896 following the

collapse of the shaft and a lawsuit. The colliery was taken over by Robert Cartwright and Edmund Sharpe. The mine was pumped out and repaired and continued to produce coal until 1897 when the firm went into liquidation. The mining rights were sold to a sanitary pipe making firm – Wraggs. Finally the mineral rights were leased from Wragg's at £120 per year for 15 years, plus royalties per ton of coal and clay worked. However the enterprise failed again in 1906 and the business was bought out by the Granville Colliery Company.



The mine was served by a mineral line from the main railway that ran through Swadlincote, south of the present park. Remains of an old railway bridge can be seen on the access path from Belmont Street. The mine shafts were capped off as shown in the photographs above from *Burton Mail* dated 6th June 1938.

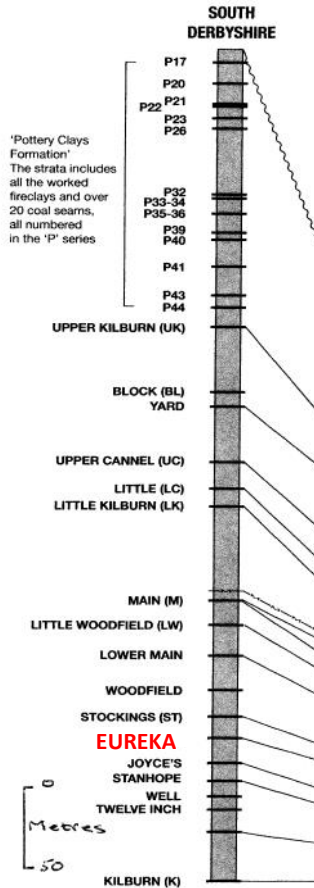
Continue to the footpath crossroads

3

Why Eureka? Coal seams of the South Derbyshire

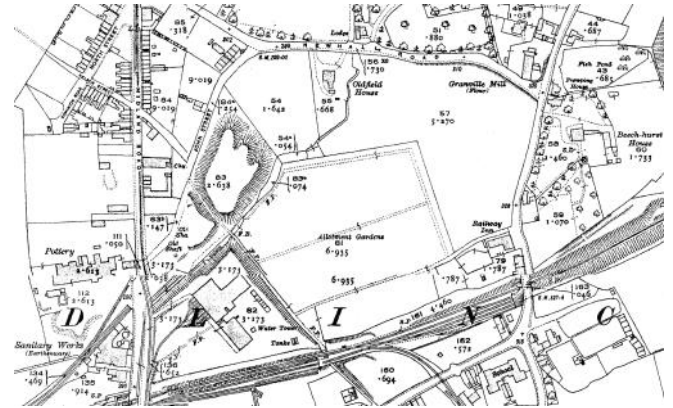
Coalfield lie below the clays

Eureka coal seam was named in the early nineteenth century. It is between 1.2 and 1.5 metres thick and lies about 460 metres below where you stand. The coal is sandwiched between grey sandstone and mudstone and occurs in Eureka Rock that is twelve to eighteen metres thick. The coal seam was mined from Shoddy Pit but the pit was short-lived consequently the seam had been productive for only a short period. The name of the recreation ground was changed to Eureka Park in 1937.



been finished. The embankment can be seen south of the area but no track laid at the time the map was drawn.

On the 1923 map above the urban nature of the town was developing. Wide Shaft Inn had



its name changed to The Railway. Tram-sheds can be seen south of the site of Shoddy Pit. All that remained was the 'pit bonk' and two old shafts. Footpaths served the allotment gardens. Potteries and pipe-works were growing too, linked by a network of railway sidings. The area would be noisy, dusty and an eyesore. The smell of acrid fumes from numerous chimneys serving the kilns permeated the district. The salt-glazing process needed to finish the earthenware pipes was the cause – hydrochloric acid vapour following the shovelling of salt onto fires and resulting evaporation.

Continue straight ahead then turn left and walk towards the bowling green. Take a rest on one of the seats.

4

Rural Swadlincote

As can be seen from the map extract below of 1882 the area where you are now, was on the edge of the small town of Swadlincote. It was laid out as six small fields with hedgerows and trees. A stream flowed diagonally through the site. It is likely that the fields were grazed by cattle and owned by the Wragg family. Even though Shoddy Pit had only been open for two years a pit bank had started to grow to the north east of the mine. Sidings from the main railway line had been laid from close to Swadlincote railway station but the line to Woodville had not



The Air Training Corps – 1211 (Swadlincote and District) Squadron

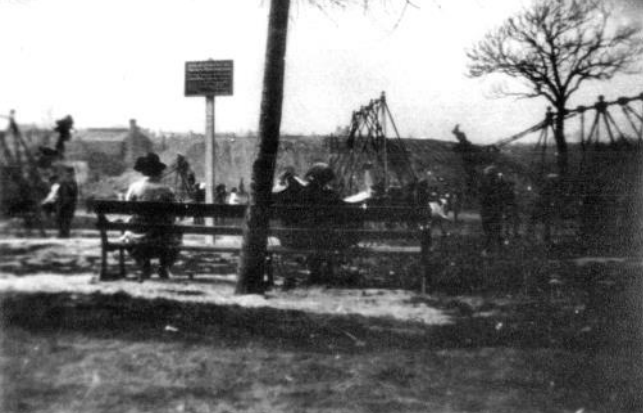
The building beyond the playground is the HQ of this youth group. The Swadlincote Air Cadets were formed in the Town Hall on 8th April 1941 and originally paraded at Hastings Road School. The Unit then moved to its present site in 1947 when there were even plans to place a WWII bomber aircraft next to the building! The building is the third one to be placed in this location which has seen hundreds of young men (and women since 1985) pass through the doors, many of whom have gone on to join the military and far more taking up a civilian life and gaining qualifications with this highly successful Air Cadet Squadron, one of the foremost Units in the UK.

Move on to another seat around the bowling green.

5

6 Early amenities

The area had a small recreation ground in the 1920s with playground equipment squashed on a triangle of land. It included children's swings, Bobby's Button, a mountain glide and giant slide. All these were fun for the local children as you can see on the photograph below.



Before the playground site was reclaimed Shoddy Pit bonk provided much entertainment for the local lads. Here George Harris, Mick Golby and Alan Neale are ready to enjoy a ride on their trolleys.



Pass in front of the Park Keeper's office to reach a cross road of paths.

7 The Park

The recreation ground was transformed into a 6.5 hectare park with formal and informal leisure activities. A proposal for memorial gardens was drawn up by a well-known Derby landscape gardener, William Barron. The design appeared in *Burton Observer* in June 1923 but there is no evidence that the plan ever developed. By 1937 the present path network, paddling pool, bandstand and open space had been established. Today the park is home to a crown green bowling green, 2 tennis courts, 2 football pitches, a crazy golf course, play area, natural water play area, open space for informal kick

about games and hard-standing with a grassed amphitheatre. The floral clock was installed following the coronation of George VI in 1937. This has been replaced by a sundial called *Now is the Hour*. Also, fourteen rustic timber rose arches were installed at the time. They were over the semi-circular footpath running between the rear of the floral clock and Newhall Road. The varieties of rambler roses used were "Exelsa" and "American Pillar" unfortunately due to disease, lack of maintenance and funds they were removed in the mid-1980s. In 2014 they have been reinstated to provide a pleasant walkway and reflect the previous rose garden.



Turn left and left again to walk up to Newhall Road gates.

8

Newhall Road gates – These are original. The gates were removed, wrapped in oily rags and buried when the original railings were removed for the Second World War effort. They were replaced afterwards. The railings and furniture of the Park are now painted in Midland Railway venetian red to reflect the town's railway history.

Turn right to just before the bridge over brook then turn left along the gravel path. Rest on the next bench.

9

The Wraggs

Thomas Wragg moved from Sheffield to Swadlincote in 1872 to start a pipe factory on land between Hill Street and Church Street. John Wragg, son of the founder, expanded the business by buying out Woodward's factory on the corner of Coppiceside and Hill Street (where the Pipeworks and Morrison's supermarket are located today). They specialised in salt-glazed pipes but manufactured sanitary ware, chimney pots and garden ornaments too. Sir Herbert

Wragg, Thomas' grandson, was an MP and well-known public figure. The family lived at Eureka Lodge (now demolished) off Newhall Road opposite the park.

Continue along the path keeping the Cascade and wooden fence on your right. Stop at the junction with the main path through the park.

10 Water features

The water cascade and paddling pool were fed by untreated water from a stream draining from Midway fish-ponds. The cascade was designed as an ornamental water feature, lined with concrete and a number of stone ledges to provide a series of



small waterfalls. Rockery style planting along the margins soften the banks. This was laid out and completed in July 1934. The water from the cascade fed the paddling pool – a large diamond shape as seen in the photograph (the original kerb edging of the paddling pool can still be found). This was a very popular feature on hot, sunny summer days.

The culvert linking the cascade to Midway Pond, across the road beyond the park gates, was witness to an interesting escapade linked



to one of the colourful characters of Swadlincote. Charlie Hextall had served King and country during the Great War and returned to pursue his local pastime – poaching. On one

occasion the police were looking for him. He was staying with his aunt in one of the cottages across the road. He dodged the policemen and jumped into the pond. He didn't surface! The police thought he had drowned. The death of Charlie as a result of a pursuit in this manner would be despised by locals. Charlie was a likeable chap, much admired by "Swadie's" for his antics. The police continued to try to find him. It was dark and there was no sign. Some time later he shouted from the ground now Eureka Park – 'I'm here, behind you'. He had waded through the culvert, his local knowledge had fooled the police. He ran off again. The outlet of the culvert at the top of the cascades is known as the 'Hole in the Wall'. The lettering can still be seen today.

Turn right (downhill) and then first left along the avenue to the corner close to The Railway Inn entrance. Turn right to continue along the perimeter path and rest on a bench near a line of young trees planted in 2013/14 by the Air Cadets.

11 Natural History in the park

As you wander through the park there is often plenty of opportunity to spot wildlife creatures. Blackbirds, mistle thrush and other small garden birds enjoy seeking out food in the grass. Listen out for the calls of blue tits and great tits as they fly through the tree tops. Carrion crow and wood pigeons search for tasty morsels too. Foxes visit in the evening. You maybe lucky to see one passing through the park looking for easy pickings. The herbaceous borders and ornamental shrubs attract butterflies and other insects in the late spring and summer. Mallards make use of the brooks. Bats fly around the mature trees on late summer evenings. Purple loosestrife and sedges grow alongside the brook and provide shelter for invertebrates.

Enjoy the variety of trees throughout the park, some are ornamental species, others are native. Some were planted as memorials. In December 1935 a silver birch avenue was planted by the Swadlincote Girl Guides Association at the fish-ponds end of main footpath to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V. They are now very mature and South Derbyshire District Council has a planned programme of felling & replacement to retain the Silver Birch avenues. The Girl Guides Association planted further Silver Birch trees in 1953 along the footpath that runs to the Railway Inn to commemorate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

The scent of the linden blossom from the lime horseshoe hangs in the air in mid summer. Cherry trees provide colour throughout the year – blossom in the spring, fruits in the summer, golden foliage in autumn and a rich red bark in the winter. SDDC is replanting cherry trees as the mature ones reach the end of their life. Spring flowering varieties by the performance area of the avenue, and summer flowering varieties towards the old paddling pool end of the avenue. Ash keys are fun to watch when tossed in the air to become helicopters. Also look out for the Sweet Chestnuts and Horse Chestnuts (conkers), and the more recently planted Holm Oak, Sweet Gum and Antarctic Beech.

Continue around the perimeter path to return to the footpath crossroads.

The British Legion was given permission to erect a further set of Memorial Gates to commemorate the Second World War in 1949. This is where the WW2 gate stood (one pillar remains) The pillar was rescued by a local builder and passed to The Magic Attic & the other pillar is depicted with setts in the ground.

Turn left to the gates. When you are ready, return to the Delph.

Eureka Park



Acknowledgements

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Download this and the other WW1 Commemorative walks here:
www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/firstworldwar

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Swadlincote Townscape

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