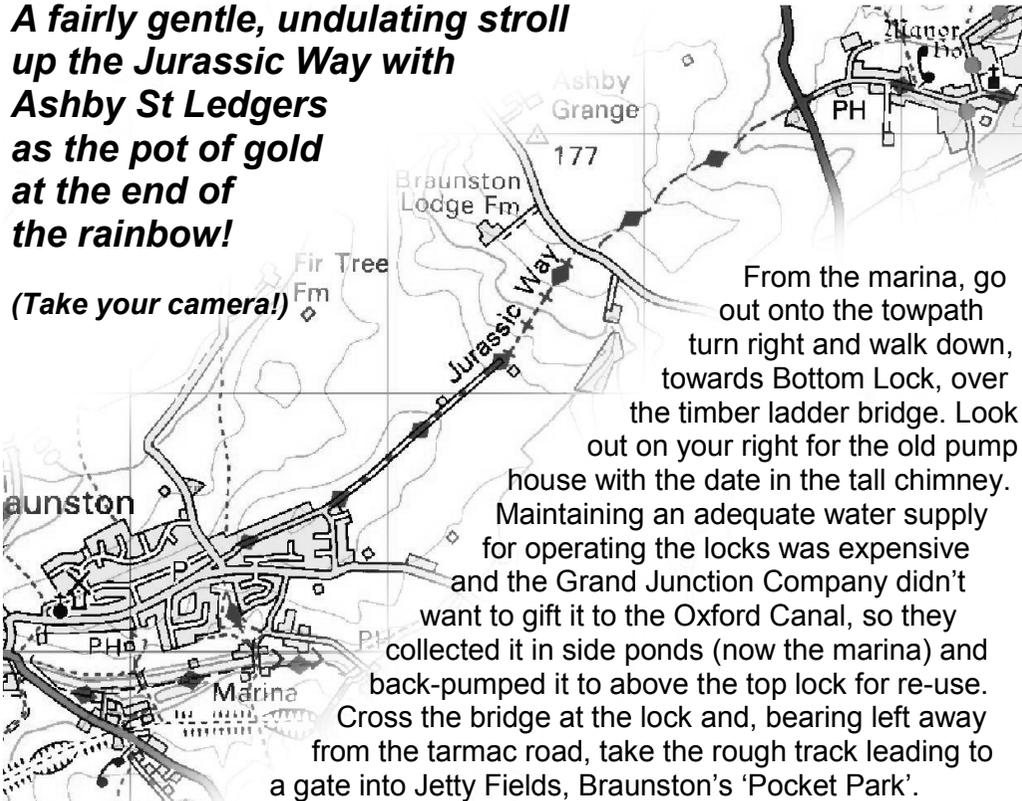


***A fairly gentle, undulating stroll
up the Jurassic Way with
Ashby St Ledgers
as the pot of gold
at the end of
the rainbow!***

(Take your camera!)



From the marina, go out onto the towpath turn right and walk down, towards Bottom Lock, over the timber ladder bridge. Look out on your right for the old pump house with the date in the tall chimney. Maintaining an adequate water supply for operating the locks was expensive and the Grand Junction Company didn't want to gift it to the Oxford Canal, so they collected it in side ponds (now the marina) and back-pumped it to above the top lock for re-use. Cross the bridge at the lock and, bearing left away from the tarmac road, take the rough track leading to a gate into Jetty Fields, Braunston's 'Pocket Park'.

Recently gifted to the Parish Council for the villagers' recreation, a lot of very hard voluntary work has been undertaken by the usual 'few' in tidying up the open space, thinning the spinney and smartening up the garden at the top end. They are also endeavouring to re-introduce native species of trees and shrubs.

Going straight up the field you can see to your left a marked depression in the hillside alongside the canal; this is the site of a clay pit and works making bricks for lining the tunnel during its construction - three bricks thick for nearly 1¼ miles is a hell of a lot bricks! If you stray off the track you can experience the ups and downs of mediæval 'ridge and furrow' field workings; indeed, if the sun is low you will see on this walk many such workings everywhere.

Go through the spinney at the top. A gate takes you out to the village green. Cross over to the far side past the village hall (once the school) and turn right up Ashby Road. At the top the road turns right but you go straight on up the wide track. Once this was the main 'road' to Ashby but is now part of the Jurassic Way, a long distance footpath of 88 miles from Banbury in

Oxfordshire to Stamford in Lincolnshire but don't worry, you'll only be on it for a mile or so!

After some very easy going, the track ends. Go straight on through the gate and up the gentle hill. At the top, on a clear day, there are good views to be had behind you far to the west. You are standing on the edge of the Northamptonshire 'heights'; eastwards from these hills there is only flat plain until you reach the Ural Mountains! This is why the BBC chose nearby Daventry's Borough Hill for its World Service wireless transmission mast.

At the Barby Road turn right and after 80 yards turn left on to the path marked by a small arrow on a fencepost. Soon you find yourself going gently downhill to the busy A361 with Ashby just ahead behind the trees. Take care crossing the road and go down the lane opposite.

After a hundred yards you come across The Olde Coach House on the right. Converted from a cow barn it is now a very decent pub with good beer and even better food. Close your eyes and walk determinedly past, resisting the call of its charms.

You are now in Ashby St Ledgers, a small, thoroughly delightful and picturesque village, population 166 (2001). "St Ledgers" because this is the lazy way to say "St Leodegarius", the saint to whom the church is dedicated and indicative of a Norman foundation. A rare chap, only 2 other British churches are similarly dedicated, but very popular in France where he was a C7th priest, held captive, tortured, eyes gouged out and most horribly mutilated over a number of years for political not religious reasons and eventually put to death. There, now you know. His detailed story doesn't make for good bed-time reading.

A visit to the church is a must but on the way to it down the main street admire the quite spectacular thatched terraced cottages designed by Lutyens a hundred years ago for the manor's agricultural workers. Poor farm hands? Huh! You'll need a banker's bonus to buy one of these bijou residences now. Look out too for Ashby's old communal pump. The village is stuffed with attractive thatched cottages and houses, some of them tucked away behind the main street so do have a good nose round. Even the village hall is thatched. You may be interested to note that seven houses changed hands in the 5 years to 2010 - at an average price of £516,000.

The last building in the street is the magnificent manor house, unfortunately not open to the public, but do go and stare through its various gates.

Referred to as Ascebi (ash tree settlement) in Domesday Book, William 1st granted manorial rights soon after the Conquest and there has been a manor house here since. The present, early Tudor, building is much as it was at the end of the 1500's. The Catesbys were the lords for nearly 250 years but didn't have much luck. William Catesby, a favourite of Richard III and Chancellor of the Exchequer, was the only person of high office who had fought on 'the wrong side' to be executed by Henry Tudor after Richard had lost both his horse and his kingdom at nearby Bosworth (1485). Robert Catesby, infamous as the ringleader of the Gunpowder Plot (1605), shuffled his coil in a shoot-out resisting arrest after the attempted coup. Look through the gate next to the church and you will see the timbered gate-house where, safe from the servants' flapping ears, he along with Guy Fawkes and the other conspirators, frequently met to lay their plans. The manorial desmesne extending to 2,337 acres of arable and organic dairy farming, woodland, residential, commercial game shooting, fishing and deer stalking was bought by the Queen in 2005 as part of her personal investment portfolio, a 'snip' at only £10 million.

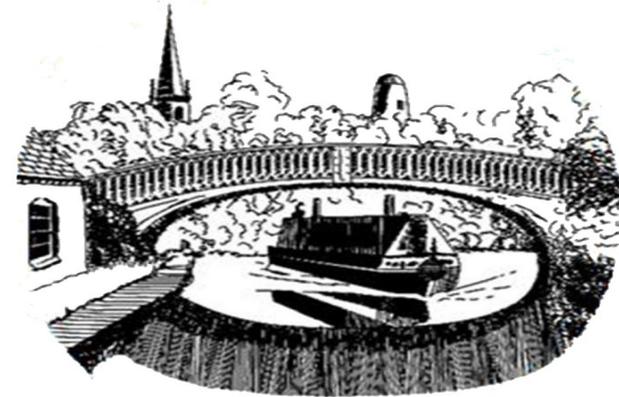
Last and definitely not least is the ancient and very pretty church, bravely open each day in daylight hours, and what a treasure chest it is! Do purchase one of the guides but, briefly, you will see some original Norman architecture including arches, tower and font, a C15th rood screen, unique floor brasses, an intriguing Jacobean triple-decker pulpit, manorial and C18th box pews and a minstrels gallery. **BUT**, better than all of these and alone worth the journey, are the remarkable early mediæval wall paintings including a skeleton and a 'Grim Reaper'-type figure on the west wall, which taught our illiterate peasant forebears lessons on morality and mortality the best part of a thousand years ago. Wondrous. A fortune has been spent on conservation but so much more is needed so do please leave a generous donation in appreciation of your visit.

That's it; that's Ashby 'done'. All that remains is to retrace your steps back to Braunston - with perhaps a brief stop at the Old Coach House on the way (dogs allowed in front bar if no-one already eating there) or, nearer to home, the Old Plough (dogs welcome in bar). Unfortunately there are no footpaths providing a reasonably alternative route back, but at least you do get a second chance to admire that marvellous view from the hill-top. And it's downhill most of the way back!

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Walks from Braunston Marina



No. 2

Ashby St Ledgers by The Jurassic Way

A short but very rewarding walk

return trip of c.7 miles taking approx. 2½ - 3 hours
+ time taken exploring pretty village & wonderful church

The local soil is mainly heavy clay and conditions can be a bit muddy
so do wear boots or stout shoes