

# Ripley Town Guide



A short history of Ripley and local villages



Includes a map of Ripley Township

Issue 1

Produced by Ripley Town Council  
Written by Ian Fisher

---

# Introduction

---

The Township of Ripley has a rich and varied history. Ripley consists of a dozen or so villages and hamlets with a town centre that has developed over the centuries. This Town Guide explains some of the history of the area that is shown on information boards displayed in the villages and town centre.

The earliest history of Ripley probably starts with the Roman road at Street Lane. Later, there were Saxon settlements at “Riplelie” and “Pentric” that are mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. The town prospered, and, after Henry III visited to go hunting in 1251, he granted a charter for a weekly market and an annual fair.

On the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1542, the lands belonging to Darley Abbey were bought by two noble families. The Dukes of Devonshire (the Cavendishes) owned most of Pentrich, and the Zouch family of Codnor Castle, who sold most of their

land in Ripley to local farmers who enclosed it and began to mine coal and ironstone.

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Ripley was big enough to separate from Pentrich, although people still had to travel there to worship. In 1742, John Wesley preached in Ripley Market Place and later the first non-conformist chapels were built. Ripley Parish Church was built in 1822, perhaps as a response to the Pentrich Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution transformed Ripley into a vibrant market town. It began with the Cromford Canal; when digging the tunnel under Butterley Hall, the engineers William Jessop and Benjamin Outram found ironstone and coal. In 1790 they bought the hall and its lands with finance provided by Francis Beresford and John Wright. In 1792 the four men founded the Butterley Company.

By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Butterley Company employed over 10,000 mainly in the

ironworks, brickworks and the pits. There was also employment in factories and businesses, among them Ogles Agricultural Implements, Towlson's Wire Factory, Stevenson's Dyers, Johnson's Wire Works, Ripley Manufacturing Company producing textiles and horsehair products, Smedley's soft drinks factory and Brittain's printers and stationers.

The early twentieth century was the heyday of commerce in Ripley. Stalls filled the market square, often staying open until late in the evening. The Co-op had many shops, covering everything from wet fish to boots and shoes. In 1903 they built their new headquarters, with its 82ft high clock tower whose dome is still a landmark in Ripley.

In the 1930s, as shown in Walter Brierley's book "Means Test Man", Ripley was a busy, bustling, noisy, smoky place. He also describes how difficult life was for those who lost their jobs before the changes in society after the Second World War.

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought closure to

mines and factories across the Township. Out of town shopping took away much of the vibrancy of the town centre and the market became just a few stalls.

New housing estates, supermarkets and industrial areas have replaced the old works and pits, but the Township of Ripley continues to adapt to a changing world with the same strength and determination that once drove a vital part of the Industrial Revolution.

This guide has been written by Ian Fisher and Peter Smith. Acknowledgement goes to the Ripley and District Heritage Trust as a major source of information used in the guide, particularly their publication of the history of Ripley written by members of the WI in the 1930s. Ripley Town Council has published the guide and we also thank Nigel Weaving, and those who have given permission for illustrations to be used.



Ian Fisher

---

# 1 Street Lane

---

Roman soldiers will have marched up this straight road during the period 43 AD to 410 AD. This was a Roman road called Rykniel Street, and is known as Street Lane from what is now Station Road at Smithy Houses in Denby to its junction with Heage Road, known as Chadwick Grave.

The Roman road runs from the Fosse Way at Bourton on the Water in Gloucestershire to Templeborough in South Yorkshire. Locally the route was from Chester Green to Breadsall, to Smithy Houses and up to the Roman Camp at Coneygre.

At the northern end of Street Lane we can still see the remains of the Morley Park furnaces. These were cold-blast and coke-fired iron smelting furnaces. These are Grade II listed and are also a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

The first Morley Park furnace was built for Francis Hurt of Ambergate in 1780 and the second added in 1818. Iron ore and limestone were tipped from the top into charging holes and the blast was introduced by a battery of steam engines. The furnaces were supplied by a series of banks of coke ovens and 3000 yards of wagonways. Production stopped in 1874 but the furnaces were restored in 1986, so they can still be visited today.



**The remains of the Morley Park blast furnaces**

---

## 2 Sawmills

---

The village is named after the sawmills used for cutting marble that were near the canal and river. The marble cut at the site originated from Hopton Wood Quarry, probably brought to the sawmill by horse drawn wagon. The stone was used for facing fine houses around Britain after being transported down the canals to the River Trent.

The only remains of the sawmill are four cottages, now two houses, near the four arch bridge into the old brickworks. The rest were demolished to make way for the Belper to Pye Bridge railway line in 1875.

There were two brickyards in Sawmills. One was where Lockwoods Haulage is now, although it was linked to the brickyard that was at Buckland Hollow. It was known as the Ambergate Brick and Tile Company,

probably starting around 1876. It became Bull Bridge Brick Company in 1889. After the 1920s it was owned by Midland Refractories, producing bricks and refractory products. It closed in 1981.



There was also a brickyard at what is now known as Riversdale. This was owned by Edwin Glossop, probably starting in 1917. Butterley Brick Company bought the works in 1947 and it finally closed in 1970, becoming a tip. Bricks from this works were used to build the houses in Riversdale and also used in the building of the new Roman Catholic Cathedral in Liverpool.

---

# 3

# Waingroves

---

The first known reference to the village is when land at “Waingrif” was granted for “perpetual almsgiving” (meaning that the rent was used to support the poor) by Ralph Fitz-Stephen in 1147. The land was held by Henry of Waingrif.

The Zouch family of Codnor Castle were given the land after the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII and the first reference to “Waingroves” was after his death in 1586.

The village grew during the second half of the 1800s with the opening of the colliery in 1859. There was a single 10ft diameter shaft and associated headworks. The Butterley Company also built rows of cottages on Church Street. When the mine flooded during the miners’ strike of 1921, it never re-opened. The colliery is commemorated by a wonderful sculpture

of miners on the site of the pit shaft in Waingroves Community Woodland.

Brick making was a common industry in the Ripley area in the 1800s; Ripley Dannah Street School and Porterhouse Road are built on brickwork sites. In the late 19th century there was a brickworks between Pit Lane and Queen Street in Waingroves.

The much larger Waingroves Brickworks, part of the Butterley Company, provided much needed employment after the closure of the pit.

A vivid portrait of the village in the 1920s and 1930s can be found in the novels of Walter Brierley, a Waingroves born miner who wrote about his experience of unemployment in “Means Test Man” and “Sandwich Man”.

# 4

## Ambergate

Ambergate grew from the old Hamlet of Toadmoor, (t'owd moor) mostly through the development of transport links. For four miles to the north, road, river, canal and rail ran side by side, as they do today.

The Cromford Canal, linking mills at Cromford with the rest of the world via canal links from Langley Mill to the River Trent, was built by William Jessop and Benjamin Outram and was completed in 1793. The Canal also provided a route for the transport of vital minerals to Butterley Ironworks.

The village name probably came from the Turnpike Road opened in 1817. Here, a series of tollgates which controlled the junction of the roads to Cromford and Langley Mill were known as the "Amber Gate".

George Stephenson was the engineer for the Derby to Leeds railway and the Francis

Thompson designed station opened in 1840. In 1849 the Ambergate to Buxton line opened and led to an unusual triangular station.

This opened the Peak District to many early tourists and the station was very busy.

The coaching inn was built by Francis Hurt in 1874 and bears his name, The Hurt Arms. All the stables are long gone.

Further along the A6 there was the wire works, founded by Richard Johnson in 1876 on the site of an old foundry started by Francis Hurt many years previously. The Ha'penny Bridge on Holly Lane, so named as the toll was one ha'penny, was also built by Francis Hurt.



**Amber Gate toll bar**

---

## 5 Marehay

---

The village of Marehay is located on land which in the 13th century was owned by Ralph de Wyteleg. Over the centuries this name has evolved to Whiteley.

Mary Hay Parc was granted to the Zouch family of Codnor Castle in 1542 after the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII. Marehay Hall is situated close to Street Lane.

St John's Church started life as a corrugated sheet construction in 1871. The foundation stones of the brick church were laid in 1873. St John's Church closed in 1987 and it was sold to the Pentecostal Church, who renamed it as The Springs of Living Water in 1990.

Whiteley is one of the oldest named areas in the whole of Ripley. Marehay Miners' Welfare was built on the site of Whiteley Colliery which was started around 1835

and closed in 1936. Marehay Colliery started in the early years of the 19th century and was sold to Butterley Company in 1860. It was opposite the site of the Miners Arms, now known as The Village Inn.

The railway line from Little Eaton reached Marehay in 1856, crossing the road at what is now Marehay Garage. With the need for passenger traffic from Ripley town centre, the line was extended in 1890 to Ripley Station on Nottingham Road. Marehay crossing was closed in 1963 and the line converted into a footpath, known as Ripley Greenway.



Railway crossing



---

## 6 Heage

---

Heage is a scattered village with two main parts, Heage itself and Nether Heage (or formerly High Heage and Low Heage).

The name Heage is derived from the Old English hēah and ecg, and means 'high edge' or 'high ridge'. In 1817 it was recorded that "Heage, alias High-edge, lies about five miles from Duffield, upon the road from Chesterfield to Derby." This turnpike road passed through Duffield, Pentrich, Oakerthorpe and eventually to Sheffield. It is rumoured that Dick Turpin rode along this road on his way to York.

In 1842 three men from Heage were involved in criminal activities which caused quite a stir at the time. They were sentenced to death and gave rise to local sayings such as "They 'ang 'em in bunches in Heage", and "You can tell a man from Heage by the rope mark on his neck."

Heage is known for its six-

sailed windmill; work on it started in 1791 and it was first recorded as working in 1797. Originally built with four sails, improvements in 1894 led to six sails. The mill sails were virtually destroyed by the weather in 1919 and the mill was not used again until the restoration was completed in 2002. Each of the six sails weighs nearly one ton, and the tower is built from local sandstone. The windmill is a Grade II listed building and is now a major Derbyshire attraction.



The restored Heage Windmill

---

# 7 Butterley

---

In 1276 the Abbot of Darley Abbey enclosed a new park at “Buterleg”, now known as Butterley Park. There was a mill near to where Butterley Station now stands.

Benjamin Outram and Company was founded in 1790 to extract coal and ironstone. With the support of Richard Arkwright, it was decided to build a canal from Cromford to Langley Mill with William Jessop as the engineer.

The canal included a tunnel 2996 yards long and the Butterley Reservoir was created to provide a ready supply of water. The canal completed in 1793.

There were many developments on the Butterley Works site and products included tram rails, steam engines and bridges. The St Pancras Station roof, the Falkirk Wheel (the world’s first rotating boat lift) and Portsmouth’s Spinnaker were

all manufactured here.

Butterley Company employed thousands of people from Ripley and the surrounding area, with farms, collieries, Codnor Park Ironworks and brickyards all belonging to the Company. The works had its own fire brigade, post office and health centre.

New rail links were important to the developing business in the 19th century. Butterley Station was opened in 1875. Services between Butterley and Ripley were permanently withdrawn on 1st June 1930, together with trains between Ripley and Derby. Butterley Station was closed to regular passenger traffic on 16th June 1947.



**“Legging” through Cromford canal tunnel 1845**

---

## 8 Market Place

---

On 25th November 1251 Henry III visited Darley Abbey while hunting. At the Abbot's request he granted Ripley a weekly market and annual fair by signing a charter later that year. These were held on what was then known as "The Green".

All roads to and from Ripley led to The Green and until the late 18th century it was a few scattered cottages with rough tracks for roads. There was also a well and a quarry. On 18th June 1742 John Wesley preached on The Green, allegedly next to a thorn tree, on his way to Sheffield.

Ripley Fair has been held on the Market Place since the 1251 Charter. Since the mid 19th century it has always been around the 23rd October. It had a good reputation for horse sales, but there were also many entertainments such as jugglers, melodramas,

shooting galleries and a "ghost show".

The Local Board was formed in 1867 and took over the market and fair, constructing the Market Place. The market hall that was built in 1880 on the site of The White House, that had stood on The Green for many years, was never successful and was adapted to become the Town Hall for the new Ripley Urban District Council.

The top of Lowes Hill, next to the Market Place was renamed Church Street when the new church was built in 1821. Next to the old White Lion alehouse there was a path. In 1904 this track became Grosvenor Road.



Ripley Fair

---

# 9 Co-op Square

---

In 1860 a small group of Butterley Company workers started a shop in a house on Butterley Hill. Their aim was to set up a shop which bought quality goods wholesale and sold them. Any profits went to the members in the form of a dividend.

In June 1864, they changed the name to the Ripley Co-operative and Provident Society.

Expansion was rapid. In 1870 they bought premises on Park Corner for £50. They made structural alterations to the premises and it became both the provisions (i.e. grocery) and boot and shoe departments.

The crowning moment for the Society was on the 18th July 1903 when the new premises on Nottingham Road were opened, with a procession through the streets and a “great meeting”. There was

an 82 foot high tower with a copper roof, a flagpole and a clock made by Smiths of Derby.

A radio and TV shop was added (in Grosvenor Road) and the Funeral Service was established, together with the motor garage in Derby Road and a taxi service.

There were more than 30,000 members, each with a unique number to record the dividend to be paid out during the year – everyone looked forward to the day the “divi” was paid! Many still remember that important “divi” number.

With the change in shopping habits the branch shops and the travelling shops disappeared. New, smaller branches, or convenience stores, were built around the area. These included the petrol station and store on Hartshay Hill and the store on Maple Avenue.

---

# 10 Hammersmith

---

Until the Butterley Company purchased the land early in the 19th century and built a number of semi-detached and terraced houses, Hammersmith was a small hamlet.

A geological survey of a large area around Ripley during the years 1817-27 shows pits near Padley Hall at Hammersmith.

A house on the site of Padley Hall was probably the home of the le Luy family in the 14th century. The family name evolved into Lowes, and the road from Ripley to Pentrich that passes through

Hammersmith was known as Lowes Hill Lane. Everyone from Ripley who went to the Parish Church at Pentrich must have used this path every Sunday.

Padley Hall has Elizabethan origins, but was substantially improved in the 17th century. In 1679 Robert Fearn of Padley Hall, a Quaker, was sent to prison for not paying a tithe of one shilling and sixpence. Quakers did not recognise the role of priests, which the tithe supported, and so in conscience refused to pay the tithe.



**Hammersmith – early 20th century, with the cinder breaker on Cinder Bank in the background**

We are fortunate to have many local community groups in the Ripley Township. Below are some of the groups who have been supported by a Ripley Town Council grant. If you would like more information about applying for a financial grant for your group, please contact: [townclerk@ripleytowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:townclerk@ripleytowncouncil.gov.uk) / 01773 513456

### Local Group information

The coat of arms of Ripley Town Council is a central graphic element. It features a unicorn's head with a golden horn and a red tongue, facing left. Below the unicorn is a shield with a green background, a white stag's head, and a red fleur-de-lis. The shield is set against a background of golden flames. A banner at the bottom of the shield contains the Latin motto 'INGENIUM · INDUSTRIA · ANTIQVVM'.

1st Ripley Guides	Ripley & District Heritage Trust
4th Ripley Brownies	Ripley & District Twinning Association
Aim Excelsum	Ripley & District U3A
Ambergate Carnival	Ripley Hospital League of Friends
Amber Sound	Ripley Ladies Group
Amber Valley Movie Makers	Ripley Leisure Centre Badminton Club
Amber Valley Rotary	Ripley Music Festival
Amber Valley Stroke Group	Ripley OAP Association
Ambergate Cricket Club	Ripley Running Club
Blend Youth Project	Ripley Town Football Club
Butterley United Cricket Club	Ripley Mancave
CAB Derbyshire	Ripley Morris
Friends of Carr Wood	Sawmills Over 60's Club
Friends of Ripley Greenway	Sawmills Village Hall
Greenhillocks	Sisu
Greenwich Park Sports Partnership	The Rotary Club of Ripley
Heage and Nether Heage Carnival	The Royal British Legion
Hearing Help	The Village Hall at Heage
Marehay Bowls Club	Waingroves Community Association
Marehay Community Trust	Waingroves Community Woodland Trust
Marehay Cricket Club	Waingroves Show
Meadow Road Neighbourhood Watch	Woodie's Wings
Musical Dimension	Yellow Daisies Stay & Play Group
Nether Heage Community News & Neighbourhood Watch	
Pentrich & South Wingfield Revolution Group	
Ripley and Alfreton Tennis Club	
Ripley District Guiding	

*For further information please see:  
[www.ripleytowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.ripleytowncouncil.gov.uk)*



## Here are some telephone numbers you may find useful

### Emergency Services

Police	999 (emergencies) 101 (non-emergency)
Ambulance	999
NHS	111
Fire	999
Mountain Rescue	999
RSPCA (emergency)	0300 1234999

### Hospitals

Ripley Hospital	01773 743456
Royal Derby Hospital	01332 340131

Crimestoppers	0800 555111
Drug Helpline (24 hour)	0800 776600
Samaritans (24 hour)	116123
Severn Trent Water	0800 7834444
Water Floodline	08459 881188

### Local services

Ripley Leisure Centre	01773 514727
Ripley Library	01629 532982
Ripley Post Office	01773 512932

It is important that you contact the correct council for the right service

### Local Councils

Ripley Town Council	01773 513456
Amber Valley Borough Council	01773 570222
Derbyshire County Council	01629 533190