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The Official Guide

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The offices of The Barrow-upon-Soar Rural District Council

INTRODUCTION

THE Barrow-upon-Soar Rural District is situate in the northern part of the County of Leicester, and extends from the border of the City of Leicester to the southern boundary of the County of Nottingham. It comprises an area of 54,804 acres lying for the most part between 200 and 400 feet above sea level, with a central Y-shaped depression running northwards and eastwards from the southern boundary along the course of the Rivers Soar and Wreake, and on the extreme west the uplands of the Charnwood Forest. The area is, on the whole, well-watered, there being several brooks flowing into the river valleys from their sources on higher ground.

The district can conveniently be divided into four parts :

- (i) Soar Valley, or central part, containing the parishes of Barrow-upon-Soar, Birstall, Cossington, Mountsorrel, Quorn, Rothley, Sileby, Syston, Thurcaston and Wanlip.
- (ii) Wreake Valley, or eastern part, containing the parishes of Barkby, Barkby Thorpe, Beeby, South Croxton, Queniborough, Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake, Rearsby and Thrussington.
- (iii) The Wolds, or northern part, containing the parishes of Burton-on-the-Wolds, Cotes, Hoton, Prestwold, Seagrave, Walton-on-the-Wolds and Wymeswold.
- (iv) The Charnwood Forest, or Western part, containing the parishes of Anstey, Newtown Linford, Swithland, Thurcaston, Ulverscroft and Woodhouse.

COMMUNICATIONS

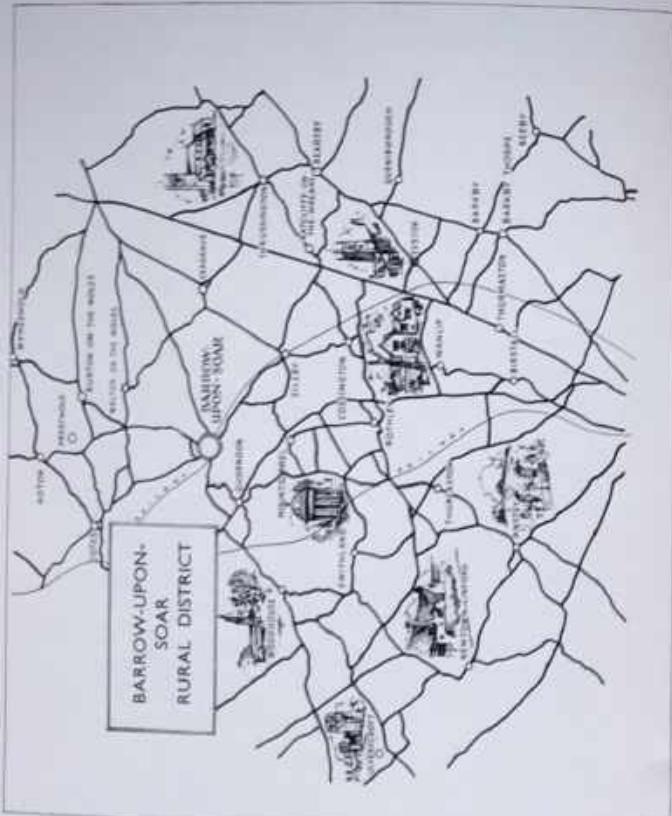
THE whole district is well served by trunk and classified roads, and there are many minor lanes forming useful connecting links between them.

Trunk Route A.46, Bath to Lincoln, passes through Thurmaston to Syston, at which place Route A.607 branches off to Melton and Grantham.

Route A.6, London to Carlisle, enters the district at Birstall and after passing through the parishes of Wanlip, Rothley, Mountsorrel and Quorn, leads into the Borough of Loughborough.

Bus services, except in the very rural parishes lying to the north and east of the district, are good and convenient, being operated both by private companies and the Midland Red Omnibus Company.

There are two railway lines running through the area, one with stations at Birstall, Rothley and Quorn, and the other at Syston, Sileby and Barrow-upon-Soar. Only the extreme eastern and western sections of the district are therefore any great distance from main line rail transport.



HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

IN pre-Roman days an ancient track leading from the Fens entered what is now the Barrow-upon-Soar Rural District near Six Hills, followed a ridge of high ground for some miles, and dropped down to a crossing of the River Soar near Barrow before leading on past Quorn and Woodhouse to the summits of Beacon Hill—a Bronze Age habitation site—and Bardon Hill, high look-out posts over the endless western forests. The hill now called Buddon Wood at Quorn was quarried for millstones in the early Iron Age—hence the name “quern dun”, or “quern hill”.

Another ancient track links South Croxton and Queniborough, where traces of Bronze Age occupation have also been discovered.

The Fosse Way, running straight as an arrow up-hill and down-hill from Syston to Six Hills, follows the line of the old Roman road of that name: a Roman Centurion would be somewhat amazed by the speed and volume of traffic using his road at the present day.

Danish invasions left their mark on the countryside in the number of place names ending in “thorpe” and “by”.

Harold, the last of the Saxon kings, held lands at Barrow-upon-Soar, which after the Conquest passed into the hands of various Norman barons who had assisted William I to victory.

Little is known of the area during the middle ages, but the past emerges from obscurity again at the end of the fifteenth century, when Thomas Grey of Groby began to build at Bradgate one of the first unfortified country houses in the kingdom. This mansion subsequently passed by marriage to the Duke of Suffolk, and was the childhood home of Lady Jane Grey, the tragic “Nine Days Queen”.

It is said that at Bradgate the Lady Jane was found by her new tutor—Roger Ascham, formerly tutor to the Lady (later Queen) Elizabeth—reading Plato in Greek in prefer-



Bradgate Park. Ruins of Lady Jane Grey's House in the Distance

ence to joining a hunting party. Unfortunately, the ambitions of her parents, and particularly her mother—niece to King Henry VIII—resulted in this studious girl being involved in the struggles between Protestant and Catholic then surging round the English crown, and following a hasty and distasteful marriage with Lord Guildford Dudley she was proclaimed Queen by his father, the Duke of Northumberland, as successor to the young King Edward VI. The Duke did not, however, gain the anticipated Protestant support for his cause, and the failure of his bid for power resulted in the Lady Jane and her husband being imprisoned in the Tower. Owing to her extreme youth—she was not yet seventeen—and her obvious reluctance to be Queen, Mary Tudor might have spared her, but her fate was sealed by the outbreak of a second rebellion, during which the Duke of Suffolk was also captured. The Lady Jane and her husband were beheaded in February, 1554, and within a few days the Duke followed his daughter to the block. It is ironic to note that the widowed Duchess, whose ambitions had done so much to involve her family



The Pack Horse Bridge at Anstey

in destruction, had recovered sufficiently, a fortnight later, to marry Adrian Stokes, a servant in her household.

The foresters on the estate seem to have shown more feeling, for there can still be seen the ancient oaks which were lopped as silent tribute to the fate of the gentle and unhappy maid of Bradgate.

Bradgate had a second brief flash of fame when in 1696 the second Earl of Stamford, who then owned it, entertained King William III there. The ancient pack-horse bridge at Anstey, over which the royal visitor passed with his retinue, is still known as "King William's Bridge" in memory of this occasion.

In later years the great houses of the district became more associated with men of letters than royalty: Lord Macaulay was born at Rothley Temple and the Herrick family, of Beaumanor, were connections of Robert Herrick, the poet, who visited them there.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Charnwood Forest.—First and foremost among the attractions of the district, for lovers of the countryside, is Charnwood Forest, sometimes described as the playground of Leicestershire. This area, roughly rectangular in shape, comprises approximately 16 square miles of hills and valleys, woods and waterways, lakes, picturesque hamlets and historic monuments, and is one of the most beautiful districts in the country.

The interesting and unusual rock formations in this area are the result of volcanic action thousands of years ago, and are an attraction to geologists from all parts of the world. It has been said that the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Andes and, in fact, nearly all the important mountain ranges of the world are but mere children in point of age when compared with the venerable antiquity of the Leicestershire hill country. Charnwood Forest also contains many features of interest to the botanist and zoologist.

For those whose interests are less technical, the Forest offers many attractions. Bradgate Park, comprising 1,200 acres of beautiful parkland, is a public open space presented to the City and County of Leicester in 1928 by the late Charles Bennion, Esq. Besides the ruins of the ancient manor house the park contains the curious building known as "Old John", which, standing high on a hill-top, is a conspicuous landmark for miles around. The origin of this tower is rather obscure, but it is believed to have been erected by the fifth Earl of Stamford as a memorial to an old retainer who was killed by the fall of a maypole used in the coming-of-age celebrations of one of the family about 1786. A windmill formerly occupied the site and "Old John" is said to have been the miller.

The park also shelters a herd of red and fallow deer, and



The summit of Beacon Hill, Woodhouse Eaves



Near Hallgates in Bradgate Park



Cropston Reservoir

the scenery is enhanced by the expanse of water forming Leicester Corporation's Cropston Reservoir.

Swithland Woods, near the Hallgates entrance to the Park, are also administered by the Bradgate Park Trust. These woods are deservedly famous for their glory of spring flowers: wood anemones, primroses, and particularly bluebells. A Bluebell Service is held annually in the woodlands.

Beacon Hill, at Woodhouse Eaves, is worth a visit at any time of the year for the sake of the magnificent views to be obtained from the summit, but particularly so at the season when rhododendrons are in flower.

Other places of interest in the Forest are Hangingstone Rocks, Windmill Hill, and the ruins of Ulverscroft Priory.

Anstey is a thriving industrial parish situated four miles north-west of Leicester. Despite extensive development

which has taken place since the last years of the nineteenth century, this village still retains something of its rural character, and The Green is a pleasant open space reminiscent of more leisurely days.

Barkby, an agricultural village two miles south-east from Syston Station, has an attendant hamlet of Barkby Thorpe, which includes the site of the Town of Hamilton, one of the "lost villages" of Leicestershire, de-populated during the Middle Ages.

Barrow-upon-Soar, as its name implies, is situate on a hill rising on the eastern bank of the river of that name, and is noted for the production of lime, obtained from the lower lias formation which underlies a large portion of the parish.

At Barrow-upon-Soar are two hospitals, founded in the seventeenth century by Humphrey Babington, providing for eleven aged men and eight aged women. This parish was also the birthplace of William Beveridge, D.D. (b. 1637), prebendary of St. Paul's and Canterbury and Bishop of St. Asaph, 1704-8. His grandfather, father and brother were successively vicars of the parish.

The station is conveniently situated near the centre of the village, and the river flowing nearby is a popular playground for visitors during the summer months. Both rowing and motor boats may be hired and quiet reaches above and below the village have a restful charm.

The Quorn Hunt Kennels are a short distance out of the village along the road leading to Melton Mowbray.

Birstall, with the largest population of any parish within the rural district, borders the City of Leicester and is now almost entirely developed as a dormitory area. Between the

main Leicester-Loughborough road and the River Soar a few traces may still be found of the ancient village in the quiet streets near the Church.

Cossington, an attractive and unspoiled village, lies in the valley of the River Soar, a mile south from Sileby station and a similar distance from the main Leicester-Loughborough road. The Rectory is partly Elizabethan and is in remarkably good preservation: there is also an ancient mill house which has recently been converted to an attractive riverside cafe without any of its distinctive features being lost.

Lord Kitchener was at one time a resident in the parish, and although the house where he lived is no longer in existence there are many other dwellings of architectural interest, including cottages dating back, in all probability, to the early sixteenth century.

The unspoilt Village of Cossington





The Butter Market at Mountsorrel

Mountsorrel was formerly a market town, with a charter dating back to Henry III, but the market was discontinued about 1850. The old market cross, which formerly stood near the centre of the village, was removed at the close of the 18th century to the grounds at Swithland Hall, its site being taken by the open circular building which still remains.

Castle Hill, rising precipitously to a height of 100 feet above the houses on the main street, recalls the fortress which once dominated the town and was demolished, it is said, by order of Henry III.

There are extensive granite works at Mountsorrel, established some 78 years ago, a speciality being the granite "setts" which for so long paved the streets of London and other cities of the land. Many millions of tons of road and other stones are still sent annually from Mountsorrel to all parts of the country.

Newtown Linford, at the gates of Bradgate Park, is a most attractive village with a wide main street, a number of picturesque old thatched cottages, and a quantity of modern development which blends well with the beautiful surroundings.

It is a centre of attraction during the spring and summer months, and many of the inhabitants provide teas for visitors. Newtown is no less beautiful when autumn turns its creeper-clad walls to crimson, or when the hillsides are mantled with dazzling drifts of snow.

Prestwold is a parish comprising the townships of Prestwold, Burton-on-the-Wolds, Cotes and Hoton, and lies about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles north-east from Loughborough station. The countryside is typical of the rolling English Midlands. The Church of St. Andrew in the grounds of Prestwold Hall contains many interesting monuments to the Packe family, including Sir Christopher Packe, Lord Mayor of London 1654-55, and Major Robert Christopher Packe, killed at the Battle of Waterloo.

Quorn was formerly an urban district, established in 1894, but was absorbed into the Barrow-upon-Soar Rural



Cottage Corner, Newton, Linford



The Lodge and River Soar at Quorn

District under the County Review Order, 1935. In the ancient church of St. Bartholomew are memorials to the Farnham family. Quorn Hall, from which the famous hunt derives its name, is now a residential hostel for students at Loughborough College.

Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreak is situate two miles north of Syston station. Ratcliffe Mill is of very ancient origin, being mentioned in Domesday Book; the present structure dates from 1815.

Ratcliffe Roman Catholic College, dedicated to Our Lady Immaculate, is on the Fosse Way, a short distance from the village, but owing to curious winding of boundaries is actually within the Parish of Cossington.

Rearsby, on the road to Melton Mowbray, has an interesting packhorse bridge. The font in the Church of St. Michael is an exceptionally fine example of 13th-century work.

Rothley, on the main Leicester-Loughborough road, has a church dating back to 1425, and in the churchyard is a Saxon cross, believed to be dated about 750.

Rothley Temple is an old manor house of historic interest, standing in a park studded with oaks: its name is derived from a preceptory of Knights Templars, founded here in the reign of Henry III. The 13th-century chapel has in recent years been restored to its former dimensions. Rothley Temple, the birthplace of Lord Macaulay, has now been adapted for use as a nursing home.

The Grange, another interesting house dating in part to 1774, has recently been acquired by the District Council for use as offices.



The Slate Pit at Swithland Woods

The Church at Thrussington



Sileby is an industrialised parish on the main railway line almost half-way between Leicester and Loughborough. There are hosiery and boot and shoe factories, and a brick works.

Swithland is particularly noted for its valuable quarries of blue slate, with which almost all the buildings in the neighbourhood are covered. Swithland Hall is the seat of the Earl of Lanesborough, and in the parish church are many memorials to the Butler-Danvers family. A short distance from the village the Rothley road crosses the reservoir owned by the Leicester Corporation: this beautiful stretch of water is set in wooded country and is a sanctuary for many varieties of wildfowl.

Syston is a populous village near the confluence of the Soar and the Wreake, and is also a railway junction connecting Peterborough with the main Leicester-Loughborough line. There are various types of manufacturing firms in existence, including light engineering.

Thurcaston has associations with Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worcester (1535-55), who was born in this parish about 1490 and martyred at Oxford in 1555. The Church of All Saints is a building in the Early English style and has an embattled western tower containing eight bells, one dating from the reign of Edward I.

Cropston is a small hamlet in the parish.

Thurmaston, like Birstall, adjoins the City of Leicester and has developed rapidly since it was de-urbanised in 1935. There are a number of industries in the parish, but most of the inhabitants are employed in Leicester or, to a lesser extent, in Syston.



A quiet corner of Syston

Ulverscroft, in the Charnwood Forest, is an agricultural parish and contains no village. There are the remains of a priory of the Augustinian Order, founded in the reign of Henry II.

Woodhouse, in the immediate vicinity of Charnwood Forest, is three-quarters of a mile from Quorn Station. The church of St. Mary-in-the-Elms contains many monuments to the Herricks, who formerly occupied Beaumanor Hall.

Woodhouse Eaves, also in this parish, is a larger village which has been fairly extensively developed in recent years. The church, parsonage house and school nearly adjoin each other, and occupy an elevated position on the verge of a rocky excavated cliff, from which extensive views can be obtained over the surrounding country.

Wymeswold is a township which had a charter for a market in the reign of Edward III: the market has long since been discontinued and the inhabitants are now chiefly employed in agriculture. There is, however, a faint reminder of urban importance in the style of many of the Georgian houses remaining in the village.



Remains of The Priory at Ulverscroft



Woodhouse Eaves in Charnwood Forest

INDUSTRIES

THE most heavily populated part of the district lies in the Soar Valley, no less than 72 per cent of the population residing in the parishes through which the river flows. With the exception of Anstey, all the industrialised villages lie in this valley, although it contains also the parishes of Cossington and Wanlip, which are purely agricultural, and the parish of Birstall, which is almost entirely residential.

The Barrow-upon-Soar Rural District is extremely fortunate in that the industries developed within its borders are essentially clean, and consequently the countryside is not marred by the slag or waste heaps pertinent to many undertakings. Atmospheric pollution by smoke is also practically unknown.

The main industry is the manufacture of boots and shoes, although there are many other undertakings such as cardboard box manufacturing, hosiery, light engineering, elastic web making, wallpaper manufacturing, cement works and granite quarrying. Sand and gravel workings also exist at various points.

Many of these industries have a volume of export business, and as the articles made are much in demand production is heavy and continuous, resulting in a high level of full employment at wage rates above the average. A very large amount of female labour is employed.

Several world-famous firms have factories in the district, including Rolls-Royce, Ltd., Auster Aircraft, Ltd., Airborne Shoes, Ltd., and the En-Tout-Cas Co., Ltd.

The Wreake Valley, the Wolds and the Charnwood Forest area are predominantly agricultural: Leicestershire has always been noted for its sheep and cattle and the standard of quality is still maintained, although owing to

war-time regulations much of the pasture land has been ploughed and sown for root crops. There are extensive market gardens, rose-growers' nurseries, etc. in some parishes.

AMENITIES

THE Barrow-upon-Soar Rural District offers many attractions as a place of residence. Development has been carefully watched, with the result that villages are, on the whole, compact and well planned, and there is remarkably little of the straggling ribbon development which has spoiled so many parts of the country.

Piped water supplies are available in all villages, and the need for efficient drainage is kept continually in mind by the Local Authority. All the larger parishes have an effective sewerage system, and schemes are in course of preparation to deal with the more rural areas.

Gas and electricity are also generally available.

Recreational facilities are also good: there are golf courses at Birstall, Rothley and Woodhouse Eaves and the more general pastimes of tennis, cricket, bowls and football can be enjoyed in practically every parish.

Coarse fishing can also be enjoyed along the rivers.

Building facilities are ample and up-to-date, and many well-known contractors have offices and works in the area.

The Rural District Council officials are always pleased at any time to supply information to persons interested in any particular feature of their district.

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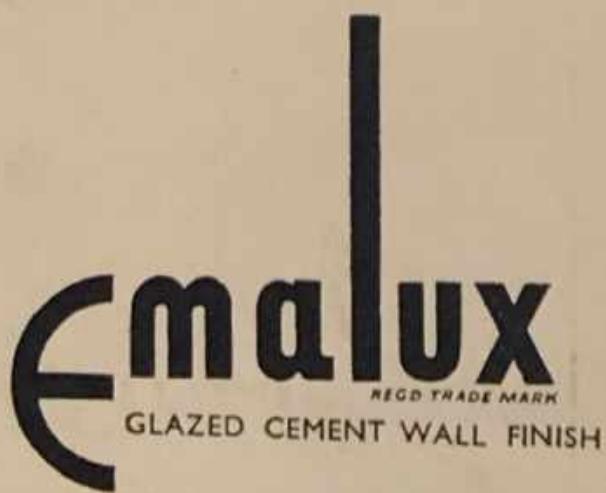


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