

VCH Leicestershire draft text

LEIRE**Sites and Buildings**

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VICTORIA
COUNTY
HISTORY

Leicestershire

The manor house

The manor appears to have been administered from Burbage from at least 1462, and its lords were prominent nationally and resident elsewhere. A possible manorial site has been identified north west of the church, where fishponds and a building platform have been recorded.¹ The rector recorded in 1706 that the Earl of Kent had a house in the parish,² but that is the first documentary evidence that a manor house existed. A reference to a building of this name occurs in the Highway Book in 1809 when the 'lane by the Manor House' was cleaned.³ A thatched and timber-framed building of mostly 16th century post and truss construction north of the Queen's Arms is known as the Old Manor but there is no evidence to suggest that this was a manor house.⁴

Domestic buildings

The present village has a limited mixture of styles and periods. The last mud house in the village was on the site of Charnwood House and a row of thatched cottages stood along the roadside.⁵ Of several substantial brick former farmhouses distributed around the south half of the village, the earliest is Elms farm dating from the early 18th century, possibly with an earlier core. Glebe House has a datestone of 1793 in its frontage, but this is thought to date from when the farmhouse was extended.⁶

One of the older cottages is Rose Cottage, dating from the late 18th century, built of brick with a slate roof replacing the earlier thatch.⁷ The other surviving thatched cottage is on Little Lane and is of a similar age. The arrangement of houses along a single street allowed each to be backed by a garden plot extending to Back Lane on the west and to a footpath on the east.⁸ Between 1900 and 1960 infill development and council housing on Frolesworth Road and Dunton Lane made a modest addition to the housing stock. The second half of the 20th century saw a major increase from 115

¹ Leics. County Council, Leics Museums, Arts and Records Service *Sites and Monuments Record*, Leire compiled by W. Scott 22 Feb 2002, 2; *VCH Leics*, I 269. See Figure 2 in the Introduction for the location of this site and others mentioned in this chapter.

² J. Broad (ed.), *Bishop Wake's Summary of Visitation Returns from the Diocese of Lincoln 1705-15* (Oxford, 2012), 856.

³ ROLLR, DE 1325/112, Leir Highway Book 1805-1843

⁴ Heritage Gateway, Leics. and Rutland HER, Leire,

http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MLE11007&resourceID=1021, accessed 20 April 2012, N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Leicestershire and Rutland* (1960), 171

⁵ Leire Village History Group, *A Brief History of Leire*, (1992), 6

⁶ English Heritage, The National Heritage List for England, Leire, <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/results.aspx>, (Accessed 19 April 2012)

⁷ English Heritage, The National Heritage List for England, Leire, <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/results.aspx>, (Accessed 11 Nov 2014)

⁸ OS Map 1:25000, sheet 233 (2000 edn)

dwellings in 1960 to 224 houses in 1998.⁹ These were mainly small developments towards the railway bridge on the north, on former closes around the church, along Back Lane and south of the Old School House. Brick and slate farmhouses surrounded by farm buildings remained within the village, sited along Main Street and Little Lane, the pre-enclosure route to Ashby Parva.



Figure 10: A small development of six bungalows for older residents near Back Lane

Leire Hall stood on the west side of Main Street. Offered for auction in 1927, it was described as an old-fashioned three-storey property of two inch brick, set back from the road behind a brick wall.¹⁰ There were seven bedrooms on the first floor, five attic bedrooms and beneath the house was an extensive brick-lined cellar.¹¹ Outside the Hall were a tennis lawn, gardens and orchard extending to a second frontage on Back Lane. Unsold at auction, it stood empty until it was largely destroyed by fire. The north end of the Hall, which contained the kitchen quarters, survived the fire and is a residential property.

Industrial and commercial sites

Two watermills stand in the eastern half of the parish. 13th century documents mention two watermills but the present buildings are both of more recent date.¹² Leire Mill lies on the south side of Dunton Road and is a three-storey brick building roofed with clay tiles;¹³ 1773 is picked out in contrasting bricks on the west-facing gable wall. It is a long narrow building, one room deep along its length. Internally, none of the mill machinery remains, but the truncated channel of the water that powered the wheel is visible on either side of the building. Stemborough Mill lies further north on the same stream. The present buildings show several phases. The main building, formerly known as the Granary, has three storeys. The ground floor, which contained the millstones, machinery and

⁹ Register of Electors, Harborough District Council, qualifying date 10 Oct 1998

¹⁰ ROLLR, DE 4674/213, Auction particulars, *Lutterworth Guardian and South Leics. Advertiser*, 1 Apr 1927

¹¹ Personal observation during building excavations, 22 March 2002

¹² J. Nichols, *The History and the Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1807/1810), IV, part 1, 240

¹³ Personal visit, 9 April 2102

water wheel, was retained with the machinery intact, but the two floors above were taken down and rebuilt in 1964 for residential use.¹⁴ The old Mill House is a two-storey brick building with a slate roof, which was formerly thatched and occupied until 1964. Attached to this is a three-storey brick building consisting of three large rooms above each other, with no access to the neighbouring building.

Postal services were provided within whichever of the village shops could accommodate them. All such premises have now reverted to private residences. A petrol station, now replaced by housing, stood on the corner of Back Lane and Main Street on the site of a former vegetable garden. A railway platform was built in 1925 beside the 19th century line to form Leire Halt. When this closed in 1962, the track was removed and the station area grassed over.

Community buildings

A school was built on Frolesworth Lane in 1814.¹⁵ A stone plaque, six feet long with an inscription stating 'Erected by subscription to commemorate the Peace of 1814' was made to adorn the school.¹⁶ The building is now a private house.

Land was acquired in 1873 for a new school, erected in 1874 of red and buff brick with a slate roof. It had a panelled partition to separate the younger children from the older and a privy in the adjoining garden.¹⁷ The school closed in 1947 and in 1964 was converted to provide a venue for social activities.¹⁸

Religious buildings

The parish church stands at the junction of Main Street and the road linking Dunton Bassett and Frolesworth at the south end of the village. An engraving of 1792 shows a nave with no aisles or clerestory, and no separate chancel,¹⁹ although there is a 'chancel arch' in the interior, creating a visual and physical break. This part was rebuilt in 1867-8 in Leicestershire 'granite' and syenite as a nave, north aisle, south porch, chancel and north vestry. The previous windows were incorporated in the new building where possible, although the accounts show that east window had new mullions and tracery. The west tower, of limestone ashlar, was not replaced and is 13th century.²⁰

In a church inspection of 1619, very little met with approval. The soil level was rising around the church, stopping windows and doors and causing damp. Boarding and doors were missing from pulpit and pews, and pigs were foraging in the churchyard.²¹ By 1633 it was noted the chancel windows were broken, the roof timbers were rotten and a grave in the chancel had collapsed.²²

¹⁴ http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MLE11012&resourceID=1021, (Accessed 29 September 2012)

¹⁵ *Leicester Chronicle*, 10 Dec 1814

¹⁶ ROLLR, DE 1425/144f

¹⁷ ROLLR, DE 1425/148a

¹⁸ ROLLR, DE 1425/157, *Leicester Advertiser*, 7 August 1964

¹⁹ J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1810), IV, opposite p. 238.

²⁰ Pers comm, Leics. County Archaeologist, 21 Feb 2012 (pottery sherd, 1100-1300, found below tower floor during building work in 2012).

²¹ ROLLR, 1D41/18/3, Church Inspections 1619 -20

²² A.Dryden (ed.) *Memorials of Old Leicestershire* (London, 1911), 144

In 1780 considerable renovation of the medieval church was carried out.²³ The seating was replaced and the back part of the gallery was raised and provided with seating. A commission of three local clerics with the rector and churchwardens allotted the new seats.²⁴ The gallery was reserved for the choir on the south side and seats were allocated to maidservants and the poor. At the same time the rectory was to be repaired or rebuilt 'according to the Provisions of the late act for promoting residence'.²⁵

Two visitations around 1840 found that the church was in good condition, as were the furniture and books, although the need for three buttresses on the north side suggests the wall was leaning.²⁶ In 1867 a survey of the church found that it was necessary to take down and rebuild the chancel and nave.²⁷ The architect proposed that the large, western gallery was not replaced but a small aisle was added to the north side to ensure sufficient seating.²⁸ A loan from Queen Anne's Bounty contributed to the cost of rebuilding the chancel, the total cost being more than £2,000.²⁹ During the work, the bells were rung as usual. Services, including baptisms, were held in the barn of Airedale Farm but no marriages were recorded in the Leire register for the years 1866 to 1868.³⁰ For one Leire couple in 1867 the banns were read at 'Ashby Parva, the Parish Church at Leire being taken down for rebuilding'.³¹ The architect in 1867 was William Smith, possibly the same individual employed for the design of the school.³² The organ was installed in 1887 to commemorate the royal jubilee.³³

In 1894 the churchwardens suggested that it would be an improvement to have free rather than allotted seating.³⁴ The pews of the north aisle were smaller, to accommodate children. These were removed in 2012 during the installation of a kitchen area and lavatory.³⁵

The Wesleyan chapel stands on Main Street and has a date stone of 1863 in its frontage. It replaced an earlier chapel and is a rectangular, brick building sited close to the roadside.³⁶ It was converted to a private residence in the late 20th century.³⁷

²³ ROLLR, 1D 41/41/143a

²⁴ ROLLR, DE 1425/55 Churchwardens Accounts

²⁵ ROLLR, 1D 41/18/21, Bickham Parochial Visitations 1774-88

²⁶ ROLLR, 245/1850/6, 245/1850/8

²⁷ ROLLR, DE 1425/60

²⁸ ROLLR, DE 1425/60n, Letter from William Smith, architect, 14 Mar 1867

²⁹ ROLLR, DE 1425/61

³⁰ Manwaring, Historical notes, 72a

³¹ ROLLR, Register of Banns for Leire 1823-1927

³² ROLLR, DE 1425/148a

³³ *Leicester Journal*, 23 Dec 1887

³⁴ Northants. RO, X.923, Visitation returns, 1894

³⁵ Personal observation, 27 January 2012

³⁶ W. White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Leicestershire* (Sheffield, 1846), 400

³⁷ Cambers, G. and Currie, S., *Geography for Avery Hill* (Oxford, 2002), 119