

The Walk

The walk takes about one hour, but may be done in stages. It covers the most interesting buildings, (*are listed) and includes three conservation areas, and the original mediaeval street layout.

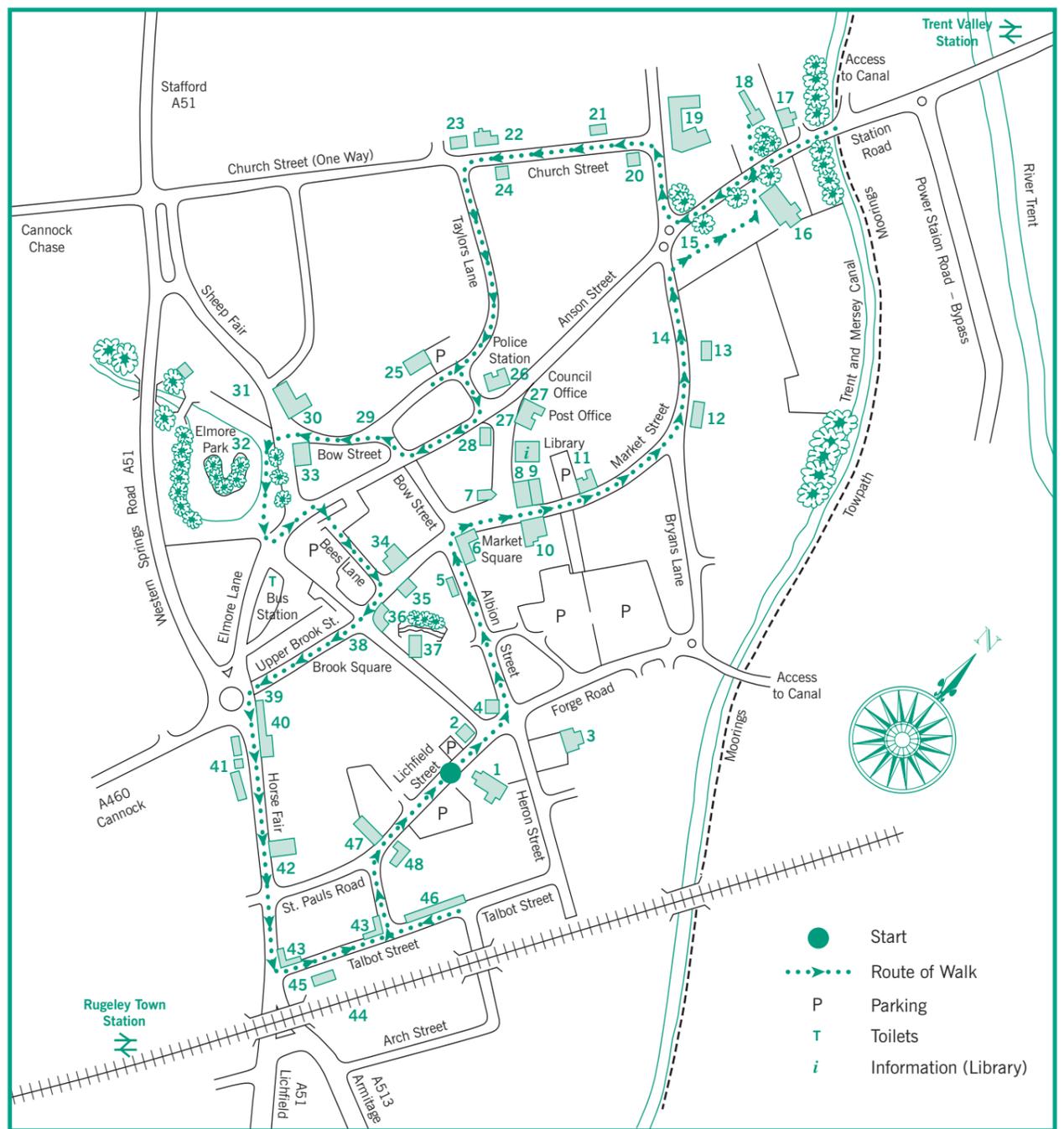
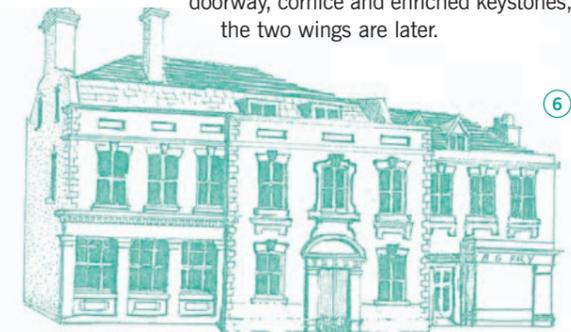
Near to extensive car parking, the **Roman Catholic Church of Saints Joseph and Etheldreda 1**, is a good place to commence. The church was built of local stone in 1849-51; the architect was Charles Hansom (brother of the cab designer) who favoured the "14th century" style. The spire was added in 1868, East window by Hardman and Powell, Birmingham; bell dated 1546; carved oak altar by Pugin in the confessional; ironwork by Harris (local ironfounders).



Alma House 2 of 1878 opposite has some eccentric decoration on the porch and the garden wall (1880). Looking across the road and churchyard into Heron Street, **Heron Court 3** is in the "Tudor" style, 1851, built for the Whitgreaves, who founded the Catholic church.

On the corner with Albion Street, **Herons Nest 4**, built in 1850 in similar style was the residence of the doctor to the local Roman Catholic community; 44 Albion Street attached to it was his surgery. Note that the false window over the front door, which adds symmetry to the house. Albion Street was built up after 1825 with terraced houses. The present veterinary surgery is converted from the former **Albion Iron Foundry 5**, begun in the 1820's.

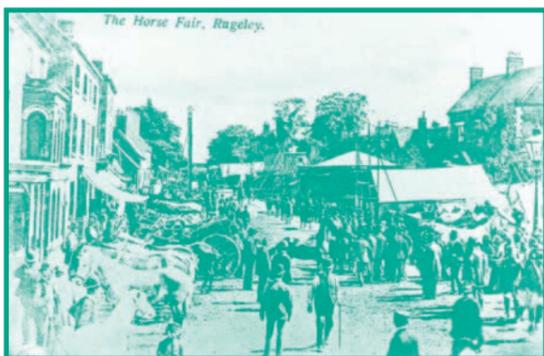
Turning right into Market Square, the **National Westminster Bank* 6**, dates from 1649, when it was the residence of Erasmus Landor, a mercer. The earliest features are the doorway, cornice and enriched keystones, the two wings are later.



RUGELEY – A brief history

"Rugelei" was established by the Anglo-Saxons on a low ridge on a lea (clearing) above the flood plain of the River Trent, William I confiscated the area from Edwin, son of Earl Aelfgar of Mercia, after a rebellion in 1071. In 1189 the town was sold, as part of the Royal Forest of Cannock to the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. The church was first mentioned in the agreement.

The town had grown sufficiently by 1259 for Henry III to grant it a charter to hold a weekly market and an annual three-day fair around Saint Augustine's Day in early June. This fair lasted until 1932 as an internationally known Horse Fair, mainly for carriage horses. There are now four market days and the fair has been revived as a recreational event.



In the 18th and the 19th centuries there was a Sheep Fair for the thousands of sheep pastured on Cannock Chase. Cattle fairs were held thrice yearly, succeeded from 1854 to 1967 by weekly auction markets.

The earliest industries thrived on natural resources; nearly all using the power and clear water of the Rising Brook. These included: a corn mill by 1086; a fulling mill processing wool by 1423; linen produced from Flaxley Field; important leather tanneries from the 12th century to 1959; ironworks from the 12th century to the 1930's; manufacture of window glass in the surrounding woodlands in the 14th to 16th centuries, (some is in York Minster); felt hat making, 1770's to 1870; a papermill in the 17th century; brass and chemical works 18th to 19th centuries; a brewery in the 19th century and colour grinding c1900 – 1970's.

Coal, had been dug from "bell-pits" on Cannock Chase since the 13th century. Deep mining began near Brereton about 1790 – the foundation of later prosperity.

By 1700 Rugeley had over 1,000 inhabitants, but not all went well. There had been a serious fire in 1646 and again in 1709. Also in 1708, 1845 and 1874 the Rising Brook breached the mill dams and flooded parts of the town.

Being on the London – Chester turnpike road, Rugeley benefited from regular coach and mail services. In 1777 the completion of James Brindley's Grand Trunk Canal between the Rivers Trent and Mersey brought further prosperity and saw the building of Rugeley's first town hall. The London and North Western Railway along the Trent Valley reached Rugeley in 1847 and the Cannock Mineral line linked with it in 1859. Today there is a halt on the Trent Valley line and a new halt (1998) on the Cannock line, linking Rugeley with Stafford, London, Birmingham and Walsall.

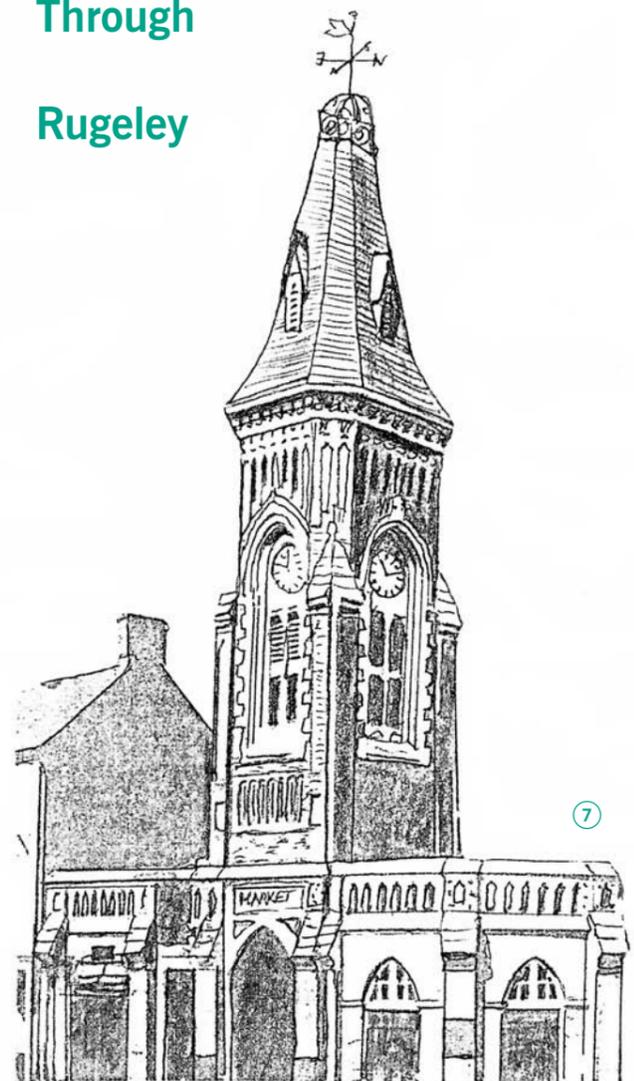
By 1848 Rugeley was described as being "of respectable appearance with houses of superior order". By 1861 the population had risen to 4,362. All industries thrived especially coal, with seven shafts in the Brereton area. In the 1920's forestry was developed on the Chase.

By the late 1950's practically all the old industries had run down, but in 1960 a modern record-breaking deep mine was opened, named Lea Hall, supplying directly the adjacent Power Station 'A' (1963). The population in 1961 rose to 13,012 then to 14,320 by 1963 to 20,500 by 1969. Electronics became an important industry and Power Station 'B' was built. "Redevelopment" removed some of the town's old buildings. The population levelled out at about 25,000, but Rugeley could not avoid being merged with Cannock for local government to become part of Cannock Chase District.

The closure of 'A' power station and the Lea Hall Colliery in December 1990 dealt a severe blow to employment prospects and local economy.

Recently, industrial estates and business parks have been opened on vacated sites and industry has become far more varied. Supermarkets caused the closure of many local shops, but the development of housing is now occupying every available space in the town, only held in by the green belt and the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. That and the canal bring in tourists. Communications have improved by rail and the Rugeley Eastern Bypass was opened in 2007. Enjoy your glimpse of the past of a town which has hopes for the future.

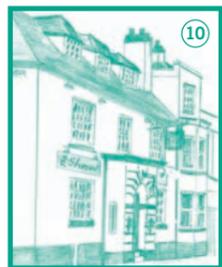
A Walk Through Rugeley



Overlooking Market Square is the **Clock Tower 7**, all that remains of the “gothic” public buildings built in 1879 at the height of the town’s prosperity. The ironwork on the tower is local, as is the plaque commemorating the town’s first public water supply (1895).

On the corner with Anson and Market Streets the **three storey building 8** was once the residence and retail premises of Robert **Harris**, the agricultural engineer and hardware manufacturer. The neighbouring **Market Street buildings 9**, have modern shop fronts which conceal the remains of a large Tudor house. Only the gables can be seen from a back lane and they are refaced.

This was the **home of William Palmer**, the “Rugeley Poisoner”. Established here as a surgeon, Palmer became almost a professional gambler and racehorse owner, always in debt. Members of his family died soon after he had insured them, until his insurance company refused to pay after the death of his alcoholic brother. When Palmer’s friend, John Parsons Cook died in agony under Palmer’s care at the Shrewsbury Arms opposite and his winnings “disappeared”, Palmer was arrested, convicted of murder at the Old Bailey and hanged in public at Stafford in 1856.



Only the front of the **Shrewsbury Arms 10**, survives (c1810 doorway late 19th c) as The “Shrew”. It was a coaching inn from at least 1700, as “The Crown”, then the Talbot Arms, then “Shrewsbury Arms” (after 1856 to alleviate its notoriety as a murder location). The cattle market occupied its yard between 1860 and 1967.

On the left of Market Street is the renovated “Pig and Bell” formerly The Bell (18th c). The **Red Lion Inn* 11**, has a timber framed wall of about 1600. The other end is of stone, the front rebuilt in brick in the 1950’s. Inside, the timbering and linen-fold panelling show the age of the building, the oldest licensed premises in town.

Further on facing you on the bend of Market Street **The Sycamores* 12** was a timber framed farmhouse also of about 1600, converted into two cottages.

Continuing along Market Street, the much altered **Mansfield House Club 13** c1840 was the vicarage until 1920’s, but has lost its timber framed domestic quarters. The **stone wall opposite 14** was the boundary wall of Lower Hall, a residence of the Chetwynds, demolished before 1800. The hall possibly stood on the site of the Post Office.

Turn right into the churchyard of Saint Augustine’s Parish Church under the plane tree and take the right hand path. Adjacent to the path is the **headstone to Christina Collins 15** murdered on a canal boat in 1839. Under the yew trees at the west end of the church is the grave of John Parsons Cook, Palmer’s victim.

The **church* 16** is an early example of simplified perpendicular gothic revival style (1823) by C. Underwood. The east end and lady chapel are by Frank L Pearson (1905-6). The fine peal of bells includes six from the old church dating from 1706-8, renovated for the millennium. Across the road to the right, is the Georgian former residence of the Palmer family, **Chuch Croft* 17** formerly the Wharf.



The remains of the old church “**The Old Chancel**” * **18** date from the 12th century. The earliest visible remains are in the south wall. The lancet window and easternmost pillars are early 13th century. The other pillars, north chapel and aisle were added later in the century, the tower in the 14th century. Inside (not open) a brass to John Weston, (1566), a monument to Thomas Landor (1670), a painted text and original charity boards are notable. In danger of collapse, the nave was demolished in 1823 and the materials sold to help pay for the new church. In the churchyard are the remains of a half-buried 14th century cross* and a tomb of 1696* with two shrouded figures.

Return towards the town. The original **Grammar School 19** (1567-1968) stood in the present school grounds, the surviving building (1939) is now the Chancel Primary School. The low parish churchyard wall, over the road is “listed”.

Cross Wolseley Road to Church Street, enter between two imposing houses, **No 9 Wolseley Road* 20** on the left, is “pattern book” Georgian with carefully proportioned storeys and windows and a “double volute” pediment over the door.



Numbers **2 and 4 Church Street* 21** are the unaltered half of a Georgian terrace, each with a false window over the porch to add symmetry to the design of the terrace.

Further along the street are more early 19th century houses, including number 20, the **Rectory* 22** of about 1830. The pleasantly designed **Sneyd Almshouses 23** (1885) are alongside.

Opposite, **The Hollies 24**, was the retirement home of Frederic Bonney (1842-1923), naturalist, anthropologist and photographer of the aborigines of New South Wales, Australia, just one of the eight sons of the Grammar School headmaster who all had distinguished careers.

Return to the town centre along Taylors Lane which once led to Church Field, one of Rugeley’s mediaeval open fields. Beyond the car park to the right are the **Walters’ and Littleton Almshouses 25** (1890 and 1930) in “rustic cottage” style with lattice windows.

Keep to the right in front of the Victory Hall (formerly the Drill Hall). The corner is a convenient viewpoint over Anson Street with its brick and stone trimmed buildings. The **Police Station 26** is of 1907, the Old Post Office (1910) is now joined to the **Foresters Hall 27** (1909) which is now the public section of the Post Office. The Library, to the right (1960),



(much altered within), is the centre of local information, especially for more detail about subjects mentioned in this leaflet.

Over the road is the three times rebuilt **Penny Bank 28**, once attached to the first town hall in Market Square.

Built in 1844 to replace an even earlier bank building, it was removed to its present site in 1879 when the second town hall was built, then rebuilt again in 1995 to add to the flats which replaced that hall, retaining the original stone work.

Remaining on the right of the road, turn into the mediaeval **Bow Street 29** once the site of the tithe barn (burned 1708) and pinfold. The terrace of houses on the left share one entrance front door between two, each opening off the passage inside. Reaching Crossley Stone, look right to the **Vine Inn 30**, a long timber framed building of about 1600, once the malthouse to the Crossley Stone Brewery, with projecting wings added in the late 1890’s. Internal timbers may have been re-used from an even earlier building. Sheep Fair, beyond, was where sales of Cannock Chase sheep were held.

From the gate of Elmore Park **Hagley Mill 31**, much overbuilt as a house on the site of a mill (possibly older than 1600), may be seen. **The Pool 32** was once the moat of Cannock Forest keeper’s lodge, as well as regulating the flow of water to the Town Mill pool (Market Hall site).



Facing the park, in Crossley Stone, is the imposing **Crossley Stone House* 33**, Georgian, with another double volute door pediment.



Leave Elmore Park to cross Elmore Lane by the Market Hall (1980). Behind the hall Bees Lane leads to Lower Brook Street.

To the left the “classical” style former **Lloyds Bank* 34** (1840), includes an arched coach entrance. **Numbers 17-19* 35** opposite, have a Regency front in “Ionic” style, (early 1800’s) added to a 17th century farmhouse. These were shops by 1825.



Brook Square is dominated by the curving façade of **numbers 3-5, 36**, built in 1867, at the end of which the brook re-emerges by **Brook House* 37**, a neat Georgian building. The brook was open until 1825.

Cross the square to **Upper Brook Street, 38** quite narrow, once part of the main thoroughfare with old coaching inns lost in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Later inns, the Crown (1900’s) and the Globe (1888) end the street where **ironwork 39** depicts the town’s former trades.

In **Horsefair** buildings **on the left 40** included an early cyclist’s café and the tallest building was an early police station. Tethering posts once lined this side of the road. On the far side are a pair of **16th century timber framed cottages* 41** and a restored 18th century stone wall*.



The Plaza 42 was built as The Picture House in 1934 and retains its original Art Deco stained glass and much of its interior decoration, although converted into a public house in 1997.

Cross Saint Paul’s Road. Old buildings with small-panelled windows line the corners on the left of **Talbot Street 43**, the nearer was a sub post office.

On the right are the railway viaduct and embankment of the **Cannock Mineral Line 44** built at a cost of £40,000 per mile in 1859 by the engineer Thomas Brassey to bring Cannock’s coal to the Trent Valley Line (1847).

The old town station (1870-1970) was almost above the viaduct. The new one (1998) is further southwards. Between Talbot Street and the embankment is Rugeley’s only remaining 19th century school, built as an infants school in 1892 **45** now the Youth Office and Drama Centre.

Talbot Street is lined to the left with elegant **Victorian houses. Numbers 26-44** form a group of which **number 32* 46**, is outstanding. Arch Street is well named! In Keystone Lane nearby was the clothing factory of George Key, who invented the “Donkey Jacket” for workers on the “donkey engines” draining the workings of the Manchester Ship canal. He was a pioneer of the mail order business.



Retrace your steps a little to Lichfield Street. Facing you across the road is the coloured brick façade of the **Old Wesleyan Methodist Church 47** first erected in 1839. It can be seen how the building was extended to the front in 1870 and to the rear in 1877. It is now the recreation hall for **Saint Paul’s Methodist and United Reform Church 48**, opposite, a fine modern building of 1967. You are now back to the starting point of the walk.

* Indicates listed building.
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