

SPIRES AND STEEPLES

Part 3:

METHERINGHAM TO RUSKINGTON



Moderate Terrain

8 Miles
Linear
4 hours

170519



Access Notes

1. The walk is generally flat and follows a mixture of tarmac paths, farm tracks, quiet lanes, grass tracks and field paths.
2. The paths through crop fields can be very narrow and muddy at times.
3. There are a couple of short stretches of road walking that need care.
4. You will need to negotiate several footbridges, steps and kissing gates plus seven stiles (six of these have large fence gaps alongside which should be suitable for most dogs to pass through, although one – the sixth one, just before Dorrington – has a wooden fence gap suitable for medium dogs but large dogs may need a hand over).
5. Most of the countryside is arable, but you will cross one pasture that is likely to be holding sheep and one pasture that is likely to be holding beef cattle (sometimes with a bull). The cattle ignored us when we walked with our dog, but do take care.
6. OS Map Explorer 272 Lincoln.
7. Please remember the Countryside Code.

An 8 mile (13km) linear walk from Metheringham to Ruskington, forming the third part of the Spires and Steeples Trail in Lincolnshire.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This is a linear walk that uses public transport for the return leg, available Mon-Sat only. On Sundays you will need to use two cars instead.

The route leads you through a variety of villages, both large and small, with plenty of beautiful stone cottages, impressive churches, streams, old stone crosses, artworks and sculptures to enjoy.

ABOUT: The Spires and Steeples Arts and Heritage Trail is a 27 mile (43km) linear long-distance walk from Lincoln to Sleaford. The name refers to the spires of churches being the landmarks to which visitors make their way and to the rural sport of steeple chasing. This guide is published through a collaboration with North Kesteven District Council to inspire more people to enjoy the district's landscapes, ancient woodland, historic buildings and charming villages.

LOGISTICS: As a linear walk, you will need to make transport arrangements for the return leg. The return leg can be completed by a 9-minute train journey Mon-Sat or a 20-minute bus journey via Bus Number 31 Mon-Fri. Trains normally run hourly and buses every two hours. Check details via Traveline on 0871 2002233 or at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/busrailtravel. There is no public transport connection on Sundays, so you would need to use two cars instead. If this stretch sounds too long for you, it is possible to split it into two parts, breaking the trail at Digby and using two cars.

FACILITIES: Refreshments are available at The Royal Oak pub in Scopwick (2.5 miles along), at the Red Lion pub in Digby (5.5 miles along), and at two pubs, a cafe and a chip shop in Ruskington at the end of the walk.

Getting there

The walk begins at St Wilfrid's Church in Metheringham and ends at All Saints Church in the centre of Ruskington. Metheringham and Ruskington rail stations are each about a half mile walk from the respective churches. If you are coming by car, parking is available in Metheringham in Prince's Street by the play area or roadside, preferably off the High Street which is always busy.

Approximate post code **LN4 3DZ**.



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Walk Sections



Start to Blankney Church



The walk begins at St Wilfrid's Church in Metheringham, accessed via Church Walk opposite the White Hart. Standing on the tarmac walkway within Church Walk, with the church behind you, turn left along the walkway with the churchyard on your left and a stone wall on your right. Beyond the main churchyard the tarmac path continues between wire fences, passing another section of cemetery on your right. Where the tarmac ends, you will reach a crossroads marked with a fingerpost.

Go straight ahead on the grass footpath with an open crop field on your left. About a quarter of the way along this field, glance across to your right (beyond the telegraph poles) for a glimpse of the (now sail-less) remains of Metheringham Mill, which dates from 1867. You will come to a kissing gate ahead. Pass through this and continue along the right-hand edge of a grass field. At the far side, a gate leads you into the cricket field at Blankney. Cross the field diagonally, heading for the centre of the stone houses ahead, and exit via a kissing gate to reach the road.

Turn left along the pavement, passing between the impressive stone properties. Notice the elegant tall chimneys and matching green paintwork on the houses, this uniformity being a sure sign of a typical estate village. The estate developed by the early 1400s and came into the hands of the Chaplin family in 1719. The Chaplins were responsible for these estate cottages which were built during the 1830s and 1840s. Sadly, Blankney Hall was ruined by fire in 1945, but the stables and garden buildings remain (which we will pass later).

Cross over the side road and continue ahead, passing the golf course on your right and the old hall gates on your left. When the yew hedge on your left ends, you will see the entrance track for Blankney Church on your left which is worth a quick visit. St Oswald's stands near the hall site and has a lychgate dedicated to the wife of Henry Chaplin, Lady Florence, who died in 1883. Henry and Florence rest together behind the chancel. Look up to see the particularly characterful gargoyles.



Blankney Church to War Graves Cemetery

When you have finished at the church, return to the roadside pavement and turn left to continue along this for 30 paces further. Turn left onto the surfaced estate road, signed as a public footpath, passing Blankney Church across to your left. Follow the road as it swings left (passing the estate's old stable buildings on your left) and then swings right (passing the estate's old walled garden and Hall Gardens cottage on our



left).

Where the surfaced estate road bends left, go straight ahead on the grass and stone track (with a hedge on your right). Stay with the track as it bends right and then left, to pass Brickyard Plantation on your left. Beyond this woodland, follow the track as it dog-legs left then right to continue with a crop field on your left. In the field corner, pass alongside the field gates to reach a junction with a larger farm track. Go ahead to join this and, at the next waymarker, do NOT follow it bending right, instead go straight ahead on the grass field margin (with a hedge on your right).

In the field corner, pass through the hedge gap ahead and go straight on to join the wide grass avenue, a restricted byway known as Trundle Lane. Stay with the avenue ahead and then bending right to become a tarmac access lane, Vicarage Lane.

Part way along on the right you will see the lychgate for the War Graves Cemetery. At the far end is the white Cross of Sacrifice. Personnel from nearby RAF Digby who have been killed in action are buried here. During World War II many New Zealand and Canadian Air Force personnel were stationed at Digby and their graves predominate, and there are also five German aircrew buried here. One of those buried here is John Magee, a Canadian officer who wrote the poem High Flight. This was quoted by US President Ronald Reagan in the context of the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster. Tap the listen button below (App only) to hear an extract of the poem.



War Graves Cemetery to Scopwick Church



Standing with your back to the cemetery lychgate, turn left along the lane (retracing your steps) back to the end of the tarmac. Turn right here to join the tarmac path leading into a residential road. Keep straight ahead through the houses and join the enclosed path at the far side, which emerges to the main village road.



On your right you will see Holy Cross Church and ahead is the village green with its pretty beck. If you are looking for refreshments, The Royal Oak is about 200 metres along the road to your right. You will no doubt want to pause in Scopwick to enjoy the idyllic scene. The name Scopwick derives from the Old English for Sheep Farm and today, the wide main street is lined by ancient stone cottages and flanked by greens with the beck flowing through the middle; with plenty of ducks.

Scopwick Church is unusually dedicated to the Holy Cross rather than to a saint. The most ancient element is the Saxon chevron masonry built into the lower part of the tower.



3 → 4 Scopwick Church to Church Lane



When you are ready to continue, stand on main street with your back to the church. Walk ahead to cross the beck via the clapper-style footbridge and then turn left to follow the lane with the beck running on your left. At the end of the lane you will come to a footbridge and gate. Turn right through the gate and follow the right-hand edge of this crop field (with a hedge on your right). In the field corner, turn left to stay in the same field and, just before the next corner, turn right over a footbridge.

Cross the crop field diagonally left, pass through a hedge gap, cross a grass track and continue in the same direction over a second crop field (heading just to the left of the pylon). Pass through the hedge gap to the left of the pylon and maintain your line across a third crop field (heading for its far corner). As you approach this corner, follow the grass path as it bears left, following a hedge on your left to reach a footbridge hidden in the hedge at the field corner.

Go up the steps to cross the bridge and turn immediately left. Follow the grass and then stone track which leads you past the end of a woodland belt on your right and ahead to reach the road, Church Lane.

4 → 5 Church Lane to Rowston Church

NOTE: The footpaths in this section are not particularly well-walked, so if you are walking at a time of year when there is lots of mud or undergrowth, you could use the lane instead. For the lane option, simply turn right along the lane (taking care of traffic), follow it ahead and then bending left to reach Rowston Church.

To follow the footpaths, cross over the road and walk ahead along the concrete access road for about 40 paces, to reach a waymarker post and fence gap on your right. Turn right here and follow the narrow path through the trees. As you emerge

from the first section of trees, join the rough grass track bearing slightly left then right and follow a narrow path through more trees to reach the edge of a crop field. You will now be able to see the spire of the church ahead, your perfect navigational guide. Walk directly ahead across the centre of this crop field. NOTE: If the first stretch is blocked by sweetcorn, you may need to divert around the right-hand edge of this.

At the far end of the crop field, keep ahead on the enclosed path with a fenced paddock on your right. As you reach a gate on your right, dog-leg left then right to continue between a large barn and a row of conifers. Beyond the barn, keep ahead through the remainder of the farmyard and cross the stile (with large fence gaps for dogs) to reach the road in Rowston.

Taking care of traffic, turn left along the lane and follow it as it swings right to pass St Clements Church on your right. You will notice that St Clements is rather unusual, having an exceptionally slender tower. In fact, it measures only 1.7 metres across on the inside. The spire is also very narrow and the overall effect has been described as looking like a candle with a snuffer.

5 → 6 Rowston Church to Digby Church



Continue ahead along the road, passing the stone village cross (dating to the 1300s) on your left. Follow the road leading you out of the village, passing Maidens Farm on your right and continuing ahead to reach the village sign for Digby. Follow the lane as it swings right, join the left-hand pavement here, ignore the side road (Chestnut Close) and follow the pavement bending left as it leads you into the centre of Digby.

Continue down to the T-junction, with the Red Lion pub on your right and the large village stone cross directly ahead. The cross probably originates from the 1300s but has been restored since. Turn right and continue just to reach the Church of St Thomas the Martyr (that being Thomas a Becket) on your right. A church has occupied this site since Saxon times. The lower section of



the tower is Early English but is topped with a perpendicular, crocketed spire. Just a few metres further along the street on your left, you will see the six-foot high stone pepperpot. The precise function of this is in doubt; in some sources it is referred to as the village lock-up, but in official records as a wellhead. Either way, it dates from the 1600s and is a most unusual sight.



6 → 7

Digby Church to Wind Pump Stile



When you have finished at the church, head back to the stone cross, continue a few paces beyond this and turn right onto the signed public footpath. Turn left across the stone clapper bridge and then immediately right to continue with a house wall on your left and a stream on your right. Cross the stile and walk ahead along the right-hand edge of the orchard and allotments. Cross a second stile to reach the corner of a crop field.

Keep ahead along the right-hand boundary and then continue straight on through a clump of trees to cross a footbridge. Emerging from the trees, continue ahead to cross a second footbridge to reach a second crop field. Keep straight ahead on the path through this field, passing just to the left of a wooden power pole. On the horizon, at about 1 o'clock, you will be able to see Dorrington Church.

Unusually, Dorrington Church is not located in the village centre, but is isolated from the village. Local earthworks suggest that Dorrington is what archaeologists call a migrated village; in other words, over the centuries the village has moved, perhaps into the current less-exposed ground that had become better drained. However, not to be satisfied with this simple explanation, two closely-related legends tell their own stories (more about that later...)

When you draw level with a line of trees on your left, go ahead over the grass track and footbridge to reach the edge of the third crop field. Keep straight ahead over this, heading to a stile about 50 metres to the left of the wind pump. (If this path is not visible in the ploughed field or crops, there is a grass track which leads you around the left-hand field margin instead).

7 → 8

Wind Pump Stile to Dorrington Demons

NOTE: The next two fields are pastures that are grazed by beef cattle, sometimes including a bull. Cross the stile to enter the first pasture and walk across this between 12 and 1 o'clock to reach the next stile at the far side. Cross this into the second pasture, and continue in the same direction to exit via the stile in

the middle of the far boundary (which large dogs may need a hand over).

Cross the footbridge and continue on the enclosed path with garden fences running on your left. You will emerge to the corner of the playing field. Cross the field diagonally left to reach the junction with the main village road. If you look to your right you will see the stump of a medieval stone cross protruding from a garden that once formed part of the village green. Opposite this on the far side of the road, you will see the large sculptural carving called Dorrington Demons by Nick Jones.

This is the perfect prompt for those village legends we touched on earlier. The first tells the tale of the church construction. When villagers attempted to build the church in the village on the site of this sculpture, each day's work was mysteriously undone during the night. Even when the workman guarded the site overnight, their work was destroyed when they went for breakfast. One large stone was mysteriously moved to the site of the present church and, once work began there, it was uninterrupted. The second version is similar but involves Tohti, a Saxon Lord, who tried to build the church from stone taken from a pagan site. Again, the stones were stolen each night and guards were put in place. The guards witnessed a great oak being torn asunder as demons emerged to carry the stones away. The legend of the Dorrington Demons was born and some believe the site haunted.

8 → 9

Dorrington Demons to Sports Field



Turn right along the pavement, passing between the cross stump and the demons sculpture. Immediately after the sculpture, turn left across over the road with care and cross the grass verge to reach a small metal gate with a footpath waymarker. NOTE: This next small pasture is likely to be holding sheep. Go through the gate, walk ahead over the pasture and exit via a gate and footbridge at the far side. Keep ahead on the grass field path, crossing a further footbridge to reach the edge of a crop field.



Walk ahead over this field, aiming directly for the wooden pylon at the far side to reach a second crop field. Pass through the hedge gap beside the pylon and keep ahead over this second and then a third crop field, with the power lines running on your right. You will find a footbridge (a few metres to the left of the power lines), cross this and go ahead over a fourth crop field.

At the far side, pass alongside a stile to reach the corner of a meadow. Walk directly ahead with the hedge boundary on your left. In the corner, cross the stile to reach the corner of a sports field.

9 → 10 Sports Field to End



Keep ahead along the right-hand boundary and pass through the car park to reach a residential road. Cross over and continue ahead on the enclosed footpath. At the next road, cross diagonally right and go ahead down the access lane, with the rear of bungalows on your right. Turn right through the parking area and pick up the paved path at the far side.

Swing left at the path junction and follow the tarmac path between walls. You will emerge to the road junction in the centre of Ruskington, with the Reading Room (dating from 1877) on your left and All Saints Church ahead. This marks the end of this leg of the trail. All Saints is known to stand on the site of a (probably wooden) Saxon church and inside a massive tower arch from its Norman successor still survives. There was a spire until it collapsed in the early 1600s and the present tower was built in 1620. The south aisle east window is by William Morris and depicts the Ascension.

Disclaimer

This walking route was walked and checked at the time of writing. We have taken care to make sure all our walks are safe for walkers of a reasonable level of experience and fitness. However, like all outdoor activities, walking carries a degree of risk and we accept no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal effects, personal accident, injury or public liability whilst following this walk. We cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies that result from changes to the routes that occur over time. Please let us know of any changes to the routes so that we can correct the information.

Walking Safety

For your safety and comfort we recommend that you take the following with you on your walk: bottled water, snacks, a waterproof jacket, waterproof/sturdy boots, a woolly hat and fleece (in winter and cold weather), a fully-charged mobile phone, a whistle, a compass and a map of the area. Check the weather forecast before you leave, carry appropriate clothing and do not set out in fog or mist as these conditions can seriously affect your ability to navigate the route. Take particular care on cliff/mountain paths where steep drops can present a particular hazard. Some routes include sections along roads – take care to avoid any traffic at these points. Around farmland take care with children and dogs, particularly around machinery and livestock. If you are walking on the coast make sure you check the tide times before you set out.



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