



Carol's Rough Photographic Guide to Knutsford

for the *Lymm Photographic Society* July 2019



Armorial Bearing of Knutsford

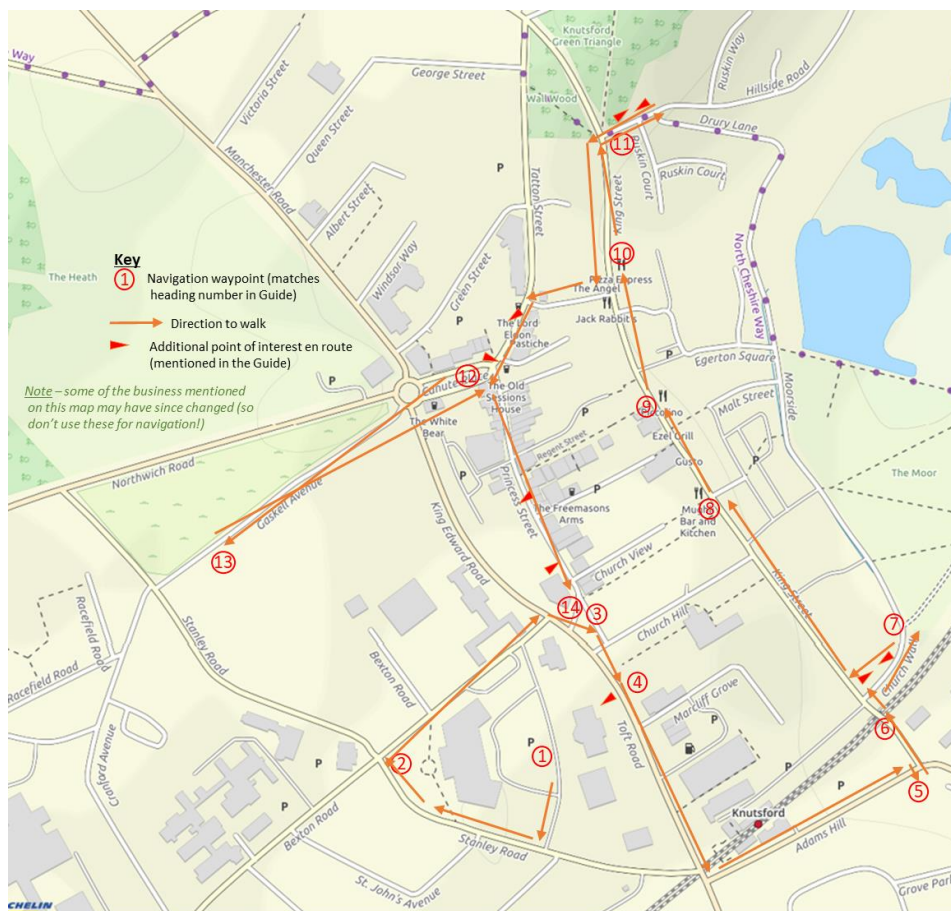
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Introduction

As the club's resident Knutsfordian (and Knutsford Photo. Soc. representative) I'm sorry that I can't be with you to guide you round my home town in person. I am currently retracing Mr Beesley's steps by cruising up to Iceland. However I hope you enjoyed my virtual guided tour which points out some of the more notable buildings and history of Knutsford as I recall it.

So, welcome to Knutsford, or should I say C(K?)nut's Ford or perhaps Cranford, or maybe, correctly Cunetesford? More of this later.

Our Map for the Evening






1. Booths car park (Knutsford Gaol)

Your meeting place. Don't be fooled by appearances. Booths supermarket is a relatively new institution in the town. You are actually standing on one side of site of the former Knutsford Gaol (or House of Correction). The prison housed 800 inmates after executions ceased in Chester in 1868 these moved to Knutsford and 8 prisoners were sentenced to death here (sorry about the cheery start to our tour – best to get the worst bits over and done with 😊). The Chartists complained about the food here and the treatment on inmates (there was a treadmill). During WWI it became a military prison and conscientious objectors were housed here (but they were not welcomed by the town). After WWI the prison became a school for Toc H to train military personnel who wanted to be ordained. Demolished 1934.



Post the demolition of the prison, as a girl I well remember catching the school bus to Wilmslow from the then much bigger bus station and playing tennis on the hardcourts that now sit under booths building.

	Leave Booths car park the way you came in and turn right onto Stanley Road. Walk up Stanley Road until you reach the junction with Bexton Road.
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2. Stanley Road/Bexton Road Junction

On the left hand side of the road notice the very fine row of terraced houses. These accommodated some of the prison staff.

Also note on the corner the redbrick former Bucklow Urban District Council office building. Bucklow Rural District Council is long gone and the name was based on the Bucklow Hundred of which Knutsford was part and which had been in existence since at least 1260.



Until fairly recently, behind this building was the former Cranford Lodge Hospital, which was quite a big hospital. I remember visiting my grandmother on a ward there and also going there when my younger sister was weighed as a baby. The nurses home building remains and there is a small community clinic there now. This was originally the workhouse.

Whilst you are here cast your eyes down the rest of Stanley Road that goes beyond the crossroads. The Trumpet Major who sounded the charge at the battle of Balaclava used to live down Stanley Road on the left.



Now turn right and go down Bexton Road until you reach the police station and pedestrian crossing, noting further prison related houses on the left. Using the crossing, Cross the main road to Simon Boyd and then turn right to stand outside the lost and found the pub.

3. The Old Town Hall (Lost & Found pub)

This fine Gothic building has been recently restored as part of turning it into a pub. It is thankfully listed. The locals are very unhappy with the name of the pub as it does not convey any of the history associated with the building!

Designed by architect Alfred Waterhouse (who designed Manchester Town Hall and the Natural History Museum, Kensington), this building was paid for by Lord Egerton of Tatton Park as a market hall – as lords of the manor the Egertons held the market rights. If you look at the building carefully you will see the Egerton coat of arms in relief in large squares and also lots of small “E” decorating the building below the windows.

The history of Knutsford has been inextricably linked with the Egertons over many centuries. If you look at the town coat of arms on the cover page you will also see the Egerton red lion sitting above the shield. The buildings last use under the Egertons was as the Egerton boys club (note, no girls, the last Lord Egerton (Maurice d.1958) didn't like girls!). The club has since relocated onto Mereheath Lane (the back road to Mere) and girls are now most welcome, but I think Maurice would be turning in his grave if they knew).

Here's an Edwardian (probably) photo of the Town Hall. This is how I remember it still looking in the 1960s/70s. Although called Town Hall when it was built there wasn't a town council and it was used as assembly rooms.

As a child I remember Knutsford and especially the area outside the Old Town Hall being used in the making of the film Patton (his HQ was in Peover). Filmed in 1970, George C Scott played the part of General Patton.

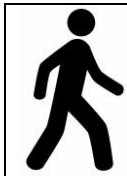


In the film, he stood outside the Town Hall addressing the crowd, as the real Patton had in 1944 when he made his famous speech.



When making the film they covered all of the glass in the building (and those nearby) with white crossed tape to simulate the anti-shatter tapings used on windows during the war. Many of our neighbours were extras in the film and I remember watching some of the filming here (why wasn't I at school?).

Incidentally, Legh Road in Knutsford provided a film set for the film Empire of the Sun (an unlikely double for Shanghai and it was odd seeing rickshaws going up and down the road!).



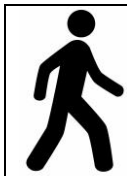
Continue to walk down the main road, passing the very Georgian St John's Parish Church on the left. Do come back to this spot in the spring as the graveyard looks lovely when all the crocuses are out (see my photo right). Proceed to the pedestrian crossing.



4. The Sessions House

Stop to admire the very grandeurs Sessions House (very recently reinvented into a hotel, fairly anonymously due to its listing status). Quarter sessions were held in Knutsford from 1757 and in this building from the 1820. A competition was run to decide the winning design. It was a Crown Court and magistrates court when I was growing up – as a teenager I recall going and watching some cases (no doubt inspired by Crown Court on the telly). The Sessions House was conveniently located next to the prison (for those that were to be taken down) and has the police station again conveniently adjoining on the right. It doubled up an air raid shelter during WWII. Look how clean the stone looks. When I was growing up the stone was jet black through years of smoke and pollution (as was Tatton Hall and various other stone buildings in the town).

Famously this is where the trial of Alan Turin for gross indecency was held.



Continue to walk towards the traffic lights. Note the fine building on the right hand side which now houses the Knutsford Guardian and the town council. This was built as the home for the governor of the prison in 1844 when the governors house within the walls needed to be replaced with a chapel. You'll also pass the Curzon Cinema.

The cinema used to be the old Civic Hall where, as children, we used to watch Children's Film Foundation Films on a Saturday afternoon and eat Poppet toffees brought with our pocket money, whilst being kept in order by the very strict manager Mr Dome. I have also performed as a reindeer in a tutu on the former stage here (I'm giving away all my secrets now).



Cross over Adams hill to the far side using the pedestrian crossing. Turn left and walk down Adams hill, noting the once splendid Victorian railway station on the left. Above You on the bank on your right hand side is a housing estate called Grove Park and this is where I grew up :). Towards the bottom of the hill you will walk passed the door of the Unitarian Hall. This is where the Knutsford Photographic Society meets. Progress to the bottom of the hill and then sat back on the right you will find the Unitarian Chapel.



5. The Unitarian (Brook Street) Chapel (Grade 1 listed)


This chapel is of historic significance and is very much a mirror of a similar chapel in Dean Row village on the outskirts of Wilmslow. Take some time to explore the outside of the building and then look for one very special grave. Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell, the Victorian authoress, is buried in the churchyard.



Mrs Gaskell wrote the framed novel Cranford very much based on Knutsford, as well as many other notable novels such as north and south, wives and daughters et cetera. As we will see later Mrs Gaskell grew up in Knutsford. Those of us who know the town well, when reading Cranford, can place many of the locations she describes in the book. She is buried here with her husband; she taught at the Sunday School. Look again at the Town Coat of Arms and you will see that the Egerton's red lion is reading a book. Perhaps it's Cranford? The book is in recognition of Mrs Gaskell and other literary associations.



Once you have finished exploring, note the library opposite then turn into Bottom Street and walk under the railway bridge. You are now in what we locals call "Bottom Street" (aka King Street)

 the first librarian (1904) earned £20 a year.

6. The Railway Bridge (just a way point)

This is not of great interest in itself but it gives me the opportunity to tell you that the railway came to Knutsford in 1862 (2 years after piped water was introduced to the town and 10 years before the water and gas company combined – that's probably tonight's most useless piece of information!).

Also, the high brick Victorian retaining wall that you have just walked past on the left hand side suffered a significant collapse just a few years ago, so be careful! Just passed the bridge on the left hand side is the opening to what used to be the coal yard which was used to supply coal to passing steam trains as well as locals. I just about remember coal there. It's now mostly car parking.



We are going to take a very brief diversion and then retrace our steps. Opposite the entrance to the coal yard is a narrow lane called Church Walk. Walk down that lane to the point where it curves round to the left and you should see, running opposite The Moor, a very narrow stream.

7. The River Lily

You have now reached the "River" Lily.



It is known locally as the River Lily and it was this river that was supposedly forded by King Canute (Knútr in Old Norse) whilst King of England (between 1016–1035).



Look yet again at the town's coat of arms and you will see a crown sitting over some water. This signifies this historic (or mythological) event. A few years ago a rather large tree carving of King Canute appeared on the outskirts of the town.

Knutsford has lots of interesting architecture and take a moment to look at the buildings past the corner by the river.



Now retracing your steps back up Church Walk to the Bottom Street. Continue to walk down the bottom street noting in particular the half-timbered Tudor buildings on the left as you approach the bottom of the church. In passing take a look at the Botanist restaurant on the right also at this point. This was the site of the Grammar School and previously from the 14th century a Chapel of Ease

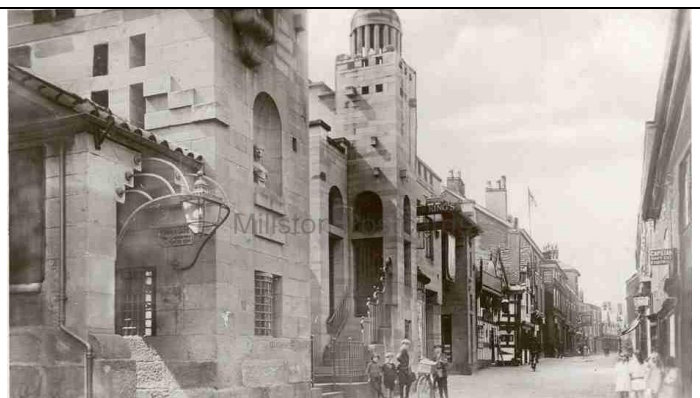
Continue to walk down the bottom straight until you reach the Gaskell Memorial tower on the left – keep looking up so that you know you've reached the tower!

8. Gaskell Memorial Tower

..... and the shortly to-be-closed La Belle Époque restaurant (opened in 1973, closing following a lease and financial dispute with the Council and which is considered part of Knutsford's fabric). I remember my father taking me to its previous reincarnation (the King's Coffee House) for lunch in the late 1960s.

There is plenty of photographic interest in this Grade II* listed building. The building was designed by the Italianate-influenced Richard Harding Watt and was opened in 1907. Watt designed many eclectic buildings across Knutsford, although he was not a qualified architect. The building is owned by the Town Council and the clue to its purpose is in its name!

Notice the various carvings on the pillars and the side of the building. Also take in the general the architecture and the columns in the opening on the right hand side.



Whilst you are here go to the left-hand side of the building and you will see an alley going up to "Top Street". As you walk along the bottom street observe the many alleys. These stretch back to at least



Knutsford's medieval (and possibly Viking) past as plot demarcations. Also observe many of the buildings on the right hand side of Bottom Street (backing onto the Moor). Most of these have been extended forward in days gone by but if you go in inside most of them they have their original timber framed construction either visible or now covered up. By the time you complete your journey this evening, you will have walked passed many listed buildings, some from the 16th century or earlier.



Continue along the bottom street, noting the various architectural styles, until you get to a big coaching arch on the left hand side of the road.

9. The Royal George

The Royal George was Knutsford's principal coaching inn (as you can tell by the arch) for the well-to-do. Built in the 14th century, it was originally called the White Swan but was renamed The George and Dragon in 1727 (some say to commemorate the accession of George II but probably not so). It gained the "Royal" when the young Princess Victoria, visited five years before she became queen. Later we will hear about Highwayman Higgins. The Royal George is where he spent much time assessing coaches and wealthy individuals suitable for attack.



By the time I was a teenager that had become a Bernie Inn! It is obviously listed and it has been carefully redeveloped into shops and restaurants. Take a look up the cobbled entrance which leads to the Top Street. The stables ran all the way up the RH side of the George year.



Before we continue, consider how narrow the pavement have been on your journey so far. This is because Spinster Lady Jane Stanley, daughter of the 11th Earl of Derby, who lived in the town did not like couples walking together along the streets of Knutsford so the pavements she funded in the late 17th century (at a cost of £400 – a huge sum of money then) were made only wide enough to accommodate a lady and her dress. Lady Jane suggested as her own epitaph: "A maid I lived and a maid I died; I never was asked and never denied.". I recall various suggestions to improve pedestrian access over the years, but as you can see, Lady Jane still reigns supreme.



Continue along the bottom street for a couple of hundred yards until you get to the Angel Hotel on the corner with Minshull Street. Note the very fine building opposite the bottom of Mitchell Street (no. 113). This now houses antiques (and is quite interesting to mooch around) but was for years the home of the Knutsford Guardian.

Continue further ahead until you reach a large arch on the left.



10. Marble Arch

This is known locally as Marble Arch. It is one of the most iconic and photographed parts of Knutsford. It was another coaching inn and later the Angel before it moved across the road. The cottages are in the stable year.



Continue a little way further down Bottom Street and you will find the building which for many years was the town's post office (you'll see the phone boxes). Look up to see the sundial.

Continue past the former Barclays Bank and brackets noting the old white cottages on the left hand side. I used to deliver meals on wheels to the old folk here when I was doing voluntary work as a student. At that time they weren't the most desirable of dwellings I recall (dark and dingy inside).

Opposite the cottages is Drury Lane. Turn down Drury Lane.

11. The Ruskin Rooms and Old Laundry

You should now have come to the Ruskin rooms sitting back a little bit on the right hand side. Here we meet more of Watt's Italianate fantasies. It was built in 1902 partly to provide a social club for laundry workers. General Patton (yes him again) used the Ruskin Rooms for a similar purpose for US troops during WWII.



Wander down Drury Lane further and you'll see a row of buildings on the right hand side. These include the old laundry (owned by the Knutsford and District Steam Laundry Co.), built on the site of the old tannery.



If time permits, continue down to the very bottom of Drury Lane and you'll meet the River Lily again before turning and going back up Drury Lane. Otherwise, turn now and walk back up to Bottom Street.

We are going to retrace our steps back to the Angel now, but were are you to continue to the end or the bottom street you would come to the Knutsford Entrance and Gatehouse of Tatton Park.



Walk back to the Angel and then turn right up the hill, climbing Minshull Street. As you turn left you will walk briefly down Tatton Street into the square called Canute Place. Note the 300 year old pub, the Lord Eldon on the right hand side.... and I hope you don't mind ghosts!

i The Lord Eldon is haunted by Annie Sarah Pollitt, Knutsford's first May Queen (her father the landlord in the late 19th century). People report seeing an apparition that wears clothing dating from the 1800's, flickering lights, moving objects and an unidentified cold breeze. Staff (including the landlady in 1999) have reported sightings of the white shade in the lower rooms and a white shadowed figure. I use to frequent the Eldon after Knutsford Photo. Soc. meetings in the mid-late 1980s but Annie left us alone.

12. Canute Place (or "The Square" or the New Market Place)

You have now reached the edge of the Square, Knutsford's twice yearly cattle market in times gone by. Try to ignore the awful modern development on the right – fine Victorian buildings and thatched cottages once stood here.

Note the pub (which was for years and years called the Red Cow and stood finely in its original brick but has recently painted and renamed to the Old Sessions House, which does reflect its past). Between the pub and the newsagents to its left, take a look at the commemorative pebble roundel in the road. It's that king again!

Whilst you are in the square walk up to the big roundabout at the opposite end of the square and you'll see north of the deer that have escaped from Tatton Park! The large building on the roundabout now used by OKA was from 1912 until recently the offices of the Conservative Party. This was built by the Egertons (yes them again!) as a working mens' conservative club. Ironically, although this was the base for the former Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne (MP for Tatton at the time), the local HQ was given up after financial problems.

BTW this is where I had ballet and tap lessons as a child! Behind what I'll always know as the Conservative Club is Knutsford Heath, where the traditional Royal May Day and fair are held each year and also is rumoured to contain escape tunnels, but more of that later.



You may also recall the well publicised “Battle of Knutsford Heath” between BBC war correspondent Martin Bell, who stood as an Independent in 1997 and the “disgraced” former Conservative Party MP, Neil Hamilton (and the associated media scrum).

Much to everyone’s discussed the BBC News referred to Knutsford Heath as “Knutsford Common” – wrong! (although technically it is common land).



Cross the main road using the zebra crossing by the White Bear. Proceed up Gaskell Avenue, next to the Little Heath. There are two notable buildings in Gaskell Avenue.

13. Novels and skulduggery

Towards the end of Gaskell Avenue is a rather large and genteel house at number 17 called Heath White House. This is where Mrs Gaskell, the authoress, lived as a child with her aunt. By all accounts she had a happy childhood here and had various other relatives in the town. After growing up she went on to be an acclaimed novelist and married – her house in Manchester (her husband was the minister of Manchester’s Unitarian Cross Street Chapel) is well worth a visit, but you have to find on-road parking (which I managed to do quite easily when I went there). Here’s a sneak preview of her Manchester house from my visit’s photos :



However, of far more interest to us as children, was the house a few doors further down (number 19) which was the home of the notorious Highwayman (Edward) Higgins, who lived a double life in the 1750s and 60s wining and dining by day and burgling the local gentry by night. He committed a number of “audacious” burglaries until his luck ran out in 1764. He was hanged in 1767. His wife had apparently been blissfully aware of Edward’s illegal activities.

The rumour has always been that Higgins had escape tunnels built from under his house leading over to the Heath, which you can see in the distance. The sand dunes we used to playing on the Heath as children



were always said to be the collapsed tunnels. However there is apparently no truth in these rumours sadly.



Now retrace your steps back down Gaskell Avenue, across the pedestrian crossing, past the White Bear pub back to the Old Sessions House pub and turn right into Top Street. This is the relatively new Princess Street, built originally for housing. The shops here are fairly unremarkable although you might detect where Woollies used to be (now the Waitrose), opposite the top of the Royal George cobbles.

Just past the Waitrose on the right hand side of the road you will get to W.H.Smiths i.e. 22 to 24 Princess Street, where we will pause.

I mentioned that we Knutsfordians have a pretty good idea where much of Cranford a set. There's not a big point of photographic interest point here but if you read the blue plaque you'll see that this is where Miss Matty's teashop in the novel is thought to have been located.



Continue along the top Street until you get to the Methodist church on the left hand side.

Just a brief pause as we note the steps on which, on the 20th March 1738, the Rev. John Wesley preached for the first time in the town from the steps of a house then near the (Royal) George Hotel. The steps were later moved to this location. Apparently he visited Knutsford a second time, over 30 years later. The church used to have a Spire! (see vintage photo).

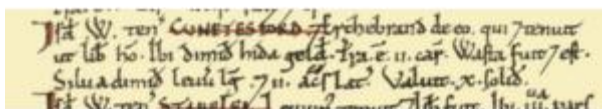


Also look at the toy shop immediately to the left of the church. After WWII Hal Whittaker was one of the founding members of the Knutsford PS and the club has a trophy named in his honour. The club has records, back in the day, of a speakers being art paid in cigarettes – changing times!



Continue to the end of Top Street and your find yourself once again outside the Lost and Found, so we've come full circle.

Congratulations you have completed my rough guide tour of Knutsford.... Except I mentioned but didn't explain "Cunetesford". It is of course Domesday



"Cunetesford: William FitzNigel. Egbrand holds from him. ½ hide pays tax. Land for 2 ploughs. It was and is waste. Woodland ½ league long and 2 acres wide. Value was 10s."



14. The Beginning of the End

There is so much more I could have shown you but I'm sure you now feel it's time to have a pint.

The Lost and Found is very expensive (although it's an interesting building to have a drink and has lofty ceilings). I'd suggest you maybe try the Lord Eldon (a second chance to try to see Annie) or the White Bear in the square

..... or try something completely different and go to the Sessions House across the road opposite the Parish Church and have a drink in the hotel bar, which is open to non-residents, called Barristers. It will give you chance to go inside the courts, see the interesting architecture and have a drink in the dock dark (or on the bench if you prefer). Have one for me while you're there and you might even find some photo-opportunities inside (on the right is one that I found)!



Knutsford's skyline as seen from my yoga class!

Disclaimer: all recollections and opinions are those solely of the author and the facts represent my best recollections based on 50-something years association with the town and having grown up there as a child with a deep interest in history. I have double checked a few of my hazier memories, dates and added photos which are purely for information just for this evening's use.