

Nº1 RESCUE TEAM

Walking & Cycling Guide

Bestwood, Top Valley & Rise Park

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KING COAL



KING COAL

“Two miners having finished work for the day mounted bicycles and, lurching forward round the angle of the gatepost, vanished into a little lane leading into the woodlands. I decided to follow them and was glad I did, for the scenery of the district is indeed enchanting”
Alex Wells, Nottingham Journal, 1934

The two most distinctive aspects of Bestwood are its royal associations and urban development from a colliery company village. But it also plays a part in the incredible northern growth of the city – onto an area which had been mostly farmers’ fields – throughout the twentieth century. Bestwood is so big that it becomes a difficult area to define, with a village, two council estates and a pumping station sharing the same name and some distance apart. The old maps reveal that Bestwood has always been huge, following



Cycling in Bestwood, c. 1880*



Date stone plaques, Bestwood village

the same contours since it was defined as a royal hunting park in the Middle Ages, stretching from Goosedale Ponds in the north, to Arnold Road in the south, and east to west between Bestwood Lane/ Hucknall Rd and Mansfield Rd.

Bestwood takes a starring role in various episodes of royal history, from the Normans to the Stuarts. The Dukes of St Albans descended from the latter family which, in the seventeenth century, was granted Bestwood as its ancestral home. The 10th Duke took a particular interest in the site, building the fabulous Bestwood Lodge in the 1860s, which became frequented by the rich and powerful of late Victorian England. The following decade a very different Bestwood emerged: an industrial village planned around a coal mine and ironworks, with competing railway lines tripping over themselves to get here. By the end of Victoria's reign the city was edging ever nearer with the building of Bestwood Pumping Station and the City Hospital. Yet it wasn't until the 1930s that the first council housing emerged. The subsequent housing estates reveal the decade by decade changes in everyday life throughout that long century.



Emmanuel Church*



The view at Bestwood Country Park today



1. Royalty & Aristocracy



Bestwood Lodge*

After the Norman conquest, Bestwood (forming part of Sherwood Forest), became subject to Forest Law – an area vigorously protected by royal officials for both deer and timber. Grievances over access were bitter and likely it was these laws which led to the folk tales of Robin Hood. Despite this, it was hardly a landscape for developing densely populated communities with diverse economies; this was a hilly deserted landscape of dry sandy soils, grass, woodland and deer. Hunting, for Medieval kings, was not a necessity but a leisure pursuit, a game where a feudal society centred on military service and privilege could be played out. And it was some of the most vigorous of those kings who exercised that right here: Henry I, Henry III, Edward III (who built the first lodge), Edward IV and Richard III – who famously stayed the night

here only 3 days before the Battle of Bosworth. In a sense the Woodside Riding School has revived this equestrian tradition at Bestwood (1).

Bestwood's next and greatest feature within royal history did not emerge until the late seventeenth century, when the playboy king, Charles II, granted the lodge and grounds to his beloved mistress Nell Gwyn. "Poor Nelly" was the mother of his illegitimate son and Charles was concerned enough to endow him with a stable income and social position, entitling him '1st Duke of St Albans'. It was the 10th Duke, William Beauclerk, who had the most remarkable impact upon the estate, demolishing the medieval lodge and building an incredible mansion (2), gatehouse (3) and stables (4) throughout the 1860s. Designed in the gothic style by notable architect SS Teulon, the complex is stylistically the same as St Pancras Station (built the same decade). Bestwood was therefore a very attractive location for visiting dignitaries, such as Charles Dickens and Benjamin Disraeli. The Duke's patrician approach can also be seen at the 1869 Emmanuel Church (5), built on the eastern fringes of Bestwood when it was still a small farming community.

2. A Colliery Company Village



Bestwood village cottages*

The 10th Duke's next ambitious scheme involved a partnership with mining entrepreneur John Lancaster. This was the planning of an entire community centred on a coal mine and ironworks company. Bestwood quickly became one of the best provided colliery villages in the county, with a school, cottages (6), offices (7) and the pit engine winding house (8) built during the 1870s alone. The Bestwood Institute pub (9), St Mark's church (10) and cemetery (11) were completed the following decades, but it is perhaps the little things which are most evocative of the Company's paternalism. Notice the initials and date stone plaques on the cottages, walled gardens and the green square – originally laid out for allotments. Nevertheless the Duke liked to keep work and home life separate: the hedgerows along Colliers Way



The restored winding engine house

(12) were grown tall to keep the blackened miners from sight.

By 1901 Bestwood was so popular that there were three different railway company lines scrambling over themselves to feed on the iron and coal produced here. Most of this infrastructure was demolished following the Beeching axe of the 1960s but the cycle routes beside Hucknall Rd (13) and Moor Road (14) follow the old embankments. At its peak the Bestwood Coal & Iron Company employed around 2000 people, but by 1967 the coal mine was considered uneconomical and closed. In the decades that followed there began a successful transformation of the 'moonscape' – the colliery slag heap – into a Country Park and the careful restoration of the engine winding house. The panoramic view from the top of the Country Park (15) is one of the best in the county

3. Farmers' Fields & Bendigo's Ring



Southglade Park today

Bestwood's difficult soils were a magnet for have-a-go farmers from 1775 until they were covered in housing during the twentieth century. The estates and roads still recall the names of the various farms that stood here, such as Top Valley, Southglade, Bulwell Rise Farm, and Cherry Orchard Mount. Remarkably the hedgerows of Southglade Park (16) beautifully preserves the field patterns of the old farm. The first pioneers failed because the soils were so light and pebbly but by the mid nineteenth century farmers such as George Lamin were highly regarded for developing new methods in manure and crop rotation.



Bendigo in 1839*

Just as these fields were carefully being tended to, a man with an athletic appearance would have been walking here, searching for a suitable hill to conduct a boxing match. According to historical records it appears that Sunrise Hill (17) was the site of Bendigo's Ring, rather than is popularly believed to be at nearby Glade Hill (18). Either way, it was one of these hills in Bestwood where twice champion bare-knuckle prize-fighter William Abednego Thompson, practiced and fought during the nineteenth century. He died in 1880 but lived an eventful life (politics, religion, drink) and was nationally famous.

4. Growth of the City



Bestwood Pumping Station*

By the end of the nineteenth century Nottingham was growing ever closer. Neighbouring Bulwell was incorporated in 1877 – notice the boundary markers (19) – but the first real instance of the city starting to absorb Bestwood was the building of a fantastic pumping station by the Corporation in 1874 (20). Taking advantage of the natural sandstone wells deep within Bestwood, the famous water engineer Thomas Hawksley saw this as an important step in supplying water to a growing industrial population. Yet this was not without some stipulation from the design conscious 10th Duke, who decided that the chimney should look like a church steeple!



Postwar council housing at Bestwood Park

The City acquired Bestwood fields in the 1930s and spacious ‘garden city’ style houses were erected at Bestwood Estate (21). To the east, Bestwood Park Estate – with its incredible views – (22) was built 1959-1966 and though of similar style and materials to its predecessor you can spot subtle differences such as the brickwork and modernist porches. By the 60s and 70s car ownership had grown enormously and local authorities throughout the country struggled to accommodate the growth in traffic and concern for safety. One approach – Radburn planning – involved the separation of vehicles from pedestrians and this can be seen in the ring roads, cul-de-sacs, green space, precincts and multiple subways of Top Valley (23).

Walking & Cycling Map

Bestwood, Top Valley & Rise Park

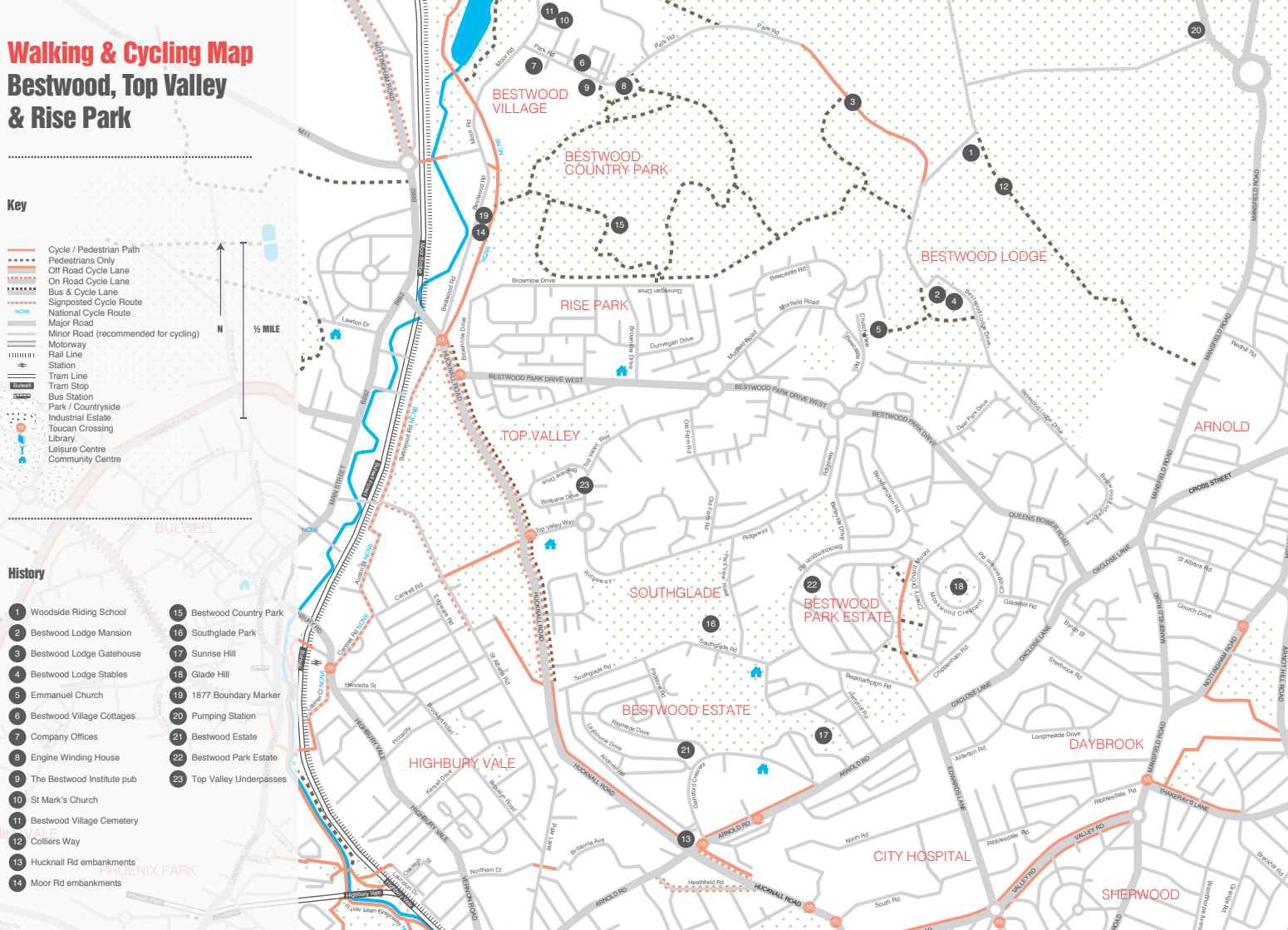
Key

- Cycle / Pedestrian Path
- Pedestrians Only
- Off Road Cycle Lane
- On Road Cycle Lane
- Bus & Cycle Lane
- Signposted Cycle Route
- National Cycle Route
- Major Road
- Minor Road (recommended for cycling)
- Motorway
- Rail Line
- Station
- Tram Line
- Tram Stop
- Bus Station
- Park / Countryside
- Industrial Estate
- Toucan Crossing
- Library
- Leisure Centre
- Community Centre



History

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Woodside Riding School | 15 Bestwood Country Park |
| 2 Bestwood Lodge Mansion | 16 Southglade Park |
| 3 Bestwood Lodge Gatehouse | 17 Sunrise Hill |
| 4 Bestwood Lodge Stables | 18 Glade Hill |
| 5 Emmanuel Church | 19 1877 Boundary Marker |
| 6 Bestwood Village Cottages | 20 Pumping Station |
| 7 Company Offices | 21 Bestwood Estate |
| 8 Engine Winding House | 22 Bestwood Park Estate |
| 9 The Bestwood Institute pub | 23 Top Valley Underpasses |
| 10 St Mark's Church | |
| 11 Bestwood Village Cemetery | |
| 12 Colliers Way | |
| 13 Hucknall Rd embankments | |
| 14 Moor Rd embankments | |



BESTWOOD COLLIERY

Bestwood, Top Valley & Rise Park

Welcome to the free walking and cycling guide for the Bestwood, Top Valley and Rise Park suburbs. We're delighted to bring you this unique insight into the history of this part of Nottingham. If you'd like to find out more about walking or cycling, organised rides and walks or how to plan your journey, then visit www.travelright.org.uk or call 0115 883 3732.

You can download this map by visiting www.travelright.org.uk/bestwood



Nottingham
City Council

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Bestwood Colliery, Rescue Team, 1911*

*images courtesy www.picturethepast.co.uk

