

Newark

medieval timber
frame buildings trail

This is the sixth leaflet in a series of seven and the full range may be viewed on our website www.newarkcivictrust.org.uk/

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Newark Medieval Timber Frame Buildings Trail

Distance: 750m

Time: 1 hour. Easy trail

Start: at the bronze model of Newark
in the Castle Grounds

Finish: at the Castle Grounds

Wheelchair & pushchair friendly

*This short walk around
the town centre passes
by many of the town's
most interesting timber
framed buildings*

These are tell-tale signs of a structure built of natural materials and, once you get your eye in, you will soon spot more on the edge of the town centre and beyond. Oak becomes harder as it seasons, so it has to be worked soon after felling.

Like most of the buildings on this tour, it has windows that date from much later than its construction date of about 1650.

Cross Castle Gate at the zebra crossing and make your way to the far end of Boar Lane and 17-21 Boar Lane (2) another white painted building.



Newark Castle



At the beginning of the medieval period, slow-growing oak timber was readily available in the sizes and shapes necessary to construct quite large buildings. As time went on, the competing demand for warship-building, as well as diminishing timber stocks, meant that the common house brick became the standard structural element used for houses, and in recent times timber came to be regarded as rather inferior. Although medieval timber frame buildings are now quite rare, the fact that many have survived intact over the centuries is testament to both their durability and the craftsmanship of their builders. Newark has a good number of these buildings, and this trail takes you past many (but not all) of them.

Several are now occupied by businesses which offer refreshments and, for the price of a cup of coffee, one can relax inside and admire the structure as well as colourful medieval decorations.

Although the archetypal 'black and white' exterior finish can be a clue to the existence of a timber frame, this is not infallible. As you progress around this route, look at the featured buildings and you will see that their roofs are all steeply pitched - indicating that they were originally thatched, that the ridgelines are rarely straight, and that the walls are rarely square. Note also how many of them have upper storeys that are 'jettied' out beyond the lower ones - to provide extra floor space, but also to protect the ground floor from rainwater damage.

This means that dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) of the timbers can provide a very precise date for a building's construction. For further information on building styles and techniques, see Jason Mordan's 'Timber-Frame Buildings of Nottinghamshire' (ISBN 0 902751 48 4) - Nottinghamshire County Council, 2004.

Start the route at the bronze model of Newark in the Castle Grounds. Leave the Castle Grounds via the iron gates, turn right, then pause to look across at 17 Castle Gate, the white-painted former **Royal Oak pub (1)**. The walls of this modest building have been bricked up so that the structural timbers are hidden from view, but it was sufficiently well thought of to survive the extensive redevelopment of Castle Gate during the 18th century.

It is easy to see that the premises were originally three cottages. They date from 1588, and the ground floors were converted into shops in the early 19th century. A further row of cottages (now the coffee shop) stood beyond them across a yard, with outbuildings in between.

Turn left along Middle Gate and, at the junction with Kirk Gate, turn left to look at **18 Kirk Gate (3)**. The coloured render hides a 'close-studded' structure (indicating that it was built for a wealthy owner). If the shop is open, you can combine a browse among the antiques with a good look at the internal dividing partitions, most of which, unusually, are still in place.

Retrace your route to the junction with **Middle Gate** to look at the impressive black-and-white building on the corner, **22-24 Kirk Gate (4)**, with its huge diagonal braces readily visible. Note that the upper storey has jetties on two sides – this means that the floor joists have to run in both directions and these are supported by a diagonal timber (visible above and inside the entrance door) known as a 'dragon-beam'. The building dates from 1337 – a period when the 'hall' was the focus of daily life and was commonly located on the ground floor (see *The Prince Rupert* below); however, this building is a rare example of an 'upper hall' house, with the living quarters at first floor level.

Continue along **Kirk Gate** beyond **The Old Post Office** and look across at a pair of black-and-white buildings **37-39 Kirk Gate (5)**. They provide a practical illustration of the evolution in construction methods as timber became scarcer and more expensive, with the (later) left hand house's 'box-framing' showing much less timber than the (earlier) right hand one's 'close studding'. In a room upstairs an ancient wall painting is exposed to view.

Some 20 yards further on, turn right through the second archway to reach **Queen's Head Court** and find the **Old Bakery Tea Rooms (6)**. Formerly a bake house, when the surrounding area was redeveloped in 1961 this was the only one (of three) shops that was restored and retained.

Turn towards the **Market Place** and **The Queen's Head (7)**. Also extensively restored in the 1960s, it was originally a coaching inn. Many of the original timbers are visible inside, dating from long before the reign of Good Queen Bess for whom it was named.

Make your way diagonally across the **Market Place** (negotiating the stalls if a market is in progress) to reach the complex of buildings fronted by the former **Old White Hart (8)**. This was once **The Old White Hart Inn** – its front range identified by Niklaus Pevsner in 1979 as "one of the paramount examples of late 15th century timber-framed architecture in England". Subsequent dendrochronology confirmed this date, but also established that the rear range is much earlier, dating from 1313. The entire building was saved from collapse by a masterly restoration in the 1970s, which included establishing the original colouring of the elaborate frontage, including traceried windows. The small plaster figures depict Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Michael and Saint Barbara, repeated over and over.

The walls of the downstairs room display medieval wall painting (vines with grapes) referring to the room's original function.

Pass through the **carriageway** to see the stair turret, giving access to the upper galleries of the front range, the 1320 hall to its side, and the extensive rear range, which once provided for the needs of travelers and carters in the pre-stagecoach period.

Return to the **Market Place**, turn left and go past the former **Saracen's Head** and **Clinton Arms coaching inns** to reach **Stodman Street** and the **Governor's House (9)**. The front range of the complex was constructed in about 1475 for a wealthy merchant, who showed off by using a great deal of timber in the 'close studded' style, by building to a great height on three jettied storeys (each jetty coved), and by having 'billeting' on the 'bressumers' (decorative carving on the horizontal timbers). The interior is glorious, retaining much of its 16th century painted decoration. The entire first floor was the living room (known as a 'solar') with vertical sliding shutters to the original windows. About 1500 the rear wing – visible via the passageway to the left – was added, including a grand full height hall. The impressive building was commandeered by the town's four military governors during the Civil War (1642-46). King Charles I stayed here during his many visits. A plaque on the front refers to the king's quarrel with his nephew Prince Rupert. Rupert had been dismissed from his military post following the surrender of Bristol in September 1645, but came to clear his name. He was cleared of any wrong doing, but his supporter, Sir Richard Willys, was about to be dismissed as Governor of the town, prompting the quarrel during which swords were supposedly drawn.

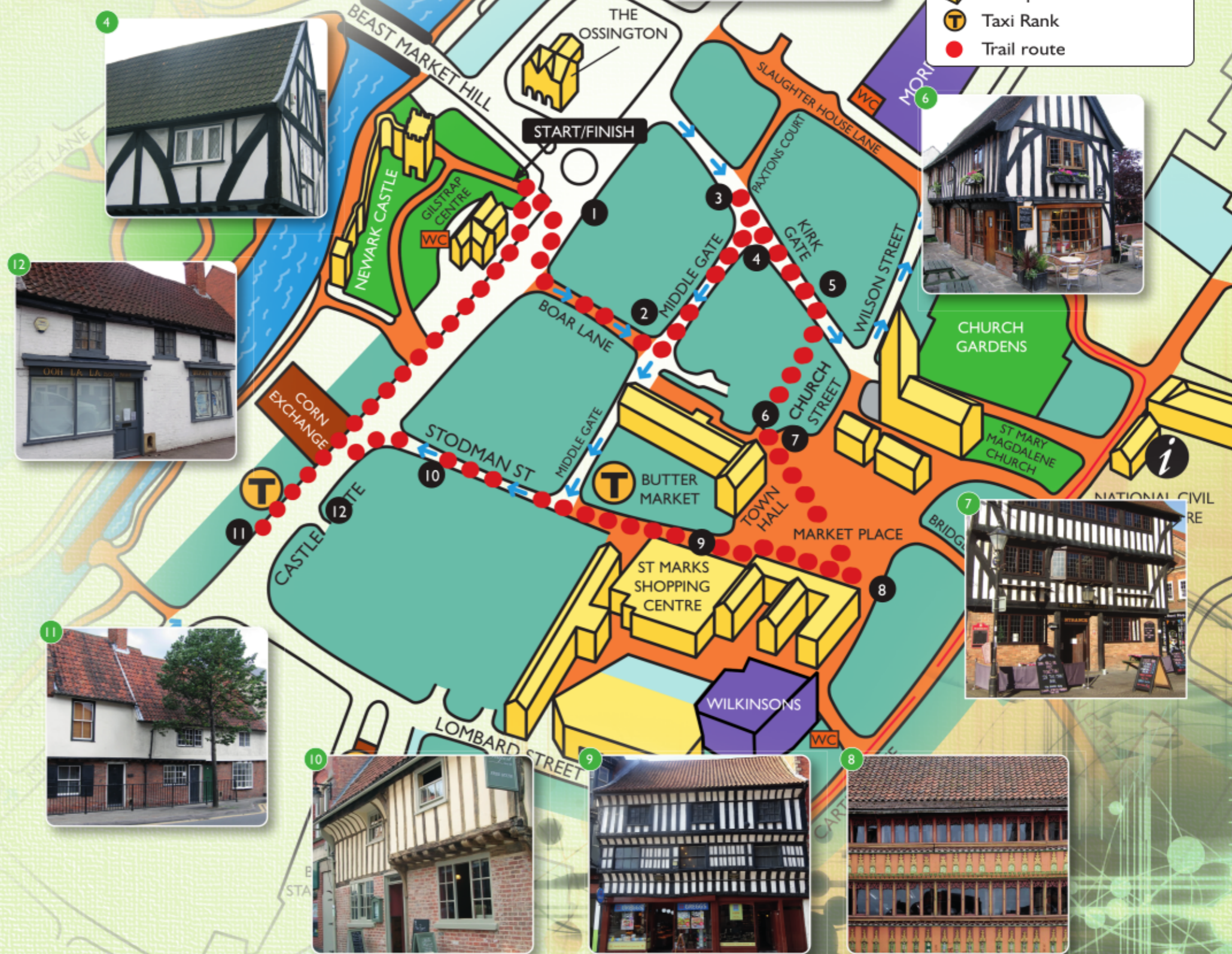
Make your way down **Stodman Street** away from the **Market Place**, past the junction with **Middle Gate**, and on your left you will see **The Prince Rupert (10)**. Restoration revealed the timber frame, which has been dated to 1452. Another apparently wealthy family had this house constructed in the 'Wealden' style, which originated in the wealds of Kent. On the ground floor, the right hand bay provided for kitchen and other domestic activities while the centre bay housed the hall, open to the thatched roof, whose original rafters are still in situ. The left hand bay was removed long ago, probably because of fire damage, but would have provided private quarters. An upper floor was added at some time to cover in the hall and create two bedrooms. You can visit these upstairs rooms and enjoy a drink beneath the rafters.

Go on to the junction of **Stodman Street** and **Castle Gate**, cross the zebra crossing and turn left. About 30m further on your right is a row of **three cottages (11)** (now converted into two) with jettied upper floors and brick lower walls. These buildings date from around 1330 and, although extensively restored, retain much of their original structure and all of their charm. On the other side of the road, **57-59 Castle Gate (12)** dates from about 1700, its walls bricked up some 100 years later. Note the rather eccentric chimney stack, extended upwards in recent times.

Retrace your route along **Castle Gate** and go on to return to the **Castle grounds** and the end of the trail. Alternatively, go to **Carter Gate**, **Barnby Gate**, **Balderton Gate** or **Mill Gate** to see if you can spot more timber frames. Did you notice the one in **Stodman Street**, opposite **The Prince Rupert**?

KEY

- Green areas
- Car parks
- Main shopping area
- Pedestrian area
- Public buildings
- i Tourist Information
- One-way streets
- WC Public toilets
- Cycle route
- Main places of interest
- T Taxi Rank
- Trail route



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