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Take a Train to Humber Bridge

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Not many railways take you close to a bridge, but don't actually take you across it. However, this is exactly what happens at Barton-on-Humber station in North Lincolnshire.

The station is about a ten-minute walk from the Humber Bridge, which crosses the River Humber and connects North Lincolnshire to East Yorkshire. Today, if you want to travel from Barton-on-Humber to Hessle station (the first station on the other side of the bridge) by rail, you need to travel via Doncaster, which takes about three hours. Why not walk the three miles instead?

The Humber Bridge is a suspension bridge; this means the path of the bridge (where cars drive or people walk across) is held up by cables that hang down (suspended) from above. The bridge took seven years to build and measures 2,200 metres long.

Top tip!

The bridge is open every day of the year, but you should always check the weather as high winds can make crossing the bridge dangerous. Also, remember that cars can travel up to 50 mph on the bridge, so always take care when walking.

The Hardy Tree

Sometimes it's not the biggest, longest, or tallest sites that tell the greatest stories. To discover one such example, take a short five-minute walk from London St Pancras station, down Midland and St Pancras Road, to St Pancras Old Church.

Here in the graveyard you'll find an ash tree. The base of the tree is encircled by headstones; not surprising in a graveyard you might think, but these headstones are different. They are packed so tightly around the tree they look as though they have grown from its roots.

It is known as the Hardy Tree, named after Thomas Hardy, who was a famous British writer from the nineteenth and twentieth century. It was Hardy himself who placed the headstones around the tree, not for any artistic purposes but because it was his job. In the 1860s, before he was a writer, Hardy worked for an architecture company. His job was to clear away parts of the graveyard (bodies as well as headstones) to make way for the new St Pancras station.

Not far from the tree, you'll find a large brick wall at the back of the graveyard. Behind that wall are the busy railway lines taking trains in and out of St Pancras station.

The Hardy Tree reminds us that in Victorian times nothing could stand in the way of the railways, not even the dead.

Churches and Cathedrals

One of the easiest landmarks to spot while travelling on the railways are churches and cathedrals (with their enormous spires they don't really blend into the background). There are a few, however, that particularly stand out and are well worth getting off the train to take a closer look at.

The Crooked Spire

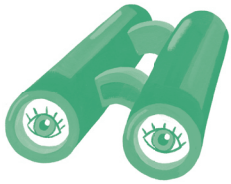
No matter from what direction you arrive at Chesterfield station, you cannot fail to see the nearby parish church spire from the train window. The first thing you might notice is how crooked it is. Not even just a little bit crooked, but very crooked. So crooked that as you stare up at it, you'll wonder how on earth it manages to stay up – especially on a windy day.

The story of Chesterfield's spire starts in 1361 when it was first added to the church's tower. It was built using wood and measured 69.49 metres tall. About 300 years later a decision was made to cover the spire in lead tiling to help protect the wood from the damaging effects of the weather. It was then that things started to take a different shape.

The lead tiling is extremely heavy, much heavier than the wood underneath. It is also affected by the temperature, getting ever so

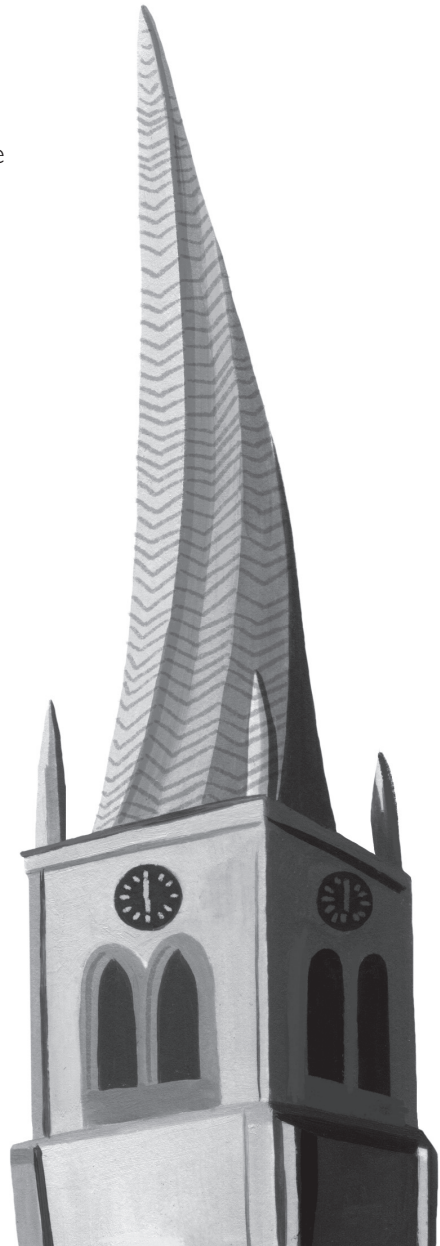
slightly bigger when it is hot, then shrinking ever so slightly when it cools down. Some people think that the combination of the weight and its constant changing size has forced the wood underneath to twist with the pressure.

Seems to make sense, right? Well, this is just the theory. No one really knows for certain as nothing like this has ever happened to another church. What we do know is that the spire is leaning 2.9 metres away from where it should be, and there's no stopping it – it's still moving to this day!



Look out for!

There are tours of the spire led by staff and volunteers at the church. You will climb up inside the tower and see how twisted it actually is. It looks even more twisted on the inside than it does on the outside – if that's even possible!



A World Heritage Site

Durham Cathedral is part of a UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) World Heritage Site that includes Durham Castle (right next door to the cathedral). This means it is recognised as a place of historical and cultural importance. There are currently only 1,121 places in the entire world that have been given UNESCO status, which makes Durham extremely special.

When you look at Durham Cathedral from Durham station, the size and scale of the building makes it feel much closer than it actually is – and that's because it's huge! It still only takes about fifteen minutes to walk there so there's no excuse not to visit.

It was built nearly 1,100 years ago between 1093 and 1133, and it still has lots of its original features, like its stone vaulted ceiling, one of the first to be built using new techniques with stone rather than wood. This changed the way cathedrals were built for the next 400 years. (Durham Cathedral was a bit of a trendsetter).

The cathedral also has three original copies of the Magna Carta. Written in 1215, it was the first legal document that officially said Kings and Queens needed to follow the law just like everyone else. It also established the idea that all people were entitled to justice and a fair trial. While the exact rules have changed a lot over the years, the ideas first written in the Magna Carta are still the foundation of Britain's laws and system of governance today.

Going into Battle

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The platform signs at Battle station in East Sussex always make us feel like we're travelling back in time. 'Alight here,' they say, 'for 1066'. If time travel was possible, Battle in October 1066 would have been one of the most dangerous places to visit. For it was here that the armies of Harold, King of England, and William, Duke of Normandy in France, engaged in one of the deadliest fights on British soil.

Thankfully, Battle is now a peaceful and beautiful town. A fifteen-minute walk from the station will take you to Battle Abbey, where the battle, now known as the Battle of Hastings (the town of Hastings is about 6.4 miles away), is thought to have taken place.

But what were Harold and William fighting about? Well, despite the fact that Harold had officially been made King of England earlier that year, William believed the title belonged to him and he wanted to take it back.

Spoiler alert – Harold was killed and Battle Abbey was later built under the orders of the new King William I (also known as William the Conqueror, for obvious reasons). It is said that the high altar in the abbey was built on the exact spot where Harold died.

Crossing the Border

Take an adventure via the East Coast Mainline and stop at Berwick-upon-Tweed to discover the history of an English (and Scottish) border town. Carry on into Scotland and see if you can spot the crossing sign – you'll have to be quick; the train doesn't slow down!

Where does Berwick belong?

For hundreds of years, the Scottish and the English fought over land and who would be its King or Queen. While people in both countries were affected by the fighting, there was perhaps one town that suffered more than any other: Berwick-upon-Tweed.

If you take a look at a map today, you'll see that Berwick-upon-Tweed is located in the very north of England, just three miles from the Scottish border. It is the very last English town where the train stops before crossing the border and heading to Edinburgh.

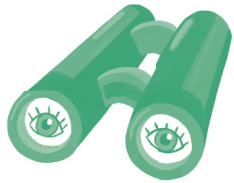
However, for 300 years Berwick was an important port for Scotland. That is, until the end of the thirteenth century when Edward I captured the town and declared it part of England. Over the next 200 years, Berwick was passed back and forth between the two countries, and back and forth again, and again, until 1482 when it was captured for the very last time. It has officially been part of England ever since.

Yet despite what the map says, the town still has strong connections to Scotland. The local football club, Berwick Rangers, plays in the Scottish football leagues, and secondary school students can choose

to study in Scotland rather than in the English schools in Berwick.

Take some time to explore the town – and in particular the town walls – the castle ruins, Berwick Barracks, and any of the local museums to learn more about what life was like living in a border town.

Look out for!



One of the most picturesque views of Berwick is from the railway itself, which crosses the River Tweed via the Royal Borders Bridge. Made of twenty-eight arches, the bridge is thirty-eight metres at its tallest part and measures 656 metres from one end to the other. The railway bends before and after arriving at Berwick so you get an incredible view of the bridge no matter what direction you're travelling in.

Spotting the Boundary Sign

As you cross the border between England and Scotland see if you can spot the sign marking the exact location. As the train travels so quickly you might not be able to spot it without some help. We suggest filming through the window (if you're heading north make sure you're looking out the right-hand side) and play it back slowly until you spot the sign.