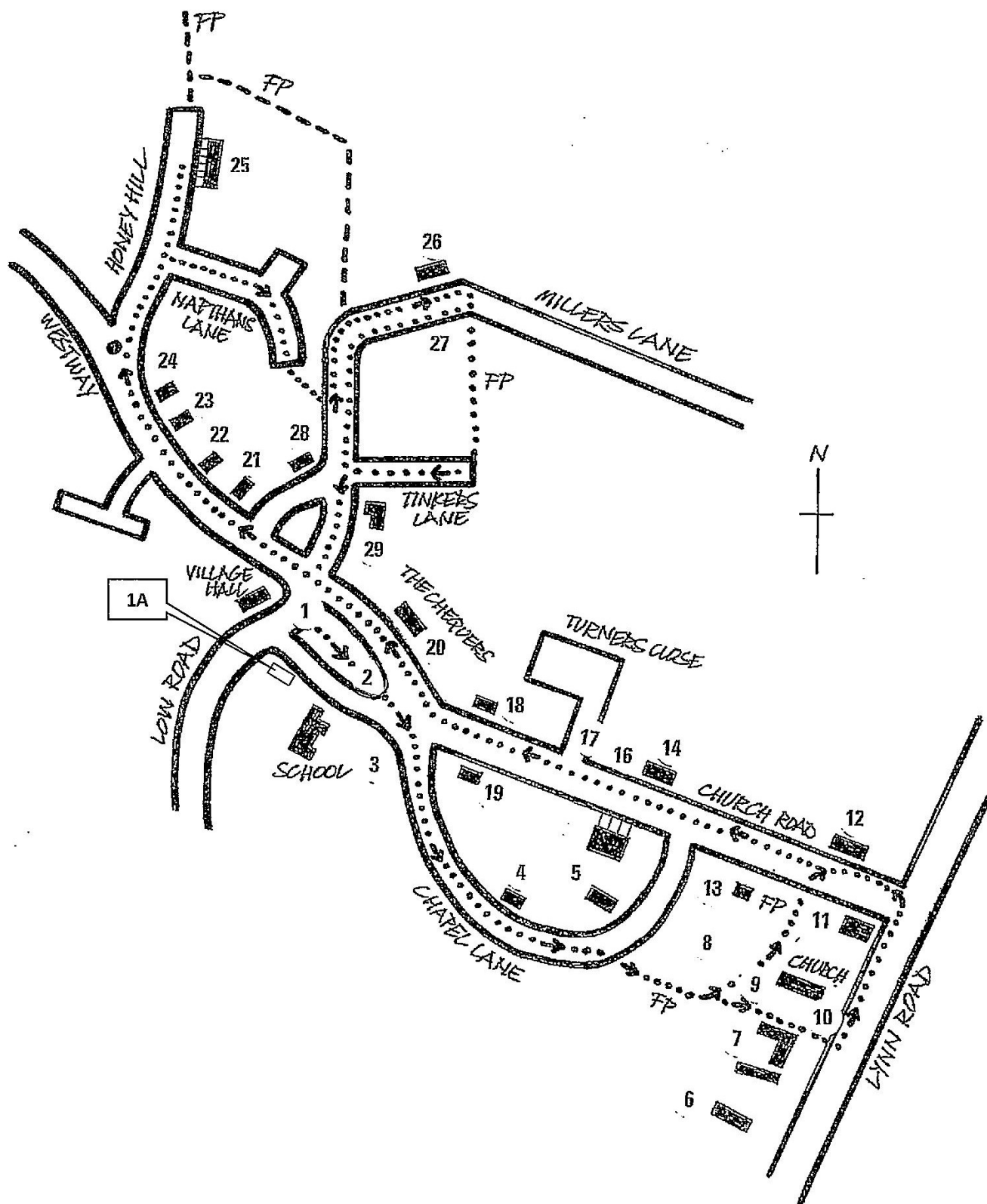


WIMBOTSHAM HISTORY TRAIL (Walk takes approx 60 minutes)



WIMBOTSHAM HISTORY TRAIL - Guided Walk - The items of interest are numbered on the map

► **START** on the large village green, opposite the Village Hall.

1 Village Sign Below which is a **Memorial Plaque** for a Lancaster Bomber Crash in 1943. Behind you is the **Village Hall**. It was previously a WW2 building from RAF Downham Market airfield or Bexwell Aerodrome as it is known locally. The photo below circa 1920s.

A new village sign was erected in 2025. This replaced the previous village sign made by Walter Edgeley in 1979. The wood of Japanese oak rotted but was originally supplied by local carpenter and joiner, Gordon Hoskins. **Memorial Seat**, around the large lime tree, the seat has memorial plaques naming the people involved in setting up The Fenman Classic Bike Show in 1988. Walk on to the centre of the green and note the high beacon lit on special occasions. The Village Green (a large triangular shape) contains some mature trees planted in early 1900s. When moving on to the **War Memorial** at far end of the green you will pass a newly installed Oak Tree, donated to the village by the family of Sgt. David Booker who died in the Lancaster crash of 1943..



1A Wimbotsham Poorhouse site, Plot 107 as shown on Tithe Map of 1840 to be found at Norfolk Records Office. It is believed to have fallen into disuse when the new Downham Workhouse was opened about 1850. Though when restoration work was carried out on St Mary's in 1853, the old poorhouse building was used as an Office of Works. The new pews were executed here by celebrated 19th Century wood carver, James Ratteebut sadly lost in the church fire of 2019.

► Passing **Wimbotsham & Stow Community School** on your right hand side, enter **Chapel Lane**. The school was built in 1869 and enlarged in 1894 to accommodate 250 pupils aged 5-14 years. The bell tower was often the target of unwanted attempts to climb it and ring the bell. A noteworthy headmaster was William Turner. He is buried in St Mary's Churchyard and Turner's Close is named after him.

5 – Fish and Chip shop was sited for 20 years in a shed where the Playing Field car park now stands. Emma Jeary (nee Napthan) fried Tuesdays and Fridays. Fresh fish was collected by bicycle each day from Alflatt's fishmongers in Downham Market.



► Continue along CHAPEL LANE. (On the 1840 Tithe Map, Chapel Lane is called Oatmans Lane.) and halfway up there is;

6 – No 15. Beech Cottage. This building dates to 19th century and was once 2 cottages. Continue to the bend where a small kissing gate faces you on the right, it leads on to a designated footpath alongside a field. The Methodist Church can be seen, further along Chapel Lane on the left. See Extended Notes page for further information.

7 – The Primitive Methodist Chapel built in 1874. *You might like to wander up to this chapel before coming back to the kissing gate. See Extended Notes Page.*

► Pass through the kissing gate, follow the grassed footpath towards the church. On the right, across the fields behind the trees, is the large former main house of :-

8 & 9 – Upper Farm, now Church Farm House; look out for the tall chimneys. The barns of the former farm are just beyond the 5-bar gate, now **Church Farm Barns**.

► After you go around the gate, you enter the area where a gibbet was once sited. It is said that convicted felons were buried here and in 1980 skeletal remains were found. Convicted felons could not be buried within church grounds. *Two choices of path – **Either** go straight ahead on the grassed footpath and turn left when*

you reach Lynn Road and then turn left on the corner of Church Road, where stands the impressive **Hill House**, description later on next page or climb the steps on your immediate left to:

10 – Churchyard leading to the village church. On entering, look immediately to your right; the grave with the large cross is that of:



11 – William Henry Turner, a well-loved headmaster of Wimbotsham School for 25 years from 1893-1918. Turner's Close, off Church Road, is named after him.

Take time to look at:

12 – St Mary the Virgin Church – first documented in 1230. In the early morning of 4th September 2019, a fire was discovered in the church. The building was saved but its roof collapsed. The carved pews and a 15th century table perished. The chancel with altar and organ suffered smoke damage. [See Extended Notes page](#)



► Follow the path through the church grounds and away from the north side porch entrance, down the narrow, unmade lane to **Church Road**. Cross the road to the pavement and turn right and walk to the top of Church Road. At the top of Church Road, (originally called “The Street”) you will see the large imposing Grade 2 listed building called:

13 – Hill House, noted for its special architectural/historic interest. Brick and Carstone with slate roofs. L-plan was a former coaching inn built in 1753 and called The Green Man. See [Extended Notes page](#).



► **Retrace** your steps back down Church Road and after passing the lane to the church, carry on walking down and note several historical buildings in this road :-

14 - Nos. 69-73 A very old building, built in 17th Century. It was converted to 3 properties in late 18th Century with parts demolished and back extensions added in the 19th Century. A baker's oven is in the kitchen of No. 71. No. 73 was the home of Mr Lee, the last miller at Rodwell's Mill, which was situated off the upper part of Miller's Lane.

16 – 47 Church Road, formerly a farmhouse with stabling and sheds at rear, once owned by the Boughen family. They used to walk their cows up The Street (Church Road) for milking.

17 – Nos 26, 28 and 30 Church Road. Opposite 47 Church Road these cottages were originally one long thatched barn, circa 17th century (to be confirmed).

18 – No. 45 Church Road. On the pavement outside this bungalow you will see the original threshold stone entrance (marked in photo) to **The Primitive Chapel**, the first Methodist Chapel in Wimbotsham.



19 – The former Bell Public House, licensed 1845-1934 was sited slightly back from the entrance of Turners Close. *(As mentioned earlier, this road was named after a long-serving Wimbotsham School headmaster).*

20 – No 35 Church Road, this Carstone house was once the former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel 1844, now a private home.

21 – No. 12 Church Road – formerly a single storey building, used as a laundry by the Hare Estate. Take a look at the higher gable end and you will see the original line of the roof.

► Carry on walking along Church Road until you reach:-

22 – The Chequers Inn, a mid-17th century building, which has had licensees since 1794 to date. Note the Millenium sundial to the left of the entrance, midway between the ground and 1st floor. Funding for this was raised by Cynthia Doran.

► Continue to walk forwards, the road name changes to **Westway** after the little village green on the right. Westway originally called The Street then connected to Station Road, leading to Stowbridge Station.

23 – Nos. 2 & 4 Westway were built as two separate homes, though appear joined together - note the difference in the windows bordering the road.

No. 4. was built between 1703-5 and was a detached building with the front door and large windows facing the small village green. This was discovered in renovation work in 1974. **No.2** was added in the early 19th century and built alongside No. 4, facing the small green, with a small gap of 2 feet between. This meant that the windows of No. 4 had to be moved to the opposite side. At different points in village history both 2 & 4 became the Post Office and Village shop and were owned individually by Harold and Christopher Gunns in 1900s.



24 – No 10 Westway - The Cobblers, a former shoe repair shop - run by Harry Snasdell, (the left hand window was the actual workshop).

25 – No 20 Westway housed a former Post Office run by the Misses Baxter in 1930s.

26 – No 30 Westway, Chapter House built in 1870. Occupied in late 1870's by the curate of St Mary's Church, the Revd. Henry Courtney Price who later became the vicar of Shouldham Church and is buried in the churchyard of that village.

► Continue to the mini roundabout, turn right into **Honey Hill** - said to have once been the main route from Downham Market to Kings Lynn. This lane has over time been known as Napthans or Rodwell's Lane. Walk ahead and cross the side road of Napthans Lane. A short distance ahead and set back on the right-hand side, there is a row of cottages.

27 – Nos. 14-24 Honey Hill. Of 18th century origin and originally known as **Rodwell's Row**. It is thought they were built by one of the owners of the former mill, north of Miller's Lane. Mr Rodwell was listed as a miller and corn merchant in 1834. **No. 14** Honey Hill housed the family of Robert Napthan and was the site of his dairy farm.



► From the cottages, **retrace** your steps and turn left into **Napthans Lane**. Follow this around the bend to the right. In the left-hand corner, there is a pathway leading between the homes, follow this path to join **Millers Lane**, turn left and follow the lane around the sharp right bend to:

28 – 19 & 21 Rose Cottage, the date plaque shows 1798 but this alludes to the time the extant cottage received an overhaul by The Hare Estate. [See Extended Notes Page](#). The field on the opposite side of the lane was originally an orchard and some of the trees still produce fruit.

► Walk on a short way until you reach the narrow, marked footpath on the right-hand side.

29 – EE118 Lancaster Bomber. Facing the footpath, you will have a clear view of the site which crossed the newer driveway of 12 Miller's Lane, originally within the old orchard. This is where a Lancaster Bomber crashed on 29th September 1943 between 20.40 & 20.55. There was only one survivor of the 7 crew.

► **Either**, follow the nearby footpath alongside the old orchard back to Tinkers Lane where there are several old terraced cottages. These homes were originally single storey Norfolk longhouses (See if you can spot an end gable showing the original roof line.)

► At the end turn, right onto Millers Lane **or**, **retrace** your steps back along Millers Lane. The lane then opens wide on to the small village green.

30 – The Old Smithy. During 1920/30s, the blacksmith George Smith lived at No. 1 Tinkers Lane. He used the single storey building that faces the little green, for his work. Older residents spoke of being allowed to watch the large horses being shoed but only if they were quiet and they could see the bellows working too. In the centre, was the workshop with its forge, anvil, etc. On the right-hand side was an area where wooden cartwheels were retired with iron hoops. (See extended notes)



31 – 2 Tinkers Lane, In the early 1900's this was a small 2-up, 2-down cottage. The house was extended after the WW1 and named **Paschendale Cottage**. It was owned by the Skilling family, one of whom lived in "Bethcar" Cottage (1894) fronting the Village Green in Church Road. We are told that this Mr Skilling suffered the after-effects of being "gassed" in WW1, maybe at the Battle of Passendale and possibly the reason for the naming of No. 2. The children pictured in front of the Old Smithy were the "Wade family", 10 children, who all lived with their parents in Paschendale Cottage about 1910-20.

*You have reached the end of the Wimbotsham History Trail.
We hope you have enjoyed our village history.*

Extended Notes for Wimbotsham History Trail

Item No.	
5	The fish shop was a wooden structure with a coal fire. Emma's daughter, Yvonne, did continue the shop for a short while after her mother retired. Eventually, upgrading was required to install water and electricity and the costs were prohibitive, so the frying stopped in early 1960's.
7	The first chapel closed and subsequently demolished but a large threshold stone remains in the base of a wall on Church Road. The second was The Wesleyan Chapel built in 1844 in Church Road – now a private house (35 Church Road). This Chapel built in 1874 was the last of three to be built in Wimbotsham. The first was the Primitive Methodist Chapel dating back to 1836 known colloquially as "The Ranter's Chapel".
12	This church was first mentioned in a document attributable to about 1230. Apart from a solitary entry in the Ramsey Abbey Cartulary of a Thomas de Docking as rector of Wimbotsham in 1253, the list of rectors does not begin until early in the 14 th century. The oldest part of the construction is the nave (1170-1190). The original thatched roof was removed in 1853 and a new slate roof put in place in about 1854. The old nave walls were almost completely replaced in 1853 when other major restorative works were carried out including the carved wooden pews by the renowned James Rattee. There are two fine Norman doorways in the nave, the north side having the arch decorated with twisted cable and double billet mouldings and a plain roll: the arch rests on each side on a cylindrical shafter with cap and base; the tympanum is plain. The doorway is covered by a porch (late 14 th -early 15 th century). The south side doorway is more elaborate with the arch having two shafted orders – the outer shafts are twisted and the inner ones covered with zig-zag work; the arch-moulds consists of double billet, zig-zag and twisted cable work; the tympanum is plain. (<i>Tympanum is the space over the door between lintel and arch.</i>) The bell tower (14 th Century) did house three bells in 1552, only two since then and now removed for safety and repair.
13	Hill House - Brick and Carstone with slate roofs. L-plan. East front of 3 bays in 2 storeys. Central gabled porch behind flat portico on pair of Tuscan columns. Two ground floor early 19 th century tripartite sashes and three 20 th century casements on 1 st floor. Besides being a resting place for travellers going to London, the inn was reputed to be the place where the convicted felons were taken for their last meal and then receiving 'last rites' in St Mary's Church before being taken to the gibbet.
14	69-73 Church Road is a 17 th century brick house that was divided into 3 cottages around the late 18 th century. Further work in 19 th century involved some demolition and extension. It has ornamental gable walls and low wings. The Norfolk Heritage Explorer website has a listing for 71 Church Road under NHER No. 30810. Multi-period finds found in 1994/5 in the lower back garden. Neolithic & Bronze age flint implements. Fragments of late Saxon, Medieval and post-Medieval pottery and post-Medieval clay pipes.
22	The name of The Chequers may have come from The Wild Service Tree, whose fruits known as "Chequers" would be used to flavour alcoholic drinks such as whisky. The fruit required "bletting" to make them edible and were often given to children as sweets.
28	Whilst returning home to its base at RAF Warboys in Huntingdonshire after taking part in Operation Bochum in Germany during WW2, Flight EE118 from 8 Group, 156 Pathfinders Squadron crash-landed. Six of the seven crew aged 19-26 years died at the scene. The plane first hit the ground in the field to the left of the footpath (<i>the field has an old name of Hot Pikel</i>) and finally came to rest in the old orchard with its nose pointing close to Rose Cottage. Miraculously, none of the surrounding homes were affected.
28	Rose Cottage – it is believed the property was once a single storey, thatched building. The gable wall of No. 21 clearly shows the original roof line. Its roof line was extended to include a 1 st floor and made into 2 cottages. There is an outside kitchen to the rear of No. 21, installed and shared between Nos. 19 and 21 with the oven being on No. 19's side, the old chimney can still be seen within the old kitchen of No. 21. This shared kitchen was built as a separate extension to avoid the risk of fire. Further up Miller's Lane on the north side in front of Slubberdike Wood. The rising height of this woodland affected wind and the working of the mill and it soon fell into disuse. It was made of red brick with 3 floors and had an ogee cap. The mill suffered serious damage during a gale on 16 th March 1913 when the cap and sails were blown off. It was later demolished. In recent years, a millstone, believed to be from the Miller's Lane mill, was found buried in garden of No. 2 Westway. This can be seen from the outside pavement.
30	Mr Smith would construct the iron hoop tyres to the correct size and shape – a very skilled job. Then it would be heated to red hot and placed on the waiting wheel. It would immediately be quenched with cold water, making it shrink which tightened all the wooden staves. etc. The process took many hands. Could this be where the saying, "many hands to the wheel" came from?