

AN INTRODUCTION TO MIDDLETON

Have you heard the one about the body snatcher who dug up the recently dead to sell to medical students? Or perhaps you've come across the band of Middleton soldiers who prevented England falling to the Scots?

Old Cankey who stole bodies from the town's cemetery and the Middleton Archers who helped defeat the Scottish uprising in 1513 are just two chapters in the town's deep history which also includes tales of a rowdy bar room ghost, secret tunnels and a natural disaster.

The story began 3000 years ago around the site of Middleton Parish Church with a Bronze Age settlement and burial fields, or Barrowfields as the area is still known as today.

For much of its history, the town was little more than a small farming community of 20 houses, originally ruled by the de Myddleton family. But 200 years ago, the town began to grow rapidly

and became an important centre for hand loom silk weaving during the industrial revolution. When cotton spinning, weaving and dyeing arrived towards the end of the 19th Century, the population soon reached 30,000.

Over the centuries the town has seen a rich-tapestry of people leaving their mark, including Cardinal Thomas Langley who built the parish church we see today, political campaigner Samuel Bamford who helped secure the vote for the common man and Edgar Wood who designed some of the town's most impressive buildings, including Long Street Methodist Church.

Despite its humble beginning, the town is blessed with a rich history and this tour will take you through the heart of old Middleton, revealing the great, the good, the gruesome and the gratifying of the town's past.

FACT **ST LEONARD'S CHURCH**
St Leonard's Church is home to Britain's oldest glazed war memorial. The Flodden Window was placed in the church in 1515 by Richard Assheton in tribute to the 17 Middleton Archers fought at the Battle Flodden in 1513. St. Leonard is the Patron Saint of prisoners.

FACT **OLD BOAR'S HEAD PUBLIC HOUSE**
It's said that secret underground tunnels link the Old Boars Head to the Ring O'Bells pub and Middleton Parish Church.

FACT **RING O'BELLS PUBLIC HOUSE**
The Ring O'Bells is believed to be haunted by the ghost of a sad cavalier known as Edward. The ghost is said to throw stones, glasses and other objects around the bar while its footsteps have been heard around the pub.

FACT **MIDDLETON LIBRARY & JUBILEE PARK**
The park still retains its original Victorian bandstand. Most others in the country were melted down and turned into Spitfires during World War Two. There is a large boulder near the library, which was originally carried to Middleton from Cumbria during the last ice age.

FACT **PETERLOO PLAQUE / LOOM HOUSE (69 MORTON STREET)**
Like many houses in this area 69 Morton St was a loom house and weaver's cottage. Its former occupants used a loom to weave silk in their front rooms, which was a vital way for locals to make money before the mills were built in Middleton.

FACT **MIDDLETON FLOOD MEMORIAL**
As the flood tore through the town, barrels of beer, chicken coops full of drowned hens, and 20 squealing pigs were spotted in the raging torrent.

FACT **OLD GRAMMAR SCHOOL**
The typical school day at the Grammar School started at 6am and didn't finish until 6pm. Two famous pupils include Edgar Wood who carved his name in three different places in the Old Grammar School as well as Samuel Bamford.

FACT **MIDDLETON OLD CEMETERY**
A body snatcher known as Old Cankey is said to have preyed on the bodies of those recently buried, digging them up and sending them along the River Irk to Manchester University where they were sold to medical students.

FACT **TWENTY FOUR STEPS**
Lowry's 'The Chapel' featured a five legged dog which the artist insisted was there when he painted it. The painting was stolen in 2000.



DID YOU KNOW...

- The first edition of the Middleton Guardian rolled off the presses on December 1st 1877, and cost just 1p.
- The town was struck by an earthquake on March 16th 1843.
- The bells of the parish church used to chime for 10 minutes from 9.50pm between 1812 and 1939 to remind people to go back to their houses; this was known as a curfew bell, or The Nowster.
- In 1791, the town received the Royal Charter from King George III to hold a weekly market in the town. It is still held today.
- Punishment stocks used to stand in the church yard, where locals found guilty of minor crimes were locked in and 'made a laughing stock' by having rotten vegetables, mud, stones and other nasties thrown at them.
- The marking on the entrance to Jubilee Park near the Ring O'Bells is a bench mark which shows that at that point, the town is 325 metres above sea level. There is another bench mark on the Parish church. Can you find them?
- Football fever gripped Middleton on February 11th 1778 when the town played against its neighbours as part of an army recruitment drive for the Royal Manchester Volunteers.
- A great wood, or shaw, used to stand in the town, which was populated by wild boars. Its name still survives, can you guess which area of town this was?
- The old Barlow's Dye works at Slattocks used to be a WWII internment camp, the Major of the camp lived on Jubilee Road. The prisoners were British or Allied soldiers who were guilty of serious misbehaviour.

13 Hopwood Old Hall

13 Sam Bamfords House

10 Ring O'Bells Pub

12 Old Grammar School

11 Peterloo Plaque / Loom House (69 Morton St)

9 St. Leonards Church

5 Edgar Wood Exedra

4 Flood Memorial

2 The Old Boars Head

3 Middleton Library & Jubilee Park

1 Long St. Methodist Church

7 24 Steps

6 Middleton Old Cemetery

8 Sam Bamford Monument

1 Alkington Hall

2 Tonge Hall