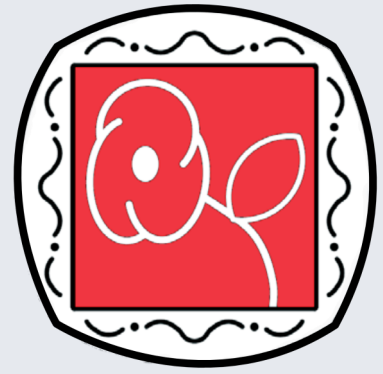


POPPY TRAIL MAURICE LEA MEMORIAL PARK



Environmental
Education
Project
South Derbyshire



For more information ring: **01283 535039**
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Swadlincote
Tourist Information Centre

POPPY TRAIL

MAURICE LEA MEMORIAL PARK

This short walk can start at Sharpe's Pottery Museum on West Street, Swadlincote (Grid reference SK298195, Postcode DE11 9QG) or from York Road, Church Gresley where ample street parking is available. (Grid reference SK300188, Postcode DE11 9DG).

The route is graded as easy and should take less than an hour to complete. The trail is just over a mile but if walking up and down from Sharpe's Pottery Museum another 1½ miles needs to be added.



THE TRAIL CELEBRATES THE HISTORY OF MAURICE LEA MEMORIAL PARK

One of the first examples of landscape reclamation in the country.

Discover the reason for its name, the changes that have taken place since its inauguration and people and their stories associated with the park.

Do visit Sharpe's Pottery Museum which opened in January 2003 before or after your walk. The complex was founded in 1821 by Thomas Sharpe. His son, Edmund, patented the world's first flushing WC rim in 1855. Household pots and utensils were manufactured and sold throughout the British Empire, Russia, Germany and Holland. The works eventually closed in 1967.

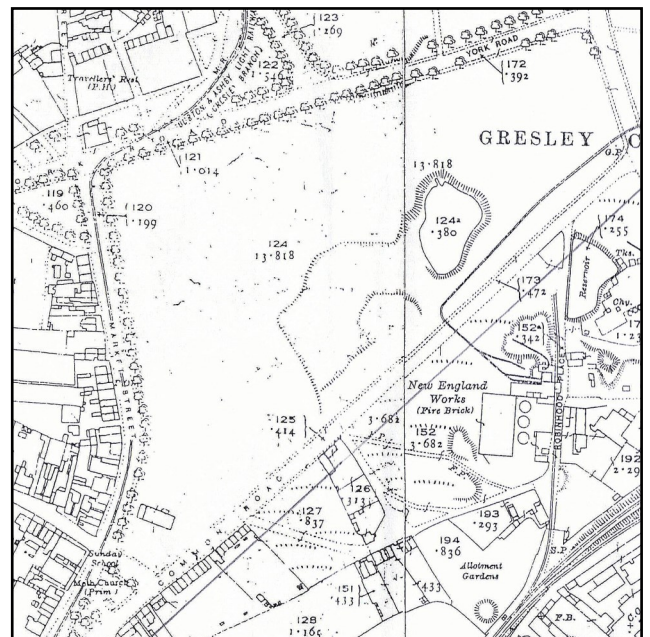
Leave Sharpe's Pottery Museum by walking through the kiln hovel and taking the door on the right into the walled garden. Pass through the metal gate and keep the wall on the left. Walk uphill along Alexandra Road passing The Union of Democratic Mineworkers offices on the right and the wall clock on Crown Stores dated 1914. Next cross Hastings Road junction. At the top of the hill continue ahead along Church Avenue and Wilmot Road to meet Wilmot Gates opposite, at the junction of York Road. Cross the road with care and enter the park. Turn left and take a rest on the first seat. Numbered poppy plaques guide you round the trail.

Imagine the area before the park was laid out. In the 19th century it was grazed by cattle. By the 20th century it had become a grey pot holed space covered with pot shards and waste from the potteries and clay works that were found east and south of the site. Gypsies camped here and old dilapidated sheds were an eyesore. The development of the coal and clay industries brought wealth to the district but it had a huge effect on the quality of the environment. Spoil heaps, clay holes and acrid air caused by pollution from the salt glazing process used to

1 Gresley Common



Before restoration



1923 OS map extract

finish the clay wares hung in the air. Quite a contrast to this spot today. Even in 1895 there was a suggestion in Bulmer's Directory that 'if levelled and suitably laid out it could be an ornament to the village and an attractive recreation ground for the inhabitants'. The inhabitants had over a thirty year wait due to the outbreak of war in 1914. Plans were postponed, money was in short supply. A large pond opposite where you are sitting can be seen on the 1923 map extract above. During the miner's strikes of the 1920s coal was extracted from shallow pits. Small groups of people dug the coal – a practice called feeding. The photograph below taken in 1921 shows a typical feeding company. By the end of the Great War in 1918 the landscape was a disgrace and ripe for improvement.



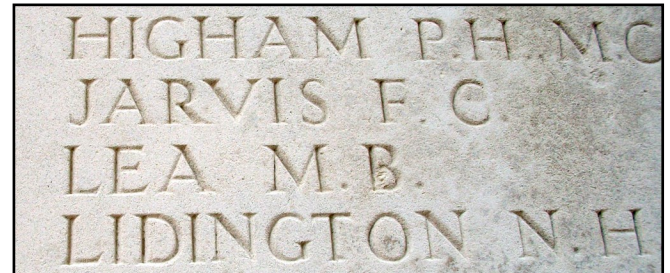
In 1922 restoration of the area was raised again by the council. It was felt that a memorial should be raised to the memory of those who died in the Great War. Trees had already been planted to enclose the site.

Continue round the park in a clockwise direction

2 Maurice Lea

Nineteen year old, Lieutenant Maurice Lea was killed on a hot sunny August 18th 1916 during the Guillemont Advance at The Somme Battlefields. Just after 4pm he was gunned down by skilled German defenders equipped with machine guns. His sergeant witnessed his death and noted the location where he fell but his body was never recovered due to subsequent shelling of the area between the village of Guillemont and Trones Wood.

His name is etched on the Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval in France which was designed by Lutyens. This memorial carries the names of 73,412 others who disappeared in the area and have no known graves.



Maurice was a 2nd Lieutenant in the 7th Battalion/24th Division of the Northamptonshire Regiment.

This was a service battalion that supported and supplied the front line troops and not directly involved in fighting. As a student at Cambridge University he had little military training so this posting would be considered appropriate. He had been based in Ypres but an urgent call came to report for action in The Somme Valley. On July 30th they travelled by train and London bus to their camp a few miles from the front. The war diaries record days of warm weather and swimming in the Somme Canal interspersed with rigorous training.



A sad letter in the 'Officer's Papers' dated 9th September was sent by Winifred Maie, an actress working at the Empire Theatre, Dublin at the time to the Ministry of Defence. She was requesting if the 'third hand' information she had received two weeks earlier concerning Maurice's death was true. 'I should be glad if you can kindly let me have an early reply as I am very anxious' quoted from her letter. She received a reply three days later saying that he was killed in action.

The park is his memorial.

3 Natural History

As you wander through the park there is often plenty of opportunity to spot wildlife. Robins sing in the spring and are close companions. Take note of chaffinch, magpie, and wood pigeon. Blue tits, long-tailed tits and great tits flock through the tree tops. You hear their high pitched tweets. If you are in the park early in the morning listen for the drumming of woodpecker. Occasionally tree creepers can be seen spiralling up tree trunks. Foxes visit in the evening. You maybe lucky to see one passing through the park looking for easy pickings. The flower beds attract butterflies and other insects in the late spring and summer.

Just before you reach Poppy 4 at Common Road gate, turn right to walk round the paddling pool footprint admiring the herbaceous plants as you go.

4 Changes in the Park

By 1927 the land had been enclosed, levelled and laid out paid for by the Council. The playground was funded by the Miners Welfare Committee. The layout changed little over the years. A croquet lawn had been replaced by a fountain in the 1930s. The original metal perimeter fencing was removed for the Second World War effort and replaced with a hedge.

The paddling pool was filled in following complaints from locals about its danger. The original pavilions and toilets were removed too. Recently a Heritage Lottery Fund grant has allowed extensive work to upgrade the amenity. The bandstand has been restored and the outline of the paddling pool has been planted as a herbaceous border.

Return to Poppy 4 and continue to walk in a clockwise direction.

5 Effects of the war on local people

Bill Wright, fought in the Great War, lost a leg and returned to run the Ex- Serviceman's Stores on Market Street. In addition to selling sweets he was the local agent for booking coach trips. He would have watched from the shop doorway as the park took shape.



Behind where you are standing lived William Clark, to this day the house is still occupied by one of his grandchildren. William's family had a bakery on Church Street. His elder brother stayed at home to run the shop whilst William went off to fight. He was 35 when he died of wounds on 1st May 1918 in Flanders. He is buried in the Military Cemetery at Boulogne

When you reach Regent Street Gates walk through and then turn round to view the plaques on the gate posts.

6 Herbert Lea

Father of Maurice Lea, Herbert was a local man. He was born in School Street, and worked at Gresley Colliery on the coal screens. He was injured and gave up mining to become a butcher. He eventually established the London Central Meat Company. Even though he made his fortune in the south east he never forgot Church Gresley where he had grown up.

He helped to finance the development of the park in memory of his son, Maurice, after the Council approached him for funding to enable a larger area of the common to be enclosed and transformed. The park was officially opened on 17th May 1930. The event was described in The Burton Mail :

'A crowd of over 5000 people ... witnessed the crowning act in the transformation of Gresley

Common into the Maurice Lea Memorial Park when Mr Herbert Lea, through whose munificence such a scheme was possible, unlocked the main gates at the Regent Street end and admitted people for the first time. Simultaneously the other four gates were thrown open as the Union Jack was hoisted..... The band began it's concert in the artistic bandstand and before the eyes of thousands of people rose up a misty vision of the old Common which had vanished for ever.



It was then they fully realised the magnitude and splendour of the gift of this gentleman, who began life in a very humble way in Church Gresley.'

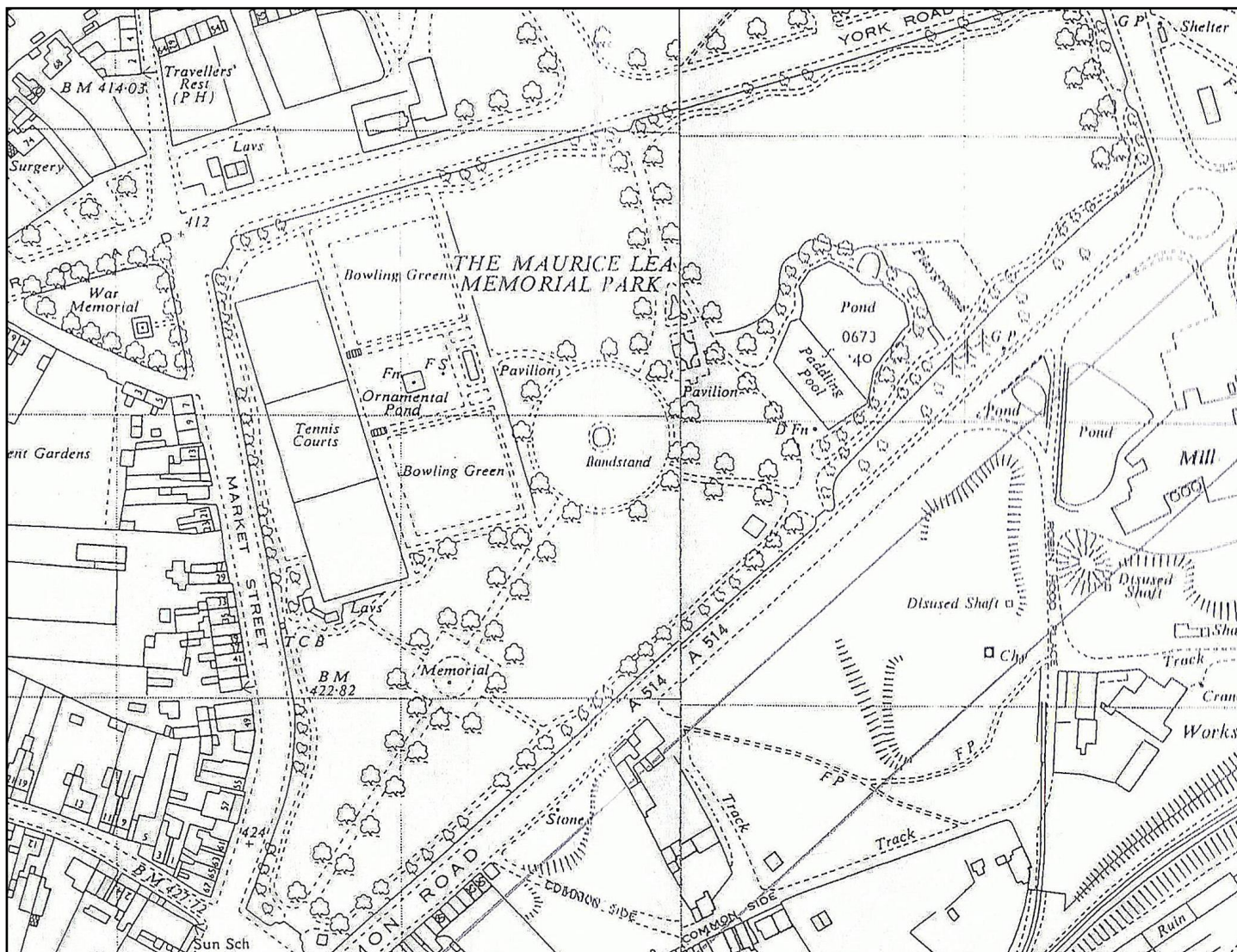
Return to the park and turn left to Poppy 7 then bear right across the grass towards an avenue of mature trees running through the centre of the park

7 Grass sculpture 'Darning the Seam' created by Philippa Lawrence (visible 2011-15)

Parks are for exercise and freedom from the chores of daily life. In 2011 an 80 metre long grass sculpture was created at this spot. It represented a seam of fabric and a seam of coal with wildflowers planted in a line through the mown grass. The concept was part of the post-mining-era mending of the landscape, epitomised by the creation of parks and more recently The National Forest on land which had been worked hard and had become an eyesore.

The living sculpture was planted in September 2011 and visible until 2015. It's an example of how something permanent-looking in the landscape is subject to change—and that we have the chance to observe, to change and improve things.

As you reach the avenue of mature trees, look for Poppy Post 8 and turn left.



8 Planting

The sycamore trees in the avenue along with the poplars, mountain ash, hollies and chestnuts provided height in the park and screened the view of potteries and colliery spoil heaps to the east. However the trees grew slowly being planted in poor ground conditions. The avenue is mature and well spaced today and provides shade on sunny days. Shrub planting around the perimeter provides colour at all times of the year with many berry bearing bushes used for food by small mammals and birds. Formal bedding is limited. Rose beds close to the bandstand and around Herbert Lea's memorial provide colour in the summer. A local reminisced by saying that during the summer holidays along with three ten year old friends they weeded the bowling greens for ten shillings a week.

Admire the memorial to Herbert Lea and continue towards the bandstand.

9 Amenities

Originally the park included two bowling greens, two tennis courts, a paddling pool, two pavilions, a bandstand and an 18 hole miniature golf course and croquet lawn. A perimeter path gave a circular walk around the site and a main walk centred on the bandstand from Regent Gate to Wilmot Gate. Most of these can be seen on the map extract dated 1959. Brass bands gave concerts every Sunday evening throughout the summer. Fifty years ago a cafe in the pavilion close to the paddling pool served tea and strawberries. The golf course is a well used football pitch today.

Continue ahead along the main path to view Daisy Adams Memorial Gardens.

10 Daisy Adams

For a short time Daisy Irene Adams was the oldest resident in the country. This is her garden created by her family. It is amazing to think that she not only lived through The Great War and the Second World War but the Boer War too. She was born in 1891 and died in 1993. She nearly reached 114 years of age.

Make your way towards Wilmot Gates where you entered the park and then turn left remaining in the park to continue along the perimeter path to York Road Gates on the corner with Market Street. Cross the road with care to poppy 11 by the war memorial

11 War Memorial

The cost of the memorial was defrayed by public subscription and its design has not altered. Now names of those who lost their lives serving the country cover almost a century. As well as Maurice Lea and William Clark, please spend a moment to think about the thousands of others who lost their lives not only in the Great War, but in the wars since.

The war shattered lives, changed society and altered how we think about conflict.

When you are ready to leave the war memorial garden recross the road and follow the perimeter fence of Maurice Lea Park to the left, round the corner into York Road to find your parked car. Alternatively walk downhill retracing your steps to Swadlincote Town Centre.

‘AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE MORNING, WE WILL REMEMBER THEM’

Thanks to Shirley Horton, for the picture of the Thiepval etching.

Pauline Key for information about William Clark

Dot Morson, Graham Nutt and the Magic Attic for help with photographs

Staff and students at the William Allitt School for the design and production of poppy plaques

Anne Pittam who donated family papers to the Magic Attic concerning Maurice Lea's death.

Historic maps copyright Ordnance Survey and Landmark Information Group.

This leaflet has been made possible by a grant from the National Heritage Lottery Fund.



Download this and the other WW1 Commemorative walks here:

www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/firstworldwar

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