

ABOUT THE WALK

DISTANCE: 2 1/4 miles. **TIME:** 1-2 hours, depending on whether you visit the Minster
START/PARKING: Church St CP or Saracen’s Head CP.
TERRAIN: mostly pavement walking with short stretch on path by riverside.
FOOTWEAR: ordinary footwear.
OS MAP: Explorer series No. 271, 1-25,000 scale
REFRESHMENTS: a big choice of cafés and inns in town centre.

REV.JT BECHER HERITAGE TRAIL

The trail is named after the Rev. John Thomas Becher (1769-1848) who was a social reformer of national importance as well as being a dominant personality in the town. He was a clergyman, magistrate, botanist, close friend of the young Lord Byron, but is probably best known as a social reformer, whilst more would have been known of him if one of his family had not destroyed his personal papers in the early 20th. century. The trail takes you a number of places in the town closely associated with JT Becher’s activities. If, after the walk, you feel you want to find out more about him and the Becher family, read Julie O'Neill’s ‘The Life and Times of JT Becher’ (2002) and Robert Hardstaff’s “Human Cargo - The Southwell Connection” (2004).

SOUTHWELL IN 1792. JT Becher moved to Southwell in 1792 after education at Oxford and ordination as a priest. He had been born in Ireland but most of his family were living in either Bristol or Southwell. The ‘Bristol’ Bechers were heavily involved in shipping which included slave trading activities. The ‘Southwell’ Bechers were important as local land agents, squires and parsons for generations. What kind of town was the Southwell that JT Becher settled in after 1792? The diary of George Hodgkinson for 1781 gives us a reasonably clear picture. Southwell was a small town of approx. 2,000 people very much centred on the Collegiate Church and its many fine Prebendal houses. (Trollope’s ‘Barchester’ springs to mind as a comparison). As JT Becher’s family were already well established and living in some of these prebendal houses, he would have immediately found himself welcomed to the homes of the families of substance who were the ‘social set’, such as the Hodgkinsons, the Leacrofts and the Pigots.

The trail starts at the Church St. CP (alternative Saracen’s Head CP). On leaving the CP cross the road and go through the gate opposite into the Minster precincts. Walk to the North

Porch entrance and notice the fine Norman carvings. It is a wonderful experience visiting the Minster. In the south transept near the war memorial look out for the fine memorial to JT Becher and his wife Mary. For information about JT Becher and the Minster read below.

POINT OF INTEREST 1

SOUTHWELL MINSTER-JT Becher the Clergyman. Despite his many interests JT Becher’s main work was in the church. His family must have told him before he arrived in Southwell about the fine

Minster and its surroundings. With his good connections he was presented with a number of parish livings that he could enjoy, curate at Blidworth, Thurgarton and Hoveringham, vicar at Rampton, Midsomer Norton and Farnsfield. So he was a pluralist, which might to us appear somewhat greedy, but to people then it would have appeared quite normal for the well-connected. In later years as Prebendary and Vicar-General he did everything he could to make the management of the Chapter efficient.



Stone carvings from The Chapter House

If you have visited the Minster, leave by the North Porch, turn right and pass the highly regarded Chapter House. Two of the four well known Southwell springs, Holy Well and Lady Well were nearby within the precincts of the Minster. Pause when you reach Vicar’s Court (blue plaque on wall) and read below.

POINT OF INTEREST 2

VICAR’S COURT AND THE RESIDENCE. This attractive group of five houses is on the site of the medieval College of Vicars Choral. These were men who deputised for canons at the daily services, were paid by the canons and lived a communal life, eating together in a hall. In later years the Vicars no longer needed the hall and eventually in 1689 a house was built for the Canon-in-Residence (at the end) and the whole complex was gradually rebuilt by the 1780’s. Today there are no full time Vicars Choral, the Dean and Canons attending most services themselves. The Dean lives in The Residence and Canons and the Rector Chori, who is in charge of music, in the other four houses.

Turn left and just before you cross the road look at the impressive Georgian, Prebendal houses opposite, several of which have links with JT Becher. Take a look at ‘Cranfield’ on the left, formerly Oxtou 1 Prebendal House (blue plaque on wall). It is a wonderful Queen Anne mansion. It was lived in by William Becher and later by his son Cranfield Becher from whom the house got its name. Walk on to South Muskham Prebendal House which is medieval in origin but Georgian in style. Richard Becher (cousin to JT Becher) lived there and the house remained in the Becher family until 1916, apart from 1829-48. For more information about Prebendal houses read below.

POINT OF INTEREST 3

PREBENDAL HOUSES were the residencies lived in by the canons (clergy) who were supported by income from property (prebends). The houses are named after the villages from which most of their revenues were derived. The canons (prebendaries) were members of Southwell Minster Chapter. JT Becher became a Prebendary (South



Prebendal houses

Muskham) in 1818. He later became senior canon and in 1830 was appointed Vicar General of the Collegiate Church. Most of the prebendaries were absent much of the year, having several incumbencies elsewhere, and by the 18th century the houses were rented or owned by wealthy families.

From South Muskham Prebend turn left and walk up Becher’s Walk (named after Rev. JT Becher). This takes you to Becher’s home, ‘Hill House’ on Burgage Lane. Notice the spacious garden that he had, seen on the right as you go up the lane. As you get closer to the house note its commanding position. It would also have been very convenient being so close to the Minster. For

more information read below and look at the blue plaque on Hill House gatepost.



Hill House

POINT OF INTEREST 4

HILL HOUSE - JT Becher the Family man. After marrying Mary Becher in 1802 JT Becher had the mansion called Hill House built around 1805. He and Mary were to have a son, John Drake Becher and a daughter, Mary Becher. As the Bechers were very much in the ‘social set’, they would have had a host of servants and most likely would have regularly entertained the Hodgkinsons, the Pigots and the newcomers to town in 1803, Lord Byron and his mother. JT Becher died here in 1848 but the Becher family continued to live at Hill House until early in the 20th century. It became a boarding house for the Minster School until the early 1990’s and recently it was converted into luxury flats.

Turn right and walk down Burgage Lane and at the junction with Newark Rd cross and follow the FP sign straight across the first little road. Continue on the road as it bends round to the right until it reaches the Potwell Dyke. Follow the FP to Upton Road. This brings you out on Upton Rd. Turn left and stop at the bridge over the River Greet, being mindful of the traffic. It was a common saying locally in the late 19th century, according to Richard Fisher of Westhorpe, that when people got old they would soon cross the Greet Bridge; meaning

AT THE GREET BRIDGE
*From Andrew’s eyes the tears fell fast
While longing looks he Westward cast;
Standing on the turnpike road
Bending beneath poverty’s load,
From birth he’d lived a simple life
And shunned the snares of sin and strife
Many hard winters had he braved
Which used the little he had saved.*

*This poor old man with scarce a vice,
Whom vanity could not entice,
Who heeded not the snare of drink
Was now upon starvation’s brink.
Without a home, without a friend
His life must as a pauper end;
But it meant starvation to retreat,
So broken Andrew crossed The Greet.
by Richard Fisher of Westhorpe 1878-1966)*

they would go to the Workhouse. Read the following poem. Cross over to the Workhouse. You have the choice of visiting now or later. It is most definitely worth a visit and has recently won an Award for Excellence. In any case look at the leaflet below and the blue Information Plaque and try and imagine what it must have been like to end up there.

POINT OF INTEREST 5

THE WORKHOUSE. The maintenance of the poor was the major national social problem from the Elizabethan age to mid-Victorian years. The ruling class believed

that a large part of the problem was idle or dissolute workers. To clamp down on this vice of the age, as it was seen, Becher and other reformers devised the ‘workhouse test’, the rule that no relief should be granted to the able-bodied without entering the dreaded workhouse. In 1823 he persuaded people of local influence that a large workhouse should be built to serve 49 parishes. He set out his ideas and strategy to manage the poor in a pamphlet, ‘The Anti-Pauper System’ in 1828. Becher’s system was an economic measure, to reduce tax, and a moral crusade, to teach the poor to ask for help only as a last resort. In the workhouse paupers were divided into men, women, children, vagrants and sick.

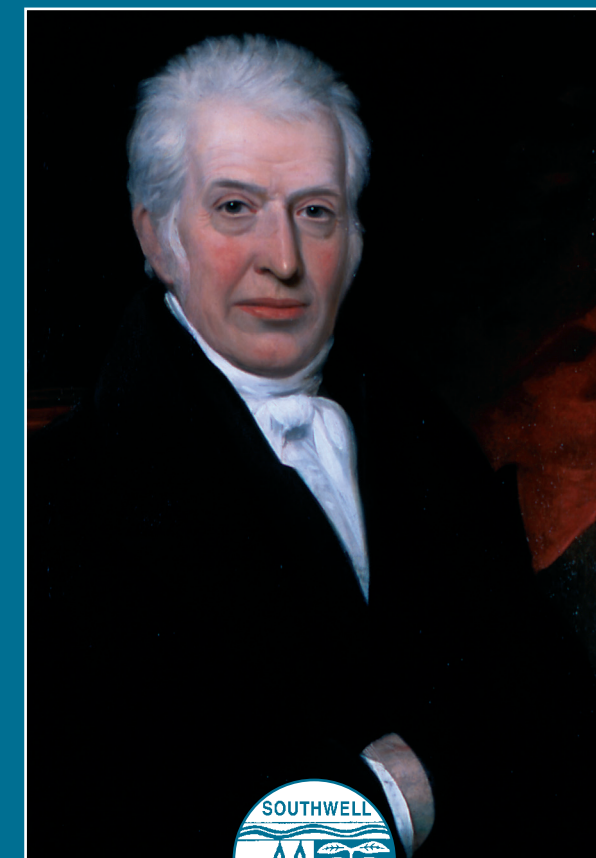


The Work House

Southwell Heritage Trails

The Rev. John Thomas Becher

HERITAGE TRAIL



Published by Southwell Tourism Partnership

Go back over the side road to the bridge and take the FP by the River Greet on your right. This takes you back towards town. Before this was made into an attractive riverside walk this was part of the Southwell to Rolleston Railway line. It is not unusual to see a heron or kingfisher along here. You come out on Station Rd., which is characterised by its Victorian houses including the Station House (blue plaque on wall) and the 'The Final Whistle' PH which has a very good beer garden. In JT Becher's day this would have been fields (part of the Burgage). Lord Byron, friend of JT Becher refers to swimming in the River Greet in his poetry. Turn left and walk down Station Rd to the Burgage junction. The Burgage area is the surviving remnant of Burgage Manor, which was a separate Manor within the parish of Southwell. Burgage Green itself is common land and is an attractive, peaceful place shaded by tall trees. Cross and walk on the pavement straight ahead until you are opposite the austere gateway on your right and close to a blue plaque on the wall. This was the gateway to the town's House of Correction on which JT Becher had a major influence. Read the information below.



POINT OF
INTEREST
6

HOUSE OF CORRECTION. There had been a House of Correction since 1611 on the Burgage and sited 100yds further up near the Old Court House. Though they were originally intended to enforce the Poor Law by giving the idle and troublesome work, Houses of Correction became more like prisons as places for punishing criminals. JTBecher had become a JP in 1802 and four years later, in this role, he was asked to report on the condition of the House. His 1806 Report indicates how appalled he was about the state of the prisoners and their lack of work

opportunities. He persuaded the local magistrates to agree to build a new prison. It was built in 1808, extended in 1817, and designed by a Southwell architect Richard Ingleman. It was built on a windmill plan with a central building to which were adjoined three wings. JT Becher drew up 'Regulations' for the management of the new prison. These rules were more humane, providing regular employment in productive work and paying prisoners for this work. It became a model for other prisons. Some of the other regulations might appear to us as very severe as Becher was a great believer in prison discipline being firm, but for the times they seemed quite enlightened.

Cross over the grass to the old prison, turn left and walk on the right hand side of the Burgage and you will pass a series of Victorian buildings, including the former Court House and Police Station. Eventually you come to an impressive Georgian house, Burgage Manor, famous for being the residence, for a while, of Lord Byron and his mother. Notice the other fine Georgian buildings opposite which no doubt would have been open to JT Becher and Lord Byron as key members of the 'social set'. Read the information below about the friendship between the two men.

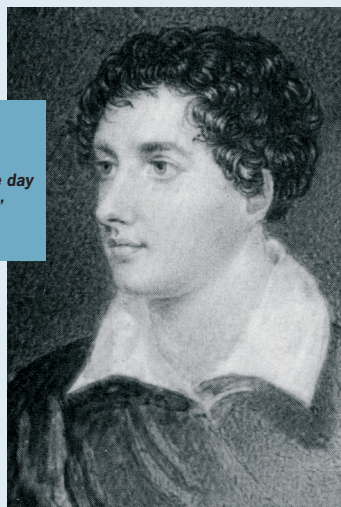
POINT OF
INTEREST
7

BURGAGE MANOR. In 1803, at the age of 15, Lord Byron and his widowed mother moved into Burgage Manor. JT Becher probably got to know Byron through Elizabeth and John Pigot, who lived opposite them at 'The Burgage'. They became good friends despite the difference in age and Becher encouraged Byron with his poetry. However he was on occasions

*'Say Byron! Why compel me to deplore
Talents designed for choice poetic lore
Deigning to varnish scenes, that shun the day
With guilty luster, and with amorous lay?'*
JT.Becher

prepared to rebuke Byron, when he felt he was too erotic. After Byron left Southwell to live at Newstead Abbey the friendship continued and Byron made Becher an alternate executor to his will, drawn up in 1811.

Walk from the leafy, spacious Burgage, with its impressive Georgian buildings, to the tightly knit King St. This follows the line of the original medieval street.



POINT OF
INTEREST
8

INNS of the TOWN in Becher's day. In the late 18th century, the social life in a small country town like Southwell would have been centred around the Assembly Rooms, now part of The Saracen's Head, town centre inns, races on Burgage Green and the private houses of the 'social set'. The Becher family were certainly members of that privileged group. We learn from George Hodgkinson's Diary of 1781 that the privileged would use the local inns for public meetings, business transactions and private clubs as well as for a casual drink. Becher would probably, like George Hodgkinson, have referred to them after the name of their proprietor. The 'Saracen's Head' was known as Thompson's, the 'Cross Keys' (on the corner of the present Queen St and the Old Market Place, now demolished) was known as Cade's and 'The Crown' was Taylor's. The 'Admiral Rodney' was there in Becher's time as was 'The Black Bull', by Bull Yard and the 'Castle' or Nicholson's, now demolished, but formerly by the west entrance to the Minster churchyard. As Nicholson's was used frequently for Sessions of the Justices, it is likely JT Becher was a frequent visitor.

There is a good selection of inns and cafés to stop at before you stroll back to the CP which is on your left down Church Street.

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There are six Heritage Trails for Southwell.



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