

# Rivers of Life

A self-guided riverside trail exploring the hidden natural and industrial heritage of Chesterfield. Follow the trail along the river to Spital Cemetery where you can find and uncover the secrets of this special place.

**Walk Length:** 1.2 miles  
**Total tour time:** 45 mins

River Hipper

Ravenside  
Retail Park

Markham Road

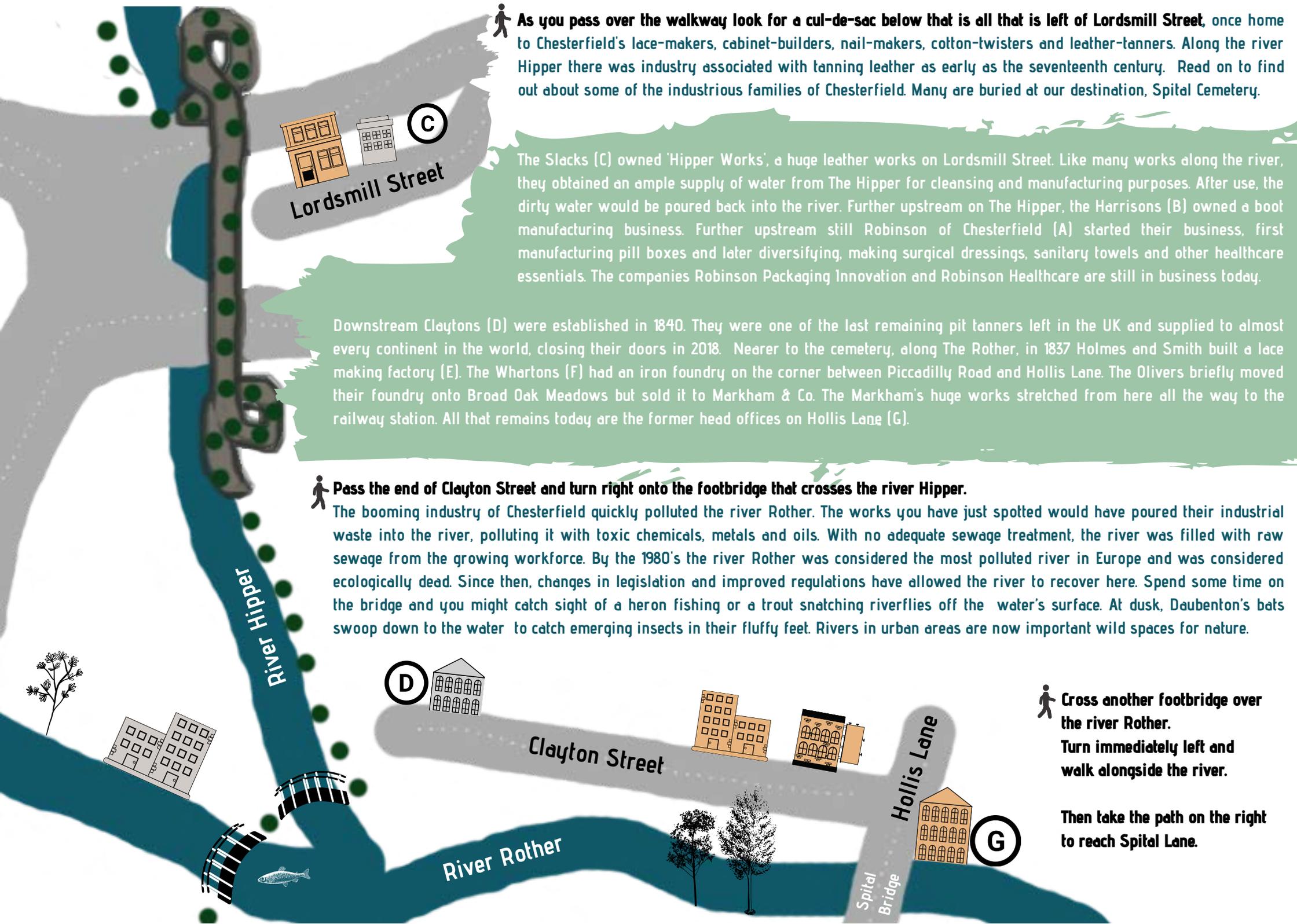
 **From the Retail Park take the passageway between B&M and Asda and follow the path over the metal footbridge, passing over the river Hipper. Look at the concrete holding the river into its artificially straightened channel.**

Like many towns, Chesterfield's origin begins with its rivers. Rivers provided defence, water and food to early settlers of Chesterfield. In the town's beginnings, the power of water would have fuelled food production and early industries. Water mills used the power of the river to turn machinery, first grinding flour, but later other goods. Chesterfield soon became a bustling market town famous for its production of pottery, lace, leather and metals.

From the west of Chesterfield, small streams flow down the hills towards the town, meeting the River Rother. The Rother then runs north to Sheffield where it meets the Don Catchment's main tributary, the Don, which winds its way across the land through the towns of Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster, Goole and then out to sea at the Humber Estuary. Goods produced in Chesterfield needed transporting to the Humber, which would allow them to be sold across the world. Chesterfield's navigable waterways, the canal, opened in 1777.

 **Follow the second path to the left between the river and B&Q carpark until you get to the main road. Turn left here and then climb up onto the pedestrian walkway on your left. Use this to cross over the main roads. This is the start of the Spital Trail. Look in the direction of the bridge (due east) and you might see the spire of the chapels in the cemetery peering out above the pine trees. Look back between B&Q and TKMaxx and you'll see The Hipper forced into a concrete channel.**

 **Continue over the walkway and along Spital Trail.**



**As you pass over the walkway look for a cul-de-sac below that is all that is left of Lordsmill Street, once home to Chesterfield's lace-makers, cabinet-builders, nail-makers, cotton-twisters and leather-tanners. Along the river Hipper there was industry associated with tanning leather as early as the seventeenth century. Read on to find out about some of the industrious families of Chesterfield. Many are buried at our destination, Spital Cemetery.**

The Slacks (C) owned 'Hipper Works', a huge leather works on Lordsmill Street. Like many works along the river they obtained an ample supply of water from The Hipper for cleansing and manufacturing purposes. After use, the dirty water would be poured back into the river. Further upstream on The Hipper, the Harrisons (B) owned a boot manufacturing business. Further upstream still Robinson of Chesterfield (A) started their business, first manufacturing pill boxes and later diversifying, making surgical dressings, sanitary towels and other healthcare essentials. The companies Robinson Packaging Innovation and Robinson Healthcare are still in business today.

Downstream Claytons (D) were established in 1840. They were one of the last remaining pit tanners left in the UK and supplied to almost every continent in the world, closing their doors in 2018. Nearer to the cemetery, along The Rother, in 1837 Holmes and Smith built a lace making factory (E). The Whartons (F) had an iron foundry on the corner between Piccadilly Road and Hollis Lane. The Olivers briefly moved their foundry onto Broad Oak Meadows but sold it to Markham & Co. The Markham's huge works stretched from here all the way to the railway station. All that remains today are the former head offices on Hollis Lane (G).

**Pass the end of Clayton Street and turn right onto the footbridge that crosses the river Hipper.**

The booming industry of Chesterfield quickly polluted the river Rother. The works you have just spotted would have poured their industrial waste into the river, polluting it with toxic chemicals, metals and oils. With no adequate sewage treatment, the river was filled with raw sewage from the growing workforce. By the 1980's the river Rother was considered the most polluted river in Europe and was considered ecologically dead. Since then, changes in legislation and improved regulations have allowed the river to recover here. Spend some time on the bridge and you might catch sight of a heron fishing or a trout snatching riverflies off the water's surface. At dusk, Daubenton's bats swoop down to the water to catch emerging insects in their fluffy feet. Rivers in urban areas are now important wild spaces for nature.

**Cross another footbridge over the river Rother. Turn immediately left and walk alongside the river.**

**Then take the path on the right to reach Spital Lane.**

**E**

 Cross Spital Lane, carefully and turn left. You will be walking alongside the bottom of Spital Cemetery. Turn right to enter the cemetery.



**F**



Spital Lane

Piccadilly Road

Wain Avenue

**1**



In 1857 churchyards were full. The Industrial Revolution had resulted in a population explosion, plus crowded conditions and pollution from industry brought disease and death to the town. Non-conformists grew in number and followers did not want to be buried in Church of England graveyards. Space was found in Spital for a new General Cemetery. Victorian Garden Cemeteries had been springing up around the country since the 1830s, owned originally by private companies but Spital cemetery was in the hands of the local authority and still is today. It was the second General Cemetery built in Derbyshire, following another in Derby.

Hady Hill

Stanley Street

**2**



**3**



**4**



**5**

**9**



**10**



**12**



**11**



Follow the numbers on the map and guide as we take you around the cemetery.

**1**

Leper Priest

**7**

Wildflower Meadow

**2**

Gateway Path

**8**

Bug Hotel

**3**

Oak Tree

**9**

Chapel

**4**

Wharton Grave

**10**

Robinson Grave

**5**

Oliver Grave

**11**

Harrison Grave

**6**

Slack Grave

**12**

Elm Tree

**7**



Cemetery Road

Read on to find out more .



As you walk around the cemetery look for the hidden history, symbolism and nature around you.

## 1 Leper Priest

Hidden in a grave in a garden opposite the entrance to the cemetery in 2001 the house owners found remains of a priest, presumed to have worked in the leper hospital in the area during the late 12th and early 13th century. The name Spital comes from the shortening of the word Hospital. A new grave at the cemetery entrance has been erected to commemorate the priest.

## 2 Gateway Path

This old path, part of the original garden cemetery design, was hidden under grass but recently uncovered. It has become a special place where we remember the sacrifice but also the resilience of families and communities following times of loss. Look for the bat box on the pine tree just at the entrance to the Gateway Path and the bird boxes on the trees around you. Owls, songthrush and treecreepers have all been spotted here.

## 3 Oak Tree

Victorian cemeteries are filled with deep and complex symbolism. Florigraphy, the language of flowers, was very popular in the 19th Century and families carefully chose the flowers to represent what they wanted to say about their departed loved one. Can you find and identify any of the following flowers on the gravestones here? Primroses (innocence and youth), fern (humbleness and sincerity), corn (riches), rose (beauty), passion flower (the souls redemption through great trials), lily (purity and innocence, also motherhood). Look for the names of the stone carvers on the graves, often hidden at the foot or on the edge of the stone: J.T. Wright, W Ellis and others. This collection of graves is under the spreading branches of a magnificent oak tree. Many of the trees planted in the cemetery also have their own symbolism. Oak speaks of ancient wisdom, longevity, faith, power and endurance.

## 4 Wharton Grave

The Wharton family once lived in the houses opposite the entrance to the cemetery: Powderham Lodge, Rose Cottage and Bridge House. Round sewer manholes bearing their name can still be found in parts of Chesterfield.

## 5 Oliver Grave

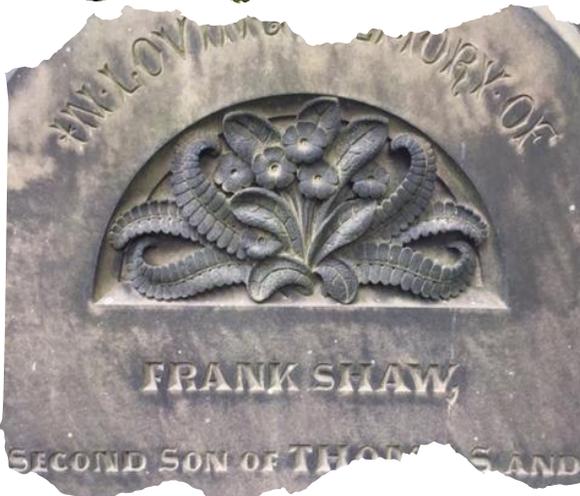
The Oliver family had a foundry in the middle of Chesterfield but moved alongside the Rother on what was called Broad Oak Meadows. Shortly after the move the works was taken over by Markham & Co. and for more than 100 years they exported engineering machinery all over the world. A weir remains just downstream from Spital Bridge which powered hammers in the works.

## 6 Slack Grave

William Slack, whose family ran the leather works, is not buried in Spital but lies with his parents in St Paul's, Hasland. St Paul's church has many connections with the cemetery. One of their beautiful stained glass windows is in memory of Elizabeth Slack, William's second wife. His first and second wives are both buried at Spital.



Safety in the Cemetery: Take care as you walk around the cemetery as the ground and paths can be uneven. Do not lean on the gravestones.



## 7 Wildflower Meadow

Areas of grass have been allowed to grow long and there are now wild flowers supporting insects, small mammals, birds and bat species.

## 8 Bug Hotel

Look for the bug hotel on the Community Tool House. Urban cemeteries provide important spaces for nature.

## 9 Chapels

The architects Bidlake and Lovatt won the competition to build two mortuary chapels (one for Anglicans and one for non-conformists) in the new cemetery in Spital in 1857. They ceased to be used by the 1970s and lay neglected although they had been given a Grade II listing by English Heritage. In 2018 they were sold to a private buyer and are in the process of being carefully renovated.

## 10 Robinson Grave

Founders of Robinson of Chesterfield, John and Martha Robinson are buried here.

## 11 Harrison Grave

A long line of flat tombstones to members of the Harrison family, boot makers. It cannot have been a healthy lifestyle, close to the river and even a successful business did not protect them from disease. Many children in the family died young.

## 12 Elm Tree

Around the elm tree are more wonderful flower carvings. Look out for roses, lilies, primroses, ferns, and oak leaves carved into the gravestones. Can you find harebells (mourning and worship) and a palm frond (victory over death)?

Elm trees once covered much of the country, but are now rarely seen due to the spread of Dutch elm disease, which has wiped out many trees. Elm wood was resistant to decay when permanently wet, so the hollowed trunks were widely used as water pipes during the medieval period in Europe.

 You've reached the end of the trail.

This walk was created for Heritage Open Days 2020 by the Friends of Spital Cemetery and Don Catchment Rivers Trust

