INTRODUCTION
The village is first mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 when it was known as Castretone. Later names include Briggcasturton, Brygg Casterton, Briggecasterton (13th and 14th centuries), Magna Casterton (15th century); Bridgecasterton (16th century)

The name 'Casterton' signifies Roman origin. Great Casterton is located at the crossing of the Roman Ermine Street and the River Gwash, which flows past the village on three sides on its journey to join the River Welland to the east of Stamford. The bridge which carries Ermine Street over the River Gwash may have been the origin of the name Brigg (or Bridge) Casterton. Great Casterton and Casterton Magna are more recent names which differentiate it from Little Casterton.

The Great North Road (A1), which mainly follows the path of Ermine Street, ran through the centre of the village until the construction of the Stamford bypass in 1960. This new road runs to the west of the village. The former route of the Great North Road through the village is now the B1081. This important route, known also as The York Road and Horn Lane, carried many interesting travellers over the centuries, from Royalty and funeral corteges to highwaymen (possibly including Dick Turpin), armies and prisoners, and drovers’ animals moving south to the London markets.

The village church is dedicated to St Peter & St Paul. The churchyard is entered from Old Great North Road via an arched war memorial to the dead of both World Wars. The benefice is shared with Pickworth, Tickencote and Little Casterton.

The village has a primary school (Great Casterton Church of England Primary School) and a secondary school (Casterton College). The Crown Inn is the only surviving public house.

ROMAN TOWN
The earliest recorded settlement here was a Roman fort which was established about AD44. A civilian settlement adjacent to the fort later developed into a walled town and the defences are still apparent. Archaeological excavations have also discovered a villa, pottery kilns, and a large cemetery.

About a mile and a half north of the village are the earthwork remains of Woodhead Castle, a medieval moated site with an attached bailey, which was probably visited by Edward I in 1290.

THE VILLAGE MAP
The map attached to this guided walk is based on the 25 inch to one mile Ordnance Survey 2nd edition map of circa 1904. Consequently, later buildings, extensions and demolitions are not shown. Numbers in the text [12] for example, refer to locations shown on the map.

Please:
Respect private property.
Use pavements and footpaths where available.
Take great care when walking alongside or crossing roads. Remember that you are responsible for your own safety.

THE WALK
The walk starts at the Church Hall [1] which is near the west end of the Church of St Peter & St Paul [2].

Great Casterton church in 1839. (Uppingham School Archives)

The church has many interesting features and it is worth spending a little time here to look at some of them. They include:

- The Perpendicular tower with pinnacles, possibly replacing a thirteenth-century bellcote. It was erected in the west bay of the nave.
- The embattled walls, probably of the fourteenth century.
- The medieval wall decoration in the north aisle.
- The oak south door which has very early hinges.
- The 18th century pulpit and canopy, originally painted blue.
- A tomb with the effigy of a priest in vestments in the wall of the south aisle. There are two other tombs with remains of an effigy, one in a recess outside the south aisle and the other at the base of the tower.
- The memorial to Vincent Wing of Pickworth on the outside of the chancel south wall. He was the son of Tycho Wing, the distinguished philosopher and astronomer of Stamford and Pickworth.

There should be a booklet in the Church which describes these and other features.

The Old Rectory [3] can be seen from the churchyard. This mid-18th century Grade II listed property has been the subject of a television restoration programme.

At the entrance to the churchyard [4] is the memorial to local men who lost their lives in the two world wars. It is in the form of a stone arch with bronze tablets and was designed by a Mr Lenton and erected by Belton and Goddard of Stamford. One man mentioned is Tom Noel, the son of Gerard Cecil Noel of Cottesmore House. He died in action in August 1918 whilst serving with the 20th Squadron RAF. His brother, John Noel,
was a well-known racing driver in the early 1930s who took part in the Le Mans 24-hour motor race.

*The Rectory in 1910. (Jack Hart Collection)*

At [5] on the map, but not part of this walk, is the bridge over the Gwash after which ‘Brigg Casterton’ took its name, and at [6] the site of a medieval watermill. Nothing remains of this today, but it is clearly shown on a map of 1798 when the village was part of the estate of Lord Exeter of Burghley House. It is also mentioned in a document of 1555 when ‘a watermill with adjacent croft in Brigg Casterton’ was leased for 21 years by the Crown to George Goodlad at a rent of 40 shillings a year.

John Clare (1793-1864) ‘the greatest labouring-class poet that England has ever produced’ lived in Great Casterton and worked locally as a gardener and lime-burner for three years from April 1817. At Great Casterton Church, in March 1820, he married Martha (Patty) Turner who lived on a remote farm to the north of the village. After the ceremony, the wedding party crossed the road to the Crown Inn [7], where they had the wedding dinner, paid for by Martha’s uncle. Her parents had disowned her and boycotted the wedding because they objected to her forthcoming marriage to a poor lime-burner.

From the war memorial walk in a northerly direction along Old Great North Road. On the right is the 17th century Grade II listed Crown Inn [7]. To its right is the former Post Office and shop [8], also Grade II listed.

The Burghley Estate thatched cottages shown at [9] on the walk map have been demolished and replaced by modern housing. There were no stairs to the bedrooms of these cottages. There was, instead, a simple wooden ladder through a hole in the living room ceiling.

Further along Old Great North Road, on the east side is The Limes [10], an early 19th century Grade II listed former farmhouse with six bedrooms. It can be seen centre left on the second c1910 photograph (opposite) of Old Great North Road looking south.

Bridge House [11] is a former Great North Road coaching inn, dating back to 1700. When John Clare came to Great Casterton in 1817, it was known as New Inn and owned by a Mr Wilders.

Mr Wilders also owned several limekilns in the area, including Pickworth where John Clare was set to work. At this time, Clare lodged at the house of a family named Cole.

Of the New Inn, he records: ‘They took in men of all descriptions, the more the merrier for their profits, and when they all assembled round the evening fire the motley countenances of many characters looked like an assemblage of robbers in the rude hut dimly and mysteriously lighted by the domestic savings of a farthing taper’.

The 17th century Grade II listed Crown Inn looking north along Old Great North Road, about 1910. To its right is the former Post Office and shop, also Grade II listed. (Jack Hart Collection)

Looking south along Old Great North Road, about 1910. The Crown Inn can be seen on the left in the distance and the thatched cottages, also on the left, have since been demolished. (Jack Hart Collection)

Again looking south along Old Great North Road, about 1910, The Limes farmhouse can be seen centre left. (Jack Hart Collection)
Over the road from Bridge House are the former premises of Forsyth and Ferrier’s Garage [12]. Don Forsyth and Jack Ferrier met whilst serving in the navy in the Great War and decided that after the war they would start a garage. With this intention Don Forsyth purchased the blacksmith’s business of Mr Knight, a maker of agricultural implements, in 1921. Jack Ferrier joined a few months later and the now partners were able to purchase the freehold from the Exeter Estate in 1924 for £500. The first manual petrol pumps were installed in the same year. They went on to become a successful business and later opened another garage in Stamford.

Looking down Water Lane to the left, the bridge over the River Gwash has replaced the former ford and footbridge [13].

The original primary school, just inside Pickworth Road [14], was built in 1861 by the Marquis of Exeter to teach 60 juniors and 24 infants. The new Great Casterton Church of England Primary School was built on the same site.

The surviving Roman earthworks can be seen from Ryhall Road at [15]. Please note that they are on private property and there is no public access.

The Romano-British settlement at Great Casterton developed adjacent to the Roman fort which was built on the north bank of the River Gwash about AD44. The defences of the fort, which lay to the north-east of the settlement, enclosed an area of around 6 acres. The fort was large enough to house an auxiliary cavalry unit of up to one thousand strong. Military occupation probably ceased sometime around AD80.

The settlement developed along the line of Ermine Street in a loop of the River Gwash. It was contemporary with the fort, and it continued to be occupied into the fourth century. Evidence of late first century ore-smelting has been found within the defences. A late first century villa and bathhouse, a pottery kiln dated around AD150-180 and another undated kiln have been found nearby.

The town defences were in the form of an elongated polygon of seven or eight faces which enclosed an area of 18 acres and were probably erected around the turn of the third century. They consisted of a stone wall, backed by an earth rampart and fronted latterly by a single ditch.

A Roman cemetery lay to the west of the settlement. Part of the cemetery was exposed during an archaeological investigation on a site to the north east of the Primary School in 2004 prior to residential development [16]. The excavation discovered the north-west corner of a 3rd/4th century cemetery, consisting of 133 graves. Three crouched Iron Age burials, three 2nd century pottery kilns and two 3rd century corn driers were also found.

Now return to the Church Hall and the end of the walk.