INTRODUCTION
Empingham lies in the Gwash Valley, near the eastern end of Rutland Water. When the reservoir was under construction in the early 1970s archaeological excavations confirmed that this area had been occupied for many centuries. Discoveries included:

- Traces of an Iron Age settlement
- Two Romano-British farming settlements
- Pagan and Christian Anglo-Saxon cemeteries

The most enduring legacy the Saxons left to Empingham was its name. The ending 'ingham' denotes one of the earlier settlements, older than those with 'ham' and 'ton' endings. So Empingham was the home of the 'ing' or clan of Empa. From then on it was known as Epingham (11th century), Empingeham (12th century), Hempingham, and Amplingeham (13th century), before finally becoming Empingham.

This large parish of approximately 1970 hectares, or 7.6 square miles, was enclosed by Act of Parliament in 1794. It includes a considerable part of the former Normanton Park, now mostly under Rutland Water.

The River Gwash runs from west to east through the middle of the parish and passes to the south of the village. The five mills recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 were watermills on the River Gwash and its tributary the North Brook. They were reduced to two by 1557, and Empingham Mill, the sole survivor, has long been disused. It is on the north side of the Gwash about half a mile to the east of the village.

Thomas Blore in *The History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland* (Vol. 1, Pt. 2, 1811) notes that there was a chapel of St. Botolph in what is now Chapel Spinney on Chapel Hill to the east of the village. The location is marked on some old maps.

Chapel of St Botolph on John Speed's map of c1610

Earthworks in Hall Close, to the south-west of the village, ([20] on the walk map, but not part of this walk) mark the moated site of a manor house, probably the hall which Ralph de Normanville was building in 1221. It is recorded that the king, Henry III, gave instructions for Ralph to take six oak trees from the forest to make crucks for this project (Victoria County History, *A History of the County of Rutland, Volume 2, 1935*).

Hall Close earthworks. (Hartley, *Medieval Earthworks of Rutland*)

Hardwick, which comprises that part of Empingham parish lying north of the Great North Road, was at one time a hamlet of importance, but now survives only in the name of Hardwick Farm. It was near here, during the Wars of the Roses, that the battle of Losecoat Field was fought on 12 March 1470, when the Lancastrian forces, under Sir Robert Welles, were defeated by those of Edward IV.

The population of Empingham increased in the 18th century when Normanton was depopulated by Sir Gilbert Heathcote, the 3rd Baronet, most of the new tenants being accommodated in existing estate properties.

When Gilbert Henry Heathcote, the 6th Baronet, inherited the Normanton estate in 1867, Empingham 'was in a dilapidated state and many of the houses were in ruins' (Post Office Directory, 1876).

In 1860, the Poor Law Commission investigated rural housing and like other landowners, this Gilbert Henry took...
note of their reports. The family owned 13,600 acres in Rutland in 15 different parishes and he and set about modernising his properties all over the estate.

Normanton Works, to the south-east of Normanton Hall, was established by 1871 for this purpose. It employed every type of craftsman required to repair, renovate and build the properties and other assets on the Heathcote estates both in Lincolnshire and Rutland. Brickyards at Luffenham and Pilton provided the bricks and tiles. Old farms were repaired and acquired red tiled roofs instead of thatch, brick extensions were added and both small and large properties alike gained tall brick chimneys with decorative banding.

By the end of the nineteenth century Gilbert Henry Heathcote was justifiably called ‘The Building Earl’.

All the Estate houses built in and around Empingham after about 1870 carry the Heathcote family coat of arms. These are surmounted by two styles of coronet. A Baron’s crown was used until Gilbert Henry Heathcote became the 1st Earl of Ancaster in 1892. From then on it became an Earl’s crown. Both can be seen in the village.

Baron’s Coronet
Earl’s Coronet

The Entire Model Village of Empingham is how the village was described in the sale advertisement when the Normanton Estate was sold in 1924 by the 2nd Earl of Ancaster (the 7th Baronet). Included in the 149 lots were eighteen tenanted farms. The Heathcote family of Normanton Hall had owned Empingham for 200 years, and the village today is largely a legacy of that dynasty.

In the last hundred years Empingham has changed from being a self-sufficient village mainly occupied by tenant farmers, farm workers and others employed by the Ancaster Estate. Now, most of the houses, farmhouses and farm buildings are private owner-occupied residences. The Ancaster style is still much in evidence throughout the village, but there has been a great deal of modern development which has taken over the farmyards, large gardens and other open spaces seen on the 1904 walk map.

The impact of Rutland Water has much to do with increased tourism in the area and the creation of a more desirable place to live. The earth dam, the largest in the United Kingdom when it was built, is visible from the village, but excellent landscaping means that it is by no means an eyesore.

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

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

THE WALK

Main Street
The walk starts and ends at Empingham Methodist Church [1] in Main Street.

It is thought that there were Methodists in Empingham by the beginning of the 19th century. By 1818 a house in Church Street was being used for worship, and it was formally licensed by Rutland Quarter Sessions in 1821. An ‘old chapel’ was used from the 1820s, and this was on the site of what is now 18 Main Street. As congregations grew this building was enlarged. It was used for the last time on 21 July 1899. The following day contractors moved in to demolish it, the stone being sold to defray the cost of erecting the new and present church on land donated by the Earl of Ancaster. One of the workshops belonging to Joseph Healey was used for worship in the transition period. The engraved stones which can be seen on the front of this new church were laid on 17 August 1899. After the ceremony tea was provided for 300 people in a marquee. The opening was on 30 November 1899, when 500 teas were served in Audit Hall. The new building had cost £967.

In 2002 a church council meeting decided to embark on scheme involving the complete refurbishment of the church. This was completed in time for the first service on Sunday 18 December 2005.

Empingham Methodist Church in 1920. (Jack Hart Collection)

Across Main Street from the Methodist Church is Hallstones [2], a bungalow built by Mr Healey using stone recovered when Normanton Hall was demolished in 1926. Adjacent, on the west side, is one of Mr Healey’s workshops, again built from Normanton stone. Note the sign board above the doors.

Wisteria House [3], also known as Weed’s farmouse, is on the north side of Main Street. This 17th century dwelling was originally thatched and it probably acquired the present Ancaster style roof in the early 1900s.

The line of six red brick Ancaster style semi-detached houses [4] on the south side of Main Street is not shown on the 1904 walk map. However, the group of cottages that
are shown must have been demolished to make way for them. Note the absence of first floor windows on the front elevation of these houses.

**Primrose Hall** [5], on the south side of Main Street, was built on land donated by the Heathcote family. It was opened in 1899. The Primrose League was an organization for spreading Conservative principles in Great Britain. It was founded in 1883 in memory of Benjamin Disraeli, the primrose reputedly being his favourite flower. It was active until the mid-1990s and was finally wound up in December 2004. Membership of the League was open to women as well as men, although the hall in Empingham was also used as a Reading Room where men were able to play billiards and cards.

The line of **Town Houses** [6] built by ‘JG’ in 1933 are obviously not shown on the original 1904 map. ‘JG’ was John Griffin, the village baker and local entrepreneur, and in these properties he was trying to emulate the Ancaster style.

**Peasgood’s Farm**, now known as **The Firs** [7] on the corner of Main Street and Exton Road was probably the largest farmhouse in the village when the Normanton Estate was acquired by Gilbert Heathcote in 1729.

**Exton Road**

Turn right into Exton Way and walk approximately 200 metres to a Bridle Way sign on the right. From here you will be able to see the unusual round **Dovecote** [8] in a paddock behind The Firs. It is said to have over 700 nests. Return to Main Street and cross over to Church Street.

**Church Street**

Just inside Church Street on the east side is the 17th century **Cobbler’s Cottage** [9]. Return to Main Street and turn left.

**Main Street**

Immediately on the left is another **Ancaster Cottage** [10], this time built of stone. On the north side of Main Street at this point is **South View Farm** [11]. The building attached to the west side and fronting the pavement was formerly a small shop. Next on this side is **Home Farm** [12], occupied for many years by the Hibbitt family. Opposite is the former blacksmiths, now **The Old Forge** [13], hardly recognisable in its new role.

Walk to the end of Main Street. On the north side is the **White Horse Inn** [14]. Today it is a popular hostelry, but when it was owned by the Normanton Estate it also had another role: Petty Sessions were held here every Monday to deal with minor criminal matters. More serious legal matters were referred to Assizes at Oakham.

**Audit Hall Road**

Turn left into Audit Hall Road. Immediately on the left is the **Audit Hall** [15]. The whole of the Normanton estate was managed from Empingham and as Lords of the Manor the Heathcotes would be responsible for the Court Baron, a local civil court to deal with all matters relating to tenancies and rentals. Leases were for one to five years and renewed on Lady Day or Michaelmas. Payment took place on Rent Days at the Audit Hall. The Steward would preside and keep records. The Audit Hall was not sold in the Normanton Estate auction in 1924 and it was presented to the village by the 2nd Earl of Ancaster for use by the community as a village hall.

![Empingham dovecote in Exton Road. (RO)](image1.jpg)

**Audit Hall Road with the Audit Hall (arrowed) in 1910. (Jack Hart Collection)**

There are more **Ancaster houses** [16] behind the Audit Hall and across the main road from the hall [17] where the lines of privies, coal houses and pigsties which went with each dwelling can be seen.

Walk down Audit Hall Road until the entrance to Nook Lane can be seen on the right, **but do not cross**. Nook Lane leads to the former Nook Farm, now a private residence. This was the only farm retained by the Heathcote family when the Normanton Estate was sold in 1924. On the south side of the entrance to Nook Lane is another variation of the Ancaster style. This time it is a pair of **semi-detached houses** [18] with the front and east elevations in stone, and the rear and west elevations, which are less visible, in red brick.

Remaining on the same side of the road, continue along Audit Hall Road. Soon you will see, on the right-hand-side the former **Rectory** [19], now known as Lovick’s Place. It was the Empingham vicarage, becoming a rectory in 1867. The Rectory was sold by the Diocese of Peterborough in 1974.

The front half of this house was built in the second half of the 17th century. Originally it had Mullion windows, but
in 1833 the present sash windows were inserted. At the same time the house was virtually doubled in size by the erection of a matching rear section and this included a water closet, said to be the first in Empingham. The cost of the extension was £480, of which £437 was loaned from Queen Anne’s Bounty and secured on the lands and future income of the then vicar, the Rev Thomas Lovick Cooper. It is from him that the house takes its modern name. He was rector for 61 years until 1892. By all accounts he was a strong-minded and argumentative character, who was constantly in dispute with the Heathcotes and invariably in financial difficulties. The 1851 Census shows Thomas Lovick Cooper, his wife, three children and seven servants at the vicarage. Sadly, he was insolvent when he died in 1892 and did not leave a will.

A little further along Audit Hall Road on the left-hand side is the former National School [21]. It was built in 1838 by Gilbert Heathcote, the 4th Baronet. He let it to the managers for 4s a year and contributed towards a salary for the schoolmaster whom he appointed. Gilbert Henry Heathcote, the 6th Baronet, added an extra room in 1872.

![When the Prince and Princess of Wales visited Normanton in 1881, the children were given an extra half hour at playtime to watch the procession through the village.](Illustrated London News)

The school is now a private dwelling having been replaced by the new Empingham Church of England Primary School in School Lane, off Main Street.

Next to the school, on the east side, is School House [22], also built by the Heathcotes. At the Normanton Estate auction in 1924 it was described as having four bedrooms, two sitting rooms, a kitchen and a pantry. Outside were a wash house, a coal house and an earth closet. The tenant at the time was William Forsyth, the headmaster of the school, and his rent was £10 per year.

From here look at the Village Sign [23], the sides of which depict the village before and after Rutland Water.

Also from here look down the main road towards Church Bridge [24]. Originally this was very narrow, but it was widened in 1958 to the extent that it is now hardly recognisable as a bridge. However, the original late 17th century west, or upstream, parapet has been retained together with its three cutwaters.

![Empingham National school and School House in 1910.](Jack Hart Collection)

Church Street

Before turning into Church Street, walk across to the gates of Prebendal House [25], from where some of the house can be seen.

Originally the Prebend, or patronage of Empingham was in the charge of one of the Canons at Lincoln Cathedral. In effect he was the absent Rector of Empingham and had the rights to the Great Tithes. Because he lived in Lincoln, he appointed a vicar to look after the parish who lived in the Vicarage. Prebendal House was reserved for visits by the Canon, or Prebend, but it was rarely used for this purpose. It was leased to the Mackworth family in 1688 and subsequently the Heathcotes who purchased the Normanton Estate in 1729, but rooms were still reserved for the occasional Prebendary visit. The freehold of Prebendal House was transferred to the Heathcotes in 1795. When the Prebendal system was abolished in 1867 the Vicarage became a Rectory.
Now walk along Church Street to St Peter’s Church [26] which is normally open for visitors.

Enter the church via the west door. St Peter's has much to offer to the visitor and the following notes will help you to make the most of your visit:

St Peter’s Church has an impressive 14th century tower with a small but richly ornamented spire and very tall pinnacles. Otherwise the exterior has a mostly fifteenth-century appearance, with striking Perpendicular windows, though the lancet windows in the south transept and chancel are thirteenth century as is most of the fabric. The south arcade has round-headed arches from the early decades of the thirteenth century. One of the original clerestory windows is preserved in the north wall. There were two altars in the south transept where the lower part of the windows was cut away to allow a reredos to be placed behind them. The north transept, known as the Mackworth chapel, also had two altars and in 1872 the roof was painted to represent clouds. The church was restored in 1894-5 when the painted deal pews were replaced by chairs, the floor renewed and the west galleries, which hid the slender tower arch, were removed. A considerable amount of medieval paint remains, especially in the north transept. In the chancel are a particularly fine double piscina and beautiful sedilia. The Victorian choir stalls came from All Saints, Stamford, and were installed in 1983. The entrance was originally from the south, but this was altered to the west about 1900 at the request and expense of the Misses Trollope who lived at the Prebendal Manor.

On leaving the church, turn right to walk up Church Street. Near here, on the left is the site of the former Fire Station [27]. In 1807, as there were a large number of thatched houses in the village, the Heathcotes contributed half the cost (£40) of a fire engine and engine house, the other half being paid by the Overseers of the Poor. In 1894, the engine came under the control of the newly formed Parish Council. At the Normanton Estate auction in 1924 the Fire Station was described being of brick with a corrugated roof.

Near here was the stack yard of Butler’s Farm [28] and in the early hours of Maundy Thursday, 1941, it was the scene of a heroic feat. A German bomber had dropped a large cluster of incendiary bombs to the north of the village and the whole area was bathed in an intense light. Denny Griffin, the village baker, was watching the spectacle from his bedroom window at the Bakehouse in Church Street when he spotted an incendiary bomb on fire in the stack yard. Fearing that the stacks might catch fire he put on his clothes, ran the 60 yards to the stack yard and extinguished the fire with a bucket of sand. Thankfully, the villagers had acted on government advice to have buckets of sand, buckets of water and stirrup pumps ready for such an event.

Continue walking up Church Street to see, on the right, Church Farmhouse [29], now a private dwelling, and also The Old Bakery [30].

At this point turn round and retrace your steps down Church Street, then turn left into Crocket Lane.

Crocket Lane

On the right, at the end of the church wall, is a magnificent and well-preserved Tithe Barn [31]. Continue along Crocket Lane. On the right is the wall to the grounds of Prebendal House. In these grounds, but unseen from here, is the second dovecote in the village.

A little further along Crocket Lane are several thatched cottages [32] which were occupied by estate tenants who were moved from Normanton when it was depopulated in the late 18th century by Gilbert Heathcote, the 3rd Baronet.

Looking east along Crocket Lane about 1930. (Jack Hart Collection)

The thatched cottages in Crocket Lane which were probably occupied by the estate tenants moved from Normanton when it was depopulated in the late 18th century. (Jack Hart Collection)

Continue along Crocket Lane to Main Street and Empingham Methodist Church which is the end of this walk.

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