

Walk No 14.1: Clifton Grove, Clifton Village & Clifton Woods, Part 1

Walk/Photos taken 8th – 19th October 2020

The full walk (14.1 + 14.2) is a bit over 18km long; it took me 3 hours. This could be reduced by nearly 6km by parking in the small car park near Clifton Bridge (see later). If shorter walks are wanted then going by car to Clifton Village is an option – doing two or three loops from Holgate. Parking is restricted on-street (no parking Mon-Fri 10-11 and 2-3) in much of the village but not on Holgate and there is a small car park opposite the church on Holgate.

(Description 14.1 ends at Holgate in Clifton Village where 14.2 continues the walk)



Initially following Walk 3C, the route is from Musters Road, via Eton and Rugby Roads towards Compton Acres.

Turn right off Rugby Road at Collington Way and cross the open ground towards the entrance to David Lloyd fitness club and then along the path to the rear of Rushcliffe Arena. Turn right, past the Lynden Homes Wilford Fields development, and left on Wilford Lane.



Continue along Wilford Lane, at some point crossing to the north (right) side. After the traffic signals at Wilford the road becomes Clifton Lane and on the right is the Harvester restaurant. This was called Wilford Farm Inn when it first opened in the 1990s. Before that it was a garden centre but originally it was a Stable Block belonging to Wilford House (opposite side of Clifton Lane – see Walk No.5).



The Stable Block was built in 1781 and is a Grade II Listed building (as is Wilford House).



Go under Clifton Bridge – still dominated by the structural repair works when I was planning the route and apparently work may now continue until the Autumn 2021.



Just beyond the bridge, turn right through the entrance to the small car park and continue along the path towards the river. **This is where you could park to reduce the walk length.**



The path from here to Clifton Village has been part of a favourite walk for Nottingham residents for over two hundred years and was once a carriage route to Clifton Hall - [see Further Info 1: Clifton Grove.](#)

In the field on the left there are often horses – like this sturdy fellow...



A few yards further on, the path goes across a bridge over the Fairham Brook, on its course from Old Dalby, Leicestershire, via Widmerpool and Bunny and then alongside Silverdale (part of Walk 10) to this point where it flows into the River Trent.

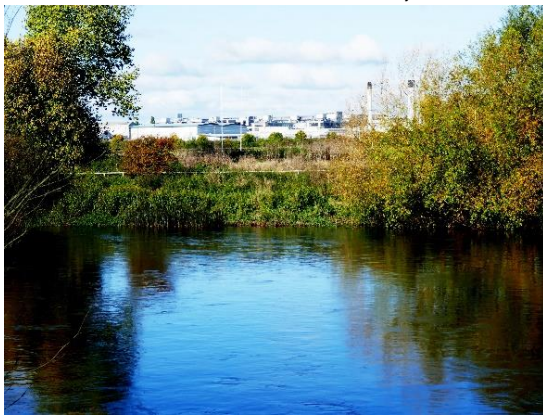


The path continues alongside the Trent, so you can look at....



...views across the river

....towards Boots, Beeston



...trees just starting to turn colour



...and herons on the far bank



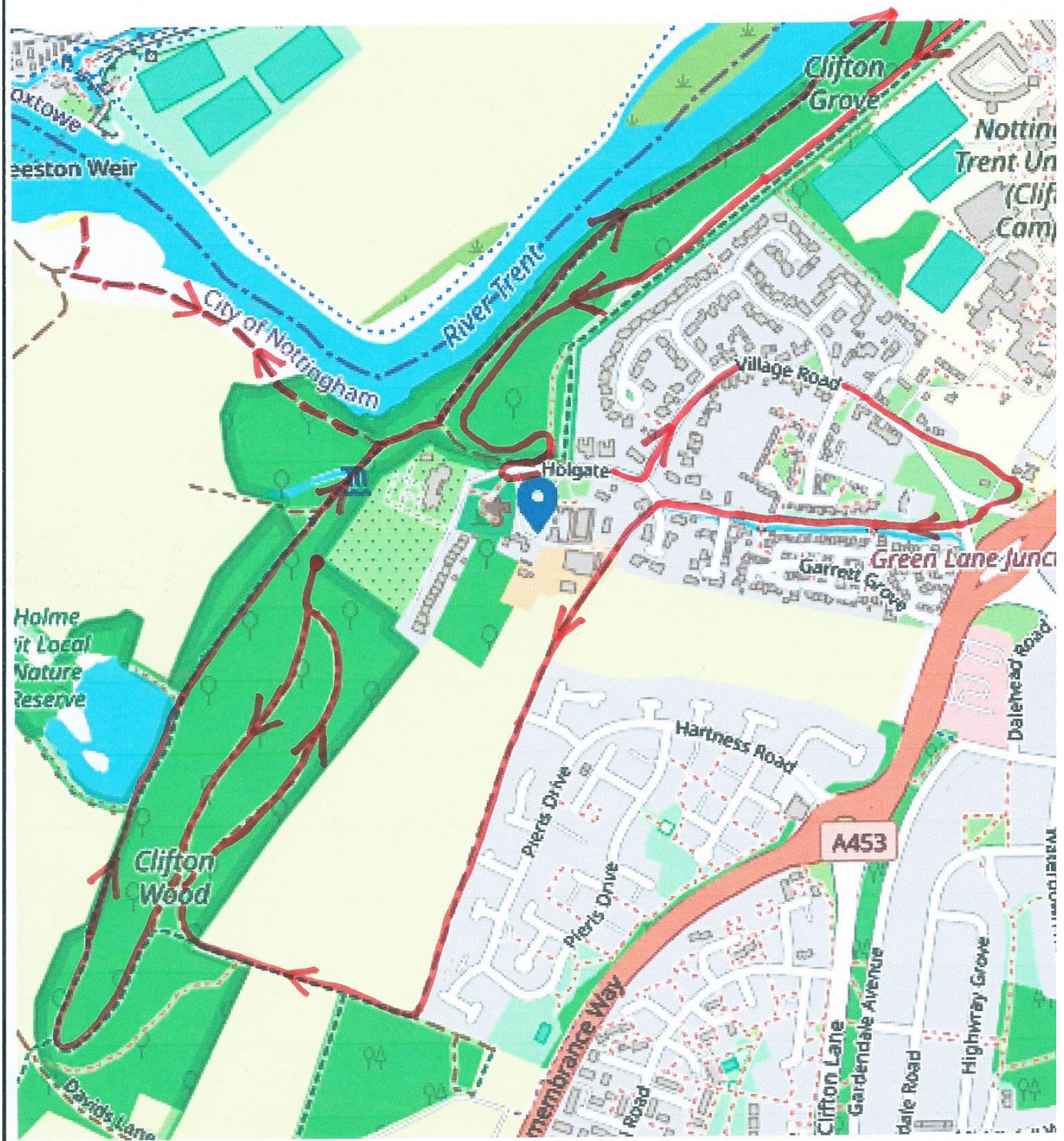
The path goes through two stiles 3m apart (not really 'stiles' but barriers to motor cycles) and enters Clifton Grove local nature reserve



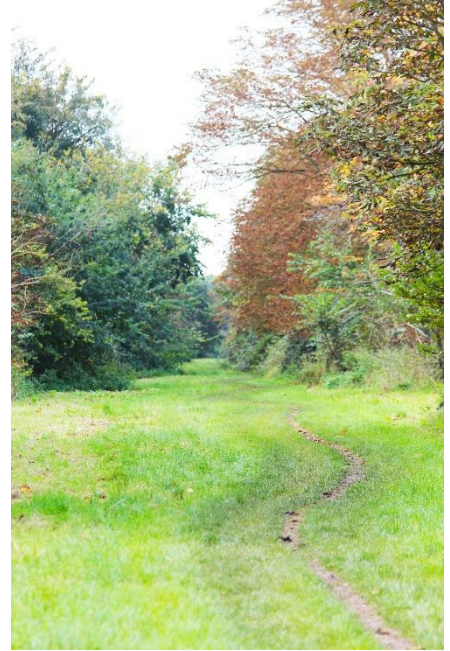
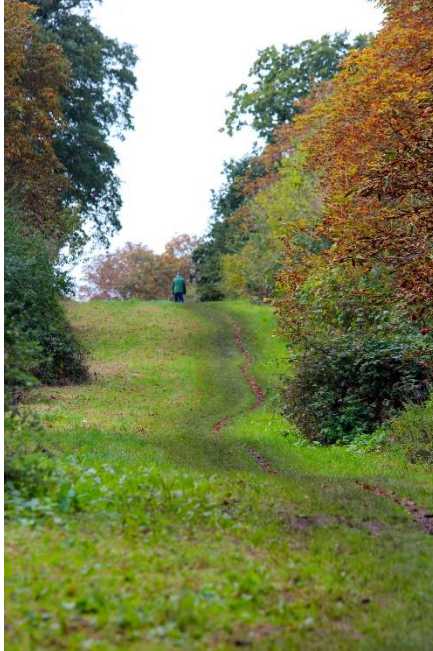
At this point the path divides: to the right it goes alongside the river (we come back that way), to the left it goes up – go left.



At this point a larger scale map is needed.....



Starting from the top right hand corner of this map, the path through Clifton Grove climbs up between magnificent trees (notably some mature oaks) and then opens out to a pleasant grass path bounded on both sides by dense trees and shrubs



With leaves still dense, there are few gaps to provide a view west and north across the Trent – another visit in the winter or early spring is called for!

However, I did manage to get a view of Wollaton Hall, on the horizon nearly 5km away.

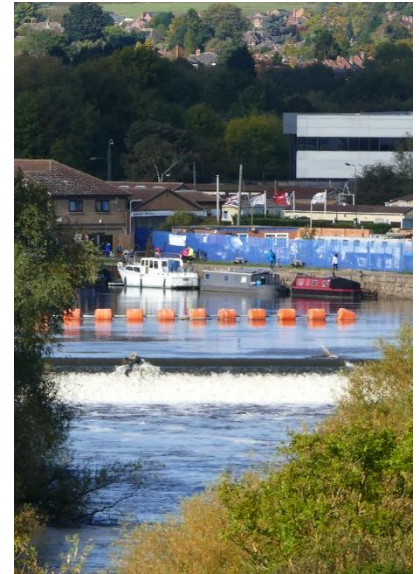


Continue along, passing, on the left, the Clifton Grove estate and then Nottingham Trent University (Clifton campus) and when the path divides, take the right fork....

...which goes between more grand oak trees



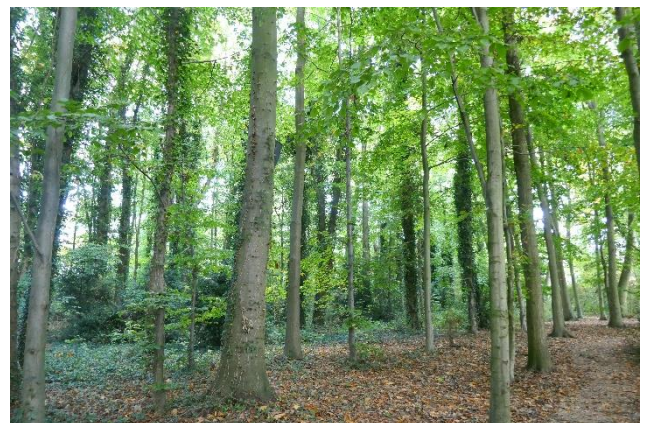
Keeping to the right wherever the path divides, follow the cliff edge....with views down to the Trent and Beeston Weir



At the point where the path curves left, away from the river, there is what looks like the entrance to an Anderson air raid shelter from WW2. It is actually a Grade II Listed mid-C18th Ice House. The brick round-arched entrance (boarded up) leads to a deep chamber. Ice collected in winter was brought here to keep food cold for use in the kitchen at Clifton Hall.



The path continues, with Clifton Hall on the right but hidden by trees – nothing like the supposed open view back in the 1880s.



After a few yards, turn right, through the small car park and out onto Holgate – you are now in Clifton Village.

The settlement of Clifton has existed for many centuries (see [Further Info 2. Clifton manor and Hall](#)).

It held a commanding position on the cliff overlooking the River Trent – which is probably the origin of its name: cliff 'slope', 'cliff-side slope' + tun 'enclosure', 'settlement'.

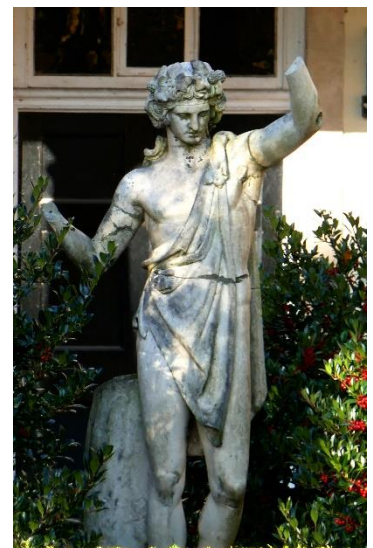
The manor of Clifton is recorded in the Domesday book as 'Clifton-cum-Glapton'. Glapton was a much smaller village, which was eventually absorbed by its neighbour but was still separate at the time of this map of 1880.



While the Clifton part of the village remains, Glapton has all but disappeared, fully absorbed by Clifton Estate – this walk goes through the old village of Clifton but Glapton will be part of Walk 15.

Start the walk around Clifton Village by turning right towards Clifton Hall. The Hall is private gated land so go into the churchyard to get a view – partly obscured by trees.

A statue (with no hands) stands in front of the doorway.



The Clifton Hall building is Grade I Listed and the early to mid C17 terraced garden is Grade II Listed.

As noted in [Further Info 2](#), the Hall is now split into two. One part is currently for sale and I have copied a couple of photos from Savills' website to give a better picture of the building and a view inside.

Savills: "Widely regarded as having some of the most enchanting rooms in Nottinghamshire, The South Wing at Clifton Hall oozes elegance, charm and exquisite examples of the late Carolean and Georgian periods...."



...The Octagon Hall - Probably the most spectacular of the rooms at Clifton Hall, it was constructed in the well of the former watchtower hence the shape. Finely proportioned with a resplendent domed ceiling, niches around the room contain plasterwork friezes of the Roman gods Diana, Neptune, Bacchus and Apollo."

There are another couple of views of the Hall in 14.2 but now we start the walk around the Village.

The Church of St Mary the Virgin is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Built in the form of a cross, with a lofty tower, it was restored in 1846 by Sir J.G.J. Clifton and inside is the family vault of the Cliftons, in which are deposited several generations, its entrance bearing the date of 1632. There are also gravestones for members of the family in the graveyard.



Leaving the churchyard, the next building is a late C18 stable block (listed grade II), now private homes.



At this point I have split the description (to limit the file size).
The walk continues at **14.2 Clifton Grove, Village & Woods, Part 2**.

Further Information on Sites along the Walk

1. Clifton Grove

The path from near Clifton Bridge, through Clifton Grove up to Clifton Hall follows a route from several centuries ago. It leads to Clifton Hall in what was Clifton manor, home to the Clifton family for 700 years.

No doubt the Cliftons would have made frequent trips to Nottingham and the quickest route was, from the late 1500s, through Wilford and across the Trent by ferry, as shown on this map of 200 years later (the last bit up to the Hall is not on the map).

As mentioned on Walk No 5, a wooden bridge replaced the ferry in 1864 and this was replaced with a cast iron bridge in 1870, paid for by Sir Robert Jukes-Clifton.



John Chapman's Map of Nottinghamshire 1774

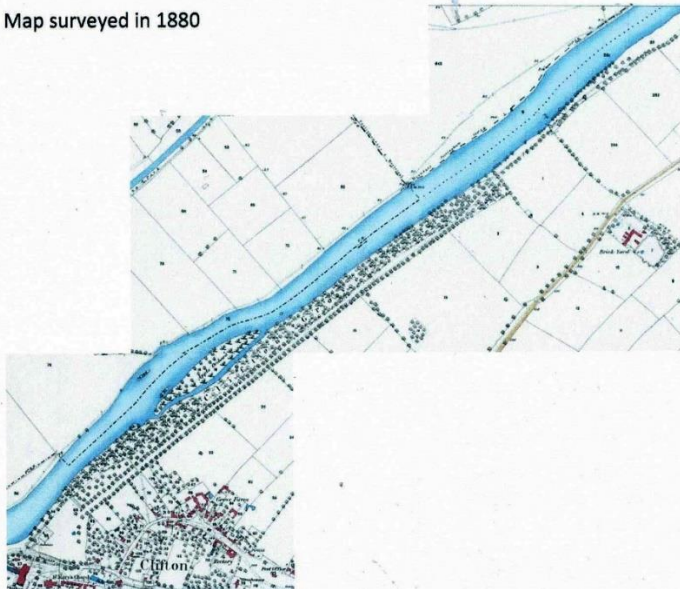
Leaving Wilford following the alignment of the Trent, the carriage route to Clifton Hall went up the sandstone cliff that forms the bank of the river here. In 1677, to enhance the view and impress his visitors, Sir William Clifton planted a spectacular avenue of elm trees – the first part of which is indicated by the double row of dots on the left part of the map.

Visitors would travel the full length of the avenue, known as the Grove, starting at a small stone bridge over Fairham Brook, up the gradual slope of the cliff and ultimately to the

gates of Clifton Hall itself. The original bridge over the brook collapsed in 1910 but a new one quickly replaced it and it is still in use today (we walked over it from the car park) as a foot bridge.

Much of the avenue has gone but much remained in 1880, as shown on the map below, and the path through the woods remains today, although now much narrower than the original avenue which was allegedly wide enough for six (or even 12, according to the Historic England description) carriages abreast.

Map surveyed in 1880



This picture shows the approach along the Grove to Clifton Hall in the 1880s – this view no longer exists; the area is now full of trees.



It was not just the Cliftons and their visitors who used this route; the Grove has been a popular attraction for the people of Nottingham for well over 200 years. Crossing the river by the ferry at Wilford and walking to the attraction of Clifton village had certainly become popular pastime by the 18th century. By the 19th century the Grove had become the most popular retreat from the rigours of Nottingham. Shaw's 'Guide to Nottingham 1874 states; 'At Easter and Whitsuntide if the weather at all permits, thousands of Nottingham artizans with their wives and families, and young men and maidens, either with sweethearts or to gain sweethearts, flock to the Grove.'

The poet Henry Kirke White (1785–1806), who was born in Cheapside in Nottingham and later lived in Wilford (Walk No 5), made visits here. One of his longest poems, 'Clifton Grove', includes the following passages:

*Bespeak, blest Clifton! thy sublime domain.
Here, lonely wandering o'er the sylvan bower, I come to pass the meditative hour;
To bid awhile the strife of passion cease, And woo the calms of solitude and peace.....*

*How lovely from this hill's superior height Spreads the wide view before my straining sight!
O'er many a varied mile of lengthening ground, E'en to the blue-ridged hills' remotest bound.....*

*Dear Native Grove! where'er my devious track, To thee will memory lead the wanderer back.
Still, still to thee, where'er mt footsteps roam, My heart shall point, and lead the wanderer home,
When splendour offers, and when Fame incites, I'll pause, and think of all thy dear delights*

Turn once again to these scenes, these well-known scenes once more, trace once again old Trents romantic shore

*And tir'd with words, and all their busy ways, Here waste the little remnant of my days
Ride on the wind that sweeps the leafless grove, Sigh on the wood-blast of the dark alcove.....*

These are thy charms; the joys that these impart Bind thee blest Clifton close around my heart.

The poem has a number of verses about the Legend of Clifton Grove. There appear to be many versions of the legend, with different characters and even different periods in history when it was supposed to have occurred. The basic story is that a young man and a maiden of Clifton fell in love. They spent time together strolling in the Grove. However the man's lord and master (one of the Cliftons) was going away to some far foreign land and needed his services. The couple halved a ring, or a gold coin depending on the version, and each kept a half as a token of their love – the maiden pledged to wait for his return when they would marry. Eventually the young man returned to marry his beloved only to find she had married someone else. He is then said to have killed himself by plunging into the Trent in despair. Soon after, the guilt ridden maiden was dragged into the river by a demon at the great 'chasm' in the the Grove below Clifton Hall.

Whites's 'Directory of Nottinghamshire', 1853, referencing John Throsby in the 1790s, gives a very different version: "*Here tradition says, the Clifton Beauty, who was debauched and murdered by her sweetheart, was hurled down the precipice into her watery grave*".

I was reading D. H. Lawrence's 'Sons and Lovers' (1913) recently and was pleased to come across a section where Paul Morel (the lead 'son') was out with Clara (one of his 'lovers') and took a tram to Wilford toll bridge:

They paid their two halfpennies at the turnstile and crossed the bridge. The Trent was very full. It swept silent and insidious under the bridge, travelling in a soft body.....

On the next page:

.....They were at the entrance to the Grove. The wet, red track, already sticky with fallen leaves, went up the steep bank between the grass. On either side stood the elm-trees like pillars along a great aisle, arching over and making high up a roof from which the dead leaves fell....

....On the right, looking down, they could see the tree-tops of elms growing far beneath them, hear occasionally the gurgle of the river, Sometimes there below they caught glimpses of the full, soft-gliding Trent, and of water-meadows dotted with small cattle.

"It has scarcely altered since little Kirke White used to come," he said.

A while later ...they went on into Clifton Village.

2. Clifton manor and Hall

Much of the history here comes from "*The Clifton Book (Nottingham)*" by Rev. Rosslyn Bruce, 1906, (Rector of Clifton) on the Nottinghamshire History website (www.nottshistory.org.uk/), Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clifton,_Nottingham), "*Clifton Family*

of *Clifton: A Brief History*", Nottingham University, and the Clifton Village website (www.clifton-village.org.uk)

Whilst Clifton is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086), a settlement most probably existed on or near the site long before that date due to its commanding hill position overlooking the river. There is also evidence of Bronze Age settlement by the river here.

In 1937 the employees of the Trent Navigation Company, when dredging for gravel near the foot of Clifton Grove, found their work impeded by a large number of wooden piles which had been driven six or eight feet into the gravels. Also some human remains had been brought to the surface, together with three bronze spears. Further investigation led to the conclusion that it had been a late Bronze Age Pile settlement, as the type of spears found indicated that period. Two dug-out canoes were found, also several large bronze spearheads, bronze swords, rapiers and knives or daggers, together with a crucible containing metal, and a quern or mortar. Practically all these implements and objects, now preserved in Nottingham Castle Museum, belong to the middle and late Bronze Age; dating from 1000 to 500 B.C.

This settlement at Clifton appears to have extended a little over 100 yards and stretched two-thirds across the river. The piles would stand out above flood level, with cross beams to form a platform upon which the huts were erected.



Before the Norman Conquest, according to the Rev. Bruce, *'In the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066) Clifton belonged to Gode the Countess'*. Gode the Countess is described elsewhere as a *Kings Thegn* – in Anglo-Saxon England, a thegn was a lord who held land directly from the king in return for military service in time of war. Thegns could earn their titles and lands or inherit them.

In the Domesday Book, Clifton is mentioned as having "*a priest and a church*" and also a mill. The manor belonged to William Peverel. Interestingly, the value of the manor had decreased in the 20 years since the Norman Conquest of 1066 from £16 to £9 – presumably, properties being commandeered by the Crown and given away to favourites resulted in the opposite of demand led price inflation.

As noted in earlier walks (e.g. Nos 5 & 11), William Peverel was a favourite of William the Conqueror. He was greatly honoured after the Norman Conquest and as, his reward from the king, he received over a hundred manors in central England. The Domesday Book records William as holding the substantial number of 162 manors, forming collectively the Honour of Peverel, in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, including Nottingham Castle.

At that time the warden of Nottingham Castle was a man named Alvaredus or Alvered. He is the earliest known English ancestor of the first 'de Clifton' – see below.

William Peverel's son, also William, inherited the Honour of Peverel on his father's death in 1115. William "the Younger" was apparently a principal supporter of King Stephen (king from 1135-1154). Stephen's successor, King Henry II, dispossessed William of the Honour in 1153, because, historians speculate, the King wished to punish him for his "wickedness and treason" in supporting King Stephen. The Honour (including ownership of Clifton) stayed in the Crown for a period before being gifted to Gerard de Rhodes.

In the late 13th century, Gervase de Clifton purchased the manor of Clifton (together with nearby Wilford) from the de Rhodes family and adopted the surname 'de Clifton' from his new seat.

For 700 years the 'de Clifton' family (from the 1450s, just 'Clifton') owned the manor, of which their manor house was Clifton Hall. Its position on the cliff meant it was easily defensible – and it was originally a fortified tower house, designed for defence as well as habitation.

Over the centuries, the de Cliftons, and then Cliftons, were very much part of the English landed gentry, with many roles including High Sheriffs of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and the Royal Forests, Knights, Bannerets, Baronets, MPs, JPs Commission of Array (to muster and array the inhabitants and to see them in a condition for war), and fought in various wars and battles (Shrewsbury, Tewkesby, Wars of the Roses, Bosworth, WW1 and WW2).



Arms of Clifton of Clifton, Nottingham: Sable semée of cinquefoils and a lion rampant argent



The site of Clifton Hall was a fortified tower house from medieval times. This is shown to the left of a 1676 engraving by Hollar, from Thoroton's 'The Antiquities of Nottinghamshire' (The tower on the left is the Church tower.)

The five-gabled three storey country house building on the right is late C16th with alterations by John Smythson in c1632.

Many of the rooms in this part of the current Hall retain their Jacobean decoration, e.g. this fireplace by John Smythson (from Savills website)



John Smythson was the son of architect Robert Smythson (most renowned as principle mason on the building of Longleat and later the design and supervision of the building of Wollaton Hall). John originally worked as a mason at Wollaton Hall and pursued a similar career to his father. He worked for the Cavendish family and, in particular, was involved in the rebuilding of Bolsover Castle.

Further alterations to Clifton Hall were carried out during the later C17th and again in 1731-62. A more substantial remodelling of the hall in Georgian style took place between 1778 and 1797 by the 6th Baronet, Sir Gervase Clifton.



Clifton Hall in 1791, from 'Thoroton's History of Nottinghamshire, republished, with large additions, by John Throsby'.

Clifton employed the premier architect in the north of England John Carr of York (whose work included Buxton Crescent in Derbyshire and Harewood House in West Yorkshire). Presumably the old tower was demolished at this time. Carr built a new octagonal hall on the site of the previous Great Hall (beneath the tower), but incorporated many of the existing state rooms into the new house.

Further alterations were made during the C19th by the 9th Baronet, Sir Robert Jukes Clifton (1826-1869), who was responsible for the development of Clifton Colliery and the construction of Wilford Toll Bridge (Walk No5).

In 1947, Lt.-Col. Peter Thomas Clifton (1911-1996) sold 944 acres in Clifton to Nottingham City Council for a housing estate. In 1953 an auction of the contents of Clifton Hall took place, and he moved to Home Farm in Clifton. In 1958 he sold the remainder of his estate

in Clifton and Barton in Fabis and moved to Dummer in Hampshire where he was a churchwarden for many years.

After the Clifton family, the Hall has had a number of uses and owners. In 1958 it became Clifton Hall Girls' Grammar School, the alumni of which includes ice-skater Jayne Torvill. The school closed in 1976. Nottingham Trent University (then Trent Polytechnic) then used the Hall until 2002.

It was then bought by Chek Whyte, the foster child from an Ilkeston estate who became a millionaire businessman responsible for renovating Bunny Hall, where he lived, Colwick Hall and Stanford Hall. He converted Clifton Hall into two luxury 'apartments' (one with 7 bedrooms, the other with 9!) and built fourteen houses to the south east of the Hall.

Anwar Rashid, a businessman with a £25 million fortune and a portfolio of 26 properties including a chain of nursing homes and a hotel in Dubai, bought the house (for £3.6m) in January 2007 and applied to Nottingham City Council for a 'change of use' to hold weddings, etc. The council refused permission. In addition, from the first day in the house, the family allegedly experienced paranormal activity, leading them to believe that Clifton Hall was haunted; a belief that was also present when the Hall was the Girls Grammar School. After spending eight months there, the family moved out of the house in August 2007. They stopped paying the mortgage in January 2008 and, in September 2008, the Yorkshire Bank reclaimed the property.

The North Wing sold for £1.25m in 2016. The South Wing is currently for sale at £2.7m – it is worth looking at the RightMove (for the North Wing) and Savills (for the South Wing) websites advertising the sales; the interior photos are quite something!

Just one final piece. In his 'The Clifton Book (Nottingham)' the Rev. Bruce tells of the possibility of underground passageways in the vicinity of the Hall:

'There are believed to be still the remains of many hidden passages. One is supposed to run from the Church to the Hall, and to continue to the little monastic Chapel on the Terraces and thence to the River, and even, one early writer adds, under the Trent to Lenton Priory. Someone else must verify these traditions, but there are certainly many points which puzzle the architects'.

I have not found any verifications but.....