

Ninety eight STAFFORD – A VERY PLEASANT CHANGE.

Take a trip on an express train to Stafford, an attractive county town. It packs many shops, pubs, cafes, and lovely buildings into a very small centre that is easy to stroll around.

Take the train to Manchester Victoria and from there a tram to Manchester Piccadilly Station.

From Piccadilly catch a train that stops at Stafford.

Option: - turn right as you get off the tram and on Fairfield Street use the lift on the left to the link bridge lounge.

Alight at Stafford – the station is a product of the 1968 electrification of a very busy main line.

Leave the station and cross the road to enter Victoria Park. *This is a beautiful little park on the edge of the town.*

Walk towards the right and cross the bridge over the River Sow - *Which flows lazily along, home to ducks and swans.*

Go along the right hand side of the bowling green (*there is a cafe*) to the aviary. *This has many unusual birds – please don't feed them bread as it is not nutritious enough.*

Walk across to the glass house *to see the colourful plants inside.*

Leave the park between the aviary and the glasshouse.

Continue in the same direction along Mill Bank. *On the right are remnants of a large old water mill that worked until 1957. The Yard sells real ale and food.*

Turn right onto Bridge Street at The Tavern (*no it doesn't*).

Cross the Sow. *Ahead you can see the pierced spire of Stafford Baptist Church. Notice many modern buildings interspersed with the old ones. Stafford was heavily bombed by the Germans in the Second World War - it had high tech war industries, and it was also in the Baedeker Guide as a very attractive medieval town.*

On the right is The Picture House – *do take a look in. It's a good conversion to a Wetherspoon pub selling real ales and food. The bar is like a wide cinema screen.*

Return to Mill Bank and cross onto Greengate opposite. *Note the fine old Post Office building and its plaque – Sheridan was MP for Stafford.*

On the RHS of Greengate is the small St Chad's church *dating from 1150. This is the oldest building in Stafford. Inside the carved arch stones are quite amusing – including owls and green men. Websire: www.stchadsstaffordshire*
Opposite the church is The Swan - *go in to see an interesting development of an old building. It provides a wide range of food up to full meals.*

Next is the Ancient High House – *impressive, a must! Built in 1595, it has an exhibition about the building methods, embroidery, period rooms, local history and The Staffordshire Yeomanry museum in the roof space. Admission is free - closed on Sunday and Monday. Tel: 01785 619619*

Turn left down the side of the High House and into St Mary's churchyard. *The collegiate church has an octagonal tower but lost its spire in a great storm in the 1590s. Inside there is a strange and bulbous old font, green men, a 'shoe window by David Gleeson, and something very fishy indeed – a memorial to Izaak Walton! Normally open 11.00 to 14.00 at least. Website: www.stmarysstafford.org.uk*

Walk right in a U round the church. *You pass the foundations of the early St Berteline's Chapel.*

Pass the Grove Coffee House and go down the entry ahead to come out on Market Square. *This has fine county town buildings around it.*

In front of you is the classical Shire Hall. *It houses an art gallery, library, balcony cafe, and The Holding Cell display. Admission is free.*

To the right of it is the bow windowed front of George Bate fishing and shooting shop.

[OPTION: Go between the Shire Hall and George Bate. *Notice the door to the cells and court on your left. Opposite is Joxer Brady's – a real ale, and real food, real pub!*

Turn left on Martin Street *amongst attractive official buildings.*

Turn left as you face Exchange House, *a typical piece of the clean neo Elizabethan architecture after the war.*

Pass the Staffordshire Gatehouse Theatre and cafe on your left. *Housed in the 1874 Borough Hall, notice the Staffordshire Knot above the door.*

Fork left to return to Market Square.]

Enter the Guildhall shopping centre behind *the 1934 facade. There are many modern shops in here. I've left the shopping till last, see!*

At the far end is the modern market hall - *open Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.*

Exit from the Guildhall Centre on its right hand side. You are now on Crabbery Street. *The fine Victorian market hall tower has survived. The Pie and Ale House is prosaically named – it sells four or five real ales and a similar number of types of excellent pie (with gravy and chips or mash etc.)*

Go along Gaolgate Place which is opposite the Pie and Ale House. *This is a typical sixties/seventies shopping precinct.*

At the very far end turn right and come out onto Gaolgate. *This is an older shopping street and therefore more attractive.*

Turn right along this and go back through Market Square.

Turn right by the side of the High House *passing the Mews shops and cafe opposite the church.*

Turn left down Church Lane, *a lovely narrow street. The Soup Kitchen, a good refreshment place, is on the left.*

Cross Mill Street. *To your right are the stone built Martin Noels almshouses.* Continue ahead, to cross Mill Bank/Tenterbanks. Enter the Victoria Park and bear right past the aviary *(I hope you bought some nuts or fruit for the birds! One bird seems to take all that is proffered and then drops it inside for later!)* Cross the bridge and head to the park gate.

Cross Station road and into the station. Go over the footbridge to catch a train back to Manchester.

CLASSIFICATION: SHORT. EASY.
ARCHITECTURE, GALLERY, CHURCHES,
MUSEUM, CAFES, PUBS, SHOPS.

RAIL FARE: category five

Maps: OS 1:50 000 SHEET 127. A-Z Atlas Stafford
Philip's Street Atlas Staffordshire

I recommend Saturday for a visit as everything is open then!