 transporting them to the nearby **Bell's Mill** where a stream running thorough the site drove a water wheel. In 1836 John Bourne with new business partner Matthew Mare renewed the lease of the Etruria mill site.

The Shirley family become involved when **John Bourne** married Jane Shirley the widow of Jesse Shirley I in 1834. By 1841, John had taken Jane's sons, Jesse and Joseph, into the business. John died in 1852 and in 1856 Jesse II commenced building a new mill, which consolidated all operations onto the Etruria site.



**Shirley's Bone and Flint Mill** utilised a powerful beam engine named Princess made in the 1820s by Bateman and Sherratt of Salford.

In addition to bone other materials such as flint, Cornish stone, and colours required by the expanding pottery industry were

ground. As specialists they became expert at producing the materials required to produce high quality pottery, including bone china.

For many years the Shirley family lived in Etruria and played a major role in the commercial, community, religious and political life of the village and The Potteries. The first **Wesleyan chapel** became too small so was replaced by the present building in 1820. Jesse Shirley I was involved in its planning and opening. There are two stained glass windows and a tablet commemorating the Shirley family who continued to support the chapel for many years.

In 1855 Jesse II purchased land from the Wedgwoods to build **Etruria Villa** which was his home until death. The family continued to live there



for many years. It is now divided into two houses with much less land.

On the death of Jesse Shirley II in 1875 control of the business passed to his sons Jesse III born in 1848

and Henry Benjamin known as Harry born in 1858. They attended the **British School** which was housed at the rear of the Wesleyan Chapel.

As well as successfully running the business the Shirley brothers were prominent members of Hanley Town Council with both serving terms as mayor. Jesse III was also chair of the parks committee and instrumental in the development of Hanley Park opened in 1897 and Etruria Park opened in 1904. The brothers donated a drinking fountain to **Etruria Park**. It remains but is in need of restoration.

The Shirley family have prominent and well kept graves and memorials close to the entrance of **Hanley Cemetery**.

The steam powered mill continued to run commercially until 1972 and the modernised part of the site operated until 2014, still owned and managed by the Shirley family.



**Text and photographs by Etruria Industrial Museum.**  
**Designed & edited by Potteries Heritage Society.**

© SBFMV CIO 2020 [etruriamuseum.org.uk](http://etruriamuseum.org.uk)



# The Shirleys of Etruria



## Bicentenary Walking Tour

From the early 1800s the Shirley family was the second most well known and influential family in Etruria, the other being the Wedgwoods - Etruria village being created in 1765 by Josiah Wedgwood I to house the workforce of the famous Etruria Pottery factory.

**The Shirley dynasty** was founded 200 years ago in 1820 when John Bourne and George Hudson started to produce bone flour for the developing pottery industry. It is known that they occupied the site of the present mill from before 1836 and possibly from the start of their business. Having a wharf just off the **Trent and Mersey Canal** was an ideal location for the delivery of bone from all parts. They boiled and calcined bones on the site



**The Walk: approx 3 miles, allow 2 hours.**

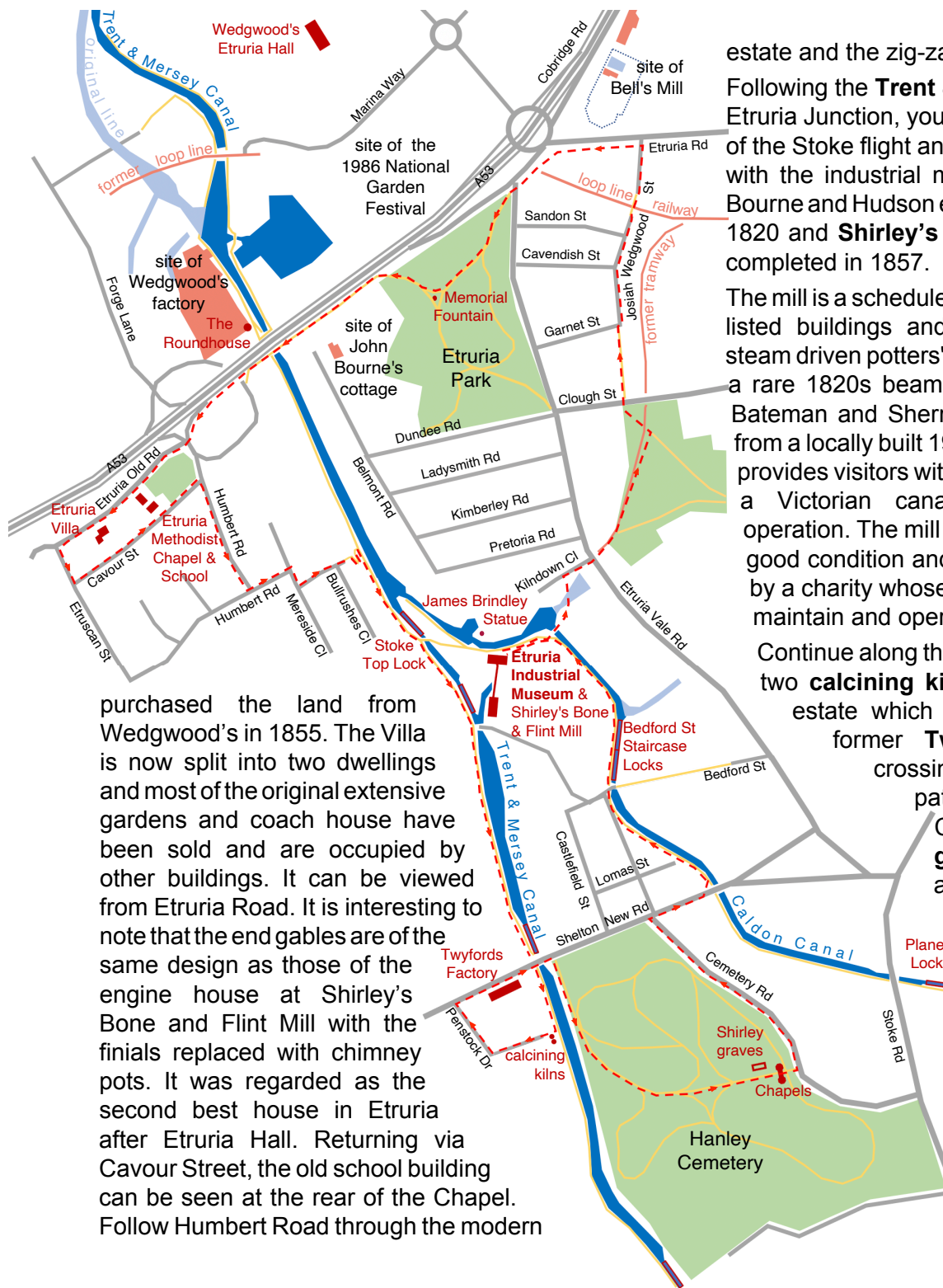
Starting from the **Etruria Industrial Museum** visitor centre entrance, cross the footbridge and the Museum car park before following the route of the former tramway on the opposite side of Etruria Vale Road. Cross Clough Street and follow a footpath and Josiah Wedgwood Street to view the site of **Bell's Mill**. In existence from 13th century as a corn mill, Bell's Mill was used for milling flint from around 1720 and it was here that calcined bones were originally brought for grinding. No traces can be seen above ground and any remaining foundations are buried under the modern retail building close to the junction of Cobridge Road and Etruria Road.

Following the road around to the left, **Shirley's Drinking Fountain** may be found in Etruria Park. The fountain was presented by Jesse III and his brother Henry in 1904. Three of the Wedgwood panels were damaged many years ago and the pieces are in storage at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery. There is no water supply and the lamp on top is missing.

Beyond the park is the site of **John Bourne's Cottage** which was later the site of St Matthew's Church consecrated in 1847. John died in 1852 and was buried in a tomb in the church yard which was originally part of his garden.

Etruria's **Wesleyan Methodist Chapel** was opened in 1820 to replace a smaller chapel. Jesse Shirley I was involved from the beginning and the Shirley family continued to support the chapel until its closure. They served as trustees, wardens and Sunday school teachers. In the chapel is a plaque commemorating Jesse Shirley II, his wife Sarah and daughter-in-law Sarah Elizabeth and two stained glass windows commemorating Jesse III and his wife Sarah Elizabeth.

Further along Etruria Old Road, **Etruria Villa** was built by Jesse Shirley II as his dwelling after he



purchased the land from Wedgwood's in 1855. The Villa is now split into two dwellings and most of the original extensive gardens and coach house have been sold and are occupied by other buildings. It can be viewed from Etruria Road. It is interesting to note that the end gables are of the same design as those of the engine house at Shirley's Bone and Flint Mill with the finials replaced with chimney pots. It was regarded as the second best house in Etruria after Etruria Hall. Returning via Cavour Street, the old school building can be seen at the rear of the Chapel. Follow Humbert Road through the modern

estate and the zig-zag path to the towpath.

Following the **Trent & Mersey Canal** south, to Etruria Junction, you will find the first two locks of the Stoke flight and the buildings associated with the industrial museum. It was here that Bourne and Hudson established the business in 1820 and **Shirley's Bone and Flint Mill** was completed in 1857.

The mill is a scheduled monument with grade II\* listed buildings and is the only operational steam driven potters' mill in the world. Driven by a rare 1820s beam engine manufactured by Bateman and Sherratt with steam generated from a locally built 1903 Cornish boiler, the mill provides visitors with the experience of seeing a Victorian canal side manufactory in operation. The mill and machinery are in very good condition and were purchased in 2015 by a charity whose members and volunteers maintain and operate the mill.

Continue along the towpath and turn right by two **calcining kilns**, through the housing estate which occupies the site of the former **Twyford's Factory**. After crossing the canal, follow the paths through Hanley Cemetery to the **Shirley graves**, on the left as you approach the twin chapels.

From the gate, follow Cemetery Road left, turn right onto Shelton New Road and join the Caldon Canal towpath on the left.

Continue past **Bedford Street Staircase Locks** and return to the museum site to complete the walk.