



bowed back to town, with golden evening sunlight slanting through the weeping willows.

Awkward reverence

On day two, the goal was to explore the flat country out towards the Lincolnshire Fens. The weather was grey and windy so we put on our jackets. We wanted to begin today's ride at Sleaford, a market town about 15 miles east of Grantham. So we caught the 9:32 train that runs along the branch line to the coast.

St Denys, Sleaford, was the first of a bunch of medieval Lincolnshire churches we planned to see. Cycling around visiting country churches is a lovely thing to do. Philip Larkin wrote a poem about it: Church Going. "I take off my cycle-clips in awkward reverence," he wrote, about stepping inside a church.

Dad and I entered Sleaford's parish church and tried to appreciate the window tracery, which we had read is what you're supposed to do there. But we found the faces that the medieval masons had carved a lot more fun: pigs with big ears, a man in a floppy hat pulling a face, a woman in a wimple, smiling. People say the faces must be portraits of local people that the mason knew. We enjoyed looking at them through binoculars, our bikes propped up on tombstones.

We left Sleaford and headed east. The roads were flat and unfenced. We had big views of yellow stubble under huge, grey skies. The church at Ewerby, where we went next, has "more rude carving per metre" than

any other in the area, so we took the chance to see a few medieval men baring their bottoms, then headed to the Finchatton Arms and wolfed down soup and sandwiches.

A few miles further on, at Heckington church, the last on our list, our favourite thing was a carving of a girl feeding her squirrel. From Heckington, we hopped on a train back to Grantham, glad to be in the warmth after a day out in the wind.

Roaming off road

Our fenlands day had felt autumnal. The following morning, the forecast was for sun and summer again. Our plan was to explore an area along the Lincolnshire Edge, an escarpment that runs through the centre of the county. There were no railway stations near the places we wanted to go, so we would use buses instead.

We joined a chatty group of people waiting for the number 1 from Grantham to Lincoln. "Are you going to visit Mrs Smith's Cottage?" people asked (several times). "What about Heckington Windmill?"

When the bus arrived it was already half full but it was no problem to stow our folded bikes in the area for wheelchairs and prams. An hour later we were in Navenby, a small village of limestone houses 10 miles south of Lincoln. We visited the medieval church, which was suffused with light, making me think of an aquarium. Then we cycled south →

Top left: Ermine Street is a Roman road that ran between London and York
Top right: Temple Bruer tower



On the buses

Trains aren't the only way to travel with your folding bike

Most buses take fully folded bikes. If you can't find confirmation of this on the bus company's website, check the FAQ (if there is one) or the conditions of carriage.

According to their rules, drivers for some bus companies could ask you to cover your bike, but no one has ever asked us to do so. Luggage/wheelchair/pram space is not huge, so taking folding bikes on board is fine for one or two but may not be realistic for groups.

The national bus price cap (currently £3) makes bus travel very affordable. If you have an older person's bus pass, like Dad, you can travel free. Tickets are easy to buy. I could either pay by card when boarding or use the bus company app.

The main challenge is finding out where the fast, frequent buses run. Brendan Fox's Bus Atlas UK website (busatlas.uk) is a godsend.

County-by-county maps make it easy to see at a glance the principal inter-urban bus routes. Thick lines show those routes with frequencies of hourly or better, so it's easy to plan trips.

