



Above: St Denys church, Sleaford. Travelling by bike meant that parking was no problem

across the high heathland, golden in the sun, along a narrow lane that had once been the Roman road between London and York. The old road was empty and silent. We squinted into the sunlight, the road straight as an arrow as far we could see.

On the Ordnance Survey map, a section of this old road was white, meaning 'other road, drive or track'. I thought it would just be unpaved, perhaps gravel. But to my alarm, we found ourselves struggling along between high banks of nettles and meadowsweet, ducking under swinging briars, with our wheels in deep tractor tracks. We had to walk. It was hot and tiring in the sun. I wondered what my friend would say...

The knights' tale

We were heading to a place with the odd name of Temple Bruer. While researching the trip, I'd seen 'Tower' written in Gothic script on the map here, as well as a place called Temple Farm. I'd looked it up and found that this remote spot had been one of the richest Knights Templar preceptories in England, with a large Templar church, a manor house, farm buildings and cottages. The entire complex had melted into the soil – except for this one tower, which was still standing in a farmyard. I had rung Lincolnshire council to see if the tower was locked. No one knew. I asked Dad if he wanted to visit it.

"Apparently, if it is open, we might need a torch," I'd said.

"We definitely want to go there," Dad had replied.

We at last emerged from the

brambles and got back on our bikes, hugely relieved to see tarmac. Turning up Temple Farm Lane, we hesitated.

"We can always apologise," said Dad. So we rolled gently on.

Suddenly, in front of a range of farm buildings, there it was: a tall, square tower, with smoothly faced walls. We leant up the bikes, climbed stone steps to the door and tried the handle. It turned! We shoved at the heavy wood, shoved again, and the door burst open. We tumbled into the tower. There were stone arches, benches and a worn, old tomb. It was dusty and echoed. There were mason's marks and daisy-wheel symbols on the walls.

The tower was built in the 1200s. We fingered the worn arcades, under which the medieval soldier-monks and their sergeants and chaplains must have sat. Then we sat on the steps and drank tea from our flasks, listening to the sparrows in the hedges, before getting back on our bikes and zooming down to the plain.

In the afternoon, we stopped to look at a couple more medieval churches, then climbed up a huge hill back onto the Lincolnshire Edge. We pushed up the climb on foot. When we reached the top, we looked back the way we'd come. The road was dusty silver, the lowlands faraway and indistinct in the evening haze. We picked up the number 1 bus in the village. It took us back to Grantham as the sun went down.

"So how was the trip? Was your dad all right?" my friend asked, a few days later. He had loved it, I said, and so had I. 🌞



Fact file Rail & bus Lincs

Distance: Just over 30 miles of cycling in total.

Route: Dad travelled from Stockport to Grantham (East Midlands Railway, two hours), and I travelled from London (Hull Trains, one hour). We cycled a five-mile route to Belton House, a 10-mile rail-assisted route on the flat towards the fens and a 15-mile bus-assisted route along the Lincolnshire Edge.

Accommodation: We stayed at the Avenue Hotel, Grantham, returning each evening. The hotel stored Dad's Decathlon Tilt in a secure shed, as it's a 20-inch wheel bike and was awkward to carry upstairs. I stored my Brompton in my room.

Bikes used: Decathlon Btwin Tilt 500, Brompton C Line 3-speed.

Maps/guides: For planning and inspiration, we used the OS Landranger 130 (Grantham, Sleaford & Bourne) and the OS Maps app. To research buses, we used the Bus Atlas UK website map of Lincolnshire. To choose churches to visit, we used England's Thousand Best Churches book by Simon Jenkins and the Great English Churches website by Lionel Webb.

I'm glad I had... Snacks and flasks for when energy levels dipped. Camping chairs, so we knew we could sit down whenever we wanted. Binoculars to view the details of carvings.

Next time I would... Not hesitate, just go.

Bus travel: Bus Atlas UK website by Brendan Fox: busatlas.uk

Great English Churches website (Lionel Webb): greatenglishchurches.co.uk

Watch the YouTube video of our trip: bit.ly/cycle-bus-rail-lincs