



St Oswald's Church
in Malpas

PHOTO: NIGEL HOWIE

MALPAS

This small market town is one of North-West England's best-kept secrets. Located close to the Welsh border, Malpas isn't on a direct road to anywhere. It is approached via a series of country lanes and that could be one of the clues to the town's enduring appeal according to Bethan Rose-Bailey.

'Malpas is a self-sufficient town with a strong community, a strong town centre and a sense of history,' explains Bethan, who is general manager of The Lion at Malpas. 'You always get the sense people want to live here and take pride in Malpas.'

The Lion is located in the heart of the town. The main building dates back to the 1600s and it contains a remarkable piece of history. King James I, who reigned between 1603 and 1625, stopped off at the house, which became The Red Lion.

In an account of the event, *Pigot and Co's National Directory* said: 'King James, travelling *incognito*, stopped at the house now called The Red Lion Inn, which was frequented in the evenings by the most opulent and respectable part of the inhabitants, among whom were the rector and the curate of the parish. The King entered familiarly into their conversation and enjoyed the hilarity of the evening, to which he himself contributed in no small degree.' King James was unable to keep his identity secret and the chair he had sat in became part of Malpas folklore.

When The Red Lion closed, the chair was sent off to auction, only to be bought back by Malpas residents. To this day, it takes pride of place in The Lion and the names of the owners are displayed next to it. Woody Barlow, director at locally based Bear Inns, bought The Red Lion in 2020 and undertook a major revamp before reopening it as The Lion at Malpas. Now the pub is renowned for its food, and wherever possible uses seasonal local produce.

The Old Fire Station is a café bar with breakfast, lunch and dinner menus, while the Little Deli offers breakfast, brunch, and lunch.

Malpas is renowned for its excellent schools, including Bishop Heber – a comprehensive high school with a sixth form.

Well-known former pupils include auctioneer Christina Trevanion, of *Bargain Hunt* fame, and England and Sale Sharks Rugby Union players Tom and Ben Curry. The twins' father, David Curry, is headteacher at Bishop Heber, and coached his sons as young rugby players both at school and at Crewe and Nantwich Rugby Club.

Malpas is also home to Manor House Stables founded by footballing legend Michael Owen, and Donald McCain Racing, which is based at Bank House Farm, Malpas. Donald, known as the north's leading trainer, took the reins from his father, Ginger, trainer of three-time Grand National winner Red Rum.

No visit to Malpas is complete without taking in the magnificent Grade I-listed St Oswald's Church. The present building dates back to the 14th century and has strong associations with the Cholmondeley family, of nearby Cholmondeley Castle.

The castle gardens are generally open to visitors on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, together with Bank Holiday Mondays, in the spring, summer, and autumn months, although it is advisable to check with the castle gardens website.

Nearby, you will find the Cholmondeley Arms pub and Cholmondeley Farm Shop and Café.

Not far from Malpas, on the main Wrexham Road, is the Bickerton Poacher. Famous for its Sunday lunches, it also boasts substantial grounds including a popular camping and motor home field, with full amenities. It sits on the Sandstone Trail, the hiking route stretching 34 miles from Frodsham to Whitchurch.