

Kirkstall Abbey - Thursday 3rd November 2022

As we turn another page on our calendar, we move deeper into the autumn season - no more summer breeze - no ice-cream teas - no leaves on trees - November!!! Which is my favourite month. The Americanised Halloween is behind us, 'trick or treat' come-on now - how did that all come about? The all British bonfire-night is just two days away, what can be better than celebrating Guy Fawkes, who tried to blow up the houses of Parliament in 1605. With our third prime minister in as many months and fourth Chancellor of the Exchequer of the year, I pose the question - where is Guy Fawkes, now that his country needs him? He was after all a Yorkshireman being born and raised in York - if only we knew someone who lived in York and could rise to this challenge!!!

Now on our tenth walk of the autumn series, we departed Idle village as the church clock struck 8.00am, nine in number this week, Being joined by Pete and Ian from South Pennine as well as Christine from North Yorkshire. We headed east along the banks of the river Aire towards Horsforth on a dry and promising day, the weather forecast was for a sunny afternoon and we were not to be disappointed. Due to the recent wetter weather, the paths are getting muddier but at last our reservoirs are starting to refill. The river was also fuller and flowing at a quicker rate than during the summer - where did those 40 degree Celsius days go? We quickly reached Horsforth Vale and Calverley before leaving the river bank at Thornton Woods. Heading to the historic Newlay Bridge, we crossed the river and canal as we took the short climb to Bramley Fall. We then followed the woodland track on the south side of the canal passing Forge Locks and Kirkstall Locks on the way to Kirkstall Bridge - there is some impressive artwork on the bridge, produced by local artist 'Burley Banksy' We then followed the abandoned miniature railway track up to the abbey grounds for our midmorning stop - sat on the seats in the shadow of the abbey ruins. Founded by Cistercian monks in 1152 it fell prey to the dissolution of the monastery's under Henry viii, in 1538. Much of the mill stone grit used to build the abbey was mined from Bramley Fall and we had probably just walked in the footsteps of those monks. Maybe there is some truth in the ghost stories of Halloween after all, because at one point I had glanced behind me and thought I had seen a monk shuffling along with what appeared to be a heavy load on his back. He seemed old and dishevelled as he slowly trudged along the path but when I looked a second time, I realised it was Trevor, who was on the walk with us!!!

Leaving this historic and sacred place behind via Vesper Gate, we reached Hawksworth Woods and took the lower trail to Butcher Hill. Climbing through Horsforth Woodside we reached Cragg Hill, before dropping down to Horsforth Broadway for our early lunch at Café Dino – bacon sandwiches seemed to be a popular choice again today. After lunch we headed to Hall Park where we visited the quirky Japanese Gardens and viewed the memorial by the newly planted Hornbeam tree. The Hornbeam tree has historical significance as in 1916 a WW1 battle took place on The Somme at Delville Woods when thousands of British and Commonwealth troops died in a ferocious battle. Such was this ferocity that a whole wood was destroyed but for one Hornbeam tree, that survives to this day.

Leaving the park behind, we climbed through the woods to the top of Hunger Hill, only pausing to take in the panoramic views across the valley. Having lost both Mike & Sara on this section of the walk last year, we took extra care to make sure no one was left behind, as we departed the hill top. We were now heading towards Rawdon and the famous Billings,

Passing Hill Top Farm, we followed the field track through Beechwood, which can often be boggy during the depths of winter but was easily negotiated on this early November day. Crossing Gill Beck there is a short but often tricky climb but it was firm underfoot on this early November day. We now had Billing Hill in our sights and soon reached the wooded summit, which has a height of 231 metres. Following the track through the woods, we exited in direction of the trig point, which at 223 metres in height gives spectacular views over Leeds and the surrounding area. We then headed into Yeadon via Cold Harbour Farm and had our afternoon stop in the early November sunshine on the seats outside the recently refurbished Town Hall. The weather was in stark contrast to two weeks ago, when we walked to Ilkley on a day when it never stopped raining. The afternoon was providing a day that felt like summer. We were not the only ones confused as we saw a lot of spring bulbs in flower!!!

With the clocks having gone back one hour last weekend, we were aware it would start becoming dark much earlier this week and on departing Yeadon, the pace had quickened and we were now moving more swiftly, trying to out run the impending nightfall. We quickly descended through Henshaw and Westfield, reaching Gill Lane, which took us down through Gill Wood, to the Home Farm Business Park. We then headed to the suspension bridge over the river Aire, Climbing to Idle swing bridge we crossed the Leeds/Liverpool canal, for our last climb of the day passing the impressive Plumpton House on our way to Mitchell Lane. From here, we were soon back in Idle Village, arriving at 3.30pm, We had not needed to worry about finishing in the daylight, we had walked quickly enough to beat the nightfall by a good hour - we checked our GPS's and 19 miles was agreed. The only disappointment being, that we had finished too early for the white Bear to be open. It opens at 4.00pm, so the drinking crew decided to head for home. If these early finishes continue, I might have to start calling the Thursday walks 'Temperance walks'?

Next week sees us on our eleventh walk of this year's series, our lunch stop is planned for the 'Refreshment Room' in Lister Park. We are heading out to Six Days Only - if it was 1968, we would meet Nettle Nellie and be able to buy some nettle beer - Intrigued? Then join us and everything will be explained.