

# Today's Journey

## **GLAPWELL to HARDWICK via ROWTHORNE**

On a scorcher of a day here in NE Derbyshire we decided to have a third attempt to get into Hardwick Hall, having been too late on the previous occasions to get into the house. Don't worry, it's a habit we have, we did the same at Kedleston. We took a bus from Matlock the relatively short trip to Chesterfield. The views from the main Chesterfield road on such a clear day enabling us to see the walls of Bolsover Castle standing proud in the distance and the Crooked Spire twists into view as we approach the top of the hill where the old renovated windmill stands guardian.

Chesterfield is busy, the town is chaotic as the bus terminus undergoes a face lift. We have thirty minutes to kill in this market town, Patricia thinks that means how much of his money can I spend before he realizes it! Her work done, I grab a pack of socks, yes, the mystery of missing socks never is solved, you just stock up with them.

In the market square, neatly cobbled, the crowd gathers round as a brass band begins to play, I'd play it for you but I don't think you would hear it. The crowd appreciated it, brought up no doubt on the many colliery bands that once played in the area. The clock at the market hall says it's time to go and we finally, among the chaos, miss the bus, one driver says it's not him, another says she has never heard of Glapwell!

We like Chesterfield. People get married there and a marriage is taking place over the road at the registry office. A stretch limo arrives, what would great great grandad make of this contraption that can carry a lot of people but wouldn't do much good at harvest time?

Finally we find a bus that want's to go where we do. The Young Vanish, no not us, that's the name of a race horse by which the pub is named after, where we step off the bus.

This area is dotted with little rows of terraced housing, about four or five houses here another lot over the distance there, coal pit "furniture" clings to sites that once saw black faced men emerge in their hundreds from black pit shafts as if to say this is their memorial. The area is transformed now from black to shiny yellow, golden fields of wheat spread out before us. If they came back would our ancestors think they were lost?

We head towards Rowthorne, a picture postcard village, one of the best kept secrets in Derbyshire. It seems as if they want to keep it that way. The first sign says guard dogs, beware! The next warns about horses, yet another beware of young bulls and another guard dog sign.

Sandstone built houses, the stone weathered away over the centuries still holds up the walls of Top Hill Farm and it's surrounding neighbours. Fancy terra cotta coloured tiled roofs, flat stone tiled roofs and the odd blue Welsh slate roof add their colour to the near immaculately cut verges of countryside green. The bright red Victorian letter box stuck in a wall opened only five days at four o'clock in the afternoon and on Saturday at ten in the morning (even the Rowthorne letter

box has a lie in) all join with the golden shimmering wheat fields to make Rowthorne a rainbow without the need of rain. The grey old lurcher lies by the grass verge, he has nothing to lurch about, he would get on well with Rodsley dog! The trees in the distance, two fields back look like bunches of broccoli set against a pure blue sky, idyllic.

The lane takes us through Rowthorne, I have forgotten the map, which way now, straight on say the locals, you can't miss Hardwick. We see a sign to Stainsby, a church in the distance and Hardwick with Bess's initials beckoning us. We don't go that way, we go straight on, another local fixing his gate is asked the same question.

"Is this the way to Hardwick Hall?"

"Yes, straight on," is the reply.

We walk under horse chestnut trees some baby conkers want to be the first to be a "tenner" and have already fallen from the tree; the smarter conkers stay put.

The sun is blazing. We walk up a slight incline now and as we reach the top we search for Hardwick. The hawthorn hedges block our view, a path going through a wheat field shows clearly the way to Ault Hucknall church and beyond to Stainsby corn mill, still working, but no Hardwick. We walk on still scanning the horizon. We look behind us to our right and hidden among the trees a mile or so away stands Hardwick Hall, it's as if while we lifted our feet up the world turned backwards while we weren't watching.

We turn round and go back the way we came, where do we go now? All is quiet until a couple of athletic types, road runners come our way. They are heading the same way as us now, going back on our selves, we shout:

"Is this the way to Hardwick Hall?"

"Yes, straight on, you can't miss it," they reply, panting out each word.

I wanted to shout we already had but in eighty degrees and a long drive to walk up I decided to save my energy.

We found he turning but I don't think they get many letters, I doubt the postman knows where it is. There's probably more glass in Hardwick Hall than the whole of Rowthorne put together but you can find Rowthorne and you know when the postman's coming.

Finally we arrive at this stately home, she's covered in plastic and steel, the builders are in! From one building site to another still, inside, all her glory is revealed, a magnificent hall with fabulous plaster relief around the top, complete with unicorn. I wonder if we will see one on the way back after all I saw my first mole in Rodsley.

There are pictures abound in this house, only one of Bess though, the guide said to compare the one downstairs with the one upstairs. Someone forgot to tell him that the one upstairs is on exhibition somewhere in America for three years! There's a brilliant staircase that Douglas Fairbanks would do justice to sorting out the Sheriff of Nottingham and Guy of Gisborne.

Now it's time for home, we go back the same way, Rowthorne has come alive or it will do next week, it's party time there, an annual fair. Overhead small white breasted birds with forked tails all face the same way on the telephone wire, as if they are deep in thought. I go to see what they are looking at...it's a large barn without the roof. I conclude they are taking bets on which tiles it will have. As we leave another bird lands on the wire, he faces the opposite way, there's always one who sees a different view but he still came to be with his relatives. Maybe your ancestors left this beautiful village? I hope, if you can, you can revisit it for them and be for a while with his "relatives".