

Today's Journey

SNITTERTON, OAKER, DARLEY BRIDGE, HACKNEY

"Where shall we go today? It gets dark earlier now," she said.

I was thinking of going over Snitterton way.

"Let's go to Snitterton," she said.

"What a good idea," said I.

First rule of setting out on a journey, make sure you are both going to the same place.

We are off to a good start, we cross Matlock Bridge with its old niches we can dodge into to avoid the rush of human cargo crossing it. The river below looks a greeny brown (or is it a brownish green?) as it speeds along to join the Trent miles away south of Derby.

Crossing the river brings about a strange situation of not being in England anymore, for within seconds, posters declaring Nile Jewellery confront us. I thought it was the Derwent we crossed but now the French Wine shop is before us and the Bank from over the northern border.

Matlock is very cosmopolitan. At the bottom of Snitterton Road, once called Smithy Lane, is a magnificent willow tree, a joy to behold, that stands in the grounds of the Bank, once a Ladies School where the daughter of **Joseph PAXTON**, Rosa, once sat her eleven plus back in 1851, well something like it. Three sisters **SCUDAMORE** kept a close eye on the pupils including one born in Australia, ten year old **Elizabeth EATON**.

One thing I find interesting is that the Census enumerator records how posh the people at the school speak. So we have **Emma GARTON** from Lomsdale. It's Lumsdale, Emma. **Sarah FOWLER** is from Shiffield; She must have been mates with Aussie Elizabeth. As for **Georgina CLAPPERTON** and **Emma HALT**, they hail from Balton, Lancashire. Even a lass from Cromford is touched by the antipodean "ixent". General servant, **Emma DEXEY**, works alongside her fellow servant, **Aney HOLMES**, from good old Ashover and, at 19 and two years older than Emma, she probably turns a blind eye to such language.

We climb the hill out of Matlock passing Bridge Farm, the white fronted "Beeches" with its sturdy beech towering above. Thousands of rooks nest in the tree opposite reminding me of Hitchcock's "The Birds". I decide not to say anything about this to Patricia since I once mentioned that Janet Leigh, starring in a film we were watching also appeared in "Psycho".

"No, she didn't," said Patricia, "She was in the one where a woman got stabbed in a shower!"

Along the left side of this road big old houses sprang up, no doubt built there to take in what must have been panoramic views of the hillside opposite the river. Now modern housing has engulfed every blade of grass virtually and the trees, with the rooks nest in, have added their own screening.

We pass the entrance to Salters Lane, an old packhorse route and carry on up to the top. Megdale, once an old house is gone, **James MARRIOTT** from Ashover and his Matlock wife Rachel lived here. A hundred years or more later a whole housing complex opposite would be named after their house.

As we walk on the top road, the once massive Hydro of **John SMEDLEY** (now County Hall) dominates the place, how much more imposing it would have been mid nineteenth century?

We stand against a wall that is covered in moss and ivy, below lies the remains of Cawdor Quarry. Once the home to Derbyshire Stone, Permanite, Ragusa, all in a place where a little green tank engine trundled up and down the line carrying whatever it carried. We would, as children, often walk alongside the riverside path to grandma's and hope to see the train.

On the left of the road it is fields and more fields, totally unspoilt. However, the path to Jugholes and Bonsall is closed but no worries another one is further up the road. In the field I spy a solitary magpie. I'm not superstitious.

We pass the White House, yes, Matlock has its own Casablanca and in 1851 the resident but not the president is **Charles BRONSON**. What is it about the White House and actors? Actually, it must have been shared because **Job BODEN** is also listed in the census as living here. He must have been the vice resident. He was, in fact, a messenger.

We come upon the lane to Masson Farm and Jugholes, we go and have a look because hidden here are the cottages of Hall Dale. Totally hidden away from civilisation but with all the mod cons like a slide in the front garden. In fact, in front of the cottages, is one huge field, very flat. I once played football for the school here. I must have played badly because the

school bus left without me and I trundled home in a muddy kit through pouring rain.

Patricia spies a pile of top soil, good soil, there for the garden she says. I pretend not to hear, I can't carry pockets of humus home, anyway I thought, the garden's her domain. She finds a small branch and says she will carry that as one of the plants wants propping up.

Old barns in need of repair are dotted on the field side as we walk along the road to Snitterton. Patricia finds a bronze bell, very old, lying in the road. The road here as been altered and we wonder if it has not fallen out of the hedgerow, probably lying there for years before. Watch out for us on the Antiques roadshow. The bell will be the old object!

Over the opposite side a sheer drop led one into a deep gravel pit, always considered dangerous, the road has been altered to erect a wall further away from the quarry edge. Across the horizon the sun shines on Two Dales and falls like a torch on fields that from a distance look like a bowling green, as if it trying to find the Jack.

To the front and slightly to the right is Oaker Hill and, of course, its tree. It is to this area what Riber castle is to Matlock, what the Stand is to Crich. It is so important that even William Wordsworth the poet waxed lyrical about it.

In the distance I see a stream in full flow down in the valley and wonder why I have never seen it before. Then it came to me, whenever we went to Snitterton it was along the riverside and, when we came over the roads, the wall was too high for me to see over. Then when I have been tall enough its been summer and no rushing torrent to show. It looks superb winding its way across fields of different greens, a silver streamer, sparkling and shimmering as it goes. It's not a big stream, but it makes the effort and deserves all the recognition it can get.

A sign as we enter Snitterton says to be careful as there are no footpaths for a few hundred yards. It's good to know but there hasn't been a footpath since not long after we started. Snitterton is not a place to shop, go for a pint, fill up with petrol or make a phone call...but you can post a letter there.

An old milestone seen again, now the growth of brambles has been cut back, shows it is getting worse for wear. The stone wearing down so you can barely read it. Patricia is amazed that Snitterton boasts an Elizabethan Hall surrounded by a wall, "Like you see on Secret Garden," she half expects Dickon and Mary Lennox to appear. She is so enthralled she goes and spies through the old wooden gates. I walk up the lane to Lea Wood Farm and view the Hall over the wall. She comes running when she knows what a good view I have but is suitably unimpressed because

she saw through the crack in the door the small box maze and a "fancy modern bit of fancy stuff". I remain quiet and leave her to her own imaginings.

Snitterton also boasts an old bull ring now removed from the road and set on the grass verge at once was called Bull Ring Cottage. Bull Ring Cottage is now the name of what was once called the "Manor House". It causes havoc with the postman. The Manor House was once Grandma's house and it had a deep well in the back garden where we loved to drop stones till we heard the yell of "get away from there". Being the Manor House it had it's own toilet right at the bottom of the garden and it was a long garden.

We travel on carefully avoiding any potential traffic that came whizzing round the bends that make Snitterton more like Snetterton. Suddenly a convoy approaches and we wait while all three cars negotiate the chichane back to Matlock.

Many people in the area started Sunday morning with a good old read as **Dick TAYLOR** delivered the newspapers to their homes. Dick came from Snitterton, no longer do the papers get delivered but that doesn't stop the news from getting around.

Past "Brook Vale " a message fastened to a sign post that states a black kitten has been found. We pass Aston Grange and on up into Oaker, past Oaker Lane. This is a place that doesn't really know what to call itself. I half expect to see Ochre Road.

The small Wesleyan Methodist Chapel built in 1854 is now converted into a house. On the opposite side of the road, the sweet shop. Well, I thought it was a sweet shop at that age, belonging to my auntie now a fully fledged dwelling without till and counter. We always seemed to leave Grandma's house to late to go to Auntie Ruby's. Missed out on tons of sweets we did.

Snitterton is a hamlet that has moved, not with the times but position and, as we walk up to Oaker on the hillside, the markings of old mediaeval dwellings stand out in the fields well away from "modern Snitterton".

The Tearsall trees impose themselves on the horizon. Holmefield House stands on the hillside on the road out of Oaker. A lane named after **Will SHORE** is not the only claim Will has on the place. The tree, out of sight in Oaker but seen miles around from elsewhere also bears his name. The name Oaker is from the Latin "occorus" meaning lookout. Oaker Hill is the perfect look out post.

Those Romans were the first of the Latin's to visit Oaker but not the last. Years later Italian prisoners in the second world war would work in the area. So pleasant were they that 14 years after they had gone a Matlock baby would be named after one. He's not my ancestor but I know where my first name came from! My mother was ten at the time when the POW's were in Snitterton and Oaker.

The broad bottom of Wensley Dale lies below us on the left. In these fields budding athletes held sports day, the children from South Darley School trying to emulate the Bannister's of the day but dodging limestone outcrops instead of hurdles and no doubt a few sheep!

Wensley lies at the head of the dale, house lights being put on as twilight descends on the village on the hillside a mile or so away. Patricia finds a lane that "looks like the lane that goes to Castleton". I tell her Kirby Lane will take her there but only if she goes on the A6 to Bakewell.

"Are we near via Gellia?" she says.

I point backwards and say it is over there. I tell her maybe the lane she is thinking of is nearer to Castleton itself. She is convinced Kirby Lane is the same road or else they all look the same. I am glad I carry a compass, this woman's sense of direction is becoming legendary and I don't want to fall victim to a legend in my own lifetime!

Quickly we go to the junction, peer left up towards Wensley and with all due respect to that village turn right...

Turning down towards Eversleigh Rise, past the path to Mill Close Mine, past South Darley church Here, the graves of **Benjamin and Caroline MARSDEN** of Wensley stand, both died in 1883 it seems to read but it is difficult to read as is the grave of the **WILDGOOSE** family, Samuel, Wm, Sarah, Sarah again and Elizabeth. Another gravestone to **Margaret and Henry WRIGHT** of Wensley stands close by but again the ivy growing on it makes it impossible to read from the roadside.

By complete contrast a bus shelter over the road has been decorated with a picture of a castle, blue sky with white clouds, smiley sun and red and white toadstools. It is outside the school at South Darley with its bell tower pointing skyward.

We carry on down past Mill House and Ironbrook Grange (not the one near Ible) and opposite is the Three Stags Heads. **Etta FLINT** was mine host in 1835. A sign in a cottage wall says **Jonathan and Alice POTTER**, the date looks like 1763 but the light plays havoc with the eyes and I can't be certain.



I walk upon a pavement no bigger than a shoe width toward the Bridge. Darley Bridge has no little niches to dive into should a runaway horse or stagecoach come charging through...so you dive into the river. Countless drownings have occurred here and it's no wonder as the bridge wall comes to just above my knee. On the other side of the Bridge is the "Square and Compass" public house, in 1829 **Robert CLAYTON**, landlord. I suspect many a tippler tumbled into the river Derwent crossing this bridge. The name of the pub is emblazoned in giant white letters on the roof of the pub so it is seen from a good distance.

We pass the small cricket ground where Darley Dale C.C. play. I mention to Patricia that because of the bad light the cricketers have packed up. She looks across the road once occupied by sheep and cows but now empty. I point her in the direction of the cricket ground. Point made, the fact that the cricket stopped months ago is lost on her.

As we walk towards the A6 we see the steam train puffing out its smoke and whistling a tune as it speeds on its way to Rowsley. It has come all the way from Matlock Riverside, the newest station in Matlock, for nearly 150 years.

"We've just missed the train," says she, who has no sense of direction.

"It's not going our way anyway." I say, to soften the blow.

We cross the rail line which crosses the road and make our way into Whitworth Park. This place is where, near the duck pond. I took the plunge and proposed. I have been on dodgy ground and knees ever since! By the pond, which has been nicely done up, right on cue Mr and Mrs Duck swim from under the bridge, they are still quackers about each other after all these years.

We leave the Park and its Institute and over Tearsall a single star shines bright above the trees. I see a solitary magpie but I'm not superstitious. We visit a large furniture store and, on entering, we are greeted with a large glass of Chianti! Thank you magpie. Warney House is still standing here as is Warney Mill, now a warehouse. We leave suitably refreshed. I was worried in case the wine made Patricia order that three piece suite she wants. The orange boxes will have to last another year.

We go up Greenaway Lane and past Darley School whose long angled roof makes it look Dutch in style. We make our way along Hackney Lane an old sign on the side of a house announces we are now approaching the Top Nurseries of **Gervase SMITH** and Son. The sign is almost faded but the bright lights of the Laburnum pub beckon but we move on, a dog barks but we are going that fast we don't hear the end of his bark. It starts to rain.

Down below us on the road to Whitworth Hospital we see the outline of Morledge Farm recovering from a recent fire. We approach Smedley Street; so good they named it twice! Smedley Street East and Smedley Street West, named after **John SMEDLEY** of Hydro fame. He was so respected that they gave him a road that takes twenty minutes to walk.

Along the road we pass the Crabtree, that was later named The Willows, the Sycamore Inn off Sycamore Road, where else, is the home of the rugby community. The Gate Inn stands at the big junction with Rutland Street and Bank Road. Once trams ran up and down this steep hill, second only to San Francisco in steepness, we cross it and walk the entire length of Smedley Street.

Not a bad walk, an antique bell, a free glass of wine and yet another shop free day, two in a row. I am on a roll but don't tell Patricia.