

# Today's Journey

## CRICH to WHATSTANDWELL

It wasn't going to rain, it wasn't too cold, it was a good chance to get into the old walking boots and see some more of the county. The problem was where.

Crich had been put off more than once so we decided to get it under our belt and decide when we got there which direction to go. Our mate Den, a Cockney exile offered to "dump" us wherever we wanted (next time we're doing the Seychelles) and so to Crich we went.

A nice steady drive out to Tansley which a few hundred years ago meant you were in Crich already, it being part of that parish becoming separate around the mid 1840's, then up to Tansley Moor a sharp turn right and on past the old farms of Plaistow Grange and Plaistow House farms. Still looking like old farms should. We come down the hill into the centre of Crich having passed the church further up the hill. The roads in the centre of Crich must be the Spaghetti Junction of Derbyshire, all roads converging from all points of the compass, and standing for all the world like!

Something like the City Hall out of Back to the Future, clock and all, is the Crich Baptist Church, it's cloudy but I don't think we will get a lightning strike. With its double-doored archway and pillars either side it holds up the names on blocks of stone above it, names which include **Mr J WILLN** of Cromford and **Robert WILDGOOSE** of Holloway.

Patricia is asked to describe Crich. She says it's like the Tardis in Dr Who. It looks small but it's much bigger than you think. She's right. It seems to have enough to keep most people happy.

I'm about to tuck into some Peak Practice chips so I would say that wouldn't I? Allsops bakery further along the road has a small place for a cafe, there are newsagents and all sorts of other shops which can be fatal so I quickly move on; Patricia and shops are not a mix I enjoy too much.

The old Methodist chapel now disused is hidden up some back alley. We have already passed the "Jovial Dutchman", a pub, that in 1835 **Samuel SMITH** ran; five years earlier it was **Charles BAKER**.

We now pass the Kings Arms still going offering entertainment to it's customers long after **Henry BESTWICK** moved on. He was the host in 1835 and the BESTWICK's they seem to have been very popular during the late 1820's and early 1830's for Elizabeth had the "Rising Sun" in 1835 and John the "Swan" in 1829. **Charles BAKER** in 1835 had gone from being Jovial to work the "Black Swan" which in 1829 was run by **George YOUNG**. No doubt the lead miners of Crich made good use of such facilities. **William SHIPSTONE** was a scythe stick maker so not everything was underground.

Crich was a parish that had it's own workhouse and the records show that one **Sarah MARCHANT** a pauper in the workhouse was buried the 1 Aug 1822 aged 61.

Moving on towards Fritchley but still in Crich we pass a building, now a house with the name "The Old Nick". Striding his way towards us is a sprightly gentleman we accost and ask him to explain what it was. Without a moments hesitation he tells us it was the old police station, and that it once had cells. He assures us swiftly he has not been accommodated there, he just knows about it. He points out to us Culland Wood perched on a hill in the distance and other details of the village he lives in. His parents from Belper gave him a good old fashioned Derbyshire name .... Idris ! His wife Joan is at home netting, we thank him and he rushes of home to see what Joan has found on the net.

We pass Grove House that has enough chimneys to make you a bankrupt in Hearth Tax days, and Rose Cottage. There's always a Rose Cottage but there isn't always a rose.

Just before Fritchley we see a sign that says "please do not feed the pony", a cross between an elephant and a bull tells us the plea failed but the horse feels happy about it. It's not really that big but you get the picture. It's not a pony either.

A solitary stone post stands in a field, it must have been there donkeys years but when it wasn't looking the donkey must have carted the walls away. An old twisted tree, maybe a willow, it has it's own water supply so I can't understand why it should be weeping stands in the grounds of Orchard House opposite the sheep who look us over and go back to the clover. A new housing development is taking place so we decide to detour and head off down Fritchley Lane.

Turning down Fritchley Lane our first building is Hill Top Farm, no longer it seems a farm unlike Dial Farm passed a few hundred yards back, no, Hill Top as a converted look about it, tastefully done though.

It isn't the only converted building down this small lane, after passing Mole Cottage; we find the old chapel converted and a new use for the old

school. It's called the Old School House. The last house on this lane is the old Fritchley Cottage, its upper windows and walls seem to be swooning. You feel that if someone doesn't push them back they will fall out of the building. It's got character Fritchley Cottage.

Fritchley Congregational church built in 1841 is still standing proud in front of a village green that takes you by surprise. It appears suddenly as you walk down the lane, a wide expanse with a telephone box, a pub, the Red Lion, a cottage with a name that shows it's not greedy or maybe it's limited in what it sees "One Valley View". It probably moved from Two Dales ! !

What looks like framework knitters cottages lined the road down here and Bobbin Mill Hill confirms that. Fritchley down here even has a Post Office but you will have to walk round the block to find it. We do but it's closed.

We pass Kirkham Lane and the Friends Meeting House, a red brick building dated 1897. A stone in the wall of the Congregational chapel bears the legend **Jonathan FLETCHER** of Milford 27th Sep 1899.

On a steep hill in the distance is Barnclose farm, I don't want to go that way for it means a drop into the valley and a steep climb up the other side. The road to Barnclose can wait for another day, or year.

We head off down Bowmer Lane, we hope we have come the right way. Bowmer is a well known Crich name, and in 1832 **Benjamin and Thomas BOWMER** were classed as "able and sufficient persons " to collect the Land Tax. Another old farm is converted looking out as it does towards Bullbridge. Bowmer Lane shrinks, but it's still a lane, it turns, passes houses, it's still going strong!

We are confident we are heading in the right direction. Going down the hill its condition deteriorates, suddenly it stops, a dead end. It now turns into a footpath through fields its course blocked up by the Fritchley Sewage Treatment Works! The footpath skirts the plant, surrounded by a seven foot fence with two rows of barbed wire on top for good measure. Who is going to break into a sewage works?

We walk through the fields it is so quiet down here. We are walking alongside a baby brook which gets very big for its bubbles when we have to cross it further on. There is no bridge, just a plank, courtesy of Captain Hook it seems. A stair rail set into a wall looks a bit iffy, so it's a balancing act on a plank that has more spring than an onion. Finally we cross it and set out through the next field, the path leads across it to what looks suspiciously like Barnclose Farm! Thankfully it turns right across the main rail line to Derby. No barriers, just a stile and straight onto the track edge!

We look once then once again and again and again. A light down the track shines green. That means go but for who the train or us! We get across safely and walk into the next field, next minute the Leeds express comes hurtling through. Birds were circling overhead, did they know something?

The path through these fields must an ancient way, old stones are raised above the ground so you can step through the water logged fields. This must be Derbyshire's answer to the Everglades. We cross a bridge that carries us over the river Amber. This river starts in Ashover, a trickle, and here it is needing a bridge to cross it. We finally come to the end of this path.

Patricia sums it up nicely. It's like stepping out of the Tardis. Whenever the occupants stepped out of that they looked around wondering where they were. It feels like that just now. Where are we?

Sawmills. A row of houses, "modern" mainly. Woodlands one of the older houses is a bed and breakfast house, it may come in useful. Sawmills has a post office and a village hall with an elongated felt roof, under which you can enroll for Keep Fit classes. A poster says that Crich Brass band needs musicians. Are they that bad?

We are on a busy road, far from being quiet, we set off towards Ambergate. A sign seems to indicate we have (or should I say I have) took the wrong way. Ladygrove does not appear to be on our route. It's here we stop and ask someone if this is the road to Ambergate. She is visiting but goes inside the house to ask, she comes out and says, "Yes". Did she ask was this the Ambergate Road or which was the way to Ambergate? We suspect it was the first for later on we pass an old milestone which states that we are only two miles from Ripley! We decide to carry on a make for Buckland Hollow. Here a few years back an excavator sat on the roof of a pub. Today the excavator is gone but The Excavator pub still opens!

We double back on ourselves and head up the road towards Heage but we have no chance of getting there. The light is failing and we turn our attention to crossing the fields once more. The path leads us towards Prospect Farm, red bricked and standing elegantly and proudly in it's secluded position. It looks just right. We look behind us at the view having climbed out of the hollow. It is magnificent.

We are looking towards Coalburn Hill and Pentrich. I have noted before how beautiful this place is. It looks so peaceful in the distance, having been through it, I know how peaceful it is when you are there; tranquillity itself.

Yet, in 1817, the "revolutionaries" from Pentrich set about their work. A man died that day, others would be later hung for treason, others

transported. Could this place in the distance have witnessed such events. It just doesn't seem possible. Yet history shows that it is true.

We turn aside from Prospect Farm and walk across and down fields, followed all the way by a brook, it even manages to form a waterfall, a drop of at least three foot six. It twists and turns and cuts across our way, as if trying to divert us, it is succeeding. A bit further along a tree has fallen over and we have to go round that. Finally, we come to the final stile and the brook is still with us. If we are to cross this field after the stile we must clear the brook. I tell Patricia to be careful, we'll jump this together, holding hands we take a step back and...jump. We land safely on the other side. All four inches of the brook well and truly cleared.

The hedges forming the boundaries in the field have an unusual purple tinge which we have not really noticed anywhere before. We finally reach the road and enter into the village of Ridgeway. The biggest place is Ridgeway House a large stone edifice on the edge of the village. By the side of this house a footpath will take us to Sawmills. We don't want to go there and two huge bulls the other side of the fence help us to clarify quite clearly the decision is right.

Ridgeway should be the home of Dr Doolittle for, here, out of all the places we have seen today is a menagerie of bawling bulls, grumpy geese, singing sheep, dancing ducks and hippy chicks. The sedate sound of clip clop horse shoes is beefed up by a herd of cows adding there own brand of moosic. What could be the reason for such a noise?

We pass by the Netherlands (we get about a bit you know) where someone has attempted to re-create Stonehenge, well one arch of it and slightly smaller. Caulton House opposite is a lovely cottage and, in the grounds, a huge bonfire is blazing. It is a welcome sight, you can almost feel the heat. Is this the reason for the noise, is there to be a barbeque tonight?

We pass the sign which says Nether Heage, it's about half a mile up the road but the sign is staking it's territorial claim. At Church Lands farm some Jacob Sheep are running around having the time of their lives, they look so happy. I think they heard through the grapevine that lamb is off the menu tonight.

At the crossroads in the village stands the Heage School Board. Ridgeway School, built in 1877, is a wonderful little school or was! It is now a private dwelling but you cannot mistake it for anything other than a former school. It must have a play ground that if you played hopscotch half the pupils would have to stay in the schoolroom. Yet, it is a quaint little building with it's tower trying hard to look and indeed succeeding in

looking impressive. You cannot fail but be charmed by this once tiny school.

Across the junction and upon the brow of the hill the dogs of what was once Ridgeway Farm bark an enthusiastic welcome. We decline the offer, we have need of both legs to get home. They would probably lick us to death but I prefer to stay alive for as long as possible.

We carry on and pass Thacker's Hall along a new road called New Road, strangely enough. At the junction we are probably only three quarters of a mile from Sawmills; we have probably done about a two to three mile detour.

We turn left for Ambergate missing out Bullbridge which had its own Dry Dock no doubt for the canal trade that plied the Cromford Canal. Ambergate railway station is calling, after a long slog and feeling tired and hungry it will be good to sit down for the journey into Matlock.

At the station platform a couple of folks are reading a sign. Repairs on the 10th of January mean there may be delays. As we arrive at the station a train pulls out. It can't be ours it's too early! Patricia wanted to go to Heage to catch the train there earlier on. We didn't go to Heage because it was getting late; that was a better reason than having to tell her Heage doesn't have a rail line let alone a station.

We leave the station and the row of houses that make up Midland Terrace with their lights glowing through the windows makes us wish we were inside. It's getting colder, we approach the junction at Ambergate, the sign on the Hotel across the road says "Hurt Arms". I couldn't agree more, not only hurt arms, but sore feet.

The Hurt Arms is a large square shaped building reflecting the name of the major family in this area, the **Hurts of Alderwasley**. The Hotel stands next to the River Amber's final few yards before the river becomes part of the Derwent.

We now have a long stretch to get to Whatstandwell. We set off at a good pace I want to be home in the same day! Just then a train pulls into Ambergate station, now behind us, set on the embankment above us on the opposite side of the road. Could it have been our train? Who cares, there's no chance now of catching it.

Suitably depressed we carry on. The road to Whatstandwell is like a roman road, nearly straight, so you know exactly how far you have to go. The twinkling far ahead we thought was Venus, then we see it get bigger and bigger. Eventually a truck passes us, having taken a good minute or so to reach us. The way to Whatstandwell is long, very long.

The meadows at the side of the Derwent have been flooded, leaving behind large pools of surface water. Beyond the river the trees of Shining Cliff Woods look eerie. It starts to rain. Patricia notes the big wall on the opposite side of the road; it acts like a landmark as to how far there is to go. It's the halfway point. The wall stops the railway and Cromford canal merging with the A6.

The light of the Derwent Hotel shines invitingly. The road up from the Hotel leads into the main area of Whatstandwell which almost merges with Crich Carr. By road Crich Carr is a fair distance to walk but a path across the fields leads to almost opposite the parish church at Crich. Many of your ancestors from Benthill and Crich Carr no doubt used this path.

A quick call to Den and the cockney sparrow flew like an eagle to pick us up. Treweek Travel was considered but three on a pogo stick was a bit tricky. All in all a good day, and I am thankful we took the wrong way, for we would not have seen that wonderfully peaceful view from Prospect Farm back to Coalburn Hill.