

# Today's Journey

## **KELSTEDGE, UPPERTOWN and SPITWINTER**

A knock at the door that shook the rafters announced to us that the Crafty Cockney had arrived. "Ere" he said in a tone that signified "where are you", I've been sat in me motor for quarter of an hour and you still ain't turned up. Lovely bloke Den. The fact that we told him we would ring before we went round to his home had been lost on him. Never mind we was going to Kelstedge. That was after we had finally got Marilyn out of the house. She turns up at very inconvenient times. When we left, Marylyn was sat on top of the dividing fence, she obviously thought our grass was greener. The cat from next door sharpened its claws as I passed by her. She was getting ready for the next encounter.

Kelstedge lies at the bottom of the steep Slack Hill, it's a village you pass through on your way to Chesterfield, or turn off from on your way to Ashover or catch your bus to Clay Cross or Matlock. There are no shops here. In 1835 if the bus didn't turn up you could always call in at the Nags Head where **Samuel VEANS** would be happy to serve you as well as mend or make anything a blacksmith would mend or make. **George BENNETT** a nail maker from Kelstage probably did a roaring trade with **Matt SMITH** the wheelwright. **Sam Veans** didn't have it all is own way for **William ASH** kept the White Horse. Today there is just the Kelstedge Inn. Slack Hill, once a twisting road, now redeveloped and straightened also boasted a public house, the "Lord Nelson" long since gone. Slack Hill was known as Amber Hill for the river Amber begins in this area. It was also the site of houses belonging to Ashover parish. An old reference tells us that "**Wm BOARS** house at Amber Lane Head which was formerly **Wm HOPKINSONS** of Eastwood and sold to the parrish by his son **Giles HOPKINSON** for ye sum of three pounds, which sum loosed him out of prison, etc" was one such parish house. Another was **Godfrey SWIFTS**, which was formerly "**William BOARS** barne, and stands the next, but somewhat higher in the Lane". **Anne TISSINGTON'S** house, by **John BOARS** house at Slack was another parish house.

An old notebook detailing Ashover folk and their final resting place records that "**SPENCERS** (of Celstidge) is buried just at ye steel by ye yates, a little flatt stone with A.S. Also listed is "**SHEPHERDS** (of Slack) is buried at ye belhouse end, they have two little stones letter'd. The **TOWNDROWS** (of Peck lant) is buried a little below ye view tree, a large

flat stone with a W and a T on it. Peglant is still in existence today lying as it does further up the road from Kelstedge and set back of the main road. An account of monies paid to Ashover Church beginning 1724 indicates that one **Godfrey BATSFORD** of Pecklant paid two pence. There was also another **Godfrey BATSFORD** at the same time and the Pecklant name is obviously added to differentiate. Just above Peglant is another place called Paulstown. The same 1724 list shows **Paul BASTFORD** paying one penny that year. I wonder if he is the Paul of Paulstown

Two old cottages with datestones of 1756 and 1686 and the letters BPM and BGS respectively, stand across from the Kelstedge Inn just below the old smithy. Behind the trees lies Ashover, about a mile away. Turning round towards Chesterfield the road, the old Chesterfield to Matlock turnpike, rises gradually until it disappears over the horizon and turning towards Matlock that same road climbs steeply. Over three hundred and fifty feet from where the road passes over the Amber River to the top of Slack Hill. Slack hill was notorious for being blocked by snow, our ancestors would have had a hard time travelling this main route in winter. On the right, nearly half way down is Eddlestow Farm. To the left of Slack Hill is the prominent ridge of Bradley and Cocking Tors from which viewpoints Ashover is best seen. The hillside is covered in Rhododendron bushes. Overton Hall lies beneath the ridge.

The traffic rushes by on this busy road, it's very noisy and we seek a bit of piece and quiet. We find it on Vernon Lane.

Vernon Lane stands opposite a castellated house that looks prepared to repel all boarders or protect all who sail in her. The lane is flanked initially by cottages on both sides, Meadow View and Nether House among the first encountered. Gradually the houses become more spaced and bigger and modernised. The roar of the traffic gradually decreases until all is quiet except for the birds singing. It is a most peaceful lane at this point. Suddenly our eyes are turned towards a giant larger than life figure standing stern faced in a garden. A huge statue of Fu Manchu or could it be one of the seven Samurai. He looks lost and it seems he will stay that way for not many buses stop at Kelstedge for Tokyo. A more familiar scene awaits us as we walk further along Vernon Lane, which by now has no more houses, but has fields either side of it in which little balls of white on four legs skip about enjoying in full measure the run of the field. A group of three lambs lying basking in the warmest spot under the wall in the corner of the field decide it is time to make a move, I look again and the trio is a quartet, then a quintet, how many lambs can you squeeze into a corner? Six, as another joins the group. All run of to their various mums, as there mums once did a few years before.

Clumps of Celandines adorn the lane, the hawthorn is in bud and the purple flowers of a dead nettle sticks its head above the short grass. It's

Spring greening time, everywhere looks fresh and new. Even the moss, clad on the wall has a shine all of its own. It's not quiet summer yet, a breeze reminds us of that fact. In the next field a horse takes to heart the old adage not to "cast a clout 'til May be out" by sporting a blue jacket. Not exactly the height of fashion or colour co-ordination, blue on brown but it doesn't seem bothered.

We pass the entrance to Amber House and take a muddy path into a wood. Soon this wood will be covered in a mass of bluebells, no doubt many an ancestor passed this way to Robriding and enjoyed the same beauty Spring bestowed here. The wood anemones gather in groups alongside the twisting but slow running, at least at this point, Hodge Lane brook which wends its way below us. A large fungus, the size of a dinner plate grows halfway up a tree. Not far away a huge conifer has toppled over. The path leads down to the brook and over an old stone bridge, reminiscent of a clapper bridge. It turns towards Vernon Lane farm but we go through a metal gate and up and over a hill which will bring us out eventually at Eaton Lane. Climbing the hill we are now once more above the brook, a perfect bunch of anemones greet us as we round the hawthorn bushes. A group of cows, inquisitive or nosey depending on your outlook, peer through the barbed wire fencing looking at the first tourists of the season it would seem. We have been beaten, a group of walkers kitted out for the ascent on Mount Fuji pass through the stile just before us. They turn right, going back into Kelstedge, no doubt hoping to catch the four ten to Tokyo. They should have a word with the Samurai. Before we enter the lane we see an old railway sleeper. Did some labourer take a wrong turning, the Ashover Light Railway was on the other side of the road.

Walking up Eaton Lane we pass the turning to Brockhurst, which turning drops down and over Smalley Brook. The same grave location document informs us that "**STONE** of Brockhurst was buried on ye left hand **Robert BOTHAMS** stone about midway betwixt Church yates and Church-porch in the gate".

The walk up Eaton Lane is gradual. Evenly spaced dandelions, all with huge flower heads, six in a row, each about three feet apart like landing lights on a runway show us the way. What would our ancestors make of the Tennis court belonging to the houses up here.

The hawthorn hedges clad in ivy are broken by the entrance to Yew Tree Farm, once farmed by **John HOPKINSON** back in 1829. Its gravel path now leading to converted barns. We see the old roof of Prestedge Farm and make a small detour to take a look at this corner of Ashover parish. Three or four houses, one modern, follow the curve of the road, Whitefield Lane, Prestedge Farm seems to have been converted, renovated, done up, made over and repaired all its long life. It has character. Windows

bricked up, door entrances bricked in, old roof tiles, three inches thick now part of a path between old sheds all add to its charm.

We press on, up to now Patricia has not see a shop, it's a good day. The sign says "Uppertown". "I didn't know we had come to Bonsall" she says. She had not failed me, her directional sense is as good as it as ever been. "No" I said, "this is Uppertown, Ashover".

"Can you have two Uppertowns?"

"There are a lot of Uppertowns" I said, " but only one Patricia".

After explaining that there will be no Market Cross or Kings Head here, we set of along Lid Lane to Uppertown, the one in Ashover parish. I have heard of a Sid Lane, a corruption of Side Lane but never a Lid lane. Could this be the same. No worries, whether Sid or Lid someone has prepared the way, for the hedgerows have all been cut back. The tarmaced surface has been reclaimed by moss and grass in the central reservation and a lone cyclist has the lane all to himself. In fact only one car has been seen since we left Kelstedge, it's that rural.

This area is known as Overend and in 1736 **Samuel BUNTING'S** end was over as he was laid to rest on the twenty fifth of April. Forty years later **William WHARTON** also of Overend was buried in 1776. An **Alice WHARTON** was also buried, but in 1729, alongside her name in the registers is the legend "an excommunicated woman". Whether Alice was from Overend the registers do not say.

On our right a field is absolutely covered in daisies, the dandelions are not having it all their own way, while over to our left the road across the valley carries the traffic onto Beeley Moor. The plantation of fir trees act as a black and dark green backdrop as silver topped machines speed towards their destination. In times past horses from Ashover, Wirestone and Highlikely quarries would have plodded their way along here.

The road dips slightly as we approach the junction of Cullumbell Lane and Lid Lane. Two huge trees stand in a field near a farm, they have seen better days for they have been cut in half. Still their size is big. An old, crudely cut trough, hollowed out of a large lump of stone stands at the entrance to Uppertown House Farm. There are "dead tractors" everywhere, bits of old farm machinery scatter the place. This place has character, as rough as it looks. It looks like it's been part of a movie set, and could quite easily fit the bill in Wuthering Heights or Deliverance. I bemoan the fact I had left my banjo at home, I am expecting a duel. The cows munch contentedly in the byre, and a black hen rummages between the hay. They have the place to themselves. There's an old wooden barn piled high with bales of hay. This place has atmosphere, it's what you expect from the country, yet as well as being the idyll, on a dark night it could easily project itself as a house of horror. It has so many buildings

grouped together, dark passages between them, that on darkened nights they would create strange shapes, who knows what lies in wait round the next corner. It's ramshackle, a working junk yard, but that's its personality. That's its style. Uppertown House Farm has survived all this time, long may it continue to do so.

Right on the junction of these two lanes stands the tiny Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, or at least it was. Today it is someone's home. Turning right at the junction we climb a slight incline that takes us past Uppertown Farm. A sign points into the yard, "Public Footpath", within a couple of feet another one reads "Beware of the dogs". We carry on into a tiny community that seems to be thriving. The old school built in 1881 is now Uppertown Social Centre. It held a Murder Mystery Night, no doubt inspired by the farm down the road. A makeshift sign points to a car park. They must get that busy. A large black cockerel leaves the confines of a farm yard a makes for shelter under a tree. Its bright red comb swinging side to side as it announces to the hamlet the arrival of strangers.

The Ashover burial register records that **John HOLMES** who was buried in November 1809 was from here. He was eighty. **Joseph** the son of **John TURNER** was also buried at Ashover. He was only ten when he "left" Uppertown.

The place is not called Uppertown for nothing, for there is nothing above us, we are at the top, by the time we arrive at the end of Cullumbell Lane we will technically be on a mountain at just over one thousand feet. It has been an easy climb. The views are extensive as we set our sights on our next goal,... Buntingfield.

The long straight stretch of road before us is accompanied by a deep drainage ditch. It has been recently cleaned out and the "renovator" has even put his name in stone. Not for him initials only. These ditches not only serve as a means to take away excess water but could also serve as a boundary mark between properties. Manor court books often refer to someone's ditch needing scouring.

We pass the junction with Buntingfield Lane, another long lane that has very few buildings along its length. Stonefield House, Spring House and Slate House accompany its route to its merger with Hardwick Lane. However our journey is towards Buntingfield and it stands opposite, well back of the road, an impressive double gabled building with large bay windows that are squared off into enough spaces to play chess on. Buntingfield is associated with the Quakers, and in 1724 "widow **BUNTING** ye Quaker" paid one penny to **Titus WHEATCROFT** the Clerk of Ashover. In 1829 Buntingfield is occupied by farmer **Thomas LEE**. We walk down the long drive towards the farm, four ducks waddle their way to safety. Two barking dogs run from the farm, we follow the example of

our feathered friends and head for a stile. We shout to a farmhand, wanting to know if this is the right stile. An outstretched hand points us in the same direction as the stile, and a loud voice calls off the dogs. I check my ankles for puncture wounds. The path enters into a copse, which is neatly kept together by a surrounding stone wall. It's not a big enclosure but very soon the path disappears as we try and find our way across this walled plantation. We duck under branches, climb out of hollows and skirt numerous trees. Underfoot it is very soft, very. I look down and I am sinking into an ant hill. I escape before the creatures awaken to the fact their home has just been crushed. Nevertheless I check my ankles for puncture wounds. Having finally made it across we look for an other stile, down in the hollow we can make out Peasunhurst. In August of 1780 **George WRIGHT** of Peasonhurst buried both wife and a child. Fifty years earlier on the seventh of May, **Edward RAGG** of Pesonhurst buried his wife **Mary**. The lack of an obvious stile means we have to retrace our steps. We avoid the ants and the dogs are nowhere to be seen, possibly lurking and awaiting our emergence out through the other stile, wherever that was. Looking at the view from Buntingfield at the rhododendron ridges above Ashover and two conical shaped hills in the distance makes us realise what a beautiful county we live in. You take in the same view coming down the road into Kelstedge, probably better. It's the kind of view that makes you stop what you are doing, as in silence you take it all in, and you feel all the better so for doing that one act. Our ancestors may not have computers and motor cars, but at least each of their living days they could behold the view unfolding before them. I am sure they experienced the same feeling of well being just by looking around their world. It is something that transcends the toil of lead mining, having to find a living and all sorts of illnesses that plagued them. . and us today, if only for a moment.

We pass Cullumbell House further up the road, and cross the Alice Head road. **Job BERRISFORD** was from Allishead when he died in 1812 aged 70 years. Alice Head road stands on the one thousand foot contour line but there are no snow capped peaks here. Just moorland and fields and roads that carry traffic back to the Chesterfield Road or Two Dales. We cross a small stretch of road that brings us out onto the Stanedge Road. On one side we are in Ashover parish and over on the opposite side almost in Walton parish. I say almost because along this stretch one field back from the road is still in Ashover.

Dean Farm faces us, it has a welcoming display of daffodils and heather along its track leading to its door. Chapel House farm is next in line, but on the right hand side of the road. Black faced sheep protective of their lambs, running about on a stretch of marshy ground stare at two visitors. Hardly anybody walks along this road. Highfield House Farm announces it has Duck eggs for sale as well as a host of other things. A large sign captures the attention of speeding motorists as some take a pit stop too

top up on their cholesterol. Along this road is also hidden the Stanedge Golf Club just opposite the nineteenth hole that is the Red Lion. Having walked this far I think it would be a pity to by-pass such an establishment. Having had a satisfying drink in a well maintained hostelry we walk a couple of yards across to the car park and into Wingerworth parish. It's a kind of "I've been to Wingerworth thing".

We double back up onto Belland Lane. A map of 1899 shows at the bottom of this lane a place called the Pig of Lead. The tall chimney off Belland Lane shows its association with the lead smelting business. Miners from Winstar and Ashover brought their lead ore here to be smelted before it was shipped by canal at Chesterfield. The remoteness of the spot no doubt being chosen because of the poisonous fumes that emanated from such places.

We finally arrive at Spitewinter. A tiny settlement on the main Chesterfield road. The road here is very dangerous being on the crest of a hill. There's a Methodist chapel and a pub. A bus stop and just down the road a view of Chesterfield and beyond second to none as the whole vista opens up. The **STAFFORDS** of Spitewinter had such a view. They are mentioned in a burial location document that tells us "**STAFFORDS** of Spitewinter is buried at ye feet of **Joseph MILLNS** daughter". Our journey has taken us to the other side of Ashover, the unbuilt side. A side comprising a few farms. Roads rarely travelled, other roads resemble Silverstone as people rush through. No shops. A different way of life, a life mainly lost to "progress" but still hanging on in there and epitomised if not in reality but in essence by Uppertown House Farm.