

Today's Journey

Taddington, Priestcliffe, Blackwell and Millers Dale

It had been a long time since we had put one foot in front of the other in the great outdoors, today we decided we would head for Taddington. It was a good a place as any, and as there are no shops there it seemed even better. So we set of to catch the Trans Peak. Derbyshire's answer to the Greyhound.

As we had a few minutes to spare I risked all by allowing Patricia to go to the market, which in Matlock is not what it used to be. They no longer bait bears, the minstrel has laid down his mandolin and the town crier has a sore throat. However it did have a very useful instrument. As this was the start of the season I decided to treat Patricia to a very useful present. Her sense of direction, or lack of it is renown, she thought Halifax was a building Society but couldn't believe how big it was when she went there. It's as big as a town she said! Bearing that in mind I found a thing that when you whistled, it lit up and buzzed all at the same time. So if she is ever lost in the Derbyshire hills she just has to whistle and I'll come running, which is similar to home, so I am used to it.

The bus arrived and we set of for Taddington.

The lambs were doing the lambda at Rowsley, the Pheasant was strutting his stuff opposite the grouse in the field across the road and the cows were swinging their tails to the bleat of the sheep, but we knew Spring was here when we turned into Ashford in the Water.

For there, in all their glory, bells, sticks, hankies and hats were the Morris Men. They were also accompanied by two other groups, one in Lincoln Green the other in red, but they held no accessories in their hands apart from a pint of beer. There was much merriment as some Morris Men tried hard to gain maximum points by attempting moves seen in episodes of Strictly Come Dancing.

We waited until a passenger alighted, and our front row seat in the Executive Box of the Trans Peak bus gradually pulled away from the show. We turned down Fennel Street and onto Buxton Road passing the Bulls Head where already a group sat outside pondering where the noise of a thousand budgie bells was coming from.

We return to the A6 and follow the course of the river Wye as it contorts its way below the towering Fin Cop, a huge backbone of a whale of a hillside, whose upper slope is virtually treeless and would make a superb sledging track if you could stop at the bottom. The fishermen on the Wye today ,dressed in camouflage wouldn't not appreciate it. Leese Bottom

stands about five hundred and fifty feet below Fin Cop so it would make a bit of a splash.

Moss covered dead trees and ivy clad living ones line the route, Wood Anemones in patches of white contrast with the greens of various hues.

We turn off left towards Taddington which greets us with a show of Daffodils on either side of the road. Today the bus has free passage and nothing is there to stop it in its tracks. Taddington has a bunch of ducks that decide to cross the road at the most inconvenient moments. Why fly when you can waddle is their motto. Today they are not to be seen.

We alight across from the oddly named Hades Lane and head up a side road passing colourful window boxes perched on old sills. A rickety barn still holds onto corner spot, it has been there for hundreds of years and nothing it seems is going to shift it now. Across the way One Day Cottage stands.

The limestone walls are, like in the Dale, covered in moss. The houses to our left have Taddington Moor above them, the houses on the right look onto open countryside. The aptly named Field View Cottage says it all. Taddington has lanes and footpaths going of from all angles. Tiny thoroughfares and passages covered many of them in grass. Smithy Lane, about as wide as an horseshoe, Ash Tree Lane, and Donkindale Lane. Lanes that pass through and in front of householders front rooms, where you have to open the garden gate for access. Ash Tree Farm and Sycamore Farm two of the farms on the main street. **Abraham TAYLOR**, **John BRADDOCK** and **Matthew** and **John ROBERTS** just a few of the farmers recorded in 1829 at Taddington. Any would have known these farms, some probably lived at them.

Star House still stands, now a private dwelling it was in the same year the Public House of **George HIBBERT**. Today alongside it stands or should that be totters, the remains of a building that has seen much better days. Outside Wheelwright Cottage are a the red phone box, not yet replaced by the shower cubicle type, and a bright red post box. Get your mail in by 4.15 or travel the six miles to Buxton for a later post. Another post, the white and black metal guide post tells us it is six miles to Buxton. There's another of these old mileposts in Taddington Dale.

It must have been much easier back then to get the stagecoach through the village. The Trans Peak has to manoeuvre very carefully along the narrow street.

Although Taddington is a quiet village it is set very much in the future. apart from the modern housing around Horse Mill Lane the Church clock is two and three quarters of an hour fast !

Somewhere in that churchyard lies **George NEEDHAM** of the Duke of York Public House, aged 31 in 1824, and **William MAYCOCK** aged 58 was buried here in 1822. **Alice BUCKLEY** was 107 when she finally was laid to rest in 1813. **Henry RATHER** we are told was taken ill while travelling, he was 65, we don't know where he was from, but we know where he is. In 1817 at the age of 65 he too joined Alice.

On our way out of the village we come across Rose Cottage, every village has a Rose Cottage, no front garden but stone pavers about the front yard and road. Across the way the dogmatic Wesleyan Chapel Lane shows the way to the chapel.

The School nearby hosted the likes of **Grace MOSLEY** from 1878 until 1882. **Lottie BROCKLEHURST** lasted just under a year, she left Jan 1900. **Josephine NETTLETON** joined in 1893. Her last School was at Dove Holes. **Mary WRIGHT** started in June 1894 and by October that same year she had left the village.

Now it was our turn.

On the way out of Taddington we came across a horse in a field where he had virtually eaten all the grass. He must have been so hungry he could have ate like a horse. When you see Horace, say hello.

Monyash and Chelmorton are three miles away, Flagg half a mile less, but having left the village we now set our sights on Priestcliffe. Not that there is a lot to see, most of it is hidden in the valley, and this isn't even the ditch part. The bus stop here goes by the name Opposite Hollow O' the Moor. The "Hollow" is a great description as the land sinks away much as water down a plug hole. In the hollow therein lies our goal.

Before we turn right into the road that will take us there, we make our way further on the road and onto the beginning of a rough stony lane. Propped up against a wall is a two foot high teddy bear, sporting a bib, with the words "Anthonys Big Bear". I say hello and he gives me a nod. Maybe he lost his way to the Picnic spot.

No sooner had we sat down, than the sun went in, the clouds darkened and the rain teased us as a few spots fell for a moment, dried up, rained again then went away for good.

Across the way the road leading down to Priestcliffe Ditch was bounded by old quarry workings and lead mines. Even further in the distance, the massive chimney of Hope Cement Works could be seen. Behind was Priestcliffe Low, actually a hill with a long elongated outcrop of limestone that Patricia said looked like a crocodile half hidden under the surface of the water. We called it "Crocodile Rock".

We retraced our steps to the crossroads, careful not to wake the bear, who had now dozed off. He looked at home, if you pass this way drop in and see for yourself. Just ask for Taddington Bear.

From the crossroads it is a quarter of a mile to Priestcliffe. Across the way the spire of Taddington church can just be seen poking up between a group of trees. Down below us, Rock Cottage hidden by a a similar group of trees stands. From the A6 you would never know it existed.

Priestcliffe is a quiet place, the slamming of the post box is done by 9 o' clock in the morning. That I would imagine would be it for noise, but a

local when asked said "Oh no, it can get noisy at times ". Down in the bottom a tractor was dragging chains across the field, it was so far down, you couldn't hear a thing.

Also down below us, a row of varying sized houses, all joined together, some with a stone roof others slate, some grey others moss covered. Big houses and small houses, some with chimneys on the end, some in the middle, some with one, others with two. We are so high above these houses that we have a perfect view of the roof. It's like looking down on a smaller version of the chimney sweep scene from Mary Poppins.

When the noise did come, it came from the hill above us, a lamb being taken into the arms of a farmer. There have been other farmers in Priestcliffe, the **BROOMES, Isaac** and **Robert, James BUXTON** and **Ruth DAKAYNE, George HODKIN, John LINGARD** and **William MAKINSON** and **William MOSLEY. George WILKSON** was described as a farmer and Schoolmaster. All this in 1829. Twenty six years later **Robert BROOM, William MAKINSON** and **James BUXTON** along with **George WILKSON** were still farming. They had been joined by **William ROSCOE** and **Joseph BAGSHAW. James MIDDLETON** was a cattle dealer there.

School House Farm was named after the school, that according to the local, owned it. We saw no evidence of a school, but one was here. It opened up in 1874.

John William PERCIVAL attended here although he lived at Chelmorton, he came in 1884 three years after **John SKIDMORE** from Flagg. Another of the class of 1881 was **Samuel BERESFORD** who lived in Millers Dale. That was one long hill he climbed each day for a lad of eight.

Bakewell Poultry Show took away a few of the class. Several were absent in October 1878 because of it.

Of course the lads and lasses were just that, **John FOX** punished for throwing stones, several punished for "playing with a heated poker", and **Mary Jane BROOME** receiving an occasional slap with a strap that brought her father the two miles from Brushfield to have a few words with the teacher, "in language unfit for children to hear" !

As we walk towards the end of the hamlet, Patricia dons hat, scarf and gloves. It has gone from Spring to Winter in a few yards.

Those few yards were different a few days ago, for a whole row of trees had been felled along the roadside.

The final farm is Lydgate Farm and instead of heading for Brushfield, which lies in the parish of Ashford in the Water we follow a track round in a circle back to where we sat to have a bite. The track we walked up is called Long Lane, it is not called that for nothing. The trees and bushes either side will, when fully clothed will make a tunnel of green leaves for a large part of the way. This is most likely the route **Samuel BERESFORD** took, along with his brother **John**, and the **BANNING** children, all four of them, who came in March 1884 and left later the same year.

Now back where we started we head for Priestcliffe Ditch. On the way we see Taddington Bear is still dozing. Not wanting to disturb him, I creep up and put his bib down because it had blown over his eyes.

Priestcliffe Ditch, like its name suggests lies in a hollow, a few houses spaced out about every eighty yards or so. The first house is a doubled gabled one. It may have been home to **John WRIGHT**, his two children **James** and **Mary** attended the school up the hill, both left within a year of each other. James in 1882 and Mary a year earlier.

The place was no doubt a place of sadness when on Dec 19 in 1853, **George NADIN** aged 32 and **Joseph NADIN** aged 3 were buried at Taddington.

In 1857 **Septimus MIDDLETON** lived here, he was a shoemaker, a probably made shoes for **John WEBSTER** another resident.

I said to Patricia this place reminds me of Wheston, near Tideswell. Amazingly the house we were next to was called Wheston House. A couple of grey cats patrolled the place, totally ignoring the visitors to their hamlet. Not a whisker flinched as we walked by.

Towards the bottom of the hill there is a stone trough dug into a large patch of grass at the roadside. Many a horse stopped here no doubt to take on refreshment for the pull up the hill.

Just before we get to the crossroads on our right is Springhill, a large house set behind a balustrade, and having a Georgian like porch. Set back of the road, with a large drive up to it, it looks very grand for Priestcliffe Ditch.

Finally leaving Priestcliffe we cannot make our minds up on whether to follow the road to Milers Dale or go over the fields.

We cross the boundary line into Blackwell where we meet a most interesting gentleman.

We went to Blackwell because it's there. This Blackwell is not the one near Tibshelf nor the Blackwall, a hamlet in the parish of Kirk Ireton. This Blackwell is at the end of a rainbow. Rainbows End the name of one of the properties here.

Many have been converted into holiday homes, the many can be counted on the right hand, the others on the left hand.

The others include the farms. Crossroads farm situated near crossroads, where else, has a black and white sheep dog, that although in the distance, gives us a long hard wary look. He stares until we have moved on. At the crossroads is the Post box, just inside the boundary of Blackwell. There are no shops, no newsagents, but hidden inside the end of a barn is a phone. Just hung on the wall. You wouldn't know it was here unless you walked up the road. It is probably connected to the caravan and camp site at the top end of the hamlet.

The weather on October 25th 1878 would have ruined any camp site. The Taddington School log book states that there was a severe thunderstorm that afternoon, "the lightning was so vivid that the children became alarmed. Lessons had to be discontinued for an hour". I don't know if **Peter WRIGHT** a child of **John WRIGHT** would have remembered it. He was only four when it happened, but the teacher wrote his name down when he started Priestcliffe School. I can't imagine the road to Millers Dale would have been so busy as it was today, no lollipop crossing lady needed here back then.

We began to wonder how safe it was to walk the road to Millers Dale. Was there a pavement all the way? We needed someone with a bit of local knowledge.

Other locals we could not ask included **Dorothy GOULD** who died here in 1821 aged 28 and **Grace GOULD** who died four months later in October just 26 years old. Both are recorded in Taddington burials. Others from Blackwell buried at Taddington lived much longer. **Ralph MOSLEY** was 77 when he died in 1825. **Ann GOODWIN** was 93 in 1813, **Nicholas WRIGHT** was 80 in 1815 and **Robert BAGSHAW** when he was buried in 1853 was 76 years old.

Then we saw an elderly couple walking towards us.

"Are you local ?" I asked.

"Sort of " was not the reply I expected, but it would do.

"How safe is the road to Millers Dale ?"

We had walking gear on, carried rucksacks, our boots were muddied, we held a map open studying the routes and apart from being tied together with ropes and carrying an ice pick, I thought it was pretty obvious we were walkers.

"Oh it should be alright, never driven it myself though" he said.

"No, we're walking it, we want to know if there is a pavement all the way, if not we have to go across these fields, we don't want to go back to Taddington up the hill again."

The reason we couldn't go across the fields was there was a fence blocking the entrance to the stile.

"Oh I don't know about that never walked along there " he said, "but we are going over this field, we were going another way, but it's too dangerous".

Too dangerous! I looked at this man, a rambler and his wife in their seventies, but where-ever he would have been going was not too dangerous for him. No, he was seeking out another route to lead a group the following week, a route that he considered easier.

The route he wanted to go, the group he was leading wouldn't be up to it. Couldn't cope with it he said.

"What do you mean by too dangerous"?

"Well, you have to wade the river three times, the path is very slippery and you have to hold onto overhanging tree branches as you walk along

in case you fell. If you fall in the river you'll be swept away". I thought, here was a rambler that did "Extreme". Not just a man who carried a flask and sandwiches and wrapped up for the cold.

Were going over the field as an alternative walk for next week, just doing a "reccy", was how he put it.

His wife had mentioned to Patricia about a few cliffs, he had failed to see the entrance to the stile had been blocked, so when he asked would we like to walk along with them we decided we were going to look around Blackwell first. This may have puzzled him, because having got this far, there wasn't much more to see. A few purple flowers, Patricia called Mesambrathums or something, and an old long limestone barn opposite, but it was enough to help us sidle away.

I heard "they can't do that it's a public footpath" and when I turned round they were gone.

"It's a simple path" he had told me, "never done it before" he said but "its straight all the way apart from the dog leg", which he pointed out on the map. "We follow it until we get here, then you will turn right and we will turn left. About a twenty minutes walk in all", he said.

We waited ten minutes and made our way back down the road, prior to this we saw another rambler coming from the dangerous route ,he appeared very dry, no cuts or scratches no torn clothing. May be he just turned back I thought.

We made our way through the stile, or rather squeezed between a post and a barn wall into the field. We noticed a fresh boot print bedded in the wet soil. He had gone straight through the boggy part. This was a man on a mission. As a result we were able to trace his every step. Not that we needed it, because the map made the route pretty obvious.

The path turned at an angle and took us over a wall, clambering over the steps embedded in it. It was some wall. This was an easier route for this mans group next week! His boot mark told us he had manoeuvred it ok, and we came upon not one dog leg but four in the shape of a Jack Russell. The path takes us alongside Hall Green, a house hidden among trees and a farm. The dog was barking like mad, but never came anywhere near the path and as long as we never came anywhere near the farm we seemed safe.

He realised this and the dog strutted back to his position casting a wary backward glance in case he was out smarted.

In 1829 **John LINGARD** had a farm here, but whether it was down in the hamlet itself or up here I could not say. **Arthur Shipley HEATHCOTE** also had a large farm here that same year, as did **Misses WRIGHT**, **Misses DAKIN** and one **HODKIN**, who was also described as a corn miller.

The path is fairly easy to follow, it's a track about ten feet wide to begin with, turns slightly right with a sign indicating that you walk alongside the

wall instead of going across the planted fields. The views are extensive, we can see Monksdale, the place where Patricia claimed she went on a walk with a group including a blind person, although on the day that we did it after a few minutes in the undergrowth it was obviously not so.

Getting back to where we are now, the East Buxton Lime Kiln which stood alongside the railway looms out from between openings in the trees. We would pass this later on. Over the hill before us is Tideswell, Wormhill close by, a group of sheep to our right and down an almost sheer drop to our left is an old man waving his walking stick in the air, walking along a "path" the width of a tightrope!

"What's he doing there"? shrieks Patricia. Where's his wife?

Before we can shout ship ahoy, he has disappeared. I don't know where he was from and I certainly don't know where he was going but if he appeared alongside a group of mountain goats on a Survival Special it would not surprise me.

We follow the path the man has turned aside from and descend the steep open slope into Millers Dale, we cross the little bridge over the River Wye and turn right towards the Viaduct. The turn left is to Wormhill, just as the man had said.

Walking along the rivers edge we hear cries and screams and laughter. On the viaduct a group of young people are abseiling from the top of the viaduct. The men at the top hope to dip the dangling kids into the river. The shrieks echo all around. They are a group of friends from Birmingham and seem to be having a lot of fun. Somehow I can't help thinking that the man with a walking stick should be here as well. He could teach them a thing or two, or maybe he would find it boring.

We climb the limestone slabs, that serve as steps from out of the dale onto the old railway track, making our way past the Lime Kilns which were opened in 1880.

The day is mild the air still, just right for walking. We arrive at Millers Dale Station, opened in 1863 but long since closed. A sign tells us that another Peak event is about to take place. Flagg races on the Tuesday. Here horse and jockey take on a course around the countryside.

We go the road, going under the two bridges that carried the railway and make the sharp turn left into the hamlet of Millers Dale. We wait for our bus outside a row of cottages all with similar names, Millers Dale Cottage, Dales House and Dale Cottage, all fronted with stone cobblestones and each with a bright red door. **Robert HOLME** was a farmer here, and **William BINGHAM** and **George DAKIN** millers. William was also the Licensed Victualler of the Peacock.

The bus arrives and takes us to Tideswell via Litton, we wait five minutes and catch the bus to Bakewell via Litton. On the way we pass a building known as Newhouses, although they are not new. Near here is the road to Litton Slack a hamlet of a few houses perched on the hillside opposite the

incredibly stark and beautiful Highfields above Burfoot in Millers Dale. Deep down in the valley, out of sight lies Litton Mill, here orphans from London and young children from the area served their apprenticeships. Many died very young. How many I wondered had chance to spend time among such magnificent scenery. Very few I wonder. We are extremely lucky.