

# Today's Journey

## **BONSALL UPPERTOWN, SLAYLEY, LEYS LANE**

There wasn't going to be a better day than today this week to get out into the fresh air before the rain set in. On the spur of the moment we decided to head to Bonsall as far as the M2 would take us. The M2 is the new changed number of the bus we caught from Matlock Green. Like Tawney House once an educational establishment opposite the bus stop it has also changed, now a cafe with seats and tables outside, but not today, slightly fresh.

We get on the bus and ask for as far into Bonsall as we can go. It makes it seem like a trek into the interior. The passengers of which there are a few hang onto their rails as the driver makes the turn up into Church Street and negotiates the narrow road besides the Church before pulling up outside the Duke William. The lady alighting here is busy saying her goodbyes to her fellow passengers when a sudden jerk makes her last few measured steps on the bus come all at once. She is rushed to the front unable to do anything about it. She smiles, probably glad she hasn't gone sprawling on the floor. After this scenario the rest of the passengers wisely stay sitting until the bus has stopped before they make a move.

Over the top to Starkholmes with Matlock Bath looking empty below. Just a few cars passing along the A6. We carry on down Willersley Lane, water running down the cobbled side of the road, bouncing over each white cobblestone before cascading into the drain, or if lucky jumping over the grate and across the road. The bottom of Willersley Lane is narrow and blind and you hope no one is coming the other way. Thankfully we are across the road and over the narrow humped bridge across the Derwent. We reach Cromford and take the turn right for Bonsall. At this point Patricia asks "what shall I eat?"

As this was a spur of the moment operation about eleven o'clock we didn't really know how long it would take in all. One thing was certain, we wouldn't be at home to have anything to eat. That could only mean one thing. A shop. Bonsall is not blessed with shops, not since a run of the mark forced the Bonsall and Ible Cooperative Superstore to close in around 1540! Which I fear also put paid to the market there. Oh, the market cross is still standing but the tradesmen and women don't seem to bother. So it was, that no flower lady was there, no one selling hot pies on which any seller would have made a fortune today. Still at Uppertown is a Farm Shop. Well at least I believed so. Well founded too. Patricia entered and stocked up with non coeliac provisions, a banana basically, and we set off down steep Bank Side and across the road up the hill towards Slaley.

Slaley Lane climbs at a nice rate to enable you to keep walking and still enjoy the scenery, unlike some hills which leave you with lungs about to burst and eyes about to pop. The sky is a beautiful blue, a real sky blue. Just a few clouds float by, the air is clear and crisp, the wind negligible. Uppertown is at peace, it's houses criss crossed and clinging into a huddle, big ones and little ones, single and double, tall and small, and yet seemingly to remain as individual as the pie the pie man didn't sell today. Further down the Dale the rooftops around Puddle Hill blacked roof with red brick chimneys reach above the limestone walls and across the way the spire of St James points upwards towards Masson.

Fairy Lane which we go by is waterlogged. There are tiny splashes as fairies in wellies have a field day as they try out their water wings.

We are at seven hundred and eighty feet and still climbing, the sky is still blue and the hands are red.



On our right an old field path runs through stiles that go all the way back into Bonsall and carry on wards towards Ible. Used no doubt by many a lead miner over the centuries. We can see Crich Stand in the distance, as the view takes in Lea Wood and other woods in the area, all devoid of foliage, looking like a brown mass of giant molehills.

We descend the hill into Slayey, on our right sheets billow out enough to propel a Spanish galleon, bright blue like the sky above they contrast greatly with the grey of the house beyond. The wall in front of the garden has large clumps of unknown flowers, who have gone inside to get away from the cold. The road to our left Black Tor, goes back to Clatterway and down in the dip in front of us we can see the tall chimneys of the many gabled Slayey Hall. The well built, sturdy looking stone houses are mainly set back from the road overlooking the Via Gellia in the valley below.

**Peter SMEDLEY** died here in 1817. He reached the ripe old age of ninety one. Maybe it was fetching the water from the well down in Via Gellia that kept him so fit! The appropriately named Well Lane Cottage has a path at the side of it that the old maps shows goes over two fields downhill to reach a well. **William HENSTOCK** of Slayley, a miner, in his Will of 1731 stated that the house with the croft or garden he purchased of **Thomas ELSE** and formerly the Estate of **John BESTALL** should be sold and the money used to pay off his debts and for bringing up his children. His other house to be divided between sons Edward and Richard.

The bright red old telephone box still stands, last contact with the outside world before we disappear over the hill towards the moor.

As we carry on up the hill a signs reads "Slayley please drive carefully". We haven't met a single vehicle since leaving The Dale. All is quiet.

The limestone walls are having a job to stay together, some stones seemingly trying to queue jump. May be they want to be coated with the deep green velvety moss that has grown on a few privileged stones, keeping them warm. The leafless branches of

a hawthorn bush hangs over them, like the spindly fingers of a wizened witch, outstretched ready to snatch the moss and clothe itself with it.

We are now two hundred feet higher than the chapel near Horsedale and it is beginning to get a little colder. The water in the dew pond in the adjoining field lies almost motionless except for tiny ripples that form across it as it shivers. The hedgerows defunct of all leaves act as no barrier whatsoever as a freezing wind blows across the moors. The odd few flowers growing on the rough grass verges under the walls lie close to the floor, keeping their stalks down. An old barn, roofless but with its roof timbers showing in a series of "A" frames along its length stands alone in a far corner of a field.

The narrow road carries straight on, with little hillocks in the fields either side of the road, looking like a small battlefield pitted with craters.

There's another barn, that looks like its been renovated as many in Bonsall have. Under a field wall is an amazing tree whose trunk seems to have been plaited, twisted like a liquorice stick. The road now takes a sharp turn right, the map of 1900 calls this area Bonsall Mines. It's mostly open fields, bleak and cold and the prospect of working up here in this type of weather doesn't bear thinking about. For many though, that is what they did. The thought of working at Arkwrights mills in Cromford must have seemed pleasant in these circumstances.

Leys Lane is a long straight road. Somewhere around here I expected to see a plaque inscribed built by "Romanus Tarmacus". We searched in vain for the Roman Baths, or steam, a match, anything warm. We consoled ourselves in knowing that in just over an hour and a half we would be back on the bus. Some trees up here are clever. They must be, for they have surrounded themselves with huge walls to protect them from the wind and cold. Their tops emerging just above the walls, while the rest of the tree is cosseted. Old barns make an excellent windbreak. On our left in the distance is Bonsall Leys Farm. It's one field away from being in Ible.

In 1844 so his Will informs us, **Reuben SPENCER** was farmer here. He died January 7th 1846.

Two closes of land he purchased from **Joseph BANKS** at Ible are now given to son **Benjamin** as well as a house then occupied by **William BELFIELD** at Middleton by Wirksworth. The children of Reuben's deceased daughters **Mary MOORE** and **Elizabeth** who had married a **Peter SPENCER** were also bequeathed property around Middleton. His daughter **Anne**, had married **George SPENCER**, they received the dwelling houses occupied by **James SPENCER** at Middleton. His daughter **Hannah YOUNG** widow of **Samuel** was to receive the rents from lands, again in Middleton. **Sarah** his other daughter had married **Thomas BUXTON** who wisely lived in what must have seemed the tropical climes of Bradbourne. **Mary** the wife of the younger **Newton WRIGHT** of Bonsall received five pounds.

**Thomas** and **Hugh TRAVIS** both of Ible signed the Will as witnesses in big bold writing on the twentieth day of September before frost bite set in and the ink froze. In the same month, but in 1829, the Constable of Ible, on the evidence of **Thomas HENSTOCK**, had **John SPENCER** and **James THOMPSON** at the Petty Sessions "for using a gun". They were fined five pounds. Had they been poaching in the woods around here? **Edward BUTLER** of Ible who died 1747 wrote in his Will about the land he had in "Bonsall Lays". That when his wife **Anne** died his son in law **John SMITH** should take possession. His daughter in law **Mary SMITH** "as long as she keeps herself unmarried" is allowed to have "a quiet residence and a sleeping place in my house from time to time So often as she hath occasion During her Life". His other daughter **Hannah** the wife of **John BAYLEY** is to receive twenty shillings a year and a acre of land called Nether Field in Ible. The Nether Field appears on an old map dated 1710 of Phillip Gells Estate in Ible. It appears to be a large field divided up into sections with a couple parties having a share. **James BANKS** and **Robert SPENCER** being named. Part of the fields

seem to have disappeared as a result of quarrying.

**Edwards** son **William**, a butcher had the residue. Eddie's inventory appraised by **Thomas FERN** and **John SPENCER** reveals he had "one old house watch" as well as one seat one Cupboard two chairs. He also had a cow, one stirk and a couple of calves and thirty eight sheep.



We pass an old mine shaft with old concrete slabs laid across it, no doubt to protect sheep and cows from falling in, which even today they occasionally do. We pass alongside lands lying in the distance that in 1710 belonged to **TRAVIS, William BUCKLEY** and **Richard LEA**. Also in the distance is a group of white cows. Or so we thought. On closer inspection they are sheep! Unfortunately Patricia has left her knitting needles at home or else we could have had a couple of jumpers, woolly hats, scarves, mittens and a draw full of bed socks from just one side of one of them.

We are now at over one thousand feet which makes us mountaineers. Then we see a pond, surrounded by a wire fence with a wooden stile and step to get into the enclosure. Could this be the Roman bath? The stile lets you in, but there is no way out only the way you came in. The water looks inviting and I decide to have a paddle, then change my mind as I have forgotten the bath towel.

We look back on the long straight road we have walked upon. I put my ear to the ground to see if there is any chance of catching a lift with Ben Hur. At one thousand and sixty four feet we reach the peak. It is freezing, the wind blowing cold against the forehead, I felt I had eaten an ice cream, one of those that gives you an instant headache. At this point Patricia decides it's time to eat her banana and rests against an old rusty fence that slowly sinks as I lean against it. It holds. Actually this is not a bad spot. An old bush offers some sort of shelter from the biting wind, at least in comparison with what we have put up with.

We move on, the path to Bottom Leys Farm is opposite Green Lane which leads up to Ible. It sends down in return water, which accumulates in a very big puddle. Opposite in the fields are the rusty remains of machinery, old diggers and other scrap. Beyond lies the trees of Tearsall, standing to attention like soldiers on parade. The grass is a bit longer and coarser, the fields have more bushes, the walls are knocked about more. Something else has changed.



The sky. From bright blue to slate blue and ominous. The thought of being caught up here in the rain spurs us on.

Close in front is Moor Farm and alongside it runs the way to Bonsall Moor and Winster. I remember this place with "affection". Once I came here and the place was over run with horses and men with red coats and little whips. The horses formed a circle around us. I think they thought we were hunt saboteurs. I asked one gentlemen the name of his dog. Good grief man, it's a hound, a hound I tell you. Not long after his dog ran away to chase a fox.

We have to get a move on as well, our bus is about twenty minutes away, the sky is dark and the sun has not got it's hat on.

We turn down Blakemere Lane, cobbled together with bits of stone, concrete, hardcore chippings and mud. We pass Blake Mere a small body of water that sits under a line of pylons that stretches across the moor. Nearby a group of cows stand huddled together in a perfect circle, as if playing pass the parcel and hoping to win a hot water bottle or a pair of gloves for the dairy maid to wear.



We now come off the lane and take a right turn across the fields. In a hollow lies another body of water. It's not a mere, merely surface water as our path takes us into what can only be described as a bog. We cannot go back, we are so near getting back to Uppertown. We negotiate one way then another, climb up the field a bit to avoid the water below, but it is everywhere. We stand on tufts of grass at our peril, instead we have to quickly hop from one tuft to another. There's a well defined path that is simply running with water and mire. On top of that the sign post seems to point us away from it. Possibly we think as an alternative route. I press on, darting between pools of surface water. Then changing direction as the tufts run out.

Suddenly a cry is heard. "What about me?, I'm freezing, I'm wet, I'm hungry and I've only got shoes on". The more she stands still the wetter her feet get.

Yes, although I had told Patricia there would be no real fields to cross, I did know that we would have to cross these on the home run. I did not know it would be tantamount to crossing the Everglades!

I did ponder the thought of spreading my coat Raleigh style on the ground to help her across the field. However, as it was freezing it didn't bear thinking about. So I didn't. Instead I pointed her to higher ground, and she slowly grew smaller as we drifted apart, or was she sinking. After an eternity we finally made it through the bog and into another field peppered with old lead shafts to be met by a herd of cows. Now, we are not bothered by cows, but these all converged on a corner of the field where we thought the path lay. We simply could not push our way through. They just blocked us out. We finally decided to go back up the field and climb down a wall into Moor Lane an old narrow high walled way which eventually took us to Uppertown. As we approached Brumlea Farm and only yards from where we catch the bus we saw it disappearing up the hill. By the time we got to Abel Lane the sky was bright blue again. We went down Bank Side, down the Dale, down Clatterway and past the old Pig of Lead and walked to Cromford where we caught the bus home. Tired, wet and feeling great.