

Askrigg

Introduction



Take a look at any tourist guide to the Yorkshire Dales and they all feature lovely bright midsummer days.

We do get some of those days, and they are indeed special, but perhaps even better are those really crisp wintery days when the ground is hard, the air is crystal clear and the views uninterrupted by haze.

This walk is not one that only works in winter though. Key attractions are Askrigg, the original and true All Creatures Great and Small village, a couple of water mills, long lost dams, waterfalls, perfect views of the Cam High Road, a unique chapel, a couple of fortified houses, a riverside stroll, a brief diversion to a lovely Dales village, magical stepping stones, and finally a

visit to a really good café and cake shop.

- **Total distance 10.4 km (6.5 miles)**
- **Total ascent 284 m**
- **Easy walk**

The Walk

We start in Askrigg village centre, where you will generally find roadside parking on Main Street, or at the village car park on the Leyburn Road. There is also parking in front of St Oswald's church, with an honesty box where you may pay for parking. This is where we started, so if you park elsewhere walk down to St Oswald's to pick up the route.

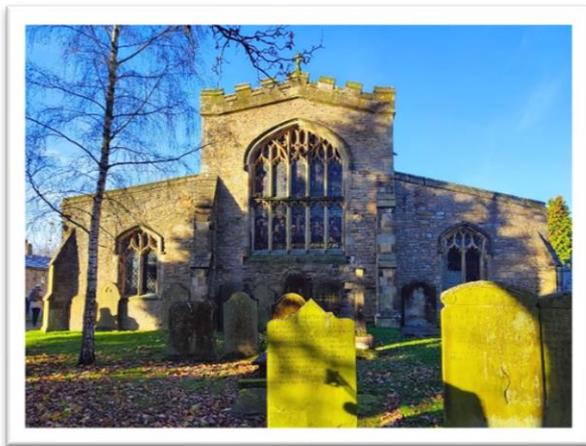
The OS grid reference for St Oswald's is SD94809102, and the What-3-Words tag is **typical.fruits.selling**. If you are using Satnav to get there then use the postcode DL8 3HT.

From the carpark, look downhill toward the temperance hall – there is a public toilet there, or just uphill is the village centre with opportunities for coffee and cake.

We start out by heading through the church grounds to the left of the church. You may prefer to spend a moment or two visiting the church – it's well worth a look and has an interesting history. There has been a church on this site since the 15th century, although what we see today is largely later additions and restorations. It is constructed from local stone in the Perpendicular style, with a five-bay chancel and nave, aisles, south porch and an embattled western tower with pinnacles containing a clock and six bells.



By the mid nineteenth century, the foundations of the nave piers had given way, requiring restoration works between 1852 and 1854 at a cost of £1,500. The body and north aisle of the church were completely rebuilt, and the 15th century roof to the nave was repaired. A western gallery which blocked up the tower was removed, and a staircase giving better access to the tower was added. A fine pipe organ, splendid stained glass and a fine set of bells also feature. The whole structure is now Grade I listed.



If the building looks familiar to you, that may be because it featured as the parish church of “Darrowby” in the first series of “All Creatures Great and Small” The most striking thing about the church on the day of our walk (November 2024) was the fact that the entire tower is encased in white sheeting supported by scaffolding. This is part of ongoing works to address damp ingress which threatens the structural integrity of the building. The plan is to install render and limewash, but there has been some local resistance to this, based on fears that it would result in a stark white

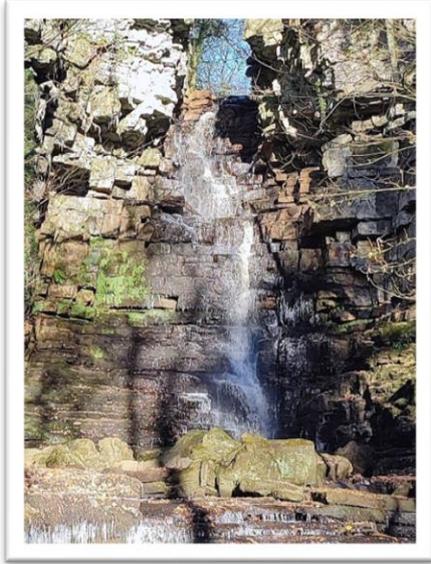
appearance out of character with the Dale. Some of this was perhaps based on the application of a test patch intended to demonstrate the texture of the render, rather than the colour – this was as startlingly white as the sheeting, but the architects insist that after some weathering, the final colour will be “honey”.

We continue around the left hand edge of the church and then take the gap stile (rather than the gate into the graveyard) to walk around the back and up a narrow lane to meet a metalled road – we head left here and walk down the road for some 150m.

We need to look for a way marker on the right showing us the path over to an old mill. This is West Mill, an early 19th century corn mill. The most obvious architectural feature of this interesting structure is a galvanised steel water trough running over our heads and into the building as we walk round to the right. This carried water from a small dam about 50m upstream via control gear (still visible at the upstream end of the trough) and onto a water wheel within the building. This was later used to drive a saw when the corn mill was converted into a sawmill specialising in the manufacture of hay rakes. The remains of the dam are not particularly visible from the path we used, but if you wish to explore, there is another path next to the drystone wall before the mill which gives better access.



We follow the path over a small wooden bridge and then uphill following Mill Gill toward Mill Gill Force. There are a number of paths here, but signage is good, so just follow way markers for Mill Gill Falls. On the way to the falls, the path runs just below a disused lime kiln, this together with the mill is a clear indication that the area was once more industrial than it is now.



Once at the fall, we are greeted by water cascading down a drop of about 20m. How spectacular this will be is of course dependant on the weather. The flow was relatively gentle on the day of our visit, but as a compensation for that, we were treated to stunning icicles where the spray from the falls had tricked down the mosses and lichens at the side.

Having enjoyed the waterfall for a few minutes, we return to the last way marker and then head uphill following signs for Whitfield Gill.

This path takes us north through two open fields – with great views – to another footbridge, this time over the higher reaches of Mill Gill. From here there are a number of routes we could take. There is a path to the left of the beck up to Whitfield Falls – similar to Mill Gill Force - less impressive, but still worth considering as an addition. You will also see paths

to Helm – not for us today.

We cross the bridge and then bear slightly left heading up the embankment to the corner of a drystone wall, and from there we see a gate ahead giving us access to a lane at Leas Head. We follow this for the next 200m or so as it curves round to the left and climbs to meet a slightly broader track known as Low Straights Lane.

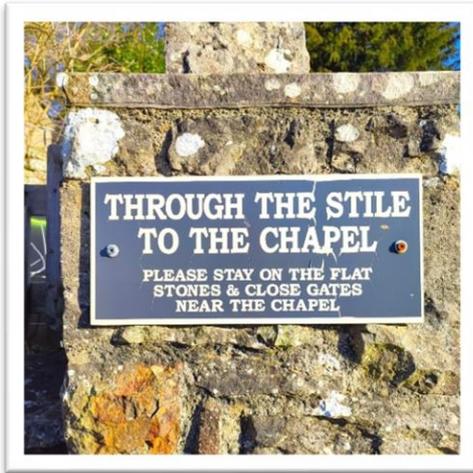
We will go right on Low Straights Lane, but it's worth knowing that if you did add the walk up to Whitfield Gill Force, there is a path from there up to this track – adding this diversion would extend the walk by about 1.5 km.

We follow Low Straights Lane to the right for about 700m, with great views across the valley to our right and Askrigg Common to our left, until we arrive at a minor road – we are now at Lead Green and need to head right and slightly downhill. The road is generally quiet, and we are on it for only 100m until we see a marker on the left taking us over a couple of fields heading east toward Newbiggin.



This particular Newbiggin is a tiny hamlet with just a few houses and farms, but the name Newbiggin is quite common: There are six in Cumbria, two in North Yorkshire, two in County Durham, one in Northumberland and even one “down south” in Derbyshire. Clearly then the word once had a common meaning, and it seems that this was simply “new building” being a composite of the Old English word *nīwe* meaning "new" and the Middle English word *bigging* meaning "building".

Once at the hamlet, we cross the Newbiggin Beck and take a moment at the green to enjoy a break before pressing on along the path at the front of the houses at the left and into an open field. Ahead and slightly to our left we see a small plantation of trees – our path heads toward these trees crossing four fields as it does so.



We then pass to the left of a barn – the path is clearly signed - and then cross a stile to access the woodland. From here the path rises up through the trees and then after crossing a couple of fields, we arrive at a stile onto a long straight lane, looking very similar to Low Straights Lane. From here we look across the valley toward Bainbridge and see the startlingly straight Roman Road (Cam High Road) toward Ingleton.

We go right here, and after just 40m arrive at a fork. We keep right and start to head downhill on what is now a metalled road – albeit a very minor one. We now need

to look to the left to find a sign for a chapel – we follow the directions around the garden of the house to a gate and then climb up through woodlands to find the chapel. There is little to explain the chapel, and almost nothing online, but it would appear that it is remembrance of Charlotte Browne, the wife of Piers Browne, a local artist. Charlotte died in 1998, and Piers passed away in July 2024. The chapel is both poignant, and rather beautiful, featuring stained glass windows depicting the saints Joseph, Mary, Peter and Paul created by well-known stained glass artist Alan Davis.



After returning to the road, we head downhill until we arrive at Dolly Farm and the main road out of Askrigg. We go left here and walk on the main road for just 100m until we take a signed footpath on the opposite side

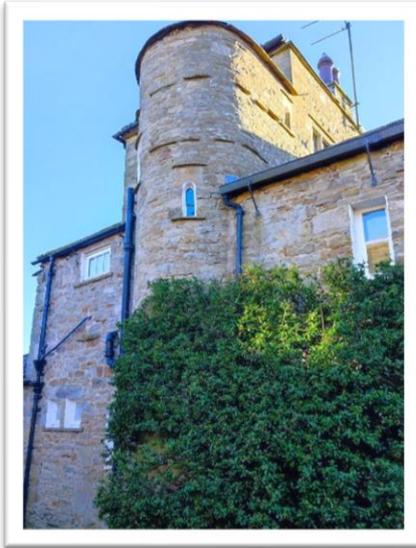


of the road taking us down to Nappa Hall, a fine example of a 15th century fortified manor house. It was built in 1459 by James Metcalfe at a time when there were frequent raids by the Scots, so in that respect it is similar to a number of other Pele Towers that we have encountered on Bentham Footpath Group walks. This building however is more elaborate than most: A single-storey central hall sits between two towers, a four-storey western tower and a two-storey eastern tower. The four-storey tower has a turret, lit by slit vents, for a spiral staircase that climbs to crenelated parapets.

The taller tower retains its original windows, but the lower parts of the two storey tower saw sash windows added in the 18th century to allow light

into the kitchen and service rooms, at the opposite end of the hall. Then in the 17th century, an extra wing was added. Today it is somewhat run down looking significantly less impressive than shown in Victorian postcards.

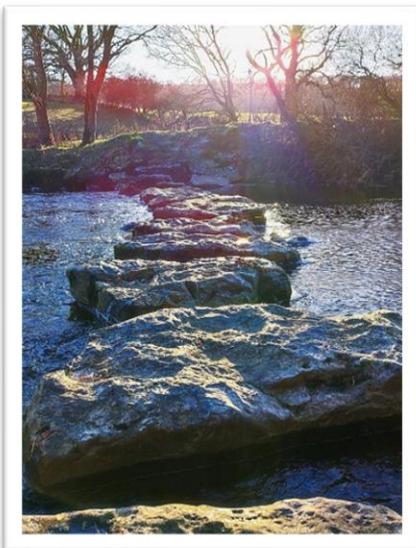
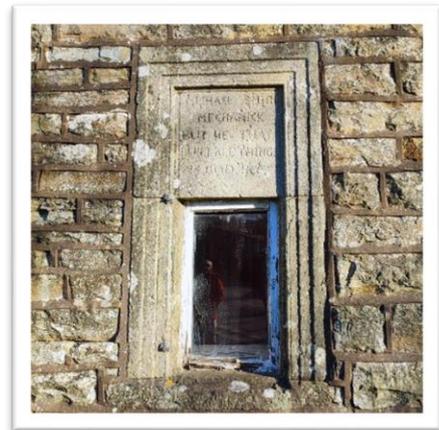
The path continues along the side of the Hall and then down past outbuildings to a gate where the path is clearly signed across a couple of fields and down to Nappa Mill – another disused water powered corn mill now repurposed as a farm. We walk down to the mill and then round the right hand side to pick up a path along the banks of the river Ure, heading upstream – as we do this it's worth noting the weir that sits next to the mill - presumably this controlled the water level such that the waterwheel could function reliably at all times.



We continue along the riverside path until we arrive at a minor road, and at this point we see a bridge to our left. This is Worton Bridge, and we took the opportunity to cross the bridge and climb the road opposite to the hamlet of Worton which features a number of unusual and attractive buildings, including another fortified house – less grand than Nappa Hall, but in good repair, and a cottage built in 1729 and lived in by Michael Smith – a mechanic

bearing an interesting inscription, now somewhat hard to read, but which we think says "Michael Smith Mechanick, But He that built all things is God, Heb 3".

Worton is listed is named in the Domesday Book and it is thought that name derives from the Old English wurt-tūn and means the (herb or vegetable) garden.



We return to Worton Bridge and pick up the riverside path again, still heading upstream on the Askrigg side of the river. Just 400m later we arrive at the stepping stones across the river. We don't need to cross the stepping stone as our path is now back across the fields to Askrigg, but few can resist striding across them when the river levels and weather permit.

We now turn away from the stepping stones and head directly toward Askrigg, using the church of St Oswald as our landmark – particularly easy when wrapped in sheeting.

We arrive at the town centre, next to an agricultural warehouse, where we turn right and head up the road past the Temperance Institute and public toilet to get back to our parking place. If all this walking has made you peckish, there are a number of places in Askrigg where you can get something to eat - the Bake Well is recommended.

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