

Cockerham to Glasson Dock

Introduction



Bentham Footpath Group enjoyed a great walk from Galgate to Glasson Dock and the Lancaster Canal in June 2024.

The weather was glorious, and the walk was wonderful – but that begs a question: Is this really a good place to walk or were we just enjoying the sunshine? To answer that we return in the autumn. This time we start at Cockerham, catching a bus to Thurnham Hall where we join the canal towpath which we follow down to the docks. From there we pick up the Lancashire Coastal Way which takes us to Lighthouse Cottage, Plover Hill, then the ruins of Cockersand Abbey. To return, we follow the path around the edge of Cockerham Sands and Cockerham Marshes to

Pattys Farm where we cross a live airfield runway and watch parachutists landing, before returning to Cockerham via St Michaels church. We conclude that whatever the weather, this is indeed a fascinating area to walk.

- **Total distance 13.2 km (8.2 miles)**
- **Total ascent 62 m**
- **Moderate walk**

The Walk

We start at Cockerham, a small and attractive village just a few minutes' drive from Junction 33 of the M6. It has a large car park next to the Village Hall on the B5272, which makes a great base for a walk. If you are using Satnav to find the car park, use the address of the Village Hall: 14 Main St, Cockerham, Lancaster LA2 0EF. If your device uses What-3-Words, then the tag is **luggage.scariest.airfields** which corresponds to the OS Grid reference SD4655203.

Our intention is to walk to Glasson dock, via the Glasson Branch of the Lancaster Canal, and there are a number of footpaths we could take from Cockerham to the canal, but in this instance, we opted to take a bus to Thurnham Hall, allowing us to include more of the Lancashire Coastal Way path later in the day. To find the bus stop, walk left out of the car park down Main Street as far as the junction, then go right, but stay on the left hand side of the road. The bus stop is opposite some recently built houses at the corner of Rectory Gardens. The service provider on this route is Kirkby Lonsdale Coach Hire on behalf of Lancashire County Council, and the service numbers are 88 and 89 - timetable information can be



found at the LCC website: <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/roads-parking-and-travel/public-transport/bus-timetables/>

The ride is short – one stop, taking just 4 minutes, but it adds a great deal to the day by giving us the opportunity to see Thurnham Hall, and to spend more time on the Lancashire Coastal Way later on.



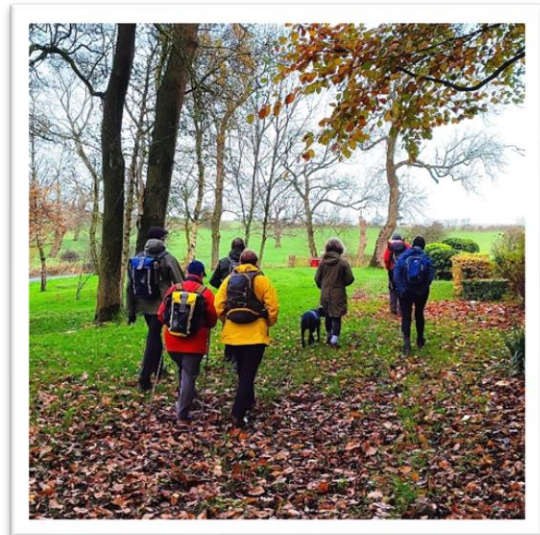
Once we get off the bus, we are opposite the access road for Thurnham Hall – so we cross and stroll up to the Hall just 100 away.

The present building is a three-storey stone-built house erected in the 17th century for Robert Dalton. It stands within a 30 acre estate close to the River Conder. The building contains an impressive Jacobean Great Hall and now functions as a resort hotel.

The history of the site goes back much further however, and in the 12th century the property belonged to the de Thurnham family before passing by descent to the Flemming, Cancerfield, Harrington, Bonville and Grey families, then by sale to the Lonne family and finally Robert Dalton of Bispham, Lancashire.

It is thought that Dalton built the present house soon after the purchase. Robert left just one heir, Elizabeth, who married William de Hoghton of Park Hall, Charnock Richard. Their son John took the surname Dalton and was involved in the Jacobite rising of 1715. For this he was imprisoned in London and his land was confiscated, but after his release he walked back to Lancaster and recovered Thurnham Hall after paying a large fine.

John Dalton married Mary Gage and carried out some modernisation of the building in 1823, creating the front facade and corner turrets that we see today. The hall stayed within the Dalton Family until the early 1970s – when it was purchased by Stanley Crabtree who completely renovated the building – this was a significant operation, because parts of the hall had been badly damaged by a fire in 1959. The public footpath runs past the front of the House and then to a rear car park where a waymarked gate gives us access to a field by the side of the canal. We head north for 200m toward the bridge over the canal - curiously this is referred to as Bailey Bridge on the OS map when you approach from the west, and Bayley Bridge coming from the East.



We now need to take the towpath and head northwest down to Glasson Dock. To do this, we first need to head right to get down from the bridge to the towpath. Once at the towpath we go left – the canal should be on your left from here onward.



The Glasson branch of the Lancaster Canal was built to connect the main canal at Galgate to the River Lune estuary at Glasson Dock, with construction starting in 1820 and the branch opening in 1826. Over its 2.5 mile length the branch drops through 52ft via 6 locks - making it very different to the main canal which is lock-free for the whole of its 42 mile length. At its peak, the Glasson Branch was an important industrial asset but is now a tranquil oasis for wildlife and a great place to walk.

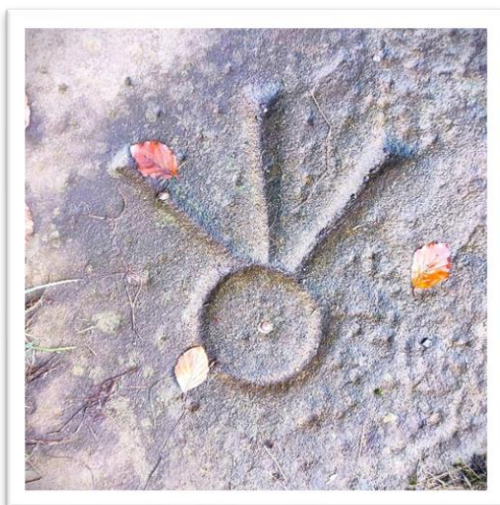
We soon pass a lock - all locks and bridges on the canal system are numbered, and this is Glasson Lock number 5. Not far beyond we see a large building, now the Mill Inn, a popular pub / restaurant – and just in front of this is the next lock (lock 6).

Lock No 6 was built between 1823-1825, and rather unusually, the mill was at one time fed by canal water. The reason that this would normally be considered unwise is that provision of sufficient water to enable the locks to function proved a challenge for all canal engineers, so allowing a mill to use that precious supply seems counter-intuitive. The reason for this unique arrangement is that the canal company purchased the Mill in 1824 for £1,100 in order to obtain its right to take water from the River Conder diverting it into the canal. So, in practice, the existing right to run the mill from the Conder was used as a secondary supply to the canal with water bypassing the lock via the mill wheel, and tail race before returning the water to the canal below the lock.



We continue down the towpath, walking under Thurnham Bridge (Bridge number 6) noting a widened section of the canal

right next to the bridge. This is a “winding hole”, a small section of the canal that is widened to allow boats that were typically of a length greater than the width of the canal to be turned around.



We press on for a while now, passing under bridge 7 (also known as Brick Kiln Bridge), at the exit of this bridge, look for the curious carving on the stone at the edge of the waterway – this is a surveyor’s mark or “benchmark” placed there by the Ordnance Survey at the time of construction.

The term benchmark refers to the chiselled marks that surveyors made in stone structures, into which an angle iron could be placed to form a "bench" for a levelling

rod. This ensured that the levelling rod could be accurately repositioned in the same place in the future. We have come across benchmarks on other walks – notable our recent Sedbergh, Brigflatts

and Millthrop walk, but this canal side mark is particularly unusual in that it is on a horizontal surface – most are on the vertical faces of prominent buildings.

We soon arrive at Bridge 8 (also known as Brows Bridge) where we walk under the bridge and then climb the ramp up to the road above to take a left turn and walk toward the Lune Estuary just 100m away. We take the path along the edge of the estuary down to Glasson, passing Glasson church on the way. Regular users of the website can probably guess the architect for this pretty building – Austin and Paley designed the chancel and vestry that were added in 1930 and extended a design by Edmund Sharpe (also a partner of Austin and Paley).



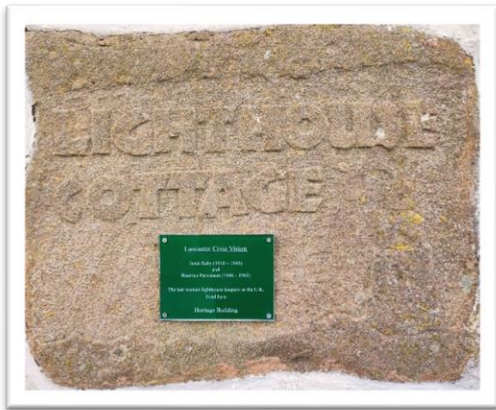
We continue down to the docks and look for the road crossing over the lock between the large marina – considered part of the canal, and the dock, which is tidal and therefore considered part of the marine environment. At the time of our visit, the bridge was out of use, so we crossed at the pedestrian footbridge at the lock.

The harbour at Glasson originally opened in 1787, following the demise of Lancaster as a port, and was at its height the largest port in the northwest, importing cotton, sugar, spices and slaves from Africa and the Indies. Lancaster Canal was important in affording swift distribution of cargo landed at the port into the heart of industrial Lancashire. Glasson is still a viable port handling over 150,000 tonnes of cargo annually. Associated with the portside are a number of interesting tourist attractions, including the Smokehouse and associated shop.



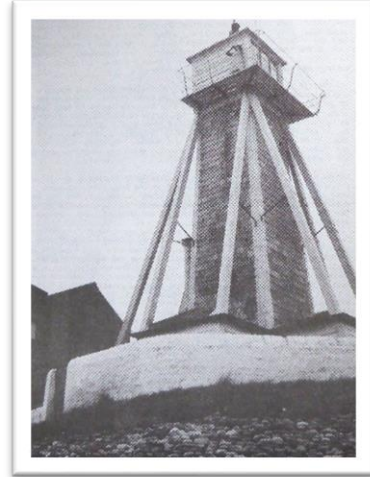
We now head up Tithebarn street, soon reaching the highest point on the walk at the peak of Tith Barn Hill – a dizzying 20m above sea level. As if to emphasize just how high we are, there is a toposcope at the top of the hill with indicators of the outlying hills and landmarks engraved on stainless steel plaques.

We follow the road round to the left and walk about 150m to a junction where we see a way marker for the Lancashire Coastal Way – this points us right along Marsh Lane (the clue is in the name here) and we are soon crossing fields as we head west toward Crook Farm. We soon meet a point where the path crosses the end of a channel noted on the OS map as Janson Pool – after heavy rain this extends right across the field and crossing under such circumstances requires a little ingenuity. Some of us tried the heroic leap, whilst others opted for the shuffle across the opened gate. If you are lucky enough to do the walk after dry weather, everything should be straightforward.

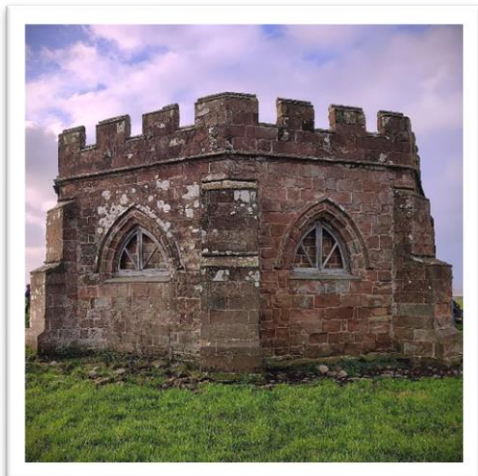


At Crook Farn we climb up to the coastal path, noting a rusty steel buoy as we enjoy the views over the estuary toward the power station at Heysham. We head South along the Lancashire Coastal way for a good while now. Our next landmark is Lighthouse Cottage – where Janet Raby and Beatrice Parkinson were the last female lighthouse keepers in the UK. The simple cottage we see now tells us only

a small part of the story – until 1954 there was a substantial wooden lighthouse standing 18m high and acting as a “first sight” lighthouse. The smaller stone-built lighthouse that we see in the estuary 500m away at Plover Bank is a “second sight” light house – the two were used together not just to warn ships of the coast and rocks; but also, by aligning their course with the two beacons navigators could establish the optimum approach to the docks.



We follow the path along the coast passing Plover Hill, which as the name suggests is a good location for birdwatching (with more than plovers to be seen), and then bear slightly to the left, at which point the remains of Cockerham Abbey come into view. There is little to see now other than the intact Grade I listed Chapter House, but clearly this was once a much larger structure.



Legend states that Hugh the Hermit chose this lonely and often bleak spot to establish a monastic cell. At that time, it would have been cut off from the outside world by marsh land - although this was later drained and brought into agricultural use. The isolation was ideal for use as a charitable leper hospital, and this was incorporated into a Premonstratensian abbey was founded on this site in 1190. The phrase Premonstratensian simply means Canons belonging to the order of Prémontré. They wear white robes and so in Ireland, are referred to as the slightly easier to pronounce “White Canons”.

Called St Mary’s of the Marsh the abbey grew and became one of the richest houses in Lancashire. In 1539 the abbey was seized by Henry VIII and its land sold as part of the dissolution of the monasteries. The Chapter House built in about 1230, was used as a mausoleum by the Dalton family (of Thurnham Hall) which explains why this part has not been plundered for building materials.

We continue with the coastal path as it heads down to the edge of Cockerham Marshes – just past a second world war lookout post - and then follow the clear and obvious route around the marsh edge for the next mile or so, passing a number of caravan parks as we go. We walk along a long straight road below an embankment and at the end of this meet a junction – noting a memorial to a local man killed in a tragic road traffic collision in 2007.

At this junction, we follow the arrows to Pattys barn and just 400m later we arrive at the barn and need to look for a way marker at the embankment above which leads us through a small woodland and into an airfield where we are greeted with ample signage to indicate that danger is present here.



The airfield is used by the Black Knights Skydiving Centre, and if the weather is calm – as it was for us - there is a good chance that you will see aircraft taking off or landing or parachutists landing in the field ahead. The public footpath is across the end of the runway – so the club provides marshals to help with safe crossing. It should go without saying that any advice they give should be taken seriously.

From here the path continues across fields for about 500m until we arrive at a road – this is the A588 so take care. We turn left and cross the carriageway to walk on the opposite pavement for just 200m until we see a way marker for a footpath across a field toward the attractive St Michaels and All Angels.

The fact that the church is so well proportioned should tell us who the architects are – it's obviously Austin and Paley again, this time with a rebuild in 1914 of an earlier church dating back to the 18th century.

From here the car park adjacent to the village hall is visible and the walk ends here.



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