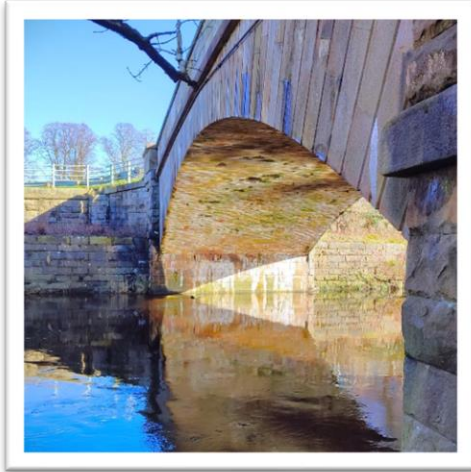


Melling circular via the rivers Lune and Greta, Wrayton and Wennington

Introduction



Over the last couple of walks, we have started to see the first signs of spring – with snowdrops, daffodils, and hazel catkins starting to emerge. The optimistic feeling that the winter might be releasing its grip was confirmed on this excellent local walk: We enjoyed brilliant sunshine as we walked from Melling over to Wrayton, and then on to the banks of the river Greta, following it down to its confluence with the Lune.

The original intention was to continue down the Lune and loop back to Melling via farm lanes. However, the recent rains made this route impassible, so our ever-resourceful leader provided an alternate route back: We returned to Wrayton as per the outbound walk, then took a path over

the hill by Catgill Barn and down to the edge of Wennington Hall. A brief stretch on the road then took us to Lodge farm where we took a path that over the top of the Melling railway tunnel indulging in some industrial archaeology and then back into Melling.

- **Total distance 9.5 km (5.9 miles)**
- **Total Ascent 173 m**
- **Easy walk**

The walk

We start in Melling, parking in a layby just uphill from the school. For those of us lucky enough to live in Bentham, this is a familiar location – we take the B6480 down to Wennington and then go right onto Lodge Lane. Look for the layby as we head steeply downhill into Melling.

For those travelling from further afield, Melling is on the A683 between Hornby and Kirby Lonsdale. Once you get to the village look for the road to Wennington, and head in that direction for just 200m to find the layby on the left. Satnav users will find that the postcode LA6 2RE should work, or if your device accepts what-3-words tags, try **developer.convert.flexibly**. This corresponds to the OS grid reference SD60367116 for paper map users. There is sufficient space for four or five cars here, but as ever, please be considerate to local residents and leave access free.



Melling with Wrayton (as the village is officially known) is an interesting and rather attractive place – the villages, such as Arkholme and Whittington along this stretch of the Lune valley boast the densest distribution of Norman castles outside of the Welsh border countryside. All have clear

evidence of a Motte - but Melling has no surviving bailey. Also worth visiting is the church of St Wilfred's – known locally as “The Cathedral of the Lune Valley” it features an impressive belfry of six bells and would have formed the manorial chapel within the, now missing, castle bailey, meaning that the earliest evidence of a church here dates back to the 10th century, although most of what we see today is from the late 15th century. An extensive restoration took place in 1763 when the clerestory was added, and in 1891 a further restoration was carried out by the Lancaster architect E G Paley.



The walk starts from the layby, by taking the lane on the left as we look uphill. After about 100m, the track forks with the lane to the left going to a private residence – so we stay right and follow the track for a further 200m until we find a footpath sign and stile on the left – this is easy to miss as the sign is tucked behind a hedge.

Once in the field we follow the left hand boundary uphill and head toward woodland at the brow of the hill. We will be walking through

that woodland, but before we do, its worth taking a moment to look left to the view over the Lune Valley and on toward the Lakeland fells; on a crisp winter morning like this the snow capped hills may well be visible making a great contrast with the gentler dales that we are walking.

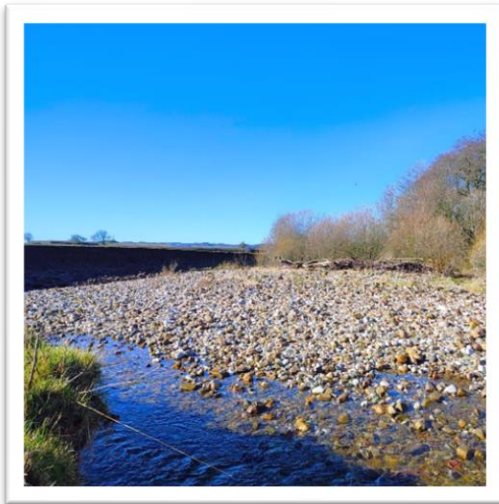
We enter the woodland via a stile and follow the clear path north through the trees that clearly have a long history of coppicing, taking a route between two ponds with atmospheric bullrushes, to meet a forest track after no more than 100m. Once at the track, we go left (still heading north) passing piles of neatly stacked firewood, as the track continues downhill to Wrayton.



Once we arrive at the village we see the noticeboard opposite us on the metalled road – rather encouragingly, this features a display of local walks. Just to the left of this, we see a stone step stile and a footpath sign. We take the stile and follow the narrow path between the fence and the ill-tended Leylandii trees down to another stile on our left no more than 50m ahead. Once we are over this, we are within an open field and continue to head north soon finding ourselves on the bank of the river Greta. There are in fact three rivers Greta in the UK, all deriving their name from the Old Norse “Griota” meaning “Stony Stream”. There is also a river Greta in New Zealand, though presumably this was named Greta by English settlers.

Ahead of us at the far end of the field we now see the Greta Bridge which carries the busy A683 over the river. We head toward the bridge and soon find a gate in the corner of the field which accesses steps up to the road. We climb up to the road and immediately see a corresponding set of steps

down on the far side. We will be taking those steps but take care when crossing the road – visibility is not very good here – particularly to the right.



Once down at the riverside again, we take a moment to enjoy the light reflecting off the river on the underside of the bridge and then continue along the riverbank for the next half mile. As we do so, we see clear evidence that the Greta has meandered over the years, and that it continues to do so. The footpath comes close to the edge of the river in a couple of places, and it's worth noting that the bank has been somewhat undercut during winter flooding – so take care here.

As we head downstream along the Greta, it's worth looking to the far bank where we pass a noisy rookery where the birds were squabbling for the best spring nesting sites. Some of our group were also lucky enough to see a couple of kingfishers.

We soon arrive at the confluence of the Greta and the much wider river Lune. This also has a long history of meandering in this part of the valley, and a quick glance at the OS map shows a number of oxbow lakes, and dry channels that were clearly older river courses. In fact, our intended return route from here had been along what would once have been the bank of the Lune to pick up farm tracks. These were impassible after heavy rain earlier in the month, so we now retrace our outbound route back to Wrayton.



Once back at this rather lovely village, we take the metalled road to our left for 50m until we find a stile on

the right

accessing a path rising steeply uphill giving us a great view of the village and its five Grade II listed buildings.



Directly below us is Wrayton Hall, a collection of historic buildings, forming a courtyard arrangement to include Wrayton Hall Farm. The farmstead was built in the late 19th century by the Burrow family of Wrayton Hall, principally to accommodate dairy farming. The buildings include a five-bay hay barn with two lean-to shippons, which together form the east range, there are further buildings forming a north range, but their original function is less certain.

Over to our right as we walk up hill, we have a clearer view of Wrayton farmhouse – we passed this on the outbound leg of the walk, but it was largely behind us then, so not as apparent. This is a rather fine three storey house with four bays.



Our path heads consistently south now, with somewhat challenging stiles as we progress through a series of large fields, arriving at Catgill barn 800m south of Wrayton – the views of Ingleborough are particularly good from here, making it a great location to take a breather.

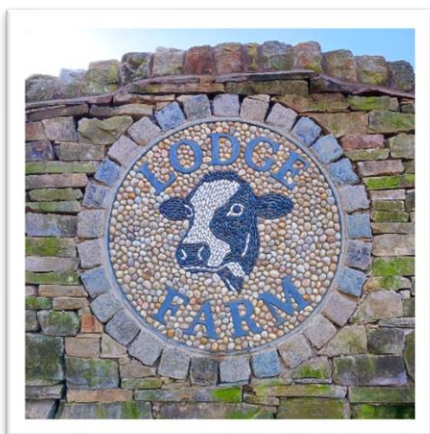
From here we continue south, and after 150m we arrive at a stile onto a lane - in fact it's the lane that we took

right at the start of the walk, so if you wanted a shortcut back to the start, just go right here and stay on the track for the next 1000m or so. We opted to continue south using another stile opposite and to take a footpath across the peak of a small hill and then down to the right hand side of Wennington Hall.

There has been a grand house on this site for centuries: Wennington Hall was the seat of William de Wennington until the 14th century, when it passed to the Morley family, who sold it in 1674 to Henry Marsden, MP for Clitheroe. It descended to Henry Marsden, who lived at the hall with his younger brother John, known as "Silly Marsden", and their aunt. Henry died in 1780 from alcoholism and John was induced by his guardian aunt and her ambitious husband to sell the hall and buy nearby Hornby Castle. After this the Hall was bought in 1788 by the Rev Anthony Lister, who for reasons which are opaque, took the surname Marsden. The Hall was later sold to Richard Saunders in 1841.

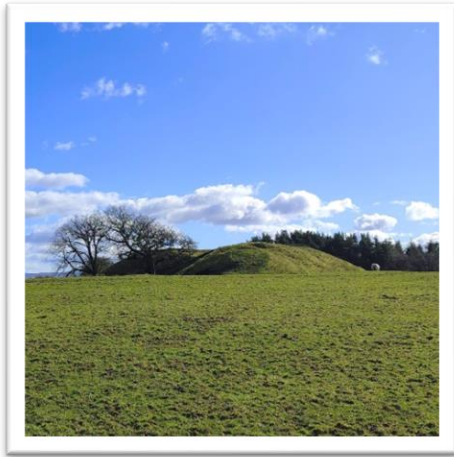


The present building on the site, designed by Lancaster architect Edward Graham Paley, was constructed in 1855–56 for Richard's son, and after him it passed to the Saunders family.



During the Second World War it housed the Wennington School, which moved to Ingmanthorpe Hall in Yorkshire at the end of the war, and it again saw service as a school from 1954 until 2022 when it was occupied by Wennington Hall School, a Lancashire County Council boarding school for boys with learning or behavioural difficulties. More recently it has been redeveloped as a wedding venue.

We soon arrive at a metalled road – this is Lodge lane, and we go right here to walk on the road for a while – take care on this section. We are on the road for about 400m and need to look for the access road to Lodge Farm on our left.



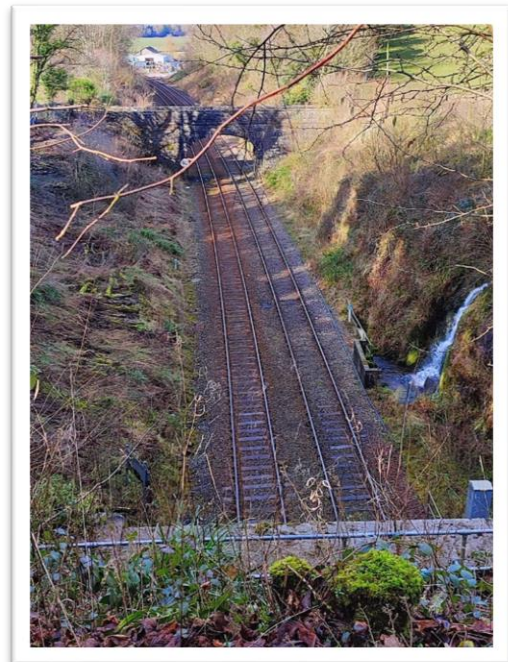
We follow the track up toward the farm for about 100m and then notice a pair of earthen mounds – one to each side of the track. These are spoil heaps from the construction of the Melling railway tunnel which is now directly beneath us. This was part of the Furness and Midland Joint Railway, and at 1118m was a significant civil engineering challenge.

In order to build the tunnel as quickly as possible, it was excavated not only from both ends, but by digging a number of shafts down to the required level, then digging from the base of these along the route. The series of hillocks that we see now are the grassed over remains of

the spoil from that construction.

We leave the track and go hard right across a couple of fields and onto a small track, where we head left for a few metres before continuing right again along the fence line and down toward Melling. After 100m or so we cross the fence at a stile and then follow the path north along the side of a small beck until we arrive at a wooded area. From here the path goes through the trees and meets Lodge Lane again.

At the road we head right toward our cars. Just before we get there though, we cross the railway and if we peer over the wall can see the portal for the tunnel that we have been walking above. Further down the line we see another road bridge carrying an access track and just beyond that some buildings – this was the site of Melling station.



The station was opened on 6 June 1867 and was closed on 5 May 1952 by the British Transport Commission due to low patronage. Though most of the structures were subsequently demolished, the station house still exists and is used as a holiday cottage, whilst the former goods yard is used as commercial premises. The line passing through also remains operational, as part of the Leeds to Morecambe Line, which of course passes through Bentham.

Just a few metres further up the hill, we arrive back at the cars, and another excellent walk ends.

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- **Total Ascent 173 m**
- **Easy walk**