

History notes for Silsden Stroll 2

CLOG BRIDGE – the present bridge was widened in 1964 to take modern traffic needs. It improved a bridge first built in 1830 to span the beck at a point where the sides were steep and difficult to ford in bad weather. There is a fascinating story attached to the origins of Clog Bridge. In July 1830, yet another revolution swept a French king, Charles X, from power. He fled to England and his friend, the Earl of Thanet at the time, gave him refuge in his house in Kent. To mark the safe escape of the King, the Earl, who was landlord of much of Silsden, gave £30 to the community to pay for clogs for needy Silsden children. The townsfolk pointed out to the Earl that they were quite capable of providing cheap footwear themselves as Silsden had a thriving clog-making industry of its own. They therefore petitioned for a bridge instead. The earl concurred with their request and Clog Bridge was the result!

ST. JOHN'S STREET – this narrow street is lined with some of the oldest cottages in Silsden. Number 55 has a very early date- stone of 1646 and was once a farmhouse. Other cottages were built for an expanding village in the eighteenth century. Cheaply-built cottages used to line both sides of St. John's Street. In a flood of 1922, water poured through the ill-fitting doors of two of these one-room dwellings on the east side of the road (now demolished), flooding the ground floors, which were set below street level. Cottagers awoke in the night to find their beds inundated! St. John's Street gets its name from the Knights of St. John, a mediaeval, religious order. There is a single cross on the gable end of number 52, and there were two other crosses now gone. Whether or not the Order owned land in mediaeval Silsden remains unproven. In the nineteenth century, the road was known for a while as Caleb Street after one of its inhabitants.

SWARTHA – After crossing fields the path rises up and you pass the attractively renovated Haw Farm, before reaching the back lane through the hamlet of Swartha, one of the mediaeval hamlets within the Township of Silsden. Haw Farm, a substantial farmstead, tenanted by the Gott family through much of the 19th century, has some earlier stone features. In a little quarry to the south of the house there is a stone outbuilding that once housed a small nail forge at a time when a great many of Silsden's farmers, in the 19th century, supplemented their incomes by making nails.

Passing across the lane, you climb up through fields towards North End Farm. To your right you will pass disturbed workings in the fields. These were described as limestone boulder pits on the 1852 O.S. map. There is limestone rubble within the glacial deposits smeared across the Silsden district, and this was dug out and burnt in local field kilns. The resulting lime was used to sweeten the land. Local pits like these were a limited source of limestone before the arrival of the canal, which allowed quarried limestone from near Skipton to be transported easily and cheaply by water to be unloaded and burnt in new kilns built all along the canal. The geology of Silsden Township has yielded other materials. Coal was dug out of the ground on the slopes of Rombald's Moor over the skyline ahead of you and sandstone was quarried on a small scale throughout the area. There is evidence of quarrying on Brunthwaite Crag, the edge immediately to your right. Stone from here was quarried in the 1770s by local men to be used in the construction of the canal through Silsden.

BRUNTHWAITE – This is another of the mediaeval hamlets of Silsden Township. It is a collection of dwellings, originally farmsteads with associated barns and outbuildings, now designated as a conservation area. The hamlet is a good example of an 18th century farming community centred round a 'village' green and beck. As well as farming, Brunthwaite would have had cottage-based wool combers, spinners and handloom weavers until the arrival of industrial factory processes in nearby Silsden, in the middle of the 19th century, revolutionised the production of worsted cloth. Archaeological excavations in the early 20th century found evidence of two mediaeval potteries in fields on the edge of the hamlet.