

HISTORY NOTES FOR Silsden Stroll 5 (Around Cringles and past Sea Moor Farm)

EXPLORING SOME OF THE DIFFERENT ROADS AND TRACKS OF SILSDEN TOWNSHIP

This walk gives us an opportunity to consider the different lanes and route ways around Silsden. Almost immediately after parking in Fishbeck Lane, you will have to cross Bolton Road. This is the engineered late turnpike from Blackburn to Addingham. It was designed as a new road, built as straight as possible and cutting across the landscape bisecting the fields on a slanting line with little regard to the existing lanes and field boundaries. It was the motorway of its day, cutting across the landscape over the saddle between the Aire and Wharfe valleys. It was constructed in the 1820s by a private turnpike company, who charged tolls to pay for its construction and maintenance. When it was opened it revolutionised travel locally, providing a wide, smooth, hard surface, using as easy gradients as possible. It is still a key connecting road between the two valleys today. Milestones were erected every mile along the road, the nearest being a little up the road near the entrance to Cringles Caravan Park.

Crossing Bolton Road, the walk then passes through fields with a clear view of Silsden Reservoir before climbing up to pass across Bolton Road again. After next climbing up Brook's Hill the path comes out onto Lippersley Lane. This is on or near to an ancient route way that crossed the saddle between the Aire and the Wharfe valleys, connecting the moor tops either side. During the eighteenth century cattle drovers brought their cattle across this route way between Skipton Moor and Rombald's Moor, driving their herds south from Scotland to the urban centres of the industrial West Riding and beyond. It was convenient for them to be up on the sides of the moorlands following routes that avoided turnpikes and village centres. This ancient drovers' route came down from the direction of Skipton, skirting the side of Counter Hill. It then crossed the saddle in the region of Lippersley Lane and ascended beside the Nab to climb up onto Addingham High Moor via Windgate Nick. Passing the Doubler Stones it turned south, skirting high up along the side of Rivock Edge, to come out along the northern slopes of Airedale.

As far as possible the routes the drovers took crossed rough pasture and unimproved moorland. The softer the track surface the kinder it was on the hooves of the cattle. The drovers were a mixture of youths out for adventure and hardened stock men hoping for a good return on their investments in the markets of places like Leeds and Bradford. En route they would stop in local moorland farmhouses overnight where the local farmers took the opportunity to make a little extra money by providing the drovers with food, ale and a bed if they required it. One such farmhouse was at Marchup close to the highest point of Bolton Road near to Cringles. Droving came to an end with the arrival of the railways in the first half of the nineteenth century.

As you walk along Lippersley Lane you will pass Sea Moor Farm. Over the wall to the north, in the direction of Addingham, there is a noticeable, flat-bottomed depression. This contains poor, damp pasture evidenced by the presence of rushes and coarse vegetation. It was the site of Seamer Tarn, a glacial lake that was drained in the late seventeenth century. A drainage channel was dug in the direction of Addingham to drain off the water.

The walk along Lippersley Lane brings you to a point where you cross Brownbank Lane. This was the ancient route from Silsden to Addingham and Ilkley, before Bolton Road was engineered. In the mid eighteenth century local clothiers complained that the road was in poor repair, too narrow and

difficult for waggons to navigate. As a result an act was passed in parliament in 1755 to improve the road and upgrade it to be a turnpike from Blackburn by way of Colne, Cowling, Glusburn and Silsden to Addingham. The route renamed as a turnpike was to be funded by a private company, who would then maintain it. This was really just an upgrade of an existing set of lanes, providing them with a better surface and giving them a standard width. This was the first turnpike to be designated to pass through Silsden. It came over from Glusburn via Kildwick Bridge and up the hillside by existing lanes to pass through Crossmoor and then down through the town by way of Skipton Road, Bridge Street and North Street on its way to Addingham via Brownbank Lane.

It was not until the first decades of the nineteenth century that a further act of parliament allowed for a completely new turnpike route to be constructed through Silsden Township, coming from Glusburn via Steeton and then over the new bridge across the Aire (built in the first decade of the nineteenth century) to come along Keighley Road into Silsden by way of Kirkgate. This completely new road, a second turnpike route, was then constructed up to Cringles and over to Addingham. It later became known as Bolton Road, which we have already considered.

Our walk now passes through fields until it eventually crosses back over Brownbank Lane and, by way of more fields, brings us back to Fishbeck Lane. Fishbeck Lane is a part of the original mediaeval lanes network that served Silsden Township. Branching off Brownbank Lane it was the way from Silsden to Cringles and on to Skipton via the moors. Our last footsteps are along this byway, now a quite backwater, but once the track that Cringle's farmers would have taken to get down into Silsden. Remember Bolton Road had not existed then. Many peasant farmers over many centuries have trudged along where you are walking now. Few people use this lane today.