

## HISTORY NOTES FOR ALLAN FRISWELL'S SILSDEN STROLL 6

This walk starts by walking along Light Bank Lane. You will soon pass a farm on your left, overlooking Silsden down in the valley. This is Crag Top Farm. At the beginning of January 1850, at the time of the 'old Christmas holiday', the farmer and his family were staying overnight in Silsden with relatives at the King's Arms Inn. Whilst they were away, the farmhouse was broken into and robbed. The thieves stole 'the bacon of a whole pig and ransacked the chest of drawers and took money, bed linen, weaving apparel, etc.' Scurrying away downhill across the fields towards Silsden, the robbers were accosted by a group of farming brothers, the Gills, who had been out late celebrating Christmas in a Silsden pub. The robbers threw stones at the brothers, chasing them off before continuing on their way. The stolen goods were then quickly hidden away before being taken by a local carrier into Bradford to be disposed of. Nobody was convicted, despite the fact that the instigator of the crime was known to be a local person. Those villagers in the know kept quiet. Sadly, the wife of the farmer, Elizabeth Clark, was so shaken up by the incident, that she 'never after enjoyed the same good health' and in August, just short of eight months after the robbery, she died. She was only twenty eight years of age.

Now walk along and climb up to the Nab. From here you will get an excellent view over Silsden, which is spread out like a map beneath you. It is possible to pick out the size of the settlement in Victorian times as it was becoming a mill town. Look for the ranks of straight terraced houses in dark stone. You can even see a surviving mill chimney on what was once a large mill complex beside the canal called Waterloo Mills. The main mill building, a tall stone structure, built in the middle of the 1850s, still stands out proudly.

Once you have got to the top of the Nab there is a breezy walk along Addingham Edge, which gives splendid views down into Wharfedale. Here we reach Windgate Nick, where the old drover's road climbed up to pass over the edge on its way from Skipton to Bingley skirting the Doubler Stones on the way. Looking down over the Edge at this point you can see the deeply rutted and braided path that the cattle took to surmount the hill.

When you pass the Doubler Stones, stop for a moment to wonder at their eroded shapes. They are the result of both hard and softer bands of coarse, pebbly gritstone being shaped by the elemental forces of the Ice Age. Their irregular appearance is the result of frost action and scouring by icy, grit-laden winds, which easily eroded the softer layers of the rock, but made less headway on the harder layers. These harder layers were rounded and buffed to stand out like weirdly shaped mushrooms.

You will now pass Doubler Stones Farm. This was the scene of another robbery in May 1840, when seven men broke into the farmhouse, tenanted by Abraham Flesher and his wife, who were at home at the time. The couple, together with two servants, valiantly tried to resist the attack, particularly Mrs Flesher, who wielded a broom handle, striking blows on the men, but the defenders were overpowered. Mrs Fletcher suffered quite badly in the attack. She was found in a 'very precarious and dangerous state', having at least three broken ribs. The robbers got away with money and two silver watches. They were not local men, but they were nevertheless traced and brought to trial at the York Assize Court, where they were sentenced to death. Their sentences were, however, commuted to transportation to Australia for life. It was unusual at the time for death sentences to be actually carried out except for murder.

The walk takes you on across upland fields to Out Laith. The rough pasture uphill to your left is part of Rough Holden Moor and this upland area was once a busy centre of coal mining. There is evidence of mining for coal as far back as the beginning of the fourteenth century. This local coal industry was largely replaced by coal from South Yorkshire and Lancashire shipped in by barge along the canal and later on the railway. Sporadic mining still occurred, however, as late as the 1930s, but the coal was generally poor and could not compete in quality or quantity.

Skirting the edge of Rough Holden, you will soon turn back north and descend into the upper part of Holden Beck. This is a beauty spot known as Lumb Clough. An original, narrow, stone packhorse bridge spanned the stream above the waterfall before it was washed away in a violent storm in 1900. The pretty little bridge in its sylvan setting was much visited by the Victorians. The large pipe that crosses the beck here today still carries water to Bradford from the large reservoirs in Upper Nidderdale, built at a time, in the middle of the last century, when the city was a far-sighted local authority prepared to spend a great deal of money to provide a secure, continuous supply of clean water to its citizens.

From here you walk across the fields past Ghyll Grange Farm, back to Light Bank Lane.

