**5 Broken Bridges: May 5th 2018 (aka a historical tour of the Bridges of lower mid Wharfedale)**

12 of us- including 3 guests- enjoyed excellent weather.

Our route took us across the Tadcaster Viaduct, past the Tower Brewery on road, then down to the River Wharfe to follow the Ebor Way to Boston Spa. Through the village and past the high school, we crossed the A1 by footbridge to cross Clifford Moor, to Compton, then Collingham. Crossing Collingham Beck we reached Linton Bridge, to cross the Wharfe to Linton, and pick up the Ebor Way (in the reverse direction to previously) through Linton Village, and across Wetherby Golf Course to Wetherby. We climbed Scaur bank and joined the old railway bed which we followed through Wetherby to Walton Cross, Thorpe Arch, and across the newly opened Wharfe Bridge to Newton Kyme’s new housing estate, from where we returned to Tadcaster via the Ebor Way, passing, once again, through the original Newton Kyme Village and joining the riverside once more.

There is a key historical event that broke two of the broken bridges on this walk, and gave rise to the 5th Broken Bridge- the pub at the start/finish- Previously the Leeds Arms. For many years this was the surviving John Smiths Brewery tap in Tadcaster but is now not connected. Renamed the Broken Bridge to acknowledge the damage caused by the torrential rain of 26th December 2015, brought by Strom Eva which caused devastation in Calderdale, and 2-3 days later, as the water surged downstream from the dales damaged bridges in Wharfedale. The walk passed the following points of interest:

Broken Bridge 1: The Tadcaster Viaduct. Broken by human activity not floods. Many of Yorkshire’s Railways were built in the 1840s by Railway “Baron” George Hudson- born in York, and largely responsible for York being the railway hub it is today. While successfully completing the Church Fenton to Harrogate Line (part of which we walk along later) simultaneous plans also involved building a Leeds to York line passing through Tadcaster. This viaduct was completed in 1848 as part of that line, but a false accounting scandal hit George Hudson, and his company went bankrupt before the line could be finished. Some freight trains did run across the viaduct to a flour mill, but the intended passenger viaduct never took a passenger. When Tadcaster Bridge was damaged it was reputedly used by Humphrey Smith, the richest Yorkshireman, on his way to and from work at Sam Smiths Brewery each day. He refused to use the temporary footbridge (no longer in place) as he had opposed its construction. George Hudson, known as the “Railway King”, built a significant part of Britain’s Railway, and had become an MP for Sunderland by the time the scandal hit. He became bankrupt and was forced to flee overseas to avoid being imprisoned as a debtor. Only when the law changed in 1870 could he return without facing jail, and he died in London in 1871. He is buried in Scrayingham on the banks of the river Derwent near Stamford Bridge, and despite the scandal he made a huge contribution to the UK’s railway development.

Tower Brewery (currently Molson Coors, previously Bass, originally Tower Ales)

Newton Kyme Village. For a village of 275 people this has the history a town would be proud of. A prehistoric henge was built here. The church dates back the 12th Century. The beautiful Newton Kyme Hall was built by General Fairfax (of Cromwell’s parliamentarian Army in 17th Century) In front of it there is also the 18th Century Ha-ha (that’s not funny, that’s a ditch and wall to keep animals out!)

Rudgate Roman Road – most likely a “by pass” to allow travel northwards without detour into York, Rudgate crossed the river by a ford known in modern times as St Helen’s Ford- now no longer in use.

Boston Spa- and the surviving Thorpe Arch Bridge. We leave the river at the Thorpe Arch Bridge and head up into Boston Spa village . Like Wetherby Bridge upstream this bridge survived the flooding of Storm Eva intact. Boston Spa claims (with others) to be the longest village in England

Compton, with its busy stables, has never been more than a farmstead in Collingham Parish

Collingham is in the Wharfe valley. About 3000 people live in the village, and its pub, the Half Moon Inn was an overnight stay for Oliver Cromwell after the Battle of Marston Moor.

Demolished Bridge a): Leeds Wetherby Railway Bridge across the Wharfe. The Line was opened in 1876, and closed in 1964. The Bridge was then demolished

Broken Bridge 2: The Linton Bridge. During the floods of December 2015 one of the main support columns of the bridge moved, and the bridge was closed for some 20 months. It is a grade II listed building.

Linton “A millionaire’s village”. Some massive houses and many wealthy people here- but since the demise of Leeds United as a major force there are no footballers!

Wetherby Golf course. Opened as a Golf Course in 1910 (the now closed railway having been built before hand in 1876) After passing under the old railway line we remain on the golf course- but this was the first site of Wetherby racecourse. In 1878, with the Railway having been built and making his land, in his eyes, more valuable, the owner wanted a rent increase for the racecourse. 13 years of dispute was resolved when the racecourse moved to its current site in 1891.

Scaur Bank on the edge of Wetherby Town: Scaur is a Scottish/North English word, probably derived from Scar, and simply means steep.

Wetherby’s Second Railway Station. This was built around in the early 1900s on the Wetherby to Leeds (via Crossgates) line. Wetherby is one a select few towns that have seen two railway stations closed! Closed on 7th January 1964, Wetherby was the first town in the UK to lose its station as a result of the Beeching recommendations.

The Devils toenail: After Wetherby Station, passing under the A661, the railway splits in two directions. The pointed central cliff which the railway splits at and goes either side of is known locally as the Devil’s Toenail. The left fork was built in 1901, the right fork- which we take, in 1876. Both routes soon splice into the older line- Church Fenton to Harrogate, built in 1847 (and completed to Harrogate in 1848) by George Hudson (remember him from earlier?!).

Demolished Bridge b): The Railway Bridge used to cross Wetherby’s Deighton Road, which was the original A1 “Great North Road” (Wetherby being exactly half way between London and Edinburgh), until 1967 when freight finally stopped using the line.

Demolished Bridge c): Railway Bridge over York Road (B1224) Like Demolished Bridge b) this was taken down after use of the railway stopped in 1967.

Wetherby’s old station. Just behind the side of Demolished Bridge c) is the site of the original Wetherby Railway Station, built, in 1847. Until 1901 Trains from Leeds- which started in 1876, had to come in and reverse out, then the 3rd side of Wetherby’s Railway Triangle was built to overcome this, and as Wetherby to Leeds was the popular line, the old station being on Church Fenton to Harrogate line was no longer in the best place, so a ‘new’ station- now also closed, and which we passed earlier, was opened. Much of the site became an engine shed, and since the railway closed the site is now a dance hall- still called The Engine Shed- reputedly “The North’s premier Dance Venue” where many dancing lessons are held. Nearby a light industry/office area includes the site of the recently opened Wetherby Brewery (the town not having had a brewery for many decades)

Wetherby Racecourse: The railway bed skirts Wetherby Racecourse (since 1891), As we pass, a race meeting is taking place.

Thorpe Arch Station: We pass under a bridge close to Leeds United Thorpe Arch training ground, and then, under a second bridge we are in a deep cutting and at the site of Thorpe Arch Railway Station. I regret as writer of this walk report that I don’t know much of the amazing history of this area, but in World War II this would have been a quite incredible place. Thorpe Arch was one of the UK’s major munitions manufacturing sites (if you visit Thorpe Arch retail park you can still visit retailers whose premises are in underground bunkers). Over 10000 workers would have been transported to and from this station each day, and all the munitions manufactured would need to be transported away by rail. A station of this scale would need to be hidden from the air, as it would indicate major activity to any reconnaissance aircraft. The platform walls are clearly evident, but all that remains of this hidden station are featureless mounds in the woodland above, and the original station building and engine shed near the road.

HMP Walton (“Walton Jail”) is passed

Thorpe Arch Trading Estate- the former munitions factory. Like Thorpe Arch Station needed to be hidden from the air so builtg largely in underground bunkers. All the manufactured munitions would need to be distributed by rail.

Broken Bridge 3: Thorpe Arch/Newton Kyme Railway Bridge. This bridge lay redundant and blocked by fences and barbed wire since the railway closure 1967, and fell further and further into disrepair. Sustrans to their credit, have always maintained the ambition of a Wetherby to Tadcaster cycle/pedestrian route, and when plans were announce for the large housing new housing estate at the edge of Newton Kyme, renovation and re-opening of the Bridge were made a condition of planning permission.

Demolished Bridge d) – was a wooden bridge which crossed the river to Healaugh Manor, both Manor and bridge long gone- but evidence of the approach to the bridge is still clear with the path passing through a short tunnel under the embankment of this approach. (Evidence of the manor house’s existence can be seen on Wighill Road- a gateway still bears the name “Healaugh Manor”)

Continuing downstream Eventually passing under the Tadcaster Viaduct (Broken Bridge 1- already described)

Tadcaster Weir, the lowest weir on the Wharfe (meaning downstream is navigable water).

Broken Bridge 4: Tadcaster Bridge. Like Linton Bridge, so badly damaged in the 2015 floods it had to be closed, cutting the town of Tadcaster in two for over a year. Reopened, after repair on 3rd February 2017. Remnants of the floods still remain, as the flooded Britannia Pub has remained closed to this day, despite still showing its pub sign. Historically this has always been a strategic crossing point – from Roman times (Tadcaster being Calcaria back then). In 1642 a small battle, the Battle of Tadcaster took place here as part of the English Civil War.

Steph Carter, May 2018