

Ramblers Gems



A Spring Vale Rambling Class Publication

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Darwen's Corncrakes /
The Oldest Home Ground**
- 2 The Oak Tree
Ancient Tree Inventory**
- 3 Ogham and the Lunar Tree Calendar
Part 4 -The Oak**
- 4 A Stroll in and below the Yorkshire Dales
Part 2**
- 5 Below your Feet / Why walking got better**

Darwen's Corncrakes

Growing up in the Whitehall area of Darwen, this was my playground. The moors, Whitehall Park and fishing with a little net for minnows in the stream that fed Jack Kays reservoir were all on the menu. Jack Kays has its own claim to fame in terms of natural history. The rare Corncrake, now found on only a few remote Scottish islands, used to breed in the grasslands close to Jack Kays reservoir up until the early 1960s. The Corncrake is a mysterious, antiquated water bird that took a fancy to dry land and never went back. The bird favours meadows and tall grass where they look for earthworms and beetles. It is a very secretive shy bird and does not like disturbance. The sound the singing male makes is a clicking rasping oscillation that once heard is not forgotten! (Ask Barbara), It has been likened to drawing a comb across a matchbox.

Tony C

The Oldest Home Ground

I have walked around the area of Turton Tower for many a year and during a recent stroll with a friend we went exploring down a side street in the village of Chapeltown opposite to the Chetham Arms. It was here that we were to discover the oldest football ground that has been in continuous use and is still being played on today. Both pitches provide splendid views of the neighbouring West Pennine Moors, though I feel certain that the players would be concentrating on their game to notice this. We soon got talking to an official connected to the ground, who was only too pleased to share his knowledge.

The ground was the original home of Turton FC who first staged a football match on this site as early as 1830, although since 1952, it has been home to Old Boltonians AFC, a respected amateur team connected to Bolton School. Turton FC, now play at Thomason Fold in Edgworth, are the oldest football club in the North-west, and are recognised as being the first to introduce the modern "no hands" game in Lancashire.

They are also accredited with teaching the modern rules of the game to embryonic local clubs. The various local teams were not professional sides as we know them today, but there was always money put up for the teams, usually held by a local pub landlord for the winning team.

I always enjoy the opportunity to talk to local individuals for you never know what information they hold and which they love to share with you.

Alan R

The Oak Tree

by Mary Howitt

Sing for the Oak-Tree,
The monarch of the wood:
Sing for the Oak-Tree,
That groweth green and good;
That groweth broad and branching
Within the forest shade;
That groweth now, and yet shall grow
When we are lowly laid!

The Oak-Tree was an acorn once,
And fell upon the earth;
And sun and showers nourished it,
And gave the Oak-Tree birth.
The little sprouting Oak-Tree!
Two leaves it had at first,
Till sun and showers had nourished it,
Then out the branches burst.

The little sapling Oak-Tree!
Its root was like a thread
Till the kindly earth had nourished it,
Then out it freely spread:
On this side and on that side
It grappled with the ground;
And in the ancient, rifted rock
Its firmest footing found.

The winds came, and the rain fell;
The gusty tempests blew;
All, all were friends to the Oak-Tree,
And stronger yet it grew.
The boy that saw the acorn fall,
He feeble grew and gray;
But the Oak was still a thriving tree,
And strengthened every day!

Four centuries grows the Oak-Tree,
Nor doth its verdure fail;
Its heart is like the iron-wood,
Its bark like plated mail.
Now, cut us down the Oak-Tree,
The monarch of the wood;
And of its timbers stout and strong
We'll build a vessel good!

The Oak-Tree of the forest
Both east and west shall fly;
And the blessings of a thousand lands
Upon our ship shall lie!
For she shall not be a man-of-war,
Nor a pirate shall she be: —
But a noble, Christian merchant-ship
To sail upon the sea.

Then sing for the Oak-Tree,
The monarch of the wood;
Sing for the Oak-Tree,
That groweth green and good;
That groweth broad and branching,
Within the forest-shade;
That groweth now, and yet shall grow,
When we are lowly laid!

Contribution by Pesto Cennor

Ancient Tree Inventory

Ancient trees are as much a part of our heritage as stately homes, cathedrals and works of art. But they don't get the same protection. The Woodland Trust has arranged for a survey to map and record the location of the oldest and most important of these trees throughout the UK. These ancient trees have lived for hundreds of years and there are more of them in the UK than many other European countries.

What can I do to play my part?

While out walking look out for the old and ancient trees and let the Woodland Trust know if you see any and put them on the map. There are already more than 160,000 trees listed but there are thousands more to add. Help protect our valuable tree heritage.

Adding a record is easy enter the details on the website [Ancient Tree Inventory](#)

Once you've spotted an old tree, note its location and a few basic details such as species, girth size and access. Enter these details onto the website.

Your tree record will then automatically be sent for checking and approval by one of their verifiers.

Its that simple and your input could help record these trees and help protect them for future generations.

Michael C

Ogham and the Lunar Tree Calendar – Part 4 The Oak

The OAK tree is the Ogham letter D and is the ruler of the 7th Lunar Month (10th June - 7th July). It is associated with the Summer Solstice Festival on June 21st. Ogham is an Early Medieval alphabet used to write the early Irish language, Primitive Irish. Evidence shows that Ogham was in use since at least the 4th century, long before the arrival of the Latin alphabet to Ireland.

The oak is considered as the King of the Woods and is widespread across the UK. We often see one or more on our Spring Vale Rambling Class walks. It is part of the 'Sacred Triad' of Oak, Ash and Thorn. It is the tree of endurance, strength and triumph.

We have two native oaks, the Common Oak and the Sessile Oak, and many of our giant oldest oaks have legends and folklore associated with them.

In May the tree has inconspicuous flower tassels. The greeny-brown 'acorn' fruits ripen in summer and drop in autumn. The tiny cups that hold them are treasured by the faeries for use as utensils or as night-bonnets. The oak tree yields the strongest of woods, sought after through history to be fashioned into fine ships and the stoutest of ancient doors and weight-bearing beams. Despite its immense strength, oak is a wonderful wood to carve. In England, the Horned God or Herne the Hunter (Lord of the Greenwood) wears a crown made up of oak leaves and acorns, as may the oaken faced 'Green Man' and folklore's 'Oak King.'



Fine old oak tree near Winkley Hall.

Photographed from the public right of way on route to Stonyhurst College

©Barbara Sharples
28 April 2017

As fuel, it gives off a great heat and burns slowly. The fuel of the mid-summer solstice fire is traditionally oak. The great Yule log is an oak log, and part of it should be kept until the next winter to rekindle the yule-tide fire.

Oak bark was used by the ancients and is still used in modern medicine as a powerful tonic, being both very astringent and antiseptic. When powdered bark is mixed with water (as part of a herbal tea) it has a strong, bitter taste, but smells faintly aromatic. This can be given instead of Quinine for relief of fever or high temperatures. This quality is thought to have been discovered by drinking rain water which had collected in the hollows of oak boughs. Powdered bark may be mixed with a little natural peppermint oil and used as a toothpaste.

Charms and Magic...

- Two twigs of oak, bound into an equal armed cross with red thread should be hung in the house, as a charm against all evil.
- Carry an acorn as a charm for youthfulness and fertility.
- Acorns placed on the window sills guard against lightning.
- Add oak logs to your fire and they will help to carry away sickness. Plant an acorn by the light of the full moon to invoke the money power of the oak for prosperity.
- Camp beside an oak tree and your time there will be blessed with good luck, happiness and prosperity.
- Burn a handful of oak leaves to purify the atmosphere in a dwelling place.



The ancient oak tree in the Ribble Valley. It can be seen from the public right of way near where the rivers Hodder and Ribble join.

©Lancashire Evening Post Michael Finch

Jean G

A Stroll in and below the Yorkshire Dales Part 2

As lockdown restrictions eased and the weather appeared to be on the turn for the better, I along with two friends, Anne and Nick, decided that a day in limestone country was needed. This is my continuing story of that day's walk. See Vol 2 Issue 23 for Part 1 of my days adventure.

The entrance to Ingleborough Cave has always been an obvious feature in the landscape, but it was not until 1837, that James Farrer the local landowner realised that a large cave could be hidden behind a large dam. He instructed local workman to break the dam, releasing the water, thus revealing a wonderland of passages, sculptures and formations. Today the visitor walks along concrete paths in a subtle lighting, in the Victorian time, woman in crinolines would wade waist deep with candles to reach the inner depths!! Exploration is still ongoing.

The cave is approximately 450 million years old (give or take 5 years), with a plethora of stalactites, stalagmites, flowstone and fossils. The main fossils are that of warm sea corals, when the limestone was formed as a tropical seabed about 350 million years ago. The formations were given names by the early Victorian explorers such as The Jockey Cap and The Elephant.



The Elephant in Ingleborough Cave

There is no evidence that early man lived in the cave, as the dam and water flow made it inhospitable, but in 2002 a tooth belonging to a woolly rhinoceros was found just beyond the show cave. These mammals existed in-between the ice ages and fed on grassland.



Woolly Rhinoceros Teeth

The cave was the outlet for Fell Beck which falls down Gaping Gill, about 2 miles away on the flanks of Ingleborough. Over time the beck has found a lower pathway and now exits a few meters from the caves main entrance - thus making Ingleborough an ideal show cave as it is "usually" dry. In severe weather the cave will flood, washing silt and pebbles through the show cave – requiring a bit of a tidy up.

For years it was known that a connection between Gapping Gill and Ingleborough Cave existed, but it wasn't until 1983 that a team of cavers from Bradford Pothole Club and the Cave Diving Groups made the full through caving trip, taking about 15 hours, with cave diving equipment and a surface back up team.

Returning via Long Lane and 'the tunnels' in good weather with views towards Robert Proctors scar we reached Clapham, realised that we had played out much longer than expected and headed straight for home. It was so good to be walking in and under limestone country again. I am looking forward to more adventures in the Yorkshire Dales.

Jane C

Below your Feet

The first walk for the Class back in 1896 was from Spring Vale Darwen via the top of Sough tunnel. Since this time, we have walked along the top of the tunnel; over the bleak Cranberry Moss many times, so I decided to research the history and building of this Victorian masterpiece.

The Sough tunnel was opened in 1848 after taking just under three years to build from the first sod being cut. The tunnel is 2,015 yards long and has a bore of approximately 22 feet. It is not quite straight and is uphill from Darwen to Entwistle at the other end. The actual tunnelling construction method was to sink 13 vertical shafts ranging in depth from 40 feet to 260 feet. The bottom of the shafts was then extended and joined to one another.

The conditions for the workers, mostly coal miners from South Wales and the Wigan area, were appalling and five lost their lives during the construction. The rock formation they burrowed through consisted of sandstone, shale and small coal seams interspersed with underground streams. The works flooded a local coal mine and polluted streams with mud which caused a nearby calico printer to sue and win a £5,000 out-of-court settlement.

After the tunnel opened it was discovered that it was difficult to work on the railway tracks for maintenance, because of the accumulation of smoke from the engines. The problem was partly solved in 1903 by reopening two of the original shafts to be used as ventilation shafts - one at 158ft and another at 210ft.

Still, many plate layers and engine drivers dreaded the tunnel because of the smoke and there are reports of staff being trapped. It was not until the 1960s that the problem was solved with the introduction of diesel locomotives.



So, the next time you stop to rest at the red brick ventilation shaft, just bear a thought for the sheer courage and hardships that the men who built this amazing structure had to endure.

Eleanor

Why walking got better

Before the year 2000 you couldn't climb the Bleasdale Fells in Bowland, similar to many other moors and hilltops, as there was no public right of access. The introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 changed all of that by designating 3.4 million acres across England and Wales as Access Land thus allowing you to wander freely anywhere.

Lost on the moors or struggling to follow a path across a field? Not anymore. 24 satellites orbiting the earth now pinpoint your precise position anywhere in the British countryside and further afield for holidays. These were first used by the US military; the global positioning system GPS became fully operational in 1995.

Ever seen Red Kites? In the early '80's the Red Kite was a very rare bird of prey with only a few pairs in Mid Wales. After introducing a programme to re-introduce this raptor, this bird can now be seen overhead on walks in the Yorkshire dales and The Lakes.

Planning a walk? Initially you plotted a route by laying out a paper copy of the OS map. To cover the area of the North West of England, it involved having over 25 explorer maps. Thanks to digital mapping you can now explore the whole of the British Isles on a computer, work out the route and then print your own paper map to take with you on that walk.

Have you been curious? Do you know the name of that bird, tree or flower? To fulfil that passion, you would once carry small reference books on a chosen subject and still not have the right one. Now all that is made much easier with a world of knowledge at your fingertips in a smartphone app like "Picture it" for plant identification or "BirdNet" for bird call recognition.

Ever run out of film? Back in the early days of photography, a single 35mm reel allowed for 36 shots, so photographs were limited, and you had to wait to see the results. Now with a digital camera and a memory card the number of photographs is in the thousands, and you can instantly see the image and not a closeup of your thumb.

Glenda B