

Ramblers Gems



A Spring Vale Rambling Class Publication

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For further information or to submit a contribution email: svrcramblers@gmail.com Web Site <http://www.springvaleramblers.co.uk/>

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Two Year Anniversary
- 2 Walk This Way Choir
A Silent, Solitary Bird
- 3 Halls of Fame
- 4 Tree are Vital
- 5 The Cistercian Way

Two Year Anniversary

It's two years since the first lockdown was introduced in the UK. Yet two years on we're recording thousands of infections across the UK on a daily basis.

Last March, a year after the announcement, England was still in lockdown. But this year, on the second anniversary, while Covid is far from a thing of the past, England has now dropped all of its restrictions.

This is due in main to the successful vaccination programme that has been carried out. Almost seven in 10 of those aged 12 or over in the UK have now had a booster jab, while nine in 10 have had a single jab and more than eight in 10 have had a second dose.

But despite more than 38 million boosters, or the third doses, being given so far, more people are being urged to come forward and jabs are being rolled out to all five- to eleven-year-olds.

On the 23 March 2021 the Government told people they must stay at home and looking back into the archives the Ramblers Gems from 12 months ago we were hopeful that we would be able to start walking as a group in a limited way from Monday 12th April. The first walk for over 12 months had been arranged as an additional ramble to the syllabus for Wednesday 14th April. The walk was to be a 6 mile circular from Sunnyhurst Wood Information Centre Darwen.

The government has now ended mandatory self-isolation for positive Covid cases, saying it would be “perverse” to keep the measure in the long term. The legal requirement to self-isolate, carried a fine of up to £10,000 for non-compliance, is one of several pieces of Covid legislation that expired in March 2022

A UK-wide day of remembrance for all those who lost loved ones has been held in several locations throughout the country. This was a day of remembrance and reflection and an opportunity to say a simple thank you to all those workers who provided care and support during the tough times, a chance to remind ourselves just what everybody working together has achieved, and to remember and pay tribute to those we have lost.

We all should be going about our “normal” lives, but we should do so with an element of caution. We may not have any symptoms, but we can still pass on the virus to the more vulnerable. While out walking with the group we still need to try and maintain a social distance and use hand sanitisers when ever possible.

Glenda B

Walk this Way Choir

The Walk this Way Choir was originally created back in 2016 with a wide range of local people who all took part in the Blackburn with Darwen re:fresh Health Walks and Cycling programme.

The idea for the choir came together after musician Mike Cotter, who has years of experience playing and conducting world renowned brass bands, thought a choir would add an additional community element to the walking group. Mike was keen to put something back into the group after he says the Walk this Way group has saved his life after suffering 5 heart attacks several years ago.

The inspiration for the choir came from Gareth Malone after seeing the positive effect his choirs can have on a group of people. He was also keen that some people who join the choir may also go on to join the walks too.

The Covid pandemic over the last two years put paid to any rehearsals and the Choir went into hibernation. Now after all restrictions have been lifted, they are back and are looking for members to join them.

Many of the original members have re-joined the group. A choir member says “it’s all about people having a great evening together and it doesn’t matter if you can’t even read a note of music. We’ll be singing songs that everyone knows, and you can develop your skills over time whilst enjoying a great evening with friends.”

The choir meets every Friday evening at Spring Vale Methodist Church Watery Lane Darwen, is open to all and members do not have to audition. Rehearsals begin at 7pm.



Alan R

A Silent, Solitary Bird

Heron comes striding along
Thin, long, pale bent legs
Reddish brown thighs
Featherless, pinkish, yellow legs
Culminating in sharp claws

A long black feather plume on the crown
Long sinuous neck, white in front
Speckled streaks of black behind
Iris of yellow, cautious green beady eyes
A black stripe from eye to nape.

Black shoulder patches above loose feathers
Elongated white feathers on the breast
Paler underparts of greyish white
Blue-grey from a distance
Flight feathers, brown, black and blue.

In shallow waters of ponds and lakes
Standing motionless like a statue
A tall prehistoric looking bird
Contemplating, patiently waiting
Waiting for its prey to approach.

Using both stealth and speed when hunting
Poised and silent, suspicious, wary
A long, thick, yellow, sharp dagger-like bill
Heron strikes extremely quickly
A stabbing motion grabbing hold of prey.

Combing its powder-down chest
Preening with a strong fringed claw
Using its down like a wash cloth
Removing fish slime and oils
Finally spreading its wings to sunbathe.

Heron is transformed in flight
S-shaped neck curled back
Long legs trailing behind
Slow flight, slow flapping wings
Broad wings swooshing like a cape.

When under stress or during flight
Heron emits a loud croaking sound
A harsh 'fraaank' or 'kaaark' call
Protecting its own feeding territory
It is a rather silent, solitary bird.

Barbara S 2022

Halls of Fame

We often ramble through picturesque countryside with stunning views, interesting architecture and a fascinating amount of history. The last two walks that the Class undertook were no exception. On both walks we passed remarkable old buildings that are steeped in history, but without which I knew little or nothing. I took it upon myself to research the subject and expand my knowledge.

The first house I researched was Hurstwood Hall classed as a Lesser-gentry hall-house, which we stumbled across on the first walk of the new season led by Alan and Janet. After setting off from the Kettle Drum on Red Lees Road we soon reached Hurstwood Hall. The Hall came to the Barnard Towneley by marriage, he was the son of John Towneley and married Agnes Omerod of Omerod Hall in 1579. Barnard was a stonemason and architect who was responsible for building parts of Hoghton Tower. When he built Hurstwood Hall as it now stands, it was said to be one of the finest halls in Lancashire, with magnificent oak panelling throughout. The tablet over the porch has the inscription Barnard Towneley and Agnes Omerod and the date 1579.

Barnard died in 1603, leaving a son, John aged 19. John was fined 16 guineas in 1631 for refusing a knighthood. The last John Towneley of Hurstwood died in 1704 leaving two daughters, Catherine and Ellen. Catherine married Richard Whyte who became owner of Hurstwood then left it to his nephew Richard Chamberlain. It was later sold to William Sutcliffe, but was eventually acquired by the Towneley family of Towneley Hall Burnley in 1803.

Sometime in the latter part of the 19th Century, the hall passed into the hands of the Thursby family, and it remained so well into the 20th century, when it fell into a sorry state.



Later the old hall was put to use as a bakery and also a brewery. In the mid 60s the hall was derelict, but since then and after a disastrous fire the house has now been completely renovated and operates as a successful guest house.

The second house with an interesting history was tucked away behind high walls and thick hedges so we only caught the smallest of glimpses. After setting off from the centre of Waddington village we soon passed Waddington Hall. Waddington was a manor in the 11th Century and Roger de Tempest held land here by marriage to the heiress of Walter de Waddington who was a direct descendant of Wada the Saxon. The manor descended in the male line until the time of Charles I. Henry VI took refuge at the Hall after his defeat at the Battle of Hexham and stayed hidden for over a year. There are several hiding places in the old house and one room is now known as the King's room. There is also a secret staircase and passage behind an oak panel.

Unfortunately for King Henry, Sir John Tempest who had given him shelter, had a brother in law on the side of the Parliamentarians, this was Sir Thomas Talbot of Bashall. He and his friends discovered the King's hiding place and went to the Hall to try and capture him. Using one of the secret passages the King managed to escape, only to be captured in the nearby Brungerley Woods on the banks of the Ribble. He was taken to London and executed. Talbot received a reward of £100 and a pension of £40 a year for his part in the capture. Several owners followed the Tempest family, but a John Waddington born in Leeds in 1895, settled in Sussex and then discovered he was a descendant of the Saxon Wada decided to buy the Hall and splendidly renovated it.



Michael C

Trees are Vital

While they are silent and stationary, trees hold tremendous powers, including the power to make all our lives better and healthier. As the biggest plants on the planet, they give us oxygen, store carbon and stabilise the soil.

Trees provide us with the materials for tools and shelter. They provide timber for building materials. Where would civilization be without paper? They give us useful products such as mulch, fencing and resin as well as products that only come from specific trees such as rubber and cork.

Trees increase nutrients in the soil. They help to prevent flooding.

Trees give us food and medicine. Lemons, oranges, olives, apples, mangoes, chocolate, pears, coconuts, cherries, maple syrup, almonds, hazelnuts, papayas, walnuts... just a tiny slice of what's on offer from nature's tree buffet. A lot of medicines come from trees, either directly or in their derivative form. One every day example is aspirin from willow bark.

Trees take in carbon dioxide and produce the oxygen we breathe.

Trees eat the greenhouse gases that cause climate change. Trees' food-making process, photosynthesis, involves absorbing carbon dioxide from the air and storing it in its wood. Trees and plants will store this carbon dioxide throughout their lives, helping slow the gas's build-up in our atmosphere that has been rapidly warming our planet.



Trees clean the air so we can breathe more easily. Trees remove the kind of air pollution that is most dangerous to our lungs: particulate matter. This pollution arises from the burning of fossil fuels. Tree's leaves will filter this dangerous pollution, but only if they're planted near the people who need them; most of the filtration occurs within 100 feet of a tree.

Trees give us all shade—and that's a good thing! Temperatures are rising and heatwaves are getting longer due to climate change. Trees provide shade from sun, and shelter from wind and rain. A tree's shade acts like natural air conditioning.

Trees give a home to the wildlife we love. They increase biodiversity by providing food, habitat and shelter for birds and countless other creatures as well as fungi, lichen and micro-organisms. Greater biodiversity increases resilience to pests, diseases and non-native species.

Trees filter our water, making our drinking supply cleaner and more reliable. Forests do this by removing pollutants and sediments from rainfall and then slowly releasing the water back into waterways.

Trees boost our mental health while raising our physical health. Time in nature—like a walk among the trees correlates with a drop in anxiety, depression and blood pressure.

Trees make us healthier. Because we move around more when we have access to trees and country parks, nature can help lower rates of obesity. Woods and green spaces contribute to better physical health by encouraging us to move around and exercise.

Trees play an important role in the world's myths and legends. Trees are resilient, they are not invincible—and they need our help. Trees are looking out for us, so we have to look out for them. Have I convinced you yet?

Jean G.

The Cistercian Way

Have you heard of the Cistercian Way? Not the Wales one the South Lakes District one. It starts in Grange-over-Sands, traverses the limestone fells that fringe Morecambe Bay and the sands of the Furness and Cartmel peninsulas.

I came across it when I was planning the recent NE Lancs Coach Rambles visit to Grange-over-Sands. From the start point in Grange the trail goes via woodlands to Hampsfell and Cartmel Priory and then to Cark. A visit to Cartmel Priory is certainly worthwhile.

There was a guide book, but this is no longer published, and Cumbria County Council no longer endorse the route. It is no longer marked on OS (ordnance survey) maps. Why? Because it crosses the sands of Morecambe Bay and there is no safe way to cross between Cark and Ulverston so you must take the train! It takes about 8 minutes from Cark and Cartmel along the 5-mile train track.

The trail then continues from Ulverston by way of Dalton and Furness Abbey and finishes at Roa Island.

You could of course take the Cumbrian Coastal Way instead, but it is a long trek. Time could be spent in in Ulverston exploring the canal if you took the train.

As you would expect from the name there are some historical religious sites along the way. At Ulverston the trail leads to Urswick around Urswick Tarn, Birk Rigg Common and the Druid's ancient stone circle. Several bronze age tumuli can be found on the Common. Great Urswick's church is believed to date from the middle of the 10th Century.



Furness Abbey

Continuing to Dalton-in Furness you pass Abbotswood Nature Reserve and arrive at Furness Abbey. The final section is to the coast and the finish at Roa Island on the Furness Peninsula. Until 1847 Roa Island was a true island, being accessible only by boat, or on foot across the sands at low tide. In 1840 a London banker bought the island and in 1846 he built a causeway to connect it to the mainland as well as a deep-water pier from where steamers sailed to Fleetwood.



Roa Island

How long is the walk and how much time should you allow? The recommended time is two-three days. It is 17 miles long, but you could do it over two-days or three and enjoy the historic priories, amazing views, ancient sites, towns and villages along the way.



Druid's Stone Circle

Barbara S