

Ramblers Gems



A Spring Vale Rambling Class Publication

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1900 and counting

This year marks the 1900th anniversary of the commencement of the building of Hadrian's Wall, the defensive fortification conceived by the Roman emperor Hadrian, who ruled the Roman Empire for more than 20 years (117-138AD). The Wall was constructed in the province of Britannia, which at that point marked the northernmost border of the Empire, to "separate Romans from Barbarians".

Hadrian's Wall originally ran between the banks of the Solway Firth and the Irish Sea to the banks of the River Tyne and the North Sea; this is the narrowest point in northern England. It took 6 years to complete, and, in its original form, it covered 80 Roman (73 modern) miles.

The Wall mainly served as a military construction: huge garrison forts were built at intervals, allowing for a raid to be organised at short notice. A deep ditch, known as The Vallum, was dug alongside it, while gatehouses would control access over the frontier forests and moors. Smaller forts were built at every

Initially, stone was brought in on the Tyne by boat to supply those areas where it could not be cut locally. At later stages, much of the stonework was mortared, allowing the Wall to survive the centuries to become one of the oldest structures in the country today.

Hadrian's Wall was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1987 as an "outstanding example of Roman military architecture", protected for its "extraordinarily high cultural value". According to UNESCO, much of it remains "in an exceptionally good state of preservation, surviving as part of a landscape which still contains significant visible traces of the Roman military presence"

Throughout the year special events have been organised to commemorate the building of the Wall. Ultimately the festival will celebrate 1900 years of this incredible World Heritage Site. It will connect people and places through time and bring to life the culture and experiences of local people living and working along the Wall.

If you can visit any sections of the Wall or some of the forts like Housesteads or Birdoswald then this anniversary year is the ideal time.



Glenda B

Beltane - May Day

Beltane is the Gaelic May Day festival. Most commonly it is held on 1 May, or about halfway between the spring equinox and summer solstice. May 1st, is a moon festival. It is a time when cattle were driven out to pasture so expect to see more cattle in fields when out on your walks!

People have traditionally celebrated Beltane by lighting bonfires, decorating homes with May flowers, making May bushes, visiting holy wells and feasting. Beltane is a Pagan holiday, and one of the eight Sabbats.

Beltane is a Celtic word which means 'fires of Bel' (Bel was a Celtic deity). It is a fire festival that celebrates the coming of summer and the fertility of the coming year.

As Beltane is the Great Wedding of the Goddess and the God, it is a popular time for pagan weddings or Handfastings, a traditional betrothal for 'a year and a day' after which the couple would either choose to stay together or part without recrimination. Today, the length of commitment is a matter of choice for the couple and can often be for life.

Another common element is 'jumping the broomstick' - this goes back to a time when two people who could not afford a church ceremony, or want one, would be accepted in the community as a married couple if they literally jumped over a broom laid on the floor. The broom marked a 'threshold', moving from an old life to a new one. Mead and cakes are often shared in communion as part of the ceremony. Mead is known as the Brew of the Divine, made from honey which is appropriate for a love ceremony (and is the oldest alcoholic drink known to humankind).



Jumping the broomstick

The Maypole is a popular and familiar image of May Day and Beltane. A phallic pole, often made from birch, was inserted into the Earth **representing the potency of the God**. The ring of flowers at the top of the Maypole represents the fertile Goddess. Its many coloured ribbons and the ensuing weaving dance symbolise the spiral of Life and the union of the Goddess and God, the union between Earth and Sky.

The colours of Beltane are green, red and white/silver. Green represents growth, abundance and fertility. Red represents strength, vitality, passion and vibrancy. White represents cleansing and clearing and the power to disperse negativity.

The Trees of Beltane are: - Hawthorn - Hawthorn is a deeply magical tree and is one of the three trees at the heart of the Celtic Tree Alphabet, the Faery Triad, 'by Oak, Ash and Thorn'. Traditionally Beltane began when the Hawthorn, the May, blossomed.

Birch - Birch is regarded as a feminine tree. Birch twigs were traditionally used to make besoms (a new broom sweeps clean). Maypoles were often made from birch and birch wreaths were given as lover's gifts.

Rowan - A tree of protection and healing. Branches of Rowan were placed as protection over the doors of houses and barns at Beltane to protect from increased Faery activity. Sprigs were worn for protection.

The animals of Beltane are frogs, bees, rabbits, goats and butterflies. The plants are rosemary, mint, daffodils, dandelions and tulips. The foods are fresh salads, oatmeal, lemonade, bread and honey.

May also sees the start of the ancient Derbyshire tradition of well-dressings. Well dressing is an ancient Christian custom. There is some mystery around the tradition, but it is believed it was brought to the area many centuries ago to give thanks for water.

It is widely thought that Tissington was where the tradition of Well Dressing originated.

Tissington Well Dressing

Jean G



May Musings

May is named after the Greek goddess Maia, who was identified with the Roman era goddess of fertility Bona Dea, whose festival was held in May. Maia was seen as a mother figure and a nurturer.

The Anglo- Saxon name for May was Tri-Milchi, in recognition of the lush new grass meaning that cows could be milked three times a day.

Prior to 1430, May was called Maius, Mayers or Mai.

The first day of May, or May Day holds many traditions. Morris Dancing, May Queens and dancing around Maypoles. It is also said to be a time of love and romance, although we would be warned “Marry in May, Rue the day!”

Morris Dancing – is a form of English folk dance, incorporating bells, sticks, handkerchiefs in choreographed dances. The earliest written records of Morris dance are 1448, and reports payment of seven shillings to Morris dancers by the Goldsmiths Company in London. The word Morris apparently is derived from “morisco” meaning “Moorish” and refers to North Africa. Traditionally dancers blackened their faces either as a disguise, or reference to the Moorish origins or to local miners. However in June 2020 the Joint Morris Organisation called for the use of black makeup to be discontinued in response to the BLM movement, and face paint colours changed to blue, green, or yellow and black stripes.



Royal Preston Morris Dancers

Crowning the May Queen – the May Queen is seen as a personification of the May Day holiday and also of springtime and summer. The girl wears white to symbolise purity and can be crowned with flowers and traditionally oversees the May Day festivities. The May Queen returns the following year to crown the New Queen. The oldest unbroken tradition of having a May Queen is Hayfield, Derbyshire. During the Middle Ages, she was known as the Summer Queen, and others have linked the tradition to ancient tree worship.



Crowning the May Queen

Maypole Dancing – English historian Ronald Hutton, 1996, stated that maypoles were put up “simply as signs that the happy season of warmth and comfort had returned”. Earliest recorded evidence of Maypole dancing in the UK comes from a Welsh poem in the mid 14th C, in which people were described using a tall birch pole at Llanidloes. The rise of Protestantism in the 16th C led to disapproval of maypoles and May Day celebrations as “idolatry”.

Following the Restoration in 1660 Maypoles started to appear again and by the 19th C the additional of intertwining ribbons had been added. The revived dancing consists of pairs of boys and girls (or men and women) who weave in and around each other and either end up with a lovely pattern or a tangled mess!



The May Pole

Jane C

The Easter Walk

Spring Vale Rambling Class visited the Hurst Green area on Good Friday this year. It was a different route from last season's ramble from the same village.

As well as Stonyhurst College, Hurst Green is noted for its Shireburn Almshouses. They were built in 1706 by Sir Nicholas Shireburn and were originally sited on the east end of Longridge Fell, but in 1946 they were dismantled and rebuilt on the main street in the village of Hurst Green.

On the walk our route passed Greengore, which is first recorded in 1314 when "Thomas Le Greengore confirmed to Adam, his son, certain lands in Bailey, excepting the Greengore." The name Greengore means 'green mud' suggesting a marshy piece of land somewhere in the area.



Our route took us past Trough House, which takes its name from the old 'Trows Ferry' so named because this curious craft resembled a pair of troughs lashed together that was dragged by ropes across the River Ribble between Dinkley and Hurst Green. Later a rowing boat was used to ferry people across the river. In the early 1950's a footbridge replaced the boat. One of the ancient 'Trows' is on display in Blackburn Museum.

There was also a very personal and poignant aspect of this ramble. My parents, Henry and Grace, passed away in 2019-within a fortnight of each other. They were very keen ramblers and loyal members of the Spring Vale Rambling Class. Henry was also a regular walks leader for the Class. Shortly after their passing, we thought about financing the placing of a seat, complete with a plaque to honour them - just as many

other people have done. They loved taking our dogs out on local walks, so we contacted the council to consider where would be a good place to erect a seat. Sadly, a combination of Coronavirus and a rather vague response from the council dampened our enthusiasm.

Walkers on some parts of Darwen Moors may have noticed some of the metal signposts, which are quite different from the usual wooden ones. They are usually positioned at junctions of tracks and feature arrows with destinations, pointing in various directions. They are erected and maintained by the Peak and Northern Footpath Society, and I recently decided to become a member.

When I mentioned to Class President Michael Counter about my intention to join the P.N.F.S. he informed me that they dedicated signposts to people who have passed away, complete with a memorial plaque. So, when my membership was confirmed, I enquired to see if there were any signposts available locally for a dedication plaque. I was sent a list which did not contain any in the Darwen/Blackburn area, but I did notice an available signpost near to Hurst Green at a farm called Higher Hud Lee Farm (Registration No S533/4). So, for a standard fee which pays for any maintenance that the signpost may require such as cleaning or touching up the letters, I was able to arrange for a signpost with a plaque dedicated to my parents Henry and Grace.

I could not believe it when I realised that the signpost was on my route for the Good Friday Ramble.

"What is this life if, full of care
We have no time to stand and stare"



Tony C

Photo courtesy of Anita D

The Pennine Way

When the idea of a Pennine Way, a continuous footpath from the Peak District to the Scottish Border, was first suggested in 1935, there was no prospect of helpful legislation, nor any hopes of concessions from grouse-shooters, and water authorities. For fifty years Parliament had repeatedly thrown out an Access to Mountains Bill which had proposed that subject to certain provisions, no owner or occupier of uncultivated mountain or moorland should be entitled to exclude any person from walking or being on such land for the purpose of recreation or for scientific or artistic study.

A Bill introduced by Mr A Creech Jones in 1938 did reach the Statute Book as the Mountain Act 1939, but it suffered from being a Private members Bill which could not provide for compensation. It was amended in Committee but was unacceptable to ramblers. The Act was never applied and was repealed by National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

After the end of the First World War, increasing numbers of townspeople were turning to the countryside for recreation. Rambling clubs increased in numbers. In 1930 the Youth Hotel Association was founded, the hostels provided accommodation and meals at low prices and made it possible for young people to spend weekends and holidays in the country. There were many footpaths throughout England and Wales but in parts of the Pennines, particularly in the southern end, this was not the case. Kinder Scout and the moorland surrounding this area was out of bounds. On 24th April 1932 some four hundred people met at Hayfield, for a widely advertised “mass trespass” on Kinder Scout. Scuffles between the police, gamekeepers and demonstrators led to five of the ringleaders spending time in prison.



The suggestion by Tom Stephenson, later to be the secretary of the Ramblers Association, in a newspaper article of June 1935 called for a Pennine Way, had a certain public appeal and a momentum grew for the creation of such a path. In February 1938 a meeting was held in Hope, Derbyshire and the Pennine Way Association was formed. The conference called for immediate steps to create the Way. Local committees then surveyed the proposed route as far as possible on existing paths, green roads and old drovers' routes. At the end of 1939 it was established that there were 180 miles of presumed rights of way and that 70 miles of new paths would be required.

The intervening years of World War II prevented further work on the legislation, and it wasn't until the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 that things started to happen. The Commission that was set up to discuss the provisions of the Parks also were required to submit proposals for the creation of long-distance routes. They decided to start with the Pennine Way and adopted, with only minor alterations, the route surveyed by ramblers in 1939.

On 6th July 1951, the Minister approved the route put forward by the Commission, but the detail was passed over to the local authorities to negotiate for the creation of the new rights of way that were required. On the 24th April 1965 a gathering of officials and over 2,000 walkers assembled on Malham Moor to celebrate the completion of the Pennine Way in England. Until the passing of the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 it was not possible to start work on the formal completion of the Scottish leg of the route. This was finally completed in 1977. From its initial conception in 1935 the whole process took 42 years to completely open.



If you ever get the chance to walk the Pennine Way, remember all the hard work that it took to establish what appears on the ground as a simple footpath.

Michael C