

Walking in and around Denby Dale

Skelmanthorpe Village Trail

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Skelmanthorpe Station in years gone by; The Leslie Roberts Collection

Skelmanthorpe is served by Yorkshire Tiger buses from Huddersfield (Services 81/82; three per hour Monday to Saturday, hourly on Sundays) and from Wakefield/Holmfirth (Service 435; every two hours).

N.B. Bus details were correct as of September 2017. Please check at www.wymetro.com from where timetables are available.

There is a small car-park at the bottom of New Street next to the Council Offices.

Car parking is also available at the Savoy Community Centre, Elm Street.

The village centre offers a range of shops, food outlets and pubs.

Look out for the Skelmanthorpe Village Trail waymarkers to help guide you around the trail.



see: <http://www.denbydale-walkersarewelcome.org.uk>

Walking in the East Peak



causeway to allow pedestrians to walk free of the mud and water of the cart track.

Looking back towards the wood you get good views of the railway line. As elsewhere, the building of the railway brought an influx of "navigationals" or "navvies" and with them came occasional bouts of unrest and riotous behaviour.

From Station Road in Skelmanthorpe the railway runs into a deep cutting and tunnel and local labour was taken on to break or "shatter" rocks and work on the excavations. These unskilled labourers were referred to as "shatters" and it is probably from this that Skelmanthorpe acquired its local name of "Shat".

There are conflicting views on the exact origins of the "ear-biting" habit. Was it in a fight with the navvies, or perhaps on the local rugby field, that the first ear was bitten? In either case there have been several recorded incidents over the years and these have earned the local inhabitants the somewhat threatening nickname of "Shat ear'ole biters".

Leave Pilling Lane past the Methodist Church and continue ahead into Elm Street - then take the second left onto Queen Street.

On the left is a row of old weavers' cottages. Despite the gradual development from cottage industry to manufacturing process, the textile making trade continued on hand looms in some cottages in the village right up to the 1930s.

Number 6, Queen Street, preserved by local historians as Skelmanthorpe Textile Heritage Centre complete with hand loom and all the associated equipment, is now owned & managed by a charitable trust. See <https://fosthc.wixsite.com>.

At the top of Queen Street turn right onto Commercial Road and return to the starting-point.

This trail was originally devised, researched and written with the help of Denby Dale Parish Walking Group and Skelmanthorpe Local History and Study Group.

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Follow the track between the former pit stacks until you exit onto Park Lane.

Short-cut: turn right up Station Road and then left along Saville Road, which eventually brings you back into the village near Pilling Lane Methodist Church, where you rejoin our main route.

Otherwise turn left up Park Lane and then next right into Blacker Lane.

Where Baildon Dike meets Station Road it becomes Park Gate Dike; and Station Road becomes Park Lane. This area, known as Park Gate, was the parish boundary between Emley and Skelmanthorpe and the entrance to Emley Park, part of the Savile estate.

The walk along Blacker Lane offers good views back into the village. The big mill across the valley is Greenside Mill, which was owned by Richard, one of Joseph Field's sons. It was the last working textile mill in the village.

Before reaching the farm, turn right and follow the path down the field side. Over the next stile the path bends round to the right and crosses the bridge over Park Gate Dike. At the top of the far bank, bear left into Blacker Woods.

Blacker Woods is listed as "semi-natural ancient woodland" -i.e. a site with a continuous woodland cover since records began in the 1600s. Although the wood is now a rather even-aged plantation of mixed oak and sycamore it contains many species which give away its ancient origins - especially spring-flowering plants such as bluebells, dog's mercury, celandines, wood avens and anemones. The wood contains an excellent variety of habitats with old grassland, waterside and woodlands and is a good place for a spot of birdwatching.

Follow the main path through the wood. You are following the route of what was one of the main sewers connecting Skelmanthorpe with the old sewage works at Scissett. The sewer pipe runs above ground at the far end of the wood.

Leave the wood and keep going straight ahead. Through the next wall turn right and walk up the field side to the stile and railway underpass, then up the lane and turn right onto Pilling Lane.

The field opposite, as you enter Pilling Lane, was formerly a recreation ground created in 1930 to serve both Skelmanthorpe and Scissett. Although some way from either village, the "rec" was well used and boasted various swings, a sandpit, a paddling pool and a full-sized soccer pitch. As the two villages grew, demand for more local provision was met by a land swap to create the existing recreation grounds at Sunnymead in Scissett and the "Feast Field" in Skelmanthorpe.

Continue along Pilling Lane back into the village.



The Skelmanthorpe Freedom Flag



A scenic 3.4 mile walk around the historic village of Skelmanthorpe. Allow a couple of hours for a family stroll. Stout footwear is advisable

Pilling Lane is one of the several ancient cart roads in Skelmanthorpe. These tend to be sunken by constant wear and have a raised, flagged

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Although its origins are agricultural and, in common with the surrounding villages, go back to 8th century settlements, Skelmanthorpe owes its fortunes mainly to the making of textiles which came to dominate so much of West Yorkshire. The village history has its fair share of local colour, from radical political activism to dark warnings about “Shat ear’ole biters”.

The trail starts and ends in the village centre and takes in ancient trackways, old woodland and stream courses and provides several places to stop and admire attractive landscapes and historical features.

Starting point: the Council Offices/Library at the junction of Commercial Road and New Street.

Next to the Council Offices is the current Co-operative Store. “The Cooperative” was one of several Friendly Societies which flourished in the village and Skelmanthorpe Co-operative Society actually predates the Rochdale Pioneers, commonly thought of as the founders of the movement.

Walk up New Street and take the public footpath on the right. Pass the bowling green on your right and exit into Radcliffe Street.

Look at the house facing you. The gable end of this old weavers’ cottage shows how the roof of the house was raised so that the handloom could be fitted with a Jacquard – a special machine for weaving figured fabrics. Although starting with humble origins as makers of plain cloth, Skelmanthorpe weavers and clothiers built a highly successful textile industry on the making of fancy cloths and weaves which went all over the world.

Turn left along Radcliffe Street. Note the house down the steps on the right where the Skelmanthorpe Freedom Flag was woven in 1819.

There was great anger & resentment following the Peterloo massacre in 1819, when cavalry charged protestors in Manchester with great loss of life. This led to the flag being produced – it was later taken up by the Chartist reform movement which had its origins in political discontent in the period following the Battle of Waterloo and the Reform Acts and ended with the development of the Co-operative Movement and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The flag, which became a potent local symbol of reform, now rests at the Tolson Museum in Huddersfield.

At the end of Radcliffe Street you can walk up to the Parish Church of St. Aidans.

Originally Skelmanthorpe was divided between the huge parishes of Emley and High Hoyland and inside the church is a mediaeval font which originated from the church at High Hoyland, which was rebuilt in 1804. The font was discarded during the rebuilding and was later discovered by Sir Walter Stanhope of Cannon Hall serving as a cattle trough on Wheatley Hill Farm.



From the church return to



Society. Friendly Societies sprang up alongside the Co-operative Radcliffe Street, then proceed to cross Cumberworth Road into “The Triangle” car-park.

From the bridge you can view the hillside towards Emley Moor mast

On the left note the buildings which face onto the Triangle. In 1800 this large house was bought by Joseph Field, a clothier. Here Field and his three sons developed Skelmanthorpe's first textile manufacturing base with weaving, dyeing and finishing all taking place on one site.

The Field family was extremely successful and went on to control all three of the main textile mills in the village at Greenside, Elm and Tenter Croft. To meet changing market demands and avoid direct competition between the three family mills, the Fields diversified into a wide range of textile products, from pile and fur fabrics, heavy cloths and quiltings, fancy cloths and woven shawls to high quality blazer and suit cloths and rug making. In the late 1800s the market demand for wider cloths meant that many textile mills had to refit and modernise. Many new looms were built in the 1880s, taking advantage of a good supply of reclaimed timber from Denby Dale's original wooden railway viaduct, which was rebuilt in stone in 1880.

Crossing Huddersfield Road turn briefly left and then right into Wood Street.

As you turn the next corner, note Salt Pye Cottage on the right. It is thought that pye is a corruption of the word pile, and that this is a place where salt, brought by packhorse from Cheshire, would be stockpiled for local distribution. Salt would have been in particular demand in Skelmanthorpe, not only for preserving food but for use in textile dyeing.

Walk to the end of Wood Street, turn left into Station Road and left again into Strike Lane.

The cottages on your left as you enter Strike Lane are weavers' cottages built in 1822 with money from the Golden Fleece Friendly

Movement as self-help groups where members could be involved in mutual saving and lending schemes.

Skelmanthorpe had four such societies: The Golden Fleece; The Weavers' Glory Lodge (the local branch of the Oddfellows Society); The Independent Order of Recobites; and the Good Templars.

Walk down Strike Lane to the bridge over the old Clayton West branch line, now Kirklees Light Railway (see: <http://kirkleeslightrailway.com>).

The branch line carried coal and passengers to Shepley Junction where it joined the main Huddersfield – Sheffield line.

across the site of the former coke ovens (now buried under spoil). Coal from Emley Moor colliery was brought down the hill by underground tramway to be screened, washed and then despatched by road and rail from Skelmanthorpe sidings. Along with the coal came most of the spoil, which was tipped in two large heaps either side of Baildon Dike.

Further on Strike Lane turns right into "Quaker Gate". Follow this over Baildon Dike and then turn right at Baildon Place.

Quaker Gate was so named because of a Quaker family who lived at Baildon Farm. This family used the path to walk the two and a half miles to worship at a Friends Meeting House near the Sovereign crossroads.