



Old Earth History Trail

We start our walk on Elland Lane opposite the Spring Gardens public house.

Elland Lane is part of a very old road which in 1740/1741 became a turnpike road from Elland to Leeds. Even further back in 1553 John Hanson of Woodhouse did “give and bequeste to the mendinge of one way liege betwixt the Nether Edge to one close called Oldearthe, which way is called the Long Doglayne, 6s/8d”.

Today Elland Lane is severed by the Elland by-pass opened in the late 1970’s and through traffic now travels along the Elland Riorges Link. But here is a thought. Roads often take their names from where they lead to so Elland Lane led TO Elland FROM Old Earth. This illustrates that Old Earth was and still is a compact and close knit community with its own identity.

We can reflect on this as we look at the Spring Gardens public house built in 1801, the first publican being one Christopher Tate. A careful look shows that the pub has been extended for the original windows in the original part have one-piece jambs (side pieces). The pub as built had two rooms on each floor, and a barrel vaulted cellar. Behind us we can see the date 1929 on the convenience store. This was originally the Halifax Co-operative Society’s Elland Lane branch. A little further up Elland Lane the fish and chip shop was formerly the post office which in 1951 was run by J Lunn. The post box remains in use. Across the road between Elland Lane and the Elland Riorges Link stood Brampton House which in 1905 was occupied by Benjamin Whiteley, founder of Benjamin Whiteley & Sons Ltd., whose former mill still stands at Park Road. At one time there was a brass foundry alongside Brampton Hall owned by Alexander Barnes who had moved from a works in South Lane. Brampton House and the foundry are both marked on maps of 1961, but have since been demolished.

A little further down the Link is Oliver Meadows a housing development built on the site of Oliver Hall. This was marked on Myer’s map of 1834/5 as “Oliver Hall” – part of the Savile Estate until 1932 one of its tenants being Edwin Thornton, an Elland Councillor who played a significant part in local life. He donated a pipe organ from Oliver Hall to Temperance Street Methodist Church (now the Cartwheel Club) and in 1882 he hosted a gathering of local church bands attended by 1,600 people. When the Savile Estate sold land in 1932 the tenant at Oliver Hall was J C Tate. The land attached to the Hall comprised 78 acres and included a rhubarb shed and was “almost wholly arable and intensively cultivated for market garden produce”. Was Mr Tate a relative (perhaps a son) of J H Tate who was in 1893 listed as a “jobbing gardener” at Spring Gardens? It has been suggested the name Oliver Hall comes from the name for the foot-operated hammer used by blacksmiths and may indicate early iron working on the site.

We now walk along Elland Lane towards the footbridge over the by-pass. Having crossed Springfield Road the first detached house on the left was the site of a shop remembered by some as “The Economic” and by others as “Elland Lane Stores”. In 1951 it was owned by L Sykes. Alongside the house is a single storey building which was the Spring Garden fisheries of S Layfield. Around the corner in Turnpike Street another single storey building was Tweedale’s butchers shop. The name Turnpike Street may derive from the time when Elland Lane was the Elland to Leeds turnpike road. Myer’s map of 1834/5 shows a toll booth on the opposite side of Elland Lane near here. On the opposite side of Elland Lane is the Shire Hospital, an independent hospital opened twenty nine years ago.

We retrace our steps to Springfield Road and recall an incident which in 1938 featured in local and national newspapers. The manager of the Co-operative store was thinking of closing the store for the night then going for a drink. He first called for fish and chips then retraced his steps towards the Co-op. Before reaching there he was attacked at the entrance to a passageway and sustained a cut to his hand. The police came and found a pool of blood and a razor. Around this time there were a number of attacks on people in the Halifax area. All were believed to be carried out by the same assailant “The Halifax Slasher”. It subsequently turned out that all the incidents were unrelated. There was no “Slasher”. The Co-op manager being unwell had inflicted his own injury with a razor from the store.

We now walk up Springfield Road. The red brick houses on both sides were built from 1930 onwards as part of a scheme to demolish unfit housing in other parts of Elland. A government grant of £25 per house was paid to Elland UDC under The Slum Clearance Act 1930 for these new homes. With inside bathrooms and gardens front and rear they were a considerable improvement on the cramped back-to-back houses with outside toilets which they replaced. Further improvement came in the 1980’s and numbers 17 to 31 were demolished alongside a block of houses in Whitwell Drive a little further up to create more open space.

A little further up Springfield Road on the right is a stone built house known as Heathfield – note the attractive stained glass window in the end of the building. It is believed to have been built for Joe Speight Ackroyd, a cotton mill owner, and his wife Lavinia Haley. To the left runs Whitwell Grove and a few yards along there is a small brick building alongside a large house. There is local history here. The building contained Whitwell Grove Fisheries owned at one time by Alan and Audrey Greenwood and in 1951 by Wilkinson’s. Next door, in the same building, was Blackburn’s shoe repair shop later to become a hairdresser’s. It was eventually run by Hans Bartholet, a Swiss hairdresser, who came to Leeds and then to Halifax where he worked in Irvine Lodge’s hair salon, before setting up business in Whitwell Grove. By the 1970’s he had other salons in Halifax, Elland and Brighouse before focusing on treating scalp and skin disorders at his salon in Southgate, Elland. The large, double fronted house, was until 2013 formerly run by Dorothy and Frank Youell then for thirty years by Billy and Raj Singh .as a grocery and general store.

Opposite the former shop we turn up between two rows of houses and up Whitwell Avenue still surrounded by the red brick houses built as part of the Urban District Council’s slum clearance programme in the early 1930’s. At the top of Whitwell Avenue turn left into Springfield Road and then right on to Whitwell Green Lane. Whitwell Green Lane was made probably in the early 17th century by John Whittle who lived at Marshall Hall. It ran from Old Earth to New Hall and was called Whittle Green after its builder whose family had lived at Whittell Place. But the name “whittel” actually derives from White Hill where the Nu-

Swift works now stand. Another interesting point is that Old Earth farmhouse was not built until 1709, although there is a reference to a “close at Old Earthe in 1553.

Walking up Whitwell Green Lane we can take a short cut up an un-named road on the left towards New Hall, or continue up the hill. Following the latter route we come to the premises of Messrs. J. Horsfall on the right. This was originally Victoria Fireclay Works operated by Wm Hawkyard & Sons Ltd. On the left in the stone wall can be seen the stone posts between which a tramway crossed the road carrying clay. Also on the left behind trees is the Hawkyard family home of Copperas Mount. “Copperas” is iron sulphate formerly used in dyeing and there are several houses in the Elland area bearing the word “copperas” in their name indicating where copperas was mined for the local textile industry. At the end of Whitwell Green Lane there is a fine view towards the hills which have over the years been mined and quarried for coal and clay as well as copperas.

We now turn left up Dewsbury Road, another former turnpike road, and the writer of this guide can vouch for its steepness having been the road roller driver when it was resurfaced in the early 1960's! Across the other side of the road and on the skyline on the hill top can be seen the remains of the controversial mink farm from the 1960's.

Clambering up Dewsbury Road, past the entrance to Copperas Mount, we take the farm track on the left just before the Elland & Dewsbury Road milestone, leading down through the fields, and we approach New Hall described as “one of the most important buildings of West Yorkshire”.

Built in the late 15th century it was owned by a branch of the Savile family and was originally timber framed. In 1610 part of the Hall was rebuilt in stone, then in 1640 John Foxcroft removed the south face (the face nearest to Dewsbury Road) and replaced it with the present ashlar stone front with mullion windows, a porch, an embattled parapet with finials, and perhaps most striking of all, the rose window above the porch, sometimes known as “an apple and pear” because of the shape of the window. Meanwhile the north front (the one seen by those who took the shortcut from Whitwell Green Lane) retains its timber framing with side wings on either side of the main hall or housebody. During the 17th century the Hall was occupied by one Dr. Henry Power, author of a number of books and one of the first elected members of the Royal Society. Late on in the 20th century New Hall was purchased by Robert Grotte, a Bohemian by birth, who became chief engineer at the flourishing fire extinguisher business of Nu-Swift International. By this time the Hall was not in good condition and Grotte spent twenty years restoring it. Following his death in 1964 his wife Hannah completed the restoration of the banquet hall before selling it to Con McCluskey, a

member of the Bachelors popular music group, the parlour wing having been sold in the late 1950's to Lloyd Halstead. New Hall has attracted its share of well known people!

Just below New Hall is the farm, the outbuildings of which are currently used as stables while the house is the residence of the current owners of the shop in Elland Lane which used to be the Co-op (or "Halifax Industrial Society" as listed in Kelly's 1936 Directory). To the east of the Hall are more farm buildings and we follow the signs showing the way to a footpath along the top side of these buildings.

Making our way along this path (we may have to push aside vegetation) we pass on the left the private housing developments which have grown up around Lower Edge Road since 1960. Prior to the housing, New Hall Fireclay Works stood where Heather View is now and there were mine shafts and levels, the works being operated by E Luty & Sons, later Luty & Armitage. As we traverse the path higher up the hill on the right we can see small rough mounds which indicate where mine shafts have been worked a century or more ago.

Closer to the path on the right we come to a deep hole in the ground partly filled with water. Old maps suggest it was a clay pit connected to the fireclay works by a tunnel. The path then turns left towards Appleyard Farm which has been much rebuilt over the years. We arrive on Lower Edge Road ("Long Doglayne") and then turn left. Pausing at the junction with Lodge Drive and looking to the left we see Strawberry Lodge which until the building of the 1960 houses stood alone in the fields, In the 1880's it was the home of Samuel Peel, a market gardener, and later of a Mr Gledhill who was known as "Yeasty Gledhill" as he sold yeast from his horse and cart. Next we cross Lower Edge Road to see Old Earth School. Back in the 1960's there were three junior schools in Elland, the Church of England School in Westgate, South End School where the Co-op now stands in Elland town centre and Cross Lane Infants School. Children from the Springfield Road estate or the newly built houses in Lodge Drive had to make their way to Elland and back, and increased traffic on Huddersfield Road presented dangers. Discussions therefore began as to whether and where to build a nearer school. One site said to have been considered was the site of the Spa Well allotments in Dewsbury Road. In March 1971 work started on the site at Lower Edge Road. The head teacher was the late Cyril Hood who was responsible for seven members of staff and two hundred and three children in seven classrooms, a hall and a caretaker's bungalow where the present "Little Earth" nursery is located. The school was visited by Prince Charles in the 1970's and in 2011 became an academy with 420 pupils.

We now retrace our steps up Lower Edge Road and turn left opposite Appleyard Farm into Shaw Lane. We go to the bottom of the lane where the way ahead is blocked by a large gate. Beyond this was the site of Calder Fireclay Works originally operated by E J W Waterhouse & Son for the manufacture of firebricks. The works and its coal and clay mines were important enough to have their own railway siding, Waterhouse siding. An unusual event happened on the 17th January 1890 when strong winds blew down the "up signal post" which fell across the track. Fortunately the signalman spotted this and raised the alarm. As a result a Halifax to Bradford train was delayed. The siding itself was still operational in 1956, the works being operated by Wm Hawkyard Son and then Band Clays Company and subsequently the well known Wilkinson Bricks concern. It is recalled that pit ponies were employed here, and in the summer when they had a brief holiday above ground, they were lead up the track towards Holme Laithe Farm at Scar Edge. In fact they did not need much leading and would run with joy up the track for their break in the sun!

We now climb the stile to our left and have two choices of journey. The adventurous can go straight ahead down the hill towards the railway bridge and will be described later. Otherwise turn left along a trodden path following the line of trees on the left. After about 100 yards notice the rough ground and vegetation on the right, the site of Shaw Laithe Farm. This was recorded as far back as 1198 when it was the property of Fountains Abbey. By the time the Savile Estate was sold in 1932 it was occupied by Auty & Sons who were also listed in Kelly's 1936 Directory as market gardeners. The farm was subsequently demolished and one resident family moved to Holme Laithe Farm.

We now walk across the fields towards the houses in the distance, noting in one or two places depressions in the ground surface which probably indicate the site of old clay mine workings. If we care to detour to the right hand corner of the field we can look through the railway fence at the remains of Billy Mellor Bridge. It carried a road over the railway to agricultural land, and took its name from the builder William Mellor who also built Rishworth School and several other bridges for the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway. When the land between the railway and the river was bought as the site for Elland Power Station (now Lowfields Industrial Estate) the bridge became redundant and was demolished, the arch being blown up at midnight on the 7th September 1957.

Returning up the side of the field to the corner nearest the houses we follow the footpath through the gate and turn right onto Grasmere Drive. There was a footpath from Shaw Laithe to Old Earth and although it was interrupted by the building of these houses we are more or less following its course. We continue forward into Thirlmere Avenue and it was in this area that a homestead known as "Gled Hall" stood subsequently removed to make way for modern developments. We follow Thirlmere Avenue into the cul-de-sac and now we pick up the old footpath which brings us to the junction of Elland Lane, Lower Edge Road and Whitwell Green Lane. The bungalow between Lower Edge Road and Whitwell Green Lane was once the home of Fred Taylor, local chimney sweep. A few yards up Whitwell Green Lane on the right was Prospect House the home of Elijah Luty, head of New Hall Fireclay Works as mentioned earlier. Prospect House served for a time as a community centre for the Elland Lane bungalows which were built in three phases from the 1930's to the 1950's. It was eventually demolished. New Hall Works was to our left on the opposite side of Lower Edge Road and for a time a business existed here making metal barbecues. All has now disappeared to make way for new housing with the exception of an electricity substation which still bears the name "New Hall Works".

We turn right down Elland Lane and see Old Earth Farm now two houses built in 1709. It has the same one piece window jambs as the Spring Gardens pub. But Old Earth's history and significance go back much further – remember the reference to Olde Earthe Close in 1553. In a draft mortgage of 5th September 1778 the property is described as a message called "Old Heath" and included several closes above and below the house and the field at the bottom of Elland Lower Edge. In the Savile sale of 1932 it had a frontage of 1600 feet and included 31 acres including Gled Hall. It was let to Fred Crossland and included land sublet as a sports field.

Walking further down Elland Lane on our right is the sports field which has been used as a training ground for Halifax Town Football Club reserves. Meanwhile back in 1905 a group of young men in the Thornhill area of Huddersfield began playing football together, eventually forming Huddersfield Amateur Football Club. They moved from ground to ground over the years and in 1954 took a lease on the sports ground here alongside Elland

Lane, including buying the then pavilion for £100. The Club also tried to buy the ground but the landlord who occupied Old Earth Farm (Dan Jagger) would not sell. However when he later retired the hoped for purchase went ahead. Over the years the Club has put much effort into improving the ground and building, a new club house having been opened on the 12th September 1963. The Club has over the years sold off parcels of land for housing development (eg Old Earth), the money raised from sales being used to finance developments.

The land at Old Earth Farm has had another community use. In 1934 in order to provide activities for the children of the new Springfield Road houses a group of people, including Councillor Sidney Thornton, organised the Elland Lane Children's Treat. This included a procession, games and a fancy dress competition on land at Old Earth. The event was held annually until the 23rd June 1951 when it included dog shows, a baby show, children's races, a magician and fairground rides. The procession, including Elland Silver Band, assembled in Oliver Hall Lane across from the Spring Gardens pub, then went along Elland Lane and Westbury Street and back down Quebec Street, back up Elland Lane, up Grove Place which has since been removed by the dual carriageway, then down Turnpike Street, back up Springfield Road, down Whitwell Green Lane and down to Old Earth. Thereafter the event was no longer held until eighty years after it started when in 2014 Elland Lane Children's Treat was revived and held on what had once been Old Earth Farm land. but was now the fields of Huddersfield Amateur Football Club. So, as history often repeats itself, we return to the start of our walk on Elland Lane by the Spring Gardens pub.

We gave our more adventurous walkers chance to go further from the gate at the end of Shaw Lane by the former Calder Fireclay Works. Continue down under the railway bridge following the track as it turns right alongside the railway. The River Calder joins us on the left while on the right are the stone retaining walls supporting the railway. Some of the stones in the wall contain "masons marks" which are symbols used to identify which mason had dressed which stone. The masons were paid piece rates and in an age when many people could not read it was a means of ensuring the men were fairly paid.

Following the path we come to a T junction. Take a chance to walk a few steps along the left route and find yourself on a stone arch above an excavation. This is the Tag Cut, a canal built about 1770 by John Smeaton to cut out a corner of the river and by pass a weir. It was intended to make the river more easily navigable but it saw little use for the "Freeman's Cut" canal from Brookfoot to Elland Bridge was completed some time later and took much of Tag Cut's trade. However Tag Cut did retain some trade as we shall shortly see. For now we turn and walk in the opposite direction to a crossing over the railway. Before crossing look very carefully in both directions. Listen and observe whether the signals show a green light which may indicate the approach of a train. Having crossed the railway the path turns left through Strangstry Wood. As we follow it notice the steeply sloping path coming down on our right – alongside the path itself is a groove or trench which continues down towards the railway on our left. This is an old track used to bring stone down from the quarries at Lower Edge. The track continues to meet Tag Cut, beyond the railway, and the remains of the old wharf where the stone was loaded onto barges can be discerned among the trees in Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve (See Friends of Calderdale Countryside leaflet "Walks around Cromwell Bottom" for more detail).

This leaves one final question to be explored – when the railway was opened in 1840 how did the stone traffic cross the railway? A level crossing was built for the purpose, not automated

as in the present day, but staffed by a crossing keeper. The keeper had to be available all the time and so a house was built. At one time the house was known locally as “Red Ellen’s” after the byname for the widow who lived there. The house was demolished towards the end of the 19th century and little remains but the location can be broadly discerned from the location of the track as it heads towards the railway.

We now retrace our steps across the railway and make our way back to the bottom of Shaw Lane, resuming our journey via Shaw Laithe to Old Earth.

Lyndon Shearman March 2015 ©