

Out and about in the East Yorkshire Wolds

Trevor Osgerby

East Yorkshire is a somewhat neglected area for touring. Yet, the villages in the chalk Wolds possess much charm and a lot of surprising history to reward those who would explore them. In my youth, I toured these villages many times both on foot and by bicycle. This route is a personal selection, roughly based, for the first half, on the 'Wolds Way', which is a long distance footpath of about 80 miles, running mostly on the crest of the Wolds from the Humber Bridge to Filey Brigg cliffs. Although some villages are reached by public transport, a car will be necessary to see most of them.

The first place of note is Brough, which is a sizeable village. Historically, Brough was the ancient ferry crossing place of the Humber, developed by the Romans between Lincoln and York. They named it *Petuaria* and made it into a regional centre for the *Parisi* tribe. Many Roman remains have been found in the area. Brough also has a claim to fame in that it was here that the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin stayed under the alias of 'John Palmer' in 1737. He was finally arrested at the 'Green Dragon' inn at the neighbouring village of Welton and was



Welton Green Dragon

publicly executed at York in 1739. In recent years, Brough has been a base for major aircraft development, famed for making the 'Blackburn Buccaneer' fighters. The industry still continues, although in a much reduced form. Many people have always travelled to Brough, especially since the railway arrived in 1840. Indeed, the longest stretch of straight railway track in the country is the 20 miles between Brough and Selby.

Heading north, there are some outstanding churches. Brantingham All Saints has much Norman work remaining. This is also true of the larger church of Saint Nicholas, at Newbald, with fine doorways, which date from 1125. It is reputed that the dead from a Civil War skirmish lie buried in the church grounds. For many years, Newbald was a centre for carriers, whose routes stretched across the country. Moving a few miles further north, the medieval church of All Saints at Sancton stands out. Its most prominent feature is the 15th century octagonal tower.

The route now brings us to the largest centre for this area, the town of Market Weighton. This town, which stands at the foot of the Wolds, has been an agricultural market for many centuries. It was in 1251 that Henry III granted a royal charter for the market, which has flourished ever since. The modern visitor to Market Weighton would never suspect that the town was once a very busy railway junction, as all traces of this have disappeared, as a result of the changes following the Beeching Report in the 1960s. It was George Hudson, the 'Railway King', who first brought the line from York in 1847, designing the station here himself. In 1848, he completed the line from Selby to Market Weighton. By 1865, the York line had been constructed from there across the Wolds to Beverley, joining the Hull-Scarborough line (which still runs). The growth of seaside towns such as Bridlington and Scarborough caused a further line across the Wolds, between Market Weighton and Driffield by 1890. Market Weighton was a very busy railway

Brantingham Church – All Saints



Sancton Church – All Saints





Sledmere Waggoners Memorial

Garrowby Hill Memorial

Sledmere Cross

junction, especially in the summer. However, by 1970, all had gone and now only footpaths across the Wolds show where it was. One Wolds village that did have a station was that of Kiplingcotes. This village claims one of the oldest horse races in the country – the ‘Kiplingcotes Derby’. This race has been held since the 1660s, it is four miles across fields and takes place in March annually.

Moving north from Market Weighton brings us to Goodmanham. This village is an ancient centre of Christianity. The Venerable Bede describes how in 627 A.D. the pagan high priest Coifi, convinced by the Christian message, led the attack himself on the pagan temple of Woden at Goodmanham and then founded the present church of All Saints. Nearby, there were two great houses. At Londesborough, in the 1840s, George Hudson bought land from the Devonshire family to construct a fine house, with his own private station on the York line. But financial scandal brought him down. After another sale, a house was built, but now only private parkland remains. Scandal also affected the grand house at Warter Priory, a short distance away. The Wilson family made its fortune out of shipping, based in Hull in the 19th Century. Their main

house was Tranby Croft near Hull (now occupied by Hull Collegiate School), but they wanted more social status. In 1890, they succeeded in attracting the then Prince of Wales to stay at Tranby Croft. Unfortunately, a game of Baccarat (technically illegal gambling) resulted in an allegation of cheating and the Prince of Wales had to appear in the subsequent court case. The Wilsons had lost their desired social advancement. But, in 1906, the title of Lord Nunburnholme was gained and the family moved to Warter Priory. The family trade and the house became a victim of wars and economic change in the 20th Century.

Pocklington, like Market Weighton, is a pleasant agricultural centre at the foot of the Wolds. There is a fine 13th Century church and Pocklington School has a distinguished history, which includes William Wilberforce amongst its former pupils. In the late 1960s, in an interesting display of initiative, it acquired the former Pocklington station and turned it into a large sports hall, whilst preserving its exterior.

For those interested in the Saxon/ Norman period, the 1066 battle site of Stamford Bridge is only a dozen miles away from Pocklington on the Derwent. However, to climb the Wolds again, the Bridlington road ascends by the steep Garrowby hill. This hill was the scene

of a bad bus crash in the terrible winter of 1947 and there have been reported sightings of ‘ghost buses’ since. The land round about mostly belongs to the Halifax family, based at Garrowby Hall. One of its most famous recent members was Edward, Lord Halifax, who was Foreign Secretary in the 1930s and nearly succeeded Neville Chamberlain in May 1940, instead of Winston Churchill. This Lord Halifax served with distinction as British ambassador in Washington during the last war. On Garrowby hill, there is a crucifix memorial erected to the memory of George VI by the Halifax family.

Two nearby villages which intrigue the tourist are, firstly, Fridaythorpe, of Danish origins, which is the highest village on the Wolds, at 500 feet and from where, on a clear day, the coast can clearly be seen. Here, the Wolds Way turns north, but our route is to the curiously named village of Wetwang. Despite many doubters, such a place does exist. The name is probably Danish, possibly meaning ‘the wet field’. It is a pleasant village grouped round its pond and owes a lot of its fame to the late Richard Whiteley, of Channel 4’s ‘Countdown’, who lived in the area and called himself ‘Lord of Wetwang’.

Next, Sledmere is a village which should not be missed. Sledmere House

dates from 1751, with Capability Brown parkland. It is open to the public and is the home of the Sykes family, who have been influential landowners in the area for many years. In the 19th Century, Sir Tatton Sykes led a movement to enclose the heath land on the Wolds, turning waste into profitable farm land. He also restored many churches in the Wolds and there is a fitting memorial to him on the hills. In the village, a cross, modelled on the Eleanor Crosses, of the late 13th Century, is an imposing war memorial. Also, the Waggoners Memorial is a sculpted monument, which depicts movingly, in caricatures, the story of the thousand Sledmere Waggoners, recruited by Sir Mark Sykes, who went to war in 1914. These men, with their knowledge of horse transport, were invaluable support to the soldiers on the Western Front.

Not far from Sledmere is the deserted medieval village of Wharram Percy. This site is in the care of English Heritage. It is not known why the village ceased to be inhabited. One possibility is the 'Black Death' in the 14th Century. Another is the early enclosure of land for sheep farming in the Tudor period. A village plan can still be made out. On the way to the coast, Harpham is another pleasant Wolds village, with an ancient church, notable as the probable birthplace of St John of Beverley, an early Christian saint, whose deeds led to a shrine at Beverley after his death in 721 A.D.

Rudston, with its Norman church, is also well worth a visit. Here a large standing stone, known as the 'Rudston Monolith', may be an 'erratic' boulder from the Ice Age, or may have been transported there by Neolithic Man. In the churchyard is the grave of Winifred Holtby (1898-1935) who gained fame by writing 'South Riding', which is based on East Yorkshire, which she knew well. Also, there are graves to the Scottish family of 'MacDonald of the Isles', who have been local landowners for many years.

Burton Agnes Hall is an interesting Tudor mansion, probably designed by Robert Smythson, who was the architect of Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire and Wollaton Hall in Nottingham. Among its famous visitors have been Celia Fiennes in 1697 and Charlotte Bronte in 1839. The house and grounds are regularly open to the public.

Bridlington has been a favourite seaside resort for many people since the railway reached there in the 1840s. But, before then, the Civil War brought action to the small fishing hamlet of Bridlington. In 1643, Queen Henrietta Maria had been purchasing weapons

in Europe for her husband's cause. Her ship was forced to take shelter in Bridlington Bay from a pursuing Parliamentary ship. She got ashore with her cargo, but had to shelter from bombardment in a local ditch. The local Royalist Strickland family rescued her from further harm.

From Bridlington, Sewerby Hall is only a short distance in the direction of Flamborough. The Hall, which is open to the public, has an interesting collection of memorabilia from the life of Amy Johnson (1903-41). She came from Hull and won worldwide fame by her solo flights in the 1930s. After her presumed death in World War II, her parents gave these articles to Sewerby Hall for display. The centrepiece is a re-creation of 'Jason', the plane in which she flew solo to Australia in 1930.

Flamborough village has what is reputed to be England's oldest lighthouse, built in 1674, which operated with a fire on top. With shipwrecks still persisting, it was replaced by a more efficient one in 1806. The cliffs fall steeply to the sea here, nevertheless local men used to scramble down them on ropes to collect seabird eggs to supplement meagre diets. There were many casualties before this practice, known as 'climbling', came to an end in the 1950s. Now, Bempton cliffs provide spectacular safe views of seabirds, which nest undisturbed below.

We have now reached the end of this journey. The interested visitor might wish to further explore this area, or, perhaps, to complete their stay in the nearby seaside resorts of Filey or Scarborough.

Flamborough Lighthouse



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Sewerby Hall

