

LAHS EXCURSIONS IN 2019

Calder Vale

On 11 May 2019 Michael Winstanley led a visit by 24 of the Society's members to Calder Vale (Lancashire) on a wonderfully sunny spring day. The visit started at the church (St John the Evangelist) which is next to the small primary school. Consecrated in 1863 the church is on a site donated by WJ Garnett MP, a major landowner in neighbouring Wyresdale and Bleasdale. The church is notable architecturally for its east window by Shrigley and Hunt (1906) and three, early twentieth-century windows by Morris & Co from designs by Burne-Jones.

We then walked down from the church to the village and mill, through the enchanting bluebell woods beside the River Calder. The mills, the current one and those now demolished, all used the plentiful, fast-flowing supply of water in the river to power, first, corn milling and then cotton mills, using mill ponds to even out and control the flow. The current mill in the centre of the village was built in 1835 by the Jacksons, who lived at Calder Vale House and whose family also owned the nearby Oakenclough paper mill. Cotton was spun in the current mill: Low Mill, half a kilometre downstream and now demolished, did the weaving. The Jacksons, Quakers in a largely Methodist village, built Long Row as housing for the young workers and their families who had migrated here from neighbouring towns and villages. Today the mill is owned by the Lappet Manufacturing Company, which weaves traditional headscarves and shawls for the Middle Eastern market, particularly Saudi Arabia. The party then returned through the bluebell woods to the church for tea and scrumptious cakes.

The Society would like to express its warmest thanks to Mike for organising this excellent visit.

Acorn Bank and Brougham Castle

On 7 September 20 members travelled north to visit, first, Acorn Bank near Temple Sowerby, east of Penrith. This National Trust property comprises a fine house, gardens, woodland, a working corn mill and a gypsum mine. The tour of the house was notable for the forensic way in which the excellent guide showed the evidence for the origins and the many subsequent expansions and remodellings of the house, from its beginning around 1228 as a Knights Templar building and continuing through the long ownership by the Dalston family. The Tudor building was expanded in the seventeenth century and again in the Georgian period, with new rooms, staircases and wings being added. Dorothy Una Phillips (née Ratcliffe) refurbished the house after 1934 as the National Trust did again after they took over its direct management in 1996. Today it has a pleasing symmetrical frontage, the local red sandstone glowing in the bright sunlight. Nearby are delightful gardens for herbs and a collection of pear trees and over 100 varieties of apple tree, mostly local and rarely grown today. A short walk through the woods took us to the corn mill. Recently derelict, this has now been carefully restored to working order, with its leat now powering the water wheel and the machinery. The locally milled flour can be purchased.

Our second stop was at the nearby Brougham Castle where the English Heritage guide made sense of the ruins. He showed how the Roman fort supplied the stone to build the Norman keep that was later enlarged with a strong gatehouse, curtain walls and then a second tower and a range of outbuildings. He brought the stones to life showing how they related to the life of the dominant owners, the Cliffords, and the work of the servants who kept it running. He pointed out the tiny clues in the remaining stonework of the rooms, passages, doors and windows that showed how the Castle had worked militarily and as a grand place to live. It has been remodelled many times over the years. Our final stop was to the nearby Countess Pillar, erected in 1656 by Lady Anne Clifford.

The Society is very grateful to George Howson for organising these wonderful visits.

Gordon Clark