

In the mornings I walk to the university from my apartment down on the river Aire, along the tow-path and past a complicated system of locks and weirs at the beginning of the Leeds-Liverpool canal.

The canal system here is 18th century technology, a transport and communications network pre-dating the railways, that has survived intact, in working order, and in use. The canals were all constructed by hand, dug by gangs of navvies, and there are some remarkable feats of civil and hydro engineering. For example the Leeds-Liverpool canal takes barges up and up through the high Pennines and down to the other side of the country by an extraordinary system of locks and tunnels; the canal being fed from stone reservoirs on the peaks. (One wonders why such expertise in hydro-engineering never translated into domestic plumbing that WORKS. All the tales you ever heard about the horrors of British plumbing are true, I'm afraid.)

At intervals along the canal stands a patient, dour, cloth-capped Yorkshireman, fishing, with a tray of writhing maggots beside him for bait. One of them is friendly enough when I say good morning, though, and recognises my accent. "Ye can raht beat us fair at crick-it", he comments — a solemn admission indeed from a native of Yorkshire, where the arcane sport of cricket was invented.

Engineering and applied science and technology were also invented here. I love these great, grim, grey, 19th century industrial cities of the north of England and Scotland. These cities were the cradle of the Industrial Revolution, and its relics of railway and canal, barge, bridge and viaduct, mill, mine, warehouse, chimney and mullocked wasteland, scenes of urban dereliction and industrial decay, crowd a complex and densely packed (to an Australian eye) landscape. It is a landscape stratified in time, too, because the structures of earlier societies — monstrous castles and cathedrals and the vast Abbeys that were trashed by King Henry VIII and ancient stone farms — are much in evidence, along with the inevitable concrete-block, tower-apartment, motorway, carpark, shopping-mall geometries of the late 20th century.

Continuing my walk to the University I cross a bridge, pass under the railway viaduct, continue past the baroque Venetian-style 19th century Markets, onion-domed, spired, and elaborately decorated with wrought iron, crowded inside with stalls selling chitlings<sup>1</sup> and pease puddings and *neeps* and two-bob watches, then thread my way up to the university through the cobbled city, an impressive mixture of architectural styles — neo-gothic, neo-classical, neo-renaissance, domes, columns and arches of every description, gargoyles, statues, laurels, wreaths, shields, insignia, every cornice a stone or wrought iron decoration, gilded monuments — that speak loudly of the enormous wealth that poured into this city (along with the other great industrial cities of the north) during the 18th and 19th and early 20th centuries.

It is a good walk, a distance of about 2 miles, in the units used by the English.

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<sup>1</sup>I am reminded of "Dad's Army", an early British TV comedy series about a Home Guard platoon during WWII. In one episode the platoon runs a competition, for which Jones the Butcher donates the prize of half a dozen sausages, two pork chops, and a pound of chitlings. "What the devil are chitlings?" asks Captain Mainwaring. Jones leans forward and whispers: "It's, it's the *se-cret* part of the pig, sir". I am still none the wiser about chitlings. Whatever could the *secret* part of the pig be?

In the evenings I do not traverse the same route. Why should I, when there is so much more of interest to observe? From another side of the university I pass into a plump, smug, merchant and middle-class part of town, along tall red brick, brass-plaques rows into Queen's Square. It is half-nine o'clock and twilight and, incredibly, the square is lit by gaslight, flickering from mantles inside lead-fretted glass lamps on rusty fluted iron-laced poles.

*Down the steps of one of the terraced houses a beautiful and frightened Ingrid Bergman is ushered into the fog by the diabolically criminal Charles Boyer . . . Oh — I forgot! This is not a famous 1944 film and this is Leeds not London, or Hollywood!*

Through the streets past the Rat and Parrot, the Pitcher and Piano, the Horse and Trumpet (where I first learned how to put away a pint of the warm, creamy Theakstons Bitter), and through the Dark Arches, vaulted cold chambers under the vast railway station, where the river rushes past columns and across a weir that is supposed to have been built by the monks of nearby Kirkstall Abbey. Some daft bugger has built shops between some of the Dark Arches, but since this is strictly a 9-to-5-and-closed-on-Sunday city there are few people about.

I have been kept very busy during this research collaboration visit, verifying the details of an Ordnance Survey map of Yorkshire and a jolly useful little book titled "Historic Pubs of Leeds and South-West Yorkshire". One of our field trips turned out to be a marvellous walk through ginnels and allotments and woodlands.

"Ginnel" is a Yorkshire dialect word for a narrow passage between buildings or yards. Many ginnels run between terrace rows and used to provide access to outside dunnies, but they are often simply ancient footpaths and rights of way, hemmed in by adjacent buildings. Ginnels are very narrow, often less than 3 feet wide, sometimes roofed, always cobbled and high-walled, and often very long and dark and overgrown. (*Ah'd nebbut tek the ginnels at night! Ghosts! Boverr boys! The Yorkshire Ripper! Oooh!*)

Leeds is extensively ginnel-ed, and the walk through them is mysterious because they are not on the maps and one never knows exactly where one is. At last, one very long ginnel exits abruptly into classic oak woodland, a remnant of the original Pennines forest. This wooded valley extends right into the city of Leeds, having largely escaped all the waves of development. There is a stream and an old mill-race (more interesting hydro-technology!) on the valley floor, and a row of stone mill-workers' cottages.

On the other side of the valley are more ginnels, open ginnels this time, running through allotment gardens. I believe the allotment schemes were started in the 19th century, after most of the countryside common land was taken from the people during the Enclosures of the previous century. Vacant land in and around cities was carved into little rectangular allotments. People who were hustled off the land and into the mills in the cities could then rent it at nominal charge to grow turnips and taties on! On weekends in Leeds it is not unusual to see people (I mean *folk*, other places may have *people* but Yorkshire has *folk*) getting on the bus with spade and fork, going to spend the day gardening on their allotment. The allotments now have to be defended vigorously against predatory developers and rascally Council officials who are constantly attempting to sell them to the housing developers, because they are often on prime real estate in and around the city. I am wondering if perhaps allotment-gardening has become trendified — but no, not very. It is unreconstructably lowbrow because the gardens are not amenable to cottagey rose ramblers and perennial borders. The allotment gardens on the walk were beautifully kept, with tall narrow flowers and vegetables in rows — just like the red-brick back-to-back terrace houses that the gardeners come from!

After the allotments the walk dips into the woods again and along the stream then up through the beautifully designed gardens of an old mansion and along a lane and through more ginnels to the bus stop on Otley Road. The walk was a distance of about 4 miles. The historic pub wasn't bad either.

On another day our destination was The White Swan at Aberford. This walk passes through oak and elm woods along a very, very, old railway formation called the Fly Line. It was constructed in 1825 and was horse-drawn at first, but by the 1840s was using steam locomotives built locally. The way passes through a long curved tunnel, lit at rare intervals by patches of daylight through shafts from above.

For a hundred years this railway line carried passenger trains and coal trains across the Kingdom of Elmet, from Aberford to the village of Barwick-in-Elmet. Elmet was an ancient autonomous Celtic kingdom that pre-dated then coexisted with the Roman settlements and survived as an enclave, apparently left alone by Saxon invaders, or wealthy enough to pay them off, until the 9th century. There is a huge mound behind the village church that has **never** been excavated, surrounded by a moat. *I wonder what's in the mound. A castle of course. Treasure? Aha! It must contain the Holy Grail! (Surely this place must be a Monty Python film set?)*

*The next entry in my travel diary is "A Gourmet Tour of Leeds: chip butty, balti-and-chips, korma-and-chips, spam-and-chips", but that can sit. Meanwhile, should you develop an interest in pursuing the Oz side of this collaboration, you might be interested in assisting with the research involved in my latest project, a book titled "Pub Walks In And Around Sydney And Canberra".*