

Sprotbrough Circular Walk

Tales of Knights and Heroes

Walk summary: A pleasant walk around the village taking in the River Don. This mainly flat walk traces the boyhood home of a World War Two flying ace, the footsteps of Sir Walter Scott and the places that inspired his novel, Ivanhoe



Distance: 2.45 miles / 3.95 kilometres

Duration: approximately 1hr 15 minutes not including stops

Terrain: Mainly flat, slight bumps in woodland part of walk.

Nearest Car Park: 0.5 miles to the south of Sprotbrough village, public car parking is available next to the toll house on Nursery Lane

1. Boat Lane Toll House

The trail begins from the junction of Nursery Lane and Boat Lane

On the corner of Nursery Lane and Boat Lane is the old toll house, built in 1849 for Sir Joseph Copley and used to collect payment for crossing Sprotbrough Bridge. The bridge was originally constructed in the mid-19th century with the central span being replaced in 1897 in ironwork by Newton Chambers of Sheffield.

Safely cross over the road, turn left and head up Boat Lane until you reach Rectory Mews. The hill that you are walking up is part of the Don Gorge. The gorge is an area of Magnesian limestone that has been slowly eroded away over millennia by glacier flows and the River Don that lies at the gorge's bottom.

2. Rectory Mews

On the left hand side of Boat Lane after Rectory Mews is the Old Rectory. This is a Grade II listed building with the old village pump set in to the outer wall of the Rectory, also Grade II listed. This was originally sited on Main Street and has the Copley coat of arms carved above it. WW2 flying ace Sir Douglas Bader grew up in this house. He was born in London in 1910 but moved to Sprotbrough in 1923 after his mother married the vicar of Sprotbrough church. In 1928 he joined the RAF as a

Cadet, and after becoming a pilot soon gained a reputation as a daredevil by performing dangerous stunts. On December 1931 whilst performing unauthorised low flying aerobatics he crashed and had to have both legs amputated, one above and one below the knee. In 1939 he re-joined the RAF and saw combat in WW2. He was credited with shooting down 22 aircraft and damaging 11 enemy aircraft during the war before being shot down and captured on 9th of August 1941, spending the remainder of the war as a POW. He was knighted in 1976 for 'services to disabled people'. He died in London aged 72 in 1982.

Continue to the top of boat lane near the village green.

3. Main Street

At the top of Main Street look to your right and just beyond the red telephone box you can see 18th century mounting steps to allow easy access for mounting a horse or getting in to a carriage. **Turn left onto Main Street.** You'll soon pass a house on the right with a series of grotesques carved into the exposed wooden beams of the house.

Make your way to the junction of New Lane, with Apple Tree Day Nursery on the corner.

4. New Lane

Turn right into New Lane.

Sprotbrough is mentioned in the Domesday Book as *Sproteburg* and pre-dates the Normans with the name probably originating from the Old English – Sprota meaning shoot or twig, burg meaning village. The village at that time consisted of 10 households, so quite a small place. The lord of the manor in 1066, when William the Conqueror came to power was Swein, son of Svavi, but by the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 it was recorded as Roger de Busli. De Busli or Bully was a Norman baron who accompanied William the Conqueror (Duke of Normandy) on his successful conquest of England in 1066.

At the end of New Lane turn right onto Melton Road. Continue to the junction of Thorpe Lane on the right.

5. Thorpe Lane

The Ivanhoe pub just a little further along Melton Road gets its name from the Sir Walter Scott novel of the same name. Sir Walter is said to have visited Sprotbrough and took inspiration from the area when writing 'Ivanhoe' using Conisbrough castle as part of the backdrop to his novel. The opening lines to the novel reflect the beauty of the Don Valley

"In that pleasant part of merry England which is watered by the River Don there extended in ancient times, a large forest covering the greater part of the beautiful hills and valleys which lie between Sheffield and the pleasant town of Doncaster."

We are heading right down Thorpe Lane.

The area, and almost all of the land around it, was owned by the Fitzwilliam family for many years. Sir John Fitzwilliam erected a cross next to the church during the reign of Henry V of England. Into the cross were carved these lines:

"Whoso is hungry and lists to eat, Let him come to Sprotburgh for his meat, and for a night and for a day, His horse shall have both corne and hay, and no man shall ask him when he goeth away."

St Mary's Church is at the bottom of Thorpe Lane. This Norman church was constructed in 1170. There is a Saxon inscribed stone built into the chancels outer wall, though this is of interest rather than evidence of an earlier church. It may be a fragment of a Saxon cross. The church has been radically altered and little of the original masonry can be seen. The nave was extended and the tower was built in 1360. The two upper stages of the tower were rebuilt in 1474 by the will of Sir William Fitzwilliam. Finely carved heads by the small door leading to the tower are said to represent St John and St Peter. The tower clock was installed by Lady Gertrude Copley in memory of her husband Sir Godfrey who died in 1709. You may like to visit the church before continuing on with the trail

6. Park Drive

At the end of Thorpe Lane turn left to go down Park Drive.

Park Drive runs through the old parkland which belonged to Sprotbrough Hall. The Sprotbrough Estate was owned from the early 13th century by the Fitzwilliam family. When Sir John Fitzwilliam died in 1516, with no direct descendants, the estate passed by marriage to the Copley family. Sprotbrough Hall was built by Sir Godfrey Copley, second Baronet and completed by 1690.

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Sadly the Hall was put up for sale in 1925 because death duties could not be met. Unfortunately the Lady of the Manor died on the day her late husband, the Lord of the Manor, was being buried. This resulted in two lots of death duties to be paid. After the estates' tenants had privately bought lots of land, the rest of the estate was put up for auction to pay the death duties. This resulted in the new owners demolishing the hall and eventually making way for a new housing estate. However, some walls, gates, street names, the old stable block and lodge house are all still standing and can be viewed today.

Shortly you'll reach a fork in Park Drive.

7. Sprotbrough Methodist Church

Keep left and you will pass Sprotbrough Methodist Church on the left hand side of the road. The building you can see today was built in 1938 as the Church Hall. When the hall was first built, it was intended that the sycamore tree would eventually be removed and a much bigger church be built when funds became available. However, this never came to pass and the tree become part of the church's heritage. It is now protected by a Preservation Order

At the crossroads turn right down Brompton Road.

Follow this road bearing right along Riverside Drive.

8. Meadow Croft

Turn right and at the end of Meadow Croft join a small path into light woodland.

Before passing below the A1(M) take the footpath on the right hand side and follow the steps down to the river and turn right. Your next stop is about half a kilometre along the river.

9. River Don

Look up to your right. At the top of the crags, through the trees, can you see the old balustrade that was directly in front of Sprotbrough Hall.

Keep following the river until you've almost reached the lock. On the right hand side of the path are the remains of an old building.

10. Old Pumping House

This is what remains of the Copley water pump. The pump was commissioned by Sir Godfrey Copley in the late 17th century for the purpose of extracting water from the river and conveying it to the roof of the Hall to gravity feed his gardens, which included the Great Canal, the Little Canal, the Great Fountain and the Crescent Pool.

The Hall boasted a 35ft long lead-lined heated swimming pool which had been added in the grounds. It is said that the inspiration for such a venture was conceived when the Lord of the Manor visited Chatsworth House in Derbyshire and was shown the Emperor fountain, with its jet of 290 ft, by the Duke of Devonshire.

The pump, powered by a waterwheel driven by the flow of the river, was powerful enough to raise water to tanks 100 ft above. The swimming pool could be filled in five hours. The river and pump also supplied the village until the water became too polluted.

Continue following the path to pass below a bridge. Nursery Lane car park is on the right soon after.

References

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