

CRAGG VALE, MILLS, WILDENESS & DYNASITES AUDIO E-TRAIL SCRIPT

Stop 1: Ancient and Modern

Welcome to the Cragg Vale walk! We're going to tell you just some of the history of our valley – from 10,000 years ago when Stone Age hunters were firing flint arrowheads around here; through the importance of 13th Century rabbits, and 1930s chicks; you'll see our Million Pound Church!; we'll show you how this tranquil valley pulsed with industry, noise and smoke from 11 busy mills; and we'll bring you right up to the present day with our new business park made from chicken sheds – and us hosting Le Tour De France! We hope you enjoy your walk, and finding out about our beautiful valley.

As you walk along Sykes Gate Lane, look ahead and to your left, and you will see how gorge-like Cragg Vale winds down through the steep tree-lined valley sides. This is where your walk is going to take you, down to the river, which you will follow as it flows through the valley.

Before you drop down to the river, take a look around you over this moorland plateau because this is where the area's earliest people settled – not in the valley bottom. Look to your right, across the moorland, and you can see the ridge-like hill called Manshead End. Here stone flints and arrowheads belonging to Stone Age hunters, dating back to 10,000 years BC have been found.

This whole area used to be covered in forest, but climate change over 25 centuries, and the activities of Stone Age farmers, caused the gradual decline of woodland on the hilltops, and the formation of the characteristic peat moorland that still exists today. These Stone Age pioneers were the first farmers in Cragg Vale – about 6,000 years ago – clearing areas of woodland for their crops and their herds of native cattle and pigs.

Then came Bronze Age and Iron Age peoples, but these have left little trace in our valley. Around 1,750 years ago, the Roman invaders built a network of roads across the moors to link their cities. We think one of these roads is at Blackstone Edge, at the head of our valley. After the Romans withdrew, native British tribes were gradually displaced by Anglo Saxon and Viking farmers, who cleared even more of the woodland.

Following the Norman invasion, William the Conqueror was crowned king in 1066. He rewarded the French Earls and Barons who had supported him by giving them large tracts of land called Manors throughout his new Kingdom. He granted Earl de Warrenne the Manor of Wakefield, which included land in Cragg Vale. The Earl created a large hunting or deer park in Erringden across the other side of our valley.

On the bare hillside you see today, the deer were fenced into the huge park using a wooden palisade mounted on top of an earth mound. The Earl and his noblemen would come to the park to hunt the deer for food, and woe betide any local people who were caught poaching animals or stealing timber from within the park!

Just a word about our very long hill! You got off the bus at Sykes Gate, which is only half-way up our hill. We have the longest continuous uphill of any road in England. It rises 286 metres in the 8.1 kilometres from Mytholmroyd up onto the moor at Blackstone Edge Reservoir, and there's no leveling off or downhill bits for that whole stretch! In 2011, Sir Chris Hoy (Britain's most successful Olympic athlete of all time, with six gold medals and one silver in cycling) cycled our hill. He said Cragg Vale was one of his "top ten perfect hills" (although he was on his way down and not on his way up!). And in July 2014, the Tour de France zoomed up Cragg Vale as part of Le Grand Depart.

Stop 2: Farming and cloth making: the dual economy

After the Norman conquest, in Medieval times, our valley briefly had a thriving iron smelting industry, but most people survived by farming. Gradually agricultural land was created by clearing trees, and by converting moorland into productive land. At first, people worked together in an open field system of farming, with rights to common grazing land and wood-collecting. Each family worked on their own strip of land and paid rent to the Lord of the Manor, they also worked on his land, and everyone in the Manor helped each other in big communal tasks.

As time went on, this peasant system declined, and there were more individual farmsteads. In Cragg Vale these farmsteads were mainly built on the shoulder land, where you're now standing, between the top of the steep tree-lined valley and the hilltop moors. This land was less steep, and more fertile than the moor. Once the trees and stones had been cleared, an enclosure would be formed and a dwelling built. Early dwellings were built of timber, but as time went on, and supplies of timber became scarce, these were often encased, or rebuilt, in stone.

Those farmers who had good land were able to prosper, and they became known as Yeoman farmers. They were able to build better quality houses from local gritstone, with stone slate roofs. The typical design was the laithe house, where the house and barn were attached to each other under a single roof. You can see many examples of this type of property in Cragg Vale – including Broad Fold Farm here.

Not all farms prospered, and many had to look for other sources of income. The cottage industry that became the second income to farmers in our valley was handloom weaving. Cragg Vale and the Calder Valley became highly successful in this trade. Raw wool was brought into Cragg Vale by packhorse trains from the Yorkshire Wolds. Families would work together to spin the wool into yarn and then weave it into high quality lengths of cloth – called 'pieces' – which were then taken and sold at nearby cloth markets.

Yeoman farmers became cloth merchants by starting to organise the labour of other farm workers. The Yeomen bought wool; distributed it to the weavers; paid them by the yard of cloth they produced – called 'piecwork'; then they took the cloth to market and sold it. They also built cottages near their farms and rented these the outworkers who were producing the cloth. The whole of the tenant's family would be involved – with children carding the wool, women spinning it, and men weaving. Often the weaving was carried out in upstairs rooms where more light was available from long rows of mullion windows. Typical weavers' cottages, with these mullion windows on their rear side, can be seen at Moorland Cottages as you return to Cragg Road.

Stop 3: Powering the making of cloth

Cloth-making in the home by hand was very time-consuming, so people put their minds to how these processes could be speeded up. For example, one handloom weaver needed six to eight spinners to provide enough yarn for his work. Some families recruited unmarried women to help with the spinning, this is the origin of the word spinster.

Inventors in the late 1700s designed machines that could spin wool and cotton faster than a hand-spinner. Arkwright was the first to create a spinning machine, called a spinning jenny. Hargreaves then created the water-frame spinning machine, followed by Crompton with his spinning mule.

At first horses were used to power their machines, but it was soon realised that harnessing waterpower was much better. Entrepreneurs were quick to see the potential for these inventions, especially now cotton from the Americas was being shipped into Liverpool. What they needed was a good constant supply of water to drive a waterwheel, in a place reasonably near to the supply of raw cotton, and with a workforce with the skills and knowledge of making cloth. Cragg Vale was perfect, with its fast-flowing streams from the rain-soaked Pennine moorlands, skilled handloom weavers and spinners, and close to the Rochdale Canal for supply and distribution.

At first, small buildings, to house a single spinning machine, were built close to the riverbank, ideally where there was a natural cascade or waterfall. The waterwheel was positioned under the flow of water, which turned the wheel, which spun a shaft, which drove the spinning machine. In these early years, the yarn produced would probably have been distributed amongst the local handloom weavers for making up into cloth.

The use of water became more sophisticated; dams were built to store water so that bigger waterwheels could be installed to produce more power to run more and more machines. So larger buildings or mills started to be built for a greater number of spinning machines.



Here at Turvin, if you look over the wall, you can see a large garden pond.

However a closer look tells us that this was a mill dam, built to take water from a weir in the stream much higher up the valley and conveyed through a goit to the dam. (Goits are stone-lined water channels.) In the bottom corner you can see two sluices used to control the flow of water onto the waterwheel. In 1833, this water system produced enough power for a two-storey stone mill (long demolished) employing 57 people, of which 31 were children.

Gazing out today at this beautiful and tranquil landscape, it is difficult to believe that, at the peak of its industrial power, Cragg Vale was home to eleven large mills, initially all powered by water, employing some 2,000 people. It is this industrial heritage which we will focus on as you wend your way down the river to Mytholmroyd.

Stop 4: The Hinchliffes' dynasty

It was in Cragg Vale, and many similar valleys, that the Industrial Revolution was nurtured and the 'dark satanic mills' appeared. This was the heart of Cragg Vale's industrial scene, with three or four large cotton-spinning mills in this part of the valley. These were established from 1750 onwards mainly by members of the Hinchliffe family. They were just an ordinary family – starting from nothing – but they became dominant as Mill Masters, and were our valley's main employers. From the 1750s until the early 1900s, the Hinchliffes were successful businessmen who worked hard (their sons were expected to work the same hours as their factory workers), but they were also hard taskmasters – and were seen by some as tyrants.

Reverend Thomas Crowther (the Cragg Vale vicar) campaigned tirelessly to improve working conditions in the mills – particularly for the young children – often under 6 – who worked very long hours crawling under the highly dangerous machines to repair broken threads.

Here is a verse from the poem 'The Factory Girl's Last Day' written by the Leeds-based social reformer Michael Thomas Sadler who lived from 1780 to 1835. He fought for years to bring in a 10-hour working day for children under 18, and faced huge opposition along the way.

Alas! What hours of horror
 Make up her latest day;
In toil, and pain, and sorrow
 They slowly passed away;
It seemed as she grew weaker
 The threads they oftener broke,
The rapid wheels ran quicker
 And heavier fell the stroke.

However, the Hinchliffes did manage to keep their mills going, and their workers employed, through hard times, especially the years of 'the cotton famine' brought about by the American Civil War. During this 'famine', many other cotton mills throughout the country had to close down, forcing almost two million workers out of work and into great distress.

The last of the Mill Masters was Mr Hinchliffe Hinchliffe who was born at Marsh Grove in 1823 – yes, his first name was the same as his surname! In 1855, he took his family to live in nearby Cragg Hall, the original manorhouse of Cragg Vale which dates back to the Jacobean age. When his father died in 1859, Hinchliffe inherited New Mill. He also bought up the part-built Victoria Mill (a failed co-operative venture), and, in the 1870s, the ruins of a mill destroyed by fire – and he completed and restored them both to full production.

By 1880 he had built and moved to New Cragg Hall, an imposing Victorian house lower down the hillside – to which, between 1901 and 1903, after Hinchliffe's death, his daughter Helen and her husband Mr William Algernon Simpson-Hinchliffe added a gatehouse, shown in an early photograph with a Gothic arch - but this had to be enlarged as the horse and carriage gave way to the innovative – and larger – motor vehicle.



Over the next few years, Helen and “Algie” transformed New Cragg Hall into a magnificent Italianate mansion, one of the finest houses in Yorkshire. The couple were held in high regard by the people of Cragg Vale – they were generous benefactors to villagers, the church and many local organisations, and Cragg Hall was made the centre for many social events for the village.

The gatehouse is a classic example of the work of Edgar Wood, one of Britain’s most eminent 19th Century Arts and Craft designers who had a considerable reputation both in Britain and abroad. It has many of Edgar Wood’s favourite features, such as sloping buttresses, mullioned windows, canted bays, carved decorative stonework and Art Nouveau door furniture. It remains unchanged and is now a Grade 2 listed building. Sadly, New Cragg Hall burnt down in 1921 and only a handful of photographs, and the gatehouse, remain as testament to its grandeur.

Stop 5: Heart of the Village

In the early history of Cragg Vale there was no road up the valley and few houses in the valley bottom – most people lived on the hilltops, which were criss-crossed with packhorse trails and highways. The main route came over the hilltops from Sowerby, dropped into the valley crossing Marshaw Bridge, then up Withens stream onto the moors and on to Burnley, Clitheroe and the rest of Lancashire.

The new industrial Cragg Vale grew around these important and busy highway and packhorse routes. The largest mill was Four Gates End close to the Church. It was 6 storeys high and had a waterwheel 10metres in diameter. The mill operated til 1920, but there’s very little of it left today.

Marshaw Bridge is mentioned in early records dating back to 1655. This early bridge, built with two arches, and quite low to the water, unfortunately washed away in 1891. The present Marshaw Bridge was built the following year and was a single, higher span, to avoid a repeat of the calamity.

Anyone travelling this challenging route between Yorkshire and Lancashire would no doubt be relieved to reach The Cragg Vale Inn for refreshment. Built between 1700 and 1730, this inn was much smaller than the building which replaced it in 1840. It was demolished, but not without trace, as the 1700s cellar remains unchanged – and is still in use today. Around 1900, the porch with columns was added and the name changed to The Hinchliffe Arms, in acknowledgement of Cragg Vale’s most prominent family.

Before 1815, there was no church in Cragg Vale; the area was served by the Parish of Heptonstall – 4 and a half miles away. So, fulfilling your spiritual needs meant long treks over the moors to attend church services, marriages or burials – a long way to carry a coffin! The first Chapel of St John in the Wilderness was erected in 1815, the first churchwardens wearing many ‘hats’ – churchwarden, policeman, and rate collector!

The third vicar, Reverend Thomas Crowther, was part of a group of churchmen, who, following their success in abolishing the slave trade in 1807, went on to tackle the terrible conditions in the factories. He is especially remembered for his lifelong fight to improve labour conditions for the men, women and children working in the mills, in particular to reduce the working hours for children. He was much loved by mill-workers, but sadly suffered a campaign of harassment and insults from some local mill-owners, incensed by his criticisms. He died in 1859, and his grave can be found in St John’s churchyard.

Vicars of the time had a certain authority over pubs because they had to sign the pub’s licence. Also, pubs were open all day then, but the vicar had the right to turn everyone out, and send them to the church, when they were about to preach. Rev Crowther often used this right – so, The Cragg Vale Inn (now The Hinchliffe Arms) – frequently rang to his shouts as he rounded drinkers up on a Sunday!

Following the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, ending the Napoleonic Wars, a movement gathered pace in England for the building of new churches to commemorate the war victories. These were built where there was a shortage of places for worshippers thanks to the rapidly growing workforce for cotton mills and other new industries. In 1818, Parliament passed the Church Building Act, and voted a million pounds to the building of new churches known as the ‘Million Pound Churches’. So, in 1838, a ‘Million Pound Church’ was built in Cragg Vale. It could seat 800,



and almost half of the seats were free – that meant no pew rent had to be paid.

Pew rents were the main income for churches, but became very unpopular from the 1850s with many churchmen calling for 'Equality within the House of God'.

An impressive tombstone in St John's churchyard marks the family vault where many of the Hinchliffe dynasty have been laid to rest.

Stop 6: Castle Gate Mill

Throughout the industrial period in Cragg Vale a total of eleven cotton-spinning mills were in operation at one time or another. Often the original mills were rebuilt into larger structures on the same site, however as time passed new sites were found where very large mills were built, capable of housing many more spinning frames. Here at the site of Castle Gate Mill you're able to see a lot of evidence of how the use of waterpower was put into practice.

Here is a good example of a weir – it has been constructed out of large stone blocks at a point where there is a natural waterfall. The water can be diverted by means of a sluice gate which can be wound up and down to regulate the amount of water flowing through into a water channel called a goit, which fed the mill dam. The point of taking the water from the river at the top of a waterfall, or a point higher than the mill was to create a head of water. This head or height of water was held above the mill and released from the dam over a water wheel causing the wheel to turn and create the necessary power for the mill.

Now walk along the top of the dam wall to the dam itself. When you get to the corner of the dam, look down, you can see how much higher you are than the river. This is the head of water needed to create the power.

Looking across the river you can see the remains of the mill walls. The mill was built at a right angle across the river, supported on stone arches which are still in place. If you look closely at the wall on the other side of the river you can see the holes in the stonework where the floor timbers were positioned. By counting these floor levels you can see that this was a 5-storey mill.

Walk along the dam to the small wooden bridge, you are now at the dam outlet where the water was fed onto the water wheel. Once the water had flowed over the wheel it was fed into another water channel called a tailgate which returned the water to the river.

Stop 7: Water, steam, gas and fires

As you approach the bridge at Paper Mill, on your left and right are the remains of two of the oldest mills in Cragg Vale. On the left is Paper Mill – with Paper Mill Cottage in front of you – and on your right Lower Mill or what was sometimes called Cragg Mill.

We think Paper Mill was originally built in 1758 and it produced paper as its name suggests, but for most of the 1800s it operated as a cotton spinning mill. Have a look at the waterwheel – this is not the original wheel but a much smaller, more modern one. What is authentic though is the position of the wheel to the water from the dam; the wheel being at right angles to the mill; and its tailgate – to return the water to the river.

Look downstream from the bridge and you can see what we think is the site of the earliest cotton mill in Cragg Vale. Lower Mill would have sited here because of the height of the natural waterfall, so this is where they built the weir. Water was fed from the weir through the stone arch on the right and directly onto the waterwheel below. In 1852, the 4-storey mill was over 33 metres long and 25 metres wide – that's the size of two and a half tennis courts. It filled the valley and was powered by a waterwheel 7metres in diameter and 3metres wide which produced 40horsepower. Later, a 30horsepower steam engine was added to supplement the waterpower. Twenty cottages were also built nearby to house millworkers.

At Lower Mill there was no dam to store water, power to the wheel relied solely on the water flowing in the stream at the time. When there were only a few other mills upstream there was probably enough water in the stream.

Later as more and more mills were built upstream, which fed their dams from the stream the flow reduced and Lower Mill suffered as a result. Probably because of this shortage of water, Lower Mill was one of the first mills to convert from waterpower to steam power.

Different mills competing for the same water could cause big conflicts – our ‘Sam Hill Trail’ describes one of the armed disputes that occurred between two mill-owners just over the hill from here at Luddenden Foot.

The circular pit you can see just over the bridge parapet at Lower Mill is the remains of an early gas-holder, where gas – made from coal – was stored. Gas eventually became the source of lighting in the cotton mills, when steam replaced water as the main source of power. Gas was not only more efficient, but also much safer than using candles. Fires in the early mills were frequent and deadly. Cotton dust is highly inflammable and easily ignited by a fallen candle.

However, despite these improvements, the whole of Lower Mill was destroyed by a fire in 1894. To hear a contemporary newspaper account of the fire, press the next level.

Cragg Mill destroyed by fire - Seventy made idle

On Friday the 31st. of May 1894 fire broke out at Lower Mill, Cragg Vale, and soon assumed a serious aspect. The mill was an old one, used for the manufacture of cotton. Carding, doubling and mule spinning was carried on, there being 11,000 spindles. Much of the machinery was old, although the 219 H.P. engine was new, and the mill had its own Gas Making Plant. It was owned by the Company Messrs. Richard & Herbert Hinchliffe. Both principals of the firm had recently died in separate Railway Accidents.

Although there was little chance of saving the mill the Todmorden and Halifax Fire Brigades were called. The fire began at 4 o'clock and at 5-40 the Todmorden Engine arrived. The horses were in a very exhausted condition after their long and fatiguing run. The Halifax engine arrived 20 minutes after the Todmorden engine, having only received the message three quarters of an hour before. Though the fire engines prevented the fire spreading to adjoining property they did not save the mill which at 9 o'clock was a smouldering mass of charred timber, broken machinery and twisted shafting.

The cause of the fire was overheating. The damage was estimated to be between £10,000 and £12,000, and was covered by insurance. Between 60 and 70 persons will be thrown out of work.

On Sunday the scene of the fire was visited by several thousands. Buses and Waggonettes were run from Todmorden and Halifax and the pubs did a roaring trade; all of them were crowded to their utmost capacity.

Stop 8: Spaw Sunday

Upper Calder Valley folk didn't need to travel far afield to spa towns such as Harrogate, or Buxton to 'take the waters' – their own local spa was right here on their doorstep! Cragg Vale Spa (or Spaw as some call it) is supposed to be at least 300 years old and there are many nearby places bearing its name: Spa Laithe Farm, Spa Terrace, Spa Bridge etc.

In past times, winter was a long season of cold and darkness with limited food – it was a difficult time and caused hardship and ill health. So, with the coming of spring, people looked forward to gathering at the spa to celebrate the passing of winter and to drink the water. They felt this cleansed them of winter ailments, and gave them strength to face the coming year.

Whether the water had a medicinal effect is debatable, but there are anecdotes from a number of elderly local people of the curative and restorative properties – they attribute their age to regular draughts of spa water! In the 1800s, the gatherings were usually held on the first Sunday in May called Spaw Sunday. It was said that on this day the water at Cragg Spa took on “an especial different taste”. And religious speakers would gather to regale the people.



To 'take the waters', all you needed was a small bottle full of spa water – you popped in a stick of liquorice (to make it taste better for drinking), shook it vigorously and – if you didn't want to look like a cissy! – swigged it down in one. The sulphurous water from the spa was supposed to be excellent for making tea, although some recommended a pinch of bicarb of soda to take the edge off the "bad eggs smell".

Over time, Spaw Sunday became quite popular: in 1906, the local newspaper said 'This year only 500 people went afterwards, to the White House, Blackstone Edge, accompanied by the Hebden Bridge band'. About this time, the Independent Labour Party saw an advantage in playing an important part in Spaw celebrations, and religious speakers gave way to politicians.

The Second World War ended Spaw Sunday. The event was briefly revived in 1987, but soon the spa fell into disrepair, and its presence was unknown to many Cragg Vale residents. In 2009, work was done to restore the spa to its condition at the end of the 1800s, with landscaping, and these steps for easier access. In 2010, a simple Spaw Sunday celebration was revived, and we hope the old tradition continues! Take a smell of the sulphurous water; taste if you wish – but at your own risk!

Stop 9: Turnpike tolls at Dauber Bridge

Today's main road up our valley was built in stages from 1815 to 1824. Further up the valley, it mainly follows an old track which ran beside the boundary of the Erringden Deer Park. As the industrial revolution took hold in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the old packhorse routes couldn't cope with the greater quantities of raw materials and finished goods. With no local councils, it was left to local merchants and landowners to form a company (known as a Turnpike Trust). This Trust then applied to Parliament for approval and Royal Assent to build a road, and then the Trust had to raise the money to construct it. Anyone using the road had to pay a toll – and these tolls were used to pay for road maintenance, and to pay a dividend to the trustees.

The Myholmroyd and Blackstone Edge Turnpike road received Royal Assent from King George III on 2nd May 1815. There were 90 trustees, including local mill-owners and residents. The Act allowed the trustees to set up tollhouses and tollgates, but also set out detailed instructions for tolls and road maintenance. Although turnpike roads were considered a good investment, it was not all plain sailing and our Trust had financial problems for nine years, until the road was completed.

The tollhouse at Dauber Bridge was one of several between Myholmroyd and Blackstone Edge. The system of tolls was very complicated, to cover every possible type of traffic with different fares for each type of transport. For instance, there were a mass of different types of coach back then – such as berlin coaches, landaus, chariots, chaise, chairs, hearses, as well as litters, wagons and carts. The tolls depended on wheel width, with narrowest wheels a shilling; and ninepence or sixpence for wider wheels. A horse, mare, gelding, mule, or ass was 3 pence; an ox or cow 1 pence; a calf, sheep, swine or lamb half a pence. And on Sundays the Cragg Vale toll was doubled – except for horses and carts carrying milk! This was to try to make sure that everyone respected 'the Lord's day' and didn't do any work.

In 1888, the government set up Local Councils and granted them powers and responsibilities for road maintenance. This ended all Turnpike Trusts. Our valley's Turnpike Trust stopped in 1886, and our road became toll free.

Stop 10: Hoo Hole – the Wesley Connection

Although the Parish of Halifax was the largest in the old county of Yorkshire, very few local churches served our area, and the role of these was very restricted. Most people had to travel to Halifax Parish Church for weddings, christenings and funerals.

In 1770, the Christian preacher John Wesley visited Cragg Vale. John Wesley is credited, along with his brother Charles, with founding the Methodist movement. The Wesleys were natural organisers and approached everything diligently, especially religion. At Oxford University they participated in a Christian club in such an orderly way that critics called them 'methodists'.



John took to open-air preaching, having realised that open-air services were a successful way of reaching men and women who would not enter most churches, or where there were no churches. He kept detailed journals of all his travels, and he logged more than 4,000 miles a year – mostly on foot! During his lifetime he preached about 40,000 sermons.

John arrived in Cragg Vale on 28th June 1770 – his 67th birthday. He stopped to preach at Hoo Hole Farm – under a large tree which thrived as an emblem of the occasion for over two more centuries, until sadly it became diseased and had to be cut down.

He wrote in his journal “It was a lovely valley encompassed by high mountains. I stood on smooth grass before the house, which stands on a gently rising ground, and all the people on the slope before me. It was a glorious opportunity.”

You can picture them all crowded onto the field below the farm buildings opposite, with John Wesley giving one of his stirring sermons! His visit led a religious revival in the area and many of our chapels owe their existence to him.

Stop 11: Rabbits in an Iron Age Fort?

You get a great view of Hollin Hey Farm here. Its name comes from where this farm used to be sited – further up the hill – in woodland where holly was grown for winter-feed for cattle. The first farmhouse, dated 1572, was built at a time when owner-farmers were becoming wealthier, so was not the usual humble timber dwelling, but an impressive building of stone. It's possibly the oldest stone-built house in the Parish of Halifax.

In 1896, owner Edward Helliwell rebuilt the house, moving down here, but re-using the original stones, mullions, doorheads and window heads – hence this strange mixture of a Victorian house with much older features.

Look further up the hillside, and you can see some rather strange-shaped mounds. In 1775, Reverend J Watson, in ‘The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Halifax’, wrote of an enclosure, or field, near Hollin Hey called Coneygarth. He believed it was the remains of an ancient hill fort – in fact it was the site of a rabbit warren used since at least the 1200s!

Rabbits (known as coney) were introduced to England in the 1100s and were soon an important source of meat, and fur for coat linings. When first introduced, rabbits needed a lot of care and attention in the harsh climate, so earthworks (‘pillow mounds’) were built to encourage them to dig burrows. These were clusters of rectangular, flat-topped mounds a few feet high, surrounded by a ditch and fence to pen the animals in and to provide them with some protection. So the strange mounds you can see up Hollin Hey Bank are a relic of these times.

Above the warrens is a lonely farm called Stannery End, this is where two of the infamous gang of counterfeiters lived – the Cragg Vale Coiners. The Coiners gang deserve a trail all of their own, but here are the bare facts. The gang all lived on isolated farms in our valley and found making a living very hard. So, they enlisted the help of local pub landlords to give them all the gold coins they were paid. They then filed off the edges of these coins, melted down this ‘spare’ gold, stamped new gold coins from it, and gave the original filed coins – and the newly-produced ones – back to the landlords to put back in circulation. This process was being done all over the country in a small way, but the Cragg Vale gang got so organised, and processed so many coins, that it was said they came close to wrecking the currency of Britain! The authorities sent Excise Officer William Dighton to track the Coiners down. The gang murdered him, which brought the law down on them with a vengeance, and most of the gang were captured, tried and hanged.

Stop 12: How chicks employed thousands of local people!

It is hard to believe that these rows of timber buildings were once part of the biggest company of its kind in the world! That company transformed the Calder Valley into a chick-breeding empire and made the name Thornber Chicks a legend the world over. Edgar Thornber was born in 1888, a mill-worker from the age of 13. Forced out of work in 1907 by a long-lasting strike of Hebden Bridge Fustian Workers, he turned his hobby – poultry keeping –

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into a business. Starting with a few orange boxes, 12 broody hens and some eggs in the backyard of the family home, he grew his business into a world leader, employing at its peak nearly 1,500 people!

The sheer numbers are mind-boggling: in 1930 a million chicks a year were produced in vast hatcheries, and, by 1937, three and a half million chicks and ducks were despatched each year by train from Mytholmroyd Station to all corners of Great Britain and the world. Our station today is a quiet and unstaffed – deserted for most of the day, but in 1946 it needed a staff of 41 to cope! They dealt with 2,000 consignments of chicks leaving the station every day, and also monthly shipments of 25 tons of poultry appliances. Plus, every month, Mytholmroyd's famous Moderna factory was sending out 120 tons of their luxurious blankets; and around 50 tons of textiles and ready-made clothing were freighted out from local textile mills.

Edgar Thornber died in 1944, but his son Cyril's entrepreneurial spirit guided the business forward at a remarkable pace, and beyond its 60th anniversary. However, by the late 1960s, soon after the government lifted restrictions on the import of poultry, the company wound up – but that's not the end of the story. Cyril had been able to purchase the land and buildings, and the next chapter began. Cyril's children have now transformed the disused chicken sheds into this business park. This is a major source of commercial property for rent in the area, supplying premises for businesses employing nearly as many people as the chicken empire did in its heyday.