

### **Millbank walk, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2011.**

Today's walk to Millbank was a follow up to a previous walk we did in 2010, where we looked at the lock there. Since then we had a conversation with John Goodchild where we learned of a tunnel there which carried water from the Combs colliery, Thornhill. We decided that today we would try and find this tunnel.

Myself, Steve Wilson, Alan Howe and Richard Glover met up at Alan's stables, Runtlings, and set off at about 10:40am. We walked down the old footpath which leads to the site of Healey Old Mill, and stopped to look at the field adjacent to the mill site, Jack Close. It is here where an aerial photo shows distinct crop marks of two separate areas of ridge and furrow. One is irregular in shape whereas the other is more of a square. Within a short distance is the site of a Bronze Age barrow, with evidence of Roman occupation, and a ford across the river Calder, which is crossed by an ancient track. The fields in the area have medieval references in the Manor of Wakefield court rolls, so the crop marks could date to any of these periods. Further work with a metal detector may help to date the sites, which may or may not be of the same age.

We continued down and across the river and under the railway, and arrived at the Figure Of Three lock. We believe this is named after the course of the river, which does form a rudimentary figure "3" in this part of the valley. The lock here which connected the canal to the Calder before the "New Cut" was constructed in 1838 is still visible, and was previously used by boats navigating the Calder as far as the Halifax area. The New Cut was constructed and the lock went out of use, however it remains as a relic of an old way of carrying goods to and from the upper Calder valley. It would be nice to see this cleaned out and preserved as such.



**Original lock through which boats passed before the "New Cut" to Horbury Bridge and beyond was opened in 1838.**

We walked along the canal and crossed over "Lady Bridge", now named "Lady Anne Bridge" - my guess is that this refers to a Lady Anne Savile, whose family once owned the land (and may possibly still own it). From here we walked along the route of the old mineral line which once carried coal to loading staithes. It is quite remarkable how the area has been so much transformed by industry and railway in the past two hundred years.

We reached Millbank lock, and looked at the place where the old stone cottages stood. On the old Ordnance Survey maps there are a number of cottages here, and it is my guess that these were connected with the Millbank quarry, rather than the canal. I do not know the age of the quarry here, but I believe I have reference somewhere to a man being killed in Millbank quarry in 1828.

From the lock there is a footpath, or old track, which travels up the hill diagonally in the direction of Combs colliery. At the bottom of this path there is an area of stone setts which looks like the beginning of the path, however it is slightly off course from the actual track which survives today - my guess is that the path has been diverted slightly over the years, and this represents the true beginning of the path. As for its origin, this is a mystery - was it built by the canal owners, the quarry owners, or even the colliery owners? It is quite narrow, and slightly concave, but I do believe this is a causeway.

We walked partly up this track, and then made our way down to a stream which runs below, separating the natural land from the reclaimed pit stack. This stream is stained orange, and is evidently water from colliery workings. The stream disappeared into an underground culvert, which is arched and built of stone. I photographed this, but access was not easy. It appears the water emerges from the culvert into the canal near the lower side of the lock, from an arched stone-built outlet. Looking into this outlet later we were able to see that the water must be carried in virtually a straight line, and then turn just before emerging into the canal. We deduced that this excess colliery water was being drained from the workings, and instead of being emptied into the nearby canal, it was channelled further down, under the track to the lock, and out into the canal at the other side of the lock, where it was lower.



**Culvert where the colliery drain water enters.**



**This is where the drain water exits the underground channel and flows into the canal.**

I carefully checked the edges of the stream to see if it had been stone lined, but could find no evidence. We walked back to the diagonal track, and made our way further up, where we again made our way down to the stream and looked at the place where it emerges. This is constructed of later brick, possibly from the time when the area was landscaped. We feel satisfied that this stream is a remnant of the bygone Combs colliery. This colliery suffered a major disaster in 1893 when an underground explosion killed 139 local miners. In 1948 the merger of Ingham's and Combs collieries formed the Thornhill colliery. It closed in 1971.

I took photographs of rows of old hawthorn trees, which marked the divisions of parcels of land, these divisions being clearly visible on the first edition Ordnance Survey maps. We were not sure why the land should be divided such, it is very steep. The plots of land as divided were also quite small.



**Rows of old hawthorns, planted as land divisions. They appeared to have great age.**

From here we moved on along the track which leads down to the farm. Just as it turns in the direction of the farm, a bridge can be seen to the left. This carried a mineral line from the colliery underneath the Midland railway line from Royston to Dewsbury. The mineral line continued down to a loading staithe by the canal side.

From here we went back down to the canal, and went to investigate some old arches near the lock. These are constructed of stone, and are lined with stone up to the arch, which is lined with what looks like hand made bricks. We think this structure is a loading staithe for the quarry. The 1905 Ordnance Survey map shows a crane at this place, which would be used for loading stone onto canal boats for transportation. (Coal would have been transported in wagons). We are not sure exactly how the loading worked here, but it is possible that the stone was transported to the canal side underneath the path (old mineral line) on a rail road, and then lifted by the crane onto the boats.

Above ground, next to the path, there is a stone structure which looks like some kind of tower or chimney. We could not decide if it was one or the other, so myself and Alan decided to try and climb it to see what it looked like from above. Not without some difficulty we managed to clear some of the bramble and elder, and get access. It was not easy to climb but we did

manage to pull ourselves up to glance at the top. Then Steve and Richard had the idea to hold the camera above with the extended monopod, and use the timer to take a photograph from above. This I did, and it seems that the tower was indeed the crane, or part of it. It is built vertical at the back, but inclined at the front. I am not sure how the crane worked, but this tower may have been a fulcrum for the beam. Looking at old photographs of quarries may give the answer. The arches are down by the canal side, and close to the one nearest the lock there is evidence of some sort of ironwork which was attached to the stonework, again possibly part of the crane structure. This site is a remnant of the old Millbank quarry. On the other side of the track the two arches were divided by a stone wall, however it seems this may have been added at a later date as it is not keyed into the stonework of the arches. Further down this track, next to the branch line which crosses the canal, there are further arches, which again would be loading staites for the stone quarrying there. We remarked how there was nothing in print as far as we are aware, and the history of the industry in this area is quite probably not researched in any great detail.



**Alan Howe and Neville Ashby examining the old stone column.**

From here we made our way back home, stopping to have a look at the ford near the Healey footbridge. It was easy to imagine lines of horses, cattle or oxen being driven across the river here, and again I made a mental note to return here in the summer with my metal detector, when the water is low. We made our way back to the stables, and this concluded our walk.