

## **Walkabout along the “High Road” Haggs Hill Road to Flushdyke, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012.**

Myself and Steve Wilson met at Alan Howe's house at Haggs Hill for 10:00am, our object being to walk a length (or as much as possible) of a very old track known in medieval times as the 'High Road', or in much later years part was known as as 'Ikey Pickard's Passage'. This track can be clearly seen on the 1850's Ordnance Survey map as a fairly straight line crossing Ossett. It appears to cross the Haggs Hill area and travel in a north-westerly direction, passing between Longlands and Sandbeds, and onwards in the direction of Morley. The age of this track is unknown, but it can be assumed that it is of very great age. We were following it from there to the site of Longlands Hall, which was home in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to one Joshua Haigh, a wealthy woolstapler, who also had property at Haggs Hill and elsewhere in Ossett. No doubt Joshua would have used this track to pass between his properties. Longlands Hall is now under the present site of the Team 17 business on Wakefield Road, and was a very old property.

We started by walking up the old track which led from Haggs Hill towards Spring Mill. This would have originally just led to the fields, crossing the stream by a weir. It was later extended to reach Spring Mill, which was erected around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Mr Mark Stephenson, woollen manufacturer. The main building was of brick, comprising three floors and an attic. It was eight windows long and three wide, with engine house etc at one end. A weaving shed and other buildings were added later. Early in the morning of Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> September 1899 the main building was completely destroyed by fire. It was believed that the fire had broken out around 4.00am. Some fifteen minutes later the wife of Frank Robinson, overlooker at the mill, who lived in an adjacent cottage, was woken up by a crackling noise. The ground floor was ablaze in one corner, and within half an hour of the discovery the roof fell in, the wooden floors having burned through. The fire was prevented from spreading to the other sheds. A couple of days later on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September the contraction of the walls as they cooled caused one to fall in. There were around 40 people who worked at the mill at this time, and they were thrown out of work by the fire.

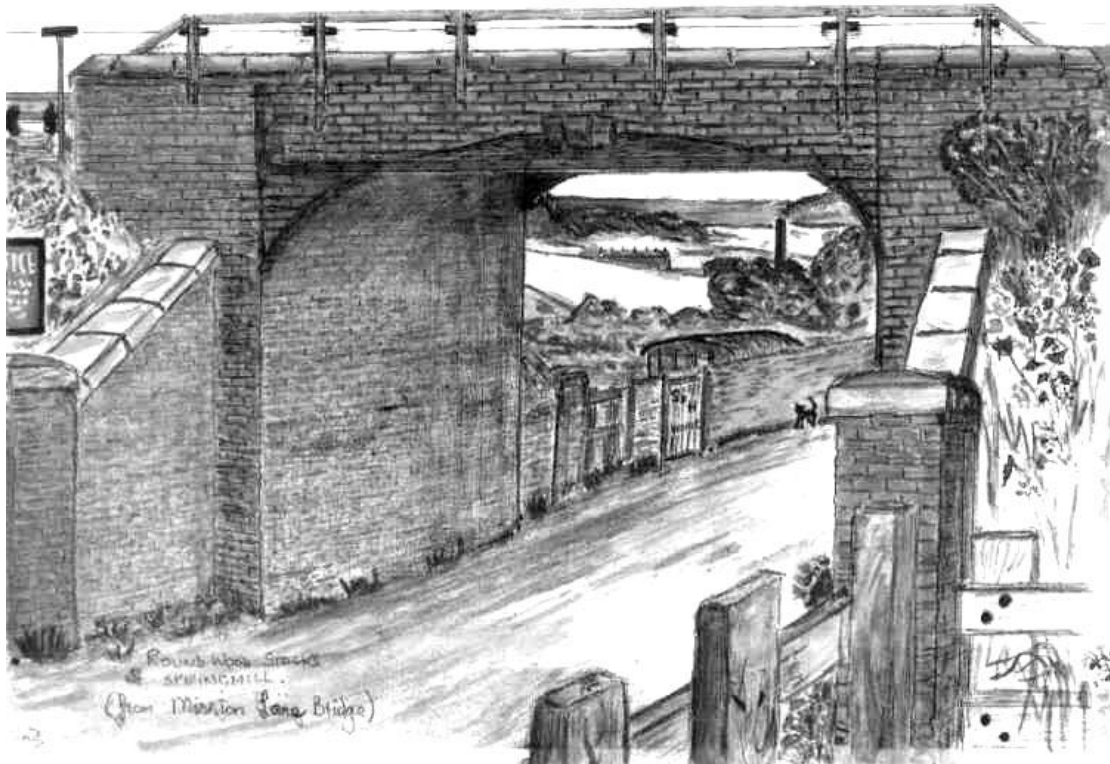
From the site of the weir we walked alongside the beck and crossed to walk up across the site of the old golf course, which was superseded in 1925 by the new club at Low Laithes. We went to the end of a ginnel which carries the footpath from Towngate into the Spring Mill area, where we found the stone remnants of an old stile which was sited on the ancient track. The footpath from Towngate appears to follow the line of an old field boundary, which would explain the presence of the stile. It would probably date from around the time of the enclosure of the open fields in Ossett in 1813.



**The old stile on the High Road.**

From this point the path was not possible to follow directly due to the abundance of growth, brambles etc, but we moved on to the point where it crosses a feeder to Whitley Spring Beck. Looking backwards we could roughly see the area where the track had crossed. I can remember a time when this was clearly visible, but lack of use has allowed nature to take over and make it quite indistinguishable. It seems a pity that this track has been here for centuries, but disappeared from view in our own lifetime. I believe that it would have been in constant use down the years, but the advent of road travel and better quality roads contributed to its demise.

We then continued along the track, past the back of the houses on Whitley Spring Crescent. The back gardens of these houses are bounded along the length of the track by a very old low stone wall - much of it missing - which originally divided the fields. The 'High Road' would have been used as a field boundary when the open fields were enclosed in the early 19th century. It then continued along, across Milner Way at the Longlands Industrial Estate, and to St Oswald's Place. Originally the railway was carried along the present route of Milner Way on a banking, and the High Road passed under this banking via a bridge which was known within living memory as Mission Lane Bridge. When the railway was dismantled in the late 1960's and early 1970's the banking was removed and tipped on the site of the present playing fields at Flushdyke. The new road into the industrial estate was constructed along the railway line's route.



**Mission Lane Bridge, sited on the present Milner Way. (Courtesy Douglas Brammer)**

At St Oswald's Place the modern right of way takes a sharp angle away from the original route, to join Wakefield Road. The original track here is now lost under industrial development, and does not appear again until it passes to the other side of the Ossett bypass. We had now walked the length of the track which we had intended.

There is very little to see of this original route, apart from the old stile. No doubt in the past there must have been countless travellers, both on foot and horseback, possibly driving cattle and other beasts, or taking cloth which they had manufactured to sell in Leeds at the cloth markets. It is nigh on impossible to put a date on the development of this route, but I do firmly believe that it must be early medieval, and quite possibly even pre-dating the settlement of Ossett. Since it lines up with Teall Street and Spa Street it could also possibly be responsible for their existence too.

We had a look at the old buildings across the road from where St Oswald's Place emerges. There are two old buildings which abut upon the roadside. One is an old Co-Operative Society branch building for Flushdyke. The other looks to be a little earlier - possibly mid 19th century - and was used in the 20th century as a rag warehouse by Frank North. Behind these buildings are what look like older buildings of stone. There was certainly one building back here with a 17th century date stone above the door, which was demolished a few decades ago to make way for industrial development. These buildings quite probably pre-date 1771, when a map was produced to help sort out a dispute between Joshua Haigh (plaintiff) of Longlands Hall and Joseph Ingham and others (defendants).

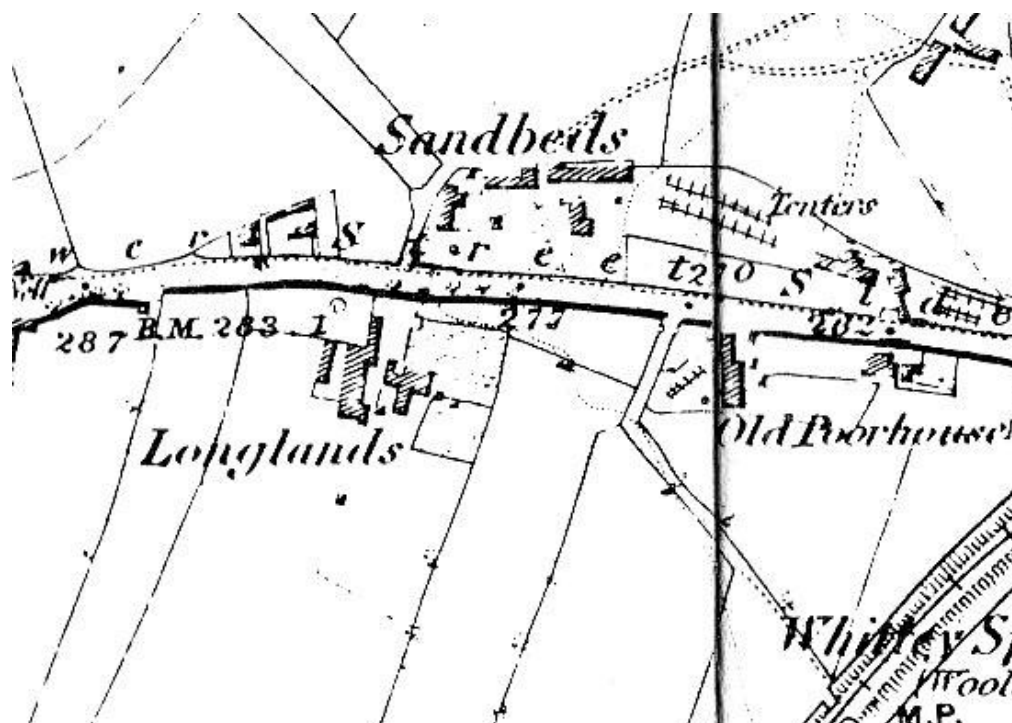
That map also shows the house of a Mr Whitaker in the approximate location of these existing buildings. In the 1775 Ossett Valuation Joseph Whitaker is recorded with a house and garden and occupying almost 200 acres of land which now comprises Owlers Farm. In 1709 The Wakefield Manor Book records Mark Whiteacres with two houses and lands in Ossett and the 1672 Hearth Tax records him paying tax on four hearths. It is quite possible that one of Whitacres/Whitakers houses was situated to the rear of the two buildings shown in the photograph below.



**Old Co-Operative branch building on the left, Frank North's rag warehouse on the right.**

From here we moved on to look at the site of Longlands Hall. There are no remains whatsoever to indicate it ever existed. It must have been in the past a place of significance - John Goodchild describes it as being similar to the old house at Low Laithes which is home to the golf club. On the older maps it is shown as being quite a collection of buildings, barns and outbuildings. I have never come across anything in print about this place, but I suspect that it would be 17th century or possibly much earlier. On the 1850's Ordnance Survey map a fish pond is shown a short distance away at Sandbeds, which could have been a medieval feature, there to provide food for the family living at Longlands. In the 20th century Longlands Hall was known as Tommy Brook's farm. Generations of the Haigh family lived here in the past. We walked back towards Flushdyke, and looked at the site of the old workhouse, behind the present houses at St Oswald's Place. There is now a small recreation ground there where the workhouse once stood. This workhouse was built before 1771, as it is shown on the aforementioned map dated 1771. While looking at the rear end of this recreation ground for any clues to its existence I found a very old looking hand made brick, which more

than likely came from the building or one of its outbuildings. This could indicate that the main building was constructed of brick.



**First edition Ordnance Survey map of c1850. Longlands Hall is shown, now lost under the site of the present 'Team 17' building. The 'Old Poorhouse' can also be seen, situated on the site of the present recreation park.**

We now continued our walk up to the top of Shepherd Hill. Flushdyke was once a thriving community with many houses and shops. A school was opened in 1912, and in the previous century Bethel Chapel was built at the end of Spring Mill Lane to serve the communities there. Today much of this has been swept away in favour of industrialisation, and there is very little left to indicate its past occupation by so many families who lived and grew up in the area. The railway station was closed in 1941, the chapel demolished in the early 1970's, and the two pubs were either closed (Cross Keys Inn) or demolished (Railway Hotel). Recently we have seen the closure of the Fern House Working Men's Club and the Commercial Hotel.

We passed the very old house at the top of Shepherd Hill. It is possibly here that the Shepherd family lived, who gave their name to the area. This house looks to be of great age, possibly 17th century or earlier.

We crossed the bypass by the bridge and went to have a look at the Cross Keys area. This is a wide section of road which is now isolated since the bypass and motorway were constructed, and the road re-routed. The wide kerbs and carriageways are still there from its days as a main thoroughfare, and the old cats eyes are still in the road. The road is bounded to the north by what appears to be a low stone wall of great age. About 8 or 9 houses are still here, including the Cross Keys house itself. This looks to be substantially built. There was a Cross Keys public house here in 1821, but I am not sure if the

present building would be that house, or whether it has been rebuilt at some time. The landlord in 1821 was a Mr John Wilby. The pub closed in 1932 due to lack of customers.

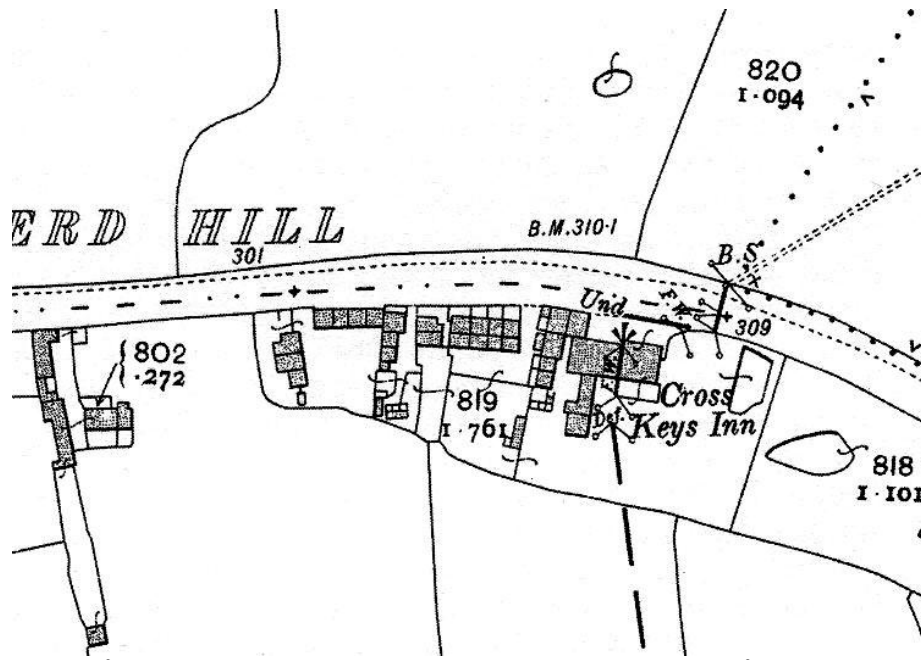
We returned to Alan's house via the footpath down the side of Spring Mill golf course, and then went to the Brewer's Pride pub at Healey for a pint and a sandwich.



**The old Cross Keys public house today.**

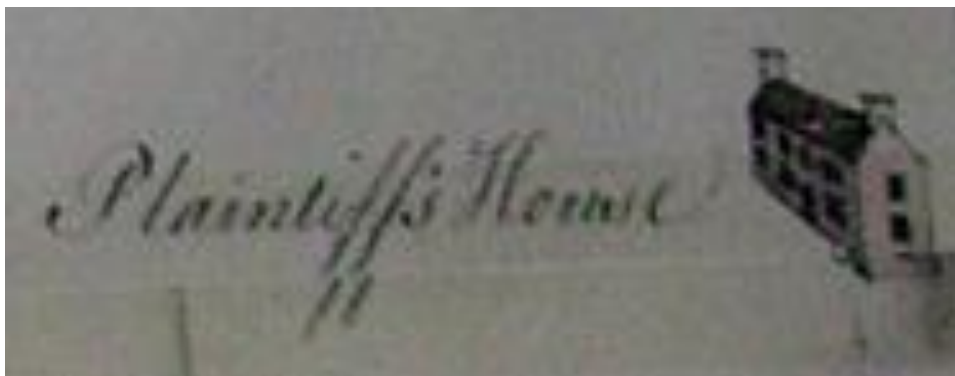


**The old boundary wall across the road from the Cross Keys shows signs of great age in places.**



**Cross Keys in 1905, when there were more houses in the area.**

A few things were seen and discussed on our walk which will prompt further research, one of which was Longlands Hall. This was the seat of one of the more well-to-do families of Ossett, who would have made their fortunes before the advent of the mills, which created the wealth of so many known Ossett families. No photographs of Longlands Hall appear to have survived but the 1771 map referred to above carries a small graphic of the house, home to the Haigh family until 1857, which is reproduced below.



As previously stated I have never seen anything in print about this place, and while going through the Ossett Observers page by page during my researches I did not find any reference to its demolition. This will be an interesting research project of the future.

(Sources used for historic reference include Steve Wilson's website [www.ossett.net](http://www.ossett.net), the Ossett Observer, an excellent collection of drawings of the Flushdyke area by Douglas Brammer and 'Ossett Pubs' by Brian Smith, some additional references by Alan Howe as well as my own extensive notes. Neville Ashby 2012)