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Monks, millers and marblers

A self-guided walk around Barnard Castle



Discover how Barnard Castle has been shaped by the River Tees
Find out some of the ways local people made a living
Explore how the Tees inspired artists, industries and ghost stories

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks



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Contents

Introduction	4
Practical information	5
Route map	6
Commentary	8
Further information	29
Credits	30

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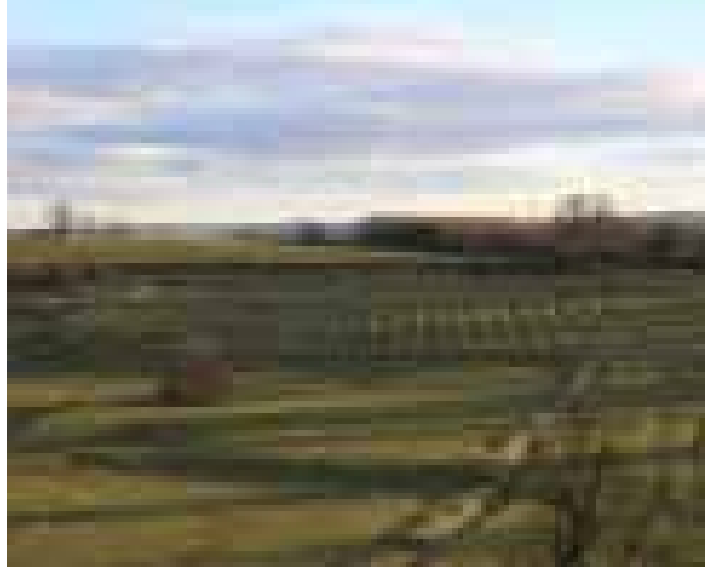
Cover image: Remains of Egglestone Abbey © Caroline Millar RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Monks, millers and marbelers

Discover how life around Barnard Castle has been shaped by the River Tees

Welcome to Barnard Castle, a bustling market town in Teesdale, set in the rural, south-western corner of County Durham.

The town boasts a ruined 12th century castle, once the home of Richard III and Henry VII; the amazing 19th century Bowes Museum, built in the style of a French chateau; and a fine market cross and old buildings around a cobbled market place.



But we turn our backs on all this and take you on a journey of discovery along the River Tees. See how the Tees has dominated this landscape, had a major impact on people's lives (and deaths), provided sustenance (both physical and spiritual) and power for commerce and industry.



Along the way, you'll hear about tropical seas, glaciers and terrible floods. But also hard-working millers and stone-masons, 'white' canons, prosperous parliamentarians and famous artists and writers who have been inspired by the varied and dramatic scenery.

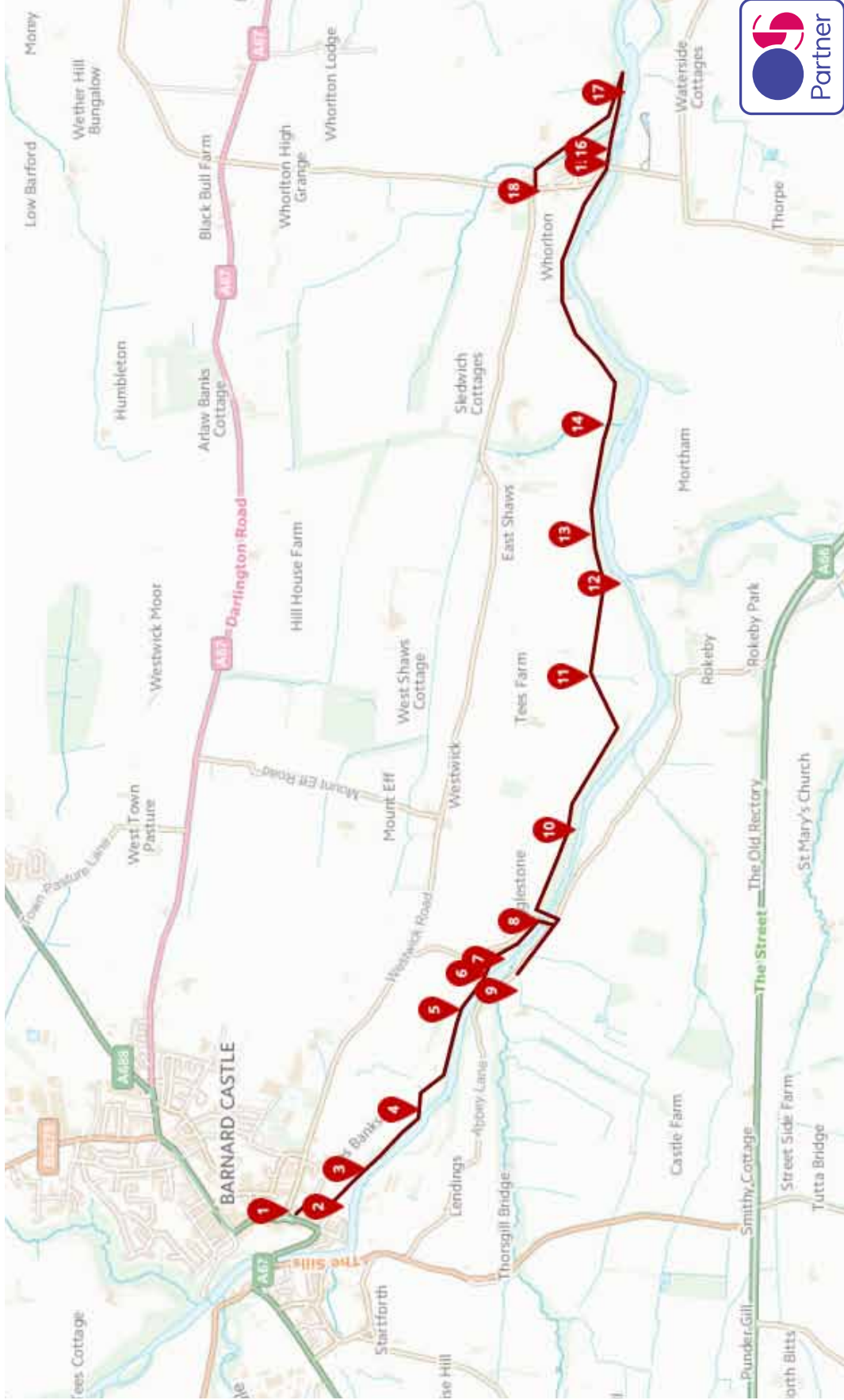
Oh - and a couple of ghosts and a river sprite, just for good measure!

Top: The stunning Teesdale landscape © Caroline Millar RGS-IBG Discovering Britain
Bottom: Canoeing on the Tees © Andy Waddington, Geograph (CCL)

Practical information

Location	Barnard Castle, County Durham
Start point	St Mary's Parish Church, Barnard Castle DL12 8NQ
Finish point	Whorlton village green, DL12 8XD
Distance	5 ½ miles
Getting there	<p>Train - the nearest stations are Bishop Auckland or Wolsingham (both about 12 miles away)</p> <p>Bus - Buses run to Barnard Castle from Darlington (75/76), Bishop Auckland (85) and Richmond (79).</p> <p>Car - Easily accessible from the A66 trans-Pennine road, from Darlington on the A67 or from Bishop Auckland on the A688. There is a long-stay car park in Newgate, about 50 metres from the start of the walk.</p>
Getting back	See Directions 18 (page 28) for suggested options
Level	Moderate - three short uphill stretches, a set of easy stepping stones and a stony track sloping gently upwards towards the end.
Suitable for	Reasonably fit walkers of any age, families, dogs (if kept on a lead).
Terrain	Marked footpaths over gently undulating terrain, fields, through woodland and along river banks. Paths may be muddy in places after rain.
Conditions	The weather can change rapidly in the North Pennines, so take suitable clothing. Boots or sturdy shoes are recommended.
Refreshments	A wide choice of cafes, pubs and restaurants in Barnard Castle and a pub / restaurant in Whorlton.
Toilets	The nearest public toilets are in Barnard Castle Market Place, on the cobbles, about 50 metres from the start or in Morrison's car park off Galgate.
Tourist information	There is a visitor information point at The Witham Hall, 3 Horsemarket, Barnard Castle DL12 8LY www.thewitham.org.uk

Route map



Stopping points

1. Font in St Mary's Parish Church
2. The Demesnes
3. Mains Corn Mill
4. Remains of former flax mill
5. River clearing at the origin of the Tees
6. Remains of Egglestone Abbey Mill
7. Site of Mains House quarry
8. Abbey Bridge, Egglestone
9. Egglestone Abbey
10. Disused lime kiln
11. Dry-stone walls
12. The Meeting of the Waters
13. Mortham Tower
14. Sledwich Gill
15. Whorlton Suspension Bridge
16. Whorlton Lido and Pool
17. Whorlton-to-Wycliffe ford and ferry
18. Whorlton village green

1. A marble mystery

Font in St Mary's Parish Church

Our walk starts here at the beautiful 12th century St Mary's Parish Church in Newgate. And for a very good reason. Enter the church and walk down the nave to the north transept, where you will find the massive and imposing font.

Take a close look. You'll notice it is dark grey in colour, highly polished and has flecks of white fossil pieces. This is Teesdale or Egglestone marble, hewn from a quarry near Egglestone Abbey which we will see later in the walk.

This font is octagonal in shape and around the edge you will see eight carved shields. On four of the shields and also on the base is what is thought to be the guild mark of Thomas Pounder, who may have been a wool merchant. The remaining four shields on the font bear the letters 'A E M T', which may be the initials of the mason or other donors.



The font in St Mary's Church
© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

Although the font is in three sections, it would have required both strong and highly-skilled men to hew, shape, carve and transport it a mile and a half from the quarry uphill to the church.

John Leland, an historian in the 16th century, wrote "Hard under the cliff by Egleston is found on eche side of the Tese very fair marble, wont to be taken up booth by marbelers of Barnardes (Castelle) and of Egelston, and partly wrought by them, and partely sold onwrought to other".

This sturdy font is one of the finest of a group of contemporary fonts in the North and is a powerful reminder of Teesdale's vanished marble industry which flourished here in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Directions 1

Going out of the main door of the church, turn left and walk along the path through the churchyard. In the bottom, right-hand corner, follow the green 'Public Footpath' sign and go down the hill, past the old school building on your left. Turn left under a barrier, with a footpath sign for 'Teesdale Way-Abbey Bridge' and then cross to the river bank on your right, where there are picnic tables.

2. On a roll

The Demesnes

This large, grassed area of land is known as the Demesnes and has long been used for recreation. It is a lovely spot, with the upper section now turned over to a wildflower meadow and the lower section running alongside the river.

The River Tees rises on the slopes of Cross Fell, the highest point in the North Pennines. Its flow is now controlled by a reservoir and dam at Cow Green, which was constructed, amidst considerable controversy and protest, between 1969 and 1971.



The Demesnes
© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

While it may now look somewhat placid, at times the Tees is one of the fastest-flowing rivers in Britain and the level can rise dramatically. Before the dam was built, the river was renowned for its 'roll' or wave. Rising up to 6 feet high, it was caused by a combination of snow melt and /or high rainfall and westerly winds. It resulted in widespread flooding.

In 1771 the roll damaged the County Bridge and 8 houses were demolished. In 1881 Thorngate Bridge was swept away, killing two people. Daniel Defoe, author of Robinson Crusoe, wrote of a tour of Britain in 1724-27 where he described the Tees as "a terrible river, so rapid". As recently as 1942, seven soldiers of the South Staffs regiment were drowned while building a pontoon bridge across the river.

Another dark side of the Tees relates to Peg Powler, an evil spirit with green skin, long hair and sharp teeth, said to live in the river. She grabs the ankles of those who wander too close to the water's edge, especially naughty children, and drowns them. So watch out!

Directions 2

Return to the obvious cart-track across the Demesnes and follow it as far as a small group of buildings, which is our next stop.

3. A miller's tale

Mains Corn Mill



Mains Corn Mill (left) and the weir in the river (right)
© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership / Caroline Millar RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Take a look at the stone house next to the river. Does it seem an unusual location for a house - being so close to the river? It was actually a corn mill (the grinding stone is said to be still inside and intact) and before that the town's very first water mill, built in the 13th century.

The mill was sited here to take advantage of a natural, diagonal rock formation, or weir, in the river. Look over the wall to see its shape still visible in the water. The weir directed water to the river bank, where a sluice gate regulated the flow and provided a steady stream of water to power the mill. When the mill was restored in 1824-5, the mill wheel was moved behind the outer wall, to protect it from the severe floods that were then common on the River Tees.

As we pass the old miller's house, look out for the two millstones by the front door. You can also still see the paved cart track, with its central cobbles for grip and outer flagstones for the smooth running of cart-wheels. As we pass the next house, look up to see the first floor window which would have been a loading door for winching up sacks of grain. Imagine the sounds of carts rumbling over these stones, the clipping of horses' hooves and the shouts of men heaving sheaves of corn and bags of flour.

Directions 3

Continue along the track in the same direction, between the buildings and take the narrow pathway after the last house, just to the right of the gate, into the fields. Proceed parallel to the river, with a fence on your right, until you reach a telegraph pole, about 50 metres before a dry-stone wall and ruined building ahead. Pause here.

4. Face the flax

Remains of former Flax Mill

This stone ruin ahead and to your left looks like the remains of an ordinary field barn. In fact, this building was once a flax mill. Flax, a plant with a pale blue flower, was grown mainly for its fibres. These were used to make linen while its seeds were used to make linseed oil.

This mill, known as Low Mill, however, probably produced fibres that were used to make rope, twine and thread for sewing shoes and gloves.

Like the corn mill we just saw, its reason for being here was the power provided by the river. If you look through the trees to your right, you will see a group of stones which have created a natural, v-shaped weir in the middle of the river, which diverted the water to both sides. There was once another flax mill on the south side of the river which shared the weir - but no evidence of it remains today.



The former flax mill
© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

On our side of the river bank and just ahead you can see a pile of flat stones. These are all that remain of a shelter built for the operator of the sluice gate. There are also the foundations of the wall of the mill-race (the channel or sluice conducting the water to or from a mill wheel). The dam was held in place by metal structures on the bank and in the river. Pieces are still visible if you look carefully.

In its heyday, the mill would have been a busy and noisy scene and the creaking of the mill wheel as it ground the flax would have been heard for some distance around

Directions 4

Continue through the gateway in the dry-stone wall and proceed to the left of the mill building, using the stepping stones if the ground is wet. (From here, if you wish to examine the weir and mill-race more closely, you can turn sharp right and veer back along the river bank to the pile of stones, before returning to the mill building).

Beyond the mill building, continue diagonally right along the path, which stays away from the river bank until the sewage works, then goes through a gate between the works' wall and the riverbank. On emerging into a field, find a gap in the tree line on your right, close to the river, which is the next point of interest.

5. A tropical paradise

River clearing and origin of the Tees

This is a lovely stretch of the Tees and it's worth spending a few minutes here to ponder the river's origins. It may be hard to believe, but 325 million years ago, in the Lower Carboniferous Period, you would have been standing in a warm, shallow sea, alive with bright corals and shellfish.



An artists drawing of the Carboniferous sea bed
© Dudley Museum and Art Gallery

The North Pennines then lay almost astride the equator and Teesdale basked in a tropical climate. In fact, at different times, the whole area alternated between swampy deltas and deeper seas.

When the water was shallower, sandstones and shale were laid down. When it was deeper and above 20 degrees centigrade, sea creatures such as corals, sea lilies and brachiopods flourished. Their skeletons settled on the sea floor and were eventually compressed into layers of grey limestone. Teesdale is like a layer-cake of these different rocks, sandwiched on top of each other.

Later, mighty glaciers up to a kilometre thick covered the area. These glaciers scoured out valleys, deposited boulder clays, rocks and gravel and flattened hill tops, until our present landscape emerged some 10-15,000 years ago.

Today, the river supports a wide variety of plants and animals. If you look carefully, you might see a grey heron standing as still as a statue, stalking its prey; black-headed gulls heading back up to the reservoirs or swallows swooping to catch flies.

Directions 5

Continue along the path through a field gateway and go straight ahead across the next field, keeping the river close on your right side. Just before reaching the gate at the end of this field, stop at the fence on your right, at an obvious clearing between the trees. As an alternative, if you feel like a refreshment stop, continue through the field gate ahead and turn immediately sharp right down the river bank, where you will find a bench in a tranquil spot with a lovely view.

6. Another miller's tale

Remains of Egglestone Abbey Mill

Ignore the dramatic ruins on the skyline for now (we'll come to those later) and instead look across to the opposite bank of the river and left to see a group of stone buildings.

In front of them you should be able to see a wall (in summer somewhat overgrown with vegetation) with two window openings. You may also be able to see some slabs of rock slanting down into the river just beyond. The wall is all that remains of the Egglestone Abbey Mill. This was a paper mill producing hand-made white paper as early as 1717.



Egglestone Abbey Mill by JMW Turner
Copyright TBC

For a century and a half paper manufacture was an important industry in County Durham. From the fifteenth century onwards paper became cheaper to produce than parchment made from sheep skins. Religious institutions and seats of learning, such as Egglestone Abbey and Durham Cathedral, created a demand for white paper. Later the emerging coal and shipping industries, especially in Sunderland and Gateshead, increasingly needed paper for stationery, wrapping and packaging.

Egglestone Abbey Mill would probably have used linen or other cloth rags as its raw material and harnessed the water from the river for power to drive the mill wheel. Paper was made by beating the raw fibres into a pulp, in a vat or vessel, screening the solution through a wire mesh, then pressing the resulting wet mat of fibre between layers of damp cloth to remove the water before drying the sheets in the open air.

The landscape artist JMW Turner famously visited the area in 1779 and later painted the Abbey Mill. By 1830 the mill could no longer compete with larger, mechanised paper mills sited nearer to markets, so it was converted to grind corn. It was severely damaged by the flood of 1881 and never repaired. Another example of a once-thriving industry lost from Teesdale.

Directions 6

Go through the gate and continue ahead, staying close to the riverbank – do not take the track slanting left up to the road. Just before a kissing-gate, there is an old access track down to the right. From the fence here, you should be able to see down to the river. If not, because the trees are in full leaf, try going just through the kissing-gate and have a look from there.

7. A marbeler's delight

Site of Mains House quarry

Look down and see if you can spot some large flat blocks of stone on the opposite bank of the river. This is the site of the Abbey marble quarry of which John Leland wrote "About a quarter mile beneath Eggleston is a faire quarrie of blak marble spotted with white, in the very ripe (on the very edge) of Tees".

This is almost certainly where the stone for the font in St Mary's Parish Church (which we saw at the beginning of the walk) was cut.



The remains of Mains House Quarry
© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

If you look carefully at the river bank directly below you, you will see more massive blocks of stone. These mark the site of the Mains House Quarry, which dates back to at least 1307. Abbey and Mains House quarries were two of the four quarries that were the source of Egglestone marble.

Egglestone marble is not a true marble, which has been metamorphosed or changed under intense heat or pressure. Instead it is a sedimentary marble, in which the pores and tension cracks in the stone have been filled with natural calcite cement. This made it possible to achieve a beautiful, polished finish to the dressed stone.

Its other merits were that it could be extracted in large blocks, had an attractive greyish/brown colour and, when freshly quarried, was particularly suitable for carving. No wonder it was used extensively for monumental purposes throughout the North East of England!

Directions 7

Continue as before, through the woods. This stretch is uneven underfoot and may be slippery after rain. (An alternative is to take the track heading diagonally left up to the road and follow it down to the bridge, but beware of traffic, as there is no pavement). The path climbs up to a squeeze-stile in a wall and out onto a bridge. Turn right across the bridge, watching out for passing vehicles and stop in one of the niches.

8. A gorgeous sight

Abbey Bridge, Egglestone

This is the delightful Abbey Bridge standing high above the river. Take a look over both sides and enjoy the dramatic views.

The steep, rocky and wooded banks form a natural gorge, through which the river rushes and tumbles over a series of rapids.

The bridge was built in 1773, when John Bacon Sawrey Morritt, an antiquarian and member of Parliament, required better access to his estate at nearby Rokeby.



Postcard showing the Toll Gates on Abbey Bridge, near Barnard Castle (1900s)
© Postcards Then and Now

The author Sir Walter Scott stayed with Morritt in 1809 and again in the autumn of 1812, as a result of which he wrote his celebrated poem 'Rokeby', in which he describes the river here as "condemn'd to mine a channelled way / O'er solid sheets of marble grey" which, of course, was Egglestone marble. Scott wrote the poem in the hope that the proceeds would help to pay for the building of his new cottage at Abbotsford in his native Scotland. Although the poem sold 10,000 copies in the first three months, it was not a great success and his hope proved to be in vain.

Abbey Bridge operated as a toll bridge until 1956. A toll booth and toll-collector's cottage stood at the opposite end, together with a tearoom. All that remain are two rounded parapet-ends planted with flowers. You can imagine the busy scene, with horse-drawn carts rattling across the bridge and queuing to pay their tolls, people stopping to admire the view and travellers enjoying tea and cakes in the tearoom.

Directions 8

Cross the bridge and turn right at traffic lights along a minor road towards the Abbey, bearing left uphill to reach the entrance to the Abbey itself. Go through the gate to find an information board in front of the main ruins.

9. A place for quiet contemplation

Egglestone Abbey

Feel free to wander round the ruins and climb up the steps of the Novices Room for a commanding view of the surrounding area.

Notice that Egglestone Abbey occupies an impressive position, high above the River Tees, near the point at which Thorsgill Beck flows under a single arch bridge into the river. The site was probably chosen because it was sheltered and secluded and also because of the quarry below, from which stone could be extracted, either for construction or to generate an income.



Egglestone Abbey

© Caroline Millar RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1540 and the monks were pensioned off. It was sold to Robert Strelley in 1548 and some of the stone was used to build a manor house, but less than twenty years later it was described as being “in utter ruine and desolation”. By the 19th century, it had labourers’ cottages and around 1900 the north transept was demolished to provide stone for paving the stable yard at Rokeby Hall.

Today it is maintained by English Heritage and is refreshingly free of ticket booths and gift shops. With the sound of the river crashing over rocks below and nobody about but the sheep, it’s a pretty, atmospheric spot.



The atmospheric abbey ruins

© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

Now see if you can find the massive tomb chest (marked on the map). It is carved, more elaborately than most such chests, from Egglestone marble, almost certainly taken from the Abbey quarry below. The sides have a number of recesses, each bearing either a shield or a bracket that would originally have supported a separately-carved figure.

Alongside the tomb chest are the lid (actually upside down) and a slab bearing an inscription to Thomas Rokeby. There would, no doubt, have been a great many more pieces here originally, but they have sadly been lost over the centuries.



The elaborate tomb and its tranquil surroundings

© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership / © Caroline Millar RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 9

Retrace your steps to go back across the bridge and, at the end of the bridge, take the path immediately to the right, signposted "Teesdale Way – Whorlton 2¾ miles", to enter a stretch of the ancient Teesbank Woods, a local wildlife site.

In spring and early summer, the woods are carpeted with wood anemones, wild garlic and primroses. Keen botanists may find dog's mercury and a very local, rare species of downy currant.

The path rises uphill a little and then drops back down to the river, near some rapids. After about 500 metres, at a fork in the path, take the right-hand path, following a sign to "Limekiln only 50 metres". Stop when you reach a partially-collapsed, stone structure on your left.

10. Toiling over a hot kiln

Disused lime kiln

This pile of stones are part of what was once a lime kiln, a furnace built to extract lime from limestone. A map of 1860 shows four such kilns, together with four small limestone quarries, along just a short stretch of the river here.



An 1860 map showing the four lime kilns on the Tees
© Durham County Council

Hard to believe today, but this would once have been a noisy, smoky, and dirty place, alive with the sights, sounds and smells of industry.

This may seem an odd place to find lime kilns, but there was a plentiful supply of limestone and wood for fuel; water from the river to slake the quicklime and a sheltered position on a rising bank to help the fire to draw. Lime kilns have been used since Roman times to manufacture lime (calcium oxide) by burning limestone at temperatures above 900C. The 'quicklime' or 'burnt lime' produced was mixed with water, or 'slaked', to produce hydrated lime, which formed the basis of plaster, mortar and concrete. Good quality lime was also used in lime-wash to waterproof walls and lighten interiors; for bleaching paper; for preparing hides for tanning or as a disinfectant.

The lime from this kiln may have been used in the building of the hall at nearby Rokeby Park or perhaps to supply the Abbey paper mill or tanning houses in Barnard Castle. It is more likely, however, that it was used primarily to improve or 'sweeten' the surrounding land, which tends to be rather acidic and of poor quality. The soil loses lime naturally through leaching and the cutting of hay and other crops, becoming less fertile over time, so needs regular nourishment to maintain fertility.

Directions 10

Retrace your steps for about 50 metres, which should bring you back to the fork in the path. This time, take the left-hand branch, signposted 'Teesdale Way', leading uphill. Go through the gate out of the wood, turning right along the path and through a wooden kissing-gate into the next field. Keep to the right-hand edge of the field (watching out for squirrel activity in the plantation on your right). Go through another wooden gate in a fence and bear diagonally left to go over a stile in a stone wall, with a white-topped 'Teesdale Way' marker-post. Follow the same line, aiming for another white-topped marker-post, just left of a solitary ash tree in the middle of the field. Pause here to take in the view.

11. A pastoral scene

Dry-stone walls

You'll notice that the landscape here is very different from the earlier part of the walk. You are now quite high above the river and have extensive views over a wide area of lower Teesdale. Across the river are the grounds of Rokeby Park.

Take a look around at the the pastures and arable fields which are divided by dry-stone walls. These are a common feature throughout Teesdale. Dry-stone walling is an ancient craft, dating back probably to the Iron Age and it requires considerable skill.



A dry-stone wall with 'through' stones
© Rory Walsh RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The walls are constructed without mortar to bind them and depend for stability on the interlocking of the 'through' stones. Some walls use rounded boulders, which would have been smoothed by the action of glaciers and rivers and cleared from the fields for agriculture. Mostly, however, these walls are built from stone that would have been taken from small quarries (still visible at the bottom of the stream down to your right) and then cut and shaped to fit the wall.

Originally, these walls might have enclosed small, medieval farms, although many were the product of the Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries. These acts controversially forced the enclosure of common lands and transferred them to the ownership of wealthy landowners, often causing conflict and bloodshed.

Here, the primary purpose of the walls is to contain sheep and cattle to prevent them from straying. They were probably built by the farmers themselves, although there are examples higher up the dale that were reputedly built by French prisoners from the Napoleonic Wars. Quite a punishment given the vagaries of the weather and the steeply-sloping fells up there! These days, skilled wallers are scarce and much in demand, as dry-stone walls are increasingly valued as part of our heritage.

Directions 11

Walk straight ahead to a wooden hand-gate in the wall, which again has a white-topped marker-post, then stay along the top of the field, with a wall on your left. At the next dry-stone wall, go through a gate and after a few metres turn right through a wooden kissing-gate in the fence, with a sign to 'The Meeting of the Waters'. Descend the stepped winding path to another kissing-gate through a dry-stone wall and into a field. Carry on straight ahead towards another dry-stone wall, where you will find a sign for 'The Meeting of the Waters viewpoint'.

12. Hacking and hewing

The Meeting of the Waters



The meeting place of the Greta and the Tees rivers depicted in art:
-JMW Turner's landscape of the quarry sites (left) and (John Sell Cotman's Greta Bridge (right)
© Tate / Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Look across to the opposite side of the river and you will see the picturesque spot known as 'The Meeting of the Waters', where the River Greta flows into the Tees. The beauty of this place has inspired many poets and artists down the years and it has been painted by both JMW Turner and John Sell Cotman.

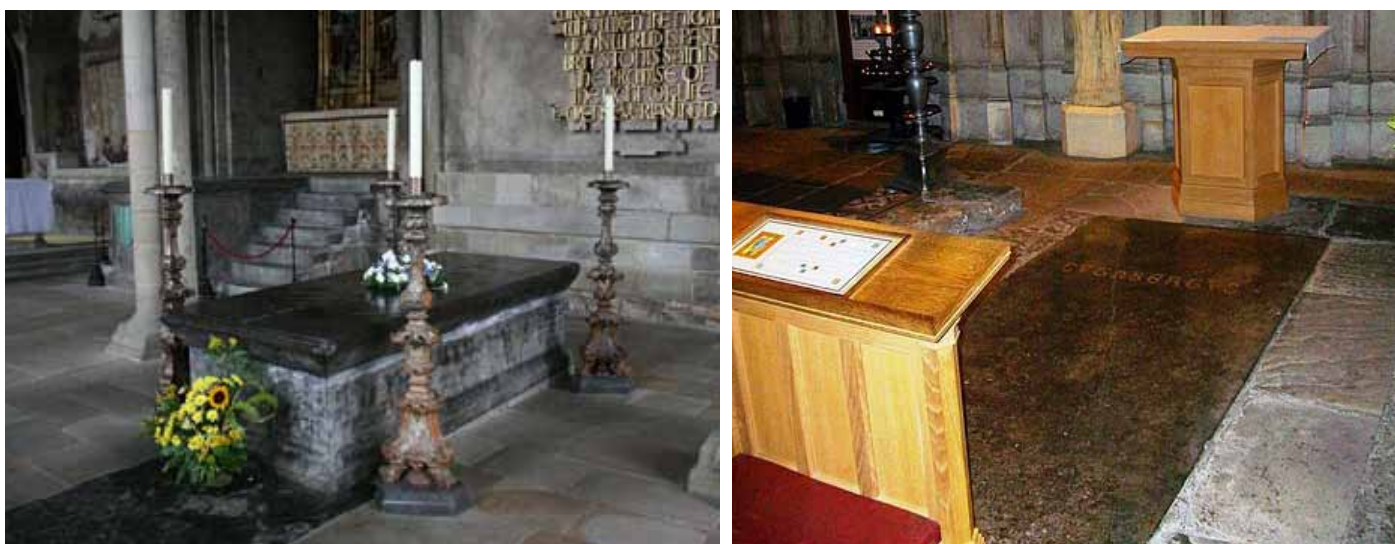
Immediately below you and to your right, at the very edge of the river, is the site of Westfield Quarry, another source of Egglestone marble. From here it could be extracted in slabs large enough to make tomb chests.



The Meeting of the Waters today
© Caroline Millar RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Quarrying was hard work. It involved hammering wedges into natural joints and bedding planes, or into slots hewn into the rock. Crowbars enabled the resultant slabs to be levered out and trimmed using mallets, chisels and axes.

Keep an eye out for the stepped flanks and wedged slots in the rock along the river's edge, where the huge slabs were removed.



Egglestone marble monuments include the tombs of the Venerable Bede (left) and St Cuthbert (right) in Durham Cathedral
 © Robert Scarth, Flickr (CCL) / J P A Hamilton, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Directly across the river, a smaller area of quarrying occurred at Watersmeet Quarry, which was also owned by the Abbot of Egglestone. The marble extracted here is differentiated from the other sites by dark-coloured shell fragments and is known as Greta or Watersmeet marble.

Monuments made from Egglestone marble are found in Newcastle Cathedral and York Minster, but also as far afield as Kendal in Cumbria, Lincoln, Newark, and Worksop in the Midlands. Over 350 pieces remain in existence, including twenty five tomb chests and eighteen fonts. In Durham Cathedral, the monk's laver or wash-basin in the cloister garth, the tomb chest of Bishop Thomas Langley and the slabs covering the shrines of The Venerable Bede and St Cuthbert are all fashioned from Egglestone marble.

The use of Egglestone marble, however, went into irreversible decline in the latter part of the fifteenth century, under pressure from imported Midlands alabaster tombs and London brasses that quickly became a new fashion favoured by the elite.

Directions 12

Re-trace your steps back to the main footpath. The Ordnance Survey map refers here to a "chalybeate" spring, which denotes that the water contains iron. This is certainly not surprising in Teesdale, given the widespread occurrence of mineral deposits, including iron ore, in the rocks of the dale. Such springs were thought to have health-giving properties and were very popular.

Resume your way along the edge of the wood. At the top of a short incline, 50 metres before the next kissing-gate, keep your eyes peeled to find a break in the trees, which should allow a clear view over to the other side of the valley. Stop and look across the river.

13. A modest family home

Mortham Tower

On the south bank of the river, can you see what looks like a rather squat church with a castellated tower? This is Mortham Tower, a fortified manor house, built by Thomas Rokeby in the time of Henry VII (1485-1509).

The old seat of the Rokeby family had been destroyed by raiding Scots in 1343 and the villages of Rokeby and Mortham, which occupied opposite sides of the Greta, had been destroyed in 1346.



Mortham Tower

© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

In 1610 local merchant William Robinson purchased the estate. Later the house was substantially altered in the 18th century by Sir Thomas Robinson, the architect and owner of nearby Rokeby Park. Mortham Tower is one of the most southerly of the fortified tower houses frequently found in the northern counties. These were traditionally called 'border peels' or 'pele towers' and were built to protect against marauding Scots, although Mortham Tower was arguably more ornamental than defensive.

According to John G Lockhart, a biographer of Sir Walter Scott, the house was haunted by a ghost named Mortham Dobie, a lady said to have been murdered in the woods. In 1837-8, Lockhart describes how she "appeared dressed as a fine lady with a piece of silk trailing behind her, without a head indeed though no tradition states how she lost so material a member, but with many of its advantages for she had long hair on her shoulders and eyes nose and mouth on her breast".

To the right, you may be able to see the outline of Rokeby Park itself (although in summer only a chimney top and section of roofline may be visible among the trees). This impressive mansion, was inspired by the designs of 16th century Venetian architect Andrea Palladio, whose symmetrical style, based on the classical temple architecture of the Ancient Greeks and Romans, was briefly popular in mid-18th century Britain.

Directions 13

Proceed and go through a wooden gate in a fence, keeping to the right-hand edge of the field. Continue through two more fields, with wooden hand-gates, until a gap in a stone wall leads down some steps to a wooden footbridge, crossing a small stream.

14. Parish Boundary with a difference

Sledwich Gill

This pretty stream running down the valley is known locally as Sledwich Gill. The word 'gill' or 'ghyll' is used for a stream or narrow valley, mainly in the North of England, but also in other parts of the United Kingdom. It derives from the Old Norse 'gil' meaning steep-sided valley.

As you will see, the gill has carved a surprisingly deep course through the hard limestone bed. The gully was probably formed by glacial meltwater, towards the end of the last Ice Age, around 15,000 years ago.



One of the boundary markers at Sledwich Gill
© Caroline Millar RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The house and gill mark the boundary between the parishes of Whorlton and Westwick. At either end of the footbridge you will see some unusual boundary markers shaped like half a chimney pot. They were commissioned in 1996 by Durham County Council, to coincide with Visual Arts year and the North of England being chosen as the UK Region of Visual Arts.

The markers were made by artist Richard Wentworth and are part of a series of similar markers for all the parish boundaries on the Teesdale Way between Mickleton and Gainford. Thus, the artistry of the stone-masons carving Egglestone marble for the Abbey and elsewhere, all those hundreds of years ago, is now echoed by a modern artist adding a stylish flourish to the banks of the Tees

Directions 14

Over the footbridge, climb the steps up the steep bank opposite, through a wooden gate and then along the field edge. Go through a wooden hand-gate and across two fields. In the next field, the path bears diagonally left and curves around the top of an open bank of oak trees. Through an iron gate at a small plantation, the path leads straight ahead (ignore the footpath marker to the left) and across fields through wooden hand-gates. Houses come into view and you pass alongside gardens, with a precipitous drop on your right down to the river far below, until you emerge onto a road. Turn right and immediately turn right again down some steps to reach a bridge at the bottom.

15. Bridge the gap – an historic structure

Whorlton Suspension Bridge



Postcard of the Whorlton Suspension Bridge © Northern Echo

Walk on to this elegant bridge and enjoy the river for a moment. It's a peaceful spot to watch the swirls and eddies of the water as it winds its way across the rocks. Arriving here on 7 July 1831 however, you would have met with a busy and festive scene. A throng of locals, workers and visiting dignitaries crossed the newly-opened wonder of the Whorlton Suspension Bridge, accompanied by a "band of music". At last, there was a road crossing from the Durham to the (then) Yorkshire side of the river and travellers would no longer have to risk the dangerous ford or the small boat-ferry further downstream.

This elegant bridge was built by John Green of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, as part of the Staindrop to Greta Bridge turnpike (toll) road. This is the oldest suspension bridge in the country still relying on its original wrought-iron chain work. It spans 173 feet (53 metres) and the deck is 30 feet (9 metres) above the water. Work on it first started in 1829, but the stonework was washed away in a great flood on 13 October that year, caused by the worst storm in living memory. A suspension bridge seemed to be the best solution, as it would not require stone piers to be built in the river and would not, therefore, be vulnerable to floods.

Until 1914 it operated as a toll bridge. You can still see the old toll house on the north side. Later, during the Second World War, Winston Churchill stood on this bridge inspecting troops, as they practised on an assault course from the steep cliffs on the northern river bank.

Directions 15

Retrace your steps from the bridge and walk up the steeply-climbing road, until you reach a sharp, left-hand bend. Stop before the bend and look over the stone wall on your right.

16. Swallows and Amazons, Tees-style

Whorlton Lido and Pool



Crowds enjoying Whorlton Lido, 1991 (left) and the miniature train in the 1970s (right)
© The Darlington and Stockton Times / © Stanley Howe, Geograph (CCL)

Directly across the river you can see a large, open expanse of grass, with a small wooden shed at the river's edge. This was the site of Whorlton Lido, which had been an attraction since 1905 and was used by locals and visitors alike as a place for fun and recreation. It is a beautiful stretch of the river, with a series of waterfalls.

There are also several natural plunge-pools, which provided safe swimming for both adults and children. Many people will undoubtedly have taken their first tentative strokes in these pools, although a hardy disposition would have been required on all but the hottest of summer days!

The shed sold ice creams and drinks to cool off the many visitors, who would come here for a day out from as far away as Middlesbrough, Stockton and even Sunderland. There was also a nine-hole putting green, children's corner and picnic area to keep all the family amused.

From the 1970s, it even had its own miniature 15-inch gauge railway, which was very popular, especially with children. On a sunny Teesdale day, there could be nowhere better to relax or let off steam than Whorlton Lido.

Directions 16

Continue uphill to the end of the metal barrier and turn right at the footpath signpost marked "Teesdale Way". The path soon descends through a wood to stepping stones across Whorlton Beck. Once across the beck, follow the banks of the river and up some stone-steps to a ruined house.

17. Who pays the ferryman?

Whorlton-to-Wycliffe ford and ferry

This ruined stone house now grown over with ivy was once the house of a boatman, who operated a ferry across the river to the other side.

This has been a local crossing-point of the Tees for many centuries, most likely because of the natural geology and the location of the village.

Before the ferry, which started in 1691, the only way across the river was by means of a ford, a little further downstream. A ford is a shallow place with good footing where a river or stream may be crossed by wading or in a vehicle.



Remains of the boatman's house
© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

This ford, however, was dangerous, particularly at times of high water and could be a formidable obstacle for local residents frequenting The Boot and Shoe Inn, which then stood at the water's edge at Wycliffe on the other side of the river. There were many accidental drownings on dark nights, so perhaps not the best option if you had taken a few too many drinks!

A few metres along you'll see some stone steps in front of a walled garden. This was probably the ferry landing point. The garden has some benches with a lovely view of the river, if you feel like a rest.

Directions 17

Carry on beside the river for another 30 metres or so, where you will see a lifebuoy fixed to a post, marking the spot where it is believed the old ford crossed the river diagonally. Turn sharp left onto a stony, woodland track. At the top of the incline, by some large stones set into the track, ignore a footpath marker to the right and go straight on. At a junction, again ignore the public footpath signpost to the right and continue ahead and over the bridge across Whorlton Beck. Turn left at the road and you will see the village green directly ahead, with a public house on your right.

18. Room at the Inn

Whorlton village green

Our walk ends outside the village pub, a typical Teesdale inn, overlooking the picturesque green of the ancient village of Whorlton, which was first mentioned in the year 1050.

The village was originally named Queornington or Querington, probably derived from the Old English word 'cweorn'. This means a stone hand-mill for grinding corn or possibly a stream where such stones may be found. Either way, there are no such examples of hand-mills remaining and no-one knows quite how the name came to be changed to Whorlton.



The pub at Whorlton
© Dave Bailey, Geograph (CCL)

In 1831, when the bridge was built, the village population peaked at 311 people. Today, the village has many attractive and interesting buildings, for example the school, which was built in 1848 and was enlarged in 1870 to accommodate 100 children, many travelling from across the river.

By 1894, the population had declined to 245, but the village still had two publicans, a butcher, tailor, joiner, mason, farm bailiff, blacksmith and overseer, bricklayer, shopkeeper, schoolmaster, vicar and eight farmers. It was a bustling community!



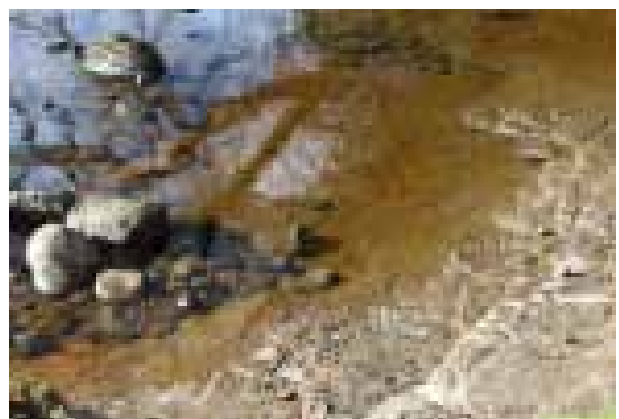
The second St Mary's Church, Whorlton
© Dave Bailey, Geograph (CCL)

Nestling in the south-east corner of the green is the second Parish Church of St Mary's Barnard Castle (this time with Whorlton). The church was consecrated in 1853 (at a cost of £600) on the site of an earlier chapel-of-ease that may have dated back to Norman times.

Outside the door of the church is a stone font, which mysteriously broke apart in 1644, diverting baptisms to Barnard Castle, until the plague that broke out there a year later forced everyone back to the village!

Next door to the church is Whorlton Hall, built by the locally-important Headlam family. It is reputed to be haunted by ghosts and one, the 'laundry ghost', has occasionally been found doing some knitting at night, which is perhaps a comforting note on which to end our exploration of this part of Teesdale. Time now to repair to the pub for refreshments.

We hope you have enjoyed this walk, which has focused on some of the local history and natural diversity of Teesdale. We have tried to show how life around Barnard Castle has developed and been shaped by the river that flows through it. The story of the River Tees has taken in past industries, geological formations and processes, monks, raiding Scotsmen and historical intrigues, all of which have contributed to the wealth of the area's heritage. We hope this walk has inspired you to learn more about our local history and to discover the secrets of the past that lie hidden in the landscape.



Scenes along the Tees from Barnard Castle
© Caroline Millar RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 18

To return to Barnard Castle, the options are to walk back along the Teesdale Way on the south side of the river (a further 4 ½ miles); return by bus (the number 70 runs infrequently on Mondays – Fridays only) or telephone for a taxi from the pub. Another option, if you have two cars, is to park one at the start and one at the finish, before setting off.

Further information

Books, reports and DVDs

'Northern Rock: The Use of Egglestone Marble for Monuments in Medieval England'
Sally Badham and Geoff Blacker, BAR British Series 480

'People and Patterns: The Carpet Weaving Industry in 19th Century Barnard Castle'
Ed Denis Coggins

'A Tour Thro' The Whole Island of Great Britain, Divided into Circuits or Journeys', Daniel Defoe

'Egglestone Abbey, Asset Management Plan (AMP) Project, Survey Statement of Significance'
English Heritage, Report No: SSoS-116

'Introductions to Heritage Assets: Pre-industrial Lime Kilns', English Heritage

'A Tour in Teesdale: Including Rokeby and its Environs', Richard Garland

'Geology of the Country around Barnard Castle', Geological Survey of Great Britain

'The River Tees near Barnard Castle' (DVD), Bob Knight and Alan Wilkinson

'Life of Sir Walter Scott', John Gibson Lockhart

'Rokeby', Sir Walter Scott

'The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535-1543', Lucy Toulmin Smith

'The Lost Mills: A History of Papermaking in County Durham', Jean V Stirk

Websites:

Bridges on the Tees
www.bridgesonthetyne.co.uk

British History Online
www.british-history.ac.uk

Keys to the Past
www.keystothepast.info

Mysterious Britain and Ireland
www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk

Credits

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A river flowing with stories
© Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership

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A trail along the Tees to High Force waterfall



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