

## Wandering through Weetwood

### Janet Douglas

The walk starts at the Three Horse Shoes on Otley Road, and will take about two hours - but much of it is uphill, so be warned! Like all good walks, it ends at a pub, the Stables Pub, which is part of the Weetwood Hall Hotel complex, and it sells a variety of drinks and food.

And always remember to respect private property.

Numbers in **bold** refer to the images in the gallery accompanying the walk.

#### Historical Context

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Weetwood became one of the best addresses in Leeds, yet the first OS map (1850) shows only one large mansion (Weetwood Hall), one farm, a scattering of cottages and a paper mill. Addle Lane (it wasn't known as Weetwood Lane until 1880s) linked Headingley and Leeds, with Adel and Otley. Remember, the Ring Road didn't exist until the 1920s. In 1850 the area remained very much as it had been at the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Leeds historian, Ralph Thoresby described it as '*a pleasant Ascent, of great variety, shades and Rocks, fruitful and desert Places, intermix'd*'. It was these dramatic qualities which were to attract some of the wealthiest men in Leeds to build their opulent villas along Weetwood Lane, rural retreats perched amongst woods, streams and springs, mossy boulders and with Arcadian vistas over the valley of the Meanwood Beck.

For building to take place, land must be on the market and at a reasonable price. In the Middle Ages, '*Whettwoods*' belonged to Kirkstall Abbey. With the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539, ownership went through a variety of hands until 1625 when it became the property of the Foxcrofts who owned Weetwood Hall and its 400-acre estate for the next 150 years. In 1741 the heir to the estate was a Boston woollen merchant so it is not surprising that he chose to sell the land. The northern part around the Hall became the property of Lady Ann Denison and in 1814 was inherited by a member of the Beckett family and remained in their ownership until 1921 when it was sold to the University. 106 acres of land to the south was bought by Sir Henry Englefield, a member of a long-established Berkshire family with connections in Massachusetts. They remained absentee landlords until 1843 when another Sir Henry Englefield died without heirs, and plots were sold - far more cheaply than land in the more developed parts of Headingley.

Between 1860 and 1896 ten villas were constructed on the former Englefield estate. They give us a glimpse into the lifestyle, tastes and aspirations of the Victorian elite of Leeds. Apart from romantic 'wild' landscapes, they sought seclusion, domestic

comfort and such accoutrements of gracious living as billiard rooms, conservatories, glasshouses and stables and coach houses, all defended by lodges alongside Weetwood Lane. A local version of the Victorian *'battle of the styles'* was fought out in Weetwood: the earliest of the villas is an example of domestic classicism, the last was designed in an arts and crafts style. Between we find fine examples of the Gothic Revival and the Jacobean styles.

### **Around The Three Horse Shoes**

Referred to as 'Moor End' in 19<sup>th</sup> century documents, **The Three Horseshoes** was built in 1837, by John Askey **01**, a local blacksmith on land he bought following the enclosure of Headingley Moor between 1829 and 1834. It is not clear whether his decision was made before or after the arrival of Leeds' first horse-drawn bus service which had its terminus here. The property remained with the Askey family until 1900 when it was purchased by Tetley's for £11,000. The bay windows on the frontage of the pub were added in 1903. Attached to the side of the pub is an interesting house of 1841, once the home of the Askeys; note the 16-pane windows on the ground floor and a good door case with its shallow pediment **01a**.

The properties on the opposite side of Weetwood Lane, now two shops, date from 1831 and were also once part of Headingley Moor **01b**. On the corner of Weetwood Lane and Moor Road is **Victoria Buildings** of 1841 [Listed Building], built as a shop and houses, once Beer Ritz (it took me some time to recognise the pun!) [now under new ownership closed] **02-02b** Notice the similar windows to the house we have just seen adjoining the pub, the slanted corner has a blocked window above the door. Between 1696-1851 the property tax was based on the number of windows of a house, hence it was fairly common for window spaces to be in-filled.

**Headingley Parish School** (corner of Weetwood Lane and Hollin Lane) **03-04** was built in 1839 to supplement school accommodation at the parish school by St Michael's Church, the land was given by Edward Oates of Hollin House. Originally the school consisted of one large schoolroom and an attached schoolmistress' house. In 1869 with the division of the Headingley parish, the school was transferred to St Chad's, and two years later another classroom was added, paid for by the Beckett family, to accommodate the hundred children who attended the school. As school numbers increased in 1883 the mistress' house was converted into upper and lower class rooms. The plainer parts of the building are the earliest, but the 1871 extension has a Gothic window with stone tracery and pinnacles. When the school closed in 1892 and moved to a site on Otley Road, the building was bought by George Oates, the son of Edward Oates who had donated the land in the first place. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century it became the Far Headingley Working Men's Club to serve the large number of tram drivers and workers who were employed at the tram depot on Otley Road.

**St Chad's Home for Waifs and Strays** (now Weetwood Primary School) **05-06** In 1883 Ernest Beckett of Kirkstall Grange married a wealthy New York heiress, Lucy Tracey Lee then aged 19. According to the Vicar of St Chad's, Lucy occupied herself with '*good works*' in the parish and was particularly interested in the Church of England Society for Waifs and Strays which had opened a home in Glebe Terrace in 1889. Within two years it was clear that Glebe House was too small and it was agreed that a larger orphanage needed to be built. Although involved in the fund-raising, Lucy didn't live to see the project come to fruition. She died in 1891 having given birth to her third child Ralph six days previously. It was as a memorial to his wife that Ernest Beckett gave £3000 to complete the new building designed by W.A. Hobson. Two years after her death, the three children (Ralph was just two) were provided with small hammers to formally lay the foundation stone of the new orphanage, their initials are carved on the stone. The Beckett family crest appears above the door. The Home accommodated sixty girls who besides making stockings, offered a laundry service for many of the large houses in Weetwood. It closed in 1939.

Proceeding up Weetwood Lane, on the left are Edwardian houses of little distinction except that no. 49 (by the bus stop) was once the family home of T.S. Eliot's second wife and was often visited by the famous poet **06a**. The houses opposite (and also Weetwood Avenue) were built on the fields of Weetwood Farm which functioned until the end of the First World War. The land was then sold to a local builder, Gilbert Lax who began building in 1927, retaining sections of the old field walls along the street frontages.

**Detour: Weetwood Mill Lane** (optional)

Described as '*ancient*' in the 1790s, Weetwood Farm [Listed Building] and its out-buildings have been converted into housing. Just beyond the farm is Weetwood Mill Lane, and taking the narrow footpath on the right brings us to the frontages **07** of **Weetwood Garth** and **Weetwood Garden House** built some time after 1894, adjoining the earlier **Victoria House**. Largely shielded by trees in the summer, it's only when their leaves have fallen that we can see the three rendered gables of the houses and its projecting porch with its Tuscan columns and leaded dome. To the right is Victoria House, its bay windows are a later addition. Back on Weetwood Mill Lane, is the coach house, and the cottage opposite has retained the reference to Victoria House. Beyond lies Rose Dene and Weetwood Terrace once four separate houses but converted into a single dwelling **08-09** and renamed **Rose Garth**. Along side is the millstream which once fed **Weetwood Mill**. The site of a fulling mill when Daniel Foxcroft bought the Weetwood estate, it later became a paper mill and then in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a bleach house **10**.

Return to Weetwood Lane

**Weetwood Lodge** [Listed Building] on the left, marooned amongst the semis of Weetwood Court, is the first of the Victorian mansions we will see on this walk **11-12**. It has been renamed Weetwood Manor despite the fact that Weetwood never had a lord of the manor! The house was designed by the architect John Simpson for Frederick Baines, the editor of the Leeds Mercury who moved here in 1873. A spiky Gothic extravaganza with sharply pointed gables, mansard roofs, tall chimneys, wooden bargeboards and a tower, it looks like something out of a fairy tale or a horror film!

Close by is the similar but even more splendid Gothic fantasy, **Bardon Hill** [Listed Building] also designed by Simpson for his cousin, the solicitor, Thomas Simpson **13**. Now a gated housing complex with no public access, from 1899 the house was the home of the millionaire, Joseph Pickersgill. Pickersgill had one of those '*rags to riches*' trajectories so loved by the Victorians but in this instance his wealth came from what was hardly a respectable occupation. He graduated from being a butcher boy in the Leeds Shambles to a bookie's runner and thence a prosperous bookmaker with the motto '*No Bet Too Large*'. It was said he took bets from all the crowned heads of Europe except the German Kaiser. As well as taking bets, he became an important racehorse owner, training his horses at Richmond, but at Bardon Hill built what must have been amongst the most sumptuous stables in the country [Listed Building]. He also provided the capital for the famous Leeds printers, Chorley and Pickergill, and therefore was able to register his occupation in the census as '*a printer*'! When Pickersgill died in 1920, Bardon Hill became the home of more re-

spectable residents, firstly James Baillie, the Vice-Chancellor of the University, and from 1930 the Roman Catholic Bishop of Leeds. Some of you may remember that for many years Bardon Hill housed St Urban's Primary School.

The delightful **lodge** [Listed Building] alongside Weetwood Lane **14** was added in 1902 designed by Thomas Winn with black and white timbering, bargeboards, a red tiled roof and tall chimneys. Also notice the splendid wrought iron gates and vigorous gateposts with remnants of their lamp holders.

**The Hollies** on the east side of Weetwood Lane is frankly a rather dull design of 1864 by W.H. Thorp for George William Brown **15-16**, the gardens however are anything but mediocre. Created out of abandoned quarries and set amongst mossy boulders, ferns, trickling streams, they are a fine example of the Victorian fashion for 'wild' woodland gardens **17**. The thirty-acre gardens were given to the people of Leeds in 1921 as a memorial to William Brown's son who was killed in the Great War. Later in this walk we will be looking at Quarry Dene, and from the broad walk at the top of The Hollies, you can view the rear of this house (**21**). Also see if you can find just beyond the parking space on the left, the grave of Jack, a twenty-seven year old pony who died on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1900 and was buried here.

**Bardon Grange** (now called Oxley Residences) [Listed Building] **18** on the left-hand side of the road, is the earliest of the Weetwood mansions built in 1860 for James Brown, a stuff (worsted) merchant who bought 93 acres of land from the Englefield sale, some of which he sold on for the construction of other villas. Bardon Grange, handsome house, is the only example of Victorian classicism we will encounter on this walk, and is an indication of the waning appeal of this architectural style. The house was reputedly designed by Cuthbert Brodrick, the architect of Leeds Town Hall, and certainly it shares the same deep eaves, prominent brackets and windows as a house at 7 Alma Road, which is known to have been by Brodrick. Bardon Grange was purchased by the University in 1948.

Beyond Bardon Grange, down a long driveway, stands **Weetwood Villa** [Listed Building] now better known as Oxley Hall **19-20**. Another design by John Simpson between 1861-4, for the banker Henry Oxley, it is a fine French Renaissance composition with another of Simpson's lively roofscapes. Altered by W.H. Thorp in 1880s to give the house a more Jacobean feel, the property remained empty between 1905-15 before being presented to the University in the 1920s to become a hall of residence for female students. A new wing was added in 1928 by Procter and Charlton who were also responsible for the design of Devonshire Hall.

Returning to Weetwood Lane, on the east side stands **Quarry Dene** built between 1881-6 by W. H. Thorp for George William Brown, perhaps on land that was part of The Hollies. For many years this was the home of John Rawlingson Ford, a solicitor, radical Liberal councillor and brother of Isabella Ford, the famous socialist and women's rights activist. The Jacobean-styled house was constructed on an artificial platform amidst quarry workings forming a series of dramatic rock gardens. Now another gated complex, the gardens and house can be viewed from the wall to the south, and its rear from The Hollies (see above) **21**. On the opposite side of the road is one of the lodges to Weetwood Hall (**24b**) to which we will return to later in this walk.

Next to the north is **Oxley Croft** [Listed Building] dated 1898 **21a** (originally called Weetwood Croft), designed by Francis Bedford as another speculative venture for George William Brown, its first tenant was Joseph Hartley Wicksteed, a mechanical engineer who became President of The Society of Mechanical Engineers. The design was based on that of 17<sup>th</sup> century Pennine hall houses, long and low, with naturalistic carving above the entrance porch. To the side high in the gable, is a sundial with the words '*True as the Sun*'. The interior has fine fittings in the arts and crafts idiom by Bedford who probably also designed the gardens. Purchased by the University in 1955 and used as an annex for Oxley Hall, it is now a private house (hurrah!). In architectural terms it is probably the most distinguished of the Weetwood villas.

Set deep amongst the '30s houses of Foxhill Avenue, is **Foxhill** (now Moorlands School) **22**, one of George Corson's earliest commissions in 1861 for Francis William Tetley the only son of Joshua Tetley. Francis and his wife Isabella had 14 children and the census records 10 resident servants at Foxhill. Following Cuthbert Brodrick's departure from Leeds, Corson was the most distinguished architect working in the town, responsible, amongst many other buildings, for the Grand Theatre, the School Board, the Municipal Buildings and nearby Spenfield. The house is a typical Corson composition, a mixture of Romanesque and Gothic elements – severity with romance - with steep roofs, tall chimneys and peering dormers. Its Wagnerian splendour was somewhat diminished when its huge tower was lowered by Sydney Kitson as part of an extensive remodelling for his father-in-law, Charles Francis Tetley. The Tetley family lived here until 1934, apparently everyday Charles would walk down Weetwood Lane followed by his Rolls Royce. After the departure of the Tetleys, 80 houses were built in the grounds and Foxhill itself became a country club famous for its gambling tables – it also had a good restaurant, and later the house became a school. The lodge [Listed Building] to Foxhill, also by Corson, is a delight with its extremely tall chimneys and pepperpot turret **22a**.

Our next destination is probably my personal favourite amongst the Weetwood villas, **Weetwood Grove 23** [Listed Building], now isolated amongst the modern flats and houses of Foxhill Court. A richly Gothic design by Thomas Ambler who is now best remembered for his wonderful Moorish building in Park Square. The house was built in 1861 for Thomas Wolryche Stansfeld, the business partner of James Brown of Bardon Grange. Originally a square-shaped structure with stepped gables on all sides, set high in one of the front gables is a rose window. The porch **23a** is especially noteworthy, three Gothic arches are supported by columns with naturalistic carved capitals (each is different) and the inner door has a carved tympanium with the date 1861 and the monogram TWS. The house was substantially extended in the 1880s. Turning to the right, we can see the new wing linked to the older house by two-tiered section with a conical turret with French windows and a carved motto above, then a projecting block with an ogee window on the first floor and the carved family crest of the Stansfelds. In the early 1900s, the house was divided into two separate homes.

Returning to Weetwood Lane and moving towards the Ring Road, is the **lodge** to Weetwood Grove **24** with a patterned tiled roof with quirky dormer windows and fabulous angled brackets. We now have a vista of the fields of Hope Pastures, the horse sanctuary, with its 18<sup>th</sup> farm buildings – a reminder of Weetwood’s rural past **24a**.

We now need to retrace our steps passing the University’s sports fields on our right, to the lodge of Weetwood Hall which we saw earlier on our walk **24b**. Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this marked the entrance to Weetwood Hall. Weetwood Hall now has two lodges (there is another on Otley Road): both date from 1887 and were built for Alf Cooke, the printing magnate was the tenant of the Hall from 1887 to his death in 1902. They were designed by W. H. Thorp [both Listed Buildings]. Turn onto the path beside the lodge and continue until we reach the Hall.

**Weetwood Hall** [Listed Building] is a complex building with three main building phases **25-26**. All that remains of Daniel Foxcroft’s house is the doorcase with its Ionic columns bearing the date 1625, and some mullioned windows to the rear. There are possibly fragments of 17<sup>th</sup> century plaster ceilings in some of the ground floor rooms (heavily restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). In the Hearth Tax returns of 1660s, the house had 11 hearths making it the second largest house in Headingley. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the house would have been regarded as old-fashioned and was given a Georgian makeover though the old entrance was retained. Under the stewardship of Alf Cooke, W.H. Thorp was employed to extend and remodel the house. The Victorians regarded Georgian architecture as far too plain and dull so Weetwood needed yet another facelift. Thorp added a wing in the fashionable Jacobean style and switched the main frontage to what had once been the side, creating a new porch bearing the

dates 1625 and 1887 and a rather eroded AC monogram. One suspects that some of the interior plasterwork emerged from this second make-over. After Alf Cooke's death, the house stood empty for many years, though during the War it became an Officers' Convalescent Home. In 1919 the property and its estate was sold to the University by Hickman Beckett Bacon.

The stable block [Listed Building] to the rear is Georgian with a pedimented gable and narrow Venetian window, and this forms a court with the former halls of residence built 1925-7 with a stubby crenellated tower to create the illusion of antiquity 27.

Now for a rest, have a well-earned drink in the Stables Pub!