

On Wednesday the 25th of September three of us met at the lay-by to the north of Shipton for our run out to the Weardale Museum at Ireshopeburn in Weardale. A decision was made to risk it with the hoods down and apart from a brief stop at some temporary traffic light during a shower we got away with it. Our route would have been quite straightforward if it hadn't been for the U.C.I World Road Cycling Championship that would be starting the Elite Mens Time Trial from Northallerton, thus closing some of the roads that we would normally have taken. So a detour was called for. We went to Thirsk, then continued on the A19 before heading towards Northallerton and then finding a byroad to take us north of the town and on to the Darlington road thus avoiding any road closures. From Darlington it was off towards West Auckland before heading to Stanhope and our lunch stop in the village of St Johns Chapel.

The Chatterbox Cafe is a small establishment that is dog friendly and popular with people walking in that part of Weardale. The enthusiastic and friendly staff offer an excellent all day breakfast, home made Bakewell tarts that beat anything seen on a tv baking show and frequent tea or coffee refills and much more besides. So after a very leisurely lunch it was time to go and visit the museum handily situated in the next village.

The Weardale Museum is in the former manse of High House Chapel in Ireshopeburn. The chapel adjoins it. Nearby runs the river Wear and between the river and the manse/chapel the Weardale railway used to run but was closed to all traffic in 1961 and the track removed. The museum is run by volunteers and tells the story of Weardales history and heritage and also provide family history research for anyone who has ancestors from Weardale. On the ground floor are two rooms, one of which tells the of the life of John Wesley and the Methodists movement that he founded. The other room has many household objects from the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, some quite common and others that were quite obscure such as a cockroach trap. Never seen one of these before.

Upstairs are another two rooms. The first one houses the Weardale Tapestry that over five panels tells the history and heritage of Weardale from prehistory up until the early part of this century. This was made about 15 years ago by five local ladies who would meet for coffee, cake

and conversation. There is also a large quantity of family history information and lap tops and pads for access to on line genealogy resources. The other room contains many items of a geological nature, rock samples etc and models and displays about the lead mining in the area. There is the story of Klondyke Wilkinson who went to the Klondike, came back fabulously rich and was able to improve the life of many by providing employment. There are also two memorials the the men of Weardale who gave their lives during WW1. One is of white marble with the mens names engraved upon it and the district they were from and the other one looks like a pile of boots but each boot has a poppy and the name of one of the fallen. This was presented by the men of Catterick Garrison. And on the ground floor, under the stairs is the toilet, but no ordinary toilet. This one is twinned with one in a remote part of Sierra Leone. Directions available on Google Maps.

In the adjoining building is High House Chapel, the oldest purpose built Methodist Chapel in continuous use. The chapel was built as a meeting house in 1760, the manse was built in 1804 and in 1872 the meeting house was enlarged to make the chapel. Wesley had preached at the original meeting house 13 times and before that had preached outside beside a hawthorn tree that still stands nearby. It is known unsurprisingly as the John Wesley tree. The building is quite plain on the outside and inside is typical of chapel architecture. With it's rows of pews and a balcony that runs around three sides, an imposing pulpit and an organ previously thought to have been in a theatre it has been called one of Englands best examples and is mentioned in a list of Englands 1000 best churches.

By the time we came to leave the weather was definitely getting damp, not raining, not even drizzling but just the feeling that it might be imminent. So we left our hoods up for our return journey and followed our earlier route in reverse. The closer we got to home, the better the weather was, not blazing sunshine but sunny intervals. And we all arrived home safely after a good day out.