

Reeth and vicinity self-guided local-history walk

[Image references link to a photography appendix at the end of this guide]

Starting on Reeth Green, Reeth has the appearance of **an incomplete planned village** with a single row of grand 18th C buildings on the West side probably constructed not long after Reeth acquired its market charter in 1695. Prior to that there was **a market in Grinton** which John Leland described around 1550 as supplying corn & linen; he also refers to some houses there being roofed in stone, some thatched. Some houses around the Green **pre-date the late 17th C.**; e.g. the house to the right of the Congregational Chapel; also note its front door to the left (East); that lane between it and the chapel clearly pre-dates the chapel.

SWAAG's Swaledale Big Dig (2014/15, see <https://new-swaag.org/big-dig-project>) suggests that High Row was built on the site of the **earlier medieval tofts and crofts**; the toft being the land on which the house was built, the croft being the adjoining land used for pasture or arable. This is supported by the 1st Ed OS maps showing long narrow fields (the crofts) running West from the rear of High Row and the admittedly small but nonetheless significant sherds of medieval pot (13th – early 14thC) recovered from the test pits in the gardens behind High Row. The tofts conform to the old medieval measure or multiples thereof – about **a pole or perch (5.25 yards)** wide; see Overton House frontage for example.

The Big Dig yielded no evidence of Saxon occupation but did find two pieces of probable Roman pot suggesting some activity in the area.

What else can we see from the Green?

Windows show that some houses **used to be shops**. Until the 1950s or 60s Reeth was a self-sufficient community. **Pubs –there were 7** – Half Moon, Gift Shop was the Shoulder of Mutton, Temperance Inn was The Joiners Arms, Red Lion over by the Post Office, plus The Black Bull, Kings Arms, The Buck.

From the middle of the bandstand, looking between the Ice Cream parlour and the Old Temperance Inn b & b, the Western-most of **the Grinton-Fremington Dykes** is visible running up Harkerside, marked by a line of small trees ([image 1](#)). Approximately half-way up you can make out the 'lumps & bumps' of a Romano-British settlement. There is some debate as to whether the settlement pre-dates or post-dates the dyke. Looking along the top of Harkerside, note nick at the top- this is the bank and ditch of the southern-most dyke. What date are these dykes? Probably multi-period; our digs suggest possibly originally Bronze Age (maybe 2,000BC) but reworked later; the Western one you can see seems to have been reworked around 90BC – 70AD maybe as a result of the Roman invasion while the furthest South seems to have been reworked around 950Ad in the Viking era (see <https://new-swaag.org/earthworks-2/>). Another parallel Dyke is visible to the left of the Chapel.

Mill Lane, in the NE corner of the Green runs down to the Arkle Beck. If you go down there, note Turbine House at bottom. Why 'Turbine'? Water from the old mill race from the earlier Corn Mill (initially late 13th C.) and later Sawmill (the latter for the AD Mining Company (now Dorant's Garage)) was used by William Handley Burton, a pioneer of electricity provision in the Dales, to begin generating electricity at 150v AC here in 1910; ceased in the 1950s as people began to use more electrical appliances. Nationalised in 1947.

Note two **Water Pumps** still on the Green and pump house to the left of the Copper Kettle in an area previously known as Duck Dub – a dub being a marshy boggy area – possibly a spring there.

Note **unusual small building** to the right of the Copper Kettle - why so small? It was the Porter's Lodge for the Reeth Poor law Union Workhouse from 1840 – 1930; the large building behind housed the wards for up to 80 paupers; men and boys upstairs, women and girls downstairs ([image 2](#)). See <https://www.workhouses.org.uk/Reeth/> and records on The National Archives site

Walk down to **Reeth Bridge** noting more houses on Stonegate which used to be shops. Early maps show a long field where there is now a blocked-up gate on right; perhaps the line of the original road into Reeth before The Green as now is? John Carr was the architect and bridge builder – together with Robert Adam he designed Harewood House – was also ‘Bridgemaster for North Riding’ built Reeth Bridge 1772/3, Grinton 1797 (see later)

19th C (possibly earlier) **AD Mines sawmill** where Dorant garage now stands; as above, water from Arkle Beck originally fed the Reeth Corn Mill, then later the sawmill and finally the electricity turbine.

Look over to Fremington Edge. The grey spoil (waste) heaps above and to the right of the White House are not from lead mining but from the early-mid 20thC underground chert quarries ([image 3](#)) see <https://new-swaag.org/chert-and-flagstone-quarries>.

Stop on grass by the bench just before Fremington Mill Farm– follow the public footpath to the right just before Fremington Mill Farm for about 50 yds; from the footpath you can see **Fremington Corn Mill’s** waterwheel through the door/window but frequently weeds etc block the view in the summer. Note **leats** (water channels) carrying water from /to Arkle Beck. First record of mill is 1288. Current building present in 1751. Closed around 1900.

Back to the road; stop in farm entrance; note that the hillside opposite seems to be terraced. Why? Big Dig test-pitting suggest **medieval settlement** on the narrow terraces – ([image 4](#)) see <https://new-swaag.org/big-dig-project>.

Just before Draycott Hall ([image 5](#)), note the **Dyke** (ditch & bank) running up to High Fremington.

Stop by bus stop – across the field to the right just make out the heavily eroded bank – part of the dyke which continues up to Fremington before terminating at steep rise to Fremington Edge; a colleague thinks it might just be a boundary bank, not part of the dyke system.

Look back to **Draycott Hall** – late 18th C built for mine owner Sir George Denys. His grandmother Anna Maria Draycot (1736-1787) Countess of Pomfret inherited the mineral rights to much of Swaledale in 1760. Sir George’s family (sons Sir George and Sir Francis) founded the AD mining Company in mid-late 19thC – worked Gunnerside Gill, Old Gang. The AD mine offices were nearby, perhaps in what is now ‘AD barn’

Grinton Bridge – 1797 – view underneath to see that unlike Reeth Bridge the earlier (medieval?) bridge was widened not rebuilt ([image 6](#)).

Look left down the river. You are standing in what was a post-glacial lake with the water held back by the **terminal moraine** visible about 200 yds downstream; not visible from here, there appears to be a small, enclosed settlement on top of the far, eastern mound; possibly iron Age / Romano-British. See <https://new-swaag.org/grinton-mounds>.

Toilet stop - Public toilets around corner after the pub.

Grinton Church – until 1580 it was the only Church in Upper Swaledale; thought to have been built in 12th C and heavily modified over the centuries, it probably stands on the site of an earlier Saxon Church for the Saxon settlement of Grinton. Note **hagioscope** – leper’s squint in SW corner ([image 7](#)).

Now on **Corpse Way** running all the way up the Dale with some coffin rests still in place e.g. large flat stones by path at Muker, Ivelet Bridge, 2 miles E Gunnerside etc.

Mill House / **Grinton Corn Mill**; mentioned in 1521 (although may be one at Swale Hall farm see later) water was taken from Cogden Beck, across the fields to a dam below the Youth Hostel then over Grinton Beck on a wooden aqueduct, destroyed by the 2019 flood – the tail leat runs by Mill House then under the road and the graveyard to the Swale, demolished in the 1950s; allegedly stone used to build the ‘new’ houses in Reeth on Back Lane in 1980s

Walking along towards Swale Hall Farm, note **the dyke** just beyond the static caravans; ([image 8](#)) the ditch and bank are clear here (as they are in High Fremington, also from the road near Dyke House) – there are 7 sections of dyke in all; as said previously, possible Bronze Age / iron Age, Viking i.e. pre-conquest – most likely multi-period, extended and re-used as conditions demanded.

There is a suggestion that the topography of this area fits the description in the Y Gododdin of the **Battle of Catraeth** ca. 600AD rather than Catterick https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Catraeth

At **Swale Hall Farm** join the Swale Trail bridleway – the Corpse Way; house surveyed by YVBSG – 17th C, one of the oldest houses in the area. There was possibly another corn mill here. Generally, each medieval manor had a **corn mill**; the Lord of the Manor required tenants to mill their corn there – for a fee! In 17th/18th C the Swale family led by Sir Solomon Swale attempted to establish a Manor of West Grinton and possibly built a mill here as part of the claim. See <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/north/vol1/pp236-245>.

Note the large **Bronze Age burial mound** just off track to the left, around 3,000 yrs old; never probably excavated but ‘antiquarians’ had a go, probably 19th C.

A few hundred yards on pass through the **Western most of the Dykes**; this is the one with the outline of the Romano-British settlement visible from The Green ([image 9](#)).

Through the small wooden gate there is a **Burnt Mound** in the field on the left, by a stream or spring as they always are ([image 10](#)). Long grass etc mean difficult to make out in summer. A mound of burnt fire-cracked stones with a small bath sized depression in the centre. Two theories – use hot stones to heat up water in the ‘bath’ then use for stewing meat/veg; alternatively put tent-like structure over and you have a sauna! Most likely not cooking in this area as no evidence found of bones, cooking residue etc See Tim Laurie’s article <https://new-swaag.org/burnt-mounds>.

Behind the burnt mound is a **Tufa ‘Quarry’** where (white) tufa, calcium carbonate, a form of limestone, outcrops and can be used as a fertiliser, particularly for grass land.

Over the river, beyond the Swing Bridge the **field terraces** – aka strip lynchets – come into view ([image 11](#)). These long, narrow fields along the hillside possibly date to the early 14thC before the Great Famine of 1315-22 and later Black Death when population was at a maximum. Their use would be managed by the community as whole with families allocated strips on a rotational basis.

As you approach the Swing Bridge, look left at the small mound-shaped hill; **How Hill** ([image 12](#)) with isolated tree on top; it appears to have been worked with possibly a small settlement on top. In this area, South of the Swale, was the medieval settlement of **Hercay** reached from Reeth via stepping stones across the river, long since washed away; it is said more people drowned crossing the Swale than in the many lead mines in the area!

Alan & Judith Mills October 2024

Appendix

Image 1 – Dyke viewed from Reeth Green Bandstand



Image 2 – Reeth Poor law Union Workhouse



Image 3 – Chert quarrying spoil heaps above & to right of the White House



Image 4 – site of Medieval Settlement



Image 5 – Draycott Hall, Fremington



Image 6 – Grinton Bridge – n.b. narrow, rougher stonework to right



Image 7 – 'leper squint', small narrow window to left



Image 8 – South-eastern dyke; ditch and bank.



Image 9 – Bank of south-western dyke looking North from Swale Trail



Image 10 – Burnt Mound, looking back from West



Image 11 – Lynchets (strip fields) looking North from Swale Trail



Image 12 – How Hill from the Swing Bridge

