

Oxenhope Sacred Trail

Walking tour of Oxenhope taking in the main places of worship.



1 Bents House

The home of the Railway Children in the **1970 film**

Bents House is the large detached house that can be seen over the wall on the left of the footpath. It was used as the Three Chimneys in the 1970 film of the Railway Children, adapted from E. Nesbit's popular children's book. After their father is falsely accused of being a spy, the three children and their mother are forced to come and live in Yorkshire where they have many adventures centred around the railway. The film, which starred Jenny Agutter as Roberta, uses many locations in the area including Oakworth station, Haworth Main Street and Mytholmes Tunnel. The field below the house is where the children would wave to the Old Gentleman and behind the house you can see the stone stile which Perks, the station porter, struggles to negotiate with his bike whilst delivering a package to the family.

2 Haworth Free School

Seventeenth century school for educating potential clergymen

In 1638 a Free School was established in Marsh to teach gifted local boys. There was a national shortage of ministers entering the church, but in order to enter the clergy, a university education was required and in order to get into university a boy would have to demonstrate that he could read and write Latin and Greek. All over the country grammar schools were founded by wealthy noblemen and merchants to give boys a standard of education that was not previously available locally. The Haworth Free School was endowed by Christopher Scott,

the rector of Chastleton in Oxfordshire, the brother of John Scott who lived in Oxenhope. Christopher Scott left £20 a year to pay for a school master. After the establishment of Board schools the school was dissolved in 1886 and the endowments used to provide scholarships to neighbouring schools



3 Marsh Methodist Chapel

Chapel and former Sunday School

The Wesleyan Methodists opened a Sunday school in the small hamlet of Marsh in 1836. Demand for services for adults led to the chapel being placed on the Methodist circuit for services two years later. Like many Sunday schools elsewhere the emphasis was on teaching children literacy and numeracy but when an Act of Parliament established Board schools in the late nineteenth century, Sunday schools moved more towards religious education, teaching children the Christian message through informal teaching, stories and songs. The Sunday school at Marsh was once a focal point of the community where services, parties, pantomimes and picnics weaved the social life of the village. However, mill closures, cars and a wider choice of other distractions have brought lifestyle and population changes leading to dwindling congregations. The Sunday School finally closed in 2005 but the chapel continues to hold services fortnightly.

In 2008 religious sociologist Lewis Burton conducted a study of Marsh chapel, surveying older people regarding their experiences of attending Sunday School in Marsh. The article, *A Village Sunday School* published in the *Journal of Rural Theology* describes a 'chapel culture' that provided educational, social and leisure activities and brought the community together. Sunday school gave its teachers, almost always women, a standing in society and a sense of purposefulness. Children gained an understanding of faith and morals, in a safe and familiar environment. As at other chapels, the highlight of the year at Marsh was the Anniversary, a large scale open air event which would draw crowds from far afield. Children were bought new clothes, mothers would put on grand spreads of tea and entertainment was provided by the Black Dyke Mills band from Queensbury. Burton concludes that in rural villages like Marsh when the chapel culture fades the sense of community fades with it.

4 Hawksbridge Baptist Chapel

Baptist Sunday School and chapel with striking differences in architectural style

The old and new Hawksbridge Baptist Chapels stand adjacent to each other on Shaw Lane. The original building was a joint initiative by the two Haworth Baptist Chapels. Although West Lane and Hall Green had their doctrinal differences, in 1832 the two were working together to establish a Sunday School in the outlying village of Oxenhope. The Sunday school also held services, but had no baptistery so baptisms took place at West Lane, apart from the occasion in 1839 that nine people were immersed in the Brooks Meeting Mill dam, which must have been a true test of faith. The Sunday school has now been converted into residential properties but it retains its rounded arched windows and solid plain structure that was typical of non-conformist church buildings. In 1914, in a need to expand, a chapel was added to the Sunday School. Unlike all the other non-conformist chapels in the Upper Worth Valley the architects chose the Gothic style with stained glass windows, pointed arches and an altogether more decorative style. A plaque from the Sunday School has been installed in the side of the wall.

The chapel holds services monthly on the third Sunday of the month.



5 Brooks Meeting Mill

One of the few mills in the area still in industrial use

In 1850 there were approximately 20 mills in Oxenhope and the old mill buildings are scattered across the area, either abandoned or converted into residential use. Brooks Meeting Mill is one of only two in the area still in industrial use; it is now the home of a bespoke furniture maker and a tankard wholesaler.

The mill took its name from the field below the site where two brooks meet to form one. The weaving mill was originally built in 1880's although it was rebuilt in 1910. It is build from locally quarried sandstone and shares an architectural style with the non-conformist chapels all around this area. Between mill and church, the working class population's lives were dominated by these imposing box-like structures that kept them duly in their place.



6 Old Parsonage

The original vicarage built for Joseph Brett Grant, Patrick Brontë's former curate

The house next to Brookes Meeting Mill was formerly the vicarage for Oxenhope and is one of the few houses in the area to retain its original features. It was originally built in 1840's for Joseph Brett Grant, Oxenhope's first vicar. Grant had previously been curate in Haworth, until Patrick Brontë appointed him to establish the new parish. He was a very active man, raising money to build the parish church, the vicarage and the national school. The story goes that he wore out 14 pairs of shoes in his travels seeking subscriptions and even succeeded in getting a donation from Queen Victoria. Brett's energy, kindness and dedication made him a popular figure amongst all villagers, not just the Anglicans. The exception however was Charlotte Brontë who rather unkindly portrayed him as the curate Mr Donne, a 'champion beggar' in her novel Shirley.



7 Millennium Way

Long distance footpath connecting Bradford's beauty spots

45 mile circular walk designed by volunteers from Bradford Countryside Services to celebrate the Millennium. The walk is entirely within the boundaries of Bradford and takes in some of the district's finest landmarks and landscape, including Ilkley Moor, Five Rise Locks, the Leeds Liverpool Canal and Haworth.

8 St Mary the Virgin Parish Church

Norman style church that is only just over 160 years old.

The Church of St Mary the Virgin in Oxenhope was built in 1849, but looks much older. The architects Ignatius Bonomi and John Cory had been based in Durham and the church's Norman style is no doubt influenced by the architecture of Durham Cathedral.

Until the 1840's Oxenhope was part of Haworth parish and Anglicans who wished to attend church had to take the long walk up to Haworth for services. As the population grew it was decided that Oxenhope needed its own church and the then vicar of Haworth, Patrick Brontë, sent his curate Joseph Brett Grant to establish the new parish. Initially services were held in other buildings but Grant was an effective fundraiser and by February 1849 the foundation stone for a parish church was laid and the building finished just eight months later. Brett was a popular and respected vicar who served the parish for over 30 years. The stained glass windows in the choir are dedicated to his memory.

The church tower is relatively short and originally housed a single bell. In 1899 this was replaced with a peal of six, which was raised to a full eight in 1927 and today an active bell ringing group meets weekly to practise peals for weekly services and special occasions. In the 1990's the tower was renovated to accommodate two new meeting rooms which are used as extra seating for the church or space for the children's groups to meet during the Sunday service.

9 Bay Horse and the Straw Race

Second stopping point on the annual Oxenhope Straw race.

The Bay Horse is a cosy village pub that offers meals and a pleasant outside seating area. Being next door to the cricket ground it gets busy on match days, but really comes into its own on Straw Race day in early July. The Oxenhope Straw race feels like an ancient tradition but actually began in the 1970's as a bet between two local men. It is now a major fundraiser for local charities. Competitors must race between the five village pubs, drinking a pint in each (half for ladies). It is made more difficult by the elevation, (starting at 1171 feet, down to 783 ft and back up to 1014ft above sea level) and the fact that teams must carry a bale of straw which they pick up at the second pub, the Bay Horse. In 2009, 250 teams entered and the winning time was an amazing 15 minutes, but most people are running for fun and the fancy dress costumes of the teams taking part make it a great spectator sport.



10 Upper Town

Mill workers' houses and agricultural cottages from different eras sitting side by side.

Oxenhope was not thought of as one village until relatively recently. It had been a series of farming hamlets which merged together as industry grew, although which retained separate identities. Upper Town, like Lower Town and Leeming, is a conservation area and contains several listed buildings. Pre-mid nineteenth century farming cottages and farm houses with large gardens sit next to high density rows of industrial workers terraces. In a walk around the village you will see a significant number of historic iron railings, gates and balustrades in a style peculiar to the area, known as the 'Oxenhope style.'



11 Oxenhope Methodist Church

Chapel built in 1970

The Methodists established their first chapel in Lower Town, Oxenhope in 1806, not long after the movement had split from the Church of England. Further Wesleyan chapels and Sunday schools followed in Sawood and Marsh. The original Lower Town chapel was replaced in 1893 with a grand two storey rectangular building in the classical style. In the late twentieth century reduced congregations and rising costs of maintaining antiquated buildings meant that many of the church and chapels that had sprung up in the nineteenth century were forced to close, but in Oxenhope the Methodists were able to sell off part of their land for housing and rebuild a smaller chapel on the site of their former Sunday School.

The church is part of the Airedale Methodist Circuit and holds services every Sunday.



12 Millennium Green

Wildlife haven in the middle of the village

Oxenhope Millennium Green is a peaceful park in the centre of the village. Rather than swings and slides this green space is a wildlife conservation area providing various habitats for local flora and fauna. A beck flowing from Leeming Reservoir intersects the green and flows over a weir in the centre. In the past the field had belonged to a local mill owner and had been used for grazing the horses working in the mills or bringing coal up from the railway. In 2000 the village formed a trust and bought the field with help from funding from the National Lottery, via English Nature as part of a national scheme to create green spaces which benefit local communities. The green is used for village events, including a farmer's market which is held monthly during the summer months.



13 Oxenhope Railway Station

Heritage railway station at the top of the Keighley and Worth Valley Line

In 1867 the line was finally opened that would bring trains up the steep five mile line from Keighley. The line connected the communities of Oakworth, Haworth and Oxenhope, allowing the populations easier access to the bigger towns and cities of the North, but principally the railway was built to bring cheap coal to power the textile mills that were dotted all across the valley. When British Railways closed the line in the early 1960's there was strong local opposition. The Preservation Society that formed was one of the first in the country and after years of negotiating, the dedicated group of local volunteers and railway enthusiasts were successful in purchasing the line and reopening it to passenger traffic. The Keighley and Worth Valley Railway is still run entirely by volunteers and offers a heritage steam-hauled service at weekends and daily in the school holidays.

Oxenhope station has a shop, picnic area and buffet car offering drinks and snacks. Large engine sheds adjoining the station are used for carriage restoration and showcasing locomotives and carriages which are out of service but remain in good condition to be exhibited. The shed to the right of the booking office is also used as a venue for the KWVR's programme of events including the popular Beer and Music Festival and the Santa Special.

