

The Shorter Walks Group Report by Jean Kipling

The weather was glorious as fifteen members of the group met at Romaldkirk for a four-mile circular walk on May 22nd. We joined the Tees Valley Railway Path and soon became aware of the diversity of wild flowers growing there. These included wood cranesbill, cowslip, cuckoo flower, greater stitchwort, Jack by the hedge, water aven, germander speedwell, forget-me-not, bugle, violet, bluebell, red campion, wild strawberry, red clover, ribwort, plantain, herb Robert, daisy, dandelion and the list goes on. Thanks to the wild flower identifier in the group most of us learnt the name of an unfamiliar flower or two (the problem is remembering them!!) The bird cherry bushes were resplendent and the hawthorn blossom was just beginning to burst. Leaving the railway path just before the viaduct we walked through fields with views of the woods, the river Balder and the impressive Balder Grange to our left. Passing Doe Park (a former hunting lodge) and the ruins of Balder Water Mill we reached Balder Bridge, having learnt from another member of the group that the river Balder was appropriately named after Balder the Beautiful who was the Norse God of Beauty, Peace and Light.

Turning left at the bridge we walked the short distance up the hill to Thwaite Hall and experienced Teesdale's rush hour (on the reccie we only saw two vehicles!!) From Thwaite Hall we took a track along the edge of two fields and entered a wood, making our way carefully down a narrow track through the bluebells and wild garlic. Having crossed the little bridge over Wildon Beck we made our way up the other side of the gill.

As we emerged from the wood, Woden Croft Lodge came into view. The first section of the lodge was built as an academy for boys in 1792 and more was added as the demand for places grew. The name used is another reference to the Viking presence in Teesdale - Woden being the Old English name of the Norse God Odin, who is portrayed as the father of Balder, Thor and many other sons.

The footpath took us directly in front of the cottages and farm buildings into more fields. We noticed the marker pointing to the gateway that leads to the Fairy Cupboards, but continued on our route through more fields, passing interesting derelict buildings and enjoying the views towards Eggleston before joining a lane which brought us back to the lower green of Romaldkirk.