

## SHORTER WALKS

Report by Hilary Dunnighan

Sitting in the car park of Bowes village hall on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June, the heavens opened, and the rain poured down. Luckily, by the time we started our 3½ mile circular walk, the wind had blown away the clouds and it remained dry for the rest of the time.

10 of us walked towards St Giles church where the churchyard houses the grave of William Shaw, headmaster of the former school known as Shaw's Academy. This became Dotheboys Hall, with its headmaster Wackford Squeers, in Charles Dickens' novel, "Nicholas Nickleby".

Turning down Back Lane, we passed the entrance to Bowes Castle, built in 1170 on the site of an earlier Roman Fort. We crossed into the fields and down to the river Greta, then on to Gilmonby Bridge, before taking the long incline up towards The Rigg. We were treated to panoramic views over the surrounding countryside with the Stang Forest in the distance. Our route ran parallel, but a mile away, to the A66. As we were high up, there was no impediment to the view (and the noise) of this arterial road!

On entering Green Lane, there was a warning not to disturb the ground nesting birds - curlews and lapwings. The curlews were in abundance, with their distinctive cry, curved beaks, and mottled brown plumage.

At the end of the lane, we entered The Rigg, which is part of Scargill Low Moor and is full of heather and rushes, and which gets very boggy in wet weather. We crossed the farmyard of White Close Hill Farm, across a very wet, muddy area and climbed a difficult stile in a high stone wall. In all, there were 13 stiles on this short walk and, as the photograph shows, some were a lot trickier than others!



On the return half of our circuit, we had good views of the village and Bowes Castle and, beyond, the summit of Mickel Fell at 790 metres, the highest point in County Durham. Having climbed many more stiles - and avoiding electric cattle fences - we passed through the Tom Gill Plantation and made our way back to the road over Gilmonby Bridge and back to the car park.

Although a challenging walk, participants agreed that it was enjoyable exercise with magnificent views throughout.

Thanks to Colin for helping with the recce and taking the photos.

