

THIRSK – A WALK WITH JAMES HERRIOT



Parking

Parking in Thirsk is not difficult. I parked in Millgate car park (see map) and paid using the mobile app 'pay by phone' which meant I could top it up later when on the walk.

Start Point

Thirsk Clock Tower - where James Herriot stepped of the bus and started his adventure.

Distance/Duration

3 Miles / 1 hour - Short

3.85 Miles / 1hr 20 mins - Long

Map

A pictorial Map (not to scale) is at the end of this document.

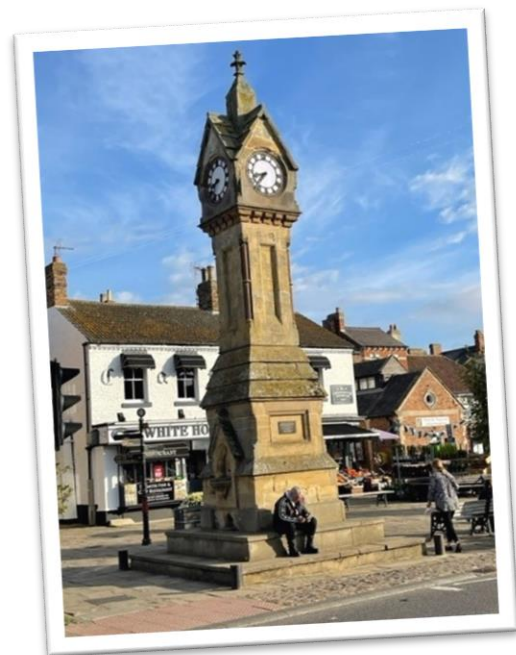
The Walk

This walk is a general walking tour of Thirsk but takes in several points of interest related to the James Herriot books and TV series.

The fictional town of 'Darrowby' was based on Thirsk mixed with elements of Leyburn, Richmond and Middleham and, as Alf Wight said, *'a fair chunk of my own imagination'*. Thirsk was more recently described by his son Jim as having *'an atmosphere of friendliness and charm'* which sums up the town nicely.

Start at the landmark

1 **Thirsk clock tower** on the Market Square.



This is where James Herriot arrived by bus and observed the men sat on the clock tower. *"..but they might have been made of stone"* he wrote in his first book.

Follow James Herriot's footsteps as he walked to his interview that day by passing the old Post Office and then continuing along Kirkgate. You will pass Thirsk Museum on the right where Thomas Lord, founder of Lords cricket ground was born as indicated by a blue plaque on its frontage.

Further on to your left you can see the front door of the original 'Skeldale House' surgery which is now

② 'The World of James Herriot'.



This is the door that Alf knocked at in 1940 for his interview with Siegfried (Donald Sinclair). A few months later, in the hallway behind that same door, James stole his first kiss with Helen (Joan) with whom he would soon marry and live here with for 8 years. Alf described

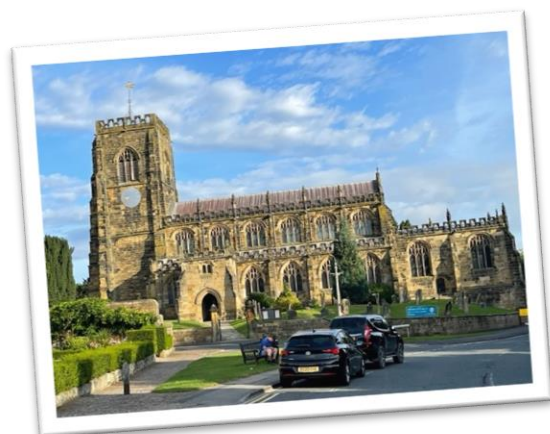
the house as having an '*ageless charm*' which is a fitting description.

The world of James Herriot is a must-visit for all Herriot fans, and they can easily include it before or after this walk.

Carry on down Kirkgate and pass the 'Cross-Keys' pub. This is a typical local pub, unpretentious with just the clink of pint glasses and the murmur of pub chatter.

Next you will see the imposing

③ St Marys church.



It is here at 8am on 5th November 1941 that James Herriot (Alf Wight) was married to Helen (Joan Danbury).

At the end of Kirkgate, turn right onto Marage road. On your left is the site of an ancient moat with a board at the entrance of the car park describing its history. There are several other history boards like

this around the town which are well worth reading.

Carry on to the end of the road and directly opposite, on the other side of the bridge along Riverside Mews is a pretty garden built on the site of **4 Rymer's Mill**. This is where Joan Danbury (Helen) worked as a secretary and Alf's endearing memory was of her sat at her desk in the mill office wearing a red sweater. Rymers Mill was demolished in the 1960s but there is a full description of its history on a board by the garden.

Now cross over the bridge in the direction of the one-way traffic towards St James Green and cross the road towards the church. Turn left at the back of the green and head towards the end row of houses. Here, near the end, you will find a cottage named 'Sunnyside'.

5 'Sunnyside Nursing home'



This was the home of Nurse Bell (Nurse Brown in the books) and her husband Cliff. It was here that Alf and Joan's two children, Jim and Rosie, were born as described vividly in the books.

Now re-trace your steps back to the bridge, but this time keep going along Millgate to arrive back at the market square. You will pass the White Rose bookshop on your left, which has a fine selection of Herriot books and many other Yorkshire related publications and a nice cafe. Carry on straight ahead towards the Three Tuns - a popular drinking hole mentioned in the Herriot books. Now is the time to stop and admire the market square laid out before you. Turn right in front of the Three Tuns and on towards The Golden Fleece known in the stories as

6 'The Drovers'



This pub features in several of the Herriot stories and was the scene of some memorable events. There is an archway outside marked with a 'public footpath' sign. Follow this through to the pub car park and out onto Chapel St. When you get there, turn left and then take a passageway immediately on your right that leads you out past the Thirsk leisure centre. Keep to your left and walk across the grass to the gateway in the far corner.



This leads to a winding walk alongside Cod Beck (meaning 'cold brook'). The grass area beyond the gate is known as 'Sowerby Flatts' and was a popular walking place for Alf. A picture of him standing there is in the delightful book 'James Herriot's Yorkshire'.

Walk alongside the river (or if wet and muddy, keep on the grass). Follow the path until you pass a small bridge called 'Lock Bridge'. This is a

remnant of a proposed canal construction in the 1760s.

It was never completed due to lack of funds, but it was the subject of some imaginative letters Alf wrote to Brian Sinclair (Tristan) which are displayed in 'The World of James Herriot'.

Carry on following the path alongside the river - this is a pretty walk that Alf Wight will have done very often. You may see cattle grazing in the adjoining meadows. Be warned, this part of the walk can get a bit muddy when wet. The path emerges onto a road by Blakey bridge. Cross over the bridge and immediately on the right-hand side there is a little gate where the path continues along the riverside. Just here on your left you will see an unusual mound called 'Pudding Pie Hill' where Rosie and Jim played as children. This is actually an ancient burial site which archaeologists have determined to be at least 2500 years old.

According to Alf's book 'James Herriot's Yorkshire', archaeologists found the remains of three warriors inside.

There is a seat nearby to sit on and just imagine Alf with Rosie and Jim playing on the hill. Now follow the path further along by the river until you approach a road. Beyond this you will see a small Pack Horse bridge on the other side dating back to 1672.

At that time goods were transported around the country by packhorse and this bridge allowed them to cross the river. Now cross over the road and walk over the bridge and along a track. The red brick house on the right was 'Worlds End Pub'. This was used by weary travellers as they travelled this ancient route. The track leads you back on to Front Street.

Follow this road until you reach **7** *The Crown and Anchor Pub*.



The house next door to the pub was 'Blakey View' where Alf lived for a while in 1943 with his in-laws. He would often drink in the Crown and Anchor Pub with his father-in-law. Note the historic postbox on the corner, which bears the marking VR, signifying its installation during Queen Victoria's reign.

At this point, if you want the shorter walk, then you can either carry on walking towards Thirsk through the pretty village of Sowerby and past the Church until

you reach the junction with Green End Lane. Or you can take a slightly longer walk to see the house where Alf wrote most of his books.

Longer walk:

Turn left at the Crown and Anchor down the long road called 'Gravel Hole Lane'. At the end, turn right onto 'Topcliffe Road' and between number 98 and number 96 you will find **8** *'Rowardennan'* - the nameplate is still on the gatepost.

This is the house that Alf had built in 1953. He stayed there for 25



years and much of his writing was done whilst living here.

Carry on past the secondary school until you get to the primary school on the corner of Green Lane. This is where Rosie and Jim (and their mother Joan) went to school before the secondary school was built. Turn right down Green Lane and at the end of this street we rejoin the shorter route.

Rejoining the shorter walk route:

On the corner of Green Lane and Sowerby Road is an imposing house

9 currently called Juliet House (number 12) and previously called Thorpe House.



This was the house belonging to Miss Marjorie Warner alias 'Mrs Pumphrey' and her Pekingese dog Bambi alias 'Tricki Woo.' The house looks out across the Flatts to the Hambleton Hills. Miss Warner purchased this land to preserve the view and later gave it to the Flatts preservation trust that still looks after it today.

Follow the footpath on the other side of the road towards the town centre and soon the path splits into 3. Take the middle path.

At the end of the path immediately on your left is the wonderful

10 'Ritz' cinema.



It is still operational today and run by volunteers. It featured as James and Helen's courting venue in the Herriot stories and, more recently, it has featured in the latest 'All Creatures Great and Small' TV series.

Before you walk on down Castle gate, look at the red brick building second on your right in Chapel Street. It is the former Lambert hospital.

Tristan regarded it as "*an agency to provide him with female company.*"

[Chapter 9 of 'If only they could talk']. But the hospital is now on its way to being reopened by **Herriot Hospice Homecare** a charity championed by Alf Wight's daughter Rosie Page, who was a former GP here when it was a cottage hospital.

Carry on straight ahead down Castle Gate and round the sharp corner and you will pass a 'Herriots Hospice Homecare shop (Please call in!).

Then you will be back on the market square at the clock tower where we started.

There is a Tourist Information Office on the Market square for further information and souvenirs.

I hoped you have enjoyed this 'walk with James Herriot' soaking up the charm and character of Thirsk whilst paying homage to Alf Wight, the successful vet, author and storyteller.

Alf Wight made Thirsk his home and Thirsk has made him its favourite son.

Thank you.

Roger French



The World of James Herriot



Herriot Hospice Homecare



Thirsk Tourist Information



James Herriot Musings

JAMES HERRIOTS THIRSK



KEY

- 1 THIRSK CLOCK TOWER
 - 2 THE WORLD OF JAMES HERRIOT
 - 3 ST MARYS CHURCH
 - 4 RYMERS MILL
 - 5 SUNNYSIDE NURSING HOME
 - 6 THE DROVERS
 - 7 CROWN & ANCHOR PUB
 - 8 ROWARDENNAN
 - 9 MRS PUMPHREYS HOUSE
 - 10 RITZ CINEMA
- - - SHORT ROUTE
- - - LONG ROUTE

MAP NOT TO SCALE