

# HOW ABOUT?

with Louise Howland



This month, Louise finds hidden pleasures to buy, admire and eat in a beautiful English country town.

When you find yourself in a new area, where do you head first? The best looking place to eat? And then ... the craft shop, the art gallery, the quilting store, the bookshop or the antiques gallery?

An English village usually provides all the above in spades and the one in which I've just spent a couple of days is no exception. The lovely village of Kirkby Lonsdale – the second 'k' is superfluous, I discover – is in prime position for exploring the Yorkshire Dales. I quickly gave up browsing antique shops, divine as they were, because the resulting purchases would require buying a shipping container. I was already schlepping some 40 kilograms on and off the now privatised rail system (meaning fewer luggage racks and more seats), so adding pieces of oak was not an option.

A little of the Yorkshire food has come home on my waist. I quickly developed a love for Yorkshire pudding, treacle pudding, curd tarts, Cumberland sausage and parsnip mash, Wensleydale cheese, Parkin and various assorted Dales treats. At no time did I glance sideways at a salad.

But the real pleasure was, as ever, the craft shops. The little craft cottage in Kirkby Lonsdale was barely the size of a couple of phone booths, and opened only Friday and Saturday, yet it was packed with wools, threads, fabrics and kits, and had a busy class schedule.

In Doncaster resides the indefatigable Suzanne Brackenbury. Widely qualified through City & Guilds with almost 30 years spent running the family needlework shop, she passes on her skills in that quietly practical, kind, solid manner that Yorkshiremen – I'm told this is the term regardless of gender – possess.

Like Australia, Yorkshire flourished in part due to the wool industry. Since the Bronze Age, around 3000 BC, sheep have been raised in the Dales and played a vital role in the industry and tradition of knitting, spinning, weaving and dyeing.

Knitting as a cottage industry in the Yorkshire Dales began at the end of the 16th century and lasted until the early 20th century. For many tenant farmers money was in short supply so knitting provided an extra source of income. A school was set up to teach the poor to knit, and according to the fascinating exhibit at the Countryside Museum in Hawes, men, women and children knitted at night in their cottages. Apparently they knitted well in the dark (my knitting only looks as though it is done in the dark) and sang to relieve the monotony.

A township to the north of the Dales, Kirkby Stephen's main square



is still called Stocking Square from the days when the town was a centre of the knitting trade. The carriers, who operated from larger towns, would travel the Dales collecting the knitted stockings and 'guernsey' frocks from the cottages and delivering more wool – known as 'bump' – for the next assignment.

Traditional textile crafts, including quilting, rug-making, spinning, weaving, dyeing, loom-making and more are still widely practised and taught in this great county, and artists and historians regularly lecture, demonstrate and exhibit at the many cultural centres throughout – the same cultural centres which, with true Yorkshire practicality, teach skills such as 'Using your GPS'.

Until next month,

*Louise*