

Roots and Routes Walk 3 – Cousin Lane to Keighley Road

As you leave OSCA turn right on to Cousin Lane and cross the road. At the roundabout, turn left by St Malachy's Church, walk down Nursery Lane and turn right on Vegal Crescent designed and built by Laura Annie Willson. Laura Annie Willson was an English engineer and the first female member of the Federation of House Builders. After the war she was a founder member of the Women's Engineering Society and decided something needed to be done about the poor housing that was available for working people, so she designed and built her own houses. Laurel Crescent and Vegal Avenue being 2 of her housing projects. When you reach the end, turn left and continue walking down Ovenden Way. One of Ovenden Way's most famous residents was Champion Jack Dupree. William Thomas "Champion Jack" Dupree was a New Orleans Blues and Boogie-woogie pianist and singer whose nickname was derived from his early career as a boxer. He began a life of travelling, living in Chicago and Indianapolis and Detroit where he worked as a cook. The boxer Joe Louis encouraged him to become a boxer and he fought 107 bouts, winning Golden Gloves and earning the nickname Champion Jack. He moved to Europe in 1960, living in Switzerland, Denmark, Germany and Sweden before coming to England. In the 1970s, he lived at Ovenden Way.

At the bottom of Ovenden Way, turn left and you are at Bank Top. Keep walking and you will pass the site of the Ovenden Police Station at 67 Ovenden Road and Ovenden Hall on your left. The present Hall was built by Joseph Fourness in 1662 on the site of an earlier house. In 1713 his Grandson, Captain John Furness, an army Captain and fought with the Duke of Marlborough at the Battle of Blenheim owned the Hall. That year he married Frances Oates. Captain Furness died at Ovenden Hall in November 1717 and was buried in Halifax Parish Church, now the Minster. At 28 Frances became a widow but the use of Ovenden Hall for life and beyond as Frances is said to haunt the Hall. In 1944, it became a home for the elderly and in 1954 Ovenden Hall was made a Grade II listed building. It was later used by Halifax Social Services, Fostering Service.

Continue on Ovenden Road and you will see the Noah's Ark Centre on the right. This was originally opened as a Beer House, a Pub that was only allowed to sell beer and not wines or spirits. In the 1830s, with the Beer Houses Act, they were intended to divert the poor from gin. Noah's Ark was the last one to be opened in Halifax and later turned into a coaching inn before becoming a Webster's pub in 1860. This business was started by Samuel Webster in 1838 at Fountain Head, Ovenden Wood. Their first public house was the Lane Ends, Wheatley. In 1999, Noah's Ark closed as a pub and re-opened as a voluntary-sector provider of therapeutic services.

As the road bends to the left Shay Lane is on your right. On the corner where Ron Lee Motors now stands was Bethel Methodist Church built in 1859. On the opposite corner, to your left, is The Ovenden Private Day Nursery, formerly The Ovenden Cross, another Samuel Webster's Pub. In 1846 Branwell Bronte stayed here and became friendly with the landlord's daughter, Mary Walton. He copied poems and sketched for her. This sketchbook is now in the possession of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, Texas. Continue walking up Keighley Road and another Pub you will pass on the left is The Railway Hotel at the bottom of Nursery Lane. This was also originally a Beer House, owned by another Halifax Brewery, Whitaker's.

Continue up Keighley Road, on your right is Ovenden Park, home to the Ovenden Rugby Union Football Club. The club currently runs three senior men's teams along with 2 women's teams and a Mixed Ability team. The railway ran at the side of Ovenden Park, under what was Keighley Road Bridge.

Continue to Cousin Lane with Morrison's Supermarket in front of you on the corner. Turn left onto Cousin Lane.

Before you reach Club Lane. On the left hand side of Cousin Lane there is a fenced area between 68 Cousin Lane and 66 Cousin Lane. Look through the metal fencing and you will see a red brick tower which was a ventilation shaft from the age of the steam train. Hidden around Ovenden are reminders of the railway.

Continue on and you have arrived back at OSCA.