

# Walks Ravensworth, Whaston and Kirby Hill

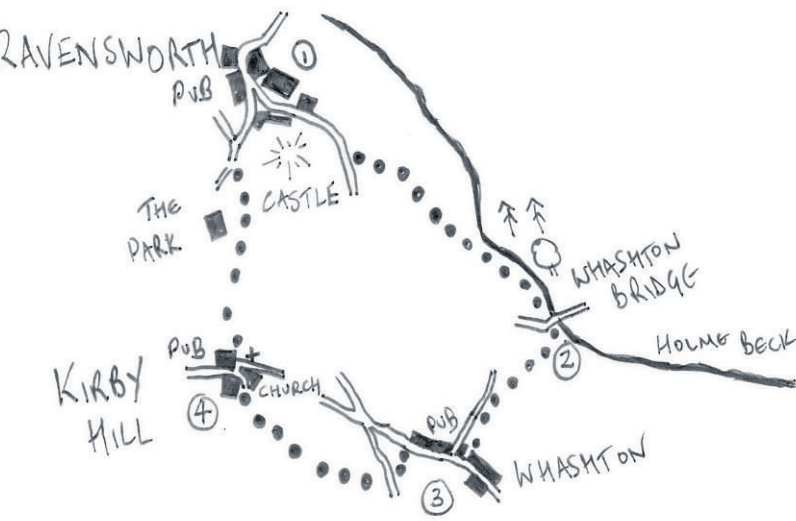
## Walk information

**Distance:** 5.75 km (3.6 miles)  
**Time:** 2 hours  
**Maps:** OS Explorer Sheet 304 - always take a map on your walk  
**Start / Parking:** Parking around the village green at Ravensworth; please park considerably and not on the grass.  
**Refreshments:** Pubs at Ravensworth, Whashton (restaurant) and Kirby Hill.  
**Terrain:** Country lanes, field and riverside paths. Several stiles, some small stream crossings and muddy terrain.

**How to get there:** Ravensworth lies just off the A66, about 5 miles to the west of Scotch Corner.

## Points of interest

**R**AVENSWORTH is a beautiful village with a large village green overlooked by old stone cottages. Just to the south of the village are the gaunt ruins of Ravensworth Castle, including the large 14th Century gatehouse, an archway and some ruined walls that give an idea of the importance of this castle; these ruins feature in Sir Walter Scott's 'Rokeby'. The first stone castle was built in Norman times by the powerful Fitz-Hughs who controlled this area along the strategically important Stainmore Gap route across the Pennines. The castle was defended by a surrounding moat, lake and marshland, much of which still remains. The Fitz-Hughs were at Ravensworth from the late 12th Century until around 1500, and their most famous son was Henry Fitz-Hugh who went into battle with Henry V. In the late 14th Century, Henry Fitz-Hugh enclosed 200 acres of land surrounding the castle to create a Deer Park, and stretches of the enclosing walls and earthworks can still be clearly seen as you approach Ravensworth at the end of this walk. The castle was held by the Crown during the late 16th and early 17th century since when it has been in private hands; much of the stonework has been plundered



for local buildings over the past 400 years. The ruins are thought-provoking, with many bumps and earthworks in the surrounding fields that are yet to be excavated.

From Ravensworth, a delightful path heads across fields and then alongside Holme Beck before climbing up into the village of Whashton, which is situated on an escarpment overlooking the valley of Holme Beck. Here you will find the Hack and Spade, a country pub renowned for its food. More field paths then lead to the beautiful village of Kirby Hill. As the name suggests, there has been a church on this ridge of land since at least Norman times when it was built to serve the spiritual needs of the lords of Ravensworth Castle. The Parish Church of St Peter and St Felix is mainly Perpendicular, although some Norman stonework remains, and boasts a rare 14th Century defensive tower. Across from the church is the old Grammar School, founded by John Dakyn in the 16th Century; its most famous pupil was Matthew Hutton who became the Archbishop of York. Dakyn's hand-written 'school rules' can still be seen in the church. The church, village green, grammar school and old stone cottages create an attractive scene. The descent from Kirby Hill is superb, with far-reaching views across the surrounding countryside towards the ruins of Ravensworth Castle.

## The walk

**1** From the centre of Ravensworth, follow the main road across the middle of the large village green (away from the Bay Horse Inn), at the south-east end of which you reach the castle ruins in the field on your right. Continue along this road out of Ravensworth then on along the road for 250 metres (walk on verge on left side of road avoid inside bend) then, just after the road bends sharply round to the right, take the track to the left through a gate (signpost). Walk straight on along the track for 50 metres then, where this track curves left, carry straight on across the field to reach a stile across a section of wall that leads onto track (cottage to your right). Head straight on along the track, enclosed at first then along the edge of a field, for 200 metres then, where the track bends sharp left towards some large barns, turn sharp right alongside the fence to reach a stile beside a gate in the corner of the field. After this stile, turn left heading across the middle of the large field to reach a stile over fence/wall (just to the left of the two telegraph poles). After the stile, walk straight on across the next field to join the wooded banks of Holme Beck on your left. Head straight on alongside the stream on your left for 450 metres to reach the road beside Whashton Bridge.

**2** At the road, turn left for a few paces then right immediately before Whashton Bridge and immediately right again over a stile across a fence towards 'Whashton' (NB: this path on the ground from Whashton Bridge up towards Whashton differs slightly from the path shown on the OS map; I have followed the path on the ground). After the stile, walk up the field alongside the fence/hedge (and road) on your right for 75 metres to reach a fence/hedge/wall across your path, where you turn left up alongside this field boundary for 150 metres to reach Z-bend in this fence/hedge on your right, where you bear right passing the two fence corners then, as you reach the second corner, carry straight on (away from the field boundary) rising up across the field to reach a gate in the top right-hand corner of the field that leads onto a road. As you reach the road, take the path immediately on your left (signpost) that leads out onto a field, after which turn right up the field and over a stile over a fence (left of the gateway in the wall), after which walk up the field alongside the wall/hedge on your right that leads through a small gate and onto the gravel driveway of Moss Cottage. Follow the driveway straight on to emerge in the centre of Whashton.

**3** Turn right up along the road through the village passing the Hack and Spade pub on your right and follow the road straight on out of Whashton then, just after you have left the village (just after the Whashton village sign), take the bridleway to the left (signpost). Follow this clear wide path heading up through woodland to reach a road. At the road, take the path opposite over a stile (signpost) then walk straight on alongside the hedge on your right, through a gate in the corner of the field, after which carry straight on alongside the hedge on your right to reach a stile over the fence to your right just before the end of this field. After the stile, head left across the field (towards the houses of Kirby Hill) to reach another stile over a fence, after which drop down the bank (heading towards the church

tower) to reach another stile beside a couple of trees. After the stile, walk straight on (towards the buildings of Kirby Hill), over a small stream then on across rough pastureland (heading along the top of the low 'ridge' of land) for 250 metres to reach rough track across your path, which you cross over (ignore the gate to the right across the small stream) and carry straight on (wall and stream on your right) for 50 metres to soon reach a squeeze-stile beside a gate in a wall corner that juts out into the field (houses of Kirby Hill just to your right). Head through the squeeze-stile/gate and follow the enclosed path round to the right to emerge on the village green in the centre of Kirby Hill.

**4** As you emerge onto the green at Kirby Hill, head to the left across the village green to reach the road junction beside the red 'phone box and Shoulder of Mutton pub, where you follow the road to the right passing the pub on your left then, where the road turns sharp right just after the pub, take the footpath over a stile to the left (signpost). After the stile, walk down the small field to soon reach another stile at the top of the bank (superb views), after which follow the path to the left slanting down the hillside to reach a stile in the bottom left corner of the field. After the stile, walk straight on alongside the wall on your left then, at the end of the field (farm on your left), cross the stile and head bear left across the next field (passing over earthworks) to reach a stile towards the far left-hand corner of the field (just before the overgrown old hedgerow/line of trees). Cross over this stile (and stream) to join a track, where you turn right to join the road on a bend. Head straight on along this road back into Ravensworth.

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## Birdwatch By Ian Kerr

**I**F those garden feeders favourites, blue tits, are scarcer than normal outside your windows this winter you are not alone. New data compiled from hundreds of birders shows that these popular little entertainers are at their lowest levels for eight years.

The data from the long-running garden watch scheme run by the British Trust Ornithology (BTO) blames a very poor breeding season in 2016. Pairs produced fewer young than normal with the wet spring and early summer reducing the number of foliage caterpillars vital to the species.

In my own nest box scheme,

brood sizes were poor. In good years pairs can fledge up to a dozen young but last season most of my broods were of only five or six. Some pairs either failed altogether or produced only one or two chicks.

The BTO says that the species had its worst breeding year on record in many areas, resulting in far fewer birds coming into gardens this winter. Senior research ecologist Dave Leech said that bird ringers had reported a 31% drop in the number of young blue tits compared with an average year. Young and inexperienced birds may also have had difficulty finding enough food

for survival as the wet weather continued into June.

Fortunately, many of our regular wintering species are providing some compensation by being present in good numbers. Waxwings continue to frequent many areas, the largest parties in County Durham being up to 200 at Lanchester and 50 at Great Lumley. The larger Cleveland concentrations involved 150 around Sainsbury's car park in Middlesbrough and 120 at Thornaby. A gathering of 200 bramblings, the Scandinavian cousins of our own chaffinches, was at Sedgfield, indicating a good winter for them, at least in

that area. A mealy redpoll, always a good winter find, was with a flock of lesser redpolls at Rainton Meadows.

Among larger species, a rough-legged buzzard was on the edge of the north Durham moors at Blanchland, a single juvenile Bewick's swan remained at Whittle Dene and a crane was at Netherwitton in Northumberland. Bean and European white-fronted geese have continued to be well reported, usually with gatherings of greylag and pink-footed geese.

It's proving to be a good winter for Arctic gulls. Coastal glaucous gulls were at Whitburn, Hartlepool, Burniston, Filey, St

Mary's Island and Holy Island. Others were at Stokesley and Nosterfield. The only Iceland gulls were at Blyth and North Shields Fish Quay.

The various rarities of remained: eastern black redstart at Skinningrove, black scoter at Goswick and shore larks at both Hartlepool and Druridge Bay.

