

Tales from DalesRail

Appleby Horse Fair Aidan Turner Bishop

(based on work done by Howard Hammersley)

DalesRail may not be operating in 2020 but that doesn't stop us sharing our many interesting experiences about our journeys. We hope you will share your interesting stories, favourite walks, fascinating anecdotes, and pictures about DalesRail. Please send them to richard.watts.crl@gmail.com or Simon Clarke at simon.clarke.crl@gmail.com.

Appleby Horse Fair is always held on the second Wednesday in June.

The 'travelling people' and horse traders arrive about 7 days prior to the sale day, to camp out on Fair Hill (formerly Gallows Hill), owned by Appleby Town Council, and officially opened on the Thursday prior to the final Sale Day.

The Fair is reputed to be the largest of its kind in the world, and is said to have existed under the protection of a charter given by James II (much to be disputed as you will later read) for the purchase and sale of all manner of goods, cattle, horses, mares, geldings, since 1685.



Appleby Horse Fair (Deben Dave)

Appleby-in-Westmorland, normally a quiet and peaceful town is changed overnight – gypsies, traders, potters and travelling people descend on the town: they have been travelling from

various parts of the country for several days, stopping overnight, or for a few days on their way. For three or four days before the encampment is opened, they may be seen at Sandford, Hilton, Mallerstang and the Sedbergh area, in groups of eight or ten caravans. There are many



Horse drawn caravans or Vardoos

types of vans from gypsy *vardoos* (horse drawn vans) to the very luxurious living homes drawn by Range Rovers, Mercedes or Rolls Royce's. Each year they meet old friends, renew acquaintanceships and rivalries. Traders may set up their stalls on Fair Hill, and a great variety of goods may be purchased. Those wishing to look into the future may have their fortunes told; children are selling lucky charms; camp fires are lit in the evenings, and if one is lucky the sound of one of the traditional gypsy songs may be heard – more often than not one hears regular pop music. Horse traders conduct their business daily, often taking their animals for a wash in the River Eden, at the bridge in the town centre. Animals are staked out on the roadsides for several miles around Fair Hill, and one may see the owners showing the paces of their animals up and down the nearby lanes. Tuesday and Wednesday sees the most intensive trading in animals and equipment, from saddlery to carriages.



Appleby Horse Fair (Durham Magazine)

Visitors come from all over the world to see the Fair and join in the fun. Do not expect to see swings and roundabouts; bring you wellies and be streetwise. Many hotels, guest houses, and accommodation are fully booked weeks beforehand; some inns and public houses close for part of the time. Those remaining open are full and overflowing with merrymakers. Restaurants and cafés are full, from morning till night and some visitors may prefer to bring picnic luncheons. If you are contemplating staying in the area during Fair Week book early to avoid disappointment. On Tuesday there is Harness Racing on Holme Farm meadow – 5 minutes from the town centre. Refreshments and drinks are available; car parking nearby; bookmakers and stalls on the field. Horse traders compete against each other and local enthusiasts in their hair-raising races; all types of horses and ponies are on show, and there is a real holiday atmosphere. Trading closes about 4pm on Wednesday and some vans leave along the A66 – there is an air of exhilaration in the town.

Traders celebrate successful business; families celebrate having met old friends; and the locals look forward to having their town back!