

INTRODUCTION



Austwick is a village and civil parish in the Craven district of North Yorkshire, England, about 5 miles (8 km) north-west of Settle. The village is on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The current population is 400 to 500. In earlier centuries about 30 families might have lived here so the population number has increased gradually assuming that there were about 4 to 5 members of each family. In the early 17th century there were 63 families and 32 single persons – making about 300 to 350 inhabitants.

The village can be thought of in three parts – Town End in the west, the Green in the middle, and Town Head with Austwick Hall in the east. Three clapper bridges are still in place across Austwick Beck, together with a stone bridge across a road into the village. (The best collection of clapper bridges in the country). There was also a ford. There are many stone-built houses with date stones from the third quarter of the 17th century – during the ‘Great rebuilding’ when economic stability in the country encouraged the replacement of thatched-roofed simple cottages with more substantial houses.

In early days most people combined work in agriculture with textile processing at home. There was a small local market but the principal markets were in Clapham and Settle.

Austwick was part of the parish of Clapham until 1879 but was a separate manor. A chapel-of-ease existed but a church was built only in 1839.

Today it is a quiet residential village with a shop/post office and a popular pub – the Game Cock. A description of a walk around the surrounding countryside is given by Michael Southworth, see www.NorthCravenHeritage.org.uk, Publications, NCHTJ 2005 p29.

Historical records are mainly to be found in the North Yorkshire County Record Office (PR/AUS and the Lord manuscripts ZXF), the Special Collections Library at Leeds University (Yorkshire Historical and Archaeological Society archives), Skipton Library, Lancashire Records Office (wills), the University of Lancaster (Stan Lawrence collection), The West Yorkshire Registry of Deeds and The National Archives but an exhaustive systematic search and collection of documents has not been made. Much more remains to be done! The location of items provided by various contributors and discussed here has not always been identified and needs searching for.

The notes used in preparing this partial historical account of Austwick were provided, amongst unknown others, by Mary and David Creaser, Sylvia Harrop, Jennifer Holt, Kevin Illingworth, Jean Jelley, Stan Lawrence, Bessie Marshall, Ken Pearce, Michael Pearson, Molly Preston, Richard and Lindsey Smith and Jill Sykes.