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THREE PLACES IN NORTH-EAST LANCASHIRE After Charles Jves

Abstract

WHALLEY ABBEY, HELMSHORE TEXTILE MUSEUMS, TOWNELEY HALL, BURNLEY

Steven Waling

THREE PLACES IN NORTH-EAST LANCASHIRE

After Charles Ives

1. WHALLEY ABBEY

I'm sampling this rather nice fruit cake,
chatting to the driver from Formby. There's
bits of the Abbey all over; we've been lucky

again with the weather. Vestments in Burnley,
statues in Preston, ashlar in various churches.
Our party lunched in Oswaldtwistle Mills,

took scenic 'B' roads through the Pennines.
The Parish Church holds the misericords –
griffins, Green Man, George and his dragon.

Ruins echo to the gossip of birds. There's plans
to restore the monks' dormitories, talk of English
Heritage. I barely remember having been here

past the Gate-house with its original doors.
Not an old haunt, but yes I was here before.
Look round the cloisters, gaps that were windows,

smell the rarefied air of long-dissolved psalms
as the Calder flows back to its source. Once
a line of crosses on old houses, drinking fountains,

marked the pilgrims route from Manchester.

2. HELMSHORE TEXTILE MUSEUMS

This café has a feel of studied neglect: fixed
green plastic chairs, tea, wrapped confectionery.
Like a works canteen, no mats, table cloths,

tinkle of polite conversation. Last time I came
the water-wheel loomed over, twice as large,
four fulling stocks boomed in unison. They've shrunk

in their urine wash or I've grown out if it. Now
hardly any visitors watch the Derby Doubler
pull its threads into line. Then Compton's Mule,

twisting the thinnest of yarns across centuries.
It must have been crammed as a weaver's arse
in this valley, its lodge deep enough for drowning.

There's a World Outside and a World of the Factory:
when the gates first opened Washington was President.
During Lincoln's Civil War, the hands all starved,

built roads between Burnley and Blackburn.
School Parties Welcome. I finish my coffee,
walk out and back past newly done up terraces

where a woman I don't know smiles as I pass.

3 TOWNELEY HALL, BURNLEY

Lemon cake with walnuts, coffee at the Stables
with a wagon wheel on the wall. The priesthole
(guided tours only) keeps my memories intact

till next time. Drizzle disrupts a battlement crow
or raven. Once the ladies inside walked the Long Gallery
this kind of weather, pondering the pious and brave

dead along the walls, who took the veil or died
at Marston Moor. Here's Richard, first to measure
rainfall; a useful skill to pass time by as tenants

plough his fields in the rain. The Great Hall's plasterwork
(Italian, 18th C) does not recall each schoolboy neck
that ever craned up to its mouldings. Did we then step

into the kitchens, run down that secret passageway
that isn't? Time stitched those secrets into the fabric
of these stones, intricate as the *Opus Anglicanum*

of Abbey vestments, orphreys expounding the Life
of the Virgin. I get lost returning through damp woods,
birds shriek out of the gloom. When I reach the road

a bus wakes me, turning round the bend for home.