

The great British weekend

Huddersfield, West Yorks

There is something incongruous about a shiny pink Nissan with a personalised plate referring to “wool”, but this is Huddersfield and the place is changing. It was once a mill town famous for worsted cloth, Harold Wilson and a laconic comment made by John Wesley in 1757 that “a wilder people I never saw in England”. Today, now the mills have stopped belching smoke, you can see why Friedrich Engels was keen on the architecture. It may seem counter-intuitive, but Huddersfield has 1,660 listed buildings, the third-highest number of any British town or city.

Arrive by train and you can't miss the station's splendid colonnaded façade — by James Pigott Pritchett, of York — and the handsome buildings around George Square and along John William Street, all, like the Italianate town hall, in creamy stone. The art gallery has Lowrys, as it should have, and the Tolson Museum will walk you through the industrial heritage that created the wealth behind the fine architecture. Or you can stroll by the canal and see how mills have become pleasing accommodation for students. The growing university is having an impact, shifting the mood of the place as bars open and cafés spread on to pavements.

There's a contrast between the imposing buildings and the unassuming nature of the people. I caught a brass band and a flower and vegetable show, attended by the mayor no less, where the onions were the size of melons, the leeks as long as stockings. But then, however wealthy the mill owners once were, they were hardly the majority, as you are reminded every time you see a row of deep windows on the top floor of a cottage. These maximised

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light for home weavers, and at Golcar, a couple of miles outside the town, three cottages have been colonised to form the Colne Valley Museum. There you'll find working looms, a spinning jenny, and perky volunteer staff almost as ancient. Thankfully, when they demonstrate wuzzing — the degreasing of wool using urine — they do it without the wee.

But the greatest surprise of this weekend was the proximity of open spaces on the steep hillsides that surround the town. On Castle Hill, Victoria Tower was built to commemorate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee but these days it attracts walkers — and drivers — who stop for the spectacular panorama over the town and far beyond. It was blustery when I visited and the kite flyers were out, liberated three years ago when overhead electricity cables were moved below ground.

Penny Wark

Need to know

Chowdown at...

Discovery Bay (www.discoverybayuk.com) is a find because the people who run it understand that feelgood eating depends on front-of-house knowledge and enthusiasm as well as its Afro-Caribbean food. Try the escabeche fish. For a fine curry cooked to order, the popular Nawaab (www.nawaabs.com) is far ahead of the average high street curry

house. At Thurstonland, the Rose and Crown does excellent pub food and is bucking the trend for pub decline, with good reason. www.therosethurstonland.co.uk

Bed down at...

Ackroyd House (www.ackroydhouse.co.uk) is a comfortable B&B on a hilltop with 360-degree views across the valleys. The rooms (£40pp per night) are spacious, the breakfasts locally sourced and you can use the private areas within the two-acre garden. Ideal as a walking or cycling base, and a ten-minute drive or £10 taxi ride from the centre of Huddersfield. For a more formal hotel and a spot of golf, Bagden Hall at Scissett (www.bagdenhall.classiclodges.co.uk) was built by a wealthy mill owner in the 1860s.

