

Walk 2 Blog 27.10.25

Stepping out for a cause: Bruce's Stray Walk Challenge for Older Citizens Advocacy York (OCAY)



Gild Master Bruce Harrison set out on his second walk on 23 October 2025, tracing the boundaries of Hob Moor to raise vital funds for OCAY's work.



OCAY is honoured to be the Gild of Freemen of the City of York's chosen charity for 2025–26. Bruce has begun a series of walks exploring York's historic Strays, with the first across Walmgate Stray having taken place last month.

Gild friends, OCAY Trustee Ali Rogan and Hector the dog joined the walk on a drizzly Thursday morning. When asked about his inspiration behind the Strays Walk Challenge he explained: "Four years ago towards the end of lockdown, I went to explore the Strays. I didn't know much about them as no book covered the whole thing, so I took it upon myself to learn more."

He went on to give us a guided tour of Hob Moor, a 90 acre expanse of grassland which by 1624 had become inter-commoned (ie its use was shared) with Holgate, and the Knavesmire with Dringhouses and Middlethorpe, forming part of Micklegate Stray, one of York's four Strays which extend to 800 acres or so in total.



It remains an unspoilt oasis amid the bustle of suburban York and was designated a Statutory Local Nature Reserve in 2003. Its formation stretches back to the last Ice Age and over the centuries it has witnessed the unfolding history of the city, having played host to Scottish soldiers during the 1644 Siege of York, a watermill, brickmakers, many cattle and even a golf course - amongst others.

Just a few steps from the start of our adventure on Hob Laine leading from the Tadcaster Road entrance, we came across the plague stone. In 1604, a third of York's inhabitants (3,500 approx) died from the bubonic plague. Sufferers were banished from the city as a means of protecting the remaining population. Many were relocated to temporary huts or lodges on Hob Moor where it is thought that money was placed in a shallow sink of vinegar on this stone, to pay for food and everything they needed. This stone was cleaned and refurbished by the Freeman of the City in 1988.

Next to it, the taller Hob Stone arrived a century later. This stone sculpted in c1315, was originally an effigy of a knight, probably placed over his tomb. The sculpture is very eroded but it's possible to see his decorated shield and the letter C (meaning common). He was a member of the de Ros family and an inscription from 1717 stated "This image long Hob's name has bore who was a knight in time of yore and gave this Common to ye poor.".



Bruce with Plague Stone and Hob Stone



Hob Moor Railway Tunnel

The allotments opposite were created circa 1917 as part of the 'dig for victory' campaign' to improve the food supply for the city during the first world war.

We continued through the pedestrian and cycle railway tunnel.

Being designated as Common Land, Hob Moor was traditionally used for the grazing of livestock and was a component part of the food security provisions of the city. Such a valuable asset inevitably fell under the stewardship of York's Freemen whose origins date as far back as the 11th century. Only they held the right to graze their animals according to established custom. The moor itself is a clay-rich remnant of the post-glacial landscape, believed to have once formed part of a shallow post-glacial lake bed.

During the Civil War more than 10,000 Scottish troops were encamped for ten weeks to the South of the city, many on Hob Moor, as part of the Parliamentary Army that besieged York. Allied with Cromwell's army, they reportedly caused considerable hardship for local residents. The Royalist Prince Rupert arrived to lift the siege on 1 July 1644 but his and the Marquess of Newcastle's forces were defeated the following day at the Battle of Marston Moor. The city fell a fortnight later to the Parliamentarians, marking the beginning of a decline in York's political influence.

Bruce encouraged us to take a closer look at the ridge and furrow pattern of some of the grassland - a legacy of medieval ploughing with oxen and explained the characteristic broad



Medieval ploughing ridge and furrow pattern

curved formation still visible on parts of the stray. In other areas, narrower, straighter parallel ridges were indicative of the Napoleonic period ploughing methods using horses.

The Napoleonic War led to a period of unrest in the early 19th century which was marked by widespread social and economic upheaval. Bread riots sparked by grain shortages and high flour tariffs, were soon followed by the Luddite riots, protesting at the introduction of machinery, whilst Swing riots by agricultural workers resulted in the widespread destruction of threshing machines.

This wave of discontent culminated in the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832, which expanded political representation and began to challenge the old systems of local power. The

subsequent Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 broke the monopoly of York's Freemen over city governance. Although they lost much of their civic authority, the Freemen retained the stewardship of the city's Strays for some decades. The York (Micklegate Strays) Act 1907 transferred the management of the Stray (including Hob Moor) to the City of York Council.



Former putting green

In 1920 the York Railway Institute established a 15 hole golf course on Hob Moor to replace the earlier Knavesmire Club which in turn was re-located and renamed Pike Hills in 1946.



Today the Moor is managed by the City Authorities in conjunction with The Friends of Hob Moor (established in 1999), as a public amenity rich with biodiversity. Seasonal grazing by cattle usually takes place between May and October.

Bruce's fundraising journey

When asked why he chose to dedicate his fundraising efforts to OCAY this year, Bruce explained: "As we get older and life continues to speed up, it can be difficult not to feel left behind or overwhelmed by the pace of modern life. It's vital that no one is excluded from today's increasingly cashless world. OCAY provides essential advocacy and practical support to help people over 50 in the York area access the services and benefits they need."

Support the fundraiser today

<https://localgiving.org/fundraising/BrucesStrayWalkChallenge>

For more information about the work of OCAY, how to be a volunteer and how to access support:

- Call: 01904 676 200
- Email: info@ocay.org.uk
- Visit: The Priory Street Centre, York
- <https://oldercitizensadvocacyyork.org.uk>

To find out more about the Freemen of York

- <https://freemenofyork.co.uk>