

IMOGEN CLARK

POSTCARDS FROM A STRANGER

the inside story

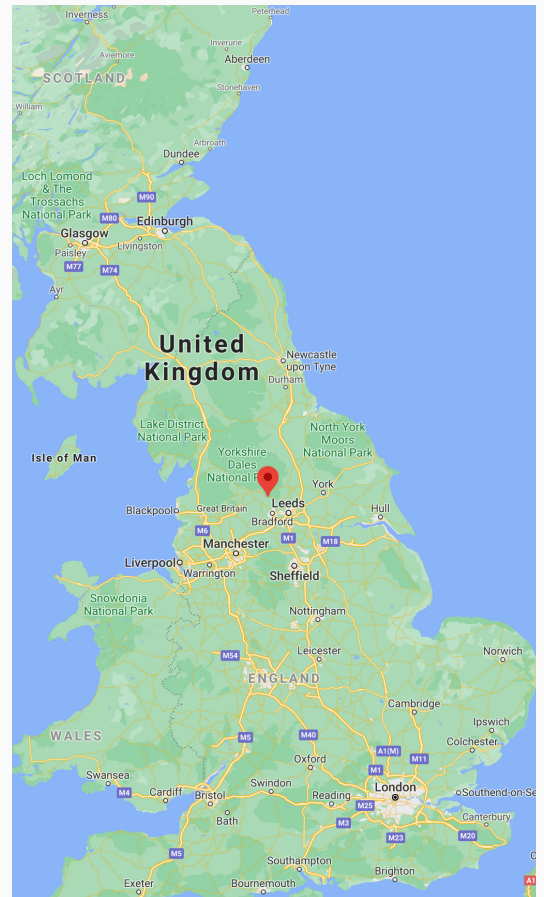


Where is Ilkley?

Ilkley is a small town of around 15,000 inhabitants situated in Yorkshire in the north of England. It has been continuously occupied since the Bronze Age (around 1800 BC). The Romans also settled here for a while following their invasion of Great Britain.

Slightly more recently, it became a spa town for the Victorians who flocked here to take the healing waters and many of the town's houses (including Cara's) and its civic buildings were built around this time.

The town is situated in a valley on the banks of the River Wharfe which begins its journey in Langstrothdale in the Yorkshire Dales to the northeast of the town and then flows until it joins with the River Ouse. The town's most notable feature is Ilkley Moor, shown above. If you ask anyone what they know about Ilkley they will often burst into song. Ilkley Moor Bah Tat (Ilkley Moor without a hat) is a popular folk song sung in Yorkshire dialect. The lyrics tell you what will happen to you if you are silly enough to venture onto the chilly moor without being suitably dressed. The song suggests that it won't end well!





The River Wharfe

When Cara needs time to think she wanders down to walk along the riverbank. It's far gentler than the rugged moor but no less beautiful for that as it meanders its way along the valley.

Home to some very shy otters, brown trout and lots of waterbirds it's amazing what you can spot as you wander along. If you look really carefully, you can see that I managed to snap a heron in this shot although I'm not sure I noticed him at the time.

Ilkley also has a thriving town centre with lots of independent shops, restaurants and cafés and Europe's smallest 4K cinema, a favourite haunt of mine. All that together with a raft of sports clubs make it a lovely place to visit and a great place to set a book!

Cara's house.

Cara and Joe live on the north side of the river in a Victorian townhouse nestling in the shadow of the moor.

I had so much choice when I was looking for suitable houses to fire my imagination as there are streets and streets of three and four storey Victorian terraces all over Ilkley.

However, the one that I kept returning to was this one. It's very typical of houses in that part of town. Of course, Joe's house was a lot more run down than this one, but you get the idea. I like to think of the dusty attic where Cara and Michael were forbidden to go, and to picture the Christmas tree in that huge bay window.





Simeon's flat

This is where I chose to locate Simeon's flat. It's such an interesting building. It's divided into flats now, but before that it was a maternity hospital, and my closest friend from school was born inside.

Before that, Hillside Court was called North View House and had a moment of fame because Charles Darwin and his family stayed there whilst he was in Ilkley taking the waters in November 1859. Coincidentally, he was in residence when his book was published. Like *Postcards*, that one turned out to be a bestseller too - it was called *On the Origin of Species*. You might have heard of it!

You can see just how close the building is to the moor which is why I chose it for Simeon's place and I put him in an attic flat because there was one for sale when I was writing so it was easy to have a peek inside to help me with the descriptions.





Photo credit Toast House

The café

The café where Cara and Beth meet is based on my own favourite coffee shop in Ilkley, Toast House. It's a place where I like to go and meet my friends for coffee and a catch up. I have also been known to open up my laptop and write a chapter or two whilst the café buzzes around me.

In fact, I feel so at home there that I chose it as the venue for *The Thing about Clare* book launch party for my friends and family. (The picture to the right is of that evening.)





The pub

You may remember the scene one night between Christmas and New Year when Cara strolls to town to buy supplies and ends up being dragged into the pub by a former client. Well, this is the pub.

Friends of Ham, another independent business in Ilkley and another favourite haunt of mine. The long table in the photo below on the right is where I pictured the moment when Simeon and Cara first meet. That table is no longer there but it's been preserved for posterity in the pages of *Postcards From a Stranger*!

I hope you have enjoyed seeing the places that inspired me to write the book. Maybe one day you might even get to visit us. Don't forget that you can check out more about me and my writing life at <https://imogenclark.com>.

Imogen



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