

Ripponden looks very much like Holmfirth, chosen long ago by the BBC as the location for *Last of the Summer Wine*. But those terrifying battleaxes, with wrinkled stockings and nylon overalls crackling with static, are noticeable by their absence. The women of Ripponden and district evidently look after themselves. This small West Yorkshire former mill town is now blessed with a tanning salon, a beauty therapist and at least three hairdressers.



In other words, it has been feminised. Ironmongers and 'gent's outfitters' are noticeable by their absence. At least the last unreconstructed middle-aged men hereabouts have managed to keep a corner that is forever northern England. You'll find them every Saturday evening, sitting in their reserved window seats at the Old Bridge inn, putting the world to rights and discussing events on the football, cricket or rugby field. Some of the chat is punctuated by a volley of flying crumbs. After all, the main business of the evening is the discussion and analysis of pork pies. Rarely in the field of human conversation have so many words been devoted to pastry, jelly and cured meat. Almost every one of those words is recorded in black ballpoint in a thick, hard-backed diary by Bob Letven, scribe of the Pork Pie Appreciation Society. He writes with the neatness and deliberation that you would expect from a primary school head teacher. Among the other members are a lorry driver, a haulage contractor, at least a couple of engineers, the health care development manager of a pharmaceutical company and someone who works in human resources at Yorkshire Water.







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Way Down in the Valley, by David G. Smith, 1995. Oil on canvas, 18" x 24".  
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