

Client: The Piece Hall Yellow News
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BIG TURN UPS IN 'TROUSER TOWN'

When **BARRIE MILLS** and his family visited the historic textiles town of Hebden Bridge and the surrounding area, they expected to find pretty scenery and quaint shops... but the UK's biggest climbing wall and a state of the art science museum was a surprise

THEY say it's good to have relatives in high places. Although when your 11-year-old daughter is clinging to a vertical concrete wall, over 100 feet up, you might not share that sentiment.

Of course, she wasn't in any real danger and was, in fact, having the time of her life - otherwise this would have been a rather dark introduction to a light travel feature.

We were at ROKT, a huge climbing gym that sprawls through the vast spaces inside a former flour mill in the West Yorkshire town of Brighouse.

While most of the climbing areas are indoors, ROKT boasts the UK's highest man-made outdoor climbing wall, 36 metres straight up the side of an old grain silo that is taller than the Tower of London.

Owner Euan Noble has turned the once-derelict premises into a haven for climbers from all over the UK and a busy activity centre for families who can take part in Nerf battles, yoga, spin classes, or attempt to free themselves from the fiendishly-plotted Escape rooms.

Although Euan is also a health and anti-obesity campaigner, with the ear of the government, not everything he has created here is about running around like a mad

thing. Next door to the outdoor climbing wall (known as ROKT-FACE) and beside a pretty stretch of the Calder and Hebble Navigation canal he has a pub called the Millers, regularly voted one of the best in Yorkshire, and above it a restaurant called 47 Grains - another nod to the flour-milling past of the location.

So parents like me, whose climbing days are so far in the past they'd need Dr Who to find them, can sit with a pint in the beer garden and watch their offspring climb the giant wall.

If I had managed to get to the top myself, though, I would have been

able to enjoy the breathtaking views across picturesque Calderdale, our holiday destination for the weekend.

Home base was Elmet Farmhouse in the tiny village of Pecket Well, high up above the bustling market town of Hebden Bridge.

Beautifully restored by owner and design historian Lesley Jackson, Elmet is a Grade II listed farmhouse dating from around 1728, with its own glorious views of Calderdale.

From its stone mullion windows or - when the weather is kind - from a seat in the garden, you look out

across Hebden Bridge and neighbouring Heptonstall, enjoying the same view immortalised by photographer Fay Godwin on the cover of the book of photographs and poems she produced in 1979 with the late Poet Laureate Ted Hughes, entitled Remains of Elmet.

Hughes, born in nearby Mytholmroyd, had a cousin who lived in the neighbouring cottage to Elmet Farmhouse, and would have been a familiar face in the little lane leading to the houses in the 1950s and 60s.

Artists of all kinds have long found themselves drawn to Hebden

Bridge, regularly voted one of the nicest places in the UK to live.

That it was also the birthplace of Ed Sheeran should not be held against it. Nor should its former nickname 'Trouser Town', from its garment-making past, concern the holidaymaker too much.

Hebden is packed with quirky independent shops that spread along its maze of tiny streets and down to the canal. We were there during the town's Arts Festival, when musicians, writers, photographers and artists of all sorts arrive for intimate performances and exhibitions in some unusual venues.

It's a great time to visit and feel the lively, bohemian atmosphere of

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the place.

When Hebden's textile industry was in full swing, much of its produce would have been traded at the Piece Hall in Halifax, about eight miles up the road (the 'Piece' was a unit of measurement for cloth).

Recently renovated, the 18th century, Grade I-listed building is like a Roman piazza transplanted to Yorkshire. Its large courtyard is surrounded on all four sides by a three-storey building, fronted with colonnades and housing 315 rooms where the cloth traders once had their shops.

Now, it's home to independent businesses, everything from bookshops to ice cream parlours and even a shop specialising in model cars. It's a unique place – open and light. It couldn't be further removed from the dark, Satanic mills that characterised the textile industry at the time of its construction.

But there are only so many craft shops children will visit and, conveniently, a few hundred yards away is Eureka!, the national children's museum.

'Museum' suggests glass cases full of Victorian dolls and dusty toys – Eureka! Is more of a discovery centre, packed with hands-on exhibits that explain the world and how it works in a fun environment scaled to suit smaller people.

My two girls particularly loved the

'magic of science' demonstration given by Danny, one of the centre's friendly staff. He showed them how to create lightning, made a fiery tornado and, for an encore, conjured a column of flame from their outstretched palms. All perfectly safe – after all, as Danny explained, he was wearing a white coat.

They were also able to take part in a digital art workshop, creating strange creatures that were displayed on giant screens.

Final stop on our weekend in Calderdale was a walk around Heptonstall, a beautiful, unspoilt Yorkshire village centred on a steep

main street straight out of a Sunday night TV drama.

Although it's small, there's a lot to see, including the two adjacent churches of St Thomas a Becket (damaged by storms 150 years ago and now left as an atmospheric ruin), and its replacement, St Thomas the Apostle. Here, too, you can find the grave of the tragic American poet Sylvia Plath, wife of Ted Hughes, who died in 1963.

A little haven of tranquility, Heptonstall was the perfect place to end a weekend of fun, adventure and relaxation.

NEED TO KNOW

■ **BARRIE MILLS** and his family visited West Yorkshire as guests of Visit Calderdale.

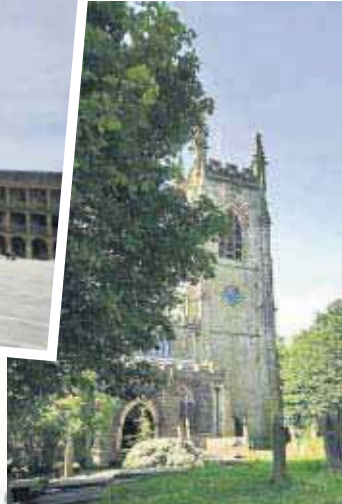
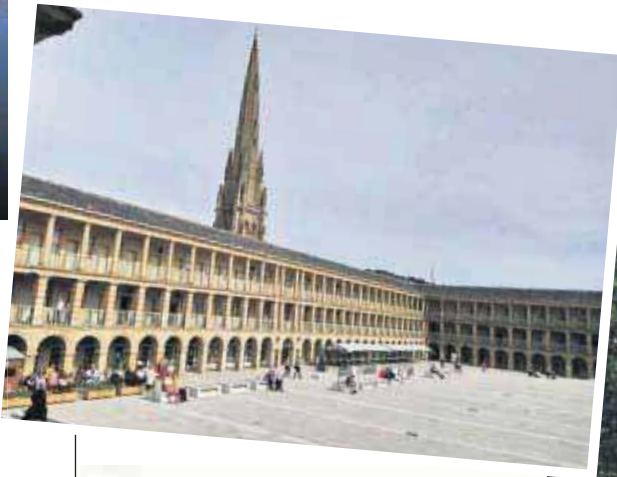
■ They stayed at Elmet Farmhouse in Pecket Well - elmetfarmhouse.co.uk



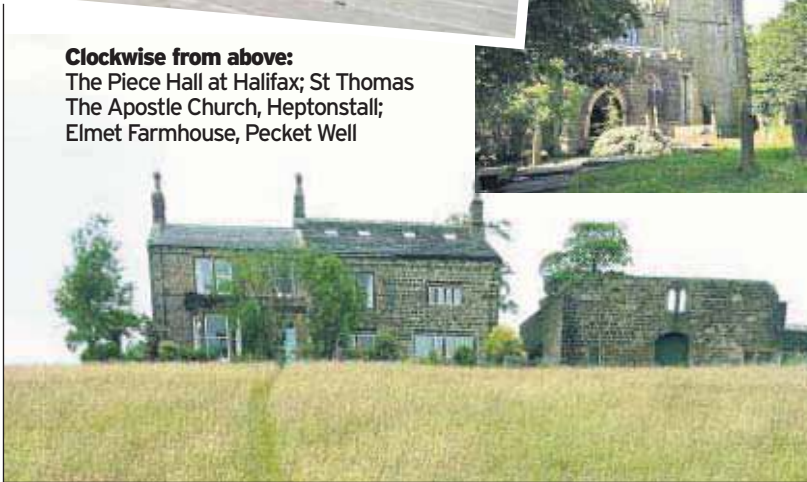
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Niamh Mills reaches the top of the giant climbing wall at ROKT in Brighouse



Clockwise from above:
The Piece Hall at Halifax; St Thomas
The Apostle Church, Heptonstall;
Elmet Farmhouse, Pecket Well



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Isobel Mills takes part in a science demonstration at Eureka! The National Children's Museum in Halifax with staff member Danny