

27<sup>th</sup> February 2023

## Obstruction

**“Throughout the greater part of his life George III  
was a kind of ‘consecrated obstruction’.”**

William Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (*The Monarchy*) 1967

I don't have an opinion on the monarchy of George III, but it's another kind of obstruction I have in mind today, consecrated or otherwise.

Walking recently on a section of the Cleveland Way north of Whitby, I followed the track of a disused railway along the cliff top. Offering spectacular views of the mile-long stretch of beach sweeping down to Sandsend, the path took me past disused Alum and Iron Ore excavations, part of the industrial heritage of the rail line and the surrounding area.

Rounding a wide bend, I found an entrance to a tunnel with metal fencing across it to bar my way. A passing walker indicated that the tunnel had been closed because it was dangerous, and, to continue on the path, I had to climb a steep set of steps into the trees in order to get over the outcrop of rock. I decided not to bother. So I retraced my steps back to Sandsend for a reviving cup of coffee and a cheese scone. For the trainline to continue uninterrupted, a tunnel had to be bored through the rock. But for me nearly a century later, it wasn't to be.

Clearly, there are different ways of dealing with an obstruction on a path. You can go through it, particularly if clever, skilled and hardworking people have put a tunnel there already. So today I give thanks for the tunnel-builders of my life, who make it easy for me to go forward because of the work they've already done.

Or ... you can go over it, because there's no tunnel. People have dealt with that before me too. So today I give thanks for those who show me the way; who've cut the steps into the hill; who direct me to the right path; who reassure me that I can make and keep going.

Or ... I can wait, recognise where the obstruction is, retrace my steps and take stock, and be better able to tackle the problem another time. So today I give thanks for the waiting time; the "not yet" time; the planning and preparation time; the getting-my-resources-and-resolve-in-order time. There is no failure in that, for thank God I can recognise that the coffee-and-a-cheese-scone time are a necessary part of the journey too.

### A prayer for today

*God of the journey, easy, hard or delayed, thank you for showing me a way ahead. Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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