

Kirklees Valley Heritage Trail





A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE KIRKLEES VALLEY

Prior to the industrial revolution the Kirklees valley contained a water-powered corn mill but little other development.

Typical of the valleys of south east Lancashire, Kirklees Brook was a focus for water-power-based industrial development in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It was also attractive to the water-hungry industries of bleaching, dyeing and printing. By 1850 there were 8 factories between Greenmount and Woodhill.

The 20th Century saw the decline of valley-constrained enterprises and nature colonising their remains. Whilst the valley has always had wildlife value, the industrial remains, particularly the lodges and stonework have allowed a more diverse range of habitats to develop, to the extent that much of the valley is now a Site of Biological Importance.

This booklet takes you on a 4 mile tour of the valley, starting at Tottington bus terminus, describing the points of interest to be found along the way. The points are located on a map on the inside back cover. Parts of the route are steep and un-surfaced, so boots are advised. You are also advised not to stray from marked paths as some of the remains are hazardous.

We are indebted to Ken Craven and Tottington Civic Society, who produced a forerunner publication in 1990. If you would like to know more about the valley than this summary booklet offers, a more detailed account will shortly be available from the Civic Society.

Thanks to

Bury Archives Service, Barry Lane and Michael Blakemore for the historic photographs.



POINTS OF INTEREST

1 - Church of St. John

From the bus terminus, walk down Kirklees Street. On the left is the listed Church of St John, built in 1853 as a 'Free Church of England' church. The Free Church movement, of which local employer William Roberts was a supporter and benefactor, objected to what was seen as increasing catholic influence on the Church of England.

2 - Tottington station

The site of Tottington station can be found by following Kirklees Street down to its junction with Royds Street and then continuing through the gate onto the old station approach road.

Tottington Station was one of 4 original stations on the former Bury to Holcombe Brook branch railway, opened in 1882 and closed in 1963. The railway was built by the Bury and Tottington District Railway Company, amongst whose supporters were local industrialists Samuel Knowles, Hugh Roberts and Richard Olive.

If you turn to the right on meeting the main track, the station's concrete platform edge can still be seen. It had a small station building, goods shed and siding.

From here the route follows the former railway down towards Bury. Along the way, concrete bases in the undergrowth at the side of the path are remains of an experimental high voltage overhead electric power system, possibly the first in the world that existed between 1913 and 1918.



3 - Sunnywood Halt

This is the site of a halt constructed in 1918 in an attempt to increase passenger numbers following the electrification (by a 3rd rail system) of the line.

4 - Heathland habitat

The sides of the cutting are important for the heathland and acid grassland vegetation both increasing rare habitats in lowland Britain but relatively common throughout the Kirklees Valley along the railway and steeper slopes down to the Brook. Heather, tormentil and wavy hair grass are the characteristic species, but are threatened by succession to oak, bramble and rosebay willowherb dominated vegetation.





5 - Woolfold station

The site of one of the original stations on the Holcombe Brook railway lies under the back gardens of houses on Pickering Close and Stockton Drive.

At this point you turn left, down the hill to the concrete footbridge over the brook.

6 - Kirklees Brook wildlife

Kingfisher, dipper and grey wagtails can be seen along the brook, the former often just a flash of metallic blue, whilst the black and white dipper and confusingly to many the yellow grey wagtail can be seen in and on the brook hunting for insects.





7 - Olives paper mill lodges

On your right as you climb up the slope beyond the bridge is the site of a small former lodge, fed by goyt from an upstream weir, one of many lodges, some of which still survive, which served Olives paper mill, downstream.

From here you climb up the bank and turn left to follow the top of the valley slope to the stile onto Garside Hey Road. Turn right and then left immediately after the garage/depot.

8 - Garside Hey

The garage is the site of the former Garside Hey farm. Follow the footpath up the side of the garage and follow the field boundary.



9 - Pond

After a short distance you reach a pond which unlike other open water in the valley will have been created as a result of agricultural rather than industrial development. Unusually for a farm pond there is an earth dam at the western end. Large red and blue tailed damselflies can be seen in summer and both smooth and palmate newts breed in the pond.

Pass the pond and follow the hedge, passing through it along the way, to emerge on the track to Brandlesholme Old Hall.

10 - Brandlesholme Old Hall

Whilst unprepossessing from the outside, the hall is one of the oldest buildings in the Borough and dates from the 13th century, though it was remodelled in 1849. For 11 generations it was the home of the Greenhalghs, one of whom, John, was made Governor of the Isle of Man by the Earl of Derby in 1640.





11 - Brandlesholme cruck barn

Not far beyond the Old Hall is a cruck-framed barn with sandstone walls, brick gables and a stone slab roof, probably dating from the 16th century.

Retrace your steps back down the track and then continue until you reach a square reservoir on your right and overlook a modern housing estate on your left.

12 - Kirklees bleachworks

Kirklees bleachworks, established by 1803, stood where the housing estate now is. Like many textile factories it had a varied life. The works was the site of experiments to invent artificial silk (rayon) in 1883 and the location of its production from 1925 to 1955. The works later operated as a dyehouse (between 1962 and 1980). After sporadic use by small businesses the buildings were demolished in 2003 and the chimney was the last to be felled by the famous steeplejack, Fred Dibnah.





13 - Square Lodge

This reservoir dates from around 1925 and provided water to Kirklees bleachworks. Enjoy the view of Holcombe Hill beyond.

The variety of wildlife and vegetation in the mill lodges, ranging from large deep open water bodies good for wildfowl and feeding bats, to shallow hollows now dominated by marsh and swamp is one of the prime reasons for the designation of the Kirklees Valley as a site of biological importance and its development as a Local Nature Reserve.

The rare and protected great crested newt has been recorded in one of the smaller lodges as well as toad, frog and the two more common species of newt in other reservoirs in the valley. Dragonflies such as the brown and southern hawker, four spotted chaser and common darter can all be seen in the valley as well as damselflies such as the common and azure blues and the large red dancing over the surfaces of the water.

14 - Greenmount wild bird hospital

The bird hospital was founded in 1970 on land first leased and then purchased from Kirklees bleachworks.



15 - Secondary woodland habitat

The route crosses the brook on a footbridge. From the bridge is dominated by woodland and scrub that has invaded the old factory sites. By far the commonest species in these areas are the willows, which are thriving on the disturbed ground. Willows in turn are some of the best species for attracting invertebrates which in turn feed woodland bird species such as blue and great tits.

16 - Kirklees Printworks

Across the brook on the right, in the undergrowth, are the remains of Kirklees Print Works. This existed between 1791 and around 1908. Originally a cotton mill, it became a printworks around 1830. In 1863 it employed 63 men, 45 boys and 17 girls. The back wall of the works is still visible, as is a silted up lodge behind it.

Continue up the cobbled track, Kirklees Street built in 1791 to serve the printworks. Take the first path on the right, just before the site of some cottages associated with the printworks.



17 - Tottington Mill

The track takes you past the site of Tottington Mill ash tip on the right, then one of Kirklees printworks' reservoirs which dates from around 1860, then another reservoir on the left before arriving at one of the entrances to Tottington Mill, a scene painted by Lowry in 1921.

A corn mill stood on the brook here in 1775 and was replaced in 1792. By 1796 there was a cotton mill, which may well have occupied the corn mill.

This was owned by John Gorton and his family who contributed to the prosperity and expansion of Tottington between 1790 and 1820 through the development of Kirklees and Tottington Mill.

The mill was acquired by Joshua Knowles in 1821, was converted to a printworks and underwent a rapid expansion on both sides of Mill Lane. In 1841 there were 400 people employed at the mill. After the Holcombe Brook railway was opened, a coal siding was built.

Joshua formerly worked at the Grant Brothers' mill in Ramsbottom and became a local dignitary, presiding over the opening of Peel Tower in 1852. There's a memorial to him in the churchyard at St Anne's.

The mill closed in 1928 but the engraving shop was used until the 1940s, soon after which it was demolished. The site is now overgrown but many remains survive, including walls, vats, settling tanks, engine beds, a flywheel pit and chimney bases. Exploration of the site is not advised in view of the number of hazards.



18 - Tower Farm

Up the cobbled track on the left is Tower Farm. It was built by Joshua Knowles in 1840 as stables and dwellings. It was modelled on Nuttall Hall Farm, the 14th century home (now demolished) of his former employers, the Grant Brothers.

After Tower Farm turn right then left up the path before the former millworkers cottages to Brandlesholme Road.

19 - Nabbs House

Across Brandlesholme Road is Nabbs House with its listed garden summer house folly, built by the eccentric John Turner around 1835.

20 - Greenmount cricket club

Further up Brandlesholme Road on the left is the picturesque cricket club, founded in 1867.



21 - Greenmount old school

The walk route turns left onto the Kirklees Trail, the former Holcombe Brook railway, but just beyond the trail entrance, on the right, is the independent chapel and Sunday school built in 1848 and named Green Mount. A day school had been in operation at Tottington Mill since 1863, but it moved here in 1867. It was used as a school until 1982 when it became a community hall.

22 - Greenmount station

The railway to Holcombe Brook used to pass under Brandlesholme Road but the road now marks the end of the Kirklees Trail. Greenmount station was a single platform with a small building and a single siding.



23 - Knowles' sidings

After crossing Shepherd Street the curve of the former Knowles's siding heading for Tottington Mill can just about be made out in the woodland on the left.

24 - Island lodge

The nine arch Tottington viaduct was built to carry the Holcombe Brook branch railway over Tottington Mill's Island Lodge (so-named because of its small island). The viaduct piers were built wide to allow for a future double-tracking of the railway - which never happened.

Island lodge in its current guise dates from the 1820s. However, a smaller reservoir existed previously to serve the corn mill on the site of Tottington Mill.

Bats such as daubentons and pipistrelle are extremely abundant within the valley and have been monitored for many years by the South Lancs Bat Group.



25 - Stormalong Hill bleachworks

On the west side of Island Lodge viaduct, beyond the storage yard can be seen the remains of Stormalong Hill Bleach Works.

A cotton spinning factory was set up here in the early 1800s, but by 1838 had become Haslam and Roberts' bleachworks. It was taken over by the Bleachers and Dyers association around 1900 and later acquired by Joseph Scholes and sons cloth finishers. This business survived until the late 1990s when the site was acquired by Site Electrical and some of the buildings demolished.

26 - Roberts' sidings

Beyond the viaduct on the right can be seen the coal sidings for Stormalong Hill bleachworks.

Follow the former railway the short distance back to Tottington station.

TRAVEL INFORMATION IN AND AROUND BURY

BY BUS

The walk starts from Tottington station, which is a short walk from the terminus of the 469 bus, which on weekdays runs to Tottington every 30 minutes from Rochdale and every 10 minutes from Bury.

BY CAR

If arriving by car, there is parking off Market Street near Tottington library and the walk route can be accessed from Laurel Street.

BY BICYCLE

Route 6 of the National Cycle Network follows the Kirklees Trail and is signed from north and south.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Bury Tourist Information Centre (0161 253 5111)
Bury Central Reference Library (0161 253 5871)
Bury Archive Service (0161 253 6314)
Tottington Civic Society (01204 884221)

WEBSITES

Bury Council: www.bury.gov.uk



3 Knowsley Place, Duke Street, Bury, BL9 0EJ
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