

Bradfield Walks & Trails

The Dale Dyke Disaster

Although little known today, the breaching of the Dale Dyke dam in 1864 remains amongst the worst man-made disasters in British history.

Construction of the Dale Dyke dam had begun in January 1859 and by 1864 the reservoir was almost complete, enclosing an area of water a mile in length and a quarter of a mile wide. The embankment, which held back almost 700 million gallons of water, was 500 feet wide and 100 feet high.

The evening of 11th March 1864 was rough and stormy. It had been raining heavily and William Horsfield, a local quarryman, was crossing the embankment of the newly-built dam to go home. He noticed a crack, only about the width of a man's fingers, but extending along the side of the bank for about 50 yards. He told another worker and a number of men, including Mr. Fountain, one of the contractors, inspected the crack. Although they decided there was no imminent danger, Mr. Fountain's son, Stephenson Fountain, was sent to ride to Sheffield to fetch Mr. Gunson, the Sheffield Waterworks Company's engineer.

When Mr. Gunson arrived, he hurried to the spot where the crack had been found. The opening was now wider, with water foaming over the top of the embankment. Suddenly a gap about 30 feet wide opened and water rushed out like a river.



Little Matlock Mill



Flood Ruins, Rowel Bridge

"It's all up, the embankment is going!" Gunson shouted. A huge volume of water was now gushing forth, and the men ran for their lives back across the embankment. The chasm extended, the centre of the embankment sank and almost 700 million gallons of water swept like an avalanche down the valley,

with a noise like thunder. The speed and force of the water was tremendous. Mr. Rawlinson, the inspector appointed by the Government to investigate the tragedy, said later, *"Not even a Derby horse could have carried the warning in time to have saved the people down the valley."*

Although there was only one casualty in Low Bradfield, the Great Sheffield Flood, as it became known, inflicted massive damage downstream along the rivers Loxley and Don through the centre of Sheffield, resulting in the deaths of more than 250 people and destroying forges, mills, houses and bridges.

Dale Dyke dam was eventually rebuilt in 1875 on a smaller scale. A stone engraved C.L.O.B. (centre line old bank) marks the site of the original dam wall. A flood memorial stone was erected in 1991 by Bradfield Historical Society to commemorate those drowned and a memorial plaque also can be seen in St Nicholas' Church, High Bradfield.

(Adapted from Samuel Harrison 'A Complete History of the Great Flood at Sheffield 1864')



Riverdale Cottages, Little Matlock

Suggested walk in the area

Circular walk around Dale Dyke reservoir.

This is a well-marked path, created by Yorkshire Water. Length 3 miles. Allow up to 2 hours.



For more information about Bradfield Walks & Trails please visit: www.bradfield-walkers.org.uk

Please follow the Countryside Code when visiting the area.

- ✓ Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs.
- ✓ Leave gates and property as you find them.
- ✓ Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- ✓ Keep dogs under close control.
- ✓ Consider other people.

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Bradfield Parish Council works in partnership with other local authorities, organisations and community groups across Bradfield, Stannington, Worrall, Loxley, Oughtibridge and Wharcliffe Side to improve the quality of life of everyone in the area.



Dale Dyke Breach