



# WALKERS ARE WELCOME

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## **A WALK DOWN THE LOXLEY VALLEY** **TAKING IN THE ROUTE OF THE GREAT SHEFFIELD FLOOD OF 1864**

### **Introduction**

This walk has been designed to help those who intend walking the course of the Great Sheffield Flood of 1864 down the Dale Dyke Beck, which forms the source of the River Loxley at Low Bradfield and then remains of the devastation are included along the route for your interest.

The Great Sheffield Flood of 1864 occurred on the night of March 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> shortly before midnight. William Horsfield, a quarryman who lived at Thompson Houses on the opposite side of the valley from the quarry where he worked, discovered a crack earlier that afternoon. He was using the new embankment to cross the valley, as the reservoir was almost full with water and near to completion. The alarm was raised and Stephenson Fountain was despatched on horseback by his father who was a contractor on the site to summon the Chief Engineer, John Gunson from his home on Division Street, Sheffield to return to the site. He had to stop at Damflask village to have repairs to the horse girth and whilst waiting mentioned that he was going to inform Gunson of the impending disaster.

Gunson had inspected the reservoir earlier that day and found nothing untoward and returned home, however when receiving the news from Fountain he summoned his assistant David Craven who lived nearby in Rockingham Street to return immediately to Dale Dyke.

As Gunson and Craven were approaching Damflask and Bradfield villages they could see people moving about in the darkness with their possessions etc. making for higher ground as the word had quickly spread on hearing young Fountain's news a few hours earlier. When they eventually reached the reservoir they tried to relieve pressure on the wall by releasing the valve gear and also blow the waste water weir to reduce the amount of water inside the reservoir.

It was a wet and windy night and the gunpowder failed to ignite, the valves could not release the water quickly enough. The wall subsequently gave way releasing some six hundred million gallons of water, resulting in the deaths of over 240 people as well as destroying, homes, bridges, factories and anything else in its wake along its course to Sheffield and beyond.

### **The Walk**

The start of the walk commences at the Dale Dyke beside the end of the line of the ill-fated reservoir wall and continues along established public footpaths, highways etc. There is a stone inscribed C.L.O.B. (Centre Line Old Bank) (there are in fact 4 of these stones approx. 100 yards apart, two on either side of the valley). The Flood Memorial Stone was erected by Bradfield Historical Society in 1991 and an information board installed by Bradfield Parish Council in 2011. The public footpath across the valley was opened in 1991.

To reach this point it is recommended that you park in Low Bradfield car park (off Fair House Lane) or catch the bus 61 or 62 from Hillsborough interchange and alight at the bus turning circle at the top of Fair House Lane. From the car park turn up Fair House Lane and continue on the road straight-ahead with the bus turning circle on your left. Go straight ahead at the next road junction passing Haychatter House (formerly a public house, closed c1999) and Walker House Farm which are both on the right. Dale Dyke Beck can be seen below on our left.

Continue ahead on the road and eventually an enclosed woodland is reached on the left. Continue on the road for a short distance until a gate with a stone wall stile Yorkshire Water Dale Dike sign and a public footpath sign is reached on the left. Go over the stile and continue down the track for approx. 100 yards to reach the starting point as described above.

Continue along the track with the hamlet of Lower Thornseat on the right. The large imposing house (Thornseat House) was built following the enquiry into the disaster and became the home of the Chief Engineer of Sheffield Waterworks and was used for that same purpose until taken over by Yorkshire Water Authority during the 1970s. The other buildings are Lower Thornseat Farm and cottages, the farm being used as the reservoir keeper's cottage until recently.

The track bears left through the woods, which have recently been harvested and replanted, eventually crossing Dale Dyke Beck via a wooden bridge which can be slippery when wet - at this point you are actually inside the original reservoir. The current reservoir embankment was rebuilt further upstream. Cross the bridge and continue on the track to the right arriving at a stone faced tunnel with a series of pipes coming out of it – these pipes carry water to the water treatment works in the Loxley Valley to be purified into drinking water. Excess water is released to keep the beck in flow.

A series of steps are cut into the bank to help you gain higher ground and on reaching the top you are almost level with the reservoir beside the bridge at the top of the waste water weir – there is no public access over this bridge. Continue along the path passing a small stone building (valve control house) with views both across and up the current reservoir. Thompson House Farm is the large working farm on the opposite side and it was in the adjacent cottages where William Horsfield lived. Continue along the footpath beside the reservoir until you reach a wooden fingerpost. *Just past this sign there is a bench donated by M and J Marchant in 1995 which is a good place to rest or have a picnic as it has good views of the reservoir.* Turn left here over the wall stile and go up the walled lane (Roger Lane on some maps) to a “T” junction of paths in the woodland. Turn left at this point and follow the path out to the tarmac road (Blindside Lane), turn left onto the road and head back towards Low Bradfield.

Walking down Blindside Lane the first house on the left is Brooms House. In the 1861 Census a building here is described as a “beerhouse” no doubt to serve the reservoir construction works although no other record of this is recorded in later years. The road narrows with numerous bends and one should take extreme care on this section and always be on the lookout for traffic.

Just before reaching the river go over the stone wall stile on the right. The stone bridge on the left is Annett Bridge (the original bridge and adjacent farmhouse were the first structures to be washed away in the flood). Continue along the well-defined footpath which gains height above the stream and cross over a couple of wall stiles which lead into Plumpton Lane. Plumpton Cottages are on the left (two houses now made into one) and the redundant former Water Treatment Works are passed on the left. The works were built in 1912, extended in 1953 and eventually closed around 1994 when the new Water Treatment Works opened in the Loxley Valley. The Community Orchard is on the left, planted by Bradfield Parish Council and Bradfield in Bloom. There is an interpretation board inside the gate.

At the end of the lane turn left onto the road and then right at The Plough Inn. Continue ahead passing a collection of houses and then take the lane on the left down past the former Police House, now a private residence. This lane is known as School Lane as the original village school stood at the bottom and was washed away in the flood. Mill Farm is on the right and Far Fold Cottage on the left just before reaching the stone bridge. To the left of the bridge was once the village corn mill Records suggest that there had been a corn mill in Bradfield for over seven hundred years and had obviously been rebuilt several times over the centuries. A corn mill was demolished here in the flood and was rebuilt as a three-storey mill and powered by a water turbine rather than a waterwheel. The mill survived until the 1940s when it was destroyed by fire and never rebuilt.

The next section of the walk is beside the bank of Damflask Reservoir. Here there is a choice - to walk either on the footpath on the right just before reaching the stone bridge (mentioned above) and going along the right hand side of the reservoir, or by crossing the bridge and turning right onto the road and continuing ahead until reaching a designated opening with a footpath sign along the left hand side of the reservoir. The choice is yours; the second route is the shorter. There is little to tell along this section apart from the fact that the reservoir is named after a village that stood near to where the reservoir embankment is now situated. Most of the village was destroyed in the flood and never rebuilt as plans were already in hand to build the reservoir although no work had commenced.

Damflask village comprised of a Paper Mill, Wire Mill, Corn Mill, Barrel Inn, Blacksmith's Shop, and collection of farm and dwelling houses. A two-arch bridge was rebuilt after the flood for access across the valley. It was last seen in the 1950s when the reservoir was drained for maintenance work and was said to be in a very good state despite its years under water!

When reaching the end of the reservoir go out onto the road, cross the junction at the end of the embankment and continue along the road for a short distance until reaching a cluster of houses just before reaching Nag's Head Inn. Turn right into Stacey Lane (the house on the corner was a shop until the late 1950s) and continue down the lane until you reach the river.

The concrete construction on the other side of the river is a "compensation reservoir", built shortly after WWI to supply additional water to keep the mills on the river working in time when Damflask Reservoir was low. The water in the compensation reservoir was pumped up from Blackburn Meadows Pumping Station as treated water; it became redundant in the 1970s. This was also the site of Stacey's Wheel washed away in the flood and never rebuilt.

Do not cross the bridge, turn left and continue beside the river reaching the "three corner dam", the footpath now goes along the left-hand side of the dam between the dam and the head goyt. The dam was built as an extra dam for Swift's Rolling Mill that operated near to the redundant refractory site which we shall shortly pass through. The head goyt fed the main millpond (now drained and built on) for that mill.

Continue ahead and then drop down to the roadway and go through the redundant refractory works formerly Thos.W.Marshall. Just before the road turns left look for an opening in the wall on the right, go through it and down a few steps to the footpath between the head goyt of Loxley Old Wheel pond and the River Loxley. About 100 yards along this path on the left is a square flat-topped stone with inscriptions on it. It is known as the "Weir Level Stone" relating to an agreement in 1825 when a maximum amount of water could be drawn from the river for production purposes. A mill-owner thought that by drawing more water than necessary from the river would halt production of his competitors further down the valley so this agreement had to be made and strictly adhered to.

Continuing straight ahead more redundant refractory buildings are on our right, while to the left the goyt opens up into the Old Wheel pond, one of the largest in the Loxley Valley. This served a forge at the far end of the pond which was rebuilt after the flood.

Take care along this section of the footpath as it is very narrow, approximately half way along the pond the path bears right and leads to the tarmac road. Follow the road to the left. This is where Thos.W.Wragg started his clay crushing and firebrick processing before moving to the larger now redundant site. Parts of the mill were still in use until the 1970s before being demolished and also several workers' cottages were on the adjacent site and also opposite. As the road bears left look for a wall stile in the right hand corner. Go over the stile and a concrete footpath appears. Continue along the footpath, through the woodland, where there is a bowling green on the left and then the silted up/overgrown pond - formerly Rowell Mill pond - also on the left. Eventually we reach a motorised road, Rowell Lane, that takes traffic to Stannington and Storrs from the main Loxley Road.

Turn left onto the road. The area on the left was the former Rowell Mill that was decimated in the flood but rebuilt and operated until the 1930s before falling into disrepair and finally demolished during the 1960s. During the early 1980s Sheffield Countryside Management installed a replica pentrough and information board on this site as well as tidying the area in general, but now only the pentrough remains with a few remnants of its former workings.

Go over the road bridge and take the broad footpath on the right. The large house opposite Croft House, now a private dwelling, withstood the impact of the flood. Current pictures show it has changed very little in appearance from prior to the flood. The house also operated as a corn and flour mill and also one part of it was a public house/beerhouse called Rowell Bridge Inn, known locally as "T' Muck Oyl". It never reopened after the flood although that section of the building still remains.

An adjacent wire mill and the packhorse bridge were less fortunate. A workman died on the night of the flood as he was staying to keep the furnace hot ready for production the next morning. The bridge, which is now a public footpath to Stannington, was rebuilt and a date-stone of 1865 is incorporated into the stonework noting when it was rebuilt.

Go ahead along the footpath, the water to our right is the tail goyt from what was Rowell Mill and eventually joins the River Loxley in a short distance – this is one of the best remains of a tail goyt along the River Loxley. In a short distance the path swings right, then immediately left and the head goyt to Olive Wheel pond is on the left followed by the pond itself. The path now goes between the pond on the left and the River Loxley on the right.

A narrow footbridge appears on the right (this leads towards Stannington passing through a long disused quarry) Do not go over this bridge. There are a couple of interesting facts about this bridge,. It was built in this location as the next bridge downstream was often flooded. The original bridge washed away in the flood was made from the remains of the gibbet post on Loxley Common on which the body of the infamous Francis Fearn was hung following his hanging at York for the brutal murder of a Sheffield watchmaker in 1772.

The white house – Olive House – on the opposite side of the pond was built around 1840 for Joshua Woodward who was the owner of the paper mill at which we shall shortly be arriving. It is now a private house, having been sold by Sheffield City Council some thirty years ago. One of the most well known former residents was a Dr. Adamson, a medical practitioner who had his surgery at 24 Holme Lane, Hillsborough for many years.

We now arrive at Olive Mill, which started its life as a forge and grinding works before turning into a paper mill following the arrival of the aforesaid Joshua Woodward. There were two separate workshops here which suffered a lot of damage in the flood but were brought back to working life as a rod and steel rolling mill by Swift Bros., who operated a number of mills in the area. These mills operated until the 1930s before falling into disrepair and over the years have been leased out to several businesses. One of the features of these mills is that they were powered by twin waterwheels, a unique feature on Sheffield's rivers, although each operated separately. They are still in place along with the pentroughs and wheel pits.

The footpath bears sharp left at the end of the building, then right onto the lane after passing through an opening (beside the gate into the mill yard) onto a lane. Continue ahead passing a row of cottages, Olive Terrace, built during the 1840s and known then as Cliff Row/Cliff Grove. Just past the last cottage before the lane bears left was Cliff Wheel, which was demolished in the flood and never rebuilt as the enlarged pond for Little Matlock Works was built over the site.

Follow the lane to the left then go right along another road taking us to the hamlet of Little Matlock. On the left are Riverdale Cottages, a row of cottages that withstood the height of the flood and although modernised are still recognisable from pictures of 1864. Go down the steps opposite towards the factory. This is Little Matlock Works, where a date stone on the mill wall indicates it was rebuilt in 1882. Records show that it replaced the original mill on an adjacent site and also made larger to take in the work of smaller mills which did not survive the flood. This mill is the only working mill in the Loxley Valley and still rolls steel in the old fashioned way, i.e. blocks of steel preheated and passed through a series of rolls until it reaches its desired size and shape.

A new access has been made to view the waterwheel by walking along the concrete path on the right hand side just before reaching the factory gate and the tail goyt; the original viewing area is now inaccessible due to development of the Dam House. The waterwheel is no longer used, as electricity was installed in the mill during the 1950s, although it is understood the mechanism to operate the wheel is stored inside the mill. The wheel itself is believed to have been the largest on the River Loxley.

Do not cross the 2 bridges (these lead directly to the (now closed) Robin Hood Inn) but go back up the roadway and rejoin the path to the right at the end of Riverdale Cottages passing a newly built house which is on the left. Continue ahead along the broad footpath which at this stage is some distance from the river. Pause for a moment when a footpath appears on the left, along with a cluster of small trees. This was the site of Jackson's Cottages or Jackson's Row as it was also known, a row of cottages demolished during the 1970s. Continue ahead until you reach a small cluster of buildings. The large house is Green Wheel House. There was also an adjacent mill but that was demolished and only a small section still remains. Further to the right is Glass Tilt Works. This withstood the flood due to being on higher ground and is now a motor repair business. It last operated as a steel works in the 1930s.

The derelict building on the left was built as Kenyon's Rolling Mills just before WWI and operated into the 1970s before being purchased by a Precision Grinding company who later moved to larger and more modern premises at Neepsend. Kenyon's was originally owned by two brothers who operated numerous steel mills and then went their separate ways and into competition with each other. The other mill was opposite the top of this lane and is now the site of a small housing complex.

This lane is called Low Matlock lane and the centre marks the boundary of Bradfield Parish and Sheffield.. Do not turn up the lane but go straight ahead and follow the path into the woodland. In a short distance a number of large stone blocks appear on our right. These were the retaining wall for the old mill dam of Loxley Steel Works (Denton's Forge as it was known locally), or Broadhead's/Harrison's Wheel as it was known at the time of the flood. The footpath actually goes through the old mill dam. The mill and cottages were all demolished in the 1930s with no traces remaining. An interesting point is that whilst the workforce were having their lunch break they practised playing their musical instruments and between them formed Loxley Methodist Silver Band which still survives to this day!

Continue ahead through the woodland until reaching a set of wooden steps built into the floor on the right, go down the steps which lead us back to the riverside. The head goyt for Upper Wisewood Pond is on the left, the footpath then continues between the mill pond and the river eventually arriving at the former Upper Wisewood Forge, now rebuilt into a residential home.

This site is one of the oldest on the River Loxley dating back to the early 1600s as Upper Wisewood Forge and Scythe Works. It was managed by Horne Brothers at the time of the flood and claims were put in for £10,000 of which they received £8,500 to rebuild the works as a rod and sheet rolling mill operated by John E Wood & Co (known locally as Johnny Wood's). The mill continued working under various companies until the 1980s and the site became derelict during the 1990s until purchased by a property dealer and is now Loxley Park Residential Home. Prior to the current development the "Time Team" from ITV Channel 4 filmed an archaeological dig on the site and quite a number of interesting artefacts were found including the foundations of a previous mill (it is my belief that the post 1864 mill was built on the foundations of the old mill).

Go to the right at the forge base and follow the footpath beside the river, the open space inside the perimeter fencing was the former pond for the bottom Wisewood Forge. The pond was drained and filled in during the 1960s to make more storage space for the Upper Forge. The Lower Wisewood Forge was decimated in the flood; it was also rebuilt as a rod and sheet rolling mill again operated by John E Wood & Co. It ceased production in the early 1960s; no trace of this mill exists apart from the tail goyt near to where the footpath goes through some steel upright girders to detract motorised vehicles. Just before reaching that point look to the opposite side of the riverbank and there is a large orange/brown mass of spoil extending into the riverbed. This is iron ore deposits from one of the mines that once operated beneath the surface many years ago.

Follow the track out onto Loxley Road passing the red bricked house, this was formerly the gate-house when the works operated before becoming a private house. The original house has been demolished and a new one built around 2012. On reaching Loxley Road, look to the left and we see St. Polycarps Church which was built c1930 and opposite the church in the fork of the road is the former Methodist Chapel which is now a motor repair business. The chapel was used for identifying victims of the flood along with the original Yew Tree Inn, as there were 95 victims from Malin Bridge. A marble plaque with all the names of the Malin Bridge flood victims was placed in the Methodist Chapel until its closure, after which it was moved to the former St. Mark's Church on Dykes Lane and then transferred to St. Polycarp's during the 1980s.

Go to the right and turn right keeping to the right hand side of the road to the bottom of Stannington Road where we find the former Malin Bridge Corn Mill, which operated as a corn mill until the 1960s when it was purchased by Wm. Marsden's, who demolished a couple of adjacent cottages and built a small retail outlet (now a plumber's shop). Later owners of the mill have been Comet Electrical Warehouse and a number of restaurants and a clothes warehouse. The mill has been converted into apartments. One of the unique features of the mill is the waterwheel. This is known as an undershot wheel where water comes directly from the river (there is no millpond) and passes underneath the wheel to make it turn.

Go up Stannington Road for a few yards until reaching the Dental Practitioner's and look to the low buildings behind it (now a motor repair business). These were the former outbuildings of Malin Bridge Farm (known locally as Trickett's Farm), which withstood the flood but the farmhouse took a direct hit and all the occupants perished. The members of the Trickett family are interred in Bradfield St. Nicholas churchyard.

Go back down to Malin Bridge and cross Holme Lane (take care when crossing the road, this is a one way system and is almost continuous with traffic) Rivelin Valley Road and bridge was built c1911 and Turners Wheel stood on the site of where Burgon & Ball Works are now situated. Turners Wheel was completely demolished in the flood and the millpond still stands between the two bridges and it is also the meeting point of the Rivelin and Loxley Rivers.

Burgon & Ball's La Plata Works are known world-wide for producing sheep shears and other similar products but in its early years produced the Charles Talbot motor car which was supplied to order just after WW1. The cars were shipped in from France in sections and parts and were assembled here, but production of cars only lasted a few years.

On the left is the Malin Bridge Inn. The current inn is built on the site of the original which was demolished in the flood; a section of the original wall still remains. At the time of the flood it was also known as The Cleakum, the landlord being George Bisby who had only taken over the inn a few months before the disaster. All the inhabitants perished apart from the eldest child who was living with her grandparents at the time. A marker plaque and story is near to the main entrance and pictures of the flood and more recent ones of the area are hung around the inner walls of the inn.

Opposite the Malin Bridge Inn was another inn, The Stag Inn, along with some cottages that were all demolished in the flood, the main families being the Armitages along with their servants. Twelve members of the Armitage family were lost in the flood, and are buried in one large grave in the churchyard of Loxley United Reform Church to the rear of the church. Some of the family were never found and the inscription on the headstone mentions this fact.

Continue along Holme Lane towards Hillsborough Corner. There were very few buildings along this section in 1864 until we get near to what is now Tramways Medical Centre which took its name from the former tramcar depot. To the right of the Medical Centre on Holme Lane was a terrace of three storey back-to-back houses called Haden Houses (known locally as Brick Row) and adjoining this there was another row called Hillsborough Terrace.

Brick Row suffered terribly in the flood and stories suggest that a number of occupants fled to the upper storeys and knocked their way through each house to try to escape; unfortunately some did not succeed and perished. One notable family was the Dysons who originated from Thurgoland who settled in the area for work, only to die in the flood. Their grave can be found in Thurgoland Churchyard.

The houses were condemned following the flood only to be patched up and continued to be lived in for another one hundred years or so before being demolished in the early 1970s. The one way street from Hillsborough Road was made a thoroughfare as a result. Also in that area was a retired tailor called Joseph Chapman who lived in a small house adjoining Brick Row. When rescue came there was no sign of him or his house and rescuers feared the worst only to find him later in a wooden box floating in the River Loxley below Hillsborough Bridge. It seems as he had taken refuge in the box, which probably had cloth delivered in it previously and no doubt saved his life.

Moving towards Hillsborough Corner, the road coming down on the right (Walkley Lane) crosses the river via the narrow one-way iron bridge. At the time of the flood this lane was known as Hill Street and Hill Street Bridge. At the other side of the bridge were a collection of houses all suffering severe damage and loss of life but there is one remarkable story that a girl was found fast asleep in bed totally unaware anything had happened despite the fact that half the bedroom wall has been ripped out by the force of the water. Also a man called Henry Whittles saved himself and his family by laying on top of them all on the bed and holding on whilst waters battered his house.

Hillsborough Bridge (the main bridge in Hillsborough that carries traffic from Sheffield) was a sturdy bridge and only suffered superficial damage. Cross the main road and into Bradfield Road. The rounded building on the corner is recognisable from pictures of 1864 although it did not have its upper floor added until the 1930s. The Shakespeare Inn (The Shakey) and the Blue Ball withstood the flood waters; a flood plaque on the front of each building was added in the early 1990s.

This is a convenient point to conclude the walk. However anyone wishing to continue the walk into Sheffield can do so by continuing down Bradfield Road bearing right at the mini roundabout to its junction with Penistone Road (A61).

*There is another monument worth visiting on the site of the former Rose Inn on Penistone Road. It was placed there in September 2007 in the form of a plaque mounted on a stone as it played a prominent role in the flood.*

*For anyone wishing to view this, the route is:*

*At the point where Bradfield Road meets Penistone Road turn right along Penistone Road for approx. 200 yards, it is situated on the verge outside the motor dealership. After viewing return to Bradfield Road junction and rejoin the route.*

Cross the road via the controlled crossing points into Livesey Street and continue its full length passing Owlerton Sports Stadium and the new college and go over the new bridge, (the previous bridge was washed away in the 2007 floods and access to cross the river was denied until a new bridge was installed later). Turn right and follow the river along the unmade road.

The disused Wardsend Cemetery is on the left, which was opened as an overflow for the former St. Phillips Church. Continue ahead until reaching Neepsend Lane beside Hillfoot Bridge.

Continue along Neepsend Lane to its junction with Rutland Road. Cross the road into Mowbray Street and then look for a sign on the right "Riverside Walk". Continue along this walk which at intervals goes back to the road before rejoining the walk, eventually emerging at Corporation Street Bridge. Cross Corporation Street and rejoin the walk leading to "The Flood Memorial Stone" which was unveiled in December 2008. On the floor are recorded all the names of the people who perished on the night of the flood together with others who died later from injuries and illness as a result of the flood.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED ALONG THE WALK:**

The Flood – an event that happened on the night of March 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> 1864 as described in more detail above

Head Goyt – a channel of water from the main river to fill a millpond.

Millpond – A miniature lake built to hold water in order for production to commence at each mill

Pentrough – A steel tank normally situated over the waterwheel in which amounts of water were released to start the waterwheel turning

Waterwheel – A means of powering a mill by waterpower from the mill pond

Tail Goyt – Once water has passed over the waterwheel it runs into a channel and rejoins the river at some point below the mill

Mobile Phone Coverage - Mobile phone signal coverage is poor in the Low Bradfield area and at the top end of the Loxley Valley.

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