10 Saddleworth

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Introduction

For some ten centuries, Saddleworth was part of the West Riding of Yorkshire, with its administrative centre in Wakefield. It lost this status in 1974, with the creation of the short-lived Greater Manchester Metropolitan County. On the abolition of the Metropolitan counties in 1986, it became part of the Borough of Oldham: the easternmost limit of Saddleworth is only four miles (6 km) from Oldham town centre. Saddleworth, however, remains part of "the ancient county of York"; this is indicated on the signs at the entrance and exit from each of the seven villages in the parish. Saddleworth's position on the western slopes of the Pennines has created problems for administrators for many years: it has been successively part of the Parliamentary constituencies of Colne Valley (with a Liberal M.P.), Saddleworth and Littleborough (1983-97, with a Conservative M.P. until 1995, when a Liberal gained the seat) and Saddleworth and East Oldham (since 1997, with a Labour M.P.).

Extensive areas in the north and east of Saddleworth are more than 1000 ft above sea level (Figure 1). The Pennines have been a barrier to east-west communication since the time of the Romans, who established a fort in the Hull Brook (Castleshaw) valley around AD 79, to guard the Chester to York highway as it climbed to cross the hills at Standedge at around 1450 ft. Recent excavations have shown that the Castleshaw site is more complex than previously believed (http://www.castleshawarchaeology.co.uk).

Route ways and settlements

The River Tame rises on Denshaw Moor near the northern boundary of Saddleworth, and flows in a generally southerly direction to join the Mersey near Stockport. On the way, it is joined by several streams which, flowing westwards or south-westwards through deep, steep valleys (cloughs), have played a major role in Saddleworth's development. These include Diggle Brook, Hull Brook, Chew Brook and Thorns Brook. The area's earliest settlements were well above the marshy valley bottoms, generally lying on the valley-sides at 700-800 ft, where the ground was dry and there was a good supply of water from springs at the junction of the shale and the Millstone Grit. Cistercian monks established a farm at Grange, on the sheltered south-facing slopes of the Hull Brook (Castleshaw) valley in the 13th century.

Early tracks and roads wound along the hillsides between the houses, descending to cross the streams only when this was unavoidable. Later, pack horse tracks were established as hand-loom weaving of woollen goods was developed. The houses of the yeoman farmers and farmer-weavers, often dating back to the 17th century and built alongside the hillside lanes and tracks, are characterised by stone walls and roofs, with mullioned windows designed to maximise light to the hand looms in the workshops.

Many of these early houses are in small clusters ('folds'), as at Thurstons (Figure 2), on the interfluve between Thorns Clough and Brun Clough, Bleak Hey Nook on the interfluve between Thorns

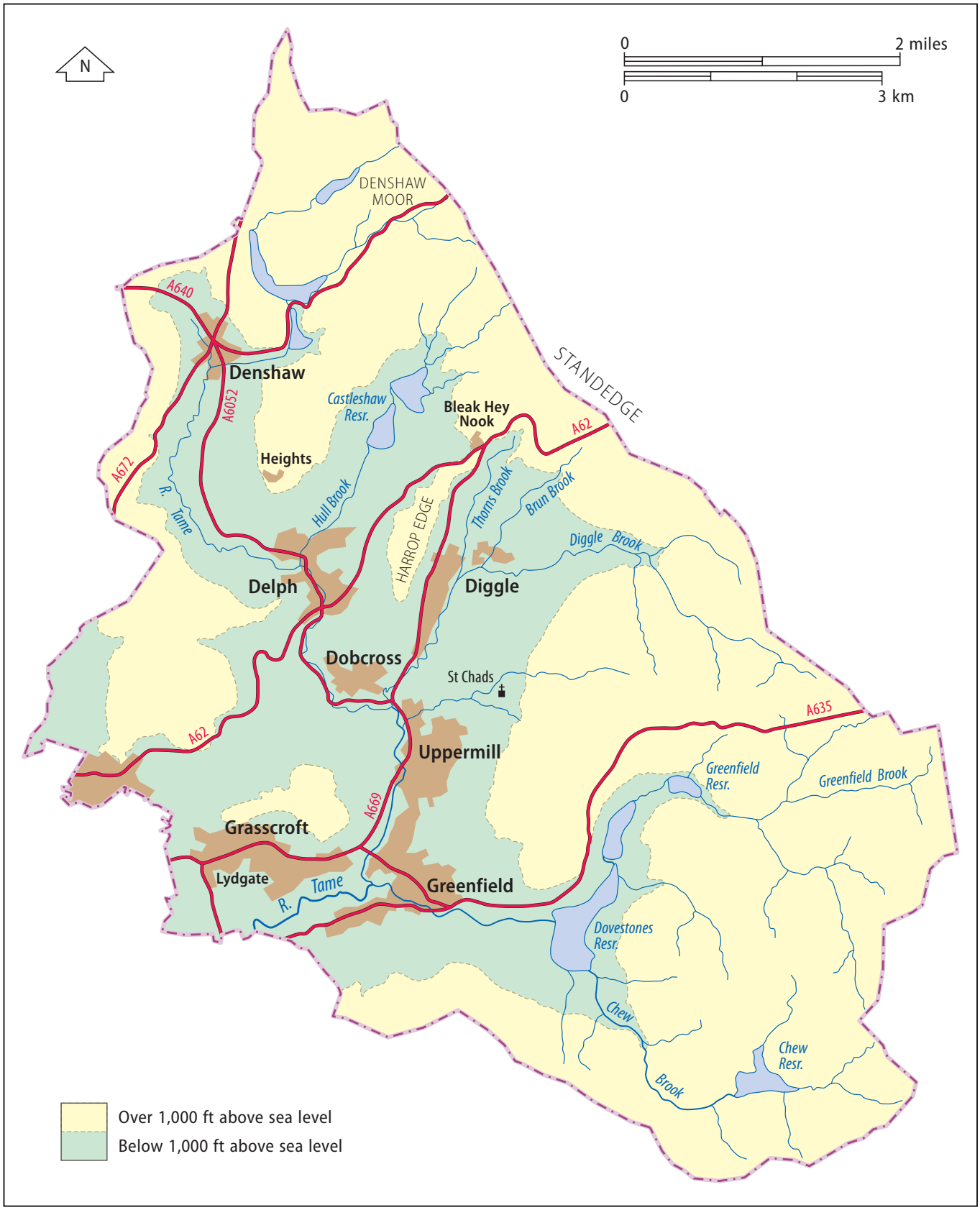

Figure 1: Map of Saddleworth District.

Figure 2: A Saddleworth 'fold'. Thurstons, on the interfluve between Thorns Clough (foreground) and Brun Clough (middle distance). On a winter morning, cloud fills Brun Clough. Enclosed fields above the Diggle valley can be seen in the background.

Clough and the Hull Brook valley, Harrop Green in Diggle and Saddleworth fold, centred on St. Chads church.

The cloth industry flourished in the second half of the 18th century as water-powered mills were founded in the valleys, and turnpike roads were developed. It was the clothiers who put forward most of the Saddleworth turnpike proposals to Parliament. Many of the turnpike roads were quite wide, with adjacent ditches for drainage. Their construction was accompanied by the growth of Saddleworth's villages. The first turnpike to cross Standedge was constructed under the guidance of 'Blind Jack of Knaresborough' (John Metcalf). It ran along the top of Harrop Edge to Bleak Hey Nook and then climbed directly, and rather steeply, to the 'summit' (Figure 3). A new, longer but less steep, route was established around the turn of the century (Figure 4), and a third, even longer but again less steep, in the 1820s and 1830s. This became the A62, the major road across the Pennines from Manchester until the completion of the M62.

The Huddersfield Narrow Canal

In 1794, an Act of Parliament sanctioned construction of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. The Woolroad basin between Uppermill and Dobcross was opened in 1799. For a decade, it was the terminus of the western part of the canal, and served as a transhipment port for goods carried to Marsden. At Woolroad, the canal leaves the Tame valley and ascends through nine locks ('the Diggle flight'), between each of which is a basin where boats moving through the locks could wait (Figure 5). The locks lead to the Standedge tunnel, opened in 1811. The longest canal tunnel in Britain (3 miles 133 yards), it is only 9 ft wide. Barges had to be 'legged' through the tunnel, whilst the horses were walked across to the other end,

Figure 3: The first turnpike road across Standedge ran along Harrop Edge (background) to Bleak Hey Nook (centre). From there, it climbed steeply to the Pennine crossing.

Figure 4: The second turnpike road to Standedge diverted from its predecessor at Bleak Hey Nook, to take a gentler ascent. The substantial width of the road, now much degraded by "off road" activities, is evident. Much of the surface was made up of cobbles, fashioned by hand.

at Marsden, starting from Diggle village along Boat Lane. By 1838, two boats sailed daily from Woolroad to London, 7 to Huddersfield, Leeds and Hull, and 7 to Manchester and Liverpool. The canal, however, was never a commercial success and could not compete with the railway. A double railway tunnel following the line of the canal was built in the 1850s. For many years, the canal and tunnel were unused; several sections were filled in and culverted. However, a campaign in the last quarter of the 20th century by the Huddersfield Canal Society resulted in restoration of the canal and tunnel, which were reopened in 2001.

19th century enclosure

Much of the Saddleworth landscape is one of enclosure. The areas of high moorland above 1000 ft provided potential for agricultural expansion and were the target of the Enclosure Acts of 1809 and 1810. A petition for the 'Saddleworth Enclosure Act' was presented to the House of Commons in 1810. It was argued that the existing cultivated land could not provide the inhabitants with food and that "waste land" should be cultivated. Provision of lime and manure would be easy and cheap as the Huddersfield Canal which was nearly finished would provide direct communication with lime works in Derbyshire, and the recently constructed Turnpike Roads would facilitate the transport of manure to the interior of the district. The Bill received Royal Assent on 2 June 1810, but 24 years elapsed before the award was published in 1834. The enclosure map published then shows an ambitious network of walls covering the whole of the high moorlands. However, the low value of land and the high cost of walling made physical enclosure an uneconomic proposition and the vast majority of the walls remained theoretical. Harrop Edge, part of the common, was sold to pay the costs of enclosure. Roads were set out and the auction

Figure 5: Looking down the Huddersfield Narrow Canal fron one of the locks of the Diggle flight. The basin below was large enough to accommodate several barges en route to or from the Standedge tunnel.

Figure 6: Parliamentary enclosure on Harrop Edge seen from Heights. The stone wall boundaries were laid out in straight lines.

began in November 1810, but some purchasers did not pay until October 1818. The walls on Harrop Edge came into being very rapidly, producing the best example of a Parliamentary Enclosure in Saddleworth (Figure 6).

Some Saddleworth villages

Saddleworth's largest village is Uppermill. Hemmed in by the valley sides, it extends along the River Tame. In 1791, several local people bought the manorial rights of Saddleworth. One of them, John Buckley, built "The Manor House" alongside the High Street. Now it is the Conservative Club. Essentially a stone-built village, Uppermill began to grow when the Oldham to Standedge turnpike reached it in 1794. By the late 19th century, it was a textile community. The northern end of the village is dominated by the striking skew arches of the railway viaduct. The viaduct carries the railway across the River Tame and the Huddersfield Narrow Canal at the point where the canal itself crosses the river in an aqueduct that includes a lock (Figure 7). At the centre of Uppermill is the Square, in which the Commercial Inn was built alongside the turnpike in about 1820. Coaches departed from the inn for both Manchester and Huddersfield. The Methodist Chapel was completed in 1841 as the Square was being developed by the Buckleys, one of several families prominent in the development and growth of the village. Another prominent family, the Shaws, included the architect George Shaw, who built or re-built about twenty churches. His firm designed the Saddleworth Mechanics and Literary Institute building, finished in 1859. Now the Civic Hall, it has an S (for Shaw) within the window facing Court Street. Later in life, George Shaw remodelled the house in which he was born; now it is the Library and Council Office. The workers at George Shaw's company were the prime movers in the construction of the Co-operative Society building in 1860, following

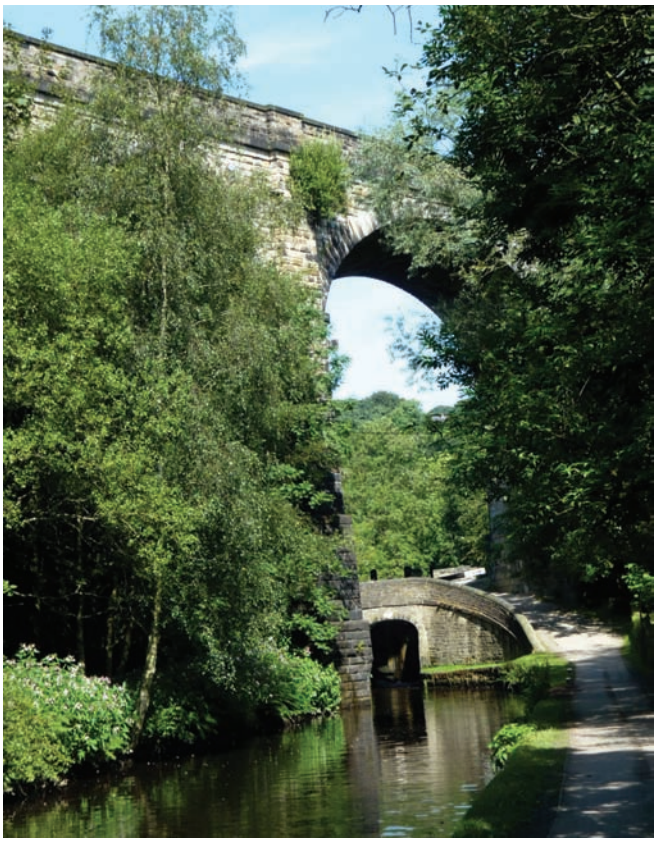

Figure 7: The railway viaduct crosses the Huddersfield Narrow Canal where the canal itself passes above the River Tame in Uppermill.

the construction of the Mechanics Institute. The Society built Saddleworth's first co-operative houses, in Co-operative Street.

Saddleworth Museum (www.saddleworthmuseum.co.uk) re-opened in September 2016 after a major renovation aided by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. The museum, which includes an archive and an art gallery used for changing exhibitions, occupies the site of one of Uppermill's former mills. The Saddleworth Historical Society (www.saddleworth-historical-society.org.uk) is based at the museum. The Society publishes books about the area, a series of Local Interest Trails and a quarterly Bulletin aiming to reflect and encourage interest in all aspects of the history of Saddleworth. The Local Interest Trails include notes on local history and the landscape. Close to the museum, there is a statue of Ammon Wrigley (1861-1946), a Saddleworth man who spent his working life in local mills but spent his free time walking on the moors, about which he wrote many books and poems. His ashes were scattered on the moors near the Dinner Stone at the head of the Castleshaw (Hull Brook) valley, where there is a memorial to him.

Dobcross, situated on a hillside above the valley of the Tame, at the cross-roads of two important routes through Saddleworth, was the area's most important village for many years. Situated on a hill at the end of Harrop Edge, which separates the Delph and Diggle valleys, the village had become the main nucleus of settlement in Saddleworth by the late 18th century. The centre has changed little since then. The Swan Inn, generally known as the "Top House", occupies most of one side of the Square. Built in 1765 as the King's Head (a name still present on one of its doors) with an assembly room on the first floor, it was the most important meeting place in Saddleworth until the construction of the Mechanics Institute in Uppermill. By 1787, funds had been raised to build a church. Early in the 19th century, two banks were established in the Square, where one of the buildings still displays the name of the bank. When the manorial rights of Saddleworth were sold in 1791, Dobcross was one of the many places to gain a Manor House. Built around 1805 in the classic style, it has large sashed windows, contrasting with mullions so evident elsewhere in the village. Although the village's roads were turnpiked in 1792 and 1806, it already was losing its Saddleworth pre-eminence to Uppermill, and it was by-passed in 1863.

Below the village, at the bottom of Nicker Brow, is Brownhill Bridge Mill, built in the 1770s alongside the Diggle Brook, near its confluence with the River Tame. It is the oldest surviving example of these early mills in a form that has seen no drastic changes. Externally, the oldest part of the building resembles a typical weaver's house, with the usual rows of mullioned windows. It housed a water wheel, with the mill pond behind. It was never steam powered and never employed more than a handful of workers. The old single arch packhorse bridge is close to the mill.

Figure 8: The picturesque village of Delph, at the confluence of Hull Brook and the River Tame, developed as a result of the construction of the turnpike road in the mid-18th century. The bridge replaced an earlier ford. Hills rise steeply above the village.

Delph is a valley village, built at the confluence of the River Tame and the Hull Brook. Like Uppermill, it is hemmed in by the adjacent hills. The key to the development of the village was the construction of the turnpike in 1758, with the first houses being built along King Street. Originally, the turnpike crossed the river by a ford, but a bridge was built in about 1770, and development then occurred along High Street (Figure 8). A central position in the village is occupied by the Swan Inn, dating from the late 18th century. Further along the street, the Post Office has a Victorian shop front. The house at Number 8, King Street is a fine example of a Georgian shop, with bow windows. On the other side of the street is the Delph Bank building, opened in 1883 as the Manchester and County Bank. It is characteristic of the confident commercial architecture of the period. Number 8, Millgate is a three-storeyed building, with warehouse doors at street level giving access to the upper floors. The sash windows contrast with the mullioned ones elsewhere in the centre of the village. The Co-operative Society built a substantial property on Millgate in the 1860s and the motto, 'Unity is Strength', still is a prominent feature of the façade.

Early settlement in the Diggle area consisted of farmsteads scattered across the valley-side, below the moors. The Diggle Brook valley upstream of the Diggle Hotel is attractive, but access to its uppermost part is not possible because of the presence of the Diggle Shooting Range. This was used as a training ground for the army during both World Wars and now continues to be used for shooting. The village itself is principally a development of the late 19th century and subsequent years. Its character is defined by long rows of Victorian terraces, but its appearance has been modified by 20th century housing expansion. The Hanging Gate Inn dates back to the construction

of the Standedge to Oldham turnpike at the end of the 18th century, but the present building is from 1926. It is a good example of the inter-war public house built to impress and to attract 'respectable' drinkers.

A prominent feature of Diggle is the building used in recent years as the offices of W. H. Shaw's pallet works. Built in the 1860s, originally as a factory for the construction of looms, it employed more than 500 men in the 1890s. The decline of the woollen trade after the Second World War led to closure of the Loom Works in 1969 and its conversion to office use. It is proposed to build a new Saddleworth School on the site. The proposal is controversial and has been opposed by many Saddleworth residents, who favour building the new school on the existing site in Uppermill. A pressure group (Save Diggle Action Group) has suggested that the new school could be built on the Uppermill site within the proposed budget. Currently, a single road (Huddersfield Road) runs from one end of the village to the other; it generally is congested as off-street parking is limited. Oldham Council has put forward various proposals to deal with traffic problems, including the installation of traffic lights and the provision of some off-street parking for Diggle residents.

Greenfield is essentially a nineteenth century village – the turnpike road which was to become the main street, Chew Valley Road, was not authorised until 1799. At the end of that street, Chew Brook, flowing westwards, joins the southward-flowing River Tame. Greenfield is set in some of Saddleworth's most dramatic scenery. The Chew Brook has been dammed to form a series of reservoirs, the most recent and largest of which is Dovestones, situated within the Peak National Park, alongside the main road to Holmfirth. It is much visited for walking, cycling and sailing.

Walking in Saddleworth

There are many opportunities for walking in Saddleworth, including easy strolling around Dovestones reservoir (payment necessary for car parking), making use of the canal towpath and, in most of the villages, more strenuous exertions in the higher parts of the area (largely outlined in the Saddleworth Historical Society's Local Interest Trails). The long-distance Pennine Way passes through Saddleworth above Standedge. A particularly good guide to a Saddleworth walk is "Crossing Point" in the 'Discovering Britain' series produced by the Royal Geographical Society (www.discoveringbritain.org).

Further Reading

Barrow N, Buckley M, Petford A and Sanders J (2003) *Saddleworth Villages*. Saddleworth Historical Society.

Mapping Saddleworth. Volume 1: Printed maps of the Parish 1771–1894 (2007). Edited by M. Buckley, D. Harrison and A. Petford. Saddleworth Historical Society.

Mapping Saddleworth. Volume 2: Manuscript maps of the Parish 1625–1822 (2010). Edited by M. Buckley, D. Harrison, V. Khadem, A. Petford and J. Widdall. Saddleworth Historical Society.

For more about Turnpike Roads:

Hindle P (2001) *Roads and Tracks for Historians*. Phillimore and Co. Ltd.