

BAMBER BRIDGE

Heritage Trail

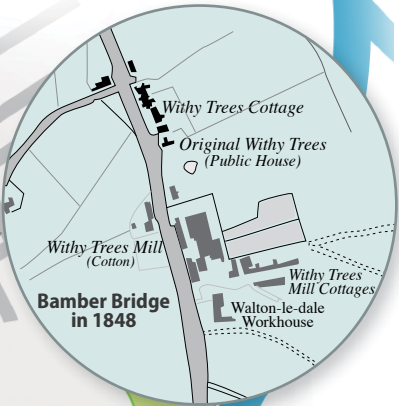
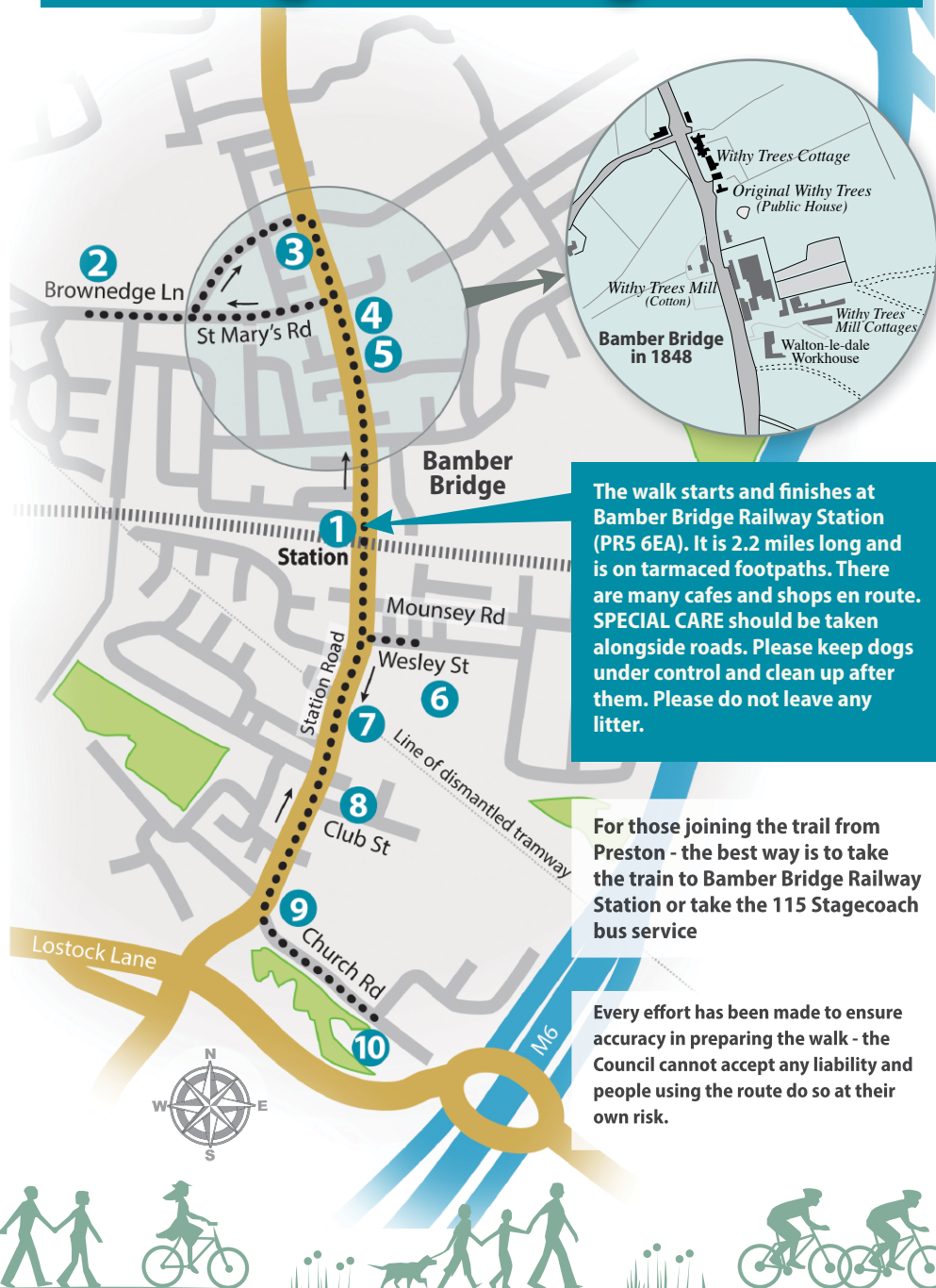
Discover the Hidden History of Bamber Bridge on this 2.2 mile walk

The Lancashire and Yorkshire railway bus used to convey passengers, between Chorley and Bamber Bridge stations, c1912



South Ribble
Borough Council

Finding Your Way Round



The walk starts and finishes at Bamber Bridge Railway Station (PR5 6EA). It is 2.2 miles long and is on tarmac footpaths. There are many cafes and shops en route. **SPECIAL CARE** should be taken alongside roads. Please keep dogs under control and clean up after them. Please do not leave any litter.

For those joining the trail from Preston - the best way is to take the train to Bamber Bridge Railway Station or take the 115 Stagecoach bus service

Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy in preparing the walk - the Council cannot accept any liability and people using the route do so at their own risk.



1 Bamber Bridge Station

In 1890 the former Methodist minister wrote; 'This village has undergone great changes during the last 50 years, politically, socially and religiously. For the first three decades of the present century, it was not very safe to be about alone after dark. Though the people of this district were comparatively poor, and lived by working the treadles, and throwing the shuttle across the hand loom, yet they excelled in drunkenness, fighting and profanity: but ALL THAT HAS GONE BY, and it shows distinct traces of modern advancement'.



The Act of Parliament for the Blackburn and Preston Railway was obtained in September 1844. Work commenced quickly, and the line was completed in September 1841. The line linked Blackburn with Farington, a distance of nine and three quarter miles, from where the trains ran on into Preston. At Bamber Bridge, the Preston Guardian informed its readers, 'On either hand a magnificent landscape tempts the eye of the traveller – to the right a fertile and well wooded expanse, backed by the colossal heights of Rivington Pike and Winter Hill, and on the left the beautiful vale of the Ribble, together with the eminent and commanding town of Preston.'

From here 'Mr William Eccles's new factory', and Mr Bashall's factory were the prominent landmarks, before the blue and black liveried trains ran on to the seemingly hazardous Farington curve to join the main line (1838). By the 1870s extensive marshalling yards, sidings, engine and carriage sheds had been constructed at Bamber Bridge, Brownedge and Lostock Hall, where the Glasgow to London main line crossed the Liverpool and East Lancashire lines. The Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company emerged as an important employer in the district, and its operations could be heard through day and night across much of Bamber Bridge and Tardy Gate.

Station Road



BAMBER BRIDGE STATION (6)



Turn left out of the Railway station and walk 380 metres to St Mary's Road. Turn left down St Mary's Road and continue 380 metres into Brownedge Road to . . .

Turn back down Brownedge Road and fork left at the junction with St Mary's Road until on the corner of Station Road you reach . . .

2 Brownedge and St Mary's



By the 1880s Bamber Bridge had absorbed the hamlet of Brownedge. Commentators frequently alluded to its pleasant aspect, which must have been in stark contrast to the crowded rows of houses clustered around the local mills. Hewitson described the view from St Mary's church around 1870: 'Looking from right to left: a mill, a wood, church spire, Whittle Hills, several cottages, and two or three factories; and in the immediate foreground, three hedges, twenty-two railway wagons, a points man's box and one end of Bamber Bridge'. He found Brownedge 'an irregularly fashioned, quietly situated hamlet . . . It stands in a flat district and if anything special has to be seen you must either climb a tree or ask somebody for a ladder. The inhabitants are homely and kind hearted . . . Humble hard working people live in it, but they make you welcome.'

3 The Council's Offices

In November 1879 permission was obtained from the Local Government Board to borrow £2,500 for imposing new offices to be built on the corner of Brownedge Lane. Expenditure for the first year came to £527-10s-0d. Wages accounted for £107, lighting the streets £250 and sanitation and scavenging £25. Strict economy was long to be the great arbiter in all things. Related signs of progress include the purchase of the first steam roller in 1890, as fears grew of the likely health hazard of the clouds of dust thrown up by the early motor vehicles on the gravel road through the township, and the establishment of a Fire service. 'The Walton-le-Dale Urban District Council Fire Brigade Rules and Regulations' were published in 1909. They stipulate that 'The Brigade shall consist of a Captain, First Engineer, Second Engineer, Sergeant, and 18 firemen, who shall be appointed by the Council'.



Cross over Station Road at the lights and turn right until you reach . . .

4 Site of Withy Trees Mill ('Old Billies')



The origins of the mill are obscure, but may have existed in 1828 when 'Thomas Eccles, Withen Trees, is recorded, becoming Thomas & William Eccles & Co by 1834. In 1854 the firm was trading as William Eccles & Co, and long continued in the Eccles family. William was succeeded by his son William II (1830-92), and this is perhaps the origin of 'Old Billies'. The mill formed a part of the Withy Trees Estate, dominated by the fine house, Withy Grove. The Walton-le-Dale workhouse adjoined the mill. A good description of the mill and the estate is provided by a sale notice of the 1840s: 'All that substantially built cotton mill, called Withy Trees Mill. With the engine-house, sand boiler-house, mechanics shop, sow house, and warehouse adjoining to the said mill, together with the steam engine of 50 horse power, four boilers, and the mill gearing therein and belonging thereto; and also the watch house, counting house, gas house, and cotton warehouse, and

twenty-four cottages near to the said mill . . . All that capital newly erected Mansion House'. After various uses, the buildings were finally demolished in the 1980s.

Continue along Station Road to . . .

5 Site of the Workhouse

The workhouse stood on the corner of Withy Trees Avenue and Station Road, just across from Withy Trees Mill. Much of the Parish Vestry's time (a precursor of the local council) was taken up with its affairs. In October 1831 Thomas Tomlinson was instructed to provide the house with 'back draughts and briskets' at three pence per pound, and stews at three half pence a pound. John Ham was to provide 'good oatmeal' at 28s-3d per load, and James Ward was to deliver 'flatte red potatoes – 20 loads at 3s-10d', 'the best Chorley Coal' was ordered at 8s-8d per ton, and George Kent agreed to supply 'good butter' and soap at ten pence halfpenny per pound and 52s per cwt. respectively. The supply of coffins was a major item in the accounts. In May, Matthew Brierley agreed to supply them as follows: 'For persons 1 week old to 5 years 3s-6d each, 5-12 years 4s-6d, 12 years and upwards 8s-6d'.

The cost of the upkeep of the house was subsidised by income from 'the Poor's Land' at



Brownedge. With the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1837 the initiative passed to the Board of Guardians at Preston, and in 1852 it was agreed to let the workhouse and its lands to the Preston Union. The house was closed in 1867.

Continue along Station Road until Wesley Street on the left to . . .

6 Site of the Bamber Bridge Spinning Companies Mill



'Wesley Street Mill', or 'New Mill' was constructed in 1907. The years before the Great War saw the final great expansion of the industry, financed by joint stock companies. Similar ventures were established at Lostock Hall and Tardy Gate. An interesting feature of this mill was its tremendous engine, similar to that preserved in Trencherfield Mill, Wigan. It



was planned to build a second mill, doubling the number of looms and sharing the steam plant at the back of the mill, but this never happened. The mill was announced for closure in 1959.

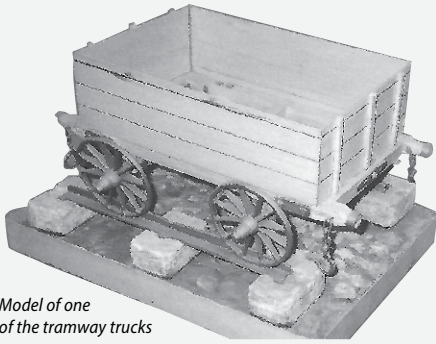
Continue along Station Road until . . .

7 Site of the Canal Tramway



With the extensive growth of the textile industry in the 1780s it was felt to be essential that Lancaster and Preston be linked to the canal network. The main engineering problems concerned the crossing of the great rivers, the Lune and the Ribble. Work on the 14 mile South End from Walton Summit to Wigan was slowed by the difficulties with the 259ft Whittle Hills Tunnel, and Rennie's estimate of £95,000 for the Ribble crossing led the company to opt for a 'temporary' tram plate way. The line ran north from the canal terminus at Walton Summit to Avenham in Preston. On 1 June 1803 A 'train' was loaded up and set off on its way; 'Old and young left their habitations and employments to witness a sight so novel'. After 1837 the line was owned by railway companies, who worked it until 1859. In 1868 the iron plates north of Bamber Bridge were taken up, and the link from the Summit to Bamber Bridge continued to be used for coal deliveries until 1879. The last driver on the line, still alive in 1882, recalled





Model of one of the tramway trucks

riding twice a day from Preston to the Summit, and needing to have his clogs re-soled every week! In his career it was estimated that he had travelled 199,000 miles on the line.

Continue along Station Road until . . .

8 Club Street and the Hand Loom Weavers Houses



Virtually all the houses along Station Road were begun in the later nineteenth century. Picked in between, usually in twos and fours, are the remains of the district's earliest industrial phase, the time of the hand loom weavers. These houses are cellar workshops with simple stone, two up and two down, cottages above. They are built out of stone, the later terraced houses being brick, and date from the period 1780 to about 1830.

This was the earliest, recognizable Bamber Bridge. So great was the demand for houses

at the peak of the boom about 1810, that few homes can have been without their looms. Club Street was built in the years after 1810. The land on which to build two rows seems to have been acquired in 1807, and by 1813 all the houses had been completed, and were available at rents of 15s-10d a week. The cellars may have held up to four looms, giving a potential of 200 looms in the project. This very interesting row of houses was demolished in the summer 1973.

Continue along Station Road until on the left you will see . . .

9 The Hob Inn and the 'Battle of Bamber Bridge'

During the second world war, large numbers of American troops were stationed in the North West of England - the area around Freckleton and Warton was known as 'Little America'. In Bamber Bridge a number of Quarter Master Truck Companies composed largely of black troops were established at Adams Hall, a camp off Mounsey Road - US Army Air force Station 569. Racial tension - all but unknown in the Britain of the time - was rife among the American forces. Events came to a head on the night of 24 June 1943.

At shortly after 10.00pm, two American MPs tried to arrest one of a group of about a dozen black soldiers who were drinking in the Hob Inn. The barmaid had refused to serve



them because it was after hours. An argument ensued and events quickly spiralled out of control when they tried to make an arrest, 'There were shouts, curses, insults, dares, and then in short order, a brief, confused and bloody fight'. The police opened fire injuring one man, and further reinforcements arrived.

As the soldiers reached their camp rumours swept it that the white MPs were 'shooting blacks'. A large crowd of men gathered, perhaps 200 strong, some of them armed, many made their way back into Bamber Bridge. Calls for order were effective and the majority of men went back to their huts, but at midnight two jeeps and 'a makeshift armoured car' carrying about a dozen MPs' roared up into the camp'. This confirmed the men's worst fears, 'Get Up! They are coming in with tanks!'. The men's officers ordered the MPs to leave, but the men had armed themselves, and two thirds of the companies rifles had been taken. As the Police withdrew they were fired on. A large number of armed soldiers thus traded shots and volleys along Station Road and its side streets. Things quietened down about 3am, when a US general arrived and put a black officer in control of the camp. Under his direction nearly all the rifles were taken back. One man, Private William Crossland had been killed and four wounded by the gunfire.



Black US servicemen based at Bamber Bridge during WWII

Turn left into Church Road and after 100 metres you will see . . .

10 Saint Saviours Church



The rising importance of Bamber Bridge was recognized as early as 1836 by the establishment of a second Anglican parish in the district and the construction of St Saviours church. The adjoining National School followed in 1839. In 1854 Mannex's Directory found that 'the vicar has a good dwelling . . . here is also a very convenient and well ventilated school'. In 1886-7 the church was extended by the addition of a chancel and transept and the nave was extended at a cost of £3,300. The Dewhurst family, the owners of nearby Cuerden and Higher Walton mills were important benefactors. The parish was subdivided again, and in 1895 work began on St Aidans.

Now, re-trace your steps back to the Railway Station where the trail ends

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