

Saddleworth Historical Society

Registered Charity No. 1195706

Transport Infrastructure Planning Unit
Department of Transport,
Great Minster House,
33 Horseferry Road,
London SW1P 4DR.

Mike Buckley
10 The Square,
Dobcross,
OL3 5AA
1 December 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

PROPOSED CLOSURE OF FOOTPATH NO. 209

On behalf of Saddleworth Historical Society I wish to register our objections to the proposed closure of Footpath 209 over the railway line on Dark Lane, Uppermill.

The reasons for the objection are:

- The path is of historical importance as a medieval inter-regional route and local church road.
- the proposal would effectively turn Dark Lane into two cul-de-sacs rendering it meaningless as a footpath.
- the present route is well used by the public.
- other routes from Ladhill Road, where the remaining section of Footpath 209 would effectively terminate would involve a lengthy diversion along a busy main road to reach the existing end of the path at Moorgate.

The historical importance of the path

Barnes in *Passage through Time, Saddleworth Roads and Trackways - A History* (1), provides evidence that the route of Footpath 209 was an ancient Churchway: a local route that gave access to Saddleworth parish church for residents in the west of the township (See Appendix) and one that played an important role in providing, not only weekly access to the church for divine services, but also for burials, the deceased being carried to the church on packhorses over this rough track. Furthermore it also provided access to the Lord's corn mill in Uppermill at which every manorial tenant was required to grind his corn. The parish church was built in the early thirteenth century to serve the whole township as was the cornmill. Deeds and court records provide ample evidence that the west of Saddleworth was populated at this time so the route would have then been in use.

Before the construction of the turnpike road in the late eighteenth century, these rough tracks were the only means of communication locally: but many had an even more important function as inter-regional routes providing connectivity between local towns: the road from Chester to York over Standedge was an important national route over the Pennines from at least Roman times continuing in use throughout the middle ages and early modern times into the eighteenth century when it was upgraded to a turnpike road: now the A62, it still performs this function. Standedge, at the narrowest point on the watershed, has always been a preferred inter-regional crossing point.

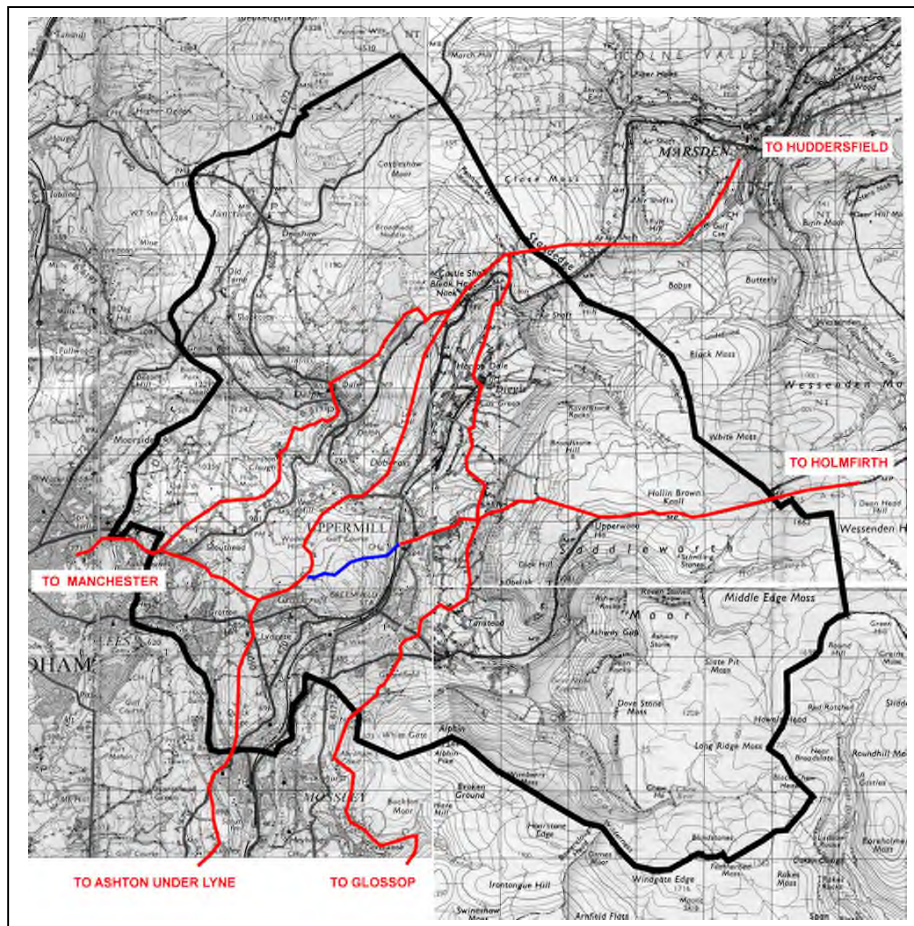


**Figure 1 Pre-turnpike inter-regional routes through Saddleworth
(Footpath 209 coloured blue)**

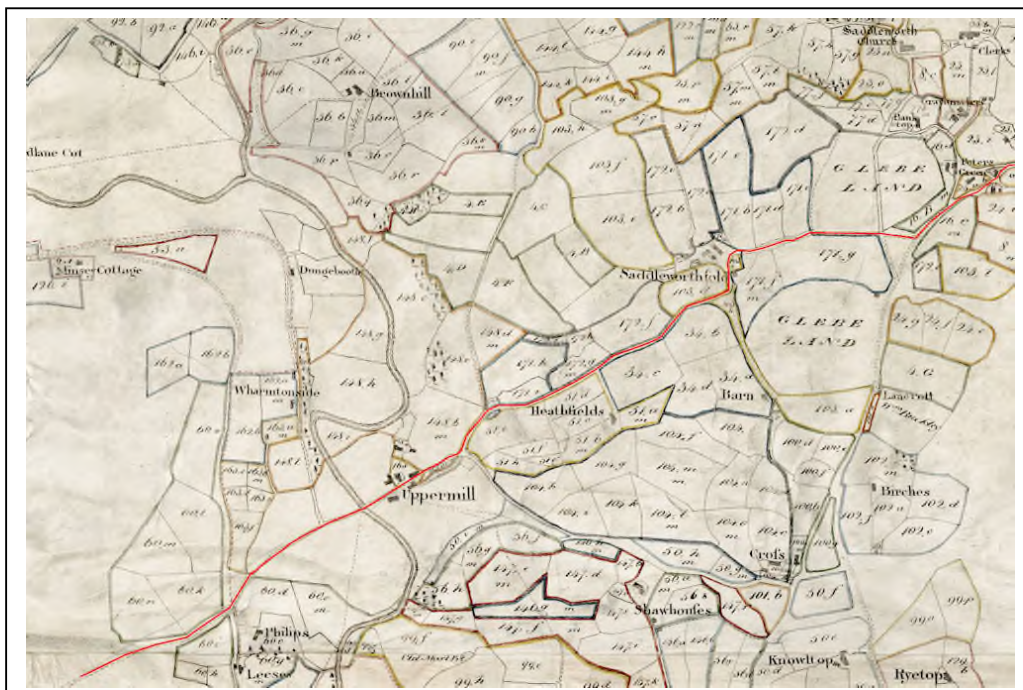


**Figure 2. The east-west inter-regional route through Saddleworth shown
on the Manor Estate Map of 1770**

From Standedge the road split into three north-south routes through the district: one continuing via Delph and Highmoor to Manchester and beyond; another via Dobcross and Wharmton to Ashton-under-Lyne; and a third, sometimes said to have been a roman route, via Saddleworth Church and Bucton Castle to Cheshire and Derbyshire. This network of roads was well used and the through traffic placed Saddleworth in a favourable position for trade, particularly the import of wool and export of cloth. These routes are illustrated in Figure 1. East-west travel through the district was provided by another route which connected the Manchester and Ashton-under-Lyne routes at Austerlands and Lydgate and continued eastward via the route of Footpath 209 to Moorgate and then via Pobjgreen over the moor to Holmfirth and the important administrative centres of Wakefield and Pontefract.

Footpath 209 was thus not only an important local road but also a key component in this inter-regional network of routes across the Pennines. The route is clearly marked on the earliest map of Saddleworth: the manor estate map of 1770. (see Figure 2). An early deed of the mid 1200s referring to a white cross in the vicinity of the beginning of Footpath 209 at Burnedge Bent underlines the importance of the route in the middle ages (2).

In view of the historical significance of this route, both locally and regionally, we feel that its integrity should not be lost by extinguishing an important part of it thus obscuring its earlier historical significance and denying the public the opportunity to walk the route end-to-end.

The proposal would effectively turn Dark Lane into two cul-de-sacs rendering it meaningless as a footpath.

This is one of the most interesting parts of the route, its sunken nature indicating its extreme age. As a hidden cul-de-sac it could present security risks to nearby properties or be a target of anti-social behaviour which in the long term would possibly lead to applications to absorb the path into adjoining properties.

The route is well used by the public.

Network Rail's own statistics indicate that the route is well used and enjoyed by the public, both for its historical interest and its immediate access to the moorland from Uppermill.

Other routes from Ladhill Road, where the remaining section of Footpath 209 would effectively terminate would involve a lengthy diversion along a busy main road to reach the existing end of the path at Moorgate.

Footpath 244 and the canal towpath, footpath 76, provide substantially longer alternative routes to Moorgate.

For the above reasons, particularly its local heritage value, we urge the Council to reject the proposals in this footpath closure order.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Buckley
Bulletin Editor and Archivist
Saddleworth Historical Society

References

1. Bernard Barnes, *Passage through Time, Saddleworth Roads and Trackways - A History*, (Saddleworth Historical Society, 1981), p. 17.
2. Victor Khadem and Mike Buckley, 'Early Saddleworth Records - 6, The Subinfeudation of Shawmere', *SHS Bulletin*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Autumn 2012, p. 82.

APPENDIX

Church Roads or 'Churchways' are sometimes mentioned in deeds or elsewhere. These were utilised by local traffic primarily, functioning for the purposes already described. The road described by Howcroft (1915, 95), which left the Quickedge route on the western side of Wharmton and proceeded in a very direct line by Moorgate (Uppermill), across the ford on the River Tame there and via Smithy Lane past Saddleworth Fold to join the Mottram-Marsden road, near the old vicarage was such an example. In 1749 there was a description of land taken in from the waste at Wharmton Bank 'betwixt the two churchways leading to Saddleworth' [Wakefield Register of Deeds, AD 655], and these would have joined to descend Moorgate as already described. The latter is again referred to in an 1801 deed [Wakefield Register of Deeds, EK 501] as the 'old road formerly leading from Uppermill to Moorgate dividing the Great Field from the Bottoms but which road is now diverted by the Huddersfield Canal Company through the Great Field': this is a reference to the abandonment of the ford across the Tame and the establishment of a new bridge at Cloggers Knowl.

Bernard Barnes, *Passage through Time, Saddleworth Roads and Trackways - A History*, (Saddleworth Historical Society, 1981), p. 17.