

Saddleworth Historical Society

Registered Charity No. 1195706

Transport Infrastructure Planning Unit
Department of Transport,
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Mike Buckley
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9 February 2026.
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Dear Sir/Madam,

PROPOSED DIVERSION OF FOOTPATH NO. 209

On behalf of Saddleworth Historical Society I wish to register our objections to the proposed closure of the level crossing at Moorgate, Uppermill and the re-routing of Footpath 209 from Dark Lane, Uppermill.

The reasons for the objection are:

- The path is an important heritage asset: the survival of a medieval inter-regional route and a local church road.
- the proposal would close Dark Lane, a hollow way and an ancient and important landscape feature.
- Diverting the footpath would lead to a loss of the primary purpose of the ancient route which was to travel in a direct line to the church and through the district.

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 well used.

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 the same function. Standedge, at the narrowest point on the watershed, has always been a preferred inter-regional crossing point.

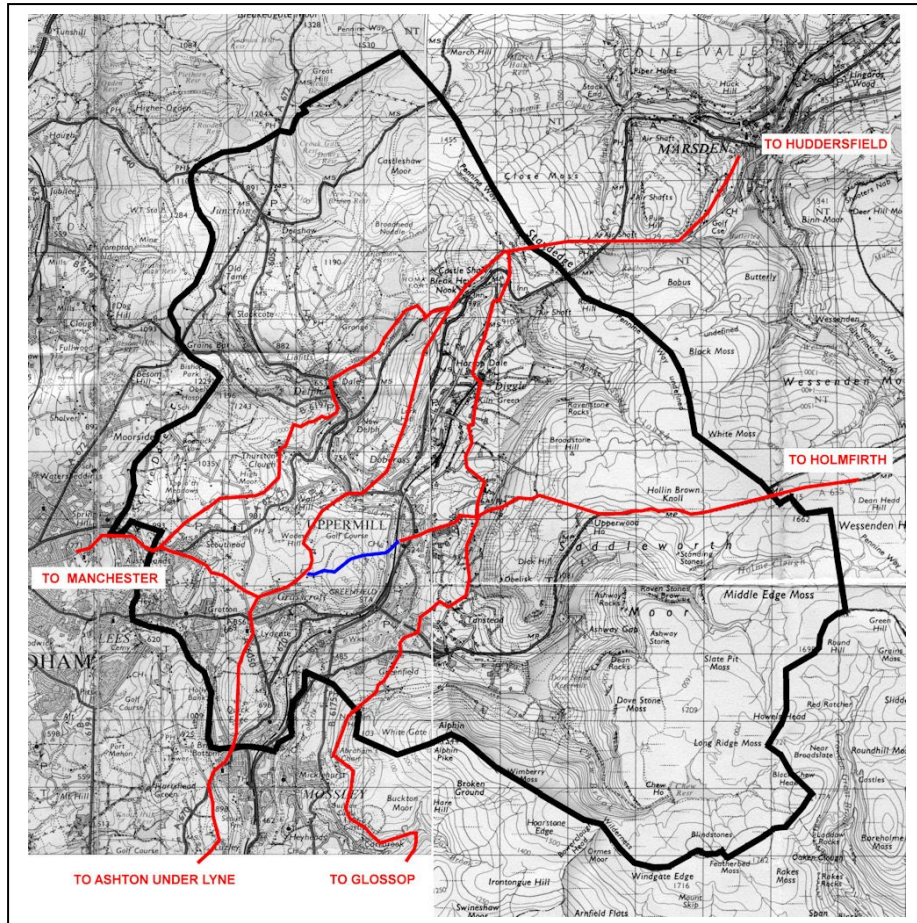


Figure 1 Pre-turnpike inter-regional routes through Saddleworth (Footpath 209 coloured blue)

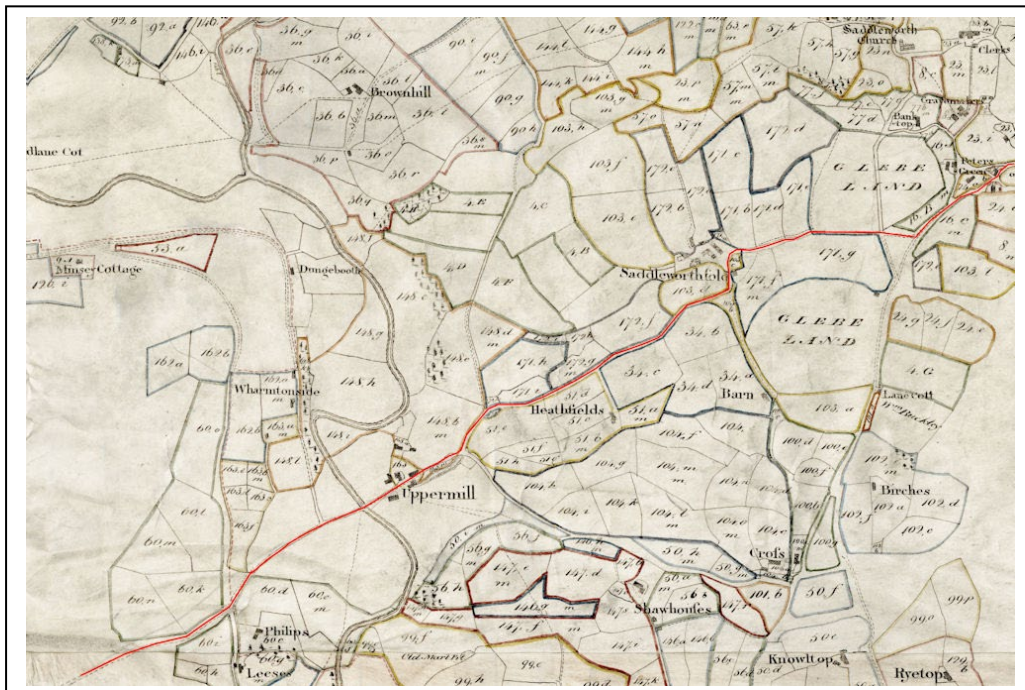


Figure 2. The east-west inter-regional route through Saddleworth shown on the Manor Estate Map of 1770

From the Standedge crossing 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.

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.

This network of roads was well used in medieval and early modern times and because of Saddleworth's position as a strategic crossing point they were probably in use earlier, certainly in the Roman period and possibly even earlier. The roads compare with other inter-regional prehistoric routes such as the Ridgeway, along the chalk ridge from Wiltshire to the Thames and the Ickneild Way, running from Dorset to East Anglia. In the middle ages 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.

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 close Dark Lane, a hollow way and an ancient landscape feature.

This is one of the most interesting parts of the route, its sunken nature indicating its extreme age. The nature of the route, narrow and steep illustrates the type of traffic that would have been found on these routes: pedestrians, pack horse trains and travellers on horseback. Wheeled traffic was impossible.

Diverting the footpath would lead to a loss of the primary purpose of the ancient route which was to travel in a direct line to the church and through the district.

A diverted path may serve to preserve a route from Wharmton to Uppermill but would be purely functional, the detour rendering it meaningless as an historic means of getting directly from A to B. The historic interest and enjoyment of the path would be lost.

For the above reasons, we are opposed to the closure of the level crossing and the diversion of the footpath.

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. See appendix below.
2. Victor Khadem and Mike Buckley, 'Early Saddleworth Records - 6, The Subinfeudation of Shawmere', *SHS Bulletin*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Autumn 2012, p. 82: 'the location of the white cross would most likely to be on, or close to, the junction of Burnedge Lane and Dry Clough Lane, two medieval routes over Wharnton.'

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 Wharnton 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 Wharnton 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.