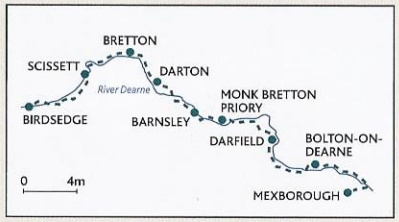
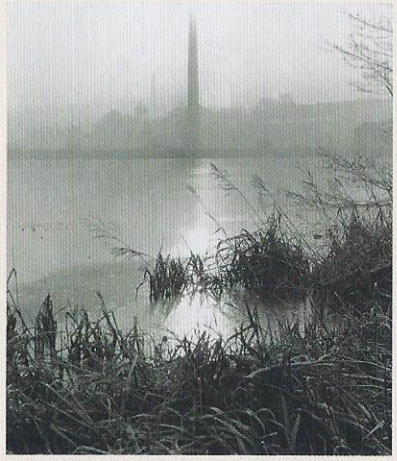
Dearne Way

The Dearne Way is made up of eight short walks joined to form a continuous footpath some 30 miles (48 km) in length, mainly through the Metropolitan Borough of Barnsley, but also in part in Kirklees, Wakefield and Doncaster.

This leaflet is one of a series of four, designed not only to show you the route, but also to point out and explain many of the interesting facts and features to be discovered along the way.



The Dearne Way follows as closely as possible the valley of the River Dearne from its source near Birdsedge, Denby Dale, to its meeting with the River Don at Mexborough. You will see for yourself that the valley is rich in wildlife, thriving in a landscape shaped and changed by human toil and industry over thousands of years.



Another lost industry – Star Paper Mill, with The Fleets in the foreground (Roy Portman/Brian Elliott Collection)

Further information

If you have any comments regarding the walk, or encounter any difficulties en route, please do not hesitate to contact:
Rights of Way Team, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, PO Box 601, Barnsley S70 9FA
Telephone 01226 773555
Email publicrightsofway@barnsley.gov.uk

Information on bus and train services is available on 0113 245 7676.
www.metrojourneyplanner.info

OS Explorer maps nos. 278 and 288 cover the area

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Supported by Barnsley Local Access Forum

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM BARNSLEY

Waymarked Walk No. 3

Bretton to Darton

Starting point
Bretton Country Park, West Bretton

Distance
2½ miles (4 km)

Time
Allow yourself up to 2½ hours for exploring at a leisurely pace

Footwear
Some sections can have wet, muddy or uneven ground. Stout shoes are recommended

Waymarks
The route is waymarked with a miner's lamp symbol

How to get there
By Bus: There are frequent bus services to Bretton Country Park from the surrounding urban areas of Barnsley, Wakefield, Huddersfield and Leeds. From Darton there are direct routes back, except to Leeds

By Train: Darton station sits on the Sheffield-Barnsley-Wakefield-Leeds line

By Car: There are frequent services to take you back to your car at the end of the walk

There's colliers...

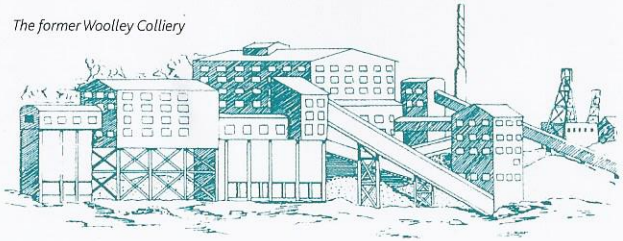
The first colliers didn't work down the pit. They would, instead, make a clearing in a wood and lay down a circular floor – the coaling pit. Into the coaling pits were placed sods and straw and, above these, poles of ash and oak. The piles were lit and many days passed before the smoking died down and the charcoal was packed on ponies and transported to the furnace at Bretton, where the pigs of iron were sent on to forges and slitting mills scattered in the valleys between Bretton and Sheffield.

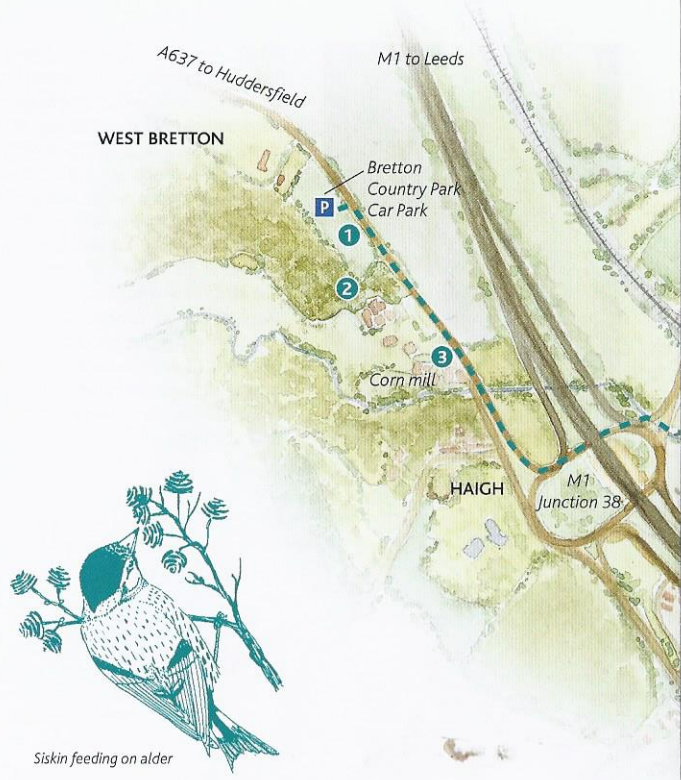
... and there's colliers

Woolley Colliery, New Year's Eve, 1891: *'... it was about 2 miles from the surface. Their working place would be 30 yards wide, 4 feet 3 inches high. Parrish had been wedging the 'day-bed' – the top coal – down in the middle of the face. He saw the two men with a corf on his flat sheet; it having taken both of them to push their corf out of their hole onto the main hurrying road. A quarter-of-an-hour later... an empty corf stood outside the working place, and behind it the fall which was 3 yards in length by a yard and a half in width. He called but got no answer.'*

By 1984 all Woolley's coal was mined by machine, but modern machine faces were no Gardens of Eden. They were still a dark, hot, small gap in the earth; they shook all the time, everything was on the move, and then there's the terrific noise and thick clouds of choking dust. Half the men on the coalface might be involved in cutting and advancing hydraulic chocks; while the other half shovels, blasts, bores and hammers home supports, and toils in much the same way as in the past.

The former Woolley Colliery

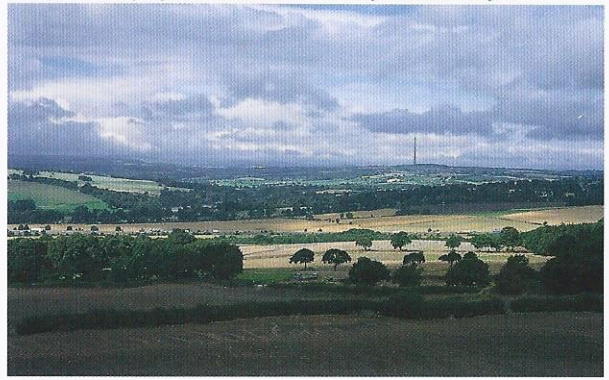




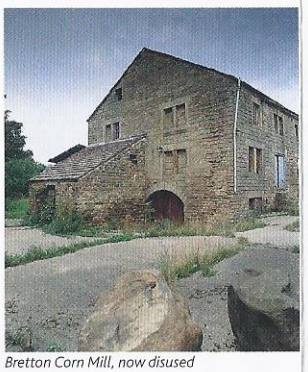
Siskin feeding on alder

1 As you leave the Country Park, take a look at the hillside opposite. Out of view behind the hilltop farmhouse is the village of Woolley, and Woolley Hall – the residence of another branch of the Wentworth family. On the horizon to your left there is a woodland on a steep-sided spur of land known as Woolley Edge. Five seams of coal outcrop on this Edge, including the famous 10 ft thick Barnsley seam at the bottom. Coal was won piecemeal until Godfrey Wentworth of Woolley Hall leased out land in 1852 to a colliery company, and the seeds were sown for Woolley Colliery.

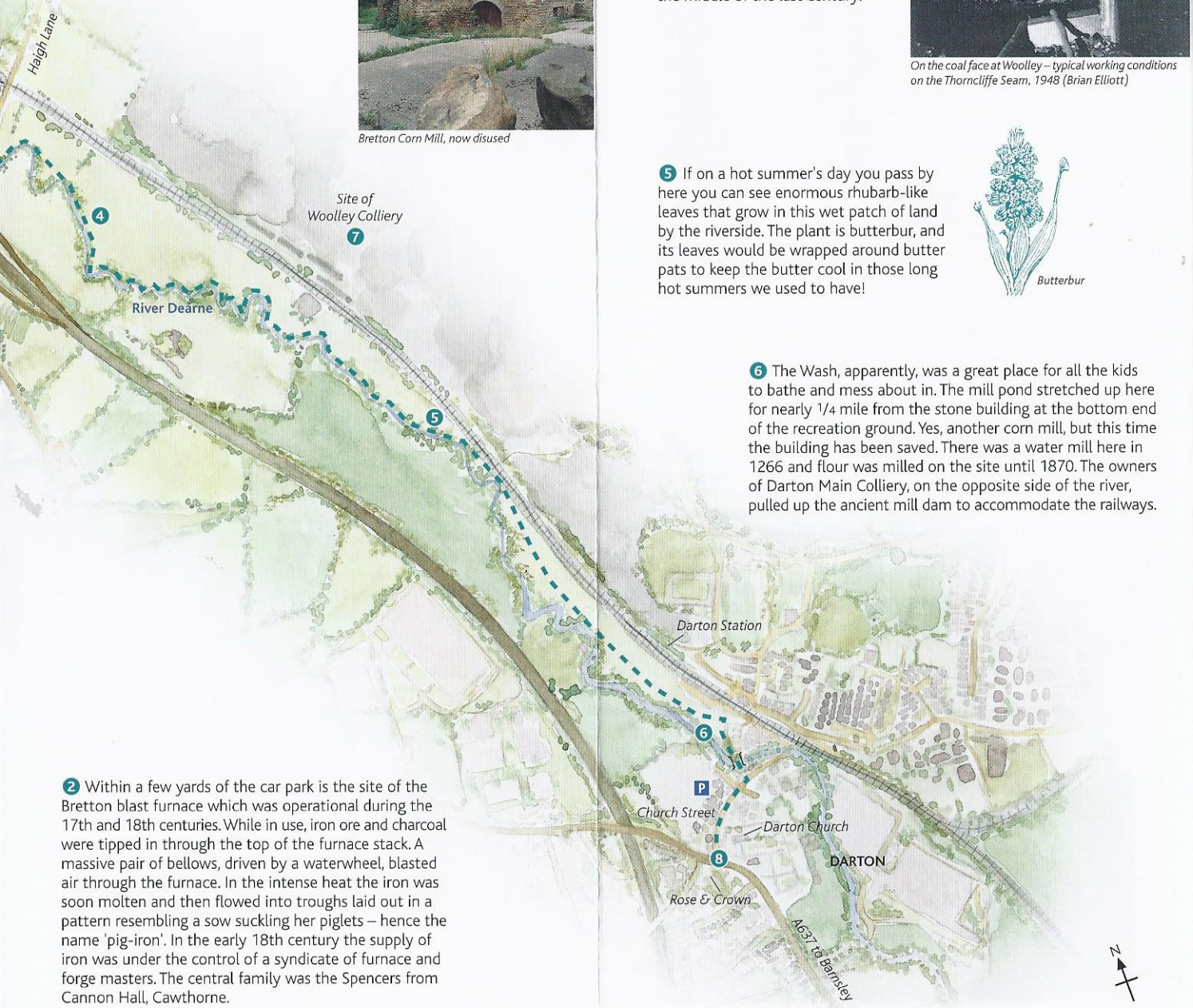
Looking from Woolley Edge towards Bretton Hall, with Emley TV mast on the skyline



3 Alone amongst the modern barns and cement-rendered farmhouse, stands a large stone building that was once a corn mill. A mill had worked here since at least the 14th century. The mill pond stood behind, where cattle now graze contentedly.

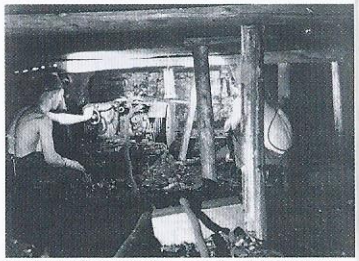


Bretton Corn Mill, now disused



2 Within a few yards of the car park is the site of the Bretton blast furnace which was operational during the 17th and 18th centuries. While in use, iron ore and charcoal were tipped in through the top of the furnace stack. A massive pair of bellows, driven by a waterwheel, blasted air through the furnace. In the intense heat the iron was soon molten and then flowed into troughs laid out in a pattern resembling a sow suckling her piglets – hence the name 'pig-iron'. In the early 18th century the supply of iron was under the control of a syndicate of furnace and forge masters. The central family was the Spencers from Cannon Hall, Cawthorne.

4 *'A few years ago this was a lovely walk through a mile of meadow, skirting the tree-lined River Dearne. . . when one might go down to the river and collect a basket of trout from its clear waters.'* A remembrance from the middle of the last century.

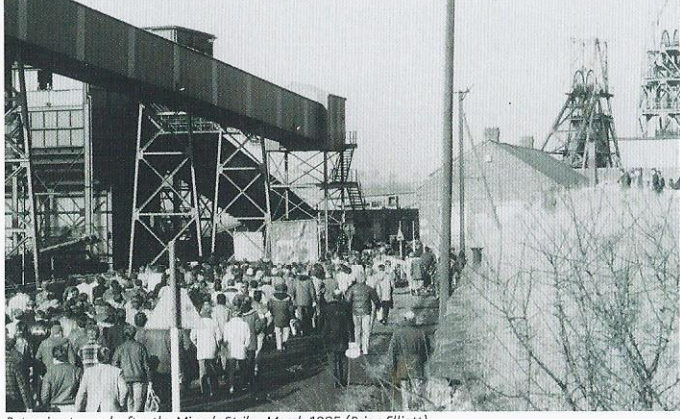


On the coal face at Woolley – typical working conditions on the Thorncliffe Seam, 1948 (Brian Elliott)

5 If on a hot summer's day you pass by here you can see enormous rhubarb-like leaves that grow in this wet patch of land by the riverside. The plant is butterbur, and its leaves would be wrapped around butter pats to keep the butter cool in those long hot summers we used to have!

Butterbur

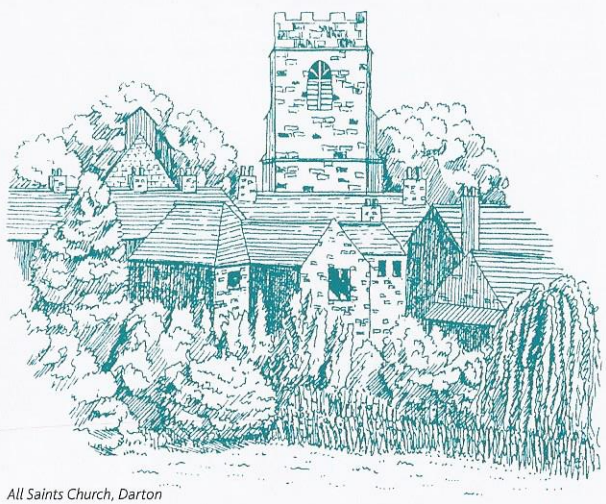
6 The Wash, apparently, was a great place for all the kids to bathe and mess about in. The mill pond stretched up here for nearly 1/4 mile from the stone building at the bottom end of the recreation ground. Yes, another corn mill, but this time the building has been saved. There was a water mill here in 1266 and flour was milled on the site until 1870. The owners of Darton Main Colliery, on the opposite side of the river, pulled up the ancient mill dam to accommodate the railways.



Returning to work after the Miner's Strike, March 1985 (Brian Elliott)

7 The massive coal preparation plant which fronts Woolley Colliery was the centre of the West Side Scheme that aimed to bring in the outputs of several local pits to be washed here. Thousands upon thousands of tons of coal were to make their way here underground. The output from Woolley itself was declining and 1986 was to see a merger with North Gawber. There was an underground city of roadways, coal faces, machines, trains, pumps, conveyors, cages, dust, noise. . . and men; of which most of us know so little. This was soon history – shortly after the miners' strike of 1984/85 the colliery shut forever!

8 It's comforting to think that at least some things don't change. Some old buildings still exist – see if you can locate them and picture what the village was like. The tower of All Saints Church rises up above the trees and buildings of the village of Darton – probably just as it has always done.



All Saints Church, Darton

Waymarked Walk No. 4

Darton to Barnsley

Starting point
Rose and Crown, Darton

Distance
4 miles (6.4 km)

Time
Allow yourself up to 4 hours for exploring at a leisurely pace

Footwear
Some sections can have wet, muddy or uneven ground. Stout shoes are recommended

Waymarks
The route is waymarked with a miner's lamp symbol

How to get there
By Bus: Darton may be reached by regular bus services between Barnsley and Huddersfield. For your return home, Barnsley has connections to most of the major towns and cities in the region

By Train: Darton station sits on the Sheffield-Barnsley-Wakefield-Leeds line

By Car: There is a car park behind the post office in Darton

To return to your car at the end of the walk there is a choice of bus and rail services from Barnsley

Mock clinkers, braggs and sparrables

'Youngsters were first taught to make a square point on a piece of cold iron and then, when they had become proficient in the use of a hammer, they were set to make sparrables, the simplest form of nail.'

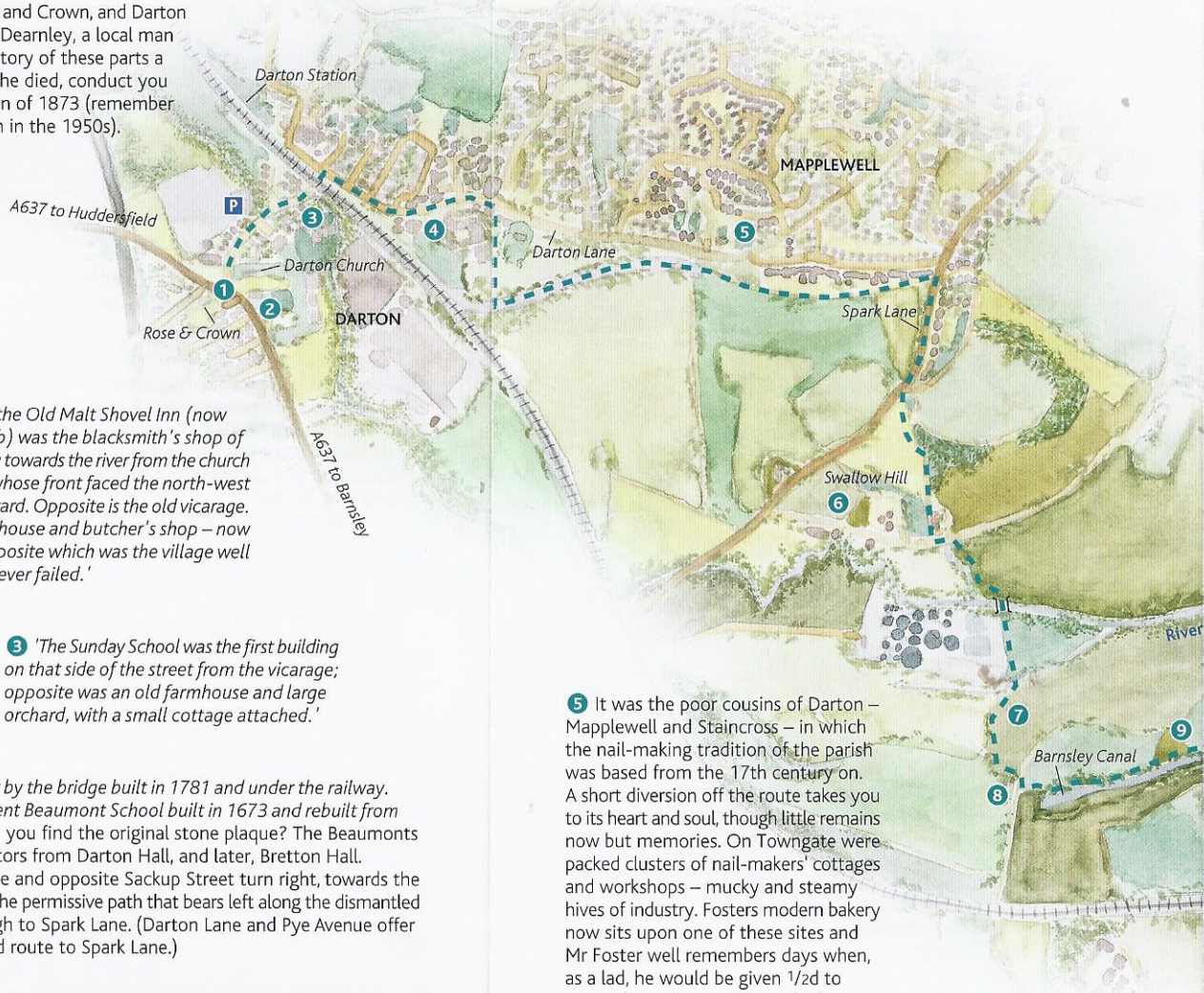
And so another generation of nailmakers was spawned.

Of all the metal trades, this was the most humble and least skilled; first as a part-time job for a poor farmer, and later in the early 1800s, a full-time urban occupation. Although only a small village, 150 years ago most of the adult population of Mapplewell would spend the day by their bellows and smithy in a sixteen feet by sixteen feet workshop in their own backyard.

The men would begin work at 6 o'clock in the morning and toil on a diet of cheese, black bread, treacle and maybe a small piece of meat. Not until late at night would the hammering stop. Often they would set out before dawn to Wakefield or Barnsley, returning with four stones of rod iron to work on after breakfast. Women and children were often made use of, and many a widow would keep her family alive by hammering at the anvil, rocking the baby's cradle with her foot.

Bridge over Barnsley Canal

1 From the Rose and Crown, and Darton Church, let James Dearnley, a local man who wrote the history of these parts a short time before he died, conduct you through the Darton of 1873 (remember that it was written in the 1950s).

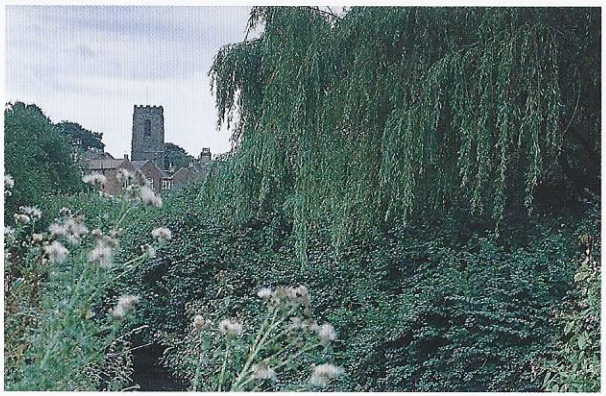


2 *'In the yard of the Old Malt Shovel Inn (now Darton Liberal Club) was the blacksmith's shop of Mark Swaine. Going towards the river from the church was an old house whose front faced the north-west gate of the churchyard. Opposite is the old vicarage. Lower down was a house and butcher's shop – now the chemist's – opposite which was the village well and pump which never failed.'*

3 *'The Sunday School was the first building on that side of the street from the vicarage; opposite was an old farmhouse and large orchard, with a small cottage attached.'*

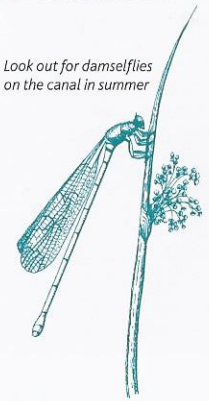
4 *'Cross the river by the bridge built in 1781 and under the railway. Beyond is the ancient Beaumont School built in 1673 and rebuilt from ruins in 1875.'* Can you find the original stone plaque? The Beaumonts were rich benefactors from Darton Hall, and later, Bretton Hall. Follow Darton Lane and opposite Sackup Street turn right, towards the school and follow the permissive path that bears left along the dismantled railway line through to Spark Lane. (Darton Lane and Pye Avenue offer an alternative road route to Spark Lane.)

Darton Church

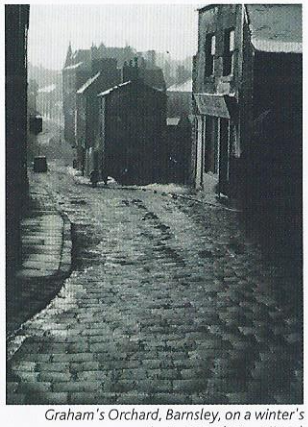


5 It was the poor cousins of Darton – Mapplewell and Staincross – in which the nail-making tradition of the parish was based from the 17th century on. A short diversion off the route takes you to its heart and soul, though little remains now but memories. On Towngate were packed clusters of nail-makers' cottages and workshops – mucky and steamy hives of industry. Fosters modern bakery now sits upon one of these sites and Mr Foster well remembers days when, as a lad, he would be given 1/2d to count the nails – a ruse, no doubt, to keep him out of mischief!

Look out for damselflies on the canal in summer



6 Turn right onto Spark Lane, then take the footpath past Swallow Hill. Swallow Hill has a curious history, with flashes of importance at various times. A blast furnace was operating here contemporary with the one at Bretton; a large number of open-cast mines were started but never came to much; and during the 19th century quite a large vitriol works was established. Just a farm and a few cottages now remain.

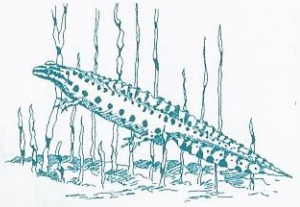


Graham's Orchard, Barnsley, on a winter's day in 1957 (Brian Elliott)

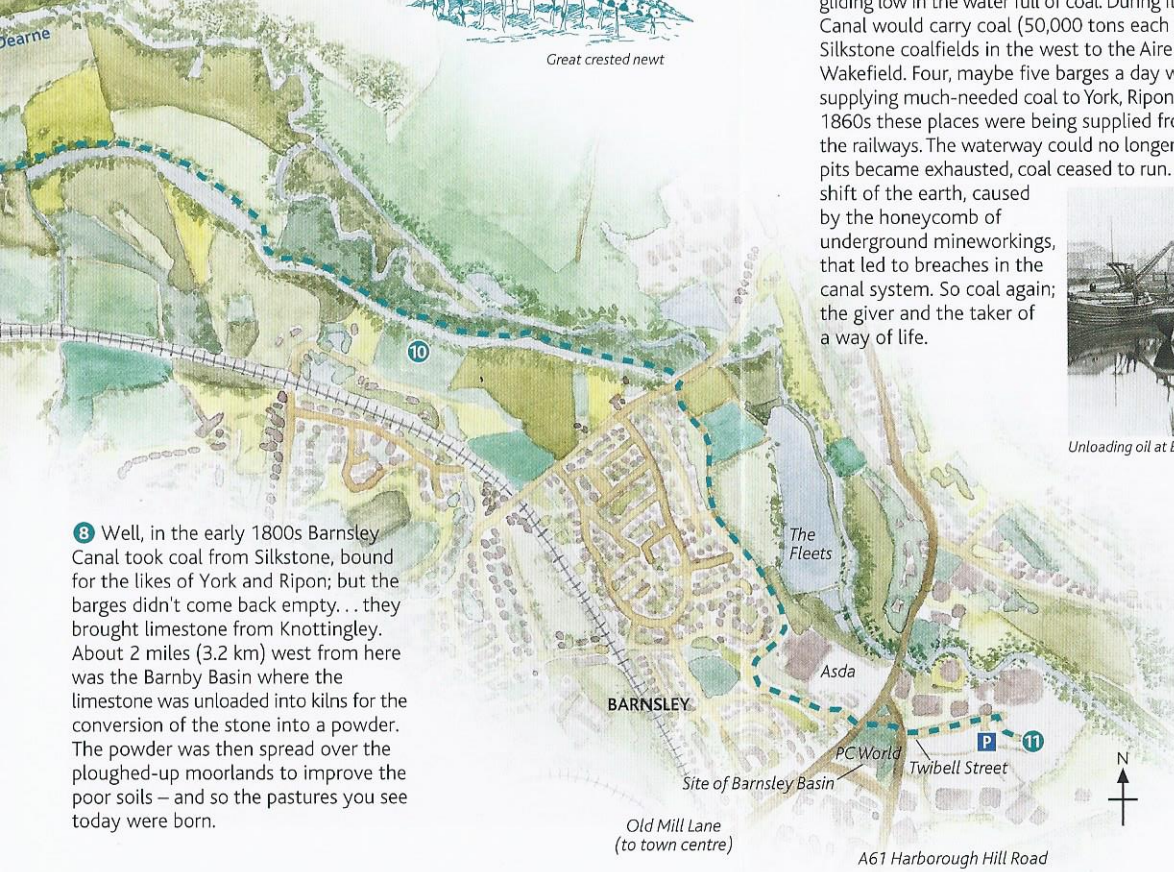
7 *'. . . Passing a town call'd Black Barnsley, eminent still for the working of iron and steel; and indeed the very town looks as black and smoky as if they were all smiths that lived in it, tho' it is not, I suppose, called Black Barnsley on that account, but for the black hue or colour of the moors which, being covered with heath (or heather as 'tis called in that country) look all black like Bagshot Heath near Windsor.'* So Daniel Defoe described the countryside around Barnsley in 1724. But there has been nothing but green fields and trees since leaving Birdsedge. Where did it all go and when?

Swans nesting on the canal

9 As you walk with the canal on your right, you may notice several distinct changes in the vegetation growing in it. Oval-shaped leaves of the broad-leaved pondweed float on the surface, and reed sweet-grass, a highly nutritious plant gorged by the cattle from the neighbouring fields. Further along there are dense beds of the familiar reed-mace, with its long bluish-green leaves and the tall flowering stem which ends in a brown tuft. Many other water plants abound which, together, provide homes for numerous pond animals, including a curious spider that constructs its own diving-bell of air under water and the brightly-coloured dragonflies and damselflies which emerge in the summer months. One threat to the water life of the ponds, streams, rivers and canals of South Yorkshire is the seepage of orange-coloured iron ochre from abandoned coal mines.



Great crested newt



10 Imagine, now, a horse slowly hauling a long wooden barge which is gliding low in the water full of coal. During its heyday in the 1830s, Barnsley Canal would carry coal (50,000 tons each year) all the way from the Silkstone coalfields in the west to the Aire and Calder Navigation near Wakefield. Four, maybe five barges a day would make the ten hour trek supplying much-needed coal to York, Ripon and Boroughbridge. But by the 1860s these places were being supplied from the Durham coalfields – by the railways. The waterway could no longer compete and, as the canalside pits became exhausted, coal ceased to run. Ironically, it was the heave and shift of the earth, caused by the honeycomb of underground mineworkings, that led to breaches in the canal system. So coal again; the giver and the taker of a way of life.

Unloading oil at Barnsley Basin, Old Mill, 1925 (Alan Hall)

8 Well, in the early 1800s Barnsley Canal took coal from Silkstone, bound for the likes of York and Ripon; but the barges didn't come back empty. . . they brought limestone from Knottingley. About 2 miles (3.2 km) west from here was the Barnby Basin where the limestone was unloaded into kilns for the conversion of the stone into a powder. The powder was then spread over the ploughed-up moorlands to improve the poor soils – and so the pastures you see today were born.

11 Well, I suppose the navigators, or navvies as they came to be known, must have done a damn fine job puddling the clay into the canal bottom; a mucky job, pounding your feet into the sucking clay, but how well it has held water, without fail, for over 200 years – although Barnsley Canal was finally abandoned in 1953.

DEARNE WAY

Waymarked Walks

Bretton to Barnsley

BARNSLEY Metropolitan Borough Council