

WALK 21 BAGDEN HILLOCKS and the COTTON FAMINE ROAD

This walk is in part a homage. It features a rarely-walked route to a high-level terrace, and a more familiar return journey.

START Hallfold Church Car Park

TIME 3 hours DISTANCE 5+ miles

FOOTWEAR Sturdy



Turn right out of the car park and go up past the school entrances, before turning right up Hall Fold. Then climb. Where road gives way to track go up and half right, through a short steep canyon leading to Fold Head Barn, where the blue plaque is worth a read. Then turn left, up an uneven little shortcut to a broad track that now rises to your right, towards Limed Farm. Follow this track for about 200m. looking for a path that leads up at right-angles to your left – the path has a wall on its right and a fence on its left. At its top is an immovable gate...but you'll be able to squeeze by at its right side.

Follow the left-hand wall for about 30m., then head out right (at about 45 degrees) and up across this meadow, known as Jennie Rough. As you breast the rise you'll encounter an awkward-to-cross narrow bog – easier if you move to your right. Ahead, in the dip, are two gates and a stile – use the right-hand gate, re-positioning it carefully, please. To your left is a curving wall, and your path through the rushes starts by echoing that curve, but, where the wall straightens out, look ahead and right for an obvious green path...and get yourself to it. Now follow it, left, to a field gate, which again you need to shut securely behind you. Head up this meadow, aiming at the obvious building, a cow byre called...Meadows!

If you are old/local enough to have walked early editions of the High School Moorathon you may just recall going right at this building. Don't. Stay left of it, on a good track that swings hard left, then rises. Simply follow this up to the old tramway, where you turn left and stride out, looking left for the splendid panorama, and straight ahead for the big neon sign announcing Bagden Hillocks. (Spoiler: one of these may disappoint.) After about a mile you'll reach Rooley Moor Road. Turn left.

In 1860 in Lancashire there was work, lots of it, in all the mills. The work was hard, the hours were long, but the pay was decent. By 1862 there was no pay. The mills manufactured cotton goods, but to do that you need raw cotton, and that doesn't grow in Lancashire now, and didn't then. It grew in the southern states of America, tended and picked by slaves whose labours made their masters and mistresses rich. But the northern states, and Abraham Lincoln, wanted to abolish slavery. They had other grievances against the Confederacy, and it all escalated into civil war. The Union blockaded the South, stopping their ships from sailing to Europe: if they couldn't sell their goods, they'd find it hard to re-arm their fighters. For Lancashire then, no raw materials for the mills. Mill owners, mostly supporting the South, reduced the output of their mills, and closed many. No work. So no pay. Workers were left in squalid housing, with precious little food. Hunger, illness, destitution and desperation – all chronicled by journalists of the day.

The authorities knew how this would go. Forty years before, for a different reason, hunger had stalked the region, leading to protests, and marches, and the savage response of the Peterloo Massacre. This time – but not before a riot in Salford - local Boards were established, and given the responsibility, and some funds, to create other employment. In Rochdale one such scheme required out-of-work millhands to walk up onto Rooley Moor, where they'd be set to work in quarries, producing stone setts...which were then to be laid to build the road upon which you now walk – and which soon became known as the Cotton Famine Road.

As a scheme for avoiding a mass uprising it was a success. But the road was never completed, and was pointless anyway. Whatever money was expended on it

was wasted. What remains now stands as a monument to an act of institutional cruelty inflicted by a selfish ruling class incapable of imagining or funding a better life for those lacking their education and wealth. There are 300,000+ setts along this road, cut and laid in brutal conditions by men who walked up here each dawn and down again each dusk to earn a bare minimum to feed their families a bare minimum.



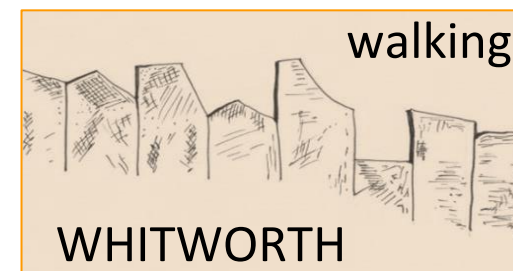
It is, however, also a monument to the honour and nobility of those men, who in December 1862 sent a message of support to Abraham Lincoln, calling slavery “...a foul blot on civilisation”. Three weeks later Lincoln wrote back, deploring “...the sufferings of working people” and invoking a hope for “...the universal triumph of justice, humanity and freedom.” The Union also sent what we would now call food aid to Lancashire.

Touchstones Museum in Rochdale has much more on this.

You and I walk the road for pleasure. All we share with those who built it are the skylarks, and the feeling that the world could be a fairer place.

Pen and ink drawing by Krista Howell

Walk down the road for a mile, with Manchester etc spread out before you in all their...er...glory. For an alternative view of Manchester and other conurbations, read Phillip Reeve’s *Mortal Engines* series! You’ll come to a wide gate announcing the end of the moor. Just beyond it, go left following the Pennine Bridleway (PBW) signs, and left again after 300m. at the cattle grid. Stay left at the next junction, before this lovely little road swings right and up into Prickshaw hamlet. 40m. beyond the end of the row of cottages on your left, go left and down, passing the United Utilities property at the bottom. Here a new path goes up to the left, between the UU wall and the building site. Near the top there’s a dogleg which brings you to a serviceable path behind the houses, then some garages, and some flats, and more houses, by which time it’s become a small road which will take you to Hall Fold, where you first climbed to the moor. Walk down, and left at the junction at the bottom. JF



This walk starts low in the village, but takes you up between old properties with fabulous views across to the east of the valley into hill-farming land high on the western side of the valley, where the views are wonderfully panoramic under big skies. Your descent is via an old road built under extraordinary circumstances, then a pretty, restored hamlet and a path that is on Whitworth’s urban-rural boundary. A typical Whitworth walk, then!

Wrap for warmth, and wear sturdy shoes or boots. JF

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