

The "OLD HIGHWAY" Between Embsay and Eastby.

To drive between Embsay and Eastby we turn up the road at Cross End (Davy's Corner), past the Church, around the sharp bend at Embsay Kirk and eventually reach Eastby. But this was not the officially maintained highway route between the villages before around 1805.

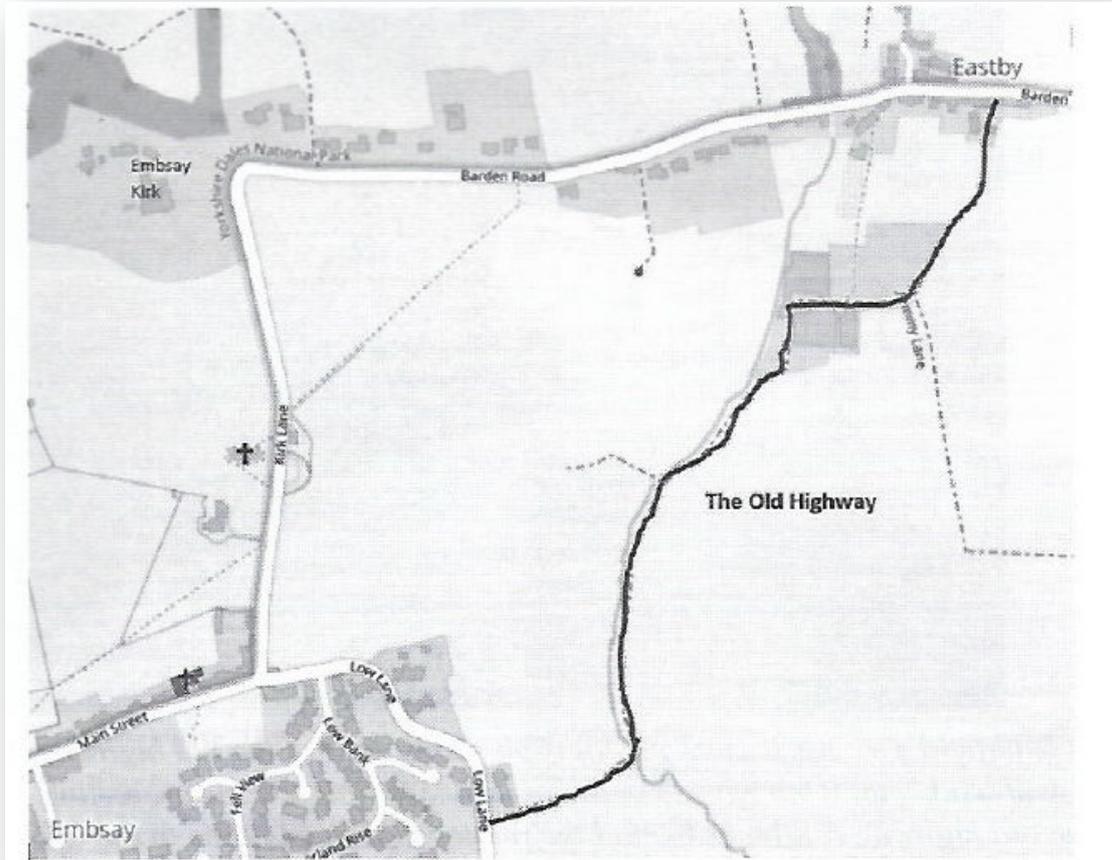


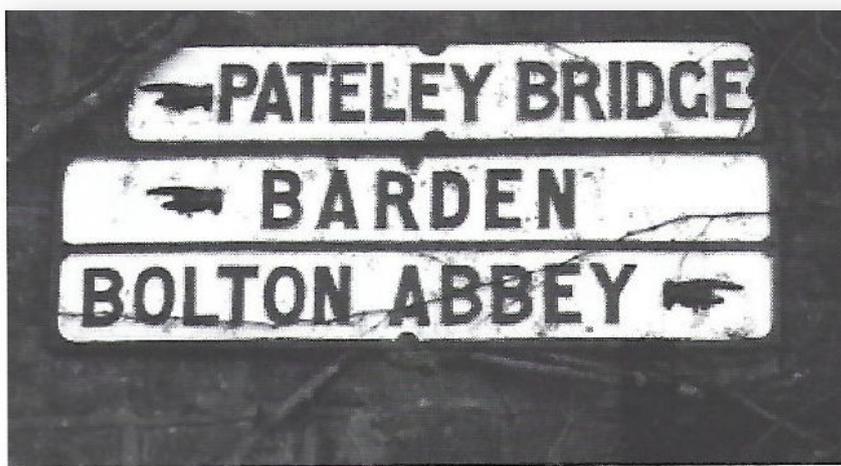
Illustration: The Old Highway (now a public footpath) shown on a modern map of Embsay and Eastby

In Wakefield Records Office there is a scrappy drawing attached to a legal note which describes how the 'Old Highway' was moved to its present location. The original highway took the trackway beside Bower House Farm in Eastby, turned to run alongside the river called Rowton Beck at this point. This beck has been the boundary between the two townships for at least 100 years. The track crossed an old bridge which can still be seen to emerge onto Low Lane, next to the now-derelict barn and the remains of what looks like the Embsay pound (*see photograph below*).



Illustration: Footpath from Low Lane to Eastby as it appears today

All the document at Wakefield tells is that some of the local landowners made an agreement to buy the track of the old road, which would finance the construction of the new highway. Messrs. William Baynes, Robinson Chippendale, and John Carr paid £57 and Jane Baynes (William's sister), paid a further £21 for the land on which the Old Highway ran. The document does not record why they made this purchase. The Baynes's mansion at Embsay Kirk had been constructed no more than 20 years earlier. One possible reason is that no-one followed the old highway anymore, travelling instead along Kirk Lane, although it would not have been maintained as a main thoroughfare.



A hint of another possible reason can be seen on the wall of the Old Smithy at Cross End, at the bottom of Kirk Lane. There is here an old signpost (*see photograph*) that directs traffic through Eastby to Pateley Bridge - not the shortest route today, but this is the route of the old stagecoach

road from Skipton to Pateley Bridge, as shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey in 1851. With the main road legally re-directed along Kirk Lane, William Baynes would have had a much easier time selling Embsay Kirk, which he did in 1807, as access to the house was greatly improved.

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