

Turnpike-style road through Embsay and Eastby

Why do the road signs at Cross End in Embsay direct you towards Pateley Bridge? It is not the most obvious destination travelling from Embsay. The reason for this takes us back to the first decade of the 19th Century.



Fig 1. The road crossing Halton Heights, Halton East as shown on 1851 OS map.

The earliest Ordnance Survey map (1851) shows the road through Embsay and Eastby, with the label 'Skipton to Pateley Bridge Trust'. This trust used private investment to improve the condition of the road and make it easier for carts and wagons to use. It was normal at this time for ordinary roads to be repaired by the local residents of the villages that they ran through, and they were often in very bad condition. Turnpike Trusts were created, often by Act of Parliament, to improve main roads between important towns. The investors could recover their costs by charging tolls to the road users. A local example is the Skipton to Knaresborough turnpike, as shown by the distinctive cast iron milestones.



Fig 2. Example of Skipton to Knaresborough turnpike milestone on the A59.

The Skipton to Pateley Bridge Trust would have been privately funded, but the Trust was not created by an Act of Parliament. The improved roads were probably constructed, primarily, to improve industrial transport, rather than to make every day travel easier. In the last years of the eighteenth century the Leeds-Liverpool canal had transformed the commercial life of Skipton. The canal to Liverpool was finally completed in 1816, but before then Skipton was able to run cargo eastwards to Bradford and Leeds. The Earl of Thanet opened a branch of the canal to run alongside Skipton castle allowing him to make the most of his quarry at Haw Bank, taking limestone to the iron foundries of Bradford.

The lead mining industry in the Dales was also able to benefit from the canal. A barge would be able to transport large quantities of lead whereas, previously, the ingots were probably carried by trains of packhorses. Constructing a road from Skipton to the lead mining areas of the Dales would maximise the benefits of the canal's presence. Not only would they be able to bring the finished ingots to the canal wharf in larger quantities by cart, but they would be able to transport coal or coke more efficiently on the improved roads from the barges to the mining areas for smelting the metal from the ore.

The Skipton to Pateley Bridge Road / Eastby Bank Lay-By

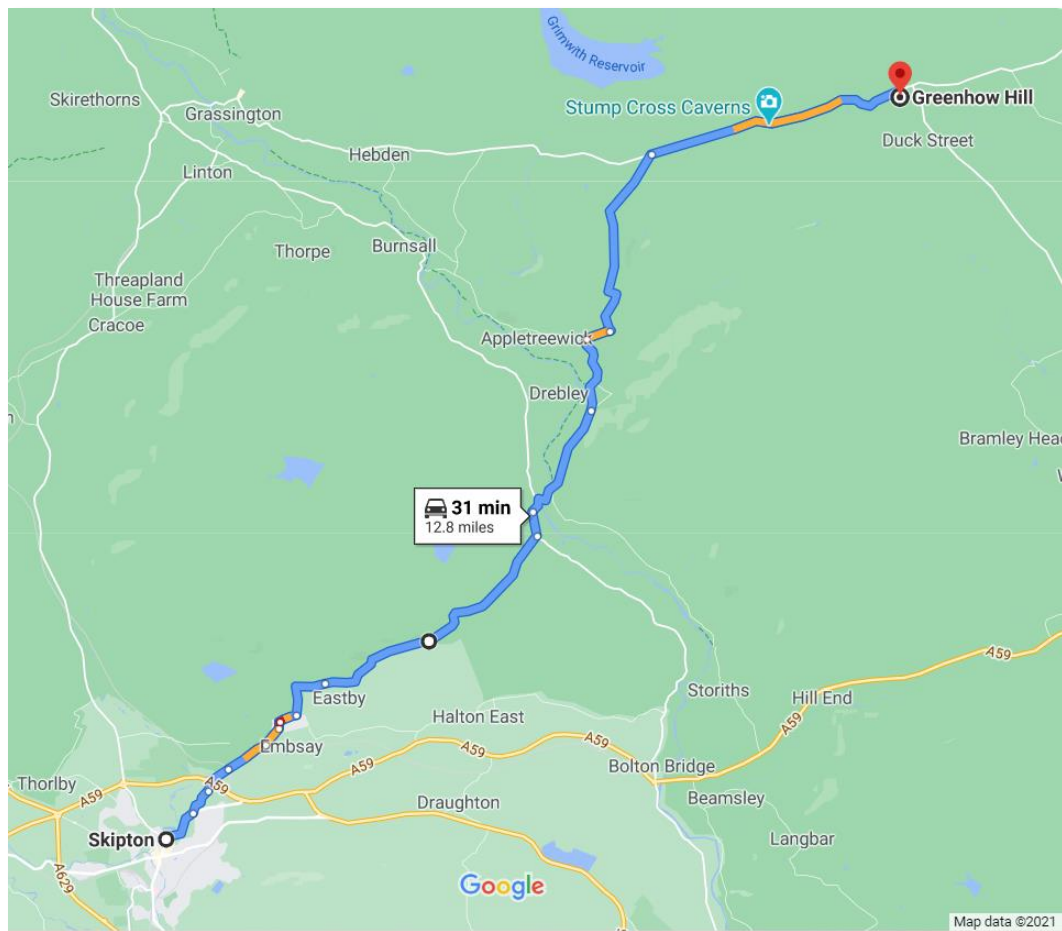


Fig 3. Map showing the route of the Skipton to Pateley Bridge Trust Road. © Google Maps

The 1851 O.S. map shows that the trust's road passed through Embsay and Eastby, ascending Eastby Bank and then descending to Barden, across Barden Bridge, passing beside Haugh Mill to the Appletreewick T-junction. From there it turned right, ascending through Appletreewick Pasture to the main Grassington-Pateley Bridge road, past Greenhow Hill lead mines and down to Pateley Bridge. (The 1851 map show the Greenhow Hill lead mines as 'Old lead mines') There is little documentary evidence which would give us more information about the privately improved road. It is possible that it was very short-lived. If Greenhow Hill lead mine was redundant by 1851 then the main reason for the existence of the road was no longer there. The Skipton-to-Grassington road was turnpiked as far as Cracoe in 1852 giving the Wharfedale mines a more direct route to Skipton, increasing the redundancy of the Skipton-Pateley Bridge Trust road.

Skipton's economy benefitted from the supply of metallic lead from Greenhow Hill and Wharfedale. The 1822 Baines' Skipton Directory of Trades shows Robert Fell as a lead merchant in Bridge Street (now part of the Coach Street car park). The Craven Lead Works was established in 1835 alongside the canal on Keighley Road. The business passed into the hands of Robert Fell and Sons in 1881. The business developed into a plumber's merchants, only closing down in the late 20th century¹. The building was converted to flats with further houses fronting the Keighley Road.

¹ 'History of Skipton', W.H. Dawson. (Simpkin, Marshall & Co, London. 1882. p84).

There are a significant number of artefacts and landscape features alongside the road through Embsay and Eastby, and at Barden Bridge, that probably originate from the building and operation of the road.



1. Signposts

This has already been mentioned above. Although the signposts at Cross End in Embsay are from the mid-20th century, the route was already long-established as the main route to Pateley Bridge.

Figure 4. Signpost mounted on wall of 'Old Smithy' at Cross-End, Embsay

2. Road past Embsay Kirk.

The route of the present-day road (Kirk Lane), which runs past Embsay Kirk, was only established as the main road in 1805. The earlier route can now be followed as a footpath from Low Lane, crossing the old bridge over Rowton Beck, past the cattle barns and emerging alongside Bower House Farm in Eastby. In medieval times, and up to the time of field enclosure, the land south of Embsay Main Street was open pasture. The 'Shepherd Lord' Clifford when travelling in the late 15th century from Skipton to his newly built Barden Tower, would have been able to pass directly across the open, common-land to follow the old road. After 1805 the main road was moved to its present-day route, which was more convenient for the new mansion at Embsay Kirk and for Eastby Mill.

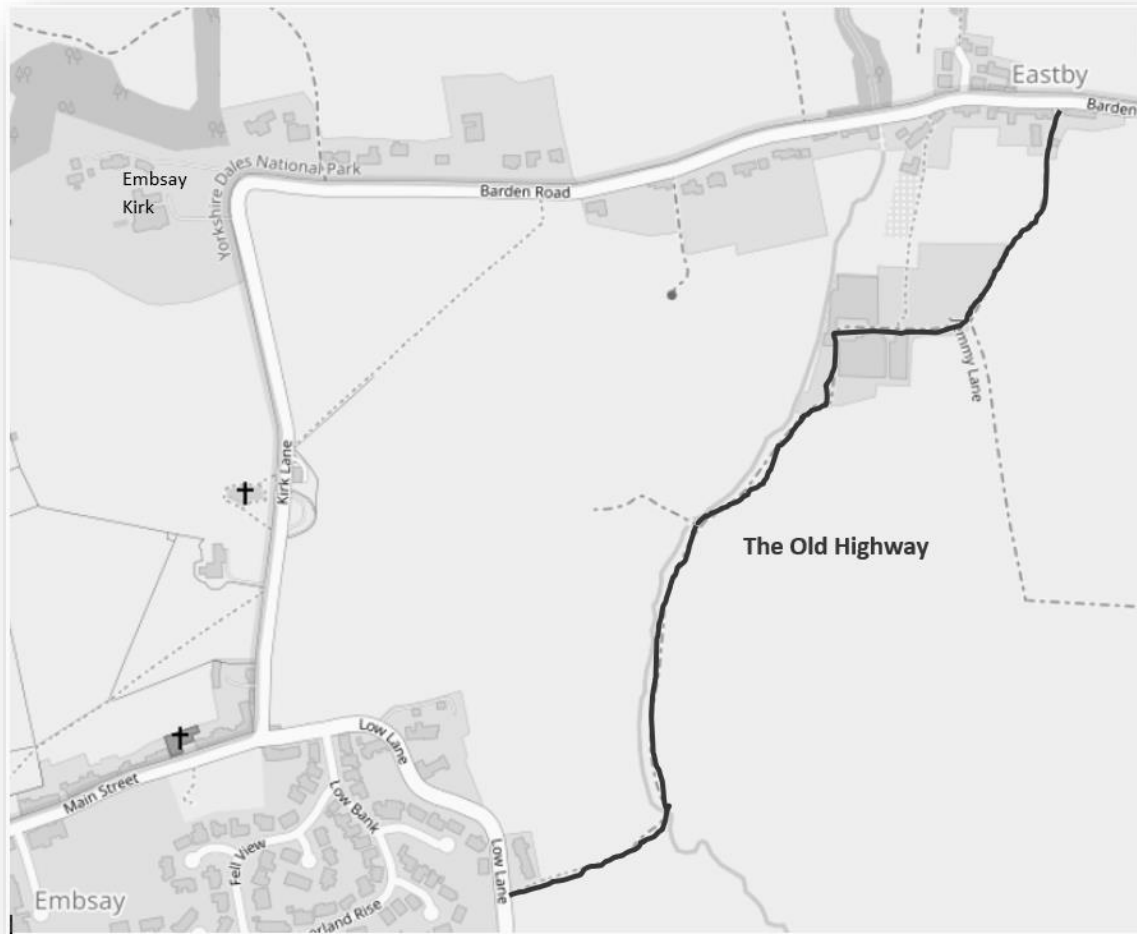


Figure 5. Map showing the route of the Old Embsay to Eastby road

3. Horse Troughs

There are two very well-made horse troughs on Barden Road through Eastby. The front face of both stone troughs have been carefully hammer-dressed. The trough outside Bower House Farm is set back into the wall to ensure that the roadway can be kept clear. It is probable that the stones from the original wall were re-used when the trough was installed, as the coping stones on the top of the wall do not appear to be in their original position.



Figure 6. Horse trough near to Bower House Farm, Eastby.

The trough opposite Dale Head Farm has also been set well back from the road. It is very likely that this was originally a stream that ran across the road. There are regular comments in 17th and 18th century manor court documents ordering work to retain a stream within its confines, and this is the most likely culprit. It is probable that the stream was culverted as part of the work on the road, and the provision of another horse-trough was sensible. It is, of course, possible that the local farmers provided the horse troughs for their working horses, but the style of these two troughs does not reflect those found elsewhere in the parish.



Figure 7. Horse Trough near to Dale Head farm, Eastby

4. Road surface levels and routes.

The houses at the east end of Eastby, beyond Dale End Farm, all sit at a lower level than Barden Road. In the medieval, monastic period, the road through Eastby continued straight ahead onto Bark Lane². The route up Eastby Bank probably only came into existence as a road when Barden Tower was constructed, providing quick access between there and Skipton Castle. It seems likely that the surface level of the road was built up when the private trust road was first constructed. It would have been necessary to enable horse-drawn wagons to be able to easily negotiate the sharp corner whilst starting to go uphill. Of course, the occupants of the houses (mostly rent paying tenants) would have not been given the opportunity to object to their front entrances being half-buried. Their landlords were probably being paid by, or were investors in, the private road trust.

There are other indications of roads being improved for cart traffic. In Embsay, the bridge over Embsay Beck, closest to Skipton, has been known for many centuries as 'Bow Bridge'. Normally, a bridge with this name is hump-backed and difficult for carts and vehicles to drive across. By comparing the road surface to the height of the bridge parapets, it can be seen that the slope on either side has been deliberately reduced making the 'bow' less pronounced.

At Barden Bridge, the road shown on the 1851 OS map comes directly down the hill and goes straight on to the bridge, whereas before the road improvements there had been two sharp corners

² Bark Lane is a mis-spelling of the Danish word for hill, 'bargh', which implies the influence of Scandinavian settlers in the area

to access the bridge. The sharp bend would have been perfectly reasonable for the pack-horse trains for which the bridge was originally built, but difficult for heavy carts to negotiate.

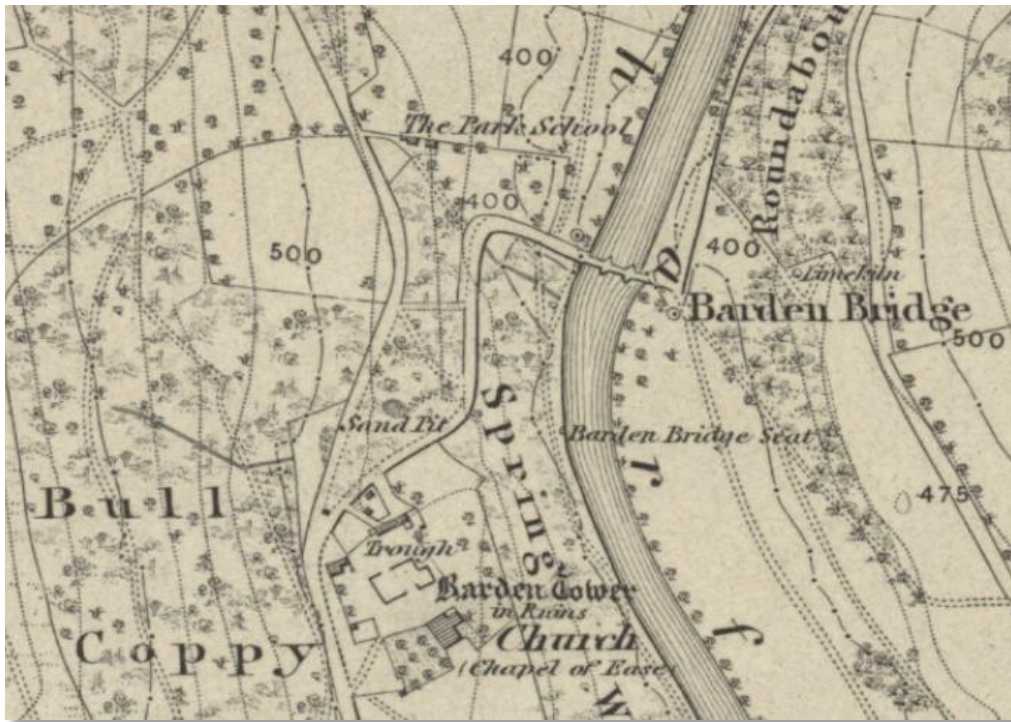


Fig 8. Barden Bridge as shown in 1851 Ordnance Survey map.



Fig 9. Barden Bridge as shown in 1731 map of Barden (Transcribed C Lunnon from photocopy of original held by Bolton Abbey Estate)

5. Horse Team Lay-by.

Immediately after the road turns to go up Eastby Bank, there is a 'lay-by' on the left-hand side of the road. The walls to this feature are constructed from gritstone blocks and there are coping stones along the complete length. At each end of the walls are large stone posts. These appear to have been made specifically for this feature and are not, for example, re-used gateposts. The walls support a bank on which trees have recently been planted, and which is scattered with old crockery and glassware. To the rear of the bank is a well-constructed, gritstone-built, drain. This appears to drain into the small stream at the entrance to Bark Lane. Slightly downhill from the 'lay-by' is a revetted wall, at the end of which is a stone post and, what appears to be a broken section of the same post. The surface of the 'lay-by' is cobbled with rectangular blocks or setts, although most of the surface is now hidden under mud, weeds and granite road-chippings. The fact that the lay-by feature is at the base of a steep slope indicates its probable use.



Fig 10. 1907 Ordnance Survey Map showing location of 'lay-by' (Red Circle to the right)' and location of supporting wall (Blue circle to the left). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.



Fig 10. Horse Team Lay-by, Eastby Bank.



Fig 11. Horse team layby, Eastby Bank, showing stone sett surface.

Any wagon making the journey from Skipton would have had a team of horses sufficient to pull the wagon over normal roads. The wagons making the journey from Skipton would probably have been loaded with coal or coke to fire the lead smelt mills at Greenhow Hill. It was common for the companies to provide additional horses to enable heavy carts to be pulled up steep banks. The lengths of road over which this service was provided were marked by 'on-stones' and 'off-stones'. It is possible that the broken stone post was an 'on-stone'. The lay-by would be a place for horse teams to wait, ready to be attached, to provide additional horse-power to get heavy carts up the hill. It would not be possible for the horse team to wait, for example, in one of the farms, because the assistance team would not be able to pass the wagon waiting for assistance. The broken post just downhill from the lay-by is probably the on-stone (the point at which the extra horse-power was connected). The location of the off-stone (where the horse power was disconnected) has been lost.

Later, probably when the private road fell out of use for traffic to and from the lead mines, the layby was used as an area to break roadstone, and the bank was reportedly used as somewhere for local people to hang their washing³.

The most likely place that the horses would be stabled would have been in Dale Head Farm.

³ 'Embsay with Eastby', Winifred Wharton, (ed). Nd. Prob 1979.

6. Walls and ditches



Fig 12. Supporting wall alongside road near Rowton Beck. The location is shown in Fig 9 (Blue circle)

On the approach from Embsay to Rowton Beck, there are gritstone walls constructed on the north of the road which have a very similar style to the method of construction used in the 'lay-by'. The house to the south of the road (Bridge End) was not yet built at the start of the nineteenth century, but there were probably a group of farm buildings sitting directly against the road. The old track was probably too narrow at this point. With the buildings making road widening to the south impossible, the road was widened to the north and the bank supported with the stone wall. The route of the road up Eastby Bank was probably the same as the road taken by the 'Shepherd Lord' centuries earlier, although the new road was wider. But it was in the Trust's interest to make the road so that it required maintenance less frequently than normal roads. The walls on either side of the road on Eastby Bank, and as the road descends from Black Park, are of similar construction, of stones probably taken from the quarries on Halton Heights. The road continuing across the moor and down towards Barden Tower also has very wide and deep ditches, essential for the volume of water that runs off the hill. It is very likely that these originated with the road improvements made by the trust, as the effort to dig the ditches, especially over the moorland, is more than would be affordable for a road maintained by the parish. The route of the road from Black Park to Barden Scale is probably not identical to that of the ancient road. On the moor, just to the south of the wall, it is possible, amongst the heather, to make out the traces of the earlier road.

The Skipton to Pateley Bridge Road / Eastby Bank Lay-By

If you have any information on the Skipton to Pateley Bridge Trust, can see other features that we have not mentioned, or have other interpretations, then please contact us via the UWHG website

Chris Lunnon.

Embsay with Eastby Historical Research Group, March 2021