

Poynton Walk 5 The canal towpath, and east of the canal

Starting at Adlington Wharf, then along the towpath past the canal aqueduct at Redacre on Shrigley Road. Northwards along the canal or the road to Hagg Bank Farm, then across the iron canal footbridge and footpath up towards Lyme Park at Green's Farm. Footpath across to Haresteads Farm, then Longchimney and Hilltop Farm. Down to the canal at Mount Vernon Wharf, then along the towpath to Barlow House Farm. Footpath past Plattwood and Pheasantry Cottage to Middlecale Pit and down to the canal again. Northwards along the canal towpath to High Lane Wharf on the main A6 road.

The Macclesfield Canal was built 1830-31 and opened in the latter year, towards the end of the "Canal Era", and soon to suffer competition from the new railways. It runs from Hall Green Junction with the Trent & Mersey Canal north of Kids Grove, Staffordshire, to Marple Junction with the Peak Forest Canal, a distance of some 26 miles. The locks are all grouped together at Bosley, and the level of water from there past Poynton to Marple Top Lock and on to Whaley Bridge at 514 feet above sea level was for a long time the highest navigable stretch on the main English canal network. It has however been recently eclipsed by the restored Huddersfield Narrow Canal, whose Standedge Tunnel section through the Pennine Hills reaches no less than 645 ft.

The canal is famed for the quality and variety of its bridges. Typical of the elegant stone over-bridges is Wild's Bridge, no. 23 near Bollington, still in original condition (right).....

Unfortunately none of these survive within our area: as we will see, all have had to be rebuilt at quite an early stage due to mining subsidence. Also, since the towpath remains on the west side of the canal all the way from Marple to near Macclesfield, there are none of the characteristic "turnover" bridges along here, allowing the boat horses to cross the canal without the need to detach the towrope. The nearest of these are at Marple Junction and at Clarke Lane, Kerridge (bridge 29). Lastly, all the low-level farm crossings, the swing or "swivel" bridges have now gone except one, bridge 47 south of Macclesfield, which has been restored as representative of the type, though the remains of another can be still seen in our area.

Starting from Adlington Wharf, the bridge here (no.18 or Grimshaws) is the last of the original stone arches going northwards.....

The next (17, Mitchell's) has been rebuilt with a wooden platform deck at some stage, into a form typical of several along the next stretch, through to High Lane.....



Redacre aqueduct

This is easily missed from the towpath, especially in summer with extensive surrounding vegetation. It carries the canal around 20 feet above Shrigley Road, with an 11 ft wide arch of around 90 ft bore.....



Redacre engine house

A short detour along Shrigley Road towards Higher Poynton, then down the lane to the right comes to the remains of the former steam coal pit pumping engine house, which has lost its original roof and been reduced in height at some time. An early engine is recorded in use in this area in 1769.

On the 1906 map below, the engine house is just to the left of the words "Old Shaft" near the centre.....



A footpath continues along the farm track past Hagg Farm, and reaches the canal again just beyond, at.....

Iron canal footbridge (Ryles, or Hagg Bank bridge 16)

Marked "F.B." on the plan, lower right side. There was once also a swing- or swivel-bridge over the canal here, to allow cart access to the fields, but the movable section was removed some years ago as it had become unsafe. The iron turntable ring set in a solid stone base may still be seen however, in the recent picture (right) after the bridge had been repainted.....



A little way to the south of the bridge, one of the original characteristic milestones survives beside the towpath. It reads "From Hall Green 22 miles" on this side (from Marple.... on the other) but all the place names were defaced in World War II in order to confuse the enemy! This one is still fairly legible though, others along the way were so badly damaged that they have been replaced by the Macclesfield Canal Society with modern replicas.



Old bell-pits in field beyond canal

Crossing the canal by the iron footbridge, the fields beyond contain extensive evidence of early workings for coal, before around 1760. Where the coal seams outcropped on the surface, they could be easily mined with hand tools to a depth of around 20ft or so, with access through a narrow hole in the top and widening out with increasing depth, hence the name. Waste rock and spoil was dumped in a ring around the periphery, and eventually the roof fell in, leaving a deep pit which soon filled with water (there are two typical ones in the picture, right). A new hole was then started a few yards away.



A somewhat indistinct footpath leads on generally eastwards up the hill, past Throstlenest Farm (right) to Green's Farm beyond.

The latter is an interesting old stone structure, with a cast-iron date plaque 1748 on its rear wall.....



A new footpath starts around the back of the farmhouse, heading northwards towards Haresteads Farm.

This is another ancient holding, called Richardson's Farm up until the 1901 census. Although the path comes up around the back of, and then through the farmyard, the front of the farmhouse faces onto the main bridle road from the canal at Mount Vernon up to Lyme Park. Being partially hidden by vegetation, it is difficult to photograph adequately (right).....

Going down the lane for a couple of hundred yards, both Hilltop Farm and the former "Longchimney" properties come into view on the right-hand side.



On this 1871 map extract, Richardson's Farm is just off the bottom at the right hand side, below the figure "93".

Reform pit winding engine house

The property shown as Longchimney and now known as Hilltop Cottage was the former winding engine house for the Reform Pit shaft nearby. This was working circa 1820 but has long been a private residence and much extended in recent years. Other coal pits hereabouts, Barlow's, Hilltop (Gee's) and "Gees next Rideker" (Redacre) were working by 1793, connected by gang-road to those further north. Benjamin Gee was an experienced miner who came to this area from Cornwall.

As late as 1980, Longchimney was little altered, with its origins easily discernable (left), but nowadays it looks like this.....

The eponymous "Long Chimney" from the former boiler house is however still evident on the north side....



Higher up the hill, Hilltop Farmhouse is a solid stone late Victorian construction (right), on this much older site; it does not appear on the above 1871 map. Further up the hill behind it is a most unexpected feature.....



Old gasholder, Hilltop Farm

Carrying the date 1877 and maker's name, this large iron structure was conveyed up here in sections from the station gasworks around 1936 and re-assembled to serve as a water tower (no longer in use). Nowadays well hidden by trees and vegetation, its OS map location is SJ950832.



Retracing our steps past Hilltop Farm and Longchimney, the track joins up with the main Lyme Park bridle path by Woodside Cottage (right), at top left of the above map. In the 1851 census this is shown as two dwellings, Gee's Lodge and Gee's Cottage, and marked the western boundary of Benjamin Gee's early colliery holdings here.



The combined lane then soon arrives at the canal and crosses it by bridge 15 (Brownhill's Bridge) at Mount Vernon Wharf.....

Lord Vemon's coal wharf here on the Macclesfield Canal started up in 1831 when the canal was opened, and the 4 cottages were built 1835. The nearby Nelson pit was working by 1847 and again from 1860-80. The wider parts of the canal on both sides of the bridge were caused by colliery subsidence after around 1871; they were full of sunken wooden coal boats for many years, and several rotting hulks remain there still. When this section of canal was drained for maintenance several years ago, some of them were revealed; they are somewhat beyond hope for any future restoration!.....



This distinctive cast-iron sign (left) reminds bridge-users of the weight limit for vehicles; it dates from around 1905 and is marked "Great Central Railway Co, Marylebone Station, London" as the then owners and administrators of the canal.

Bridge 15 is another of those that has been rebuilt with a wooden (later steel girder) platform due to the subsidence. The horizontal raised stone band marks the original roadway level, from which it can be seen that this has sunk by around 2-3 feet, and the stone parapet has also been built up higher accordingly, so long ago that the new stone has weathered to the same colour as the original. Needless to add, the canal banks have also had to be built up with clay to the same extent all along this stretch, to keep the water in!

The view northwards from the bridge (above left) shows the entrance to the side arm serving the former coal wharf at left. This is now used by Braidbar as a boat-building yard; over the last 40

years or so they have constructed over 200 new narrow boats here, mainly of the full length, traditional design, superbly fitted out and painted.....

Going north along the towpath, the extensive moorings here also usually contain one or two preserved former working boats, such as the FM&C company's motor craft "Badger" built in 1923 and "Lark" of 1913.....



Canal bridge no. 14 (Smith's or Garman's bridge)

The next bridge northwards carries a farm track leading to Barlow House; it again shows the effects of colliery subsidence, even more dramatically here as the original roadway level has sunk by around 6-7 feet in total and the parapet has had to be raised on at least two occasions

Barlow House Farm building dates from before 1841 but has been much modernised.



The nearby Dingle coal pit was working around 1820, but all trace of it and the two miner's cottages, known variously as Dingle, Barlow's or Barlow Hollow has long gone.

A choice of somewhat indistinct footpaths continues generally eastwards from Barlow's, soon coming to a bridle road running north-south, near to some attractive farm cottages, two at Plattwood dated 1868 to the south (below left) and The Pheasantry (below), nowadays called Keeper's Cottage, to the east.....



Going eastwards past Plattwood Cottages, this track leads eventually into Lyme Park, a pleasant and uncrowded alternative to the main paths.

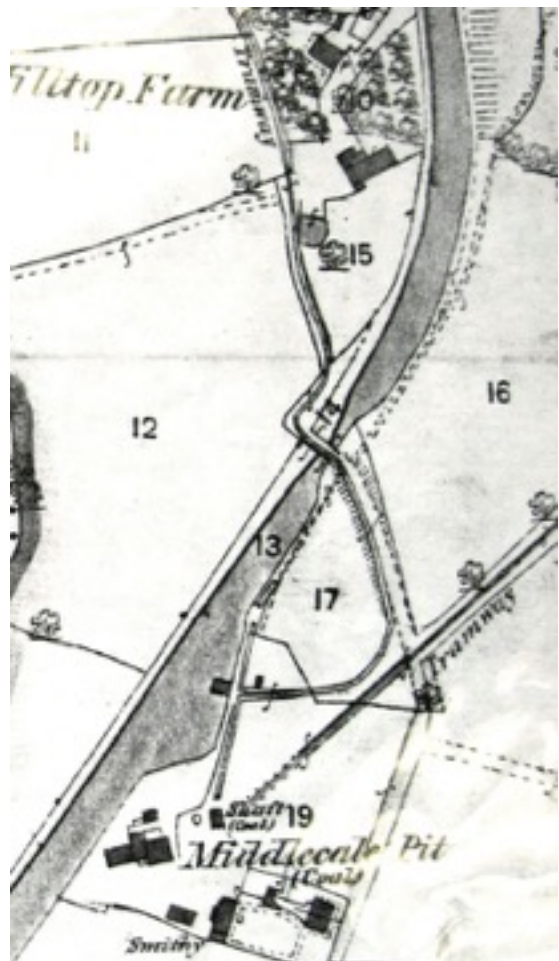
Just at the park boundary is Plattwood Farm, in an idyllic setting, with the large stone-built farmhouse undated but looking mostly Victorian with some earlier parts.....



Middlecale Farm & Middlecale Pit

Next following the bridle road northwards then turning to the west leads back towards the canal at Middlecale Farm. The farmhouse (picture below, top left) dates from around 1865 and has a delightful wavy roofline.

The next building, on the left side of the track is the pair of former Middlecale Pit Cottages, much rebuilt (left lower).



The 1871 map shows a network of narrow-gauge tramways around this site; that heading directly north-eastwards would be to a spoil tipping area; a short line goes to the canal wharf, with a straggling branch off it heading northwards, over the canal

bridge and steeply down the other side past (another) Hilltop Farm. It peters out a little distance further on down this lane; presumably coal was transferred to carts there, or maybe the line of rails was intended to go further (perhaps to the MB&M railway line?) but was abandoned before completion.

The footpath also follows the lane and tramway to rejoin the canal towpath at.....

Bullock's girder bridge (no. 13)

This is also known as Brocklehurst bridge after a one-time owner of the Middlecale coal pit. It does not seem to have suffered from as much subsidence as the previous two we saw. The "girders" are now of reinforced concrete.....



Following the towpath northwards, the canal crosses the Stockport-Buxton railway line on a very high embankment with a tunnel burrowed through it; the rails may be glimpsed briefly in a cutting just east of Middlewood Lower station. A little further on, a side arm leads to High Lane Canal Wharf, under the elegantly-curving towpath bridge (no. 12), picture left below, and the main canal line continues straight on to pass beneath the busy A6 main road at bridge 11 (below right).....

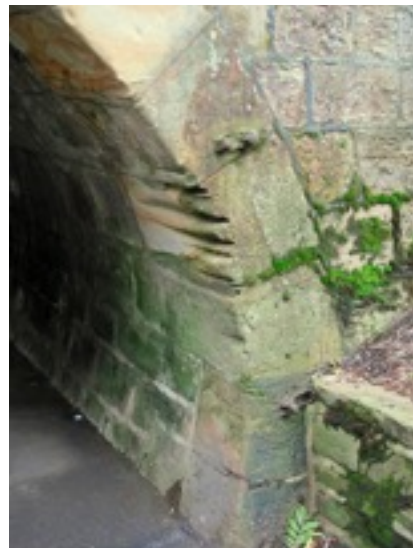


The present road was an early major traffic artery, in use by 1675 and turnpiked in 1724.

Under the bridge on the north side, the stonework of the arch bears ample evidence of gouging caused by the repeated friction of passing tow-ropes, in the days of horse drawn canal boats.....

High Lane canal wharf

Here was once the Macclesfield Canal Company's workshops complex (the main building is now a Thai restaurant). Tramways also once ran down to the canal basin carrying coal from the Norbury pits. The layout here is shown on the 1906 map extract.....





The side-arm and the wharves form a T-shape, of which the southern arm is now filled in, and the rest used as moorings for the North Cheshire Cruising Club. There is a footpath along the south side of the canal arm, but not much can be seen due to extensive and ugly corrugated-iron security fencing. The best view of the main workshop building is from the A6 road itself (below).....



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