



# WINDOWS ON THE PAST HOLMFIRTH'S HERITAGE TRAIL



The Holmfirth Conservation Group, a registered charity, aims to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the built, physical and natural environment of the Holmfirth Conservation Area.



To download a copy of this leaflet and to see and hear much more about Holmfirth's heritage and this trail, scan this QR code or visit our website:  
[www.holmfirthconservation.org.uk](http://www.holmfirthconservation.org.uk)

This walk takes around one hour and includes some moderate /steep climbs, steps and some cobbled areas as indicated on the map.



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Holmfirth's magnificent valley once set the scene for a thriving woollen textile industry. Today, a wealth of well-preserved Georgian buildings, characteristic 'under and over dwellings' and weavers' cottages with rows of tall mullioned windows, stand as testament to Holmfirth's past and provide the setting for its emergence as a lively centre for the arts, culture and tourism. Explore Holmfirth's eventful history and proud heritage on this fascinating trail through the heart of the town.



Supported by The Community of Holmfirth  
and the following organisations:



Rotary Club of Holmfirth



Front cover: Coronation procession, Victoria Street, 1911  
Back cover: View of Towngate from near Owd Gen, 1913  
Courtesy Kirklees Image Archive: [www.kirkleesimages.org.uk](http://www.kirkleesimages.org.uk)





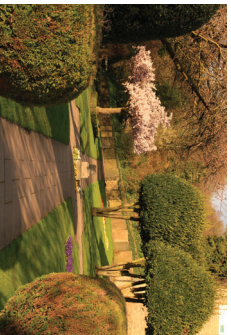
# WINDOWS ON THE PAST

## HOLMFIRTH'S HERITAGE TRAIL



### 1. OWD GEN

Erected in 1802 this column commemorated the Peace of Amiens, a brief lull in the Napoleonic War that offered new hope for the restoration of the textile trade with France. Alongside the column there used to be a gentlemen's urinal known as the Tin Tabernacle. A metal plate displays the lofty height of the 1852 Holmfirth flood when the Bilberry reservoir burst and 81 people perished in the Holme Valley. The tragedy made front-page news in the national press, instigating a flood relief fund that raised around £70,000. What was known as the Peace Stone, thereafter was called the Holmfirth Flood Stone.



### 2. HOLMSIDE GARDENS

What was the Parish Church graveyard from 1763 to 1860 was transformed into an attractive memorial garden in the mid-1960s. Look out for pre-1800 headstones and the high incidence of infant mortality. Among many of the prominent families represented here is the headstone in Latin belonging to Reverend John Harrop, vicar of the Parish Church for 55 years. Find the Stocks family stone on the far wall. Martha (née Stocks) moved to Leipzig with her husband, the prospective Baron von Sternberg in 1857. Their son Hermann became German ambassador to the USA in 1903. The gardens are a popular venue for events in Holmfirth's busy festival calendar.



### 3. STATION HOUSE

This building used to be the ticket office and waiting room of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Holmfirth branch line, opened in 1850. Apart from a 16-month interruption, when the Mytholm-bridge viaduct collapsed in 1865, passenger and goods services continued until 1959 and 1965, respectively. In the early days those relying on an inaccurate

church clock often missed their train, prompting the ringing of a mighty bell eight minutes before each departure. By the end of the 19th century there were up to 16 departures a day, with seaside excursions being all the rage.



### 4. CROWN BOTTOM

Jim McDonald, a keen cricketer and landlord of the nearby Crown pub (known by another name today), helped establish a cricket field here in the 1850s. It was also home to amusements and bazaars associated with the annual Holmfirth Feast, as well as the Albert Mill built in 1865. The site was used as a venue for public meetings – famously hosting a suffragist rally lead by Selina Cooper in 1913. It has long been used as a market, for cattle in the 1920s, as a general and craft market in the 1970s/80s and more recently housing a large food store. The mill's pediment survives here as a monument to the building that was demolished in the mid-1990s.



### 5. DRILL HALL

Built in 1892 with money raised by public subscription this was the home to the 2nd Volunteer Battalion West Riding Regiment, renowned for their shooting skills. 14 men volunteered to fight in the Boer War. Two were invalided home and an enthusiastic crowd greeted the remaining 12 on their return in 1901. A plaque celebrating this can be seen in the building. Today the Drill Hall has been combined with the former Town Hall (1840) to form the Civic Hall, a venue for events, exhibitions and meetings.



### 6. NORRIDGE BOTTOM

Renowned as an area of "lewd and disorderly behaviour" in the 19th century its imposing four-storey dwellings, with long rows of weavers' windows that had once

featured lodging houses, were transformed into an attractive shopping street in the 1990s. They are a fine example of under and over dwellings, with the upper two floors opening onto Huddersfield Road, typical of buildings in Holmfirth and the steep hillsides of the Holme Valley.



### 7. PICTUREDROME

Opened in 1913 and accommodating over 1,000 the Valley Theatre hosted vaudeville and silent movies, including those made by Bamforth & Co. Ltd., an important Holmfirth pioneering movie company, later known for its saucy seaside postcards. The first talkie "Sunnyside Up" was shown in 1930 and in the 1940s cinemagoers were sprayed with disinfectant to keep fleas and diseases at bay! Later used as a bingo hall, today this popular music and event venue bears the name of what was an earlier cinema and retains valuable period features, including a wonderful tin plate ceiling.



### 8. VICTORIA PARK

Purchased by the town council from school teacher John Burton for the occasion of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897, this park was subsequently landscaped and became a very popular venue for the Whit Sunday Holmfirth Sing - a musical festival first held on the cricket field in 1882. Profits were largely used to support local hospitals. A dramatic end to a period of drought came during a band contest there in 1929 as competitors performed a test piece called 'The Water Carrier! The park offers fine views over Holmfirth.



### 9. THE LIDO

Whilst there had been attempts to raise money for public baths dating back to 1887, it wasn't until August 1930 that John Bailey,

a joiner and entrepreneur, turned his backyard into the Holmfirth Lido. The cold spring waters attracted over 400 a day during a heat wave that month. However it wasn't always that warm and heating was later installed bringing the water temperature up to 19°C. There were diving boards, a slide, changing rooms - with hot beef drinks always at hand. The pool fell into disuse in 1949 and lies hidden in a private garden, through an historic trough fed by the spring can be seen on its boundary wall.



### 10. FENELLA THE TIGER

A real life tigress used to live in Holmfirth throughout the 1940s. Born in a circus in South Africa and directly brought to Holmfirth by a local touring acrobat family, tame and friendly Fenella could often be seen being taken for walks round the hills and near here along Cemetery Road when children would come out and stroke her. On one occasion Fenella made international news when she held up a funeral procession. The family showed her in circuses around the UK billed as Fenella the Domesticated Tigress.



### 11. THOWD TOWSER

The Towser, a gaol housing drunkards and petty criminals, dates from 1597. Its most notorious inmate the Reverend Edmund Robinson, curate of the neighbouring Parish church, allegedly spent a night there following arrest for the serious crime of coin clipping in the 1680s. He was found guilty at York Assizes and hanged. Later, the lower floor of the Towser was used as a fire station, a garage for a horse-drawn ambulance and a mortuary. A reconstructed gaol on the upper floor is open on heritage weekends each September.

