

1812

For almost fifty years, from the 1790s to the 1840s, Britain was troubled by social, political and industrial unrest. One of the most disturbed of those years, for Yorkshire, was 1812 and at its centre were the events associated with the Luddites.

Luddites

The Luddites began a campaign of violence in 1812 in the West Yorkshire textile districts which included machine breaking, attacks on property and, on 28th April 1812, murder.

They were angry about the introduction of new machinery, the shear frame in particular, which was making skilled workers, the croppers, redundant. The croppers' concerns matched those of large sections of the poor. These concerns were linked to the prolonged wars with France and an economic crisis which was putting people out of work and raising food prices.

Parliament and the institutions of the state at this time were still the province of the aristocracy and the well-to-do. Having exhausted all the available peaceful ways of influencing the government, the Luddites resorted to violent direct action.



The trail begins close to the site of Huddersfield's Cloth Hall (pictured above) on Market Street at its junction with Cloth Hall Street. The site is now occupied by a Sainsbury's supermarket.

William Horsfall

A wool textile manufacturer, with premises in Marsden, some eight miles from Huddersfield, Horsfall was a prominent advocate of the new machinery. As the Luddites escalated their campaign he became a target. His weekly visit to the Cloth Hall and the route of his journey home were well known.

From the starting point on Market Street walk as if towards the railway station, take the first turn left into Fox Street and then cross to Half Moon Street. Walk up Half Moon Street towards the bus station.

An army of occupation

Huddersfield Town Centre by the summer of 1812 was an armed camp. By 26th June almost 400 soldiers were stationed there, with similar numbers in all the major West Riding towns. It is suggested that there were more British troops in Yorkshire than Wellington had in Spain. They were billeted in inns and public houses in streets very much like Half Moon Street.

From Half Moon Street, cross Upperhead Row to the bus station. Walk along the front of the bus station to the exit for buses. Cross at the traffic lights and take the underpass to Merton Street. Walk up Merton Street to Water Street and turn left along Water Street to its end where, just beyond Spring Grove School, you will find the entrance to a steep flight of steps.

The view from Spring Grove Steps

From this vantage point there is a wide view across the Colne valley towards Crosland Moor and the industrial area of Longroyd Bridge. Horsfall's route to Marsden was by way of the Huddersfield Austerlands Turnpike, now Blackmoorfoot Road, climbing the hill ahead of you.

Descend Spring Grove Steps to Bankfield Road, turn right, then left down steps to Manchester Road. Cross at the island by the cycle shop and continue past the Wickes store to the seating area a little beyond The Bridge public house.

Longroyd Bridge



Close by was the site of John Wood's cropping shop (above) where George Mellor and other Luddite figures worked - overlooking Horsfall's route home. Across the road is the former toll booth, now the office for a taxi firm and running under one of the two bridges is the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, newly completed in 1811.

From Longroyd Bridge it is a long uphill walk to the next stop at William Horsfall Street. Continue on Manchester Road under the railway bridge and fork left into Blackmoorfoot Road - the line of the turnpike road and Horsfall's usual way home to Marsden.

William Horsfall Street marks the scene of the murder. Numerous witnesses stated that they had seen four men running away from here after shooting him, towards Dungeon Wood (now included in Beaumont Park). Horsfall himself was taken to the Warren House Hotel, back down the road, where he died.

Now re-trace your steps and turn left into Ivy Street (5th on the left). At the end turn right into William Street (or step a few yards to the left for a magnificent view of Milnsbridge). Follow William Street to Park Road West, turning left to follow it down towards Manchester Road.

Cross the A62, Manchester Road, and turn left towards Factory Lane. Head right down Factory Lane, which becomes Bankwell Road, to join Whiteley Street and then right over the canal bridge, past the Four Horse Shoes, along Market Street, over the river bridge and turn right along George Street to Milnsbridge House.

Milnsbridge House



The run-down building in front of you was once the elegant 18th century home of Joseph Radcliffe JP, with private pleasure grounds extending half a mile to the east across today's industrial sites.

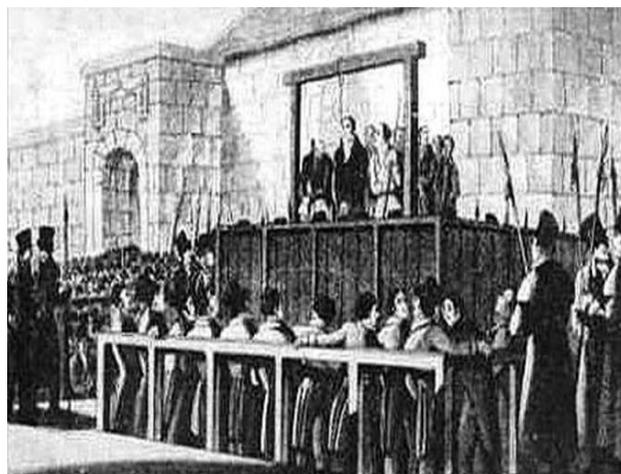
Sir Joseph Radcliffe

The attacks terrified the authorities and led them to believe there was the potential for a revolution. Radcliffe, a Huddersfield magistrate, made it his business to pursue and prosecute any Luddites he could find, and recruited an extensive number of spies and informers in an attempt to gain crucial information from within the closed and secretive ranks of society. With fear and panic spreading like wildfire after the attempted attack on Rawfolds Mill (in the Spenn Valley) on April 12th, some other mill owners began to defend their property. William Cartwright at Rawfolds was one example, staying up each night with a small group of men to watch guard after blockading his mill with death traps e.g. barrels pierced with spikes to pour onto any attacker who might breach the first line of defence.

The Special Commission at York Assizes

The Special Commission appointed to try the Luddites opened at York on 2nd January 1813. Over sixty men awaited trial in York Castle on a variety of charges and all were to be tried under the names of Luddites, though many of them had no connection with the movement. This was not to be a demonstration of justice so much as a

'Show Trial', to set an example to the public that this sort of behaviour would not be tolerated. George Mellor, William Thorpe and Thomas Smith were executed for Horsfall's murder on 8th January 1813.



From Milnsbridge there is a frequent bus service, the Golcar Circular 301 and 302, which will take you back to Huddersfield bus station. The stop for buses going to Huddersfield is on Savile Street. Alternatively, should you wish to complete the trail with a visit to the Colne Valley Museum, take the 301 or 302 from Scar Lane (stop opposite the Aldi supermarket) heading for Golcar Town End where you will find the museum.

Further Information

As a further contribution to the 2012 commemoration of the bi-centenary of the Yorkshire Luddites, Huddersfield Local History Society has published a new and completely revised edition of Alan Brooke and Lesley Kipling's *Liberty or Death: Radicals, Republicans and Luddites, 1793–1823*. This is available at £8 retail or £9.95, including postage, via our website, www.huddersfieldhistory.org.uk

This guide is the product of a collaboration between Huddersfield Local History Society and students from the University of Huddersfield's History in the Community module. It was created as a contribution to the 2012 commemoration of the bi-centenary of the Yorkshire Luddites. Financial assistance from The Lipman-Miliband Trust is gratefully acknowledged.

William Horsfall's last journey

A Luddite history trail from Huddersfield to Milnsbridge



The murder of William Horsfall - 28th April 1812

