



4 kilometres / 1 to 2 hours depending on how often you stop to admire the views.

Accessibility – Not suitable for wheelchairs, pushchairs, etc. See notes at the end of the walk

Escaping the city in Saltaire

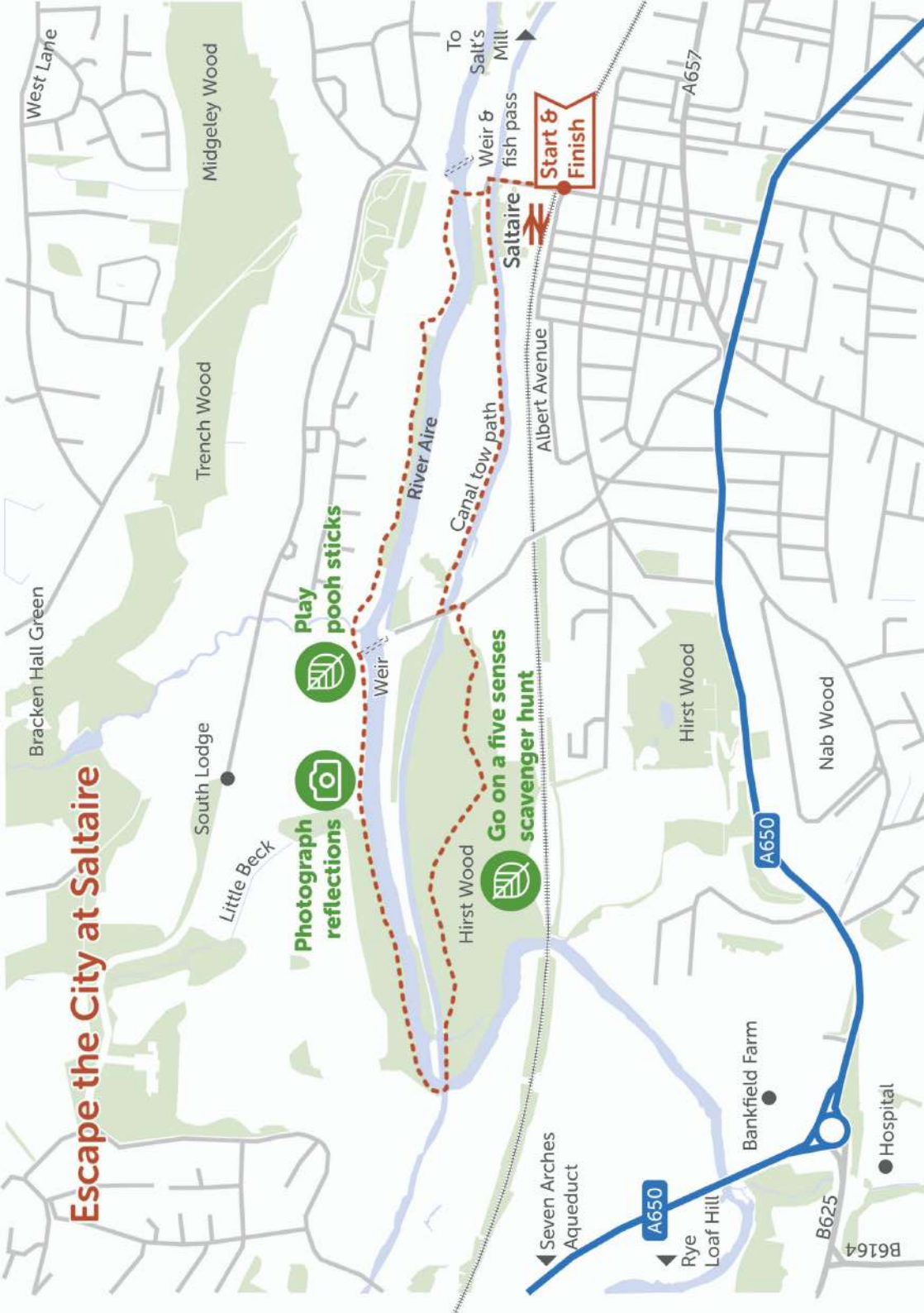
Our walk starts at Saltaire railway station (BD18 3LQ). On leaving the railway station turn left and head down the hill on Victoria Road. You will reach a footbridge that crosses the river and leads into Roberts Park.

Titus Salt chose to construct his mill and village in the rural Aire valley to escape the squalor of Victorian Bradford. Here, he planned to improve both the physical and moral health of his workers. Work began in 1851 and continued until 1876. Salts Mill was the first building to be complete in 1853. It opened on Sir Titus Salt's 50th birthday, 20th September.

© David Dixon (cc-by-sa/2.0)



Escape the City at Saltaire



The weir to your right powered machinery in the mill and widened the river. This meant visitors to Robert's Park could swim and enjoy the river. Rowing boats could be hired from the boathouse on the opposite bank (now a pub). In 1883 a steam yacht, the "Rose" of Saltaire, arrived by rail from Birkenhead to provide trips upstream to Hirst Mill.

The river was a focus for recreation throughout the year. In January 1881 the Yorkshire Post reported that ice-skating was possible on the frozen river. In summer swimming was popular. Large crowds gathered to see both races and exhibitions at aquatic fetes.

The Rose of Saltaire on the River Aire 1909
© Francis Frith Collection



The villagers of Saltaire established a fishing club. Its emblem features an alpaca whose wool they spun in the mill. Unfortunately, the pollution from the mills poisoned the river and the weirs blocked the way for migrating salmon.

If you walk down to the weir, there is an interpretation board. This explains Atlantic salmon can return to the river through the new fish pass.

You may have seen pictures of salmon leaping up waterfalls but weirs prove a particular challenge for them. Often they are too steep or the water at the foot of them is too shallow. This means they cannot get the power to get over them.

A fish pass slows the flow of water and allows all fish species to swim over. We're reconnecting 60km of river habitat to give fish space to feed, breed and shelter.



Turn left and take the riverside path through the park and past the cricket grounds. Go through the gate next to the scoreboard and follow the surfaced path alongside the river.

The Higher Coach Road estate (to your right) is named after the former carriage drive leading to Milner Field. This was the grand residence of Sir Titus Salt's oldest son, Titus Salt Jnr. With the mansion gone the drive ends as an overgrown track beyond the edge of the estate.

In Titus Salt Jnr's time there were a few old farmhouses and cottages in the area. However, in the 1950s some social housing was built in this green valley. This was to replace poorer quality housing in Shipley.

The residents have established the Higher Coach Road Residents Group. This group campaigns for riverside improvements like the wildflower meadow you are passing.



Carry on along the path until you cross a small footbridge over Loadpit Beck. This leads into the car park of Bradford Amateur Rowing Club. Continue along this riverside path. In several hundred meters you will cross a small footbridge over the aptly named Little Beck.

Notice the effect of the weir which gives the river a canal like appearance which the club need for the rowers. There has been a mill at Hirst Mill on the River Aire, Shipley for more than 750 years.

Two hundred years ago we had three water mills on the Aire in Shipley. The local domestic woollen trade relied on these mills for fulling. This is the cleaning of cloth/wool to remove oils and dirt, and to make it thicker. This was essential to make woven woollens acceptable. The Ancients would walk on the cloth in a trough or stream bed. More efficient water wheels led to the water powered fulling mill. Heavy wooden mallets in a fulling stock were menchaincally lifterd and dropped on the wet cloth in a wooden trough. This remained the woollen trade's only mechanised process for many, many years.

New Hirst Mill 1890
courtesy of Mike Short



Hirst Mill, at the end of Hirst Lane, was for many years Shipley's only fulling mill. This little mill, only fifty feet square, stood between the river and the steep hillside of Hirst Wood. Like the other mills it had a dam or weir across the river.

Saltaire Rowing Club was founded in 1867 and the Clubhouse was built in 1893 on land given to the Club by Sir Titus Salt. The Club rows on a 600m stretch of the River Aire. It's Clubhouse, built in 1893, retains much of its Victorian character, with its unique upstairs bar and balcony.



At the end of this path, follow the footpath up the steps on to the canal. You are now at Dowley Gap Aqueduct, known locally as the Seven Arches Aqueduct.

This beautiful aquaduct has taken the Leeds and Liverpool Canal over the River Aire for the nearly 250 years. The explosion of industry in the region during the 18th century required an improved transport network. This helped to export the materials worldwide and bring coal to fuel machinery. Lime and limestone came by boat to fertilise land and to produce mortar to build new buildings. The aquaduct now provides ideal habitat for bats.

Dowley Gap Aquaduct © David Spencer (cc-by-sa/2.0)

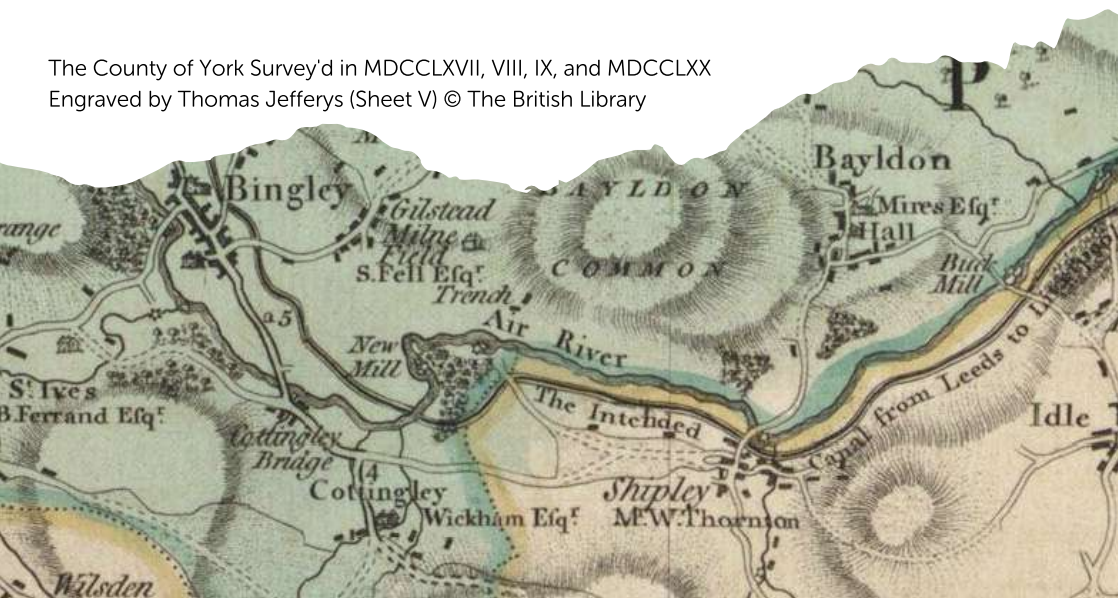


The Leeds and Liverpool canal started in 1770. This section, which connected Shipley with Skipton was finished in 1774. The below from 1772, showed the planned canal as running to the south of its current course. It took till 1816 to build the whole 127 miles (204 km) of canal. This allowed local boats called Yorkshire keels to travel over the Pennines.

Here you can return on the canal towpath to Saltaire, but we are turning right. Our walk takes us right along the canal a short distance to the stone bridge. Cross here and follow the path behind the houses to the left, alongside Dowley Gap sewage treatment works. A track at the side of the river leads back up to the canal. You are now on the other side of seven arches viaduct.

The view of the river is great, and you gain the full experience either side. The meander you can see here makes the river wind across the valley floor. The distance from the source of the river in Malham to its end in Airmyn is just 58 miles. However, meanders like this increase the length of the river to 90 miles.

The County of York Survey'd in MDCCLXVII, VIII, IX, and MDCCLXX
Engraved by Thomas Jefferys (Sheet V) © The British Library



We also can't go much further without mention of the sewage treatment works. Up to 1873 the cess pits (toilets) and mills of Bingley had previously flowed into the river. Dismayed at the pollution, new Bingley Council built a sewage treatment works at Dowley Gap. Over the last few decades Yorkshire Water has closed many smaller sewage works. Investment in the larger, more efficient works like Dowley Gap, has produced waste that is often as clean as the river. The effects of this has been miraculous. By the late 1990s, more than a decade ahead of much of the rest of Britain, otters, heron, and other wildlife began to return to the river.

At the end of the viaduct the path leads into Hirst Woods. Take the centre most path and enjoy these wonderful beech woodlands.

The remains of Hirst Mill and it's mill race are still visible near here on the bank of the River Aire here. The ruins of eight workers cottages are also nearby, above the site of New Hirst Mill. The 1841 census record show 58 people living in the 8 cottages.

As fish numbers grow we see increases in other species that feed on them including otters and kingfishers.

Listen out for the Kingfisher's distinctive cry of "kitcheee" as you explore our riverbanks.

Photograph courtesy of Sean Gibson, runner up in our Spring 2020 photography competition



Each season has its own special features in the woodland. At some points in the winter you can see the river on both sides of the wood. You be able to appreciate how big the meander is as it almost doubles back on itself.

Hirst Wood is an area of ancient semi-natural woodland. It sits on a glacial moraine. This is a mound of millstone grit boulders left as glaciers retreated over 12,000 years ago. There has been woodland on the site for at least 800 years.

Only 200 years ago these woodlands would have been a hive of activity. The tree cover itself would have been different to that encountered today. There was no beech and sycamore and less holly. Alongside the oaks grew an understory of hazel. The trees were also managed as coppice with standards. This meant trees were regularly cut to the ground to encourage new growth. The was wood sold for building materials and the oak bark for the leather industry.



Wood has been used to make charcoal within the woodland from the 1300s. This was then used to fuel the iron and textile industries. All these uses meant the woodland was highly valued and few people could visit. The beech trees you see were planted to make bobbins for the mills. With the mills now closed the woods look magnificent in spring when bluebells cover the woodland floor.

You emerge from the woods into the small car park. Opposite is the small Hirst Wood nature reserve. Since 2015 this has been cared for by the Hirst Wood Regeneration Group. It is well worth a detour.

Cross over the canal using the swing bridge to your left. Then turn right along canal towpath.

Head back to Saltaire along the canal towpath.

On your left you will see Saltaire Sports Facility. Here members have played four different outdoor sports since 1923. The football ground has even appeared in the Monty Python film *The Meaning of Life* with Baildon Moor in the background. The Association itself has a great sporting history. At 17 Brian Close scored his first hundred at Salts playing for Yeadon in the Bradford league. This led to his selection for the Yorkshire Colts and his fantastic career.



Just before you reach your starting point you will pass Saltaire United Reformed Church on your right. A Victorian architectural gem it has been described as a classic "Cathedral of Congregationalism". Paid for by Sir Titus Salt, it is a focal point of his "model" village, Saltaire. Fittingly, the Mausoleum built onto the church contains the remains of Sir Titus Salt himself.

Leave the footpath in Saltaire to head back to the train station and the start of your walk.

This walk is part of the Developing the Natural Aire programme. This partnership programme between the Environment Agency and The Aire Rivers Trust is reconnecting 60 kilometres of your river with fish passes to enable wildlife to thrive and Atlantic salmon to return. We run volunteer programmes to care for the river and school visits to educate future generations about the importance of our great river.

Thank you to Colin Coates, Saltaire Historian, and Pennine Prospects for helping write this walk.



Accessibility: this walk includes two flights of fourteen steps on the riverside in Baildon; a narrow bridge at Saltaire Rowing Club; one flight of seven steps at Dowley Gap Aquaduct / unmade footpaths and a couple of steep sloping paths in Hirst Wood. Pay & display car parks can be found in Saltaire village. Saltaire train station links to Leeds, Bradford and Skipton.

Refreshments: the Half Moon Café in Robert's Park and the either The Boathouse overlooking the river or Jay Bargie Diner on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal at the end of the walk.



With support from



**Environment
Agency**



We have produced a number of family activity postcards to accompany our walks

Why not try one the next time you take in some fresh River Aire?



Top thing to do by the river

Photograph reflections



You will need

a camera or mobile phone

1. Go for a walk along the riverbank when the water is still. What can you see reflected in the river? It could be trees, a frozen heron waiting to strike or the now silent mills that were powered by our great river. Take photos of what you see.
2. Flick through your photos and choose your favourite. Why not post them on Twitter? We'd love to see them. Tag us in @aireriverstrust



Find out more at
www.dnaire.org.uk



The calm river above Hirst weir is perfect for taking photos on a sunny day

Find these and lots, lots more about our project at www.dnaire.org.uk



Top thing to do by the river

Play Pooh sticks

