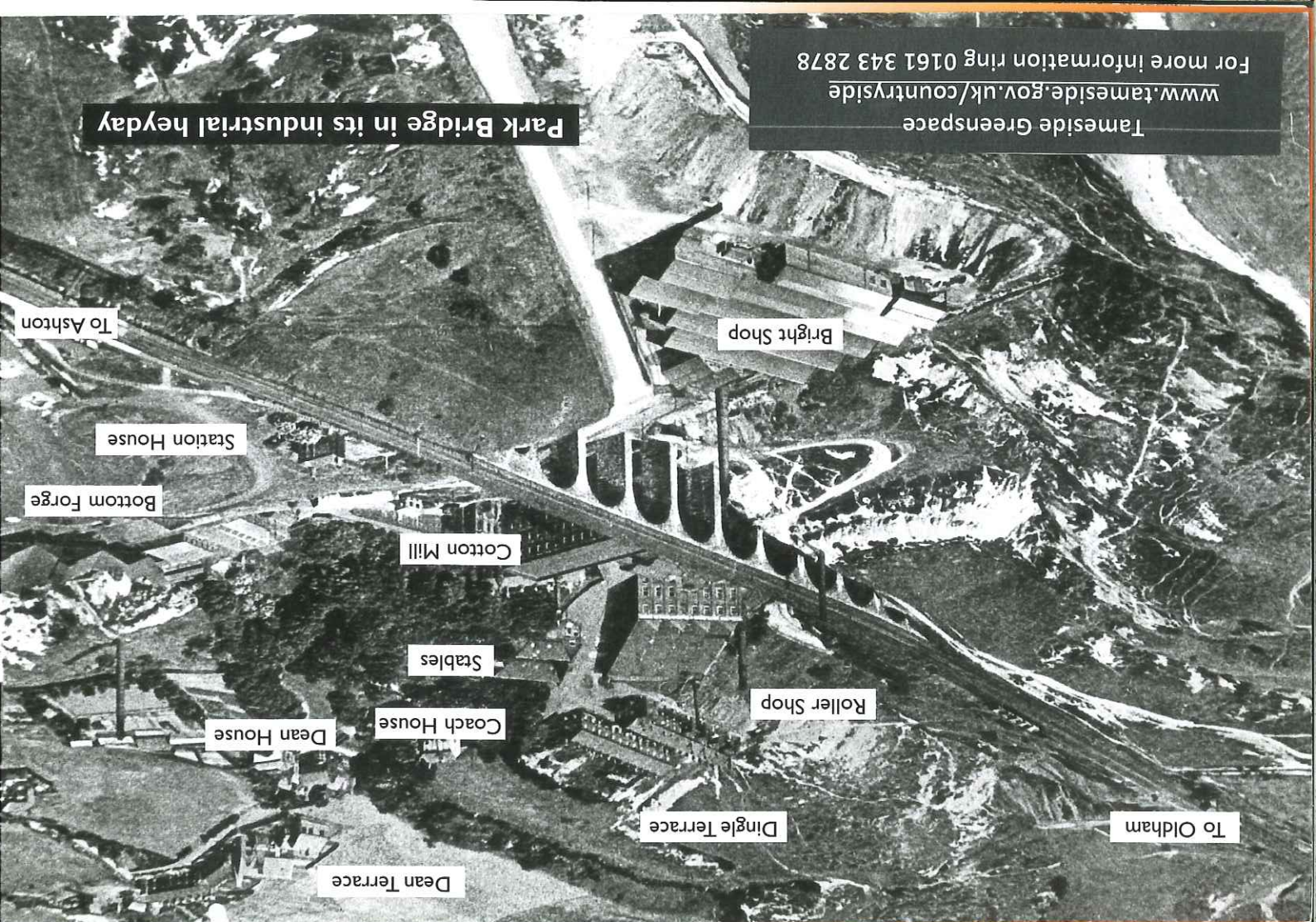
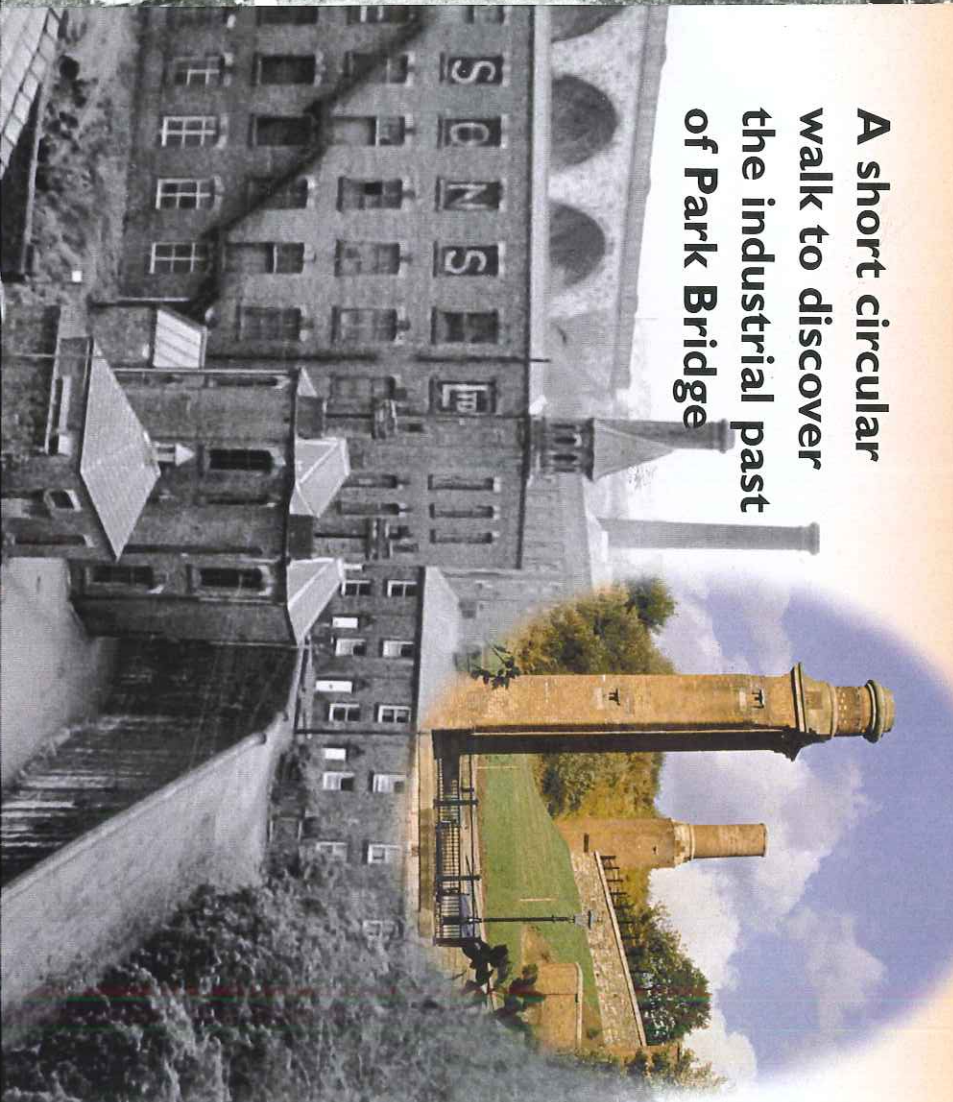




HERITAGE TRAIL

A short circular walk to discover the industrial past of Park Bridge



To Oldham

Dingle Terrace

Roller Shop

Coach House

Dean House

Stables

Cotton Mill

Bottom Forge

Station House

Bright Shop

To Ashton

Tameside Greenspace

www.tameside.gov.uk/countryside

For more information ring 0161 343 2878

Park Bridge in its industrial heyday

Welcome to

Park Bridge

If you have never visited Park Bridge before you will probably be surprised that it is there at all. Situated midway between Ashton-under-Lyne and Oldham and accessible from Park Bridge Road, off the busy A627, it is pleasantly isolated from the surrounding urban area.

THE PARK BRIDGE STORY

Park Bridge still retains a separate identity as an early industrial settlement. The ironworks was probably the longest surviving example, in what was Lancashire, of an industrial community based on engineering.

For nearly 200 years it was a thriving family business.

Hundreds of people were employed here in the early 1900s, and its iron and steel were exported around the world. Park Bridge ironworks made rivers used in the construction of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

From the 17th Century this part of the Medlock Valley had been extensively mined for coal, but the history of Park Bridge as an industrial settlement really began with the marriage of Samuel Lees II and Hannah Buckley on Christmas Day 1783. In 1786 Samuel leased land at Park Bridge, and by 1789 he had built his first water powered mill. When he died in 1804, Hannah carried on the business, at the same time bringing up six young children. The ironworks thrived and her sons renamed the business 'Hannah Lees and Sons' in her honour.

Water power from the River Medlock, a local supply of coal, and the demand for machinery parts from the textile towns of Ashton and Oldham, made Park Bridge an ideal site for the ironworks. Improved communications, first a canal to nearby Fennyfield Bridge and later, in 1861, the opening of the Oldham, Ashton and Guide Bridge Railway, with a branch line going directly into the works, ensured the firm's success.

The Lees family, notably under Samuel Lees IV, built Park Bridge village for ironworkers and their families. From the 1850s they built terraced cottages, shops, an institute and St James Church and School. A gas works provided lighting for the works and the village. There was also an alehouse at Kewerlow Farm but Samuel Lees closed it for the good of his workers.



Samuel Lees IV at Fairbottom Bobs

Rocher Vale near Park Bridge

The Park Bridge Trail

Starting at Park Bridge Heritage Centre, this is a short walk to discover the industrial past of Park Bridge.

The Trail, just under a mile long, has some steep narrow lanes, steps, and some unmade footpaths. There is a fold out map at the back of this booklet.

Strong feelings of loyalty existed between the ironworks and the Lees family who regularly mingled with and worked alongside their employees. Samuel Lees IV lived at Dean House, an imposing mansion overlooking the works. Samuel's son Maurice, and Maurice's son Lowther, the last chairman of Park Bridge ironworks, lived at Westerhill, Fairbottom, away from the noise and smoke.

The ironworks closed down in 1963, following the collapse of the cotton industry.

The works buildings became dilapidated and many of the cottages were unoccupied.

During the late 1970s, Greater Manchester Council acquired much of the land. An imaginative scheme was undertaken to preserve the lower walls of the mills as 'recognisable ruins', most of the houses were renovated, and the works stables was converted into a visitor centre.



Advertisement for the ironworks

Tameside Council now manages the area around Park Bridge.



The Stables after closure of the ironworks

The walk starts at

1 Park Bridge Heritage Centre

built in 1870 as stables to house the working horses of Park Bridge ironworks. The stables were fitted out by Musgraves of Belfast who furnished the stables at Sandringham, the Norfolk retreat of the Royal family.



Dingle Terrace 1963

From the Heritage Centre walk up the hill to

2 Dingle Terrace

Samuel Lees IV, owner of the ironworks, built these cottages in 1865. Houses were allocated according to status. The works' foreman lived in the large house on the left, and the schoolmaster lived opposite at the house known as 'School House'

Continue up the road to the first house on the right

3 Coach House

Now completely rebuilt, it was once occupied by the Lees family, and later by their coachman.

Continue up the hill to the next house on the right

4 Dean House

This imposing stone property set in lawned gardens, with a pond and fountain, was built in 1844 for the Lees family. They had their own billiard room and bowling green.

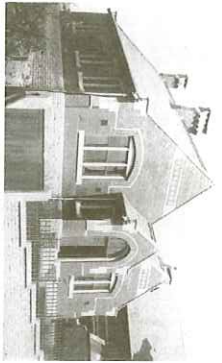


Dean House

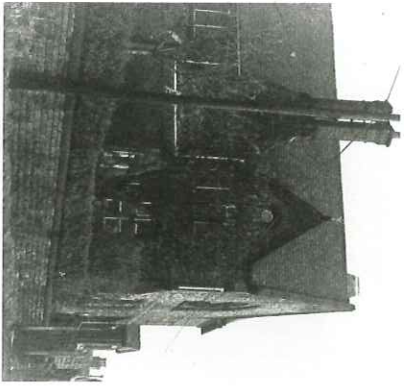
Drawing of the Top and Bottom Forges by Noel Spencer, 1927



Continue up the road. The red brick building on the left is **5 Park Bridge Institute**, opened in 1905 by Maurice Lees, at that time the chairman of the ironworks. It had a reading room and a billiard room and is still a thriving community centre.



The Institute



St James Church and School

Pass the Institute to two modern houses standing on the site of

6 St James Church and School, opened in 1866. The church was on the first floor above the school. The headmaster was organist, choirmaster, lay reader and Sunday School superintendent.

Further along the road is **7 Dean Terrace**. The cottages were built between 1850-1860 for ironworkers and their families. The first house was probably the Mechanics Institute opened in 1863, and Number 9 was the village Co-operative store.



Dean Terrace

Pass Dean Terrace, and turn left at the junction. On the right is **8 Keverlow Farm**, an old stone building dating from the 1600s. It was once the 'Yew Tree Inn' and frequented by thirsty ironworkers. Samuel Lees IV bought the lease in the 1850s and then closed the alehouse to keep his workers sober!

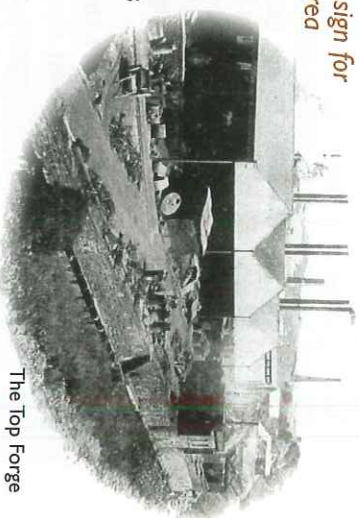
Walk up the lane, past the farm, to **9 The Villas**, four semi-detached houses built in 1910 for section managers of the ironworks.

Go back past the farm and down the steep lane (Mill Brow) to a large brick house on the right

10 Mill Brow House. It was built for the manager of Park Bridge ironworks in 1883. Mill Brow was a pack horse route from Ashton to Oldham.

Near the bottom of the hill turn left at a sign for Rocher Vale, into a small car park. This area was part of

11 the Top Forge site where the first processes in the ironworks took place. In the Top Forge wrought iron was made from cast iron and scrap, from the late 1800s until the end of the Second World War.



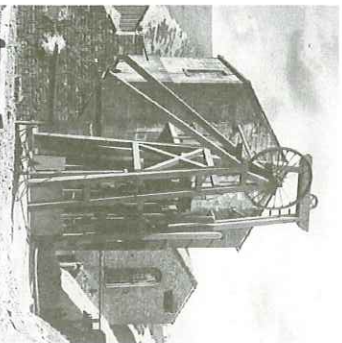
The Top Forge

At the far end of the car park turn left towards the rock face and follow a path (on the line of a branch line into the ironworks) alongside the rocks to

12 the old quarry, from which the sandstone for Dean House was probably taken. Near here was the noisy scrapyard, nicknamed 'Spion Kop' after a hilltop battle in the Boer War. (A leaflet, 'How the Land Was Formed', based upon the rocks to be found in the quarry, is available at the Heritage Centre).

Cross the bridge over the River Medlock to a ruin on the left,

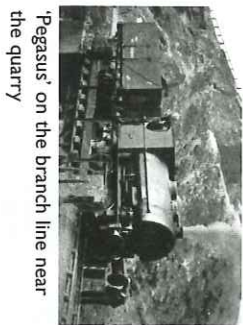
13 the pump house. This is all that is left of Rocher New Pit, which closed in 1890. Beyond is the goyr (canal) that brought river water to turn a wheel. This powered machinery to pump water out of the coal mine.



The pump house

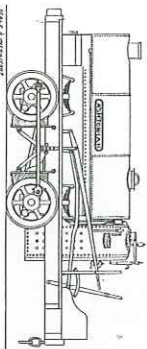
Return to the path near the footbridge and follow it ahead round a bend to stone steps on the right.

14 The ironworks branch line climbed up the incline from here to the main railway line. (You can still see the wooden sleepers that carried the rails). The ironworks' steam locomotives, 'Pegasus' and 'Orion', with wagonloads of iron, steel and coal, went to and fro between railway sidings near the main line, the Top Forge and the far end of the ironworks.



'Pegasus' on the branch line near the quarry

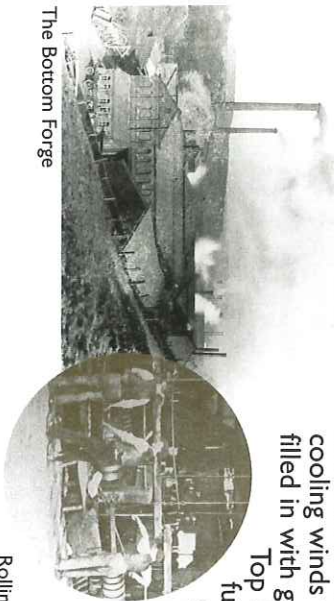
Descend steps and walk along the river path. This was the line of **15** the tramway. Coal was carried in wagons from Rocher Pit, along a horse drawn tramway, to the canal basin near Fennyfield Bridge, Faibottom, and the coke ovens beyond. In 1865 a small locomotive, 'The Ashtonian', replaced the horses. On the left, shortly before you reach the road, is a short section of excavated rails of the tramway.



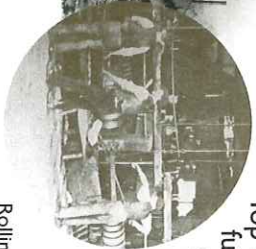
Drawing of The Ashtonian

Here the river once widened into a reservoir that supplied a waterwheel to power the machinery of the Bottom Forge. In 1850 the river was diverted and culverted to run through the tunnel on the right.

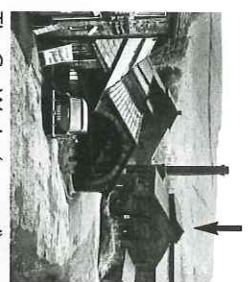
Go forward to the road. Opposite is **16** The Bottom Forge, which was built over a loop of the River Medlock in 1840, and much altered over the decades. Now it is used as a warehouse. Blue corrugated sheets have replaced the old slate roof, and the bays, once open to cooling winds from the Pennines, are filled in with grey brick. Iron from the Top Forge was reheated in furnaces in the forge, then rolled into different shaped bars.



The Bottom Forge



Rolling Iron Bars



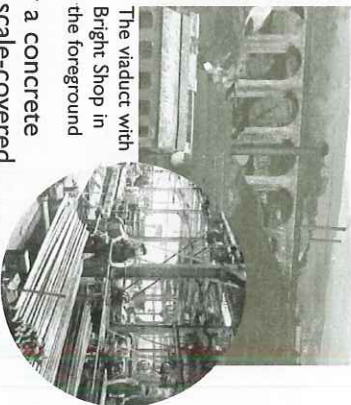
The Gas Works (arrowed)

Turn right and walk past the forge to low walls on the right, the remains of **17** The Gas Works, that provided gas lighting for the village and the works. When in 1916 Park Bridge was supplied with town gas from Ashton, the building became the Joiners Shop where carts were made. In the Blacksmiths Shop, opposite, solid iron rims were put on the wooden wheels.

Retrace your steps past the Bottom Forge to an old stone cottage on the right, which used to be the Post Office. At the junction keep right up Alt Hill Road to the entrance to the former **18** Station House, now a modern house and boarding kennels. The stationmaster lived here. Behind the house, further along the railway line towards Ashton, was Park Bridge Station. From an embankment to the rear of Station House a huge railway viaduct spanned the valley to the hillside opposite.

Continue down the hill and forward to a gate, entrance to the site of the huge

19 Bright Shop, completed in 1907. Only a concrete floor and a chimney base remain. Black, scale-covered bars from the Bottom Forge were cleaned here. The bright bars were then sold to other manufacturers, or sent up to the Roller Shop for machining.

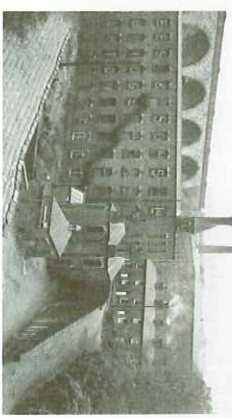


The viaduct with Bright Shop in the foreground

Inside the Bright Shop

Go back along the road for a few metres and descend steps on your left to cross a footbridge over the River Medlock. The brick walls and chimney by the other side of the river are the landscaped ruins of

20 The Cotton Mill, a four storey building that stood on the site of the original roller works. Sheepwashes Brook, which flows into the River Medlock here, once turned a waterwheel to power machinery in the mill.



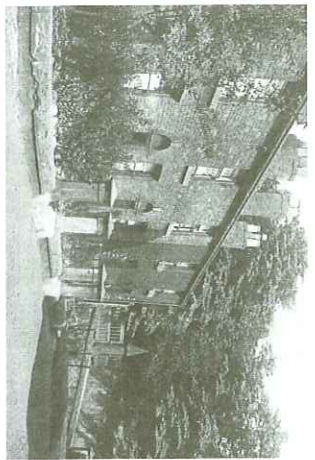
The Cotton Mill

Follow the path going diagonally across the grass to steps on the right that lead up to

21 the cobbled yard. Here you can see the outlines of five stalls, extra stabling for the working horses of Park Bridge ironworks.

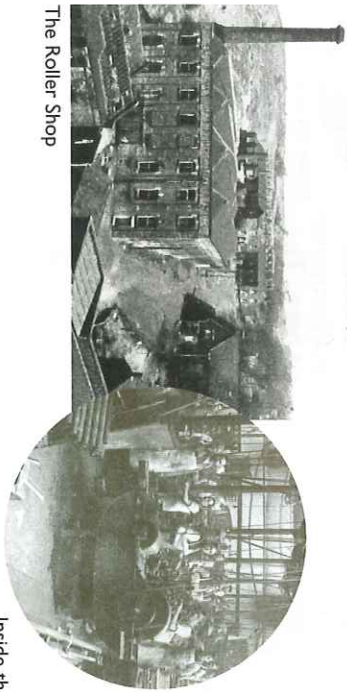
Cross the cobbles and go up some steps. The grassed area across the road is the site of

22 Mill Terrace, built just below the stables in 1840. To the right you can see an imposing gateway, entrance to the drive leading to Dean House.



Mill Terrace

Walk up the road towards the Heritage Centre. On the left are the high walls of iron and then steel bars were machined into fluted (grooved) rollers for textile machinery. This building was demolished after the ironworks closed, and is now the Heritage Centre car park.

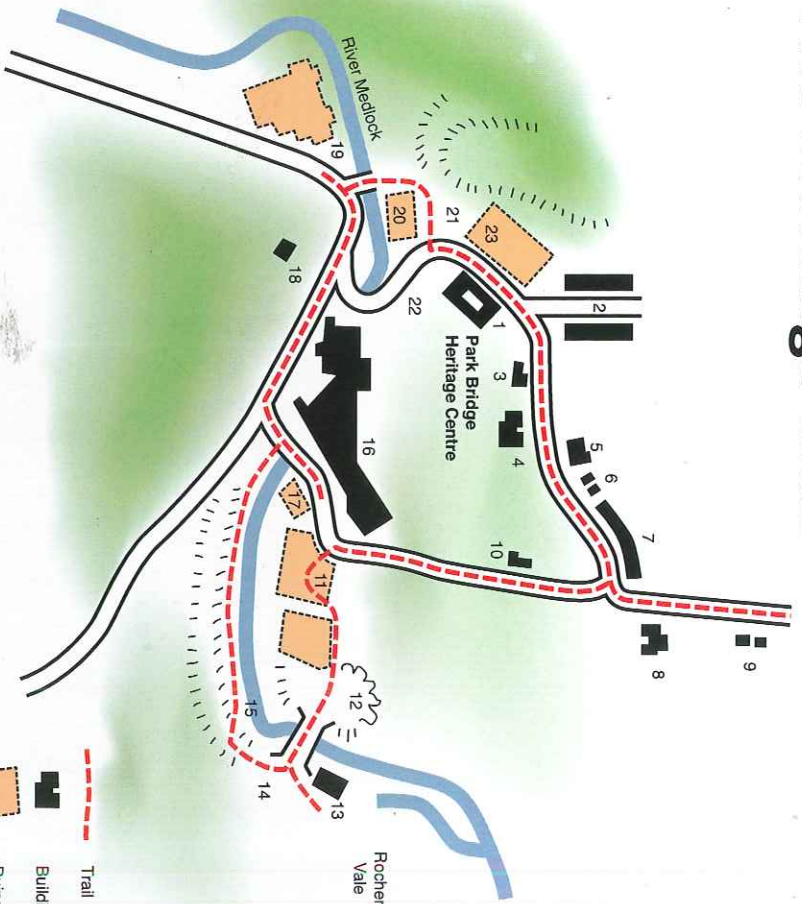


The Roller Shop

Inside the Roller Shop

Return to the Heritage Centre.

The Heritage Trail



Map key

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Park Bridge Heritage Centre | 13. The pump house |
| 2. Dingle Terrace | 14. The branch line |
| 3. Coach House | 15. The Tramway |
| 4. Dean House | 16. The Bottom Forge |
| 5. Park Bridge Institute | 17. The gasworks |
| 6. Site of St James Church and School | 18. Station House |
| 7. Dean Terrace | 19. The Bright Shop |
| 8. Keverlow Farm | 20. The Cotton Mill |
| 9. The Villas | 21. The cobbled yard |
| 10. Mill Brow House | 22. Site of Mill Terrace |
| 11. Site of the Top Forge | 23. The Roller Shop |
| 12. The old quarry | |