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Further information:

To find out more about the local history of Middleton visit Middleton Library. The library is open Monday - Saturday (closed Wednesday afternoon)

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Sam Bamford Trail Middleton town centre



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Sam Bamford

This trail aims to give an impression of the Middleton which Sam knew. It draws attention to some of the buildings which Sam would know and recognise today and to some of the events in his life connected with those buildings.

Sam Bamford (1788 -1872), a weaver, poet and radical born in Middleton was a child of the Enlightenment and demanded the freedom to follow his own rational thoughts. He was a Christian, a royalist and an English nationalist. He lived a long life (84 years) and recorded much of it in his own writings. He wrote prose and poetry, some in Lancashire dialect and it is through these that a unique record of what life was like in those days has come down to us today. It was during this time

he became known as one who had sympathy with the difficulties of the working class and turned his attention to demand better rights and working conditions. His main claim to fame however comes from his leadership of the local Radicals in the years before and after the Peterloo Massacre in August 1819. Sam had already been arrested and charged with high treason once. He was released on assurances of future good conduct.

He never the less helped to plan, train and lead a contingent of some six thousand Middleton men and women to march into Manchester to hear a speech by Henry Hunt at St. Peter's field.

The meeting was non-violent but the magistrates read the Riot Act and the armed local militia and regular army units charged the crowd. In ten minutes the field was cleared but at least fifteen people were dead and six hundred and fifty were serious casualties. Injuries by sabre, bayonet, gunshot and trampling by horse were all recorded. Sam was soon arrested at his house on Union Street, Cheapside and charged with high treason. He was tried along with others and convicted despite his appeal for non-violence. He served one year in Lincoln jail and upon his release he withdrew from the forefront of radical politics and devoted his time to writing.

1 St. Leonard's Square

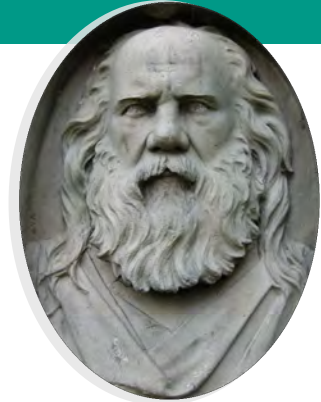
The trail begins in St. Leonard's Square, probably the most historic site in Middleton. Middleton is much changed since Sam's day but he would still recognise St. Leonards church, with its distinctive wooden steeple (one of only three in England). Although Sam's family were Methodists, his baptism took place in St Leonard's church.

2 St. Leonard's Street

Standing by the south churchyard gate you get a magnificent view of a combination of Middleton's urban landscape shaped by the Industrial Revolution, the distant countryside and Derbyshire Peak District.

3 Queen Elizabeth Grammar School

The school (QEGS) was founded in 1586 by the Nowell brothers. It is one of the oldest school buildings in the country and is named after Queen Elizabeth I who helped to endow it. Sam had a good education compared to most ordinary people of his day. When his family moved to Manchester in 1794 he attended Manchester Grammar School. After the death of his mother and his father's remarriage he returned to Middleton to live with his aunt and uncle. He attended the Methodist Sunday School, located nearby at 'Back o th Brow' (now demolished) and QEGS until he was forced to leave to help in the handloom weaving trade.



1780

1790

1800

1810

1820

1830

1840

1850

1860

1870

Born
28th February 1788

Bamford Family relocated in 1794 to Manchester. His mother & 2 brothers die of small pox. Sam sent to live with his uncle in Middleton

Baptised
11th April 1788
St. Leonard's Church

Education
Attended Manchester Free Grammar School & Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Middleton

Early Career
Succession of jobs from farmhand, east coast sailor to Manchester warehouseman

Militia
Joined the local militia in 1802

Luddite Riots 1812

Importation Act 1815
(Corn Laws)

Married
in 1812 to Jemima & birth of their child Anne

Seditious Meetings Act 1817
Arrested in 1817 on suspicion of high treason

Peterloo Massacre
16th August 1819

Middleton Hampden Club
The Luddite unrest prompted Bamford to form this group in 1816

Journalism
In 1826 he left weaving to become a Manchester correspondent for the Morning Herald

"Bamford was a reformer when to be so was unsafe, and he suffered for his faith."
John Bright

Death
of his daughter Anne in 1834

Reform Act
Passed in 1832

Writer
In 1839 he abandoned journalism to devote his time to his autobiographic works

Published
Passages in the Life of a Radical (1840- 1844)

Published
Early Days (1849)

London
In 1851 moved to London to take up post of messenger in Somerset House

Published
The Dialect of South Lancashire (1854)

Manchester Liberals became aware of Bamford's near destitution and raised annuity to support him

Relocated to Manchester in 1858 to live off the proceeds of his public readings and poetry

Death
of his wife in 1862

Died
13th April 1872
Harpurhey, Lancashire

Memorial Obelisk
Unveiled in 1877

4 Peterloo Assembly Point

It was from this point on 63 Morton St. that Sam led the Middleton Contingent of the town's workers from Barrowfields to Saint Peter's Fields on 16th August 1819 to take part in a massive demonstration to demand improved rights and working conditions for working people.

5 Public Houses (The Ring O'Bells)

The Ring O'Bells is one of the oldest pubs in the town which received its first licence in 1831, so no doubt Sam was a customer! Public houses were good meetings places for local groups such as music and botanical societies. This pub hosted the Middleton Botanical Society and it still showcases a collection of butterflies and moths. Back in Sam's day, government spies attended these meetings as they suspected they were simply a front for anti-government meetings and plots.

6 Junction of King St. and Union St.

The area was once covered in rows of terraced houses, mainly handloom weavers cottages. They stood on land formerly owned by Harbord Harbord, the first Lord Suffield, who had married Mary Assheton, daughter of Sir Ralph Assheton (3rd Baronet) of Middleton Hall. Suffield began selling off plots of land from 1770. Some of the houses were called 'Club Houses' built by a friendly society in a spirit of mutuality and co-operation.

7 61 Union Street

Sam lived in various houses and cottages in Middleton. Number 61 Union Street is the house where he was living when he was arrested on 26th August 1819 following the Peterloo Massacre. Although his house no longer exists a memorial garden was built on the site which includes a stone featuring a copy of a plaque designed by the architect Edgar Wood.

8 Silk Mills

Silk manufacture was an important part of the early Industrial Revolution in

Middleton until its collapse around 1860's. Two silk mills survive. Spring Gardens Mill located on the junction of Spring Gardens and Cheapside. To the south of Spring Gardens is the other former silk mill Rose Mill. Look out for the large windows which allowed light into the building for the adequate operation of the Jacquard looms.

9 North entrance to Jubilee Park

As you enter the park, look back at the houses on New Lane. These reflect a Middleton that Sam knew and can be said to have developed from 1776 when the Harbord's began to lease plots of land for building. The first lease of land is now known as 1 New Lane, which once housed the local Militia.

10 Middleton Library

Although it was not built until 1889, after Sam's death, the library's reference and local studies room contains much information relating to Middleton's history, Sam Bamford and a replica of one of the banners carried to Peterloo.

11 Cemetery entrance

The Old Burial Ground is the resting place of Sam Bamford and his family. His daughter Anne was the first to be buried in 1834, his wife Jemima in 1862 and Sam in 1872. After the death of his daughter, local legend has it that Sam was worried that the local body snatcher named 'Canky' might steal the body and sell it to medical students in Manchester. Parish registers show that there was a month between her death and her burial.

12 Sam Bamford Memorial

The public paid for a permanent memorial to recognise Sam's life and work in October 1877. In the 53 years after the Peterloo Massacre there had been some improvements to the governance of the country but local people still remembered the struggles of earlier times. They owed a debt of gratitude to Sam Bamford who had literally put his own life and that of his family on the line in the cause of social reform.

In the footsteps of Sam Bamford



The trail will take approximately 60 - 90 minutes to complete. The trail starts at St. Leonard's Church car park and can be reached by bus No.17 (Manchester to Rochdale) which stops near Middleton library on Long Street. The nearest train station is Mills Hill, on the Manchester to Leeds via Rochdale line, with buses connecting Mills Hill to Middleton.

1. St Leonard's Square
2. St Leonard's Street
3. Queen Elizabeth Grammar School
4. Peterloo Assembly Point, 63 Morton Street
5. Public Houses (The Ring O'Bells)
6. Junction of King Street and Union Street
7. 61 Union Street
8. Silk Mills
9. North entrance to Jubilee Park
10. Middleton Library
11. Cemetery entrance
12. Sam Bamford Memorial
13. The Assheton Arms
14. The Olde Boar's Head

Photographs Rochdale Council, © Andy Marshall

13 The Assheton Arms

The Assheton Arms was built and licensed as a public house in 1808 and for the next 100 years was used as a coaching inn. There are at least two documented connections with Sam and the Assheton Arms. Sam was first arrested and brought here, arising from arrears on an affiliation order in 1809. In 1817 he was taken here, when he was arrested for the second time, on suspicion of high treason.

14 The Olde Boar's Head

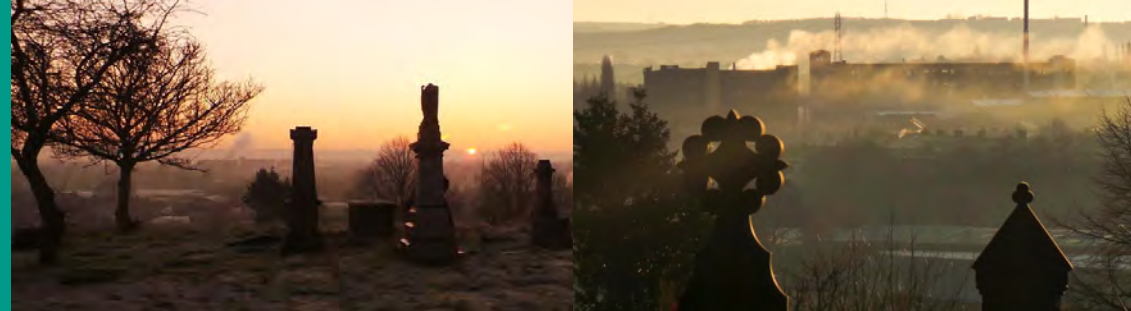
This was one of Sam's favourite drinking places and he had quite a few! It is a quaint old black and white timber structure said to date from 1587. Part of a row of ancient cottages, it operated as a coaching inn. During the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 the Scots army reached Manchester and sent out detachments looking for recruits, food and money. They used the Olde Boar's Head as a base and were helped by one of Sam's ancestors who was later arrested for his involvement and who narrowly avoided being hung.

A Luddite riot in Middleton

Between Monday 21 and Tuesday 22 of April 1812, one of the most bloody and prolonged examples of civil insurrection in the history of the UK took place in Middleton. On Monday large numbers arrived from the surrounding districts, many armed with sticks, who then proceeded to empty shops of provisions like bread, cheese and bacon. There had been similar food riots all over the Manchester area prompted by the rising cost of living along with a demand for fair prices.

The crowd, now several thousand strong, attacked Burton's Mill in Wood Street where power looms threatened the hand weaver's livelihood. Armed workers from within shot at least 5 of the crowd, Scots Greys cleared the streets and Cumberland Militia occupied the mill. Bamford, back from work in Manchester, gathered eye-witness evidence and reported the 'agitated' minds and 'fierce denunciations' of local people against Burton and his men, contrasting with little criticism of the rioters.

On Tuesday, the crowds gathered again in great numbers. Emanuel Burton's house, at Parkfield, had been abandoned after Monday's happenings and was thoroughly looted before the wrecked building was put to the torch. Daniel Burton's home at Rhodes was due the same treatment but the crowd were dispersed by troops from Manchester who then rode to the Mill. Some of the crowd took to the Church Yard and exchanged fire with the Militia before the Greys 'cleared every point'. Bamford once more collected detailed testimony, including names of those killed or badly injured. The Times said the toll was 12 dead and between 60-100 wounded - unsurprising as between 2000-3000 rounds of ammunition had been fired by the military. The coroner's inquest, just days after, found the action was 'justifiable homicide'. Burton and Sons posted a notice that they were 'determined not to work their looms anymore' and dismissed 400 workers, many of whom then left town. The Mill however reopened at a later date.



Middleton's textile industry

The North West region of England, is known worldwide for its textile manufacture. An unrivalled legacy of historic buildings, collections and expertise associated with the industry survives as testimony to the industry which not only dominated the region but was also responsible for generating its wealth. Middleton owes much of its history to the Industrial Revolution when industrial scale textile manufacture was introduced. The town became a centre for silk production in the 18th century, which developed into a mechanised cotton spinning industry by the middle of the 19th century and which continued through to the mid 20th century, this transition gave rise to Middleton as a mill town.

Middleton's industrialisation evolved from the handloom weaver's workshop. There was a symbiotic relationship between the weaving of silk and cotton, with either taking pre-eminence depending on the economic conditions of the day. Because of this, it is likely many workshops were adapted to take into account of both the weaving of silk or cotton. Sam Bamford wrote of life as a handloom weaver, and about taking finished cloth to the warehouse, where a fresh supply of raw materials were also obtained. Sam was living and working with his aunt and uncle at the time, and called the process 'home-bearing'. The strength of the silk industry in Middleton is notable. Silk throwing and weaving was a late development in England where access to the knowledge, materials and processes to produce silk garments was limited.

The suppression of the Hugenots in France (with a large silk weaving community) and their subsequent acceptance in England encouraged the introduction of silk weaving. The Mellalieux of Middleton were Hugenots and are thought to have greatly influenced the industry in the town. The silk weaving community maintained production at home rather than in the larger factories used in the cotton industry. It prolonged a traditional way of life in opposition to the marked changes of the factory system. This was possible with silk because it only became centralised and mechanised at a later date, as seen by the two (relatively small) silk mills north of New Lane; Rose Mill and Spring Gardens Mill.

The 19th century witnessed the dramatic growth of the cotton industry, primarily spinning. One of the first water powered cotton spinning mills was built at the bottom of Wood Street by John Jackson, which later became infamous under the ownership of Daniel Burton during the Luddite riots of 1812. The development of the cotton power loom in the early 19th century resulted in great hardship, much disturbance and ultimately the rapid decline of the cotton hand-loom weavers. Brookside Mill, Townley Street, is a rare example of a cotton power-weaving shed and Lodge Mill a relatively early spinning factory.