

The Brontës in Pennine Yorkshire



Shirley Country Guide

The Brontës of Spen Valley



Uncover the history of the Brontës in the villages and towns in and around the Spenn Valley.
Take a journey through **Shirley** Country.



welcome to shirley country

in the Spenn Valley

Published in 1849, Charlotte Brontë's novel **Shirley** caused quite a sensation. Local people had only just discovered that the quiet visitor from Haworth, parson's daughter Charlotte Brontë, was secretly the famous 'Currer Bell', author of *Jane Eyre*. Now they found themselves and their neighbours appearing in her latest novel.

Charlotte knew the area well from her schooldays in Mirfield and was a frequent visitor, staying with her lifelong friends Ellen Nussey of Birstall and Mary Taylor of Gomersal. When Charlotte's parents were first married they lived in nearby Hightown and her father was minister at Hartshead at the time of the Luddite riots of 1812.

Trace Charlotte's life and inspiration in sites across the Spenn Valley and surrounding area, from historic Red House and Oakwell Hall to churchyards, pubs, hotels and mill sites.



Use the map on pages 8 and 9 and the information in this guide to create your own Brontë trail.



1 Red House, Gomersal: 'Briarmains' in *Shirley*

As the home of Charlotte's close lifelong friend Mary Taylor, Red House played a significant role in Charlotte's life and in the novel *Shirley*. Charlotte often visited the family in the 1830s and later featured Red House as 'Briarmains' and the Taylors, who were woollen cloth merchants, as the 'Yorke' family in her novel.

Today this award-winning museum looks much as it would have done in Charlotte's time. Wander around the period rooms, from the elegant parlour to stone flagged kitchens and imagine taking tea with Charlotte.

Take a turn in the restored 1830s gardens which provide an enchanting setting for the house, with scented old roses

climbing arbour and arches, ornamental 'flower basket' beds and serpentine paths through tree-shaded lawns.

Find out more about Charlotte's connections with the Spen Valley in 'The Secret's Out' exhibition in the old Barn. Just what did the locals say when they discovered that they were the inspiration for some of the characters in *Shirley*? Experience local life in the 'Spenn Valley Stories' gallery in the restored Cartsheds, and browse the museum shop for books, toys, gifts and preserves.



Look out for:

Painting of Vesuvius and stained glass windows described in *Shirley*, Chapter 9

'Those windows would be seen by daylight to be of brilliantly-stained glass - purple and amber the predominant hues...'

Where is it?

Oxford Road (A651), Gomersal.

Follow brown tourist signs

Open:

Mon-Fri 11.00-17.00

Sat-Sun 12.00-17.00

Tel: 01274 335100.

Admission free.

Pre-booked groups welcome.

Email:

red.house@kirklees.gov.uk

Visit:

www.kirklees.gov.uk/museums

Access: Wheelchair access to gardens, exhibitions and Red House ground floor. Induction loop to exhibition sound systems.

Winner of Interpret Britain Award 2000

Winner Sandford Award for Heritage Education 2005



2 Oakwell Hall, Birstall: 'Fieldhead' in *Shirley*

The splendid Elizabethan manor house of Oakwell Hall inspired Charlotte's description of 'Fieldhead' in *Shirley*, the home of heroine 'Shirley Keeldar'.

In the 1840s Oakwell Hall was a young ladies boarding school which Charlotte visited with her friend Ellen Nussey who knew the owners. Today visitors can still see many features Charlotte described.



Built in 1583 and set in 100 acres of parkland, the old Manor House provides a real insight into late 17th century life. Explore period rooms set with a mixture of authentic and reproduction furnishings. Stroll through the garden or follow waymarked walks and nature trails through parkland. Take a picnic in the park or sample tea and cake in the Oak Tree Café.

Plan your visit to coincide with one of the many events held throughout the year, such as the annual summer fair, civil war re-enactments or a period candlelight evening.

Look out for:

Oak panelling and windows described in *Shirley*, Chapter 11

'...the old latticed windows, the stone porch, the walls, the roof, the chimney stacks, were rich in crayon touches and sepia lights and shades'

Where is it?

Nutter Lane, Birstall
(off A652 Bradford Road).

Follow brown tourist signs

Open:

Mon-Fri 11.00–17.00

Sat-Sun 12.00–17.00

Tel: 01924 326240.

Admission charge Mar-Oct inclusive.

Email:

oakwell.hall@kirklees.gov.uk

Visit:

www.oakwellhallcountrypark.co.uk

Access: Wheelchair access to the gardens and visitor centre. Induction loop in the visitor centre.

Winner 4 Sandford Awards for Heritage Education

3

Moor Lane House, Gomersal: Home of Ellen Nussey

Moor Lane house was Ellen Nussey's last rented home, where she died aged 80 years old in 1897. One of the heroines in *Shirley*, 'Caroline Helstone', is thought to be partly inspired by Ellen.



Where is it?

Now the Gomersal Park Hotel, Moor Lane, Gomersal off A652 Bradford Road.

Visit:

www.gomersalparkhotel.co.uk

4

St Peter's Church, Birstall: 'Briarfield Church' in *Shirley*

Charlotte attended Birstall church when visiting her friends Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey. Reverend W. M. Heald, vicar of Birstall in 1849, inspired Charlotte's character the Rector 'Mr Hall' in *Shirley*. The church was rebuilt in 1865-71, but the old tower remains.



Look out for:

Ellen Nussey's grave
(to the east of the church).

Grave of Miss Wooler -
Charlotte Brontë's teacher
& friend.

Tombstone of John Nelson -
Methodist preacher.

Where is it?

Kirkgate, Birstall off the A652 Bradford Road or A643 (Church Lane).

Tel: 01924 478560
to arrange access
to the church.

Visit:

www.stpetersbirstall.co.uk

5 **Healds Hall, Liversedge:** Home of Reverend Roberson, the Rector 'Mr Helstone' in *Shirley*

Visit the early 19th century home and boys boarding school of the forceful Reverend Hammond Roberson, who actively opposed the Luddites.

Charlotte Brontë saw him only once but heard many stories about him on which she based the strong character 'Mr Helstone' in *Shirley*.



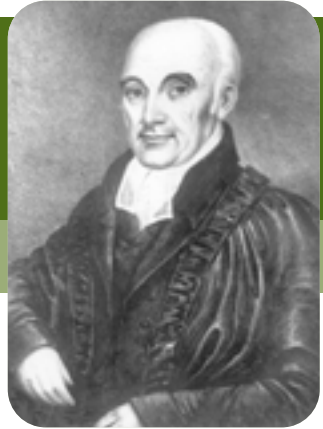
Where is it?

Now the Healds Hall Hotel and restaurant, Leeds Road (A62), Liversedge.

At crossroads of the A638/A643, follow signs to Leeds at the crossroads with A638.

The hotel is about 100m on the left.

Visit: www.healdshall.co.uk



6 **Christ Church, Liversedge:** Grave of Reverend Roberson, the Rector 'Mr Helstone' in *Shirley*

Reverend Hammond Roberson built this church with his own money in 1812-16.

He insisted that all graves in his churchyard should have identical simple headstones, including his own.



Look out for:

Reverend Roberson's grave
Look near the churchyard entrance..

Where is it?

Take Knowler Hill off the A638 Bradford Road then turn left into Church Lane at the side of the Albion Inn.

7 High Royd, Gomersal: Home of Mary Taylor, the inspiration for 'Rose Yorke' in *Shirley*

Charlotte featured her friend Mary as strong-minded 'Rose Yorke' in *Shirley*.

Mary had radical and independent views, refusing to conform to the behaviour expected of 19th century women.

She emigrated to New Zealand in 1845 and set up her own successful shop. Returning to Gomersal in 1860 she lived at High Royd until her death in 1893 and spent her time writing or travelling in Europe.

Where is it?

Now the Gomersal Lodge Hotel, Spen Lane (A643), Gomersal.



Look out for:

Mary Taylor's grave

Mary's grave (large upright stone) can be found about 30m immediately to the left of the churchyard entrance.

Where is it?

Spen Lane (A643), Gomersal. Enter churchyard from *Shirley* Road off Spen Lane.

Visit:
www.stmarysgomersal.co.uk

8 St Mary's Church, Gomersal: Mary Taylor's Grave

Mary died aged 76 in 1893, three years after the publication of her own novel *Miss Miles*.

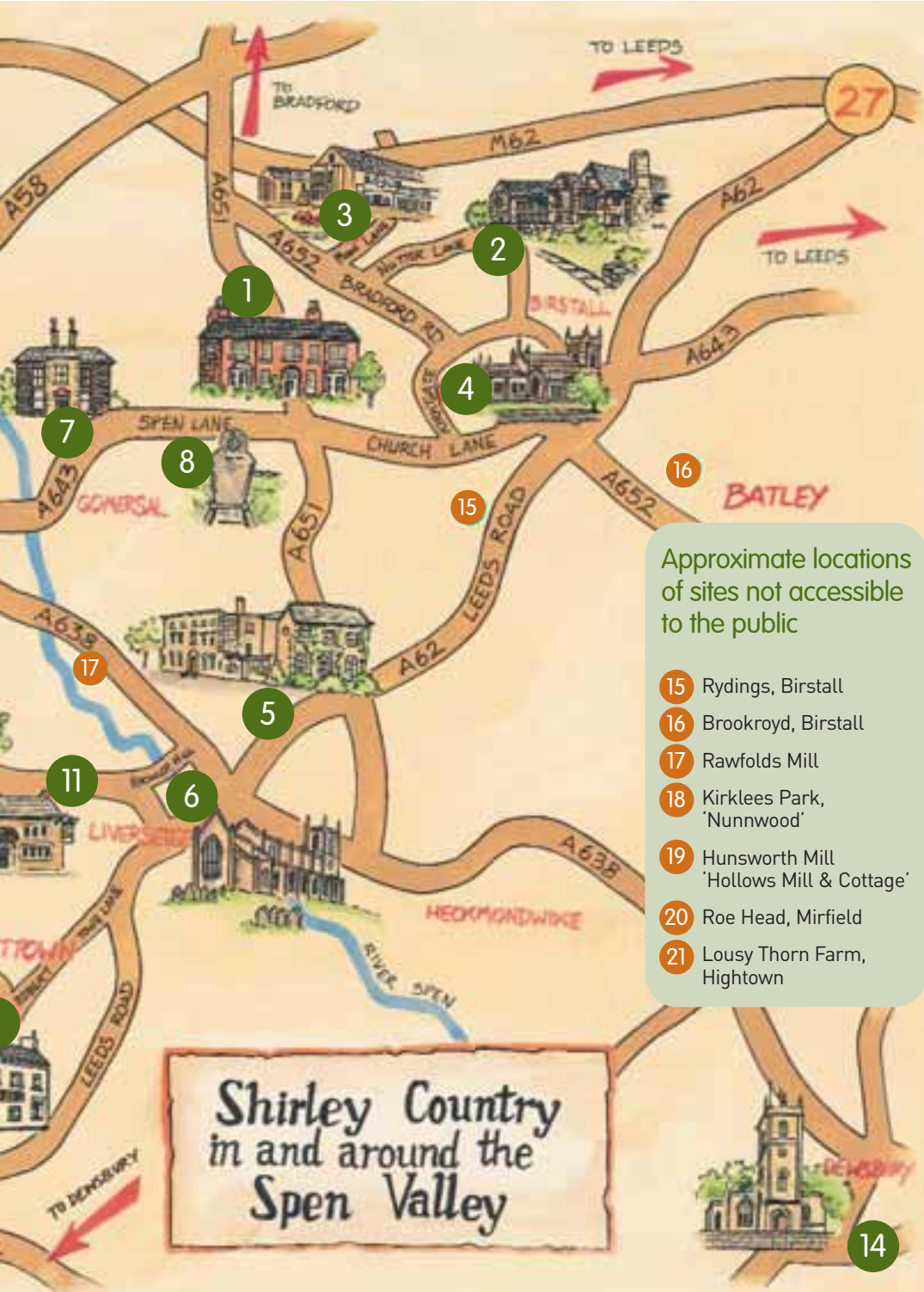
On her grave you will find a commemoration stone to her sister Martha who died at school in Brussels aged 23. Martha features as 'Jessie Yorke' in *Shirley*.



Key to map:

- 1 Red House, Gomersal
- 2 Oakwell Hall, Birstall
- 3 Moor Lane House, Gomersal
(Gomersal Park Hotel)
- 4 St. Peter's Church, Birstall
- 5 Healds Hall, Liversedge
(Healds Hall Hotel)
- 6 Christ Church, Liversedge
- 7 High Royd, Gomersal
(The Gomersal Lodge Hotel)
- 8 Mary Taylor's Grave
(St. Mary's Church, Gomersal)
- 9 Clough House, Hightown
- 10 St. Peter's Church, Hartshead
- 11 Shears Inn, Hightown
- 12 Dumb Steeple, Mirfield
- 13 Star Inn, Roberttown
- 14 All Saints, Dewsbury
(Dewsbury Minster)





- Approximate locations of sites not accessible to the public
- 15 Rydings, Birstall
 - 16 Brookroyd, Birstall
 - 17 Rawfolds Mill
 - 18 Kirklees Park, 'Nunnwood'
 - 19 Hunsworth Mill 'Hollows Mill & Cottage'
 - 20 Roe Head, Mirfield
 - 21 Lousy Thorn Farm, Hightown

Shirley Country
in and around the
Spen Valley

9

Clough House, Hightown: Home to Patrick and Maria Brontë

Charlotte's newly married parents, Patrick and Maria, lived in this three-storey house from 1812-15 when Patrick was minister at nearby Hartshead. Their first two children, Maria and Elizabeth, were born here – both died of tuberculosis at an early age.

Please note this is a private residence. Please respect the privacy of the owners.

THIS WAS THE HOME TO WHICH THE
REV. PATRICK BRONTË,
BROUGHT HIS BRIDE, MARIA BRANWELL,
AFTER THEIR MARRIAGE
ON 20TH DECEMBER 1812.
AND IT WAS HERE THAT
THEIR TWO ELDEST CHILDREN,
MARIA & ELIZABETH, WERE BORN.

Look out for:

Commemorative plaque above the door.

Where is it?

Halifax Road (A649),
Hightown, Liversedge
(opposite junction with
Clough Lane).

No public access



Look out for:

Dead Yew Tree said to be many centuries old

Stocks across the road from the entrance gate

Where is it?

Church Lane, Hartshead.
Take Far Common Road off
A62 Leeds Road, turn left into
Fall Lane, go straight on for
about 1½ miles then left into
Church Lane.

10

St Peter's Church, Hartshead: 'Nunnery' Church in *Shirley*

Charlotte's father was minister here at the time of the Luddite attack on Rawfolds Mill in 1812. It was also where Charlotte's eldest sister, Maria, was baptised. The church, set in tranquil countryside, was rebuilt in 1881 but the old tower remains.

11 The Shears Inn, Hightown

The introduction of new machinery in the early 19th century saw many woollen cloth shearers, also known as croppers, losing their jobs. In protest, some formed a secret group (the Luddites) intent on forcibly

preventing the introduction of shearing machines. A dramatic scene in *Shirley* describes an attack by machine breakers on 'Hollows Mill'. Charlotte based her story on a Luddite attack at Rawfolds Mill, Liversedge in 1812.

The Shears Inn was a favoured drinking place for the croppers, and it is thought the group planned their attack from an upstairs room at the Inn.



Look out for:

Datestone in the wall above the doorway.

Where is it?

Halifax Road (A649), Hightown, Liversedge.



12 Dumb Steeple Monument, Mirfield

At midnight on 11 April 1812 the Luddites met here before attacking Rawfolds Mill, Liversedge. Imagine the scene as they formed into ranks – some in masks, others with their faces blackened – marching across the fields to Rawfolds carrying muskets, hammers and other weapons. Over 100 Luddites attacked Rawfolds Mill, smashing windows and battering

at the door, intent on breaking the hated shearing machines inside. Mill owner William Cartwright and a handful of men prevented entry and after a furious 20 minute battle the Luddites withdrew leaving two dying men behind. William Cartwright inspired the character 'Robert Moore' in *Shirley*. A blue plaque on the monument details its history.

Where is it?

Cooper Bridge roundabout on the A62 Leeds Road/A644 Wakefield Road. Parking adjacent is impossible – glimpse it on passing or after parking safely elsewhere, walk back for a closer look.

13 The Star Inn, Roberttown

Two wounded Luddites were taken to this Inn after the attack on Rawfolds Mill. They died from their injuries, having refused to reveal the names of other rioters to Reverend Hammond Roberson, who was questioning them.

Reputedly one of the dying Luddites whispered to him "Can you keep a secret?". When Reverend Roberson eagerly agreed, the man said "So can I!"

Where is it?

Roberttown Lane,
Roberttown
[off A62 Leeds Road].



14 All Saints, Dewsbury (Dewsbury Minster): Patrick Brontë was curate here 1809-1811

Why not take a trip further afield to Dewsbury where Charlotte's father, Patrick, was curate of All Saints church, now Dewsbury Minster.

Stop for refreshments and visit the heritage centre to find out more.

Where is it?

Rishworth Road
[Dewsbury Ring Road
South].

Open:

Daily 09.00 - 15.00
Services Wed 12 noon
and Sun 10.30 and 18.30

Admission is free
Tel: 01924 457057

A number of locations with Brontë connections in the local area are part of private estates or have been demolished. Please note that the following locations are not accessible to the public.

Literary Locations



Rydings, 15 Birstall

This was the early home of Charlotte's great friend Ellen Nussey. On Charlotte's first visit here in 1832, her brother Branwell declared he was leaving her 'in paradise', with lawns, chestnut trees, fruit gardens and a rookery.

Rydings is believed to have partly inspired 'Thornfield Hall' in Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*. The property is now only partly visible on the Leeds Road (A62), near the crossroads with A652 Bradford Road.

Brookroyd, 16 Birstall

This was Ellen Nussey's home after Rydings and Charlotte was a frequent visitor. She was staying here when *Shirley* was published in October 1849 and is said to have corrected proofs of *Jane Eyre* in the garden. Take a look from Brookroyd Lane, Birstall, opposite the junction with Intake Lane. Only the rear and side walls are visible from the roadside.

Rawfolds Mill, 17 Liversedge: site of Luddite attack featured in *Shirley*

The site of the Luddite attack in 1812, the mill has now been demolished and the site now houses a private industrial estate.

Kirklees Park: 18 'Nunnwood' in *Shirley*

Kirklees Hall featured as 'Nunnely Hall' in *Shirley*. The park includes the site of a nunnery and what is said to be Robin Hood's grave – Charlotte mentioned both in her novel. The park is visible in the distance from Hartshead Lane.



Hunsworth Mill: 'Hollows Mill & Cottage' in *Shirley* 19

Charlotte modelled 'Hollows Mill', scene of the Luddite attack in *Shirley*, on Hunsworth Mill. The woollen cloth dyeing and finishing mill was owned by her friends the Taylors of Red House. 'Hollows Cottage', home of hero 'Robert Moore', may have been inspired by Hunsworth House which stood next to the mill.

Hunsworth House was the home of Mary Taylor and her brothers after they left Red House in 1840. The mill and house have long been demolished and the site is now a private industrial estate. They were originally located on the A58 Leeds Road, just off Junction 26 from the M62.

Roe Head, Mirfield 20

In 1831, 14 year old Charlotte attended Miss Woolers private boarding school at Roe Head, where she met her lifelong friends Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey. A kindly school with only ten pupils, the girls were happy and successful there.

Charlotte later returned as a teacher. During her time at Roe Head, Charlotte got to know many local people, places and stories which she drew on for *Shirley*. Her teacher and friend Miss Margaret Wooler, is thought to have inspired the character 'Mrs Pryor'. The school moved to Heald's House in Dewsbury - not visible to the public but located on Heald's Road.

Lousy Thorn Farm, Hightown 21

The lodgings of Charlotte's father when he first became minister at nearby Hartshead Church.

The farm, now called Thornbush, can be seen in the distance from Windybank Lane.

The Full Brontë...

Charlotte's sisters, Emily and Anne, also attended Roe Head school at Mirfield.

Anne Brontë became governess for the Inghams at Blake Hall, Mirfield and is thought to have used her experiences there in her novel *Agnes Grey*.

The grave of Charlotte's cousin, Rose Ann Heslip who died in 1915, has recently been re-discovered at Whitechapel Church, Cleckheaton.



Further Afield

Once you have completed your literary trail why not explore further. Visit an array of interesting museums and galleries or discover stunning architecture in the traditional market towns of Dewsbury and Batley. Further afield, famous TV locations, spectacular moorland scenery and a wealth of quality shopping will make your visit one to remember.

Bagshaw Museum

Travel the world at this Gothic mansion with exhibitions from Ancient Egypt, to Asia, Africa and the Americas.

Open: Mon-Fri 11.00-17.00,
Sat-Sun 12 noon-17.00.

Wilton Park, Batley

Tel: 01924 326155

www.bagshawmuseum.co.uk

Admission Free

Dewsbury Museum

Re-visit your childhood and experience the magic of a child's eye view of history.

Open: Mon-Fri 11.00-17.00,
Sat-Sun 12 noon-17.00.

Crow Nest Park,
Heckmondwike Road,
Dewsbury

Tel: 01924 325100

www.dewsburymuseum.co.uk

Admission Free

Castle Hill & Victoria Tower

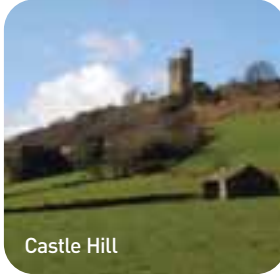
A scheduled Ancient Monument, an archaeological site of national importance and a very visible landmark offering fantastic panoramic views of the area.

For details of opening times:

Tel: 01484 223830

www.kirklees.gov.uk/museums

Small admission charge into Victoria Tower



Castle Hill

Tolson Museum

Discover the many groups of 'comers in' who have shaped Huddersfield and its landscape from pre-history to present day.

Open: Mon-Fri 11.00-17.00,
Sat-Sun 12 noon-17.00.

Ravensknowle Park,
Wakefield Road,
Huddersfield

Tel: 01484 223830

www.tolsonmuseum.co.uk

Admission Free

Huddersfield Art Gallery

A changing permanent collection of British art of last 100 years together with a lively programme of temporary exhibitions by a range of young and established artists.

Open: Mon-Fri 10.00-17.00,
Sat-Sun 10.00-14.00,

Princess Alexandra Walk
Huddersfield

Tel: 01484 221962

www.kirklees.gov.uk/art

Free admission



Dewsbury Museum

Travel further afield through pennine landscapes to Denby Dale, famous for its pie; or to Holmfirth, the setting for Last of the Summer Wine. Take a trip to Huddersfield and shop in modern precincts and Victorian arcades, or visit the Art Gallery or Tolson Museum.

Whatever you're after, explore further in Kirklees.

For more information pop into one of the local Tourist Information Centres and pick up a wide range of guides on the local area.

www.visitkirklees.com

Tourist Information Centres

Huddersfield

Tel: 01484 223200

Open: Mon-Sat
09.15-17.00.

Holmfirth

Tel: 01484 222444

Open: Mon-Fri
09.00-17.00,
Sat 10.00-17.00,
Sun 11.00-16.00.

The making of the silent film *Shirley* in 1921 at Oakwell Hall.
Reproduced by permission of the National Film Archive, London



Kirklees Museums & Galleries

The Stables

Ravensknowle Park

Wakefield Road

Huddersfield

HD5 8DJ

Tel:

01484 223800

Website:

www.kirklees.gov.uk/museums

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Kirklees Metropolitan Council cannot accept responsibility
for the accuracy of the information given.

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Kirklees Image Archive: www.kirkleesimages.org.uk

