

The Old Roads and Trackways of MIDDLETON & SMERRILL



The Manchester to Derby Road travelled along Lowfield Lane and, after crossing Rowlow Brook, continued to Gratton along a holloway which is now lined with May

AN INTRODUCTION

Palimpsest

- a manuscript on which a later text has been superimposed on the original

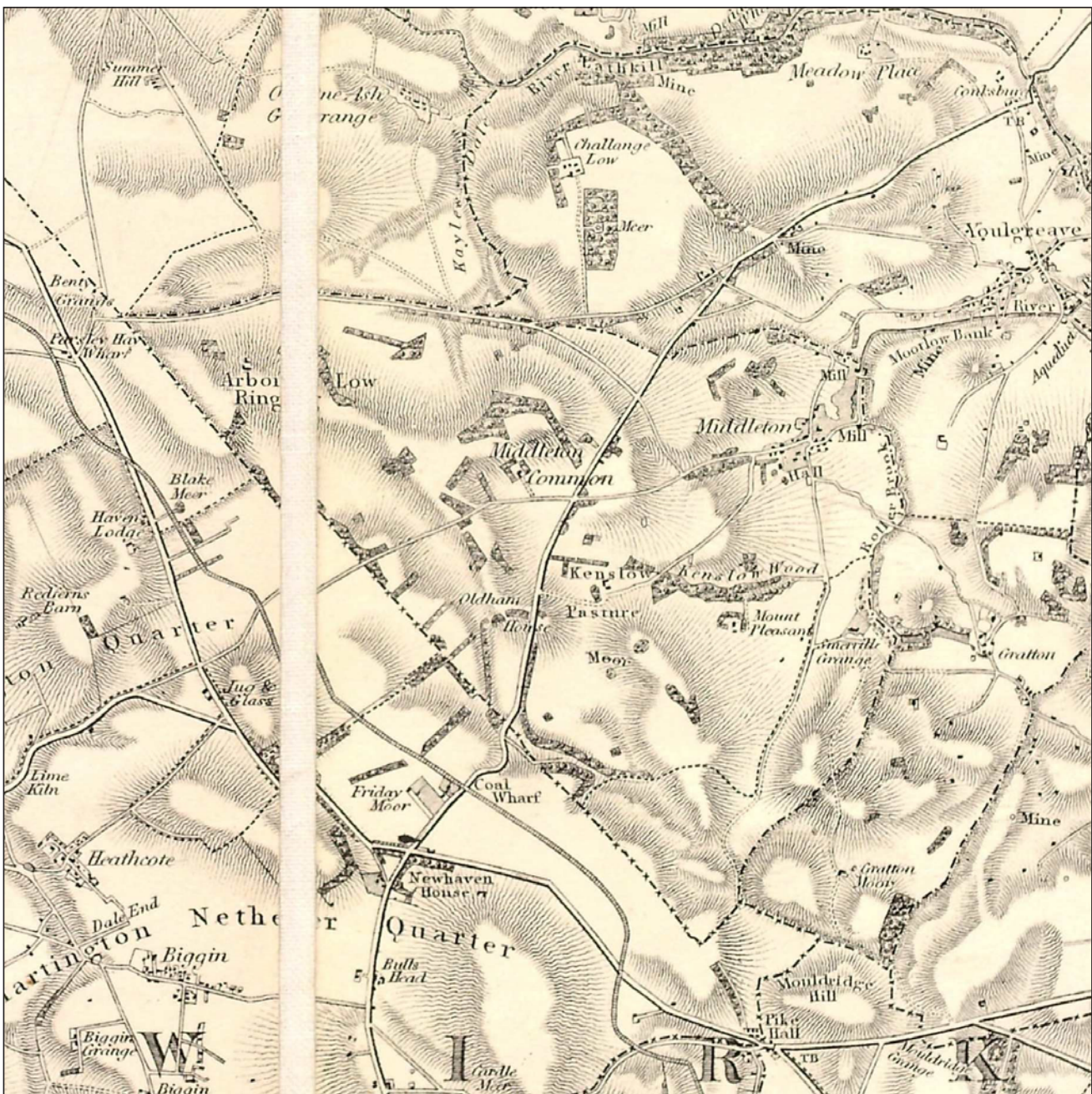
The Old Roads and Trackways of Middleton and Smerrill explores the roads, lanes and paths of Middleton & Smerrill and the journeys that people once took within and beyond the parish. It is based on maps and plans of cartographers and surveyors together with the research of historians, the experience of local farmers and the collective memory of Middleton residents. It is as much a story as it is a history.

The Neolithic Arbor Low and Roman mines, the medieval village at Smerrill and the royalist Fullwood Castle, along with the mills, mines and railways of industrialisation have all left traces on our landscape. It is a palimpsest, a term borrowed by archaeologists to describe a site displaying the evidence of multiple histories. And amongst these are the traces of the evolving network of roads and trackways that we have inherited from generations of those who lived in the landscape before us.

This exhibition includes a new map of Middleton and Smerrill, explanatory banners and old maps. The new map explores the palimpsest we live on, particularly the network of roads and trackways and the journeys made across it. The banners provide further information about the network and journeys. The maps date back to Peter Burdett's 1767 map of Derbyshire and include four Middleton Estate maps that detail changes to the network wrought by the Inclosure Acts and the arrival of the Bateman Family in Middleton.

The origins of early roads are often difficult to discern, so only the current network of roads, lanes and paths, the network we know with certainty, are shown on the map. On the other hand, the journeys shown on the map are taken from prehistory to the late modern era. They are not necessarily the first journeys made along each route, but a significant journey that gives the route its historic identity. These journeys dictated how the network of roads and trackways developed. And it is these journeys that tell of the lives and activities of those who have lived in our landscape.

Charles Monkhouse October 2025



Detail of George Sanderson's 1836 County of Derby, one of the first maps to show the Middleton and Smerrill road system as we would recognise it today.