

The Old Roads and Trackways of MIDDLETON & SMERRILL



Rowlow Brook, flowing through the gorge below Smerrill Grange, could have given access to Smerrill Medieval Village, Gratton and along Gratton Dale to Pikehall.

THE RIVER BRADFORD & ROWLOW BROOK

The limestone of the Neolithic ridge routes, with their dry and firm surface, gave ease and speed across the landscape. But the valley routes had the advantage of access to shelter, water and navigable rivers that could help move goods.

The River Bradford links Middleton with Youlgrave and Alport. It continues downstream to join the Wye and then the Derwent, a major river that stretches the length of Derbyshire. Middleton had long relied on the Bradford as its main source of water and later for industrial power. The easy route to the river through the Dale Lane gorge must have determined the position of the village. The Bradford provided a route to Youlgrave and especially Alport where it crossed the Bronze Age Portway (a prehistoric trading route from Nottingham that worked its way north through the Peak, perhaps as far as Manchester).

Upstream, Rowlow Brook works its way through Smerrill Gorge to Dale End and into Gratton Dale. The brook provided access to the medieval village at Smerrill and the gorge was home to the fishponds of local granges. It would have provided an early route to Gratton from where Gratton Dale leads towards Pikehall and a southerly link to the Neolithic/Roman Road.

Bradford Dale remained a route on foot and by horse from Middleton to Youlgrave into the 20c.; Peter Cavendish, in the Oral Histories of Middleton and Smerrill, recalls being taken to a church service in Youlgrave by carriage along the Bradford in the late 1930s.

Rowlow Brook and the Bradford constitute half the wriggly edge of the Middleton and Smerrill triangular parish boundary.

Further Reading

- 1884 OS 6" to the mile map of England and Wales
- 2009 Oral History of Middleton and Smerrill, various
- 2013 A River in Our Time, Christine Gregory
- 2018 The Inhabited Medieval Village of Smerrill, Lynn Burnett
- 2018 Pre-industrial Roads, Trackways and Canals, Historic England
- 2019 The Old Roads of Derbyshire, Stephen Bailey



A PALIMPSEST

MIDDLETON VILLAGE HALL
Supporting the community of Middleton and Smerrill