

A walking tour of Saltaire

Start your Tour from the railway station in Saltaire.

1. Saltaire Railway Station

Description

The railway line running through Saltaire had been laid a few years before Titus Salt established his new, vast mill in 1853 and began to realise the plans for a model village. Saltaire did not have a station for another 3 years.

The original railway station in Saltaire was opened in 1856 by the Midland Railway. The nearby railway, along with the canal and decent roads, was an important factor in Salt's decision to build his model village on this site.

The original stone buildings that stood on each platform were demolished in 1970 and were replaced by the current wooden and stone structures when the station reopened in 1984. Today, the station lies on the Northern Line and has services to Leeds, Bradford and Skipton.

Instructions

Turn left as you leave the station and head downhill along Victoria Road. The next building on the left is called the Mill Building today but was originally intended as a dining hall to provide meals for the workers in Saltaire Mills.

2. Dining Hall

Description

As the first 'public space' the dining hall served many purposes during the early years of Saltaire. It provided space for the factory school with elementary education for child workers, night school education for adults, church services and a Sunday school.

Many meetings for residents on the issues of the day and many large social events occurred within its walls. A new church opened in 1859 and in 1886, social and education facilities moved into new public buildings further up Victoria Road.

The building was then re-fitted in 1869 with the equipment to provide meals for the workers in Salts Mill. It had seating for 700 people and, after a second floor was installed in 1889, an upper floor café was established for residents and visitors

Today, the 'Dining Hall' is owned by Shipley College. Following a major refurbishment and conversion in 1998 the interior has been modified to create classrooms. The building is shared with Askham Bryan College for studying wild life.

Instructions

Carry on a short distance downhill along Victoria Road. The next building on the left is situated at the end of a driveway and was built to accommodate the church services that had been initially in the dining hall.

3. United Reformed Church

Description

Titus Salt was a devout Congregationalist. The Congregational Church (now the United Reformed Church) was built in 1859 with £16000 of Salt's personal fortune (around £1.4 million in 2020).

The church stands in its own grounds with a small churchyard. Like the rest of the village, the church was constructed in Italianate style, with fluted columns, tower and scagliola pillars. It is a grade 1 listed building. Two ornate chandeliers of cut glass were suspended from the ceiling, requiring roof trusses to be added later to support the weight.

The Interior of the church is as it was first designed and the interior of the Mausoleum, containing Sir Titus Salts' remains and those of other family members can be viewed from beyond the altar. There is a beautiful organ in the interior and the entrance to the church has a marble bust of the founder.

Instructions

Carry on a short distance downhill along Victoria Road. The next building is now a set of private residences but was originally built as stables.

4. The Original Stables

Description

Immediately after the church railings is a pair of large wooden gates. When these are open it is possible to see a large building at the end of a yard. This building complex was created to stable the mill owner's horses in Victorian times. Today these have been converted into a large residence owned by Salts Mill's current owners, Salts Estates.

Instructions

Continue down Victoria Road and turn left towards the park. On the left there is the Boathouse Inn

5. The Boathouse

Description

The original boathouse was built in 1871, after the river was widened, to allow for pleasure boating as part of the park's facilities. It was eventually converted into a restaurant but by the start of the twenty first century the building was derelict due to a fire.

The present owners refurbished and opened the Boathouse in its current incarnation as the Boathouse Inn. Boating on the river is no longer possible from this site, nevertheless in recent times a 'Dragon Boat Festival' has been established for one weekend each year.

Instructions

From the boathouse, cross the metal footbridge to a beautiful, extensive park.

6. Roberts Park

Description

Originally named Saltaire Park, the 14-acre space opened in 1871 and was free for anyone to enjoy. The park was originally reached by a bridge from the end of Victoria Road, over the valley to what is now the West entrance, at the lodge. This bridge had to be demolished after World War Two, thought to be due to damage caused by tanks crossing to use the area for manoeuvres.

Although provided by Salt for all to enjoy, there were strict rules enforced in the park. Among other things, political and religious demonstrations were banned, as were wheeled vehicles and unaccompanied children under 8. A bell would be rung when the park gates were due to be closed and despite the number of rules applied, this space was greatly enjoyed by residents and visitors.

After the Salt family were forced to sell the mill and the village, Sir James Roberts, the subsequent owner, renamed the park, Roberts Park – not after himself, but in memory of his son, Bertram Foster Roberts.

Instructions

Cross back over the metal footbridge and head towards Victoria Road. On the left hand side is an imposing structure known as 'New Mill'.

7. New Mill

Description

New Mill was built in 1868, in a similar style to the main 'Salts' Mill. The mill expanded to incorporate other processes required for manufacturing textiles, including a dye house in 1871.

For a time, after World War two, part of this building was converted into hostel accommodation for young Italian and Austrian women. They were recruited to work in the mill when British workers were in short supply, to help get the textile industry back to full production.

New Mill was extensively refurbished in the early 1990s and is now a combination of office space for Bradford Health Authority and 98 privately owned apartments.

Instructions

Head up Victoria Road. Between New Mill and the imposing façade of the original mill buildings lies the Leeds-Liverpool canal.

8. The Canal

Description

The Leeds & Liverpool Canal is the longest canal in Britain to be built as a single waterway. It runs 127 miles from Liverpool, through East Lancashire and the Pennines, along the edge of the Yorkshire Dales, then through Bingley and Saltaire to Leeds.

The Victorian equivalent of the motorway, along with the railway, the canal would have been an important factor in Salt's decision to build here. The land that would become Saltaire was perfectly positioned – a safe, but not excessive, distance from the pollution of Bradford and with rapid transport links to major industrial centres at Leeds and Liverpool where supplies could be bought, and products sold.

Instructions

Continue up Victoria Road, The vast building on the left is the original 'Saltaire Mills'- known today as Salts Mill.

9. Saltaire Mills (now Salts Mill)

Description

The first building to be constructed, Saltaire Mills (now known as Salts Mill) was designed to manufacture textiles on a truly industrial scale. At the time it was opened in 1853 it was thought to be the biggest factory in Europe.

Salt's intention was to incorporate all elements of the manufacturing process under one roof, rather than each taking place at a separate location as his previous mills in Bradford required. Employing around 3000 workers, the Mill was the very heart of Saltaire.

The Mill changed hands three times over the years and at the height of its capacity employed 4,000 workers. Following the collapse of the textile industry in West Yorkshire in the 1980s, processes were gradually moved out of the Salts Mill building.

In 1985, the last processes were relocated, and the empty mill put up for sale. In 1987, Jonathan Silver purchased the Mill and refurbished the prior spinning block to house art galleries, restaurants, and retail facilities. The rest of the mill buildings are tenanted by small and medium sized businesses.

Rather than a single manufacturing centre, the part of the Mill open to the public has become an important cultural hub currently displaying the world's largest private collection of art works by David Hockney.

Instructions

Continue up Victoria Road and pass some of the original allotments established in Salts' time. Just past the allotments is the site of one of only two Saltaire buildings that have been demolished.

10. The lost Congregational Sunday School. Now a small car park

Description

The last building constructed in Salt's lifetime was sited on the corner of Caroline Street and Victoria Road. Originally said to be intended as the site of a hotel, it was repurposed for the Congregational Sunday School.

This three-story imposing building could seat 700 scholars at a time and was very well used for many years. Salt was a keen proponent of Sunday Schools and lived just long enough to see his own completed.

Titus Salt had been awarded a baronetcy in 1869 and Sir Titus and his wife, Lady Caroline attended the opening ceremony but were forced to leave early due to his failing health. His grandson, Harold Salt, opened the Sunday School in May 1876. Sir Titus died in December the same year.

The Sunday School was demolished in 1973 and is now a council run car park.

Planning approval was granted in February 2024 for a new Community, Arts, Heritage and Future Technology building on this site.

Instructions

Cross over Caroline Street and continue up Victoria Road. Just past a corner shop and a few Saltaire Houses is an imposing building known today as Victoria Hall.

11. Victoria Hall

Description

Originally, this building was known as 'The Saltaire Club and Institute', with only the main hall called Victoria Hall. Opening in 1871, it was one of the final pieces to complete Salt's vision of a model village, providing many indoor leisure spaces.

The institute was intended to provide a social gathering space for residents (rather than a pub) and as an educational institute. Although not part of the temperance movement, Salt was staunchly opposed to the construction of a public house in his village, having seen many workers in Bradford drink their wages away as soon as they were paid and fail to provide for their families. Residents were free to drink at home or at pubs outside the village, but Salt hoped they would be attracted by the more immediate Social Club and Institute.

The building housed rooms for billiards, bagatelle, chess and drafts, reading, classrooms, a library, a laboratory and a large hall for lectures and concerts. It also housed the Schools of Art and Science, which later moved to a new location established in 1887.

Known as Victoria Hall today it is owned by the Salt Foundation and continues to provide indoor leisure and social spaces.

Not in the tour but worth knowing a little about is Exhibition Building.

The selected location for Science and Art Education, is behind Victoria Hall on Exhibition Road. It was planned by Titus Salt Junior and was commissioned when the Salt Family business was experiencing financial difficulties. Titus Junior mortgaged the Salt schools to pay for its construction. He had hoped to cover its costs through a five-month exhibition to honour Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. In the event, it left the Salt Schools with a large debt.

Exhibition building is not within the World Heritage Boundary, because it was not in Sir Titus Salt's original plan. It is part of Shipley College.

Instructions

Cross Victoria Road to the building immediately opposite to the original Salt Schools building.

12. The New Salt Schools

Description

The Salt Schools opened in 1868, for both day scholars and half-timers, who would work at the mill for half a day and attend school for the other half. The new factory schools were centrally heated, well equipped internally, with good outdoor areas at the rear. There were separate entrances for girls and boys and the building could accommodate 700 pupils.

The opening of the new school just pre-dated the 1870 Forster Education Act that for the first time in British history promoted the provision of elementary education for all children. It required local municipalities to establish school boards and whilst this education was not compulsory it was much encouraged, and the costs were to be met by local rate payers.

By 1876, Shipley School Board was well established and Sir Titus Salt, gave notice to the elementary school to quit, providing some land at the top of Albert Road, in Saltaire for a new 'board' school offering elementary education.

His youngest son, Titus Salt Jnr. was the first chair of Shipley School Board and, together with his father decided to use the factory school building for a form of secondary education.

While it would be two years before Albert Road Board School was completed, the initial high school for girls opened in Victoria Hall. By 1878 a high school for boys was founded and these older pupils moved into what is now called 'The Salt Building'. Later it became a grammar school but was too small for modern needs and a new comprehensive school was built on land on the other side of Roberts Park.

Outside the Salt Building, there are two lions, and two more on the opposite side of the road. Their names can just be made out, inscribed on their pedestals: Peace, War, Vigilance and Determination. Local legend has it that these were originally constructed for Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square. This is, unfortunately, almost certainly a myth.

Instructions

From outside the Salt Schools Building walk further up Victoria Road, crossing Saltaire Road at the pedestrian crossing. At the top of Victoria Road there are buildings on each side The large building on the left, was built as an infirmary and dispensary.

13. Salts Hospital

Description

Salt commissioned an infirmary and dispensary at the top of Victoria Road. It opened in 1868 as a two story building and had 12 beds for in-patients. Initially providing treatment for workers from Salts Mill, it rapidly became a source of health provision for all Saltaire residents.

The hospital was extended twice, becoming a three storey building. By 1910 it had enough wards and beds for 27 patients and continued to offer a dispensary for medicines and an outpatients surgery.

Its first consultant surgeon was Mr. Samuel Rhind. It took care of many wounded soldiers during World War One. Among the facilities at the beginning of the twentieth century was dental care.

Salt's philanthropy may have become part of the growing acceptance of the need for universal health care that led to the establishment of the welfare state after world War Two. It is perhaps fitting that the hospital was taken over by the NHS in 1948. It was sold in 1974 and became a private nursing home. It is now private residences.

Instructions

Cross Victoria road to look at the alms-houses opposite.

14. Saltaire Alms-houses

Description

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Salt was determined to ensure a decent quality of life for his workers, even after they left his employ. In addition to the education, health and leisure institutions he built to meet the needs of workers, he also commissioned the alms-houses on Victoria Road.

The houses are situated in a lovely green space called Alexandra Square. The 45 alms-houses were built to provide accommodation for those who couldn't support themselves, such as widows and injured workers. On opening it, Salt is reported to have said: "My sole desire is that you should be happy, and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to know that you are so."

Applications for residence in the Alms-houses were decided by a board of trustees and there were rules for residents to follow. These houses were rent free and residents were given a small pension from the Salt family business.

Today, the majority of the Alms-houses are owned by a housing association, and many continue to be allocated to the elderly and people with disabilities.

Instructions

Walk downhill back to Saltaire Road and cross over at the pedestrian lights to find just to the left of the lights, a Methodist Church.

15. The Saltaire Methodist Church

Description

The Wesleyan Methodist Church that originally stood on this site was built in 1868 on land provided by Salt. The original church was demolished in 1970 due to its deteriorating condition.

The current Methodist Church was built in 1971 and was subsequently modified to be more in keeping with the surrounding village.

Instructions

In order to see the site of the second building to be lost after Sir Titus Salt's model village was completed, carry on up Saltaire Road until you reach the corner of Bingley Road and turn right onto Albert Road. On the left is the prior Albert Road Board School opened in 1878, now called Saltaire Primary School.

Walk downhill almost to the end of Albert road until it meets Caroline Street on the right. Turn onto Caroline street and walk a short way to what is now a garden space,

called 'Wash House Gardens'. This is the site of what was once the Saltaire Bath and Wash Houses.

16. The Bath and Wash Houses

Description

In the nineteenth century most houses didn't have indoor bathrooms. If people wanted to bathe, they had to fill a bath with water heated over the fire and washing was usually hung across the streets to dry.

To avoid both these Salt commissioned the Bath and Wash houses in 1863 at a cost of £7000. These housed 24 baths, 12 each for men and women and a Turkish bath. A warm bath would cost 6d. and a cold one 3d.

As in the rest of the North of England, the Bath and Wash Houses did not prove popular. People preferred to bathe in the privacy of their own homes and wash clothes in their own kitchen where they could also complete other tasks.

The buildings were converted into houses in the late 1800s before being demolished in 1936. Today the site hosts a community garden, being planted following consultation with residents in 2011.

Instructions

This is the end of the tour. Continue along Caroline Street until it meets Victoria Road, turn left and follow the road downwards to the railway station.

Don't forget to note the street names, mostly named for members of Salt's family, and the varying sizes of the houses.