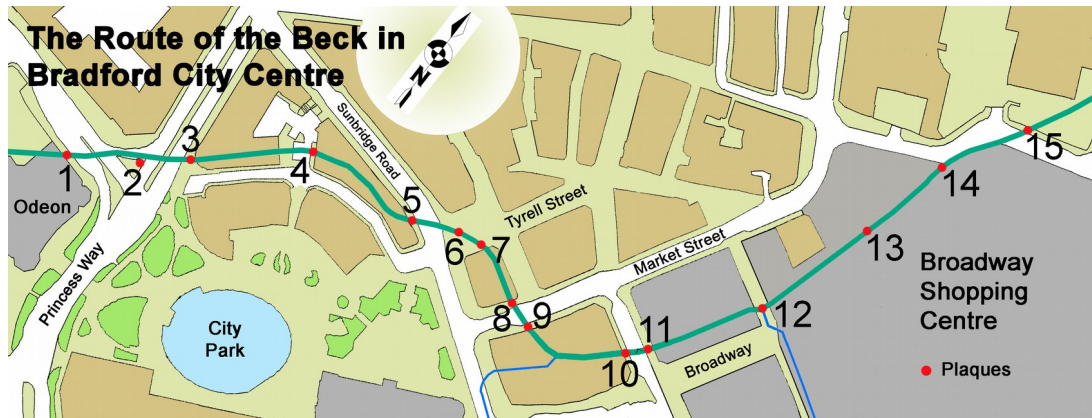


Bradford Beck: Take the Plaques Walk



Bradford Beck

On westerly moors
Rise Chellow, Pinch, Pitty

Energy once harnessed
To power this wool city

Goit and Beck in parallel
Power in, waste out

Spectral Saxon elders
Mourn memory of trout

In pure flow below Sunbridge
Fish once chased

Disregarded water
In gothic vaults encased

Culverted, covered
Forced underground, hidden

Cherished sparkling Beck
Degraded to a midden

Fouled by industry detritus
Sky just a dream

Under our city lies
A misused, abused stream

Awaiting a rebirth
Whispering in the dark

Water sighs, eddies, races
Unseen, unremarked

So small a waterway
For Bradford dale drained

Beck fed the canal basin
Its miasma ill-famed

Skip across the broad ford
Bradford is named

Jane Callaghan

FOBB © 2015

A Brief History of the Beck

The introduction of steam power and the industrial revolution saw Bradford change beyond recognition in the 1800s. As industrialisation became more intense and the city's population swelled the Beck became terribly polluted with raw sewage, offal, refuse, and effluent from mills and workshops. By 1840 it had effectively become a fetid open sewer. Since local people obtained their drinking water from the beck, outbreaks of cholera and typhoid were common. Life expectancy of just over 18 years was one of the lowest in the country.

By the mid-19th century Bradford was the richest city in England but the Beck was known as the 'filthiest river in England'. At a time of few building controls and no town planning landowners had been building into and over the Beck for many years. The Beck gradually disappeared as the city continued to develop. When the Victorian sewer network which

still serves the city was constructed in the 1860s and 1870s the Beck was finally rendered invisible in the city centre.

Our last opportunity to see Bradford Beck before it goes under the city is at the far end of Bristol Street Motors. In dry summers, the beck is a few centimetres deep but after heavy rain, at Pinch Beck further upstream, in 1837 the Bradford Observer reported two valuable working horses, yoked together, being swept away while fording the stream which, “at that time was very high owing to the heavy rain which had fallen during the day.”



Plaque 1 (On the Odeon's wooden surround)

Sponsored by Bradford Live

On westerly moors Rise Chellow, Pinch, Pitty

The area on the opposite side of the road is known as Goitside. It was named after the Goit, which was an artificial channel taken off the Beck further along Thornton Road to power the medieval corn mill. At the time it was built (circa early 16th century) the area was rural, but after industrialisation Goitside was notorious for having the worst slum housing conditions in Bradford. The line of the goit can still be followed behind the first row of buildings.

A plaque on Culture Fusion proudly claims this as being the first steam powered mill – Holme Mill built in 1798, textile mill.

Our first Marking Bradford Beck plaque is on the wooden surround to the site of the Odeon cinema, which stood at the junction of Thornton Road and Princes Way, (previously Brewer Street). Here stood Whittaker's brewery, providing beer for Bradford. Beer is highly calorific and the brewing process kills bacteria so beer was an important source of calories and safe liquid for old and young. A brewery had been there from at least the 18th century, and a congregation of non-conformists used to hold services in one of its rooms until a chapel was built in the 1780s at the bottom of Horton Lane (now Little Horton Lane).

Bradford's Lord Mayor, Alderman Angus Rhodes, opened what was then called the New Victoria Cinema on 22nd September 1930 on the site of the brewery. Designed in an Italian classical style by the Bradford architect William Illingworth, the 3,500 capacity cinema auditorium was reckoned to be the largest in Britain outside London. The opening ceremony naturally included a showing of some of the latest films, notably the British comedy *Rookery Nook* and a Mickey Mouse cartoon entitled *Barnyard Concert*. An important feature of the auditorium was its excellent acoustics – many older cinemas had poor acoustics, but the New Victoria's auditorium had been specifically designed with talking pictures in mind. The building also contained a well-appointed restaurant and a ballroom.

In 1950 the cinema became the Gaumont. Because of its audience capacity, the Gaumont was also used as a concert venue, hosting a range of world-famous performers, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, Beniamino Gigli appeared in 1954, Bill Haley and the Comets in 1957 and Buddy Holly in 1958, to be followed by such acts as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Everly Brothers in the early 1960s.

In 1969 the cinema changed its name again and became the Odeon. Instead of one large auditorium, the available space was now split, so that several films could be shown at the same time.

The Odeon closed as a cinema in 2000 and efforts to restore it as a live music and conference venue are slowing down the rate of decay.



Plaque 2 (A traffic island at the end of Thornton Road) Sponsored by Safe Style

**Energy once harnessed
To power this wool city**

This plaque is close to the scene of a serious riot which took place on 13th April 1891. This was the climax of the bitter Manningham Mills strike, which had been going on since December 1890. There had been a downturn in the textile export trade and the management at Manningham Mills sought to deal with this by reducing the employees' wages. Negotiations between workers and management quickly broke down and a strike ensued. Before long several thousand workers were involved. The winter was particularly harsh that year and many families suffered severe hardship.

There was a good deal of support for the strikers, but the city fathers, and the local Watch Committee in particular, tended to side with the employers, even to the point of banning strikers' meetings in halls and squares. Suppression led to more rallies and a demonstration in support of the strikers was called for the 13th April. It attracted many hundreds of people to the centre of Bradford and the Mayor read the Riot Act. Troops of the Durham Light Infantry with fixed bayonets dispersed the crowds. Although many people (and some police horses) were injured, nobody was killed in the several hours of rioting. The strike itself ended later that month and the striking workers had to return to work on greatly reduced wages.

One important outcome of the strike was the creation in Bradford, two years later, of the Independent Labour Party, a forerunner of the modern Labour Party.



Plaque 3 (Bottom of Godwin St, by the sculpture) Sponsored by Anchor Housing

**Goit and Beck in parallel
Power in, waste out**

In this area there were corn mills from at least medieval times. There were two channels taken off the goit and one came down Godwin Street. It may have powered a wheel or it may have been an over-flow. You are stood where it met the Beck.

Close by, is City Park which was officially opened on 24th March 2012. This is a six-acre public space right in the heart of the city and next to City Hall, which it complements very effectively. City Park contains the largest man-made water feature in any UK city, comprising a 4,000 square metre mirror pool with laser lighting and 100 fountains, the

tallest of which can produce a jet thirty metres high, making it the highest fountain in Britain.

City Park was originally conceived in 2003 and despite the failure to secure funding from the National Lottery work commenced in 2009. Its construction was not without controversy, as some critics said that the cost of £24.4 million far outweighed any benefits which might be gained. Bradford Council, however, estimated that City Park could generate £80 million per annum for the city's economy. Many events which make best use of the park have been arranged since it was opened, one of the most impressive being the BBC Television Bollywood-style spectacular production of *Carmen* which was staged in City Park on 9th June 2013. This created a very positive reaction throughout the country, not just to City Park but to Bradford as a whole.



Plaque 4 (Millergate, off Aldermanbury)

Sponsored by British Land

Spectral Saxon elders Mourn memory of trout

The Beck here is 6m wide and you are on Millergate, which as the name suggests, is the site of several corn mills. The earliest record we have of a corn mill is 1295 and it seems to be near Centenary Square. A map from Charles 1st's time (1612 – 1649) shows a mill near this plaque, given power by the second race taken off the Goit. The exact location is a matter for conjecture but the street names Millergate and Upper Millergate give us a general idea of the mill's whereabouts.

This later mill was a feudal 'soke' mill which meant that the lord of the manor had the right to demand that his tenants pay to have their corn ground at this mill. Records show fines for people who chose to grind their corn elsewhere.

It was bought (along with the soccage rights, long fallen into disuse) by Bradford Corporation in 1871 and levelled to make way for Sunbridge Road.

A few metres away is 'Sunbridge Wells', which is worth a look round. It was developed from a deep quarry, and you can see bed-rock at the tunnel's far end. The tunnel was used as an air raid shelter in the second World War.



Plaque 5 (Bottom of Sunbridge Road)

Sponsored by Yorkshire Water

In pure flow below Sunbridge Fish once chased

This plaque is close to Centenary Square. On 22nd March 1997 Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh visited Bradford to commemorate the centenary of Bradford being granted the status of a city. The Queen also laid a wreath on the Bradford City fire disaster memorial which stands in Centenary Square.

Bradford was elevated to city status by Queen Victoria in 1897. This meant, for example, that Bradford's leading citizen would be the Lord Mayor, rather than merely the Mayor. Bradford's new city status marked remarkable progress. Throughout the nineteenth century Bradford had grown at a phenomenal rate – faster possibly than any other place in Britain. In 1801 it had been little more than an obscure market town, with a population of about 6,000 people. By 1851 it had a population of 104,000 and had been for much of the intervening years a chaotic and unregulated place. By the last decades of the nineteenth century it had developed into a modern city of almost 300,000 people and it had become the international centre of the wool trade. In 1910, in terms of GDP, it was estimated to be one of the wealthiest cities in Europe.



City Hall Centenary Square City Park from Plaque 6



Plaque 6 (Tyrell St, by the seats)

Dedicated to the 56

**Disregarded water
In gothic vaults encased**

From here there is an excellent view of City Hall. Formerly called the Town Hall, it was opened on 9th September 1873 when Bradford's reputation as the world centre of the wool trade was at its height. Designed by Lockwood and Mawson, the design of the magnificent main structure was supposedly influenced by Amiens Cathedral, although the clock tower is a copy of the campanile of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Around the façade of the building are statues of English monarchs and to mark Bradford's support for Parliament during the Civil War, Oliver Cromwell is included in the line-up.

When the statue of Cromwell was due to be hauled into place, the gang of Irish workmen charged with the task was rumoured to be planning to drop it 'accidentally on purpose' so that it would be smashed to pieces. Cromwell was (and still is) loathed in Ireland because of atrocities such as the massacre at Drogheda. The rumour came to the attention of Bradford Corporation and the Irish were given a day's holiday and replaced by English labourers for the day.



Plaque 7 (Tyrell St, near the corner with Ivegate) Sponsored by the Cinderella Club

**Culverted, covered
Forced underground, hidden**

Stood here in 1800, you would have been on a bridge, perhaps looking down at Bradford Beck.

This plaque is near Ivegata, which is one Bradford's oldest streets. It rises sharply to join two more of Bradford's oldest streets, Westgate and Kirkgate. The ending of these street names has nothing to do with gates: it is a version of the Danish word *gata*, which simply means "street." The Yorkshire dialect was strongly influenced by Danish, because, prior to the Norman Conquest, this part of England was inhabited by Scandinavian settlers, who had their capital at Jorvik, now called York.

Originally Bradford's market was held where the three streets meet although later the market was moved to Rawson Square. Bradford's dungeon was located at the top of Ivegata, and if you visit Sunbridge Wells, you can find some preserved cells. This was where John Nelson was imprisoned for a time in 1744. Nelson was an early Methodist who fell foul of the Church of England because he insisted on preaching, even though the Church had forbidden it.

The red brick bank opposite in on the site of a building which was Sir Thomas Fairfax's headquarters prior to the Battle of Adwalton Moor in 1643. Bradford was firmly on the side of Parliament during the English Civil War, and Fairfax was one of the most able commanders of the Parliamentarian forces. However, he and his father, Lord Fairfax, were narrowly defeated at Adwalton Moor, and after a short siege Bradford was occupied by Royalist forces, led by the Earl of Newcastle. Although the townspeople fully expected to be massacred, Newcastle unexpectedly showed them mercy supposedly because he was visited by a ghostly female who pleaded that he should "Pity poor Bradford."



Plaque 8 (Market Street, by the Himalaya Store)

Sponsored by Rimmington's

**Cherished sparkling Beck
Degraded to a midden**

This plaque is located in Market Street. A map published in 1854 shows that Market Street, originally known as New Street, was already a major thoroughfare in the heart of Bradford. It ran from Sun Bridge, which stood at the bottom of Ivegata, to join Kirkgate near to the former Midland Station (now Forster Square Station). By 1876 the street had been extended right up to the newly-built Town Hall and by 1887 its other end terminated in the newly-designated Forster Square. A statue of Titus Salt, the great philanthropist and founder of Saltaire, stood where Market Street came close to the Town Hall.

Also at that end of the street was the magnificent Mechanics Institute building, opened in 1871 but sadly demolished in the mid twentieth century. The original Mechanics Institute was founded in 1832, and was the forerunner of Bradford College (formerly Bradford Technical College) and the University of Bradford, which received its charter in 1966.



Plaque 9 (Market Street, by the bus stop and Bank pub)

This plaque is dedicated to the memory of Jackie Emmott

Fouled by industry detritus Sky just a dream

The Bank pub was formerly the Tarapaca Bank, formed to enable trade between Bradford and Chile. The trade was in the fleece of the alpaca, which produced a soft and long fibre and was used in the finest suit cloth and cyclists' shorts!

This plaque is also opposite what was once Bradford's most prestigious department store, Brown Muff, the 'Harrods of the North.' Brown Muff could trace its history back to 1814, when a widow, Elizabeth Brown, opened a clothes shop on Market Street. Later, the shop was taken over by Elizabeth's son, Henry, who soon went into partnership with his brother-in-law, Thomas Muff.

The original shop was replaced in 1870 by the present building, and over the ensuing decades Brown Muff became an up-market department store, attracting well-heeled customers from far beyond Bradford. By 1900 the store was owned solely by the Muff family, who lived in Ilkley. In 1909 the family changed its name to Maufe, thus provoking the following somewhat sardonic rhyme:



'In Bradford 'tis good enough
To be known as Mrs Muff,
But in Ilkley by the River Wharfe
It's better to be known as Mrs Maufe.'

Brown Muff finally went out of business and was taken over by Rackham's in February 1978. This too closed in 1995 and now the building is divided into smaller retail outlets. There are still people in Bradford, however, who can remember well heeled customers arriving in chauffeur-driven cars, to be met by liveried staff who made sure they never had to open a door for themselves.

Heavy rain fell in 1947 and water levels in Bradford Beck rose. Pressure built up in the culverts and the Market Street became distorted, some of the wooden cobbles that made up the road surface exploding into the air and falling nearby. Nearby schools closed for the safety of the children, many of whom made their way into the city to enjoy gawping at the flood damage.



Plaque 10 (Bank Street)

Sponsored by Grattan

Under our city lies A misused, abused stream

This plaque is on Bank Street, which, as its name suggests, was the location of several banks which served Bradford's commercial needs. From here you can see the brown-tinted glass front to the printing annex of Bradford's newspaper *The Telegraph and Argus*. Founded on 16th July 1868 as the *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, the newspaper became the *Telegraph and Argus* in 1947.



Plaque 11 (Bank Street, across t'road from Pq 10) Sponsored by Feature Radiators

**Awaiting a rebirth
Whispering in the dark**

Close to this plaque, on the corner of Market Street and Bank Street, is the former Wool Exchange. On 9th August 1864 Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister at the time, laid the foundation stone of the building, which was designed by Lockwood and Mawson. By now the Corporation and Bradford's leading businessmen (usually, of course, the same people) were so imbued with municipal self-confidence that they organised a celebratory event which was verging on the outrageous in its pomp and circumstance. Church bells were rung, flags were flown, and there was a nineteen-gun salute in Peel Park.

From here, approximately 100 carriages, attended by two military bands, drove in procession to the site of the Exchange on Market Street. In the evening Palmerston was the guest of the Corporation at a grand dinner held in St George's Hall, where the Bradford Choral Society greeted him with a rendition of 'See the Conquering Hero Comes.'

The only fly in the ointment, apparently, was a demonstration by a large number of working men in the streets of the town who steadfastly refused to cheer the distinguished visitor. Their silent protest was because of Palmerston's stubborn refusal to countenance an extension of the franchise.

The Wool Exchange was the hub of Bradford's textile trade until the 1960s, by which time the city's world-renowned position as 'Worstedopolis' had all but ended. Nowadays the Wool Exchange building provides an excellent location for a branch of Waterstones bookshop.

Beneath your feet, the Beck flows through vaulted, gothic arches which are elegant in their symmetry and curve, but hidden from most of us.



Plaque 12 (Outside Zizi's)

Sponsored by The Broadway

**Water sighs, eddies, races
Unseen, unremarked**

Close to this plaque stood one of the handsomest of Bradford's Victorian buildings, Swan Arcade, which closed its doors for the last time on 3rd March 1962. The next day demolition commenced. Swan Arcade was opened in 1879 on the site of the old White Swan Inn. The arcade housed up-market retailers, such as a cigar shop and high-class tailors. Its office space was mainly occupied by firms of wool brokers and the like. The writer J B Priestley was employed by one of these for a time after he left school and although he found the work rather dull he admired Swan Arcade itself. When it became clear that the building was under threat of demolition Priestley campaigned vigorously to save it, but to no avail. In fact many Bradford citizens felt that Priestley had abandoned his native city years before and so his opinion did not really count for much.

Besides, Stanley Wardley, the city engineer, had devised an ambitious modernisation scheme. This involved tearing down many of the Victorian buildings in the city centre and replacing them with edifices which were supposedly more in keeping with the modern age.

Thus it was that on 10th December 1963 Yorkshire and England fast bowler Fred Trueman ceremonially topped out Arndale House, a vastly inferior and aesthetically quite repulsive replacement for Swan Arcade. Let's remember Trueman for his cricket.



Plaque 13 (By the Broadway Market St entrance info plynth)

The Broadway

**So small a waterway
For Bradford dale drained**

This plaque is within the Broadway Shopping Centre which occupies the site of the former Forster Square, once one of Bradford's major landmarks. The square was named after William Edward Forster (1818-1886) a nineteenth-century Liberal MP for Bradford. On 17th February 1870, Forster presented his Elementary Education Bill to Parliament, thus laying the foundations of compulsory education in England. The proposed legislation was not without controversy, particularly regarding the provision of religious education in schools, but the bill was enacted and became law.

The rationale behind compulsory schooling was never purely educational. By 1870 legislation had forbidden the employment of very young children in factories. This meant that whilst the adults in a family might still be working long hours, their children could well be totally unsupervised and therefore at risk. There were reports of gangs of children wandering the streets of towns and cities, breaking the law and causing annoyance to people. Confining children every day in schools, where they would not be a nuisance to the public and where they could be instructed in the rudiments of civilised behaviour (and some basic literacy) was therefore an appealing notion for many. A statue of Forster now stands outside the Broadway Shopping Centre in a much reduced version of Forster Square.

Forster was the first of several Bradford educational pioneers. He was followed by Margaret McMillan (1860 -1931). A Christian socialist, she came to Bradford in 1893 at the invitation of the Independent Labour Party and became a key figure on the Bradford School Board. Horrified by the conditions in which many of the children of Bradford's poor were living, she was instrumental in promoting a range of far-reaching reforms, notably a school meals service, a school medical inspection service, school baths, better facilities for handicapped children and the beginnings of a free nursery education system – all of which were successfully pioneered in Bradford.

Beneath here was the broad ford after which Bradford is named. Later, a wide bridge was placed here and now the river is encased in concrete, and tumbles noisily down a three-stepped weir. Except you can't hear it.

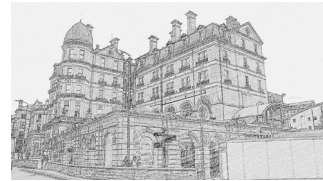


Plaque 14 (Outside River Island)

Sponsored by The Broadway

Beck fed the canal basin Its miasma ill-famed

This plaque is close to the flourishing Midland Hotel. On 13th October 1905 England's most famous actor of the time, Sir Henry Irving, collapsed and died in the foyer of the Midland Hotel, where he was staying. He had been appearing in the title role of *Beckett* at the Theatre Royal in Manningham Lane, just a few hundred yards from the hotel.



During the performance Irving was clearly unwell, even to members of the audience. His last line, perhaps appropriately, was 'Into thy hands....' uttered just before the curtain fell on the final act of the play. His business associate, Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, managed to get Irving to the hotel and was with him when he died. A battered suitcase, with Stoker's name on it, stands as an exhibit in one of the corridors of the hotel. A plaque commemorating Irving's death is at the hotel's main entrance, and facsimiles of press cuttings about Irving are also on display.

Beneath your feet a channel was cut to take water from the beck to feed the highest point of the Bradford Canal. This re-direction of the Beck had never been agreed upon and in 1865 an injunction forced it to be closed and filled in. A supply of water was always an issue and water had to be pumped up from the bottom of the canal at Dockfield Road in Shipley, at great expense.



Plaque 15 (Cross the road and take a few paces towards the cathedral)

Skip across the broad ford Bradford is named

Standing here in 1920, you would have been amidst a vast area of docks and warehouses. This plaque is close to what was once the terminal basin of the Bradford Canal. The canal was three miles long with ten locks. It was opened in 1774 and linked the centre of Bradford to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, and thus to a waterway system which provided low-cost access to the burgeoning industrial regions of Yorkshire, Lancashire and beyond, including the ports of Hull and Liverpool. This was a key event in Bradford's history. From then on the town's manufacturers had a facility which would enable them to trade coal, stone and iron with many parts of England and worsted cloth with the world. The Bradford Canal finally closed in 1922 and was filled in.

Also nearby is Bradford Cathedral. Records show that in 1281 there was certainly a church on the present site of the cathedral, and it is likely that there was an earlier place of worship which may have been destroyed soon after the Norman Conquest. By the fourteenth century a stone church had been built, possibly to replace one burned down by marauding Scots who, after their victory at Bannockburn in 1314, frequently raided the north of England with impunity.

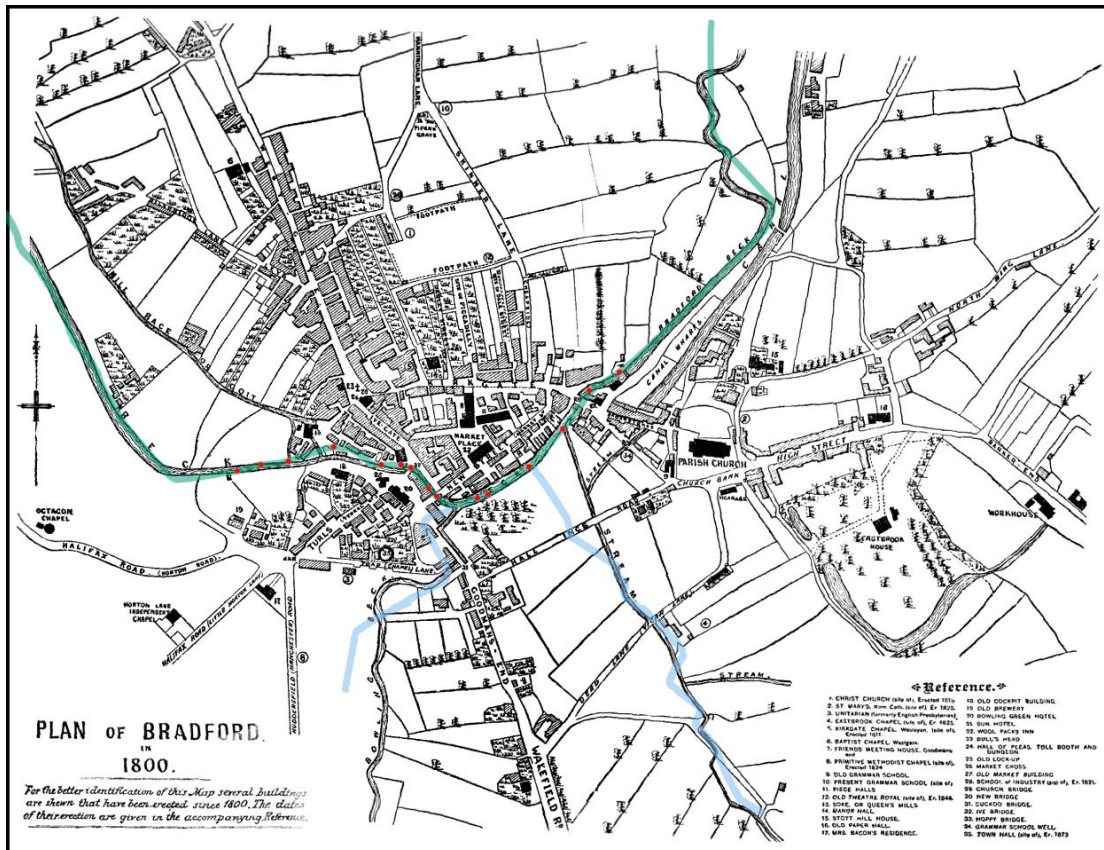
After the Reformation Bradford had a series of Puritan vicars and the town developed a strong tradition of religious dissent which flourished up to the nineteenth century and

beyond. During the Civil War Bradford firmly supported the Parliamentary cause, and the Parish Church was used as a defensive strong point when the Royalists besieged Bradford in 1642 and 1643. Wool sacks were hung around the bell tower to protect it from ordnance. The Parish Church became Bradford Cathedral in 1919.



Bradford Beck emerges to daylight in a car park adjacent to Aldi in the Valley retail area.

The Friends of Bradford's Becks hope you have enjoyed your historical tour of Bradford and that you will tell your friends about our work to bring this neglected river back into the public eye.



Visit www.markingbradfordbeck.org for more information.



The Friends of Bradford's Becks wishes to thank Bradford Civic Society, Rose Reeve and Wendy Robinson for compiling the information herein and making it readable.