

Along the Line

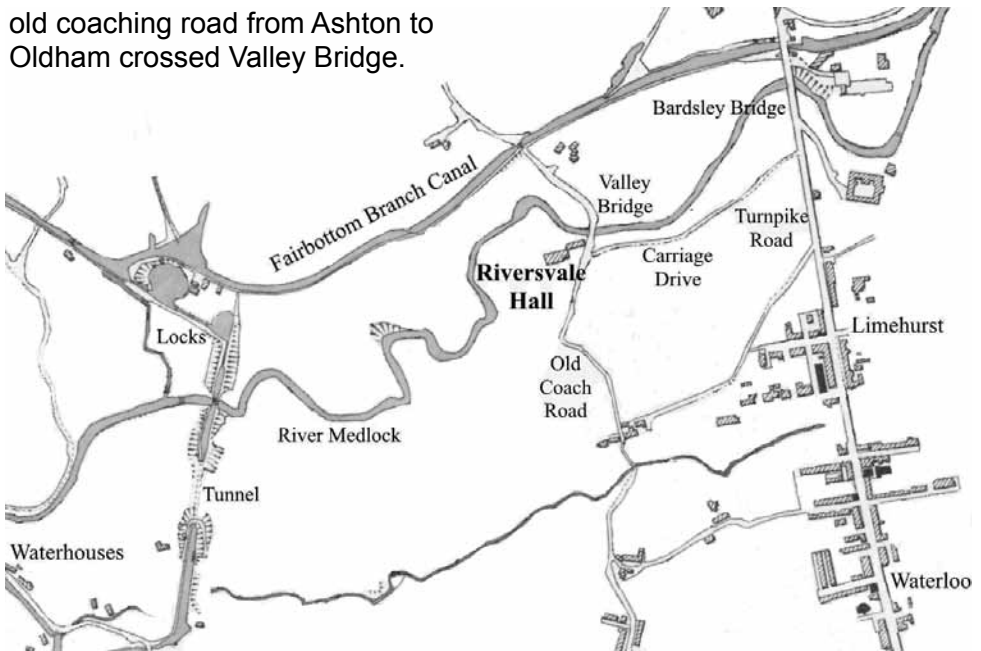
Riversvale Hall

For around a century anyone walking along the towpath of the Fairbottom Branch near Valley Aqueeduct would have had a good view, before the growth of the present-day trees, down onto a Gothic mansion called Riversvale Hall, with its extensive grounds including gardens and an arboretum.

Although it was only a short distance from the canal it stood on the opposite bank of the River Medlock. It was close to where the old coaching road from Ashton to Oldham crossed Valley Bridge.

A series featuring points of interest along the line of the canal, past or present.

The old road became a backwater after the opening in 1799 of the more direct turnpike road (now the A627) between Ashton and Oldham. So, when Riversvale Hall was built, a carriage drive was constructed, running along the steep hillside, linking the hall with the turnpike road at Bardsley Bridge.



The Carriage Drive that led to Riversvale Hall still exists and is a popular walking route.



Riversvale Hall was built around 1843 by Legh Richmond, who was the steward and agent for the Earl of Stamford and Warrington, the major land owner around Ashton.

Mr Richmond was one of a group of people who had been working to set up an infirmary or hospital in Ashton. The Earl of Stamford and Warrington subsequently made a gift of the land off Darnton Road which is now the site of Tameside Hospital.

The newly-married Richmonds did not stay long at Riversvale, however, for by 1847 it was being lived in by William Shaw, owner of nearby Bardsley Brewery.

In the hard winter of 1854-55 nearby

Crime Lake was completely frozen over and became a popular spot for skating. The Shaw family, who were living at Riversvale Hall at the time, are said to have taken their horse and carriage onto the ice, driving round the lake a number of times.

In 1868 Riversvale was bought by Charles Suthers, who owned the Oxford cotton spinning mill in Oldham and was the part owner of Bridge Pit colliery, near Bardsley Bridge.

Suthers had several extensions built to the house and expanded the gardens, importing exotic plants from around the empire.

The 1881 census shows Joseph Donakin living at Riversvale with

his wife and nephew. He was an overlooker at a cotton mill, so unlikely to have occupied what was by now such a grand house so he may have been living in the adjacent Lodge. It is possible that the Hall itself was unoccupied at this time as it was sold to its next owners the following year.

The final and most illustrious residents of Riversvale Hall were the Bradbury family. Charles Timothy Bradbury was an interesting and busy man and was one of the promoters of the Manchester Ship Canal.

Charles had been born in Delph in 1827. He and his brothers William and Frederic grew up partly at Ryecroft Hall in Audenshaw - a house of a similar vintage and style to Riversvale. They were under the guardianship of their uncle whilst their parents were in America, where they had business interests.



Charles T Bradbury.

Photo: Spencer Research Library

Charles worked in the cotton industry and became managing director of J H Gartside and Co, running Wellington Mill in Ashton and later Buckton Vale Calico Printworks in Carrbrook.

Before moving to Riversvale he had lived in Dukinfield where he had helped to establish the first School Board. He was a Justice of the Peace and the first chairman of Waterloo parish council. He was also involved in Albion Chapel and School in Ashton.

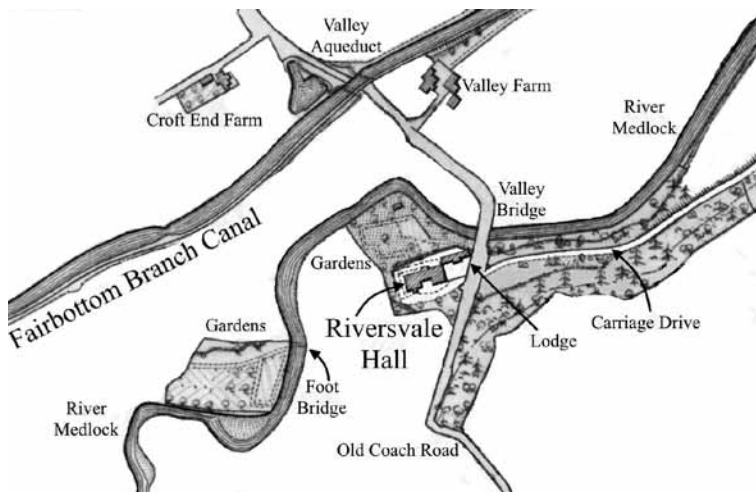
In 1853, Charles married Elizabeth Tomlins. Their daughter Kate was born in 1854, followed in the next few years by daughter Emma and son Harold. His wife Elizabeth died in 1863.

Charles then married Elizabeth's sister, Mary Jemima, in 1865, shortly after her own husband died. The three children grew up with their aunt also being their step-mother! Unfortunately the younger daughter, Emma, died in 1879.

By the time Charles Bradbury moved to Riversvale in 1882 with Mary and the two remaining grown-up children, he was wealthy enough to be able to employ a staff that included a cook, maids, general servants, gardeners, a coachman and a groom. Wealth did not stave off tragedy, however, as his son Harold died two years later.

Kate Bradbury thrived, though, and was to become the most

Riversvale in 1848. The gardens shown on the opposite bank of the river, connected by a footbridge, may have been destroyed by floods in 1857, as they do not appear on later maps.



famous occupant of Riversvale, becoming something of an expert on Egyptology. She collected ancient Egyptian artefacts, studied hieroglyphics and accompanied her friend, Amelia Edwards, on lecture tours. When Amelia became ill, Kate stood in for her and delivered the lectures herself.

In 1896, at the age of 42, Kate married Francis Llewellyn Griffith, a lecturer on ancient Egyptian language and writing, and they lived at Riversvale along with her father, Charles, and his second wife, Mary, who sadly passed away in 1898.

In 1901, after just five years of married life, Kate was taken ill and underwent an unsuccessful operation. She and Francis went to live at Silverdale, overlooking Morecambe Bay, in an attempt to aid her recovery but she died in 1902 at the age of 48. Her husband Francis returned to Riversvale where he continued to live with

Charles in between visits to Oxford.

Kate had been sufficiently well-known to merit a page about her on Wikipedia (<http://bit.ly/katebradbury>). In 1982 actress Celia Bannerman played Kate in a television documentary about the development of Egyptology.

There were a number of links between the Manchester area and Egypt, in part because Egypt had



Kate Bradbury.

Photo: Spencer Research Library



Riversvale Lodge and Valley Bridge, where the old road crossed the River Medlock, with the hall in the background behind the lodge. Photo: Tameside Local Studies

been one of the main sources of the cotton that had brought prosperity to the region. As a result, a number of wealthy industrialists became collectors of Egyptian artefacts, which may have inspired Kate's interest in the subject.

Charles Bradbury had outlived two wives and his three children and, when he died in 1907, he left most of his estate to his son-in-law Francis.

Francis had no wish to live alone in an isolated, gaunt and ageing house that was lacking modern amenities and he returned to Oxford. He was able to put the money from Charles' estate to good use, creating an endowment for the study of Egyptology at Oxford.

Kate had been buried at Silverdale where she had died. Charles was buried alongside his first wife Elizabeth and younger children Emma and Harold at Old Chapel in Dukinfield.

Riversvale Hall stood empty for around 40 years and fell into disrepair. In 1939 the Lodge (known as Riversvale Cottage) was being lived in by lorry driver

Lrft: Riversvale Hall.

Photo: Garry Jones





Riversvale Hall. Photo: Garry Jones

William Brunt, his wife May and children Gordon and Ida.

Crime Lake froze over once again in 1947 but there was to be no repeat of the carriage driving escapade of 1855 as no-one was living at the Hall by this time.

The Hall then seems to have been acquired by a film company with the intention of using it as a film location. However, this plan was never followed through, as the main part of the building was destroyed by a fire in 1948, possibly due to an electrical fault with their equipment.

The site became a magnet for children, who played amongst the ruins. A friend recalls how she and friends were playing there when they saw an elderly gentleman amongst the trees. He walked up to

them and started talking about the Hall and the beautiful gardens that had surrounded it. He said that he had been the gardener there and was sad to see it in the state it was now in.

The children were fascinated by what he had to say but eventually said goodbye and set off home. After only a few steps my friend turned to look back and to her astonishment the man had disappeared.

The ruins were demolished when the extensive grounds became part of Daisy Nook Country Park in 1976.

Martin Clark

More information can be found in the booklet 'Riversvale Hall' by Richard Unwin (2007).