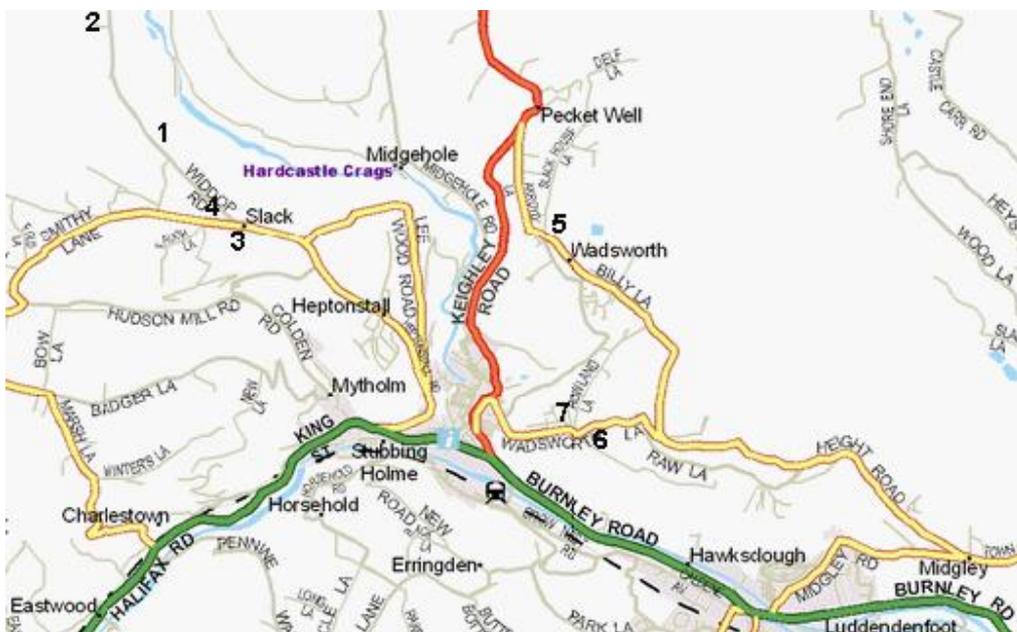


# Hebden Bridge Baptist Heritage Trail

This Trail covers three periods of Baptist expansion in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries:

1. The work of the Rossendale Confederacy of Particular Baptists (those believing in a "particular" redemption of the "elect" known as Calvinists) led by Mitchell and Crossley (Greenwood Lee and Robertshaw Farm).
2. The ministry of John Fawcett at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who was also a Particular Baptist (Wainsgate, Ebenezer, Machpelah and Hope).
3. The movement of General Baptists (those believing in a "general" redemption, open to all, known as Arminians) led by Dan Taylor (Higher Needless, Birchcliffe, Slack and Blake Dean).



Drive through Hebden Bridge on the A464, towards Todmorden. At the turning circle on the left, turn back and then fork left up the hill for Heptonstall. Continue on the main road for Blackshaw Head and Widdop, avoiding the village. At Slack Bottom, veer right, taking the right fork for Widdop, past the chapel and continuing a mile or so to the National Trust car park on the right. Walk back on the road to Greenwood Lee (1). Then, continue a couple of miles to Blake Dean (2) to view the unusual former Baptist Chapel. Return to Slack Bottom, parking to view Robertshaw Farm (3) opposite the small garden centre and Slack Chapel (4).

Return into Hebden Bridge via the turning circle and take the A6033 Keighley Road. At the entry to Peckett Well, take the sharp right turn, proceeding along the ridge, but not turning up Wainsgate (a private road). At the houses, either turn in sharp left on the track to park on the verge in front of the graveyard, with Wainsgate Chapel (5) ahead, or turn right and park on Old Town Mill Lane and walk back to the chapel.

Leaving Wainsgate, continue on the ridge road through Old Town. After about 3 miles, past the Golf Club and the Mount Skip B&B, take the sharp right down the hill. Proceed with care, noting Higher Needless (6) on the left. Continue down Wadsworth Lane until reaching Birchcliffe (7) on the right. Drop down back into Hebden Bridge.

Leaving the car in a safe parking place, start on foot in the centre of Hebden Bridge at the junction of New Road and Bridge Gate. Walk along West End, crossing Hebden Water and into Market Street. The former Ebenezer Chapel (8) is on the right. Retrace your steps, turning left along Old Gate to the riverside walk. Continue to the old pack horse bridge. Cross the bridge and turn left, past the White Swan pub, before walking round the square into Commercial Street. Proceed along here, passing the long flight of 106 steps which ends the descent via various streets from the Birchcliffe hillside.

At the end of Commercial Street, on the left, is Machpelah (9), John Fawcett's house. Turn right at the main road, crossing Albert Street and Hope Street. Hope Chapel (10) is ahead. The main entrance is on New Road, with a rear entrance on Cheetham Street.

### Greenwood Lee

A preaching station used by William Mitchell and David Crossley, who were Heptonstall cousins. William Mitchell, described as the Father of Baptist causes in this part of the North of England, was born in Heptonstall in 1663. In 1684, he began an itinerant preaching ministry



and, as a Dissenter, he was twice arrested and imprisoned in York Castle. In 1686, he was committed from Wakefield Sessions for 'ryott and unlawful assembly'. Mitchell was joined by his cousin David Crossley - also born in Heptonstall in 1669 and reported to be the largest man in Yorkshire. He had embraced Baptist views and Mitchell also became a Baptist. They set up preaching stations in houses across West Yorkshire and East Lancashire. Some 20 groups, which came together in the Rossendale Confederacy, became Baptist. Mitchell remained in the North, but Crossley was a rolling stone and a somewhat wayward character. His adventures took him to the Midlands and London before returning north. Mitchell died in 1705 and Crossley in 1744.

### Robertshaw Farm

Greater toleration led to the licensing of Mitchell and Crossley's buildings for worship. Two were at Rodhill End in 1703 (off the road to Todmorden) and in 1711 at Stone Slack, where Robertshaw Farm is the original site. Here, in premises dating from at least 1617, Thomas Greenwood of Slater



Ings purchased a barn in 1711 and converted it into a meeting place for the Rodhill End/Stone Slack congregation. At first, they were part of the Church of Christ in Rossendale, but in 1717 became independent, worshipping alternatively at both places. This is the first Baptist church in the Calder Valley, witnessing until 1783. Its members came from a wide area and were very influential locally and further afield. It provided the first minister for the new causes at Salendine Nook in Huddersfield, which led to founding many others.

### Slack Chapel

A General Baptist Church founded in 1807 by 40 members of Birchcliffe. Until the chapel was completed, the congregation met for a year in the disused Stone Slack building. In the mid 19th century, it had over 500 members and founded several rural causes, including Blake Dean. It



closed in 1973 and its purchase by a Baptist minister prevented it becoming a centre for witchcraft. It is now used by an independent congregation and the graveyard is administered by the Yorkshire Baptist Association. This graveyard is situated almost opposite Robertshaw Farm, and contains hundreds of graves, stretching down the hill-side.

### Blake Dean

At the head of Hardcastle Crag is Blake Dean, which was founded by Slack and was in use from 1820-1959. Its construction on a hillside by a couple of hairpin bends gave rise to a local phrase 'downstairs to the gallery and upstairs to the bottom'.



Although the chapel was demolished in 1971, the remaining building has been used by the Scouts for some time.

### Wainsgate

A Particular Baptist Church founded in 1750 by converts of Rev William Grimshaw. The first minister, Richard Smith, came from Barnoldswick. On his death, he was succeeded in 1764 by the young John Fawcett, who had been baptised by William Crabtree, minister of Westgate Baptist Church



in Bradford and who had himself been a member at Wainsgate. John Fawcett wrote the hymn 'Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love' in 1772. The need for larger premises and better facilities for his school led to his move into Hebden Bridge in 1777. The present building dates from 1859 and it was lavishly furnished at the end of the 19th century. The church closed in 2001 and the premises are in the care of the Historic Chapels Trust. John Fawcett is buried in the graveyard.

### Higher Needless

An independent group were worshipping here when Dan Taylor, a young man born in Halifax, joined in 1762 and became the leader. He had become convinced about the Baptist position, but local ministers would not baptise him because of differing views about salvation. He found a group in



Nottinghamshire willing to baptise him and returned to baptise his congregation, which formed the Baptist church. A plaque on the wall records this fact. The first meeting place of the Independent congregation at Wadsworth was under a tree known as 'The Nook'. As winter drew on, a house on Wadsworth Lane - 'Higher Needless' - was taken in 1763. Then, requiring better premises, the congregation purchased a piece of land along Sandy Gate and built the first Birchcliffe Chapel in 1764.

### Birchcliffe

A General Baptist Church where much of the building work for the original 13 yds x 10 yds chapel was carried out by Dan Taylor. He was minister in 1783 and became a national figure, especially after moving to London, where he died in 1816. Later chapels were built in 1825 and 1898 and the present magnificent



building seated 1,000 people. In 1934, a new Sunday School was built using stone from the original chapel. In the first part of the 20th century, the church was well-known for its musical tradition, the involvement of its members in the civic life of the area and for thriving social and cultural organisation. The church closed in 1974 and the premises were bought by the Joseph Rowntree Trust. Springs on the Birchcliffe hillside supply water to houses in parts of the town. A small part of the gathering area for the water is the burial ground of the chapel – hence the comment; 'Good stuff this Birchcliffe water. Plenty of body in it'. The water was the cause of many local disputes.

### Ebenezer

The chapel was built in 1777 for John Fawcett on the main turnpike road from Yorkshire to Lancashire when he moved from Wainsgate. The space in front used to be the graveyard. This has shrunk with each widening of the road, but all the gravestones are still under the grass.



John Fawcett's daughter's grave is on the right, near the door. Near this, upright against the wall, is a stone that mentions John Foster the essayist, who had been a pupil at Fawcett's school. Wording on the stones reflects the Calvinist beliefs of the Particular Baptists. One gravestone is of a Henry Riley murdered in 1818 'because he became poor'. The building served as a chapel until 1858 and has subsequently been the home of the Hebden Bridge Times, an arts centre and antiques shop.

### Machpelah

John Fawcett ran a school at Brearley Hall and Ewood Hall, where he also lived, before purchasing land near the canal, naming it Machpelah and arranging for four houses to be built. He moved into his house 1805, leaving running the school to his son. It is likely that John Fawcett lived at No 16, where



he spent his retirement years. The biography written by his son states: *"The proximity of his habitation to the public road afforded his friends, who were travelling, an opportunity of calling upon him; and he was here in the centre of his church and congregation, who were now enabled to benefit, not only by his preaching, but by frequent opportunities of social intercourse, which his prior engagements, and the distance of the situation, had often precluded."* Fawcett named the house after the cave mentioned in Genesis chapter 23, which Abraham bought as a burial ground. He had a vault built at the rear as a private burial place for his wife, who died in 1810. It was at the request of Rev Fawcett that, when he died, her body was to be reburied at Wainsgate.

## Hope Chapel

The need to replace Ebenezer Chapel with a larger building led the congregation to move a few hundred yards to the West and build Hope Chapel, which was opened on 16th June 1858 at a cost of £3,750. In 1879, further seats were added to accommodate the growing



congregation. A separate Sunday School building was opened in 1873 across the road on Cheetham Street. This was sold in 1961 to the West Riding County Council for a library. Inside the chapel is a memorial to John Fawcett and the church has numerous reminders of this heritage, including a members roll book, in which the first entry is John Fawcett himself. The church continues to meet for worship and to serve the local community.

For online information about the trail and about the life and work of Hope Baptist Church:

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Other useful contacts:

Yorkshire Baptist Association

[www.yba.org.uk](http://www.yba.org.uk)

0113 278 4954

Hebden Bridge Tourist Information Centre

[www.hebdenbridge.co.uk/tourist-info/](http://www.hebdenbridge.co.uk/tourist-info/)

01422 843 831

Hebden Bridge Local History Society

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