

Lymm Station & the Warrington - Altrincham Railway

Introduction

You are currently on a section of the Trans Pennine Trail which follows part of the route of the former Warrington to Altrincham Railway. The TPT runs along the old trackbed for 7¼ miles from Latchford Locks on the eastern side of Warrington to Oldfield Brow on the western outskirts of Altrincham. The full route of this branch line ran for 11½ miles from Warrington (Bank Quay) to Altrincham (Broadheath).

The point you are standing at is roughly halfway along the line. east of here the route runs mainly through cuttings, but to the east some clear views can be had as it crosses the flood plains of the Mersey and the Bollin. The area comprising the Ranger Centre and car park is the site of the former Lymm Station, one of five stations between Bank Quay and Broadheath.

The others were at Latchford, Thelwall, Heatley and Dunham. Latchford (the only one not on the section which now forms part of the TPT) is now the site of a garden centre. Thelwall (1½ miles west of here) is a small red brick building next to Halfacre Lane. Heatley (1½ miles east) is the one most easily identifiable as a former station, and Dunham (3 miles east) is now a private residence.

Railway History

Construction of the line began after the Warrington and Altrincham Railway Act received the Royal Assent in July 1851. Services began in November 1853 and the existence of the railway had considerable influence in shaping the evolution of Lymm. Several grandiose Victorian houses can be seen around the village, and many of these owe their existence to the railway. Wealthy merchants with businesses in Manchester were now able to work in the city but live in the pleasant rural surroundings of Lymm. The houses of course, needed to be on a grand scale to house not just themselves and their families, but their obligatory large staff.



An aerial photograph of Lymm Station and Lymm Hotel taken in the 1920's. The point at which you are now standing is marked with a dot. The arrow indicates the Station Master's house by the road crossing to your right which still stands. Notice also that Statham Avenue, the road between the Ranger Centre car aprk and the hotel did not exist at the time this photograph was taken.

The line was one of several that became absorbed into the LNWR before that company was itself taken over by the LMS in 1923. The LMS operated the line until 1948 when they joined together with the other three railway companies who made up the 'Big Four' and became British Rail.

Following the merger though, the story of the railway is the one of countless railways in Britain in the two decades following the Second World War. An increase in car ownership meant a decrease in use of the railways. By the early 1960s passengers had dwindled to the point where there was barely anyone on the trains other than days when football or cricket was being played at Old Trafford. Passenger services eventually ceased in 1962 on the recommendation of Dr. Beeching, the man whose name became synonymous with the closure of railways. It was however another twenty-three years before traffic on the line stopped altogether, as trains taking coal to Fiddlers Ferry power station continued to use it. At the end of the 1970s, there were as many as sixty trains running along the line, though this had dwindled to around twenty by 1985. Extensive repairs were by then required to the high level bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal at Latchford Locks, and a decision was taken to close the line completely. The last ever train then, ran through Lymm on 7th July 1985.



Photo: AJF Crossdale

At the end of the 1980's the track between Broadheath and Latchford was removed. The track bed between Oldfield Brow and Latchford Locks was then upgraded to form part of the Trans Pennine Trail. This photograph shows track being removed some half a mile west of here between Star lane and the M6 viaduct. In the distance you can see the footbridge which still stands, carrying the public footpath to the Bridgewater Canal.

Trans Pennine Trail

The Trans Pennine Trail is a multi-user long distance trail which stretches from the Irish Sea to The North Sea. 215 miles in length, it runs from Southport in the west to Hornsea in the east. The section which the former Warrington to Altrincham railway forms is indicated on the route map below. For more information on the TPT see the information board on the Ranger Centre or call into the office.



Transport Corridor to Wildlife Corridor

In addition to the physical construction of the track, some environmental and habitat improvement work was carried out and many of the trees along the track date from the early 1990s. However railways tend to develop their own characteristic flora and fauna and play an important role as 'wildlife corridors' providing an important link between otherwise disparate habitats. Much of what was already in place was simply left to flourish. Small areas of predominantly oak woodland have developed alongside the track and in characteristic fashion, banks alongside cuttings have become overrun with bramble. Many of these areas have remained largely undisturbed (save for the noise of trains, walkers and cyclists!) since the railway was constructed in the 1850s and have become excellent cover for small mammals and nesting birds. Wildflowers such as bindweed, poppies and evening primrose grow alongside the track, and plants with accessible seed heads such as teasel and thistle are particularly popular with the finches which are often to be seen in flocks along the Trail.

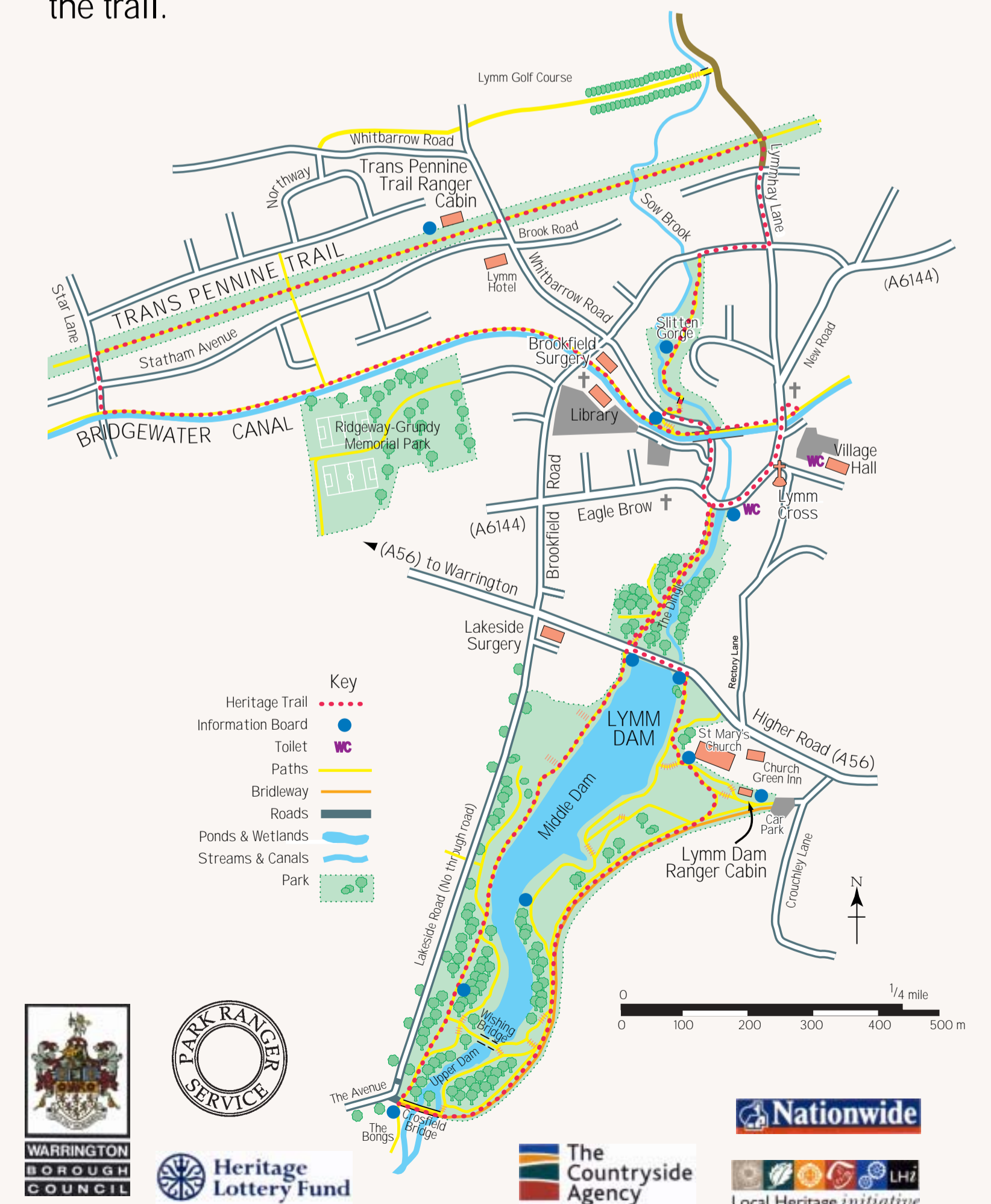
What is 'The Bongs'?

This is a commonly asked question by first time visitors to Lymm Dam. The Bongs is the area of woodland behind you which stretches south of this point for half a mile. 'Bongs' is a mediaeval Cheshire dialect word which means 'wooded banks'. The Bongs is one of only a handful of areas of semi-ancient woodland in the Borough of Warrington (the phrase 'semi ancient' means the woodland itself is older than the oldest trees in it). The wood is privately owned but a public footpath runs through it leading eventually to the A50 Warrington - Knutsford road a mile south of here.

Lymm Heritage Trail

Lymm Heritage Trail is a self-guided trail exploring the built and natural heritage of the village. The route is based on the north/south valley which runs through the village centre (comprising Lymm Dam, The Dingle and Slitten Gorge) and two east/west routes – The Bridgewater Canal and the former Warrington to Altrincham Railway (now part of the Trans Pennine Trail).

The full route is 3½ miles but the trail can be walked in shorter sections if desired. The route is waymarked and route maps can be found on each of the eleven information boards along the trail.



MAP

This photograph of the station was taken in the early 20th century from roughly the point you are standing at now. The photo looks to your right but very little of what can be seen remains today.

The Ranger Centre is where the waiting room on the left of the picture is. Above this you can just make out the roof of the Station Master's house which still stands today. On the far right of the photograph you can see a small section of the Lymm Hotel.

