

Backbarrow Ironworks – The Roads

When the first blast furnace at Backbarrow was built in 1711, it stood next to the lane from Newby Bridge to Haverthwaite – part of which has now become Ironworks Road on the new estate. From the north end of the site it ran down between the forge (now referred to as the pugmill) and the row of cottages opposite, then headed south across fields to the pub and cottages (still existing) at the other end.

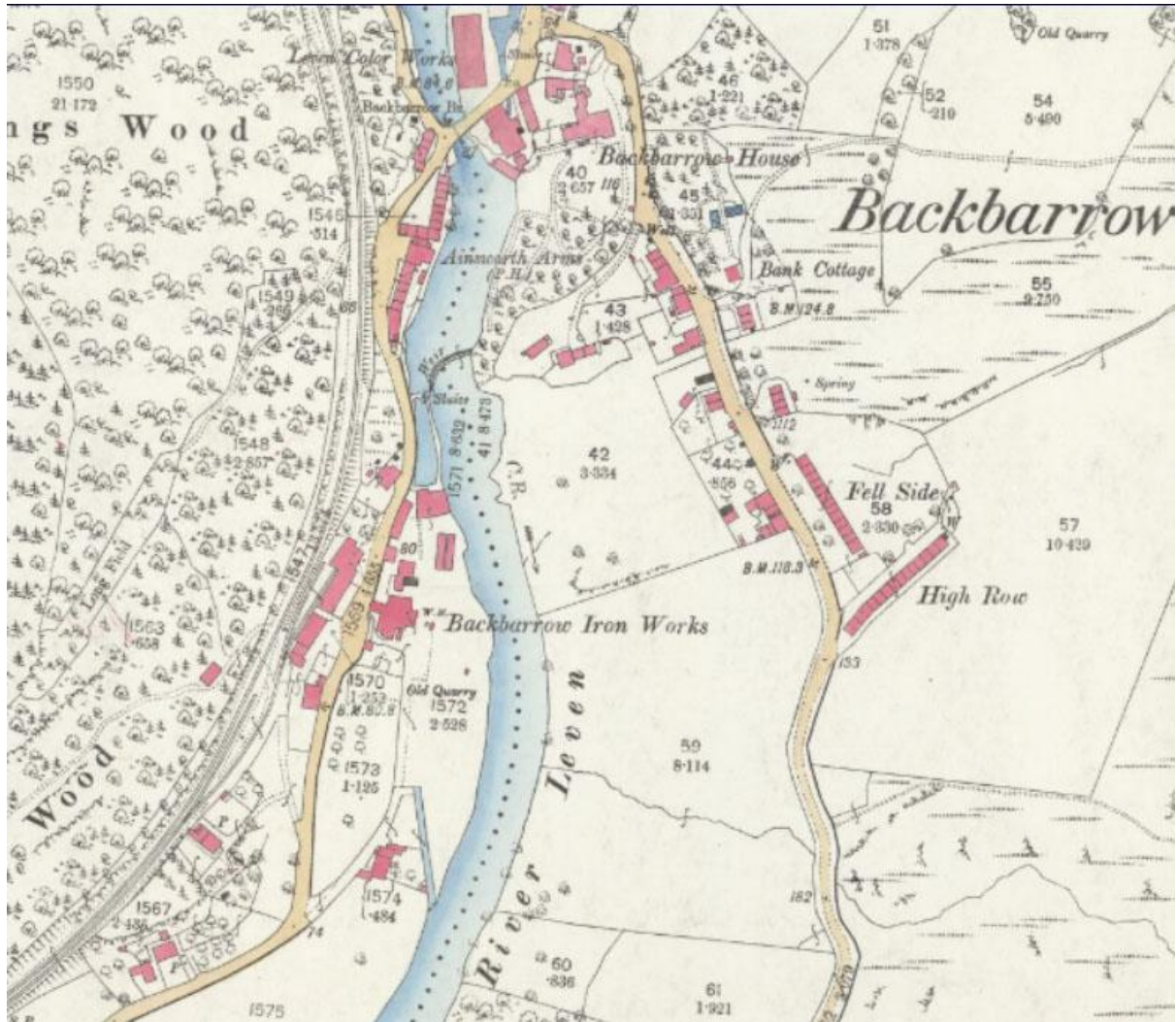


This lane is shown on Yates' map of 1786 (above), as is the turnpike road from Newby Bridge to Bouth which ran to the north of Backbarrow on the other side of Haverthwaite Heights. This was part of the Kendal & Kirkby Ireleth Trust's improvement of the old packhorse route.

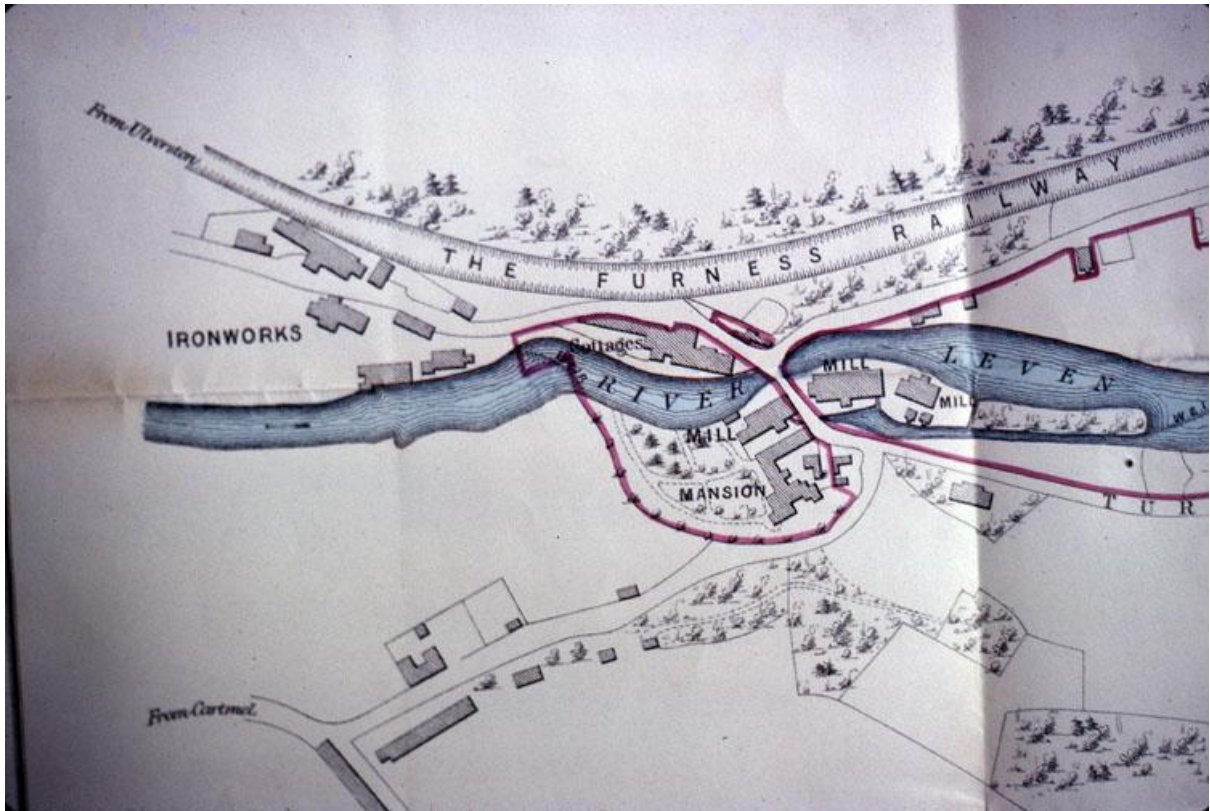
This turnpike was itself improved by an 1818 Act (Ulverston & Carnforth Trust) which chose to follow a new route from Levens Bridge to Greenodd. From Newby Bridge it now "followed the River Leven to the industrial village of Backbarrow where it crossed the river and continued to Haverthwaite". This road took a new route when it reached the ironworks – as shown on the 1848 OS map (below) – running above (west) of the furnace, between it and the storehouses which backed onto the hillside behind.



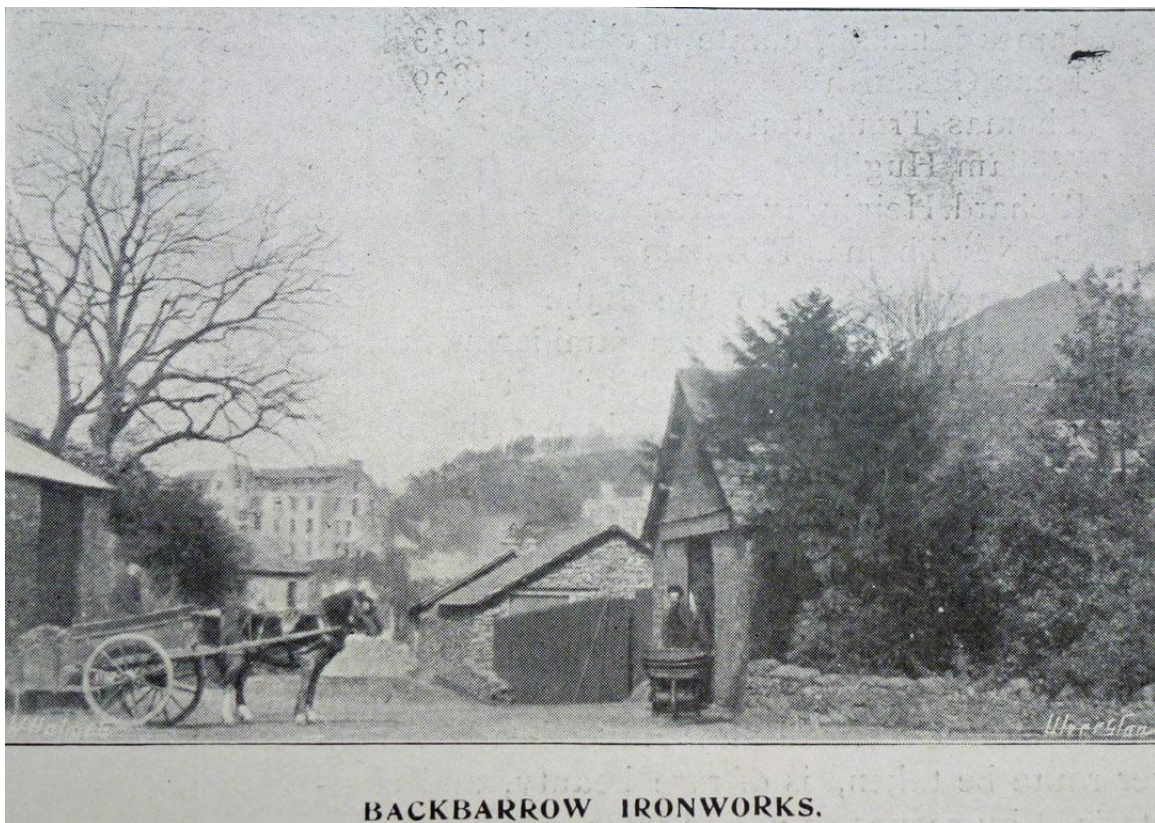
The old lane through the works can still be seen on that 1848 map, but looks to have fallen out of use by the time of the Ordnance Survey's 2nd edition map of 1888.



This is confirmed by the 1870 sale plan of the cotton mill in the village on which the TUR of TURNPIKE is clearly shown (below).



A photo from the North Lonsdale Magazine of 1900 shows a horse and cart facing across the road towards the roaster house, with one of the storehouses behind. The volume of traffic was clearly not enough to disrupt the business of iron-making!



However, things were about to change as the new national road classification and numbering scheme was introduced in the 1920s. Since the turnpikes became obsolete, roads were now the responsibility of county councils – in our case Lancashire. The amount of traffic was rapidly increasing, and neither the council nor the ironworks would have been happy with the disruption and delay caused as barrow loads from the storehouses destined for the furnace were trundled across the highway, day and night. There were certainly funds available to upgrade existing roads and build new ones as part of the scheme. Whether these contributed to the cost of building a new lift tower on the storehouses side of the road, and the bridge over the road to the top of the furnace stack is not known.

This road layout remained the same until the by-pass on the east side of the river was built in the 1960s.

Our research into the roads and other aspects of the ironworks is on-going. Please get in touch if you can add to our knowledge of this fascinating place.

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