

### AN INDUSTRIAL PAST

Along the Stocksfield Burn **iron ore smelting** took place until the mid-19th century. Local resources of ironstone, limestone and birch charcoal provided the essential ingredients for the smelting process. Small family groups produced the charcoal using similar methods to people in the Bronze Age around 4000 years ago. The process was to 'cook' or char the wood very slowly in a carefully constructed stack with very little air. This created an enhanced fuel which burnt at the constant high temperature essential in the smelting process.

### RIDING MILL

Riding Mill means a clearing with a mill. Constructed in medieval times, the **corn mill** was gifted to the White Friars of Blanchland in the 12th century. By 1565 the mill was in regular use despite being devastated at least four times by marauding Scots. The mill has now been converted to private houses, having also been used as a saw mill and a painter and decorator's over the last century.

The Wellington Hotel, formerly known as Riding House was built as a residence for the Postmaster of Newcastle, Thomas Errington. The door lintel probably carried his initials originally, but has been changed to suit a later occupant

### WITCHCRAFT

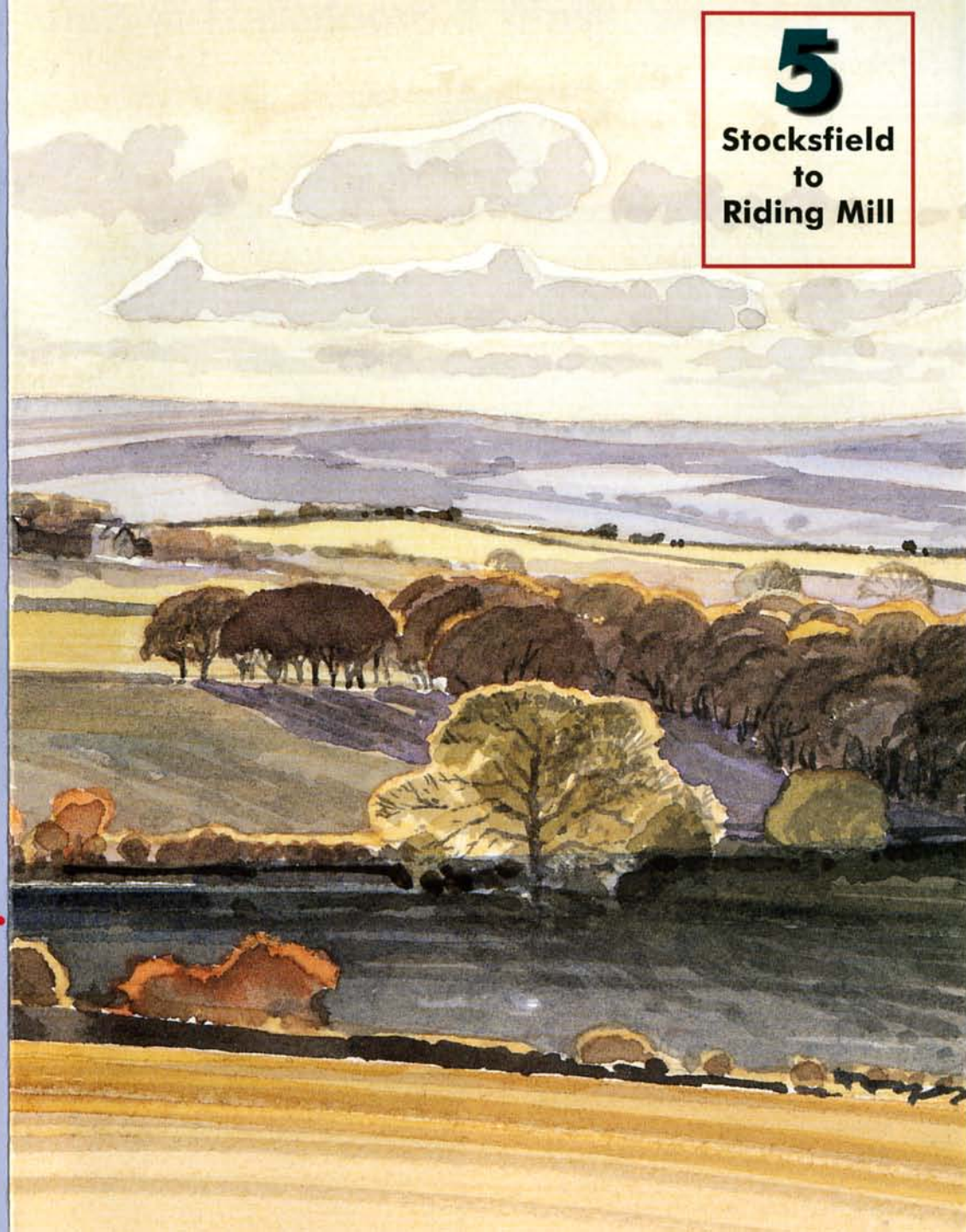
One of the greatest Northumbrian witch trials was based on the testimony of **Anne Armstrong**, a notorious witch finder, of Birches Nook east of Stocksfield. Women of Riding Mill and Stocksfield were among those accused of frequenting witches' meetings. The alleged witches were reputed to meet at the Pack Horse Bridge over the March Burn and thereafter retire to Riding House. Anne Armstrong said in her testimony to magistrates that she saw one witch, Anne Forster;

'come with a bridle and bridled her, changed her into a horse, and rid upon her till they came to the rest of her companions at Riding Mill bridge end where they usually met. Here they had their revels, singing and dancing and constantly changing shape and when they were done they bridled their bewitched steeds again and rode home'

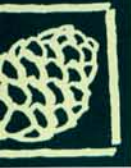
The trial was heard in 1673 at Morpeth Assizes and gained much notoriety. Despite the decision of the jury, judge and statements from the ministry, the acquittal of all the accused did not eradicate the deeply-rooted superstitions of local people.

- This **3¼ ml (5km)** walk between the stations of Stocksfield and Riding Mill is mainly on paths with very little on roads.
- There are no steep inclines but the surface is not suitable for pushchairs or wheelchairs and there are many stiles. This walk crosses the busy A68 just before Riding Mill. Please take care when crossing.
- **Services:** Along the route you will find a shop in Stocksfield and a post office, a grocer and a pub in Riding Mill.

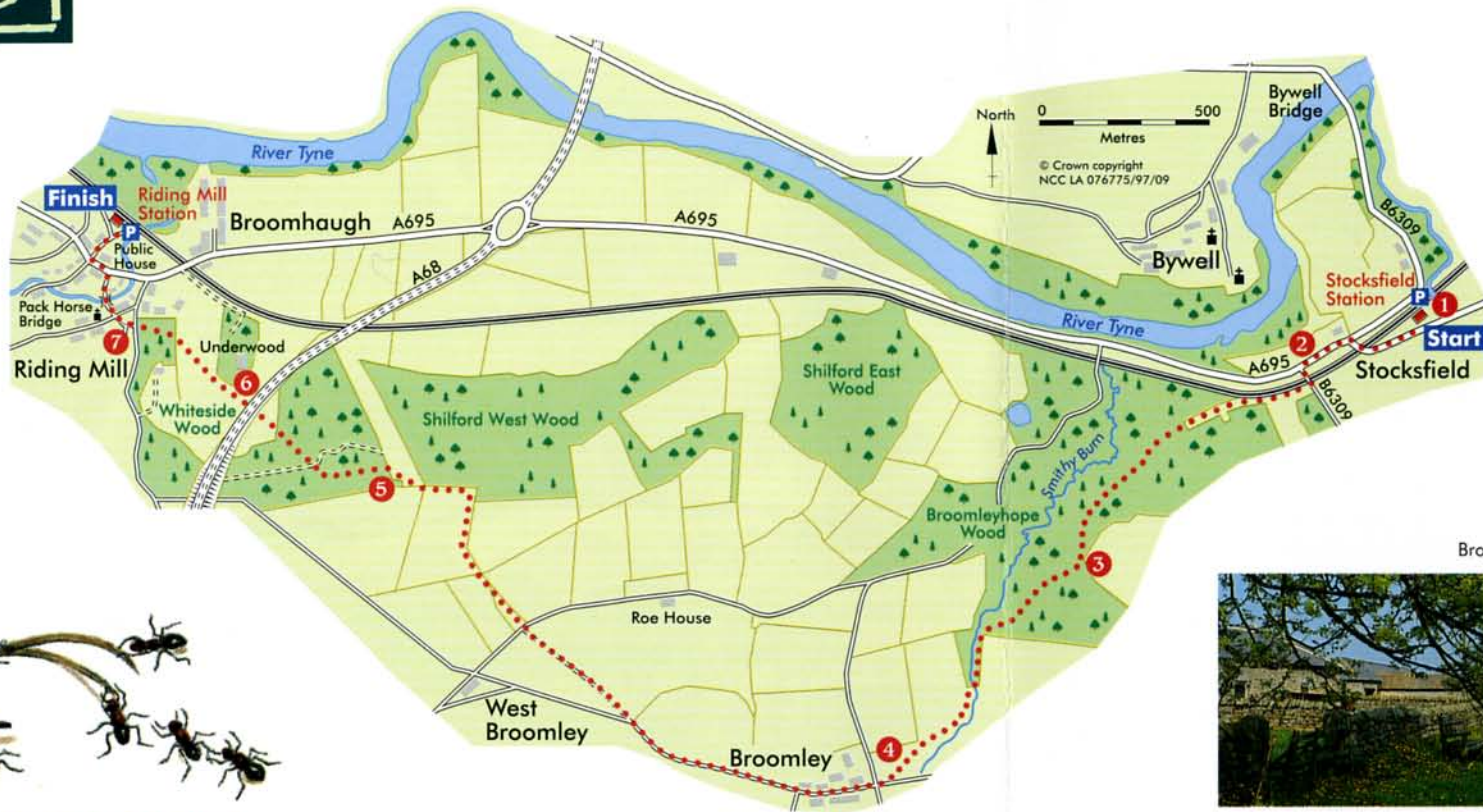
'Landscape above Riding Mill' by Eric Dale



**5**  
**Stocksfield**  
**to**  
**Riding Mill**



# Linear Walk 5 *Stocksfield to Riding Mill*



Broomley



**3** At the junction, keep right and follow the path through the wood. Before reaching the edge of the wood, turn sharp right, then follow the path to bear left along the top of Smithy Burn dene. Leaving the wood, cross the stream and at the top of the bank follow this stream round to the left. Once in sight of Broomley, cross the field to the stile and turn right onto the track.

**4** Take the main road through Broomley and continue until you reach a right hand bend. After the bend, turn right over a ladder stile. Keeping the fence on your right, cross straight over a lane and follow the fence down to Shillford West Wood, turning left at the corner by the wood and continue to a stile.

**5** Crossing the stile, bear left then right along the edge of the trees and after a short distance turn left into the wood. At the first junction bear right downhill and continue until you come to a stile at the edge of the wood. Continue diagonally over a field and cross the A68.

**6** Continue to another stile at the edge of Whiteside Wood. Drop down the steep bank and cross the road to the church, through the 'Old Playground'.

**7** Take the footpath down the side of St James' Church, over the Pack Horse bridge and bear right to the main road. Crossing over, turn right immediately after the Wellington and this takes you to the station car park.

**1** Leaving the main railway station car park turn right and follow the main road out of Stocksfield. Cross the rail bridge and take the first left up the B6309 road.

**2** After the bridge take the footpath on your right, through a small car park and follow the fence parallel to the railway. From the first small rise, bear left uphill through a fenced corridor between the new plantations. Following the left fence continue to a waymark to join another path. Following this path, continue as it bears left down a dip and up to a junction of paths with a waymark post.



## A CLOSER LOOK AT ANTS

Wood ants are responsible for the large nests of larch, pine and spruce needles, combined with chewed wood, seen in **Broomleyhope Wood**. The dome structure is a loose thatch, constantly being repaired and maintained with ventilation holes being closed at night or in bad weather. The nest offers shelter and protection from enemies as well as improving the micro climate inside to suit efficient brood rearing and food storage. The number of ants in a nesting colony varies from 1,000 up to 300,000 individuals. During an attack ants can squirt a jet of acid to immobilise their victims. Birds such as jays, starlings and thrushes place individual ants under their wings whilst preening to use their formic acid to get rid of feather lice and mites.

