



Harold Wagstaff: *The Prince of Centres, Pride of Holmfirth*

Harold Wagstaff

Harold Wagstaff was born 19 May 1891 at Underbank. He signed for Huddersfield Northern Union (Rugby League) FC in 1906 for five gold sovereigns. He remains the game's second youngest player, making his Huddersfield debut aged just 15 years and 175 days, and its youngest international, playing for England aged 17 years and 228 days.

Harold became Huddersfield's captain in 1911 as the club entered its golden period. Huddersfield's 'Team of All Talents' won all four available trophies in 1914-15, a feat only accomplished by two other clubs, Hunslet and Swinton. Wagstaff captained Great Britain tours to Australasia in 1914 and 1920. He played his last game for Huddersfield on 29 March 1925. He died of influenza aged just 48 in 1939. In 1988 Harold was among the original nine members inducted into the Rugby Football League Hall of Fame.

Harold's Greatest Match

This walk was launched in June 2014 to celebrate the centenary of the 'Rorke's Drift Test Match', the most famous international in Rugby League history. On 4 July 1914 at the Sydney Cricket Ground, Harold inspired Great Britain, reduced at times to nine fit men, to a 14-6 victory to lift the Ashes. Australian journalists compared the victory to the 1879 defence of the Rorke's Drift Garrison by 150 British and colonial troops against attacks by about 4,000 Zulu warriors. The Australian captain recalled: 'Wagstaff was not only brilliant in attack and wonderful in defence but his leadership was a most important factor in the team's success.'

Information

There is more information about the 'Huddersfield Rugby League: A Lasting Legacy' heritage project through the following media:

huddersfieldrlheritage.co.uk

Email: sportsinspire@talktalk.net

[@huddsrlheritage](https://twitter.com/huddsrlheritage)

[HuddersfieldRLHeritage](https://www.facebook.com/HuddersfieldRLHeritage)

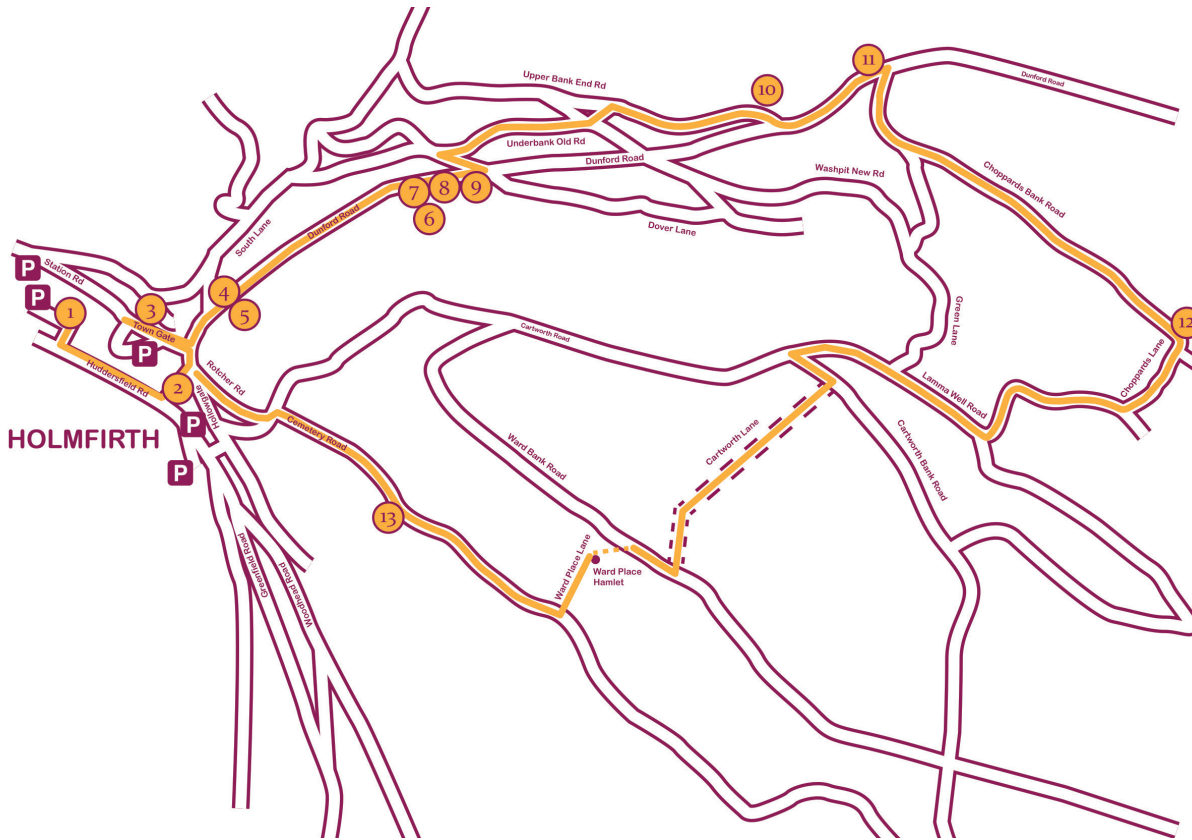


THE BIRTHPLACE OF RUGBY LEAGUE



Harold Wagstaff Trail





Key: **P** Parking

1. Former Wesleyan Chapel (School Street)
2. Victoria Street
3. Holy Trinity Parish Church (Town Gate)
4. Pump 'Ole (bottom of Dunford Road)
5. Blue Plaque (Dunford Road, opposite Pump 'Ole)
6. Harold's Birthplace, 190 Dunford Road (down the steps between 206 and 208 Dunford Road)
7. Mason's Arms, 206 Dunford Road
8. Volunteers Arms, 210 Dunford Road
9. Druid's Hotel, 214 Dunford Road
10. Bank End (Underbank End Road)
11. The Cross (left off Dunford Road)
12. Choppard's Mission (Choppards Bank Road)
13. Cemetery (Cemetery Road)



Harold Wagstaff Trail



Wesleyan Methodist Chapel

1 Former Wesleyan Chapel (School Street)

Harold married Ann Battye here on 3 January 1915. Most of Harold's Fartown teammates were present. Fellow three quarter back Tommy Gleeson was best man. Two earlier chapels were opened here in 1810 and 1872. Surviving from this time, on your left, is the schoolroom for the Methodist Church, whose sign it bears. The former Wesleyan Chapel, which fronted onto Huddersfield Road (pictured) was demolished and replaced by the present Methodist Church in 1976.

2 Victoria Street

On 22 July 1939 Harold's funeral cortege travelled down Victoria St. Large crowds lined the roads from Huddersfield to Holmfirth to pay their last respects: '... in Victoria Street the crowd was particularly dense. Special constables assisted the regular police to control the traffic.'



Parish Church seen from the junction of Victoria Street and Town Gate

3 Holy Trinity Parish Church (Town Gate)

Conducting Harold's funeral service here, Reverend TH Cashmore, Vicar of Holmfirth, described him as 'an almost legendary figure' who had 'carried his name far beyond these hills and valleys.' Harold was also baptised here, on 12 July 1891. The original church was damaged by flood in 1777 and replaced by this Georgian church in 1783. The unusually placed East End Tower has six bells and was added in 1788.



4 Pump 'Ole (bottom of Dunford Road)

In his youth, Harold played northern union rugby for hours on end with his mates. Founding their own team, Pump Hole Rangers, they played on farmers' fields from which they were often evicted mid-game.

'We took our name from the village pump at Holmfirth where we had our committee meetings. We never had a field of our own.' From these beginnings Harold progressed into the Underbank Rangers team.



5 Blue Plaque (Dunford Road, opposite Pump 'Ole)

Of twelve blue plaques in the Holme Valley, this is the only one to commemorate a person rather than a building.



Harold's birthplace viewed from across the valley of the Ribble Beck

6 Harold's Birthplace, 190 Dunford Road (down the steps between 206 and 208 Dunford Road)

Harold's birthplace comprises the two lower floors of this four-storey dwelling. The top two floors face onto Dunford Rd, the bottom two floors (under-dwellings) face the valley of the Ribble Beck.

This circular walk from Holmfirth visits places associated with Harold Wagstaff's life. It includes stunning views of the surrounding area. It is about four miles long and includes a couple of short but steep climbs.

7 Mason's Arms, 206 Dunford Road

This pub was Underbank Rangers' HQ in the first decade of the 20th century. Against Harold's wishes, the club, worried about poor crowds, switched to soccer in 1907. A year later they reverted to northern union rugby.



Volunteers Arms (photograph courtesy of Dave Green)

8 Volunteers Arms, 210 Dunford Road

Harold's uncle, Arthur Wagstaff, kept the Rifle Corps Arms, later renamed the Volunteers Arms, a Seth Senior Beer House.

9 Druid's Hotel, 214 Dunford Road

Harold's uncle, Arthur, was also the landlord of the Druid's Hotel. Harold recalled that here, on 2 November 1906, Huddersfield committeeman Joe Clifford 'spread five gold sovereigns on the table, making them cover as much space as he could. I thought it an enormous amount of money and there it was that I signed forms for Huddersfield.'

10 Bank End (Underbank End Road)

Underbank Rangers played in this vicinity during Harold's season with them, 1905-06.



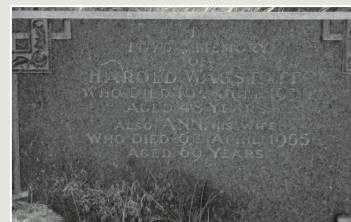
11 The Cross (left off Dunford Road)

The Cross is Underbank Rangers' current rugby ground. The clubhouse was built in 1957.



12 Choppard's Mission (Choppards Bank Road)

The wedding reception of Harold Wagstaff and Ann Battye was held at Choppard's Mission, their taxi cabs 'trimmed with claret and gold ribbons.' Their honeymoon was in London and the south.



13 Cemetery (Cemetery Road)

Harold was buried on 22 July 1939 in a plain, unpolished oak coffin. It was topped with a wreath from 'The Boys of the Fartown Football Team', shaped like a rugby football and comprising 'gold tiger lilies and claret carnations tied with ribbons of claret and gold.'

To find the Wagstaff family graves, including Harold's, walk along the tarmac path to the right, then 8 metres downhill beyond the tarmac. Turn right off the path and walk 5 metres to a cluster of headstones. Harold's grave is pink marble-like stone, inscribed 'In Loving Memory of Harold Wagstaff who died 19 July 1939 aged 48 years; also Ann his wife, who died 9 April 1955 aged 69 years.'



Harold and trainer Arthur Bennett with the four cups won by Huddersfield's 'Team of all Talents' in 1914-15