

BRIEF HISTORY OF KEIGHLEY

Keighley lies in the Aire Valley between Bradford and Skipton.

The town is recorded in the Domesday Book as Chicehlai - the field belonging to Chyya, an Old English thane vanished into the mists of history - and its name has undergone many changes over the centuries. Despite what a number of radio and TV announcers may think, it is pronounced Keethley - not Keeley or Kayley.

Wool and cotton were the fertilisers for its rapid growth in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. Two streams, the Worth and the North Beck, turned water wheels which powered looms and, despite Luddite-inspired unrest - driven by now-unfounded fears that powered weaving would put hand-loom weavers out of work - with the arrival of steam power Keighley's mill-owners prospered.

The immigration of Muslims into Keighley began in the middle of the twentieth century, attracted to the abundant number of jobs available in the then thriving textile industry. Today the 10,000 strong Muslim population is predominantly of Pakistani ethnic origin, with Bagladeshis comprising the remaining portion.

The Keighley and Worth Valley Railway, privately owned, staffed largely by volunteers has permission from British Rail to operate from a platform at Keighley Station. It is one of the leading preserved railways in the country.

The fact that Haworth, of Bronte fame lies on the line, meant that Keighley, almost despite itself, has discovered a tourist attraction. The slow, puffing ascent of the Worth Valley, with trains hauled by a number of preserved steam locomotives has proved very attractive, particularly to those for whom a whiff of coal smoke is a return ticket to childhood. It also provides a genuinely public transport service throughout the year, with preserved diesels doing the donkey work.

Keighley, once with a world-wide reputation for textiles and engineering retains a variety of light industries.