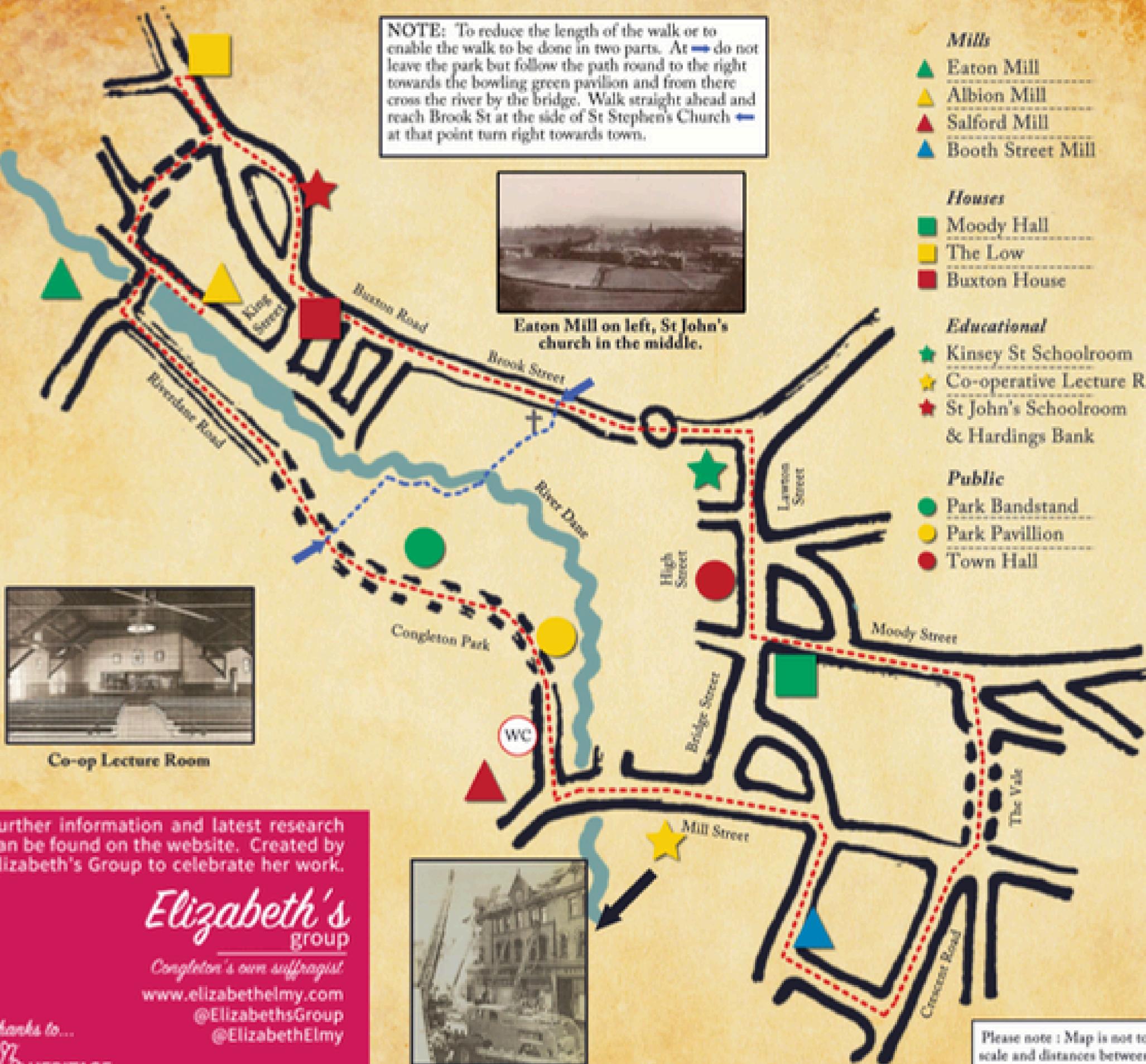


NOTE: To reduce the length of the walk or to enable the walk to be done in two parts. At ➡ do not leave the park but follow the path round to the right towards the bowling green pavillion and from there cross the river by the bridge. Walk straight ahead and reach Brook St at the side of St Stephen's Church ➡ at that point turn right towards town.



Eaton Mill on left, St John's church in the middle.

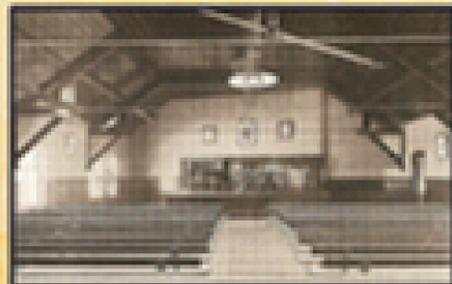


- Mills**
- ▲ Eaton Mill
 - ▲ Albion Mill
 - ▲ Salford Mill
 - ▲ Booth Street Mill

- Houses**
- Moody Hall
 - The Low
 - Buxton House

- Educational**
- ★ Kinsey St Schoolroom
 - ★ Co-operative Lecture Rm
 - ★ St John's Schoolroom & Hardings Bank

- Public**
- Park Bandstand
 - Park Pavillion
 - Town Hall



Co-op Lecture Room



The Lecture room of the Co-op building was destroyed by fire

Please note : Map is not to scale and distances between points of interest may be distorted.

This trail will be a walk around Congleton to point out places connected to Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and her husband Ben Elmy. The husband and wife worked together as a team and Elizabeth's story cannot be considered complete without including Ben. He supported her wholeheartedly and this allowed her to pursue her campaigning. Elizabeth was born in Roe Green, near Salford in 1833. Her father was Reverend Joseph Wolstenholme. In keeping with the mores of the time she was, unlike her brothers, not given access to higher education, but a bequest from her maternal grandfather, Richard Clarke, enabled her to attend the Moravian School at Fulneck near Leeds. After leaving there in 1850 she begged to go to Bedford College but she was denied. She therefore chose to study using a self-styled curriculum and did private tutoring to provide money for books and materials. By 1852 she applied for and won a position as governess to a family in Luton and was there until 1854. After her 21st birthday she returned home to Roe Green where she used her remaining capital (the residue of her grandfather's bequest?) and invested in a boarding school. This was "The Grange" in Boothtown Road, Worsley. It was a small establishment catering for up to 16 pupils.

All times and distances are approximate
 Total Distance: 7.25km (4.5 miles)
 Time required is a minimum: 2.5 hours
 Town loop: 4km (2.5 miles) 1.5 hours
 Buglawton Loop: 3.3km (2 miles) 1 hour

Public Toilets in Congleton Park

Elizabeth



Heritage Trail

Further information and latest research can be found on the website. Created by Elizabeth's Group to celebrate her work.

Elizabeth's group

Congleton's own suffragist
www.elizabethelmy.com
 @ElizabethsGroup
 @ElizabethElmy



Thanks to... Margaret Williamson Fund

From the Tourist Information Centre turn right along High Street.

At premises in this street Ben Elmy assisted as a partner in setting up a short lived local paper "The Congleton Free Press" 1883/4.

At the crossroads turn left into Moody Street and Moody Hall is approx. 50 metres/yards up the street on the right.

Moody Hall

Elizabeth was among the first women ever to testify before a Royal Commission. She was put forward as a witness by Emily Davies (founder of what is now Girton College) to talk about education for girls in April 1866. On returning from London she started to arrange the transfer of her school from Worsley to Moody Hall, a late 18th century house. By May 1867 her school had relocated to Moody Hall in Congleton. In September 1867 she was visited here by Jessie Bouchereux to discuss the "married womens' property question". Elizabeth was a co-founder of the "Married Womens' Property Committee". In January 1873 Elizabeth relinquished the lease on Moody Hall as she became more and more disillusioned with religion. She felt unable to teach it to pupils whose families would expect it as part of their daughters' education.

Continue up Moody Street and turn right into Priesty Fields and 2nd right down Vale Walk which crosses the Howey Brook. At the end cross the road into Lion Street and continue ahead onto Crescent Road for approx 200 metres (250 yards) and turn right into Booth Street alongside the cricket ground. Walk down Booth Street to the far end approx. 100 metres (120 yards).

Booth St Mill

In the block between Heywood St and the main road stood the mill, it was not large and is now dilapidated and undergoing renovation. By 1872 Booth St Mill is occupied by Ben Elmy. Ben was born in 1839 in Rochdale. His father, also called Benjamin, was an Inland Revenue or Excise Officer. Prior to Ben's move to Congleton and starting to manage crepe mills he had been a schoolmaster.

Crepe is a weaving or fabric treatment method that results in a unique rippling, three-dimensional texture. Crepe yarn is made with a process called hard twisting, which involves twisting the textile fibres used in yarn manufacture much tighter than usual. Additionally, alternating twists are used to give the yarn its distinctive bouncy texture.

At the end of Booth Street turn right into West Street and walk straight along until arriving at the inn "Lion and Swan", in approx. 200 metres (250 yards). Turn sharply to the left opposite the inn onto Swan Bank and carry on past the pedestrianised street on your right, you are now in Mill Street. Walk approx 120 metres (100 yards) past the first turning on the left.

Co-operative Society Buildings

The Congleton co-operative society had purpose built premises on both sides of Mill Street. From the bus shelter look across the road, the building would have consisted of

a shop, offices above and a lecture room on the top floor. It was here in December 1893 that Elizabeth gave a talk on "the Poet of the Century", in her opinion, Tennyson. The occasion was well received with an audience of 350-400 persons. Also in October 1894, Ben Elmy gave an address entitled "Life of a Flower" after which Elizabeth was called upon to comment, which she did "to the pleasure of the audience". In September 1893 Elizabeth addressed an audience of mostly women on the advisability of forming a branch of the "Women's Co-operative Guild" in Congleton.

Walk on the left side of the street to the junction with Antrobus Street, cross safely and continue along Mill Street keeping on the left, you will see on the right a traffic island displaying topiary bears, continue on the left across the bridge over the River Dane. The tall factory building ahead is Salford Mill (now showing the Jantex trade name.)

Salford Mill

In 1876 Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh (leaders of British atheism) were engaged on a lecture tour. Ben Elmy had tried to book the Town Hall but was refused permission "due to the provocative nature" of the lectures. Bradlaugh's lecture titles were "The Right to Think and the Right to Speak". Ben, Elizabeth and guests thus removed the lecture to Salford Mill. A disruptive crowd had gathered and, as Bradlaugh commenced speaking, stones were thrown at the windows from outside. Annie Besant was struck on the head. Afterwards, with some stalwart friends, they all walked the mile and a half to Buglawton and the Elmy's home. They had to endure shouts and mud-throwing from the crowd. The protestors continued to make a noise outside the house. The following evening Annie Besant was to speak on "Progress only possible through Heresy". They got a cab to Salford Mill. At the mill Bradlaugh ejected a heckler, the crowd outside again threw stones. This time Elizabeth was hit and sustained a cut above her right eye but the lecture was completed. Back at the house Bradlaugh and Ben confronted the trouble-makers and managed to disperse them.

Walk up the road until opposite "Walker's Strings" to cross safely, take care as this is a busy road. Head back towards the river and turn left into Mill Green which will bring you to Congleton Park.

Congleton Park

As you enter the park the Pavilion is on your right. In 1886 Ben donated 10/- (50p worth £30+ today) to the park pavilion fund, the pavilion being opened in 1887 for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

Continue, keeping left, to the bandstand.

At the Whitsuntide sports event at the park in 1887 the prizes on the first day were distributed by Mr Bromley-Davenport, local MP and landowner, from the bandstand. On the second day Ben Elmy presented the prizes. Ben Elmy was obviously a well-known, respected figure in the town.

Continue along the path running below Town Wood. On the map the → indicates the junction of the alternative routes. Red Route: Leave the park by the 4 bar gate on the left this takes you 100 metres (120 yards) along a path opening onto Riverdane Road and a small industrial estate, after another 120 metres (100yds). there will be a footbridge to your right

and a car-park ahead. Alternative Blue Route: Town Loop Keep on the park path around the grassed area to the bowling green pavilion. After the pavilion take the footbridge on the left and walk alongside the wall to the main road at St Stephens church indicated by ←.

Eaton Mill

Eaton Mill stood on the site of the car-park, at the side of the River Dane. We know that the mill had a waterwheel from the description when it was put up for auction in 1890. Eaton Mill was one of 3 mills which Ben Elmy owned. In October 1886 the mill suffered a fire and Ben posted a notice in the local press to thank people for their fire fighting aid. He was paid nearly £500 (approx. £60,000 today) insurance money. The mill continued to operate but struggled financially as did all textile mills at this time.

Cross the footbridge and turn right for approx 50 metres (60 yards) to a building which has a sign "Naturecraft"

Albion Mill

This is the site of the third of Ben Elmy's mills. Ben did not always endear himself to his fellow mill owners. As a self-confessed feminist, he paid wages direct to his female workers when the norm was to pay the father or husband. Space in this mill was often loaned by Ben Elmy for meetings and talks. The Primrose league (affiliated to the Conservative Party and the first political organisation to give women the same status and responsibilities as men) were regular users of the facilities.

Retrace your steps passing the footbridge and continue, bearing right across the front of Charlesworth Place into Redfern Ave and head up the grassy hill by a narrow path through the trees to Buxton Road. Turn left and walking uphill, go past the school playing fields on the right and the Church House inn and a bungalow, approx 300 metres (370 yds).

The Lowe

The gabled house opposite the end of Havannah Lane is part of a larger plot which was divided at some point into 3 separate dwellings. It is difficult to state exactly which was which as they all had the address The Low(e). The Elmy's lived here at various times between 1871 and 1883.

Return past the Church House inn and turn left into Old Buxton Road, follow the road downhill past Buglawton Primary School and around to the right to the junction of William St.

St John's Schoolroom / Hardings Bank

On your right is St John's schoolroom (now St John's Community Centre). In 1885 Ben Elmy was the foreman of a coroner's jury held here for the inquest on a murdered woman. Across the road from the schoolroom is the area known as Hardings Bank. In November 1876 it is reported that goods were seized from the Elmys' home (either The Low or Buxton House) in default of a £1 fine under the Vaccination Act. At that time infants had to have a certificate of vaccination against smallpox or the parents could be fined. It would appear that the Elmys had been fined for not vaccinating their son Frank. An oak davenport and a clock were sold by auction from the police station at Hardings Bank and raised £4 4/- (£4.20) in

total which was deemed to clear the debt and associated administration costs. As we now know vaccination policies managed to eliminate smallpox.

Follow the road round past the graveyard and pick up the main road again. Descend the hill to the junction with Tommy's Lane and opposite King Street. Look across the road.

Buxton House

Buxton House stands on the corner of King Street and Buxton Road with a post box in front. It is now 2 dwellings but by viewing the front of the building it will be appreciated that it was one house with a central front door. It was here that Elizabeth and Ben lived the later part of their lives, where she nursed Ben and after he died she lived until just prior to her own death.

Please take care and cross the road here to Buxton House. Continue to walk down the road noticing the buildings on your right.

Throstle's Nest / Post Office

In 1887 Ben Elmy served as foreman on a coroner's jury in The Throstle's Nest at an inquest into a suicide. A few doors further down would have been Buglawton Post Office. Would Elizabeth have posted her many campaigning letters from here?

Continue to walk towards the town along Buxton Road and Brook Street to St Stephen's church on the right, The Blue Route rejoins the walk at this point (indicated by → on the map). Cross using the crossing in front of the church. Continue towards the town centre along the main road on the left side. Pass the roundabout on your right and using the pedestrian crossing at the traffic lights go right towards the town centre into Lawton Street. Go along Lawton Street past the cenotaph on the left and reach the junction with Kinsey Street at Ye Olde King's Arms. Looking down the street you will see the frontage of a Methodist chapel.

Kinsey St Schoolroom

The Chapel in Kinsey Street had a schoolroom beneath. In 1886 there was a Congleton Lodge meeting at Kinsey Street schoolroom, Elizabeth had prepared a paper entitled "A Woman's Plea to Women" and this was read to the meeting by Ben.

Continue for 30 metres (33 yards) to the Town Hall.

Town Hall

In 1875 Ben Elmy invited Annie Besant to speak and hired the Town Hall. Topics to be discussed were "Republicanism" and "The Value of Christianity". The mayor, on seeing the topics, withdrew permission to use the Town Hall but Ben persisted and got the town clerk, Mr Wilson, to allow the lectures to go ahead. In 1892 at a political candidate meeting during the Q&A, Ben directed a question at Mr McCoan "Would he be in favour of granting the Parliamentary franchise to women?" McCoan replied that he would certainly give a vote to every man but for the present would not extend the franchise to women. It would be 1918 before women over the age of 30 would be granted the vote.