

West Lancashire has a long, rich and fascinating heritage which is reflected in its landmarks. Some are easily recognised, such as Ormskirk's iconic clock tower and distinctive parish church. Others are less well known, are harder to pinpoint and many have been subject to the ravages of time, but all have their own tale to tell about their origins and the people associated with them. This booklet highlights a selection of these landmarks which can still be seen in the West Lancashire landscape.



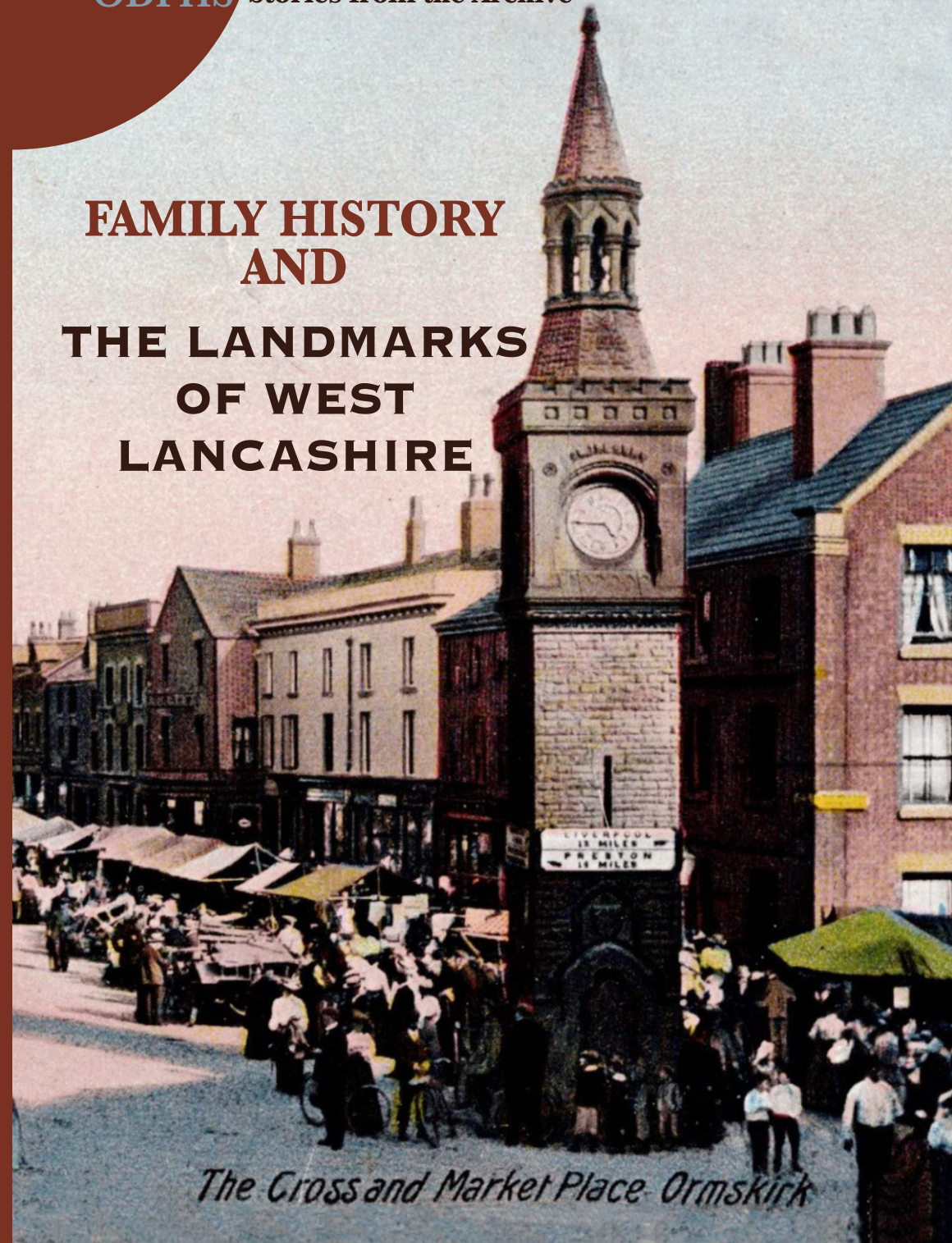
ORMSKIRK AND DISTRICT FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

Stories from the Archive Series

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FAMILY HISTORY AND THE LANDMARKS OF WEST LANCASHIRE



The Cross and Market Place Ormskirk

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Further reading and acknowledgments

In this booklet we have endeavoured to include landmarks which are readily accessible, however readers are advised to check the websites of locations before attempting to visit.

INTRODUCTION

In this companion volume to our Lost Buildings booklet, we've turned our focus onto some historical landmarks still standing, with a surprising capacity to reveal the richly detailed story of West Lancashire's social heritage.

Our twenty-first century comforts put a distance between now and the days when stone wayside markers guided funeral processions to the nearest church, and public fountains offered the poorest residents of Ormskirk an essential supply of clean drinking water - and perhaps a few moments to share the latest gossip with a friend?

The landmarks brought together in this booklet unearth human stories, from strict teachers and famous names to generous benefactors and businesses that evolved to survive. They link communities of all kinds, from Catholics and Quakers seeking unobtrusive places to worship to canal boatmen making use of the "waterway services" at Top Locks to repair their barge or take refreshment at what we now call The Ship at Lathom.

Ormskirk and District Family History Society have created this book using

funds from those generous enough to donate to our crowdfunding appeal, matched by Lancashire County Council. Our warmest thanks go to everyone who has supported its production.

Kate Hurst
Chair of Ormskirk and District Family
History Society, September 2024



*Lion water spout detail
from Ormskirk's clock tower*



*Milestone marker on the Leeds
and Liverpool Canal*

HOW DID ORMSKIRK GET ITS CLOCK TOWER?

Ormskirk's iconic clock tower is at the junction of the four main streets of the town centre, a significant position since the town's earliest days and hub of the ancient market place. Historians suggest that, as with most towns, there would originally have been a market cross from which important civic and national announcements were made. However, no records remain to show when and why Ormskirk's market cross was taken down. What we do know is that, before the clock tower could be built, a sizeable two-tier drinking water fountain (one tier for humans and one for animals), with a lamp on the top, had to be removed from the site.



A rare pre-1876 photograph showing a large drinking fountain and lamp on the site designated for the clock tower (the Kings Arms before its 1880s renovation can be seen in the background). This construction was eventually moved to a triangular grassed area known as the Hillock on Southport Road (now the car park area in front of the Civic Hall)

The Court Leet and the building of the clock tower

Since Ormskirk's earliest days its governing body was the Earl of Derby's Court Leet which made the rules and regulations for the town (including the market) and appointed officers to enforce them. The Court Leet met upstairs at the Town Hall in Church Street. This was a building constructed by the Earl of Derby in 1772; the Derby coat of arms can still be seen on its front gable.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the powers of the Court Leet were waning. The population of Ormskirk had expanded due to industrialisation and a large influx of workers from Ireland, this in turn caused overcrowding and poor health in some areas. As a result a Board of Health was established in 1850, paving the way for the powers of local government to be transferred. In 1875 the Court Leet, left without a defined role, decided to disband with any remaining funds to be used towards a clock tower as a lasting memorial in the town. At a similar time the Earl of Derby, as Lord of the Manor, passed the right to collect tolls from the market to local government; it was felt that this historic change would also be marked by the new monument.

Building the clock tower

The cost of building the new clock tower was estimated to be £300 and as the money from the Court Leet's coffers was not enough, a public subscription campaign was launched in 1876 to raise the shortfall. Anyone wishing to subscribe was asked to make their contributions as soon as possible as it was intended to build the clock tower quickly.

Local solicitor Robert Wareing, in his capacity as Steward of the Manor, was given the task of overseeing the project and plans were soon accepted from Aughton based architect and surveyor Peter Balmer. His design was in the early English Gothic style and used both York stone, known for its hard wearing qualities and more decorative Bootle red stone. The building work was to be carried out by stonemasons John and Charles Wells, from Lathom, aided by their brothers, Robert and Joshua.

The dedication plaque on the clock tower



A clock tower to be proud of

From the start it was felt that the clock tower should be of good quality and design, a building the town could be proud of. Despite concerns over the cost, it was agreed that illuminated clock faces should be included in the design, much to the delight of the townspeople as, although the Parish Church had a clock on its spire, it was not illuminated and could not be seen from the market place.



The drinking fountain facing Aughton Street

At the end of March 1877 representatives of the Court Leet presented a letter to the Local Board of Health formally handing the clock tower over to the town. During the lead up to this simple ceremony there had been a catalogue of financial, technical and planning issues. The clock in particular proved difficult to install and the first weathervane had to be replaced. Plans were amended several times, for example two water fountains were originally to face Church Street and Moor Street, but the final design had the Moor Street position changed to Aughton Street. This is the only one to have survived to the present day. Some features such as the inclusion of the coats of arms of prominent local families were abandoned.

A new landmark for Ormskirk

Despite the problems, the townsfolk must have been delighted with their handsome new tower which heralded an era of modernisation and renovation for the town centre. Other prominent buildings such as the Parish Church, the Kings Arms and Corn Exchange all subsequently received attention.

Those looking up at the completed tower could not help but admire its features, in particular the four illuminated clock faces placed 25 feet from the ground and a battlement topped by an octagonal bell turret to rehouse the ancient fire bell which had previously hung over the Town Hall. The first time the bell was needed in an emergency there was a problem as its rope had not been connected, and someone had to run up the steps of the tower to strike it manually.

Within a few years the gleaming York stone was blackened with soot and grime, a casualty of smoking chimneys. In the 1970s it was cleaned and restored to its former glory, the vision of Peter Balmer and the Wells brothers once again apparent in the contrasting stonework.

On February 24th 1897 the Ormskirk Advertiser reported that a young man named Edward Stewart had been found sleeping in the tower. He gained entry using a key hung on a nail next to the door to give access to the fire bell. After climbing the stairs Stewart had fallen asleep at the top causing the clock to strike incorrectly. He was arrested and sentenced to a month in prison.

In August 1972 the 96 year-old clock tower was given Grade II listed status as a building of historical interest.



The clock tower in the early twentieth century with its weather vane and fire bell intact

THE WATER OF LIFE -

ORMSKIRK'S DRINKING FOUNTAINS

The Public Health Report of 1848 found some terrible insanitary conditions in Ormskirk. Living conditions in some areas were poor, with little sanitation and a lack of clean drinking water. Most families collected their water from standpipes positioned around the town, but the water from these wasn't always clean.

In October 1858 Mr. James Hardy Wrigley, a retired cotton broker, approached the Board of Health with an offer to fund the erection of drinking fountains for the town on the understanding the Board would furnish their water supply. This proposal was enthusiastically taken up and referred to the Water Committee to select the most desirable sites. Mr. Wrigley's benevolent gift echoed those already made by private benefactors in Liverpool and Chester.

In the end three fountains were erected, although only one survives. This is still in position at the end of the Derby Street road bridge, by the side of Railway Road. The others were on Aughton Street (near the junction with Dyers Lane) and Burscough Street. All were unveiled in February 1859.



The Derby Street fountain was renovated in 1998 by West Lancashire District Council

The fountains had an elaborate red sandstone basin under a roof portico with a metal lion's head waterspout, the date 1858 carved above.

Clean water was supplied by the Tower Hill water tower erected in 1853.

The town gained additional fountains at the clock tower and another in 1918 at The Ruff donated by Mr. H.W. Rigby Jones.



The portico of the former Aughton Street fountain can be seen behind the girl in the foreground

WEST LANCASHIRE'S MEDIEVAL WAYSIDE CROSSES

In her book *"The History of Scarisbrick"*, local historian Mona Duggan wrote of Scarisbrick's medieval wayside crosses as the oldest still remaining signs of religious practice in the area. Crosses like these dating from around 800 AD to 1500 AD can be found in many parts of England which, like Scarisbrick, had old established church and monastic buildings, together with difficult or dangerous terrain. Areas like the North York Moors, Dartmoor and Lancashire are typical sites for wayside crosses.

The West Lancashire crosses stood on existing medieval roadways that connected religious buildings, and would have been a constant reminder of the domination of the landscape by the great religious foundations. Their purpose is thought to have been linked primarily to funerals. A secondary but vital function is thought to have been the marking of safe passageway and good footing for travellers along the difficult and unmade roads. In the often flooded or marshy medieval landscape of Scarisbrick, when Martin Mere was the largest lake in England, this must have been welcome as well as essential.

A resting place for mourners

In the countryside, where people often lived in isolated places or small villages without a church or graveyard, funeral arrangements were difficult. The mourners would have had to travel some distance transporting a locally made coffin to the place of burial along rough unmade roads. Mona Duggan wrote that crosses were erected to mark suitable resting places where the mourners could *"gather, offer prayers for the dead and either change the bearers or give them an opportunity to rest"*.

In 1906 historian, Henry Taylor, published a book called *"The Ancient Crosses of Lancashire"* which catalogued hundreds of crosses as they were at the beginning of the twentieth century. Taylor noted that when mourners stopped at a wayside cross *"a prayer for the soul of the departed was offered up or the De profundis would be said"*. The custom was to kneel at every cross and sprinkle the coffin with holy water.

Stock Bridge Cross

The Stock Bridge Cross, located near the Ormskirk/Scarisbrick boundary, is thought to have been lost around 1908 when new houses were built on Southport Road, replacing open fields and old farm buildings.

What did the wayside crosses look like and who built them?

The crosses typically stood between 1.7 and 2 metres high in total. An upright shaft with short arms close to the top was between 1 and 1.5 metres high, fixed in a pedestal around half a metre high with a base around half a metre square. They were carved from locally quarried stone, usually sandstone.



The remains of a cross by the side of Liverpool Old Road, the old A59 in Sollom Village centre near Rufford gives an idea of the cross would have looked like, there's an irregular piece of stone on the ground that was probably the shaft.



A sketch demonstrating the likely appearance of a wayside cross

Remnants of wayside crosses can still be found in the landscape as this example at Sollom shows

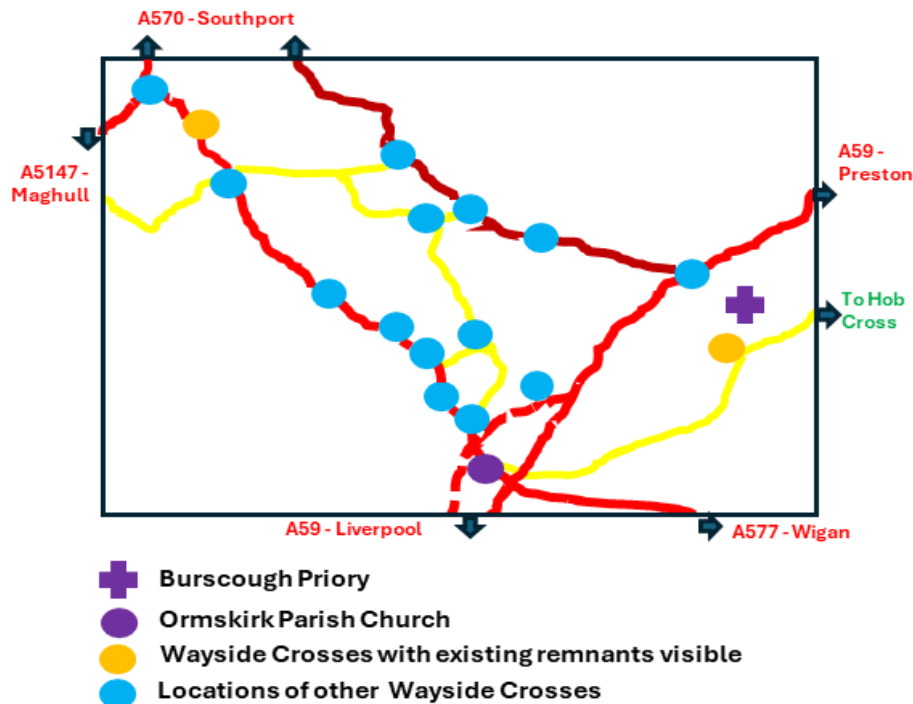
Monasteries, abbeys and priories are overwhelmingly likely to have been responsible for the crosses. They were the major influence on the countryside in medieval times when the crosses were put in place. Additionally, religious foundations were almost alone in using stone for building when most houses, even those of the wealthy, were made of wood and other materials. Their religious responsibilities required the safe transport of the dead and their mourners to the funeral service and the place of burial. Taking these together, Burscough Priory was the most likely builder of the Scarisbrick crosses.



The ruins of the once powerful Burscough Priory are now on private land, but can occasionally be visited for special events

The ancient crosses of South West Lancashire

In the area of Scarisbrick shown on the map, there were sixteen ancient crosses. They were usually spaced approximately 600 yards apart and marked out routes across the area to Ormskirk Church, St Cuthbert's Church at Churchtown, and Burscough Priory.



Why are there so few and what happened to them?

In the 1500s, the Reformation brought about the dissolution of many religious buildings and communities. It's likely that some of the crosses were destroyed at this time, urged on by legislation requiring the destruction of religious shrines. Another major phase of damage to symbols of older religious practices occurred during the English Civil War and the Puritan-led government which followed. Although in rural areas like Scarisbrick Roman Catholicism remained strong, older customs eventually died out and gradually the ancient crosses were neglected as people forgot what they were and perhaps used them as a source of building material. Finally, with large-scale drainage in Scarisbrick from the eighteenth century, there wasn't the same need to mark safe passage because signposts and milestones had replaced wayside crosses. However, more crosses survive, or are known of, in the rural parts of Lancashire than in those where intensive industrialisation took place.

The Scarisbrick wayside cross

One cross can still be seen today in Scarisbrick. It's clearly visible in an enclosure with an explanatory noticeboard, on the A570 opposite the Scarisbrick Marina, on the edge of the grounds of Scarisbrick Hall. The cross is still upright, but looks rather short because the pedestal is mostly buried in the ground.



Remains of a cross can be seen opposite Scarisbrick Marina on the A570



Modern markers for old sites

The locations of two other crosses are now marked by small pillars which were placed on the sites of the former crosses in Lathom by West Lancashire Borough Council in 2011. The position of Hob Cross is in Hobcross Lane, and Priory Cross, which still has the remains of its original pedestal, in Blythe Lane, outside Abbey Farm Caravan Park and near the remains of Burscough Priory.



Modern pillars mark the site of Hob Cross near Taylor's farm shop and Priory Cross

Although there's so little remaining today of the crosses in Scarisbrick, they represent a significant part of West Lancashire's history and its religious beliefs when this part of Lancashire was, as Mona Duggan wrote, *"truly a remote area, far away from any major route-way, an area to be shunned because of the dangers that lurked in its mossland"*.

Mona Duggan was an eminent local historian who wrote extensively about the history of West Lancashire. She maintained strong connections with Ormskirk and District Family History Society and left to us her archive of notes, cuttings, letters and drafts. This article draws from Mona's archive and her many books.

Dr. Mona Duggan (1927—2014)

Image by kind permission of Ross Duggan



ST. ANNE'S CHURCH, ORMSKIRK

St. Anne's Church in the Town End district of Ormskirk is at the centre of a thriving parish. The current church, which was completed in 1850, is the most recent of several buildings which have served as a place of worship for the town's Catholic community since the Reformation. Within its walls and churchyard there are several interesting features which provide links to Ormskirk's past.



St. Anne's church was built using public subscriptions and was consecrated in 1916

The parish of St. Anne's dates back to 1732, when, for the first time since the Reformation, Ormskirk had a resident priest. This was Fr. Maurus Bulmer, a Benedictine priest who originally established a Mass House on Aughton Street. In 1745, following an attack on the house by a violent group protesting against Jacobite uprisings, Fr. Bulmer built a chapel on what is now Prescott Road on the far side of Dyer's Brook, a location he considered much safer, this was dedicated to St. Oswald. The original chapel was replaced by another in 1795 which was in use until the church we see today was built over 50 years later.

The Mass House Stone

The part played by the former Mass House on Aughton Street in the history of the Catholic Church in Ormskirk was still recognised in the twentieth century. When the building was demolished as part of a town redevelopment, a small stone from its gable was saved by a St. Anne's parishioner. It commemorated the original owners of the house, John and Dorothy Entwistle, prominent Ormskirk residents in the late seventeenth century and the stone was later installed in St. Anne's Church interior under the direction of Fr. Clement Herlihy where it can still be seen today.



Carved into the Mass House Stone is the date 1668 and the initials of John and Dorothy Entwistle, original owners of the house



The St. Anne's War Memorial received listed status in 2007

The St. Anne's War Memorial

The war memorial stands in front of the church overlooking Prescott Road. Its imposing stone pillar depicts a crucifix with a dying soldier at its foot and is flanked by two other pillars listing the names of those from the parish who fell in both world wars. The monument, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral, was unveiled in March 1920 by Captain F. N. Blundell of Crosby Hall.



The graves of Polish servicemen

Commonwealth War Graves

St. Anne's churchyard also contains Commonwealth War Graves including those of 26 Polish servicemen; during the Second World War the graveyard was used for burials from Polish Military Hospital No. 4, then stationed at Ormskirk. The November 1944 St. Anne's Newsletter, which reported the funerals of two Polish servicemen, concluded "A small plot in our churchyard will be forever Poland R.I.P."

FRIENDS BURIAL GROUND, BICKERSTAFFE

Along the aptly named “*Graveyard Lane*” in Bickerstaffe lies an enclosed piece of land with iron gates. The inscription “*Friends Burial Ground 1665*” carved into a stone tablet set into the wall bears witness to the determination of the Quakers of the Ormskirk area, who, like other non-conformist religious groups in the seventeenth century, fell foul of the strict rules which required them to worship and pay tithes to the Established Church.



A carved stone tablet can still be seen on the wall beside the entrance to the burial ground (shown below)

The first Friends

In 1653 the first Meeting House in the area was set up in Bickerstaffe on land adjacent to the present Stanley Gate public house. At this time Richard Cubban and Oliver Atherton, prominent members of the Bickerstaffe community, withdrew from worship at the Parish Church and refused to have their children baptised. Instead they began worshipping on a family basis.

There was a significant development when a visiting group from Kendal brought them together with other like-minded locals. The new group felt an enlightenment had come and a different world was beginning, in which all would be equal and injustice would be no more. It is said that Richard Cubbon is the ancestor of many people living in Bickerstaffe.



The Religious Society of Friends

Founded by George Fox (1624-91) the Religious Society of Friends dates from the mid-seventeenth century when the movement developed in England and the American Colonies.

Friends (or Quakers as they are often called) differ from other religions as they are without creed, clergy or other ecclesiastical forms. They seek a life of simplicity, peace, truth and believe in the power of silence.

Oliver Atherton of Bickerstaffe

At this time religious non-conformity was against the law and punishable by the imposition of tithes. As a result in 1661 Oliver Atherton, amongst others, was taken to gaol in Lancaster where he died despite the efforts of his friends to petition the Countess of Derby to cancel her claim for his tithes. The Quaker community was so distraught that they decided to highlight their plight by carrying the coffin from Lancaster to Bickerstaffe, stopping at every market place to display it alongside a notice explaining the circumstances of Oliver Atherton’s death. He was eventually buried in his “*owne yeard*” in Bickerstaffe on 3rd February 1663. Over the following years there were many like Oliver Atherton who suffered fines, confiscation of goods and imprisonment for their refusal to conform.

It was not until the Act of Toleration in 1689 that Quakers could lawfully worship in their own Meeting House. The house of Godfrey Atherton of Bickerstaffe was duly registered and licensed by the local Justice of the Peace.

Quaker burials

When the Friends Burial Ground was purchased in 1665, Quaker conventions for cemeteries were followed. These differed from other religious denominations in preferring simple rough ground and often used fields to bury their dead. The location of a grave was not marked and could only be determined by referring to a grave plan. Unfortunately the grave plan for the Bickerstaffe cemetery cannot be found, although Ormskirk Parish Church records show about 250 burials.

It was not until the nineteenth century that Friends permitted gravestones to be placed on graves, but even then they had to be simple. The height and width of the monument was controlled, and it could only be engraved with a name and date. Historian Thomas Hamm, one of the foremost experts on Quaker traditions, noted that even in death, Friends showed their “*quality*” by restricting the size of their monuments.

The most recent internment in the Friends Burial Ground is that of John Bispham in May 1813, he lived in a house next to the Bickerstaffe Meeting House

The Friends Burial Ground is situated in Graveyard Lane, off Long Lane, Bickerstaffe. There is a Friends Meeting House in Court Road, Southport.



WEST LANCASHIRE LIGHT RAILWAY & ALTY'S BRICKWORKS, HESKETH BANK

In the 1800s, railways gradually became an everyday experience for people travelling between towns and cities in Britain, on trains using a standard type of track so that they could travel all over the country. At the same time, smaller private railways running on narrow tracks were in common use in factories and industries such as mining and quarrying; these were built the way they were because of the job they had to do. One such example was that used by Alty's Brickworks at Hesketh Bank, part of which is now home to the popular visitor attraction, the West Lancashire Light Railway.

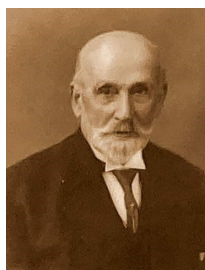


This type of transport was often unpowered and was used to push carts short distances along a level surface or down a slope. Over time iron wheels and tracks were introduced, the reduced friction allowed materials to be moved more efficiently and powered transport became more usual. Narrow gauge railways typically ran on tracks only 2 feet wide (the standard public railway width is 4 feet 8.5 inches) as they were cheaper and easier to use in smaller spaces. The tracks for narrow gauge railways were sometimes indoors, for example in corn mills moving grain, or outdoors, as in Hesketh Bank.

The engine "Sybil" was built for Dinorwic Slate Quarries, Llanberis in 1906 and worked there until the 1960s. It is now used for passengers on the West Lancashire Light Railway

A brickworks at Hesketh Bank

By 1878 the West Lancashire Railway had extended to Hesketh Bank and at a similar time the Ainsdale and Skelmersdale Brick Company began to exploit the large reserves of clay in the area. When this company failed in 1885 it was purchased by up and coming local entrepreneur, Henry Alty, whose business flourished. The site had its own light railway carrying clay dug from the claypit to the brickmaking area. The brickworks site expanded and remained operational in Hesketh Bank for nearly a century. But with the introduction of breeze blocks and new building techniques, demand had fallen to the extent that in 1970 the site closed after a period of decline. Alty's business focus shifted to the supply of building and horticultural materials and its headquarters, still supplying the area, are now in Much Hoole.



Henry Alty (1851-1939) at its height his brickworks employed over 100 people

A visitor attraction for the brickworks site

The abandoned site did not find an alternative use for some decades. In the meantime, parts of the materials and equipment left on site were moved elsewhere or leased with Alty's permission for reuse.



This tub was used at the Alty's Ltd. Brickworks to transport dug clay from the claypit.

They succeeded to a remarkable extent, and within a few years a new 430 yard track was built in a rough L shape along the edge of the abandoned brickworks claypit and a restored steam locomotive was running along it for crowds of visitors.

The West Lancashire Light Railway, the only narrow gauge railway in Lancashire open to the public, prospered greatly and continues to be very successful. The line includes a station area, sheds, workshops and sidings, while enthusiastic and expert volunteers support the railway in a variety of functions. Replacement parts that can't be sourced are made from scratch on site.

More locomotives have been fully restored and newer purpose-built semi-open coaches run on the track. The railway, now one of West Lancashire's most popular attractions, is run by a charitable trust and welcomes visitors on selected days between April and October as well as special themed events. It's so impressive to see how this modern day West Lancashire landmark has grown from the remnants of the past.



Booking office and shop at the West Lancashire Light Railway site

THE LANDMARKS OF THE SIXTEEN ANCIENT PARISHES AND TOWNSHIPS OF HISTORIC WEST LANCASHIRE

THE WEST DERBY HUNDRED



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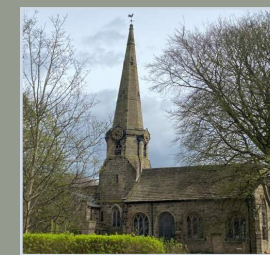
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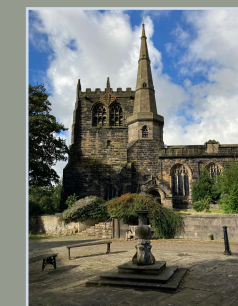
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WHAT CAN BE
SEEN TODAY?

DERBY STREET–ORMSKIRK'S PROFESSIONAL QUARTER

Derby Street, originally known as Lydiate Lane, was for many years the professional quarter of Ormskirk. A savings bank, school, police offices and magistrate's court formed an impressive line of public buildings. Opposite was a second bank, solicitors' offices and the imposing Commercial Hotel. The street looks much the same today, although some purposes of the buildings have changed. This is the case with the former United Charity School building, which, although the handsome Gothic façade remains largely intact, has been the furniture showroom of longstanding local business Stokers since the 1950s.



Derby Street, Ormskirk in the early twentieth century. The buildings look very similar today. The Commercial Hotel is on the left, the school wall is on the right with the Magistrates' Court beyond.

Ormskirk United Charity School

The history of the United Charity School goes back to 1804 when land for this purpose was first earmarked, although the plan took many years to come to fruition. A new school was considered necessary due to the poor conditions and overcrowding at the existing Charity School in Church Street. Lord Derby formed a committee of trustees who undertook to raise the necessary funds to create a school with three classrooms plus outbuildings.

Completed in 1838 in an Elizabethan style, the new Infants' School and National School initially shared the same building, which was considered spacious and modern, although of a single storey, and housed up to 700 pupils. A second storey was added in 1853 costing £1007 which allowed the number of pupils to increase to 1,000.

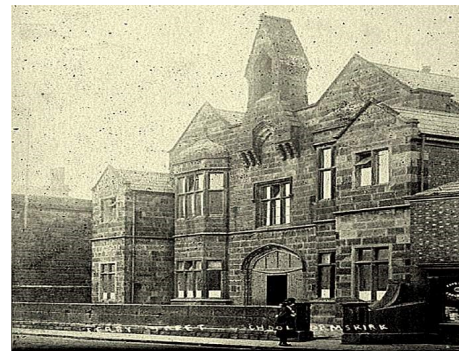
Raising funds for the upkeep of the new school

Over the years many fundraising events were held in the town to ensure the school had sufficient funds and to finance building projects. One of the most notable was a bazaar organised by Lady Mary Skelmersdale in 1839 held in the Town Hall, Church Street. It ran over several days raising a considerable amount of money, with contributions from many notable local residents such as The Misses Astley, who sold their needlework, and a display of drawings by the Farrington sisters.

Initially, the school provided education for both boys and girls up to the age of 14, but in 1874 a new boys' school was opened in Aughton Street and boys over the age of seven received their education there. The Derby Street school became known as the Infants' School and Girls' National School.

Although the 1872 Education Act made it compulsory for all children between the ages of five and 13 to attend school, the reality was sometimes different. Education was not always valued, particularly for girls. Children were often kept at home to help with jobs or look after younger brothers and sisters. Many families struggled to pay the 1d per week charge for heating the school, and the pupils often complained that they were so cold it was impossible to write.

Lessons revolved around the 3 Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) and classes were large, particularly in the early days, so that many left without having mastered these subjects. Discipline was strict, and a sharp tap with a ruler on the back of the hands was a regular method of punishment. Family stories abound of left-handed pupils being punished and forced to use their right hand. There was no provision for school milk or dinners back then and many children had to walk to Derby Street and back each day; for some this was a distance of several miles.



These two photographs were taken over 120 years apart but the façade of the former school is easily recognisable, and it is possible to distinguish many original features despite the change in purpose from education to furniture store. The distinctive bell tower, unfortunately minus its bell, is still a local landmark, but the front wall has been sacrificed to make way for car parking

School teachers through the years

The first schoolmaster was Daniel Kennedy from Linlithgow near Glasgow. He had served in the army for 21 years before taking the job of schoolmaster in Ormskirk, and later went into business in the town where he had a grocery shop on Moor Street.

By 1850 Albert Daymond was in post. Although a well regarded teacher, his conduct was called into question in 1852 when he was accused of injuring a pupil named Robert Swift, aged 12, by taking him by the shoulder and pulling him backwards to make him sit up straight; the boy fell ill shortly afterwards and died from an inflammation of the lungs. The coroner however ruled that death was from natural causes and Mr. Daymond had no charge to answer. It was reported that cheers from the pupils could be heard in the court house when the verdict was delivered.

Mr. Daymond must have left the school shortly afterwards as an advertisement for a new master in 1857 (see above) was answered by Frederick James Chittleburgh, a native of Norfolk, who took over from a Mr. Jeffcock. Mr. Chittleburgh was credited with raising the educational character of the school and although a firm disciplinarian he was also known for his kindness. In 1872, under the tenure of Mr. Chittleburgh, Miss Watts was mistress of the infants' school whilst Miss Hammond was in charge of the older children. In 1875 Frederick Chittleburgh resigned his post and opened a private school in Church Street.

Miss Elizabeth Agnes Thompson from Manchester was a well known teacher in the infants' school for 40 years. Also said to be very strict with her pupils, she lived on Stanley Street, Ormskirk with her widowed mother, also a teacher.

By the 1950s the Derby Street school was no longer considered fit for purpose, and in 1951 the infants were transferred to a new flagship school in Greetby Hill. The junior school joined them in 1952 and the old school building was closed. Very shortly afterwards it began its new life as the furniture showroom of Stokers, originally established as a drapery business in Burscough Street by Alfred Stoker in 1895.

WANTED

WANTED on 31st day of March next, for the ORMSKIRK UNITED CHARITY SCHOOLS, a MASTER, for the BOYS' SCHOOL.

He must be a member of the Church of England, and possess a Certificate enabling him to take Pupil Teachers (and he must be able to sing). He will be required to teach in the Sunday School. Salary, £70 a year, and the allowance for Pupil Teachers. There is no House attached to the school.

Applications with Testimonials, must be sent to me before 28th day of February next.

LAWRENCE WRIGHT Secretary

Ormskirk Advertiser January 17th 1857



Elizabeth Agnes Thompson
(1861-1940)

A Sessions House, Magistrates' Court and Police Station for Ormskirk

Prior to 1850 several buildings were associated with the upkeep of law and order in Ormskirk and the surrounding area. In the early days these were under the jurisdiction of the Town Constable who was elected annually by the Court Leet. Following the 1839 County Constabulary Act, a Lancashire police force was formed and by 1857 this had become the largest in the country, with 2,447 police officers. A new building was needed to accommodate the local branch of this prestigious service, and in 1850 a new police station and magistrates' court was built next-but-one to the school (Ormskirk Savings Bank being in between). It can still be seen on Derby Street with many original features intact.

The new building

Built of sandstone in a classical revival style, it had an 80 ft. frontage and cost £2,200. Its jurisdiction covered the 21 townships of the Ormskirk Union.

The building housed married quarters for the superintendent, sergeant, and constables as well as accommodation for six single constables. It also contained a sessions room for use of the magistrates and judges of the County Court, each had their own separate marked entrance and the remains of lettering can still be seen above some doorways. The superintendent's access to living accommodation was on the front right-hand side, the magistrates' entrance was on the left hand side, with the constables' entrance being from the side roadway. There were also four cells at the back of the building.



The Magistrates' Court is on the left on this 1920s view

A feature, still visible on the side of the building, is a cast-iron standard measure from 1879. This was used to ensure fair trading on the market.

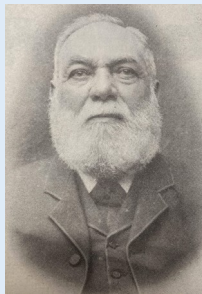


There were separate doors for the Superintendent and Constable

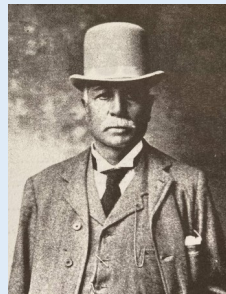
Notable members of the Ormskirk Constabulary

Inspector Edward Dorset moved into the newly built constables' married quarters in 1850 and later became Superintendent of Police in 1864.

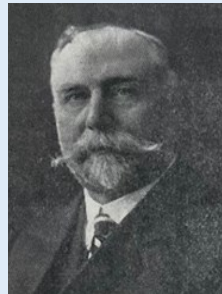
The longest serving Superintendent was Richard Jervis who retired in 1907 aged 78 after 30 years in the position. Following his retirement he wrote a book about his life.



Edward Dorset



Richard Jervis



Charles Hodgson

His successor was Charles Hodgson who had an illustrious career in the police force, and had been involved in several well-known cases including the Liverpool trial of Mrs. Maybrick, convicted of poisoning her husband.

A Petty Sessions Court was held each week, the Quarter Sessions Court for more serious cases having been transferred to Liverpool in 1817. In the early days many of the cases heard were seemingly of a quite minor nature, but often sentences were severe. One amongst many examples was that of John Kiggins and William Crockball who stole a chicken on 25th December 1881. They were referred to the Quarter Sessions in Liverpool where a sentence of four months hard labour, to be served at Kirkdale Prison, was handed down.

Justices of the Peace were appointed to sit on the Ormskirk Bench, and these were usually local men keen to do their civic duty. The 1924 list of 21 Magistrates included some notable names:

James Bromley of The Homestead, Lathom - local antiquarian

William Leak Hutton, Moss Bank, Aughton - owner of the Ormskirk Advertiser

Cecil Edward Maples, The Elms, Derby Street - former Liverpool solicitor

Samuel Thomas Rosbotham, Stanley Farm, Bickerstaffe - M.P. for Ormskirk 1929

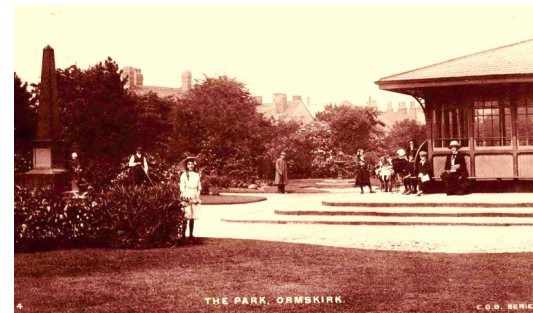
A large modern police station was built on the corner of Derby Street and Burscough Street in the 1980s and all police activities were transferred to it. The Magistrates' Court and Sessions Courts continued in the original building until its closure in 2016 when cases were transferred to Preston, Wigan and Leyland.

“TO THE MEMORY OF BRAVE MEN WHO HAVE FOUGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY”

THE ORMSKIRK OBELISK

The death of famous Ormskirk resident and survivor of the Charge of the Light Brigade, Sergeant-Major James Ikin Nunnerley of the 17th Lancers in November 1905, was the impetus behind the erection of a war memorial to honour those from the town who had fought in wars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The sandstone obelisk with its memorial plaques can be seen in the triangular park which sits between St. Helens Road and Ruff Lane. Originally called the Public Pleasure Grounds, the area has more recently been known as Victoria Park.



The Pleasure Grounds were built on previously rough ground donated by the Earl of Derby. The area was landscaped in a very short space of time, largely by striking miners. The Earl and Countess of Derby performed the opening ceremony on 12th September 1894.

The war memorial obelisk can be seen on the left



In addition to Sergeant-Major Nunnerley, three men from Ormskirk who lost their lives in the Boer War are also commemorated on the obelisk. Colour Sergeant John William Wainwright was killed at Spion Kop in 1900, Corporal Richard James Martlew was killed at Bothwell in 1900 and Trooper Austin Herrity drowned at Bleisnie Drift on the Grange River in August 1900.

In 2016 a plaque in memory of Private William Edward Heaton (1875-1941), who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions of 23rd August 1900, was laid at the foot of the obelisk.

James Ikin Nunnerley (1831-1905) owned a drapers shop on Moor Street, Ormskirk and built houses on Greetby Hill notable for the cannon balls on their gateposts

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, AUGHTON

St. Michael's Anglican Parish Church is in the Archdeanery of Ormskirk and Diocese of Liverpool. It is beautifully situated at the head of Church Lane, Aughton and is a building with ancient origins. There is evidence to suggest that Christians have worshipped here for over a thousand years.



St. Michael's Church as it appears today

The church as we see it today was constructed in the thirteenth century in local grey-brown sandstone with stone slate roofs. The area around Aughton had several quarries such as the Delph and Sandfield Quarry in Long Lane, Aughton Park, so there would have been no problem sourcing building materials.



A Norman connection

To the east of the porch is a blocked doorway, partly hidden by a buttress. This is the oldest part of the building and suggests Norman origins.

There was continual change within the church over the centuries; an extension to the nave and a central steeple were added in the fourteenth century, a chancel in the fifteenth century and an alteration to widen an earlier narrow aisle in the sixteenth century. In 1876 W. and J. Hey changed the appearance of the chancel, windows and aisle.

St. Michael's Church has a ring of six bells; four cast in 1715 by Abraham Rudhall, and two in 1935 by Gillet and Johnson.



The Burrell Collection in Glasgow has on display a fifteenth century wooden sculpture which originally belonged to St. Michael's Church

"A different church"

1913 brought the largest change when the church was closed for 18 months and opened as "a completely different church" according to contemporary accounts. Plaster had been removed displaying the stonework walls, oak beamed roofing was revealed, more comfortable pews were provided and a Lady Chapel was formed.



St. Michael's Church, early nineteenth century

A first hand account

A full and interesting personal description of this major change in St. Michael's was given by Miss Marjorie Holmes in her "Memories of Aughton" first published in 1978. Miss Holmes was well known in the local community, she often gave talks relating her memories of Aughton in the early twentieth century.

Rectors of St. Michael's Church

St. Michael's has had many notable rectors over the past 800 years. The first was Robert Blundell in 1246, whilst in the eighteenth century there were two consecutive rectors called Plumbe; Thomas in 1734 and his son William in 1769. The Plumbe Chapel (also called the Lady Chapel) added in 1913/14 was named after William Plumbe.

At one time St. Michael's had an independent Rectory nearby in Church Lane but it was demolished in 1970 and Old Rectory Green, a road with houses, was built.

The present post is held by the Reverend Andrew Housley CA, who continues to ensure St. Michael's Church remains an important part of the Aughton community.



Rev. R.F. Markham was rector during the renovations

Around St. Michael's Church

There were originally cottages and an old pub called the Ring O'Bells next to the graveyard. These buildings were demolished in 1877 when the graveyard was enlarged. Sometime later the Stanley Arms Public House, named after Arthur Stanley, was built across the road. The Stanley family, formerly of Lathom House, were still well regarded in the Aughton area.

Holt Green and St. Michael's School

Holt Green is a small triangular area of grassland situated at the opposite end of Church Lane which originally contained an ancient cross. By the 1800s the cross was broken, and the area unkempt.

In 1912 a new cross was given to the community by Mr. George Blundell of Thornhill, Aughton to commemorate the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary. On February 8th it was dedicated by Bishop Chavasse of the Liverpool Diocese. A tea was provided afterwards in the school for the community to attend.

St. Michael's School was built in 1836 as a single storey stone construction, with additions in 1881. It provided education for children from five to 11 years of age and had a strong connection with the church. Many still recall walking with their class the length of Church Lane to attend special services given by the Reverend in the 1950s. The school relocated to Delph Park Avenue in the 1980s and the building, which at first became a rest home, is now private apartments.



Holt Green view showing the Coronation Cross situated on the triangular green at the end of Church Lane, with St Michael's School behind

Francis James Chavasse, the Bishop of Liverpool, was instrumental in pushing forward the long awaited Anglican Cathedral which opened in 1910. In later years he was well known as the father of Dr. Noel Chevasse, who was awarded two Victoria Crosses and a Military Cross in the First World War, but was later killed in action 1917.

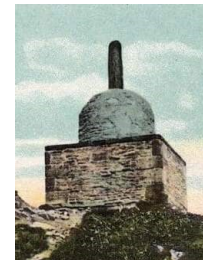


Dr. Chevasse, Bishop of Liverpool

St. Michael's Church is a Grade I listed building.

HILLTOP LANDMARKS, ASHURST BEACON AND PARBOLD BOTTLE

The flat West Lancashire plain is punctuated by two notable hills, Parbold Hill and Ashurst Hill. Each has a monument designed to be visible from the surrounding countryside, but their origins are very different.



The Reform Pillar in its original position

The Reform Pillar or "Parbold Bottle"

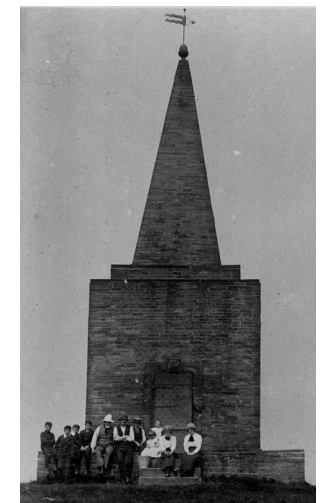
This monument was built in 1832 by Parbold Quarry owners and workers in celebration of the Great Reform Act, which extended the right to vote. It also marked the coronation of William IV and served as a memorial to Charles Dicconson of Wrightington Hall. Built on a large plinth on the top of Parbold Hill, it was visible for miles around, and was given the local name, "Parbold Bottle", as it resembled a Georgian port bottle. By the 1950s it had been neglected for many years and finally collapsed after a storm. In 1958 it was re-built by public subscription lower down Parbold Hill, where it sits today. The monument and the Millennium Path leading to it are maintained by the Douglas Valley Lions.

Ashurst Beacon

Ashurst Hill in the parish of Dalton rises 570 feet above sea level. It is crowned by a monument erected as a watch tower in the late 1700s by Sir William Ashurst of nearby Ashurst Hall, at a time when the threat of invasion by Napoleon's troops was considered imminent. Watchers were stationed on the hill day and night, ready to light a beacon if the enemy landed.

In the nineteenth century, Ashurst Hall and its surrounding countryside was purchased by Sir Thomas Bootle. Eventually around 20 acres, including the hill, came into the ownership of the Meadows family of Wigan. A brass plaque erected in 1962 commemorates the donation of the beauty spot to the people of Wigan in memory of Thomas Meadows.

The 300 acres of Beacon Country Park between Upholland, Dalton and Skelmersdale are managed by West Lancashire Borough Council.



Ramblers enjoy the view in the early 1900s

CANAL LIFE AT TOP LOCKS, LATHOM

Top Locks, Lathom is today a popular destination where people enjoy lovely views of canals and countryside, intriguing architecture, a peaceful rural atmosphere, picturesque cottages and a historic dining pub. There's not a hint that behind all this lies a noisy, hectic and grimy workplace where boatmen and canal workers laboured long hours to move the coal, materials and merchandise that powered the Industrial Revolution of the 1700s and 1800s, and kept working well into the twentieth century.



The tranquil scene today

The first cut of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal

The very first cut of the entire Leeds and Liverpool Canal was made by navvies (canal labourers) digging into the ground at Halsall, on 5th November 1770. By 1774 the work had reached Lathom, where two features were built that created the atmosphere enjoyed by present-day visitors; first a dry dock, and secondly a junction between the main canal and a side branch to be built to the Irish Sea.



A stunning statue of a navvie celebrates the first cut of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal

A connection with Rufford Old Hall

The wealthy Hesketh family from nearby Rufford Old Hall were significant funders and major beneficiaries of the Rufford Branch, because it enabled them to avoid heavy handling duties in Liverpool docks for exporting the coal dug from their own mines. Instead, the coal was sent on the new branch of the canal, which was dug through their own lands between Top Locks and Hesketh Bank, and then for onward sale through ports in Britain.

The dry dock



A hive of activity in the early 1900s

When you look at the dry dock today, it can be hard to make out everything that's still here. There were plans to restore the dock recently, but the work had to be postponed due to funding and other resource issues. If you look closely, you can see the blocks the boats would have rested on during the maintenance process, the stone lining of the dock, the steps down from the canal level and the water channel from the higher level of the main canal by which the boats would have accessed the dock.

The dry dock was essential to keep the canal boats running as they needed cleaning, repainting and general repair and maintenance which couldn't be done when they were in the water. When engine power replaced horse haulage, engine maintenance was added to the workload, and for a few years in the early 1900s boats were also built at the dock.



The dry dock today: a large, dry, overgrown area a few feet below the canal, on the opposite bank from The Ship and in front of the Top Lock cottages

The Blood Tub

At the end of the long working day, canal workers looked to a beerhouse for sustenance and at Top Locks this usually meant the famous Blood Tub (now renamed less alarmingly as The Ship at Lathom). Census records indicate that there was at one time another beerhouse on the other side of the canal, but the Blood Tub maintained its presence and expanded from its origin at 4 Wheat Lane to take over numbers 6 and 8 on its way to becoming the modern extended building of today.



The Ship at Lathom was originally three canal workers' cottages

The stories told at The Ship of the origin of the Blood Tub name, based on the manufacture of black puddings, or the washing of bloodied workers hands, vividly reflect the rumbustious days of the canal at the height of its activity.

Homes for canal workers—the story of a canal family

When the cottages were originally built, early in the history of Top Locks, the canal company had tenancy agreements with the canal worker residents, and census records show that this arrangement continued for at least one family over three generations.

In 1871, brothers Richard (19) and John Ollerton (22) lived with their widowed mother Margaret on Wheat Lane, adjacent to Top Locks. They were both canal labourers.

In 1879 Richard married Alice Baldwin (nee Rothwell), a boatman's daughter from nearby Sutch Lane. They moved into 1, Top Locks soon afterwards with Alice's son, William Baldwin, from her first marriage.



Cottages were originally built along Wheat Lane and by the side of the canal as housing for canal workers and their families

Richard and Alice lived at 1, Top Locks until their deaths in 1917 and 1931 respectively. Richard was a canal labourer all his life. Richard and Alice had six children together, including Ellen (born 1888) and Richard (born 1892, their only son).

In 1931, Ellen continued living at 1 Top Locks after the death of her mother and married Robert Watkinson, a canal boat captain from Wheat Lane, who moved in with her. They were both still living there in 1939.

A hazardous life

Living near the canal could be hazardous and local newspapers regularly contained stories of drownings, particularly where victims had lost their footing and accidentally fallen in the water.

One particularly tragic case was that of Robert Henry Lyon, aged 17, who drowned just yards from his home in 1940 after mistakenly walking into the water in the darkness whilst on his way to a meeting of the Burscough Home Guard.

Even experienced canal workers were not immune to tragedy. In 1893 Henry Peet aged 60, a lock tender for the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Company, missed his footing whilst attending to the paddles on Number One Lock. His body was later discovered in the water by his son.

Over time canals became less profitable; during the First World War the government subsidised their operation, but after this came the Great Depression when the struggling economy meant that jobs and resources were scarce. Many canal workers recorded their status in the 1921 census as “out of work”, but by 1939 the situation had worsened further. Records show that for Top Lock and Wheat Lane only six out of 23 of the cottage occupiers were active canal workers, another six were in other employment and the remaining 11 were economically inactive, either widowed or retired.



Cottages at Top Locks have been modernised and make strikingly attractive and much sought after homes (including one for holiday rentals); they contribute a great deal to the picturesque scene

In challenging times for Britain following the Second World War canals fell increasingly out of use with the growth in road, rail and air transport. They remained unused, polluted, and often a place for dumping unwanted rubbish. But gradually, often through voluntary and charitable efforts, their environmental standards improved and interest grew in using canals for leisure.

We can see the wonderful results of these efforts in Top Locks as it is today. But we still remember that people have lived difficult working lives there, and that two hundred and fifty years of history lie behind the interest and charm that we find.



A modern leisure canal boat navigates the lock at Lathom

A TOWER AND STEEPLE — ORMSKIRK'S UNIQUE PARISH CHURCH

The Parish Church of Ormskirk, dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul, is located on a sandstone ridge overlooking an area of low-lying land, a place of worship for over 850 years, possibly longer. It is unique and famous among English churches in having both a tower and steeple adjacent to each other and is by far the most historic building in Ormskirk, its oldest structural feature being a late Norman window on the north side of the chancel. Throughout its long history the church has been enlarged, adapted and repaired many times. The interior as we see it today is largely the result of a remodelling which took place in the late nineteenth century.

Victorian Restorations

Until 1877 most of the church was floored with rough paving over the bare earth, within which no less than 7,000 burials are recorded as having taken place. The first stage of the restoration, under the guidance of Rev. Richard Sheldon, was to excavate the ground, to remove the bones to a large common grave in the churchyard. The work which followed took just under 15 years and included the removal of galleries, rebuilding of the north wall and fitting new oak pews.



Ormskirk's famous tower and steeple

In 1891 a porch was added with a commemorative plaque marking the completion of the restoration by Rev. John Edwin Woodrow who had taken over as vicar in 1884 following the death of his predecessor.

... and what of the two sisters?

One of the questions asked by visitors is why does the church have a tower and a steeple? An often repeated legend tells of two sisters unable to agree on how to endow the church, but the truth is probably more practical and concerns the bells of Burscough Priory which needed rehousing following the Reformation, the existing steeple not being suitable. However, the story adds an element of myth to a fascinating building.

FURTHER READING

If you would like to know more about the families and landmarks covered in this booklet, the following references may be of interest:

Memories of Aughton by Miss Marjorie Holmes <https://aughtonmemories.wordpress.com/memories-of-aughton-by-miss-marjorie-holmes/>

Mona Duggan, The History of Scarisbrick, Carnegie Publishing, 1996

Mona Duggan, Ormskirk A History, Phillimore, 2007

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Richard Jervis, Chronicles of a Victorian Detective, P&D Riley, 1995

Ormskirk Parish Church <https://ormskirkparishchurchorgan.org/the-organist/>

John H. Sagar, The Bickerstaffe Quakers 1650-1800

St. Anne's Church guidebook <https://www.flipsnack.com/ormskirkstannes/st-annes-book-cover.html>

Ormskirk Advertiser "Nostalgia" series by Dot Broady-Hawkes <https://muckrack.com/dot-broaday-Hawkes/articles>

The Mona Duggan Archive held by ODFHS can be consulted by arrangement with the Society's Librarian: e-mail librarianodfhs@gmail.com

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Ormskirk and District Family History Society was founded in 1980 as a focus for local history and genealogical interests and covers the sixteen ancient parishes of the West Derby Hundred. New members are always welcome, contact secretary@odfhs.email, follow us on Facebook or see our website www.odfhs.website for more information.