

Cark in Cartmel: on the way to somewhere

Cark in Cartmel is a hamlet in the Lower Holker Township in the parish of Cartmel. Much of Cark's economic and social history has been as a consequence of its geographical location in the south west of the Cartmel Peninsula. It has the Ay or Eea running through the village first as a fast flowing beck and finally entering Morecambe Bay through a winding creek. The hamlet lies irregularly in and above the chasm through which the Eea flows with housing along its bank, on the road to Haverthwaite towards Holker Hall and over Cark Bridge past the Engine Inn towards Cark and Cartmel Station towards Flookburgh. Cark Hall built in 1582 lies on the edge of the village on the road to Cartmel.

The proximity of fast flowing water has generated a number of water powered mills possibly since medieval times and at least since the seventeenth century. However, it was not until 1785 that the construction of a Cotton Mill was undertaken which would according to Stockdale in the Annals of Cartmel fundamentally changed Cark from a rural idyll to a pre industrial mill village. Employing up to 400 men, women and children, at least three rows (Low, Middle and High Row and Mill Yard) of housing were built to accommodate this influx of workers. The mill was probably in decline from 1805/6 due partly to the negative impact of the Napoleonic wars, but lasted until 1815 when it and its housing were liquidated off to Stockdale's inheritors. Edward Hall became the new owner of the mill which was to be used as a corn mill until 1936 when it burnt down.

Cark's milder coastal location and the improvement to the soil through the addition of lime (Cark had a lime kiln in 1665) allowed for lucrative wheat crops to be grown instead of the more usual oats and barley. Any surpluses of these crops along with money from peat which was being cut from the reclaimed mosses created profits which were the beginnings of agrarian wealth. He has suggested that this surplus of wealth may have contributed to local investment in coastal shipping and other investment ventures.

Cark's proximity to the sea along with the neighbouring village of Flookburgh has provided employment opportunities in fishing. According to

the census records of 1841 to 1851 there was an increase in men and women who declared their employment to be fishermen and it saw a decline in the number of men employed as agricultural labourers.

Another aspect of Cark's coastal location, which has in the past brought wealth to the village in the form of travellers, was the route to Ulverston over the Sands. There were in fact three routes across the sands, the first going through Flookburgh. , Thomas Butler of Flookburgh ran a carrier service to Lancaster on Tuesdays and Fridays. However in 1810, a shorter route was established which went via Cark and John Butler of Cark was recorded as having a carrier service which ran on Mondays and Thursdays to Lancaster. The third route was via Holker and went to Braddyl's Arms in Ulverston on Mondays and Thursdays.

With the coming of the Ulverstone and Lancaster railway in 1857, the Over Sands route began to decline and by 1882, the routes had ceased to operate. However, Cark was well placed to benefit from the railways as it became the location for the Cark in Cartmel station.

Cark in Cartmel railway station owed much of its existence to the efforts of the Duke of Devonshire in the 1840's. The station was designed by Paley and Austin and was probably built in the 1870's, a superior design than other small stations on the line. It even boasted an awning which he attributed to the station being used by the Cavendish family and at times royalty. In addition to transporting people in the early years freight was also important. The Low Wood gunpowder works had a depot there until the opening of the Lakeside branch in 1869. But the General Manager of Furness Railway, Alfred Aslett, saw the potential of both the trains and steamers in attracting tourists to South Lakeland. Carriers operated locally as well as coaches to Newby Bridge.

The railways, together with clean air and fresh produce, saw Cark become a tourist destination. Several properties such as the Railway Inn, the Station Hotel, the Queens Arms, the Engine Inn and the Rose and Crown in addition to several apartments were ready to cater for day trippers

and holiday makers from the industrial Furness Peninsula. With the improvement in roads, cycling was becoming a popular pastime and ads in the 1895 Handbook welcome cycling parties to Cark.

With Cark's hinterland still predominantly agricultural, the railway provided Cark with a convenient location to set up an auction mart and photographic evidence shows a thriving auction mart operating at Cark and Cartmel station in 1908.



Cark and Cartmel railway station Auction market 1908 : Cumbria Image Archive.

The influx of animals and farmers both brought trade to the businesses in Cark and created the

need for the establishment of several banks which were sub branches of either Grange over Sands or Ulverston. By 1911, there were two banks in Cark with partial opening times probably dedicated to the operation of the auction mart. The Manchester and Liverpool District Banking Co Ltd along with the London and Joint Stock Bank Ltd on Station Rd. In addition to the usual village shops, Bulmer's also notes an agricultural seed dealer in Gainsborough House a site occupied today by Bob's hairdressers. In 1928, the third bank opened which was Martin's bank.

In 1900, there 100 fishermen in Flookburgh and many of the cockles being harvested, passed through the station onwards to destinations in Lancashire and Yorkshire and beyond. With the establishment of the airfield at RAF Cark in 1941, the station catered for movements of both RAF personnel and Americans.

Finally, a mention must be made of the influence in terms of the built environment, land ownership, farm tenancies, investment and employment that the existence of Holker Hall has had on the history of Cark. Since the suppression of Cartmel Priory in 1536, the Hall was owned initially by the Preston family and through inheritance it passed firstly to a junior branch of the Lowther family and then to the Cavendish family, its present owners.

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