

## ALLITHWAITE FISHING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Farming and fishing were the main occupations of the inhabitants of Allithwaite for many years. In 1841 there were 31 people in the farming industry and 9 in fishing, but many women and children went cockling, not shown in the census of 1841.

Allithwaite... “employs the children, wives and young women of the fishermen’s families. These people follow each receding tide, and on the banks of sand, called “cockle skeers”, find the cockles. A friend of ours, who once saw a barn full of these people on a winter’s evening, has described the scene as very striking. Women bronzed to a copper hue – little ragged children with hair as rough and of the colour of the ass’s hide – strong muscular-looking young women drenched with wet, were all crowded together with their baskets, just as they had come off their work. They were measuring their lots to the dealer, who is commissioned to take them to his cart to the market.” (Sketches Of Grange, 1850)

In 1868-9 the Royal Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, xiii, page 156 stated that “great numbers of children, young persons and women who reside in the small villages on the coast of Morecambe Bay go upon the sands on every recession of the tide in parties from ten to twenty and pursue their occupation until the advancing tide compels them to return.” Apparently farmers complained that this employment robbed them of local labour and pushed up wages as the cockling was a year round occupation, depending on the weather. Children could start cockling at the age of 5 years and there was concern that physically the stooping posture was bad for them but also the clergy complained that the money they earned for the family was “at the expense of their intellectual and moral debasement”( Rev Mr Rigg of Hawkeshead). Cockling added a substantial income for a family and was therefore important to the survival of the family. (Working Children in Nineteenth Century Lancashire pp88-90)

By 1911 farming was still a major occupation for the village but only one person described fishing as an occupation.

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Allithwaite family out on the sands  
about 1900