

Winder Moor, Flookburgh in the 20th century

At the beginning of the 20th century Winder Moor lying to the south of Flookburgh and Allithwaite villages, defined by Morecambe Bay, Humphrey Head and the Barrow in Furness to Lancaster railway was a large, flat, open, agricultural area. It was sheltered from the prevailing wind. It had been partly reclaimed from the sea in the 18th century and by 1915 its 1600 acres, owned by Holker Estates, were farmed by eleven farms.

Rougholme Rifle Range

Close to Humphrey Head, at Rougholme Pool, a firing range, comprising of seven butts set at 100 feet intervals from the firing point, had been set up in 1911 for the local volunteers of the West Lancashire Territorial Force. They arrived there by rail as a halt and platform had been specially constructed for them at Wraysholme Crossing. It was a replacement for a firing range which had been established at Cark Marsh, to the north west of Flookburgh, in 1902 for the Ulverston Volunteer Battalion and the use of this site ceased in June 1912.

Humphrey Head was popular with holiday makers from Grange and Kents Bank as the sands were firm and it was a fine, natural feature on this section of coastline. It was recommended to be included in the proposed National Park that was being considered from the 1930s. In the late 1940s concerns were expressed about the continued use of Rougholme Rifle Range because of the danger to the public visiting the foreshore and the noise of rifle fire spoilt the peace and quiet of the area. Requisition of Rougholme was due to expire in 1952 and there was much public opposition to its use after that date. However it was not until 1958 that Friends of the Lake District reported that the War Department had finally abandoned Rougholme Point. When the National Park boundary was drawn in 1951 the coastal area of the Cartmel Peninsula was excluded.

Flookburgh Airship Factory Project 1916-1924

In March 1916 the Admiralty had decided that larger airships than were already being built were needed. Vickers of Barrow had an established airship building site on Walney Island but that was not suitable for the size of ship now being envisaged and the existing sheds had no spare capacity as they were fully utilized. A U-boat attack in 1915 on the Walney site also cast doubt on the wisdom of developing the site even more intensely. During 1916 Winder Moor at Flookburgh was chosen as the site for the new facilities. It was easily accessible with a main line railway close by; there was a plentiful supply of fresh water for ballast and producing hydrogen to inflate the airship; the mooring mast could be positioned so that the airship did not have to fly over the shed; there was adequate space for the necessary windbreaks and U-boats would not be able to approach the site

This site was acceptable to the Government and the order for the R37 to be built by Vickers was placed on 5 January 1917. A shed 900 feet long, 300 feet wide and 150 feet high was needed. Windbreaks at each end of equal length and height to the shed would mean that the development would be 2700 feet long. Compare this to Humphrey Head which is 173 feet high and 4500 feet long to imagine the impact the structure would have had on the area. Clad in corrugated iron sheets it would have

looked very alien against the normal construction of limestone, sandstone and slate that existed in the area. The shed and hydrogen plant were to be built on Willow Lane by Holme Farm.

A Government requirement that a large number of unskilled but disciplined men would be needed close by to handle the airship was solved by Vickers agreeing to provide a new housing estate adjacent to the existing village and so Flookburgh Model Aero Village was born and a site on rising ground close to Mireside Farm to the west of the airship station site was chosen. The design and materials used was very different to the local architecture. The layout of the airship site and the design of the houses were very similar to what was built at Beardmore Airship shed site at Inchinnan, Scotland. The main contractor for both Inchinnan and Flookburgh was Sir William Arrol Co Ltd. In times of war short cuts have to be made and using existing plans helped the project to get started so quickly. As the Inchinnan contract had just been completed as the Flookburgh contract started it is probable that the workforce moved down from Inchinnan.

Work began on the construction of the houses on 24 March 1917. On 12 May 1917 a military guard of 10 men, 3 NCO and 1 Lieutenant arrived and on 2 July 1917 work began on the foundations for the shed. Vickers had requested sidings for the site and the Furness Railway Board had authorised the work on 8 December 1916. These were completed on 16 May 1917. Materials for both the airship shed and the houses were able to be delivered directly to the sites by rail. The first occupiers moved into the newly built houses on 5 Dec 1917 but only 120 houses of the 300 planned were completed because the contract for the shed was cancelled in September 1917, just 3 months after construction work had started. Subsequently the village was renamed Flookburgh West then Ravenstown.

The contract for the airship shed was cancelled because of the shortage of steel. There were competing demands for the available steel from builders of ships, aeroplanes and airships. Six airship shed projects had already been abandoned and the 24 month time scale of the Flookburgh shed (plus an unspecified time to build the airship) was a big factor leading to its abandonment. The steel required for the Flookburgh shed would build four standard naval ships which could be in the water and in use in six months. Only 170 tons of the required 10,000 tons needed had been delivered and the Government decided that the steel could be recovered and used to build much needed aeroplane buildings.

It has been suggested that a skeleton frame was built and it was years before it was taken down. The evidence is that the site was mothballed and in the summer of 1918 Vickers approached the Admiralty and asked for permission to complete the shed but they were turned down. Accounts for Sir William Arrol and Co Ltd show they occupied the site until November 1919. On 3rd, 4th and 5th October 1921 an auction, organised by the Disposal Board, took place to clear what had been left on the site. The auction particulars show that there were a large number of temporary timber huts that had been used as stores and timber framed buildings with cement walls that had been dormitories and living quarters for about 150 contractors (probably used by men from the Inchinnan site). These buildings covered a total area of about of 10500 square feet. Contractors' materials, office and hostel equipment was also included in the sale. The airship shed foundations would have covered an area of 270,000 square

feet but it is unlikely that much would have been built in the three months between work commencing and the contract being cancelled; 300 concrete piles, 46000 wire pile binders and 9500 pile cross stays were listed in the items for disposal. Items had to be removed quickly after the sale and some of the land was reinstated to agricultural use. Holker account books show that in 1924 the Estate received compensation in lieu of reinstatement from the Air Ministry and restoration work (blasting out concrete and restoring fences) was still being carried out at West Plain Farm in 1926. Both Holme Farm and West Plain Farm received rent reductions because of damaged or irreparable land; only Holme Farm receiving a permanent reduction. Considerable expenditure on new buildings at West Plain Farm in 1922 and 1923 indicate that the Estate was confident about the future and started to invest in the agriculture of the area again.

No additional facilities for the 120 families who moved into the houses appear to have been built in the village and there was little work available in the area. What impact this had on the village needs to be researched. What stories exist in local families about this period?

Vickers archive material relating to airship development and Air Ministry archives has been destroyed and so official records no longer exist about the development of the site during this period. Information has been found in many sources and is listed separately. Dave Parkin of Heysham first sparked my interest by writing an article for the CPLHS January 2006 newsletter. He set up a display at RAF Millom Museum which unfortunately has closed. Alan Johnstone of Cumbrian Railway Association also has an archive of material which was very helpful.

Interwar period 1918-1939

Research is needed.

RAF Cark 1941-1945

Information can be found in Lancashire Airfields of the Second World War and Wings over Sands. Local recollections of how life was affected by the existence of the airfield would add a different dimension to the history of the airfield.

1945 -1960

Following the closure of RAF Cark some wooden huts at East Plain were used to house Polish refugee families. This period should be researched and recorded.

In 1948 the airfield was still under requisition but 150 acres had been made over to Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries for cultivation and had been let back to the original tenants. It was described as some of the best land in North Lancashire when Friends of the Lake District wrote to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning on 10 February 1948, describing the area and setting out their concerns about the disused airfield and the scatter of derelict buildings.

Caravans

In 1956 Holker Estates made planning applications to Lancashire County Council to establish caravan sites on its land in the Cartmel Peninsula area which included East Plain and Wyke Farm land on Winder Moor. Friends of the Lake District supported a site on the seaward site of East Plain but felt that the site at Wyke Farm was too close to Humphrey Head and said they would object to caravans being sited there. Planning permission was refused on grounds of the affect on amenity and loss of good agricultural land. An appeal was lodged by Holker Estates and a public enquiry was held on 5 July 1957. Council for the Protection of Rural England gave evidence at the Enquiry. They pointed out that the derelict Flookburgh Aerodrome was useless for agriculture because of the large amount of concrete that remained but would be a suitable site for caravans as access was good, it was close to the village and it was assumed that water and drainage was available on the site already.

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