Blackpool Heritage Champions

Study of a Local Village: Wrea Green

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Contents

A Study of a Local Village ........................................................................................................4

Background ..................................................................................................................................4

Task 1. The Chosen village is Wrea Green. ..................................................................................4

A Short history of Wrea Green.....................................................................................................6

Task 2. The ‘Three Buildings’ selected: .....................................................................................7

  a) Wrea Green Railway Station & Sidings ........................................................................... 7
  b) Wrea Green Windmill ..........................................................................................................10
  c) Moss Side Hospital ...........................................................................................................13

Task 3. Why shops may have changed their merchandise? ....................................................15

Task 4. Demonstrate your knowledge of a trade carried out in the village around one hundred years ago? ..................................................................................16

  Brick making ..........................................................................................................................16

Task 5: Identify 3 local family graves from the Gravestones in the Churchyard .................................................................................................................. 20

  Introduction ............................................................................................................................20
  a) Family Name: Fisher ........................................................................................................21
  b) Family Name: Atkinson .................................................................................................22
  c) Family Name: Hutchinson ............................................................................................23
  Additional Information: .........................................................................................................24

Task 6. Describe how the means of transport has changed over the past hundred years? ......................................................................................................................... 25

References: ..................................................................................................................................27

Further info: ..................................................................................................................................27

Note:
Where possible all sources have been referenced. Material has been used where no source was available. This work has been prepared as part of coursework for a short programme of study and is not to be distributed more widely. The current photo’s are Copyright to Mike Coyle.
Blackpool Heritage Champions

A Study of a Local Village

1. Choose a village to undertake your research from the three that we visit today, indicate your choice on a map and identify the uses of the main buildings. Your study will include the following information;

2. Identify three buildings and state when they were built, if possible find photographic evidence of the changes of use?

3. Provide reasons why shops may have changed their merchandise?

4. Demonstrate your knowledge of a trade carried out in the village around one hundred years ago?

5. Identify three local family names from the gravestones in the churchyard?

6. Describe how the means of transport has changed over the past hundred years?
A Study of a Local Village

Background

This series of tasks were set as part of a short course arranged for Blackpool Heritage Champions, by Blackpool Volunteers Centre. Visits were made to 4 sites in and around Blackpool and the Fylde, namely, Lytham Heritage Centre and Lytham Hall, Wrea Green and St Annes Church, Singleton. At Lytham and St Annes Singleton a Guide was provided to provide a brief history of the site. At Wrea Green we were encouraged to investigate an aspect of the church.

Task 1. The Chosen village is Wrea Green.

Bartholomew's 1887 Gazetteer of the British Isles described Wrea Green as: ‘a hamlet with Railway Station (dealt with later in this work), 2 miles West of Kirkham, with a Post Office’.

In history, the village has been referred to variously as: ‘Rigbi’ in the Doomsday Book; ‘Riggebi’ in 1226; ‘Rygeby’ in 1246; ‘Ruggeby’ in 1249; Wra in 1226; Wraa in 1329.

In 1891 the population was 401; in 1901 475; by 1951 it was 697 and in 1981 it was 1464. Currently, it’s around 1,800, in approximately 630 homes.

The economy of the village is based on farming, light industrial and mainly residential activity. In the past, McLean writes that the main work was derived from farming, both arable and stock.
A Short history of Wrea Green

Farrer & Brownbill (1912) provide an account of the village and surrounding area:

‘The village lies within the Township of Ribby with Wrea, in the Parish of Kirkham’. In 1870-72, John Marius Wilson's Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales described it as: ‘a township and a chapelry in Kirkham parish, Lancashire. The township lies on the Wyre railway, at Wrea-Green railway station, 1¾ mile W by S of Kirkham; and contains the village of Wrea-Green. The church was built in 1849. There are an endowed school and charities’.

The school, one of the oldest in the country, was originally built in 1693 with a legacy of £180. Both school and chapel were rebuilt in 1721, the present school dates from the mid 1800’s.

The chief road is that going west from Kirkham to Lytham; it passes through both Ribby and Wrea Green. From Wray Green cross roads the roads go south to Warton and north to Westby and Blackpool.

There is a parish council. An infectious diseases hospital (dealt with later in this work) was opened in 1902 at Moss Side.’

The Chapel and Church, dedicated to St Nicholas, possibly in response to its main benefactor, Nicholas Sharples, a London Innkeeper and Merchant, who had spent his childhood in Wray. The chapel was consecrated in 1755 by the Bishop of
Chester. The present church of “St Nicholas” built 1848-49 and consecrated in 1855. (3 family graves in the church are dealt with later in this work).

**Task 2. The ‘Three Buildings’ selected:**

a) Wrea Green Railway Station  
b) Wrea Green Windmill  
c) Moss Side Hospital

**a) Wrea Green Railway Station & Sidings**

The two platform station, on the Blackpool South to Kirkham line, opened in 1846. A single-track line to serve Lytham, branched off the Kirkham-to-Poulton line, heading south-south-west to serve the village of Wrea Green, it closed to passengers in 1961 and completely in 1965.

When the line was connected to the Blackpool and Lytham Railway in 1874, the line was doubled and the corner between Kirkham and Wrea Green was cut by a new south-westerly line, increasing traffic dramatically. The bulk of freight traffic carried bricks from the various brickworks in the clay rich area around Wrea Green & Kirkham.

On Friday 12 July 1907, the Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser reported a serious fire at Wrea Green station, caused by spark from a passing train. Several trucks were standing in the
Photo’s from: amounderness.co.uk/wrea_green_station.html

Photo (1967) from: virtualtenby.co.uk/Photo.asp?of=Wrea%20Green%20station%201967&Photograph=948742431
1&foto=Wrea%20Green
There is very little evidence of a station at the site, which is now an Industrial Estate, ‘Brook Mill’. However, some evidence exists amongst the brambles, ivy and fencing, of brick faced walling, where the platform or station buildings stood.
The current Wrea Green Village Plan is to revive the plan for a new railway station at Wrea Green in line with Lancashire County Council’s Transport Plan.

**b) Wrea Green Windmill**

Like the famous Windmill on the Green at Lytham and at Marton the Mill at Wrea Green combined with the 10 others to provide powered grain milling to meet the burgeoning food demands of the Industrial revolution era. Earliest date for the windmill can’t be found, however, it’s reasonable to assume that there has long been a need for the services of a Miller in the rural, arable setting.
Inside the burned out ruin of the Wrea Green Mill.

In 1982, a single storey building survives next to the Mill
Photo’s by John Burke, retrieved from Flickr

Fire was a constant hazard for Millers. If the mill stone spun too quickly there was the risk of sparks from the millstones and since flour is combustible, fires were all too often the cause of destruction of mills. In the case of the Wrea Green mill the cause was an exploding steam engine.
A neighbour of the mill planted trees to reduce the amount of noise from the mill. As the trees grew, this of course reduced access to wind. Unable to use wind power the Miller turned to a new invention, a Steam Engine. The engine blew up and caused the fire.

Shortly after, in the early 1990’s, plans were agreed to the restore the Mill for residential living.
c) **Moss Side Hospital**

Moss Side Hospital, also known as "Fylde Joint Isolation Hospital" was built about 1902, this was an Isolation Hospital for infectious diseases such as Typhoid Fever and Scarlet Fever. The local name was ‘The Fever Hospital’.

Moss Side Hospital near Wrea Green c1910. available ebay

It remained an isolation hospital until its latter years when it included facilities for Geriatric patients.

Moss Side Hospital. Photo available ebay -
The author’s mother was admitted there in the mid 1930’s with suspected Diphtheria. She remained there several weeks, on the run up to Christmas as a young teenager. She recalls the staff by name and remembers the care being ‘wonderful’. Visits by her parents, hampered by communication through glass screens. Before the Hospital closed in 1988.

Sir William Hodgson laying the foundation stone of extensions to Moss Side Hospital in 1937.

There is no trace now of the Hospital. The grounds have been developed for residential properties.

Site of Moss Side Hospital, Nov 2013
Task 3. Why shops may have changed their merchandise?

Understanding why shops change their Merchandise has troubled retailers since there were retailers. There are still out-posts of retailing where the things they sell haven’t changed in decades. All centres of commercial trading depend on demand and an ability to supply. In the case of Wrea Green, in the early days as a farming community generated demand as a result of simple requirements: food that couldn’t be derived from the farm or garden; basic or work clothing and haberdashery; fuel and tools farming and implements; horse tackle and feed, all presented for sale in a single shop – the General Store. It’s worth remembering, however, that the majority of folk would have been producing what they needed on a day to day basis from what was grown or made at home, with little input from shops in the village.

As village circumstances changed, so did demand. Increasing prosperity and relative spending power oiled the wheels of demand and supply.

Once demand is generated so is variety and competition, and variety and competition are the main drivers of change. Shops become specialised and less ‘general’. The evidence of range of shopping opportunities diversifying over time can be taken from the Trade Directories of the area for 1858 (Kelly’s Directory). Whilst it’s not measuring Merchandise it does give a clue as to the relative disposable income available and the move away from farming.

<table>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Barrett</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher of Music</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Task 4. Demonstrate your knowledge of a trade carried out in the village around one hundred years ago?

**Brick making**

Digging and processing clay was a necessity in this rural area. The construction of early houses in the Fylde depended on a ready supply. Watson & McClintock (1979) described Fylde houses, built with of timber frames, set on ‘cobblestones’. The vertical and horizontal of the frame packed with these cobblestones and plastered with worked or ‘puddled’ clay, the interior walls of ‘Wattle ‘n Daub’, Wicker or willow panels again plastered with a mixture of clay, manure and straw, in the Fylde this was referred to as ‘Clat & Clay’. Clay Pits in the area are still referred to as ‘Dubs’, including the famous landmark of ‘Wrea Green Village Pond’.

The advent of brick building in the early years depended on itinerant Brick-makers hiring Clay Pits and ‘Brick crofts’, somewhere to make the hand moulded brick with simple, disposable kilns for firing them. A trade ripe for industrialisation with the development of railways and the new towns of the Fylde.

Although the County ‘Historic Town Assessment Report for Kirkham’ (2006) says ‘There were no local brickworks in Kirkham’ there were indeed many small brick producers in the Wrea Green area. The industrialisation of brick makers saw the
closure of small brick makers, as larger Brickworks were built. Indeed, the Blackpool Historic Town Assessment Report, states ‘The only other industry of note in the Blackpool area was brick making, which serviced Blackpool’s physical expansion. Initially, it was small-scale, but by 1891 there were three brickworks and a brickfield …., and another approximately on the site of the former Kiln Flatt.’ The report goes on to say that all were demolished by 1910.

Brick making was a significant employer and trade for over 100 years in the Fylde. The local soft clay, proximity of sand and peat and coal for the kilns all easily available all contributing to ease of production. Coal was shipped across the Ribble from the Wigan coalfields, by way of the Douglas estuary and Freckleton and Lytham Docks to the Balderstones Cotton Mill and industries around Kirkham until the railways took on the burden. They also made the transportation of clay and distribution of finished bricks also easier. The construction of a branch line to Lytham in 1846, through Wrea Green, Moss Side and Westby able to feed a large brick works at Westby. Latterly however, it also contributed to the industry decline by aiding imports from East Lancashire, in particular, the Accrington brick, used extensively in the development of the Fylde coast.

**Westby Brickworks**

There are no useful pictures available of the Brick Works at Westby. Nothing exists of the buildings now although there are still foundations and floorings of the sheds still exist. The many Clay pits and ponds in the area are testament to the volume of clay extracted and to the capacity of brick making in the Fylde. A journey on Google Maps, in satellite view along Peel Road to the junction with Anna Lane, shows the size of the Westby Brickworks and the number and range of the Clay and Marl pits around, although much has been turned over to arable land. All this no more that a mile and half away from Wrea Green. The site closed as late as 1995, when it was still being referred to officially as ‘Westby Brickworks’ and in 2009 the site was identified as a possible glass recycling site for Fylde Borough Council..
**Bradkirk Brickworks**

Sited close by at Bradkirk Hall, another old brick works now a ‘Listed’ farmhouse, also situated close to the long defunct railway spur to Lytham. The Bradkirk area had an additional use. The local Gibbet was situated close to the old Wesham to Weeton Road.

An aerial view of the workings at Bradkirk, The Defunct Railway spur junction is indicated by the line of trees at the bottom of the picture. Westby Reservoir is top right with the existing railway to the bottom and Preston New Road across the top. (Fylde & Wyre Antiquarian Soc)

![Site of the Brickworks](image1)

Brick making Process

The production requirements for brick are relatively simple: A Clay source; a ‘Pugmill’ for mixing clay to the correct consistency and to add ingredients; a forming arrangement either by moulds or by extrusion; a drying yard or space; and a kiln for ‘Firing’ or ‘Burning’ the dried clay; an infrastructure to collect and import clay and for distribution of the bricks.
either by road and cart or by railway, together with labour skills and capital.

**Other Brickworks examples**

A Brickworks in the Potteries

Alty’s Brickworks Hesketh Bank
Task 5: Identify 3 local family graves from the Gravestones in the Churchyard

Graves chosen are located in St Nicholas Church, Wrea Green. Selected ‘Additions to Grave Stones’. Additions are recognised as War Memorials by definition by the War Memorials Archive (formerly the UK national Inventory of War Memorials). Two CWGC War Graves are also included.

Introduction

The choice of graves for this task is apposite for the approach of the National Day of Remembrance on Nov 11. St Nicholas Churchyard is one of 23,000 locations of Commonwealth War Graves in 153 countries. The vast majority of graves are for casualties in the First World War and every conflict since.

However, there are other memorials in the form of ‘Additions to Gravestones’ recognised as ‘War Memorials’. The ‘Additions’, give a tiny glimpse of the suffering of the families impacted by the loss. These are not the graves of those who died, but are the memorials commemorating them.
a) **Family Name: Fisher**

**Grave Memorial Inscription:**

- **Front face inscription:** 'IN LOVING MEMORY OF HENRY FISHER BORN MARCH 25TH 1848 DIED NOV 1916 ALSO PTE HENRY FISHER (ANZAC) 2ND BATTALION AIF ELDEST SON OF THE ABOVE WHO FELL IN FLANDERS OCT 27 1917 ALSO PHOEBE WIFE OF HENRY FISHER DIED 9TH FEB 1943 AGED 80 YEARS’

- **Separate inscription:** 'IN LOVING MEMORY OF MADELINE DAUGHTER OF HENRY & PHOEBE FISHER OF FOX LANE ENDS BORN FEB 27 DIED 29 1886’

- **Right face inscription:** ALSO/ ELIZAMAXWELL/ THEIR DAUGHTER/ DIED APRIL 9TH 1959, AGED 68 YEARS/ ALSO KATHLEEN BOTTRILL/ THEIR DAUGHTER/ DIED DEC 27TH 1987/AGED 93 YEARS.

- **Left face inscription:** ALSO WILLIAM FISHER A.F.R.A.E.S./ THEIR SON/ DIED FEB 4TH 1992/ AGED 91 YEARS. *(William was husband of Christine, named on Grave c) below.)*

**CWGC Casualty Details:**


The Cemetery holds 9877 War Graves, including 24 without names – Unknown Soldiers.

Henry does not appear on the Wrea Green War Memorial, but is named on St Annes War Memorial.
b) **Family Name: Atkinson**

**Grave Memorial Inscription:**

Front face inscription:  "THOMAS ATKINSON/ DIED JAN 20 1908 AGE 64/ ALSO ELEANOR, HIS WIFE/ DIED APR 20 1897 AGE 35 YEARS/ ALSO TOM SON OF THE ABOVE/ SERGT 7TH BORDER REGT/ WHO WAS KILLED IN ACTION AT YPRES/ OCT 13 1917 AGED 24 YEARS./ 'TILL WE MEET AGAIN'"

**CWGC Casualty Details:**

**Cpl Thomas Atkinson** 35011 7th Bn Border Regt, Son of Thomas of 34 Victoria street, Lytham, Lancs. No Known Grave, commemorated at Tyne Cot Memorial & Military Cemetery, Zonnebeke, Belgium

The Cemetery holds 11956 War Graves of which 8368 are without names. The Memorials lists the names of 35000 with No Known Graves.

Thomas does not appear on the Wrea Green War Memorial but is named on
c) **Family Name: Hutchinson**

**Grave Memorial Inscription**

Front face inscription: ‘Thy will be done’/
‘In Loving Memory/ of/ CARL THE DEAR
LITTLE SON OF/ CHRISTOPHER &
LEONORA HUTCHINSON/ BORN OCT 29TH
1908/ DIED APR 16TH 1909/ ALSO OF
CECIL THEIR ELDEST SON,/ SECOND
LIEUTENANT, EAST LANCs. REGT/ WHO
WAS KILLED IN ACTION NEAR YPRES
JULY 31ST 1917 AGE 21.’

Right face inscription: ‘ALSO/
LEONORA/BELOVED WIFE OF/
CHRISTOPHER HUTCHINSON/ DIED JAN
22ND 1931, AGED 52 YEARS.’

Left face inscription: ‘ALSO/ CHRISTINE/
FISHER/ DAUGHTER OF/ LEONORA &
CHRISTOPHER/ BORN 30TH NOV 1899/
DIED 13 NOV 1935 (Christine was the
husband of William Fisher, named on
Grave No 1 above.)

**CWGC Casualty Details:**

**2Lt Cecil Hutchinson** 3rd East Lancs Regt, Son of Christopher Edward & Leonora
Cecil Maud Hutchinson of Moss Side, Lytham, Lancs, No Known Grave

The memorial lists the names of 54414 with No Known Graves. Cecil also appears

on Wrea Green Memorial and St Johns Lytham

Cecil’s father, Christopher Edward, was a farmer, originally from Manchester, in
Moss Side and a Parish Councillor (1934).
**Additional Information:**

St Nicholas Churchyard has 2 other Commonwealth War Grave headstones, belonging to:

**Pte TW Rossall**, Loyal North Lancs Regt, died 1921 age 26

Unusually, there are others mention in this grave:

- **Additional Inscription**: ‘ALSO IN MEMORY OF 68291 LCPL WILLIAM ROSSALL MACHINE GUN CORPS KILLED JUNE 18TH 1917’


**CWGC Details:**

**Private Timothy Whiteside Rossall**, 201444, Died 23/08/1921, Age 26, 4th Bn. The Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire), Son of Timothy and Mary Rossall, of Fair View Villa, Wrea Green, Preston.

**Lance Corporal William Rossall**, 68291, 15/06/1917, 76th Coy Machine Gun Corps (Infantry). No Known Grave, Commemorated on the Arras Memorial, Arras, France. The memorial commemorates 34,789 names of those without graves. A cemetery at the memorial holds 2,650, 10 of which are unidentified.

**Flying Officer Tom Nicholson RAF Volunteer Reserve**, died 17 Mar 1942, age 34

**CWGC Details:**

Flying Officer Pilot, 77948, Died 17/03/1942, Age 34, 140 Sqn Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, Son of Thomas Reglen Nicholson and Mary Nicholson, of Wrea Green.

**Note:**

- Clearly, 1917 was a bad year for Wrea Green 4 of those Soldiers mentioned died. The Memorial lists 12 men from a population of about 120 who served, from a population of about 420.
- Note the members of families and relations killed
- Of the 3 War Cemeteries and Memorials mentioned 89414 servicemen have no known graves and there are 8392 un-named graves.
Task 6. Describe how the means of transport has changed over the past hundred years?

The transport of people and freight has changed dramatically over the last 100 years, although not as much as it has in the last 200 years. 200 years ago the main means of getting about was by horse or walking. Without the need for metalled roads, most of the routes were simply tracks where carts and wagons were drawn by horse or Oxen.

Until 1800, the wider world had learned to fly via balloons, sail by way of steamboats, and move about in horse drawn buses and the first experimental railway trains, electric trams and ‘metalled’ (compacted stone surfaced) turnpike roads. Necessity being the mother of invention, canals provided the means of transporting heavy, bulky industrial products, fuel and building materials around the country, linking manufacturer and distribution points and ports.

However, by the mid 1800’s, the development of transport was on an exponential path. The next 50 years or so, saw petrol engined vehicles, the balloons had developed into Zeppelins, huge manoeuvrable and motorised balloons capable of travelling long distances, setting in motion the potential for flight and travel.

Initially, canals provided the principle means of transporting industrial product and the network grew as demands were placed on it. Even people had been cargo for them, as people from the destitute farming communities in the South East were shipped in under the auspices of ‘Poor Law’ arrangements, to the industrial centres in the North and Midlands. As canals were reaching the peak of their development, the first railways were proving cheaper and capable of carrying heavier and more bulky freight and more passengers, passengers who would bring about demand for travel to leisure and pleasure as well as work. Relative prosperity contributed as a result of industrial development, a growing middle class and mobility oiling the wheels of development in the Fylde area.

The first trains came to the Wrea green area around 1840’s on the back of rail links between Preston and East Lancs and the towns of the Fylde – Kirkham, Fleetwood, Blackpool, St Annes and Lytham. Enabling movement of goods and commuters to work in the growing Fylde and the linking of the villages like Wrea Green and Moss Side.

Developments over the last 100 years, 1913 to 2013, demonstrate both growth and decline, in fact, Growth, stagnation and decline of trains. Decline in particular, caused by the Beeching reforms of the railway network in the mid 1960’s. Growth stagnation and decline in popularity of leisure on the Fylde coast, with the availability and economies of foreign travel over the same period. WW1 had introduced ordinary citizens to the prospect of foreign travel and had experimented with a logistical infrastructure to make it happen. Hundreds of thousands of troops had been recruited, gathered together, equipped and shipped by all means possible to the four corners of the globe. The growth of car and road travel as a result of availability of credit; cheap travel; increasing leisure time and...
social change after WW1 and again after WW2, conspiring to make Blackpool and the Fylde Coast just another option when choosing leisure destinations.

For the majority of folk of Wrea Green, rather than the centre of universe for families, work and social life, the focus of the village became simply residential: a stop on the road between Preston and the Fylde Coast, a dormitory for workers in the centres of commercial and industrial activity in a 10 mile radius of the Duck Pond. No more reliance on local work in farms and Brickworks, local shops and businesses. We’ve seen that in the mid 60’s the community lost its railway station. Just down the line, in 1983 the community successfully fought to reinstate its station. Sadly, unlike Moss Side, Wrea Green had demolished its station and it was easier to re-establish the station there. There is an active campaign to provide a rail ‘Halt’ at Wrea Green.
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