

A brief history of Grindleton - by Chris Hall

Grindleton has a special geographical position on the northern bank of the River Ribble - a river notorious for the speed with which its waters rise after rain, making its fords and ferries unreliable. The river formed a natural boundary for the kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria and later Lancashire and Yorkshire. So Grindleton found itself an outpost of Yorkshire and the diocese of York.

At the Norman conquest the village had no church but did have a mill and was important enough to be ruled by the local thane who also controlled Clitheroe. He was removed and Grindleton was divided between the manors of Slaidburn and Clitheroe. The only sign of early housing is Cross Fold Cottages which have the classic footprint of a medieval long house. The regular plan of the village can be seen in the cottages which run at right angles to Main Street with a cottage garden to the front. Some of these gardens have been built on in Victorian times - the old Post Office and the Hollies are examples.

As a result of its position, Grindleton was not overseen closely by any authority and by the Tudor period began to attract people with 'different' religious views. As part of Mitton parish there was only a small chapel which was in Chapel Garth between Upper and Lower Chapel Lane. Flemish refugees came. Roger Brierley established the Grindletonians who had similar ideas to Quakers and the area that Ivy House is built on became known as Hell Fire Square because of the ranting preachers who spoke there.

Like Slaidburn and other villages, Grindleton grew in size under the Tudor and Stuarts. The common land was enclosed between 1590 and 1610 after lengthy disputes with neighbours. This gave us the earliest map of the village still showing the Rood Cross on the fell that gave Rodhill its name and today is only a grassy platform next to the earlier boundary ditch. During the 18th century the village became a centre for weaving, but the industrial revolution had a dramatic effect. In the twenty years to 1840, the number of handloom weavers dropped from 200 to nil. Most families had little choice but to try for work in the mill towns. The village shrank leaving cottages derelict. The remains of old cottages can be seen in some of the walls today. Those who stayed had a precarious existence trying to make a living on small holdings.

When the railways came everything changed. A new bridge allowed farmers to get fresh milk to the station at Chatburn to supply the mill towns. The old ferry was sold for use at Brungerley as a leisure craft for day trippers. The trains brought Welsh slate to replace thatch. The gable-end of Milnshaw Terrace shows this whilst Cross Fold still has the old steep rake for thatch. Coal was used as fuel and stoves were installed. Villagers expanded the damson orchards and a jam factory was built. Today most of the orchards on Back Lane have new houses from the growth of the village in the 1960's. Alongside damsons Grindleton became famous for its beekeepers. In 1805 the new church was dedicated to St Ambrose, the patron of beekeepers (one of only two such dedications in the country).

By the 1900s the Reads were building large 'modern' houses with iron railings around the gardens. During the 2nd World War when most iron railings were taken for scrap, Grindleton's survived and can still be seen. The century saw the arrival of piped water. No more would children from the school be paid to fetch water to the vicarage from the well in the field. The well at the top of the village was piped away and the road put over it whilst the old road became a bus turn round. Electricity was slow to arrive but the church had its own generator and the enterprising Joe Eccles would recharge wireless batteries

and lit his house with another generator. When it did come the independent Grindleton residents refused to pay to put the cables underground so for decades there was a spider's web of wires up the Main Street.

Bowland School began life as a spa hotel using a local sulphur well. It then became a home for Kindertransport children in the 1930s before becoming Riversmeade School and finally Bowland School.

The tithe barn was replaced by the village institute which in turn gave way to the playing fields and playground opposite the school. Finally there was the decline in shops. In the 1950's there was a butchers, teashop, post office and four general stores. The last to close was 'Gwen's shop' at the end of the 90's.