

## THE PARISH OF MEDLAR-WITH-WESHAM

Situated in the heart of the rural Fylde and adjoining the market town of Kirkham to the south, the Parish of Medlar-with-Wesham comprises of Medlar, a comparatively large rural area, and Wesham, which, though smaller in size, is semi-urban in character, with over 3,250 inhabitants. Other than sharing the railway station with Kirkham, Wesham is a town in its own right. However, proximity to Kirkham has tended to hinder the town's development and attraction of investment and new facilities.

The boundary of the Parish was established over 100 years ago and did not change until 1935 when 82 acres and 48 people transferred to the Kirkham parish; Kirkham lost 8 acres of land with no effect to the population.

The area within the Parish boundary has been settled since early medieval times (prior to the Norman Conquest). Although Roman occupation is present at Kirkham, the area of Medlar with Wesham was mainly moss with higher ground rising in a few places. Settlements were established on these rises at Bradkirk, Medlar, Wesham and Mowbreck, with a single moated farm unit at Pasture Barn about half way between Medlar and Mowbreck.



Three landowners held the area in the twelfth century, Adam de Bradkirk at Bradkirk, Rodger de Heaton at Mowbreck and Wesham, whilst the Abbot of Cockersand Abbey situated 'over Wyre' held land in Medlar. What little pasture there was supported sheep, pigs and cattle alongside some cereal crops. Tenants lived close to the manors but today little trace can be seen of medieval Bradkirk, Medlar, Mowbreck or Wesham except for hints in hedgerow boundaries north of Mowbreck Lane and field and house boundaries around Medlar. Medieval ridge and furrow fields can be detected northwest of Pasture Barn Farm and the moated feature south of the present farm. Two further moated sites have been identified at Bradkirk and North Greenfield, Medlar.

In the Tudor period Mowbreck became an important manor under the Westby family who originated from Craven in West Yorkshire. Bradkirk decreased in size and wealth until today it is a single farm. Medlar continued to survive as a hamlet whilst Wesham, which was a small assemblage of houses around Wesham Hall on Mowbreck Lane, had a green (common pasture)



and relied on the goodwill of the Westby's to support the community by leasing fields and allowing farming of the land in return for rent and tithe. Footpaths connected Wesham to Medlar in the north, Kirkham in the south and via Mowbreck Lane to Bradkirk in the west. The present bridleway of Mowbreck Lane is the original medieval route to Treales.

Until the end of the Regency period in the 1830s the Parish was wholly

agricultural, but with the advent of the railway connecting Fleetwood and Preston in 1840 and the later building of three flax and cotton mills (two built right up to the original southern Parish boundary and now just in Kirkham), the focus of the village began to shift towards the railway station. Housing was built for the mill workers, and between 1871 and 1911 the population climbed from 563 to over 1560. This industrial heritage gives Wesham its present identity.

The church school, now Medlar-with-Wesham Church of England Primary School, was built in 1880 and served also as a place of worship until the Parish Church was consecrated in 1894. The foundation stone of the Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph was laid in 1884, and the building was completed in 1886. The original schoolroom has been incorporated into the present St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School building.



The Methodists met in the Primitive Methodist Chapel on Station Road but services ceased in the late 1970s when they joined with the Methodists in Kirkham. The building has now been converted into flats. Another vestige of Victorian Wesham is the Literary Institute and Lecture Hall, which has since been subsumed into Salisbury's premises as a showroom for electrical goods.

The Fylde Union's workhouse was established in Wesham in 1907. Provision was also made to



care for the sick and during the First World War part of the building was used as a military hospital. The workhouse continued to function until after the Second World War. The hospital accommodation became Wesham Park Hospital in 1948. The hospital was closed in 2000 and the new Wesham Hospital Rehabilitation Unit on Mowbreck Lane was opened in 2001. Some of the hospital buildings were demolished and the remainder were refurbished and a large car park created in Derby Road to accommodate the offices of the North Lancashire Teaching Primary Care Trust.

Wesham's major employer is Fox's Biscuits located on the site of Phoenix Mill next to the railway line.

Local shops have declined over the last few years leaving just a handful of retail businesses including the Post Office and the Co-Op Late Shop. Consequently Wesham relies on many of the facilities of Kirkham.

The War Memorial in the town centre commemorates the dead of the two World Wars. The former joint ambulance and fire station is opposite the War Memorial at the junction of Station Road and Garstang Road South. This was replaced by new modern fire and ambulance stations on Fleetwood Road.

Wesham has a Community Centre, recreation grounds and bowling green which are all managed by the Town Council.





An important stage in the development of Wesham was the opening in 1990 of the Kirkham and Wesham Bypass with its new bridge over the railway. This road provides some relief from through traffic in the town, as well as the opportunity for further housing developments within its boundary.

There are currently two major housing developments in progress, one on part of the site of Wesham Park Hospital that will have 208 houses, and one on land at the side of the bypass between Fleetwood Road and Weeton Road where there will be 109 houses. It was during the development of this

site that traces of Wesham's windmill came to light in 2007. When these developments are completed the resultant increase in population will have a significant impact upon the facilities within Wesham and also the supporting facilities in Kirkham.

A large part of the Parish is in open countryside and is rural in character. The quality of this environment is an important feature of the Parish. The distinctive landscape of the Parish has the typical characteristics of the lowland plain of the Fylde peninsula, including fields, hedgerows, ponds and shelter belts of trees and copses planted to provide enclosure and cover for game birds. The medium to high quality agricultural land supports arable and dairy farming by the five working farms which are situated in the Parish. In addition there are nursery, horticulture and fruit farming businesses with some use of polytunnels.



There are three Biological Heritage Sites in the Parish: Wesham Marsh, Medlar Meadows and Medlar Ditch (See map on page 13). These sites are identified as making a significant contribution to the bio-diversity of Lancashire and are protected by the Local Plan from developments likely to impact on them. Wesham Marsh is one of the largest marshy grasslands in the Fylde and is noted for birds, flowering plants and ferns.

