History page

History of Laughton-en-le-Morthen

What's in a name?

The origin of the village's name has several theories. In the Doomsday Book the village name is 'Lastone', yet the Saxon name was 'Law town'. The word 'Morthen' derives from the old norse term 'Morthing' meaning 'a moorland district with a common assembly'. An alternative theory comes from the old French 'en le Morthen' word for 'place of death' . This theory is based on information that the area around Laughton-en-le-Morthen was part of the site od the Battle of Brunanburh around 937AD. This is commemorated in Celtic legend as the last chance to rgain the mainland from the Saxons. In truth it was more a case of the various Celtic and Viking chieftains and lords (this was part of Yorvik) versus resurgent Saxon power. Approximately 50,000 warriors are reputed to have died in the most decisive battle for the control of the future history of the British Isles. If so, it is a well-deserved name as the death toll was comparable to Britain's entire World War II death toll as a proportion of the population.

In contrast, it is also recorded that the village was commonly known by the name of ‘Lighten in the Morning’ - looking eastward to the village, the lofty spire was clearly defined in the early light of the morning.

From 1066 to 1379

Before 1066, Laughton belonged to Earl Edwin who had a hall there. Held by Roger de Busli in 1086, Laughton was the head of a large soke within the honour of Tickhill and was a thriving village. Roger de Busli had 5 plough teams of his own and the population of 33 villeins and 6 small holders had ten plough teams between them. Eventually the de Busli honour of Tickhill passed to King Henry I who gave the church of Laughton to the Canon of York.

Until the 13th century, The Manor of Laughton remained in the hands of the crown. The manor was then given to Geoffrey de Lusignan by Prince Edward, son of Henry III. Drogo de Merlawe was Lord of the Manor in the reign of Edward II. In 1332 the lordship had passed to the Frenchman Ralph, Earl of Eu. In 1332 Vicar of Laughton, James de Brampton, was fined for beating Hugh de Lindesay, one of the Earl of Eu servants. The estates of the Earl were seized at the outbreak of the 100 Year War and returned into the hands of the crown. Together with the Honour of Tickhill it was passed to the King's son, John of Gaunt. When his son ascended the throne as Henry the IV, Laughton once again passed into the hands of the crown.

In the poll tax of 1379, Laughton lists 232 people assessed for the tax, representing a population of 450. The subsidy or poll tax was collected for King Richard II and comprised a tax of at least 4d. for every inhabitant over the age of 16, both male and female - only beggars were exempted. Most tradesmen or small businessmen were required to pay 6d; more prosperous merchants, gentry, yeomen, and lords of manors paid more. The Laughton entry includes tax payers living in nearby townships. The most prosperous inhabitant was John de Kirke who was described as a "Marchant Sufficant" (literally "supply merchant"). He was assessed at the sum of 13s 4d, showing that he was a very wealthy man indeed. A draper and a cattle merchant were assessed at 1s while 13 tradesmen were paid 6d.

The St Ledgers and Hatfeilds

In 1577 The Manor of Laughton was in the hands of the Queen. By the 17th century it had passed to the Lords of Kiveton, the Eyre family. In 1644 Sir Gervas Eyre was killed fighting for the King at the siege of Newark. In 1767 Anthony Eyre his great grandson sold the manor to Anthony St Leger of Parkhill, Firbeck. In Laughton the Hatfeilds were the main rivals of the Eire's. The Hatfeilds came to Laughton when Ralph Hatfeild married a daughter of Robert Mirfield of Thurcroft.

In 1652, Martha, the 12 year old daughter of Anthony and Faith Hatfeild, gained national notoriety when she was seized by an illness which caused her to have fits which prevented her from moving or seeing. During these fits she was able to speak and astonished people with the piety and wisdom of her utterances. Visitors and pilgrims came from far and wide to see her. Between 1653 and 1664 a book about her, "The Wise Virgin", ran to 5 editions. After 8 months the fits passed and normality returned to Laughton. The Hatfeild dynasty of Laughton lasted until 1791 when the unmarried John Hatfeild died.

In the Hearth Tax return of 1672, the parish of Laughton lists 105 houses, of which 94 paid the tax, of these over half had only 1 hearth. Schoolmaster John Broomhead occupied a house with 5 hearths while Nicholas Pearson's house boasted 14, William Hatfeild had 13 and William Beckwith at Thurcroft Hall had 11. The Hearth Tax was a shilling a hearth collected twice a year at Michelmas and Lady Day. Rev Robert Browne reported in the 1743 Visitation Returns that there were 107 families in the parish.

Moves were made to enclose the remaining open fields and commons shortly after Anthony St Leger purchased the manor of Laughton. In 1769 The Act of Parliament for the enclosure was passed and the process was completed in 1771. Over the years a considerable portion of the parish had already been enclosed. Almost 580 acres of the 1172 acres of newly enclosed land was allotted to Anthony St Leger as Lord of the Manor, 189 acres to Doctor Hugh Thomas prebend of Laughton and 173 acres to John Hatfield.

The enclosure award replaced the payment of tithes in kind on the newly enclosed lands, replacing them with a rent charge. Tithes remained payable on the old enclosures until they were converted by the Tithe Award of 1840.

All Saints’ Church

Laughton All Saints’ Church was Mother church to a large area, an indication of Laughton's importance in Anglo-Saxon times. The original Saxon church was of a simple rectangular construction. It is suggested that this church was destroyed following Earl Edwin's unsuccessful rebellion against William I in 1069-70, but there is no evidence to support this. Rebuilding in Norman style began in 1190 when a North aisle was added. The church was rebuilt again in 1377 and it was at this time that the 185 foot tower and spire were added. The architect for this work was probably William of Wykeham as he had been appointed Prebend of Laughton-en-le-Morthen in York Minster in 1363. Salisbury Cathedral is another of Williams' works. The North arcade of the nave retains its Norman columns, while in the lower courses of the chancel walls Saxon stonework can be seen.

A pre-Reformation stone alter table which was found buried in the South aisle during the 19th century is contained in the Lady Chapel. In 1857 considerable alterations and repairs to the church were carried out and paid for by AFB St Leger, the Lord of the Manor. In 1693 the vicarage was described as "a dwelling containing about three bays of building". It had been enlarged to 5 bays by 1716. As late as 1817 most of the downstairs rooms still had earth floors. The present vicarage dates from 1840.

All Saints’ School

In 1610, Edmund Laughton of Throapham and Anthony Eyre gave adjoining plots of land for the construction of the Laughton Endowed School "for the learning and instruction in learning of the children of the inhabitants of the township and parish of Laughton". Endowments were also made by John West, William Beckwith and William Laughton. A house for the school master was erected 1670. Local trustees had the power to levy rates on the inhabitants for the support of the school. In 1820 the school was found to be in "ruin and decay" by Charity Commissioners and the trust deeds had been lost. By the mid-19th century the school was accepted as a Church of England Aided School. In 1850 the building was extended. The 1865 Visitation Returns state that there was a boys' and girl's school, the boys' school being supported by the endowments and the other by public subscription.

Slade Hooton

To the North of Laughton-en-le-Morthen lies the hamlet of Slade Hooton. The word ‘Hooton’ comes from the Saxon term ‘hoo’ meaning high town or hill town and ‘Slade’ comes from the Norse 'slaed' meaning a valley. Slade Hooton appeared in the Domesday Book as a manor called Hotone within the soke of Laughton, with three carucates of land. Despite its small size, the hamlet was divided into two manors in the Middle Ages. One manor came into the hands of the lords of Loversall (Ripers family) who gave their manor to Roche Abbey. At the Dissolution in 1538, this manor was granted to Richard Turke who sold it to Robert Saunderson, ancestor of the Earls of Scarbrough.

In the 16th century William Fitzwilliam, Earl of Southampton (d. 1542) owned the other manor. He gave Slade Hooton and other lands in the area to John Fitzwilliam of Kingsley (Hants). This grant was later challenged by the Earl's niece, wife of Sir James Foljambe and the case was settled in 1563 in favour of Godfrey Foljambe of Croxden.

In 1379, the Poll Tax Records indicate that John Mirfin was a blacksmith in the area. Subsequently the Mirfin family farmed much of the surrounding land and became the main freeholders within the hamlet. Slade Hooton Hall was built in 1698 for John Mirfin. It was constructed of local limestone under a Cornish slate roof and is one of the earliest examples of a classically designed house in the region. The stable block and barn were added in 1702 and 1705. The present hall forms part of a complex of listed buildings including the hall, walls, gates, stable block and barn.

History and Features of Brookhouse

The hamlet of Brookhouse lies 10km south east of Rotherham Town Centre, to the north of Laughton-en-le-Morthen. The area to the west of Bib Lane forms part of the Civil Parish of Thurcroft; the rest of the hamlet to the east of Bib Lane forms part of Laughton-en-le-Morthen Parish.

Physically, the hamlet is a linear settlement built around the main street which parallels Brookhouse dyke, the most significant feature of the hamlet. The dyke and hamlet nestle in a valley with sweeping views towards open countryside to the north and Laughton-en-le-Morthen to the south.

Unlike surrounding settlements like Dinnington and Laughton-en-le-Morthen, Brookhouse receives no mention in the Domesday book. Nearby Thurcoft Hall and the surrounding Thurcroft Estate are referred to as early as the 15th Century when they were in the possession of the Mirfin/Mirfield family. In 1664, Robert Mirfield died childless and through marriage the estate passed into the Beckwith family who held property at Aldborough and Ripon.

The hamlet itself, built along the dyke has a historic core centred on Brookhouse Farm and Pear Tree Farm that date back to the 17th Century. From the historic map of 1850, it can be seen that this western section of the hamlet was very much as we see it today. Historically, the next major event in the development of the hamlet was the building of the South Yorkshire Joint Railway and the viaduct that so dominates the eastern approach to the hamlet. The line opened in 1909, its prime purpose to serve eight collieries in the South Yorkshire coalfield linked to a junction with the Midland and Great Central Joint Railway just south of Dinnington. The line encounters hilly country throughout its route and is characterised by several large viaducts, the largest of which is the one at Brookhouse.

The next significant phase of the hamlet’s development, the ribbon development between the Cartwheel and the Travellers Rest took place piecemeal in the 1960s and 1970s. There are three buildings in the hamlet that are listed, all adjacent to each other on the main Street:

• Pear Tree Farmhouse (Grade II) Late 18th Century.

• Lea Cottage, The Cottage and Cobweb Cottage

(Grade II) 17th Century house, now three cottages.

• Brookhouse Farmhouse (Grade II) Late 17th Century, altered 20th Century.

In addition the Grade II\* Thurcroft Hall, a magnificent country house built in 1699, lies 400 metres to the North East of the hamlet, though this is outside the hamlet envelope. As well as the listed buildings, there are a number of older, unlisted buildings that contribute to the character of the hamlet, namely: The artwheel (former Traveller’s Rest) Public House, Holly Tree Cottage and Walnut Cottages across the road, and the former Thurcroft Lodge (The Lodge) on the western approach to the hamlet.

Built as it is along a main street with the dyke running parallel, Brookhouse is characterised and its boundaries defined by limestone walls of varying heights topped with a variety of coping stones. A fine pair of original gate piers still remain at the entrance to Brookhouse Farm. Trees are not a dominant feature in the hamlet, however there are a number of mature trees making a positive contribution, particularly to the west around Bib Lane, these being the subject of a specific Tree Preservation Order.

There are a number of significant open spaces both public and private. The western approach to the hamlet along Steadfolds Lane is dominated by the hamlet cricket ground. Established in the 1920s, it adds greatly to the rural character of the hamlet. On the junction with Steadfolds Lane is an attractive carved stone set in a grassed area recording “Brookhouse in Bloom 2000”.

Brookhouse has a number of significant views both within the hamlet and also looking out. The views along the main street are impressive with the older houses to the north built up to the road edge and the dyke and foliage framing the southern edge. Nestling as it does in a valley, there are impressive views to be had from the fringes of the hamlet. Looking south, there are views up to the church spire at Laughton-en-le-Morthen and from the north there are sweeping views across open countryside towards both Thurcroft Hall and Brookhouse Hall.

The charm and character of Brookhouse can be enhanced by smaller, minor features that reflect its history and past functions. Notable features in Brookhouse include:

• Fine example of a Finger Post sign before The Lodge on Rose Lane.

• Metal Plough on a stone plinth at the western approach to the hamlet.

• The metal Wall Post Box on Bib Lane.

• Fine example of topiary to the side of Walnut Tree Cottages.