HOLMFIRTH CONSERVATION AREA

DRAFT APPRAISAL

Appendix K
Historical, Social and Economic Development

HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Historical and Social Development

The landscape, history and social development of Holmfirth has determined the nature, scale and characteristics of its buildings within the HCA. The landscape comprises a narrow valley set within steep hillsides extending up to desolate moorland.

There is evidence, from flints unearthed locally at Cooks Study, of community living in the Stone Age and evidence from ancient hearths in Hagg Wood, of occupation by the Romano-British in the hills around Holmfirth. The Scandanavians, who invaded around 500AD, also settled in the high ground and many of the local village names derive from Norse and Danish. In 1066 the land at Holne was owned by a wealthy thane known as Dunstan who is thought to have gathered troups locally to fight the Norman invasion.

Before the Norman Conquest the area was known as Holne, and in Saxon and Medieval times the Lords of Wakefield used the area as a hunting forest, hence the name Holnfrith meaning, 'sparse woodland belonging to Holne', later becoming Holmfirth. The name is first mentioned in script in 1324 when a Bailiff of Holmfirth was recorded in historic documents and by 1379 Holmfirth was mentioned in the Subsidy Rolls, where tax was collected and paid to the King.

Holmfirth is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, as it developed later as a settlement than the surrounding villages, due to the steep-sided valley, the marshy valley bottom, and the lack of level drained land for farming. Villages that are situated on the lower moorland, where farming is sustainable, such as Wooldale, Scholes, Netherthong and Upperthong are mentioned. Farming in the outlying villages would have included crops such as oats, and livestock, especially sheep. The latter would prove to be the mainstay of farming in the future and in the growth of Holmfirth.

Early settlements were on the hillside, although by the 14th century there were indications of the town developing. Local people were obliged by the Lord of the Manor to pay for their corn to be ground at Cartworth Mill, Holmfirth, built in 1315 on the site of the present day Post Office. Those caught grinding their corn elsewhere were fined. In 1379, 175 people were recorded as resident in Holmfirth for taxation purposes. The men who liaised between the people and the Lord of the Manor were the Grave, a serf tenant elected annually to perform the duties of a village constable. The Graveship of Holme, which includes the HCA is still a tradition kept alive today by its Grave or Constable.

The development of the textile industry determined some of the social conditions of families. The predominance of grazing land for sheep and the soft water off the Pennine hills determined the wool trade which began as a small cottage industry. Carding, spinning, fulling and weaving cloth was initially a small enterprise with all the family taking part, women doing the spinning and the men the weaving. Records show a William the Fuller recorded in 1315, which demonstrates the early beginnings of the cloth trade.

There are no records of the Black Death (1348 to 1350) affecting Holmfirth, except for the loss of certain family names which indicates that Holmfirth did suffer losses. The result of the plague was that villeins or workmen, due to the lack of men of working age, acquired a new value for setting their work for a job, instead of being tied to the Lord of the Manor.

Throughout the 13th and 14th centuries sheep, fleeces and woollen cloth were becoming more important to the prosperity of Holmfirth. It was not until after the 14th Century that the Lord of the Manor gave permission for his stone to be used for building.

During the reign of Henry VIII in the 15th and 16th centuries, Holmfirth was a thriving community with many paying tax to the Kings Subsidy. The poll tax of 1532 asserts that the population of Holmfirth was larger than Huddersfield. Two fulling mills was established in the 16th century and thought to be adjacent to the river for power. These were adaptions of the corn mill, where the water wheel was attached to a shaft which was raised and let fall a pair of large heavy wooden hammers onto the cloth underneath, copying the action of human feet in walking or fulling the cloth. As the industry grew more families moved into the area and built their homes closer to the river and the mills. In the Elizabethan era the houses were still timber framed with stone starting to replace the old wattle and daub plaster and new two storey houses were appearing. There is evidence of houses and gardens existing in the 1600s in Overbrigge, as Upperbridge was formerly known. (Ref WCR.1). As a consequence of weaving being undertaken in the homes, families in stone houses often constructed a third storey with a line of consecutive windows to provide adequate light for weaving on the looms.

The early years of the 17th century were prosperous for Holmfirth with the cloth trade expanding and the demand for stone from the quarries creating a new 'middle class' of freeman or yeoman. By 1610 land was tenanted by the Crown to copyholders who could prove their 'working' of the land.

The start of the Civil War brought to an end the prosperity with the looms at a standstill and local farm produce being stolen by marauding soldiers. Worst was to come when the Royalists plundered Holmfirth, killing residents and burning houses. It was not until the Restoration that the textile trade resumed and grew in importance again.

Due to the national debt after the Restoration, the hearth tax was introduced in 1672, when there were 337 hearths in Holmfirth, where interestingly, one house had five hearths and 270 houses had one hearth, with 6 houses being too poor to have to pay. At this time spinning, weaving and manufacture of cloth was still undertaken in people's homes, in the hill settlements where the family might farm a few acres and also card, spin and weave. Those without land would rely on seasonal textile work alone. By the end of the 18th century the lives of cloth producers were generally unchanged although as demand for cloth increased the more successful weavers became clothiers, masters of their trade often employing an apprentice.

In the later 18th century, mills started to be constructed in the valley where water supply from the rivers was used for washing and dyeing and to power the textile machines. The invention of the fly shuttle by John Kay in 1733 enabled the weaving of wider cloth. The invention of the Spinning Jenny, which enabled faster spinning, came to Holmfirth in 1776. This marked an early revolution in the faster production process of cloth. Fuelled by the development of the mills to accommodate a larger number of textile machines for increased production, there was an influx of labour into Holmfirth.

By 1806 the mill owners were building large mills to contain the new looms and other machines in increasing numbers, transferring the clothiers work from home to factory. This led to the employment of the family, including the children who did the unskilled jobs, in the mills. Children often worked sixteen hours a day from 6am to

10pm and were given only porridge to eat while they worked and the strap to keep them awake. The poor and very poor often relied on this work to retain their meager homes which meant the mill owners could take advantage of the hours they forced their workers to strive. Families often lived in basic wooden homes with no running water or sewers, and with several generations sharing rooms for sleeping.

The Luddite riots in 1812 did not apparently directly affect the mills in the centre of Holmfirth.

In 1833 the Government passed a Factory Act to improve conditions for children working in factories. The basic act meant there could be no child workers under nine years of age, children 9 to 13 were to only work for 9 hours a day and children 13 to 18 years were to only work for 12 hours a day. It was forbidden for children to work at night and each child had to have 2 hours of schooling each day. In order to enforce this, employers had to have an age certificate for children and factory inspectors were appointed to enforce the law.

Holmfirth's early buildings may have been constructed of timber, however there is no known evidence of any of these remaining. Although there is a record of a church constructed of stone in 1476, and evidence of small sandstone quarries, the timber framed buildings were not generally replaced by stone until the late 17th century or early 18th century. The construction of the prominent eaves and cornices of timber framed buildings were prohibited, following the Fire of London and An Act of Parliament in 1707. Instead, the roofs were half hidden by a stone parapet wall with a cornice of stone which coincided with the early development of Holmfirth's houses and its textile mills. The availability of the local sandstone created a unity in the appearance of the buildings in Holmfirth, with brick only taking a very minor role in the middle 20th century.

A church or chapel existed in Holmfirth from at least 1422 and was the subject of several rebuilding programmes whether to accommodate more worshippers or as a consequence of flood damage, not least being the flood of 1777. The church today dates from 1782 with the later addition of the tower with six bells by 1788. In 1934 the bells were in a dangerous state and were removed and recast into eight smaller bells and rehung. Between 1472 to 1858 Holmfirth only had a Chapel of Ease, as Holmfirth west of the river was in the Parish of Almondbury, and east of the river was in the Parish of Kirkburton, and both 'mother churches' were six or more miles from Holmfirth. A Chapel of Ease was a church built to accommodate those living at a distance from a parish church. In the case of Holmfirth the 2 parishes of Almondbury and Kirkburton did not permit the independence of Holmfirth. This was over ruled in the Commonwealth period from 1651 to 1660 when Holmfirth was granted parish status. However on the restoration of the monarchy, Holmfirth reverted back to a Chapel of Ease until 1858. From that date the District Chapelry of Holmfirth was established giving Holy Trinity church parish status.

Baptisms and church services could be carried out in Holmfirth, but marriages and burials had to be held at the mother church, a long walk away. This may help explain why there is a strong tradition of non-Conformity in the area with Wesleyan and Reform Methodist Chapels and an Independent Chapel, (at Lane) built in the 19th century.

Historically there were other churches, now demolished, including the Holmfirth Wesleyan Methodist Church built in 1787, on the road now known as Huddersfield Road. The Holmfirth Zion Methodist Free Chapel was a large building situated on the

present day site of the Market Hall. It was built in 1860 and closed in 1940 when it was converted for Castle's Garage use. Communities were centred on the Church or Chapel, or local hostelries which were the drivers of many social occasions and educational opportunities in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Early schools in Holmfirth include John Burtons School which was on the site of the current Library, and the Upperbridge Girls School erected by public subscription in 1829 at 24 Huddersfield Road a three-storey building in commercial use today. The Technical Institute on Huddersfield Road was opened in 1894, offering a technical education to young people in the evenings following their day's work in the mill. After the Education Act of 1902 the Institute came under the control of the former West Riding County Council and was established as the first Holmfirth Secondary School in 1907. It closed in 1932 and no schools remain within the HCA today.

Music has played a big part in the cultural heritage of Holmfirth with many choral groups, musicians, glee and madrigal groups and brass bands entertaining at local events. In the late part of the 19th century Mr Joe Perkin founded a Choral Society and he also arranged Pratty Flowers, adopted as the Holmfirth Anthem, which from 1882 was sung at Holmfirth gatherings, and on such occasions as the Holmfirth Sing. Brass bands were in their heyday in the 19th century. They tended to be associated with a village or temperance movement or could be just a collection of player. They would perform at dances, processions, glee concerts, feasts and fairs. To this day there is an annual battle of the brass bands contest held in Holmfirth.

Historically there were as many as twenty public houses within a short distance of Holmfirth centre. The public houses were used for meetings for clubs and societies, ranging from sporting, social welfare (Friendly Societies),business and local government, to livestock and produce shows. Today, there are almost the same number of licensed places, although now they are wine bars, restaurants and cafes.

An unusual trade in the town was that of film making. James Bamforth, (1842 - 1911) in 1870 established a business as a photographer and lantern slide maker and diversified into film making in 1898, and was the first to make black and white movies in the UK. Relying heavily on the use of local people and locations, he created a historically significant collection of films. On the strength of the local film industry Holmfirth briefly had two cinemas in the 1910s. The film making ceased due to the non availability of chemicals during the First World War, however, Bamforth saw an opening in the sale of postcards of the sentimental type which soldiers and their sweethearts could exchange. Later, in the 20th century there was good business in the design and sale of saucy seaside postcards. A recent artwork installation is to be found in the King's Head Gardens which includes a paving slab with "Beryl" a somewhat overweight woman designed by Bamforth's, enjoying a day at the seaside.

August 1930 saw Holmfirth's open air swimming pool, the Lido. Which was built by a local joiner, John Bailey, in his backyard. The cold spring waters attracted over 400 people a day during a heat wave later that month. However it was not always that warm and heating was later installed bringing the temperature up to 19C. There were diving boards, a slide, changing rooms and hot beef drinks available. School children were brought for swimming lessons. The pool fell into disuse in 1949 and lies hidden in a private garden, although an historic trough on Goose Green, fed by the spring, can be seen on the boundary wall.

Today, the textile trade is still present in Holmfirth as a much smaller industry. Holmfirth's buildings are now, in 2017, occupied by homes, shops and commercial premises

Economic Development

As the importance of the textile trade waned, with only one large working factory surviving in the HCA today, other forms of business have made their mark on the fabric and nature of the town.

Unfortunately there has been no systematic analysis of Holmfirth's economic development in recent times, though a survey of Companies House records by Margaret Dale (Chair Holme Valley Vision) suggests that micro businesses with less than five employees dominate the employment scene in the wider Holme Valley. She surmises "that the sectors represented include construction related organisations, motor trades, catering and hospitality, retail personal services including education, hairdressing etc., and management, business and professional services including estate agents, IT, consultancy – in other words very varied and mixed."

Holmfirth has a rich cultural history – one that takes on a new importance today as its historic buildings provide the setting for and contribute to the town's emergence as a centre for the arts, culture and tourism, as well as a venue for international sporting events. Its magnificent setting and ease of access to Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield has also attracted a new inflow of residents that have in turn contributed to the town's development particularly in the building and services sectors.

In the late 19th and early 20th century Bamforth & Co. Ltd. put Holmfirth on the map. Holmfirth's importance to the film industry was re-established in 1973 with the advent of the TV series 'Last of the Summer Wine', with episodes filmed up until 2010. Apart from the characters, the scenery and views and tightly packed houses up the sides of the valley were the stars of the show. Holmfirth still attracts visitors on the trail of the Summer Wine. Many more come to attend or participate in the wide range of festivals and events that take place annually. These include festivals of folk, film, beer, food and drink and two art festivals.

The local economy has been boosted by increasingly large numbers of walkers and cyclists being attracted to the area. Holmfirth featured in the 2014 Yorkshire stage of The Tour de France, with the challenging ascent of Holme Moss being chosen as the location for the 'King of the Mountain.' The town was also included in Tour de Yorkshire in 2015 and 2017. In the early 1930s the Holme Moss ascent was the scene a competitive hill climb, organised by the Vintage Sports Car Club. Today various car clubs organise tours through Holmfirth, taking advantage of the magnificent scenery along its numerous winding roads.

Increased economic viability brings with it more road traffic and air pollution and the compact centre of Holmfirth is often gridlocked with cars, due to the difficulty of large lorries trying to manoeuver the tight corners, or simply from sheer volume of traffic. The noxious gases from moving and stationary cars are detrimental to the health of the conservation area residents and speed up the weathering of the historic stone buildings.

In the 21st century the HCA and surrounding area have seen growth in the field of conservation, sustainability and eco-build, from the first commercial community wind turbine at Longley Farm in 2015, to the emergence of Holmfirth Transition Town in 2011 with its ethos of attaining carbon neutral energy status.