Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

HALTON, LANCASHIRE

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Around the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 Halton was the centre of the Manor of Halton, which encompassed Lancaster and the area between Carnforth and Sunderland Point. For how long this property of the Norse Earl Tostig of Northumberland had controlled Lancaster is unclear. However, after Tostig's death in 1066, the control of Halton passed to Roger of Poitou who moved his administrative centre to Lancaster.

Nonetheless the Normans built a motte-and-bailey castle at Halton around 1092 to control travel along the Lune valley. Much of the motte [mound] remains. Halton Castle was attacked and destroyed by Robert the Bruce in 1322 and not rebuilt. What remains of it is a Scheduled Monument.



The motte of Halton Castle today, St Wilfrid's tower on the left (Source: Author)

St Wilfrid's Church is probably even older than the Castle. Its origins are Anglo-Saxon (i.e. pre-Norman) and the first records of the Church are for 1190. The earliest part of the current building is the West Tower, which is probably sixteenth century.

It survived the rebuildings of the church in 1792 and in 1876–7 by the prolific Lancaster architects, Paley and Austin. The church's clay-tile roofing is distinctive. As old as the church is the 11th century Halton Cross in St Wilfrid's churchyard, which tells the tale of Sigurd slaying Fáfnir the dragon. It is a mixture of carvings denoting both Norse mythology and Christian symbolism. The cross was demolished in the seventeenth century to make way for a sundial but it was reconstructed in 1891 from three original sections and one modern one to restore the cross to its former height, 4.5 metres.

Also in the churchyard is the Bradshaw Mausoleum built in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. This family owned the Halton area from 1748 for nearly 100 years. Their predecessors as owners were the Carus family, commemorated in Carus Lodge built between 1830 and 1832, west of Halton.



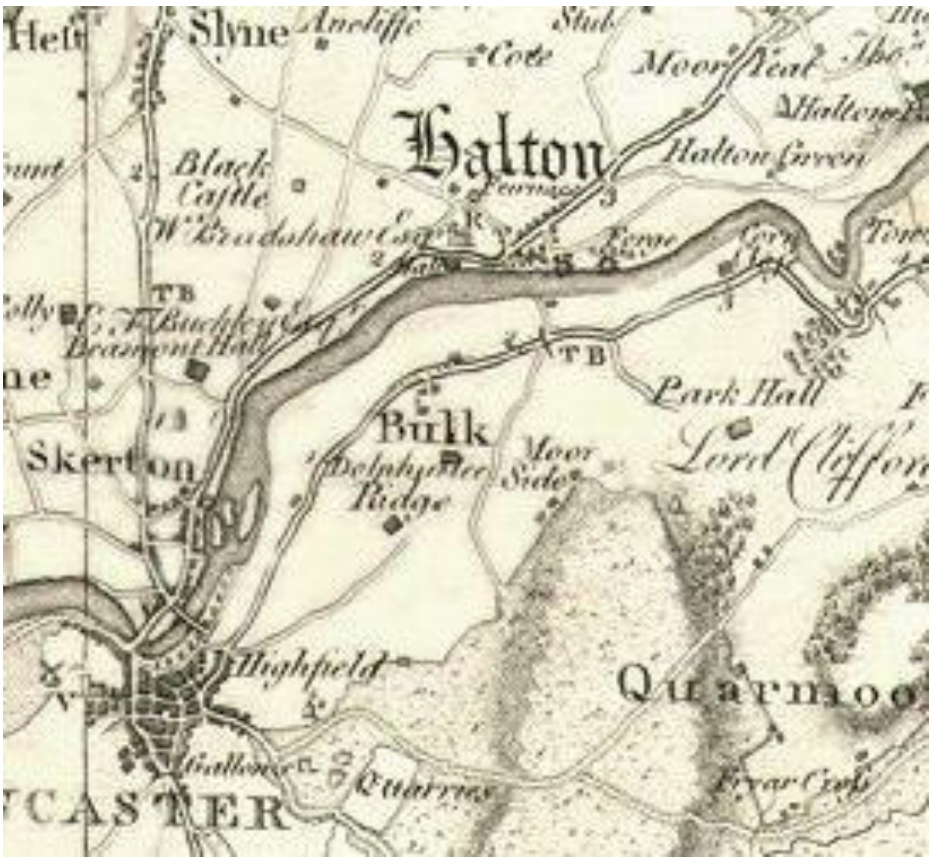
St Wilfrid's Church, Halton (Source: Author)

Harry Paley, the architect of St Wilfrid's remodelling, lived in the nearby Manor House, one of Halton's three Grade II* listed buildings. This has a date-stone of 1695 and Harry Paley added a wing around 1897. The firm of Paley and Austin also designed the Memorial Cross and Institute in

1920 and the stone Lune Bridge at the Crook o' Lune in 1881. Edmund Sharpe, the firm's founder, designed the railway bridges there in 1849.

Among the other old and surviving buildings in Halton are the battlemented Tower House (1760–1800), Town End Farm (1672), parts of Halton Hall and its perimeter wall and some of the houses on High Road (17th/18th century). Near Halton are Halton Green West and East and Halton Park with origins back to the 16th and 17th centuries. Unsurprisingly central Halton is a Conservation Area with 20 listed buildings.

Before the nineteenth century, Halton was a very small settlement – hard to see the houses on Yates's map of 1788 (below) though a place of historical importance. It was mostly a single street (modern-day High Road and Church Brow) on the Lancaster to Kirkby Lonsdale road.



Halton on Yates's map of Lancashire in 1788

Halton also has a notable industrial history, which led to its expansion in the nineteenth century. There was a foundry and forges in Halton (hence Foundry Lane) at least as early as 1752 along the Cote Beck west of the village. It later became a bobbin mill. Nothing remains of the foundry except place names.

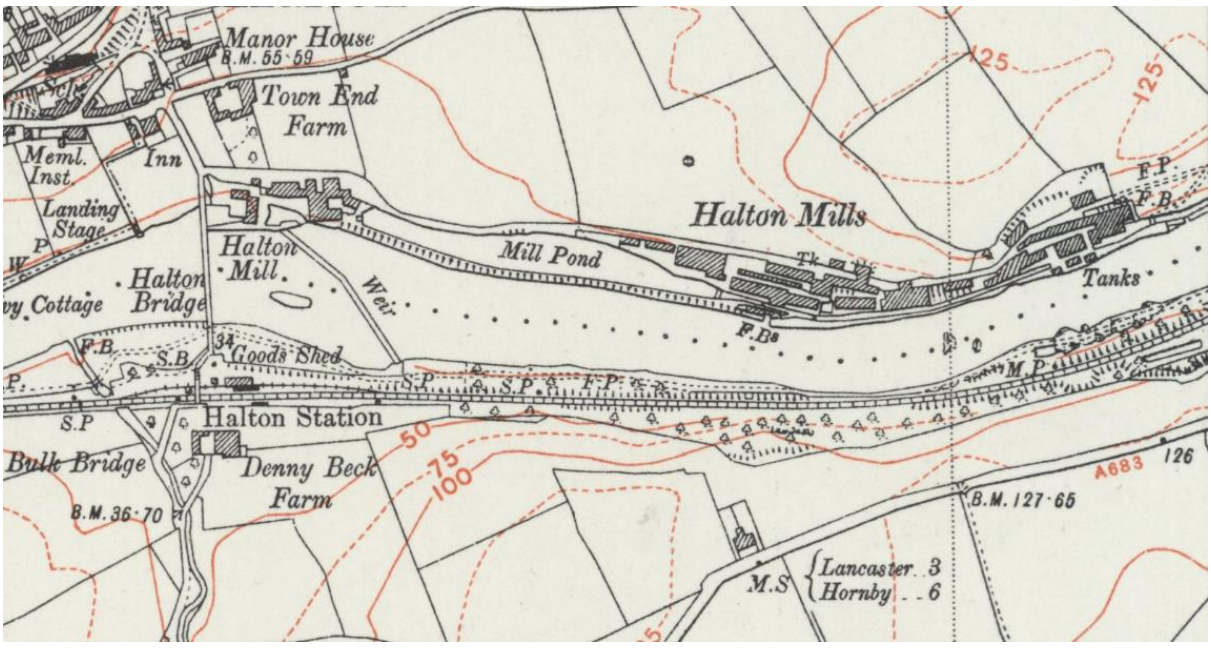
There were two mills along the Lune at Halton, Forse Mill (which came to be called Forge Bank or Halton Mill), which operated from at least 1812, and Low Mill, the latter operating from at least 1744. The two mills had different beginnings and later merged. Both were originally powered by waterwheels driven by mill-races off the Lune from an upstream weir.

The arrival of the railway in 1846–50 allowed coal to be brought in and steam power used. The history of the mills is complex. They were operating in the mid-18th century and were greatly expanded and rebuilt in the 19th. At one time or another these mills spun and wove cotton and flax, and made coconut matting, leather cloth and oilcloth. Unprofitable lines were dropped and new ones taken on. There were many changes of ownership and of products, usually involving people who owned mills in Lancaster, Preston or other north Lancashire villages with which the Halton mills were integrated.

The Ordnance Survey maps of 1891 and 1938 (below) show the two mills alongside the Lune and their associated new housing, some of it provided by the mill owners to attract workers.



Halton in 1891 (Source: Ordnance Survey 6-inch map surveyed in 1891)



Halton Mills in 1938 (Source: Ordnance Survey 6-inch map surveyed in 1938)



Halton Mill in 1926, few of the buildings remain
(Source: Lancashire County Council, Red Rose Collection, gratefully acknowledged)

The railway arrived not quite in Halton in 1846–50, allowing coal and raw materials to be brought in more cheaply and finished products to be sent out to market. The railway station was inconveniently on the south bank of the Lune (see the 1938 map above), connected to the village by a toll bridge. This still exists, despite a period of dereliction, having been rebuilt in 1869 and 1913 (see the photograph below).



Halton Bridge in 2021, from the village over the Lune to the former railway station
(Source: Author)

Since 1945 the village has greatly expanded in population, though less so in employment. The Google Earth image (at the end of this guide) shows the extensive housing estates built north and east of the old village core. Although the railway closed in 1966, car and bus links to Lancaster's expanding economy has allowed Halton to become a commuter suburb. Its nearness to Junction 34 of the M6 allows for longer-distance commuting as well. The two major bridges across the Lune are impressive.



M6 Bridge over the River Lune (Source: Author)

Since 2010 the expansion of housing has been mostly to the south-east of the town including the site of the Mills and the mill pond now filled in. The Luneside Engineering Company took over part of the Forge Mill site in 1948 and when this closed in 2008 their building was taken over as a sustainable and neighbourly work space for a wide range of small enterprises. Next door are 41 Passivhaus homes for Lancaster Cohousing, which now has its own hydro power station in the Lune.





Source: Author



Halton in 2018 (Source: Google Earth, gratefully acknowledged)

Another guide of interest:
21 Lancaster's Canalside Mills

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