

Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

CATON

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Caton is the first village along the south side of the Lune valley east of Lancaster. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086.

The Roman road east from Lancaster to Yorkshire is now known to have passed through Caton, about 500 metres south of the present road (the A683). The latter road is based on the Lancaster and Richmond Turnpike road established in 1751. This was steadily improved in subsequent decades – straighter alignments and gentler gradients for horse-drawn coaches and so shorter journey times. In this area the route was diverted in 1812 to follow the Lune more closely and so bypass Brookhouse and Caton Green. This lower-level route along the valley was also taken by the Lancaster to Skipton railway in the late 1840s. Caton had its own station.

The map below shows the Caton area as it was in the mid-1840s. Caton and Brookhouse were clearly separate villages, though the Caton Workhouse (which superseded Moor Platt on the detailed map below) was south of Brookhouse.

The oldest of the churches in Caton is St Paul's, Grade II* listed. Its tower is probably 16th century and some Norman features can be found within the church after the rebuilding of the nave in 1865–7 by E G Paley. It has some interesting internal decoration.



The Caton area in 1844 (Source: Ordnance Survey 6-inch map surveyed in 1844–5)



Caton in detail from the 1844–5 map above

The map above shows the station and the Artle Beck which powered many of the village's five mills – Willow (c.1790, closed in 1973), Low (built in 1783 and rebuilt after a fire) and Ball Lane are shown on the map above; Forge Mill (once an iron forge) and Rumble Row Mill were south of the village further up the Beck.

The mill ponds that regulated the flow to the water wheels that originally powered the mills are shown on the map. Steam engines, using coal brought in by the railway, superseded water power. The mills had varied histories, some being developed on the site of earlier corn mills or mills for fulling [cleansing cloth].

Some mill owners built houses for their workers because they needed many more hands than Caton's original housing stock could provide for. The Rock M'Jock terrace on Copy Lane is a good example. Over the years, the products made in the mills have varied between cotton, linen and silk.

Many of the mill owners operated mills in Lancaster or beyond, and their Caton operation was integrated with these. There was also a bobbin mill that survived over a hundred years until 1973. Low Road Bridge across to the Lune's north bank dates to 1883, replacing one that collapsed.



Low Mill, Caton, today (Source: Author)

Caton has always had very good connections to Lancaster, and throughout the late Victorian, Edwardian, interwar and postwar periods there was steady housing growth in the village, despite the loss of employment when the mills closed, a transport firm moved to Lancaster and the railway closed in 1966.

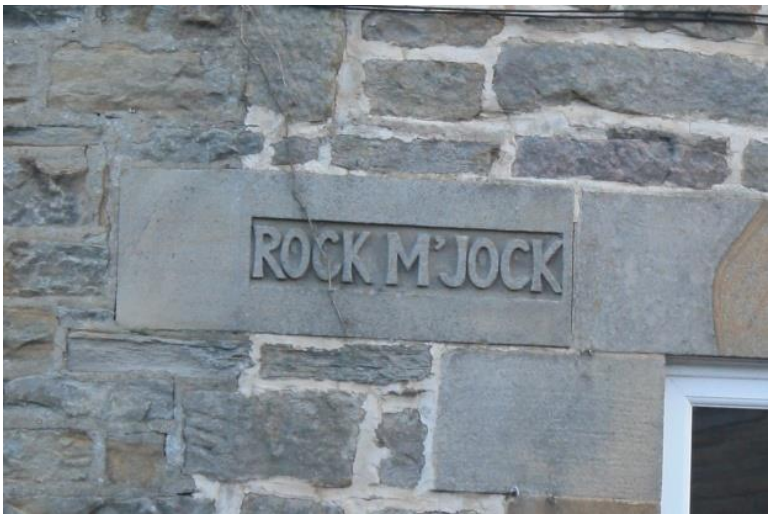
For commuters and the retired, Caton is an attractive place to live with a good range of facilities. The former railway line through the village is now part of a long-distance cycle path and foot path along the Lune valley.



Willow Mill, Caton, today (Source: Author)

The Victoria Institute – the 'village hall' – opened as early as 1883. The gap between Caton and Brookhouse has now almost closed as they have expanded towards each other. Low Mill and Willow Mill have both survived their industrial closure nearly intact, the former now apartments and the latter industrial units.

South of Caton, Gresgarth Hall (formerly Grassyard Hall) was built on earlier foundations in the first decade of the nineteenth century in a Gothic Revival style. Its gardens are well known. It is one of several interesting country houses in the Caton area.



(Source: Author)

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