Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

WRAY

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 11



Main Street, Wray

It is easy to get to Wray – 11 miles (18km) up the Lune Valley from Lancaster on the A683 and then the B6480. For satnav use LA2 8QD. Buses 81/81s from Lancaster pass through Wray.

There are many reasons to come to this small, picturesque village. The natural setting is attractive – in the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and by the River Roeburn where it joins the River Hindburn. The nearby Roeburndale Woods are a Site of Special Scientific Interest – an excellent example of northern deciduous woodland with red squirrels and well-marked paths. The buildings are equally attractive – 28 listed buildings in a Conservation Area, clustered often in terraces along four streets.

Wray's history is varied. It started as a very small farming community with few written records till the late seventeenth century. It then expanded as farming families (often Quakers) took to small-scale manufacturing. By 1851 the population had climbed to 833. By 1901 it had dropped to 499, only slightly less than today's population (532 in 2011). What had happened?

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries many small-scale manufacturing industries sprang up here. There were masons, and stone quarries and coal pits in the hills to the south of the village. Small workshops made nails, swills (a kind of basket), clogs and bobbins for the cotton mills elsewhere. Making felt hats became a local speciality, supplying Christy's of London till 1822.

Water from the fast-flowing Roeburn powered the mill, which is just south of the village. Like many such mills in the nineteenth century, what it produced often changed in response to market conditions – wool, cotton and finally silk till 1890 were all prepared here and latterly bobbins were turned. The mill closed in 1930 (and it is now houses) but by then all the local trades had been made redundant by shifting fashions or undercut by cheaper, larger-scale producers elsewhere.

The employment opportunities here shrank and the population dwindled. It is hard to imagine that today's pleasant, quiet village had a serious reputation in the 1830s as a rough, lawless place. The eight beer houses then have now been replaced by country pubs, cafe and a garden centre. The tradition of wood-working continues with *Made in Wray* products for the garden and outdoors.





There is still a shop/post office and a primary school (first set up in 1685 and rebuilt in 1885). The Wray Institute (the village hall) was built in 1923. The Quaker Meeting House on Hornby Road (established in 1668 and built in 1704–08) is now the meeting hall for the Methodist Chapel next door (1848). Holy Trinity Church (1840) was designed by Edmund Sharpe, the noted Lancaster architect. Guide 32 gives more details about the work of *Edmund Sharpe.*

Three features make Wray special. The first is the very extensive use of local sandstones for the houses, roofs and walls. Most of the new houses in the village have been faced in stone.

The second is the way the houses in terraces form pleasing streetscapes. No one building dominates the scene.

The third feature is the public art. There is the Jubilee Lantern (1887) – a chubby boy with his arms raised and a lamp on top. There is the use of cobbles on the pavements of Main Street and the Gars. Then there is the Flood Mosaic (2000, see the photograph) which commemorates the flooding in Wray in 1967 when a farm and ten houses were destroyed after a severe, intense downpour, fortunately with no loss of life. The river rose 20 feet in 20 minutes. Maggy Howarth constructed the mosaic from black Cumbrian pebbles, white Welsh ones, brown ones from the local river beds and green Elterwater slate.

A noted local event since 1995 has been the annual Scarecrow Festival that involves local families and attracts many visitors in late April and early May.

The name Wray probably derives from the Norse word for a nook or corner. Wray is a nook worth visiting.



Flood mosaic







The Old Vicarage

Further reading:

Garnett, E. (2002) *The Wray Flood of 1967: Memories of a Lune Valley Community.*
Lancaster: Lancaster University (Centre for North West Regional Studies).
Lancaster City Council (2009) *Wray Conservation Area Appraisal.* Lancaster: Lancaster City Council.
http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/planning/conservation/conservation-area-appraisal
Kenyon, D. (2008) *Wray and District Remembered*. Published by the author.

Other guides of interest include the nearby villages of:
10 Hornby
91 Halton
99 Caton.

Text and photographs – Gordon Clark.
Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (©2014; revised 2022).
Lancaster Civic Vision is the trading name of Lancaster Civic Society, registered charity no. 258434