

Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

DOLPHINHOLME

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Dolphinholme is a village 9 km south-east of Lancaster on the River Wyre. The part of the village north of the river is on the edge of Lancaster City Council's area: the southern part is in Wyre Council.

The area's development from a hamlet comprising a farm and some cottages started in 1784 when a corn mill on the river was converted by three Lancaster merchants to the world's first, fully automated spinning mill for worsted (a high-quality woollen yarn), using Arkwright frames. The Wyre is prone to flooding and after two floods the original mill was rebuilt in 1795 further away from the river.

The mill obtained the power for its very large waterwheel from a mill race, which took water from a weir upstream. A wool-combing mill and two warehouses were also built. A house for the mill's manager (later a co-owner) was built at 2 Waggon (now Wagon) Road (Derham House).

The then mill owner, Thomas Hinde, lived close by in Old Mill House, which was built around 1800. Hinde also owned mills in Lancaster and came from a family of traders and merchants.

Despite some workers walking daily to and from Forton to the Mill, there was a need to provide housing for the many more millworkers than the local area could provide and so the two rows of Corless Cottages were built in 1796. 'Waggon Road' going eastwards indicates that the yarn was taken to the Bradford area for weaving into worsted cloth. The mill was extended in 1818.



Dolphinholme as shown on the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map surveyed in 1844



Part of Corless Cottages, Dolphinholme (Source: Author)

There was a gas works supplying the mill: it was built in 1811 and probably replaced in 1818. The gas was stored in a gasometer (gas holder), which was replaced in 1820. The associated chimney stack also survives, at a distance to obtain a better draught.

The remains of the gasworks were designated a Scheduled Monument in 2020 because they comprise probably the earliest gas plant for a mill known to survive in the world. Many of the work's components are still visible for study.

Dolphinholme was one of the very earliest mills to be lit at night by gas, a major saving in candles and reducing the fire danger. In 1811 Dolphinholme was one of the first places in Britain to have street lighting using gas.

In 1822 a steam engine was installed to deal with low water levels in the Wyre and keep the machines working. Today the former mill site is private property.

The Chapel of Ease shown on the above map was built in 1839–40 and was replaced in 1897–8 by the current Church of St Mark and its vicarage, which were designed by the Lancaster architects, Paley and Austin. The church's roof beams and window tracery are worth seeing. There were also Congregational and Wesleyan Methodist chapels.

The bridge across the Wyre was constructed in 1791. The original school was built in 1865. Taken as a whole, Dolpinholme is a very good example of a mill community.



St Mark's Church, Dolphinholme (Source: Author)

Mills are vulnerable to poor management and economic depressions and Dolphinholme mill is no exception. Hinde's firm collapsed with huge debts in 1839 due to problems with their Yorkshire enterprises and a slump in trade.

The mill was taken over by the Swainsons who carried on spinning worsted. In 1852/3 Henry Rushton converted the mill to cotton spinning. In 1867 the mill closed and was demolished between 1890 and 1910 – too small, old and isolated from the core of the British textile trades to be competitive.



Old Mill House and Woodstock Hall, Dolphinholme (Source: Author)

Just south of Dolphinholme is Wyreside Hall (see below) Grade II listed. After 1790 the intention was for this old hall to be remodelled according to a plan by Robert Adam for James Fenton Cawthorne (later to become MP for Lancaster). However, this was not completed and in 1843/44 the house was redesigned in a Neo-Classical style by Edmund Sharpe, the Lancaster architect, for Robert Garnett who had bought the house in 1836. The Garnetts were major local landowners. There were later additions to the Hall in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the building is now private apartments. There is an icehouse in the grounds.



Wyreside Hall in the 1890s (Source: Lancashire County Council, Red Rose Collection, gratefully acknowledged)

Today, much of Dolphinholme is a Conservation Area with 16 listed buildings including the bridge (1791), all Grade II. The Castle Hill Motte is a Schedule Monument, being the remnants of a Norman Castle erected to control movement along the River Wyre.

Dolphinholme is a thriving community with its shop, primary school, village hall and inn, and new housing estates.



The River Wyre from Dolphinholme Bridge (Source: Author)

Reading

Winstanley, M (ed.) (2000) *Rural Industries of the Lune Valley*. Lancaster: Lancaster University: Centre for North-West Regional Studies

Edmund Sharpe: Lancaster's Renaissance Man. Lancaster Civic Society Guide 32.

Historic England Remains of the gas plant, chimney, wheel pit and mill race of Dolphinholme Worsted Mill, Nether Wyresdale - 1466557 | Historic England

Lancaster City Council Conservation Area Appraisals (Dolphinholme) 2016
http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/planning/conservation/conservation-areas

Text – Gordon Clark.
Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (©2014; revised 2026) www.lancastercivicsociety.uk.
Lancaster Civic Vision is the trading name of Lancaster Civic Society, registered charity no. 258434