

THE HISTORY OF ACCRINGTON

Accrington is a town in Lancashire, within the borough of Hyndburn. It lies about 4 miles (6 km) east of Blackburn, 6 miles (10 km) west of Burnley, 20 miles (32 km) north of Manchester city centre and is situated on the mostly culverted River Hyndburn. The town has a population of 35,203 according to the 2001 census and the urban area has a population of over 70,000.

The town is a former centre of the cotton and textile machinery industries. The town is famed for manufacturing the hardest and densest building bricks in the world, "The Accrington NORI" (iron), which were used in the construction of the Empire State Building and for the foundations of Blackpool Tower; famous for its football team and for having Europe's largest collection of Tiffany glass.

Accrington is commonly abbreviated by locals to "Accy"

The name Accrington appears to be Anglo-Saxon in origin. Its derivation is uncertain.

In the records it variously appears as Akarinton in 1194; Akerunton, Akerinton and Akerynton in 1258; Acrinton in 1292; Ackryngton in 1311 and Acryngton in 1324.

The name may mean acorn farmstead from Anglo-Saxon *æcern* meaning acorn and *tun* meaning farmstead or village. The southern part of Accrington, the township of New Accrington, was formerly in the Forest of Blackburnshire and the presence of oak trees may be inferred from local place names like Broad Oak and Oak Hill. The products of oak trees were once an important food for swine and a farmstead may have been named for such produce. Anglo-Saxon *cerntun* might become Middle English *Akerenton*, *Akerinton* and the like. Also worth considering is that in the Lancashire dialect acorn was *akran*.

There is no known Old English personal name from which the first element can be derived. But if the Frisian names *Akkrum*, *Akkeringa* and Dutch name *Akkerghem*, are derived from the personal name *Akker* there may be a corresponding Old English name from which Accrington may be derived.

The town we now call Accrington covers two townships which were established in 1507 following disafforestation; those of Old Accrington and New Accrington which were merged in 1878 with the incorporation of the borough council. There have been settlements there since the medieval period, likely in the Grange Lane and Black Abbey area, and the King's Highway which passes above the town was at one time used by the kings and queens of England when they used the area for hunting when the Forest of Accrington was one of the four forests of the hundred of Blackburnshire.

Robert de Lacy gave the manor of Accrington to the monks of Kirkstall in the 12th century. The monks built a grange there; removing the inhabitants to make room for it. The locals got their revenge by setting fire to the new building, destroying its contents and in the process killing the three lay brothers who occupied it. An area of the town is named 'Black Abbey' a possible reference to the murders. Regardless of whatever happened Accrington did not remain under monastic control for long before reverting back to the de Lacys.

It is thought the monks of Kirkstall may have built a small chapel there during their tenure for the convenience of those in charge residing there and their tenants, but the records are uncertain. What

is known is that there was a chapel in Accrington prior to 1553 where the vicar of Whalley was responsible for the maintenance of divine worship. However it did not have its own minister and it was served, when at all, by the curate of one of the adjacent chapels. In 1717 Accrington was served by the curate of Church, who preached there only once a month. St. James's Church was built in 1763, replacing the old chapel however it did not achieve parochial status until as late as 1870.

Until around 1830 visitors considered Accrington to be just a "considerable village". The Industrial Revolution, however, resulted in large changes and Accrington's location on the confluence of a number of streams made it attractive to industry and a number of mills were built in the town in the mid-eighteenth century. Further industrialisation then followed in the late eighteenth century and local landowners began building mansions in the area on the outskirts of the settlement where their mills were located while their employees lived in overcrowded unsanitary conditions in the centre.

Industrialisation resulted in rapid population growth during the nineteenth century, as people moved from over north-west England to Accrington, with the population increasing from 3,266 in 1811 to 10,376 in 1851 to 43,211 in 1901 to its peak in 1911 at 45,029.

This fast population growth and slow response from the established church allowed non-conformism to flourish in the town. By the mid-nineteenth century there were Wesleyan, Primitive Methodist, United Free Methodist, Congregationalist, Baptist, Swedenborgian, Unitarian, Roman Catholic and Catholic Apostolic churches in the town. The Swedenborgian church was so grand that it was considered to be the 'Cathedral' of that denomination.

For many decades the textiles industry, the engineering industry and coal mining were the central activities of the town. Cotton mills and dye works provided work for the inhabitants; but often in very difficult conditions. There was regular conflict with employers over wages and working conditions. On 24 April 1826 over 1,000 men and women, many armed, gathered at Whinney Hill in Clayton-le-Moors to listen to a speaker from where they marched on Sykes's Mill at Higher Grange Lane, near the site of the modern police station and Magistrate's Courts, and smashed over 60 looms.

These riots spread from Accrington through Oswaldtwistle, Blackburn, Darwen, Rossendale, Bury and Chorley. In the end after three days of riots 1,139 looms were destroyed, 4 rioters and 2 bystanders shot dead by the authorities in Rossendale and 41 rioters sentenced to death (all of whose sentences were commuted).

In the 1842 'plug riots' a general strike spread from town to town due to conditions in the town. In a population of 9,000 people as few as 100 were fully employed. From the 15 August 1842 the situation boiled over and bands of men entered the mills which were running and stopped the machinery by knocking out the boiler plugs. This allowed the water and steam to escape shutting down the mill machinery. Thousands of strikers walked over the hills from one town to another to persuade people to join the strike in civil disturbances that lasted about a week. The strike was associated with the Chartist movement but eventually proved unsuccessful in its aims.

In the early 1860s the Lancashire cotton famine badly affected Accrington, although less so than the wider area due to its more diverse economy, with as many as half of the town's mill employees out of work at one time.

Conditions were such that a Local Board of Health was constituted in 1853 and the town itself incorporated in 1878 allowing the enforcement of local laws to improve the town.

A further wave of rioting hit the town in 1962 when local men and youths clashed with some of the Asian and Caribbean Commonwealth immigrants who had settled in the town since the late 1940s.

Accrington Pals Further information: Recruitment to the British Army during World War I

One well-known association the town has is with the 'Accrington Pals', the nickname given to the smallest home town battalion of volunteers formed to fight in the first world war. The Pals battalions were a peculiarity of the 1914-18 war: Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, believed that it would help recruitment if friends and work-mates from the same town were able to join up and fight together. Strictly speaking, the 'Accrington Pals' battalion is properly known as the '11th East Lancashire Regiment': the nickname is a little misleading, since of the four 250-strong companies that made up the original battalion only one was actually composed of men from Accrington. The rest volunteered from other east Lancashire towns such as Burnley, Blackburn and Chorley.

The Pals' first day of action, Saturday 1 July 1916, took place in Serre in the north of France. It was part of the 'Big Push' (later known as the Battle of the Somme) that was intended to force the German Army into a retreat from the Western Front, a line they had held since late 1914.

The German defences in Serre were supposed to have been obliterated by sustained, heavy, British shelling during the preceding week; however, as the battalion advanced it met with fierce resistance. 235 men were killed and a further 350 wounded. Those casualty figures are wrong, — more than half of the battalion — within half an hour.

Similarly desperate losses were suffered elsewhere on the front, in a disastrous day for the British Army (approximately 19,000 British soldiers were killed in a single day).

Later in the year, the East Lancashire Regiment was rebuilt with new volunteers — in all, 865 Accrington men were killed during World War I. All of these names are recorded on a war memorial, an imposing white stone cenotaph, which stands in Oak Hill Park in the south of the town.

The cenotaph also lists the names of 173 local fatalities from World War II.

After World War I and until 1986, Accrington Corporation buses were painted in the regimental colours of red and blue with gold lining. The mudguards were painted black as a sign of mourning.

THE HISTORY OF WARNER STREET ACCRINGTON

Warner Street in Accrington, Lancashire is a Georgian street, originally built in c.1821 to house workers of the local industrialist Mr. Thomas Hargreaves and to create a safe passageway from the Abbey Street end of the town to St. James Church. The street was one of the towns earliest paved thoroughfares. Originally, the street wasn't linked to Church Street at the bottom, this came later after the River Hyndburn had been culverted.

For quite a while after it was completed, the street was informally known as "New Street" but was later named Warner Street after the Lee-Warner family who owned the land it was built on. It was considered to be the best thoroughfare in the town as it was the only street properly paved.

Warner Street leads from Abbey Street to Church Street and today houses a wide range of diverse and unique independent shops and businesses. Interestingly, if you look at the building numbers, they appear to have been started from the wrong end, with the low numbers at the Abbey Street end. This is because, when building work for Warner Street commenced, Abbey Street was the main market street in Accrington and so numbering started from there.

To the right are a series of six pictures depicting various views of Warner Street old and new. As you can see, in terms of buildings at least, not a great deal has changed. Click on any of the pictures to see a larger view.

MURDER ON WARNER STREET ACCRINGTON

Let us turn the clock back in time to 9.00am. on Tuesday 9th June 1896 and visit Warner Street, Accrington. The Coates family, John, Sarah and their son, twenty five year old Thomas, had their own business at No 3 where they made cabinets .The events of that day have gone down in local history as the Warner Street tragedy.

John Coates employed a local lad, Christopher Hindle, as an apprentice cabinet maker. John and Thomas had been busy in the workshop whilst 15 year old Christopher had been in the shop at Warner Street assisting Mrs. Sarah Coates.

At 10.15am. Christopher ran to the workshop in a state of hysteria shouting to John and Thomas that Mrs. Coates had been murdered. As he shouted these words he had his hand covering his left shoulder applying pressure to a wound. "Where is my wife" shouted John, to which Christopher replied that she was in the shop. Both John and Thomas rushed at great speed to the Warner Street premises. Both husband and son were deeply distressed by the sight that greeted them.

Sarah was lying on the floor in, a pool of blood, her throat had been cut and she was bleeding freely. Thomas tried to stem the flow of blood whilst his father, in a state of shock, tried to take this dreadful scene in. Meanwhile Christopher had gone to fetch the doctor, Mr Clayton, who, when arriving, had the unpleasant task of informing them that Mrs. Coates was indeed dead. The Doctor then turned his attention to the wound on young Hindle's shoulder, and noted that it was a series of almost identical scratches, and really only a minor flesh wound.

The police, Inspector Sinclair, Sergeant Bale and PC Andrews arrived very quickly to start their investigations into the murder. PC Andrews interviewed young Hindle first. He told the officer that he had been downstairs in the shop when he heard screaming from the upstairs room where Mrs. Coates had been working, Rushing upstairs he saw a very tall man with a huge black moustache, a blue suit on, and carrying a knife, He had assaulted Mrs. Coates and blood was gushing from her neck. Her attacker then switched his attention to him, and caught his shoulder with the knife before running downstairs and out into Warner Street with him giving chase.

Hindle was then interrogated by Inspector Sinclair and told a similar story, but this time he mentioned that he had run down the back street. As it happened that morning workmen had been block paving on the back street, and they informed the police that they had noticed no one running down the street, at any time of that day.

The police surgeon was asked to take a look at Hindle's wounds and after close inspection he concluded that Hindle had in fact harmed himself. Mrs. Coates' body was sent for a post mortem and it was ascertained by the police surgeon, Doctor Geddie that a pair of scissors had been used to commit the murder - he also believed that the same weapon had caused the injury to Hindle's shoulder. Christopher Hindle became the prime suspect.

The police looked all over the county for a man with a blue suit and large moustache, but no one was arrested. They were convinced that Hindle had been stealing money that day and indeed Sarah Coates had been unfortunate to be in the vicinity at the same time. Two days after the murder the weapon used to kill Mrs. Coates was indeed found, and was confirmed by the police surgeon as the pair of scissors used. Hindle was arrested and sent to Lancaster Castle for trial. He still kept up his story that Sarah had been attacked by a tall man in a blue suit with a large moustache.

The trial began at Lancaster, Hindle's parents were obviously horrified at the trial and fully expected their son to be executed. Then a most unusual letter arrived at the Hindle's home.

An anonymous letter from Bolton, recalling that a person called Murray had been in a Bolton pub drinking quite heavily. This man was tall, wearing a blue suit and sported a large moustache. He informed the anonymous writer that he had indeed committed a murder in Accrington. He did seem very distressed by his confession, and his guilt must have got the better of him. As they departed this character must have felt that he was about to be arrested by his confession because, the following day a body was found on the railway, the mangled mess of humanity did reveal a huge moustache.

Unfortunately for Hindle however this new evidence was not taken seriously; the jury did find Christopher Hindle guilty but also asked for mercy because he was only fifteen years old. As a result Hindle was imprisoned due to his age.