

Yarrow Valley Country Park Birkacre History Trail

The History of Birkacre

The earliest reference to Birkacre and its involvement with industry dates from the 14th Century. Prior to this farming was the main source of livelihood in the Yarrow Valley. The main reason for the establishment of industry at Birkacre was the good flow of water in the River Yarrow. The diversity of industry found at Birkacre was also influenced by the proximity of coal near the surface, a damp climate and soft water essential for textile manufacture.

1300's 1400's 1500's & 1600's 1700's 1800's

The owner of the land at that time was Robert De Burgh and in 1398 he got permission from his neighbour John De Coppull to make an attachment to the mill pool and alter the course of the River Yarrow (Yarrow as we know it today).

1300's 1400's 1500's & 1600's 1700's 1800's

By 1423 there were at least two mills at work on the Yarrow. One of these mills was a "walke" or fulling mill, where cloth was "walked" upon in a trough of water and "fullers earth".

Fulling thickened the cloth. This process was later mechanised with the introduction of water wheels driving wooden "fulling stocks", these were like wooden hammers which raised and dropped into the fulling composition. This removed the need for men to walk the cloth.

The other mill was a water powered corn mill, which was owned by the lord of the manor. The tenant farmers of the estate were obliged to take their corn to be ground into flour at the mill.

Birkacre lay in the manor of Duxbury with Burgh, Birkacre Manor being a smaller estate in Duxbury. Another corn mill was located upstream from Birkacre and one cannot help wondering if the two millers had "competitive rates" for the farmers of the estates.

After the death of Robert De Burgh in 1423, his three married daughters partitioned the estate. Alexander Rigby of Arley and the Croke family of Coppull later bought portions.

We can provide all information to you in large print, on audio tape or in your own language.
Please telephone: 01257 515151

ان معلومات سبھی کو بڑے لکڑے میں، آڈیو ٹیپ یا اپنی زبان میں فراہم کیا جاسکتا ہے۔ براہ کرم 01257 515151 پر کال کریں۔

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For more information about the society, see their website www.chorleyhistorysociety.co.uk

Photographs supplied by local historian Geoff Bellis.

This leaflet has been put together with the assistance

of Chorley Historical & Archaeological Society.

Acknowledgements

Original text compiled by Local Historian, Jack Smith.

Tel: 01257 515151 or 01257 279538 (Visitor Centre)

for more information.

www.chorley.gov.uk

contact@chorley.gov.uk

Yarrow Valley Visitor Centre is located to the South West

of Chorley off the B5251 on Birkacre Road. The centre is

open from 10.00am – 11.00am and 1.00pm – 2.00pm daily

(except Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day)

1300's 1400's 1500's & 1600's 1700's 1800's 1900's



Yarrow Valley Country Park Off Birkacre Road, Chorley PR7 3QL

Visitor Centre

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The mills remained in operation during the 16th and 17th centuries. Several coalmines were established in the Yarrow Valley during this period.

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The Chadwick family held the estate during the 18th Century. Edward Chadwick of High Burgh Hall built metal working forges at Birkacre at this time and in 1777 he constructed a purpose built cotton mill. This was significant, as at the time all spinning and weaving was being done by hand at home as a domestic industry. The "Factory System" had arrived at Birkacre.

The textile industry was becoming a business. It needed purpose built factories in which to carry out production work. Birkacre was one of the first.

Many new inventions to speed up the process of manufacture in the textile spinning and weaving trade were being developed. These were power driven machines, which increased production. With more efficient methods of manufacture, the domestic industry was being replaced by the "factory system". This transition put many of the domestic manufacturers out of business or decreased their earnings and caused much hardship.

A move by many groups to try and stop the spread of the "factory system" led to the onset of a period when "machine breakers" roamed the country and broke up "patent engines" which were putting domestic trade out of business.

In 1777 Edward Chadwick leased the mill to Richard Arkwright who was a well known inventor and industrialist. He was born in Preston and had mills in Derbyshire and he is often referred to as "the father of the industrial revolution". He leased the new cotton mill, the higher and lower forges, a corn mill, three ponds and several fields at a total rent of £181.

Richard Arkwright fitted out the mill with his patent machines for the spinning of cotton, driven by a waterwheel. It was the very first mill to be built in the Chorley area, rating this as an important development in the industrial history of Lancashire. It was the introduction of the factory system to the area. He invented the "water spinning frame", which was state of the art in the manufacture of cotton yarns.



The Birkacre Riots of 1779

The coming of the new mill was noted by the machine breakers and in the October of 1779 a large mob of men set off from the Blackrod area via many small villages en route to Birkacre, determined to stop the march of progress.

The military had prior knowledge of the mob's movement and sent a force to Birkacre from Wigan under the charge of Sir Richard Clayton. The rioters met with the militia on their arrival at Birkacre. It was Friday afternoon and the mob comprised of hundreds of men. Sir Richard Clayton tried to dissuade the mob from causing damage to the mill and left it at that, assuming his words would have the desired effect. After which he moved the larger part of his force to Preston, leaving only a small number of men at Birkacre with orders not to resist the mob if they started to cause damage to the mill.

The weekend was a stand off time, yet it is said that local pewter was collected and melted down to make shot for the military force to use if necessary.

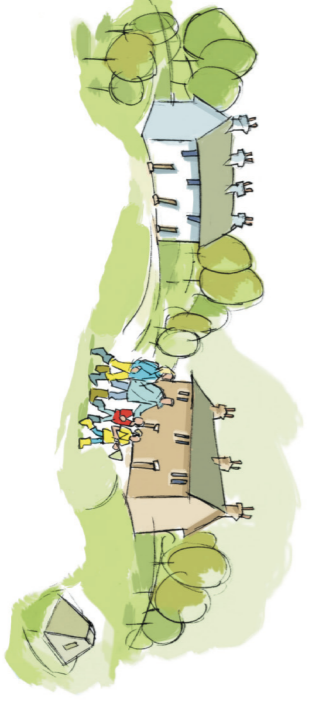
On Monday the attitude of the mob had changed to that of action. Despite local people defending the mill, the mob broke in as the militia watched from a distance. There was an exchange of gunshots but the mob was too great in numbers reputed to be upward of one thousand.

After destroying the inside of the mill, the machines, being made with wooden frames, were used to set fire to the premises. The mill was totally consumed by flames. At least one of the rioters was killed, the mob taking his body away as they left on Monday evening to continue their destruction on the way to Bolton.

Richard Arkwright was not at Birkacre at the time of the riot, but was at one of his other mills in Derbyshire. However a famous contemporary, Josiah Wedgewood was in the area and reported the riot in a letter to a friend.

Following the burning down of his mill Richard Arkwright gave up the lease in 1779. Despite the destruction, Mr Chadwick rebuilt the mill shortly after the riot.

Within two years rebuilding had taken place and Birkacre continued to develop, concentrating this time on the textile finishing business namely calico printing, dyeing and bleaching.



The land remained derelict until the late 1980's when Chorley Council obtained derelict land grants to restore the former mill lodges and create the recreational resource of Yarrow Valley Country Park.

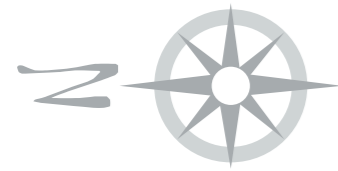
In 1930 the Thom family sold out to larger companies who ran the works until 1939 when the collieries and works were closed down. Subsequently all the buildings and adjoining land became derelict.

1300's 1400's 1500's & 1600's 1700's 1800's 1900's

Water power was superseded by steam power and even a private coal mine was opened in 1880 to supply the needs of the works, which had now grown so much that they straddled the River Yarrow.

From the mid 1800's Birkacre was most successful under McNaughton and Thom. Mr John Thom, an expert chemist purchased the Burgh and Birkacre Estate from the Anderton family in 1852. Under his guidance the business grew in efficiency.

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The history trail is one and a half miles long and will take around one hour 30 minutes to complete.

- Key
- Surfaced Footpath
 - Footpath (track)
 - Historical interest (Points accessible to all)
 - Historical interest (Points not accessible to all)
 - Information Centre
 - Picnic Area
 - Car Parking

1 Water Powered Corn Mill Site

Located on the small car park next to the Visitor Centre this site dates back to the 15th Century.

2 Richard Arkwright's Cotton Mill Site

Located on the main car park in front of the Visitor Centre this mill was built in 1777 by Edward Chadwick and leased to Richard Arkwright (pictured below). It was burned down by rioters in 1779.



3 Birkacre Forge/Lower Forge & slitting mill site

4 Site of former Higher Forge Cottages

Lived in by workers from the calico printing works, and later the bleaching/dyeing works. They had gardens to the rear to ensure self sufficiency.



5 Higher Forge

Set up in 1760 and also called Burgh Forge, it produced iron strapping.

6 Primrose Hill Cottages

Former Colliery Cottages built in the 18th Century.

7 Drybones Colliery Shaft and Winding Engine Base

The cottages close by are called Drybones Cottages.

8 Birkacre Weir

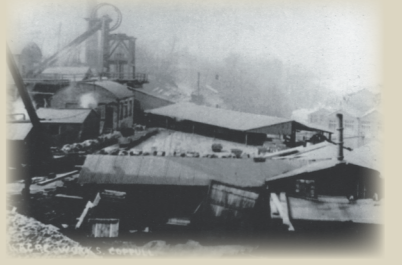
The weir raises the water level of the River Yarrow. A series of watercourses allow water to flow from the river into the lodges. The fish ladder to the side of the weir was built in 2002 to allow fish to migrate upstream.

9 Site of Cottages

The footprint of these cottages is still visible, they may have been associated with the water supply from the weir to the Top Lodge.

10 Birkacre Colliery

Open since c1800.



11 Site of former Mineshaft & winding engine bed for Birkacre Colliery



12 Birkacre Colliery coal wash system

13 Site of former Bleachworks

The picnic area is here today, the Lancashire Boilers were used to power the works that were located here.

