

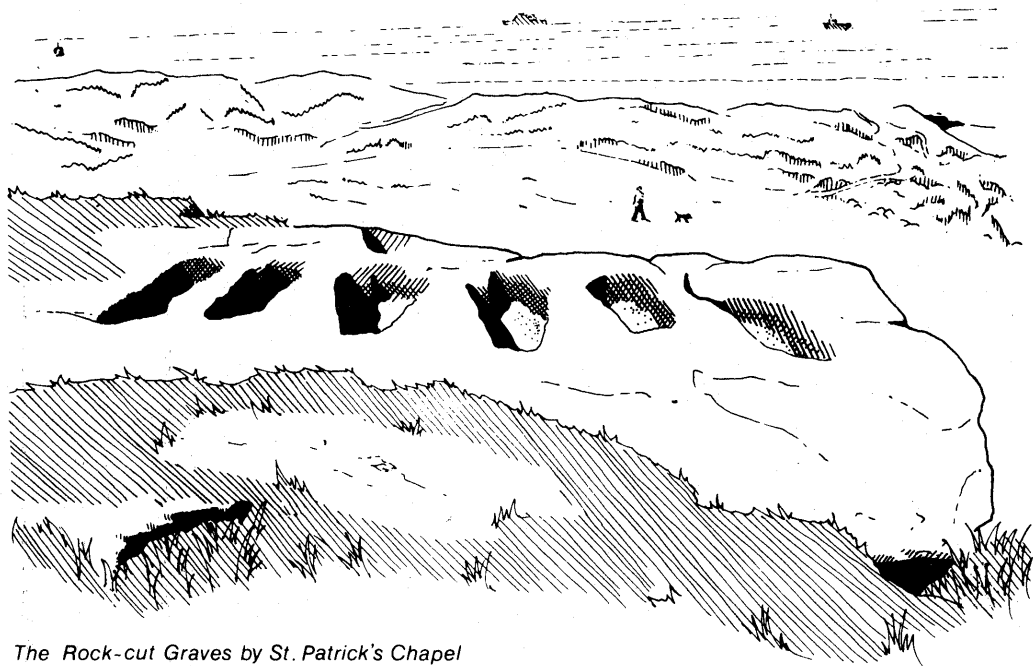


Heysham Village and Churches

Visitors to the village of Heysham will often first enjoy the colourful and varied outdoor stalls which line Main Street. Above the doors of the houses behind, or built into their walls, are datestones: these lintels are the first indication that Heysham is an old settlement. The name can be traced as far back as the Domesday Survey of 1086, when it was called Hesham.

Its origins go back further still, however, for the ruins of St. Patrick's Chapel standing on the rocky headland above Half Moon Bay in Lower Heysham and St. Peter's Church clustered just below it, both date back to the Saxon period. We cannot usually put exact dates on buildings erected before the Norman Conquest because of the lack of early documents, but we can compare them with similar buildings. Locally we have Saxon settlements at both Lancaster and Halton, which make it evident that there was a continuity of settlement through the latter part of the so-called Dark Ages, say from about 800 A.D. to the Norman Conquest.

St. Patrick's Chapel is a simple rectangular building 27 feet long and 9 feet wide, which is thought to be an enlargement of a slightly earlier building. Enough of its walls remain to show that there was one window and one door, both on the south wall. The doorway, which is 6½ feet tall and 2½ feet wide, has a round head consisting of three carved blocks, one behind the other, and on the inner side there is a groove for a door to be inset. The outer face of the doorway is decorated with three parallel curved ribs and there is also one of these on the inner side. The window, of one opening, would have been about 3 feet tall with a flat outer head and a curved inner head. Nearby are six graves cut into the rock just before it falls away and there are two further such graves, one of a smaller size; on the lower side of the site. Two of the graves are straight-sided and the others body-shaped: they all have a separately cut socket into which a wooden cross could have been inserted. Similar rock-cut graves can be found at Hexham in Northumbria and the custom was also known



The Rock-cut Graves by St. Patrick's Chapel



in Ireland in the same period. Originally they would also have had stone lids, but these have gone, with the bones that would have laid within. Such graves could have been used for the burial of certain eminent persons, whether priests or kings, for whom special treatment seemed appropriate. The bodies would have been placed on their backs and with their arms by their sides.

In the area between the two sets of rock-cut graves and on the south side of the chapel was a cemetery, discovered during an excavation of the 1970's. The evidence from the bones found there suggest that it was in use in the 10th and 11th centuries, with a few additional (and later) burials in the chapel itself. The largest number of graves was found in the silt-filled gully outside the chapel door and more were by the rock-cut graves. It is estimated that there were about 80 burials altogether, of whom 18 were children and at least 23 male and 23 female, so that the chapel was obviously being used for lay burials, as well as for the dignitaries in their rock-cut graves. Less than a tenth of them would have survived beyond the age of 45 – osteo-arthritis was a common disease – and a

high proportion shared the same inherited abnormality, suggesting that they might have been fairly closely related. In some of the burials roughly squared stones were placed on edge beside the skeletons and a few rougher stones also used as a covering. Some of the bodies had been buried in shrouds and the presence of nails near a few of the later burials suggests that coffins were being used by the end of the period. No early pottery or jewellery was found on the site, but beside the pelvis of one skeleton there was a simply decorated bone comb of Anglo-Scandinavian type.

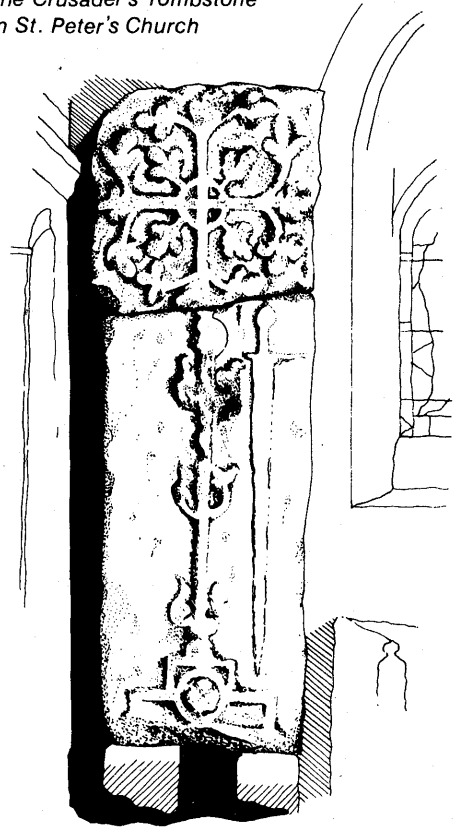
St. Peter's Church, just down the slope from St. Patrick's, looks at first as though it is later than St. Patrick's, but this is because it has been rebuilt and added to over the centuries. It is likely that both places were built in the 8th century, although the dedication to St. Peter may be much earlier than that to St. Patrick (and in neither case do these names - despite much speculation - tell us why they were chosen). There is a round-headed, blocked doorway in the west wall of St. Peter's, the head of which is formed by a single stone. In the south-west corner of the churchyard the former north

doorway has been re-erected; this was taken out when an extra north aisle was added in 1864, and preserved by the foresight of the Revd. John Royds who ensured that every stone was replaced in its original position. It is very similar in construction to the south doorway of St. Patrick's Chapel already described. Alongside the main path to the church is part of the shaft of a cross, with on one side a seated figure with a halo and on the other a depiction, probably of the raising of Lazarus. It is thought that St. Peter's may have been used as the parish church while St. Patrick's was always a separate chapel for specialised uses, although the exact relationship of these two buildings is still not finally settled.

The Anglo-Norman hogback tombstone which now lies inside, in the south aisle of St. Peter's, intermingles Norse mythology with Christian symbols and has two bears biting into the ends. It marks the beginning of a new era and it is important both for the vivid artistry of the carving and as a reminder that while people had absorbed the new symbolism of Christianity, they wished also to retain some of that of the older Northern gods.

In 1094 Heysham was granted to the abbey of St. Martin, Sées (in Normandy) along with the Benedictine priory at Lancaster. It passed to the care of Syon Abbey in Middlesex, along with the Priory, in 1430. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530's the right of patronage was sold to Thomas Fleetwood in 1554 and passed through various local families

*The Crusader's Tombstone
in St. Peter's Church*



until it was acquired by Clement Royds in 1844, the father of the John Royds already mentioned.

Building work continued over the centuries which explains why the windows, particularly along the south walls, are of many styles and dates, from both the mediaeval and the early modern periods and include an east window in

*The Hogback Tombstone
in St. Peter's Church*





Heysham Old Hall

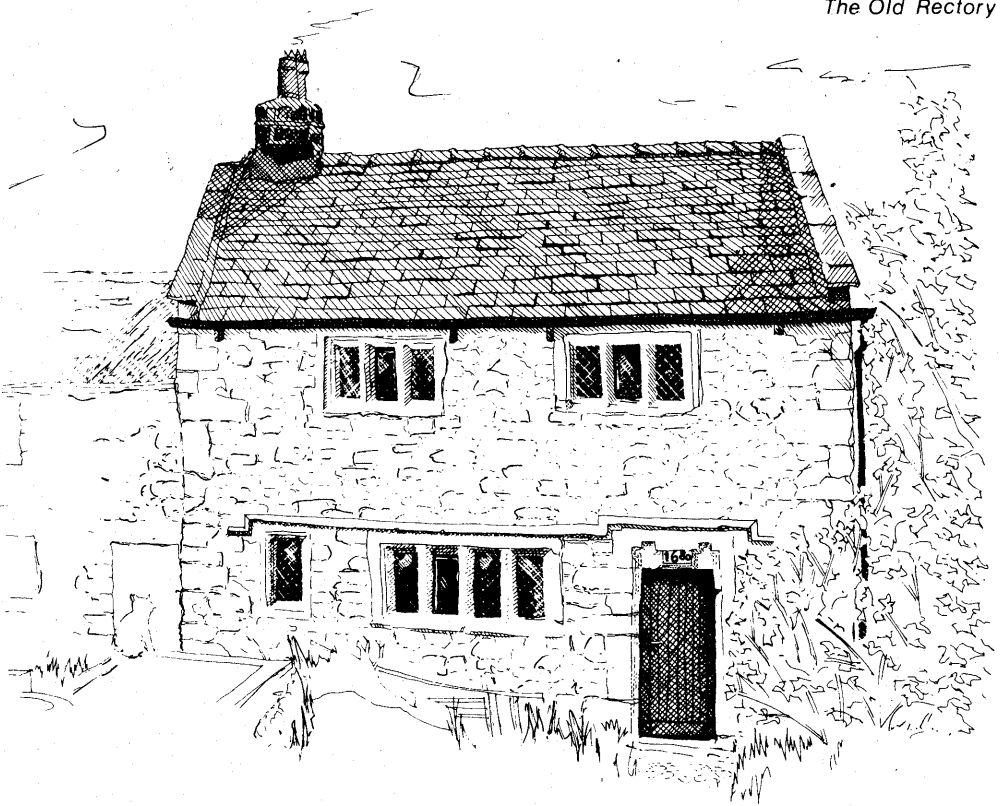
the chancel of about 1330. Thus we see a Norman chancel arch with a rope moulding pattern incised on the two supporting columns and within it some late mediaeval wood carving on the rood screen.

Visitors will also notice various coffin lids which have been built into the walls. The best-known is the 13th century slab on the west wall with a foliated cross alongside a sword, which is likely to have been placed over a Crusader's tomb. On the wall of the south aisle are two gravestones of the 17th century, while on the east wall of the chancel is the gravestone of William Ward, a vicar of the parish who was installed in 1638 and died in 1670: the style of the lettering is very similar to that of John Lawson's gravestone at the Lancaster Friends' Meeting House. Also to be seen in the wall of the south aisle is a tiny lead chalice, found in that part of the church when the burial of an early priest was uncovered in the restoration work of the 1860s.

Although we have the physical remains of

the two churches to verify the claim that Heysham is a very early settlement, we do not know who owned the manor before it was held by Earl Tostig at the time of the Norman Conquest, as part of the estate of Halton. After the Conquest, Roger de Poitou was given Lower Heysham where the two churches stand along with much other land in Lancashire, and he in turn granted it to the Abbey of St. Martin, Sées. To the south-east is Upper Heysham, whose lord in the early mediaeval period was bound, if the king came to Lancashire, to meet him at the county boundary with horn and white staff, welcome him and attend him again on his departure. The Gernet family were holding the land by the end of the 12th century and from them it passed to the Dacre family and later into the manor of Hornby which was in the ownership of the Mount-eagles.

We know very little of events in Heysham in the mediaeval period and it is likely that life was fairly tranquil. The single exception to this seems to have been when the Scots raided in



1322 and Heysham, like other local communities, suffered considerable damage: the income of the rectory, for example, was suddenly halved.

In 1597 Lord Mouteagle died and Elizabeth his wife sold the whole manor to John Bradley; we learn that the following belonged to the estate: a water mill, a windmill, a dovecote (which would have been a substantial building giving accommodation for thousands of birds), a willow grove, salt and fresh marshes, and certain rights over the extensive foreshore, which was greater in area than the cultivated land. Heysham Old Hall, at the southern end of the village, was built the following year although it was substantially altered in the restoration of 1888. Originally this three-storey building had a large central hall with a long window divided by five mullions, moulded beams and a hearth almost 7 feet wide. On

either side of the hall were projecting wings with their gables facing south and a porch, which went the full height of the house adjoined the west wing.

Another early house can be found at the very end of Main Street, almost on the foreshore. This is known as the Old Rectory: another local name was Greese House, from the Old French for the flight of steps which lead from the road to the main entrance. The lintel over the front door bears a date of 1680, which fits well with the style of the building and the date-stones further up Main Street.

The manor was forfeited to the Crown in 1715 because of the inhabitants' involvement with the Jacobite uprising of that year, but in 1724 the Corporation of Lancaster bought it and sold it again in 1766 for £672 to a group of proprietors who held it jointly. In 1836 it

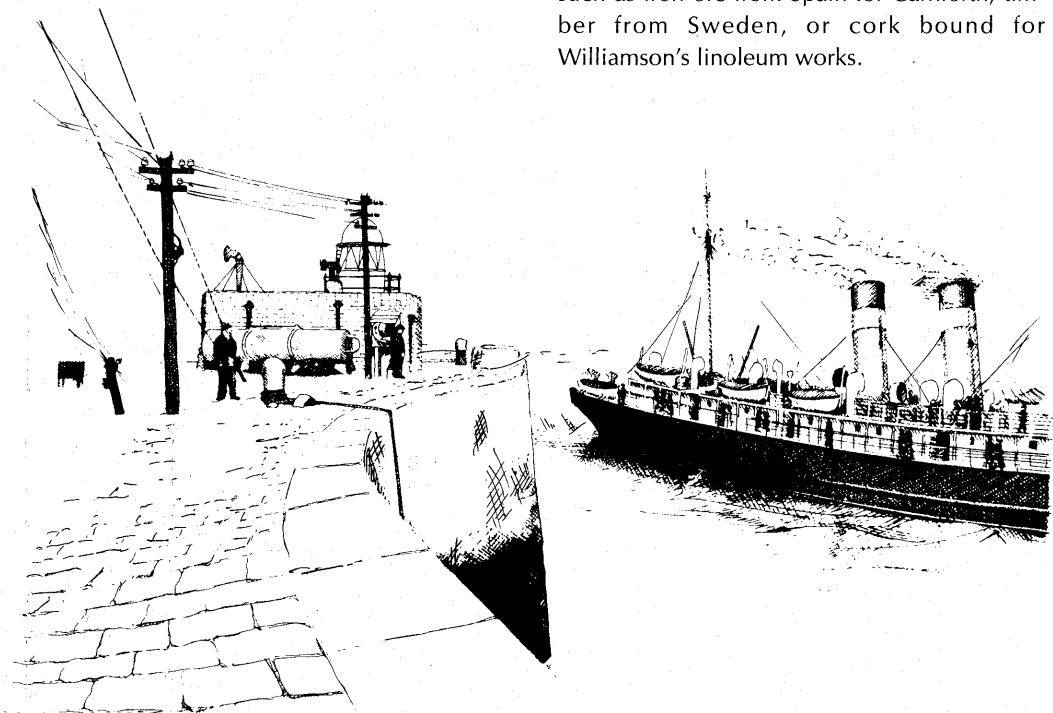
was held in 16 shares by 12 proprietors. Heysham is now part of the District of Lancaster and, with the hamlet of Sandylands linking the two communities, forms a continuous conurbation with the 19th century town of Morecambe.

Much of the land around Heysham has traditionally been under pasture although there is some land in arable use. Fishing and mussel gathering used to be another way of earning a living and the brewing and sale of nettle beer was undertaken for the tourist industry. With Morecambe leading the way, Heysham began early to develop special amenities for visitors; for example, the Strawberry and Recreation Gardens, which were first laid out around 1869.

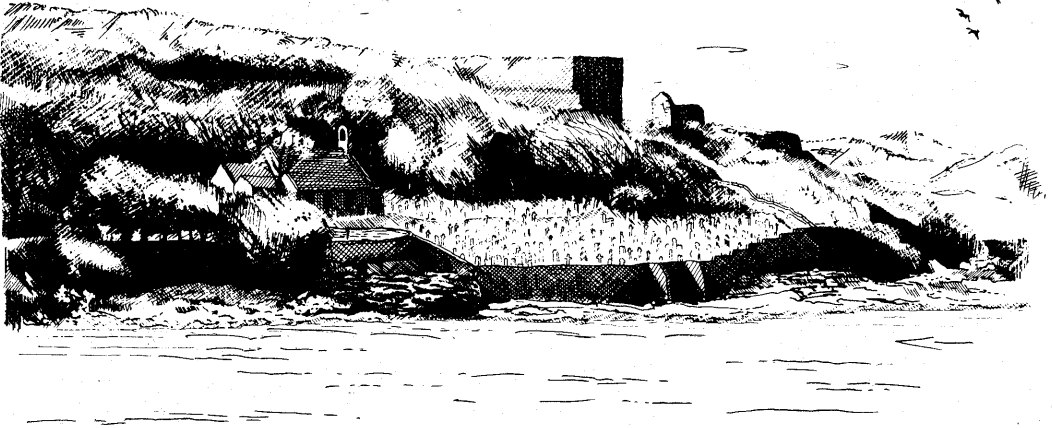
Late in the 19th century there was a brief flurry of industrial activity. There was a tramway from Morecambe to Heysham and the village had its own single-storey bobbin mill. Between

1897 and 1904 the Midland Railway built Heysham Dock, which cost £3 million and covered an area of 36 acres. A settlement of temporary shanties sprang up in the village to house the workers who migrated to the area for work on the dock.

The proprietors of the Heysham-Belfast ferry service were thus able to exploit Lancaster's position on the London/Euston to Glasgow railway line and by means of a branch line through Green Ayre and Morecambe brought passengers all the way to the dockside where the ferry awaited. This ferry service continued to ply its way over the Irish Sea from 1905 until 1975, when the levels of traffic to Northern Ireland had dropped so dramatically that the service ceased. In 1984 however, the port was still busy with general cargo and there is a regular ferry service to the Isle of Man. In its early days the harbour also admitted trawlers and boats carrying imported raw materials, such as iron ore from Spain for Camforth, timber from Sweden, or cork bound for Williamson's linoleum works.



*Heysham Harbour and Ferry,
about 1909*



*Heysham Headland
from Half Moon Bay*

In 1970, however, a momentous start on a new development took place just south of the harbour, as work on Stage I of a nuclear power station began. Stage II has been built alongside it, and as a result of natural gas being found in Morecambe Bay and because Heysham is the closest the area has to a deep-water port, the area is becoming a support base for British Gas. Industrial and commercial enterprises are rapidly establishing themselves at Heysham and even a derelict oil refinery site, which was first initiated in conditions of secrecy for the Air Ministry in 1938, has been cleansed of its oil and is to become a new industrial estate. Heysham in the 1980's, therefore, offers a fascinating juxtaposition of the old and the new, with reminders of the country's earliest history alongside technological developments that will continue their activities until well into the 21st century.

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Grateful thanks are due to Mr R. D. Andrews for information supplied about the lay cemetery at St. Patrick's Chapel.

Further information about Heysham can be found in: -

(ed) W. Farrer and J. Brownhill; **Victoria History of the County of Lancaster**; Vol. VIII (London, 1914); pages 109-118.

H. M. and J. Taylor; **Anglo Saxon Architecture**; Vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1965); pages 312-316.

R. C. Quick; **The History of Morecambe and Heysham** (Morecambe Times, 1962).