

Kirkham Treasures

Celebrating Kirkham's Heritage

The Industrial Revolution

Did You Know?

Kirkham once had 11 mills in the town and produced most of the sails on British Navy ships.

The Industrial Revolution in Kirkham

During the Industrial revolution Kirkham developed from a market town into a large industrial centre with many mills. Before this period, flax was grown in the surrounding fields. In 1736 all English ships were required by Law to carry a full set of English sails and with the increase in the number of merchant sailing ships, and the Napoleonic War (1803-1815) the requirement for sailcloth increased. The need for flax weaving became greater than ever before and Kirkham became the centre for that industry. The most famous flax mill in Kirkham was Birley's Mill which stood behind where Morrison's is now. The Birleys built spinning sheds and weaving shops and workers flocked to the town from surrounding villages. By 1807 the mills used steam powered looms rather than hand looms. Birley built an apprentice house and lodgings for poor workers nearby. The mill had its own reservoir providing water to the boilers that powered the mill. In 1840 Irish immigrants moved to the area to work in the mills. They lived in low thatched housing nearby in Mill Street and this area became known for a while as the Irish quarter. Over time flax was in less demand and many of the mills moved to cotton. Cotton mills sprung up all over Kirkham. At one point Kirkham had 11 mills, and the mill owners had a huge influence on the town, building properties throughout Kirkham. They became involved in the town planning and brought wealth to the area. During this time fish was also transported into Kirkham and sold at its weekly market on the Fishstones that you can still see in Kirkham today.

During the Industrial Revolution a parish workhouse was built in Kirkham which was later moved to Moor Lane (now Moor Street). Shortly after the end of the Industrial Revolution in 1864 the workhouse was enlarged to house 250 people. The workhouse had different wings for women, men, children and the elderly or infirm. The new Poor Law in England at this time ensured that the poor were housed in workhouses and were clothed and fed. The children who entered the workhouse would also receive a basic education. In return for their room and board the workhouse paupers would have to work for several hours each day.

Let's Imagine...

Can you imagine living in Kirkham during the Industrial Revolution working in the mills or living in the workhouse?

Task

We need you to imagine you're someone living in Kirkham during this era.

Your task is to create a postcard from them to someone living in modern day Kirkham. On the front you will need to draw a picture showing what they might have seen back then. That may be the mills, the workhouse, people, events or surrounding area. On the back you will need to write a short postcard message telling the people of modern day Kirkham what life was like.

