

Parish Profile: Askam & Ireleth



Askam & Ireleth Parish Council came into being in May 1987 as a new statutory body as part of the three-tier structure of local government in Cumbria. Our Parish has one County councillor and three Borough councillors with responsibility for Dalton North ward which encompasses all of the Parish Council area. The civil Parish covers the settlements of Askam, Ireleth, Greenscoe, Green Haume, Paradise and Dunnerholme, a population of some four thousand persons. The coastline, Duddon Road car park and the Lots are all in the Duddon SSSI – Site of Special Scientific Interest - the highest possible designation of wildlife conservation. The area has about 20% of the national population of natterjack toads and is also the home of many sea birds. Askam lies on the 240 Km/150 mile long Cumbria Coastal Path.



ASKAM AND IRELETH HISTORY

The villages of Askam and Ireleth share a quite different history with the larger “not quite a town” village of Askam-in-Furness situated on the eastern side of the Duddon Estuary only dating back just over 150 years and the smaller village of Ireleth being a Viking settlement nestling on the side of the moors above the estuary and mentioned in the Domesday Book. Ireleth was originally clustered along a stream named ‘Hole Beck’ about a half a mile up the hill from the estuary below. It was on the junction of four roads, the first of which lay on the route to Cumberland across the treacherous Duddon Sands at low tide, the others being the old drovers routes linking Ireleth to Dalton and Marton and Kirkby in Furness. Marsh Grange near Dunnerholme was one of the outlying farms (granges) of Furness Abbey and was once the home of Margaret Fell (nee Askew) who went on to marry George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement. Askam was built upon land known as Ireleth Marsh and took its name from Ascombe Woods near Greenscoe. It rose rapidly as a result of the discovery in 1860 of a rich deposit of haematite ore at what became the Park mines.

Wakefield, MacKinnon and Company began construction of a blast furnace and Bessemer converter on land now occupied by the Parklands housing estate, which explains the street names of Furnace Place and Wakefield Street. As a result of the haematite mines and ironworks, there was a large influx of people and this necessitated housing. Rows of terraced housing were built to a gridiron pattern, but in the rush to accommodate people the houses were built quickly with the roads and other infrastructure to follow. As a result of the 1810 Enclosures Act parcels of land (‘lots’) were sold to developers based on medieval strips, which explains the curious angles of some of the principal buildings to the street plan. Unfortunately, the economic situation deteriorated rapidly, leaving large areas of the street plan unfinished, principally the main town square near Victoria Street with no development west of that point, and the gap between Sharp Street and Beach Street. The legacy of the economic downturn with the closure of the mines and ironworks was a “town that never was” left with several gaps in streets which were not needed or on difficult ground conditions which were later filled by modern housing and many unmade and unadopted roads. In the early years of the twentieth century Askam had facilities like a cinema, police station, gasworks, a bake house, foundry, busy railway station and almost half a dozen churches and chapels. Another legacy of the failure of the ironmaster’s dream was a landscape scarred by the aggressive activity. Signs of the mining can be seen by the ponds which were air shafts at the southern side of the Lots and the remains of the slag bank and the part of it which juts out into the estuary known locally as “the pier”. Duke Street (named after the Duke of

Buckleuch, a principal landowner) is the main thoroughfare linking all the major streets in Askam to the Cumbria Coastal railway line and over it to Dalton Road out to the nearest town and Ireleth Road leading to the next settlement eastward.

The local History Group meet in the hall of Askam Methodist Church in Duddon Road at 7.30 pm on the third Thursday of the month between February and November.

Like most northern towns, Askam once had a plethora of corner shops on almost every street; today shopping is mainly concentrated on the main thoroughfare of Duke Street. The largest of the shops is the Co-op convenience store near Askam Station. The Farm Shop and Butchers is in Station Yard. Further along Duke Street Askam Post Office and Angel's Store is opposite Blea Beck and then Mabel's Bakery; Happy Garden takeaway and Polly's Plaice and the Taste of India restaurant across the road.



Askam and Ireleth are served by the Church of St Peter as part of the Parish St Mary's and Askam and Ireleth St Peter's. Services are at 11.15 am. The Church in Duddon Road is part of the South West Cumbria United Area.

Askam at its height had many of the buildings expected of a thriving nineteenth century township. The impressive "Swiss Cottage" Furness Railway station at one end of Duke Street remains operational; and thanks to the work of the Friends of Askam Station has seen considerable improvement since the last Plan and now has a Sunday Service and interpretive tourist information on both platforms.

One of Askam's two Victorian schools was converted into The Community Centre which provides a hub where various sports and community groups meet. Another building with sympathetic modernisation still providing its original use is the library in Lord Street, built in 1904. The Parish Council is working with Cumbria County Council to ensure this valuable asset is protected by extending its use and pays for the services of a Library Assistant on Saturdays.

One of the many nonconformist chapels built in the 1870s was that of the United Methodists; now known as the Rankin Hall. This is owned and used by Askam Pensioners Group as their base and is also used by Ireleth WI and is available for community use. It is one of two meeting places of the Parish Council; the other also being a former Bible Christian chapel known as the Temperance Hall, in Saves Lane in Ireleth. Askam is uniquely blessed with an abundance of halls. In addition to the halls mentioned above there is also the Band Hall and the Rugby Clubhouse, both in Sandy Lane and Duddon Sports Club in Duddon Road on the way to the beach.

The Methodist Church on Duddon Road is used by Rainbows, Brownies, Guides, Beavers, Cubs and Scouts as well as the Local History Group, an Exercise Class and a Dementia and Carers Support Group.

Askam and Ireleth retain their endearing village community spirit, which means that news is soon spread by word of mouth. The local shops offer advertising space for a variety of local events and the Parish Council has a website: www.askamandirelethparishcouncil.org.uk.

There are two well subscribed local primary schools in the villages, The Parish Crest was designed by amalgamating winning designs from both schools.

The school, Ireleth St Peters, on Kirkby Road dates back to a school established by Giles Brownrigg (a native of the village) in 1608. The main buildings date from 1862 with extensions in 1962 and is a very unique and special school which is renowned for its family feel and community involvement. It is housed in a wonderful building and has fantastic outdoor spaces including a purpose-built outdoor classroom. The school strives to provide a wealth of experiences that enable all of our pupils to succeed.

Askam Village School on Lots Road in Askam was originally the school for infants until the closure of the Junior school in 1976. The Foundation school, receiving funding directly from the Department for Education, was delightfully converted into a modern, classroom style school and subsequent extensions and new building projects have created a modern educational environment. Although in an urban area, the school is set in sizeable grounds in which there are extensive play and sports areas, an environmental area which has been allowed to develop naturally, a seated garden area, large chess court and two attractive courtyard garden areas. The new building leaves the school with more than enough space for all classes, lessons and projects. The school now enjoys uniquely spacious and varied grounds with an open aspect and marvellous views to the Lakeland hills and the Duddon Estuary.

The Memorial Garden is in a prominent place in the centre of the village on Duke Street and contains the cenotaph erected and opened in October 1930, which bears the names of the men and one woman who gave their lives in the two world wars. There are fifty names from World War I (which is a remarkable loss for a small village, as it was then) and twelve names from World War II. To mark the centenary of the First World War the Memorial has been cleaned and new seating, a bandstand and hard standing, new rose garden and a flagpole have been provided by AIPC. There are 7 Commonwealth War Graves in Ireleth Cemetery, as well as private family graves of servicemen who made the ultimate sacrifice. The Local History Group hold details of the men of the parish who lost their lives in the Great War. At Christmas the village tree is placed in the Memorial Garden at the Park Avenue corner with Duke Street. This is a focal point for the Christmas festivities organised by Askam and Ireleth Carnival & Events Committee, who do a superb job in organising events in the village not only at Christmas, but throughout the year. The carnival parade in June is spectacular and brings the village together.



Askam's location on the edge of the Duddon Estuary offers a real opportunity to encourage eco-tourists to visit the RAMSAR Nature reserve at Sandscale Haws and also enjoy the wildlife in a superb panoramic setting with a vista of the Lakeland hills and mountains. The estuary supports a wide range of wildfowl including the rare Sandwich terns. Apart from its year-round residents, the estuary provides a vital stopping off point for thousands of migrating birds transiting between the Arctic and Africa. The estuary has inspired the poets William Wordsworth and Norman Nicholson.

