



Parish Profile: Brigham



The Parish of Brigham is situated within the present district of Allerdale, and, from April 2023, the new County of Cumberland. Brigham Parish is located some 2 miles west of the town of Cockermouth and approximately 7 miles east of Workington. The Parish is bounded on the north and west by the River Derwent, and by the neighbouring parishes of Cockermouth, Dean and Greysouthen to the east and south. The Parish covers an area of 816 square hectares and is approximately 2½ miles from east to west and 1½ miles from north to south. The landscape is one of rolling lowland in the south with the broad valley of the River Derwent in the north. Whilst not the spectacular scenery of the nearby Lake District National Park, it is still a landscape worth preserving from inappropriate and disproportionate development.

The population is concentrated in the village of Brigham and the hamlet of Broughton Cross with a few outlying farms. The main A66 Trunk Road runs through the north of the Parish, and the village, and other nearby settlements, are accessed from the problematic staggered junction from this road. The main route through High Brigham is the C2007 which joins the A66 at the eastern end of the Parish. Broughton Cross is located along the “old A66”, now the C2065, which belies the importance of this route in terms of traffic type and volume. The other roads running through the Parish are all relatively minor.

Brigham is a “spring line settlement”, built above the flood plain of the River Derwent, but at a point where fresh water was readily available. The natural flow of water is from south to north in small streams, many of which now pass through culverts and drains. In times of exceptional rainfall the capacity of these modifications has been exceeded resulting in flooded homes and businesses.

The name ‘Brigham’ gives some indication as to the origins of the village – the “settlement” or “farm” from the Old English “-ham” and “bridge” from the Old English “brycg” or Old Norse “bryggia”. Brigham – the “settlement by the bridge”. Or it may just possibly be connected with St. Bridget, the Irish saint who died in about 523AD and to whom the church is dedicated. The Church has ancient origins and is one of the three great “mother” churches of Cumbria. Tradition has it that St. Bridget’s nuns founded a wooden church around 500AD on the small hill beside the Derwent to serve their nunnery. All traces of this foundation vanished in the Dark Ages but an ecclesiastical presence continued until a small, stone, Norman church was built. The church tower itself dates from the 1220s.

Farming was for centuries the main occupation in the village, but the geology of the Parish consists of Carboniferous rocks, mainly limestone and sandstone, with the coal measures just to the west, beyond Broughton Cross. So, as time went on, coal mining, quarrying and building employed many more people. The limestone quarries supplied the steelworks in Workington with flux in the smelting, but some was burnt for lime. Quarrying continued until 1910 when the last stone was quarried from behind where the Memorial Hall now stands. The sandstone quarries supplied the building material for most of the older houses in the village and also large parts of Cockermouth.

Broughton Cross (- the 'farm' by the 'brook') owes its existence both to coal mining and transport (- Cross = 'junction'?). Originally on the old Turnpike road from Workington to Cockermouth it had a tollbar to charge for traffic, now Elmtree Cottage. The Cross Inn was one of a line of pubs along the route, including the Limekiln and Wheatsheaf on Low Road, which catered for passing travellers and locals. The Workington to Penrith railway served both villages. The Melgramfitz Pit to the west of Broughton Cross, had railway sidings constructed to send the coal to Workington, and would lead to the construction of housing for the miners, three for the shift foremen and families, the mine office and manager's house, all at Colin Grove, and Derwent (or "Twenty") Row for the workforce.

Within our community we have an almost equal number of males and females. The number of children is somewhat above the national average, and the number of older people is somewhat lower than average. This implies a rather youthful population compared to the national average. There is also a 'squeeze' in our 20 – 40 age group which may well reflect an issue of much concern in Cumbria, that of not retaining our young people, as many move away for further education and do not return. Also, inflated house prices prevent many from getting a foot on the housing ladder. The Parish population shows a pronounced 'bulge' in the 40s and 50s age groups. Given the fact that people are generally living longer, our Parish is going to have a significantly large percentage of its population aged over 65 in 15 – 20 years' time. This has important implications for housing, services and community provision.

Levels of employment are usually higher in a rural area like Brigham & Broughton Cross, but there are a far greater number of people who commute to work elsewhere in West Cumbria than work locally, reflected in a higher-than-average level of car ownership and subsequent parking issues. We also have a well-educated work force living in the Parish. Half the economically active population are in either professional or managerial occupations which reflects the levels of qualifications for people in the Parish. The Parish appears within the top 20% of the "least deprived" areas in England. However, there is now a lack of services which some people may consider essential to a community. We are fortunate in having a village school and the local churches are active within the community. Brigham's Memorial (Village) Hall provides a venue for many community activities, but there is no shop, no pub in either village, no Post Office, nor bus service through Brigham itself. Hence, people in the Parish have to travel more than the national average distance for such services as provided by a post office, doctor's surgery and secondary school.

The Parish Council currently consists of six dedicated councillors, but there are three vacancies which have long proved hard to fill, a reflection, perhaps, of a degree of apathy amongst the community. We are fortunate that, beyond the occasional planning issue, there are few issues which cause serious controversy and the role of the Council, besides the maintenance of local assets such as the play park, is essentially one of information and advice. General communication with the Parish is provided through email, Facebook, Notice Boards, Website and a bimonthly Flier. When questioned, people in Brigham are most concerned about roadside parking, a lack of local services, and the occasional complaints of litter, fly-tipping and dog mess. In Broughton Cross it would be speeding traffic. The Parish Council is currently working on a revised Community Plan which will include actions on Nature Recovery and Climate Change. We await the long overdue construction of a roundabout on the A66 and the consequences of Local Government Reorganisation with the possible devolution of services and assets by the new Cumberland authority.