

A short history of Stainforth

The Parish comprises two settlements split by the river Ribble: Knight Stainforth (also called Little Stainforth) to the West and Stainforth (Staynford Underbergh or Greater Stainforth as it was also known) to the East. Probably first settled in the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods Stainforth has seen the coming and departure of the Brigantine Celts, the Romans, the Angles, Saxons and Norse. Unfortunately there is little written evidence of their influence though the area is rich in archaeological artefacts and some place names still reflect the later settlers.

Knight Stainforth was held in the 13th and 14th centuries by the De Stainford family until the male line died out when it passed, by marriage, to the Tempest family. One member, Sir Richard was knighted (hence Knight Stainforth) after the battle of Wakefield in 1460. He died in 1488 and his descendants held Knight Stainforth until 1511 when again it passed by marriage to the Darcy family.

In the 13th century the principal landowners in (Greater) Stainforth were Hugh (or Hugo) son of Adam of Stainforth and Elias of Giggleswick. In a series of legal processes the land in Stainforth was gifted to Sawley Abbey and in 1270 Henry III granted Sawley free warren in Stainforth and elsewhere. Despite numerous gifts of land Sawley suffered a number of natural and man-made disasters. Chief amongst these was the founding of the rival Whalley Abbey which diverted trade from Sawley. From 1291 the weather began to adversely affect crops and animal husbandry and in 1314 there was a very poor summer followed by monsoon-like rains in 1315 and 1316. Regular attacks by Scottish raiders from 1314 to 1347, following the defeat of the English at Bannockburn by Robert the Bruce further reduced the ability of Stainforth and other Sawley possessions to support the Abbey and the local population. Matters improved after 1450 and revenues recovered.

Later Henry VIII's need for Crown revenues and his dispute with Rome resulted in the dissolution of the monasteries. This was unpopular and an anti-Government movement known as the Pilgrimage of Grace spread across the North in 1536. Local rebels under the leadership of Robert Aske held a meeting at Dale Head in the parish. Nevertheless, the dissolutions were carried out and the possessions and plate of Sawley Abbey were sold to Sir Arthur Darcy uniting both Stainforths under one family. Over the next 50 years much of the estate was parcelled up and given, sold or leased on 500 year leases.

Formerly a township of Giggleswick parish, Stainforth became a parish in its own right with the consecration of St. Peter's Church in 1842. Except during the building of the Settle Carlisle Railway line, which opened in 1875, when its population was swelled by itinerant workers and their families, in recent times its population has remained around 200.

A variety of other work has come and gone. Lime burning, quarrying, wool, cotton and flax weaving and dyeing, tanning and tallow production, corn mills (both wind and water) and cotton mills have at one time provided employment in Stainforth.

Blacksmiths and farriers, innkeepers, hauliers, paper makers, butchers and greengrocers have also lived and worked here. Today tourism plays an increasing role in the local economy with the caravan site, bunk barn and holiday cottages in the village. Improved transport and communications have also made work further afield possible whilst still living in Stainforth.



Throughout its history farming has provided the mainstay of local employment. It is still a major occupation.

Over the last hundred years the village has like many others, suffered two world wars, foot and mouth outbreaks and a variety of changes not all for the better. In 1931 the packhorse bridge linking the two halves of the village was gifted by the Maudsley family to the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments. A locally raised endowment of £250 towards its upkeep was required before the Society accepted the gift.

A village bypass was built in 1974 to remove traffic from the centre

and prevent lorries grounding on the bridge over Stainforth beck. July 1984 saw the closing of the School despite a valiant rearguard action by local families to retain it.

The Post Office and shop was run by the Handy family from 1937, first in Park View and then Brookhouse Farm. It was then run by the Priors at Riston House who took it to the Craven Heifer Pub when they became tenants. Here it featured in the visit by His Royal Highness, Prince Charles, in December 2001, as part of the 'Pub is the Hub' campaign to emphasize the role played by pubs in village life. The Post Office then moved to Bridge Cottage but subsequently closed when a new proprietor could not be found. The village pub carries on but the phrase 'use it or lose it' springs to mind. The Stainforth Youth Hostel, a victim with others of rationalisation, closed in 2007. The property has since been purchased by private individuals who have restored the property, which is a listed building.

Parish Council

Most English parishes date back to the period when the Lord of the Manor had a responsibility to maintain his starving tenants through the right to levy taxes in the manor which he owned. These were imposed by manorial courts.

Over time, as the power of the manorial courts waned and that of the Church increased, these powers began to be exercised by the Church in each parochial area through meetings of inhabitants known as Vestries (from their often being held in the church vestry).

With increases in population Select Vestries were created to levy the Church Rate. In the 1800s the Church Rate was abolished and poor law administration withdrawn from the parochial authorities.

Parish Councils were created under the Local Government Act of 1894 to take over from the older parochial institutions. Although the parish once performed both civil and ecclesiastical functions, these functions were split in 1894, and church parishes are now quite separate.

Stainforth's surviving records dating from 1834 cover "Vestry Meetings" (technically Select Vestry Meetings since Stainforth was still in the Parish of Giggleswick), through Annual Parish Meetings to the setting up a full Parish Council in 1952 with regular meetings which continue to this day.