

HESKIN IN THE LATE 19TH & EARLY 20TH CENTURIES



WRITTEN BY ALAN MARSDEN & ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID NELSON



INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970's I had the privilege of talking with one of Heskin's oldest residents, Mr Harry Grimshaw, about life in the village when he was a young lad. His account was of such interest that I made notes of our conversations and went on to talk to other long-living residents about life and work in the village during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

These conversations supplemented with historical documents were used to form the basis of a number of articles about village life and were published between 1977 and 1982 in the Council Newsletter, 'Heskin Parish News'.

In 2020 Heskin Parish Council agreed to re-publish the articles on the parish website. The forthcoming articles will contain much of the original material but will benefit from the skill of Mr David Nelson who has kindly offered to illustrate the content.

The articles will describe different aspects of village life. The following list gives a summary of the content:

1. The landscape of the village and the forces that shaped it
2. Home life including housing, furnishing and daily chores
3. Local produce, shops and services

4. Working life including housework, farming, mining, quarrying, textile weaving, clogging and other crafts.
5. Leisure activities including hunting, shooting, fishing, football, pigeon racing, bowling and drinking.
6. Going to Church and Chapel
7. Schooling with illustrative material from the log books of Heskin Pemberton's School.
8. The Parish Council: the early years

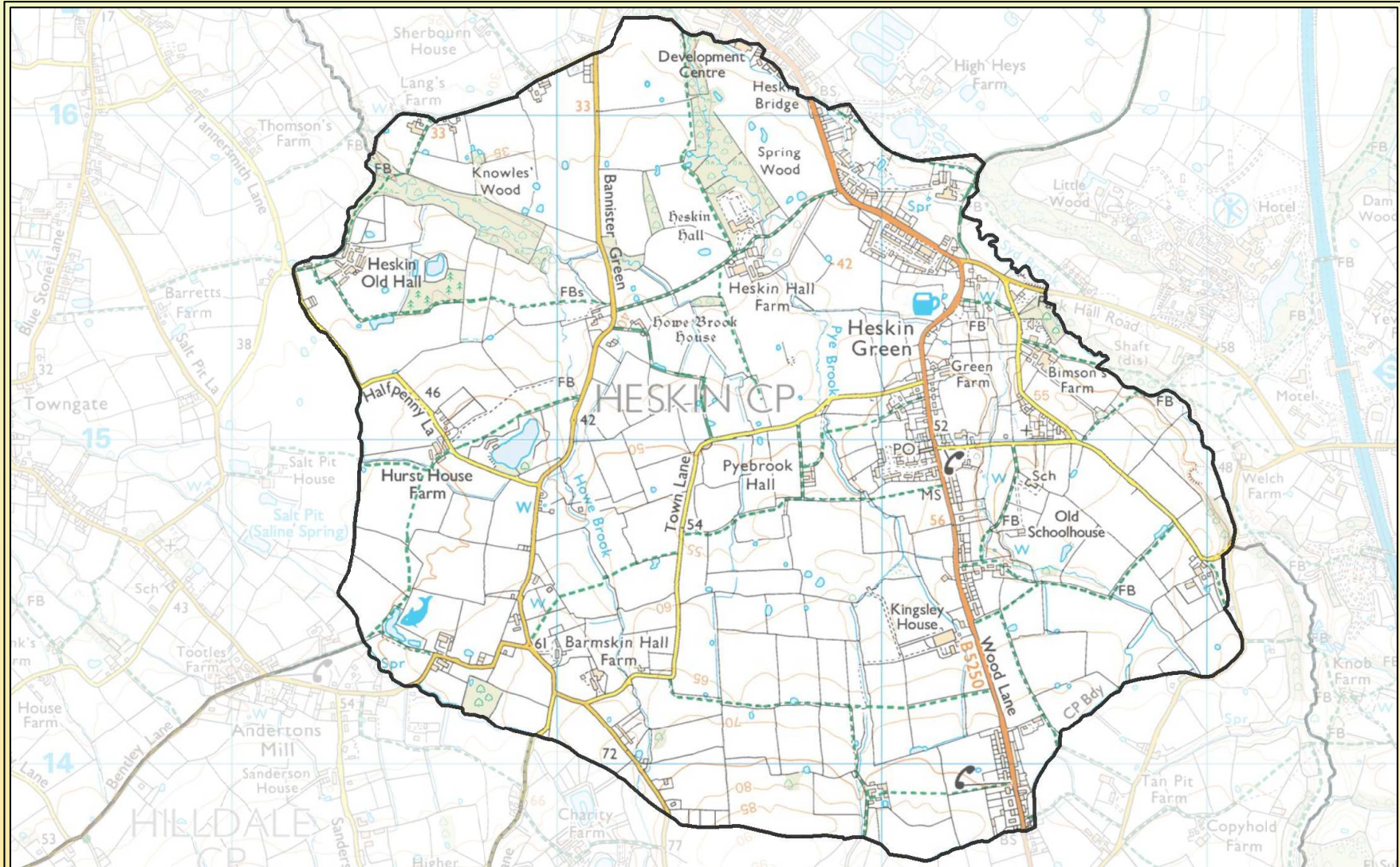
The focus of this work will be mainly on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century but reference will be made where appropriate to earlier periods in the history of Heskin.

The names of residents who provided the information are listed below. I did thank them at the time of the interviews and am glad to record that most had the opportunity to read what I'd made of their material in the council's newsletter. The names and age in years of the residents interviewed were as follows; Mr Richard Golding (89), Mrs Mary Ellen Carter (83), Mrs Mary Bretherton (86), Mrs Alice Marsden (80), Mrs Margaret Waring (83), Mr Richard Waring (83), Mrs Margaret Forsyth (90), Mrs Ruby Slater (82), Mr Earnest Goodman (82), Mr Tom Hailwood (87), Mrs Margaret Hailwood (86), and Mr Harry Grimshaw (88) – my first interviewee.

Subsequently when collecting information on, 'Farming in Heskin', I talked with Mr Tom Walsh, Mr Tom Waring, Mr Eddie Moon, Mr Gilbert Rowley, Mr John Lucas, Mr George Sephton and Mrs Mary Ellen Carter.

I was assisted in the transcription of these interviews by Evelyn Marsden, highly skilled in shorthand note taking and typing. This work was carried out in the days of mechanical typewriters before the mobile phone and computers requiring us all to become typists!

THE LAND



Heskin Parish Boundary

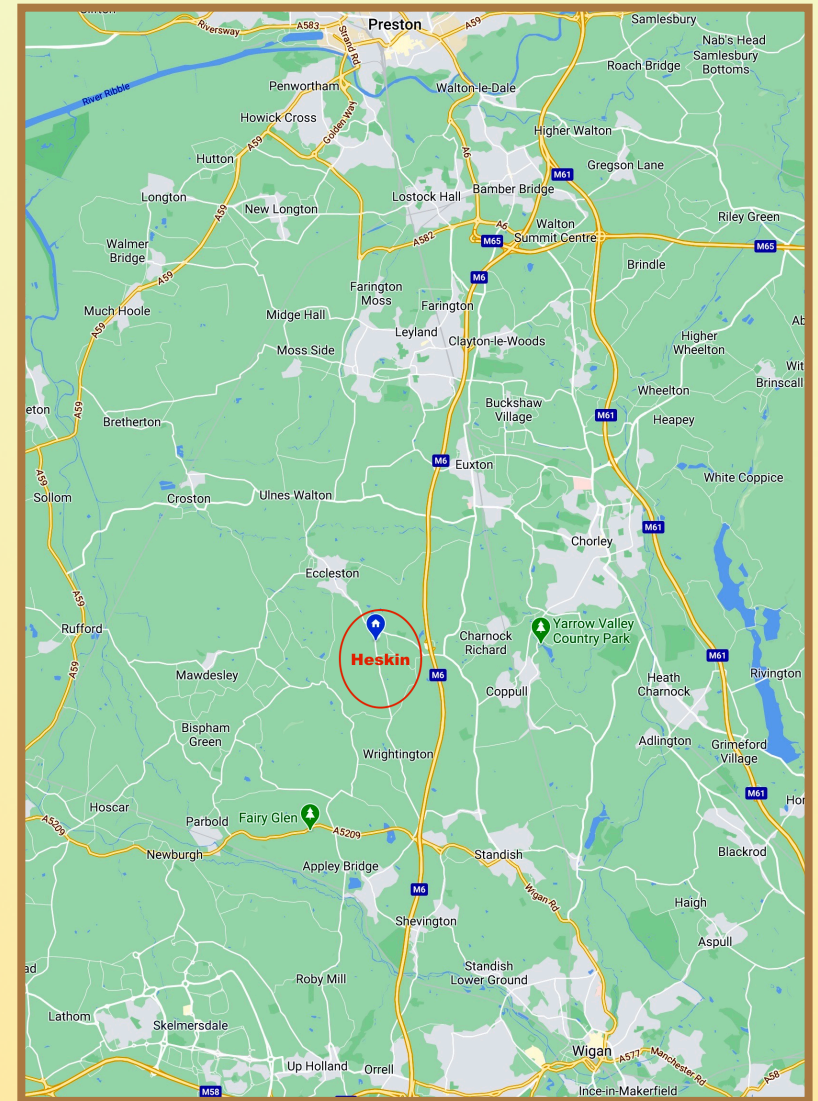
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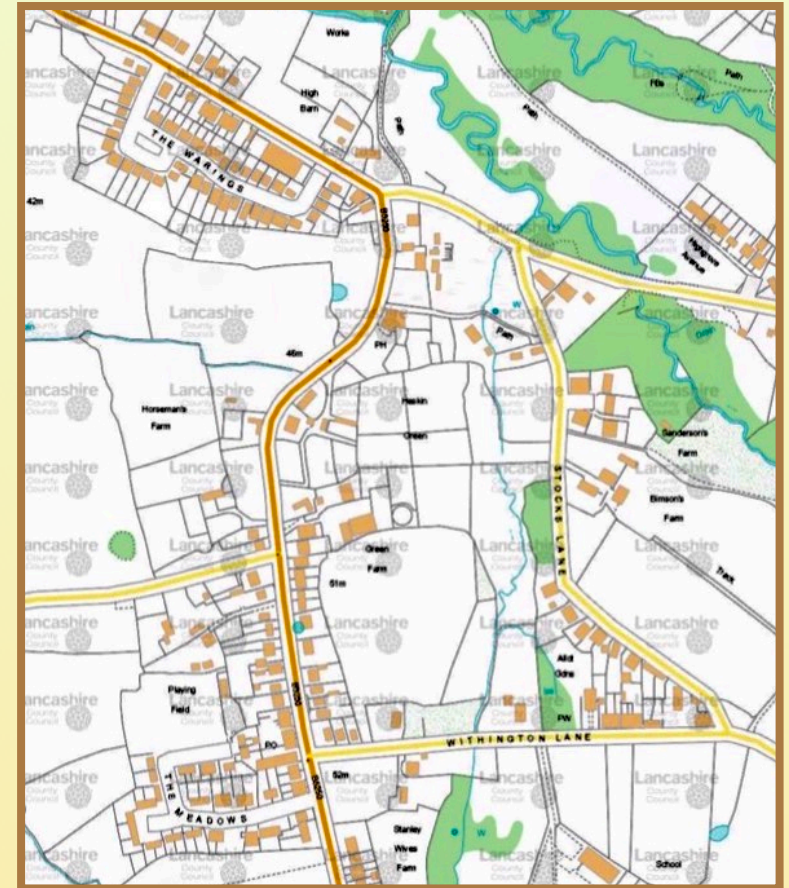
Heskin is just one of a cluster of villages which lie on the eastern edge of the West Lancashire Coastal Plain. As the map indicates, the village is situated on the route north between the towns of Wigan and Preston, close enough to the market town of Chorley in the east to be part of the Borough of that town.

Heskin is bounded in the north by the larger village of Ecclestone with which it has long been associated. For centuries, Ecclestone and Heskin were administered as parts of a joint manor and until local government reorganisation in 1894. Heskin was part of the ancient Ecclesiastical Parish of Ecclestone together with the villages of Wrightington and Parbold. The village of Wrightington lies south of Heskin, whilst the villages of Mawdesley and Charnock Richard flank the village to the west and east respectively.

Heskin covers an area of 1,242 acres (503 Hectares) and measures about one and a half miles (2.4 km) by just less than two miles (3.2 km) at its widest point.



Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the population of a few hundred inhabitants lived scattered across the village in farms and cottages. With the passage of time and a growing population, housing became concentrated along Wood Lane and around the triangle which this road makes with Withington Lane and Stocks Lane. This triangle forms the heart of the village. It contains the school, Heskin Pemberton's Grammar School, 1 (to give it the original name), the Primitive Methodist Chapel, the Farmer's Arms Inn, the Post Office and Village Store and K & J Green Butchers. The village did have another pub, the beautifully situated, 'Brook House', on the very edge of the village in the south east but unfortunately this closed a few years ago and was converted into a private residence.



Current housing distribution in and around the 'Triangle'.

In geographical and geological terms, the village shares a common history with this part of South West Lancashire. It lies on the edge of the West Lancashire Plain, which, according to geologists owes its flat countenance to a combination of grinding glaciers and centuries of erosion by wave action from the sea. Such an account becomes very plausible if one takes a stroll up any one of the nearby hills, be this, Harrock, Hunters or Parbold. Standing on any one of these 450 to 500 feet (150 m) old fossil cliffs and

looking west one can easily imagine the sea rolling across the plain and lapping the foot of the hill. Stretched before one is an open view across what appears to be a flat surface to the sea at Southport and Blackpool. The village of Heskin below lies to the east of Harrock Hill.

Like the other villages of Eccleston, Charnock Richard, Wrightington and

Mawdesley with which it is surrounded, it rests on Boulder Clay – the bane of some local gardeners.



View from near the summit of Harrock Hill. looking North West towards the Ribble Estuarv.

Below the clay, the rocks are of two main types: Permo Triassic, which consists of various types of sandstones and the Carboniferous which include the Coal Measures. The Euxton Fault, which forms the boundary between the two types of rock cuts through the north-west corner of Heskin, running from near Grove Mill, Eccleston, below Bannister Green and Knowles' Wood, before crossing the Heskin boundary by Salt Pit House in Mawdesley. Evidence of this fault, and other smaller ones in the area are difficult to discern on the surface because of centuries of surface erosion. On the southeast of the fault line however, the coal measures are evidenced by the remains of the Heskin mining industry in the area of Whalley Road and farther along the Syd Brook in Tram Road. For the most part the solid rock is hidden beneath a thick layer of boulder clay. This covering, which varies in thickness from a few centimetres to many metres is said to be debris from the glaciers as they retreated to their source in the Lake District at the end of the last Ice Age.



Evidence of glacial activity by Spencer House Farm in Town Lane. Note the gouging and polishing of the boulders as a result of the advance and retreat of the ice sheet. These could have travelled from as far away as the Lake District or even Southern Scotland.

Beside glacial action the major factor shaping the land surface in this area has been erosion by water. Geologists maintain that following each successive ice age, the melting ice produced a rise in sea level, and that much of this part of Lancashire was flooded. The result of this erosive process, has over time, produced a relatively level surface via the action of wave erosion. Just how much, if at all, Heskin's landscape was shaped by this sea erosion, is difficult to estimate since glacial deposition masks the outline of the original coast. Also, since even the lowest part of the Parish, around Heskin Bridge and Heskin Old Hall are presently 100 feet (30metres) above sea level, and since the land rises steadily to 250 feet (75 metres) at the southern boundary it seems that a combination of glacial deposition together with sea erosion has given the parish its present shape.

The more definite shaping force has been the effect of fresh water erosion in the form of Heskin's three main streams, Syd Brook, Pye Brook, Howe Brook and their tributaries. Running roughly southeast and northwest each of these streams have cut small valleys which today give rise to small hills wherever they are crossed by roads, for instance, Delph Brow, Moss's Hill and Whittle Brow.

Within these valleys one finds characteristic vegetation of damp soils such as alder and willow, while on the fields the hawthorn hedgerows are punctuated by oaks, with the occasional sycamore, ash and beech. According to experts, this area was once extensively covered by woodland, and it is only in recent centuries that man has cleared this area for the purposes of cultivation and settlement. Local place names in the village support this view in that their origin seems to derive from references to woodland clearances. For example, besides Wood Lane, several field names bear the word `intack', which means the

taking in of land from woodland and 'Martin House', originally called 'Armet Ryding', refers to a hermit's clearing. In addition, woodland or references to old woods still remain, for instance, 'Ox-Hey Wood, Knowles' Wood, Nettlebank Wood and James Clough Wood' are all indicative of earlier, more extensive woodland.

Nature has thus given much of this still rural parish its scenery, but man has added considerably to it. The most prominent characteristic

produced by man are the fields, almost 400 fields in Heskin, each enclosed from heath or wood over the centuries and carefully bounded by hawthorn hedges planted and dug by farmers past. Each field is individually named, and these give clues to past events, associations and agricultural practices, for



Knowles' Wood, swathed in bluebells in Spring.



A section from the 1837 Tithe Map of Heskin, showing named fields.

filled in, almost every field has one. These are in fact the remnants of a past agricultural practice in which farmers dug out chalky material known as marl and spread this over the clay fields as a form of

instance, Great Tom Hey, Marled Hey, Bean Croft, Anna's Acre, Fisher Field, Lime Kiln Croft, Plantation, and Little Dormer Hey.

The development of these fields appear to have been a gradual process beginning before the Norman Conquest and ending in 1737, when an agreement was drawn up between the Lord of the Manor, John Longworth, and all the other major landowners in Heskin at that time, to enclose the remaining 25 acres of waste land in the village.

Within these fields, which today are used to pasture sheep rather than cattle and to grow cereals, silage and occasionally potatoes, are often found old Marl Pits. Indeed, except where they have been

fertiliser. This practice was widespread in this area in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but references in various documents suggest that some of these pits are very much older. Today, many of these pits are filled with water providing the opportunity to fish.

Other holes dug by man have produced more extensive areas of water, the largest being in the old stone quarry at Marsh's Delph on Halfpenny Lane. Other stone quarries, for example behind the old dog kennels, off Whalley Road and beside what used to be the Brook House Inn, also contain considerable amounts of water.

Stone from these quarries and others in the locality went into the building of some of the older houses in Heskin such as School House, Martin House, Pyebrook Hall, Hilton's Cottages and others. Some of these were built as early as the sixteenth century. Other old houses such as at Stanley Wives, Howe Brook House, and Heskin Hall (1650) are built of handmade bricks. That bricks for such buildings may have been produced locally is evidenced by the fact that several fields in the parish make reference to their manufacture, for instance, Brick Kiln Field, Kiln Croft, Brick Meadows and Brick Field Hey.



The former 'Brook House Inn' built in stone from the adjacent quarry.

The early distribution of housing was scattered, as is understandable in a farming community. Indeed, as late as 1836 only 17 out of a total of 60 houses in the parish lay along the whole of Wood Lane. Fourteen houses lay along Withington Lane and Stocks Lane, whilst the remaining 29, almost half the total, were spread throughout the rest of the village.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century housing has increasingly been concentrated along Wood Lane, or just off it, as in the housing developments of The Meadows, Whalley Road, and The Warings. The result of such a concentration has given the village a new shape. Instead of settlement being fairly well spread throughout the Parish, we now have a linear concentration of housing along Wood Lane.

Aside from this major change due to building along the main transport route, the character of Heskin remains much the same as it did a century ago. Land use is still almost totally for agricultural purposes, even though the vast majority of the population no longer works the land, and so away from the main highway, the greater part of Heskin appears as it did to generations past.

