

Handforth: Past, Present and Future

Introduction

The parish of Handforth has a population of approximately 6,266 persons¹ and is now beginning to think of itself as a town rather than a village. It was formerly surrounded by land (principally to the east and west) identified by Cheshire East Council (CEC) as being of great importance to the purposes of the greenbelt. However, under the latest CEC Local Plan, much of this land is now to be used for housing. The new housing development called The Fairways, and located on the west side of Handforth, currently lies within the parish of Styal. However, CEC are presently required by HM Government to perform a Review of Local Governance. This will almost certainly mean that The Fairways becomes part of Handforth. A large area located on the east side of Handforth parish was formerly the site of both an RAF Maintenance Unit (RAF 61MU) and of farmland. This area is to become the site of one of the 14 national (Government-sponsored) Garden Villages and will include, inter alia, 1500 new homes.

Most Handforth residents dwell in the urban area (e.g. the Spath Lane, Knowle Park, Windermere Road, Hallwood Road and Woodlands Road estates) but some live in what remains of the rural area (e.g. Blossom's Lane) to the east of the village.



Tower block on the Spath Lane estate



Cottages at the end of Blossom's Lane

Handforth's Origins

It has been suggested that the name "Handforth" may derive from a Saxon crossing of the River Dean known as Hana's Ford. Handforth is not mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 but, at that time, it may have been recorded as a component part of the parish of Cheadle. One of the earliest references to Handforth occurs in a deed of transfer (copy held by the John Rylands library) between Lord Edmund Phitoun and Henry de Honeford and dated 1291. The deed relates to the

¹ Census 2011

site of a water mill and “*assigns a whole half of the water of Honeford between the two highways of which a certain way comes from Wilmyslawe and the other way which comes from Macclisfeld and extends itself beyond said water towards Bolleschawehefd.*” Maps of Cheshire published by Christopher Saxton (in 1577) and by John Speed (in 1610) record the village as “Honford.” The name Handforth has therefore long been linked to the De Honford family. Whilst fighting in the Crusades, Henry de Honford, observed a shooting star. The local coat of arms thereafter has come to bear a silver star (the Honford Star) in two of the quadrants of a black shield.



The quartered arms of Honford including the Honford star

The growth of Handforth as a settlement

In Saxon times, the population of what was to become Handforth was probably about 10 persons. The population rose to about 50 in the early 15th century. By 1815 the population of Handforth had risen to about 300. The coming of the railway in 1842 (see “A History of Handforth Station and its Military Branch Lines” by Small R. and Bishop M., www.handforthstation.org.uk) and the development of local industries promoted a further increase so that, by 1850, the population had risen to about 600 persons. Over the period 1851-1911 the population grew slowly to reach a figure of about 900. The calico print works of Symonds, Cunliffe and Co. stood on a site adjacent to the River Dean, a site later occupied by offices of the Co-Operative Society and now by a housing estate. In 1914 part of the print works was turned into a prisoner of war camp. At its peak, the camp contained about 3000 prisoners thereby producing a temporary quadrupling of the population of Handforth. The camp closed in November 1919. Thereafter the population of Handforth grew slowly from 904 to reach just over 1000 persons in 1931.

During the second world war the population of Handforth was increased by persons stationed at the at the RAF maintenance unit 61MU. One of the entrances to this unit was located at the eastern end of Hall Road. No census was performed in 1941. In the 1960s the rehousing of residents in the older parts of Manchester (e.g. Hulme) occurred as part of the post-war housing clearance programme. Mancunians affected by the programme were moved to purpose-built estates on the edge of the city. Handforth electoral ward accommodated three such resettlements including the Spath Lane estate (built in the early 1960s), the Knowle Park estate and the

Colshaw Farm estate. This resettlement process determined that, by 1971, the population of Handforth electoral ward would rise to approximately 7,500.

Year	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Total Population	650	629	662	736	794	911	934	904	1031
Males	336	320	312	349	394	441	448	425	483
Females	314	309	350	387	400	470	486	479	548
Dwellings	129	128	133	155	166	207	-	212	287

Population and housing growth in Handforth electoral ward 1851 - 1931

Year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total Population	2358 [§]	3254	7537	6843	6343	8014 6053*	9138 6266*
Males						2913*	3089*
Females						3140*	3177*
Dwellings						2849*	3097*

Population and housing growth for Handforth electoral ward 1951 – 2011.

[§]Excludes data for Cheadle and Gatley UD

* Data for Handforth Parish rather than ward.

The administrative history of Handforth

The parish of Handforth-cum-Bosden was part of the Stockport Registration District from 1837 until 1877. It was then divided into the civil parish of Handforth (1311 acres) and that of Bosden (492 acres). The civil parish of Handforth continued to be part of the Stockport Registration District until 1936. It was then abolished by being incorporated into the parishes of Wilmslow (1080 acres) and Cheadle and Gatley (231 acres). In 2011 the civil parish of Handforth was re-created from part of Wilmslow. Today the parish of Handforth has the River Dean as its southern border. The parish council was formed in May 2011 and comprises seven councillors representing wards in the west (3), east (2) and south (2).

The electoral ward of Handforth extends south of the River Dean to Dean Row Road. Handforth electoral ward therefore contains a large portion of the Colshaw Farm estate and other elements (e.g. Dean Drive) of Wilmslow parish. The electoral ward is represented by two Cheshire East councillors.

In 1974 Handforth successfully objected to becoming part of the metropolitan county of Greater Manchester. From 1974 – 2009 Handforth was administered by both Macclesfield Borough Council and Cheshire County Council. In April 2009, it became part of the Cheshire East Unitary Authority. As mentioned above, CEC are presently required by HM Government to perform a Review of Local Governance and, as part of that review, have proposed that the parishes of Chorley, Handforth and Wilmslow should be merged. All three parish councils involved have objected to this proposal.

Handforth currently falls within the parliamentary constituency of Tatton. However, following the passage of the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act (2011), the four national Boundary Commissions were asked to undertake the "2018 Review" of constituency boundaries to equalise the size of seats both within and between the four nations of the UK. The Boundary Commission of England published its initial set of proposals on 13 September 2016, with final proposals being ready by September 2018. Under the latest (October 2017) proposals Handforth ward would be placed (along with Wilmslow, Alderley Edge, Styal, Bramhall, Woodford and Hazel Grove) in the new parliamentary constituency of Hazel Grove and Wilmslow.

References

<http://www.handforthstation.org.uk>

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView>

<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10114093/cube/TOT-POP>

<http://www.ukbmd.org.uk/genuki/chs/handforth.html>

Cheshire County Council: Archives and Local Studies: Township Pack No. 48

Handforth Through the Ages. Heusel, F.E. (1982) Eaton Press Limited, Wallasey.

Portrait of Wilmslow, Handforth and Alderley Edge. Lee, R. (1996) Sigma Leisure, Wilmslow.

Boundary Commission 2018 Review