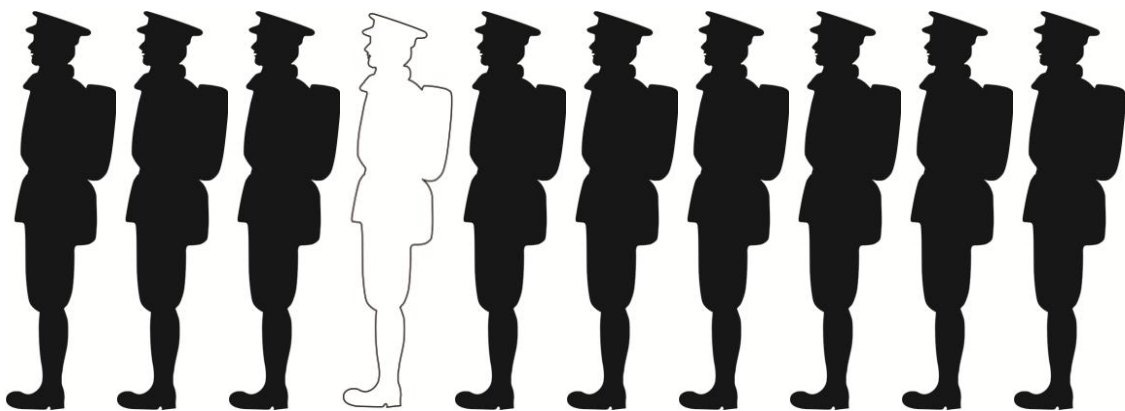


The Great War
Our Community Commemorated

Holmes Chapel Before the War



Booklet 1: John Clowes



Holmes Chapel and District U3A Local History Group

This booklet, first in a series about the effect of the First World War on Holmes Chapel, describes life in Holmes Chapel in the years leading up to the war. Using information from the 1911 Census, a Land Tax survey of about the same time and the Parish Magazine a picture of the people, their occupations, where they lived and their social life is constructed.

Photograph on Front Cover is believed to be a May Day Parade about 1911.

Introduction

The village of Holmes Chapel in the years before WW1 was a very different place from the Holmes Chapel of today. It is bigger now, busier, outward looking and fully engaged with the modern technological age. But what exactly can we say about life in Holmes Chapel 100 years ago?

We are fortunate that extensive records are available from that time and we can establish a clear picture of daily life. First of all a census was taken in 1911 so we can find out who lived in the village, how old they were, what work they did and where they were born. Secondly, at about the same time a Land Tax Survey was carried out. This was an attempt to establish whether a tax could be raised from potential building land and an extensive valuation survey was carried out across the country. These records identified who owned the land, who occupied it and included a short report on the condition of the land and property. Fortunately for us these reports included references to maps so we have a description of all the dwellings and other buildings throughout Holmes Chapel at the time. This information along with the census returns allows us to identify not only the names and jobs of all the people living in the village but exactly where they lived, what type of house it was and the condition it was in. The boundary of the survey for this report is that of the civil Parish of Church Hulme and Cotton township which is the current (2013) Parish Boundary of Holmes Chapel.

In addition to the above information, the Parish Magazines of the time are available. These contained not only information about church life but also articles about the social activities and schools in the village. There are reports about the cricket team and the Gooseberry Society along with school reports, nursing arrangements and summer festivals and on many other topics. Along with local newspapers and directories this gives us the background to understand how people spent their

time when not working and how society supported those less fortunate.

A Wider View

Before we look in detail at Holmes Chapel it may be useful to consider what was happening in England at the time. Edward VII died in 1910 and the new King George V was crowned in June 1911. There was considerable industrial unrest around the country with dock strikes, railway strikes and mill strikes. This unrest reached a level which required gun boats in the Mersey estuary and there was rioting which resulted in 9 deaths in South Wales – some expected a revolution. Workers demanded better wages (30 shillings per week for dockers) and employers responded with lockouts against unionisation. There were suffragette protests and thousands died in a record heatwave during August 1911. London was described as the second most unhealthy city in the world with a mortality rate of 19 per 1000. The population of Great Britain reached 45 million.

On a more positive note, shop workers won a 60 hour maximum week and plans were unveiled for a National Insurance Scheme designed to deal with sickness and unemployment. In April 1911 Bradford City beat Newcastle United in the FA Cup Final. During the same year an aeroplane flew over the Houses of Parliament for the first time – emptying both Houses as members left for a view.

Motor buses were now common on the streets of London, there were electricity power stations in major cities and motor cars were becoming more widespread. In fact Rolls Royce was appalled by the mascots on owners' cars and in February they commissioned the 'Spirit of Ecstasy' statuette as a uniform mascot. At the time, 1% of the population owned 70% of the countries' wealth and 700 families owned a quarter of the country.

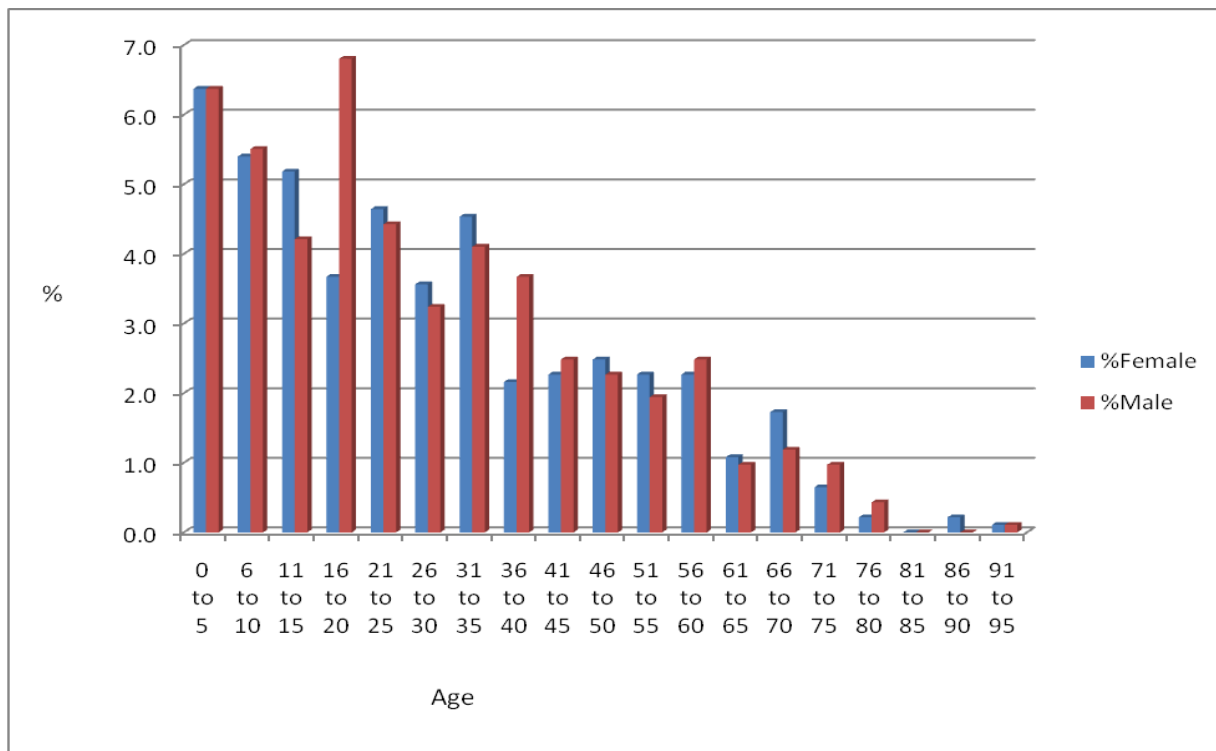
It will be interesting to look at Holmes Chapel, well away from the centres of industry, and consider whether it was as yet affected by

these events and look for any evidence of the advances in science and technology within the community.

Analysis of Information

Population

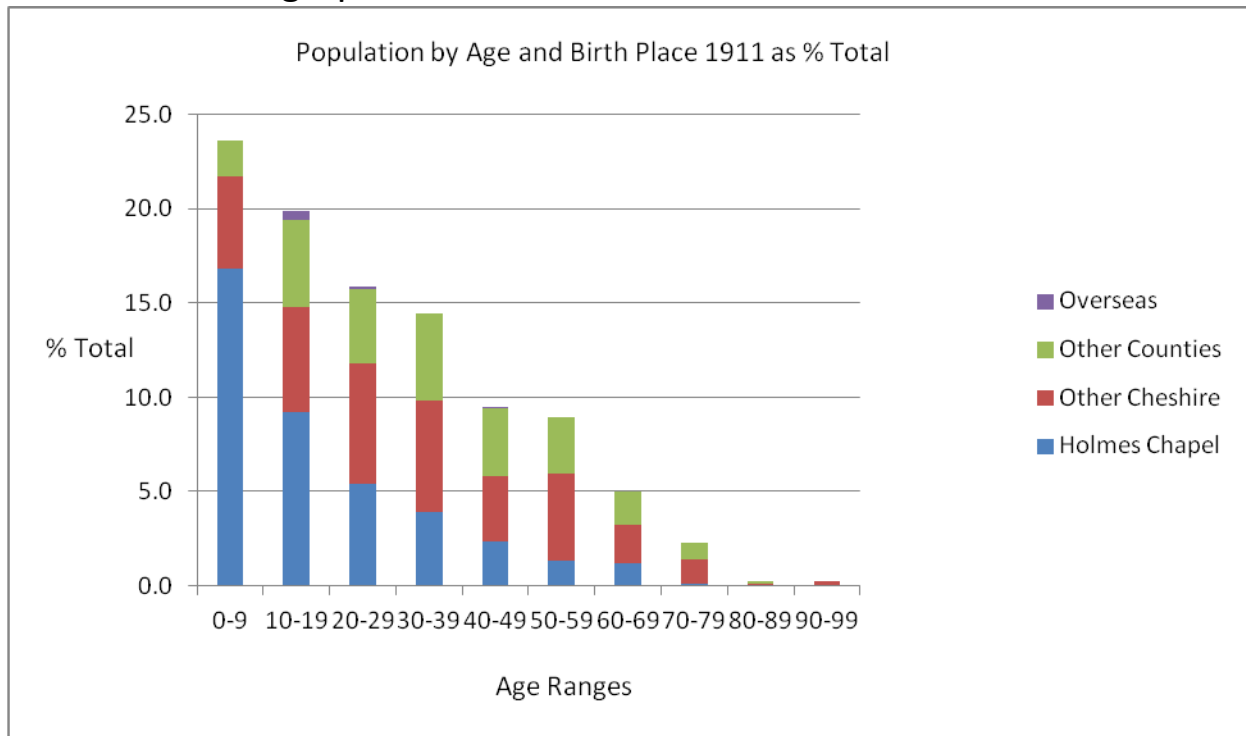
The census of 1911 shows there were 926 residents of Holmes Chapel of which 452 were female and 474 male. There were 313 married, 270 single (over 15 years), 287 children and 56 widow/widowers and one separated. An age profile for the village is shown below:



The peak of men 16 to 20 is explained by the presence of the Agricultural College at Saltersford Hall where there were 27 male students living in and a further 5 boarders in the village. The age profile is not typical of today which would show a peak between ages 40 and 55 but families were much larger 100 years ago. Family size has fallen over the period from 3.5 to 1.7 children per family. Child mortality was much higher at the time and, of the children born to women in the village, 15% had died (based on the 1911 Census). This figure covers a

wider range of deaths than infant mortality which stood at 14% across the country at the time which suggests Holmes Chapel was at least as healthy as the rest of the country. Infant mortality fell rapidly throughout the century and stands at about 0.05% now.

Many residents had been born in Holmes Chapel but others had come from far away. For example the landlord of the Bull’s Head Inn had been born in Melbourne Australia and there were students at the Agricultural College from Portugal, St Petersburg and South Africa. These were the exceptions and most people had not come from outside Cheshire as the graph shows:



A total of 40% of the population had been born in Holmes Chapel and a further 35% came from other parts of Cheshire. Of the rest 6 came from outside the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, 13 having been born in Ireland.

Occupations

The census provides information about resident's occupations but, as they gave a personal description, there are many and varied job titles. A simplified list categorising occupation has been produced as follows:

Occupation Type	Number
Trades and Services	149
Housework at Home	149
Domestic Service	97
Farming	87
House Building and Repair	35
Education	19
Health	7
Industry	6
Government	4
Retired	32
Student	34
Unemployed	5

This is probably not an unexpected distribution for an agricultural location but the amount of house building and repair suggests a thriving community.

The trades and services represented in the village cover every day needs of the village population but there are also some which probably serve a wider community:

Baker	Butcher	Dressmaker
Blacksmith	Carpenter/Joiner	Gardener
Bootmaker	Chip Potato Fryer	Grocer
Boot and Shoe Repairer	Coal Merchant	House painter
Bricklayer	Draper	Inn Keeper
Builder	Decorator	Ironmonger
	Doctor	

Lodging House	Plumber	Saddler
Keeper	Policeman	Stationer
Milliner	Post Office	Tailor
Plasterer	Railway Service	Tobacconist

There are other activities not listed on the census forms but which can be found in the Postal Directory of 1912/13. In general it indicates that people often carried out more than one trade but only listed the primary activity on the census forms:

Undertaker	Hairdresser
Cycle Agent	Clerk to the Council
Sewing Machine Agent	Catering for pic-nic parties
Newsagent and bookseller	House furnisher
Confectioner	Coach, Cab and Tent Proprietor
Fancy Stationery	China and Earthenware
Engraver	Merchants

Farming

Farming was the single most important occupation with 87 people employed. There were eight farms in Holmes Chapel but also a number of small holdings. All the farms had tying for cows and are described as mixed farms. Accommodation for cows was available at 18 properties even though only 8 significant farms were present. For example there was tying for 2 cows at Saddlers Close, the home of Dr. Picton, 12 cows at Hawthorn Villa and 5 at Lane Ends.

The eight farms in Holmes Chapel were not large with a maximum acreage at Bank Farm of 84 acres. All the others were from 45 to 76 acres except Iron Bridge Farm at 24 acres. The farms accounted for 479 acres but the remaining small holdings covered a further 100 acres.

Properties in Holmes Chapel

There were 193 properties listed as occupied according to the 1911 Census and 199 according to the Land Tax survey. Some variation is to

be expected as the data was recorded at slightly different times and vacant properties were not recorded on the census. According to the Land Tax survey 27 of these properties (13.5%) were owner occupied and the remainder rented.

Rents for properties varied considerably and a premium was added for shops and those with land. A small terraced cottage on Knutsford Road could be rented for about £5 per year and Mount St Lawrence on Middlewich Road for £40. These equate to present day prices of £168 and £1344 per month allowing for price inflation. Certainly the cottage looks cheap compared with current rental prices but earnings have grown significantly more than prices so it would not have seemed cheap at the time.

Habitation Conditions

Houses varied considerably in size, from a humble cottage with 3 rooms to large farm houses and gentleman's residences with over 10 rooms.

Rooms in Dwelling	Number of Properties
1	1
2	5
3	16
4	52
5	57
6	17
7	12
8	9
9	5
10	5
11	3
12	2
13	1
14	1

This information, from the 1911 Census returns, excludes empty properties. All rooms were counted except scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom or shop. The list excludes inns.

According to the Land Tax survey, most properties were in reasonable condition and were brick built with slate or tiled roofs. Many had a surrounding garden which was used for kitchen gardening and it was not unusual for a house to have hens, pigs or even a cow or two.

Most houses had an outside privy which was an earth closet or a pail closet. Water closets were very rare even in the better houses of the village as were bathrooms. There were only 9 properties with a water closet and 17 with bathrooms. It is not clear whether the bathrooms had water on tap but it is probable in most cases as they are mainly newer houses along Middlewich Road where a water main was available. However this may have only been cold water as there is only one reference to running hot water. The one house with hot running water was in the village and owned by Albert Henshaw a plumber.

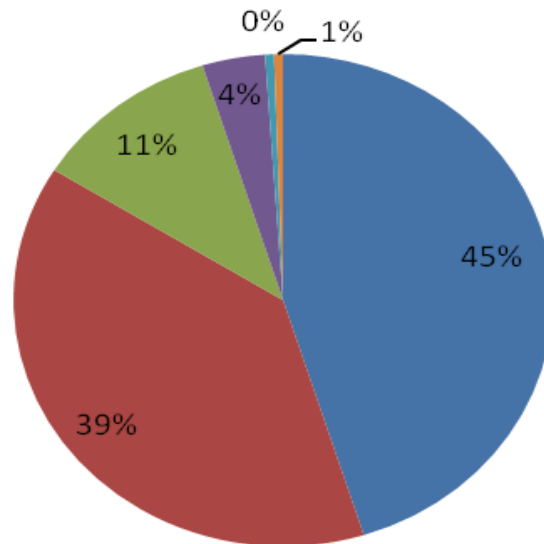
Washing of clothes took place in an external wash house which in a few cases was shared with neighbours. There is no recorded evidence of a mains sewer through Holmes Chapel at the time but the issue of mains water and sewerage were under discussion by the Parish Council for many years up to the end of WW1.

Only two houses, Sandiford and The Hollies, had electric lighting apart from Saltersford Agricultural College. The electricity was supplied from their own generator and batteries but was only sufficient for lighting. However, even if a better supply had been available there were no appliances to plug in. Houses were probably mostly heated by coal as there was a thriving coal carting business.

There were more people living in a house than we are used to today. The graph shows that 45% of houses had less than one room per person and 84% had less than two rooms per person

Occupation Density - Rooms/Resident for Holmes Chapel Properties

Density	■ 0 to 1	■ 1.1 to 2	■ 2.1 to 3	■ 3.1 to 4	■ 4.1 to 5	■ 5.1 to 6
No Dwellings	84	72	21	7	1	1



Transport

Some houses had an attached trap house for the horse and trap transport. There are two references to garages attached to properties and one person employed as a chauffeur, indicating the motor car had already come to Holmes Chapel. Most people had no form of private transport and had to rely on public services. There is no evidence of public transport along the roads but the railways were well established and Holmes Chapel was fortunate in having its own station close to the village centre. Some of the more wealthy residents had connections with Manchester and were probably making frequent visits to the city to do business. However, the service was not out of reach of the average resident at least for special occasions and the church choir had an annual trip to New Brighton as reported in the Parish Magazine.

Medical Services and Support

The 1911 Census had a column to indicate any infirmity. Only three residents recorded these, one 'Feeble minded' all her life aged 55 and living with her sister's family, one deaf since she was 60 living alone aged 73 and one deaf and dumb all his life aged 23 and living with his father.

The village had its own doctor, Dr Picton, who lived at Saddler's Close and had succeeded Dr Sutton (who lived at The Hollies) in 1903. There was also usually a nurse who was employed by the local Nursing Association, which raised funds for this purpose. There are comments in the Parish Magazine of funds being raised but also periods when a nurse was not regarded as necessary. The arrangement seems to have been that people contributed on a weekly basis so that the nurse was available should she be needed by any of the contributors. It was normal for the poor and pensioners to be treated free of charge.

Maternity nurses were called 'monthly nurses' as they were normally required for a month after the birth and were often local people.

There was some support for the poor and a Relieving Officer for the Congleton Union lived at West Hope Cottages. One resident was described as on the Parish Relief, Annie Metcalf, a widow aged 48 and there were a few references to pensioners and the retired who after 1908 would have been supported by the Old Age Pension for those over the age of seventy.

Clearly the social support from the state was very limited but in a village like Holmes Chapel richer families gave help to the poor and families tended to provide their own support for the elderly.

The Churches

In 1911 there were three churches in the village, the Anglican church of St Luke's, the Methodist Church at the end of Knutsford Road and the United Methodist Free Church on the London Road near Iron Bridge. These three places of worship would have been fully occupied at the time and catered for the nearly 1000 worshippers. There was no church

for any Catholic residents and they would have had to travel to St Mary's Church, Middlewich on a Sunday.

The Parish Magazine produced by St Luke's shows how central the church was to village activities.



Schools

There were two schools serving Holmes Chapel at the time. Cranage School, run by the Church of England which was on Knutsford Road beyond Massey's Mill and the Council run Holmes Chapel School on Macclesfield Road. The latter is now the Catholic Church. Both received grants for roughly 85 children in 1903 but they also tried to raise additional funds from social events. By 1911 children stayed at school until the age of 12 (an Act of Parliament of 1918 raised this to 14) although it seems attendance depended on them not being required for occasional farm or other work. The school was also frequently closed because of the outbreak of infectious diseases such as measles which closed the schools for a month in 1904.

The census returns for 1911 indicate that all children were attending school and there was no evidence that children were removed at an early age from school on a permanent basis in order to be sent to work.



Social Activities

As mentioned previously, the best source of information about the social life of Holmes Chapel around 1910 is the Parish Magazine. This included a wide range of reports on the activities in Holmes Chapel which were not always directly connected with the Parish Church and they give an overall picture of community life.

The impression is of a vibrant community where members at all social levels are involved. There is evidence that the more wealthy members were the leaders and their names crop up across the range of clubs and societies. This short section cannot do justice to the social life of the village but a few examples are given below.

Active in the village were: The Debating Society, Cranage Village Club, Holmes Chapel Club, Holmes Chapel Literary Society, Holmes Chapel and Cranage Reading Room, Holmes Chapel and District Horticultural

Society. Sporting activities included a cricket club, a rifle club and a hockey club. A branch of the Boy Scouts was formed in Holmes Chapel and there was a Boys Club and a Girls Club.

In addition there were annual events such as May Day, an annual choir trip to the seaside and garden parties to raise funds.

Considering the village had less than 1000 residents this level of provision is impressive. Holmes Chapel seems to have been a balanced society where the members may not have been affluent and may have, in general, had hard physical work but where there was still time to be involved in many social activities in their spare time.

Conclusions

This paper has looked at some of the evidence about life in Holmes Chapel around 1910. There is no doubt life was generally harder than nowadays. People did not live as long, work was generally physical and involved long working hours. Many diseases prevalent at the time have virtually disappeared and there was minimal support if you were sick or out of work. People at the time would not believe the home comforts we take for granted, they would not believe that machinery could take so much drudgery out of the home and working life and they would not comprehend our likely life expectancy.

However, we need to view life as it was at the time. Holmes Chapel had decent quality housing most of which had gardens for growing vegetables. Families were large but they were stable. This meant the old were looked after and children were part of a caring community. Spare time was occupied in social and community events of a wide variety in which both rich and poor participated. Perhaps we should not paint too rosy a picture and no doubt, for some, life was more difficult. We know for example that there was a workhouse at Arclid and the local Relieving Officer lived on Middlewich Road whose role it was to provide support for the destitute.

The commercial world in Holmes Chapel was active with a wide range of shops and services catering for the local community and new house

building suggests the village was prospering in a steady sort of way. The economy was not just dependent on farming, there was the Agricultural College, the railway, the building industry and the horticultural building works (which became a wallpaper works about this time) so employment prospects were good and varied. This settled and stable world was shortly to change with the onset of WW1.

Booklets in this series produced by the Holmes Chapel U3A Local History Group:

1. Holmes Chapel before the War
2. Village People 1914 – 1918
3. The Men Who Went to War
4. Refugees come to the village
5. Beating the Drum – Recruitment and Communication
6. The Community Response
7. Feeding the People
8. Rationing During the War
9. Rules and Regulations
10. Education
11. Life Goes On
12. Holmes Chapel at the End of the War

For copies of booklets see web site
www.holmeschapelhistory.co.uk

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WW1 and Holmes Chapel & District U3A

In 2011 the Holmes Chapel & District University of the Third Age (U3A) was set up in the village and one of the activities under its umbrella was a local history group. This attracted people who had been involved in research in the past as well as some new volunteers eager to learn more. After an initial period of encouragement and training for the newcomers it was decided that the group would work together on a topic - The Story of Holmes Chapel and district during the First World War.

This is one in a series of booklets describing different aspects of life in Holmes Chapel and district before and during the First World War. A full list of the booklets is given on the inside of this back cover.

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