



# Images Around Birkenshaw

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A Collection of Photographs - 2020

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# 1 Introduction

Birkenshaw lies at the centre of West Yorkshire, but being a new village, without apparently a Manor, has struggled recently to form an identity. Ironically, there are however several so named 'Manor Houses' in Birkenshaw. It is hoped this collection of images taken in the second half of 2020, of present day features of Birkenshaw and its surroundings, will help to correct this. The images are of modern features and establishments, together with older historical ones, and their relationship to the present. As well as Birkenshaw itself there are images of the surrounding towns, villages and suburbs to the North, South, East and West.

To the North and North East we have the suburbs of Bradford which were themselves, before being amalgamated into the city, often separate hamlets. There is Oakenshaw, Low Moor, Bierley, Bolling, Dudley Hill and Holme Wood.

To the West and North West we have Tong and Drighlington, Tong being considered as part of Bradford and Drighlington as part of Leeds.

To the South we have the towns which together with Birkenshaw constituted the administrative region of Spen Valley. That is Gomersal, Cleckheaton, Liversedge and Heckmondwike. In addition, Birstall and Batley, which together with Spen Valley forms the parliamentary constituency of Batley & Spen.

On all sides there are old manor houses dating back to William the Conqueror and beyond. Birkenshaw itself is something of a newcomer.

Nowadays, Birkenshaw is considered as part of the administrative region of Kirklees. It is indeed the Northern tip of

this region, which also includes the large town of Huddersfield to the South.

Residents of Birkenshaw often travel to all of these areas for both work and pleasure, as well as to the centres of the larger cities of Leeds and Bradford.

This account is my own personal collection of photographs, in and around Birkenshaw, from someone who was born in Birkenshaw in 1964. Having spent my formative years until 1990, based in Birkenshaw, I then went to live in Dursley, Gloucestershire, to work, for 30 years before returning to live again in Birkenshaw in 2020. I am thus able to compare and contrast the very old, the old, and the new. The collection of images was gathered in the second half of 2020.

## 2 Birkenshaw



The name Birkenshaw means Birch-Grove or clearing and is Anglo Saxon in origin, these probably being the earliest settlers. Indeed somewhere around AD620 an immigrant called Guthmer probably settled in the area, cleared some land and built a fortified house - 'Guthmer's Halh'. Hence we have the name Gomersal. Why this was not at Birkenshaw is probably because the land or its aspect was not as attractive - these are the usual reasons for early settling in a place. There is an entry in the Oxford Dictionary of Place Names of a place *Birkenschawe* with the date 1274, and indeed court rolls

of the period indicated that such a place yielded tax to an Ilbert de Lacy, Knight of Pontefract. It must be remembered that from the conquest of England by William the Conqueror and the Normans in 1066, vast tracts of land in the North (and South) were given to William's supporters (military men or Knights). Ilbert de Lacy was one such follower. People were granted permission to live within a Knight's lands at varying levels of servitude, consequent on them paying taxes in money or kind (e.g. labour, chickens, military service etc.). For example they could be yeomen owning the freehold of a property, or at the lowest level slaves, with no property rights, at the total beck and call of their masters. The Knights themselves paid taxes to the King (or Queen). Thus, the English class system was established.

Many of the original Saxon English landholders (Thanes) had their manorial system taken over and subjected to the oversight of the new conquerors.

The introductory image shows the main street in Birkenshaw as it is today (2020). This is one of the main roads through the area - Bradford Road. Note the numbers of cars in the image. This is one of the features of the photographs in this collection. Cars are one of the ubiquitous features of this age. Indeed it would often be impossible to wait to obtain a picture which was free of some car or other.

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This is Oakwell Hall. It was the seat of The Lord of The Manor of Gomersal and beyond; the present building probably originating in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However the early Lords of the Manor seem to reflect the worst of this medieval class system. The early incumbent (a Henry Batt) was notorious for avariciously trying to advance himself in money and lands at every opportunity. He would, for example, insist on onerous terms for the grinding of corn at the manorial mill, or engage in deed and accession falsification. No wonder he needed such a big wall around his property. We have an early capitalist in another guise?

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