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# Reconstructing the late-nineteenth century landscape and natural habitats of south west Accrington using the artwork of Thomas Frederick Worrall (1872–1957)

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## Abstract:

In the late nineteenth century, the south western edge of Accrington in Lancashire was mainly rural with a few pockets of industrial activity. Using contemporary paintings and sketches by semi-professional artist Thomas Frederick Worrall and other primary sources including maps, censuses and newspaper reports, the author uses microhistorical techniques to recreate the landscape. These reveal that rich and multifarious habitats for wildlife were present but comparisons with later sources show that many of those features have gone. A depleted environment has been left which could be restored to an extent by using the findings here as a template. The article is a new approach to landscape analysis that adds to the nature writing of authorities including Richard Mabey, Mark Cocker and Alan McFarlane.

## Key words:

Landscape, rural painting, Lancashire, microhistory, ecology, biodiversity, habitat loss, habitat restoration

In the summer of 2021, residents in south west Accrington noted clearance of vegetation being undertaken in preparation for building work upon a green site. Concerned householders protested against the destruction of this verdant area, citing wildlife species such as woodpecker, hen harrier, kingfisher and owl. They said, 'The land is next to Bullough Park and the Priestley Clough conservation area and noted sites of protected biodiversity' (Lancs Live: Accrington residents, 2021). The location, at about 200m elevation, has long been an area of special natural interest and it is the aim of this article to reconstruct the appearance of this section of land – bounded by Higher Antley Farm, Fern Gore, Miller Fold and Priestly Clough – as it was in the late Victorian age (Figure 1). This will be done by using contemporary artwork by semi-professional watercolourist Thomas Frederick Worrall (usually known as Tom Worrall) who sketched and painted many Lancashire locations while working in nearby industry. Maps, newspaper articles and censuses will also be used to help build a picture of the landscape with its varied habitats for wildlife as it was when Worrall kept a diary from 1895–6. Passages from the diary – located in a private collection but with a transcript

available at Accrington library – will be quoted to help give context, and a possible template for future biodiversity improvements will be seen.

This is a new approach to analysing the landscape and adds to well-known works by proponents such as Richard Mabey, Mark Cocker and Alan McFarlane among others, who make observations from studying nature and land usage, and show and define deep and meaningful connections between the two (Moran, 2014). Cocker has, similarly to this article, examined the landscape features of a particular area that is designated by specified boundaries, but used the study of a species of bird as the gateway to his exploration (Cocker, 2007). Hayden Lorimer used the novel idea of searching for scarecrows as his entry into scrutinising agricultural space (Lorimer, 2013) and Ian Rotherham has found lost landscapes by using the remnants of old woodland (Rotherham, 2017). Furthermore, some comparable approaches have been conducted for other artistic genres e.g. the regional novel and the topography of certain poets (Snell, 2010; Pite, 2002; Barrell, 1972; Matless, 2008). All these methods of reconstructing old rural environments achieve a strong sense of locality as will be seen in the following exposition.

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\* Dr Jones is a great granddaughter of Thomas F. Worrall.

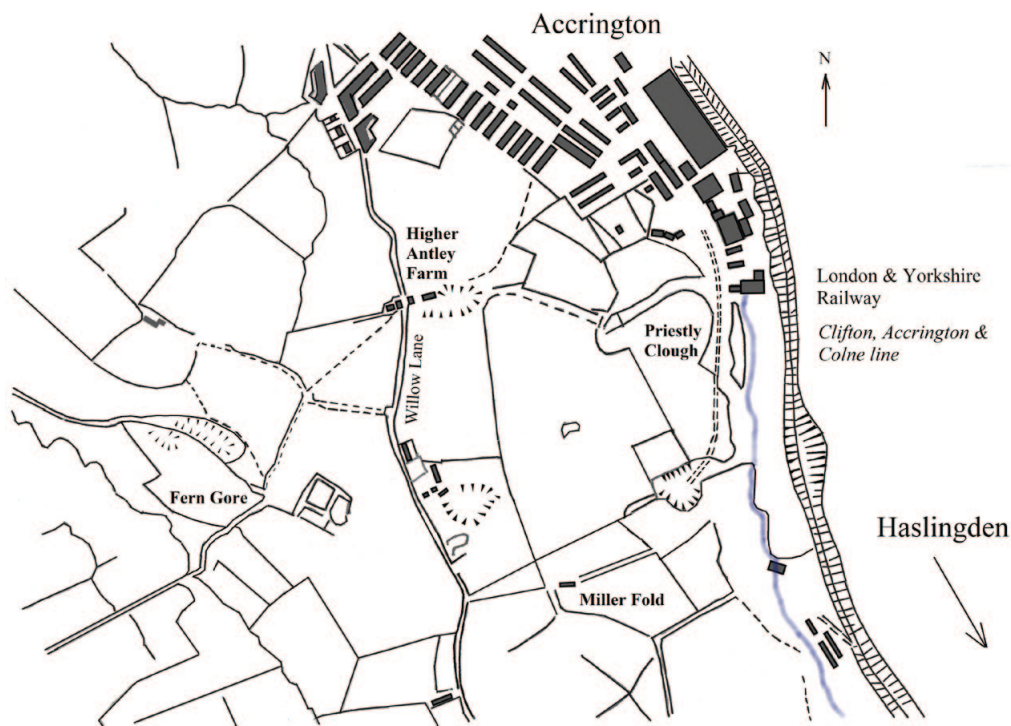


Figure 1: Land to the south west of Accrington redrawn from the 1894 1:10,560 Ordnance Survey map.

Accrington grew up along the road from Clitheroe to Haslingden, from a large village of about 3,000 persons at the start of the nineteenth century to a centre of calico printing and cotton spinning, with a population of approximately 6,300 in 1831. In 1851 there were nearly 10,500 residents and by the beginning of the twentieth century the population stood at a greatly enlarged 43,000 (House of Commons Papers, 1831, p. 138). The growing population necessarily had an effect on the landscape and built environment. The 1849 Ordnance Survey (OS) map (1:10,560) shows the south west portion of Accrington being mostly fields, with just a few buildings marked 'cotton factory' (old-maps.co.uk, 2021). These buildings were to become the giant Globe engineering works which, with associated housing for workers, dominated the area by the turn of the twentieth century (Globe Centre, 2021). The appearance of the expanded town is captured dramatically in a wide-angle view taken in 1911 showing row upon row of identical, terraced houses encircling a mass of factory chimneys (Ashton, 1975 cover page). There were also mines and dye works, quarries and numerous waterworks (British History, 2021; Old-maps, 2021; Hargreaves, 1884; Crossley, 1930; Nadine, 1999).

As the town grew, the amount of land available for farming decreased and the south west section lost about 60 acres to housing and mills between 1849 and 1894.<sup>1</sup>

The 1849 1:2,500 OS map shows about a third of field boundaries having trees along their length. There is a notable thoroughfare named Willows Lane that ran from what was the south western edge of the town southwards for about two miles towards Haslingden and was tree-lined for half a mile at the start of its route. Those trees were gone by the time Worrall was recording the area in his art and the tree-lined half-mile section was now enclosed by brick-built houses. A drinking trough that was present in 1849 was gone indicating that Willows Lane was no longer a byway for livestock. There is one surprising example of de-industrialisation. A sandstone quarry located near to the farm named Higher Antley in 1849 was connected to Accrington by a tramway. In 1894, the earthwork was now labelled 'old quarry' and the only indication of the tram rails was that a new street on the edge of the town lay along part of its length. Coincidentally, it is residents of that thoroughfare – Hopwood Street – who in 2021 campaigned against destruction of natural habitat.

Worrall lived in the neighbouring settlement of Church and started work as a labourer at Steiner's calico printing factory. He later worked for three years at an unspecified occupation in the railway works at Horwich and for a short time at the Globe works in Accrington before trying to make a living from painting local scenes, selling art materials and considering becoming a Wesleyan minister (Worrall

1. Calculation made by comparing acreages given on maps.

Diary, 28 October 1895; 14–24 April 1896).<sup>2</sup> He recorded in his diary, ‘Sketched Higher Antley Farm’ (Worrall Diary, 30 September 1895; Worrall, Paintings: Higher Antley). The sketch is shown in Figure 2.

The picture confirms details in Richard Ainsworth’s description of the farmhouse: “mullioned windows without transoms ... wide rather than tall ... a two-storey porch not being in the centre of the building ... a panel [bearing the date] over the entrance” (Ainsworth, 1928, pp. 11–13). The drawing shows trees and rising fields in the distance behind the property. It was to the rear of the house that the quarry lay and which by the 1890s was water-filled (Blackburn Standard, 1895). This provided the ideal situation for wildlife. Théo Flavenot *et al* have shown how quarries result in genetic variation of some toad species (Flavenot, 2015) and M. Soons *et al* have demonstrated widespread seed dispersal by water fowl (Soons, 2016). Studies on quarries in acidic, coal-bearing areas such as we have here show that in these areas of shallow soil and rocky habitats there will be a limited range of plant species with virtually no legumes (e.g. vetch or clover) or herbaceous flowering plants, but grasses and heather are very likely to be present along with low-lying shrubs (Davies, 1981, pp. 3–5). A photograph of a disused quarry in acidic mid-Wales shows bracken and silver birch trees (Poole, 2015, p. 99). The Higher Antley estate was about 56 acres in extent and belonged to the local Anglican church having been purchased with private donations and a grant from Queen Anne’s Bounty (Haslingden Gazette, 1903).<sup>4</sup> As with most of the farms in the area it was a livestock business, and the fields were pasture and hay meadows (British History, 2021). There was a barn and cow sheds and a few telegraph poles, and the stretch of Willows Lane nearby was lined with walls (Preston Herald, 1883; Haslingden Gazette, 1903). These features reveal opportunities for wildlife diversity. There can be spontaneous emergence of vegetation at the bases of field boundaries and underneath telegraph wires owing to bird activity and wind-blown debris, and such structures can provide nesting and resting sites (Collier, 2013, p. 143). They can be homes for mice, bees, frogs and toads, weasels and stoats (National Trust, 2021) and are hosts to lichen and alpine plants, the variety depending on the acidity or alkalinity of the stone (Marcello, 2003, p. 2). The barn and cow sheds were likely residences for summer-visiting swallows and for owls, and the meadows will have



Figure 2: Worrall's sketch of Higher Antley Farm (original sketch at Gwent Archives).<sup>3</sup>

supported a rich display of poppies and other flowering plants, along with mammals and consequent predators such as kestrels (BBC Countryfile (online), 2021). Droppings from the animals on pastureland attracted flies, which in turn invited yellowhammers, corn buntings and swifts (AA, 1994, pp. 268–9). In the meadows the plants – left untrampled, undisturbed by ploughing and uneaten – grew to seed and displayed a huge array of species including bird’s foot trefoil and yellow rattle which hosted butterflies and hoverflies (BBC Radio 4, 2021: Restorative farming; Kleijn, 2002 p. 360). As a working environment there will have been farm hands in the fields and horses and dogs to help with the labour, and at haymaking time there would be the rumbling of waggons as described by W. E. Powys: “Here come the waggons from Batemore barn, a-rumbling down through Hollow Lane” (Powys, 1991). A court case shows that stray canines also entered the fields, barking and playing, and there was a lime pit in one of the pastures, used for burning limestone to produce useful substances (Haslingden Gazette, 1903, 1909; Wikipedia: Lime pit, 2021). These descriptions show that there were sights and scents, and a diversity of sounds. Worrall’s painting of haycocks near Stonyhurst, a few miles to the north, shows the local arrangement of cut hay and invokes the bright colours of a midsummer’s day (Figure 3; Worrall, Paintings: Whalley Nab).

2. See also the biographical note at the end of the diary.

3. Deposited within the T. F. Worrall collection at Gwent Archives. The copyright belongs to the author.

4. Established by Queen Anne in 1703 to give financial support to poor clergy (Cannon, 2002).



Figure 3: Worrall's painting of a hay field, looking south east from Stonyhurst (original painting in author's private collection). Grid reference approximately SD 690 391.

A footpath led south west from the farm, down a gentle slope through fields to the settlement of Fern Gore which had become partly industrialised as brick works, reservoirs and excavations became established. A 1.25-acre sandstone quarry lay to the west of the path and was still active in 1895 as a crane is marked on the detailed 1:25,000 OS map but is gone in the 1911 version. The quarry will have had an impact both visually and aurally. A rocky precipice on the northern edge is indicated, and one building is marked. No tramway is indicated so transportation of produce will have been moved solely along the road that lies to the west of the quarry and named Coal Pit Lane, giving the origins of an earthwork that by 1895 was long gone. At set times of the day, sounds of working men and horses will have been replaced by warning blasts on a klaxon, sounded prior to blasting (Poole, 2015 p. 98).

Just after passing the quarry, the path joined a road and dropped down into Fern Gore. The name reveals the nature of the situation; even in 2021, it is a green and leafy area, the site of both a spring and a well, and a stream that flows away westwards. Gore means a triangular plot of land (Oxford, 2021) and such a section is seen on the map shown in Figure 4, at the point where the stream goes under

the road. From this location Worrall painted a scene of the cottages that are highlighted in black in Figure 4, showing a wall, some remains of which are still present (Worrall, *Paintings: Fern Gore*) (Figures 5 and 6). Trees are shown in the Worrall picture and this habitat will have been home to blue tits, blackbirds, woodpeckers and chaffinches, and summer migrants such as cuckoos and garden warblers (AA, 1994). The fresh water spring will have hosted a myriad of notably small species: mosses and liverworts, flatworms, caddis flies and perhaps a type of fish called a bullhead that can live right up close to the water source (Freshwater Trust, 2021).

About a third of a mile to the east of Fern Gore was a farm known as Miller Fold (Figure 7). Due to become the site of local authority allotments less than twenty years later, in 1895 the land here concealed a coal mine given away only by an air shaft marked on the map and a newspaper report of dangerous blasting practices (Lancashire Evening Post, 1891). A visiting lecturer described the local geology and discussed the Carboniferous rocks in the district that gave rise to quantities of sandstone, coal, shale and fireclay (Haslingden Gazette, 1912) thus explaining the quarries, mines and pits in the area.

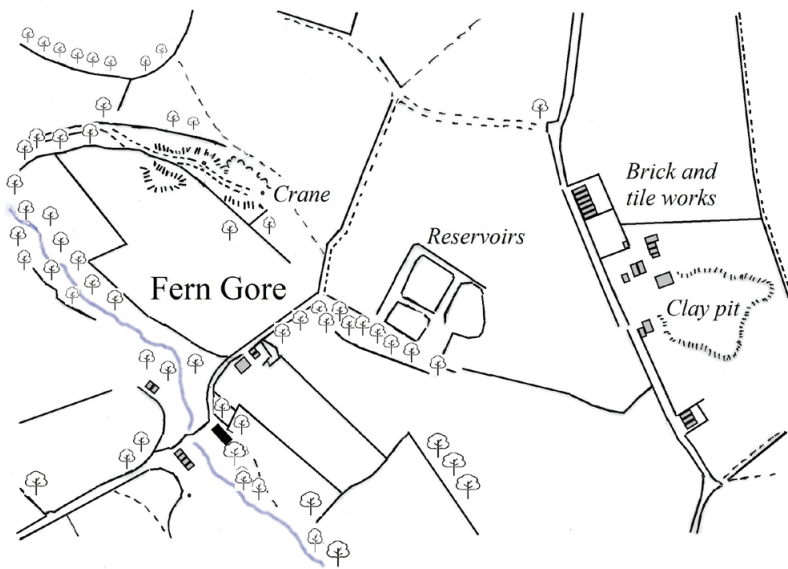


Figure 4: Fern Gore redrawn from 1894 OS 1:25,000 map.



Figure 5: Worrall's painting of Fern Gore cottages (original at Accrington Library).



Figure 6: The Fern Gore site in 2021. The remains of the wall can be seen in the right foreground (photo: author).

Worrall sketched the farmhouse (Figure 8), perhaps the only pictorial record of the building which is now gone (Worrall, *Paintings: Miller Fold*), although the footprint of the house is visible on a satellite picture (Figure 9: Google Maps, 2021). Comparison with the OS map shows that Worrall's view is of the north side of the farm and captures the angle of the building in relation to track. The largest section of the construction, furthest away from the viewer, has the appearance of a barn as it has a wide door that reaches almost to the eaves, and no windows. This part also has a chimney indicating perhaps a boiler within the barn. The scene seems a complicated arrangement and the OS map shows yet another appendage, hidden from the viewer of the sketch. Particulars of a farm sale in 1869 state that there were four dwelling houses and that the holding in total was 37 acres. There is no mention of mining activity (*Manchester Courier*, 1869). In the 1891 census, two of the houses were occupied with a farmer and his family in one and two cotton weavers living in the other. This meant that the weavers had to travel to work and nearby Church and Accrington were easily accessible via a web of footpaths, tracks and roads.

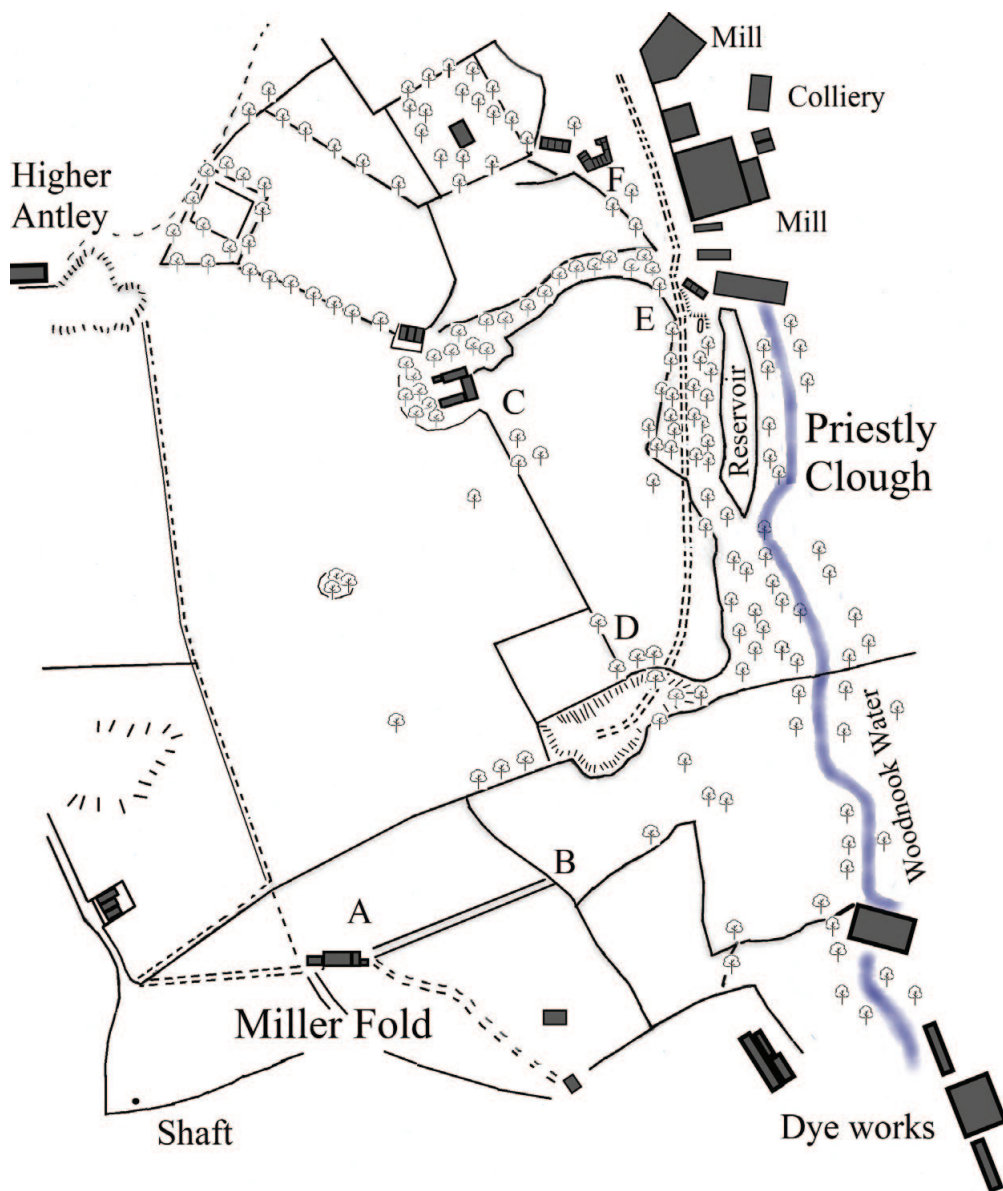


Figure 7: Map showing Miller Fold (redrawn from 1894 OS 1:25,000 map).



Figure 8: Worrall's pen and ink sketch of Miller Fold (T. F. Worrall collection, Gwent Archives).

The moors lying south of Miller Fold were visible from the farm and a naturalist described the sight in early autumn: "The moor to the right and left of us looked a veritable fairyland: the purple of the heather, the gold of the dwarf furze and the feathery fronds of the bracken with here and there the rich yellow patches of the tormentil flowers and the devil's bit scabious" (Haslingden Gazette, 1910). The last of these plants grows well in light, sandy soils (Notes & Queries, 1899) which tells us that the moorland around Accrington was heath-like in composition. Worrall captured this fairyland, and it is shown in Figure 3 as the background to midsummer haymaking. At that time of year, insects will have been abounding in the heather and a moth known as a deep-brown dart was recorded (Northern Daily Telegraph, 1910). The larvae of this species feeds on heather as do a range of other types including one known as the smoky wave. The narrow-bordered bee hawk moth, now scarce,



Figure 9: Satellite image of Miller Fold Avenue in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Imagery ©2021 Google Earth. The arrow indicates the location of the farm site.

feeds on devil's bit scabious and tormentil is the favoured host of the small heath butterfly (Sterry 2016, pp. 280, 112, 100, 66). The moor will have hosted a range of mammals and birds including lapwing, curlew and merlin as well as grazing sheep (Thompson, 1995, pp. 167–8; The Wildlife Trusts, 2021; Haslingden Gazette, 1910). There were rabbits and hares, providing entertainment for some in the form of coursing with dogs, and food for many (Burnley Express, 1908; Blackburn Standard, 1896; Sporting Chronicle, 1916). The moors were home to game birds too and there were court cases wherein landowners pursued compensation for trespass (Burnley Express, 1885; Preston Herald, 1870). Irritation with persons walking over farmland may account for an incident involving Worrall and an irate farmer: "Martha, Lizzie & a few others went on Moleside [about a mile from Miller Fold]. We enjoyed ourselves thoroughly until after we had finished our tea, then a farmer came & without any warning struck me several times with a thick stick. Willie & I then took to our heels being unable to offer any effectual resistance, for we were without means of defence" (Worrall Diary, 25 July 1896).

The maps capture a changing landscape. Between 1849 and 1894, the trees that lined the full lengths of the field boundaries at points A – B and C – D were mostly removed, and the quarry at D was created. Fences or walls were put in place to mark out a trapezoid field near point D. Trees growing within the quarry site in 1894 show that it was already coming to its end and the 1911 OS map designates it 'old quarry'. An area that maintained and continues to maintain its tree-bound characteristics however, lay adjacent

to the quarry. Called Priestly Clough, or sometimes Wood Nook (in present times usually written Woodnook), the local council decided to make it a protected green space and nature reserve in 2009 (Lancashire Telegraph, 2009) and it is now designated a biological heritage site (Hyndburn Borough Council, 2021: About Priestly Clough). The watercourse named Wood Nook Water runs along its length and was likely to be highly contaminated with effluent from the dye works upstream, and a coal seam was exposed within the stream further down, explaining the reason for Wood Nook colliery (Haslingden Gazette, 1912). Nevertheless, it was a place for local excursions and Worrall recorded a visit there in his diary: "Lizzie, Martha, Simeon, Bella Patterson and I went for a walk ... We went round Wood Nook way, then had a stroll round Accrington Park" (Worrall 1895–6, 1 January 1896). There will have been warblers, chiffchaffs and wrens, squirrels and possibly foxes and badgers (AA 1994, pp. 104–239; Woodland Trust, 2021). Worrall captured a scene in watercolour within the clough and the detail and accuracy in it enables the exact location to be determined (Figure 10); (Worrall, Paintings: Priestly Clough).

Worrall was on the track near the point marked E in Figure 7 and was looking north. It was a morning scene and the shadows were lying to the west. The building on the right of the picture was associated with Wood Nook cotton mill, possibly workers' accommodation although the absence of windows suggests that the end section, at least, was used a warehouse. Worrall captured a structure that is gone, as the OS maps show that it was changed from a three-bay building to two-bay at some point between 1931

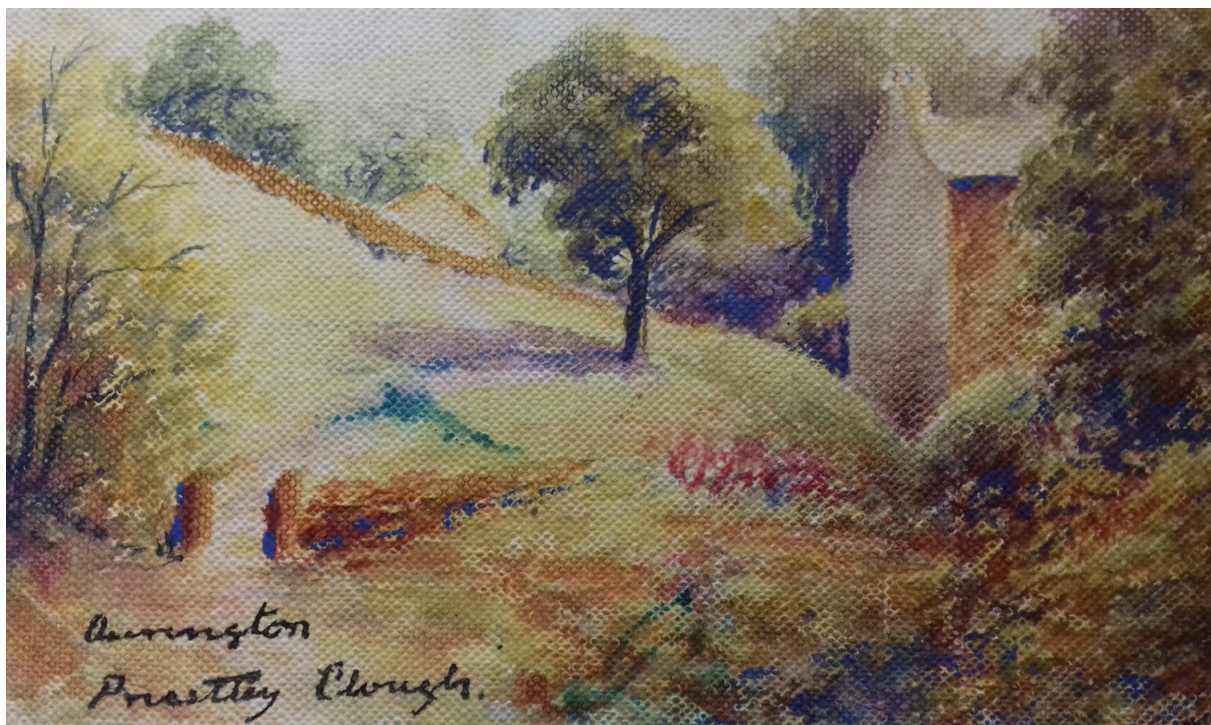


Figure 10: Worrall's painting of the northern end of Priestly Clough (original in Accrington Library).

and 1957. The steep incline symbols on the map indicate that Worrall correctly shows the sudden drop to the right of the tree. The gable end of the houses at point F is shown in the distance in the picture. The footpath is depicted clearly and the stone pillars marking the gap in the wall are similar to those in Figure 5 and thus display a local style. The rising slope on the left of the image indicates the higher-lying land between Miller Fold and Higher Antley, a feature that contributed to the seizure and subsequent death of a man making his way on foot between the two farms. At his inquest, a witnesses said, "He would have had to climb a stiff hill" (Lancashire Evening Post, 1926). The tree has the form of an oak and this is larval host to many moth varieties (Sterry, 2016, p.7). Figure 11 shows Worrall's painting spot in 2021, with the former view now obscured by trees, the shade encouraging a different sort of plant life to the species Worrall would have seen. The naturalist quoted earlier said of Priestly Clough: [Looking towards Accrington] "The town was enveloped in fog and smoke while where we were standing the air was clear and bracing, the scent of the heather meeting us as it wafted from the moorland a little beyond" (Haslingden Gazette, 1910).



Figure 11: Worrall's painting spot at the northern end of Priestly Clough in 2021 (photo: author)

## Discussion and conclusion

Worrall gave up trying to make a living from art and in 1896 stated working with his father, a blacksmith (Worrall, 1995-6: Biography). He did not stay in Lancashire and the 1901 census shows him working as a blacksmith in Yorkshire and living with his wife and young child (National Census, 1901). Figure 12 shows Worrall on his wedding day in 1899. He later worked as a gas fitter in south Wales where he was also very active in politics and gave forthright public addresses during the major coal dispute of 1910–11, one of which caused a riot (National Census, 1911; Jones, 2021).

He continued with semi-professional painting and some of his pictures are deposited in various archives and libraries while many others are held by family members (Wikipedia, 2021: Thomas Frederick Worrall). Occasionally some appear for sale.<sup>5</sup> Using his artwork and a range of other primary and secondary sources the landscape of the south western edge of Accrington has been reconstructed and this enables the reader to step back to the end of the nineteenth century. Though adjacent to a host of factories, the area was essentially rural with a few earthworks that exploited its richness in coal, sandstone and clay. Paths and byways crossed farmland comprising mostly pasture and meadow that concealed further earthworks underground.

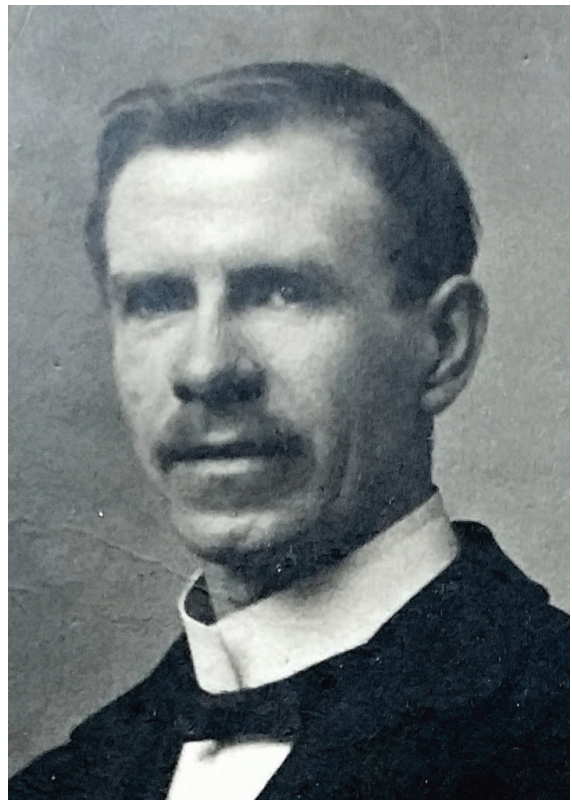


Figure 12: Tom Worrall in 1899 (author's collection)



Figure 13: Bullough Park's 'wildflower meadow' in 2021 (Photo: author).

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5. The author purchased a south Wales scene from Ebay in 2018 and donated it to the National Library of Wales. Two scenes of the Lake District appeared on Ebay in August 2021.

Summer scenes were heavy with birdsong and the hum of insects enjoying the many and various species of flower, and when the breeze was in the right direction the scent of heather was carried down from the moors to the tree-lined edge of town. A visitor to the site could see people enjoying a walk, perhaps an artist with his sketch pad or labourers at work, and livestock in the fields and on the moors.

The sources capture a topography that was conducive to nature but many of those features are gone, noticeably the stone walls, meadows and heather. Half of Accrington Moor is now a golf course and the club's written history describes how turf was transplanted to create the greens. There is also a spacious car park (Green Haworth Golf Club, 2021). Satellite views and reports of hill top fires show little variety of plant species (Lancs Live, 2021: Two fires; Google Maps, 2021). This loss of habitat is likely to be mostly from farming practices in which sheep graze the moors and heather is subsequently reduced (Helm, 2019, pp. 105–7; Pakeman, 2009).<sup>6</sup> In 1913 a generous benefactor gifted to the town 50 acres of land at Higher Antley to be a park for the public's leisure, with walks and seats thereby ensuring that the built environment did not encroach further into that area (Haslingden Gazette, 1913). It did mean, however, that the meadows and pastures of the former farm were eventually lost although modern intensive methods may well have had a negative impact even if the farm had remained (Lymbery, 2017, p. 144). There were three acres of meadow within the park in 1915 (Haslingden Gazette, 1915) but in 2021 there is a small area designated 'marshy grassland' and another, larger, 'wildflower meadow' that is an uninspiring site of bogland rushes bounded by evergreens where in Worrall's day there were deciduous trees. (Figure 13; Bullough Park, 2021: map). The park has also been invaded by the non-native Himalayan balsam which shades out many native woodland plants (Figure 14; Bullough Park: interpretive board). Stone walls are little in evidence and the slope to the south of Higher Antley Farm has been levelled in places to provide sports pitches (Figure 15).



Figure 14: Path in Bullough Park lined by Himalayan Balsam (photo: author).



Figure 15: A former field to the south of Higher Antley, now a sports pitch. Willows Lane is in the background (photo: author).

6. By 1965 the Long Mynd in Shropshire had been over-grazed and heather was depleted. The National Trust purchased the land that year and started working with commoners to graze sustainable numbers of sheep. The heather is now returning and meadow pipits have been observed, indicating heathland recovery (Peters, 2017, pp. 159–67).

There are many more trees now but a 'tree survey' available on application from the local authority is uninformative (Hyndburn Borough Council, 2021: Bullough Park tree survey). A request for a key to unlock the coded details was unanswered. At a time of increasing pressure to pay attention to biodiversity (UK Government, 2021; Attenborough, 2020, pp. 123–8; Lynas, 2020; Natural Resources Wales, 2020; BBC Radio 4, 2021: Threatened tree species; Smith, 2021, BBC Radio 4, 2021: Hedgerows; Barnes,

2013; RHS, 2021: Sustainability strategy; Daily Telegraph, 2021, Hedgerows must grow by 40%), recognition that a decline in insect populations has a detrimental effect on bird numbers (BBC Countryfile (TV), 2021)<sup>7</sup> and a recent report commissioned by Hyndburn Borough Council showing limited diversity of species in the neighbourhood (Skelcher, 2020), the local authority could use the evidence of primary historical sources to help recreate some of the richness of the past.

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7. See also comments in Barnes 2013.

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