



Visitor attendance in Lancashire 2020 and 2020/21

Key findings for Lancashire-12

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1 Summary

The national visitor attractions report for 2020 includes results for just 12 visitor attractions in the Lancashire-12 area. Only a small number of tourism attractions in Lancashire submit visitor figures for publication and some, like country parks, have to give estimations of their large numbers of visitors. Nearly twice as many were listed in 2019, so clearly there has been a major impact on the tourism industry from the Covid-19 pandemic. The local results are therefore of only limited value, but of the 12 Lancashire attractions that submitted results one attraction recorded no change in visitor numbers, one other saw visitor numbers increase while the others recorded decreases which ranged from -38% to -92%. There was no data available for the number of visitors to the East Lancashire Railway in 2019, but the figures have been generally around 200,000, so we have calculated an approximate percentage change.

The size of attractions ranged from Worden Park in South Ribble estimated at 300,000 visitors, to the 50 estimated at the Woodend Colliery mining museum.

This article also includes a separate table that shows visitor numbers at eight sites originally managed by the Lancashire Museums Service during the more recent 2020/21 season which cannot be compared with previous years owing to the forced closures necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Clitheroe Castle Museum managed to open during three months and was visited by 1,400 people. The second highest total was at Gawthorpe Hall which was only open during two months. There were no visits by schoolchildren recorded. The grand total was 3,413, down a staggering 97.1% on 2019/20.

This article is largely dominated by attractions that are either operated by non-profit making trusts, or public-sector organisations. Private enterprises are naturally reluctant to release commercially sensitive figures, such as visitor numbers, therefore this article only provides a limited insight into the commercial viability of private-sector visitor attractions.

2 Introduction

Visitor attractions make a significant contribution to the overall tourism infrastructure of the county and to economic development and regeneration in the communities they serve. It is therefore very useful to know the visitor numbers at sites across Lancashire and whether the figures are showing patterns of growth or decline. Where there are clusters of attractions that publish visitor numbers, they can together provide a range of complementary options for local visitors and an indication of the vitality of the local visitor economy.

The visitor figures contained in table 1 have been taken from the [Visitor Attractions Trends England 2020](#) report. This is an annual, self-completion, survey, so the visitor numbers are provided by the attractions themselves. For the purpose of the survey, the definition of a visitor attraction is: "*an attraction where it is feasible, but not necessary, to charge admission for the sole purpose of sightseeing. The attraction must be a permanently established excursion destination, a primary*

purpose of which is to allow access for entertainment, interest, or education and can include places of worship (but excludes small parish churches); rather than being primarily a retail outlet or a venue for sporting, theatrical, or film performances. It must be open to the public, without prior booking, for published periods each year, and should be capable of attracting day visitors or tourists as well as local residents. In addition, the attraction must be a single business, under a single management, so that it is capable of answering the economic questions on revenue, employment etc."

There are various categories under which attractions are classified, but we have merged some to avoid similar attractions appearing in separate categories. The tourist attractions which provided visitor figures for 2020 was 826. Some of these are run by local authorities, so if in any one year they do not submit numbers, it might well be that a large group of attractions disappear from the results. Unfortunately these and attractions run by charities or small organisations drop out of the listings only to reappear a short number of years later. The East Lancashire Railway amongst others, was not included in the report for 2019 but re-appeared in 2020. These omissions make the calculation of change in numbers difficult to measure.

In addition to the visitor numbers obtained via the national survey, this article also includes a table that lists yearly visitor numbers to a range of sites managed by the Lancashire Museums Service. The Clitheroe Castle Museum appears in both.

3 The Lancashire results

Table 1 lists the 12 attractions in Lancashire that feature in the 2020 edition of the visitor attractions report. Between 2019 and 2020, one attraction recorded no change in visitor numbers, one saw an increase and ten recorded decreases. The Woodend Colliery Mining Museum seems to be a new attraction, appearing for the first time in the listing, but includes a visitor count for the previous year so a yearly change can be calculated. Leighton Hall is another that has featured in previous reports. Please note that some of the attractions estimate their visitor numbers which means that their corresponding results should be viewed with a certain degree of caution.

The Visit Lancashire website lists hundreds of Lancashire attractions of every conceivable type and size, and emphasises the fact that Table 1 mentions only a small proportion of the entire list. It may therefore be misleading to try placing too much emphasis on the results from a limited number of attractions. Many attractions were forced to close because of the pandemic and, apart from those which were forced to close permanently, hopefully in future years there will be more featuring in the table.

Please note that the published results may be affected by factors such as temporary closures for redevelopments, the weather, inaccurate estimates of visitors, and one-off major events/exhibitions that can all distort yearly comparisons.

Table 1 Visits to tourist attractions in Lancashire, 2020

| Attraction | Authority | Urban, rural or coastal | Paid or free (E=estimated) | Visits 2020 | % change in visits 2019-2020 |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|
| Country parks | | | | | |
| <u>Worden Park</u> | South Ribble | Urban | Free (E) | 300,000 | 20% |
| Heritage/visitor centre | | | | | |
| <u>Carnforth Station and Visitor Centre</u> | Lancaster | Rural | Free (E) | 7,500 | -85% |
| Historic house/ house and garden | | | | | |
| <u>Browsholme Hall</u> | Ribble Valley | Rural | Paid | 359 | -84% |
| <u>Hoghton Tower</u> | Chorley | Rural | Paid (E) | 10,000 | -64% |
| <u>Leighton Hall</u> | Lancaster | Rural | Paid | 2,071 | -85% |
| <u>Rufford Old Hall</u> | West Lancashire | Rural | Paid | 4,894 | -92% |
| Museum/ art galleries | | | | | |
| <u>Clitheroe Castle Museum</u> | Ribble Valley | Rural | Paid | 3,712 | -82% |
| <u>Howarth Art Gallery (Tiffany Glass)</u> | Hyndburn | Rural | Free | 7,703 | -72% |
| <u>Woodend Colliery Mining Museum</u> | Pendle | Rural | Paid (E) | 50 | -58% |
| Nature reserve/wetlands/wildlife trips | | | | | |
| <u>WWT Martin Mere Wetland Centre</u> | West Lancashire | Rural | Paid | 119,824 | -38% |
| Other | | | | | |
| <u>The Wayside Arts Trail</u> | Burnley | Rural | Free (E) | 1,000 | 0.0% |
| Steam / Heritage Railway | | | | | |
| <u>East Lancashire Railway</u> | Bury / Rossendale | Rural | Paid | 22,788 | Approx. -88% |

Source Regional Attractions Survey; Visit Britain – Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions

Worden Park in Leyland was estimated to have had approximately 300,000 visitors, up by 20% on 2019. The gathering of crowds in public spaces was prohibited during

the Covid-19 lockdowns, but at the same time they were often the best places to go for daily exercise. The Martin Mere Wetland Centre still had over 100k visitors, so only suffered a fall of -38%.

Carnforth Station and Visitor Centre had had estimated visitors at a figure of 50,000 for nine years, but in 2020 the number was down by 42 and a half thousand. There are few examples across the country where a working railway station on the national network is also a tourist attraction, but Carnforth station attracts thousands of visitors each year because of its connection with the classic film *Brief Encounter*.

4 Visitor numbers from the Lancashire Museums Service

Table 1 contains a number of entries under the museum/ art gallery heading, and to further supplement these results, details have been kindly provided by the county council's Library and information Service, of visitor numbers to a range of venues that are either owned or managed by the Lancashire Museums Service (see table 2).

It is not possible to compare the 2020/21 season with previous years owing to the forced closures necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Clitheroe Castle Museum managed to open during three months and was visited by 1,400 people. The second highest total was at Gawthorpe Hall which was only open during two months. There were no visits by schoolchildren recorded. The grand total was 3,413, down a staggering 97.1% on 2019/20.

Fleetwood Museum was earmarked to close, originally in April 2016, then in reality in October 2016. It reopened in April 2017 as normal, hence there is no major fall off in visitor numbers. Instead of closing it transferred to operation by the Fleetwood Museum Trust. Since then it has been run independently, and as such no longer sends visitor statistics to the County Council. The Lancaster City Museum, Maritime Museum and Cottage Museum are now run by Lancaster City Council, and no figures are available for these for 2019/20.

Closure of all these attractions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic affected the very end of the 2019/20 season. Clitheroe Castle, Gawthorpe Hall, Helmshore Mills Textile Museum and Lancashire Conservation Studios had no visitors after around the middle of March 2020, Lancaster Castle had none after the end of February the Judges' Lodgings closed in mid-February, and the Queen St Mill Textile Museum had its last visitors at the end of January. Clitheroe Castle and the Judges' Lodgings reopened in August 2020 and both Gawthorpe Hall and the Helmshore Mills Textile Museum reopened in September. Only the Judges' Lodgings and the Lancashire Conservation Studios had any visitors in November. All but the Conservation Studios were closed in December and all museums have been closed since.

Table 2, Visitor numbers, Lancashire Museums Service

| Museum / Archive | Authority | 2014/15 | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20* | 2020/21 * | % change 2019/20 -2020/21 |
|---|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Clitheroe Castle Museum | Ribble Valley | 69,003 | 54,768 | 60,259 | 69,547 | 40,637 | 17,861 | 1,400 | -92.2% |
| Fleetwood Museum ^[5] | Wyre | 14,580 | 15,064 | 12,788 | 14,741 | --- | --- | --- | NA |
| Gawthorpe Hall ^[1] | Burnley | 24,129 | 4,141 | 25,138 | 30,252 | 31,213 | 28,679 | 894 | -96.9% |
| Helmshore Mills Textile Museum ^[4] | Rossendale | 21,219 | 23,005 | 11,985 | 5,110 | 8,104 | 10,154 | 246 | -97.8% |
| Judges' Lodgings ^[4] | Lancaster | 9,930 | 11,922 | 5,517 | 2,215 | 4,877 | 7,466 | 781 | -89.5% |
| Lancashire Conservation Studios | Preston | 3,913 | 4,116 | 3,713 | 4,790 | 4,067 | 4,215 | 92 | -97.8% |
| Lancaster Castle | Lancaster | 40,444 | 42,289 | 40,930 | 48,161 | 45,271 | 47,176 | --- | -100.0% |
| Lancaster City Museum ^[6] | Lancaster | 50,316 | 46,620 | 61,336 | 53,934 | 31,971 | --- | --- | NA |
| Lancaster Maritime Museum ^{[2][6]} | Lancaster | 12,838 | 8,038 | 8,450 | 5,955 | 6,048 | --- | --- | NA |
| Museum of Lancashire ^[4] | Preston | 37,587 | 30,041 | 12,771 | 230 | 0 | 106 | --- | -100.0% |
| Queen St Mill Textile Museum ^[4] | Burnley | 12,402 | 14,909 | 9,902 | 1,253 | 1,767 | 3,827 | --- | -100.0% |
| The Cottage Museum ^{[3][6]} | Lancaster | 4,398 | 4,808 | 3,529 | 2,805 | 2,826 | --- | --- | NA |

Source: Lancashire County Library and Information Service

[1] Closed Jun 2015 - Mar 2016 and Jan – Mar 2017

[2] Closed Nov 2015 – Jun 2016

[3] Closed Nov 2016 – Mar 2017

[4] Closed from Oct 2016, apart from school visits

[5] Earmarked for closure along with [4], but reopened April 2017, now having transferred to the Fleetwood Museum Trust

[6] Now run by Lancaster City Council

* COVID-19 affected the end of the 2019/20 season with all but one museum closing to visitors by 17/03/2020. No museum reopened until August and of the five that did only one stayed open till December.

5 Lancashire Museums Service budget review

In November 2015, the county council published details of budget proposals for a wide range of services. These included cultural services museums (number 043). The initial proposal was to close five Lancashire museums from 1st April 2016. These were Queen Street Mill, Helmshore, Museum of Lancashire, Judges Lodgings and Fleetwood.

Consideration is being given to alternative service delivery models including their operation by local communities and interest groups. In March 2016, it was announced that the five museums would stay open until the end of September

2016, to allow more time for discussions with interested organisations. School visits by arrangement were still allowed. Fleetwood Museum has been transferred to the Fleetwood Museum Trust, and opened normally since April 2017, but no longer provides visitor numbers to Lancashire County Council.

In April 2018 a further decision was taken to reopen the Queen Street Mill, the Judges Lodgings and Helmshore for three days a week during the summer, for the next two years. Because of health and safety issues (work is required to strengthen the mill chimney) the opening of Queen Street Mill was restricted to a few special open days. From April 2019 it has opened normally three days a week. The Judges' Lodgings visitor numbers were boosted by frequent school visits and Helmshore Mills Museum opened as planned for three days a week.

Lancashire County Council had a contract to run the Lancaster City Museum, Maritime Museum and Cottage Museum from the early 2000s, but has now relinquished this back to Lancaster City Council.

6 Complementary tourism statistics and information

The office for national statistics released in 2015 [sub-national tourism statistics](#) that consider the economic value of tourism for each local authority area in the country. Results are available for the Lancashire County Council area, and the two unitary authorities of Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool. The detailed figures cover domestic day visits, overnight stays, employment, tourism enterprises and foreign visitors.

The [Marketing Lancashire](#) website is an online resource for business advice, the latest industry news, information on skills and training and marketing opportunities for tourism businesses.

The Information Britain website contains details of [attractions in the Lancashire area](#). Please note that some of the places listed are outside the broader Lancashire area.

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