
13 Parton

Theme: Rivers, seas and life

Location

13 Parton. There is a railway station in Parton (a request stop) and a car park beside the beach [NX 979 206].

Description

Parton and its shoreline have two histories. One is recent and the other is ancient, but they are closely connected.

Around 315 million years ago, this part of Cumbria was a hot tropical swampland with large rivers that often overflowed their banks, pouring sand and mud into lagoons. The muds gradually settled often covering the leaves and stems of plants that grew beside the rivers. Many of the plants in the swamp became peat and as more sediments built up over millions of years they were compressed into coal. The sands were compacted into resistant sandstone and form the cliffs and foreshore from Saltom Bay northwards. The mud is now shale and it preserves those leaves of primitive ferns and giant club mosses as fossils. You can search for them, and other Carboniferous plant and animal remains, in stones on the beach.

There are many other rocks on the beach but not all of them are natural. The coal that was once a hot peaty swamp became the foundation of the West Cumberland economy from the 18th to the 20th century. Coal mines, and the iron and steel manufacturing they sustained, have long gone. What remains are glimpses of their existence in the industrial archaeology along the coast and its debris on the beaches. Parton was once a thriving coal port, with a tannery and glass-making factory. It was a rival to Whitehaven until a storm in 1795 destroyed its harbour. By the end of the 19th century the town was in decline and many houses became slums. They were eventually demolished and Parton moved up the cliff and away from the sea. Workington-born artist Percy Kelly painted Parton. Kelly was a friend of poet, Norman Nicholson and like him was someone whose art captured perspectives from the industrial rim of 20th century Cumbria – a very different approach to those focused on the scenic and picturesque in central Lakeland.

Photographs

(Photo 13-1) 13 Plant fossils in Carboniferous mudstone.

(Photo 13-2) 13 Parton.



(Photo 13-1) Plant fossils in Carboniferous mudstone.



(Photo 13-2) Parton.