



DISCOVERING THE CHARM OF KIRKHAM

Taking a stroll through the pretty town of Kirkham, which is rich in history and thriving with new energy, *Ali Gudgeon* spoke to the locals and was impressed at the changes. Photography: Roger Moore

settlement since Roman times, but its transformation in the 17th century into a bustling textile hub was what really shaped its identity. The old mills that once powered the town's sailcloth and cotton industries have almost gone but Progress Mill has been repurposed. It's fascinating to see how relics of the past have been preserved, such

as the fish stones in the square, adding to Kirkham's charming character.

One of the most memorable features of the town are the new vibrant murals and the talking trail, part of a heritage initiative funded by Historic England. These artistic additions bring Kirkham's history to life in such a modern and accessible way, great for a family focused history hour. The locals spoke with pride about these projects, which not only celebrate the town's past but are attracting visitors who are keen to learn more about its rich history.



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Kirkham's strong sense of community was clear to see, the list of events and markets hosted each year is amazing. I happened to be a week late for the first Kirkham Pride which apparently went down really well with everyone. The Christmas Lights and Market is set for 23rd November. Everyone is already buzzing about it, with over 40 local vendors getting ready to showcase their

food, arts, and crafts. Live music and festive displays are planned, promising a magical atmosphere that always brings the community together. The regular Thursday Market, though small, still has a lively energy, with traders offering fresh produce and unique local goods. And they hope to grow this market for the locals.



What stood out to me were the independent shops and cafes that give Kirkham its personality. One place I had to visit was Serendipity, which I found out later had proudly won the 2023, North, N. Ireland & Scotland, Independent Gift Retailer of the Year award. And then there's Book, Bean & Ice Cream, a quirky known spot for its book signings and delicious cakes – apparently, even astronaut Tim Peake stopped by recently! The local businesses here really give the town its heart, each one offering something unique and you can tell they're a vital part of Kirkham's now thriving high street.

Kirkham's recent regeneration is hard to miss. The restoration with a modern twist of the town's historic core has been a major focus, with projects like the new Market

Square breathing new life into public spaces. The square has been transformed into a vibrant hub, perfect for events, markets and gatherings. New pedestrian-friendly spaces, better lighting, and public art, make it feel welcoming and modern without losing its traditional charm. Two prominent historic buildings in the town, the former Girls School on Poulton Street and Hillside, on Preston Street, a former mill owners house, have also been purchased and are being lovingly renovated. Both are searching for business tenants in this bustling rural town.



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Sustainability seems to be a big part of Kirkham's future. Several locals mentioned energy-efficient infrastructure and eco-friendly initiatives that have been introduced as part of the town's revitalisation. And the improvements don't stop at the town centre. Kirkham's green spaces are beautifully maintained, thanks in large part to the

dedicated In-Bloom team, who ensure the town is always brimming with flowers. I was also impressed by the upgraded paths and play areas, which make the town even more inviting for families and visitors.



As I wandered through Kirkham, it became clear that the town is not just about preserving its history – it's also about moving forward. Local businesses have been supported with grants to improve their premises and adapt to modern needs and the 'Shop Local' loyalty card scheme was a hit with residents, rewarding them for supporting their town's high street. I heard from more than one shop owner how these initiatives have made a real difference in keeping Kirkham's retail scene thriving.

By the end of my visit, it was easy to see why Kirkham holds such appeal. It's a town that embraces its past while actively shaping its future. Whether you're drawn by its history, its community spirit, or its growing cultural scene, Kirkham offers something for everyone. I left with a sense that this is a place with a very bright future, where tradition and progress go hand in hand. ■