

# Hydrocarbon Exploration in the Fylde, Lancashire from 1980 to 2016, Changing Techniques and Public Response

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## Abstract

In 2011 the UK government halted drilling in the Fylde due to tremors. Two conventional wells were drilled around 1990, one dry and one productive. Interest was focused on PT Sherwood Sandstones (same as in Irish Sea Gas Field). Since 2008, Cuadrilla has attempted unconventional exploration on Namurian Bowland Shales. After a 2.3 tremor in April 2011 the government suspended work. This article is a historical account considering technical matters relying on industrial and government sources and the local response using media, social media and local observation.

25 years ago techniques involved conventional vertical wells in sandstone with no attempt in the Namurian Shale. Fracking was low volume with no laterals. After 2008, interest moved to unconventional extraction from shales, with methods not used onshore before at four main sites. The target was Namurian Bowland Shale requiring drilling to 3 km, multi-well pads and laterals, with high volume fracking. There were difficulties at three sites, where work ceased. This was the first attempt for unconventional shales onshore Britain.

In the 1980s, companies had to obtain licences, etc. from appropriate bodies and apart from consultation with those living locally, there was no involvement, positive or negative, from the wider population in the Fylde, which includes large towns of Blackpool and Preston. Licences were granted in 2008, with almost no concern from local or wider communities. It has been very different after the tremors of April, 2011, highlighted by the stunt on Blackpool tower in August. Soon local groups were formed who goaded the local communities to oppose fracking. It was a loose coalition of NIMBYs, greens and OCCUPY, who drew support from a wide cross-section, including churches and green groups. From 2012, groups were effective in opposing hydraulic fracturing and few voices were heard in favour. In local politics only the Tories and UKIP have been in favour. The change in attitude has been dramatic and may be seen as partly due to concerns over climate after 2009 Copenhagen, Gasland documentary of 2010 and the end of OCCUPY's protest in London giving an interesting symbiosis of ideas coupled with worries and NIMBYism. This culminated in the rejection of Cuadrilla's applications in June 2015. Hydraulic fracturing in the Fylde is a live and evolving issue both for the industry and communities.