

# ‘Not much history around here’

By Steve Harrison:  
Friend of Winckley Square

What is apparent to the Friends of Winckley Square (FoWS) is that every aspect of the history of the Winckley Quarter is a tiny piece of the jigsaw which makes up the much larger canvas of the History of Preston and South Ribble and in turn national and international history.

Many individuals and organisations continue to research, interpret, explain and share our local heritage. Every contribution helps build the bigger picture. Our part of Lancashire has so much history to celebrate but is often a closed book to many.



*Extract from Buck's prospect of Preston 1728, showing the Church and the former bridge across the Ribble at Walton le Dale.*

## Crossing the road by St Leonard's Church Walton le Dale

Last year I was on a history walk in South Ribble led by Dr David Hunt. We met at St Leonard's Church, Walton le Dale; high up on Church Brow. As the group crossed the road from the church a prosperous looking driver slowed his car, opened the window and asked what we were doing. 'On a history walk,' replied one of the group. The driver looked bemused. 'History? There's nothing historical to see around here' he told us. He laughed, pitying us, and then was on his way.

From that viewpoint, looking north across the Ribble, we stood within a two mile radius of important sites and events in the history, not just of our area, but of the whole British Isles.

The Romans built and occupied a large camp here. Vikings buried treasure at Cuerdale by the Ribble. Stuart armies were defeated by Cromwell's forces in the civil war and later Jacobite armies marched, fought and retreated in the area we overlook from Church Brow. Arkwright's water frame was invented near Stonegate. The world's largest power loom weaving shed stood near Fishergate. What later became the West Coast Mainline crossed the Ribble west of here in 1838; linking Preston to the coalfields of Wigan and access to cheaper fuel for the steam engines that increasingly powered the mills. Just beyond the site of the Viking treasure runs the M6; the first stretch of Motorway in the UK. Not much further east is the Roman fort at Ribchester. 'Not much history around here' indeed.



*Replica of the ceremonial Roman cavalry helmet (c100 A.D.) discovered at Ribchester in 1796: photo Steve Harrison*

## The Geography is key to the History

The Ribble Valley acts both as a route and as a barrier. St Leonard's is built on top of the millstone grit hill which stands between the Rivers Ribble and Darwen. A church has stood there since at least 1150 and parts of the current building date from the 16th Century. To the north there is an uninterrupted view across the valley of the Ribble to Preston; standing high above the river on its outcrop of Sherwood Sandstone.



*The Ribble has always been a route east-west and a barrier north-south: photo Steve Harrison*

The Ribble served as a barrier to north-south travel west of the Pennines. As we look down on the current Capitol Centre we are viewing a Roman site. Probably used as a supply base for the Roman military. It was never as important as Ribchester but its area was extensive.

Upriver, towards the M6, is the site of the Cuerdale Hoard. Here the Ribble was not a barrier but an east-west route. The Hoard, one of the largest hoards of Viking treasure ever found in Europe, was buried over a thousand years ago in the early 900s. The Ribble was used by the Vikings as a route between their centres at Dublin and York. We'll never know for certain who buried the

8,600 pieces or why, but we can see items from the hoard in the Harris Museum (and the British Museum) and we can speculate; just as historians have done since the find was made in 1840. A wooden bridge linked Walton le Dale with Preston in mediaeval times. Here was the lowest bridging point for the Ribble until the 1750s when 'Old Penwortham Bridge' was built. A number of stone bridges followed at Walton; probably from the 15th Century onwards. The bridge we see today, crossing the Ribble at Walton le Dale, was preceded by an earlier stone bridge about 90m downstream; the scene of clashes of national and international importance.





*Until the 1750s Walton le Dale was the lowest bridging point of the Ribble; photo Steve Harrison*

## Death of a King

In August 1648 the bridge was pivotal in what proved to be the deciding battle of the second English Civil War. The battle on Ribbleton Moor was followed by hand to hand fighting on the bridge over the Ribble. After hours of 'push of pike' the victory of the Parliamentary forces, led by General Cromwell, was secured. From Church Brow we can see clearly the bank of the Ribble at Fishwick Bottoms from where the Lancashire Militias, led by Colonel Ralph Assheton, attacked the Royalist forces from the east. This battle was key. It was not a foregone conclusion. The Royal armies outnumbered the Parliamentary forces. The outcome led directly to the collapse of the Royalist cause and within six months the execution of Charles I.

Charles II rode south across the bridge in August 1651 with his Scottish army before defeat by Cromwell at Worcester in September. He would spend the next nine years in exile waiting for the Restoration of the Monarchy following the death of Cromwell.

Winckley Square is named after Frances Winckley who later became Lady Shelley. She was proud of her family's Jacobite past and she treasured a locket which held blood-stained hair from Charles I's execution.

*Lady Shelley*



The last battle fought on English soil was the battle of Preston in 1715. Jacobites (the word comes from the Latin for James-Jacobus) were the supporters of James, the Old Pretender; son of the deposed James II. They wanted to see the Stuart line restored in place of the Protestant George I.

The Jacobites occupied Preston in November 1715. Meanwhile the Government forces marched from the south and east to Preston. The Jacobites made no attempt to block the bridge at Walton. The Government forces of George I marched

unchallenged across the bridge and began to surround Preston town centre. The battle that followed resulted in far more Government deaths than of Jacobites but led ultimately to the surrender of the supporters of James. It was recorded at the time that the Jacobite Gentlemen Officers, having declared James the King in Preston Market Square, spent the next few days celebrating and drinking; enchanted by the beauty of the women of Preston. Having married a beautiful woman I met in a Preston pub, not far from the same market square, I know the feeling.



*Avenham Walk was visited by The Young Pretender, Prince Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie), in 1745. From the south end he admired the view over the Ribble of what he hoped would soon be part of his kingdom; photo Steve Harrison*

Once again, in November 1745, Jacobites marched through Preston and over the Ribble at Walton le Dale on their way south to Derby in support of Bonnie Prince Charlie; only to return north over the same bridge in December on their long journey back to Scotland and ultimate defeat at Culloden.

**And that only takes us up to pre-industrial Preston- 'Not much history around here' indeed!**

Why not get involved and find out more about the history of our area? The Friends of Winckley Square offer events, walks, talks and a website about our heritage and history. <https://www.winckleysquarepreston.org/>

Preston Historical Society has an annual programme of lectures to which all are welcome. <http://www.prestonhistoricalsociety.org.uk/>

We have great museums <http://www.harrismuseum.org.uk/> and <http://south-ribble.co.uk/srmuseum/index.html> and the excellent County Archives on our doorstep <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/archives-and-record-office/>

Check out the Preston History website where Peter Smith has made available outstanding local resources <https://prestonhistory.com/>

For more information or to receive the FoWS newsletter contact [enquiries@winckley.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@winckley.org.uk) or contact via Facebook