Winckley Square Times



Steve Harrison

Issue 35 | Autumn 2025

Friends of Winckley Square

After a wonderful summer of events, we are now focussed on planning FoWS Christmas festivities. The FREE Winckley Summer Festival and Christmas Concert would not be possible without the support of PCC and many of our local businesses. Everything we do is dependent on our wonderful volunteers who give their time to organise and staff events, lead guided walks and give talks around the county and beyond; write articles for this newsletter and our website and much more. We are more than volunteers we are a FoWS family. The photograph above shows a team of volunteers and PCC gardeners who got together on 28 August to 'blitz' the weeds and overgrowth in the gardens. The improvement was significant. If you would like to join our ever-growing team of volunteers, please contact me.

The Lost Legacy of Winckley Square series: in the previous newsletter we looked at the first of three iconic buildings that once graced Winckley Square-The Winckley Club. In this edition we revisit its next-door neighbour on the Square, ***The Literary and Philosophical Society***, which stood on the corner of Cross Street and Winckley Square. The Handsome buildings that were on the east side of the Square have long gone but are worthy of remembering for their architecture, their purpose and the people who frequented them.

We look forward to seeing you in the Gardens.

Patricia Harrison

Chair of Friends of Winckley Square

Email: **patricia@winckley.org.uk**

www.winckleysquarepreston.org

Meet Michael Akers



My association with Winckley Square goes all the way back to September 1978 when I was one of the first wave of sixteen-year-olds to join the newly formed Newman College. Newman ('Cardinal' was added later) used the same facilities as the three grammar schools it replaced. I was based mainly in the former Catholic College, a fabulous warren of old buildings overlooking the Square. During a History A Level lesson about Robert Peel and the abolition of the Corn Laws, I remember gazing from an upper floor window across the garden to the statue erected in his honour. History made tangible. Looking back, I probably spent far too much class time looking out of windows at Winckley Square's many distractions, but I also feel privileged that I was part of a generation of Prestonians to experience a truly comprehensive 11-18 education for the first time.

I now regularly lead guided tours for the FoWS, although in my topics I've strayed a little from the Square. Taking groups around Preston Bus Station and along the Ribble to look at our historic bridges is enormous fun. History, I'd like to think, once again made tangible. It's an opportunity I wouldn't have had without the FoWS.

I have always particularly admired the Garden and the improvements to it in recent years has been wonderful. One tree however is very special. Under its weeping boughs I proposed to my girlfriend, now wife, more than three decades ago.

VOLUNTEER

Interested in volunteering?

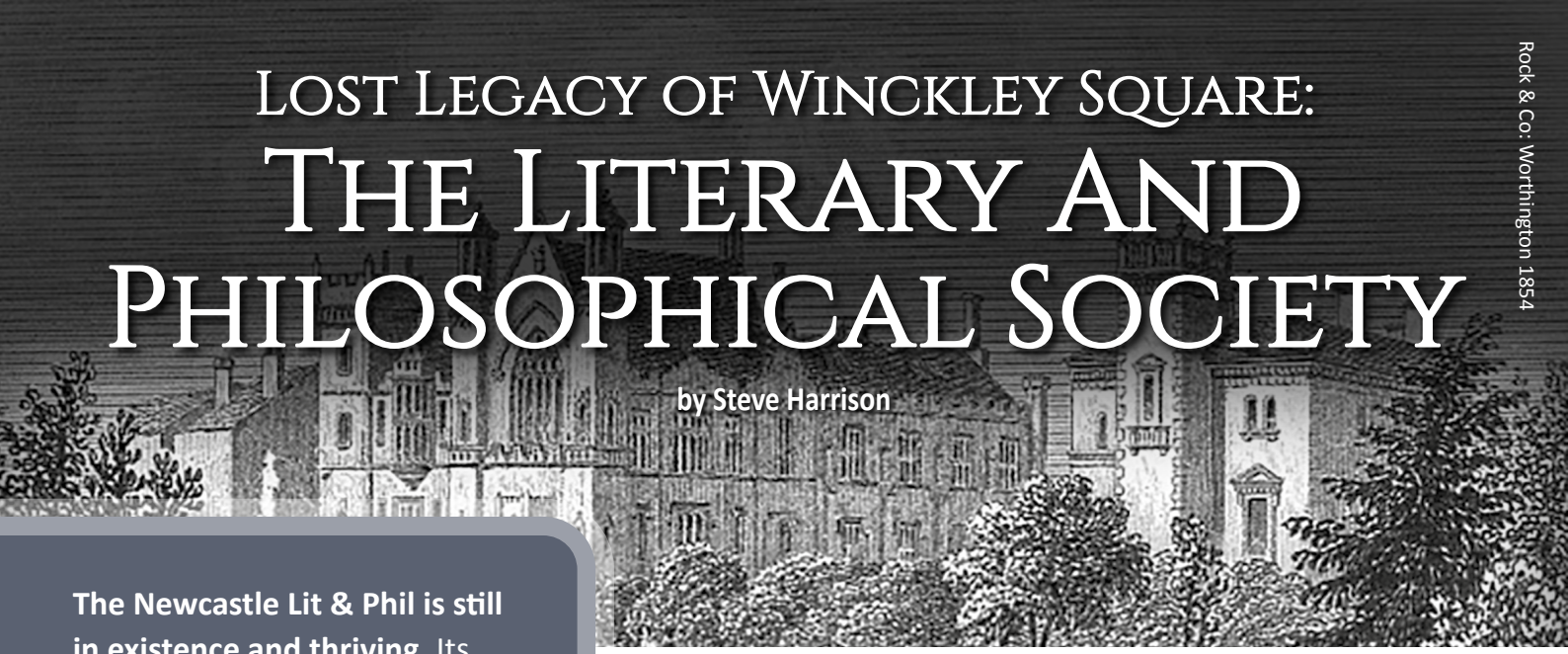
Contact **patricia@winckley.org.uk**

@WinckleySquare **Friendsofwinckleysquaregardens**

We love seeing your photos of the Square; tag #friendsofwinckleysquare on Instagram.

Lost Legacy of Winckley Square:
The Literary And Philosophical Society

by Steve Harrison



The Newcastle Lit & Phil is still in existence and thriving. Its current building has been its home for 200 years and houses the largest independent library outside London. It hosts talks, concerts, readings, discussions and book launches and provides a venue for adult classes.



Literary and Philosophical Society on the corner of Winckley Square and Cross Street.



Literary and Philosophical Society Newcastle: royalty-free images

The Birth of the Lit & Phil Movement

Martha Vandrei & Heather Ellis in 2024 provided an overview of the 'Lit & Phil' movement nationally. In this article we explore the extent to which the Preston Lit & Phil reflected the national picture.

Nationally, Lit and Phil Societies and Institutions had a largely Middle- and Upper-Class membership. Members enjoyed an organisation that was concerned with education and research but was also a social setting. Contentious topics, such as religion and politics were avoided.

Initially, Lit and Phils were largely in the north. London of course had the arts and sciences but travel to London in the 18th Century took days. Leading citizens in large northern towns and cities set about establishing places of research and learning close to home. Manchester (1781) and Newcastle (1793) were early pioneers.

The largest and wealthiest Lit & Phils commissioned fine buildings which had rooms dedicated as a library, a museum and a lecture room. Reading rooms were also common and would stage sessions where one member (or visiting speaker) would read aloud a paper for 30 minutes and then the group would discuss the reading. A characteristic part of the social side of the institutions.

Lit & Phil Societies or Institutions regarded education as a good. It could be an 'end in itself' and didn't need to be useful or purely utilitarian. A key goal was personal self-improvement.

They were not early forms of universities and did not award qualifications. Vandrei & Ellis describe the Lit. & Phil. topics as *'eclectic'*. Their museums would be stocked with a wide range of exhibits drawn from history, antiquities, geology, botany, art and sculpture. Often this would reflect local conditions but, as the British Empire expanded, a wider range of exhibits formed parts of the collections. The movement spread south after its initial northern genesis. Most opened between 1780 and the 1830s.

Nigel Morgan: **Desirable Dwellings**

Nigel Morgan wrote three linked works on housing in Preston. In the last of them, ***Desirable Dwellings***, he was scathing about how the residents of the Winckley Square/ Ribblesdale Place part of town hijacked existing social and educational institutions and relocated them close to where the wealthy lived. The whole text was never published in print form but is available on Peter Smith's excellent Preston History website. Nigel died in 2006.

Extract from Chapter Three of Desirable Dwellings:

Social Amenities of the Winckley Square Area

To these natural advantages, the residents of the area in the 1840s added social advantages, either as private citizens collaborating with one another in clubs and societies, or as members of the Corporation; which sometimes seems to have been much the same thing. It is hard to avoid the impression that what they were really doing was appropriating institutions which belonged to the town as a whole. These were the Grammar School, the Literary and Philosophical Institution, the Gentlemen's Newsroom, and the Mechanics Institute (which in Preston called itself the Institution for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge): all removed into the Square or close to it from premises formerly located in Stoneygate, the Corn Exchange, the old Guildhall, and Cannon Street, respectively.

The Cross Street buildings having been demolished and replaced with modern offices, only the Avenham Institute and the Park are left as architectural evidence of the way the new middle classes of early Victorian Preston feathered their own nests in this area. They had provided for the formal education of boys, the informal education of adults, the indoor recreation of men, and the outdoor recreation of all, on their own doorsteps.

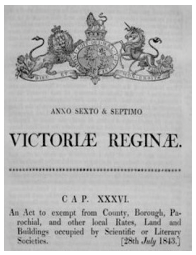


Looking west along Cross Street, Peel's statue can be seen in the distance behind the railings of Winckley Square. The building on the right is the former Grammar School and beyond it is the Lit and Phil on the corner of Cross Street and Winckley Square. Hardwick's History of Preston 1857

Why so late and why 1844?

In 1843 legislation was passed, ***'The Scientific Societies Bill 1843'***. Societies which met certain criteria were exempt from paying rates.

'WHEREAS it is expedient that Societies established exclusively for Purposes of Science, Literature, or the Fine Arts should be exempt from the Charge of County, Borough, Parochial, and other local Rates in respect of Land and Buildings occupied by them for the Transaction of their business, and for carrying into effect their Purposes;'


ANNO SEXTO & SEPTIMO

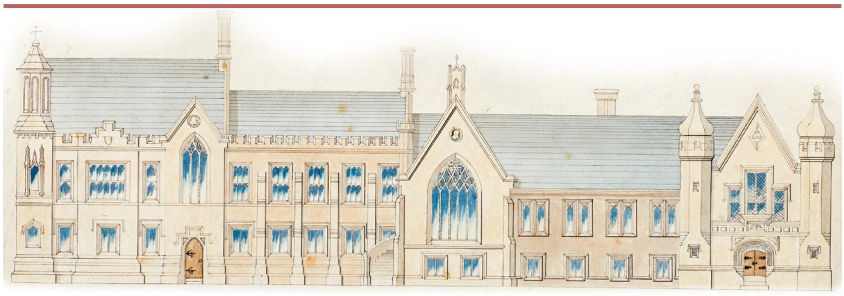
VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

CAP. XXXVI.

An Act to exempt from County, Borough, Parochial, and other local Rates, Land and Buildings occupied by Scientific or Literary Societies. [28th July 1843.]

Every organisation that could, sought exemption. However, the loss of rates income led to conflict with other organisations committed to the welfare of the poor. Local rates' income was lost which had a knock-on effect on the income of local parishes & charities. The Poor-Law Guardians of the workhouses were affected badly and the overseers objected.

Preston out of Step



The Grammar School Collegiate Hall Library And Philosophical Buildings At Preston: Gardner, DEC. 19. 1849: *This and other building plans are available to view at Lancashire Archives.*

When we compare Preston's Lit & Phil with the national picture the Preston Lit & Phil emerges as something of an outlier. A proto-Lit and Phil had existed in the town since 1810, supported by Rev Joseph (Daddy) Dunn of St Wilfrid's and Thomas Batty Addison, later Recorder of Preston and owner of 23 Winckley Square. In 1834 the Preston Society of Arts was founded. Its first President was Rev John Clay. Its aims were similar to those of a Lit and Phil. In 1840 the Preston Lit & Phil was established but without any premises. Its collections were on display in the Corn Exchange. The collections were mainly purchased from the Preston Society of Arts and in effect they became one body in 1841 – the Literary and Philosophical Society.

This was much later than many in the north. In 1844 work began to construct a dedicated building on the corner of Cross Street & Winckley Square. It opened on December 9th, 1846. The collection of books previously bequeathed to the town by Dr Shepherd was later moved to the Lit & Phil building. Over 8,500 books for reference were placed there with an adjacent reading room. The reading room also contained around 3,500 copies of patents dated from 1627. Above the library was a museum. The opening hours on Monday to Saturday were 11.00 to 21.45.

Patents

The collection of thousands of patents housed at the Preston Lit & Phil had a particular relevance in the town with its wealthy Millocracy. Patents, and the enforcement of patents, were major issues for all involved in the textile industry, whether a cloth producer or the manufacturer of textile machinery. Richard Arkwright's fortune came in large measure from his income from patents. More than 40 years earlier Boulton & Watt (James Watt of boiling kettle fame) had spies in Preston to identify who was using steam engine machinery which infringed their patents. John Watson and J&S Horrocks were among the millowners using such steam engines.

Second life: **Incorporated into Preston Grammar School**

The Lit and Phil building faced Winckley Square and butted up against the newly built (1842) private Grammar School on Cross Street. The Corporation bought the Grammar School in 1860 and in 1868 also bought the L&P. Preston's Lit & Phil Society lasted only 24 years in its custom-built building.

David Billington notes that once the Harris Free Library was completed, the library from the Lit & Phil building was transferred there. The school was then refurbished, and the former Lit & Phil building was incorporated into the school in 1898. Despite the school building being condemned in 1906 by HM Inspectors, it remained open until 1913 when it transferred to newly built premises in Moor Park Avenue (now Moor Park High School). The building was then leased to the Post Office Engineering Department until 1953. In 1955 the decision was made to demolish the whole of the structure.

David Billington quotes the reason given by the council at the time:

> *Historical interest but too far gone inside and potentially dangerous'.*

In 1957 it was demolished.

What was on offer in the Lit & Phil?


Inside Lit and Phil, Preston

Newspaper cuttings provide examples of events at the Lit and Phil and cast light, not only on the interests of the subscribers, but also on how they viewed themselves and their 'English' characteristics. Topics including - Electricity, geology, wildlife, music, astronomy, world alphabets, poetry, the Rise, Progress, and Fall of Ancient Babylon. Baths in mills. Meteorology and far more all featured in Lit & Phil programmes.

Note: **A CONVERSAZIONE** was a scholarly social gathering held for discussion of literature and the arts. The social side of this is evident from the pricing structure.

LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL INSTITUTION

A CONVERSAZIONE will be held in the Society's Rooms, Cross street, Winckley-square, on the evening of Tuesday, the 17th of January, 1860.

PROGRAMME. The Rooms will be thrown open at Seven o'clock, and there will be an exhibition of Works of Art, Photographs &c., in the Museum.

7.30 - Illustrations of English Poetry, by a member of the Institution, in the Lecture Theatre.

8.15 - Music and Glees, in the Library.

9.00 - Philosophical Experiments, in the Lecture Theatre and Museum.

9.30 - Music and Dancing, in the Library.

Admission (including Refreshments): Lady's Ticket, 4s.; Gentleman's Ticket, 5s.; a Family ticket, to admit 3 Ladies and 1 Gentleman, 15s.

Source: Preston Pilot, 14 January 1860

LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

On Thursday evening last, a paper was read before the members by Mr, J. G. Cope, "On the Structure of the English Language, as illustrative of the English Character." The lecturer opened the subject, in which there was both novelty of thought and ingenuity of application, by a glowing eulogium upon the uses and destiny of our language, bearing, as it did, the germs of civilisation and religion to every corner of the globe. The English language, he maintained, was eminently simple, energetic, practical, and acquisitive—so were the people.

Source: Preston Pilot, 24 November 1849

LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL INSTITUTION

Subject: The Sanatory Condition of Preston, Second Part. By the Rev. J. Clay. BD.

The situation of Preston pointed it out, at once as a town which ought to stand high as to its healthy condition. It possessed capacious lungs, each wind of Heaven as it blew upon it, brought only health upon its wings. No pestilent malaria could mingle with it from the north, the east, or the south; whilst the wind from the west, which commonly prevailed, came directly from the sea, bearing, as was well known along with it, the renovating influence of such breezes….. Preston ought to be one of the most healthy towns in her Majesty's dominions.

Source: Preston Pilot, 2 December 1843

Rate Shortfall

The effects of the rate exemption hit Preston's poor hard, and the borough overseer challenged the right of the Lit & Phil to be exempt. Multiple meetings took place between representatives of the Lit & Phil and of the Overseer where the issue was debated. Deals were discussed which would have reduced the sum due and committees of the council, which had no say in the matter, were nevertheless lobbied for support and spent time debating the arguments. The Lit & Phil, through Mr Gilbertson, pointed out in 1867 that they had never been charged in all the years from 1845. The Avenham Institute was in the same situation. It was charged rates for the first time in 1866.

For Sale

If it's a pure coincidence that the decision to build a Lit & Phil followed the Bill which made such institutions exempt from rates, so it might also be a total coincidence that when rates were charged the Lit & Phil struck a deal with the Corporation to sell the building to them. Given the fact that some aldermen and councillors were also shareholders in the Lit & Phil we might expect such people to have stepped aside from the discussions.

A short conversation ensued upon the purchase by the Corporation of the buildings of the Literary and Philosophical Institution, and the transference of Dr. Shepherd's library thither from the Institution at Avenham.

Source: Preston Herald, 23 February 1867

Later in the same year Mr Gilbertson asked a question about the funding.

Mr. Gilbertson said he should like to know where the money had to come from to do all this. — (Laughter.) They had no surplus revenue; they had no means of obtaining money except by borrowing, and he was not aware that they had any power to borrow money for anything of that kind. He thought the expenditure a judicious one, as they have bought the building, but where was the money to come from? Perhaps it would have been more in order if he had made his observations when it was proposed the Council to purchase the building; but he felt himself placed in a rather awkward position, for though he was a vendor he was a rather unwilling one, but he did not think it his duty to say anything on that occasion.

Source: Preston Herald, 27 July 1867

Far from declaring an interest, Mr Gilbertson helped negotiate the sale of the Lit and Phil as both a vendor and a buyer. His money was secure. He was paid out within a year.

LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL INSTITUTION, — A meeting of the subscribers of the above society was held on Thursday last when the accounts were audited, and the money arising from the sale of the premises belonging to the society in Cross-street and Winckley-square was divided.

Source: Preston Pilot, 11 April 1868

Main Sources

The Extraordinary Rise and Inexplicable Decline of Lit & Phils by **Martha Vandrei & Heather Ellis:** History Today Vol 74 Issue 8, August 2024
A Very Preston Affair, the tale of a School and a Square by **David Billington:** PGSA, 2020
History of the Borough of Preston and its Environs, in the County of Lancaster by **Charles Hardwick:** John Worthington & Co., 1857
History of Preston by **Anthony Hewitson:** Preston Chronicle, 1883
British Newspaper Archives (various)
Cotton Mills of Preston by **T.C Dickinson:** Carnegie, 2002
Desirable Dwellings by **Nigel Morgan:** c/o Preston History website



Green Flag Award

For the ninth consecutive year Winckley Square Gardens has received the Green Flag Award and also retained its GREEN HERITAGE accreditation, supported by Historic England.

The award is an international quality mark for parks and green spaces. Ashton Park, Avenham & Miller Parks, Haslam Park and Fishwick Recreation Ground & Local Nature Reserve have also received the award again this year. Well done to all our PCC gardeners and volunteers who together raised the 2025 Flag opposite Winckley Street.





A New Chapter for Winckley Square

Winckley Square has a new addition that celebrates community spirit and the joy of reading: the installation of its very first Little Free Library.

The brightly designed book-sharing box invites visitors, residents, and passers-by to "take a book, leave a book," encouraging free access to literature and fostering a culture of sharing and a love of reading. The initiative, part of the internationally recognised Little Free Library movement, brings Preston closer to a global network of over 150,000 similar libraries.

The library will stock both children's and adults' fiction and non-fiction books and is entirely free to use. All we ask is that if you do take a book, at some point again in the future, please bring one back that you are happy to share with the community.

The Little Free Library initiative is led by Helen Brady is been supported by Friends of Winckley Square, Winckley Square CIC and Preston City Council Parks Team, making it a truly shared resource for everyone who passes through the Square.



©Helen Brady

You can follow Little Free Libraries Lancashire on Instagram **@littlefreelibrarylancs** and if you have any questions, queries or a new idea of a library location, please email the team **littlefreelibrarylancs@gmail.com**

Bring a Spade to Work Day

Local businesses worked with FoWS volunteers and PCC gardeners to spend a day weeding, tidying flower beds and borders, cutting back overgrowth and planting new shrubs and flowers.





Staff from Harrison Drury Solicitors, Frank Whittle Partnership, AtkinRealis and Westinghouse had a *'Bring a Spade to Work Day'*. There were over 30 people working alongside each other and what a difference they made! WICKES provided gardening tools as part of their Community Programme.



If you are interested in being part of the next **WINCKLEY BLITZ** contact Sue Clark who is our FoWS lead gardening volunteer: **csue005@gmail.com**

Photos by Steve Harrison



FRIENDS OF WINCKLEY SQUARE EVENTS

The Summer Winckley Festival in July was a huge success attended by hundreds of families.

Friends of Winckley Square Free Family Fun Festival 26 July 2026

We can offer FREE events every year because of our generous sponsors. **DON'T MISS IT NEXT YEAR**. It was also wonderful to see so many Kate Bushes attending the festival as it followed the Most Wuthering Heights Day in the morning on Miller Park.


FoWS volunteers working on the pop-up licensed bar.

A Special Thank you!

- Barristers Chambers
- Cassidy & Ashton
- David Cox Architects
- Eckersley Property
- Farleys Solicitors
- Frank Whittle Partnership
- Freshfield
- Harrison Drury Solicitors
- Hedley & Co
- MHA
- Michael Bailey Estate Agent
- Service Care Solutions
- Winckley Square Residences
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fifteen Winckley Square

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... with a Little Help from our Friends!

Christmas Events

Annual Christmas Talk by Susan Douglass:

Three Winckley Wartime Christmases

4 & 11 DECEMBER 2025

The afternoon includes a Wartime Christmas slide show followed by the Winckley Christmas Talk.

For the fourth year running we are offering this cosy Christmassy afternoon. It is so popular we offer it twice and each year it is a new talk. Be greeted by Christmas Music whilst you enjoy a mince pie, mulled wine (0%) or hot chocolate, tea and coffee: sitting in the very comfortable seats from the Gaumont Cinema. Hear how three very different families celebrated Christmas in 1914, 1918 and 1945. They are heart-warming stories, melodrama and some surprising real-life plot-twists. Their stories will make you laugh and possibly cry!

Book now to be certain of a place
www.trybooking.com/uk/FIMD

Tickets are also available from the Central Methodist Church, Lune Street.

Winckley Square Christmas Concert 2025

Our annual and ever popular **FREE Winckley Christmas Concert** will take place on **14 December 2025**.

Guided Walks 2026

Our Guided walks run from March to September each year, the dates will follow in subsequent newsletters. However, the Regency Promenade books up very quickly as there is always a waiting list from the previous year, so this is an advance notice.

Slavery, Suffrage, Poverty | Sunday 8 March 2026 | 2pm - 3.15pm

Every year on 8th March to mark International Women's Day, FoWS offers a guided walk to celebrate the achievements of women.

Book early to be assured of a place www.trybooking.com/uk/FJYY

A Regency Promenade with Afternoon Tea | Sunday 14 June 2026

Led by Elaine Taylor, a leading garden historian, the walk will start with afternoon tea in the beautiful Winckley Square Gardens. The group will then follow in the footsteps of former residents who promenaded through Winckley Square Gardens, along Avenham Walk and into Avenham Park. Hear how the gardens have changed over time and visit two fascinating private gardens that open for us one day a year.

Book early to be assured of a place www.trybooking.com/uk/FJVF

Tickets can also be purchased at Central Methodist Church, Lune Street, Preston.

Illustrated Talks

FoWS have several speakers who give talks on different heritage topics to organisations in Lancashire and beyond. We do this to raise the awareness of people who do not live in Preston of its great history. The funds we raise go towards organising free family events.

International Women's Day



The photograph is of the International Women's Day celebratory event that took place at Farley's Solicitors in 2025. In the centre are FoWS speaker, Patricia Harrison and Stephen Bolton, Farleys Head of Business Development and event organiser.

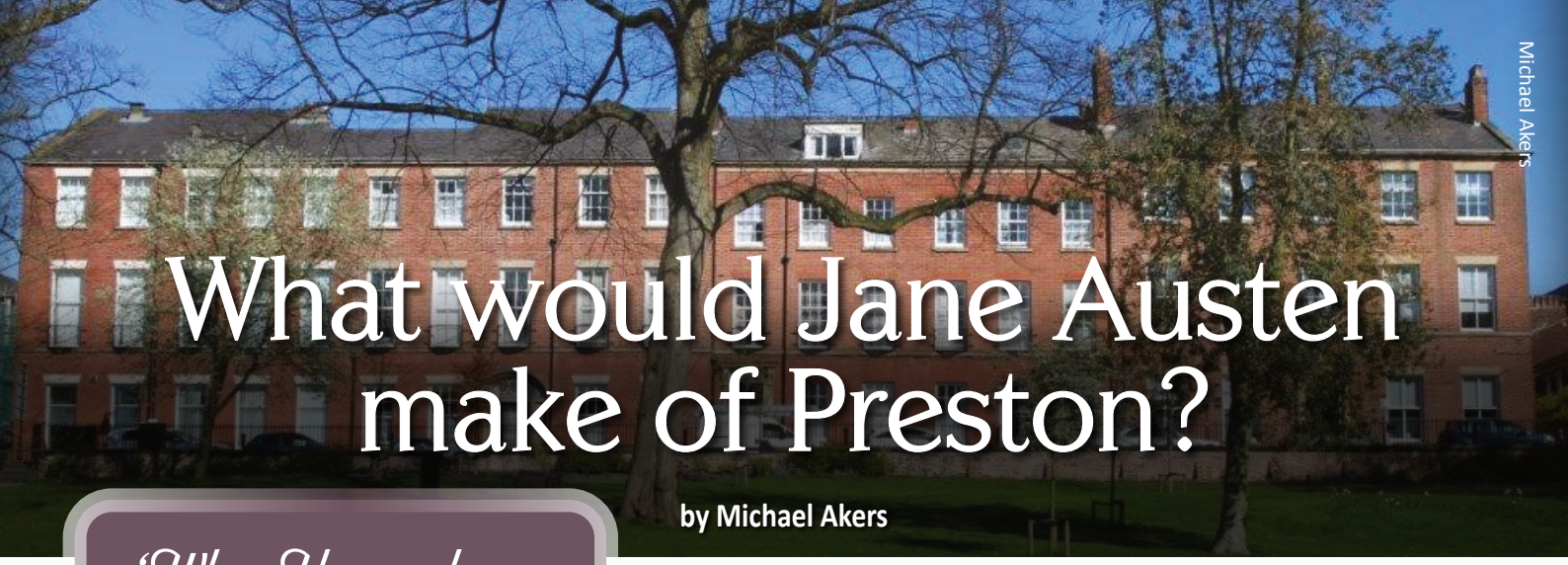
March is WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

The whole of March is **Women's History Month**, and more and more organisations celebrate this every year. FoWS are often approached to provide tailored talks with a focus on women for a wide range of voluntary organisations and local businesses.

Do get in touch if you would like to arrange a FoWS speaker for your group.

Become a SPONSOR

If you would like to SPONSOR a Friends of Winckley Square event to help us continue our work, we would love to hear from you.



Michael Akers

What would Jane Austen make of Preston?

by Michael Akers

> *'When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library',*
>
> exclaims Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's novel, Pride and Prejudice.





£10 note featuring Jane Austen in celebration of her life and significant contribution to English literature and culture.

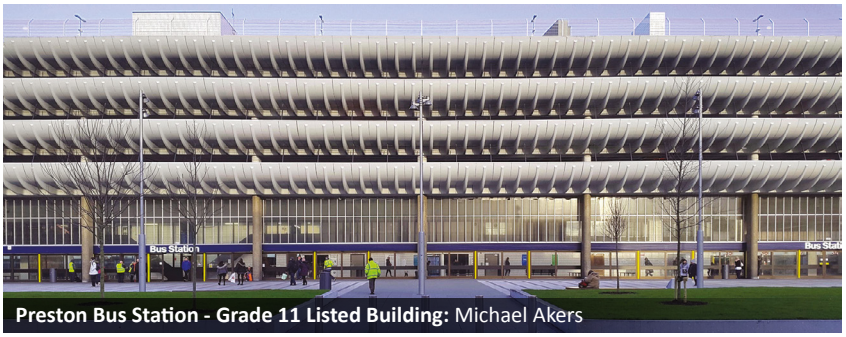
It's 250 years since the author was born and the anniversary has rightly been a cause for much celebration, dressing up, and repeats on TV. It's unlikely that any one person has done more to forge our image today of the Georgian period and the people who appear to have been so lucky to inhabit it. Her writing is a wonderful window into a world whose social dynamics, manners and book reading ambitions seem very much at odds with our own world, and we love it.

In reality, 'Jane's world' captures only a very thin slice of Georgian life. The C18th and early C19th were probably for many people a combination of chaotic, brutal, and downright perplexing. There was almost constant war (usually against our French neighbours), crushing social inequality, a criminally cruel justice system that could hang a child for stealing a handkerchief, and sash windows. Can those windows, and the buildings that so neatly frame them, speak to us about the period in much the same way as an Austen novel?

While Jane has undoubtedly done much to keep the Georgian flame burning (and yes modern hearts fluttering, thank you Mr Darcey), Georgian architecture as a building style is very firmly embedded in our collective consciousness. Many of the Georgian houses that surround Winckley Square were constructed in the same period as Jane was crafting her novels. With their emphasis on symmetry, proportion and simple classical detailing, these houses seem to convey the same innate balance and order that runs through the structured society in a Jane Austen novel.

Towers, turrets and twirly bits

During the long Victorian and Edwardian period that followed the Georgians a very different aesthetic came to prominence. Architecture rejoiced in exuberance and elaboration. The clean lines and simplicity of the Georgians however eventually found new admirers amongst the generation of architects and designers who emerged in the 1930s. These early Modernists rejected ornamentation and found inspiration from the purer classical forms. They sought and found ways of building with new materials and with new technology, and they built much of post war Britain. Those clean lines, symmetry and balance so beloved by the Georgians, and cherished in our very own Georgian gem Winckley Square, were ultimately reinterpreted for the Modern Age. For a great example of how Georgian architecture inspired the Modernists, we need look no further, in my view anyway, than our brilliantly brutal bus station. What would Jane make of it?



Preston Bus Station - Grade 11 Listed Building: Michael Akers

Photographs will be taken and may be used in future marketing and publications unless you ask us not to.

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