

International Women's Day Guided Walk: Nordic Walking Group

Winckley Square Times

Issue 36 | February 2026

Friends of Winckley Square

Annual Christmas Talk: Susan captivated two full houses with her fascinating presentation, ***Three Wartime Christmases in Winckley Square***. It was wonderful to see so many familiar faces, and especially heart-warming to welcome friends who first met four years ago at our very first talk and who now return time and again. Those long-standing connections truly reflect the spirit of FoWS.

Sadly, due to poor weather conditions, our Christmas Concert had to be cancelled: access remains restricted in the south of the gardens. This was a difficult decision, particularly after so much time and effort from our dedicated volunteers. The PCC gardeners had also worked hard in the week leading up to the event to prepare the grounds, making the cancellation more disappointing for everyone.

Every year, FoWS guided walks and talks celebrate **International Women's Day 8 March**. This year's theme, "Give to Gain", focuses on the contributions, achievements, and struggles of three extraordinary women. The walk ***Slavery, Suffrage, Poverty*** explores how suffragists, abolitionists, and advocates for mothers and children challenged unfair norms, broke barriers, and shaped Preston's history.

Our volunteers are busy all year round, as we look ahead save the date **26 July FREE Winckley Summer Festival**, which promises to be another enjoyable community celebration.

Walks and Talks - our knowledgeable tour guides and speakers continue to give talks across Lancashire and beyond, helping to raise funds for our FREE family events in the Gardens. If your group would like a speaker or a bespoke guided tour please do get in touch. Our **2026 Spring Guided Walks** (see page 4). Discover the hidden stories of Preston, whether you're a history lover, curious about your city, or simply seeking an unforgettable stroll, we promise insight, intrigue, and a touch of drama at every turn. We look forward to seeing you at one of our events this year.

Patricia Harrison

Chair of Friends of Winckley Square

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

www.winckleysquarepreston.org



We are grateful for the support we get from Preston City Council, local businesses and individual donors. As a voluntary group we are dependent on the generosity of our sponsors and donors.

Although the concert was cancelled, the Christmas talk raffles raised over £700. We donated surplus food to the Foxton Centre and the Metanoia Project, located in St Wilfrid's Parish Centre, which supports homeless men and women and those living on the fringes of society.

Our great donors were:

- Barristers Chambers
- Alan Jones Chartered Surveyor
- Williams Hand baked Biscuits and Cakes
- MHA Chartered Accountants
- Winckley Square Residences
- Harrison Drury Solicitors
- Service Care Solutions
- Artistry House
- Cassidy and Ashton
- David Cox Architects
- Eckersley Property
- Farleys Solicitors
- FWP
- Freshfield
- Hedley & Co
- Keith Johnson
- Napthens Solicitors
- OneCoWork
- Preston BID
- Sarah O'Halloran
- Society1
- WOR_SPACE



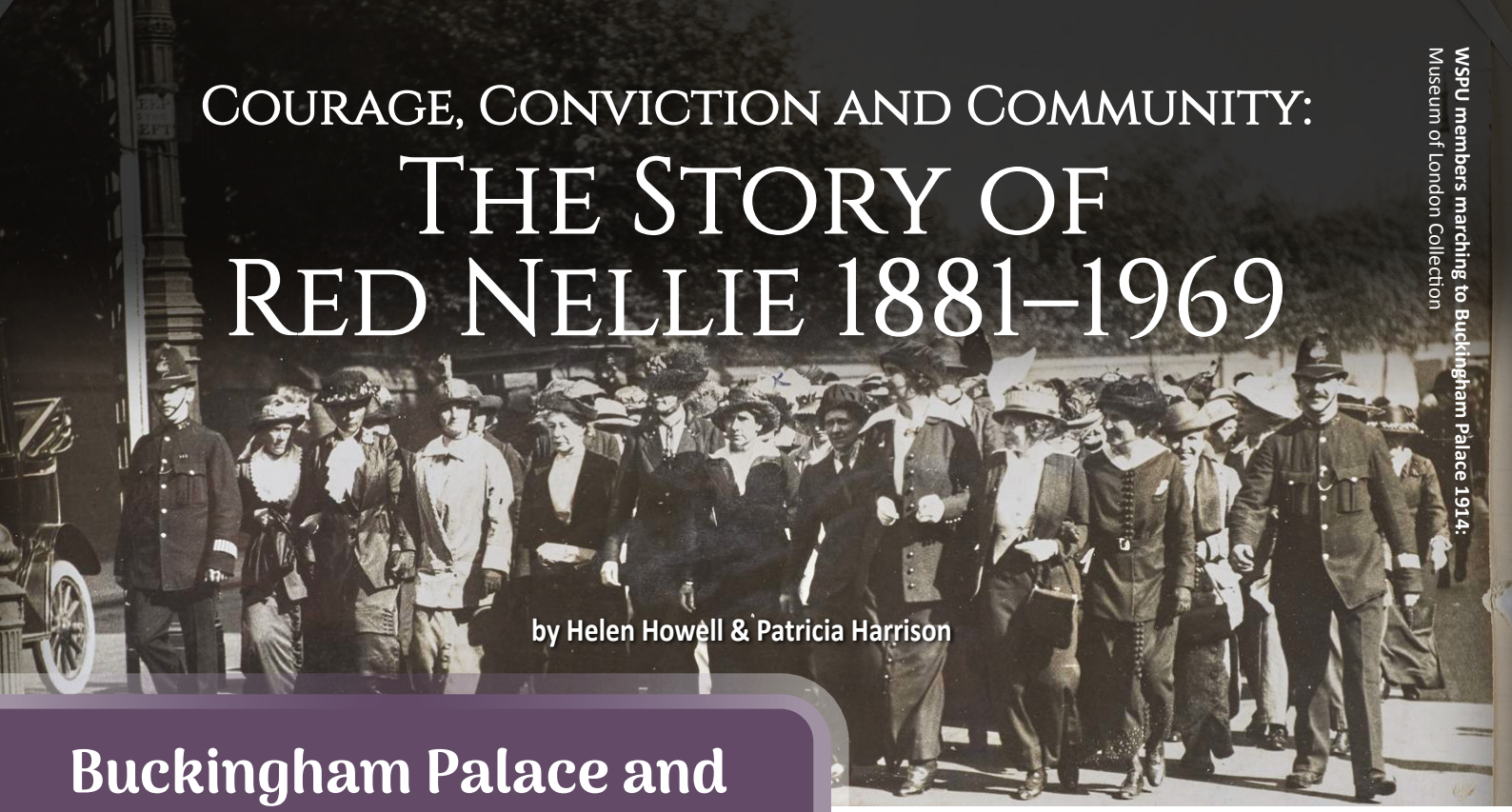
Interested in donating, volunteering or being placed on our mailing list to receive newsletters and details of events?

Please email **patricia@winckley.org.uk**

@WinckleySquare **Friendsofwinckleysquaregardens**

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

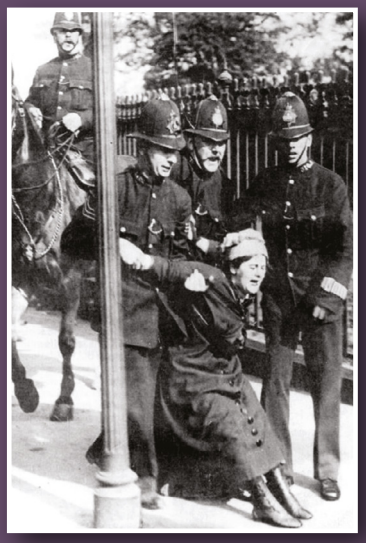
Courage, Conviction and Community: The Story of Red Nellie 1881–1969



WSPU members marching to Buckingham Palace 1914; Museum of London Collection

by Helen Howell & Patricia Harrison

Buckingham Palace and the iconic photograph



The **1914 Petition March** was led by a physically weakened but resolute **Emmeline Pankhurst**. The photograph captures members of the **Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)** walking up Constitution Hill to present a petition to **King George V**, demanding voting rights for women.

Around 200 suffragettes were confronted by approx. 2,000 police officers, leading to violent clashes, injuries, and arrests. This direct appeal to the King followed years of frustration with Parliament and marked one of the final militant actions of the WSPU before campaigns were suspended in August 1914 due to the outbreak of WW1.

Rather than allowing the peaceful demonstration to disperse, police intervened aggressively, using heavy-handed tactics. The photograph taken outside Buckingham Palace, showing Nellie being forcibly restrained, has become an iconic image symbolising the struggle for women's enfranchisement. Despite her small stature, it took four policemen and a horse to arrest her, starkly illustrating the disproportionate force used.

Nellie later recalled the events of the day, explaining that King George V refused to receive the petition.

> *"The King wouldn't receive us. The police man-handled us and we were black and blue all over when we appeared at Bow Street Court."*

Eleanor Beatrice 'Nellie' Higginson, née Ellis, was one of Preston's most courageous campaigners for women's rights. A teacher, businesswoman and mother, she became a leading figure in the suffragette movement, enduring arrest, imprisonment, hunger strikes and force-feeding in her determination to secure votes for women. Nellie and Edith Rigby were leading figures in the suffragette movement in Preston and nationally. Nellie's activism left an enduring mark on local and national history. Later known as **"Red Nellie"** for her lifelong commitment to social justice, she continued to serve her community long after the vote was won, leaving a powerful legacy of courage, conviction and civic duty.

Edith Rigby (1872–1950)

Nellie and Edith were close friends. Edith lived on Winckley Square, while Nellie lived around the corner at 35 Cannon Street. Both were passionate about inequality and injustice, and both were prominent suffragettes and social reformers. Like many other women, they endured imprisonment and hardship for the cause. Edith founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Preston and was a tireless organiser, speaker, and campaigner for women's suffrage and wider social justice.

Together, the Preston suffragettes helped place the town firmly on the national map in the struggle for women's right to vote.

Eleanor Beatrice Ellis: Marriage

Nellie was born in Upton, Essex, on the 19 April 1881. Her parents were both from Manchester; her mother worked as a teacher before marriage, and her father was a merchant seaman.

Nellie's family moved to Preston sometime between 1891 and 1901 to 30, Brieryfield Road, in the Christ Church part of the town. When Nellie was 19, she worked as a schoolteacher. Four years later, in 1905, she married Arnold Higginson at St Peters Church in Swinton, Lancashire which is where she was living at the time. Arnold Higginson was an analyst from Preston, who lived at 1, Bairstow Street in Avenham.

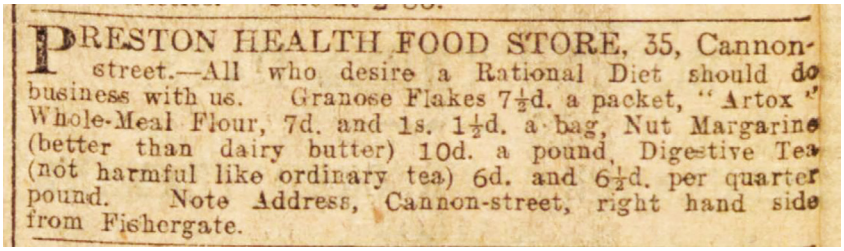


Eleanor Beatrice Ellis and Arnold Higginson at Barton Upon Irwell, Lancashire: Family Photograph

Family Life and Enterprise

By 1911, the Higginson family were living at 35, Cannon Street in Preston with their young children: four-year-old Constance, known as 'Bernie', and five-month-old Gabriel Duncan. After the First World War, Nellie would go on to have two more children, Edith May and Eustace.

Arnold Higginson worked as an analytical chemist for the Ribble Joint Committee on Water and Sewage, while Nellie was an entrepreneur in her own right. From their home on Cannon Street, she ran a health food shop and dealt in vegetarian foods. The shop became a regular meeting place for local activists and was often visited by Edith Rigby, who recruited Nellie into the suffrage movement.



PRESTON HEALTH FOOD STORE, 35, Cannon-street.—All who desire a Rational Diet should do business with us. Granose Flakes 7½d. a packet, "Artox" Whole-Meal Flour, 7d. and 1s. 1½d. a bag, Nut Margarine (better than dairy butter) 10d. a pound, Digestive Tea (not harmful like ordinary tea) 6d. and 6½d. per quarter pound. Note Address, Cannon-street, right hand side from Fishergate.

Nellie's Health Food Store: Lancashire Evening Post, 26 October 1910

Pre-decimal currency *until 1971*

d. (pence)
from the Latin denarius

s. or /– (shilling)
from the Latin solidus

£ (pound)
from the Latin libra

½d. = ha'penny

12 pence (12d.) = 1 shilling (1s.)

120 pence = 10/– or 10s

240 pence = £1

20 shillings (20s.) = £1

Examples from the advert

7½d.
= seven and a half pence (just over half a shilling)

1s. 1½d.
= one shilling and one and a half pence (13½d.)

10d.
= ten pence (⅝ of a shilling)

6d.
= six pence (half a shilling)

6½d. per quarter pound
= six and a half pence for 4 oz (¼ lb)

Bernie's first steps into the Suffrage Movement

Nellie's early involvement in the suffrage campaign was limited by her responsibilities as a mother of two young children. Nevertheless, she took her seven-year-old daughter, Bernie, with her on a suffrage march through Preston, where demonstrators were pelted with cauliflower stalks at the market. When Bernie died in 1988, she was remembered as one of the last surviving suffragettes.

Leadership and Militancy in Preston

In 1913, Nellie assumed the role of secretary of the Preston branch of the Women's Social and Political Union after Edith Rigby fled to Ireland. She quickly emerged as a determined and effective militant campaigner. Over the course of her activism, she was imprisoned in Holloway Gaol on three occasions, undertook hunger strikes, and endured force-feeding.



Force Feeding Holloway Prison: BBC

Her activities in support of the cause were wide-ranging. She was involved in a foiled plot to set fire to the grandstand at Preston North End and was among a group of suffragettes who disrupted the lives of Preston's businessmen by dropping acid into letterboxes in the early evening, when they were filled with business correspondence. She also participated in marches in both Preston and London, where she took part in rallies and window-smashing campaigns.

Nellie:

Fire raising, window smashing jail bird!

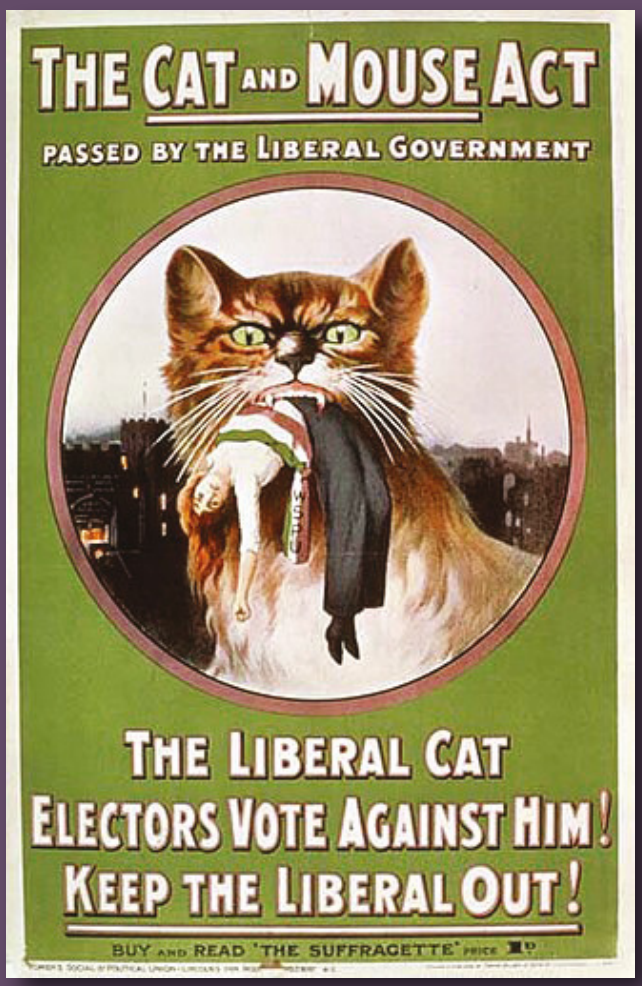
She took part in the window-smashing campaign in London and later explained that the suffragettes ***'…. did not do it in the same way as small boys – throw a stone and run away.'***

Instead, they hurled bricks through plate-glass windows and stood their ground, waiting to be arrested. Even so, she was determined to act with purpose: she targeted only government buildings and refused to damage shop windows.

She was among 200 women arrested and taken into custody. The following day, when police arrived to identify their prisoners, the women had cleverly changed hats, leaving officers struggling to tell them apart. None of them gave their names; to every question they replied with the same defiant answer: ***'Votes for Women.'***

> *The Government pretends that this Act is humane. I say it is cruel beyond words. It is playing with human life, letting women out when they are near death, only to drag them back again when they have regained a little strength. It is not justice; it is persecution, calculated and deliberate.*
>
> **Emmeline Pankhurst**

Nellie, like all the suffragettes, was aware that she would be sentenced to prison for her actions. She even went to see her doctor first, to ask if it would be all right to leave her husband. As the doctor said it was all right for her to leave him for a week, she promised faithfully only to go to prison for one week. She was sentenced to a whole month.



Propaganda poster against the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act 1913. legislation passed by Parliament to manage hunger-striking suffragettes: Wikipedia

Hunger Strikes and the Cat and Mouse Act

While in prison, Nellie joined her fellow suffragette prisoners in a hunger strike that lasted nine days. She later remarked wryly,

> *not that the food was fit to eat!*

The protest had severe consequences: Nellie was subjected to the brutal practice of force-feeding.

By 1913, the government introduced the so-called **Cat and Mouse Act**, under which hunger-striking prisoners were temporarily released when they became dangerously ill, only to be re-arrested once they had recovered enough to continue their sentences. Under this policy, Nellie was released to her home in Preston to regain her strength, before being arrested again and returned to prison in London.

Women Get the Vote – 1928

In 1928, women were given the same voting rights as men. When the Prime Minister at the time, Stanley Baldwin, said it was because of the way women had acted during the war, Nellie Higginson did not agree:

> *"Women have carried out similar duties in war-time since history began .... No! It was the insurance brokers responsible for getting us the vote. We caused over £40,000 worth of damage for them."*

"Red Nellie"

– A Lifetime of Social Activism (1928–1954)

Known affectionately by her family as **"Red Nellie"** Nellie dedicated her life to causes she was passionate about and worked hard to alleviate conditions for the disenfranchised in society through her campaigning, voluntary work, and devotion to civic duty. She was:

- A member of the **Preston Branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union** for 23 years (1928–1953) and served on the union committee.
- **Preston Labour Town Councillor** 1940- 1945 for St John's Ward Preston.
- Member of **the Court of Referees** for 17 years
- **Member of the Local Employment Committee**
- Member of the **Advisory Panel to the Assistance Board**
- Leader of the **Ashton Baptist Rest Centre** during World War II
- **Chairman** [sic] **Preston Women's Allotment Association**
- Key participant in Preston's **Road Safety Campaign** chairing the **Publicity and Home Safety Advisory Board**
- **Justice of the Peace** (1945- 1954), though she later said she did not enjoy sending people to prison, after having served sentences herself.

Later Years



Arnold died in 1938 in Preston. Nellie moved to Bognor Regis in 1955 with friend and fellow suffragette Beth Hesmondhalgh. She named her home 37, Mansfield Road *"Pankhurst"*. She was often found on the public speaking circuit, regaling audiences with tales of her time as a suffragette.

She had no regrets, and spoke unashamedly and with pride of her past actions.



Beth with Nellie on the left, proudly wearing her hunger strike medal.

Helen has written a longer version of Nellie's life to be uploaded on the FoWS website. It has all the sources Helen used in her research.

Helen is also presenting a talk for Preston Historical Society on:

Monday 9 March 2026

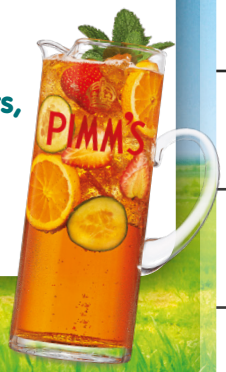
Beatrice Blackhurst's Scrapbook:
leisure, voluntary action and social change in Preston in the early 20th Century.

Spring Guided Walks



Winckley Square Summer Festival 26 July.

Fun for adults, kids and everyone in between.



Walks - price and how to book

£5 unless stated otherwise

Walks fill up very quickly. It is always better to book early at **www.trybooking.com/uk** *(search for Winckley Square)*.

Problem booking? Contact **patricia@winckley.org.uk**

Guided Walks start in the centre of Winckley Square unless stated otherwise.

4 March **2pm - 3.15pm** **Guide:** Peter Wilkinson	**Notable Residents of Winckley Square – famous and infamous** Winckley Square- In the Beginning. Starting with the vision for the Square and the first house in 1799 we will encounter real people who made history. **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXLW
8 March **2pm - 3.15pm** **Guide:** Susan Douglass & Steve Harrison	**Slavery, Suffrage, Poverty** This International Women's Day, meet the trailblazing women of Winckley Square Quarter. Discover how suffragists, abolitionists, and advocates for mothers and children defied unfair norms, broke barriers, and shaped history. **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FJYY
17 March, 22 April & 5 May **2pm - 3pm** **Guide:** Susan Spall	**Where Walls Speak: Exploring Preston's Murals** Celebrate how the city's heritage, culture and iconic murals have transformed streets into a vibrant urban gallery. ***Meet at the Obelisk, Flag Market by the Harris.*** **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FWLQ
29 March **10am - 12.15pm** **Guide:** Nigel Hardacre	**Lancaster Canal and Tram Road** The 2.5 mile walk follows the Old Tram Road to Carr Wood cottage, with stops and narration along the way. Return via the old East Lancs railway bridge, blending history and scenic views. **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FWTY
8 April **2pm - 3.15pm** **Guide:** Peter Wilkinson	**Preston it's a Gas** Explore Preston, the first town outside London with public gas. Visit the first gas works, 1816 ceremony obelisk, coal yards, and early buildings lit by gas, uncovering the city's gas history. **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXLX
12 April **11am - 12.30pm** **Guide:** Michael Akers	**'Drawing Board Dreams' and the Reinvention of Preston** In the 1960s and early 70s, ambitious planners and architects attempted to remake Preston with bold modernist ideas. This tour, which includes the iconic bus station, will ask what drove this reimagined future. ***The walk begins and ends outside the Guild Hall, Lancaster Road.*** **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXLY
18 April & 23 May **10am - 12 noon** **Guide:** Helen Howell	**Preston Suffragette and Suffragist Guided Walk** Follow Preston women fighting for the vote, from famed Edith Rigby to lesser-known suffragettes. ***Meet at the Obelisk, Flag Market, finishes at 1842, Lune Street.*** **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/ELTZ
18 April **2pm - 3.15pm** **Guide:** Susan Douglass	**Servants: The Hidden Occupants of Winckley Square** The wealthy residents of Winckley Square relied on servants to run their grand homes. Discover the hidden lives of these overlooked individuals and the surprising twists in their stories. **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXLG
25 April **10am - 12.15pm** **Guide:** Nigel Hardacre	**The Old Tram Road Route: Bamber Bridge** Part 2 of Nigel Hardacre's *'Lancaster Canal and Tram Road Walk'*. Follow the Old Tram Road route, and other local history features from C19 and C20. ***Meet at Ye Olde Hob Inn.*** **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXKK
25 April & 21 May **10.15am - 12 noon** **Guide:** Judy Beeston	**Edith Rigby: A Life that Scandalised Preston** Take a step back in time and follow in the footsteps of Preston's most famous suffragette. Visit key locations in her life: where she was born, married and lived. **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXLE
4 May **2pm - 3.30pm** **Guide:** Steve Harrison	**Preston the Jerusalem of Temperance** It is almost 200 years since the *'seven men of Preston'* signed the first total abstinence pledge, initiating the influential Temperance movement. Preston was recognised in the C19 and C20 centuries as *'the birthplace of teetotalism'*. ***Meet in front of the Blue Bell Pub, 114 Church Street.*** **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXLT
5 May **2pm - 3.15pm** **Guide:** Susan Douglass	**The Cotton Lords of Winckley Square** This walk explores the lives of the wealthy industrialists who shaped Preston's cotton industry. The "Cotton Lords" were pillars of the local economy, but they were also criticised for their power and wage practices during industrial unrest. **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXLQ
16 May **10am - 12.30pm** **Guide:** Nigel Hardacre	**Tracing the Tramway: Tracks though Time** Follow the historic Tramway through Avenham Park, across the new bridge, and down to Carr Wood, blending history, nature, and industrial heritage. **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXKL
19 May **6.30pm - 8pm** **Guide:** Michael Akers	**The Bridges that made Preston** In a beautiful setting, this riverside walk explores why bridges were built, their social and economic impact, and celebrates their stories. ***Meet at The Old Penwortham Bridge, Broadgate side.*** **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FXOW
14June **12.30pm - 2.15pm** **Guide:** Elaine Tayor	**A Regency Promenade with Afternoon Tea** Step back into Regency Preston on a guided promenade. Enjoy afternoon tea with Pimm's and cake, stroll through Winckley Square and Avenham Park, and visit two private gardens. ***Meet south side of Winckley Square Gardens*** **| £15pp** **To book:** https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FJVF

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

heritage lottery fund LOTTERY FUNDED

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WINCKLEY SQUARE COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY

PRESTON CITY CENTRE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT BID