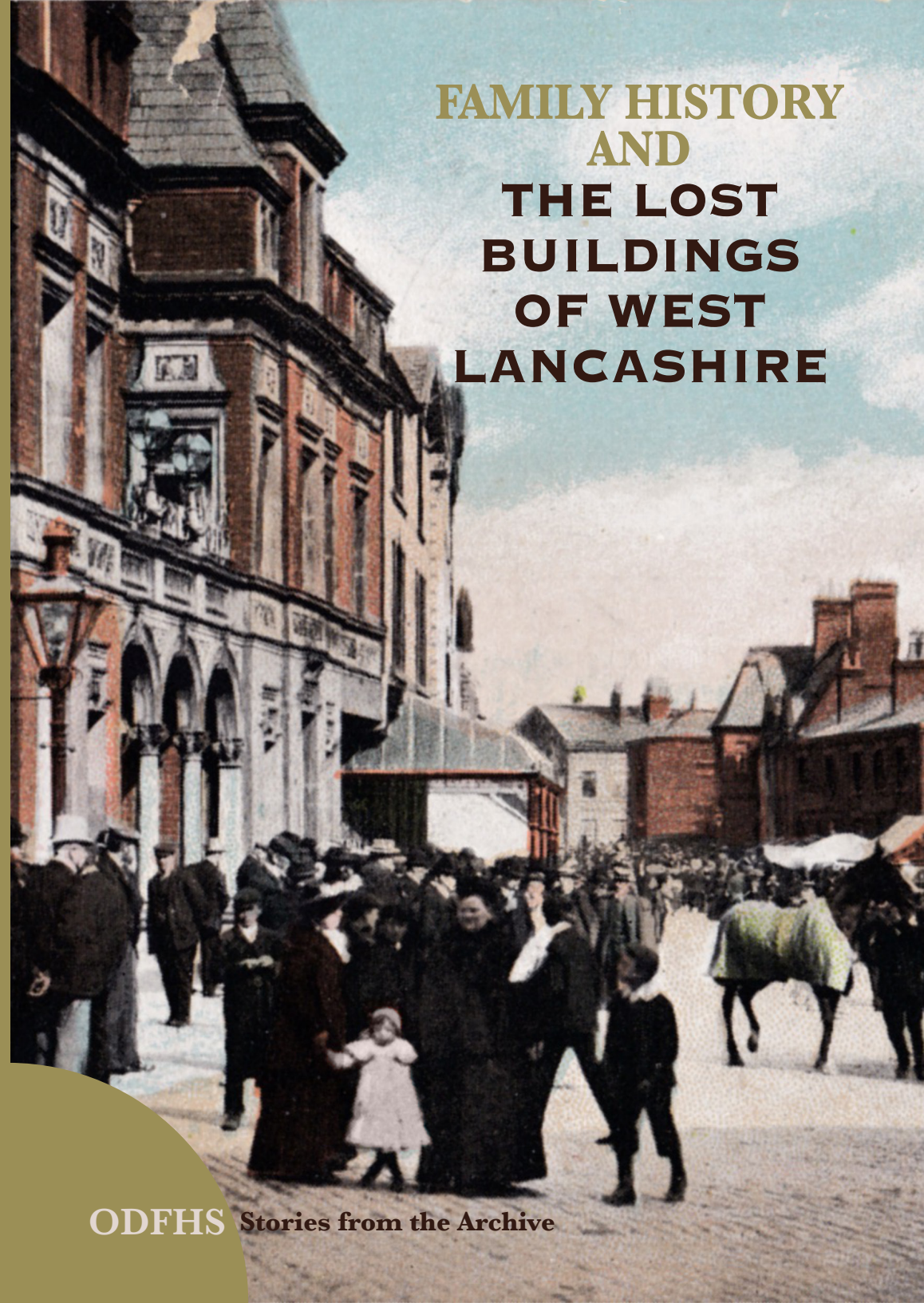


West Lancashire's rich heritage is not always obvious in the 21st century. Many architectural features of the past have been lost to wars, politics, industrialisation, neglect and changing tastes. This booklet brings the history of these important buildings and the families associated with them back to life.



**ORMSKIRK AND DISTRICT
FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY**
Stories from the Archive Series

Funded by Lancashire County Council
and ODFHS crowdfunded donations.



**FAMILY HISTORY
AND
THE LOST
BUILDINGS
OF WEST
LANCASHIRE**

ODFHS Stories from the Archive

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Readers are advised to check access arrangements before attempting to visit locations mentioned in this publication as not all are freely accessible.

INTRODUCTION

The buildings featured in this publication may no longer serve their original purpose, and in some cases have been demolished in favour of more modern structures, but their impact on the history of West Lancashire lives on.

Whether a home for a religious order, a gathering place for the community or a manor house employing an array of domestic servants, all of the sites have a social history and we, as a family history society are naturally interested in the details that bring these buildings to life.

We invite you to enjoy this walk back through the history of our local area as we explore some long-forgotten sites, the purpose they served and their significance to past generations of the people of West Lancashire. Perhaps this slim volume will inspire you to begin your own research into the local past?



The atmospheric ruins of Lydiat Hall photographed by Kate Hurst in 2015

Ormskirk and District Family History Society have created this book using funds from Lancashire County Council and those generous enough to donate to our 2023 crowdfunding appeal. We thank everyone who has supported us.

Kate Hurst

Chair of Ormskirk and District Family History Society, May 2024

THE OLD WINDMILL, AUGHTON MOSS

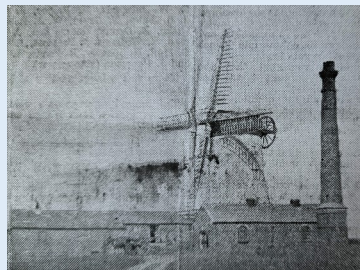
Of the many windmills in the Ormskirk area almost all are now lost, yet through historical records we can get a sense of these buildings which would have once dominated the landscape and played a vital role in feeding the local population. Over 500 years ago the Aughton Moss Mill was built on raised ground on top of Holborn Hill, in the area now called Colinmander Gardens.

The earliest document mentioning the Aughton Moss Mill, also known as Whimbrick Mill, dates back to 1418 when the widow of Richard Bradeshagh settled the manor of Up Litherland (Aughton) on her son, Richard. This included all rents with the exception of the windmill. It next appears in a document of the late 1480s when the altar of Our Lady in the chantry at Ormskirk Parish Church was endowed by Sir Thomas Stanley of Lathom with the annual rent of "one wyndmylle" occupied by Hugh Martyndale.

It is thought that originally there would have been a post-mill on the site, an early type of windmill with a small body housing the machinery and large sails that could make it unstable. Over the years the post-mill came into the possession of many owners including Henry Moorcroft who left it to his son in his will of 1575. The lawyer John Plumbe of Wavertree Hall in Liverpool bought the ruined post-mill in 1725. By 1730 it had been rebuilt in brick in a pepper-pot shape standing on a wide brick platform.

Wind power to steam

The windmill continued to play its part in feeding the growing population of the area. By the nineteenth century changes in agricultural methods such as the use of fertilisers, new types of crops and the enclosure of farm land (prompted locally by the Aughton Enclosure Act of 1815) meant increased food production. New ways of milling were needed to keep up with demand, wind power was not enough and in the early 1850s Aughton Moss Mill was converted to steam power.



A rare photograph from the 1870s showing sails still in place despite the use of steam



A postcard from 1905 showing the mill in its final years after the removal of the distinctive sails

In the nineteenth century the Fletcher and Gardner families were connected with the running of the mill for over sixty years. Lawrence Gardner, originally from Preesall in Lancashire, was in residence at the time the mill was converted from sails to steam. When he died in 1870 he was buried at Christ Church, Aughton. His son, also Lawrence, continued in business until he was succeeded by John Fletcher who had worked at the mill since the 1840s and continued to do so until his death in 1881. He was succeeded by his son, James, who retired in the late 1890s. Advertisements placed throughout John Fletcher's tenure suggest a man with a direct style of address as demonstrated by the two examples below.

WANTED,

a Strong Boy,

**With some knowledge of
gardening, and able to milk.**

**Apply at the
Aughton Moss Mill**

Ormskirk Advertiser 30 July 1868

WANTED, Immediately,

**a MILLER, one who understands Country
Work, none other need apply.**

**Apply to John Fletcher,
Aughton Moss Wind and Steam Corn Mill,
near Ormskirk**

Ormskirk Advertiser 31 October 1872

Decline and demolition

By the early 1900s mechanised milling methods were used for food production so mills throughout the area fell into disrepair, disuse and were eventually demolished (this fate befell the Town Green Mill in 1907 although it was nowhere near the age of Aughton Moss Mill). In the early years of the twentieth century the premises were used for storage until eventually in March 1908 the old mill was taken down. A newspaper report published a few days after its demise recorded the event:

Aughton Moss Mill—Whimbrick Mill, to give it its proper title—has been pulled down within the past few days. Formerly the mill was a prosperous one, and was the rendezvous of local farmers with their grain. The mill stood upon the most elevated position of Aughton Moss, and was once the distinguishing object for mariners on board ship entering the Mersey.

The foundations

Excavations of the site carried out many years later found the mill's foundations, still lined by local Aughton sandstone, almost intact. They consisted of a series of unusually shaped areas used to hold the wooden structure; in the centre was a deep hole with the remains of decayed oak timbers. Four channels extended from the centre in the shape of a Maltese Cross and one of the foundation channels, which extended for several metres, was given a concrete roof and steps. During the Second World War this was used as an air raid shelter.

Today there is little evidence above ground to show the mill ever existed and modern houses predominate in the area. The raised, circular and rocky site in the centre of Colinmander Gardens has not been built on. The ground is covered in grass and bushes and large patches of stone are visible; carvings on the stone are probably recent.

New roads, old names

Traces of the mill survive in local names such as Wimbrick Farm and the imposing Wimbrick House, built around 1783, which still stands on Prescott Road. In more recent times newly built roads have been named Wimbrick Close and Wimbrick Crescent and serve as reminders of the mill that for centuries formed a central feature of local life.

Modern day Old Mill Hill follows a direct line to the old windmill site



THE DOUGLAS CHAPEL

“Here stood Old Douglas Chapel, for four full centuries loved and thronged by those who worshipped God from all the country round.”

The very ancient Chapel of our Blessed Lady, known as “Douglas Chapel” stood in a valley near the River Douglas at the foot of Parbold Hill. It was demolished in the late 1870s shortly after the new Christ Church of Douglas-in-Parbold was completed. A stone cross with the above inscription was erected on the former site in 1906.

The chapel's origins are shrouded in folklore and traditions and probably date back to Saxon times. In those days the area was little more than a boggy wasteland on the edge of the large mere which dominated the landscape. The first serious research into the history of the chapel was published in 1895 by William Frederick Price, son of the last incumbent. He was very familiar with the building and its history and noted strong links with the Lathom family and architectural features dating from the 1420s.



The Douglas Chapel in the 1870s

Changing times

As with many religious buildings the chapel was altered and changed according to the requirements of the day. During the Reformation the interior is likely to have become much plainer in style and in the Civil War it suffered at the hands of Parliamentary soldiers laying siege to nearby Lathom House who used it to stable their horses.

All was not lost when the chapel was demolished, several pieces of furniture were installed in the new church including the pulpit and font whilst the memorial was carved from the old threshold stone. A public footpath runs past the site, this can be accessed from the Parbold Local Council car park.

BURSCOUGH PRIORY

There are almost no visible signs today of the large priory which once dominated the surrounding countryside. A few remnants of stonework located in a private garden two miles from Ormskirk are all that remain.

For almost 350 years the canons of Burscough Priory held great influence and power over the everyday lives of people under their jurisdiction both spiritually and economically. Their way of life continued, essentially unchanged since the foundation of the priory in 1190, until it was brought to an abrupt end in 1536 by the orders of Henry VIII. Although little is left of this once magnificent building, archaeologists, antiquarians and historians have sought to unlock its secrets, whilst artists and photographers have been inspired by the beauty of its ruins.



The remains of the once majestic Burscough Priory were photographed in the early 1900s by prolific local photographer Alfred Wragg

The priory was founded by Robert Fitz-Henry who became lord of the nearby manor of Lathom in the late twelfth century. Robert was of Norman descent and like many noblemen of the time he wanted to ensure spiritual comfort for himself, his family and the local population. He endowed the priory with extensive lands in Burscough and the township of Marton, the Chapel of St. Leonard in Knowsley and also bestowed patronage of the parish churches of Ormskirk, Huyton and Flixton. The priory was dedicated to St. Nicholas and was administered by followers of St. Augustine, also known as Black Canons after the colour of their habits.

The priory became very important to the area of West Lancashire for its religious influence and also the care it gave to its community. Those in need would be given food and drink in the priory's Beggar's Yard, whilst by the early fourteenth century local nobleman Richard de Tarbock allowed use of a building at Ridgate near Huyton as a hospital for lepers. This was later given to the priory.

Burscough Priory and Ormskirk

Given its proximity to Ormskirk, it is not surprising that the priory had an important influence on the history of the town. In 1286 Edward I granted the prior and canons of Burscough Priory a market charter for Ormskirk. It gave them the right to hold a weekly market on a Thursday and an annual fair lasting five days starting on the Feast of John the Baptist (29th August). The priory benefitted from the market as the canons had the right to charge rent on stalls and levy tolls on those who purchased goods. The canons were also responsible for making Ormskirk a borough and established law courts to administer it. Almost without exception vicars of Ormskirk were members of the Augustinian Order or closely associated with the priory. Even in the few exceptions the canons had to approve the appointment and the vicar was subject to their jurisdiction.



The seal to surrender of Burscough Priory as sketched by James Bromley in his 1889 archaeological notes

Despite their piety the canons were not immune to scandal

One of the most intriguing cases relates to charges of divination, sortilege and black arts brought in 1454 against the Prior and several others including William Bolton, Vicar of Ormskirk. All denied that any invocation of demons or sacrifice had taken place, but Bishop Boulers was not convinced and suspended them from priestly office or receiving the sacraments for two years.

Burscough Priory and Ormskirk Parish Church

In 1390 the lordship of the manor and the lands of Lathom passed to the Stanley family through an advantageous marriage. The priory church became the chosen burial place for several high profile members of the family, including Sir John Stanley in 1414 and Thomas Stanley, 1st Earl of Derby in 1504.

As a priory with less than £200 per year, Burscough was dissolved by Act of Parliament in 1536. At the time of its surrender the religious community consisted of only five canons, including the prior. The Earl of Derby tried to save the church, but payments demanded by the King's commissioners were too high. Some of the buried remains and several effigies were moved to Ormskirk Parish Church and later interred in the Derby Chapel which was commissioned by the 3rd Earl in 1572. Several bells were also moved to Ormskirk, the original tenor bell can be viewed in the Bickerstaffe Chapel.

Ownership of the priory lands has changed many times. In 1547 the King granted the site of the late priory of Burscough and all buildings to Sir William Paget who was principal Secretary of State. In 1614 they came under the ownership of Robert Hesketh and William Bradshaw.



Effigies removed from Burscough Priory can be seen in the Derby Chapel of Ormskirk Parish Church today

James Bromley and the first excavation of Burscough Priory

In 1886, James Bromley, a local antiquarian from Lathom, led an exploration of the lands on which the priory stood on behalf of The British Archaeological Association. Bromley's findings, with illustrations, were published in 1889 under the title *Notes on some recent excavations at Burscough Priory*.

The priory ruins stand on privately owned land, and cannot be accessed without permission, however, there are several public footpaths in the area.



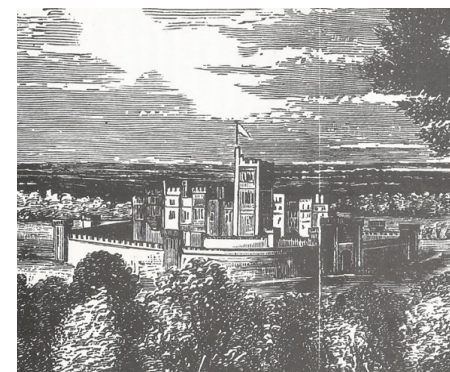
Ceramic floor tiles from illustrations by James Bromley

THE TALE OF TWO LATHOM HOUSES

The history of the once great Lathom House, home to Lancashire nobility of the highest order, stretches back many centuries. There has been more than one mansion on the same site, although little remains today.

At the time of William the Conqueror in 1066, the manor of Lathom was a large and wealthy estate covering 360 acres of farmland and 720 acres of woodland. It was inherited by the Lathom family in the eleventh century and remained in their hands until 1385 when Isobel Lathom, daughter and heiress of Sir Thomas Lathom, married Sir John Stanley and the manor passed to the Stanley family.

In 1496 an earlier wooden structure was replaced by a stone built castle befitting the status and wealth of the Earls of Derby. A carving in Manchester Cathedral is the only known contemporary depiction of this substantial fortified manor house, but artists and historians have sought to recreate its image. It was said to have nine towers, each equipped with six cannon plus a high vantage point known as the *Eagle Tower* giving excellent views of the countryside. With strong defences, the castle was surrounded by an embankment, substantial outer walls and a wide moat.



An artist's impression of Thomas Stanley's Lathom House published in the early nineteenth century



Margaret Beaufort, first Countess of Derby

The Stanley family moved in the highest royal circles and held influential offices at court. In 1472 Sir Thomas Stanley married Margaret Beaufort, a famous figure in English history and mother of Henry VII. Thomas was made Earl of Derby following the Battle of Bosworth in 1485.

Henry VII is known to have visited his mother at Lathom House during his reign and is reputed to have stood on the top of the Eagle Tower to survey the lands owned by his father-in-law.

The Siege of Lathom

The Stanley family were staunch Royalists which led to a siege of the house by Parliamentarians during the English Civil War. In February 1644 James Stanley, 7th Earl of Derby, was in the Isle of Man, a Stanley power base. It was left to his wife, Countess Charlotte, to defend the house with 300 men. Her brave refusal to surrender has become a legendary story. She held for two months until the arrival of Prince Rupert of the Rhine and the Royalist cavalry. With the house safe, Charlotte and her children left to join the Earl. When the house was besieged for a second time, Colonel Rawsthorne and the 45 men deployed to defend it were no match for the 4,000 Parliamentarians surrounding them. With supplies running short and no sign of any help arriving, Rawsthorne had no option but to surrender which he did on 2nd December 1645. Following this the building was ransacked, plundered, and, by Order of Parliament, levelled to the ground.



Charlotte Stanley, Countess of Derby

The second Lathom House



In 1714 all that remained of the house and land was purchased by Sir Thomas Bootle, MP for Liverpool, who had the house rebuilt in the neo-classical style. This took 15 years and was completed in 1740.

An engraving of Lathom House from the "Portfolio of Fragments relative to the Duchy of Lancaster", 1869

The Wilbraham-Bootle family (and Bootle-Wilbraham)

When Sir Thomas Bootle died without issue, his brother Robert inherited the estate. Robert's daughter Mary became the heir. Under the terms of her uncle's will when she married Richard Wilbraham of Rode Hall, Cheshire in 1755 the couple were obliged to retain the Bootle name, therefore the family became known as Wilbraham-Bootle.



Lady Alice, Countess of Lathom

Richard and Mary had eight children, all born at Lathom House. Their eldest son, Edward, inherited the Lathom Estates in 1796. Edward changed the order of his surname to Bootle-Wilbraham in 1814 and whilst in service to George IV was created 1st Baron Skelmersdale in 1828. He was succeeded to the barony by his grandson, another Edward, who married Lady Alice Villiers and became Earl of Lathom in 1880. The Earl and Countess were great supporters of the local community, and in 1897, when Alice was killed in a tragic carriage accident there was a public outpouring of grief. Heartbroken, the Earl died the following year.

The second Earl lived only until 1910 and under the tenure of the third Earl the house was used for military purposes during the First World War. Some of the land surrounding it was developed into a Remount Depot for the training of military horses. Following the war, the Earl preferred to live in the nearby Blythe Hall and in 1924 the estate was put up for sale.

The house was found to be in a sorry state. The east and west wings were put up for sale separately with an option for the buyer to purchase the central building for £100 on the understanding it would be demolished and the site cleared within 12 months. Eventually Mr. John Bell, a dairyman from Ormskirk, purchased the west wing, which included the stables and coach yard. Shortly afterwards he exercised his option and demolished the main house. Both wings remained until the east wing was taken down in 1962. Only the west wing and stables survive, these are now private apartments.



Lathom Hall during demolition in 1925

SKELMERSDALE TOWN HALL AND “THE MINERS’ FRIEND”

The Lancashire volume of Arthur Mee’s famous 1936 guide book *“The King’s England”* noted three things about Skelmersdale; *“the bust of the miners’ friend, Thomas Aspinwall on the little town hall ... a soldier on the green in memory of those who did not come back”* and the tragic story of the Tawd Vale Mine, devastated by explosion on 30th November 1897.



Skelmersdale Town Hall, war memorial and garden

Skelmersdale’s war memorial

The Memorial unveiled by the Earl of Derby on 25th August 1923 still stands in its original position on the corner of Sandy Lane and Clayton Street. It depicts a soldier looking towards the now demolished railway station where many of Skelmersdale’s soldiers embarked on their last journey. In 1925 the Ormskirk Advertiser claimed that no other public war memorial in the district was better tended than the little garden adjoining the Town Hall.

The Town Hall was built in 1877 at a time when the population of the township was growing rapidly due largely to the expansion in mining. It formed part of a general improvement programme which included the laying on of gas and water to cater for the growing numbers. Originally referred to as the Local Board Office, it became the Town Hall after the formation of Skelmersdale Urban District Council in 1894.



The Town Hall after the memorial to Thomas Aspinwall was situated beside the front door in 1903

From the start the building provided a focus for the local community. Upstairs there was a function room which hosted bible classes, political meetings, dances, flower shows, concerts and wedding receptions. During the First World War the Town Hall served a different purpose when it became the local recruiting office. For many years it was the venue for inquests, often for those killed in mining-related accidents. One such inquest was that of 15 year-old Margaret Briscoe, crushed by wagons at White Moss Colliery just a few days after the disaster at Tawd Vale.



Crowds gathered outside the Town Hall on notable occasions

By the 1960s the building was in need of modernisation and extensive refurbishments were carried out. However, in the 1980s a survey found it to be suffering from mining subsidence, dry rot and asbestos leading to its demolition shortly afterwards.

Thomas Aspinwall, the Miners' Friend

The Town Hall was twenty-six years old when one of its most memorable features, a marble plaque commemorating the life of miners' agent Thomas Aspinwall was mounted on its exterior. The memorial was paid for by public subscription and was unveiled with much ceremony, reflecting the regard the local community felt for a man who did much to improve conditions in mines.

Born in Bickerstaffe in 1846, Thomas Aspinwall began working in the mines around 1860. He eventually became a checkweighman which meant he was responsible for weighing the output, and therefore the pay, of each miner.

He was later given the post of miners' agent for Skelmersdale and Wigan, a role he undertook with such diligence that when he died in 1901 a great crowd gathered outside the Town Hall on the day of his funeral to pay their respects.

This was repeated in 1903 when a gathering of over 800 watched St. Helens J.P. Mr. T. Glover unveil the plaque to honour his memory.



A plaque to the memory of Thomas Aspinwall was mounted on the exterior of the Town Hall

The bust of Thomas Aspinwall with its sculptured miner's lamp and pickaxe was removed from the building exterior in the early 1960s as part of a major refurbishment. Despite efforts from Thomas Aspinwall's daughters the plaque was found to be in too precarious a state to be reinstated. There is, however, a memorial to Thomas Aspinwall in Wigan's Royal Albert Edward Infirmary which celebrates the many years he spent as vice president of the hospital board.

The town of Skelmersdale pays tribute to the fallen at the war memorial on Remembrance Day each year.

MELLING POTTERY JAM POTS AND BEER BOTTLES

For many years the Midland Pottery at Melling was the biggest manufacturer of utilitarian stoneware products in the area.

Jugs, beer bottles, whisky jars, ink pots and above all pots for Hartley's Jam Works were manufactured at the pottery which was built in the 1870s alongside the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, a site likely to have been chosen for its good transport links.

Items with a Midland Pottery mark are much sought after by collectors of today



The history of pottery making in the Melling area can be traced back to a small-scale business owned by the Abbey family; Richard Abbey became a pioneering earthenware printer and engraver in the 1700s. However, it was not until the arrival of Glasgow manufacturers John McIntyre and William Murray, who established the Midland Pottery, that production took place on an industrial scale. They brought a skilled Scottish workforce to the site in Waddicar Lane which was described in the Pottery Gazette of 1889 as having three kilns, warehouses, sheds and six double cottages. Many in the area can trace Scottish ancestry through the migration of families in the 1870s. One notable example was the Service family, Edward and later his son James, from Glasgow, who were pottery managers for many years.

In 1889 the pottery was sold to John Turner, the former manager. However, such was the demand for jam pots that in 1922 the pottery was purchased by Messrs. W.P. Hartley and the output became primarily to serve this business. The end for the pottery came in July 1929 when a catastrophic fire destroyed a large wooden building containing machinery and pots. Although the kilns were not affected the business did not recover and many were put out of work. By 1934 the Melling Pottery chimney which had survived the fire became unsafe and was demolished much to the delight of local schoolchildren who were given a holiday to watch. The site was taken over by the British Insulated Callender's Cables works and was later developed for housing.

THE LOST BUILDINGS OF THE SIXTEEN ANCIENT PARISHES AND TOWNSHIPS OF HISTORIC WEST LANCASHIRE

THE WEST DERBY HUNDRED



1. Site of Aughton Moss
Windmill *Page 2*



2. Site of The Douglas
Chapel Parbold *Page 5*



3. Ruins of
Burscough Priory
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4. Lathom Park Chapel
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5. Skelmersdale War
Memorial *Page 12*



6. Lydiat Hall
Entrance to site
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7. Site of Melling Pottery
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8. The ruins of "Lydiat
Abbey" *Page 23*



9. Rufford Old Hall
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10. The site of the Kings
Arms Hotel, Ormskirk
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11. Ormskirk Corn
Exchange *Page 27*



12. Site of the
Ormskirk Working
Men's Institute
Page 30

WHAT CAN BE
SEEN TODAY?

WHAT DOESN'T REMAIN AT RUFFORD OLD HALL?

Dating from 1530, Rufford Old Hall is one of England's outstanding Tudor buildings, owned by the National Trust and visited by thousands every year. Its long history is closely intertwined with that of the Hesketh family, who built the Hall and whose home it was for many centuries. Like many families, the Heskeths adapted the building to suit their changing needs.

The first Hesketh was a local West Lancashire man who lived in what is now Hesketh Bank in the late 1200s. Owning no land himself, he gained ownership of Rufford through marriage to the heiress of the estate. But the family had other homes, and there are no records of buildings on the site until the current Hall was built by Robert Hesketh around 1530.



An engraving of the front face of Rufford Old Hall as it appeared in Matthew Gregson's "Fragments Relative to the History and Antiquities Topography and Genealogies of the County Palatine and Duchy of Lancaster" published in 1869

The Hall that we can still see today is so striking in its high ceilings, spacious proportions and beautifully carved wood that it must have been intended to reflect the owner's high status. Yet that owner was born illegitimate in an age where the norm was for inheritance to pass only to legitimate family members, and Robert Hesketh was only able to confirm his inheritance after a prolonged legal challenge by his half-sisters. The grandeur of the Hall is often interpreted as an assertion of Robert's worth and honour after the public challenge in court.

An engraving of the Great Hall at Rufford from the 1840s



In the sixteenth century, the high point of the day was dinner in the Great Hall, with the family at the high table, while retainers ate at trestle tables in the same noisy convivial space with its huge fireplace, tapestries for warmth and colour, and dogs diving on the bones flung from tables. Here there was also often entertainment, musicians and singers, acrobats and dancers, jugglers and clowns, or travelling groups of actors performing scenes from plays. There's evidence that the young William Shakespeare may have been here for a time.

William Shakespeare could have performed at Rufford as part of the Hesketh Company of Players in the 1580s

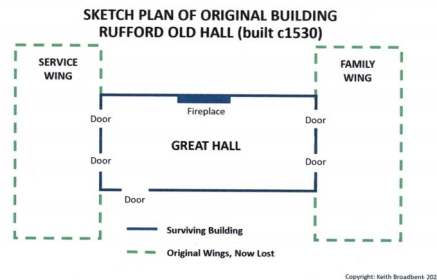


The Civil War—a lucky escape

During the upheavals of the Civil Wars of 1642-1651 in which many fine buildings were lost, Rufford survived without damage, because the Heskeths were non-participants in the war. The family had a long history of military support for the sovereign, and most probably this would have continued but for an unusual circumstance. The head of the family at the beginning of the war was an octogenarian, who was succeeded by his infant grandson shortly afterwards. As a result, the Heskeths and Rufford Old Hall were not involved in the fighting, nor were the family's fortunes depleted or destroyed unlike those of many others.

What had disappeared by 1720?

Over time the house changed and what's visible now is less than half of the complete original building. What doesn't survive are the two original wings of the Great Hall; one held the Hesketh family's private rooms and the other housed the daily work of feeding and maintaining a large household, plus servants' accommodation. By the early 1700s they had disappeared. No existing records tell us what happened, so we don't know whether the buildings fell into disrepair, were accidentally destroyed or perhaps intentionally removed. New buildings replaced them, and because the Hesketh family had these well-sited to make the house look complete, it's not apparent that the original buildings were ever there.



Tantalising hints help us to imagine details of the family wing now lost

Clues to the existence of earlier buildings remain. The doors to the lost family wing now lead only to the open air of the gardens. Traces are visible next to the end wall of the Great Hall (adjacent to the lost wing) where marks in the ground indicate foundations. In 1949, after the ownership of the Hall was transferred from the Hesketh family to the National Trust, suspected remains of a hiding place for Roman Catholic priests were found when that same end wall was repaired. It is thought that the family probably had a small private chapel in their own rooms; the Heskeths, always a Catholic family, needed a place for safe and secretive worship when discovery meant persecution and a priest's hole has been found close to the chapel in other houses.

PEACOCKS IN THE IVY LYDIATE HALL

Just off Southport Road, Lydiate, behind a farm shop and concealed by trees, lie the ivy-covered ruins of a red brick building with a history spanning more than five centuries.

Lydiate Hall was begun by Lawrence Ireland, the lord of the manor, and completed by his son John around 1509. Originally quadrangular, the hall had two storeys and was said to be surrounded by a moat. Lawrence Ireland's initials were incorporated into the frame of a doorway leading from the passage to the hall.

The inventory of Edward Ireland 1637

One of the descendants of the Ireland family, Edward Ireland, left a detailed inventory which gives us a glimpse of how the hall might have looked in the early seventeenth century. It was a substantial building with eleven formal rooms, the most important being the great hall or "*dyning chamber*" and various smaller rooms including the curiously named Squirrel Chamber. There were nine functional spaces including a servants' chamber, brewhouse, dairy and "*piggon*". Descriptions of the contents paint a picture of everyday life, for example the family owned two spinning wheels, a cheese press and wooden bottles whilst in the grand chambers ladies might have played music on the "*pair of broken virginals*". In case of conflict, the residents could arm themselves with the three muskets.



A postcard depicting Lydiate Hall as it appeared in the early years of the twentieth century

Catholic connections

Like many Lancashire people, the Ireland family remained loyal to the Catholic faith after the Reformation and as a result Lydiate Hall residents were fined as recusants. This included Ellen Ireland in 1641, and Margareta (Margaret) Ireland (Edward's widow) in 1667. By 1663 the same Margaret Ireland had decided to lease the land to tenants, keeping Lydiate Hall, its outhouses, orchards, gardens and a dovecote for herself until she died in 1695. The Hall passed to her granddaughter Margaret and son-in-law Sir Charles Anderton of Lostock Hall, who then rented Lydiate Hall out to a local farmer. Although Margaret returned to live at Lydiate following the death of her husband, years of legal wrangling concerning the inheritance of the estate followed her death. Eventually Mary Anderton, a daughter of Margaret and Charles gained ownership, Mary was married to Henry Blundell and at this point the estate came to the Blundells of Crosby.

From family home to tenement, changing fortunes

During the eighteenth century the fortunes of Lydiate Hall changed dramatically. No longer a house for the gentry, the eastern side of the building (apparently the oldest section) was demolished around 1780; what remained was divided into a farmhouse and tenements.

By the early 1870s two households were in residence headed by Rev. Thomas Ellison Gibson, the priest at Our Lady's Church, and author of *Lydiate Hall and its Associations* (1876). Thomas Tickle, a farmer of 176 acres lived in another part of the building. Thomas' widow Ann, and later their son, another Thomas Tickle, farmed the land until at least 1901.



The Hall as it appeared in Thomas Ellison Gibson's work of 1876

In the early twentieth century the decline of the hall continued. Charles Joseph Weld Blundell owned the unoccupied building in 1907 when thieves broke in through a window, stealing carved panelling and cutting family paintings out of their frames. Over a century later, all that remains of Lydiate Hall are ivy-covered red brick walls, two tall chimneys, a ground floor fireplace, and sandy coloured stone edging the unglazed windows. It isn't unusual to see and hear peacocks roaming the grounds.

At the time of writing the footpath past the ruins is closed due to falling masonry.

THE ABBEY THAT WASN'T AN ABBEY

Two hundred metres south of Lydiate Hall another pre-Tudor building is visible from the car park of the fourteenth-century Scotch Piper Inn. Locally known as "Lydiate Abbey", the building is correctly called St. Katherine's Chapel and was never intended to house a religious order.

Originally a private chapel for Lawrence Ireland and his wife Katherine Blundell, it may have been constructed as early as 1450, and presumably before Lawrence's death in 1469. Over the centuries, it would fascinate historians and visitors alike.

Impressions of Lydiate Abbey

Victorian impressions of the Abbey are found in an 1857 account of a visit to south-west Lancashire, published by *Ashton Weekly Reporter and Stalybridge and Dukinfield Chronicle*. The anonymous author painted a romantic picture of "a small rectangular structure, about 17 yards by 6, supported by flying buttresses, with a tower steeple". Although "long destitute of roof", the building was "in good condition, and richly mantled with ivy". Venturing inside, they found a receptacle for holy water, strongly suggestive of a Roman Catholic connection. The barely detectable initials "I.B." and "E.L." could be made out in the stonework near the entrance, as well as a carved shield featuring "six fleurs de lis, divided by a bar". Upon exploring the overgrown nettles, brambles and grass around the ruin, the visitor found a small wild plum tree and a number of gravestones bearing then-recent dates.



Today, St. Katherine's Chapel is a Grade II listed monument, and the Friends of Lydiate Abbey group is devoted to its preservation. It can be viewed from the adjoining field.

Lydiate Abbey photographed in 1876 for Lydiate Hall and its Associations by Rev. Thomas Ellison Gibson (Priest of Our Lady's Church, Lydiate)

KINGS ARMS HOTEL, ORMSKIRK

Amongst the many hostelries and inns that have come and gone in the local area, the majestic building of the Kings Arms is the one that stands out. Right next to the Clock Tower in the centre of Ormskirk, you couldn't miss it.

Records show that there was a Kings Arms Inn in Moor Street at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it wasn't the iconic French style mansion usually associated with the name. At that time, it was a much lower building with a white, plastered or pebble dashed exterior, and had steps at the front extending onto the pavement.



The original Kings Arms Inn on Moor Street (viewed here from Aughton Street before the replacement of the market cross by the clock tower) had a more traditional frontage before its 1880s make-over

Early licensees

Licensees have come and gone through the long history of the Kings Arms. Often local, their families may still reside in the area today.

In 1811 Mary Lea was the landlady, followed by Thomas Fazackerley of Halsall in the 1820s.

The longest serving incumbent was James Bryers who ran the inn successfully with his wife Elizabeth (nee Fazackerley) from around 1834. They had married in 1826, at Ormskirk, and raised their family at the Kings Arms. When James died in 1871 his will showed that not only was he an innkeeper, but also a farmer. He left over seven thousand pounds (over a million today).

Catering for travellers through the years

During their long tenancy the Bryers family would have experienced many changes, not least in modes of transport. 1830s Ormskirk was a busy market town with a constant stream of stage coaches thundering through, only stopping to pick up and drop off travellers or change horses. Coaches to London, Scotland, Leeds and Sunderland called every day and the Royal Liverpool coach stopped each evening. Coaches would turn into the inn's yard from a passageway in Burscough Street and out through another passageway at the side of the inn onto Moor Street, which was easier than turning round. The imminent arrival of a coach was heralded by the ostler, and this would summon the local gingerbread ladies eager to sell their wares and jostling for sales. On a busy market day, the scene could be quite chaotic. In 1849 the railway arrived in Ormskirk bringing even more trade to the town, whilst in the early years of the twentieth century the popularity of the bicycle often meant cyclists wanted a bed for the night.

The Kings Arms gets a facelift

In the 1880s Thomas Goode took over as landlord, and it was during his tenancy that the premises were upgraded. This was at a time when many buildings in the immediate area were being refurbished or upgraded, inspired by the erection of the new Clock Tower in 1876. The work was undertaken by Thomas Riding & Sons, a well-known local firm of builders. A new frontage created a fine Victorian hotel, with a grand staircase and an ornate balcony, used on special occasions to make important announcements such as election results.



The Kings Arms on Moor Street in the 1890s shortly after its gothic style remodelling

The hotel continued to be very busy and took a lot of effort to manage with its 17 bedrooms plus reception areas. When Thomas Goode's wife died leaving him with three small children he struggled to continue and was replaced by Arthur John Brooks and his wife who ran the hotel for many years. The brewery then hired Thomas and Agnes Westhead. Advertisements placed by Thomas Westhead in the local press in 1897 claim the hotel to be "*replete with every modern convenience*". Thomas died in 1899 but his wife continued with the help of her son, William, until he died in 1905.



A postcard showing the Kings Arms Hotel in 1905 during the brief tenancy of William Tommas, who is presumably pictured on the front steps. The former exit for coaches can be seen on the right alongside the black and white frontage of the Corn Exchange next door

William Tommas, formerly of Whitwell, was the landlord for a short period in the early years of the twentieth century before being replaced by Tom Worth in 1906. At this time the hotel offered a “Market Dinner” every Thursday with steaks, chops and chips. It boasted a billiard room and extensive stabling with a covered yard.

By 1911 Godfrey William Turner had bought the hotel and hired live-in staff to help him run it efficiently.

Last orders

During the First World War things began to change in the licensing trade. In 1914 a law was passed limiting the number of hours alcohol could be served and many small establishments had their licences refused. The Kings Arms adapted by, amongst other things, hosting meetings of local organisations. Despite the best efforts of successive owners, last orders for the Kings Arms came in 1961 when Higson’s Brewery accepted an offer from a Liverpool company for the site. The iconic building was demolished later that year and replaced with modern shop units.

THE CORN EXCHANGE, A NEW VENUE FOR LOCAL FARMERS

Shortly after the Kings Arms was renovated the premises next door were transformed into a beautiful mock half-timbered building to be used as a Corn Exchange. This was a flagship enterprise designed to enhance the beauty and prosperity of the town.

The proposal to build a corn exchange, a place where local farmers could buy and sell produce, was first made in 1844 by the Earl of Lathom who called a meeting of interested parties to discuss the idea. Prior to this, farmers wishing to sell their produce had to travel to markets in Liverpool or Preston, which was inconvenient and costly. Ormskirk was the centre of a rich agricultural area, so it made sense to have its own produce market. As well as benefitting the farming community it would bring visitors to the town and thus help local businesses. It was decided that a corn market should be held at the Town Hall in Church Street on market days and this continued successfully for a number of years.

Ironmongers to Corn Exchange

By the late 1890s there was a feeling that Ormskirk could do better. When Josiah Wainwright retired from his ironmongery and furnishing business on Moor Street the premises were purchased by local businessman, Thomas Stoner, with the intention of providing the town with a meeting place, reading room and corn market. He employed local architect, John Riding, to convert the building and it underwent a complete transformation. All the work was carried out by local tradesmen including:



Josiah Wainwright's shop on Moor Street before the premises were remodelled

Chisnall & Constantine, builders

Thomas Riding & Sons, builders

James Whittle, builder

Thomas Ball, ironmonger

John J Balmforth, ironmonger

Thomas Ball, plumber

“Let Ormskirk flourish” - Thomas Stoner’s vision

Thomas Stoner was the driving force behind the new venture. An energetic advocate for change in the town, he was well known for voicing his opinions and his phrase “let Ormskirk flourish” became a popular refrain.

As well as holding the post of President of the Ormskirk Liberal Association, Thomas Stoner owned a shop known as Market Cross House where he sold clothes, hats, boots and shoes with an emphasis on value for money.

Thomas Stoner’s shop on the corner of Church Street and Burscough Street



The new Corn Exchange opened in 1896

The painted half-timber effect exterior was designed by Arthur Vaughan Wiggins, a decorative sign writer and glass painter, who was the son of the licensee of the Queens Hotel in Aughton Street. The stylish veranda was added to give shelter to the farmers discussing business outside during bad weather.



The glass and iron veranda of the Corn Exchange gave Moor Street a stylish new look. Advertisements for Thomas Stoner’s business can be seen in the windows

The Corn Exchange opened its doors in 1896 and was a fine example of local craftsmanship. The basement was laid out in a uniform plan of mahogany tables at which agents could provide samples of their grain or sell the corn from fields waiting to be harvested. Buyers would haggle over the price and try to get a good deal.

On the upper floor there was a generously sized meeting room and a reading room.

The building was well used by various groups and organisations of the town, with the meeting room providing an excellent venue for balls, parties and other entertainments. Smaller rooms were used for such things as music, dancing or drawing lessons and there was even a billiard room. The reading room provided a very comfortable, warm place to relax in.



The road to the side is Market Row which still exists, but is now much narrower and cannot be accessed today, although the street sign is still visible

To help cover the cost of the upkeep of the building, users were required to pay a yearly subscription.

With the advent of the First World War things began to change, particularly as the government had to set corn prices and required farmers to sell their crops to them. This had a negative impact on local farmers and businesses. There was no call for a Corn Exchange, and so the building became a recruiting centre for men enlisting in the armed forces. A recruitment clerk was available to help them complete the paperwork and to hand out khaki armlets.

A poster encouraging the enlistment of new recruits at the Corn Exchange



After the war the building was competing for business with other establishments in the town. It was no longer needed as a Corn Exchange and it eventually closed. The building was sold to the Midland Bank, who had previously had offices in Burscough Street and once again, the exterior was completely altered to that of the recently vacated HSBC. The glass veranda was taken down and bought by a group of shopkeepers in Burscough. It graced a building on the A59 in the centre of Burscough village for many years.

ORMSKIRK WORKING MEN'S INSTITUTE

In the middle of the nineteenth century there was concern about the amount of drunkenness in Ormskirk. Living conditions were harsh and many working class people spent their free time in the numerous beer houses and inns of the town. Something needed to be done.

In 1865 a meeting was called to consider the problem. It was agreed unanimously that a men's reading room and newsroom should be established. This would provide somewhere for men to go other than the pub.

Initially rooms were opened in Burscough Street which proved so popular (330 men enrolled in less than a month) that it was decided something larger was needed. Fundraising began in earnest for a new building and amongst other things, a very successful bazaar was held. The Earl of Derby gave a large site in Moor Street where the building was to be sited.



Ormskirk's Working Men's Institute was an imposing building paid for by the local community. The names of donors were published in the Ormskirk Advertiser

The foundation stone was laid on 4th March 1867 by the Hon. Mrs. R.B. Wilbraham who was presented with an inscribed silver trowel and mallet to mark the occasion. A copper box was inserted in a cavity in the stone containing papers and coins.

Less than a year later the building was opened by the Right Hon. Lord Skelmersdale on the 14th January 1868.

Quite an achievement in terms of the speed of raising the £1,520 needed and completion of the building work.



Lord Skelmersdale

The finished building was large and spacious. It housed a reading room and news room as well as a billiard table and large hall. In later years coffee and cocoa rooms were added. There were also smaller rooms, often used for evening classes teaching reading, bible studies or singing.

Very quickly the Institute became the centre of the community and all for the payment of a penny per week. But it wasn't just used for serious pursuits, it was also a venue for entertainment and celebrations.

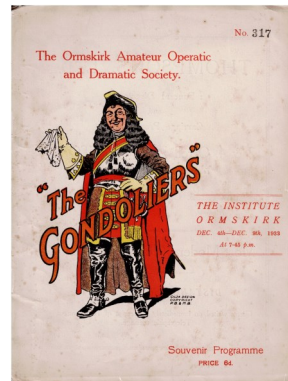
THIS EVENING
ORMSKIRK WORKING MEN'S INSTITUTE
GRAND OPENING OF THE COFFEE AND
COCOA ROOMS
AND
RE-OPENING OF THE INSTITUTE
BY THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF LATHOM
ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3rd
LARGE MUG OF COFFEE 1D CUP OF TEA 1D
OTHER REFRESHMENTS SUPPLIED
Ormskirk Advertiser 3rd February 1881

In the early years many different types of event took place, with local dramatic and operatic societies putting on concerts, sometimes to raise funds for local causes. Whist drives were held, French Marionettes put on a show and there were musical recitals. A three day bazaar was held in 1907 to raise funds for the decoration of St. Anne's Church and rebuilding of the parish room. The event included a shooting gallery and other games as well as concerts and other musical entertainments.

Local societies used the rooms for meetings and activities. In 1886 The Primrose League held its inaugural meeting here. This was a group which offered ladies an opportunity to be involved in political issues and presented the statue of Benjamin Disraeli to Ormskirk. The First Ormskirk Scouts put on demonstrations in 1911 and were presented with their colours by Lord Derby. Adela Pankhurst, daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst, attended a political meeting here during her suffragette days, which was organised by the local Conservative Society.

The Essay and Discussion Society (Established 1869)

The high minded aspirations of the Institute's founders were met by groups such as The Essay and Discussion Society which held monthly meetings throughout the 1870s. Serious topics such as "*is dancing an innocent recreation?*" and "*does the restriction of licences tend to sobriety?*" were debated by the attendees. Unfortunately we do not know the outcome of their deliberations.



Theatre groups such as The Ormskirk Operatic and Dramatic Society used the Institute for their productions. The 1930s cast photograph above shows the stage and orchestra pit. The Gondoliers souvenir programme is from 1933

Ormskirk's Beatles connection

During the twentieth century the Institute became the main entertainment venue in Ormskirk. Regular dances were held, much to the delight of young people in the town. American servicemen stationed at Burtonwood during the Second World War often came over for the entertainment. Local pop groups played at the dances in the 1950s and 60s including Ringo Starr, of Beatles fame, who played at The Institute with a group called Rory Storm and the Hurricanes.

In 1959 Ormskirk Urban District Council purchased the building for £3000. Although it had been refurbished in the 1930s it was in need of further work and an architect was employed to decide what should be done. During the course of the survey the building was found to be unsafe and as a result was demolished in 1962. The footprint of the Institute is now occupied by Ormskirk's bus station and a car park. During a remodelling of these facilities in 2022 it was possible to see the foundations of this popular building.



A photograph of the Working Men's Institute was placed at its former site during building work in 2022

FURTHER READING

If you would like to know more about the families and buildings covered in this booklet, the following references may be of interest:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Ormskirk and District Family History Society was founded in 1980 as a focus for local history and genealogical interests and covers the sixteen ancient parishes of the West Derby Hundred.

New members are always welcome, contact secretary@odfhs.email, follow us on Facebook or see our website www.odfhs.website for more information.