

BLACKBURN



The Early English History

Blackburn was the name of a little frontier settlement in the days when the Ribble was the northern border of Saxon England. In those days, a thousand years ago and more, the north of the Ribble and east of the Pennines were Viking territory.

Southwards as far as Darwen Moor, eastwards to the Pennines, westwards to the rivers Roddlesworth and Darwen and northwards to the Ribble, this region, the furthest limit of Saxon rule was known as the **Blackburn Hundred**.

Why **Blackburn**? - Because **Blackburn** was on the Roman road.

This road had been built some eight hundred years before to link the new Roman Forts of Manchester and Ribchester, and even in those days there were stone circles and burial mounds, already a thousand years old, on the hills which the Roman road passed.

When the Romans had gone their roads remained as important means of communication. What could be more efficient than that the northern district should be administered? From a site that was situated on the Roman Road? What is more, while most of the route of the Roman road followed a track along the hilltops east of the River Darwen, at **Blackburn** it dropped into a broad glacial valley, with good east west communications, before rising again up over Revidge Brow to continue its line towards Ribchester. **Blackburn**, a settlement on the Blakewater or "black" stream, a rivulet that flows into the River Darwen. It was probably a frontier town in earlier days when the Mercians had their border with the Northumbrians here.

The earliest written reference to **Blackburn** appears in the Domesday Book which was prepared for William the Conqueror. It tells us that under the last Saxon rulers this territory belonged to the king. The Church of St. Mary also owned property in Whalley. There was a vast tract of woodland to the north of the town that was good for hunting.

By this time of course, the Vikings had lost their hold over the ancient kingdom of North Umbria. Under Viking influence that land had changed its name and was then known to us as Euricshire or Yorkshire, but the Ribble was still the boundary between it and the South.

Our own **Blackburn** Hundred, or **Blackburnshire** as it was also known, formed part of a territory known as the Land between the Ribble and the Mersey. As such, administratively we were linked with the County of Cheshire and, for religious matters, part of the Diocese of Lichfield. The Norman barons who took over - **Blackburnshire** about the year 1100 were- known as the Lords de Lacy. Lacy or Lassy, was the name of their ancestral village in Normandy. Their home in England was Pontefract Castle. To them the **Blackburn** Hundred was known by the name of their castle by the Ribble, as the barony of Clitheroe.

The Lacy's acquired more lands. Through the lack of a male heir their properties passed through a female line to the Constable of Chester. The task of a Constable was the military protection of his lord, the Earl. In terms of Chester this meant to fight against the Welsh. Because of his inheritance he adopted the surname, de Lacy, but by the Welsh he was called Roger of Hell.

As the de Lacy lands increased so, indeed did **Blackburnshire** which crossed the ancient barrier of the Ribble to absorb Chipping, Longridge, Stonyhurst and Ribchester.

Roger of Hell's son who had the good fortune to marry the Countess of Lincoln was one of the barons at Runnymede for the signing of Magna Carta. Roger's great grandson, Henry, achieved the pinnacle of the family's success.

By birth, Earl of Lincoln; by marriage, Earl of Salisbury; he was one of King Edward the first's most trusted advisers. In 1299, as military governor of Aquitaine, he came first in Parliament after the King and the Prince of Wales.

It is worth remembering that it was not until Henry's lifetime that there was any such county as Lancashire. It was divided between Cheshire and Yorkshire. The Saxons and the Vikings; the Mercians and Northumbrians; even in Roman times the Ribchester region had been administered first from Chester and then York.

Clearly local government reorganization is nothing new:

King Henry III had a younger son called Edmund, and, despite what one might think to be born a prince was not a guarantee of wealth. Kings had to find a source of income for their sons. The King asked the Pope if he would consider making Edmund King of Sicily. When this failed then he created a new earldom

for his son.

The Land between the Ribble and the Mersey had never been fully integrated into Cheshire. This region and most of Yorkshire that lay on the west side of the Pennines were added together to form a brand new county called Lancashire.

Edmund's son, Thomas, was then married to the daughter of Henry de Lacy and the future of the family possessions was thus made one. It remained so even after Thomas had separated from his wife and when Thomas himself had been beheaded for rebellion.

The possessions were inherited by Thomas's brother's descendants, indeed his nephew, Henry, was created the very first Duke, and the Duchy of Lancaster became the very first Duchy in England. It is small wonder that John of Gaunt, one of Edward III younger sons, should have been anxious to marry the Duke's daughter, or that, when his son, King Henry IV, grabbed the throne in 1399, he wished to keep the Duchy as a private possession of his family, to be held independently from the rest of his kingdom. Hence today, the Queen is Duke of Lancaster in her own right and a member of the Cabinet is called Chancellor of the Duchy of the Lancaster.

Despite the maneuvering, and perhaps to a certain extent because of it, when the Wars of the Roses came there was considerable sympathy in this area for the House of York. When King Henry VI was captured at Clitheroe, John Talbot of Salesbury was a prime mover in the event. One consequence was that when the last Yorkist king, Richard III, was finally defeated at the Battle of Bosworth field, several properties in the neighborhood of the Ribble Valley, including Eccleshill, were confiscated from their Yorkist owners and presented to the Stanleys who had defected during the battle.

BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL

There has been a Christian Church on the site of ***Blackburn*** Cathedral since sometime before the eighth century. The Church has been replaced and rebuilt several times, and after reconstruction in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, a new Church was erected in 1826 which, although Georgian is one of the earliest Gothic Parish Churches to be built. Indeed its architectural style is transitional because the aisles are typical of eighteenth century building while the Center Nave is pure nineteenth century Gothic. This church now constitutes the

Nave of the present Cathedral.

The Diocese of *Blackburn* was created in 1926 and *Blackburn* Parish Church became the new Cathedral. An appeal was immediately made to raise money to extend the Church by the addition of transepts and a chancel on which work began in 1938, but had virtually to be suspended eighteen months later because of the outbreak of War.

Building was continued throughout the fifties and the older building was heavily restored. In 1965 the Nave was re-hallowed and in 1969 the whole church was brought into use apart from the extreme East End and the new crypt. Work has gone on steadily up to the present day and now only the Crypt needs completing.

One interesting feature of the Cathedral is the sitting of the sanctuary the worshipping area at the crossing of the Nave and Transepts so that, with its square altar and surmounting corona, the same appearance is presented to all arms of the building.

In the Cathedral there are noteworthy works of art and in particular there is the large statue of Christ the Worker by John Heywood and the Virgin and Child by Josephina de Vasconcellos. There is also some interesting stained glass of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There is one window by Burne-Jones.

Meanwhile, other changes were taking place. Henry, the last de Lacy, had brought some Cistercian monks from Cheshire and established a new Abbey for them at Whalley. Their old home at Stanlow, given them by Roger of Hell's father had gradually become inundated by the tide. In June 1296, Henry de Lacy, himself, laid the foundation stone of the new Abbey.

St. Mary's in *Blackburn* which until then had been the prime ecclesiastical building in north-east Lancashire, now came under the administration of the monks of Whalley. The annual tithes of the parishes of Eccles, Dean and Rochdale -

were also presented to the monks. But in 1520 out of the income from these churches well over half came from the parish church of **Blackburn**. Indeed St. Mary's with its parish which covered the western half of the **Blackburn** Hundred, was contributing a quarter of the Abbey's annual income.

When King Henry VIII cast his eyes on the wealth of the Church he did not lose sight of Whalley. A ballad of the time tells how Lancashire lads had served with him at Flodden field in his victory over the Scots,

With lustie ladds, liver and light, from Blackborne and Bolton in the Moores".

But this would not dissuade him from his religious policies.

A religious rebellion in the north called the Pilgrimage of Grace sucked Whalley Abbey into its whirlpool. Lord Derby (of the Stanley family) was sent to capture the Abbey and its Abbot was executed at Lancaster Castle.

From this time onwards for the next three hundred years, the local Catholics were to suffer. Sir John Southworth of Samlesbury Hall, who was imprisoned in Manchester in Queen Elizabeth the first's reign, has in recent years been recognized as a Catholic saint. His offense was refusing to attend public service on Sundays in **Blackburn** Parish Church.

When strange stories of witchcraft began to spread in Samlesbury and around Pendle the Catholics-were accused of trying to get people into trouble. In Turton a little girl accused two women of trying to give poison, and possibly one of the worst cases took place in Lower Darwen. A man claimed to have dreamed that the wife of the owner of Newfield farm had murdered her husband and buried him behind the barn. When the spot was investigated the corpse was found and the poor man's widow was burned at the stake.

By the time of the Civil War the number of Catholics in this area had dwindled. Most local people were fairly low church. While Preston, ten miles away, declared itself for King Charles, the people of **Blackburn** declared themselves for Parliament.

Sir Gilbert Hoghton of Walton-le-Dale, the owner of Hoghton Tower, made two attempts in 1642 to capture the town. On the first occasion, in October, he posted men on the church-tower, who spotted their opponents approaching the town from the direction of Accrington. The roundheads attacked across the Blakewater, up Church Street and up Darwen Street and eventually sent Sir Gilbert packing.

Sir Gilbert came back to make another attempt on Christmas Eve. This time he fired a cannon from the slope of Dukes Brow but did not achieve any successful result. An account of the time tells us,

".... the greatest execution that it did, as was hard of a bullet shot out of it entered into a house on the south side of the Church Yard and knocked the letter of....."

Eventually he withdrew. to the relief of his men, "*... that they might eat their Christmas pyes at home.*"

The economy of **Blackburn** in those days was one of a market town which was renowned for its annual Cattle Fair on Blakey Moor. Each May rearers would flock from all parts of the county.

By modern standards the old town was a little village. Its houses stood on Northgate, Astleygate. Darwen Street and Church Street and where these last three streets met together stood the Market Cross. There was little left of this even in the eighteenth century. Beside it stood the stocks and a well. To travel to Preston in those days you took a road that skirted the north slope of Hoghton Tower. The road to Bolton rose up over the hills through Tockholes. Darwen, in those days the village of Over Darwen, stood fairly isolated in its own little valley, perhaps visited by strings of packhorses from north of the Ribble which used to come to collect their coal.

The Industrial Revolution changed this. The textiles by which **Blackburn** was known its checks and greys were woollen goods. The introduction of cotton, no doubt assisted by the port of Liverpool rivaling Bristol, and a spate of local inventions changed the course of the North West's economy.

At first the local home industries tried to cope: the handloom-weaver with local girls doing the spinning. Possible with better foresight than has ever been acknowledged, they attacked the newly invented machines and, in the words of a Lancashire historian of 1844, "**Blackburn** which bid fair to be the metropolis of the new trade, ceded its honors and advantages to Manchester".

One wonders if that was so important when he goes on to tell that in **Blackburn**, "*... we were struck with the pale and emaciated features of the poorer sort of people*". Most of them were newcomers from other parts of Lancashire and from Ireland, Scotland and Wales. When the American Civil War cut the supply of cotton to Lancashire, it was reckoned **Blackburn** was the town that was worst hit.

From 1780 to 1880 was a period of constant strife between the cotton-workers and

the owners of the mills. And yet **Blackburn** was a boom-town. In that period its population grew from a village to a town of a hundred thousand. The old local government structure of Hundres and Townships was hopelessly inadequate for an industrial community.

In 1851 **Blackburn** gained a charter to set up a Mayor and Corporation and to provide the planning and facilities needed by a boom-town. The village of Over Darwen followed suit in 1878 and became recognized as the borough of Darwen. Today they form the nucleus of the Borough of **Blackburn**.

The Cathedral possesses an interesting and historic collection of treasures including one of the very few mediaeval 'paxes' which survived the Reformation. These may be seen by appointment. It also contains a very fine modern organ made by Walkers on which many recitalists of international reputation wish to, and indeed do, play.

VILLAGES IN THE BOROUGH OF **BLACKBURN**

BELMONT

Belmont is a moorland village based on the industries of bleaching and dyeing although stone quarrying was formerly carried out to a large extent, and the houses are of local millstone grit.

The storage of water for industrial purposes resulted in numerous small reservoirs which have survived to the present day, being widely used for recreational activities by anglers and canoeists.

The village is located three miles North West of Bolton along the A675 which was a turnpike road constructed shortly after 1800 to link Preston with Bolton.

The population was at its peak in 1851, but has declined since, after a fire in 1867 which destroyed the local cotton mill and in turn brought about the closure of the print works. For a time, the total abandonment of the village seemed a distinct possibility.

However, the purchase of the print works by Mr.E. C. Deakin in 1870 restored the village's fortunes and the population now stands at around 600.

The Parish Church is of grey stone, situated on a dominating site south west of the village and is of a Neo-Gothic design by J. E. Grogan, erected in 1850. The Congregational Church is in red sandstone and of unconventional design. Situated in the main street and opened in 1859, the church is now derelict.

An unusual feature of the village is the street name plaques carved stone in oval cartouches.

CHAPELTOWN AND TURTON

Chapelton is an attractive moorland village of Tudor and 18th Century stone cottages, situated five miles north east of Bolton on the B6391.

The main axis of the village is High Street with the Chetham Arms - an 18th Century hostelry, the Chapel House - formerly the Old Grammar School and other picturesque houses all of historical interest and worth visiting. There is also a Stocks and cross situated in the rest garden at the northern end of the High Street which has been designated a conservation area. Both the Stocks and Cross have a long history. The Market Cross marked the center of Turton Fair, a well known and popular livestock fair held in the village until early this century. In 1885 they were both moved to the grounds of Turton Tower. The Village Garden in which they now stand was donated to the village by Miss Annie Barlow in 1930. They were then renovated and brought back to the village and have continued to be a feature of the historic heritage of the Area.

The Parish Church of St. Anne was built to a design of John Palmer in 1841, it is said that the original church was built on the present site in 1111, but there is no documentary evidence of this, there is, however, evidence that a chapel existed here in 1523. About 1610, Humphrey Chetham, on acquiring the Manor, rebuilt the Chapel in 1630 and bequeathed the money for a library - *"An Oaken bookcase containing 45 volumes of religious books chained fast for the use of the parishioners"* and was kept in the Chapel, these are the famous chained books.

The antiquity of the district is attested by the prehistoric Druidical circle in the center of Chetham Close at an elevation of 1,060 feet and The Manor House, Turton Tower, developed from a Pele tower, and acquired in 1628 by Humphrey Chetham. The building is now controlled by Lancashire County Council. The original construction of this building dates back to the 12th Century but most of the existing building dates

from the 16th Century when extensive alterations were made, and it now stands as a medieval Pele Tower with Elizabethan farmhouse attached.

Turton Tower houses a collection of local historical items, weapons and period furniture and is open to the public.

Turton is a more straggly village strung out along a twisty moorland road from Chapeltown, north and east towards the old woman Road from Manchester to Ribchester. Its origins are industrial. Famous residents have included Samuel Horrocks, founder of the famous cotton firm, and Henry Ashworth, whose mills were visited on many occasions being regarded as a model of an industrial community in the mid 19th Century. Humphrey Chetham was one of the wealthiest men of his day, (1580 - 1653) and one of the four greatest cotton men. Resident for a long period at Turton Tower, which he purchased in 1628, he was Sheriff for the County of Lancaster, and responsible for collecting taxes for Charles I. In his will he left the famous chained library to his local church and endowed a Public Library and Blue Coats School in Manchester.