



## Notable people of Preston—Marian Roberts 1920-2007

In many respects Marian Roberts was one of Preston's great historians of the twentieth century. Not only has she written numerous papers, now deposited in the University of Central Lancashire's special collections, she was much loved and respected by her contemporaries, in such institutions as the Friends of the Harris, the Preston Historical Society and the Lancashire Records Office.

In 2004 she received the British Association for Local History Award for Personal Achievement.

Marian was born on 11th March 1920 in Bloomfield Street, Preston, and at the age of five she moved with her family to a flat in Castle Chambers, Market Place, Preston, this was the home of the Refuge Assurance Company where her mother became the caretaker. Marian lived with her parents at the chambers until 1949. From the windows of the house facing onto the market place Marian was able to witness many Civic events such as royal visits and processions of successive mayors taking place on the flag market. She would have witnessed many other occasions from this vantage point, such as the return of Preston North End in 1938 when they won the F.A. Cup, the pot fair, the Whitsuntide fair and of course the fateful fire at the Town Hall, she would have witnessed the clock fingers falling to the ground from her bedroom window.

In her early years Marian spent most evenings in the Harris Museum and Library opposite Castle Chambers where her great love of this fine institution grew. She was able to walk around the many exhibits, one of her favourites was the doll's house on display in one of the galleries. At the age of 14 Marian left school and

went to work as a clerical assistant in industry and then for Lancashire County Council. It was while working at County Hall that she met and married Louis in 1949. They lived in several areas of Preston but eventually moved to Watling Street Road.

When Louis died of cancer in 1980 Marian was devastated at this great loss, the same year she retired from the Royal Infirmary where she worked as a part time ward secretary. To help alleviate the resulting despair Marian joined a class on palaeography at the Lancashire Records Office, it was from this that her interest and enthusiasm for local history grew. She went on to join the Friends of the Museum working as a volunteer and it was there that the Keeper of Social History—Frank Carpenter, knowing Marian's interest in Winckley Square and the Addison family, gave her several bags of Addison papers to read and asked if she would catalogue them. The results of her research that followed are now housed in the County Records Office.

In the late 1980's Marian published a book called *The Story of Winckley Square*, which was acclaimed by local historians as the definitive work on the square; sadly it is no longer in print but is available in the library. Throughout the years she gave many talks to local societies and was always on hand to help with history projects. All royalties from the sale of her book and fees from the talks she gave were donated to St. Catherine's Hospice.

In 2001 at the age of 82 Marian and her sister Elsie moved to Wymondham in Norfolk to be close to her niece. Before she left for Norfolk a civic reception was held at the Harris Museum in her honour. Sadly on 21st February 2007 Marian died shortly after being diagnosed with cancer.

*By Gillian Lawson, Archivist of the Preston Historical Society.*