



PRESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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PROMOTING LOCAL HISTORY ACROSS NINE DECADES

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Murder Most Foul

By Stewart Turner

The vast majority of historical events that occupy the time of Preston Historical Society members are those involving Preston and Prestonians in local issues. Once in a while a subject will come up that is of a national, or even international significance. One such incident was recently raised in a question to the PHS Help Desk.

The questioner was researching his ancestors, the Patten family of Preston. He had come across an entry of interest, dated 5 March 1690, in an online diary of Thomas Bellingham¹.

Ye 5th. A frost and very fayr weather. I din'd att [cousen Pattens](#). [Cousen W. Bellingham](#) went hence for Lancaster. Coll Rawstorne and I walk't with Mrs Winkley [wife of [Thomas Winkley](#)] and Mrs Francks [wife of [John Franks](#)] as far as to ye boate. [Money came to pay ye Danes](#). Att night one of them stabbd' young Wm Patten [son of [William Patten](#)] with his bayonett att widow Carrs [hostelry, not identified]

The underlined part refers to a fatal stabbing, a murder, which had international ramifications. Unfortunately, Thomas Bellingham does not enlighten us further about this incident and its outcome. The entry does however raise a number of questions including: what was a Danish soldier doing in Preston? To answer that, we need to look at what was going on in the country when this happened.

England was in political turmoil at that time. In 1688 King James II had been forced from the throne because of his increasing support for Catholicism, and William of Orange,

Statholder (head of state) of the Dutch Republic, and a Presbyterian, was invited by members of the House of Lords to become King of England. James II escaped to Ireland to form an army to wrest back control of his country. This posed a problem for William. Since the Civil War, England had not kept a large standing army, so William needed to ask for help from other sympathetic European heads of state. In August 1689 he entered into a treaty of military assistance with King Christian V of Denmark and Norway, and shortly afterwards 1000 Danish horsemen and 6000 foot soldiers were despatched to east coast ports including Newcastle and Hull, whence they marched to Chester to be ready to set sail from Liverpool for Ireland.



William III and Prince George of Denmark at the Battle of the Boyne²

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About PHS

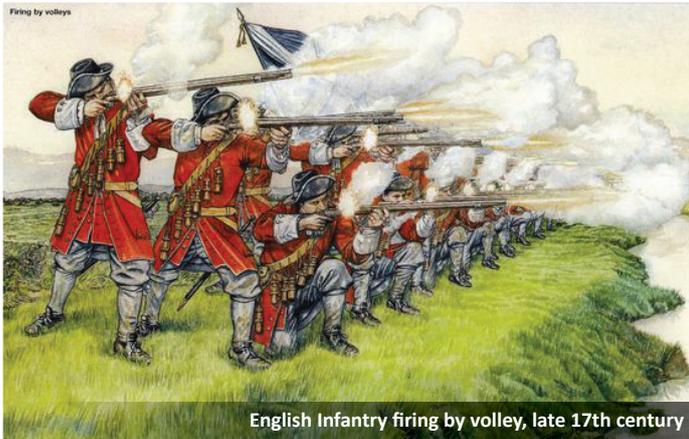
Since 1948 the aim of the Society has been to promote the study of local history in Preston and Lancashire. Talks are held in the Central Methodist Church, Lune Street. The annual member subscription is £20. Visitors pay £5 per talk. There are eight talks in each season.

Contact PHS

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 /prestonhistoricalsociety



English Infantry firing by volley, late 17th century

In the meantime, the Lancashire militia were called out. The Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, William Stanley, 9th Earl of Derby, organised three regiments of foot and three troops of horse. This brigade volunteered for service in William's campaign in Ireland, and, because they were part-time soldiers, carried out much-needed training on Fulwood Moor before embarking for Ireland.

So, now the scene was set, with the professional Danish army and the Lancashire militia bound for the Irish campaign. Given that the militia would have needed professional troops to help with their Fulwood Moor manoeuvres, could this be why 'widow Carr' had organised a soirée as a thank you to 'our Danish allies', and why William Patten, a distant relative of

William Stanley and a member of Preston's upper class, was also invited alongside Danish troops.

We cannot know why there was a fight to the death. We do know that the Danish troops had not been paid for some time (although, according to Thomas Bellingham, they had just got their back pay), so they might well have made up for lost drinking time before the party. Also, if William Patten had been one of the militia men having to put up with foreign troops telling them what to do, there was potential for an explosive encounter at widow Carr's that night.

William Patten was buried at St John's in Preston on 6 March 1690 while his fellow militia, along with the Danish troops, set sail for Ireland to take part in one of the most important battles on British soil, the Battle of the Boyne on 11 July 1690.

What happened to the Danish soldier accused of the murder? If he had been found guilty under Britain's 'bloody code' (a name given to the legal system between 1688 and 1815 which made more than 200 offences, many of them petty, punishable by death), or under Danish military law, he would have been beheaded. If, on the other hand, he had been tried by a British military court he might have been executed by firing squad. Neither of which would have been much consolation to William Patten.

¹ March 1690 – preston history (prestonhistory.com/sources-2/Bellingham-and-rawstorne-diaries/1690-2/march-1690)

² by Jan Wycke (1645-1700) c.1700 from National Trust, Chirk Castle

PHS Programme Of Talks 2025/26

The new season of eight talks has an exciting programme included in the membership fee of £20. Visitors pay £5 each talk. Talks take place on the 2nd Monday of the month between September to May (excluding January).

8 September 2025	<i>The 'Paupers' Rebellion' of 1858: Poor relief, industrial distress and the labour test in mid C19th Preston</i>	Dr. Lewis Darwen
13 October 2025	<i>The 'Battle of Bamber Bridge' 1943</i>	Prof. Alan Rice
10 November 2025	<i>Cornelia Connelly: Blissful Bride to Notorious Nun</i>	Judy Beeston
8 December 2025	<i>Strawberries and Villas – the development of a freehold land society estate in mid-Victorian Ashton-on-Ribble</i>	Sue Latimer
9 February 2026	<i>Plague and hunger: mortality in the Preston area 1590-1650</i>	Dr. Alan Crosby
9 March 2026	<i>Beatrice Blackhurst's Scrapbook – leisure, voluntary action and social change in Preston in the early C20th</i>	Helen Howell
13 April 2026	<i>Preston and its region in the Domesday Book and beyond</i>	Prof. Fiona Edmonds
11 May 2026	<i>That's entertainment! The rise and fall of Preston's Guild Hall</i>	Michael Akers

Talks start at **7.15pm** and end at **8.30pm**. Doors open from **6.30pm** so members and visitors can meet friends in the **Olive Grove Coffee Shop, Central Methodist Church, Lune Street Preston PR1 2NL**.

New members and visitors are very welcome

Membership enquiries: patricia@prestonhistoricalsociety.org.uk

Society Information and Events

Who Does He Think He is?

(with apologies to BBC TV)

On 22 February 2025 Preston Historical Society's Help desk received an e-mail from Michael James of Lincoln, Nebraska 'seeking connections to knowledgeable individuals in Preston who might help me during an upcoming trip'. As it is the Society's policy to help anyone with respect to the history of Preston and its people, we gladly agreed to give him a guided tour around parts of Preston associated with his ancestors.

It was therefore with great pleasure that on 2 May Stewart Turner from the Society met Michael to be his Preston guide. They started at 71 Skeffington Road where Michael's great-grandmother, Teresa Eccles James, had lived. This is just across the road from St Joseph's RC church where Teresa Eccles married Joseph James in 1888. St Joseph's was the next stop and they were entranced by the beauty of its interior. Teresa, like many Prestonians at that time, was second generation Irish, her parents having emigrated from Ros Comáin (County Roscommon) around 1845. For the next fifty years the family worked in Preston's cotton mills, and in the mid-1890s emigrated again; this time to Massachusetts, U.S.A. They settled in New Bedford and continued as mule spinners and weavers in the cotton mills there.

Michael had researched his family meticulously and wanted to see every address in the Ribbleton and Fishwick areas where his Preston ancestors had lived, worked, prayed and been educated. Inevitably, some of these addresses no longer exist but Michael was happy to see any buildings, such as St Joseph's boys' and girls' schools, and the façade of St Augustine's church where his great-great-grandmother and great-great-grandfather, Elisabeth Schofield and John Eccles, had married in 1864.



St Joseph's church, Skeffington Road, interior

At the end of his sojourn in Preston Michael declared himself very happy with the day's events. He was later to say of his ancestors' time in Preston:

There is a story here that I feel compelled to attempt, inspired not least by the difficulties and challenges that my great-great-grandparents most certainly faced: Elisabeth and her family as escapees of the famine, her husband John Eccles (b. Lancs. 1834, and a cotton spinner in Preston according to his daughter Teresa's marriage certificate) as a mill worker at the height of cotton manufacture in the UK. That this great-great-grandson would one day find himself working in the textile domain, albeit from a very different wheelhouse, suggests that I might be able to fashion a narrative that illuminates the realities of these textile workers' lives and of the immigrant experience in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

At the end of his guided walk, Michael James made a very generous donation to Preston Historical Society as a thanks for our help in discovering his Preston heritage.

If you want to find out any more about Michael James he has an entry on Wikipedia which you can access via:
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_James_\(quilt_artist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_James_(quilt_artist))

Lancashire Archives

Summer Workshops 2025

Throughout the summer of 2025 Lancashire Archives, in conjunction with Preston Historical Society and The Friends of Winckley Square, hosted a series of history workshops. These enabled PHS members and others to learn about records in different archive collections and to join tutorials on how they might access and interpret such material. The format of the tutorials varied but they all put the records in question into an historical context.

The series started on 3 June with **Diaries and Journals with a particular reference to John Dalton esq of Preston and Thurnham Hall**, led by archivist, Victoria McCann. This workshop focussed on a selection of personal diaries, not just of the rich but also written by working class diarists. Workshop attendees were able to study different diaries in small groups and then come together to discuss their findings.

On 11 June, collections assistant, Lee Sanderson, led a session on **Researching the Built Environment using Preston Building Plans**. Lee outlined how the state of working-class housing in Victorian Preston was the cause of much bad health and disease, as highlighted by Preston Prison chaplain, John Clay, in his *Report on the Sanitary Condition of Preston (1842)* which led to legislation to improve sanitation and house design. Participants studied a wealth of architectural drawings from the mid-19th century onwards to see how Clay's report and the subsequent legislative changes affected building design in the town.



On 8 July archivist, Kathryn Newman led the workshop, **Once in Every Guild: Exploring Preston Guild Records**. This session reverted to the small groups approach, allowing the study of a variety of documents illustrating 14th to 20th century celebrations of the Guild. At the end each group reported their findings back for general discussion.



The penultimate session on 16 July, **The Road to the Workhouse: Preston's Poor Law Guardians**, was facilitated by Victoria McCann. Here five groups studied different documents created by Preston's Guardians of the Poor, which led to some interesting discussion by the whole group.



Finally, on 5 August, Kathryn Newman once more assisted participants in studying **County Mental Asylum records with particular reference to Whittingham**. The source documents available dated from the foundation, in 1816, of the first asylum at Lancaster to the building of four huge county institutions by the middle of the 19th century. This study and subsequent discussion guided by Kathryn gave the group a greater understanding of the Victorians' attitude and responses to mental ill health.



A small subset of the many photographs of Whittingham's patients, on display during the workshop

Throughout these sessions, the emphasis was not only on understanding the many documents held by Lancashire Archives, but also how to access them, either by visiting the Archives on Bow Lane, or also by searching for them through the online catalogue at <https://archivecat.lancashire.gov.uk/calmview/>

I thought the diaries were really good for uncovering social trends and the evolution of literacy in Lancashire.

Nicholas Serpa

Lee was both enthusiastic and knowledgeable and the workshop was most enjoyable. Some of the architectural drawings in the collection were absolutely fascinating.

Jane Brind

It was a privilege handling and examining some wonderful documents which had passed through the hands of many generations of Prestonians.

Dave Canning

I would just like to say how fantastic the sessions have been and would like to congratulate the society in organising these and the Archives for presenting the information so well.

Gail Capstick