

RIBCHESTER HISTORY TRAIL



Welcome to Ribchester: a historic place indeed!

There is more to Ribchester than meets the eye and this trail has been designed to take you through the rich history of the village from Roman times to the present day. As you stroll down the narrow streets you will see how the village has developed over the last 2000 years.

The map on page 3 gives you the full route. The circular walk takes from 30 minutes to one hour and starts from the car park.

From the Pope Croft playing field and car park follow the path to the right of the tennis court to St Wilfrid's church. Note the Roman ditch defences to the right of the church wall. The slight ridge in front of the dip is the line of the rampart.

1. St Wilfrid's Parish Church

The Parish Church, dedicated to St. Wilfrid, stands on the site of the Roman Fort, established in the early 70s AD as part of a network of defensive forts across northern Britannia. The first written record of a church on the site dates from 1193, although there may well have been a church before then. St Wilfrid was Bishop of Ripon and Archbishop of York in the 7th Century. He began a programme of church building that extended across the North of England. While there is no documentary evidence it is possible that St Wilfrid visited the township and converted the small Celtic church into one of a more durable and magnificent structure. However while Ribchester is mentioned in the Domesday Book, the church is not.

2. The Roman granaries can be accessed from the Churchyard.



St Wilfrid's church c 1900

3. Museum

The idea of a museum in Ribchester was conceived by Margaret Greenall, a member of the famous brewing family, in the early years of the twentieth century. Her objective was to stem the flow of artefacts out of the village that had occurred ever since Ribchester was first recognised as a site of special historic interest.

One of Ribchester's most enduring symbols, and one of Britain's most spectacular Roman objects, is the famous Ribchester Parade Helmet. While the original is in the British Museum there is an excellent bronze replica on display.

The helmet is an extremely refined piece of work. The mask depicts a youthful but stylised face with curls of hair that end in snakes' heads.



The helmet is decorated with scenes of combat. Originally it is highly likely that the helmet was gilded and the mask silver-plated. This type of helmet was worn during displays of military horsemanship.

4. Villa and Tithe barn

This apparently 19th century villa stands on the site of the old tithe barn from which it was seemingly converted. Next to it is a delightful 17th Century cottage which stands on the line of the Roman rampart.

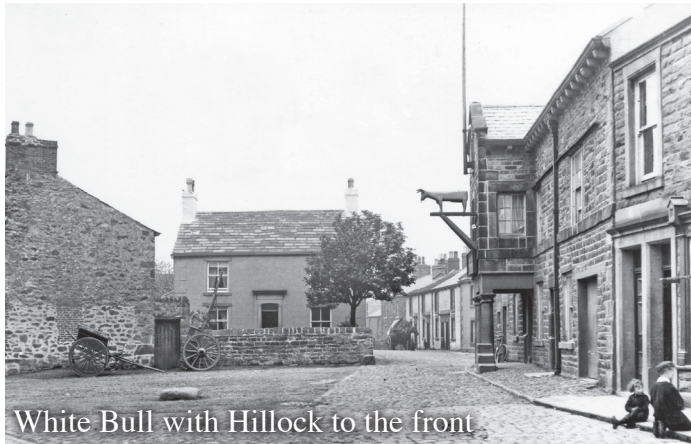
5. The Hillock

This is the ancient centre of the village standing at the Y junction where the Roman branch road heads up Water Street and Stoneygate Lane to join the main route from Chester to Hadrian's Wall. It has been used for leisure and relaxation for nearly two thousand years. Although the Hillock gives the impression of being a market place there is no evidence of any regular weekly markets having been held there. Opposite can be seen several examples of weaver's cottages, including two with loomshops.



6. The White Bull

The White Bull dates from 1707, and at one time was used as the local court house. The pillars that support the front porch are of Roman origin. Over the years a number of alterations have been carried out including the opening of a refreshment room to cater for the large number of visitors. By the 1940's the doorway to the right of the main entrance had been blocked up to be replaced by a central doorway to the refreshment room which remains to this day.



*Our walk continues along Water Street before turning right onto Greenside and to the **Roman Bath House** (7) where the outlines of the main building can be seen. Continue along Greenside to the **Ribchester Arms**. From there walk towards the bridge before taking a left turn to Stydd Lane.*

8. St. Peter & St. Paul's RC Church

St. Peter & St. Paul's is a barn church, built in 1789 and extended in 1877. The site was carefully chosen for at that time it was still illegal for Catholics to have a public place of worship. The priest's house, Stydd Lodge, is presumed to have been the residence of the Bailiff of the Stydd Estates for attached to the building is a barn and a piggery.



The church is the last of what are traditionally known as 'Barn Churches', others having been altered or pulled down. St. Peter & St. Paul's is the oldest building in use at the present time in the whole of the Salford Diocese; not the oldest parish but the oldest church building.

9. The Almshouses

In his will dated 1726, John Sherborne of Bailey left instructions to found "good almshouses on his estate at Stydd for five poor persons to live separately therein", and endowed it with the sum of £30 per annum. Later the Walmsleys of Showley Hall, Osbaldeston took on the responsibility for the payment of a monthly allowance and for supplying free coal once a year to residents, who at

that time had to be Roman Catholic widows or spinsters.

The building's most unusual staircase and first floor arcade is a wonder to behold. Careful repair work over the years has ensured that the houses continue to be useful as well as attractive.



10. St Saviour's Stydd

Over the centuries this small chapel has been altered many times. The earliest part of the building is in the north wall which is a good example of transitional Norman work, and which indicates that a church stood here during the first part of the 12th Century.

If the existence of a Norman church is conjectural there is no doubt that a church was built around this time at Stydd, situated about half a mile north east of Ribchester and adjoining the Roman road running to the north. The history of the small chapel of St. Saviour is also obscure. Whether it was originally built as a hospice for the religious order of the Knights Hospitallers, or whether it began its history as the domestic chapel of the Lord of the Manor of Stydd is not clear. From contemporary deeds it is known that the manor was in the possession of the Knights Hospitalise, during the middle of the 13th Century and that it was a "Camera" of the Preceptory of the Order at Newlands, near Wakefield.



Stydd Church was transferred to the parish of Ribchester in 1545. It was last restored in 2005 with assistance from English Heritage.

Retrace your steps to the Ribchester Arms; continue along the right hand footpath towards the large house situated opposite Greenside.

11. Stone House/Bobbin Mill

This large building was occupied by the owner of the 19th Century mill then situated opposite. The building to the front of Stone House was originally a stable for the New Hotel.



This view is of Blackburn Road in the early 1900s. Stone House lies beyond the Ribchester Arms. Note the small cottages opposite the hotel. These regularly flooded and were demolished in the 1960s.



Another early photograph of Blackburn Road, looking back towards Stone House. In the centre can be seen what was then the last remaining building of the old mill used to grind corn in the 1830s. The mill eventually diversified to bobbin turning until 1890 when it finally closed. To the left are stone posts and railings that ran alongside the mill lodge (12) (the Phone box now stands on the piece of ground to the left of the railings). Water for the mill was diverted from Boyces Brook.

This postcard print shows a view looking towards Dam End (junction of Ribblesdale Road with Blackburn Road)



(13) Beehive House, now rebuilt, seen to near left of the picture, was for many years the village post office and in the mid 1900s the

telephone exchange also operated from a room in the building. In the centre of the next row of cottages is Dam cottage. Of particular note is the sapling now grown to be one of the village's grandest trees, better illustrated by the following print from the 1920s.

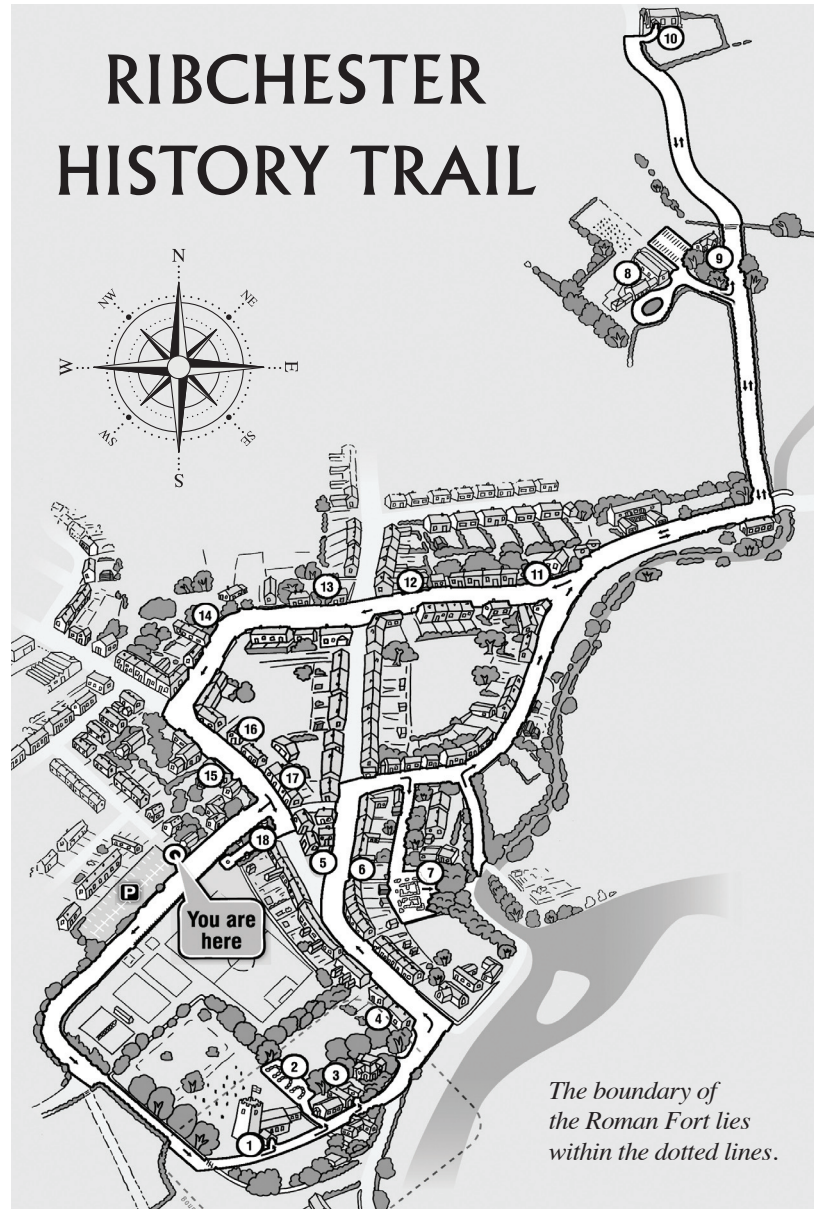


14. Weavers Cottages which like so many village houses have been rebuilt and changed.

15. Brick Town houses A pair of Georgian Houses built around 1745. They are unusual in that few brick town houses such as these were built in this part of the country.

16. Cottage Built around 1645 this cottage was used at one time as a grocers shop and as the local Co-op store. This was eventually considered too small and inconvenient and work on building a new store on the opposite side of the street began in 1885. Originally intended to be completed by the following May the foundations gave way and the building was finished six months behind schedule. The store served the village well for a considerable period before closing its doors for the last time in 1985. The building was not however lost and now operates as a Spar supermarket.

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The boundary of the Roman Fort lies within the dotted lines.

17. Weavers Cottages Ribchester began to take on something of its present appearance late in the 18th Century when many new cottages were built to house the growing number of handloom weavers who worked



at home, usually on their own looms. There are several distinct types of weaver's cottages in Ribchester, but all have common features. The loom shops needed quite a lot of light, so wide often multiple windows are a tell tale sign of this. Secondly the loom shop had to be kept humid.

Most of the village loom shops were on the ground floor and traces of blocked in windows can be seen. But more often the weaving shops were at the back of the house and many of the best examples cannot be seen from the road.

18. The Millennium Sculpture garden The garden features four carvings by sculptor Fiona Bowley to celebrate the life of the village past present and future. It was commissioned as a piece of public art to mark the Millennium.

The column (opposite) is history written in stone. It tells the story of the community's development from pre-Roman times to the present day and comprises some 30 cameo scenes. The style of carving varies from naive to modern, according to the period depicted. Fiona Bowley modelled the column on Rome's famous Trajan column.



A short history of Ribchester

The village of Ribchester is encircled by green hills and lies in a curve of the River Ribble mid way between Preston and Clitheroe. It is a pleasant jumble of multi-coloured stone cottages in long twisting terraces. It has three pubs, the White Bull, dated 1707, the Black Bull and the Ribchester Arms, and a Sports and Social Club. The White Bull has a porch canopy supported by four columns from Roman ruins. The parish church of St. Wilfrid has a sun-dial with the inscription 'I am a Shadow. So art Thou. I mark Time. Dost Thou?'

The village takes its name from the River Ribble and the fort of Bremetennacum (the walled town by the Ribble). For this reason, Ribchester has been seen to have a purely Roman foundation. But excavations in 1977 showed that settlements going back to the middle Bronze Age existed in the area.

Roman Ribchester

The Roman site at Ribchester, *Bremetennacum Veteranorum*, comprised a fort and civilian settlement or *vicus*.

The earliest Roman fort in Ribchester was established in the early 70s AD as part of a network of defensive forts across northern Britannia. Originally of turf and timber construction, the fort was rebuilt in stone in the mid first century AD.

The fort accommodated a garrison of cavalry troops whose purpose it was to patrol the surrounding area and keep the local inhabitants under control. The first unit of cavalry originated from Spain, the *ala II asturum*, or second Asturian cavalry unit. Towards the end of the second century AD they were replaced by an *ala* of horsemen from Eastern Europe, a Sarmatian cavalry unit. The settlement then took unusual veteran status indicating that a high level of importance was attached to the site. At this point, if it had not already, Bremetennacum became the focal point for governance of the area.

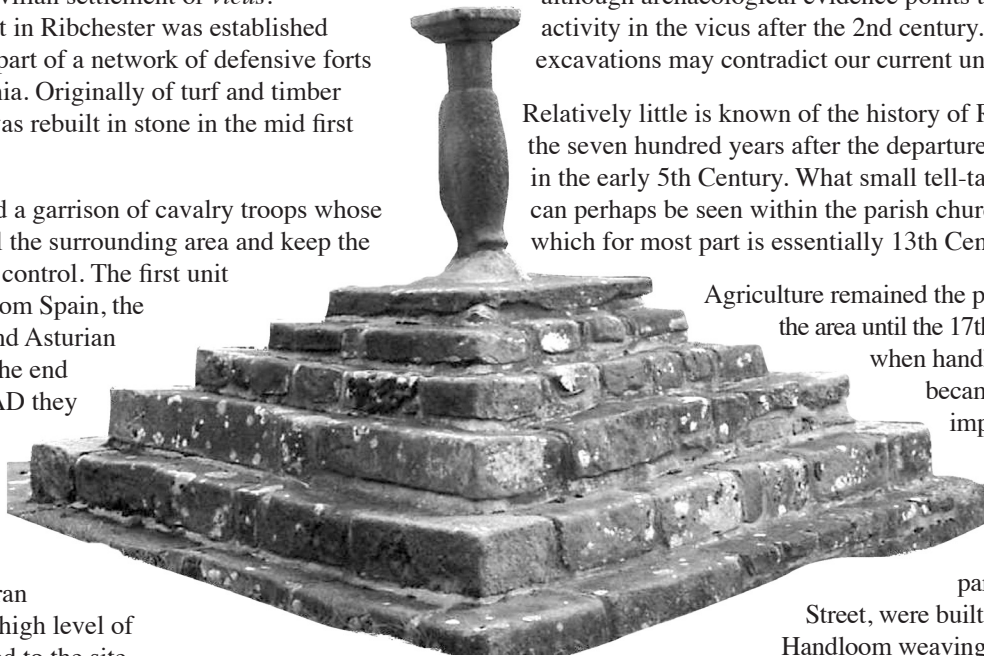
The civilian site outside the fort was extensive and covered an area more or less corresponding to that of the modern village.

Narrow plots were occupied perpendicular to the main Roman roads. Excavations have revealed rectangular wooden buildings used as workshops and dwellings. Craftsmen plied their trades in the *vicus* providing essential goods for both civilians and military personnel alike. Metalworkers and leather workers were particularly abundant, supplying all kinds of military and cavalry equipment.

A network of Roman roads met outside the fort allowing both the military and merchants easy access to and from Bremetennacum in all directions. In 1989 a well-preserved section was excavated running parallel to the north wall of the church yard.

The *vicus* was also the site of the baths, the most substantial stone built construction outside the fort, and at least two temples, fulfilling important social and religious functions. The fort at Ribchester was occupied into the fourth century although archaeological evidence points to there being little activity in the *vicus* after the 2nd century. However, future excavations may contradict our current understanding.

Relatively little is known of the history of Ribchester during the seven hundred years after the departure of the Romans in the early 5th Century. What small tell-tale signs remain can perhaps be seen within the parish church of St. Wilfrid, which for most part is essentially 13th Century.



Sundial in the churchyard of St. Wilfrid

Agriculture remained the principal industry in the area until the 17th and 18th Centuries when handloom weaving became of growing importance to the local economy. Many of the older cottages in the village, particularly in Church Street, were built with this in mind. Handloom weaving reigned supreme for about fifty years before the advent of efficient power looms brought great economic hardship to the area. By 1850 the weavers of Ribchester had fallen on very hard times. Large numbers of young people moved away to the towns and by early 1900 the population of the village had fallen by about one third.

This leaflet was produced by Ribchester Parish Council and is dedicated to the memory of Jim Ridge who in partnership with Mr A C Hodge produced the first village trail in 1984. The Parish Council also acknowledges the following sources and for the help and advice of members of the community.

Mr Roy Skilbeck

(extracts from 'Reflections of Ribchester')

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Ribchester '100 years in photographs' edited by Caroline Openshaw and Ken Ford

The Margery Wordsworth postcard collection.