

South Ribble Primary Schools

Local History Project

The Dark Age



This document provides additional local material to teachers for the teaching of the National Curriculum (History) in Primary schools and has been compiled by Dr David Hunt. These take the form of teaching notes highlighting local links based around a Time Line. They should be seen as a supplement to the mass of national material available on the Internet and on CD.

Contents

- 1 – Overview
- 2 – Dark Age Time Line
- 3 – Main Themes in the Period:
 - The Coming of Christianity
 - The Anglo-Saxons
 - The Vikings and Norsemen
- 4 – The Evidence of Place Names:
 - Religious Names
 - Anglo-Saxon (old-English) Names
 - Norse Names
 - Modern Names
- 5 – The Cuerdale Hoard
 - The Great Find
 - Frequently Asked Questions
 - The Coins
 - The Bullion
- 6 – The Domesday Book (1086)
 - Preston
 - Walton-le-Dale
 - Leyland
 - Penwortham
- 7 – The Ribble Skulls

1 Overview

As the control that the Romans had imposed onto NW Europe began to fail, the migration of small groups of people resumed. North West England was open to these influences from Eastern England down the Ribble valley, and along the western seaways to Lancashire's sandy coast.

We can study these local people from the traces that they have left behind.

These comprise place names, sites and churches, and occasional finds – most notably the great Cuerdale treasure.

The 650 years between the Roman withdrawal and the Norman conquest (404-1066ad) are known as the Dark Age. Of course this was not really a 'dark' age at all, and many of the key events in the emergence of our country took place within it.

Locally we have the first evidence not only for 'Preston', but of many of our villages. Perhaps you live in one of them!

What are these Key events in the evolution of England?

2 Dark Age Time Line

350 Romans abandon Walton site.

389-461 Legend of St.Patrick at Heysham.

400 St.Ninian preaching in Britain.

410 Romans leave Britain.

563 St.Columba lands on Iona.

570 Anglo Saxon families begin to migrate into the county from the east.

597 St.Augustine at Canterbury.

615 British defeated by Anglo Saxons at battle of Chester. End of the Anglo-Saxon conquest. 'tun' place-names.

634-709 St.Wilfrid

664 Synod of Whitby. Celtic and Roma Christians join forces; 'eclis' place names.

670 St.Wilfrid's abbey at Ripon granted lands along the Ribble, probably including Preston. A settlement probably exists here by this time.

735 Death of the Venerable Bede, the 'Father of English history'.

789 First incursion of the Northmen.

793 Viking raid on Lindisfarne.

798 Battle of Whalley: best 'fit' for carbon-14 date of one of the Ribble Skulls.

827 Ethelred Lord of the English.

835 Viking invasions begin in earnest.

861 350 Viking ships appear on the Thames, raid Canterbury and plan to stay.

871 Accession of Alfred the Great. Leads the resistance to the Norsemen. The Vikings rule all the country north of Wessex, and 'Lancashire' is in the Dane Law.

875-900 Viking (Norse) settlements in the Hebrides, Ireland and along the west coast of Britain.

890s Monks compile the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles from ancient documents.

905 Latest date for the coins of the Cuerdale Hoard.

918 Norse capture York.

954 Norse of Northumbria significantly defeated,

1000 Norse Hogback tombs at Halton, Lancaster and Heysham.

1066 Battle of Hastings.

1086 Compilation of the Domesday Book.

3 Migration and Christianity: Main themes in the Period

The coming of Christianity.

Christianity reached Britain during the Roman period. Monks from Ireland preached widely along the coasts of the Irish Sea, among them St. Patrick (389-461ad). An old legend has it that he was shipwrecked in Morecambe Bay, and the ancient chapel on the cliff at Heysham suggests that this site was indeed greatly venerated over a thousand years ago by the later Anglo Saxons.

After meeting at Whitby in 663ad this traditional Celtic church agreed to join forces with the Roman church established by St. Augustine at Canterbury.

Slowly the church was able to impose a measure of order on all the peoples of England who, coming together, contributed to the emergence of a new dialect of German – their own English language. A tongue first spoken in places like Preston and South Ribble, and today the world's favourite tongue!

'Preston' literally means 'the place of the priests', and was a religious centre perhaps long before 670ad. Other very early churches probably existed in Leyland and Walton-Le-Dale.

The Anglo Saxons.

German speakers from the Low Countries were the most important group to move from Europe into England, and accordingly are known as the Anglo-Saxons.

The precise nature of this migration, whether settlement or invasion is still not very clear, but within two hundred years of the Roman withdrawal the country was covered by a network of their petty kingdoms.

Their movement to the west along the Ribble valley from Yorkshire into Lancashire began around 570ad. Again it is not clear if they lived happily alongside the locals or not, Though many of the existing 'British' place-names have survived, the monk Gildas painted a different picture.

He described the invasion as 'a fire from the east which burned from sea to sea', and 'did not die down until, consuming almost all the island that stood above ground, it licked the Western Ocean with its red and savage tongue'.

The Norsemen.

Around 800ad the monasteries along the eastern coast of England began to be raided by the 'Vikings' or Norsemen. Sailing the comparatively short distance to Scotland and NE England in their long-ships they quickly established settlements across the north.

About 900ad many boatloads of Norsemen from Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man began to settle in the western part of our county. This seems to have been a fairly peaceful process, and they generally occupied poorer land which had not previously been settled. It has been said that they filtered into Lancashire rather than invading it.

As the Anglo Saxon kings of the south began to exert their control the frontier of

'England' was steadily pushed northwards.

By 934 the river Ribble had been successfully closed to Viking ships, and the study of place-names suggests that many of our local settlements were also established by this time. By the time that the Domesday Book was compiled in 1086 the outline of settlement pattern was already centuries old.

4 The Evidence of Place names

What our local place-names tell us

These main themes in the story of the Dark Age can be illustrated by a look at the history of our place-names. When we study the map we see Anglo Saxon speakers strongly represented in the east of the county, Norse speakers along the coast and the river estuaries, and Welsh speakers (the descendants of the Ancient Britons) here and there.

Religious place-names

Churches have always been one of a village's principal buildings. Indeed very early churches sometimes gave the name to the village. Our locality has a number of good examples:

Preston: Preosta-Tun, 'The Place (house, farm, settlement) of the Priest (s)'. Old English (Anglo-Saxon). Prestune (1086), Prestonam (1094), Prestona (1160). Lands here were granted to the church of Saint Wilfrid of Ripon in 670.

Eccleston, Eccles: Ecles-Tun, 'The Place of the Church'. Ecles is a British word meaning a church. 'Kirk' serves a similar function in Old English, for example in *Kirkham* and *Ormskirk*.

British place-names

We do not know what the ancient Britons called themselves, but the Anglo Saxons incomers called them the 'Walings' and their tongue 'Welsh'. When the Anglo Saxons found a community of Britons to the south of what is today 'Preston' they called their settlement 'Wal-ton' meaning 'the Place of the Welsh'. We still call it Walton-le-Dale.

A number of our hills and rivers still have names which derive from those given to them by the Britons:

River Ribble. This name is recorded very early RIPPEL (710), RIBBEL (930), RIBBLE (1130).

In the second century the map-maker Ptolemy called the river BELISAMA FLUVIA, the 'Beautiful Stream'.

Alternatively the name we come from the Welsh RHIU BEL or 'Head Stream'.

Before the coming of the factories this river was a fine salmon stream; in June 1760 3500 fish were netted in a single day!

River Darwen. The name is recorded as DEREWENT (1227), DERWENT (1240). It may be derived from the Welsh word for 'oak'.

River Lostock. A very confusing name, but it may be derived from the Welsh for 'Beaver' hence the 'Beaver's stream'.

British place names - overwhelmed by later invasions - are quite rare, but **Penwortham** is a good example. This is really three words: Pen (from the Welsh Penn, a hill), Worth (a form of settlement), and Ham (Old English perhaps here meaning 'land'). So Penwortham might translate as 'The settlement (Worth) by the end of a hill (Pen) with land in the bend of the river (Ham)!

Anglo-Saxon (Old English) place-names

Preston emerging as an important administrative centre in Anglo-Saxon times and the majority of our place names reflect this:

Leyland (Lailand 1086: Leiland 1212: Leyland 1243) 'Farm-Land' probably grassland.

Fishwick (Fiscwic 1086: Fiswich 1203) 'The village where fish are caught or sold'.

Farington (Farinton 1149: ffarington 1327) Perhaps from the Old English for 'Fern' or from the person's name 'Fara'.

Cuerdale (Kiurdale 1190: Keuerdale 1293) 'Low lying ground by a rise'.

Cuerden (Keurden 1200: Kyrden 1451: Keuerden 1554) May be derived from the Welsh Cornish word 'Cerddin' meaning the tree Mountain Ash, or from the Old English person's name 'Coer'. Alternatively it may be the same meaning as Cuerdale.

Longton (Longetuna 1150: Langeton 1243: Longton 1391) 'The Long village', stretching 2.5 miles along Marsh Lane, Liverpool Old Road and Chapel Lane.

Howick (Hocwick 1096: Hokewike 1122: Howyk 1285) 'The homestead by a ridge'. Old English 'Hoh' a ridge of land, 'wic' a homestead.

Hutton (Hotun 1180: Hoton 1200) 'Hoh' a ridge or spur of land, 'Tun' a place.

Walmer Bridge (Waldemure Bruge 1251) Abridge over a brook. 'Walmer' may derive from 'Walde's Mire'.

Middleforth Green (Middelforde 1296) The middle ford crossing the river Ribble before the old bridge was built in the 1750s.

Samlesbury (Samerisberia 1179: Samlesbure 1188: Samelsbur 1212: Shamplesbiry 1246) Interpretation depends on how the 'S' was pronounced. If 'SH' 'a bank or ledge along the river; if 'S' it might indicate a fortified house or fort. Samlesbury had a defended manor house and lies along the bank of the river Ribble.

Brownedge (Le Broune Egge 1313: Brownach Common 1680) The edge of the now vanished Walton Moss, The peat was dug away for fuel and the land reclaimed for farming and housing.

Deepdale (Dupedale 1228: Depedale 1354) 'The deep valley'.
Fulwood.

Blackburn (Blacheburne 1086: Blakeburn 1187) A town on the stream, the Black Burn, the black stream.

Norse Place Names

Since the Norse settled the previously sparsely populated lands along the coasts and in the Fylde, mid-Lancashire is not well endowed with them.

A line of Norse place names cluster along the river Douglas to the west (Hesketh, Beconsall, Tarleton).

Grimсарgh (Grimesarge 1086) The 'argh' (summer pasture) belonging to the Norseman 'Grim'.

Goosnargh (Gusans Arghe 1246) the 'arghe' (summer pasture) belonging to the Irishman Gusan.

Anglezarke (Anlaws Argh) The summer pasture of the Norseman Anlaf or Olaf.

Hoole (Hulle 1204: Hole 1212: Hoole 1508) Scandinavian 'Hula' a hut. Middle English 'Hulu' a hut. Hence:

Much Hoole (Magna Hole 1235: Much Hole 1260: Great Hoole 1320: Hole Magna 1332).

Little Hoole (Litlehola 1200: Parva Hola: Little Hoole 1423)

Modern Place names

Place names continue to evolve right up to the present time.

Bamber Bridge, Bamber Green (c1650) This name was adopted for the district with the opening of the railway station in the mid-nineteenth century. Previously this had been a rural area of scattered houses, and if the area was recognised at all it was known as Little Walton. 'Bamber Bridge' (c1650) is the bridge on the river Lostock under the A49, and may take its name from a member of the Bamber family. Alternatively 'Bim-Brig' occurs as a place name in the fourteenth century, the bridge belonging or built by Bimme.

Tardy Gate (c.1580) The site of Mr. Tardy's gate on the Leyland-Preston road close by the end of Browndedge Road.

Higher Walton The name given to the rebuilt mill settlement in the 1860s, Originally the village was known as Moon's Mill.

Lostock Hall, perhaps named after the house by the river Lostock.

South Ribble A name invented to describe the three separate local government units which were bundled together to create a new grouping in 1974.

5 The Cuerdale Hoard

Direct evidence of Dark Age mid-Lancashire is provided by the great Cuerdale treasure. This was the largest Viking hoard of silver ever found in the country.

The Great Find

'At six o'clock in the evening of the 15th May 1840, a number of workmen were engaged on the river bank repairing the damage done by winter floods, which had disturbed the alluvial soil from the bank...

It would appear that stakes of wood were being driven into the riverbank with the object of forcing a way the soil when the treasure was disclosed...

One of the men struck the leaden chest with his pick when it immediately burst open, whereupon he remarked, 'It's quare' ow these cockle shells her gotten there'.

But it was quickly realised that the 'cockle shells' were really silver coins'.

Some frequently asked questions:

What is it?

Around 8600 items; coins and pieces of silver Irish Norse bullion weighing 40kg, packed into leather bags and buried in a lead chest:

16 ingots, each about 8oz	132oz
Small bars of silver	725oz
Rings, armlets, chains etc	103oz
Around 7000Coins	304 oz
Total weight	1265oz

Who found it?

A party of local workmen repairing flood damage to the river bank in August 1840 who were working for Jonathan Richardson the bailiff of the Cuerdale estate:

William Teasdale, William Dawson, James Walne, John Walmesley, John Walton, Thomas Horrocks, Thomas Parkinson, Thomas Marsden, Thomas Southworth, Henry Bennett, William Valentine, Ambrose Woods, Edward Brown, James Holding.

When was it buried?

Study of the dates of the coins suggests that it was buried sometime between 905 and 910ad.

Where?

Close to the south bank of the river Ribble at Cuerdale.

Where is it now?

The hoard was quickly split up, but the British Museum has the largest collection, where it is on permanent display.

What was it for?

We really do not know. It has been suggested that it was a silversmith's stock in trade, but the favourite explanation is that it was an army's pay chest hurriedly buried.

Why was it buried here?

During the Dark Age the Ribble valley formed a route from Viking York and Ireland. The

Vikings were temporarily driven out of Dublin in 902ad, and it has been suggested that the hoard had been gathered to fund a military expedition from the Ribble valley to recapture the town.

The hoard comprises two elements, the coins and a mass of bullion comprising personal ornaments, bars etc.

The Coins

The 7000 coins are drawn from the entire Viking world, including a single specimen from Byzantium. Most of the coins were English (comprising 5000 Northumbrian Viking silver pennies minted at York about 900ad, and 1000 Anglo Saxon silver pennies of King Alfred and Edward the Elder 899ad) with a further 1000 from 'France'. A small number of coins had probably been in circulation in Scandinavia itself. The latest coins are those of Louis the Blind, Emperor of the West Franks 901-5.

The Bullion

By weight the hoard was dominated by silver bullion (36kg, 80lb). Silver jewellery, luxury items and small items had been cut into pieces or melted down to form ingots. A great array of valuable crafted items had been cut up for melting into bars or handing out as convenient payments. There are no complete examples of jewellery.

The original items were drawn from a wide area, but the majority is of Norse-Irish type, and therefore essentially local. A small number of items came from the Baltic area and 'France'. Taken together with the coins the various contents of the hoard seem to suggest that a large number of smaller parcels had been brought together quite quickly, and just as mysteriously soon buried and lost.

6 The Domesday Book

*'William the First, was the first of our kings,
Not counting Ethelreds, Egberts and things...
And he had himself crowned, anointed and blessed
In 1060... – I needn't tell you the rest!'*

Twenty years later William the Conqueror ordered a great survey of his new realm to be drawn up, comparing the wealth of each district before the conquest (in 'King Edward' time) and after. This became the celebrated Domesday Book.

Although it marks the start of a new era in our land's history it really describes a country which was beginning to emerge out of the Dark Age. The Preston and South Ribble districts are particularly well described. At the close of the long wars with the Vikings lands in the north-west were controlled directly by the crown.

Preston

THE LAND OF THE KING IN YORKSHIRE.

In Preston Earl Tostig had 6 carucates. These lands belong there Ashton, Lea Town etc... (lists 63 places north of the Ribble). All these vills and 3 churches belong to Preston. Of these (vills) 16 are inhabited by a few people, but it is not known how many the inhabitants are, The rest are waste, Roger de Poitou had them.

Preston and the Fylde had belonged to the Northumbrian Earl Tostig and after the conquest these lands had been given to one of William's henchmen Roger of Poitou. A 'carucate' was a Norse measurement of space, defining an area of about 120 acres. Quite what was meant by the 'the rest are waste' is confusing, but most historians assume that this was a result of the extensive fighting in the north.

At the end of the Dark Age Preston had long since emerged as the central place in mid-Lancashire, and the villages of the Fylde (Amounderness) were subordinate to it.

ROGER OF POITOU HELD THE UNDERMENTIONED LANDS BETWEEN THE RIBBLE AND THE MERSEY

Walton-le-Dale

In Blackburn Hundred...

King Edward had ...Walton-le-dale 2 caruscates of land

Though Walton has the most basic of entries it had long existed as a distinct manor,

Leyland

King Edward held Leyland. There is 1 hide and 2 carucates of land. There is woodland 2 leagues long and 1 broad, and a hawk's eyrie. To this Manor belonged 12 carucates of land which 12 free men held for as many manors. In these are 6 hides and 8 carucates of land. There is a woodland 6 leagues long and 3 leagues and 1 furlong broad. The men of this parish and of Salford did not work by custom at the king's hall nor reaped in August. They only made 1 enclosure in the woodland and had the forfeiture for bloodshed and for a woman who had been raped. In respect of the other customs they had the same arrangements as the other manors mentioned above. The whole manor of Leyland with the Hundred rendered at farm to the king £19-18-2d.

Of the land of this manor Gerard holds 1.5 hides, Robert 3 carucates of land, Ralph 2 carucates of land, Roger 2 carucates of land, and Walter 1 carucate of land. There are 4 radmen, a priest, and 14 villans and 6 bordars and 2 oxmen. Among them all have 8 ploughs. There is woodland 3 leagues long and 2 leagues broad, and there are 4 eyries of hawks. The whole is worth 50s. In part it is waste.

Leyland was a comparatively important place, having given its name to the Leyland Hundred, an area of Saxon 'local government' that extended 15 miles south from the river Ribble.

Both Norse and Saxon land measurements are used, but both the Carucate and the Hide were of about the same size, 120 acres. The 'woodland 6 leagues long' probably lay to the east of the village extending to the foothills of the Pennines at Winter Hill. In the troubled time following the conquest the value of the manor and Hundred had fallen from almost £20 to 50 shillings, but it is again unclear just what 'waste' meant; it does not necessarily mean the place had been utterly destroyed.

A Radman was a mounted escort or messenger.

A Villan was a farmer.

A Border was an occupier of a smallholding.

The Oxmen were very important people, having charge of the community's largest ploughing equipment.

Leyland had a Priest, but the entry does not tell us where he was based, Leyland, Eccleston or Croston?

Leyland does appear to have been the administrative centre of the Hundred, and the important storage barns for the collection of payments in crops may have stood close by the site of St. Andrew's church.

Penwortham

King Edward held Penwortham. There are 2 carucates of land and they rendered 10d.

Now there is a castle, and there are 2 ploughs in a demesne and 6 burgesses and 3 radmen and 8 villans and 4 oxmen. Among them all they have 4 ploughs. There is half a fishery. There is woodland and eyries of hawks as in the time of King Edward. It is worth £3.

The entry for Penwortham is particularly interesting, and the village is a place rising in the world, worth 60s a year against Leyland's 50s. A castle has been recently built (its 'Motte' can still be seen in the graveyard) and on the river there is half a fishery (the other half belonging to Preston). Who the burgesses were has never been satisfactorily explained: their presence could indicate the establishment of some form of urban settlement but if such existed it did not survive long.

7 The Ribble Skulls

During the construction of Preston Dock a new path was cut for the river Ribble. This enormous trench revealed a number of interesting archaeological finds, among them a large number of human skulls. These are the remains of bodies swept down the river over a many thousands of years and preserved by the silt at the bottom of the river. Modern science allows them to be dated, and one specimen in particular aroused great interest. It was the remains of a young woman whose skull had a serious head wound. Although the dating cannot be absolutely precise she may have been a victim of the Anglo Saxon battle fought near Whalley in April 798AD. At last however, we have come face to face with an inhabitant of Dark Age Lancashire.

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In 2006 South Ribble Borough Council was awarded a grant to run an educational programme by the American Alcoa Foundation. The objective was to provide key source materials to teachers to supplement the teaching of Local History at Key Stage Two with information which they may not otherwise have the time to locate themselves.