

The Story of Freckleton through 2000 Years.

The village of Freckleton is situated in an area of Lancashire known as The Fylde, on the north shore at the mouth of the River Ribble. The Rivers Dow and Douglas also join the Ribble nearby. Freckleton was used by the Romans as a port serving their fort at Kirkham, a few miles inland.

The name Freckleton, however, is an Anglo-Saxon name and was given to the Township of Freckleton. "Freck" doubtless alluded to the temperament of the inhabitants as they were known to the people of the surrounding districts and, while it can mean "lusty", it can also mean "eager to be quarrelsome" or "defend a dispute". Maybe it continues from their Roman period when they would make forays to rescue young men being taken away from their port as conscripts. "Ton" is the Saxon word for "an enclosed place".

From the medieval period the place has certainly belied the latter meaning as history has shown it to be a peaceful oasis away from the turmoil of the times – just away from the North Road and surrounded by marshes. Before the Norman Conquest by William in 1066 the land formed part of the Earl Tosig's Lordship of Preston and "was held by a family assuming the name of Freckleton".

After the Conquest, William had an inventory made of his newly conquered land. This was done in 1086 and known as the Great National Book of Winchester but generally known as The Domesday Book. Freckleton is recorded there though the name is spelled "FRECHELTON" and is written as "Frechelton Manors". It consisted of four caracates of land. These would normally be ploughed or "worked" land. Four caracates would equate to four hundred acres. On the scale of the times that would constitute a very thriving place.

Early records show the spelling as FREQUELTON (1212), FREKELTON (1242) and FREKILTON (1244). Roger de Freckleton is the first recorded member of the family in 1199. In 1201, the second year of King John's reign, an entry occurs in the Lancaster Records – a personal property of the monarch – that one R de Frekelton made a payment of five Marks, (approximately Three Pounds, Thirty Pence) for the use of the pasture "Brechemor" (Breckmoor). This is quite a large sum for that period, and the land must have been extensive and of value. This R de Frekelton may have been either Ralph or Richard since both names often occur in the family at this time. Not until the thirteenth century do we find an extended list of local landowners, again the family name "Freckelton" appearing with first names of Richard, John, Ralph, Ivan, etc.

It should be understood that, in medieval England, the only "Landowner" was the King. Various parcels of England were then passed down, or leased, for services or "enfoeffed" as it was called. A whole county or two may be leased to an Earl and payment may be in men for the King's army or in cash, raised as taxes. The Earl would then continue to subdivide the county and receive the promise of men, goods or money for it. Records show that the heirs of Adam de

Freckleton held their lands from Alice, daughter of the Earl of Lincoln, owner of the manor. Another de Freckleton, Robert, also had extensive land holdings, while the family also held Wittingham Hall from the same Alice Lacey, (daughter of the Earl of Lincoln). In 1199 a water mill was in existence owned by Sir Richard Freckleton, son of Roger. By 1242 he held more than half of the land in Freckleton.

The Hall was, no doubt, passed on to the various Richards, Adams, Ralphs, Johns, Henrys and Roberts until about 1427, when Joan, daughter of Ralph de Freckleton, carried it to her husband, William Muddleston. This seems to be the last direct Freckleton connection with the Manor. The Manor did pass to various families and the last recorded occupier appears to be the Sharples family in 1618. It then disappears from records. However, records show that in this period a Thomas Freckleton married Alice Sharples and his sister, Elizabeth Freckleton, married Alice's brother, George Sharples. So, undoubtedly, the Freckletons remained connected to the Hall.

In 1615 a new mill and house were built and, in 1699, were sold to the Earl of Derby. It later passed on to the Clifton family in 1850. Farmers from all over the Fylde brought corn to be ground at the mill and it was still in full working order until 1915. Incidentally, in hard winters villagers would skate on the mill pond to violin and melodeon music.

This musical tradition has continued through the years and Freckleton has had a prize-winning brass band for over a hundred years. The current band is in the Championship Brass Band category and has recorded a CD. They also have a Home Page on the internet.

Sailcloth was made in the village for many years for the early boating industry. Cargoes of wood, grain and slate arrived, mainly from Connah's Quay on the River Dee and sometimes from Ireland. Coal was unloaded daily, coming from Wigan, up the River Douglas to Freckleton. In 1814 a shipyard was established and the first ocean-going vessel was built in 1871. Six schooners, ten sharking boats, a sailing yacht and river barges were built. In later years the shipyard serviced all the lifeboats in the North-West of England.

The Freckleton's last recorded connection with the village seems to be a Ralph de Freckleton who held, what was termed, a "meessuage" or dwelling house with outbuildings and lands. He died in 1612 but did leave an heir, Henry.

A Sir Ferdinando Freckleton was knighted in Dublin Castle on James' I (James VI of Scotland) coronation day, July 1603. Ferdinando also received a BA from Oxford University in 1573. How he came by the very Spanish name of Ferdinando would be an interesting story. Ferdinando probably accompanied the Earl of Essex, Queen Elizabeth's favourite, to Ireland in 1599. Essex was a magnet for young men of the time wanting adventure and looking forward to the day when the old queen would be no more. Ferdinando was, in some ways, fortunate not to have been knighted by the Earl of Essex. The earl knighted some fifty young gentlemen during his Irish campaign. This was contrary to the Queen's orders and it was one of the reasons that Essex was executed in 1601. The men who had been knighted by Essex were always referred to

in a derogatory fashion as “Irish Knights”. Ferdinando avoided this and was the recipient of a Coronation Day honour given by James I. Perhaps, Ferdinando remained in Ireland and began the Irish branch of the family.

The family seems to have been originally established around Keady, County Armagh or close by in County Monahan. In 1900 they were still there and some of the family had lived in the same home for over a hundred years. By the 1700s this branch was firmly established in County Armagh, County Down and County Antrim. Due, no doubt, to their accents the name began to be spelled “Frickleton” by some of the family. In the early and mid-1800s, as famine swept over Ireland the family began to spread its wings again. Various members emigrated to England, Scotland, New Zealand, Australia and one branch of the family, through a John Orr Freckleton established itself in Utah, USA while still others moved to Rhode Island, NY, Menard County, Illinois and Montana Territory. A Susan Frackleton, from one of the USA families, took to the art of pottery in the late nineteenth century. Some of her work is currently valued (1980) at \$6000.

In 1901 John Orr Freckleton returned to County Armagh for a visit and his diary records that he visited a Joshua Freckleton in Keady. He quotes, “*the house on the hill, the home of the Freckletons for over a hundred years*”. He writes in his diary, “*in plain sight on an eminence a mile distant I see the ancient homestead of Samuel Freckleton, father of this family. The place is called “Tallnagar” and it is in the county Monahan*”. The diary also records a meeting with Mrs Margaret M Freckleton, the wife of Andy Freckleton. “*Her husband was killed in a pit in Scotland. Some man squeezed him against the top of the mine where it was low and he died*”. It appears that he and the other man were quarrelling about a car or trolley and the result was Andy’s murder. Today there are still Frackletons living in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

During the 1400s the Freckletons show up in the Midlands of England where a Thomas Freckleton is shown in the Guild Book of Stratford on Avon and an Edmund Freckleton was admitted to the same guild in 1506. This line lists a George Freckleton as Vicar of Budworth in the County of Warwick and a John Freckleton of the Priory Warwick. However, they seem to have become centred in the little town of Spandon in Derbyshire from the early 1600s until about 1813. This branch is still located in the Midlands in and around Leicestershire. In the middle of the nineteenth century this branch was using Freckleton as the spelling of the name. A Henry Freckleton, born in County Armagh, married a Margaret McCreary in Stirlingshire, Scotland and the Scottish branch of the family was founded. Again, though the spelling of the name was changed, possibly by accents or semi-literate clerks. This time it became Frickleton and shows up in 1876 with a Robert Frickleton, one of the ten children of Henry who adopted this spelling. Subsequently, some of this Henry’s branch emigrated to New Zealand. One, Samuel Frickleton, who was born in Slamannan, Stirlingshire, earned the Victoria Cross in World War I with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

Lance Corporal, later Captain, Samuel Frickleton, 3rd Battallion, 3rd N.Z. Rifle Brigade, N.Z.E.F. was gazetted on August 2, 1917. His citation reads, “*On 7th June, 1917 at Messines, Belgium, Lance Corporal Frickleton, although slightly wounded, dashed forward at the head of his section,*

pushed into our barrage and personally destroyed with bombs an enemy machine-gun crew which was causing heavy casualties. He then attacked a second gun killing all the crew of twelve. By the destruction of these two guns he undoubtedly saved his own and other units from very severe casualties. During the consolidation of this position he received a second severe wound”.

Samuel Frickleton survived the war and died in Wellington, New Zealand on September 1, 1971, aged eighty.

In the mid-1800s the family was also re-establishing roots in Lancashire, though this time not in a small rural village but in the then booming Port of Liverpool. At that time members of the family were using the spelling of Freckleton and Frackleton and some used Frackelton. It was inevitable that members of the Liverpool group became involved in shipping. Two members of the family lost their lives at sea in World War II.

Then, on a late summer day in 1944, the village of Freckleton burst into the news. On Wednesday, August 23, at 10:30 in the morning, an American Air Force B24H was cleared for take-off from nearby Warton's runway 08. Warton was the home of a USAF repair facility. This aeroplane was being test-flown by 1st Lieut. John Bloemendal with T/Sgt Jimmie Parr as co-pilot and Sgt. George Kinney as Flight Engineer. Shortly after take-off warning was received that a violent storm was approaching the area and an immediate recall was issued to Bloemendal's aircraft and another that was also on a test-flight. By the time the two bombers returned to Warton the storm was at its height. The two aircraft turned to hold clear of the storm. Witnesses related that the rain was so heavy that it was impossible to see across the road. The wind uprooted trees and thunder and lightning rolled across the sky. However, John Bloemendal and his crew were caught in a massive downdraught as they headed away and the B24 plunged to earth in the centre of Freckleton. The aircraft totally destroyed the "Sad Sac Café" on the north side of the Lytham Road where some American and RAF personnel had joined civilians sheltering from the storm. The bomber crossed the road and ploughed into the infant class of Freckleton's Holy Trinity School, causing massive loss of life. Petrol from the aircraft tanks exploded and the centre of the village was engulfed in flames. From the infant classroom only three children emerged alive. Thirty-five children and two teachers died. One of the teachers, a Miss Jenny Hall, had only arrived at the school the day before the accident. Bodies of six Americans and four RAF members along with several civilians were recovered from the café. Several of the more seriously injured victims died within the next few weeks. The total death toll was sixty-one.

The majority of the victims were buried in a communal grave in the village's Holy Trinity Churchyard. A year later two thousand people watched the official opening of a Memorial Playground constructed by American servicemen as a permanent memorial. A bronze plaque set into a seven ton block of granite is the centerpiece of an ornamental garden. The money raised from a memorial fund became the centre of a prolonged and bitter wrangle and the two factions fought for thirty years over whether to build a new school or a village hall. By the time a decision had been made the value of the cash had dwindled in real terms to about a third of its original value. A new school having been built in the interval the money for the new hall

provided only a tenth of the required £60,000 estimated cost. The Village Hall finally opened in September, 1977.

In the 1990s the village is being encroached upon by the City of Preston from the east and Lytham St Anne's from the west. The major employer in the area is British Aerospace located at Warton just a few miles west.

Today the tourists' guide for the Fylde says, "*Freckleton is one of the oldest and largest of the Fylde villages. It is a former port situated on the Ribble estuary and gives access to the Lancashire Coastal Way walking route. Freckleton is renowned for its Annual Music Festival which is the largest rural festival in the country*"

From humble beginnings in a little town on the shore of the Irish Sea the name has spread to Ireland, Scotland, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Papua, New Guinea. A dam in Australia and a bank building in the USA carry the name. We probably speak with a hundred different accents and our common name gets pronounced in ten different ways. Some, probably, do know where the name comes from and some may not even care. But the name and the little village of Freckleton have survived for two thousand years; let us hope that they can survive for two thousand more.

E. C. Freckleton.
Bolton, Ontario, Canada.
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