

RIBCHESTER CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



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RIBCHESTER CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Introduction

Purpose of the appraisal

This appraisal seeks to record and analyse the various features which give the Ribchester Conservation Area its special architectural and historic interest. The area's buildings and spaces are noted and described, and marked on the Townscape Appraisal map along with listed buildings, buildings of townscape merit, significant trees and spaces, and important views into and out of the conservation area. There is a presumption that all of these features should be "preserved or enhanced", as required by the legislation.

This appraisal builds upon national policy, as set out in PPG15, and local policy, as set out in the Local Plan 1998, and provides a firm basis on which applications for development within the Ribchester Conservation Area can be assessed.



Stone House, Blackburn Road

Overview

Ribchester Conservation Area consists of the village core centred around a small triangular area, on one side of which is the White Bull Inn, and Stydd, a rural area north-east of the main settlement which contains two churches and 18th century almshouses.

Ribchester village is dominated by rows of handloom weavers' cottages, many of which were built in the late eighteenth century, but some of which were also adapted from existing houses. There is a scattering of older houses in the village, many of which have seventeenth or eighteenth century datestones. There is a small amount of late nineteenth or early twentieth century development on the north side of the village, around Blackburn Road. The area also includes the excavated areas of the Roman baths and granaries, now preserved in an open area of land for display to the public, and the Roman Museum, next to the church.

Stydd is approached via a narrow single track road. After leading first to the Roman Catholic Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, a listed 'barn church' built in 1789, then Stydd Almshouses (1728), the road becomes a rough track that continues to the late 12th century Church of St Saviour.



Handloom weaver's cottages in Church Street

Summary of special interest

The special interest that justifies designation of the Ribchester Conservation Area derives from the following features:

- Remains of Roman fort and associated outbuildings of settlement (*vicus*), including granaries and bath house, much of which is protected by Scheduled Monument status;
- The architectural and historic interest of the area's buildings, 21 of which are listed;
- Two grade I churches: Church of St Wilfred and Church of St Saviour, Stydd;
- Church of St Peter and St Paul (grade II), a 'barn church' and one of the earliest Catholic churches in Lancashire;
- Stydd Almshouses, listed grade II*;
- Narrow, closely developed streets of former handloom weavers' settlement;
- Ensemble of St Wilfred's Church, Rectory, Museum and Churchgates;
- Handloom weaver's cottages, including two with cellar loomshops, particularly in Church Street and Water Street;
- Good examples of late 19th century terraced houses along Church Street and Blackburn Road;
- River Ribble;
- The prevalent use of local building stone;
- Stydd, a tiny rural hamlet containing two historic churches and 18th century almshouses;
- Open space in front of White Bull;
- Views of River Ribble and surrounding landscape;
- Individual trees and groups of trees.

The planning policy context

Conservation areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. A conservation area is defined as “*an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”. It is the quality and interest of an *area*, rather than that of individual buildings, which is the prime consideration in identifying a conservation area.

Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are conservation areas. Section 72 specifies that, in making a decision on an application for development in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

This document should be read in conjunction with national planning policy guidance, particularly Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG 15) – Planning and the Historic Environment. The layout and content follows guidance produced by English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the English Historic Towns Forum.



The White Bull dates from the early 18th century

Local planning policy

Local planning policies for the preservation of scheduled monuments and conservation of historic parks and gardens, listed buildings and conservation areas are set out in the Ribble Valley Local Plan which was adopted in June 1998 (Policies ENV14, ENV15, ENV16, ENV17, ENV18, ENV19, ENV20, ENV21) and the Joint Lancashire Structure Plan 2001-2016 which was adopted on 31st March 2005 (Policies 20 and 21, supported by draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) entitled ‘Landscape and Heritage’).

The Ribchester Conservation Area was designated on 17 July 1973.

Location and setting

Location and context

Ribchester lies on the north bank of the River Ribble, at *c* 27m above sea level among low hills which form foothills to the peat-covered uplands of the central Pennines. The Ribble flows between the Forest of Bowland in the north and the hill country of Pendle in the south.

To the north and south of Ribchester the land rises markedly, with Longridge Fell (5km to the north), an isolated Pennine outlier, rising to over 350m, and Anglezarke Moor, less than 16km to the south. To the west, the land drops gradually to the flat, former mosslands, of the Lancashire Fylde. Adjacent to the village, the Ribble is between 15m and 25m wide in summer, but in flood can overflow to as much as 250m at the meander opposite the end of Church Street.



The Victorian Rectory overlooks the River Ribble

General character and plan form

The Roman north-west generally lacked towns. The only settlements which appear to have had urban functions in most of the region were the *vici* which grew up adjacent to the Roman forts. Ribchester's *vicus* is likely to be the closest that Ribchester ever came to being a town. Nevertheless, its local importance in the Roman period, and probable control of a sizeable territory is likely to have given it an historical central place function.

Although it has been considered that occupation of parts of the fort may have continued into the Anglo-Saxon period, there is no conclusive evidence for occupation in Ribchester in the early medieval period.

The nature of medieval settlement in Ribchester is not known. The layout of streets does not indicate that there was any real element of planning, but the settlement appears to have evolved as a nucleated settlement between the church and the road to Blackburn, perhaps focused along the line of the Roman roads. Blackburn Road was formerly known

as Back Lane, and the main route would have followed Church Street and Water Street. Back Lane may thus have marked the rear boundary of properties, but none of the existing property boundaries show evidence of planning. There is no evidence to show when the nucleated settlement of Ribchester originated.

Ribchester was probably a nucleated settlement by the late medieval period. By the post medieval period, the settlement was based north of St Wilfred's church, around the route from Longridge to Blackburn. There is some evidence to suggest that the open area in front of the White Bull may have been a market place, or at least the site of the three annual fairs.

Ribchester's greatest period of expansion and prosperity was from the late eighteenth century, when rows of handloom weavers' cottages were built in Church Street and Water Street, transforming a small rural settlement into an industrial village. Even though two small cotton mills opened in Ribchester in the second half of the nineteenth century, the village's position, isolated from the main area of industrial expansion in east Lancashire, meant that its potential as an industrial centre was never realised.



Roman Bath House (remains of)

Landscape setting

Topography, geology, relationship to surroundings

Ribchester stands on the flood plain of the Ribble Valley, on the north bank of the river, near a crossing point. About one third of the area of Ribchester's Roman fort has been lost due to erosion of the river bank to date.

The rural Ribble Valley is one of the key characteristics of the Lancashire Valleys countryside character area, lying on its north western edge. The valley is mainly pastoral in character, with small to medium sized fields bounded by hedgerows and with small hedgerow trees, creating a sense of intimacy in contrast to the surrounding fells, which form an important backdrop. Around Ribchester the bedrock geology is dominated by the 'Sabden Shales' formation, previously part of the Millstone Grit Group.

Historic development and archaeology

Origins and historic development

The place-name form *Riblecaster* is found in *Domesday Book*, but by 1202 became *Ribblecester*, the name perhaps exhibiting differences in dialect between the *-caster* (cf Lancaster) of the Old English word *ceaster* 'walled town', found in Northumbrian lands north of the Ribble, and the *-cester* or *-chester* forms of the Mercian lands south of the river.

The Stydd place-name is recorded as *le Stede* in 1276. Its origins are from the Old English for 'place', a steading, which later also meant 'farm, estate of land'. There are examples elsewhere of it possibly meaning 'place of worship'.



River Ribble

Prehistory Little is known of prehistoric Ribchester but during excavations at Parsonage Avenue a Bronze Age circular ditch and cremation burials in collared urns were uncovered. These were radiocarbon dated to *c* 1300 BC. A late Bronze Age triple-headed bracelet mount is reported to have come from the town.

Roman The first Roman activity at Ribchester dates to around AD 72, when a timber fort was established. The Latin name for the settlement was *Bremetennacum Veteranorum*. It was situated on the important road from Manchester via Carlisle to Scotland. The early timber fort was modified *c* AD 82-86, and subsequently demolished *c* AD 117-25. The rebuilding of the *principia* (headquarters) in stone may have been done by the Sixth Legion in *c* AD 198-209.

There was then limited occupation until the fourth century, the latest coin so far found being minted in AD 367, but final evacuation may have been as late as AD 383. For part of its history, the fort was apparently of high status, with a cavalry regiment garrison, and a regional governor as commander.

Medieval There have been a number of finds from Ribchester which suggest settlement in the area in the early medieval period. The sundial in the courtyard is thought to incorporate an earlier cross base, and at least two pre-Norman cross fragments have been found in the churchyard. In addition, there was a stray find of a Saxon coin, eight sherds of possibly early medieval ceramic were found from the area of the *vicus* site at 28 Water Street, and a findspot of an eighth-century bronze boss, the only one of its type from Lancashire came from Ribchester.

The nature of any settlement of this period is not known. Even so, it is likely that the tradition of an important place as well as the practicality of surviving defences may have attracted Anglo-Saxon use of the former Roman Settlement, as is known to have happened elsewhere.

The church appears to have been established after the Domesday Survey of 1086, which does not mention a church at Ribchester. It may have been established in the twelfth century, following its transfer to Blackburn Hundred, and the building does contain a Romanesque window. In general, however, the church is thirteenth-century in style. The north, or Dutton, chapel, and south porch were added in the fourteenth century, and the west tower in the late fifteenth century. A chantry was founded in 1405.



Iron railings and greenery beside the Ribble

Ribchester up to the late eighteenth century. Little is known about the development of Ribchester through the post medieval period. It certainly continued as a wholly rural settlement, largely dependent on agriculture, but it does not appear to have been a settlement of any wealth. The settlement was centred on the area north of the church, and its northern limit appears to have been on the north side of the present road running between Longridge and Blackburn, then called Back Lane, and the main road passed through the centre of the village. Parts of the village appear to have been lost to erosion by the River Ribble, and by 1773, Ribchester was described as a '*poor village*', where annual encroachments by the River Ribble had swept away a row of houses and some gardens and threatened the village.

There are a large number of characteristically eighteenth-century houses in Ribchester, and other, apparently eighteenth century buildings hide older origins, such as 48 Church Street, which dates from 1680. Number 49 Blackburn Road has a datestone door lintel, inscribed 'R W 1700', re-used as a window sill. The process of adaptation continued, for example at Churchgates, which was converted into one house from a terrace of three seventeenth-century cottages in 1906.



St Saviour's Church, Stydd

Ribchester in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From the late eighteenth century Ribchester became a local centre of handloom weaving. There had been linen weaving from at least the early seventeenth century, when specialist linen weavers were recorded. By the late eighteenth century, the domestic weavers had switched to cotton, and a large number of houses with loomshops had been built. Many of the houses in Church Street, opposite the White Bull Inn for example, had loomshops and date from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, though many were probably rebuilds of earlier houses. Water Street also has surviving weavers' houses, including number 18 which has a triple loomshop window, number 31 which has an offset window and may have been the loomshop of number 32, and number 30 and 30A which may have been one house. These cottages mark the period of greatest economic prosperity in Ribchester, from about 1780 until 1830, after which the advent of power looms brought hardship to the handloom trade. Ribchester's location, remote from the main centre of the machine-powered cotton textile industry of east Lancashire, would have led to some depopulation, with villagers attracted to the main urban centres.

Ribchester had a manorial water corn mill from at least the thirteenth century. A corn mill was still functioning in the 1820s, and its location has been postulated approximately opposite the modern Ribchester Arms. This was a bobbin mill in 1847, but was clearly marked as a watermill in 1786. Two cotton mills opened in the village from the mid-nineteenth century. Bee Mill still stands but the second mill was demolished in 1990 and the site used for housing (Sarmatian Fold).

Textile industry. There is slight evidence that there was a late-eighteenth-century carding and jenny mill on the north side of Ribchester, where an engine house was marked in 1847. This may have been the spinning mill belonging to Peel, Yates and Company of the Church, known to have been somewhere in this area in 1802. Some foundations were extant in 1990. Ribchester's isolated position in the Ribble valley, away from east Lancashire's industrial centre, the coalfield and the canals, limited the impact of the factory-based textile industry in the nineteenth century. The corn mill, which continued grinding until at least 1825, was adapted as a bobbin mill by William Welsby, though corn milling may have continued at the same time for a few years. The business was still working in c 1912.



Almshouses, Stydd founded under the will of John Shireburn c.1726

Commercial development. There is no detailed information on commerce in Ribchester in the late eighteenth century, although there is documentary evidence for small-scale hat-making from 1767 and later. In the nineteenth century, trade directories and the tithe map provide evidence of a range of businesses, presumably stimulated by demand from workers at the bobbin mill, and later from mill employees.

In 1831 there were 55 retail traders in Ribchester, and in 1838 there were 17 shops, presumably general retailers' within the defined urban area. The range of commercial premises recorded by trade directories indicates that Ribchester businesses were typical of a village, including a blacksmith, a wheelwright, various boot and shoe shops, butchers, groceries, a tailor, a timber dealer, a cabinet maker, and a flag dealer. In 1886, the Ribchester Industrial Co-operative Society built a shop at 32 Church Street. The upper floor, reached from street level up a grand staircase contained a meeting room, used also as a dance hall from at least the 1920s, and possibly as a cinema.

Pubs, inns and hotels. There appear to have been a number of inns in Ribchester by the eighteenth century. These include two inns, the Red Lion and The Unicorn's Head, which were washed away by the River Ribble in the eighteenth century.

Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. Up until 1789, Roman Catholics worshipped in various private homes. In 1767, there were 275 in Ribchester and a further 49 in Stydd, including a number of weavers. In 1789, the Roman Catholic church of Saints Peter and Paul at Stydd was opened, and is the oldest church in use in Salford Diocese, and the last unaltered 'Barn Church'. It is one of the earliest Catholic churches in Lancashire. Near to the church are the Stydd Almshouses which, according to a lost inscription, were built by John Sherburne in 1698. The almshouses are, of two storeys with a first floor arcade of three semi-circular moulded arches, and two, possibly re-used Roman, Doric columns. The upper floor is approached by a central flight of stone steps, and the building originally contained six dwellings, five for poor old single women or widows professing the Roman Catholic religion, and the sixth for the school teacher, free of rent.

Schools. The present primary school was built as a National School in 1872. There was also a Roman Catholic school in Stydd Cottage up to about 1861, where boys were taught on the ground floor, girls on the first floor. The cottage was demolished in 1965.



Building adjacent to Ribchester Arms



O.S. 1847



O.S. 1893

Spatial analysis

Key views and vistas

There is no indication that any of Ribchester's streets were laid out to provide vistas of distant points, although their layout does focus on the open area in front of the White Bull. Ribchester's post medieval development as a handloom weavers' settlement has resulted in quite narrow, closely developed streets. The area around the church is the most open area, where the Rectory, a large house known as Churchgates, and the Museum are laid out spaciouly, with views across the river to open countryside.



Ribchester Museum beside St Winifred's Church

The character of spaces within the area

The small size of the settlement meant that it was always closely linked to its rural surroundings. The need for open, social places within the town was not great. In consequence there were no formal open spaces, aside from the churchyard and open triangular area in front of the White Bull.

The playing field on the west side of the village forms the main open space. This area will remain open as it lies in the area of the Roman fort and *vicus*, and is a Scheduled Monument. Likewise, a small area between Greenside and Water Street, which had formerly been part of the common waste, is also a Scheduled Monument and remains open land.

Stydd is a small rural hamlet in which a few buildings are set in virtually open countryside.

Definition of the special interest of the conservation area

Activities/uses

The conservation area is primarily residential. The former Bee Mill on the north-east of the town is the workplace of a small number of businesses, just outside the conservation area. There is a small supermarket in the town, a teasshop and cafe but currently (August 2005) no post office. There are four churches (Anglican, Roman Catholic and Evangelical) and three pubs or inns (White Bull, Black Bull and Ribchester Arms). Ribchester Museum, established in 1914 and dedicated to the Romano-British history of Ribchester, is a popular attraction, recently extended. The Ribble Valley Way, a middle-distance footpath that follows the full 70 miles of the river, from its source at Ribblehead in North Yorkshire to the flat, tidal marshes of its estuary west of Preston, passes through the conservation area. The sound of the St Wilfrid's primary school bell is a feature of the southern end of Church Street.



Natural stone paving leading to the south door of St Winifred's Church

Architectural and historic character

Ribchester has a high number of buildings surviving from the late eighteenth century, and some are probably rebuildings or alterations of earlier structures. It seems highly likely that Ribchester was substantially rebuilt from the later eighteenth century into the early nineteenth century corresponding with its growth as an industrial village and centre of handloom weaving. The survival of these buildings in Ribchester has retained a character that would have been shared by many of east Lancashire's textile towns around 1800. In these other settlements later expansion led to the replacement of earlier buildings which as a consequence of overcrowding were often regarded as slums. In Ribchester it is clear that these handloom weavers' cottages were well built for their period and a cause of pride as indicated by the numerous examples with initialled datestones.

In keeping with many small provincial towns, the impact of Georgian building techniques was notable but also mixed with local building techniques and building customs

continued to be used. Some of the cottages whilst being broadly vernacular in style have high quality classically inspired detailing on their sandstone door surrounds. As with many other towns where nineteenth century development was limited, the physical environment retains a distinctive local individuality. Typically of such settlements, the status of the buildings and the occupants was mixed throughout and there was no development of specific class related areas. Overall, however, there is a high proportion of handloom weavers' cottages, built as two-up, two-down properties. Some had either first floor or ground floor weaving windows, but others had separate loomshops added to the rear of the buildings, or in the rear yards. Although the highest concentration of weavers' cottages is in Church Street and Water Street, loomshops in Greenside and Stydd illustrate that provision for handloom weaving was provided throughout the settlement. Nos 16-22 Church Street had attic loomshops but there is little evidence for the use of cellar loomshops, as Ribchester's location within the floodplain of the River Ribble would have made them susceptible to flooding. There is a pair of cottages at 61 and 62 Church Street, however, with former cellar loomshops.



Mounting block formed from a single piece of sandstone at The White Lion

Building materials and local details

The buildings of Ribchester were constructed mainly in Millstone Grit, with some fine grained sandstone used for decorative features, such as door and window surrounds. Stone flags and slate were used for roofing. In the late eighteenth and earlier nineteenth century most buildings were constructed using water-shot stone building techniques. Older buildings were rubble-faced, and later nineteenth century structures were built using pitch-faced stone blocks.

Given the large amount of building that took place in the centre of Ribchester in the second half of the eighteenth century, many of the older buildings must have been replaced. There are some seventeenth century buildings, which may have survived because they were built of stone. It is likely that in Ribchester, as in Clitheroe, most of the buildings were originally built of timber and thatch, and which were replaced by stone and slate from the post medieval period.

There are relatively few brick-built buildings in Ribchester. The oldest are three houses in the centre of the village, one of which is dated 1777 and the other two of which date to 1745. The houses are fairly large and impressive, and brick would have been used to make a statement about the status and quality of the buildings. Most brick-built structures in Ribchester date to the end of the nineteenth or early twentieth century, when factory-made brick was readily available. This can be seen in small areas of terraced houses and an early twentieth century mission church on Blackburn Road. In some cases, stone was used for the front elevations, with brick to the rear and sides. The late date of the terraces is reflected in the use of large bay windows and small front gardens, features which had become common in terraced houses of all sizes by the end of the nineteenth century.



Trees and meadow flowers in the churchyard of St Winifred's Church

Buildings of Townscape Merit

Marked on the Townscape Appraisal map for the Ribchester Conservation Area are a number of *unlisted* buildings which have been judged as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. This follows advice provided in English Heritage guidance on conservation area character appraisals, and within Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15), both of which stress the importance of identifying and protecting such buildings.

Local details

- Prominent trees and tree groups are marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map. Lack of a specific reference on the map does not imply that a tree or group is not of value;
- A small park beside no. 26 Church Street (west side) contains a 1936 memorial and stone sculptures;
- A row of benches above the river bank and overlooking the river is a popular spot;
- Historic floorscape - small and localised areas of historic floorscape are part of the area's special interest and should be preserved. For example, cobbles outside The White Bull, stone slabs outside the doors of nos. 63-73 and 68-74 Church Street, stone paving to St Wilfred's and outside The Black Bull;



Open space in front of Greenside

Issues

This section provides a summary of the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) identified during the appraisal process.

Strengths: The most important *positive* features of the Ribchester Conservation Area are:

- Picturesque large village with substantial Roman remains;
- Ribchester Museum, a popular attraction;
- Location on the Ribble Valley Way, surrounded by open countryside;
- Ribchester is the only large village on the River Ribble;
- Historic character and appearance of core area;



Old iron kissing gate to St Winifred's churchyard

Weaknesses: The principal *negative* features of the Ribchester Conservation Area are:

- Loss of architectural detail (original windows, doors etc);
- Insensitive alteration of historic buildings spoiling the conservation area's historic character and appearance;
- The open space at the rear of the Black Bull, visible through the gap in the Blackburn Road frontage north of The Black Bull is unkempt and out of keeping with the historic character and appearance of the conservation area;

Opportunities within the Ribchester Conservation Area

- The road beside Churchgates and the Museum is in need of resurfacing;
- There is evidence of historic stone setts in the triangular space in front of The White Bull. Restoration of these historic stone setts would enhance the centre of Ribchester;
- Two historic buildings are in a poor state of repair: outbuilding at rear of no. 31 Church Street (roof) and the building adjacent to (west) Ribchester Arms;
- No. 33 Church Street is a vacant shop.



*Former Ribchester Industrial Co-operative Society building (1886),
Church Street (right)*

Threats to the Ribchester Conservation Area

- Continuing loss of original architectural details and use of inappropriate modern materials or details.

Many of the unlisted, and some of the listed, buildings in the conservation have been adversely affected by the use of inappropriate modern materials or details. Common faults include:

- the replacement of original timber sash windows with uPVC or stained hardwood;
- the loss of original panelled front doors and their replacement with stained hardwood, uPVC or aluminium doors;

Recommendations

Ribchester Conservation Area boundary review

It is recommended that a minor amendment is made to the existing conservation area boundary in the vicinity of Lower Boyce Farm in order to take account of recent development. The proposed alterations are marked on an accompanying map.

Monitoring and review.

This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:

- An evaluation of changes that have taken place in the conservation area, ideally by means of an updated photographic record;
- An assessment of whether the various recommendations detailed in this document have been acted upon, including opportunities for enhancement;
- A building condition survey;
- The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and any necessary action;
- Publicity and advertising.

Bibilography

Buildings of England: Lancashire
Ribchester: A Short History
Extensive Urban Survey: Ribchester
O.S. map 1847,1893

N.Pevsner (1969)
A Hodge & J Ridge
Lancashire County Council

Ribchester - list of photographs

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