

# CLITHEROE CASTLE MUSEUM

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Set on a prominent limestone mound the museum and the ruined keep of Clitheroe Castle look over the market town of Clitheroe, Lancashire. The keep is almost all that remains of the Norman Castle built about 1186. The Castle was built by Robert de Lacy, Lord of the Honour of Clitheroe, who had inherited it and all the lands around Clitheroe as well as 27 surrounding manors, from Roger de Poitou. De Poitou had been a follower of William the Conqueror and had been originally granted the lands between the rivers Mersey and Ribble. The Honour of Clitheroe was granted to the De Lacy family about 1089 by William II.

Castle House, the present museum, was partly in place by 1723 as the residence for the steward of the Honour. The dates for the construction of Castle House are unsure, however, it is likely to have been started in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The estate office of the Honour, situated to the west of Castle House, with the adjoining stables, was possibly converted from the earlier court house in the eighteenth century.

The first indication of any museum in Clitheroe was a report in the town paper, the *Clitheroe Advertiser and Times*, showing there was an interest in creating an exhibition of historical artefacts as far back as 1926. A practical proposal did not emerge until some twenty years later. The driving force behind the founding of the museum consisted of five local people: R.C. Musson, Mr. T. Dobson, and from the Borough Museum Committee, Councillor I.T. Rushton, Alderman J.H. Satterthwaite and Captain F.B. Mitchell. In the minutes of Clitheroe Borough Council, February 1945, it was suggested that Mytton House, the old Town Council Treasury on Church Street, would be, 'utilised for the reception of exhibits for the museum to be open one night each week'. The museum was initially set up in a small upstairs room in February 1945, and the original nucleus of the museum's collections comprised about 100 exhibits which had been stored at the Castle, and a collection of local fossils from the Free Library, a gift from Richard Fort, uncle of the then Conservative candidate and future M.P. for the area.

The museum created much local interest. An appeal for exhibits yielded over 500 articles in a period of nine months. The town newspaper recorded, 'People have come forward with gifts with a public spiritedness which is commendable, and a noteworthy feature is the good condition of most of the articles'. The collections at this time consisted of a variety of archaeological, geological and historical objects. The collection was soon too large for the small room it was allocated in Mytton House, and so it was moved to a larger display area on the ground floor in November 1945. This move was made to coincide with Thanksgiving Week, when it was recorded that over 600 people visited the museum. But the premises were hardly satisfactory, and there was the suggestion in the local newspaper in 1945 that the museum might eventually end up at the Castle.

By early 1951 the Borough Council decided that the museum should be located in the Castle grounds, in order for it to be more readily accessible to visitors to Clitheroe. Due to the

reorganisation of local government offices at this time, exhibits were removed from Mytton House and stored in the Mayor's parlour and at Castle House. An article in the *Clitheroe Advertiser and Times* on 14 December 1951, entitled, 'What has happened to Clitheroe's Museum?', remarked on this storage of the museum collections. The article was prompted by a letter written to the paper, by someone signing themselves, 'Ratepayer who was keen to discover some explanation regarding the disappearance of this piece of public property'. The answer to this letter was published in the same paper in the following week with the announcement: 'Permanent home found for Clitheroe Museum, Town Council told of important agreement'.



*Clitheroe Castle Museum (Castle House).*

The museum was finally on its way up Castle Hill into the grounds of Clitheroe Castle, thanks to the Lord of the Honour of Clitheroe. This came about due to a 99-year lease which had been granted in 1920 to the then Lord of the Honour, when the Castle and its grounds were sold to the townspeople and Town Council for the princely sum of £9,500. Even then this was a bargain, but the forementioned lease was granted to the Stewards Office to run until the year 2018. The Stewards Office, however, was released at an earlier date thanks to the then Lord of the Honour, the Rt. Hon. Ralph Assheton, M.P.

Mr. Assheton proposed that the Court Rolls, manorial records of the area and other records of the Honour would be loaned to the Lancashire County Records Department. Councillor Dugdale commented for the record, 'Even this remarkable concentration of records in the Stewards Office left the whole of the ground floor and one room on the first floor available for use by the council.' It was soon decided that these rooms were an ideal location for the museum's collections. Immediate transfer of the collections from their storage was not possible, due to the number of documents in the Stewards Office that needed sorting. The appointment of a curator to oversee the collection, funded by the County Council, was also proposed in December 1951.

The museum was unofficially re-opened on 6 July 1954, slightly later than had been planned, to coincide with the 400th-anniversary celebrations of the Clitheroe Royal Grammar School. The Town Council's Museums Committee decided to open the museum from 2.30pm till 4.00pm Monday to Saturday of that week. Later in the year, the museum's opening times were reduced to two hours on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. The museum was certainly not lacking in the curatorial department at this point in time, as there were four voluntary curators: Mr. H. Clarke, Mr. E. Aldersley, Mr. Stretch and Mr. C. Taylor.

In 1974 the museum moved towards having its first full time curator due to a goods and service agreement reached between Ribble Valley Borough Council and Lancashire County Council. The agreement allowed curatorial advice for the museum collections from the Lancashire County Museums Service. From the Borough Council minutes, it appears that a Mr. Woodhead was acting in some curatorial capacity at this time, albeit on a voluntary basis. It was also agreed that the opening hours of the museum were inadequate, and that the museum should open four afternoons a week, from April to September.

The Lancashire County Museum's Service started a phased programme of improvements to the museum in the Autumn of 1975, under the guidance of John Blundell, the County Museums Officer. The museum was still housed in the Stewards House at this time, and was in serious need of cataloguing and conservation. The task of curating and conserving the collections was undertaken by the Lancashire County Museums Service. The first ground floor room of the museum, in the Stewards Office, was officially reopened in April 1976, by the Mayor of the Ribble Valley. The display concentrated on aspects of local history and archaeology, and was a great success as it tripled the visitor figures from the previous year to over 6,700. By April 1977 a second phase of work had been completed on the museum. This still concentrated on aspects of life in Clitheroe, including the reconstruction of a Victorian printing room.

By 1979 the phased improvement of the four principal rooms in the museum was almost complete and visitor figures were still rising, to over 8,000 people a year. John Blundell alerted the Borough Council to the fact that the museum was now beginning to outgrow its premises and that reorganisation of the displays in certain rooms was

required to combat problems such as lack of space for visitors and security.

When Ribble Valley Borough Council vacated their offices in April 1980, it was decided that the museum should move into the Castle House. The official opening of the present museum took place on 3 July 1981 and was presided over by the Mayor. However it was not until April 1982 that a decision was made by Lancashire County Council to appoint a museum assistant to work full time at the museum.

The ground floor of the building was opened with displays of local history and archaeology and a phased programme of work was started on the other floors. Today, the first room you enter in the museum contains the largest item on display, this being the Hacking Ferry boat. The ferry carried people across the River Ribble, where it joins the Calder opposite Hacking Hall, until 1955. There are records of a ferry crossing dating from the seventeenth century, however it is likely that a service existed in medieval times at this point, as there was no bridge. The ferry boat was discovered in a barn in 1983 and was restored for display.

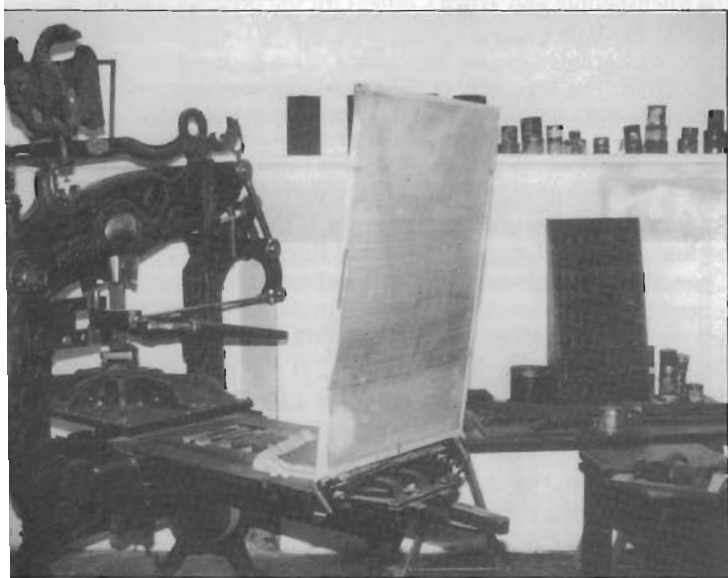
Leading on from the Hacking Ferry the visitor enters the World War II display, but not before passing a new display of the recently discovered Waddington coin hoard. The hoard dates from 54-138AD, and includes 30 silver coins. The war-time display takes a look at many aspects of life in Clitheroe: ration books, identity cards and gas masks are but a few of the memorabilia on show.

The Local History gallery then follows. Material on display includes items from the early Police Force and Fire Brigade through to exhibits showing the sporting interests of the population of nineteenth-century Clitheroe. The Act of Parliament of 1846, which allowed the building of the railway to Clitheroe, opened in 1850 at a cost of some £600,000, is also recalled in the display. The ceremonial spade used to cut the first sod at the beginning of the railway is preserved here. Various robes from town council dignitaries are also on display including the Mayor's robes from 1857. Clitheroe Royal Grammar School, one of the earliest grammar schools in the country, is featured in this room. The school is recorded as early as the thirteenth century, though the founding charter of the school, granted by Queen Mary, dates from August 1554.

The local-history room leads into a display of predominantly agricultural items including bull leaders, peat spades, the tackle for dray horses and many other curious objects. Of note is a bicycle, probably built around 1870 by a local blacksmith, predating the penny-farthing.

Other displays take the visitor back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with sound-tracks adding to the realism. These include an eighteenth-century kitchen. A printer's press room includes a double crown press, built in 1848, and shows how intricate and laborious the process of printing was before the invention of gravure and offset litho techniques. The last of the ground floor displays is a reconstruction of a clogger's workshop from around the turn of the century. The tradition of clog-making in Lancashire can be traced over centuries, but today the craft, like so many others, has become a rare skill. The display in many respects represents the nineteenth century equivalent of today's high-street shoe shops, the difference being the proprietor knowing their Balmoral from their Derby shoe clog!

The museum continues on the first floor, where there are several areas devoted to geology. The largest geological display in the museum, 'More Than Just Rock'!, was built



*Printer's workshop on the ground floor.*

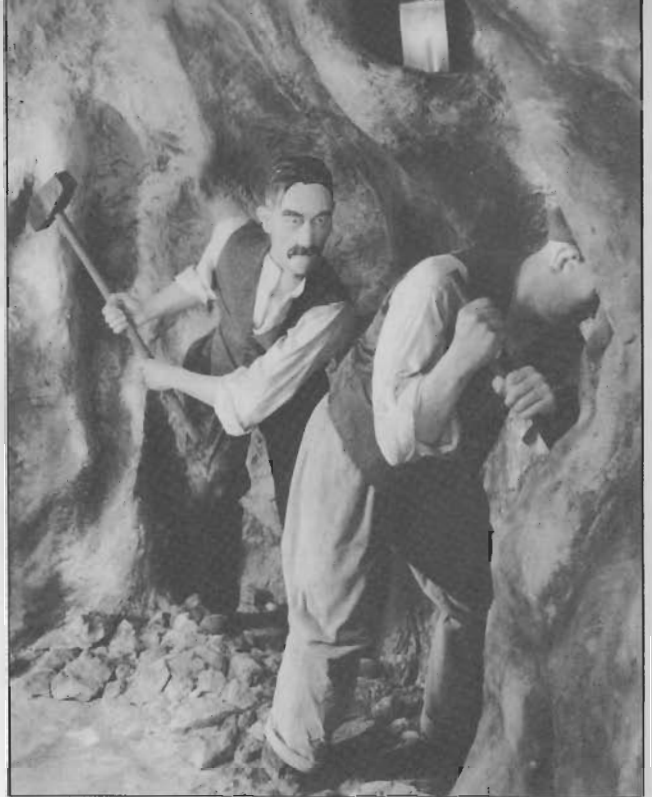
over a period of two years from 1989 to 1991 and was the last major alteration to the museum's displays. 'More Than Just Rock' introduces the limestones, sandstones and lead mining of the district from an economic stance as well as the exploration for oil. The extraction of limestone in the Clitheroe area is recorded from the medieval period, although it is likely that lime burning was practised even earlier. The present day use of limestone varies from the manufacture of cement through to road building. The processes involved in cement production can be followed on an interactive video and a cement-works model. Road building from Roman times to the present day also used and continues to use large quantities of limestone. The structure and composition of roads has however moved on from the Roman times as can be seen in the cross-sections of road surfaces on display.

A reconstruction of a lead mine, complete with miners, portrays lead mining in the Ribble Valley at the turn of the century. There is strong evidence of lead mining occurring in the district around 50AD, probably by the Romans based at Ribchester. Lead mining continued until almost the present day, with the last attempt to mine lead by two students in 1950. However, as recently as 1984 BP have explored the area looking for mineral deposits. The exploration for minerals underground is followed by a display on the techniques used in the exploration, extraction and refining of oil. The use of sound waves, which differentially bounce off rocks of varying density, show how seismic surveys reveal the structure and composition of the rocks beneath our feet. Life-size reconstructions of a drill rig head as well as a model of an inland drill site show some of the techniques used in the oil industry.

The 'Mineral World' room was opened in June 1987 and, as with many other museums, forms one of the most eye-catching displays in a geology gallery. The myriad colours, forms and sizes of minerals are displayed in their full glory. However, no mineral display is complete without the ultra-violet light box! Some minerals possess the property of fluorescence under ultra-violet light. By placing a group of such minerals in a dimly lit case and introducing ultra-violet light the minerals come to life in an eerie display of glowing crystals.

The remainder of the geology gallery is predominantly devoted to the fossils of the area, the first being the 'Westhead Room', dedicated to local fossils and their collectors. Opened in June 1988, the display is named after Stanley Westhead, who built up an important collection of local fossils, including two species which were totally new to science. Westhead's collection is of national, if not international importance, and is now kept at the Natural History Museum in London. Stanley Westhead was not the only palaeontologist of local importance and several others are also remembered in this display.

The local palaeontologists neatly introduce you to the typical fossils of the Clitheroe area in the 'Salthill Quarry Room'. Salthill Quarry is an example of a so called 'reef knoll' or Waulsortian mud bank, deposited in the warm seas of the Lower Carboniferous, some 350 million years ago. The shallow warm seas coupled with a hot climate, (the landmass which later developed into Britain being at this time on the Equator), gave rise to the ideal conditions for the deposition of lime-rich mud-banks, which later turned to limestone. The museum and castle sit on such a structure, but the fossils are not as clearly seen as they are at Salthill Quarry. Salthill has been quarried from at least as early as 1651, however, the quarry we see today was



'More Than Just Rock!' leadmine workings.

developed during the nineteenth century. Quarrying ceased in the 1960s.

The last display in the geology gallery is of the roadside geology of the Ribble Valley. Opened in the summer of 1985, this display provides maps and photographs of the Ribble Valley showing easily accessible sites of geological significance. The display also shows a geological timescale and in detail the rocks which outcrop in the Ribble Valley, spanning over 350 million years of the area's geological past. Ice, in the form of ice-sheets and glaciers, carved much of the present landscape of the Ribble Valley. The form of Pendle Hill was caused by such ice activity, exhibiting classic steep, smooth sides created by glaciers. The limestone mound on which the castle and museum sit, stands proud of the surrounding land due to the harder rock of the 'reef-knolls', when the ice differentially removed the relatively softer surrounding rock. The relationship between the geology and past climates has played a vital role in shaping the landscape and history of the area, in providing naturally defensive sites. The rich mineral, rock and soil deposits of the area has provided a sound base for industry and agriculture, resulting in the wealth of history associated with the Ribble Valley.

Clitheroe Castle Museum has collections which are of interest to many specialists in archaeology, social history and geology. Access to the collection, as with most museums, has to be supervised and is therefore dependent on the availability of staff. The museum will endeavour to assist any person who wishes to carry out research on aspects of the collections and provide access to professional curatorial advice.

The museum opens 1 April till 31 October, seven days a week (including Bank Holidays), from 11.00 am. till 5.00pm. Enquiries to **Clitheroe Castle Museum, Castle Hill, Clitheroe, Lancashire BB7 1 BA (Tel 0200-24635)**. The present curator has a specific interest in geology and palaeontology and would be happy to assist in the identification of minerals, rocks and fossils. The museum also has an active education policy and is keen to introduce schools and colleges to the local history and geology of the area by encouraging museum and field visits.