

# Limited tour of Lancashire, Merseyside and Manchester



**Michael Pierre de Villiers**

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Title page: Blackpool, Clitheroe Castle and war memorial, Crosby Beach and Gormley statues, The Lowry at Salford Quays.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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## Limited tour of Lancashire, Merseyside and Manchester

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An altogether too short three-day trip in 2010 to visit specific places in the south-west of Lancashire and Liverpool. Then a one-day trip to Manchester in 2011, again to visit specific places.

### Blackpool, Ribble, Liverpool beach and Mersey tunnel

We went north by motor car on a three-day trip during the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> September 2010 to the Preston/Liverpool area, although we stayed away from the inner cities.

We checked into a B&B at Cloughton-on-Brock, Preston, around midday on the first day and then went to Blackpool via Fleetwood.

Of interest at Fleetwood were the Pharos and Beach lighthouses, also known as the Upper Light and Lower Light, respectively. Grade II listed Pharos Lighthouse, completed in 1849, is named after the ancient Pharos of Alexandria in Egypt. The Grade II listed Beach Lighthouse, was also completed in 1840. Not seen was a third Wyre Light that was built of wood and is falling apart about 3 kilometres out to sea in the Bay. Together, the Wyre Light, the Beach Lighthouse and the slightly inland Pharos Lighthouse to the south (in the middle of a road intersection), they provided a guide to shipping through the sandbanks of the Wyre estuary. Keeping the light from the taller (upper) Pharos (also on higher ground) above the light from the shorter (lower) Beach in turn above the Wyre Light, provided a safe leading lane along the channel into River Wyre estuary to dock at Fleetwood. They have been made redundant by modern navigation methods.



Pharos Lighthouse standing in the centre of a road intersection. The Beach Lighthouse on the beachfront on the right.

The trams came in every shape and size from 120 years old to 50 years old. We saw the wide collection just in time, because after our visit, in 2011/2012 (139 years old as in 2026), Blackpool Tramway replaced them with a modern fleet while some were kept as a heritage fleet. The tram we rode in was a very plain looking double carriage box shaped tram; the driver in the front carriage with a conductor and a conductor in the second carriage. We sat in the second carriage. Not a cost-effective way of doing it. Two conductors. It means an extra salary. The modern fleet consists of 16 Bombardier Flexity double carriage trams. Modified 1934

English Electric double-deck trams operate on select weekdays, weekends, bank holidays and summer months, as well as during the illuminations.



A twin car tram number 671 with trailer number 681 on the Promenade. An older more traditional type of tram, number 147 built in 1924, on the northern part of the Promenade

We spent the greater part of the afternoon and evening at Blackpool. Long enough also go on a horse and carriage ride and see the night illuminations, before heading back to Garstang for a pub dinner at the Church Inn. Very good it was.



An example of a horse and carriage and an example of the illuminations, hastily taken through the car window while stopped at an intersection.



Stonyhurst College. Pupils 3-18 years.

The following day, Sunday, we went inland to the Ribble Valley (very picturesque) where we walked around Hurst Green and Stonyhurst College and its antecedent dates back to 1593. The Observatory at the college (built in 1866) and weather station are still in use. Continuous temperature records date back to 1846. During the earlier part of the 1900s, the observatory fell into disuse and the telescope sold. However, it was bought back and the observatory restored. Although occasionally open to visitors, it was not open at the time of our visit.



Stonyhurst's Roman Catholic St. Peter's Church, built 1832 to 1835. Right, the 1866 observatory.

Nearby Cromwell's Bridge is a packhorse bridge built around 1560. It is named after Cromwell because he reputedly marched his army over it to the victorious battle at Preston in 1648. It is still in use as a foot bridge.



Cromwell's Bridge at Hurst Green and the remains of the keep at Clitheroe Castle.

We then visited Clitheroe and Clitheroe Castle ruins. A notice board says it was built by the de Lacy family around 1100 "to defend the cross Pennine trade route through the Ribble-Aire gap." Built on the top of the highest natural mound in the area, the now ruined keep overlooking the town, was one of the smallest in England. The fortified keep within a castle was the last



Landscape in the Bowland Forest.

form of defence. There are remains of other structures, such as the curtain wall and gatehouse. A battle was fought here against a Scottish army in 1138. During the Civil War, Prince Rupert of the Royalist Army stayed in the castle in 1644, but fled after defeat at the Battle of Marston Moor.

We then returned to the B&B via the Bowland Forest. A bit of a misnomer, as it is mainly pastureland with trees here and there and remote small villages. It is very pretty and green. However, in medieval terms, forest was a legal term for an area of land,

wooded or not, where hunting was restricted to the king, namely William the Conqueror.



Rufford Old Hall.

On the Monday we headed back home in a roundabout way. First, we went to the National Trust Rufford Old Hall, where we had a guided tour. The great hall dates from 1530-1550 (Dean, 2007). It is almost certain William Shakespeare acted here in his early touring actor days. During the guided tour, we learnt that dried used tea leaves were used to keep the place clean. The housekeeper would sprinkle them on the carpets and if she found any later, she would know that they had not been properly swept by the housemaids. See the article Visits to National Trust heritage sites.



Formby Point.

From there we went to Formby Point, another National Trust place. They manage and look after the beach (where fossils can be found), the sand dunes and adjacent woodland.

It is also one of the rare places where the indigenous Red Squirrel can still be found. The imported USA's Grey Squirrel has taken over elsewhere over most of England and Wales. It was a very bleak, wet and windy day, so we did not stay long. In fact, we were the only ones on the beach at the time.

Then we went to Crosby Beach, immediately north of Liverpool, to see the Gormley statues. The collection is called Another Place. It consists of 100 life-size cast-iron statues made from moulds of the artist's body, which stand on 3 metre sunken foundation piles and are spread along 3 kilometres of Crosby Beach. We drove through Crosby as near to the beach as possible, but saw no signs to the statues. Finally, we stopped at a health gym and I went in to ask. The receptionist looked surprised and said if we walk across the parking lot and through the gap

you will be on the beach and among the statues.



A Gormley statue beach scene.

A notice board, courtesy of the South Sefton Development Trust, provides ample information. Standing facing out to sea, the collection consists of 100 life-size cast-iron statues made from moulds of the artist's body. They stand on 3 metre sunken foundation piles spread along 3 kilometres of Crosby Beach. Some are high up on the beach and some are up to nearly 1 kilometre out to sea, so that at high tide some of them are not visible. They seem to evoke a lot of different



Gormley beach desolation.

South Sefton Development Trust decided to keep them permanently.

emotions from people, mostly depending on the weather and tide level. It was also from Liverpool that many people left to settle in the USA during bad times in the UK, so the figures standing staring out to sea where people left never to return can be quite emotional. My wife was quite emotional and took lots of photographs.

They were previously on display in Cuxhaveb (Germany), Stavanger (Norway) and Du Panne (Belgium). In 2006 they were supposed to go elsewhere, but there was quite a protest and the Crosby Council and

Gormley is a UK artist and is well known for large metal statues, the most notable being the Angel of the North, near Gateshead and the leaning statue in Birmingham's Victoria Square next to the Floozie in the Jacuzzi (a fountain with a reclining woman). The Jacuzzi has since been drained and replaced with flowers. Anthony Gormley's controversial and quirky metal statue "Iron: Man" stands at the lower end of Victoria Square, near Pinfold Street. It is sunk up to its calves in the pavement, and leans at an angle, seemingly slightly the worse for wear. It was a gift to the city by the Trustee Savings Bank, in March 1993.

From Crosby we skirted the Liverpool Harbour to the Mersey Tunnel. It is much longer (just over 3 km) and much deeper than I thought and winding. I wondered if they built it from each side of the Mersey and battled to meet in the middle. It was disconcerting because we saw no speed limit signs, so we stuck to the speed of slower cars around us. UK tunnels have strict speed limits, usually 40 mph and with reminder signs in the tunnel, but I have since found out that this one is 30 mph. We also saw no signs warning us what it costs, even though we kept a good lookout. We thought it must be free until we came up on the south side and suddenly saw a tollgate and we had to pay £1.40. We should have known. I was not impressed, because I now had to quickly find a cash booth while my wife had to quickly dig for money. From there we came home via south of the Mersey.

### **A small part of Manchester**

Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2011, we spent the day in Manchester. We went by bus, train (CrossCountry, very good) and tram. Reverse order back. All went according to plan. Very good trip.

The motivation for the trip was to see the L. S. Lowry art collection. For many years, since the late 1970s, I am a fan of his style, technique and subject matter. More recently, since seeing an exhibition of his art in Birmingham, my wife became a convert. We have a collection of Lowry mugs, place mats, some prints and a book all about him and his art. There is also a song about him, recorded in 1977 a year after Lowry died, called "Matchstalk Men and Matchstalk Cats and Dogs" by Burke and Coleman and St Winifred's Choir. I liked it when was released and obtained a copy of it in 2003. The choir slowly builds later in the background singing a children's song called "The Big Ship Sails on the Alley-Alley-O," a reference to the Manchester Ship Canal. Altogether a lovely and moving song.

The Lowry is a theatre complex and the permanent gallery/museum that houses the Lowry collection where we obviously spent considerable time. I was standing looking at a particularly interesting painting when a woman of similar age came and stood next to me and started talking about the painting, but soon moved away when it was apparent that I did not sufficiently emote, as the aficionados like to say.



The Lowry and the Imperial War Museum North buildings.

We were also close to Old Trafford Manchester United football stadium that we passed while walking along part of the canal and also briefly visited the Imperial War Museum North, a most unusual building design. In my opinion the contents of London Imperial War Museum are better, at the time anyway.

Back in the city centre by tram, we stopped at a church at St. Anne's Square, where a plaque states that the square dates back to Henry III, 1227 when it was called Acres Field and a Fair was held every St. Michael's Day. It goes on to state, St. Anne's church was built between 1709 to 1712 when consecrated. John Wesley (who cofounded Methodism with his brother Charles) preached in 1738 while Charles Edward Stuart, the pretender (British prince claimant to the British throne also known as Bonnie Prince Charlie), rode into the square in 1745. It is assumed he rode out again.



The Lowry and the Imperial War Museum North buildings.

We walked into the church while there was a piano recital, so we sat and rested our feet. It reminded me very much of a Giles cartoon. There were about 22 people scattered around in the pews with the piano near the pulpit. A tall young Chinese guy and then a short young girl, played. There was one guy sitting near the front looking very attentive and appreciative, the

permanently smiling Reverend, two women off in a corner looking at pamphlets (to all intents and purposes oblivious to the music), a man far off on his own looking like he was asleep (maybe appreciating the music) and three people sitting with one of those children's helium filled balloons sticking up in the air.



Sam's Chop House.

changing the name in 1872 to Sam's Chop House at new premises on Market Street, becoming very popular. In 1963 Sam's moved to its current location at the corner of Chapel Walks, Back Pool Fold and Pall Mall, now no longer in the Stubb's family.

We had an early dinner at Sam's Chop House, before returning. I had previously learnt that it was a pub that Lowry frequented.

Brothers Thomas and Samuel Studd established their first Chop House in 1867 at Cockpit hill off Market Street. A chop house is restaurant that serves thick slices of meat, such as chops and steaks. Hence chop refers to the meat, and house the eating place. Chop Houses were very popular in Victorian England. After a disagreement, Thomas left to start his New Chop House. Sam named his establishment Sam's London Chop House,

He was a rent collector and remained so even when he was famous until he retired at 65. No one apart from his colleagues knew and never let on. He used to have meals at the pub as well and would doze off afterward.

The pub now has a life size statue of him sitting at the bar. It blends in so well that I did not see the statue and asked the barman where it was located. Obviously, used to myopic tourists, deadpan, with no comment, he pointed to it. Judging by photographs of him, it is a very close likeness. We were first seated close to the statue. Later, we moved to a better position further back in a corner where two women had been sitting.



Lowry seated at the bar in Sam's Chop House. A novel and pleasing idea.

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