

THE RISE AND FALL OF PONY DICK

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About 200 years ago, Squire Bankes of Winstanley Hall had a white pony – Pony Dick. Dick died in 1841 at the grand old age of 36 and is buried under a gravestone near the Hall. In the first part of the 19th century, the Old Horse and Jockey Inn, at the bottom of present-day Ribbesford Road near the border between Wigan and Winstanley, was rebuilt and renamed Favourite Pony Dick Inn. The inn was demolished in the 1950s, but we can reconstruct the history surrounding Pony Dick from old records and memories of Sam Fouracre and Joe Starkey, as recorded in 1979 interviews.



The Favourite Pony Dick Inn about 1900

The Inn was the focal point for folks living in the Hall Lane Cottages, Copperas House, Molyneux House, Rainford House, Sumner's Hall, Holme's House, Hill House and the New Houses. It was also a stopping place for travelers along 'th'owd cut" (then Rylance Mill Lane, now Billinge Road). Squire Bankes frequented the Inn. In the 1820s to 1840s, the start of coal mining at Blundell's Wood, Venture and Mill pits and Bankes' Winstanley Colliery pits would have created a lot of thirsty colliers and no doubt boosted trade. There was a club room on the upper level where the Foresters and the Picnic and Children's Clubs met and contributions were collected for funerals.

William Starkey from Cheshire, whom Squire Bankes hired in about 1830 to take care of his horses, took over the Inn in 1837. In 1899, after serving as apprentice to James Hesketh in Wallgate, Joseph Starkey, the son of James and Alice Starkey (nee Winstanley) and grandson of William Starkey started a wheelwright business. The buildings to the right of the Inn were the paint and wheelwright's shops, the building on the left was the smithy and the workshop was in the middle. There was no electricity, so work was done by hand; turning and bandsawing were contracted out. The railway line

cutting across the main road was built around 1850 to connect Winstanley Colliery with the Bury to Liverpool mainline in the Summersales.

James Starkey made high quality carts, shafts, lorries, floats, pig crates, barrows, coffins and cow troughs and repaired these and ploughs, binders, spades, traps and churns. He used oak, ash and hickory timber and all his supplies came from south Lancashire, except high quality varnish supplied by Joseph Mason & Co. in Derby. He had many customers in a three mile radius of Pony Dick including farmers, coal merchants, butchers, grocers, fruiterers, builders, contractors, quarry owners, wine and spirit merchants, collieries and Squire Bankes. James Starkey was twice awarded Silver Medals for his carts at agricultural fairs and was a Member of the National Association of Vehicle Builders.



The Favourite Pony Dick Inn and Starkey's Wheelwright Business, 1923

Rylance (Ryland's) Mill Bridge spans Smithy Brook and to the west is the road leading to Winstanley Hall. Remains of the estate wall (the Long Wall) built in the late 1800s can be seen to the right; to the left is the old Ryland's Mill farm house and the 1841 barn. Stone from the delph up Hall Lane was used to build the wall and barn.

Across the entrance road to the Hall and behind the wall was one of the last working tythe mills in Lancashire, possibly dating from the 16th century. William Fouracre came up from Somerset about 1770, probably as page boy at the Hall, and about 1800 took over the mill and farm. Fouracres also carted coals, slack, marle, lime, stone and cinders and coal. Even after living around Pony Dick for a couple of centuries, the Fouracres retained a bit of a Somerset accent.

The mill was water powered and had three sources of water: Smithy Brook flowing down from the northwest; the stream that flows along the side of Hall Lane from the west; and a stream from Lea Wood to the southwest. Embankments were constructed to store water in a mill pond. The stream from the west flowed directly into the mill pond, but water from Smithy Brook and Lea Wood was diverted to feed into the mill pond. The 12-15 feet diameter mill wheel was iron with brass bearings and oak troughs. All other mechanisms in the mill were wooden and the mill, about 40 feet long and 30 feet wide was stone and brick. A big square wooden trough controlled water flowing on to the top of the wheel

and there was a timber sluice gate at the side. Water used in the mill was channeled underground to Smithy Brook. About 30 feet from the mill was a brick kiln about 41 feet long, 21 feet wide and 13 feet high where grain was dried on terra cotta 'tiles' over a coal fire. An inscription over the fire place read 'Luke Taylor Dryster 1797'.



Map of Pony Dick area

Business at the mill in 1669-70 to 1671-72 is shown in the table:

	WHEAT		BARLEY		MEAL		MALT		TOTAL CHARGES
	windles	pecks	windles	pecks	windles	pecks	windles	pecks	£. s. d.
1669-70	9	0	64	1	89	1	18	1	29 3 1
1670-71	8	0	75	3	74	0	11	2	33 2 2
1671-72	6	3	71	1	106	3	18	1	29 9 11

The mill stopped working about 1900 and was demolished in 1927. At least one of the two millstones was taken up to the Hall, remnants of the waterwheel rest *in situ* and part of the mill was incorporated in the estate wall. From 1921 to 1924 the average annual income from the wheelwright business was £387 6s 4d. However, as the coal and cotton industries declined and manufacturing was mechanized, the wheelwright business came to an end and the Inn lost its license in 1924. In 1926 a new era began as a Wigan Corporation bus (No. 19) arrived at Pony Dick – and Winstanley Hall today lies in ruins.

References

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