

# FAMOUS PEOPLE BORN IN THE NORTH WEST

Part 1  
By Andrew Harris



Fame is fickle. Thousands of people achieve the type of fame which comes and goes. So with apologies to many sporting and media stars - and egos everywhere – just twenty people can be selected who were born in our region, whose fame achieved great prominence and permanence and whose legacy has made or will make our world a better place. This is, in date order, a tribute to the first ten who were born before 1900.

## Richard Arkwright



Richard Arkwright was born in Preston on the 23rd December 1732. His parents couldn't afford to send him to school so he was taught to read and write by his cousin Ellen. He was apprenticed to a barber in nearby Kirkham then set up his own shop in Bolton where he invented a waterproof dye for stylish wigs which were fashionable at the time. The income from this enabled him to later invent a spinning machine in what is now called Arkwright House in Preston. Arkwright went on to combine power, machinery, semi-skilled labour and the new raw material of cotton to create mass-produced yarn. He developed new industrial methods at his mill at Cromford in Derbyshire which is now preserved as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Arkwright is recognised as being the "father of the modern industrial factory system" and to some extent the father of the industrial revolution which changed our region, our country and our world. Although he died as Sir Richard Arkwright aged just 59 his legacy lives on.

## William Wordsworth



On the 7th April 1770 William Wordsworth was born in what is now called Wordsworth House in Cockermouth - then part of Cumberland. He was taught to read by his mother who died when he was just 8 and his largely absent father encouraged him to study the works of Shakespeare and Milton but he died when William was just 13. He attended Hawkshead Grammar School from an early age and had a sonnet published when he was just 17 from when he studied at St John's College in Cambridge. Aged just 23 he had collections of poems published – *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* - and two years later received a legacy which enabled him to pursue a career as a poet. That same year he met Samuel Taylor Coleridge with whom he formed a close friendship. In 1798 they produced the famous *Lyrical Ballads* which helped to launch the Romantic Age in English Literature. Wordsworth's chief works were the 14 books of his masterpiece *The Prelude* but for the Lake District where his life started and

ended aged 80 he will forever be best known for *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* or simply *Daffodils*. See the panel below for the first and last verses.

\* \* \* \* \*

*First & Last Verses of 'Daffodils'*

*I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.  
For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.*

\* \* \* \* \*



## Robert Peel



A very different life started when Robert Peel was born in Bury on the 5th February 1788. The son of a wealthy textile manufacturer, Peel won a double-first in classics and mathematics from Christ Church, Oxford. He went on to be Chief Secretary for Ireland 1812-18, Home Secretary 1822-27 and 1828-30, author of the 1834 Tamworth Manifesto on which the modern Conservative Party is based, then Prime Minister 1834-35 and 1841-46. As Home Secretary he founded the Metropolitan Police Service in London and became regarded as the father of modern British policing. As Prime Minister he re-introduced income tax which enabled 1,200 tariffs to be removed or reduced, achieved the 1844 Factory Act which improved safety and working conditions for women and children. It cost him his job but he secured the repeal of the Corn Laws which had kept prices artificially high by limiting grain imports. His dominating achievement, however, was policing. Peel developed the Peelian Principles which defined the ethical requirements police officers must follow to be effective. When establishing the principles of policing a democracy he declared *"The police are the public and the public are the police."* Sadly, much needed today as it was then. In 1850 Sir Robert Peel, aged just 62, was thrown by a horse and died of his injuries three days later.

## William Ewart Gladstone



On the 29th December 1809 William Ewart Gladstone was born to Scottish parents at 62 Rodney Street in Liverpool. He first entered the House of Commons in 1832 beginning his career as a High Tory – a group which became the Conservative Party under Robert Peel in 1834. Gladstone served as a minister in both of Peel's governments and in 1846 joined the Peelite faction which merged with the Whigs and became the Liberal Party 13 years later. He became Chancellor of the Exchequer four times and his liberalism earned him the nickname The People's William. During his first term as Prime Minister 1868-74 he introduced secret voting and disestablished the Church of Ireland. In his second 1880-85 he achieved major reforms. Back in office in 1886 he proposed home rule for Ireland but was defeated in the House of Commons and it split the party which was then out of office for 20 years. He became Prime Minister for the fourth and last time in 1892 – when he was 82 – when he got Irish home Rule through the commons but it was defeated in the House of Lords. He left office in 1894 and died three years later. Success with his Irish objective could have saved many a life. Gladstone's career spanned 60 years and he was Prime Minister for 12 of them causing many historians to call him one of Britain's greatest leaders. But your columnist thinks it was his humanity which made him great. In 1848 he founded a charity for the *"Reclamation of Fallen Women"* and spent much time and effort helping them and securing employment for ex-prostitutes. He cared.

## Henry Tate



Henry Tate had a very different career. Born in White Coppice near Chorley on the 11th March 1819 he was the son of a clergyman and became a grocer's apprentice for seven years. He then opened his own shop and had a chain of 6 by the time he was 35. In 1859 Tate became a partner in a sugar refinery and sold his shops 2 years later. A mere 8 years later he gained complete control of the refinery company and renamed it Henry Tate & Sons. After 3 more years – in 1872 – he bought the patent for sugar cubes and built a new refinery in Liverpool. Five years later he built a refinery in London's Silvertown and added the Tate Institute next door to provide a bar and dance hall for his workers. Tate's massive success as a millionaire businessman was matched by his generosity as a philanthropist. He gave huge sums to colleges and hospitals such as the Liverpool Royal Infirmary. He became Sir Henry Tate then a Baronet. In 1889 he donated his collection of 65 contemporary paintings to the government on condition that they be displayed in a suitable gallery. He donated to the cost and what is now called the Tate Gallery was opened in July 1897 and its creator died 2 years later. Some legacy!

## Emmeline Pankhurst



The future Emmeline Pankhurst was born Emiline Goulden in Manchester on the 15th July 1858 but she always told the world that she was born on the 14th – Bastille Day. She was brought up by politically active parents and Emiline read the *Women's Suffrage Journal* from an early age. When she was 20 she met 44-year old Richard Pankhurst who campaigned for women's suffrage and other causes. They married the following year and were distracted for some years by child-rearing and Richard's unfulfilled political ambitions. In 1888 the 'umbrella' organisation for groups campaigning for women's right to vote broke up. The following year the inaugural meeting of the more radical *Women's Franchise League* was held in the Pankhurst home but only lasted a year. Richard died in 1898 and by 1903 Emmeline – as she had become – despaired of moderation and launched the *Women's Social and Political Union* which escalated the campaign by smashing windows, violence, arson and hunger strikes. The campaign was suspended when war broke out in 1914 which led in 1918 to the vote being given to all men over 21 and women over 30 because men feared they would be in the minority as so many had been killed in the war. Emmeline Pankhurst died aged 69 in June 1928 - only weeks before this age difference was corrected.

## Laurence Binyon



On the 10th August 1869 Robert Laurence Binyon was born in Lancaster. He became an art scholar, dramatist and poet – winning the Trinity College, Oxford, Newdigate Prize for poetry when just 22 years in 1891. Laurence Binyon had a distinguished career. He became Keeper of the new Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings of the British Museum. Later in life he was appointed the Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University. Between these achievements – and being too old at 46 for military service – in 1915 he volunteered to work as a hospital orderly in France caring for injured soldiers. He later returned to care for many of the soldiers wounded in the horrific 10-month Battle of Verdun in 1916. Moved by these experiences, Binyon wrote the seven stanzas of *'For the Fallen'* which has become a unique memorial to those who died in all wars. The middle stanza is spoken at virtually all services of commemoration throughout much of the English-speaking world. It is –  
*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them.*

Binyon went on to enrich the world with many other works, including *'The Burning of the Leaves'* which many regard as his masterpiece. But his towering achievement is the heart-felt *'For the Fallen'* for which he will be remembered for ever. Binyon died in 1943 aged 73.

## L.S.Lowry



Laurence Stephen Lowry – later known simply as L.S. Lowry – was born in 8 Barret Street in Stretford on the 1st November 1887. Nothing in his upbringing would suggest the enormous acclaim and fame that he achieved during and after his life. He had an unhappy childhood, made few friends and showed no academic promise. After leaving school he took private art lessons in antique and freehand drawing and aged 18 secured a place at the Manchester School of Art. By chance the family moved from leafy Rusholme to industrial Pendlebury in 1909 when Lowry was just 22. At first he hated it but over time it grew on him and he loved the industrial views which he depicted in so many of his paintings and drawings. Much later he explained why he featured 'matchstick' men and women. *"I wanted to paint myself into what absorbed me. Natural figures would have broken the spell of it so I made the figures unreal... I was not thinking much about the people. I did not care for them the way a social reformer does. They are part of a private beauty that haunted me. I loved them and the houses in the same way: as part of a vision."* Lowry became world-famous and his painting are worth £millions but he has the record for rejecting the most number of British honours – five including a knighthood. He died aged 88 on the 23rd February 1976 – the same enigma he had been throughout his life.



Going to Work by L.S.Lowry

## Stan Laurel



Stan Laurel – of Laurel and Hardy – was born Arthur Stanley Jefferson on the 16th June 1890 in Ulverston which was in Lancashire then but Cumbria now. He was born into the theatre as his father Arthur was a

theatre manager and his mother was an actress so he spent much time with his grandmother Sarah Metcalfe. Stan began his career in music hall when he was just 16. Aged 20 he joined Fred Karno's troupe of actors who pioneered slapstick. The troupe moved to the USA before the outbreak of war in 1914 and Stan Jefferson – as he then was – sometimes understudied Charlie Chaplin. He then linked with two other performers to form the Stan Jefferson Trio. He then met Mae Dahlberg with whom he lived until 1925 and she suggested he use the name Laurel. By 1924 Stan Laurel gave up the stage to work in films full-time. By chance Laurel teamed up with Oliver Hardy in 1927 when they made several short films together. They went from strength to strength becoming a legend over the next 27 years. In 1955 Laurel had a minor stroke and recovered but the

next year Hardy had a massive stroke which ended their acting. Hardy died in August 1957 but Laurel was too ill to attend his funeral. Like many comedians Laurel had sadness in his life. After he and Mae parted in 1925 Laurel had four wives one of whom he married twice. Having made nearly 190 films he was given an Academy Honorary Award in 1960 “for his creative pioneering in the field of cinema comedy”. Laurel lived his final years in a small flat in Santa Monica in California and died aged 74 in 1965. He has been honoured in many ways including a bronze statue of the duo outside Ulverston's Coronation Hall unveiled in 2009. As recently as last year he topped the list of greatest British comedians compiled by the TV Channel Gold.

## Gracie Fields



Gracie Fields had humble origins but was destined for greatness from an early age. She was born Grace Stansfield in a flat over a fish and chip shop in Molesworth Street in Rochdale

and made her first stage appearance just 7 years later. Her professional debut wasn't long delayed as she appeared in variety at the Rochdale Hippodrome when she was 12. The comedian and impresario Archie Pitt had already boosted Gracie's career with the revue *Yes I think so* when she was 17. He presented Gracie with a bottle of champagne on her 18th birthday and told her he would make her a star. He did. They both performed nationwide, married in 1923 and appeared in many major shows the following year. In 1931 Gracie's most famous song *Sally* featured in her first film *Sally in our Alley* which was a major box office success. Strangely, the first few lines of this song – which Gracie sang at every performance from 1931 – were written by her husband's mistress

Annie Lipman. Gracie Fields was now at the peak of her popularity and she went on to make many more films although she preferred having a live audience. She received many awards but her marriage broke down and, in 1939, she became ill with cervical cancer but recovered only to suffer a mental breakdown. She found comfort in Capri which became her favourite island and her home in later life. During the second world war she travelled widely to entertain troops. Now a legend she had her own radio programme *Our Gracie's Working Party* for a while. In 1952 she married her third and final husband Boris Alperovici, appeared in her 10th and last Royal Variety Performance in 1978 and lived happily on her Capri idyll with Boris until she passed away in July 1979 aged 81.

These ten amazing people from our region achieved real fame and enriched us with their legacy. Read about a further ten born after 1900 in the December edition of the Lancashire & North West Magazine.

Most of the images featured in this article were procured from Shutterstock. The panel is by David Bridge of Southport. This and previous articles by Andrew E. Harris can be downloaded from [www.andreweharris.co.uk](http://www.andreweharris.co.uk)

