

## THE BEGGAR'S BRIDGE

A Hull Story of Adventure, Love and Romance.



This is the author of this entry, Jennie Freeman, enjoying the moment as she crosses

In North Yorkshire, not far from the beautiful and rugged Yorkshire Moors, lies the area known as Glaisdale, through which the River Esk runs. Not far from the market town of Egton , spanning the river is a bridge; “The Beggar’s Bridge”. The bridge has a history going back some 380 years, and has a

fascinating rags to riches story concerning one Thomas Ferres attached to it, and also, as you will read below, a connection to the city of Kingston upon Hull.

In Stage 2 of our Walk, we look at the buildings down Princes Dock Street. One of which was once the Ferres Hospital Almshouse. Following on from here the walk takes us down Posterngate and into Trinity House Lane, where we again see evidence of Thomas Ferres in connection with Hull's Trinity House. This story is his:-

Back now to North Yorkshire: The year is 1568 and Thomas Ferris is born, the son of a poor sheep farmer. The farming life doesn't seem to be where Thomas's future lies, and at the age of about 14 he finds himself apprenticed to a Hull ship owner.

He often went back to visit his family in Glaisdale, and whilst there he met and fell in love with a young girl, Agnes Richardson. Agnes's father was the local Squire and they lived in a grand house. Squire Richardson didn't approve of Thomas as a suitable match for his daughter, considering him little more than a beggar and deeming his status far too lowly. This didn't deter the sweethearts and they soon found ways to meet up. Unfortunately for Thomas this involved having to cross the River Esk, which at times could be quite calm and most likely had stepping stones to help him get across but at other times it could become dangerous torrent, and would result in him arriving soaked to the skin but being refused admittance by the Squire. Nevertheless he was determined to marry his Agnes. He asked the Squire if he would allow them to marry if he became a wealthy man. The Squire

reluctantly agreed, thinking it would never happen. He clearly didn't know just how determined the couple were. He told them they should have no further contact until he had made his fortune. This still did not deter them, and using an elaborate signalling system, whereby Agnes would put a lantern in her bedroom window to indicate to Thomas it was safe to make the trek over Glaisdale to Egton.

Thomas's life over the following years is a story worthy of an adventure novel. Throughout his courtship of Agnes, he went away to sea many times, and according to the story, when he was only 24 years old he engaged in piracy in the Caribbean, where he sold a captured vessel and added to his already growing fortune.

In 1586 he joined the British fleet and served under Sir Frances Drake. On 7<sup>th</sup> May 1588 whilst he was visiting Egton, he received notice he was to return to his ship in Whitby. Without the chance to say goodbye to Agnes - he daren't risk trying to cross the river- he was told to rejoin Sir Frances Drake in Hull, where he then learned of an impending battle.

By May 1588 an Armada of 130 vessels sailed from Spain to invade England. Thomas fought courageously alongside Sir Frances and his men and by July 21st The Armada was finally defeated.

Thomas Ferres returned to Glaisdale as an extremely wealthy man. This time the Squire consented to the marriage!

The couple set up home in Hull, and eventually Thomas established a shipping

company. By the age of 46 he had become a renowned and very successful businessman. His beloved Agnes died in 1617. Devastated, he immersed himself in civic affairs.

In 1619, as a monument to Agnes's memory he built a bridge over the River Esk at Egton. This became known as "The Beggar's Bridge".

Thomas Ferres's story does not end there;

In 1620 he remarried, and continued his benevolent work in Hull.

On three occasions he was chosen as Honorary Head of Hull's Trinity House and also became the Sheriff of Hull. In 1620 he was made the Mayor of Hull.

In 1625 he founded an almshouse – The Ferres Hospital Almshouse, in the tradition of

Trinity House, to to give aid and succour to seafarers and their families.

He was to eventually bequeath his considerable Whitefriars Estate to Trinity House.

In Trinity House Lane, at the end of Stage 2 of our walk, you can see a green plaque to the right of the main entrance of Trinity House, which states;

Thomas Ferres.

1568/9 - 1631

Master Mariner, Warden of Hull Trinity House, Mayor and Sheriff.

Significant benefactor to Hull Trinity House leaving this estate for the benefit of distressed and needy seafarers.



The land bequeathed by Thomas is still largely owned by Hull's Trinity House.

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Thomas Ferres died in 1631, and was buried in Holy Trinity Church -now the Hull Minster. His portrait was hung in Trinity House, with a copy placed in Glaisdale church.

Beggars Bridge is perhaps the most poignant achievement of a truly remarkable life.

As surprising as it may seem you can still visit and cross over the bridge today

A century old guide tells:

“And he built’ere he won her, the bridge of  
his vow,  
And the lovers of Egton pass over it now”