

KEELEY TRAVEL is a travel agency that doesn't sell holidays run by architectural historian Tom Keeley. This travelling agency acts as both guide and tourist, visiting one destination at a time. KEELEY TRAVEL is interested in the echo between people and their surroundings, and what the gaze of the tourist can show us about the everyday. Brochures are released monthly by email.

A journey to the north west of England. A river of tarmac, metal, and light in Lancashire.  
The first stretch of motorway in the United Kingdom.



### Epigram On Rough Roads

I'm now arrived – thanks to the gods!  
Thro' pathways rough and muddy,  
A certain sign that makin' roads  
Is no' this people's study.

Robbie Burns, 1786

Quoted by Harold Macmillan at the opening of the PRESTON BYPASS. Macmillan subsequently broke the first rule of motorways by walking down the highway.

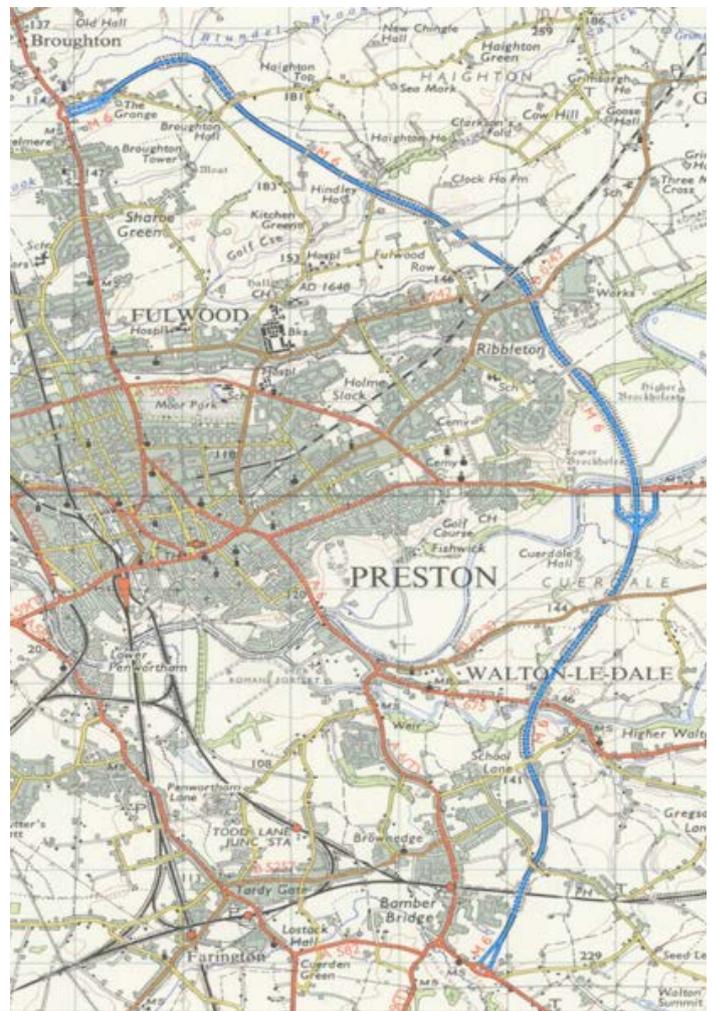
PRESTON BYPASS was the first stretch of motorway in the UK, opening in 1958. It was the beginning of a road-building programme that marked Britain's entrance into the modern age. Changing, perhaps, the way we see places, and what they see of us. The motorway as a place out of place, situated within a landscape but gives a very different point of view.

Lancashire had long been at the forefront of automobile architectures. It had been the first county

in the UK to erect its own road signs, and developed a precursor to the motorway in the East Lancashire arterial road. PRESTON BYPASS ultimately became part of what we now know as the M6. But rebuilding and widening means that little or nothing of the original still exists.

No green fields. Streams culverted. Tree roots lying tangled under asphalt. It's easy to lose sight of how one fits into the land, difficult to know the colour of the soil, the underlying rock, how to relate to the gentle contours of the map. The land where I live was concreted over long ago.

As a city dweller my sense of the countryside can feel detached. I know it exists over there somewhere, but it doesn't feel close. It is somewhere I might visit occasionally, but not somewhere I have ever spent any





real length of time. It is somewhere I traverse when travelling between places. By. Pass. Often at high speed.

Motorways and the modern world may have contributed to this disconnect. But the blame can't fall solely with them. The conditions they exert lend warped perspectives to the world around them. Within, and without. They are kinetic sculptures experienced en vitesse, detached and divorced from local networks.

Joan Didion described the freeway experience as the only remaining secular communion that we have. She was referring to Los Angeles but the parallels with Lancashire remain. The motorway is one of the few places where we come together.

You end up in a Subway, in a petrol station, eating a crappy sandwich. Contemplating the modern age and the collective experience of motorway life while looking at an image of said petrol station. It's almost too self-referential to take in. An echo.

Perhaps as much as PRESTON BYPASS is a symbol of its age, this is a symbol of ours? A Subway, inside a Co-op, inside a petrol station, by a roundabout, with an attempt a sub-PFI architecture in the swoop of its roof.

From here to modernity, what a time to be alive.

