Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

SIGNS & PLAQUES IN LANCASTER

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 23



8 New Street

Plaques to commemorate notable buildings or their former residents are a well-known part of the London street scene (blue plaques) and they are found in many other British cities. There are over 30 such plaques (mostly green) in Lancaster.

Some of these indicate people, events or buildings that have been described in more detail in other guides in this series. In this guide we introduce you to some of the less well known people and buildings commemorated by plaques and signs in central Lancaster, which will illustrate other aspects of the city.

Roman Lancaster

In truth there is not much left above ground of Roman Lancaster. We know the town was the site of a Roman fort from *c.* AD 80 till just after AD 400. We know the fort was rebuilt several times. Most of these forts are now underneath the Castle and Priory. Only a fragment of the bathhouse and Wery Wall peek out to the north-east of the Priory.

There was probably a ford and perhaps a bridge over the River Lune, though its alignment is unclear. Lancaster City Museum displays some local Roman finds including the

remarkable tombstone of a horseman. The clearest reminder of Roman Lancaster is the alignment of Church Street (formerly called St Mary Street), which runs west–east from the Castle down to Stonewell where the civilian settlement was based. There is a green plaque on 36–40 Church Street (Banks Lyon, the jeweller's shop) to mark the Roman road's route which is followed to this day.

St Leonard's Gate

At the foot of Church Street is St Leonard's Gate – there are many spellings of this street's name. Here the Grand Theatre and (almost opposite it) the Shakespeare have green plaques to record their long history as places of leisure and entertainment in Lancaster.

The Grand Theatre is one of oldest surviving theatres in Britain. It was built by public subscription in 1782, remodelled in 1897 by Frank Matcham and then again after a fire, reopening in 1908. It is now the home of Lancaster Footlights, an active amateur-theatre group.

The Shakespeare was first recorded in 1794 (it may be even older) and until recently it has been a tavern, inn or hotel. Other very old pubs still trading in Lancaster include the Three Mariners (formerly the Carpenter's Arms) which has been on Bridge Lane/Damside Street since 1778, and the Sun Hotel on Church Street since at least the 1680s. Early inns were also places for societies to hold their meetings and places to do business as well as places of leisure.



Church Street to Castle Hill and Priory (left) - Roman Cavalry officer's tombstone (right)

Shop and trade signs

In the nineteenth century and earlier, some shops had decorative signs hanging outside to show what they sold or their trade. Two examples survive in Lancaster and have green plaques.

At 8 New Street, off Church Street, is the shop with the rocking horse sign, though no longer above a toy shop. On King Street the chemist's shop has a golden pestle and mortar. The pawnbroker on Ffrances Passage has the traditional sign of three golden balls.

A large teapot/kettle and a golden canister from other shops have been preserved in Lancaster City Museum in Market Square.



Traders

If you go down New Road, off Church Street, you will come to Cable Street where Nos 1–3 have a green plaque to Captain Henry Fell. He was a sea captain who participated in Lancaster's overseas trade, particularly with the West Indies, bringing back rum, sugar, spices and hardwoods.

Sugar refining and the making of fine furniture were notable Lancaster trades in the 18th and 19th centuries. As a consequence of these trades and the slave trade, some merchants became rich enough to afford grand town houses in Lancaster, like Nos 1–3 Cable Street and some around the Castle. Henry Fell's daughter, Agnes, married Robert Gillow Snr who founded the furniture-making firm.

If you walk from Cable Street along Damside Street, under the bridge and along St George's Quay, you will come to the Custom House (now the Maritime Museum) where the merchants and captains congregated. It too has a green plaque. The building was designed in 1764 by Robert Gillow's elder son, Richard.

Grammar School

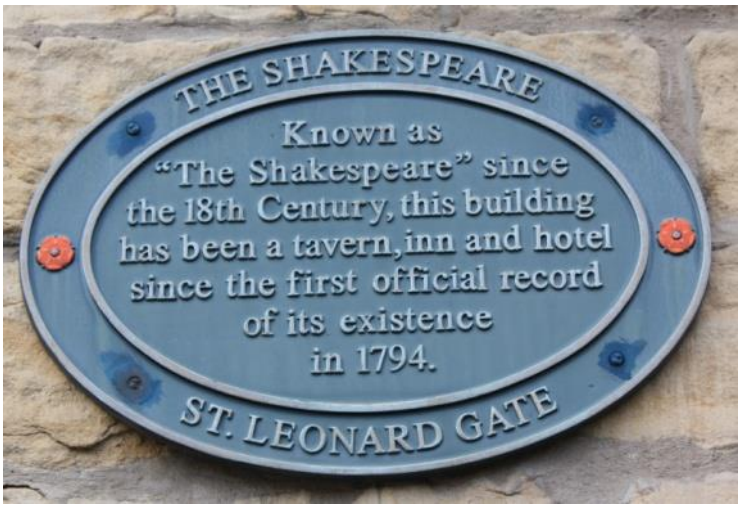
Just west of the Castle is 6 Hillside, which is the first site of the Grammar School in Lancaster, as its green plaque notes. John Gardyner, in his will of 1472, left a bequest to pay for a school master. The original school building is no longer here – the current house dates from around 1820 – but Lancaster Royal Grammar School continues on an extensive site on East Road. There is also the Lancaster Girls Grammar School on Regent Street.

Other Green Plaques

Here are some of the green plaques that are discussed in our other leaflets.

Gillow workshops (1a Castle Hill) *Gillow of Lancaster*
Shrigley & Hunt workshop (23 Castle Hill) *Stained Glass in Lancaster*
Highmount House (High Street; Mawson's offices) *High Street*
Laurence Binyon's House (1 High Street) *High Street*
Assembly Room (King Street) *Almshouses in Lancaster*
Penny's Hospital (King Street) *Almshouses in Lancaster*
Friends' Meeting House (Meeting House Lane) *Friends' Meeting House*
Penny Street Station (South Road) *Railways around Lancaster and Carnforth*
Moor Lane Mill (Moor Lane) *Lancaster's Canalside Mills*
The Old Dispensary (Castle Hill) *Public Art in Lancaster*





An interactive map of all the plaques in 2022, and descriptions of them, can be found on Lancaster Civic Vision's web page at – Green Heritage Plaque Tour of Lancaster

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