Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

SKERTON WALK

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 24



Skerton Bridge from Skerton

Why 'Skerton'? The name comes from the islands in the middle of the River Lune on whose north bank Skerton sits. These islands were locally called skaars, skears, shards or ayres, all these versions appearing in place names. After 1900 Skerton became absorbed into the borough of Lancaster but it has always had its own character.

The route

In this short triangular tour (1¼miles; 2 km) we shall show you its main features. We start at the north end of Skerton Bridge; follow the bank of the River Lune as far as Skerton Weir; turn left (west) and follow Aldrens Lane to its junction with Slyne Road (the A6); and finally turn left (south) back to Skerton Bridge.

Skerton Bridge

Built in 1783–8, Skerton Bridge became the main road crossing of the Lune and it still carries all the traffic into Lancaster from Morecambe and the north. At its southern end is the old toll house. The design by Thomas Harrison is both classical and modern.
The inspiration may have been a Roman bridge in Rimini – the Doric pilasters and balustrades are classical. Yet the five shallow elliptical arches (giving a flat road surface) were cutting-edge eighteenth-century design.

The Bridge put Skerton on the main north–south road, as the medieval river crossing was further downstream. Use the traffic lights or underpasses to cross this busy road. Once over the bridge, turn right and walk down to the river bank, now a walkway. Follow the path upstream along the river.

Along the river

To your left are two, 11-storey tower blocks (Bridge House and Skerton House). They were among the earliest tower blocks built in Britain, opened in 1960. They were soon dwarfed by much taller blocks elsewhere but they remain the only tower blocks in Lancaster outside the two university campuses.

Concerns over the quality of the old houses in Mainway, Captains Row and The Ramparts led to compulsory purchase, demolition and comprehensive redevelopment – in preference to the refurbishment of the houses that local people wanted – a pattern replicated widely elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s.

The flats were renovated inside and outside after 2000. The old Skerton along Mainway, home to the Lune fishermen, corn millers, sea captains and the traveller families, almost completely disappeared in the redevelopment. Some of the 137 families in the houses demolished were moved to nearby Ryelands, a council estate first developed in the 1930s.



Bridge House and Skerton House from Skerton Bridge

To your right is the River Lune now tidal only as far up as Skerton Weir which links the north and south banks via several of the islands (shards and ayres) in the middle of the river.

This weir was first developed to supply water power to Skerton Corn Mill (demolished in 1956) which stood where Aldrens Lane meets the river bank path near Millstone Court flats. The weir was realigned and raised in 1976/77 to ensure a higher water level upstream at Halton and Caton from where water is extracted and sent south in a tunnel to supply the Fylde area.

Some 100 metres beyond the junction of Mainway and Aldrens Lane (on Halton Road) is the club house of the Lancaster John O'Gaunt Rowing Club, established as the Lancaster Rowing Club in 1842 and one Britain's oldest surviving clubs. There are currently three other rowing clubs in Lancaster using the broad deep water from the weir to beyond the Lune Aqueduct. See Guide 100 *Rowing and Rivalries* for more details.

Back inland

At the junction of Mainway and Aldrens Lane (by Millstone Court) turn left and follow Aldrens Lane. You will pass St Joseph's Catholic Primary School. When you get to Slyne Road (the A6) note Dacrelands, two houses from the early 19th century and of an attractive design. They now house a health clinic.

Next door along Slyne Road is St Joseph's RC Church (1900-01) (See Guide 80 for more details). It was designed by Pugin & Pugin (who probably designed the Presbytery and Primary School too) and it has screens, altar rail and pulpit by Gillow. There is a separate leaflet in this series on *Gillow of Lancaster* (No. 5).



St Joseph's Church (left) St Luke's Church (Right)

Back to Skerton Bridge via Ryelands House

Cross Slyne Road by the traffic lights at Dacrelands and St Joseph's, and walk back to the river and bridge. On your left you will pass the former Skerton Community High School on Owen Road. This is approached by a grand avenue of cherry trees and is in an Art Deco style, designed by the Borough Surveyor. It opened in 1934 and closed in 2014. Next to the school is St Luke's Church, consecrated in 1833.

Cross Torrisholme Road (by the petrol station) and Ryelands Park is on your right. At the Park's heart is Ryelands House (mid-1830s), subsequently the home of James Williamson (Lord Ashton) after 1874 when he extended it on two sides to a design by Paley and Austin, the noted Lancaster architects.

James Williamson gave Skerton the Lune Bank Gardens (1904), a riverside walkway that continues the river route towards the Lune Aqueduct (1797) by which the Lancaster Canal crosses the river. The footbridge attached to Carlisle (railway) Bridge over the Lune allowed Williamson's workers to get more quickly from their Skerton homes to his extensive linoleum factories on the Lancaster side of the river. He also gave the John O'Gaunt Rowing Club its original premises.



Ryelands House, original section to the right, extension to the left

From Ryelands Park it is a short walk back to Skerton Bridge.

Text and photographs – Gordon Clark.
Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (©2014; revised 2020).
Lancaster Civic Vision is the trading name of Lancaster Civic Society, registered charity no. 258434