

Lancaster Civic Vision

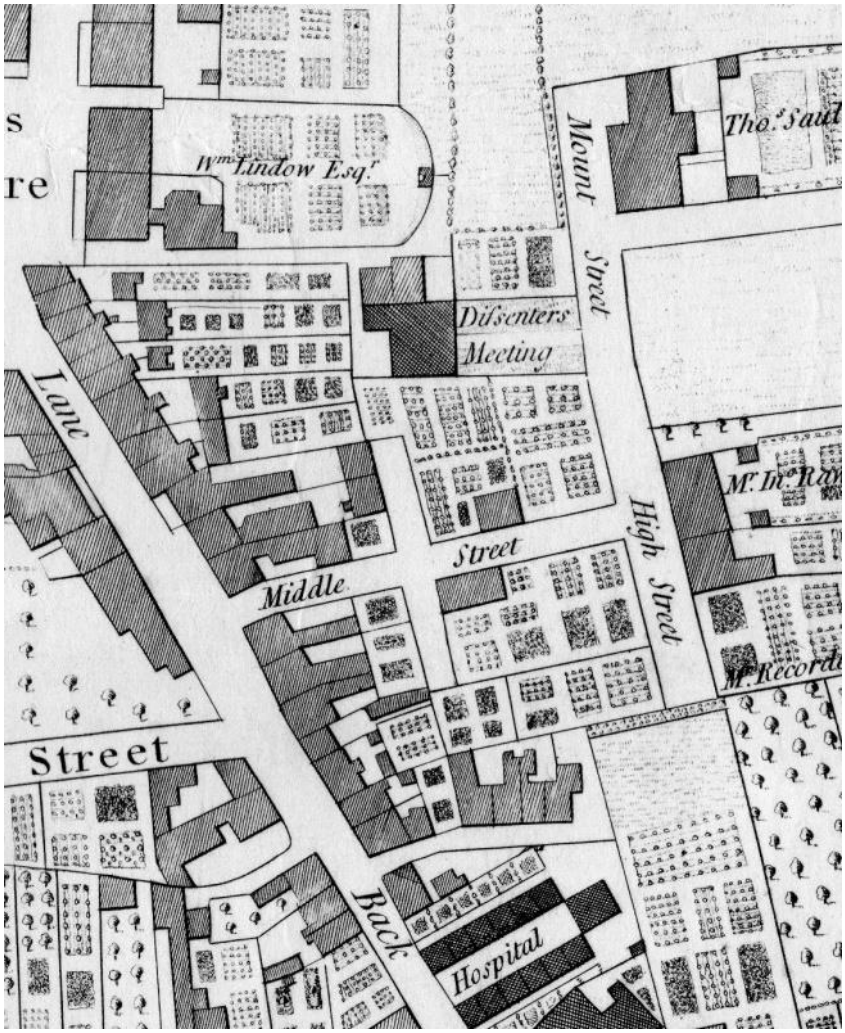
Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

HIGH STREET, LANCASTER

Lancaster Civic Society Guide 15

At the heart of many British towns is the 'High Street' – an old, bustling thoroughfare. Not in Lancaster. Our High Street is only 160 metres long and Georgian in age.

Yet it is packed with interesting buildings reflecting the city's development. Even by 1778 it was still just a stub of a street on the edge of town as you can see on the right-hand side of Mackreth's map below. It was then a cul-de sac, attached to the rest of the town only by Middle Street.



But the edge of town was land with prime development potential and that is how High Street expanded — as a fashionable addition to the town.

In this very short walk let's start on King Street (part of the one-way system and marked on the map above as Back Lane). Walk up Middle Street, which widens to create an imposing approach to Nos 2, 4 and 6 High Street. They were built around 1775 as three houses within one design.

The intention was to impress – Doric demi-columns, carriage access, a Diocletian window up in the triangular pediment. Note the three-step mounting block to the right. The owner of No 4 was John Rawlinson, a member of the wealthy Quaker family who were leading traders with the West Indies. Today it is flats.

If you turn left and walk up High Street, the next big house you come to on the right-hand side is Highmount House (1774), now flats, which between 1908 and 1936 was the offices of Thomas Mawson's firm, renowned as landscape and garden designers and town planners.

Mawson and his firm designed Lancaster's War Memorial (by the Town Hall) and Westfield War Memorial Village, for both of which there are separate guides in this series.



Thomas Mawson is third from the left in the front row. His staff in 1913 outside Highmount.

Carry on south to the end of High Street, which is marked by the 1912–14 building of Lancaster Girls Grammar School with the borough's coat of arms in the triangular pediment above the front door. It is a complex Edwardian Baroque design with cupolas, octagonal stair towers and leaded windows. Many other buildings have since been added to the school.

Retracing your steps back into High Street, opposite Highmount House is High Street Cottage, an unusual design in a Gothick Style. The complex tracery in the windows and the embattled parapet are notable.

Continuing back towards Middle Street, you come to what was until recently Trinity United Reformed Church. On the 1778 map (above) it was called the Dissenters' Meeting. It then became High Street Congregational Chapel. It is still a church.

The outside (1774) is very plain for a church. Inside the layout has seating and galleries with box pews on three sides, focusing on the pulpit (perhaps by Gillow) and altar. The building was extended in 1833 and 1851 as the congregation grew. Outside was their graveyard till 1837. Next door is their Independent Sunday School (1855–6) designed by E.G. Paley of the famous Lancaster architectural firm of Sharpe, Paley and Austin. This building extends into the top of Middle Street.

Next to it, one door down on Middle Street, is the former Bluecoat School (now called Windermere House), which dates from 1849–50, again designed by Sharpe and Paley. Note the window design and the sculpture with two girls above the main door (see below). This replaced a smaller school of 1772.



Back on High Street, walk to the end and stop outside No 1. As the stone plaque in the wall notes, this was the birthplace of Laurence Binyon, the poet and art historian, who wrote in his poem *For the Fallen* the well known lines:

> "They shall not grow 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."

Nos 1–9 High Street date from about 1850 and have the long staircase windows seen in Lancaster's Georgian houses.

Across the street is No 2A High Street, which was formerly the National School for Girls. It was, the inscription tells us, "Built by Public Subscription A.D. 1820, to establish Order, check Vice and uphold Virtue". The building has been much altered – it had a spell as a shop and is now flats. The School lay at the south end of the grounds and house (*c.*1770s–1921) of Fenton Cawthorne, which are now occupied by Lancaster's Telephone Exchange (1952, note the modern stair window to the side), the former Post Office and the Postal Delivery Office.

Fenton Cawthorne was a colourful character – a fraudster, bankrupt and Member of Parliament for Lancaster for periods between 1806 and 1831, with views which today would be described as reactionary.



Looking down into Fenton Street, the end house is No 10, built in 1846–7 as the town house of Edmund Sharpe, the architect and railway engineer, who was also Mayor, a musician and singer, co-founder of the John O'Gaunt Rowing Club and owner of the Phoenix Foundry. The house's oval staircase is impressive. His house later became the Trades Hall and, after extensions and refurbishment, is now offices.

Most of the buildings in this walk are Grade II listed.

Here are some other guides in this series that may be of interest:

19 Westfield War Memorial Village
32 Edmund Sharpe
46 Thomas Mawson of Lancaster

Text – Gordon Clark. Photographs – E. Kissack, 2006 p69 for Mawson staff; Gordon Clark for the others.

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