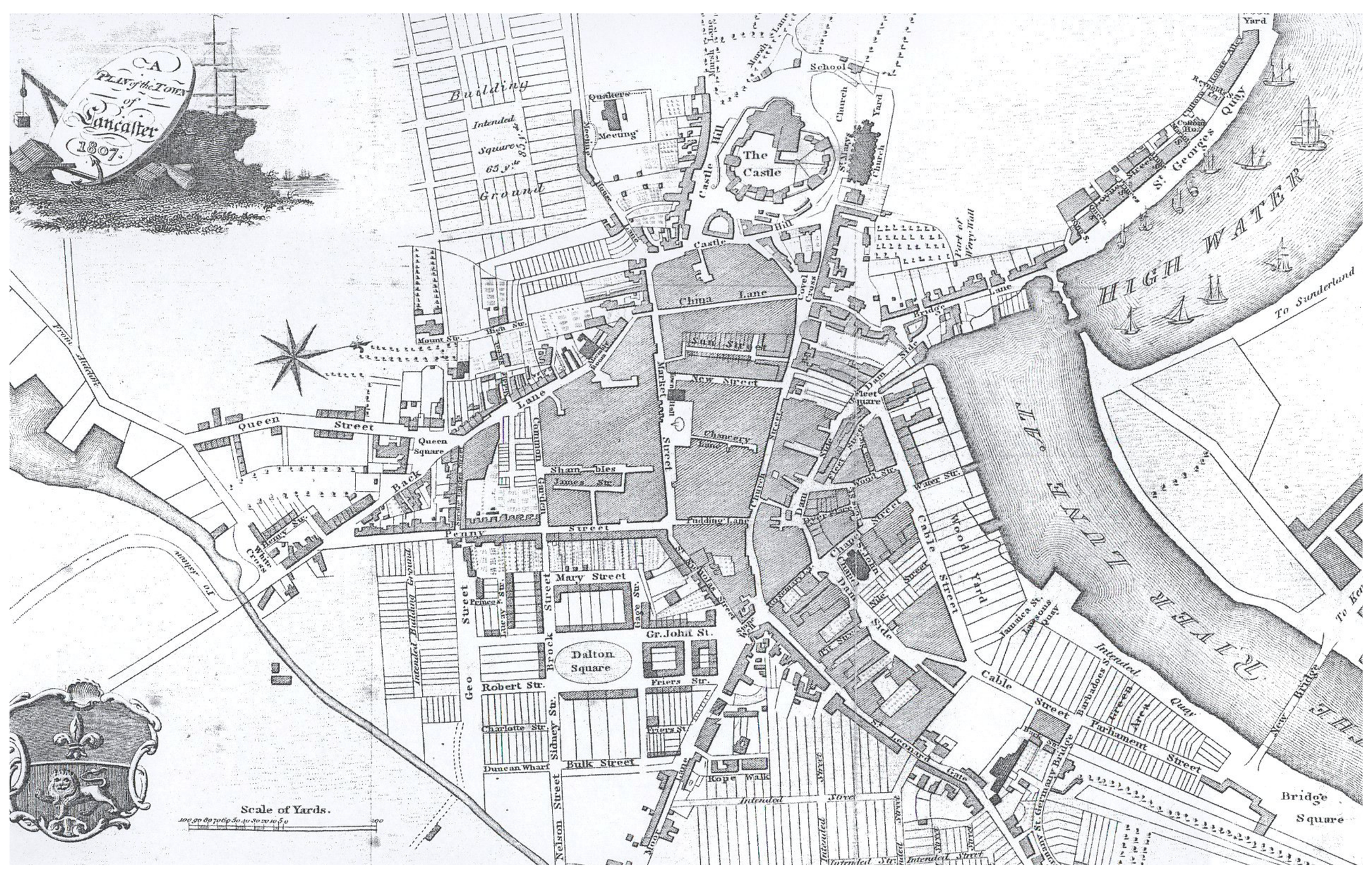
# Saving St John's - The history of St John's




Lancaster expanded in wealth and population in the 18th century, spurred by the development of the port which connected the city to global commerce, including the trade in enslaved people. Growth prompted the construction of St John's in 1754-5, as a chapel-of-ease to the medieval Lancaster Priory.

The church is thought to be designed by Henry Sephton. It comprised a simple 'preaching box', a design for church buildings that ensured the whole congregation could hear the Bible readings and sermon.

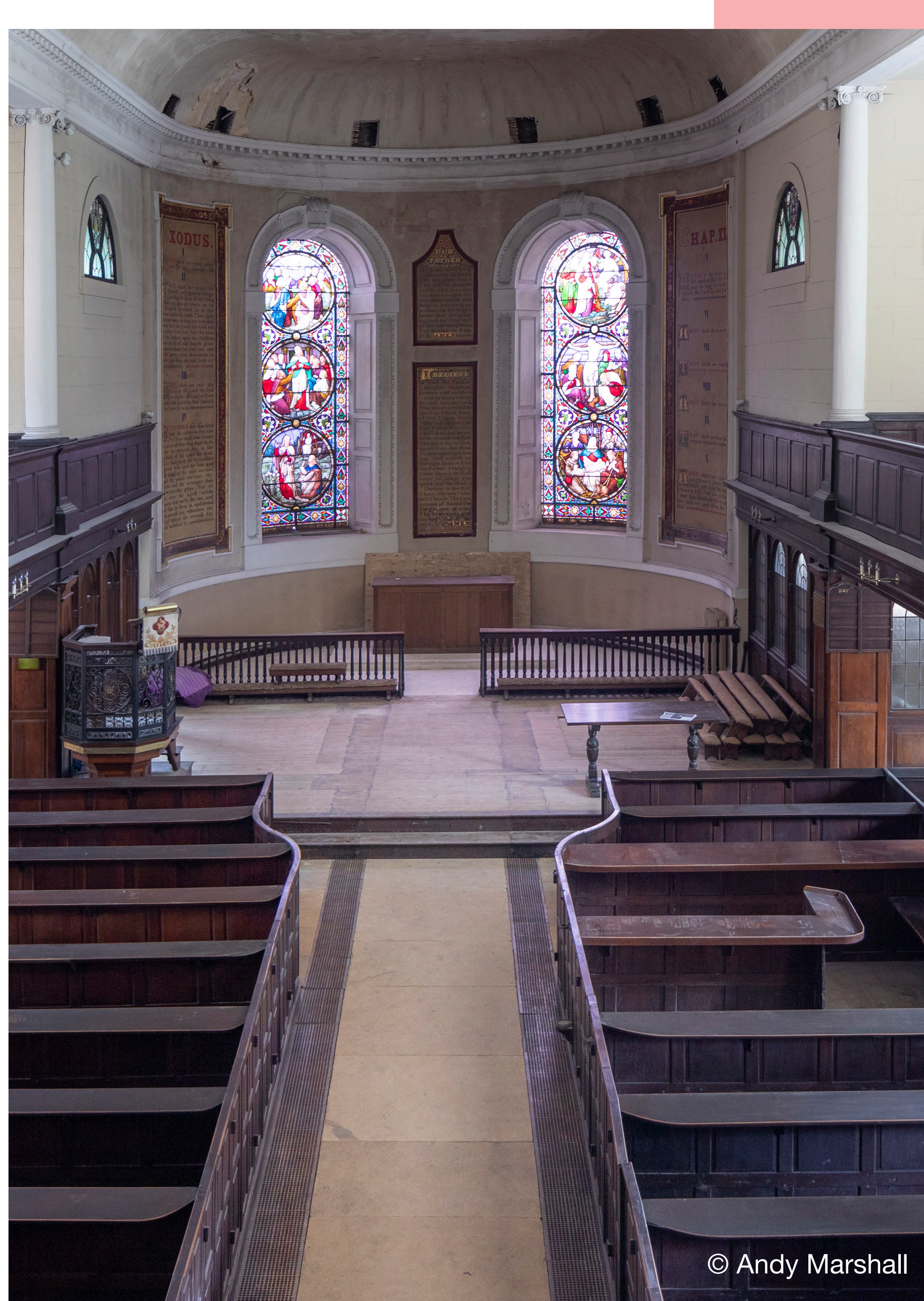
The church was initially funded by wealthy Lancastrians, with later contributions from the 'Queen Anne's Bounty' (forerunner to the Church Commissioners). A bequest in 1784 paid for the addition of the tower and spire, designed by Thomas Harrison who also built the Skerton Bridge over the Lune. A new organ case designed by Gillows of Lancaster was added in c.1785.




The nave and galleries were originally fitted with wooden box pews, designed for the comfort of parishioners because they kept out cold draughts. The best pews were rented for the exclusive use of wealthy families and there was also a Corporation Pew, for town dignitaries.



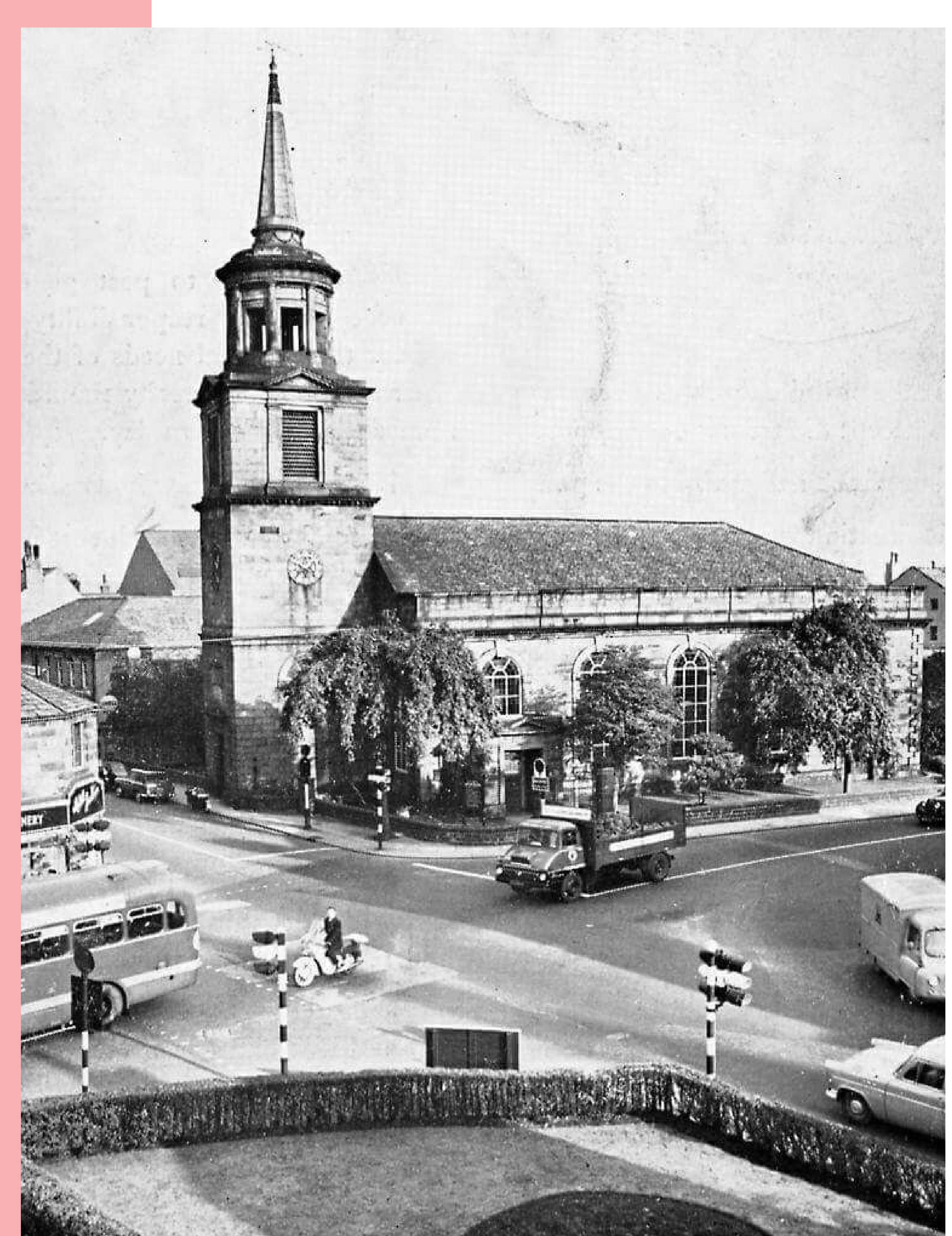
All of the original nave pews survive. The curved form of the pews sides at the east end, nearest the altar, shows where there was originally a large central pulpit in the nave; this was removed in the 19th century when the east end of the church was remodelled and a vestry added in the south-east corner of the building.


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The church survives largely as it was in the 18th century, and for this it is listed at Grade II*. Later alterations have generally been of a quality and character which complements the original building. These include  Victorian stained glass windows by local firm Shrigley and Hunt, a timber draught screen at the west end, and a north-east side chapel designed by Sir Albert Richardson in the 20th century.

By 1958, the population of central Lancaster declined to the extent that the parish merged with nearby St Anne's (now Duke's Theatre).  Repairs were undertaken by architect J H Martindale in 1964 but the church closed in 1981.



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