

Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

THE FRIARY AND DALTON SQUARE

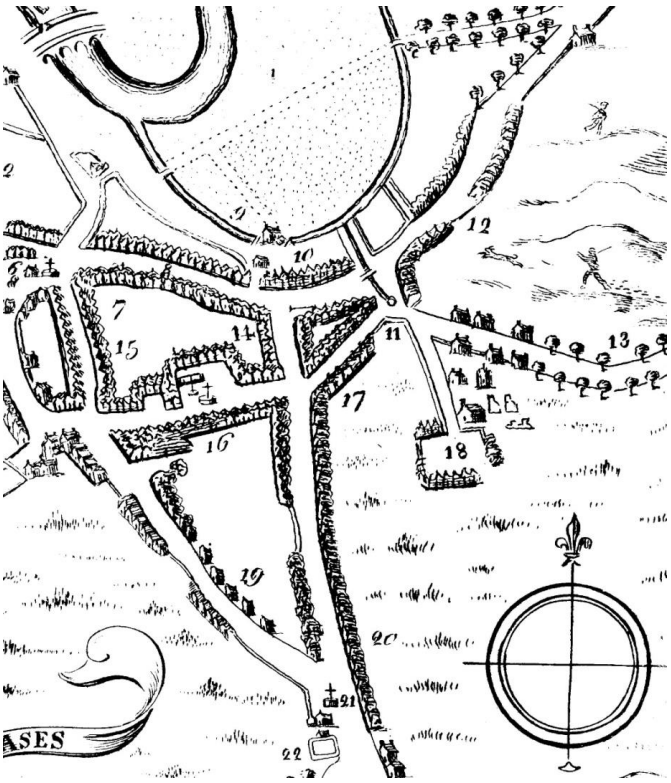
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Before Dalton Square was built, this part of Lancaster was the site of a Dominican Friary. The monks were the Blackfriars and they established a base here around 1260. In the early fourteenth century they expanded their buildings and precinct. The entry points to their lands were from Moor Lane in the north and South Road.

The site was dedicated to the Holy Trinity and the friars were supported financially by wealthy local landowners. There was a major church, bell tower, cemetery, chantry and the usual outbuildings for the friars and lay staff who lived and worked there. There was a precinct wall around their lands, sections of which survived into the early nineteenth century.

In 1539 the Friary was dissolved, like so many religious establishments at that time. The church disappeared quickly but the outbuildings proved useful for the new owners of the land.

Speed's map, surveyed in 1607, shows a quadrangle of buildings. By the time of Mackreth's map surveyed in the mid-1770s, some still survived but not for much longer.



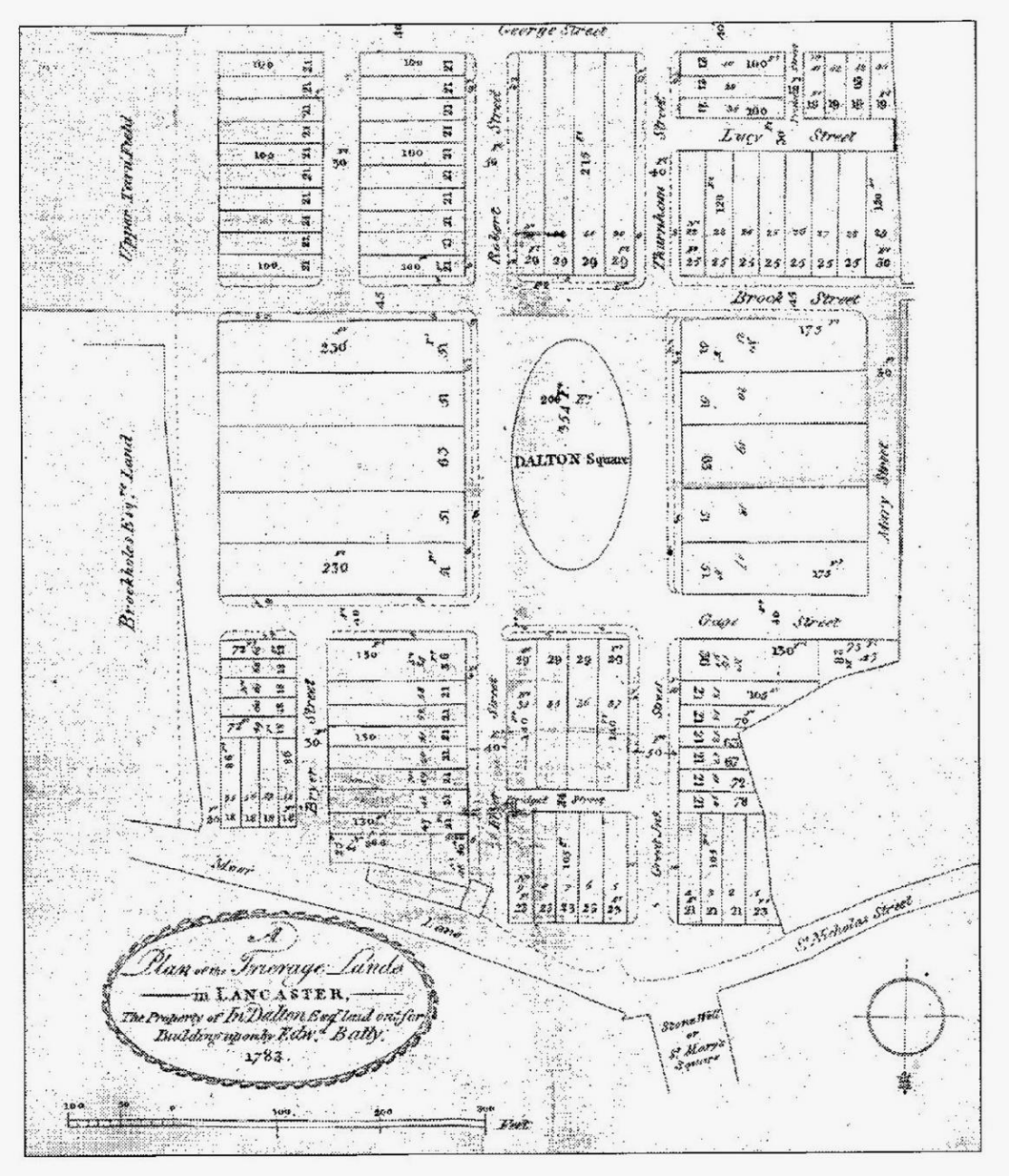
The area of the Friary (No. 18) shown on Speed's map, surveyed in 1607.
'11' is Stonewell and '13' is Moor Lane



The Friary area (centre) as shown on Mackreth's map, surveyed in the mid-1770s. The map is apparently 'upside down' because the original map had north at the bottom of the map. On this map it is at the top to allow a comparison with the previous map by Speed.

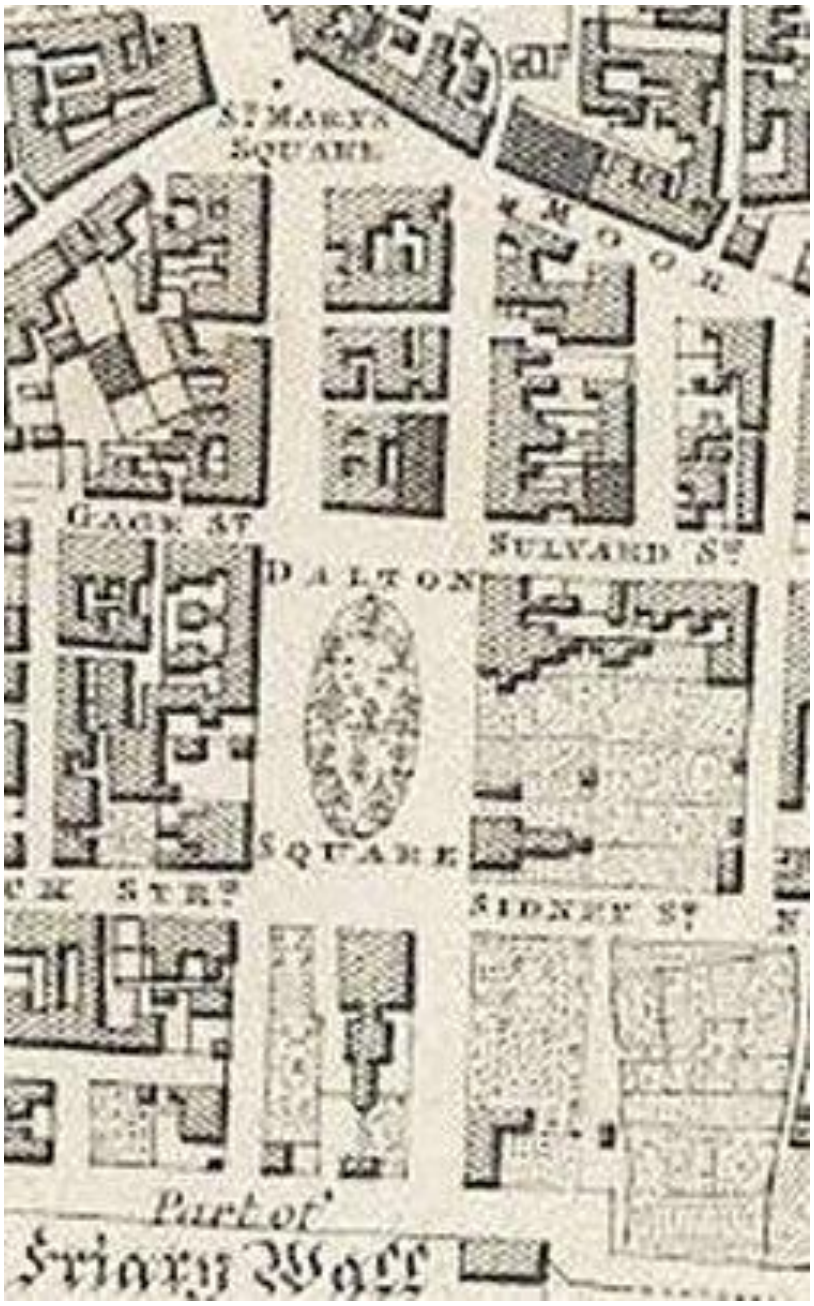
Although not the original purchaser of the dissolved Friary's land and buildings, the Dalton family at Thurnham Hall soon became its owners. In 1783 John Dalton obtained an Act of Parliament that allowed him to divide this large area into building plots and lease these to builders. Perhaps he had in mind the then fashionable squares and crescents being constructed in Bath, London and Edinburgh's New Town.

He created an overall plan (shown below) that had long narrow plots on the north and south sides of the Square and larger, broader ones on the west and east sides. Some of the nearby streets are said to have been named after family members (Mary, Lucy).



John Dalton's original plan for the roads and building plots, 1783. North is at the top of the map to allow comparison with the two previous maps.
(Source: White A (2003) *Lancaster: a History*).

Dalton's hope was that the growing wealth of late Georgian Lancaster would stimulate a demand for large houses in a new fashionable part of the town. However, the demand fell short and, even after the plots had been subdivided, demand was sluggish. There were still empty plots in the mid-1840s when the Ordnance Survey first recorded the area.



Dalton Square in 1844/5 (Source: Ordnance Survey 6-inch map). Note the fragment of the former Friary's boundary wall still surviving at the foot of this map. North is at the top.

This protracted period of development meant that any hope of a single unified style of architecture right round the Square was lost. The photograph below shows the east and south sides of the Square in 1903/06, with Victorian buildings on the left, the spire of St Peter's in the centre and the edge of a large town house on the right.



East and south sides of Dalton Square, 1903/06.
(Source: Lancashire Archives, Red Rose Collection, gratefully acknowledged)

The building on the right was originally the home of Margaret Coulston and later became the base for the Sisters of Nazareth. It was demolished and they moved to their premises on Ashton Road. This cleared the site for the new Town Hall, opened in 1909, along with the Queen Victoria Monument in the centre of the Square, unveiled in 1907.

John Dalton's plan was for a quiet square surrounded by grand houses. Today the Square is busy with traffic and the properties are largely commercial and administrative, with ever-changing occupiers.

Other related leaflets in this series include:
No. 17 Queen Victoria Monument.
No. 47 Three Town Halls.
No. 80 St Joseph's Church, Skerton.

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