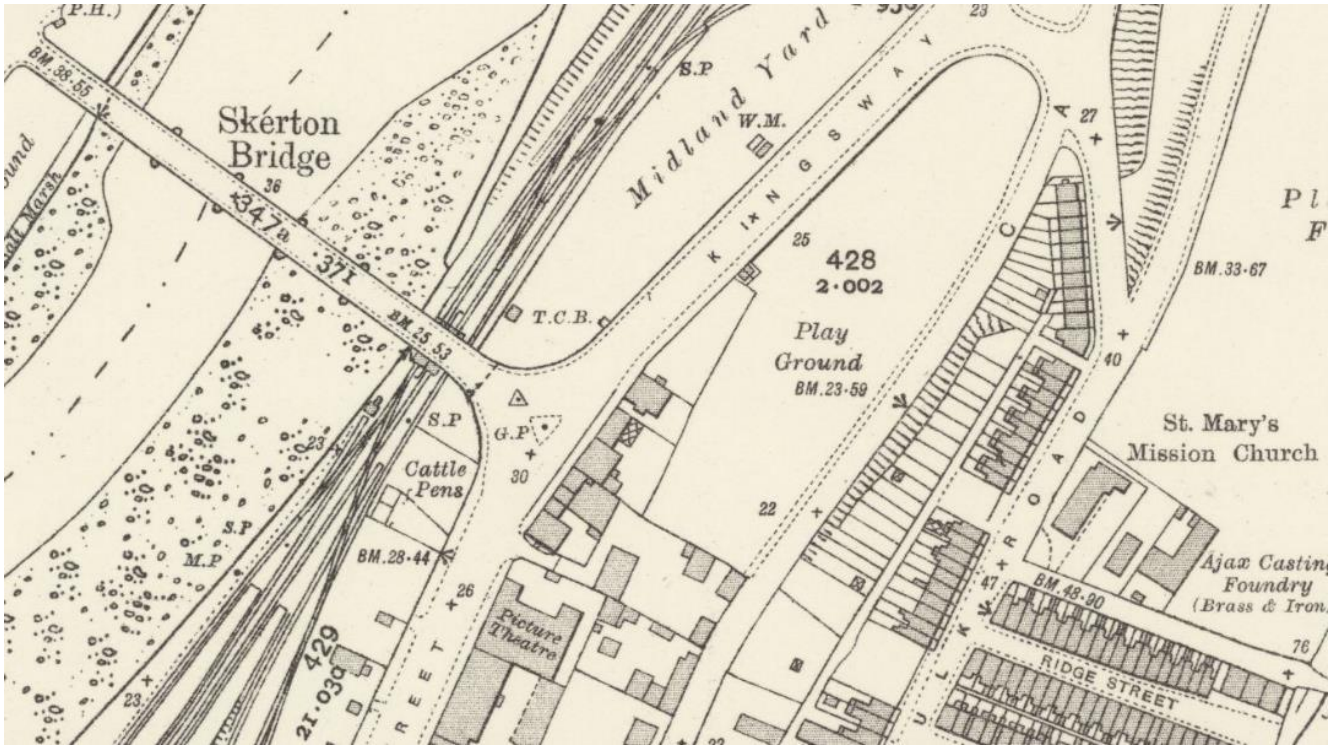
Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

KINGSWAY

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 70

In Lancaster, the Kingsway area lies in the angle created by Caton Road dividing into Parliament Street / Cable Street and Back Caton Road. In the early 1930s the site was mostly open ground, marked on the OS map (below) as a playground. So large an open site on the edge of town was an obvious location for any new developments that needed space. In the late 1930s two such developments happened there in quick succession.



Kingsway area in 1931 (Source: Ordnance Survey)

The bus depot

The first development was the new Corporation bus garage. From 1904 the depot for Lancaster Corporation Tramways was a basic, corrugated-iron shed on Thurnham Street that was converted to a bus garage when the trams were phased out in the late 1920s.

However, the building had serious limitations for the maintenance of an expanding fleet of diesel-engined buses. Furthermore, staff facilities were limited. The site was hemmed in by other buildings and could not expand. Today this site is occupied by Kwik Fit.

The northern section of the Kingsway site was selected for the new bus garage for Lancaster Corporation Transport Department: it opened on 20 July 1937. It could house 40 buses and had workshops, stores, offices for administrative staff and facilities for the crews. Buses entered the garage via large doors on Back Caton Street and left on to Kingsway.

Messrs R L Dilworth was the main contractor: they were a Lancaster firm as were most of the sub-contractors. The building was designed by the City Architect, Mr Edgar Middleton, overseen by the City Engineer, Mr Frederick Hill. It was very much a Lancaster enterprise – client, architect, builders, funder and user.

The design is modernist, with simple, clean lines and limited decoration on the Longridge sandstone which faced the brick and steel structure. Some of the details are shown below in the photographs. In the 1930s bus services in Lancaster were also provided by Ribble Motor Services whose garage was on Owen Road, just north of Skerton Bridge.

This site too was originally a tram depot – in this case that of Lancaster and District Tramway – rebuilt around 1930 as a bus garage for Ribble. The site is now housing. A new bus station (along with associated roadworks on Bridge Lane) was built in 1938/9 on Damside for Lancaster Corporation and Ribble services. This was replaced by the present bus station in 2001 for Stagecoach and other operators.



Surviving architectural details from the bus garage (Source: the author)

The Swimming Baths

The Super Swimming Stadium in Morecambe opened in 1936. 1937 was the year the bus depot opened and also the year in which work started on building Lancaster's new swimming baths. Again, the impetus was the perceived inadequacy of existing facilities. Lancaster's original public baths were on Cable Street, donated to the town in 1863 by Samuel Gregson MP. They provided bathing, swimming and laundry facilities. Some of the original stonework and a commemorative plaque have been included in the Cable Street wall of Sainsbury's, which demolished the old baths site and opened as a supermarket in 1985 – see Lancaster Civic Society Green Plaque Tour at http://www.lancastercivicsociety.uk/green-plaque-tour-of-lancaster/. The baths had been extended in 1893, 1904 and 1914 (a filtration system) but by the 1930s they no longer met modern standards. Again, the site could not be extended as it was hemmed in by warehouses and by railway tracks and sheds. A new site was needed. The remainder of the Kingsway site was selected for the new baths.

The baths were again designed by Edgar Middleton (by then the former City Architect) and T D Kennedy and the project was overseen by Frederick Hill, now the City Engineer and Architect. The cost was £59,000 (nearly £4 million in 2020 values). Again, it was a Lancaster enterprise – client, architect, builders, funder and user. The baths were opened officially on 1 July 1939 by the Rt Hon. Walter Elliot, the Minister

of Health. The exterior design matched that of the bus garage, again faced in Longridge sandstone. Only the front entrance with its classical columns decorates a stripped back facade. The size and detail of the baths matches that of the garage suggesting that Middleton designed them as a complementary pair of municipal buildings.



The Swimming Baths (right and centre) and the Bus Garage (left) in 1939
(Source: Lancashire County Council, Red Rose Collection)

A very wide range of facilities was provided. There were two swimming pools, the larger (100 feet by 36 feet) had seating for at least 600 spectators and was used for the town's swimming club and very successful water-polo teams and by other serious swimmers. National, regional and local championships have been held there. The smaller pool (95 feet by 30 feet) was for children and family groups. Both pools had several diving boards. There were also 14 slipper baths, four foam baths and a café.

Eventually the minor pool was filled in to provide a multi-sport hall. At various times there have been facilities in the complex for basketball, badminton, table tennis and volleyball. By the early 1980s the floodlit roof provided space for football and netball. There was a crèche, saunas, solarium, café and laundry. The pools could be covered over in the winter and the areas used for concerts. The emphasis was on multiple, year-round sporting and other uses for the baths complex. In 1984 £60,000 (around £200,000 in 2020 values) was spent on upgrading the facilities at the Kingsway Sports Centre after nearly 50 years of use. Many local people have fond memories of the Kingsway Baths.



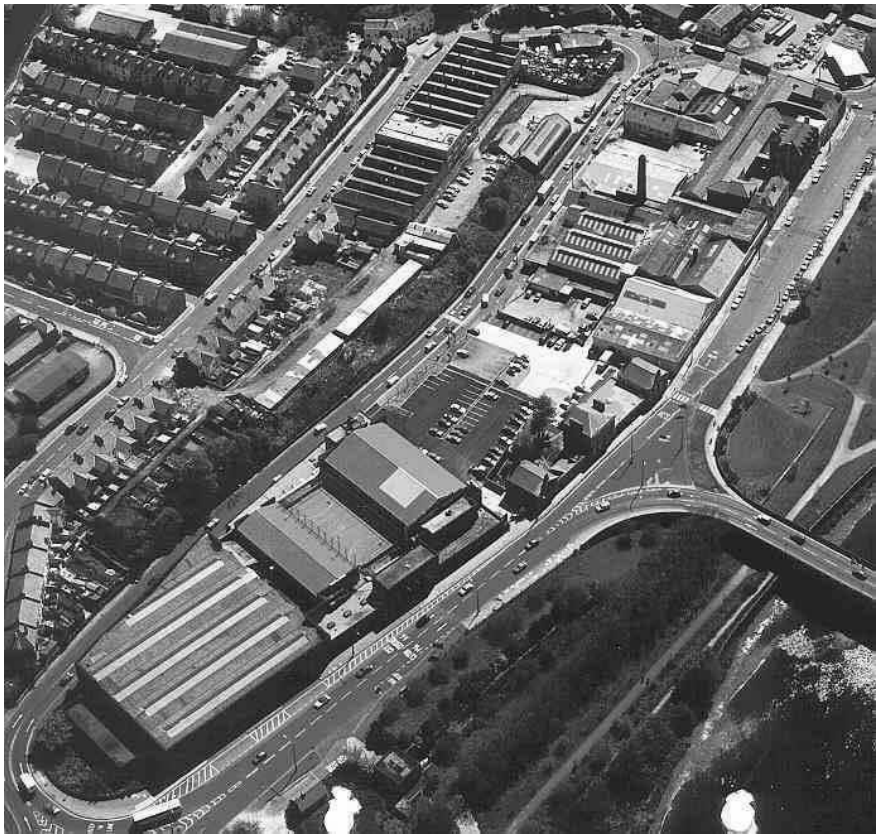
The large swimming pool – note the clear span arches and the large windows giving natural light (Source: unknown)



The former entrance to the baths (Source: Author)

In the 1990s fortune turned against both the bus garage and the swimming baths. In line with government policy the Lancaster bus operation was in effect privatised around 1985 and then taken over by Stagecoach, as was Ribble. They closed both the Kingsway and Skerton garages and consolidated bus servicing on White Lund Industrial Estate. The Kingsway sports complex was by this time showing its age too and it closed in 1997. A new sports centre was built at Salt Ayre. The whole Kingsway site therefore came up for redevelopment. An architectural complication was that the facades of both parts were listed by English Heritage in 1998 – a tribute to Middleton's high-quality designs in the late 1930s. However, listing meant that the

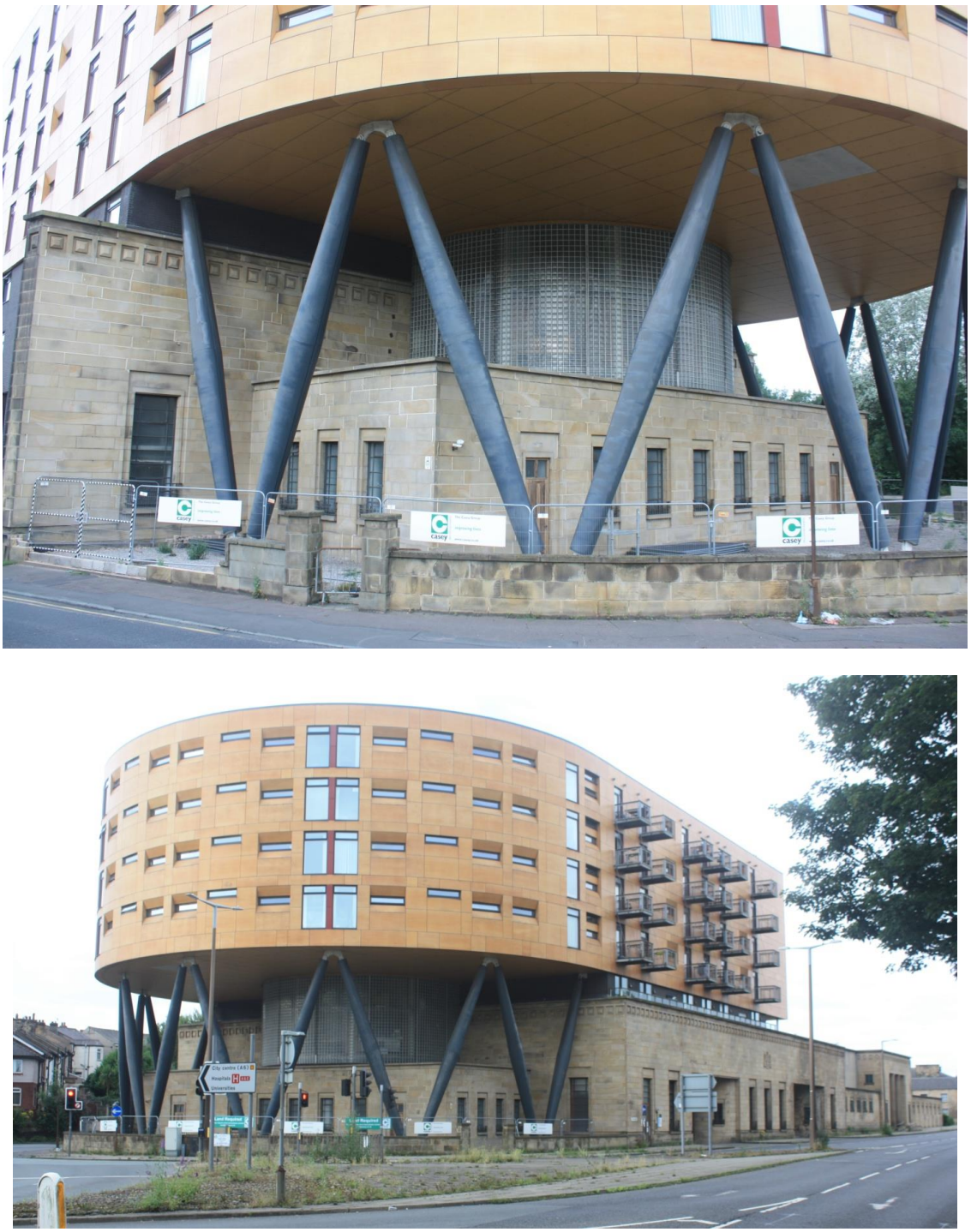
facades had to be incorporated into any new structures on the site. In 2002 the City Council issued a development brief for whole site.



Aerial view of the Kingsway site in 2002 before its redevelopment
(Source: Lancaster City Council)

The swimming-baths site became a retail store. The south-western part of the baths site was demolished to create a larger car park. A new facade for the store was built, neatly complementing the original stonework and design.

The bus garage site became 100 flats using a design that was strongly opposed by Lancaster Civic Society and others because of the building's height, design and bright orange cladding. The building we see today was narrowly approved by the Planning Committee in 2007, even though alternative designs had been provided by the Civic Society. This explains why today parts of the original 1930s building survive underneath the flats towering above.



The former garage site today (Source: Author)

Historic England described the combination of old and new styles as an "exhilarating dissonance": others might use less complimentary words. In 2016 Historic England revisited Kingsway and, because so much of the original buildings had been demolished, they revoked its Grade II listing.

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