Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

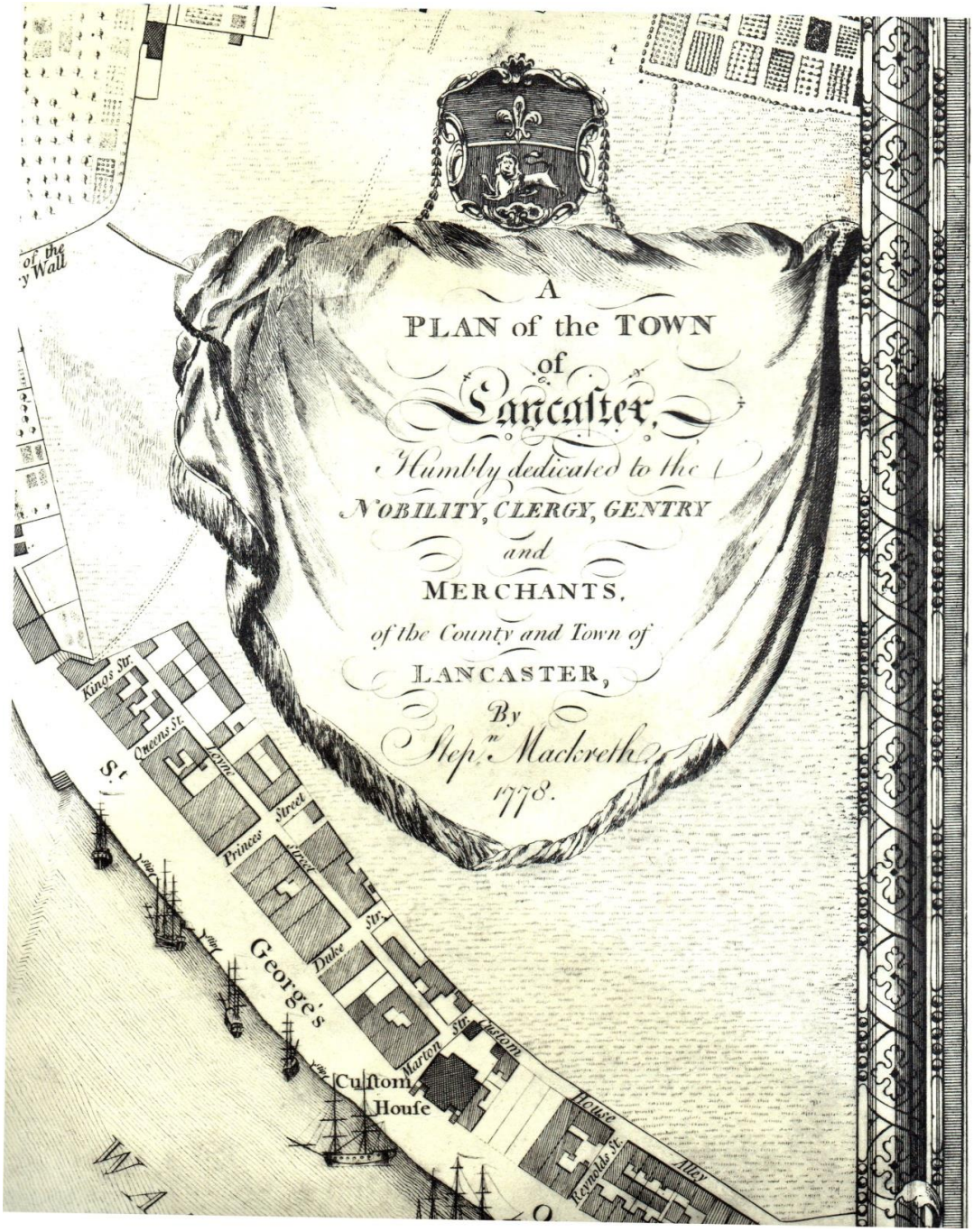
MAP OF LANCASTER IN 1778

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 66

In Guide 65 in this series we showed Lancaster as it was portrayed in John Speed's map of 1607 – basically a very small medieval town. By the time of Stephen Mackreth's map published in 1778, the town had grown considerably and the town centre is recognisably as it is today. His map is highly detailed, the work of a professional surveyor and showing the outline of individual buildings as well as the streets. It is a large map – 60cm by 72cm.



A number of features stand out. There are the two images in the top-left-hand and top-right-hand corners showing the Castle and St Mary's Church (The Priory). Unusually, south is at the top of the map. It has a decorative border to make it resemble a framed picture on display in your house. It is an artwork rather than a map to be used for navigation. It was a status symbol for the well off, costing 5 shillings (about £39 in today's money) or you could buy seven for the price of six. The cartouche in the bottom-right-hand corner is interesting. It indicates the clientele who could afford the map.



The cartouche of Mackreth's map.
Note the ships and warehouses on the then recently developed St George's Quay.

So who was the cartographer, Stephen Mackreth?

We know little of his life and this was his only map. At first sight he is an unlikely cartographer.

Orphaned at four years of age, he was probably brought up by George Grey who was one of his father's executors and a bookseller, as Stephen's father had been.

Stephen was apprenticed at 14 to a joiner and cabinet maker. By the time he was 17 he was listed as a painter. Few cartographic skills there.

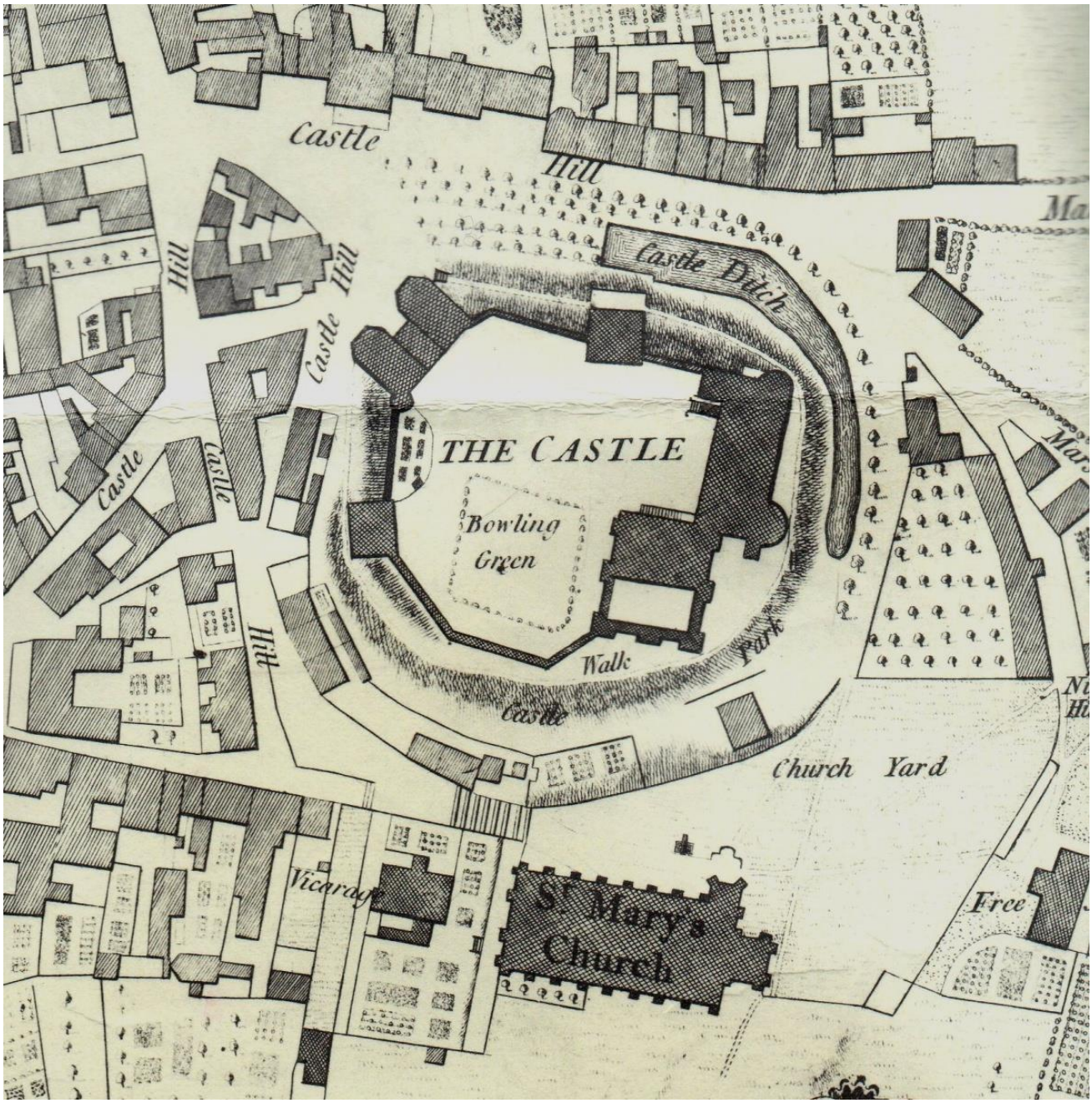
However, George Grey was also a land surveyor – a useful skill if you want to produce a town map. The map is certainly the result of very accurate surveying.

Grey's son, Bryan, is probably the draughtsman for the map. The copper-plate engraving was advertised as being done in London.

The printing could have been done by Mackreth because by the age of 36 in 1778 he is noted as being a printer too.

George Grey moved in the right circles among Lancaster's elite to drum up the subscriptions that would be needed to ensure that the map was a financially sound venture.

Stephen Mackreth died in 1793 aged 51.



The Castle Hill area



The town centre

The map is well worth close study, in terms of what has survived and what has not – the St Nicholas Street area and the Shambles, for example. What other changes can you spot?

Text – Gordon Clark.
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