Lancaster Civic Vision

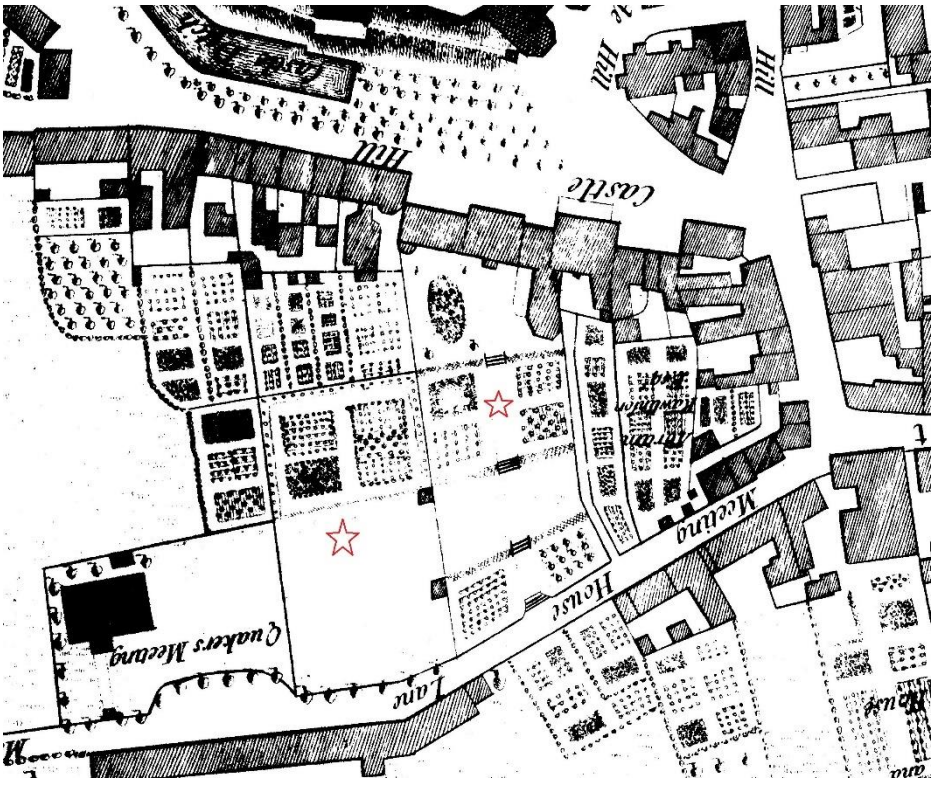
Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

THE STOREY GARDEN, LANCASTER

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 117

Guide 68 in this series describes the development of the Lancaster's Mechanics Institute in the early nineteenth century and its conversion to the Storey Institute in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The guide does not mention the Storey Garden to the west of the Institute, between it and the Friends Meeting House on Meeting House Lane. This guide fills that gap.

The earliest image of this area is found on Stephen Mackreth's map of Lancaster (below), surveyed in the mid-1770s and published in 1778.

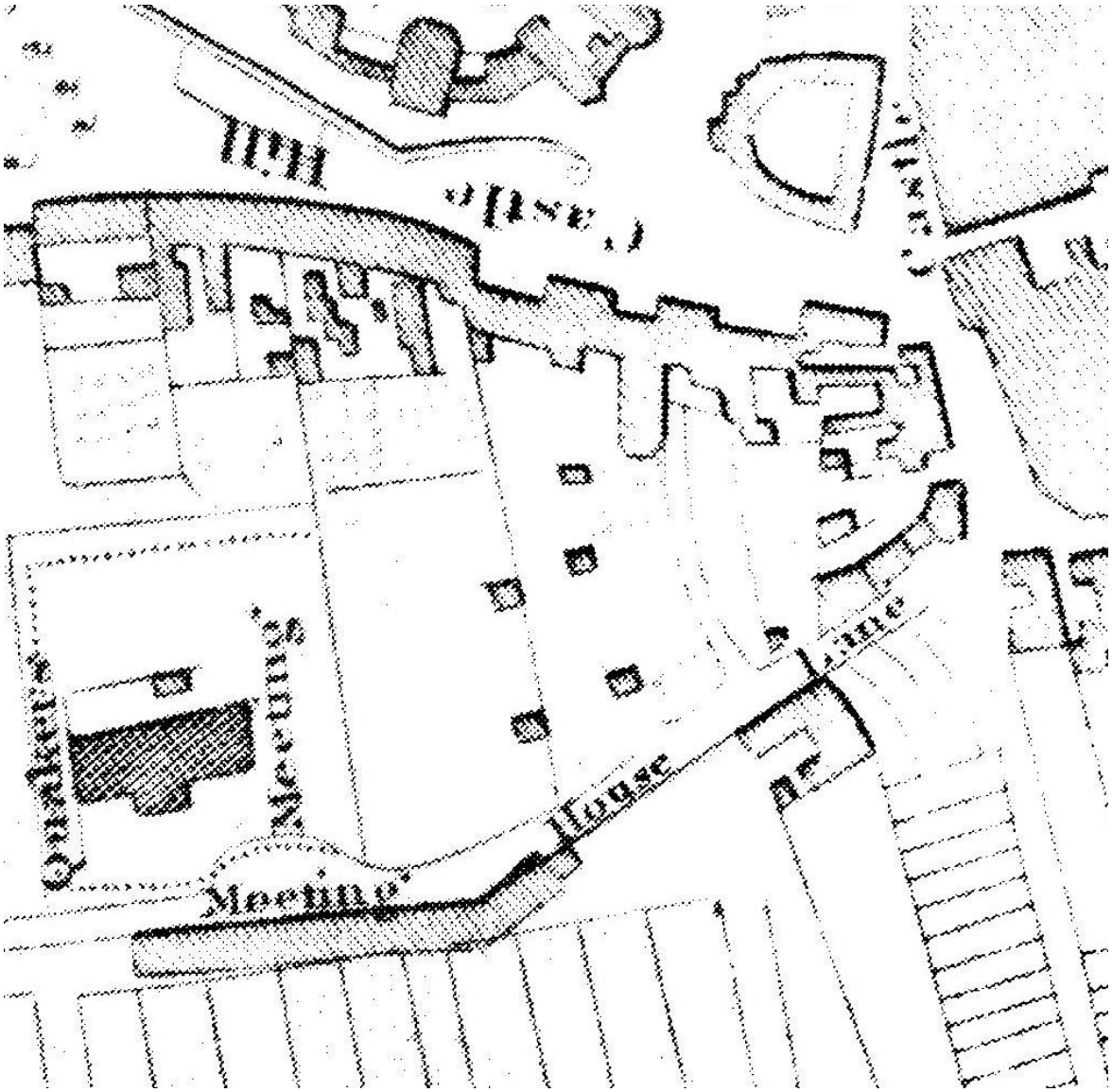


The area of the Storey Garden on Mackreth's map of Lancaster published in 1778.

The map has been rotated so that north is at the top of the image (originally south was at the top). The two north-south strips of garden with the red stars are the area of today's Storey Garden.

Then they were the private gardens of those living at No. 20 and neighbouring houses on Castle Park. No. 20 was a large Georgian house built in 1720. The horticultural detail on Mackreth's map is not always precise but the four short flights of steps down from the right-hand garden to Meeting House Lane are clear.

Christopher Clark's map of 1807 (below) shows five small buildings in the gardens, perhaps gardeners' sheds or summer houses.



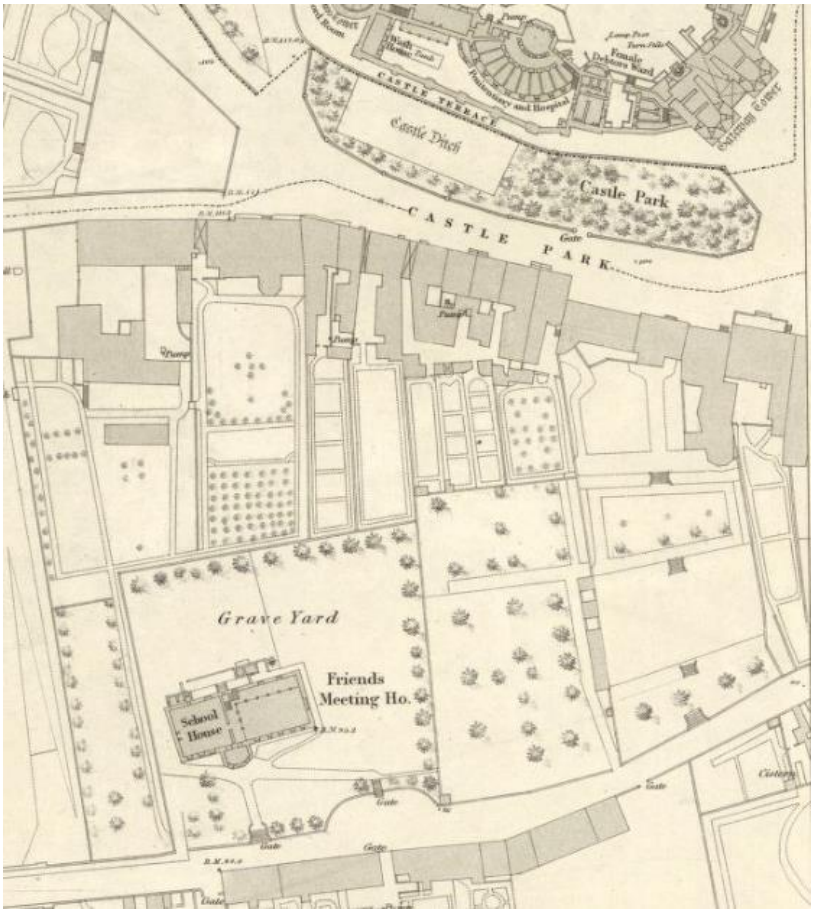
Christopher Clark's map of 1807

Binns' map of 1821/25 (below) is probably more realistic (if accurate) in terms of the pattern of vegetable patches, flower beds and trees, particularly for fruit, in what would become the Storey Garden and its neighbours.



Binns map of 1821/25 in the centre of the image

The very detailed Ordnance Survey (OS) plan of 1845 (below) gives a lot of detail of the layout of the two gardens at that time – a complex pattern of smaller beds near the houses and more open areas with a few trees at the further end near Meeting House Lane.



OS 5-foot plan (1:1056) surveyed in 1845.

The OS 25-inch map of 1890 (below) shows the gardens in relation to the newly built Storey Institute. The left-hand garden has a new glasshouse.



OS 25-inch map of the Storey Garden area in 1890, the slope and steps up from Meeting House Lane clearly visible.

By the time of the 25-inch map in 1910, little has changed apart from a sundial erected in the middle of the right-hand garden and the Lancaster tramway passing along Meeting House Lane. By the 1938 25-inch map few changes are shown except that the tramway has been removed.

The left-hand garden was taken over by Lancashire County Council in 1932. The side nearest the Storey Institute became a recreational area for the staff and students of the relocated Middlesex Technical College during the Second World War.

The left-hand side was used for vegetable growing and for air-raid shelters – this was one of the few fairly level, open areas in the centre of Lancaster.

After the war, the area become derelict and overgrown. Lancashire County Council took over the right-hand garden in 1955. The Storey came to house both the Lancaster School of Art and the Art Department of the then Preston Polytechnic (now UCLan).

In 1976 one of the students, Andy Goldsworthy, started to experiment with using the officially out-of-bounds wilderness as a site for developing art in the landscape, which was to become his main style. In the late 1980s Lancaster City Council took over the site, still very overgrown.

From this point, the reinvigoration of the gardens began. After 1997, the area began to be a regular display space for artworks.

Perhaps the best known and still remembered was Mark Dion's original *The Tasting Garden* (1998). Branching pathways leading westwards traced out a tree with large bronze sculptures of their fruit on plinths.

Heritage varieties of fruit trees were planted. This imaginative and thought-provoking exhibition had to close in 2006.

Since 2018 the hard work of local volunteers to 'The Friends of Storey Gardens' has allowed the Storey Garden to reopen to the public as a tranquil green space in the centre of town.



The entrance from Castle Park to the Storey Garden (Source: Gordon Clark)



Mark Dion's bronze fruit on plinths (Source: StoreyG2)



The branching pathways (Source: StoreyG2 and Lancaster City Council)



Fritillaries and primroses in the spring (Source: Gordon Clark)



I am grateful for the information in the following publications:
Cox, H (n.d.) *The Story of the Storey.* 38pp
The Storey Gardens http://www.storeygardens.org

Text: Gordon Clark.
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