Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

LANCASTER'S CANALSIDE MILLS

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 21



White Cross, Lancaster

What happened to Lancaster's eight textile mills? Once the heart of the local economy, the textile industry has now disappeared. Join us on a pleasant stroll along Lancaster Canal to discover what happened – and get to see another side of the city.

The canal towpath has been refurbished and the walk is only ¾ mile (1.2km). There are many access points to the towpath but we suggest you begin at the Water Witch pub between Aldi and the Royal Lancaster Infirmary (for satnav use LA1 1SU; by canal bridge 98A). Look out for the bird life by the canal.



Bridge Number, Lancaster Canal

Why were the mills all built along the canal? Lancaster Canal from Preston was opened in 1797 (see Guide 39 in this series on the *River Lune and Lancaster Canal*). Water transport was then by far the cheapest way to move heavy goods. Coal for the steam-powered mills came from south Lancashire and finished products went off to southern markets. In the early nineteenth century there were plenty of large sites for big mills this far east of built-up Lancaster. All but one of the mills was built before the railway arrived from Preston in 1840 (see Guide 20 on *Railways around Lancaster and Carnforth*).

Queen's Mill (Demolished in 1983, then a B&Q store, now Aldi). It was originally built by Satterthwaite and Burrow in 1840 for cotton spinning. It then made table baize and leathercloth. By 1886 it had become part of the Storey group of mills. This was where Anaglypta paper was first made. It then became the home of Rembrandt Intaglio (owned by Storeys) who pioneered colour photogravure printing. Some of the mill's stones were reused for the walling.

> ***Table baize*** **is a woven covering for tables and other surfaces.** ***Leathercloth*** **was calico coated with linseed oil and embossed to create a covering mimicking leather.** ***Oilcloth*** **was an early waterproofed cotton textile**.

White Cross Mills (Between Bridges 99 and 100) This is Lancaster's oldest mill (1802) and an early user of steam power for cotton spinning. Coal came here by canal till the 1940s. Thomas Mason and two later owners ran it before the Storeys took over in 1856. Expansion and a fire in 1861 led to many years of rebuilding.

Table baize and leathercloth were the main products. The site, after clearance of outbuildings, now houses many manufacturers, distributors and professional offices. The frontage in Scottish Baronial style (see above) was militia barracks (1854–81) then Storeys' offices.

At Bridge 100 the towpath switches to the other side of the canal.

Moor Lane South Mill (Between Bridges 101 and 102) This started as a sailcloth factory and, after being bought in 1825 by Samuel Greg (of Quarry Bank Mill in Cheshire), it was converted to spinning and weaving cotton.

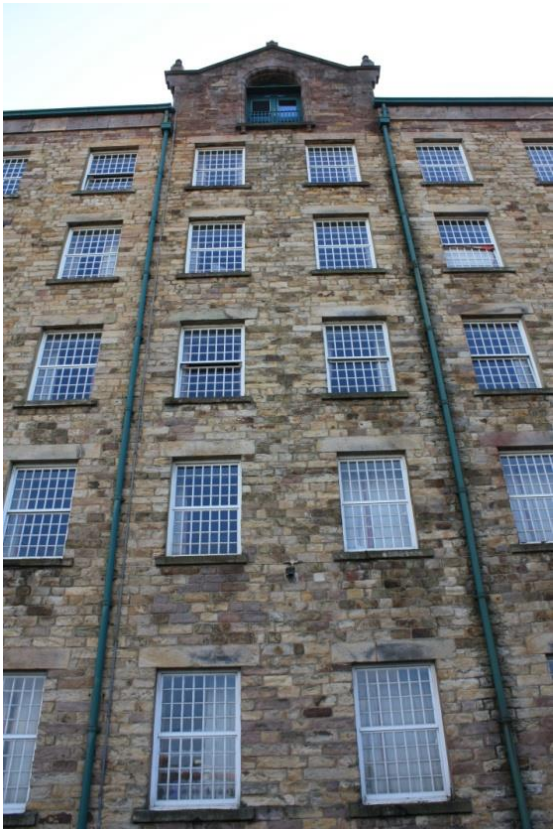
The current building dates from 1825–31. The Storeys took it over in 1861. After the mill closed in 1982 the site became offices for Reebok, who then moved out, and it is now NHS offices. The red water-tower is a local landmark (see below).



Moor Lane South Mill

Moor Lane North Mill (Beyond Bridge 102) This was built in 1819 by Higgin and produced fine worsted yarn. By 1828 it had switched to cotton spinning. By 1846 it was owned by Samuel Greg for additional cotton-spinning capacity.

The Storeys took over in 1861 and it closed in 1975. After 1989 became a Hall of Residence for the University of Cumbria, an impressive six-storey building, though no longer owned by the University. (see photograph below).



Moor Lane North Mill

Greenfield Mill (Before Bridge 102, to the east, not visible from the towpath) A Williamson mill and the last of the eight to be built (1864). It was an imposing five storeys high. Demolished between 1975 and 1982, the site is now housing.

Bath Mill (Beyond Bridge 102, to the east) Built by John Threlfall in 1837 for cotton, by 1864 it was part of Williamsons, again five storeys high and it made table baize. Demolished in 1974, the site is now housing. Stones from the mill were extensively reused and the site has won housing design awards.

Albion Mill (Bridge 103) The mill has mostly been demolished. Built between 1821 and 1825 this was William Jackson's 'Canal Side' cotton mill. By 1848 silk production had been added and after 1881, when owned by William Sly, it specialised in producing coconut matting.

Ridge Lane Mill (Bridge 104) This was a silk mill when it started in 1837, built by Henry Gregson and Thomas Mason who were solicitors. It had a short working life, ultimately making oilcloth, and it was largely demolished in 1889, when the houses of Ridge Street and Green Street were built on the site.

So, of the eight mills, five have been largely or completely demolished with only a few reminders of their existence in reused stonework, street names or minor outbuildings.

Three mills are still in use after some clearances of outbuildings and considerable refurbishment. This includes White Cross, the largest of the eight mills, and still a major location for employment in Lancaster.

There were also notable textile mills around Lancaster in villages like Galgate, Halton, Dolphinholme and Caton (see Guides 37, 10, 82 and 99 for more about these villages).

By the 1870s rising demand meant that the main manufacturing base needed to move west of Lancaster to the rail-connected site of Luneside where Williamsons built one of the largest factories in Europe. It specialised in linoleum. This site has been demolished for new housing.

The history of Lancaster's textile mills shows three abiding features of the textile industry in the nineteenth century and now.

The first is the sector's ability to expand and contract as global demand and local competitiveness have waxed and waned.

The second is the switching of products and technologies as fashions and styles have changed – in Lancaster from low-value products to more specialist ones.

The third is the many changes of ownership leading to consolidation, initially into the two Lancaster firms of Williamsons and Storeys and then their eventual takeover by even larger outside firms and both their final demise and that of textile production in Lancaster.



Part of White Cross Pub - part of the old White Cross adapted to new use.

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