

Lancaster Civic Vision

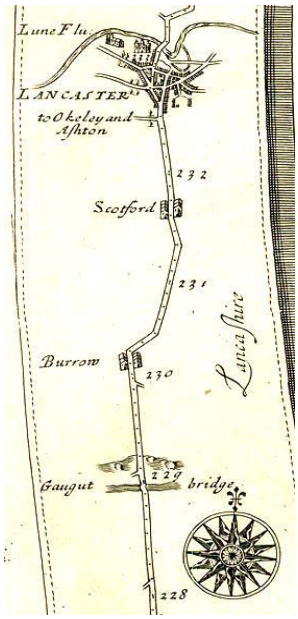
Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

GALGATE

Lancaster Civic Society Guide 37



Galgate (from Google Earth) – M6 on the right; West Coast railway line in the centre; A6 crossing under the railway; Lancaster Canal and marina on the left



John Ogilby's road map of 1675 shows 'Gaugut bridge'.

Galgate is a village south of Lancaster on the A6, sadly known today as a bottleneck where north-south traffic is squeezed through the village's narrow main street and across an east-west road. This junction is seen in the centre of the satellite photograph above and in Ogilby's road map of 1675.

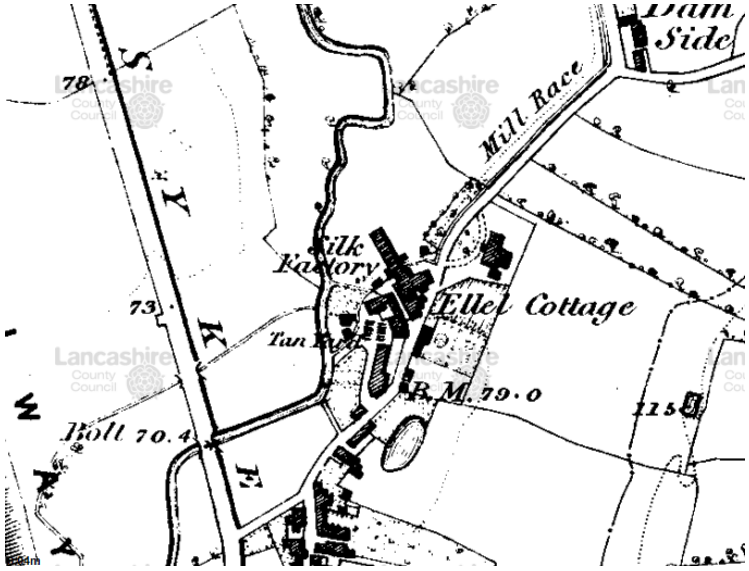
The medieval road north went along the higher, drier ground (now Highland Brow and Burrow Road). This was superseded in 1824 by the Garstang and Heiring Syke (turnpike) Trust's straighter and more level road (the current A6) that passes Lancaster University.

The north–south theme was continued when the Lancaster to Preston canal opened in 1797. The Lancaster and Preston Junction railway (now the West Coast Main Line) opened in 1840 (there was a Galgate station till 1939). The Skew Bridge over the A6 at Galgate and the viaduct over the River Conder were designed by Edmund Sharpe, the noted Lancaster architect. The M6 (the UK's third stretch of motorway) opened in 1960. The road east from Galgate goes to

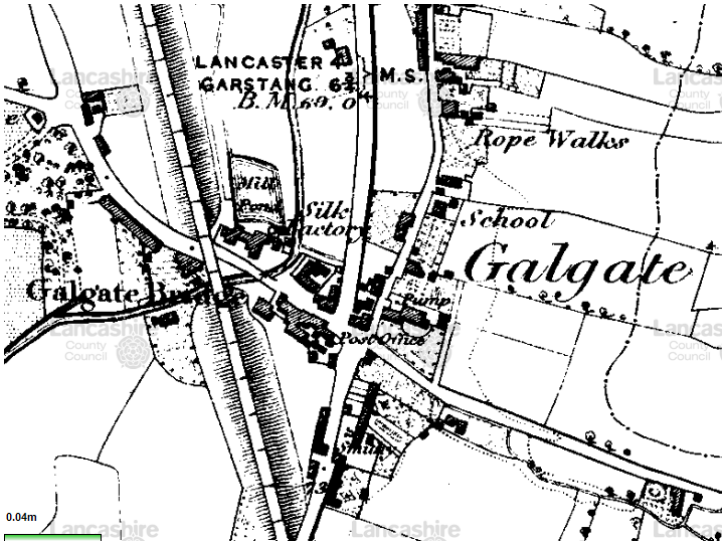
Dolphinholme and to the west to Glasson. A canal branch linked Galgate and Glasson after 1826.

The expansion of Galgate, beyond a place that serviced travellers and the local farming community, came with the development of textile mills, as happened in many of the villages around Lancaster.

The three Galgate mills specialised mostly in silk, especially the spinning of waste silk, though flax, cotton and nylon were also produced at times. The first mill, on the west side of Chapel Lane, was a corn mill until it switched to silk production in 1792 in a two-storey building and expanded in 1832 into a three-storey building. The boiler house and square chimney are still visible. Water-powered by the River Conder it was reputedly the first mechanical silk-spinning mill in the UK and was run, like the others in Galgate and some in other villages, by combinations of two generations of local Armstrongs, Nobles and Thompsons.



The first silk mill (OS survey of 1844-5, courtesy of Lancashire CC)



Central Galgate, the second silk mill, R. Conder and railway (OS survey of 1844-5)

The second mill was on Salford Road, west of the crossroads, and again used the Conder for water power. Called Low Mill, it was operating by 1801, first for flax and cotton and then for silk by 1836 and for a short time in the 1860s for cotton again. The original three-storey mill was expanded into a four-storey extension. The mill was partly demolished in 1895 but remnants are visible.

The third and largest of the mills was built in 1851–2 on the east side of Chapel Lane, opposite the first mill. John Armstrong may have designed it for his company, which traded as William Thompson and Co. It is an imposing five-storey structure in red brick with a water tank in the north-west corner of the roof. The engine shed, chimney and the remains of the mill pond and water race from the Conder are all still visible as is Ellel House, the early-19th-century manager's house near the mill, now part of a nursing home.

Coal for the mills arrived via the Lancaster Canal and the mill supplied gas for Galgate's street lighting. Terraced housing on the east side of Main Road was provided by the mill. The Thompson mill closed in 1971, England's last silk spinner, with the loss of 85 jobs – over 400 had been employed in these mills at times during the previous century. The building has recently been converted into student accommodation.



The first and third Galgate mills

There are two notable houses around Galgate. The grandest is Ellel Grange just south of the village. Built in 1857–9 for William Preston (a Liverpool merchant and Mayor), the style is almost exotically Italianate, with two towers resembling those at Queen Victoria's Osborne House. The interior is imposing, and the furnishings were largely by Gillow of Lancaster.

There are 12 acres (5 ha) of parkland with impressive trees, the Preston family mausoleum and a chapel. Ownership passed to the Sandeman family (of port fame) and then to the current owners, Ellel Ministries, an international, non-denominational Christian healing organisation. Just west of Galgate is Ellel Hall, the seat of the Ford family. The current house dates from the early nineteenth century; there is fine stonework with three bays and an impressive pediment

over the front door. The house was bought by Lord Ashton, Lancaster's linoleum magnate, in 1898 and refurbished soon after. It is currently a private house.

Galgate has three churches within a few hundred metres of each other. St Joseph's RC is on Main Road, converted from an infant school around 1970. The Wesleyan Methodist chapel (a late-nineteenth century building) is round the corner on Chapel Lane where you can also find St John the Evangelist (Church of England), which was built in 1906–7 to a design by Paley and Austin, the noted Lancaster architects. The stained glass is by Shrigley and Hunt of Lancaster.

A recent development is the new Ellel Village Hall to the south of the village (see below). Sited near the playing fields and the allotments, the hall is a busy centre for many local community activities. Galgate also has a large primary school and a pub and shops, and a marina on the Canal. Several groups of new houses have been added to the village in recent years. There are plans for a new M6 junction to remove much of the village's through traffic.



Narrow Boats at Galgate Basin



Ellel Village Hall

Text and ground photographs – Gordon Clark.
Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (©2015; revised 20202).
Lancaster Civic Vision is the trading name of Lancaster Civic Society, registered charity no. 258434