Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

PHILANTHROPISTS IN LANCASTER

Lancaster Civic Society leaflet 43

Many people give money to charities, but this leaflet focuses on major and repeated donors of large sums that have left a legacy for Lancaster which we can still see today.

Some donors wish to be anonymous or their names have been lost; the philanthropy of others is better known. Generally the outcome of the donation is the furthering of a cause, service or facility that the donor wishes to support, usually without any direct benefit to him/herself, at least in a financial sense.

There is wide range of activities that have benefited from major gifts. They are usually activities that struggle to find public money and are not inherently sufficiently income-generating in their own right. Here are some examples. Those in italics are described in more detail in other guides in this series.

Donations to public buildings
Lancaster Town Hall
Queen Victoria Monument
Ashton Memorial
(former) Public baths
Lancaster War Memorial

Donations to hospitals, health and welfare
Lancaster Royal Infirmary
(former) Public dispensaries
Westfield War Memorial Village
Lancaster's many almshouses



Donors' board at Royal Lancaster Infirmary


Plaque at Infirmary formerly at the dispensaries

Donations to education

Lancaster Royal Grammar School
Ripley St Thomas C of E Academy
Mechanics Institute (now The Storey)
Wray-with-Botton Endowed School
Cawthorne's Endowed School, Abbeystead
(former) Bluecoat School, Middle Street



William Penny's generosity for almshouses and the warning

Donations for open spaces, parks
Williamson Park
Lune Bank Gardens
Miss Whalley's Field

Donations to religious buildings
St John the Evangelist's Church
Christ Church
Most local churches and mosques

Sometimes the donors cannot be easily identified or it would be invidious to single out a few from the many who contributed. There are some donors who gave very large sums openly and they merit recognition.

The Williamson family

Their money came from manufacturing linoleum in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. James Williamson senior started by gifting the site that became Williamson Park and then landscaping it from the late-1870s. His son, also James and later ennobled as Baron (Lord) Ashton, gave around £400,000 (about £49 million in today's money) to an immense range causes and buildings – notably Lancaster Town Hall, the Queen Victoria Monument and the Ashton Memorial. He also contributed to Lancaster Royal Grammar School, Royal Lancaster Infirmary and Lancaster Priory and he helped many churches,

social groups, the Trades Council and individuals. He supported charities for the needy in Skerton and Morecambe. The family contributed to Westfield War Memorial Village in the 1920s and to repairs to the Ashton Memorial in the 1930s.

The Storey family

They too made their money in Lancaster's textile mills. In the later nineteenth century Thomas was a major benefactor of the Royal Lancaster Infirmary, the Royal Albert Hospital and what is now The Storey (then a Technical College incorporating the Mechanics Institute). After the First World War Herbert donated the 16-ace site for the Westfield War Memorial Village.



The chapel at Ripley Academy



Thomas Storey's donation to The Storey

Julia Ripley

Her husband, Thomas, had been born in Lancaster and had made his fortune as a trader with the West Indies and East Indies, based in Liverpool. She carried out his wishes by founding a school, then called Ripley Hospital, that opened in 1865. The cost was £25,000 then, about £3.1 million in today's money.

Samuel Gregson

MP for Lancaster and a successful trader with the East Indies, he donated Lancaster's first public baths; their facade is now part of the frontage of Sainsbury's. He also paid for Christ Church, noted for its stained glass.

Multiple donors

Some buildings can be attributed to one key donor. Others were at various times supported by several donors, such as Lancaster Royal Grammar School, Gregson Institute

and Royal Lancaster Infirmary. Westfield War Memorial Village is similar, and it also benefited from money raised from many small donors in the community, as did Lancaster's War Memorial. Lancaster Charity, which runs the almshouses, has amalgamated many smaller donations into a single fund. Many churches, church-based schools and social clubs have always been dependent on volunteers and donations.

New forms of philanthropy

Today one can select from not only local causes but also national and international ones. Yet funding from public sources is diminishing. The need for philanthropy is as great as ever. Today people may donate their time and expertise – writing winning bids to competitive sources of grants; lobbying for action; giving time to work in charity shops or with those in need. The many local "Friends of…" groups are run by volunteers. This leaves a less visible legacy of buildings associated with individual donations, but it is invaluable nonetheless.



Lord Ashton's Town Hall



Queen Victoria Monument and coat of arms

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