

Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

ISLANDS IN THE LUNE

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 84

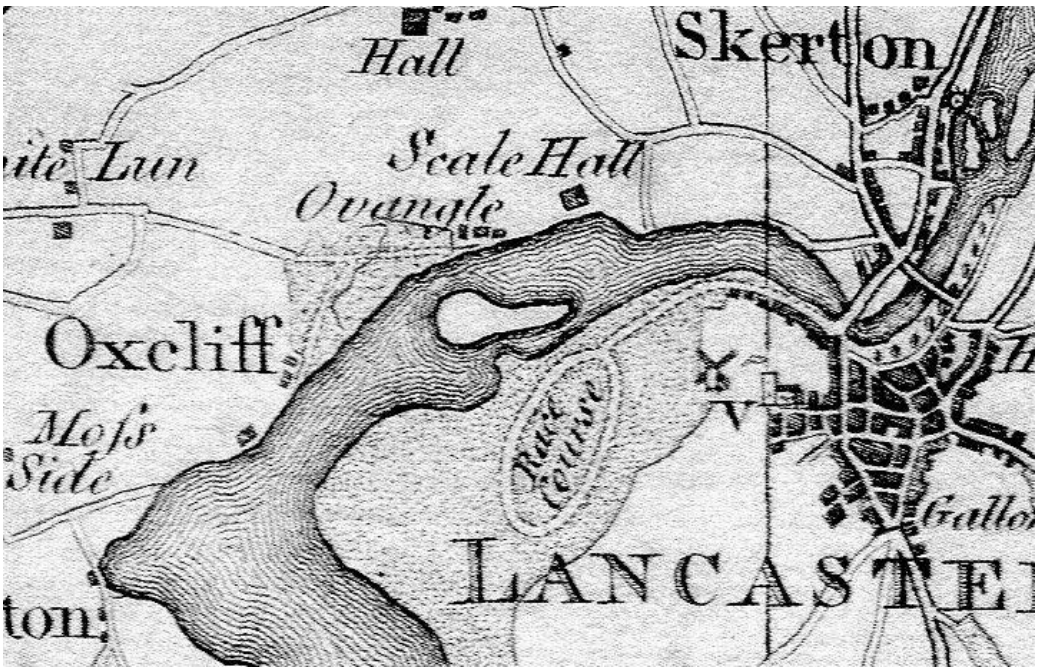
It is not unusual for large rivers, like the Lune, to have small islands within them. Examples include the many islands in the Thames upstream from London and in the Tay both at Perth and further downstream. Such islands may comprise mud banks or marshland, or they may be shingle and large stones. These are deposits brought down the river from erosion in the uplands and temporarily deposited midstream when the river level is low.

The next major flood will bring enough water to move some of these materials further downstream and deposit new materials, so moving and remodelling the islands. They are always in a state of flux. Nevertheless despite the fragility of their composition they can be surprisingly long-lived, eroding at one part and being renewed at another.

The River Lune has had several islands, which this leaflet describes. The maps of the area are the best source of where the islands were, what shape they took and for how long they survived. However, the cartographic record is patchy and the surveying of the islands is sketchy at times.

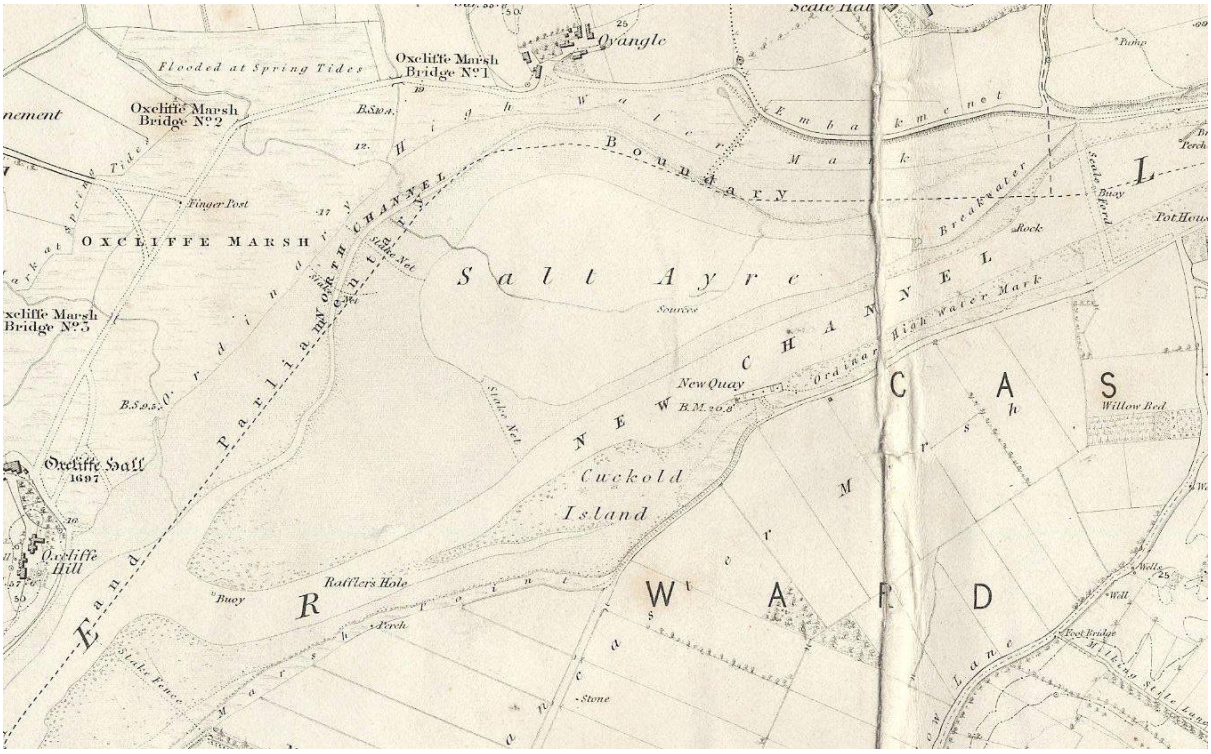
Salt Ayre

Today Salt Ayre is a part of the north bank of the Lune to the west of Lancaster. It used to be an island. It was first shown on Emanuel Bowen's map of Lancashire in 1752 and a better image is found in William Yates's map of the county in 1787 (see below). Both were small-scale maps – much enlarged below - and so the shape and location of Salt Ayre may not be fully accurate.



Salt Ayre (not named but south of 'Ovangle' and an island mid-stream) as shown on Yates's map of 1787

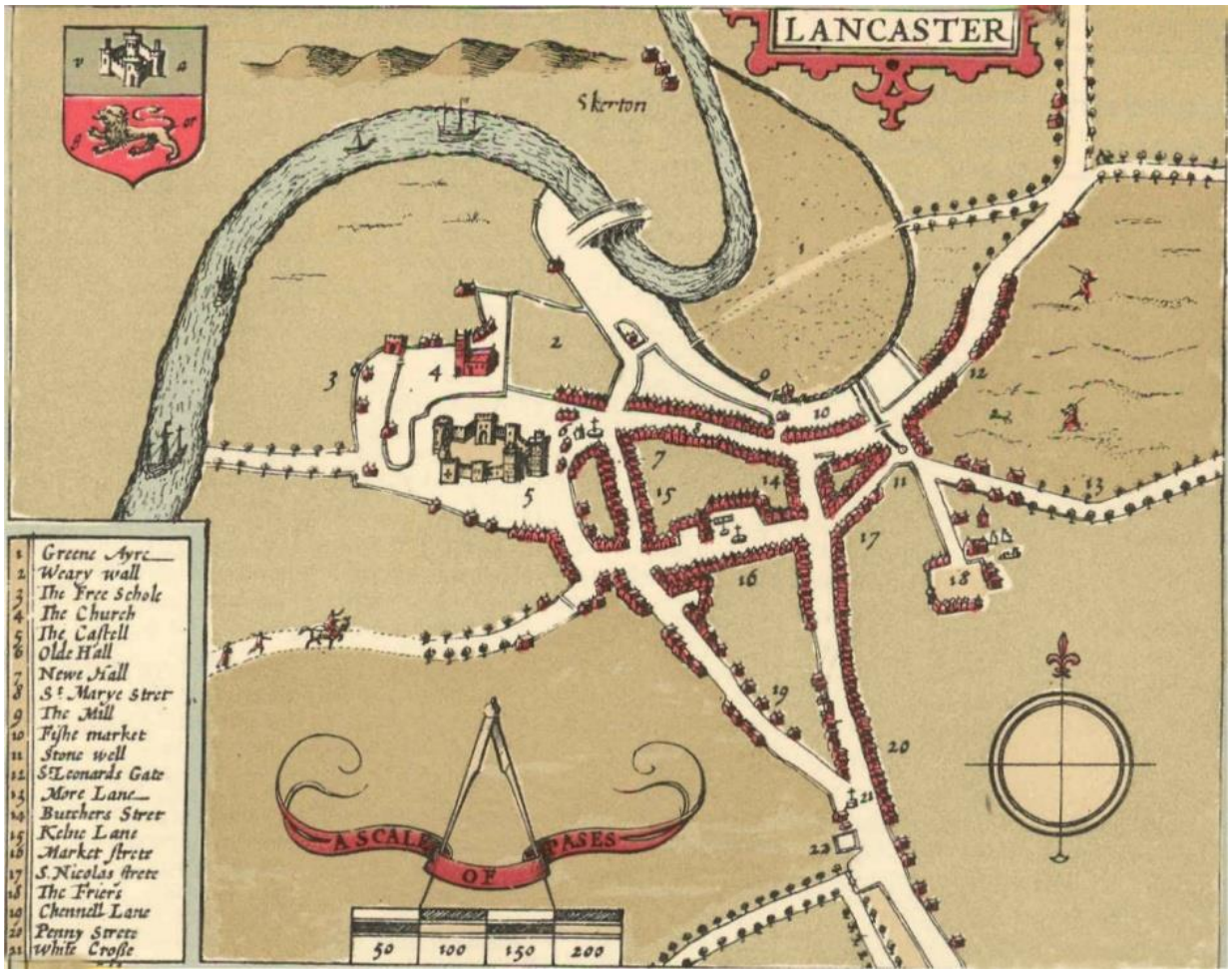
The Ordnance Survey 6-inch map surveyed in 1844/5 gives a better picture. Salt Ayre is still an island but only the narrow North Channel now separates it from the north bank of the Lune (see below). The map also shows a Cuckold Island which now seems to be fully attached to the south bank.



Salt Ayre as shown on the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map surveyed in 1844/5

Green Ayre

The Green Ayre was an island on the south bank of the Lune as it flowed through Lancaster. It was a prime development site in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Speed's town plan of Lancaster, surveyed in 1607, shows it as an undeveloped island with the narrow channel (the Mill Race / Damside) that made it an island.



Speed's map of Lancaster, surveyed in 1607, showing the Green Ayre at the top

By the time of Mackreth's map of Lancaster, surveyed in the mid-1770s, the channel that made it an island had been bridged over and culverted so comprehensively that Green Ayre was an island only in name and memory. See Guide 79 in this series for more details about this area.

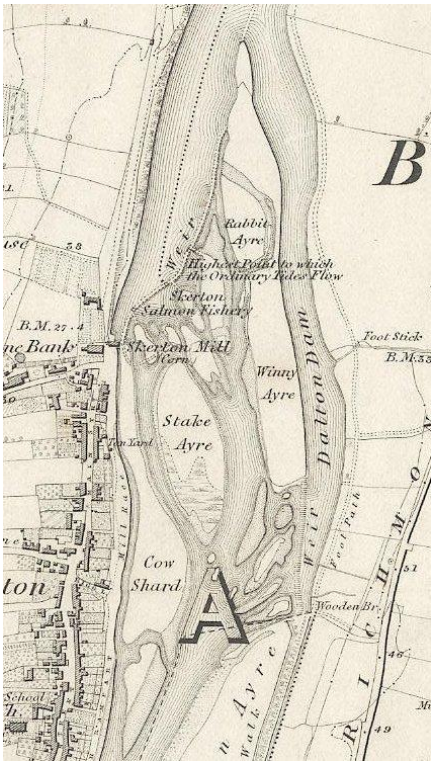
Islands at Skerton

The first clear image of the small islands in the Lune at Skerton is on Yates's map of Lancashire in 1787, a part of which, enlarged, is shown below. It shows three islands and, by a small round symbol, the corn mill in Skerton.

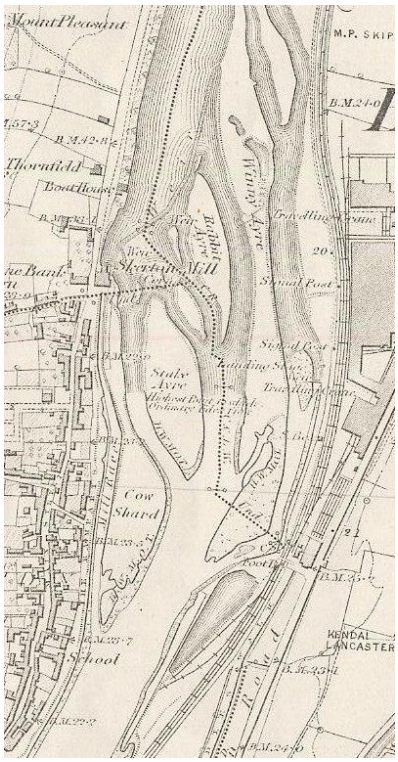


Islands at Skerton in 1787 on Yates's map

The Ordnance Survey 6-inch map surveyed in 1844/5 shows the islands in much greater detail and accuracy.



OS 6-inch map of 1844/5



OS 6-inch map of 1891

The maps for 1844/5 and 1891 show the weir that powered the corn mill (demolished in 1956) and the islands mid-stream. When you compare the two maps nearly 50 years apart, you see that: (i) the islands have survived many floods but (ii) they have changed in shape, some expanding, some narrowing and some merging with their neighbouring island.

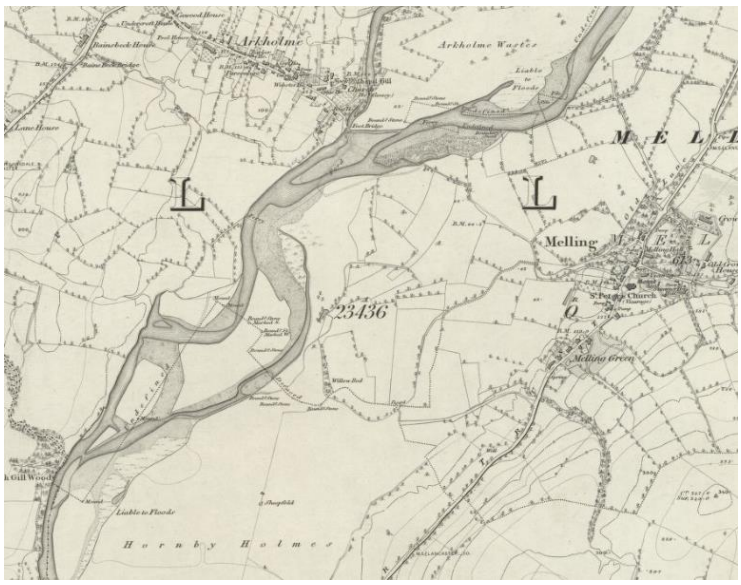
The construction of the present-day, much higher weir in 1976/7 has contributed to the further evolution of the islands, as the Google Earth image from 2018 below shows. The new weir is clearly shown and the many small islands of the past have coalesced into one large well-wooded island, now a heronry, and a smaller island above the weir. The islands were not swept away even by the unprecedentedly high flow of the Lune during Storm Desmond in 2015.



The island in the Lune at Skerton in 2018 (Source: Google Earth)

Islands further upstream

Upstream from Caton the Lune has several small islands. Some are bare shingle banks and others have some vegetation. Some are usually true islands, and some are islands only when the river level is high, at other times being areas of shingle attached to the river bank. Floods can alter these islands' shapes quite easily, as shown by comparing the Lune at Melling as shown on the 1844 OS map and on the Google Earth image in 2018 (see below). The earlier islands have largely disappeared, having been incorporated into the adjacent fields.



The River Lune at Melling as shown on the OS 6-inch map surveyed in 1844/5



The River Lune at Melling today (Source: Google Earth)

Doubtless the islands in the Lune will continue to evolve as the river meanders across its floodplain.

Text – Gordon Clark.
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