

Lancaster Civic Vision

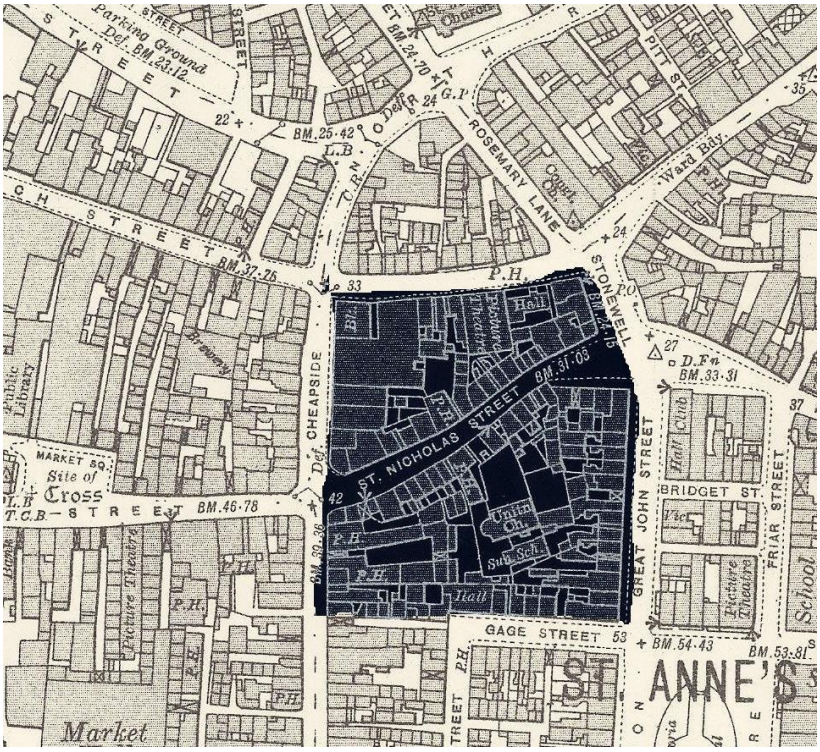
Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

LANCASTER IN THE 1960s

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 50

The 1960s were a decade of considerable change in all British cities. A growing economy and rising standards and expectations for housing, health, mobility, retailing and leisure all led to a surge in building that extended, replaced and relocated facilities, and added new ones. Lancaster was not immune to this urban transformation, though it was arguably less drastic than in some other cities.

The population and wealth were not growing as rapidly as in some southern towns. And the legacy of poor housing from previous centuries was not as large as in some other northern towns. The city's growing conservation ethos was a further check on comprehensive redevelopment. Nonetheless the sixties witnessed considerable change in Lancaster that we can still see today.



St Nicholas comprehensive redevelopment area as in 1933 (OS map).
The approximate area cleared is highlighted

Housing

Much of the cramped housing in the courts and yards of central Lancaster had been cleared in the interwar years when council housing had been built in Bowerham, Ryelands and Ridge, but parts remained in the area east of Market Street and they were removed in the early 1960s to be replaced by St Nicholas shopping area.

The removal of the church and housing allowed a reconfiguration of the layout, creating much bigger shop units and pedestrianised routes. A similar project removed Gillison's almshouse and replaced it with Arndale House (now demolished).

The demolition of large parts of Skerton (Mainway, Captain's Row and The Ramparts) created the space for Lancaster's only public tower blocks (Bridge House and Skerton House) opened in 1960. Two other towers were built at S. Martin's College (now University of Cumbria) and Lancaster University (Bowland Tower) to provide student accommodation.



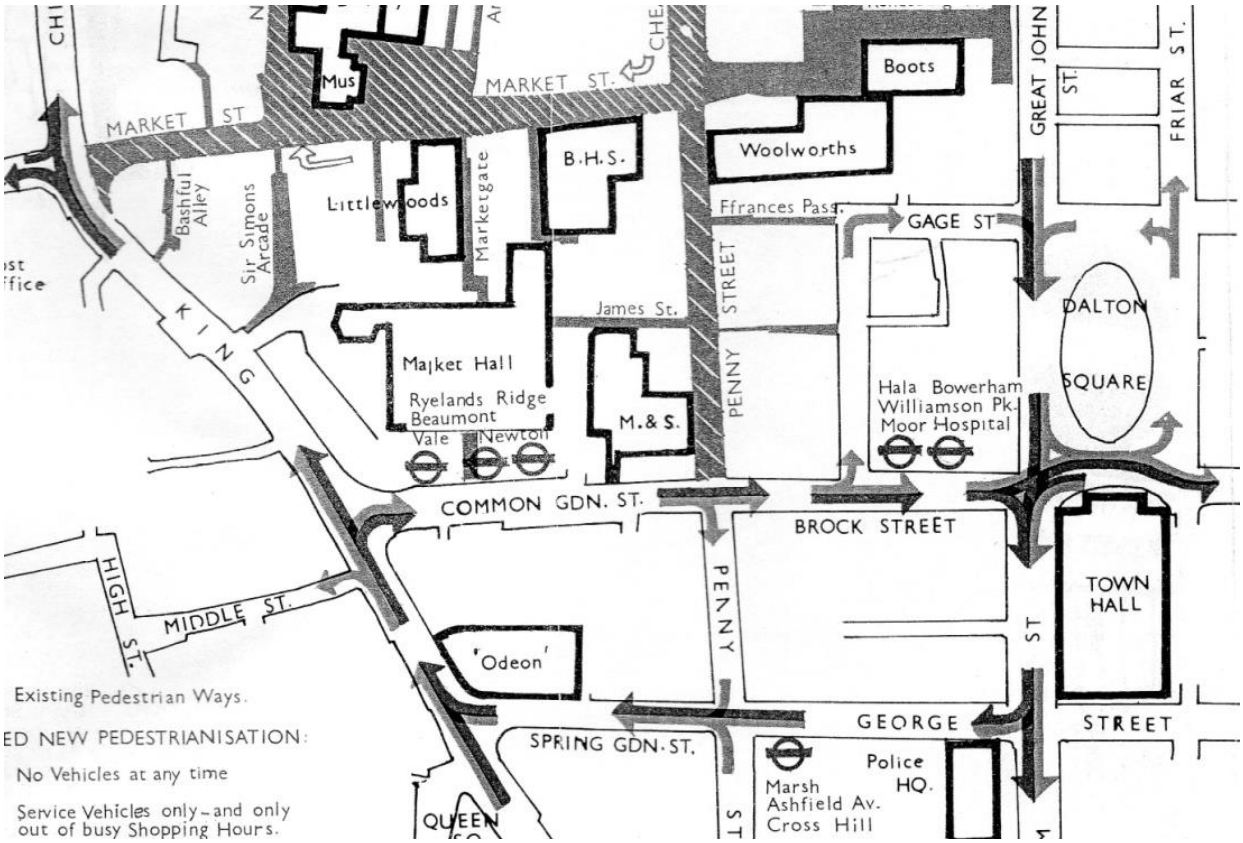
Skerton

Transport

The sixties are associated with three transport changes as car numbers increased. The inter-urban motorway network expanded and Lancaster got its section of the M6 as early as 1960.

Also popular were intra-urban gyratory systems and Lancaster's opened in 1973. It comprised a large outer loop within which were several smaller circuits using one-way streets.

It was accompanied by the partial pedestrianisation of central streets such as Church St, Market St and Penny St. A third sixties trend, an inner relief road, was proposed for Lancaster – east of the city centre was the favoured route – but it never happened, leaving large areas as car parks for decades. The electrification of the railway from Crewe to Glasgow had to wait till 1974.



Part of the gyratory and pedestrianisation of central Lancaster as originally implemented in 1973

The economy

By the end of the 1960s the outlook for Williamson's and Storeys – the inheritors of Lancaster's Victorian industrial heritage – was beginning to look vulnerable, as was Morecambe's tourism sector.

Yet the sixties saw economic growth too. Lancaster University and S. Martin's College both accepted their first students in 1964. They provided a wide range of jobs and bolstered the rented housing sector, especially 'digs' in Morecambe in the 1960s. The NHS was expanding and as was local government.

The first of the two nuclear power stations began construction at Heysham in 1970 and Lancaster's small coal-fired station by the Lune closed in 1973. Employment sites were

expanding on the edges of Lancaster at Lune Industrial Estate (now Business Park), Caton Road (Lansil Industrial Estate) and particularly at White Lund between Lancaster and Morecambe. The College of Further Education was established between the two towns in 1953 and expanded greatly in the sixties.

Mitre House

In the shadow of the Castle and Priory today sits Mitre House. In the early 1970s it was one of the fiercest planning controversies in Lancaster. New offices were needed in the centre of this historic town for government departments and agencies. But office developments in the 1960s were notable for being 'blocks' – tall, massive slabs of work space, steel-framed and glass-covered. They made no concessions to their architectural or historic surroundings.

Plans for such a block were lodged in 1971. Conservationists, including the newly formed Lancaster Civic Society, mounted a challenge that prevailed. A redesign led to the sensitive modernity of the current building (1976) in the historic core of Lancaster.



Mitre Houses (opened 1976) on the right, Judge's Lodgings (mid-17th century) on the left and houses (1790s) in the middle distance

Text and photographs – Gordon Clark.
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