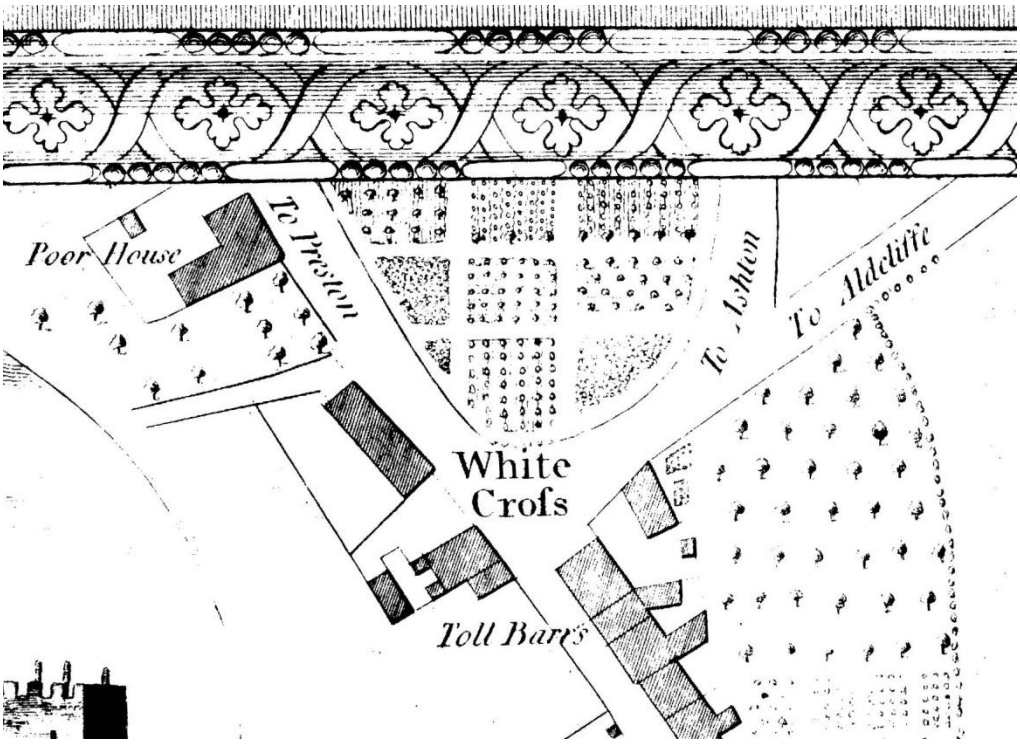
Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

THE WORKHOUSE FOR LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 75

A workhouse in England was a publicly funded institution for the destitute. We know that there was a 'Poor House' in Lancaster in 1730, which was replaced in 1748 by one at White Cross, housing around 80 people in 1777. It is shown on Mackreth's map of Lancaster surveyed in the mid-1770s.

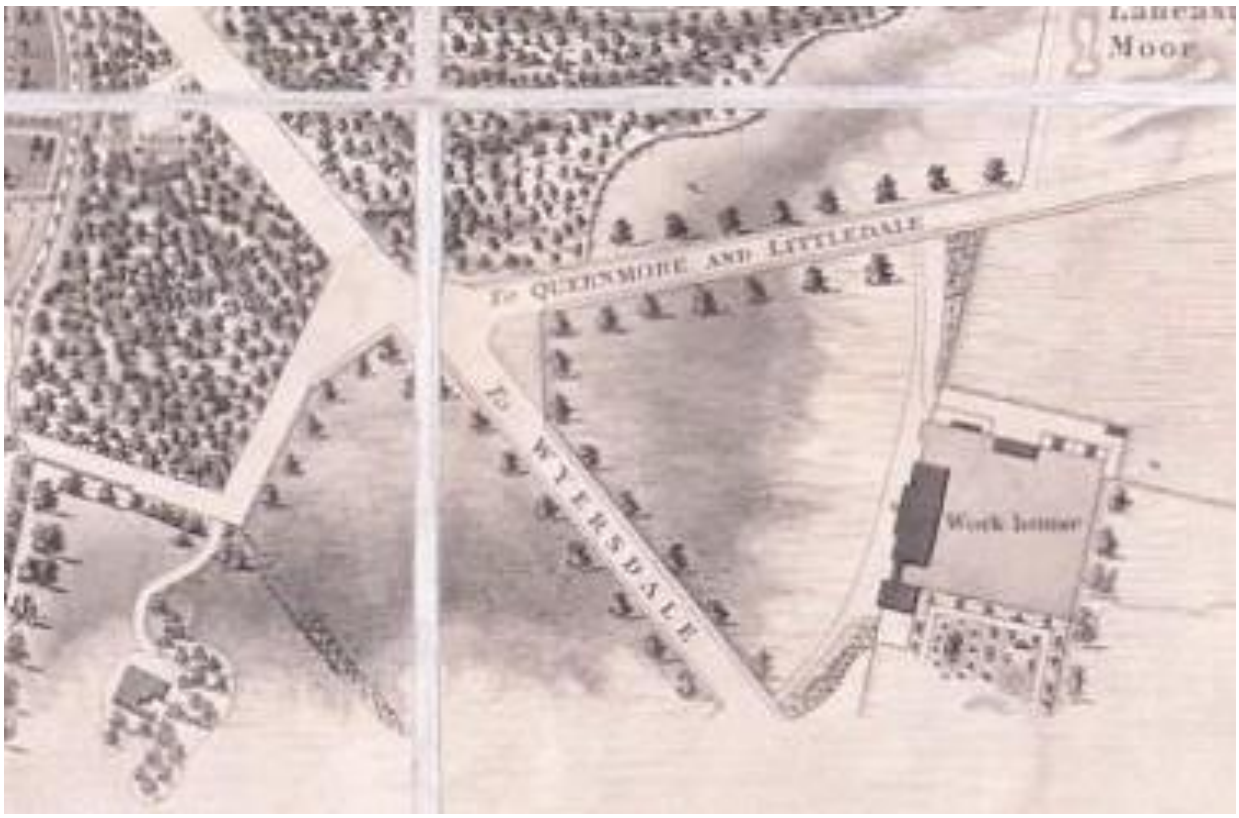


Mackreth's map of Lancaster dated 1778 and surveyed in the mid-1770s. Note that south is at the top of this map. The 'Poor House' was roughly where the White Cross building is today, very close to the road "To Preston" (now South Road).

By 1787/8 the Corporation had relocated the Workhouse to a new, larger building on a site in the angle between Quernmore Road and Wyresdale Road. At the time this site was the western edge of Lancaster Moor on sloping ground high to the east of the town.

In 1797 it was reported to have 57 inmates in a borough of around 9000 people – an average number for that period. They slept in two-bedded rooms with a basic but nutritious diet of bread, broth, 'milk potage', beef or hash, oatcakes and vegetables.

As the map below shows it was not a large building. This would change.

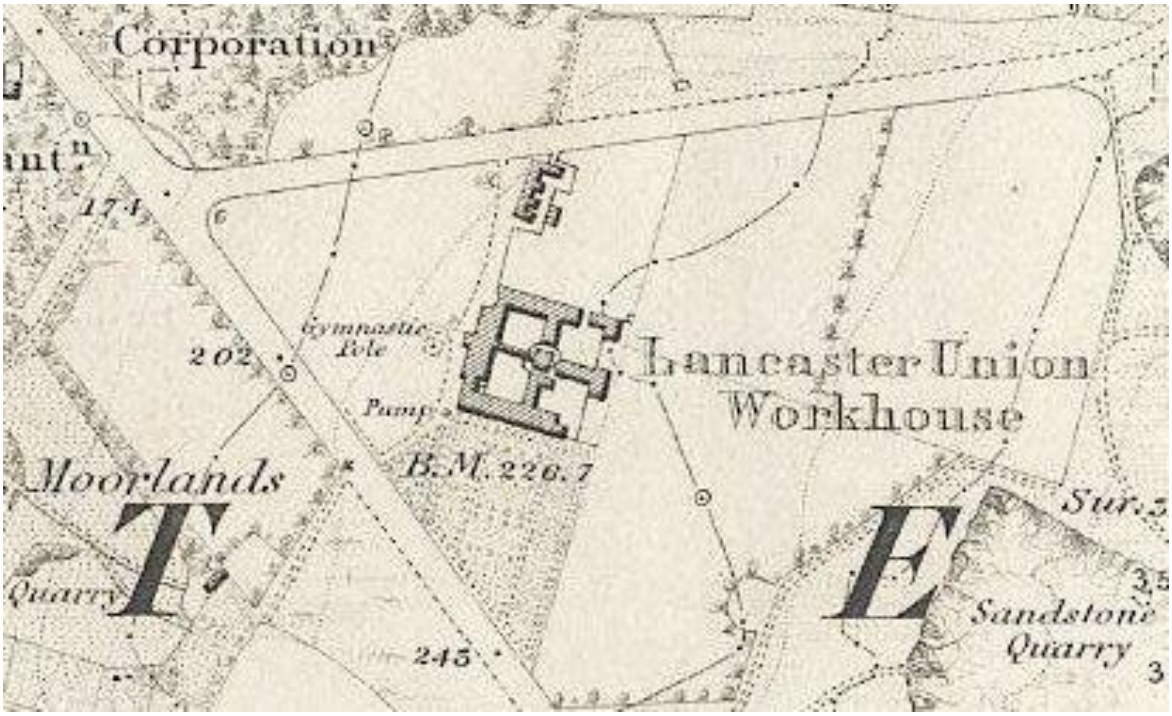


Lancaster workhouse as shown on Jonathan Binns' map of Lancaster in 1821/4

In 1839 Lancaster assembled the Lancaster Poor Law Union (as it was legally obliged to do) and this required a much larger workhouse to service the 25,000 people in 21 previously independent townships. They included Lancaster, Silverdale, Cockerham, Scotforth, Warton, Carnforth, the Yealands and Wyresdale. They were later joined by Heysham, Morecambe (and its predecessor communities) and smaller places like Bolton-le-Sands and Slyne.

Therefore, the Workhouse needed to be enlarged at a cost to the Board of Guardians of £4000 (about £417,000 in 2020 values), Edmund Sharpe being the architect. Guide 32 in this series gives more details about Sharpe's life and career.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1844/5 shows the new building built in 1840–1, which incorporated and greatly extended the 1787/8 one.



Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of 1844/5

As the nineteenth century progressed, further facilities and buildings were added, many in the late 1880s – a new porters' lodge, 'receiving wards', an infirmary and chapel on the south side of the site, an infectious diseases hospital on the north side, and in 1908 a children's home (see the photograph below). These are shown on the 1911 OS map below. By 1911 there were 312 inmates – often the aged, orphaned or long-term invalids – and 15 resident staff.



Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of 1911

In 1930 the site was renamed the Parkside Institution or the Lancaster Public Assistance Institution and by then it was being run by Lancashire County Council. In 1948 it became Bayview Hospital within the National Health Service. The extension of social-security systems in the UK, especially after 1945, meant that the workhouse function, and its stigma, were redundant and the site was closed down. Most of the buildings were demolished to provide sites for additional facilities for the nearby Lancaster Royal Grammar School. A few of the original buildings remain on the northern side of the site, now put to very different uses.



The Children's Home (1908) of the former Workhouse, the largest of the surviving buildings on the north side of the site. (Source: Author)

There are extensive records about the Workhouse – the building, its administration and those who lived there – in Lancashire Archives (Bow Lane, Preston) which can be found by searching the Archives online catalogue – LANCAT: Home Page (lancashire.gov.uk) – which is the link to the Archives catalogue.

The decennial Population Census records are also very helpful for tracing individual people in the Workhouse.

There is no public right of way to the site of the former Workhouse.

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