Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

PENNY STREET BRIDGE, LANCASTER

Lancaster Civic Society Guide 124

Thousands cross Penny Street Bridge every day: it is the main road into Lancaster from the south. You drive looking head at the traffic, scarcely noticing that you have gone over a bridge – admittedly a low and short bridge.

The best early map of the area is Mackreth's, published in 1778.



Mackreth's map of the White Cross area, 1778. South is at the top of this map.

South of the junction of Penny Street and King Street (then called Back Lane), the road passes the southern toll booth into Lancaster. The roads to Aldcliffe and Ashton go off to the south west and the main road to Preston continues southwards, passing what was then Lancaster's Poor House (i.e. Workhouse). There is no bridge because there was no need for one. That need arose 19 years later in 1797 when the Lancaster Canal was opened, skirting to the east of the town but here going westwards , cutting across the main road. Binns' map of the early 1820s shows the changes.



Binns' map of the White Cross area. North is at the top of the map.

Tomlinson's almshouse at the junction of Penny Street and Back Lane (King Street) has disappeared. The toll bar is still operational. The road to Aldcliffe has been realigned to run north of the new Canal and the one to Ashton and Cockerham is now south of the Canal. The Poor House at the start of what is now South Road was replaced in 1787/8 by a new workhouse on East Road. The first cotton mill in what would become the White Cross industrial complex has been built (on the right of the map, still quite small).

The difference in height between the canal's water level and the road is around four metres, so a low, short bridge was needed to keep the road's gradient acceptable. However, Binns' map shows that what they built was also a narrow bridge, like others over the Canal (e.g. the one eastwards on Moor Lane). The narrowness saved on

construction costs at a time when traffic volumes were low and slow. The photograph below shows the original bridge.



The first Penny Street Bridge. (Source A White (1990) *Lancaster: a Pictorial History.* Chichester: Phillimore; Lancaster City Museum)

By the end of the nineteenth century , the bridge had become too narrow for the increasing traffic and the buildings at its north (town) end – such as the Corporation Arms and Prince William Henry Hotel (shown above) – provided a poor gateway into the town.

Early in the twentieth century (1900–2) a major redevelopment took place at White Cross. A completely new, wider bridge was built. It was around twice the width of the original bridge and was designed by the Borough Engineer, Mr John Cook. The small Corporation Arms was rebuilt a little to the south east as a new, larger, more stylish Corporation Hotel, which was soon renamed the Alexandra Hotel after the recently crowned Queen Alexandra, Consort to King Edward VII. This pub, possibly designed by Paley and Austin and once run by Yates & Jackson, has closed and awaits redevelopment.

The nearby Prince William Henry Hotel, next to the former livestock auction mart, was demolished to make way for a wider Thurnham Street. Across Penny Street on its west side, another new large hotel was built, initially called the White Cross (after another former local pub) and later called the Farmers' Arms, Penny Street Bridge

and now the Toll House Inn. The plaque shown below commemorates this period of rebuilding and particularly the new Penny Street Bridge. Originally in bronze the plaques were replaced recently.




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The opening of the new Penny Street Bridge in 1900, taken from the White Cross Hotel. (Source: Lancashire County Library)



The two hotels and the Bridge soon after their opening. (Source: unknown)



Penny Street Bridge in more recent times

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