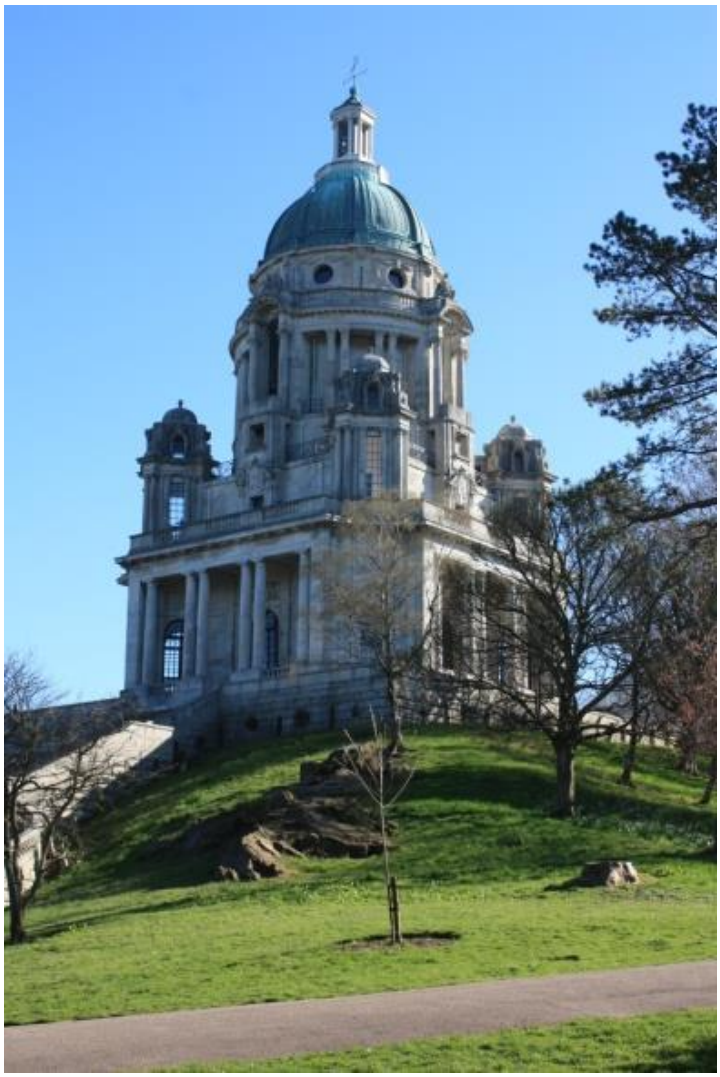
Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

FOUR PARKS IN LANCASTER AND MORECAMBE

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 35

Not all parks are the same. In Lancaster and Morecambe four parks show the variety needed to meet different people's needs. There is Williamson Park – simply spectacular; Happy Mount Park – for Morecambe's families and visitors; Ryelands Park – for local people; and Lune Bank Gardens – for walkers. All are owned and maintained by Lancaster City Council, helped by active Friends groups.



The Ashton Memorial

Williamson Park

Williamson Park is spectacular. High above Lancaster it provides views west to Morecambe Bay, north to Lakeland mountains and east towards the Yorkshire Dales. The site's history, as quarries for stone-built Georgian Lancaster, has carved out cliffs and amphitheatres to enliven the many winding walks through the woodland and grassland of this 54-acre park.

The site is enhanced by an artificial lake, a stone bridge across it and a 'temple'. The centrepiece is the Ashton Memorial (above), opened in 1909 as the huge commemoration to the Williamson family whose wealth from their linoleum works in Lancaster funded their philanthropy.

The Memorial was designed by Sir John Belcher and J. J. Joass in an extravagant Edwardian Baroque style. Herbert Hampton, who designed the Queen Victoria Monument in Dalton Square (see Guide 17), sculpted four allegorical statues that sit just below the dome. The Memorial has a steel and concrete frame and is faced in white Portland stone on a plinth of speckled Cornish granite. See Guide 55 for more details.

James Williamson senior commissioned the principal landscaping of the long-redundant quarries in the late 1870s. The designer was John McLean from Donington Park Estate. In 1881 James Williamson junior, Lord Ashton, gave the site as the town's first public park. He paid for further embellishments around 1904 and 1909 including the memorial. Other features include a bandstand (demolished and replaced by a complex sundial), the Greg Astronomical Observatory (1892–1944, also demolished) and an orangery and palm house (now a butterfly house).

The café is a recent addition as is the extension into Fenham Carr which is rich in wildlife. In summer the Dukes (a local theatre; see Guide 34) stages a promenade play in the Park. For several years there has been a programme of refurbishment to bring the Park back to its best.

The Park is best accessed from the car park on Wyresdale Road (postcode LA1 3DZ). Its website is at: https://visitlancaster.org.uk/attractions/williamson-park/

Happy Mount Park

A holiday resort like Morecambe needs a park for families with children of all ages. In 1927 Happy Mount Park opened, designed by Percival Holt, the borough engineer. It lies north of the town, between Bare and Morecambe Golf Club. Rival Blackpool had opened its much larger Stanley Park in 1926, designed by Thomas Mawson of Lancaster.

The Park is laid out on each side of a broad central promenade. A wide range of trees, bushes and colourful flowerbeds are the setting for the many family attractions – a

bowling green, putting and crazy golf courses, trampolines, splash park, indoor and outdoor play areas and a miniature railway.

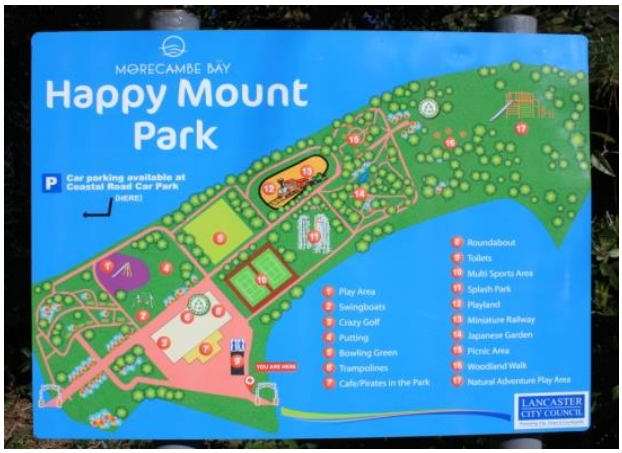
A woodland walk, Japanese garden, wildlife trail and café complete the offerings. The aim is for a balance of more active and less active pursuits and enough variety to encourage visitors to stay for a while.

Happy Mount Park is on Marine Road East, Morecambe LA4 6AJ. Its website is at: https://www.happymountpark.co.uk/









Ryelands Park

The youngest of the four parks is Ryelands. Ryelands House at its centre was built around 1836 for Jonathan Dunn, twice Lancaster's mayor. It was bought in 1874 and considerably extended by Lancaster's linoleum magnate, Lord Ashton (James Williamson junior).

What is now the Park was the house's private grounds behind high walls. Lord Ashton died here in 1930 and the house and grounds subsequently became a municipal park, the walls taken down to open it up to the communities north of the river. The house became offices, the greenhouses attached to it were eventually demolished as too expensive to maintain.

For a time the Park offered relatively little – walks, spring flowers, a play area and football pitches. Recently the City Council and a Friends group have begun an ambitious programme to enhance the facilities – a BMX track, a multi-use games pitch, changing rooms, more car parking, a new planting scheme and perhaps a community café. The area bordering Morecambe Road is used periodically for travelling circuses and fairs.

The Park is best accessed from Torrisholme Road (postcode LA1 2LN). Its website is at: https://www.lancaster.gov.uk/parks-and-open-spaces/ryelands-park/



Ryelands House



Play area and Ashton Memorial on the horizon

Lune Bank Gardens

The smallest of the four parks is Lune Bank Gardens, sometimes known as Skerton Park. It is only 1.4 acres, the least well known and is the second oldest of the four, having opened in 1905.

The Gardens form a long, narrow promenade along the north bank of the River Lune, running from Skerton towards Halton. The Gardens closely follow the river, and inland the ground slopes steeply up to Halton Road.

There are no facilities, just steps and a steep ramp to access the Gardens from Halton Road. The sloping bank is densely wooded with trees and shrubs. The real attraction is the peacefulness of a walk along the river, watching the wildlife and the rowers, and admiring the spectacular views, both upstream to the aqueduct carrying Lancaster Canal high over the River Lune and downstream to Lancaster and its Castle.

The land for the Gardens was given to the town by Lord Ashton in 1903 with funds to lay them out and maintain them. A recently formed Friends group is refurbishing the Gardens.

Lune Bank Gardens is accessed from Halton Road, most easily from near the boathouse of the John O'Gaunt Rowing Club, postcode LA1 2EA). More information can be found at: https://www.facebook.com/lunebankgardens



The view upstream today



Lune Bank Gardens *c.*1910 (Lancaster City Museum)

Three of the four parks are connected to the Williamson family. Each is well worth a visit.

Text and photographs – Gordon Clark.

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