

Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

GEORGIAN LANCASTER – A SHORT TOUR

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Lancaster expanded considerably during the Georgian period between 1720 and 1830. Yet by 1830 it had been overtaken in population not only by Liverpool and Manchester but also by other Lancashire towns.

In the Georgian period the once-compact mediaeval town expanded north along the River Lune, up to the east, and south to White Cross. Fields were built on and gardens in the old town were used for more houses and commerce.

The expansion of Lancaster in the Georgian period had two drivers – influence and money, which were connected. The influence came partly from being the commercial and manufacturing centre for north Lancashire with trading links to Ireland and the Baltic.

More influence came from being Lancashire's county town. The county organisations met in the town as did the twice-yearly Assizes (the courts) and the latter particularly brought the county's elite for the accompanying social whirl.

The money to fund the new buildings and new jobs came from general commerce, rents from farmland and properties, and from the slave trade and the processing of tropical products. This guide suggests a walking tour of the town that showcases some of the most important of Lancaster's remaining Georgian buildings.



The Tower of the Priory Church



Female penitentiary, Lancaster Castle, 1818–21

Let us start at St Mary's Church (The Priory). The west tower was added in the mid-1750s to replace an unsafe medieval one. Next door is Lancaster Castle. The mediaeval core of the Castle (the Keep) was added to when the Castle became a major prison for the county.

Between the 1780s and the 1820s the Shire Hall (for the trials) was added to the west side, cells for men on the north side (wholly rebuilt) and cells for women on the south side. The outer walls were rebuilt too.

As you leave the Castle look right to No. 20 Castle Park with its fine pillared and pedimented doorway, a wealthy merchant's house from the 1720s. If you walk left down Castle Hill you pass first the original premises of Gillow, the famous furniture maker. Then on to Church Street, which has many Georgian buildings, notably No. 76, which was remodelled around 1723 and was the town house of the Marton family.

Turn right into Sun Street laid out in 1797. Along with the parallel New Street created in 1745, these streets intensified the building densities in the centre of the town. The Music Room at the south end of Sun Street was built by the Martons around the 1730s. Walk through the passageway into Market Street and Market Square where you see the old Town Hall, now the City Museum, built in the early 1780s.



The original premises of Gillow, Castle Hill



The Music Room, Sun Street



The Georgian Town Hall, now the City Museum



Dalton Square

From here, walk down Market Street, turn right into Penny Street and walk up it until you come to Ffrances Passage (also a Georgian creation) on your left. Walk along here until you come to Dalton Square, developed after 1784. Try not to notice the dominating Edwardian Town Hall.

This area of town was planned as a whole by the Dalton family of Thurnham Hall on the site of a Franciscan friary. The east and north sides of the Square show the classical style of Georgian houses. Walk down Great John Street – passing the Reform Club (*c*.1783) and turn right into St Leonard's Gate. A hundred metres on your

right is the Grand Theatre, one of the oldest surviving theatres in the UK and completed in 1782. The interior is Edwardian (after a fire) and the exterior has been modified.



The Grand Theatre, St Leonard's Gate


St John's Church, Chapel Street

Retrace your steps to Great John Street, cross at the Stonewell pedestrian crossing and walk along Rosemary Lane and Chapel Street. You will pass St John's Church, an excellent example inside and outside of a Georgian Church. It was built around 1755 to cope with the town's expanding population.

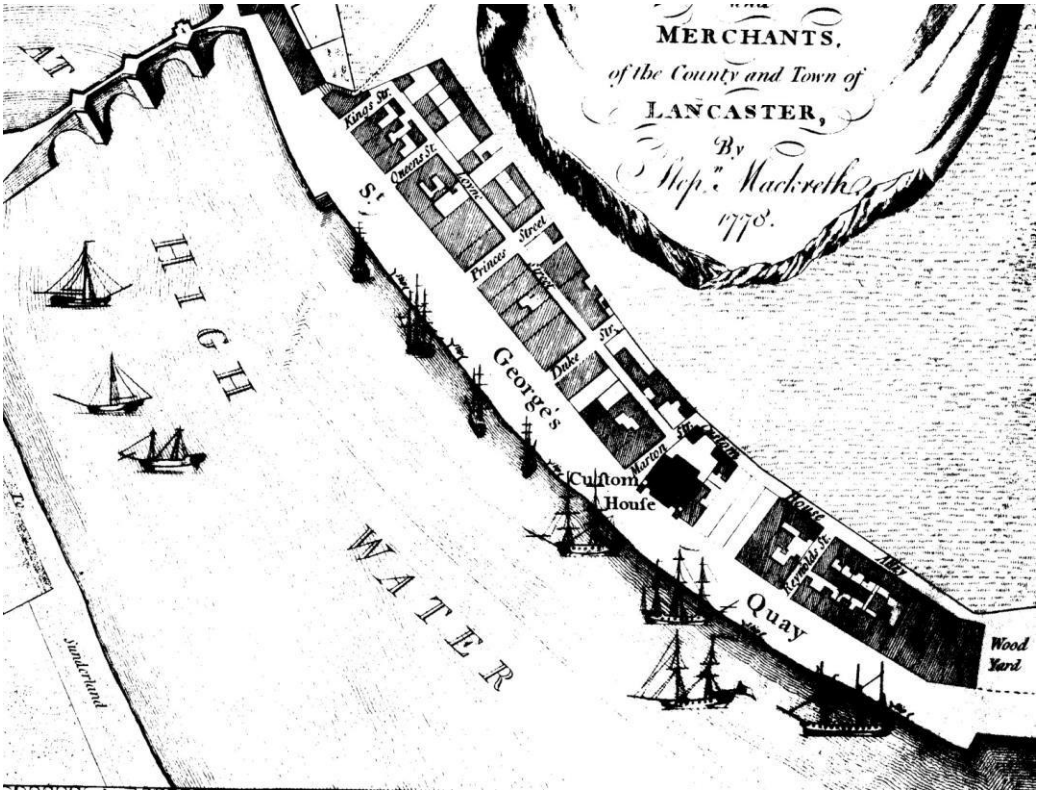
At the end of Chapel Street is Cable Street, which has some fine Georgian houses opposite the bus station. From the traffic lights over Cable Street walk along Water Street (Sainsbury's on your right) and stop when you get to the riverside walkway.

Upstream to your right is Skerton Bridge (the 'New Bridge') opened in 1788 to ease traffic flows through the town and especially on the now-long-demolished mediaeval bridge which crossed the Lune roughly where the Millennium Bridge is today.



Skerton Bridge (the 'New Bridge')

Walk left along the riverside walkway to St George's Quay. Built between 1750 and 1755 this provided easier handling of cargo that could be stored in the quayside warehouses built in the following decades. Downstream the New Quay was built in 1767 to cope with expanding trade. The outstanding building on St George's Quay is the Custom House, built between 1762 and 1764 and designed by Richard Gillow. The Georgian wealth that funded the town's expansion was partly generated by the goods that passed across this quayside.



St George's Quay and warehouses shown on a map of 1778



St George's Quay



The Custom House, St George's Quay

This short tour has shown you some of the many important Georgian buildings in Lancaster. Others have not survived – the south side of Dalton Square for example. Other surviving buildings from the Georgian period are well worth a visit though not included on this short tour – the Assembly Rooms (1759) and Penny's Almshouses

(*c*.1720) on King Street, High Street, the Lancaster Canal Aqueduct over the River Lune (1797), the Dukes Theatre (formerly St Anne's Church, 1796), the original part of the former Moor Hospital (1816) and Moor Lane Mills (from 1819). Many of these are the subject of separate guides in this series.

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Further Reading

A White (2000) *The Buildings of Georgian Lancaster*. Lancaster: Lancaster University, Centre for North-West Regional Studies
A White (2004) *Life in Georgian Lancaster*. Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing

An online "Virtual Tour of Lancaster" has been provided by Lancaster Archaeological and Historical Society at:
https://lahs.archaeologyuk.org/Tour/default.htm
which covers a wider area and more periods than this leaflet.

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