



Lancaster Conservation Area Appraisal

Character Area 6. Canal Corridor: South

March 2013

3.6 Character Area 6. Canal Corridor South

3.6.1. Definition of Special Interest

"The character of this area is defined by a group of large, significant former industrial buildings, and their relationship with the Lancaster Canal. Uses have changed and new buildings appeared but the legacy from the White Cross Mills and the former Barracks remain important. The setting of these buildings and the attractive environment created by the Canal make this a distinctive place within the City."

3.6.2. Topography and Views

The area is generally level, adjoining either side of the Lancaster Canal. This, and the presence of tall buildings throughout mean that few long range views are possible. The significant views in the area are those through the canal corridor - from Nelson Street Bridge, Quarry Road Bridge and along the canal towpath. The presence of the Cathedral spire to the east of this towpath creates a strong vista in views from the south. The presence of heavy vegetation means that a view into the area is not possible from the Penny Street Bridge. Although outside this area, this bridge provides an attractive viewpoint westwards along the canal.



View northwards on the Canal towpath

3.6.3. Current Activities and Uses

The area has been successfully transformed with new uses. A mix of uses has secured the future of historic buildings and added vibrancy to an area where the historic uses ceased. The largest building within the White Cross Mills complex now houses the Adult College. The single storey mill buildings fronting the canal-side have bar/restaurant uses. The remainder of the former White Mills complex is now the White Cross Business Park. This includes the former barracks, which have been converted for offices and also include radio station studios in a former chapel. To the north-west of the canal new apartment blocks have been built to a similar massing and scale as the White Cross Mills. There is a large, triangular-shaped, open car park in the north of the area, south of Nelson Street.

3.6.4. Historical Development

This area was outside the south-east edge of the medieval town, and fields when the canal opened in 1797. Lancaster's first steam-powered mill was built on the east bank of the canal in 1802 by Thomas Mason, a merchant. Named White Cross Mill, it took its name from the White Cross at the junction of Penny Street with Aldcliffe Road, a medieval landmark. The mill was extended to two blocks during the first half of the 19th century and bought by the Storeys in 1856. To the south of the mill, off South Road, Springfield Barracks were built for the First Royal Lancashire Militia in 1854, and a Baptist Chapel was built adjacent in 1872.



Detail from Binns' 1821 map (Lancaster Library)

Packet boats provided transport along the canal; a packet station on the south bank between White Cross Mill and Penny Street Bridge operated between 1832 and 1842. South of the canal, to the west of the mill were gardens. North of the canal, the roughly triangular area south of the Dalton Square grid and east of Thurnham Street was largely undeveloped until the late 19th century; it was an open space called Prince William-Henry Field, shown on the 1877 Harrison & Hall map. This was developed for an auction and cattle market in the later 19th century, a use that continued well into the 20th century. Stone, timber and coal yards were served from the canal wharves. An additional canal bridge was added at Nelson Street in 1876 and in the late 19th century the bridge carrying George Street/Quarry Road was known as Friarage Bridge. Thurnham Street was not extended south to meet Penny Street until the c.1900, improving access into the area and now part of the one-way system. Penny Street Bridge was widened and rebuilt at the same time, opened on 24 May 1900.



The area on the 1891 OS map (Lancaster University)



The Nelson Street canal bridge, built 1876 by Joseph Clayton

The key site in the area is Storeys' White Cross Mill which grew rapidly during the late 19th century, manufacturing oil cloth, table baize and imitation leather. The upper floors of the original mill blocks had to be rebuilt after a fire in 1861. The works expanded onto neighbouring sites in the 1880s when the Storeys took over the adjoining barracks for offices. After the Baptist Chapel was fire-damaged in 1894, they acquired the building as part of the works. An entrance block was added in 1899, next to the canal, with new buildings in similar style.



The Springfield Barracks, taken over by Storeys in the 1880s

As the industry declined in the second half of the 20th century, the condition of the White Cross buildings deteriorated until the site was sold; they were converted to a range of new uses in 1989, including education, offices and leisure. Radio Lancashire occupies the former Baptist chapel.

3.6.5. Archaeological Potential

This area was east and south of the Roman town; burials have been found at the southern end of Penny Street, and there is some potential for further Roman archaeology and burials. A report of burial urns found during work on buildings for the War Department may relate to the Springfield Barracks or to the militia site now occupied by St Martin's College; it may also refer to prehistoric, rather than Roman remains. In the medieval period, this area was south of the Friary precinct and may have been part of the townfields, limiting scope for archaeology of this period. ; Archaeological potential is also limited by ground disturbance for cellars and later development, although the latter may have built up ground levels rather than removed remains. Industrial archaeology in the area includes canal structures and the mill site, although as the latter was redeveloped in the 1980s some original material has been lost. The area includes an interesting collection of 19th century buildings which have been adapted over time for different uses, and evidence of original uses may merit recording as opportunities arise.

3.6.6. Buildings and Architectural Quality

All the buildings and structures in this area date from the 19th or 20th centuries; the most significant group of buildings is White Cross Mills, incorporating the former barracks and a converted Baptist chapel. This former industrial area contains no historic domestic or retail buildings. Sandstone is the dominant building material, generally laid in regular courses, with dressed stone for mill structures and the barracks. There is some red brick and render, used for secondary elevations. Historic roofs are generally laid with Welsh slates, some with ridge vents. Roofs are laid with profiled metal sheeting on additions and recent blocks of flats. There is a very wide range of windows and door patterns, most are now late 20th century replacements for the originals, installed for new uses. Sashes have been retained on the 1899 entrance block, and the former barracks has small-paned casements with fine glazing bars. Stair towers are a distinctive feature of the mills, some with conical roofs and circular windows.



White Cross Mills, from the east

The striking structure of the former barracks contributes to the character of the area, due to its distinctive Scottish baronial style and its prominent position facing South Road, a gateway into the city centre. It was designed by Edmund Sharpe. The former Baptist chapel, now in office use, is set back within the White Cross complex, adjacent to a later entrance block.

The canal and related historic structures contribute strongly to the character of the area, with stone copings to the towpath and stone retaining walls, and a variety of bridge designs. The original stone bridge carrying Quarry Road/George Street was rebuilt in the 20th century with a concrete deck, and the Penny Street Bridge has also been rebuilt and widened on several occasions; the current bridge dates from 1900, when it was widened to allow for the southern extension of Thurnham Street to cross the canal. This has an ashlar stone parapet with moulded copings. The most striking Victorian bridge is the cast-iron and stone bridge at Nelson Street; the name of Thomas Clayton, the maker and the date 1876 is in raised lettering on the south cast-iron arch.



White Cross Mills from the George Street canal bridge



The 1899 entrance block and former Baptist chapel, 1872

The scale of the White Cross mills buildings ranges from single-storey canal-side former warehouses (now a café/bar) to five storey former spinning mills, with some modern

roof-top extensions. The style of the blocks varies depending on their date; the early 19th century multi-storey blocks are robust and fairly plain in character, characterized by a regular pattern of windows with stone sills and lintels, stone gutter brackets and plain roof verges. Some of the later 19th century blocks have crow-stepped gables and conical turrets, reflecting the style of the barracks. The single-storey canal-side warehouses are gabled with arched openings (altered in the 20th century) or loading slots, expressing their function, and these are partly rendered. Historic details such as iron brackets and hinges for external shutters survive on some canal-side blocks, but most the external joinery is modern. Small-paned windows painted white have been used on the earlier mills to retain their character, but dark-stained larger paned windows on other blocks are less sympathetic to the historic mill architecture. Roof features include metal ventilation cowls, retained on the late 19th century mill (now Adult College) and stone chimneys with decorative details on the barracks.



19th century iron features on canal-side warehouses

Adjacent to the north side of the canal close to Penny Street Bridge is a former public lavatory, a single storey stone structure with a revival style moulded door surround (blocked) and an ashlar west elevation integrated into the design of the bridge. Probably built in the early 1900s for mill workers, its primitive sanitation may have drained into the canal. These facilities were once common in mill towns.



Stone-built former public lavatory attached to Penny Street Bridge

Recent architecture is characterized by large-scale residential development along the north side of the canal. Blocks of multi-storey flats with balconies and stepped rooflines contribute to the character of the area; their scale is not out of place in this location.



New flats line the north bank of the canal opposite White Cross

3.6.7. Assessment of Condition

The condition of historic buildings in the area is generally good. The conversion of the White Cross complex for new uses in the late 20th century secured a future for the industrial buildings and funds their maintenance. The canal towpath is a well maintained popular public route through the east side of the town, with setted or tarmac surfaces in good condition.

3.6.8. Urban Form

The urban form of the area is still a direct result of its industrial legacy as the White Mills complex. This took in previous land-use patterns, for example the barracks, and the large scale of historic development has been replicated by the new apartment blocks. The overall form consists of large footprint buildings, ranging from one to five storeys in the historic mill buildings (rising to six storeys with undercroft parking in the new apartment blocks - although this is not out of character). These buildings are arranged with functional relationships to each other but no obvious pattern. There are no roads through the area, only a series of interlinked hard landscaped spaces. These are now service yards or car parks. This pattern has also been replicated by the new buildings. The buildings, both old and new, address the canal strongly and this is the strongest factor in the urban form of the area. The former barracks present a strong frontage to South Road.

3.6.9. Nodes and Gateways

The Penny Street Bridge is a very strong gateway to the south edge of the City Centre and the presence of the barracks building facing South Road contributes very positively to the attractiveness of this gateway.

There are no real gateways into other parts of this character area; the entrance to the area via White Cross Street, and to the canal towpath, is low-key. This presents a pleasant element of surprise and discovery when entering the area from this side.

The area is much more open and visible from Quarry Road and the bridge over the canal. The towpath entrance is inviting, with canal-side activity visible. This does not have the status of a gateway, and the adjacent vehicle access is designed as a simple junction to the car park of the Adult College. There is no access to the area from Nelson Street. The disparate and separated access to individual uses mean that the street form is weak and often confusing (in contrast to the strong canal-side), and there are no strong gateways from the road network.

3.6.10. Landmarks

The former barracks building and the five-storey element of White Cross Mills (now the adult college) are both landmark buildings. They are well known, visible and have historic and architectural importance (although the mill building is not listed).

3.6.11. Frontages

The lack of roads penetrating the area means that there are few road frontages. Quarry Road passes at a higher level through the area, rather than at grade. South Road is fronted very strongly by the architecturally interesting former barracks, set behind an attractive green space. At the other end of the area the car park is set at a level below Nelson Street and is fairly hidden. An historic stone boundary wall provides the street frontage.

The most significant frontages face the canal. The converted mill buildings on the south side present an attractive and vibrant frontage, with restaurant uses spilling out onto the canalside. On the opposite bank the new apartment blocks contribute by overlooking and providing enclosure. This frontage is strong, despite the presence of parking grills at the canalside level.

3.6.12. Positive Spaces

The canalside is a positive linear space crossing the area from north-east to south-west. The survival of historic features, activity from adjacent uses and the amenity of the water and local flora and fauna, all create a pleasant environment, which forms part of a longer recreational route.

The open space in front of the former barracks is an attractive semi-public space that is well maintained. It forms a strong setting to the listed barracks and the hospital on the opposite side and creates good amenity space at this gateway.

Character Area 6 contains a large group of former textile mills and warehouses associated with the Storey family; these have local historical and architectural significance, relate well to the canal and contribute to the

character of the conservation area, but none are listed. The former barracks is the only listed building in the area. The former Baptist Chapel, now in commercial use, also contributes to the character of the area and its former function is still legible. Penny Street Bridge and the former public conveniences are part of early 19th century improvements and also contribute positively to the street scene.



Heavy vegetation in the canal corridor

3.6.13. Public Realm

There is a significant amount of mature vegetation within the canal corridor. Much of this is overgrown and would benefit from better management. Elsewhere in the area there is some planting and trees but generally spaces are hard in their landscape character. Much of the public realm is simply laid with tarmac. On the canal towpath some areas have a plain modern finish but historic setts are important to character. The towpath edge is an important historic feature. Throughout the area stone boundary walls add character, and the stone bridges contribute to the canalside character.

3.6.14. Low Grade Environments and Detractors

There are no low grade environments. There is scope to improve the setting of the mill buildings; at present these have a standard landscaping treatment typical of many business parks.

Figure 3.6: Conservation Designations (East)

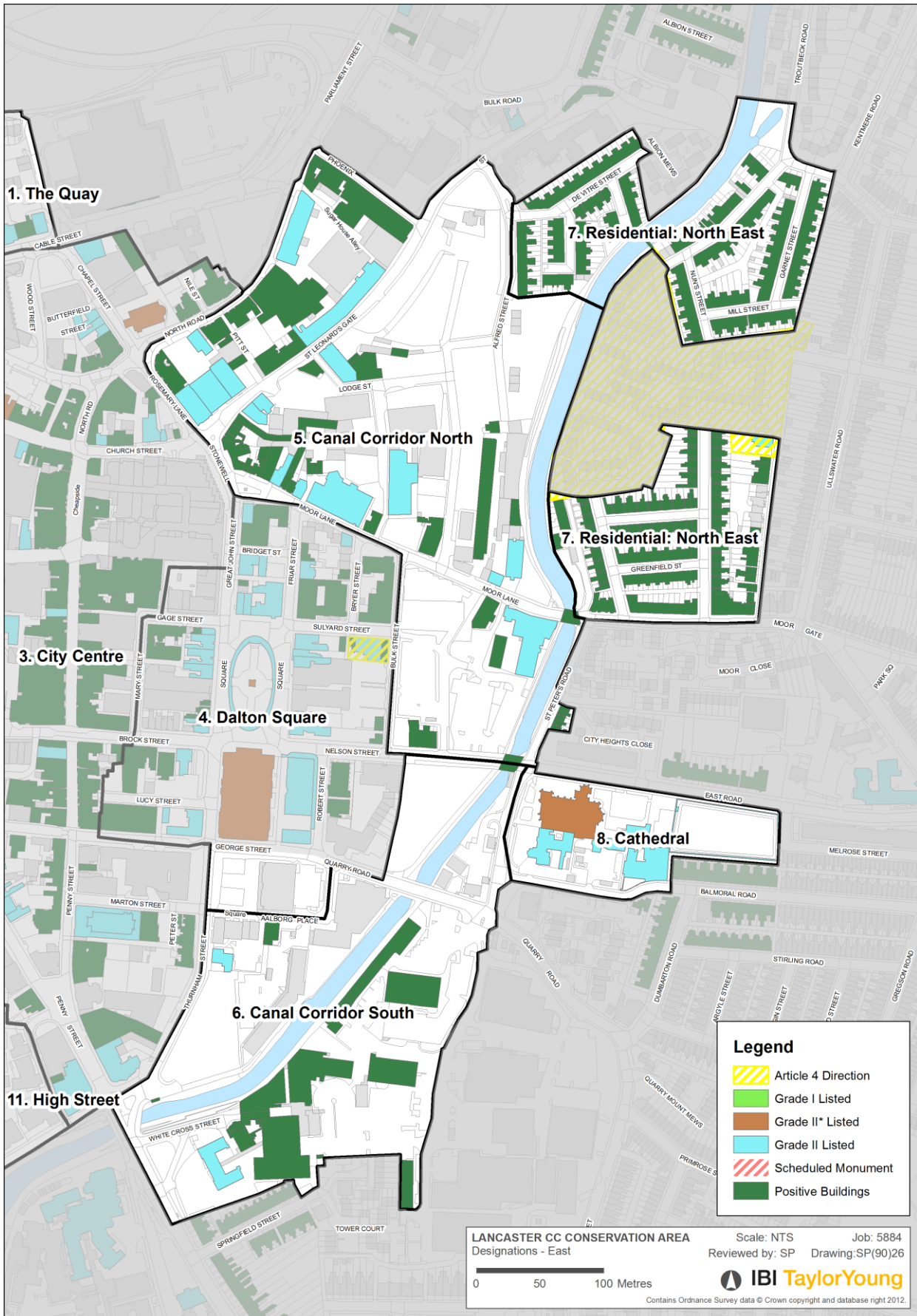


Figure 3.7: Townscape Analysis (East)

