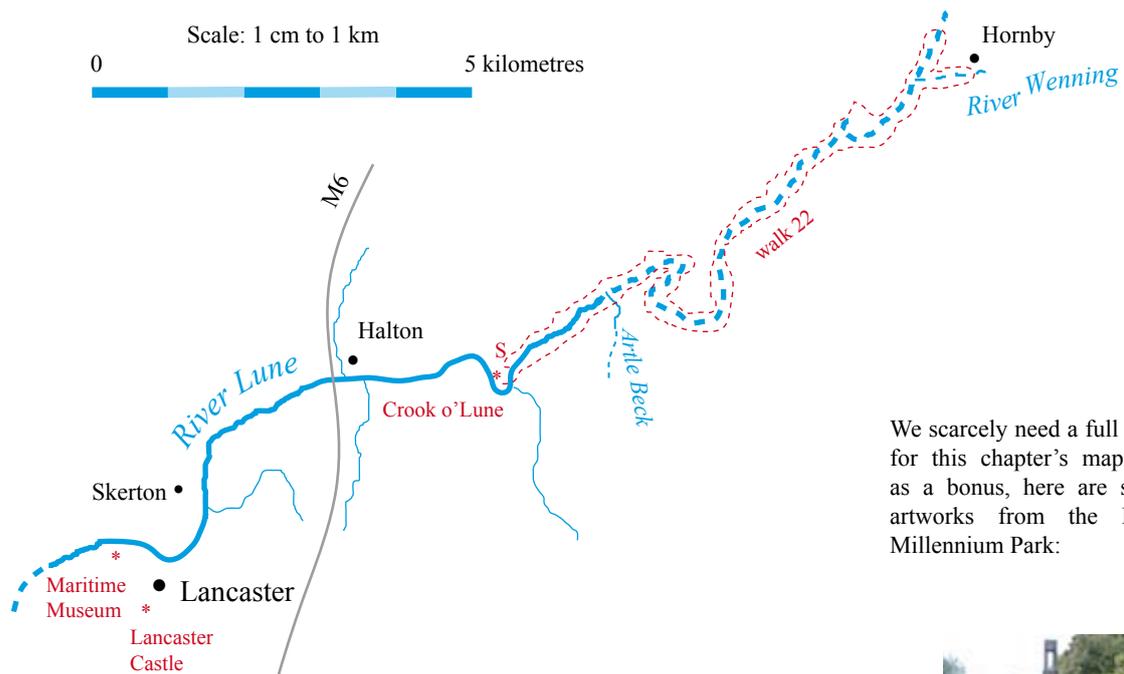


CHAPTER 13:
The Lune to
Lancaster



We scarcely need a full page for this chapter's map, so, as a bonus, here are some artworks from the Lune Millennium Park:



Heron's Head
(Marjan Wouda)



Gray's Seat bench
(Jim Partridge)



Maybe
(Colin Wilbourn)



*Captured Africans**
(Kevin Dalton Johnson)

*Strictly, this is not in the Millennium Park: it is a nearby memorial to Lancaster's slave trade, unveiled in 2005



When Traffic Cones Take Root
(Mark Renn and Mick Thacker)



River Rocks
(Colin Reid)

The Lune from Artle Beck ...

After 1km the Lune reaches the Crook o'Lune, a popular picnic spot where the Lune meanders in a graceful curve under wooded banks. There are three bridges. The first and third, on opposite sides of the meander, were for the Wennington-Lancaster railway line. The second is Penny Bridge, which was built in 1883 after the 1806 bridge collapsed. This was a toll bridge but rather than pay the toll some people preferred to cross the Lune on foot, not always successfully.

In the summer the river banks and surrounding fields provide a colourful display that would be regarded as beautiful in other contexts. Here it should be viewed with alarm, for the purple flowers are of Himalayan balsam, an alien, fast-growing, invasive species that swamps native plants, so that when it dies down in the autumn it leaves the banks vulnerable to erosion. Its nectar-rich flowers also attract bees away from native species. It can be eradicated relatively easily but attempts to do so must begin in the upper reaches of the Lune and Rawthey where the balsam has become established, because its explosive pods spread the seeds, which are carried downstream in floods.

At the Crook o'Lune a small beck, Escow Beck, slips into the Lune. This, with its tributary Deys Beck,

originates 2km south in Flodden Hill Wood. This name is thought to be due to Richard Baines, who was given land in the area by Lord Monteagle of Hornby in reward for his bravery at the Battle of Flodden Field. He no doubt gave his own name to Baines Cragg, which provides a fine viewpoint over Lancaster and Morecambe Bay. Escow Beck flows through the pond at Escowbeck House, which John Greg, the then owner of Low Mill, built in 1842. He had the grounds landscaped so that a sight of what he owned did not spoil his view, and as a result it is difficult for us now to see the house.

Above the Crook o'Lune is Gray's Seat, a recently restored viewpoint that was eulogised by the poet Thomas Gray in 1769. He wrote that "every feature which constitutes a perfect landscape of the extensive sort is here not only boldly marked but in its best position". These words are carved at the viewpoint, beside a grand seat made by the renowned woodcarver Jim Partridge.

Gray's view seems intended to rival Ruskin's View at Kirkby Lonsdale, which, after all, it does pre-date. It was well known in the 19th century, as the effusive paraphrase of Gray's words in *A Pictorial History of the*

*Two pages before: The Lune Aqueduct.
Below: Penny Bridge, Crook o'Lune.*



County of Lancashire (1854) indicates: the view “leaves nothing to be desired in a landscape that pleases rather than surprises, and of which the prevailing character is more beauty than grandeur . . . we see nothing misplaced, and desire neither to add to nor take away [a] solitary object.” Since then we have added eight wind turbines. Today, trees largely obscure the view and it is surprising that we are encouraged to dash across the dangerous A683 to see what’s left of it. (Gray’s Seat is probably not Gray’s view at all: he stood to the north of the road, 400m below the “more advantageous station”, according to the 1821 editor of Gray’s *Guide to the Lakes*.)

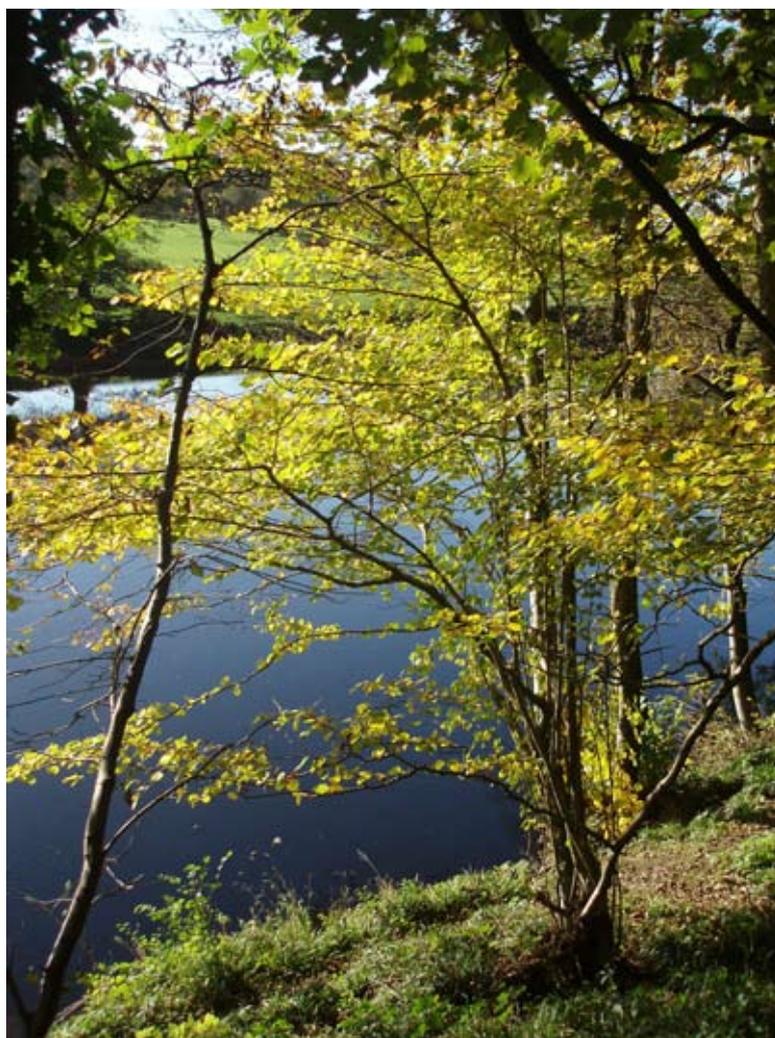
As we sit with our cuppa at the Crook o’Lune picnic tables, admiring the view (shown on page 8) up the Lune valley to Ingleborough, contemplating the words of Thomas Gray, mulling over the wind turbines on Caton Moor, and fretting over the banks of Himalayan balsam, we may lapse into a reverie on the nature of naturalness. In 2006 various agencies coalesced to form Natural England, which on first hearing seems a rather strange name for a public organisation. Its brief is “to conserve and enhance the natural environment”. So, naturally, we are led to ask: “What is natural?” and in particular “What of Loyne is natural?”

The name of Himalayan balsam tells us that it doesn’t belong here. Similarly, for the more pernicious Japanese knotweed. What about the rhododendron that has run amok at Kitmere and many other places in Loyne? It is a native of Southern Asia. Should we seek to eradicate it? Is there any enthusiasm for giant hogweed (from Asia)? Its name alone suggests we can do without it! What about all those alien plants that Reginald Farrer brought to Clapham? Should we demand the removal of the fine araucaria that stands alone in a field near the Roman milestone at Middleton? It is not a native tree: is it a natural one?

Apart from introduced species, what about all those plants, such as cowslip and primrose, that used to be abundant but are now rare or extinct? Are they, or should they be, part of the natural environment?

So many of our lowland meadows have been taken over for agricultural purposes that those that remain in anything like a natural state (such as those at Raisbeck, Bretherdale and Tatham) are so rare that have been made Sites of Special Scientific Interest. And, as we have seen, the grouse moors have to be carefully managed to retain what we now consider to be their natural state.

What could be more natural than the Ingleborough that we see in the distance? Well, we know that a century ago it would in the autumn have looked purple from the Crook o’Lune viewpoint. Its slopes were then heather-clad. Before that, they would have been tree-covered. Even Aughton Woods in the middle distance are not



Near the Crook o’Lune

Walk 22: Crook o'Lune and Loyn Bridge

Map: OL41 (please read the general note about the walks in the Introduction).

Starting point: The Crook o'Lune (522647).

Guidance for this suggested walk is simplicity itself: walk from the Crook o'Lune on the east side of the Lune to Loyn Bridge and then back on the west side.

In a little more detail: Walk east over the old railway bridge and then immediately take the path right and then right again to go under the bridge you've just crossed to gain the footpath on the east bank of the Lune. At the Waterworks Bridge continue on the bank, as there is a good stretch of the Lune below Lawson's Wood, where salmon often leap. Follow the long loop round until you are again heading northeast. Don't take the public footpath to Claughton but continue on the river bank where there is a permissive footpath not marked on OS maps. This continues to the Wenning, where it is necessary to walk east to Hornby Bridge and then back on the other side of the Wenning. Continue to Loyn Bridge where, if the footpath under the bridge is impassable because the river is too high, you should cut up through the wood to reach the road. Walk over the bridge and take the path south on the west bank of the Lune. As this is part of the Lune Valley Ramble there should be no difficulty in navigation. At the long meander near Burton Wood nobody will object if, through exhaustion, you need to walk straight across.

The walk can alternatively be started from Loyn Bridge, which would have the advantage of enabling a half-way cuppa at Woodies snack bar at the Crook o'Lune. Between the Crook o'Lune and Loyn Bridge there is only one way to cross the Lune - at Waterworks Bridge (the footpaths marked on the OS map as crossing the Lune are not paths for feet).

Short walk variation: There are several short loop walks from the Crook o'Lune that may be combined in any way you wish: northeast to Waterworks Bridge and back (5km); east over the old railway bridge, south on the south bank of the Lune and back over the other bridge (1km); west over the bridge, along the south bank of the Lune to Halton Weir and back along the Millennium Park (2km); west along the Millennium Park to the bridge at Denny Beck and back on the north bank of the Lune through Halton Mills (4km).

entirely natural. Within Loynes the Forestry Commission plantations, usually of conifers, occupy a greater area than the remaining broad-leaved woodland. But before the trees, of course, it would all have been ice-covered - which is, if you take the long-term view, our most natural state over the last million years.

There are similar considerations when we come to consider the naturalness of Loynes's animal life. The red squirrel and grey squirrel debate is a familiar one. Similarly, the otter and mink. We are seeking to encourage the return of the former and to eradicate the latter. What about the polecat? One has been trapped and others sighted in Loynes. Should it be welcomed?

On farmland, do we mind alpaca (from South America)? They are assuredly not as natural as our sheep - the majority of which are (from) Swaledale. Why did I include a photograph of a black swan rather than a white one? Are we actually rather fond of the exotic?

Do we object to the red-legged partridge moving north into our area? It is a handsome bird. Is our opinion influenced by the fact that it was introduced as a game bird in the 18th century (it is also known as the French partridge)? Or that the once common grey partridge is now on the red list of endangered species? Is it natural for gulls to nest on Bowland Fells? Or for oystercatchers

to travel far inland? Would we welcome the eagle owl, which has recently returned to other parts of England? Is it more natural here than the little owl, which was introduced in the 19th century? What about the pheasant, introduced from Asia so long ago that nobody is quite sure when?

Of course, none of the man-made constructions that we see are natural. It is always the most recent (today, the wind turbines) that are the most controversial. But we can also see the old railway line, Low Mill at Caton, electricity pylons, the chimneys of Claughton brickworks, the Thirlmere aqueduct, and Hornby Castle. The last is not even a 'natural' castle, since it was re-built in the 19th century to pretend to be one. To varying degrees, we now accept these as part of the environment.

On a smaller scale, there are innumerable instances of our tinkering with the environment. For example, the Lune banks have in many places been reinforced to prevent erosion. Fair enough: farmers don't want to see their fields disappear. But why are huge limestone blocks often used? Their white gleam does not belong here. As I write, a bulldozer is pushing rocks and soil over the natural bank opposite Aughton Woods, burying sand martin nests and anything else that happens to be there. Just upstream from the Crook o'Lune a single

electricity wire crosses the Lune. It is surrounded by seven prominent ‘danger of death’ signs. Fishermen surely do not need such protection.

Almost everything mentioned in this reverie concerns changes since Thomas Gray considered the landscape perfect in 1769. Was the environment natural then, or now? So many questions, but no answers. I suppose the answer is that we should all notice, question and decide about what we wish to see and have in our environment.

Cuppa finished, let us move on. Beyond the meander, the Lune curves west. Here, on a winter’s afternoon, is a good place to spot the kingfisher, for in the absence of other colours the setting sun makes its iridescent blue and orange particularly vivid when seen from the south bank. According to the Lune Waterways Bird Survey there are at most half a dozen breeding pairs between Lancaster and Kirkby Lonsdale, so their frequency here seems surprising.

On the south bank, 100m before Forge Bank Weir, is the Lune Intake, the first sign of any significant **management of the Lune**. Up to this point the Lune and its tributaries have run largely unrestrained from their various fells. There used to be a millrace from the weir to power Halton Mills, a substantial industrial complex that survived for over two centuries, changing when necessary between cotton, flax, leather, oilcloths and coconut matting, until becoming derelict in the 1970s. A renovation of the site was begun in 2006 by a company with the motto “property touches emotion”. How true! The residents of Halton’s 1960s bungalows angrily objected to the scores of self-contradictory “rural townhouses”. The project has been left suspended, unfinished, after the developers went into administration in 2008.

Between Forge Bank Weir and Lower Halton Weir the Lune’s natural turbulence has been increased in order to provide rapids for canoeists. Stone banks protrude into the flow to create eddies and waves, suitable for novices at the lower end and experts at the higher, especially under spate conditions.

On the south bank the Lune Millennium Park continues along the old railway line. Various artworks are passed, of which the most striking is that of Giles Kent, whose website says that he creates “in situ installations that enhance and elaborate on the natural properties of wood ... [the work] compliments the natural landscape by responding to lines and shapes found around each

The **management of the Lune** is important to enable proper use of water resources, to make flood predictions, to assess the impact of discharges, and to support the use of the Lune for recreation. There are four flow-measuring stations on the Lune (at Lune’s Bridge, Tebay (3), Killington New Bridge (6), Caton (17) and Halton (16)) and a further four on the Conder, Hindburn, Rawthey and Wenning tributaries. The figures in brackets show the median flows in cubic metres per second. The Halton figure is lower than the Caton one because of water extraction, particularly at the Lune Intake.

Water is pumped from the Lune to help provide Langthwaite Reservoir with Lancaster’s water supply and also to be transferred to the River Wyre along a 13km pipeline as part of Lancashire’s ‘conjunctive use scheme’. The Wyre catchment is heavily exploited for industrial and public water supply and may be supplemented from the Lune, provided that its flow is high enough.

There are over a hundred licences for water abstraction from the Lune and its tributaries and if all the allowed water were taken the Lune would be ‘over licensed’, that is, flows would fall below necessary levels. Thankfully, the actual level of abstraction is lower than licensed and has decreased recently because of changes in the region’s industry.

The nature of the Lune catchment area makes this monitoring important. Flows in the floodplain are determined by rainfall on the fells, and these run-offs have different characteristics. Rain in the Howgills runs quickly off the hills but in the Dales water percolates into limestone until it is saturated, giving rise to flash flood conditions. The continued health of the Loyne riverside flora and fauna depends upon maintaining the required conditions of erosion and sedimentation, and this needs to be better understood.

particular site”. There are nine upside-down larch trunks with roots aloft.

The park reaches the old Halton railway station, which looks different from all the others we’ve passed because it was re-built in 1907 after a fire. By the station there’s a temporary-looking bridge across the Lune that has stood since 1913. The crossing here has a chequered history. While the railway was being built there was no bridge across the Lune here and workers were ferried across from Halton. In 1849 eight of them died when washed away in a flood. Today such an event would be a national tragedy; then it seems to have been accepted as a price to be paid. A new bridge was opened in December 1849: it wouldn’t do to have potential customers from

Halton washed away. This was swept away in 1869 and replaced in the same year. This in turn was replaced in 1913 by using the remains of the old Greyhound Bridge then being demolished in Lancaster. The bridge operated as a toll bridge until the 1960s and since the railway line closed in 1966 it has been a matter of contention who is responsible for its upkeep.

North of the Lune is the village of Halton, the larger eastern part of which is mainly new housing for commuters but the older part of which is rich in heritage. This part is clustered around the small tributary of Cote Beck, which enters the Lune unobtrusively 200m below the bridge. Cote Beck arises south of Nether Kellet, rather tentatively, as is usual in limestone country, below the large quarries. It runs by the M6 and then past Furnace Cottage, where Cote Beck used to be called Foundry Beck.

Below Dale Wood, Cote Beck passes the site of Halton's motte and bailey castle, now marked by a flagpole. The site is relatively small but the motte, rising

3m above the bailey, can be clearly seen (although the present top is not original) and traces of the bailey are visible despite recent ploughing. The site is on private land.

On the other side of the beck is the church, dedicated to St Wilfrid, a 7th century Archbishop of York. Maybe there was a church here from that time, although the earliest remains are 12th century Norman stones built into the arch. As we have seen with other churches, the tower was retained when the church was rebuilt (by Paley & Austin again) in the 19th century.

A Roman altar was found in the churchyard in 1794 and is now in the Lancaster City Museum. It bears an inscription to the god Mars from Sabinus and his unit of boatmen, perhaps grateful for their safe passage up the Lune from Lancaster. There is no other evidence of any Roman settlement at Halton, although it is likely that there was a camp on what became the site of the castle and it is assumed that there was a Roman road on the north bank of the Lune up to Whittington and over a ford



The Lune at Halton

to Over Burrow. Still in the churchyard is a cross carved with Christian symbols and a version of the Sigurd the Volsung legend by Norse settlers who came to the region in the 10th century. It is 3.5m high, mounted on three steps, with the top parts having been rather inexpertly reassembled.

Halton, then, was an important centre before the Norman Conquest, when it was held, like many places we've visited, by Earl Tostig. At the time of the Domesday survey, Halton was regarded as the centre of lower Lune, with twenty-two villages, including Lancaster, considered to belong to the manor of Halton. When Roger of Poitou took over, he preferred to make Lancaster his centre and the importance of Halton waned. The Royal Foresters, responsible for managing the king's forests in Lancashire, had Halton for their principal manor until the Gernet inheritance passed to the Dacre family in about 1290. The lords of the manor in 1715, the Carus family, perhaps still smarting from Halton's subordination to Lancaster, gave helpful information to the Jacobite Army on its way to occupy Lancaster. From the 18th century, the manor house, Halton Hall, passed through several hands, gradually being split up and demolished. Only one 19th century wing remains, the rest having gone by the 1930s, apart from the boathouse on the Lune.

The Lune is slow, deep and wide, and local rowing clubs make good use of this section, down towards Skerton Weir. Rowers get the best view of the fine M6 bridge, whose single-span arch of 70m provides a frame for an attractive stretch of the Lune.

In view of the on-going controversy about a proposed link road from the M6 just north of the Lune to Heysham, it is interesting that this was already part of the original plan in the 1950s. It was only when the Lancaster emergency services expressed concern at the difficulties of gaining access to the motorway that an interchange south of the Lune was built, to lower design standards than normal and

only later, after public representation, that it was opened for general use.

After passing the Halton Training Camp for army cadets on the north bank and a hotel and industrial buildings on the south, the Lune reaches the Lune Aqueduct, one of the finest aqueducts in England. It is 200m long, with five semi-circular arches carrying the **Lancaster Canal** 18m above the Lune. It was one of the first bridges designed by John Rennie, who went on to design Waterloo Bridge and London Bridge, and was a great civil engineering feat for its time. The aqueduct was completed in 1797 and some indication of its impact and aesthetic appeal can be gained from the fact that



The Viking cross at St Wilfrid's, Halton



The M6 bridge

Turner sketched it on his 1797 tour of northern England. This was the only time on his tour that he addressed a contemporary subject, although he could not resist framing a view of Lancaster Castle within one of the arches.

However, the grandeur of the aqueduct's design was not without its critics. A committee set up in 1819 to review progress on the Lancaster Canal commented that resources had been wasted in "ornamenting the town of Lancaster, with a grand aqueduct over the Lune, upon which the water had lain stagnant for over twenty years." It is not stagnant now: it is leaking. The aqueduct was closed for repairs in 2009, as part of a £3m project to develop the Lancaster Canal as a key part of the visitor infrastructure.

After 1km the Lune reaches Skerton Weir, the normal tidal limit. A weir has existed here for centuries, to provide water for a millrace to power corn mills by the Lune, but the present structure was built in 1979 to prevent salt water entering intakes for the Lune-side industries upstream. It does, of course, have a fish pass for salmon and trout.

The weir is of disappointing design. It is unsightly; it is not integrated into the so-called riverside parks

to provide an appealing leisure amenity; and it is a hazard for river users, who are regularly swept over it, sometimes with fatal consequences. The UK Rivers guidebook describes the weir as "extremely dangerous" and "lethal in high water", rating the weir as grade 6 on the International Grading Scale, that is, the highest possible (or most dangerous) grade.

In the past the weir was renowned for its salmon fishing. Fishing is now regulated by the Environment Agency, who own three beats on the Lune. Fishing directly below the weir is prohibited but further downstream fly-fishing is allowed. Above the weir, coarse fishing with a single rod is permitted, outside the close season, of course. The Agency's other two beats are upstream, at Halton Lower Beat and Halton Top Beat. The former is a game fishery, best fished at high water; the latter is slow, deep water and is said to be the most productive of all the Agency's salmon fisheries.

The Lune flows through the built-up areas on the outskirts of Lancaster and the becks, such as they are, run unobtrusively through culverts to the river. For example, Newton Beck joins on the east bank from the estates of Ridge and Newton. On the west bank is Skerton, which was mentioned as a separate village in the Domesday

Lancaster Canal was intended to connect Kendal with Houghton, and hence the Leeds–Liverpool Canal, but has yet to achieve that goal. The Act approving its construction was passed in 1792 and the sections from Tewitfield to Preston and from Walton Summit (6km south of Preston) to Houghton were completed by 1803. The costs, however, were high: for example, the bill for the Lune Aqueduct (£48,000) was nearly three times the original estimate.

The Kendal to Tewitfield section took until 1819 but no canal link between Preston and Walton Summit was constructed – until 2003, when the Millennium Ribble Link was finally built. But by this time the Kendal to Tewitfield section, now cut off by the M6, had largely been filled in. The grandly named Association for the Restoration of the Lancaster Canal, formed in 1963 at the time of the M6-enforced separation, still hopes to re-open the Kendal to Tewitfield section for navigation.

The Lancaster Canal is misnamed because, although it was intended to help get goods to and from Lancaster avoiding the Lune, the main beneficiaries were Preston and Kendal and other villages en route. Preston, which had its own problems with navigation in the Ribble, was in 1792 smaller than Lancaster but its population trebled in thirty years as new markets opened up. The main effect within Lancaster, which had lacked water-powered mills, was the development of steam-powered mills alongside the canal, where coal could be delivered easily.

The eight-hour journey from Kendal to Preston could not compete with the railway when it arrived and the Lancaster Canal Company was duly dissolved in 1886, with the last freight being carried in 1947.

Today, the 66km from Tewitfield to Preston is for leisure only. As it follows the contour there are no locks, to the disappointment of today's canal travellers, who seem to revel in them. If that makes the canal too boring they could try counting the bridges (Lancaster City Museum asserts that there are 247 of them, including 22 aqueducts – which I assume includes those bridges still standing, mysteriously, in fields between Kendal and Tewitfield). Or they could tackle the Ribble Link, which has nine locks in 6km.

Book and remained apart from Lancaster until the late 19th century.

Skerton Bridge was designed by Thomas Harrison, who had studied in Italy, and is in a classical style similar to that of the old Roman bridge at Rimini. Its flat roadway and use of balustrades across the width were innovatory for English bridges. There are five elliptical arches, each spanning 20m. It was completed in 1788 and soon influenced other designers. We might, for example,

detect an echo of Skerton Bridge in the Lune Aqueduct, for John Rennie came to see it and a flat design was exactly what was needed for the aqueduct.

A sixth, inferior arch was later added to Skerton Bridge on the east bank for the Wennington-Lancaster railway line. The station was just south of the bridge at Green Ayre, which is today a rare example of an industrial site that has been returned to a green field, quiet apart from the skate-boarders' ramp and the traffic. The railway line continued from Green Ayre over Greyhound Bridge to Poulton-le-Sands, or Morecambe as it became called. The present Greyhound Bridge was built in 1911, replacing earlier bridges of 1849 and 1864, and converted for road traffic after the closure of the railway line in 1966.

Green Ayre has had a long and active past. Some experts believe that at the time of the Romans, Green Ayre was an island, with the main flow of the Lune being south of its present course, along the line of the present Damside Street. A millrace followed this line and powered what is believed to be the oldest recorded water mill in Lancashire, being referred to in the borough charter of 1193. Green Ayre then became a busy quay and from 1763 a shipyard. It doesn't seem an ideal spot for such activities because the old bridge, dating back to at least the 13th century, prevented large ships from reaching Green Ayre. Newly built ships were floated from the shipyard under the bridge in parts and assembled downstream.

When Skerton Bridge was built the old bridge became redundant. The shipyard bought the bridge in 1800 and removed one arch, which reduced its functionality somewhat but allowed tall ships to pass through. By 1845 the whole bridge had fallen down or been demolished.

The Millennium Bridge, opened in 2001 for cyclists and pedestrians only, is roughly where the old bridge stood. Opinions on this new bridge are mixed: some people don't like it much; others don't like it at all. Certainly, for cyclists and pedestrians it is a boon, because for them Skerton Bridge and Greyhound Bridge are inconvenient and dangerous. The bridge is a key part of the Lune Millennium Park, linking the cycleways along the old railway lines from Caton and Morecambe to form part of National Cycle Network route 6. It was designed by Whitby Bird, cost £1.8m, has a span of 64m and is suspended from 40m masts. Perhaps we will eventually come to admire the classic view of Lancaster's

castle and priory now framed by the long blue fingers that are supposed to echo old sailing ships.

From Green Ayre, the castle and priory look as one, overseeing the city of Lancaster, dominating the strategically important lowest old fording point of the Lune, and providing extensive views over Morecambe Bay and up the Lune valley to Ingleborough. What is now called Castle Hill was settled long before the castle existed, with Neolithic and Bronze Age artefacts having been found here.

The Romans recognised its key position overlooking a main route between Scotland and western England. Of the Roman fort that was based on Castle Hill there is little to be seen but more than we saw at Low Borrowbridge and Over Burrow. Most of the site is under the present castle and priory but to the north in Vicarage Fields the remains of a 2nd century bathhouse, excavated and preserved in 1973, can be seen. The meagreness of the remains does not excuse the shabbiness of the site and the shamefully poor foreign language information board.

When Roger of Poitou moved his base from Halton to Lancaster he no doubt built a motte and bailey castle within the site of the old fort, although there is no trace of this castle today. The Domesday Book records a village called **Loncastre** here. The castle would have been rebuilt in stone and strengthened part by part. The 12th century keep is the oldest surviving part. Scottish raiders in 1322 and 1389 ruined much of Lancaster but spared the castle and, to a lesser extent, the priory. During the Civil War, Parliament ordered that the castle (apart from the courts and gaol) be demolished but in 1663 the king agreed to have it repaired. The gatehouse, the most impressive external feature, is 15th century, with the John of Gaunt statue added to it in 1822.

The grandeur of the long-distance view, with the battlements on the skyline, is not sustained at close quarters, where the bland, relatively modern, external wall dominates. If you prefer a castle to be in dramatic ruins redolent of historic battles then Lancaster Castle is a disappointment: it is still in good enough repair to



Greyhound Bridge and the Millennium Bridge below the castle and priory

continue as a working castle, functioning as court and prison. Even so, it is arguably Lancashire's greatest historical building.

Lancashire became a County Palatine in 1351, with John of Gaunt becoming Duke of Lancaster, a title that passed to his son, who became Henry IV in 1399. Since that date the monarch has continued to be Duke of Lancaster and has retained the Duchy and the castle as a separate estate to those of the Crown. As county town, Lancaster held the Assizes two or three times a year. They were held in the Crown Court from 1176 until 1971, when a Royal Commission on Assizes, chaired by Lord Beeching (a second, and less controversial, Beeching Report), recommended changes. Until 1835 it had been the only Assize Court in Lancashire. The regular influx of Lancastrian gentry helped to sustain Lancaster's relative importance and to preserve its status as county town even after the Industrial Revolution.

According to H.V. Morton's *In Search of England* (1927), "It is remarkable that Lancashire, which possesses Liverpool and Manchester, should own a delicious, sleepy, old county town like Lancaster, and this is itself symbolic of the fact that the great industrial new-rich cities of northern England – vast and mighty as they are – fall into perspective as mere black specks against the mighty background of history and the great green expanse of fine country which is the real North of England." Since then, the black specks of Liverpool and Manchester have been evicted from Lancashire.

Over the centuries, many famous and infamous trials have been held at the castle. In 1612 ten 'Pendle witches' were sentenced to death. Between 1584 and 1646 seventeen Roman Catholic priests were executed. From 1660, about 270 Quakers, including George Fox, were imprisoned. Innumerable felons were sentenced to death, to provide public spectacles that up to 1799 were held on the moor east of Lancaster and between 1799 and 1865 at what is now called Hanging Corner, outside the castle. Grammar school boys were given a half-day off to learn the price of sin. This entertainment was more frequent than elsewhere, as the Lancaster court passed more death sentences than any other.

We do things differently nowadays, but less so than we might think. In 1975 the Birmingham Six, accused of the Birmingham pub-bombings, were tried in Lancaster, which with its high security prison next to the court was felt safest for Britain's biggest mass-murder trial. They were sentenced to life imprisonment mainly on the basis

The name **Loncastre** may prompt some speculation on the origin of the name 'Lune'. Since the Domesday Book the name has appeared in many forms (Lon, Loin, Loon, Lonn, Lone, Lona, Loune, Loone, Loyne, Loine, Lan, and, of course, Lune) but clearly it has pre-Norman origins.

There is not yet agreement on what the Romans called their fort at Lancaster. The assignment of Alauna or Alone is now discredited. Possibly it was the Calunio or Caluvio of what's called the Ravenna Cosmography. The Artle Beck milestone's "I L M P IIII" suggests that the name began with 'L'. It seems probable, then, that a Lune-like name existed in Roman times.

So the origin is lost in pre-history and, in this case, we may as well adopt a suggestion that appeals. Eilert Ekwall concludes in *English River Names* (1928) that it comes from the old Irish (and probably old British) slán, meaning healthy, sound or safe, which is a fair enough description of the Lune.

of confessions that were extracted under conditions that "if the defendants' stories were to be believed [implied that] many police officers had behaved in a manner that recalled the Star Chamber, the rack and the thumbscrews of four or five hundred years ago", as the judge said in his summing up. They had – and the convictions were eventually overturned in 1991.

The Shire Hall and Crown Court, which were designed by Thomas Harrison and completed in 1798, may be seen, along with Hanging Corner, in a tour of the castle. In the Shire Hall are the heraldic shields of all High Sheriffs of Lancashire since 1129. The High Sheriffs are appointed annually and the ceremony of Shield Hanging is deemed so important that it necessitated an adjournment of the Birmingham Six trial. Within the castle, the tour includes the ancient keep, the dungeons and the medieval Hadrian's Tower and Well Tower (or Witches' Tower).

Next to the castle stands Lancaster Priory. At least, that is what everyone calls it although there has not been a prior here since 1430. The church is said to date from 630, or earlier. There is a Saxon doorway in the west wall of the nave. The priory was founded in the 11th century and Roger of Poitou promptly gave it to the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Martin of Sees in Normandy. This arrangement, whereby income was sent to France, was strained by our war-like relationship with that country and duly ended in 1414 when Henry V gave the priory to the Convent of Syon in Middlesex. The priory then became the parish church of Lancaster and



Lancaster Castle gatehouse

with the Dissolution of the Monasteries came under the see of Chester.

Unlike most other churches we have met, the tower (of the 18th century) is newer than the rest, which mainly dates from a 15th century restoration. In external appearance it retains the graceful serenity that we like to imagine for that period. Internally, there have been changes but not to the most outstanding feature, the carved choir stalls of about 1340, which some people consider the finest in England.

Despite its long history, Lancaster has few buildings older than 1750, other than the castle and priory. Most of its fine stone buildings in the Georgian style date from the 18th and 19th century. Usually unnoticed, perhaps because they are understandably not near the city centre, are some impressive buildings that possibly result from Lancaster's role as county town. The Royal Albert Asylum for "idiots and imbeciles of the seven northern counties" was built in 1870, its opening being declared a public holiday, suggesting that it was a matter

of civic pride. It closed as a hospital in 1996 and is now the Jamea Al Kauthar Islamic College, catering for over four hundred girls from across the world. The Ripley Orphanage was built in 1864 and is now a school and the 1816 County Lunatic Asylum at Lancaster Moor, which cared for three thousand people, has been converted into

The Top 10 historical sites in Loyne

By 'historical' I mean anything over a hundred years old:

1. Lancaster Castle
2. Norber erratics, near Austwick
3. Brigflatts, near Sedbergh
4. Castle Stede, Hornby
5. Middleton Hall
6. Sedgwick Trail, Garsdale
7. Leck Fell ancient mounds
8. Rayseat Long Cairn, near Sunbiggin
9. Claughton brickworks
10. Low Borrowbridge



The Jamea Al Kauthar Islamic College (née the Royal Albert)



The Judges' Lodgings

residences, with the 1883 annexe currently up for sale.

The Lune passes the most visible indication of Lancaster's period of prosperity, St George's Quay, built to inspire the 'golden age' of **Lancaster's shipping trade**, from 1750 to 1800. An Act was passed in 1749 "for improving the navigation of the River Loynes, otherwise called Lune, and for building a Quay or Wharf, etc." This was in spite of, or because of, the difficulties that the port faced. Daniel Defoe wrote in about 1730 that Lancaster had "little to recommend it but a decayed castle and a more decayed port" and Samuel Simpson considered in 1746 that "the port is so choaked up with sand, that it is incapable of receiving ships of any considerable burden, and consequently trade finds little encouragement here."

St George's Quay was duly built by 1755, with merchants buying blocks of land behind the new quay wall to build warehouses. The Custom House, for the payment of harbour dues, was built in 1764 with graceful Ionic columns, to the design of Richard Gillow, who had a particular interest in the success of the quay because his company (founded by his father, Robert) depended on the import of mahogany from the West Indies. The Gillow company became world famous for the quality of its furniture, still widely admired today. Samples of its work can be seen in the Lancaster Town Hall and in the Gillow Museum, which is housed in the Judges' Lodgings, Lancaster's finest town house. Later, Gillows fitted out royal yachts but, after merging with S.J. Waring in 1903, the company closed in 1961.

Today, most of the warehouses have been converted into flats. The Custom House ceased functioning in 1882 and passed through various roles, including that of theatre, before finding an eminently suitable one as the Maritime Museum in 1985. The museum provides an excellent picture of the lower Lune, including the port, the canal and Morecambe Bay.

While we are on an aquatic theme, I'll mention the zenith of Loynes's sporting prowess. The region has no major sporting venues or



St George's Quay from the Millennium Bridge



*The Priory and Custom House across the Lune
(the view after the trees were removed and before a 1.4m high flood defence barrier was installed)*

events but in the suitably unsung sport of water polo Lancaster won the British Championship every year from 2003 to 2009, with the exception of 2008.

The Lune passes under its 43rd and last bridge, Carlisle Bridge, for the west coast main line. Its construction in 1846 conceded defeat for St George's Quay, because larger ships could no longer reach it. The 1848 OS map marks Scale Ford 0.5km below the bridge, indicating that the Lune here was much too shallow for large boats anyway. In fact, in 1826 the new steam ship John o'Gaunt had run aground here, much to the disappointment (or amusement) of the assembled spectators. The Port Commission did not give up entirely: it used the compensation received from the railway company to develop New Quay downriver of the bridge.

Lancaster's shipping trade, in terms of ships arriving from or leaving for foreign ports, peaked in 1800 at 78 ships. It is a common, but mistaken, belief that Lancaster was once a much bigger port than Liverpool and that it was the rapid growth of the latter that ended Lancaster's trade. The figures show that both Lancaster and Liverpool were minor ports in the early 17th century, with Lancaster being the smaller, and that Lancaster grew slowly through the 18th century as Liverpool grew faster.

The main trade was with the West Indies, importing sugar, rum, mahogany and cotton and exporting hardware and woollen goods. Lancaster was the fourth largest port for the West Indies trade, with about 8% of the outward and 5% of the inward trade. The disparity in the two figures results from Lancaster taking less part in the triangular slave trade (whereby ships travelled to Africa, then America and back to England) than other ports. The register shows that the highest number of ships travelling from Lancaster to Africa in any one year was 6 in 1772 (Liverpool registered 107 such ships in 1771).

There was also considerable European trade, such as the import of timber from the Baltic, and much local shipping: in 1800, 273 ships registered for trade within Britain. After 1800, wars at sea harmed foreign trade generally and continued silting harmed the port of Lancaster in particular. Several local banks failed and merchants took their trade to Liverpool and elsewhere. Although the numbers of ships continued to rise until 1845, reaching a peak of 712, very few of these were from overseas and Lancaster's proportion of the increased national trade was much reduced. The quay was transferred from the Port Commission to Lancaster Corporation in 1901.

The Top 10 cultural sites in Loyne

1. Maritime Museum, Lancaster
2. Lancaster City Museum
3. Ruskin Library, Lancaster University
4. Farfield Mill, Sedbergh
5. Storey Gallery, Lancaster
6. Judges' Lodgings, Lancaster
7. Dent Village Heritage Centre
8. Cottage Museum, Lancaster
9. Bentham Pottery
10. Finestra Gallery, Kirkby Lonsdale

The Lune Shipbuilding Company was established beside New Quay in 1863, aiming to build iron clippers. Its first ship, the *Wennington* (the company chairman lived at Wennington Hall), took three sets of emigrants to New Zealand before disappearing in the Bali Straits in 1878. The Lune Shipbuilding Company had already disappeared by then, having gone bust in 1870, after building just fourteen ships.

The site was then bought to extend St George's Works, a factory built from 1854. By the 1890s this was said to be the biggest factory in the world owned by a single man. There is no way of verifying this now (although it seems unlikely) but the factory was certainly large enough to employ a quarter of Lancaster's workforce. The 'single man' was James Williamson the younger. His father, also James, had invented a type of oilcloth as a table baize and set up the company, which the son took over in 1875 and developed to manufacture linoleum, in particular. He eventually became Lord Ashton – the Lord Linoleum of Philip Gooderson's 1995 book, *Lord Linoleum: Lord Ashton, Lancaster and the Rise of the British Oilcloth and Linoleum Industry*.

In 2004 a £10m project for the Lancaster Economic Development Zone was launched to revitalise 'Luneside East'. The industrial eyesore is being cleared and sold to developers to build a "high quality, mixed-use urban neighbourhood" by 2009, it was originally hoped. However, in June 2008 the firm that had planned to build 327 homes withdrew as a result of the housing market downturn. In preparation, a 3km-long flood defence has been installed, designed to protect lower Lancaster against all except 1-in-500-year floods. It is a bold person who will predict the effect of climate change on sea levels in 500 years time.