

LANCASTER'S URBAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATABASE: A NOTE

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The database

The Urban Archaeological Database for Lancaster is a publicly-available compilation of archaeological and historical data for Lancaster, presented as a graphic output in a GIS format. Our knowledge of the archaeology of any city has been built up over centuries, item by item, find by find. The information may be a discovery from an excavation, a monument, a document or a drawing, painting or photograph. The information will be scattered across publications (some easily available, others obscure), or it will be held in finds' stores, museums or galleries. In short, it is difficult, particularly for the non-specialist, to get a general overview of a place's heritage. Creating an urban archaeological database was a response by English Heritage (now Historic England) to these problems of accessibility and integration. These databases were created for what were deemed to be the 30 most important historic towns and cities in England, and each displays a range of information about a place's archaeology using a digital map to locate the finds and monuments.

In the UK, each English county has compiled a Historic Environment Record (<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/CHR/>) and this was one of the sources of information that went to create Lancaster's Urban Archaeological Database (UAD). Other sources included historical documents (including old maps), LiDAR, ground photography, engravings and paintings, aerial photographs, excavation archives (those published were examined), soil cores, ground surveys and museum archives. Together these represent the most definitive record of the town's archaeology. For Lancaster 554 'monuments' were identified and recorded.

By geo-referencing each item, they can all be displayed on a digital map of the city within a Geographic Information System (GIS). The Lancaster UAD, one of the few freely available, can be found at <http://lancasteruad.oxfordarchaeology.com/>. It was created by the staff at Oxford Archaeology North who are based in Lancaster, on behalf of Lancaster City Council. There is a default base map for the city centre from OpenStreetMap, which can be replaced by, or superimposed upon, a historic map of the city: the Ordnance Survey's First 25-inch map of 1890; the Docton/Kuerden map of 1684/5; Mackreth's map of 1778; Clarke's map of 1807; or Baines's of 1824; or even a rubber-sheeted version of Speed's map of 1607/10, albeit accessible only from the primary GIS.

You can select which categories of item to show – 'digs and surveys' and/or 'paintings and drawings' – and items can be selected from five historical periods from 'Prehistoric' to 'Post-medieval'. There is a search facility. The information will appear as coloured dots or polygons, and by clicking on a dot a pop-up box will open providing further information. The scale of the map can be altered by zooming in or out, using either the + or – buttons on the screen or by rotating the wheel on your mouse. The area is pre-1800 Lancaster from Ryelands Park in the north to the Royal Lancaster Infirmary in the south, and from Fairfield Road in the west to Ullswater Road in the east.

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