

CHINA STREET AND ITS LANCASTER ARCHITECTS

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Abstract

The widening of China Lane in the later 1890s required the demolition of many old buildings. This created opportunities for Lancaster architects to design the replacements that we see today. This paper introduces these architects – many less well known – and their work in China Street and elsewhere.

Introduction

Clark (2022) has described how Lancaster Borough debated the need to improve China Lane in the early 1890s and carried out the work in the later 1890s. The project not only widened a very narrow street but also removed many very old buildings that were in a poor state. The project was also intended to improve the social profile of an area which had been stigmatised for many years for its rowdiness and criminality. The scheme involved the demolition of the west side of the street and several properties on the east side. This created an opportunity for local architects and builders to replace the demolished properties of China Lane with new ones on what was renamed China Street, visually enhancing the area and attracting new businesses and income for the Borough and landowners.

Most new buildings required local-government permission before they could be built. The developer would submit a plan of the proposed building to the Borough which, on the recommendation of the Borough Surveyor, would grant or withhold permission to build. If plans were initially rejected, they were often resubmitted quickly with sufficient amendments to secure approval second time round. The deposited plans still exist at Lancashire Archives in Preston, catalogue reference MBLA/ACC5167. This source allows the construction of a timeline of the new buildings and the changes to those older ones which survived as China Street was filled in over the next 40 years.

An illustrated timeline of new and altered buildings on China Street

Here is a timeline of the principal applications and approvals for the buildings, new and surviving, on China Street, as recorded in the plans in Lancashire Archives (MBLA/ACC5167). This source records the year each application was submitted. The building's construction and opening were later.

1891 In September and October John Hartley gained approval to rebuild and add to the Bay Horse public house (later the Castle Hotel and later still renamed again) on the east side of the road (Figure 3). This was despite the discussions on the widening of the road.

1895 The Lord Nelson Hotel was rebuilt by James Hull and Sons on the west side of the road (two plans in July and September were approved). The public house had been built by 1897 but had closed by 1901. The site was taken over by Thomas Atkinson, the tea and coffee merchant (Figure 4).

1895 Thomas Barrow planned to alter his premises and he also built a stable, coach house and warehouse in September but the same plan was resubmitted in October for Mrs Parkinson and approved. It was probably on the west side of China Lane, subsequently cleared in the road widening.

1896 The first substantial new-build was on the south-west corner of China Street, replacing the Feathers Hotel, which closed in 1895. The 'Castle Chambers' shops and photographic studios were erected after November, designed by Harrison Hall and Moore for the builder and contractor, Robert Thompson. They are in a typically late-Victorian commercial "Wrenaissance" style (Figures 1 & 2). The date stone records 1897.

1897 The Bay Horse Inn (Castle Hotel) rebuilding plan was again proposed in April by William Yates of the Castle Brewery in Manchester. He had purchased the Inn from J S Ducksbury, the owner of many local hotels. Approval was given and it was inspected on completion in May 1899 (Figure 3).

1899 Robert Thompson planned to make three shops and offices etc. at 37–43 China Street for James Lockhart (the landlord of the Castle Hotel), adjoining the hotel, in February 1899. One house and shop was inspected on completion in September.



Figs 1 & 2 Castle Chambers – shops, offices and photographic studio above



Fig. 3 The former Castle Hotel Fig. 4 Premises of Thomas Atkinson

1902 Thomas Atkinson proposed to convert the former Lord Nelson Inn (on the west side) into lock-up premises intending to cover-in the yard, etc. Approval was given in October (Figure 4).

1905 At the “Old Spink Bull” – the site of the former Spink Bull inn which closed in 1901 – the kitchen floor was raised and a bathroom and toilet were added for D Kirkbride, designed by Harrison Hall and Moore and approved in October. The plan was amended in December for M Kirkbride, a family member of the property firm.



Fig. 5 Jubilee Hall



Fig. 6 The YMCA building and extension



Fig. 7 The Black Bull Hotel



Fig. 8 Boot-repairing workshop

1907 The plans of the new YMCA building designed by Spencer Ellwood Barrow were submitted in September for the Trustees of the YMCA and were built along with provision for further expansion (Figure 6). It is in an Arts and Crafts style. The stone above the front entrance records 1908 in Art Nouveau lettering.

1908 The widening of China Lane into China Street left the Black Bull Hotel on a corner site of China Street and Church Street. Harrison Hall and Moore prepared rebuilding plans for the brewer, William Mitchell in February (Figure 7). The architectural style is Edwardian Baroque.

1909 In June a plan by James Alfred Seward was approved to replace the aborted plan of 1899 by Robert Thompson for James Lockhart at 37–43 China Street. Abraham Seward and Co (whose premises extended from Market St along Sun St adjoining the four houses on China Lane) had his grandson John Alfred Seward produce plans to convert three houses into lock-up shops, offices and storerooms.

1911 Plans were submitted by W Mitchell for M F Kirkbride for a surgery, office and shed, and were approved in February.

1913 A workshop for the Office Supply Company was designed by R E Jackson, submitted and approved in March. The building was demolished in 1956.

1914 to 1925 Very little building activity took place in this period.

1925 The prolific architect Reginald W Jackson of 43 Church Street designed the “boot-repairing workshop” on the corner of China St and Castle Hill for the Lancaster and District Co-operative Society; approved in February. It is in a simple modern style (Figure 8) He also surveyed the Black Bull for William Mitchell at a later date.

1932 Harrison and Moore submitted plans to extend Mr G Simons’ veterinary office and kennels, approved in June. The above practice made further plans in November and December. Both approved.

1933 The Corporation asked Austin and Paley to plan a diversion of drains, approved in November.

1933 Mr Simons’ plans (Harrison and Moore) to convert his veterinary operating theatre into a bed-sitting room were not approved.

1934 A plan for Mr W Wiggins to convert two old cottages into one shop was allowed in December.

1935 & 1936 A plan for a Hall – later the Jubilee Hall – designed by Robert James Skilling was rejected in June but all the later plans in 1935 and 1936 were approved. The Hall was on the west side of the street between the coffee shop of Thomas Atkinson and the office of George Hardcastle Petty, the estate agent. It was the project of the Lancaster Brotherhood Society. A simple ‘moderne’ neo-Georgian style imitates the local older buildings but with pyramid roofs on the wings (Figure 5).

1935 A plan for shops and offices in the YMCA building of 1907 were approved, E J Harrison being the architect (Figure 6).

1936 Plans for a Parish, Church or Priory Hall were deposited in January, March, and July and approved. Initially deposited under the name of the Rev. Cannon Pollard, the designs were by Austin and Paley. The planning had started in 1933 (Brandwood 2012, 255). The style is a stripped back ‘moderne’ of the Liverpool type (Figures 9 & 10). The foundation stone records 1936.

1937 R J Skilling planned an extension to the kitchen of the Jubilee Hall for the Brotherhood’s Trustees (Figure 5).

1937 E J Harrison planned internal alterations to his office at 35 China Street; approved in April.

1937 Also in April Mr Harrison reconstructed 37–43 China Street (adjacent to his office at 35) after an extensive fire, on behalf of the Misses Seward of Claughton Old Rectory near Caton. The late eighteenth-century origins of this building are visible at the first and second floor levels (Figure 11).

1937 In October Austin and Paley secured plan approval to place a glass roof above the entrance to the Church/Parish Hall (Figure 9).



Fig. 9 Parish Hall



Fig. 10 Priory Hall

1940 A reconfiguration of the Black Bull Hotel for the executors of William Mitchell by R W Jackson was approved in October (Figure 7).

1942 E J Harrison planned to convert his suite of offices at No. 35 into a temporary flat on the second floor; allowed in February.

1942 H A Thomas of Bradford Yorkshire made plans for a hostel and bridge to the games room for the trustees of the YMCA; it was approved in April (Figure 6).

1950 Alterations and a fire escape for the Castle Hotel were planned for Yates's Castle Hotel drawn up by C G Middleton of E Middleton and T M Jones and passed in November.

1950 In December alterations for a tearoom for J Atkinson were approved. William Huddleston and Son of Back Sefton Road Morecambe were the builders. An earlier plan by J Atkinson had been withdrawn.



Fig. 11 (left) East side of China Lane, nos 37–43 in the mid-1890s, their first and second floors being recognisable today.



Fig. 11 (right) East side of China Street, nos 37–43 in 2019.

The Lancaster Architects of China Street

Austin and Paley are the best-known of the Lancaster-based architects who designed new buildings for China Street (Brandwood 2012; Price 1998). This multi-generational firm had been the town's best-known architectural practice for many years. On China Street they designed the Priory (Parish/Church)

Hall for St Mary's Priory Church, this being one of the practice's later commissions. The firm designed over 80 buildings in Lancaster including St Peter's Cathedral, the Lancaster and Skerton Co-operative's main shop (Church Street and New Street), the Storey Institute and St Paul's Church, Scotforth.

Harrison Hall and Moore c.1863–c.1970s was a long-established architectural practice in Lancaster at 73 Church Street. The original partners were Michael Mattinson Harrison (1842–1931), Richard Inglis Hall (1851–1920) and Isaac Moore (1858–1940), the elder brother of the stained-glass artist Thomas Leeming Moore (of Lambert and Moore). They were responsible for five projects in China Street, the best buildings being the Castle Chambers and the Black Bull Hotel. Elsewhere in Lancaster during the Edwardian period they produced many houses in the Ashfield and Fairfield areas among others, and the new hotels/pubs for Mitchell's Brewery in Bowerham, Moorlands and Greaves.

Spencer Ellwood Barrow (1873–1915) was born in Lancaster into an extensive local family. He was a pupil of Frank West Rich of Newcastle upon Tyne (the birthplace of his mother) and he established an architect's office in Bank Chambers, Market Street, Lancaster. A bachelor, he lived at the home he designed in 1908 for his parents, 'Yewgarth' in Haverbreaks. He designed the YMCA building on China Street. Other local work included several commissions on Haverbreaks, the Friends Hall on Fenton Street, the Hippodrome Cinema on Dalton Square and the layout of Hall Park in Scotforth. He was invalided in action and died of his wounds in St Thomas' Hospital London in 1915.

Edward James Harrison of Lancaster (1907–97) was the only architect to have his offices on China Street (No. 35). His main contribution to the street was the restoration of Nos 37–43 after a fire in 1937, and he had to rebuild his office at No.35. He was very active in the 1930s with many commissions for mostly semi-detached houses in the Vale, Cross Hill, Torrisholme, Ryelands and Scale Hall areas. He moved his practice to Rotherham and died in Yorkshire. His parents occupied the Lodge at Haverbreaks.

Reginald William Jackson was originally from Weymouth in Dorset (1882–1950) where his father was an architect. He became an architectural assistant at the practice of Harrison, Hall and Moore, as did his elder brother, when he came to Lancaster in 1903. Following the First World War R W Jackson established an independent architectural practice at 43 Church Street which took commissions from many of the clients with whom he had worked when with his previous employer. His other important client was the Lancaster and District Co-operative Society – he replaced Paley and Austin (Austin and Paley) – and designed the Society's boot-repairing workshop on China Street.

John Alfred Seward (1853–1931) was born in Lancaster in 1853 and moved with his father and family to Ashton-on-Ribble, Preston, where he qualified as an architect. John Alfred's uncle had started the stained-glass branch of his father's firm, which became one of Lancaster's more famous companies. He was often asked by Abraham Seward and Company and other members of his family to design buildings for them. His relatives, the Misses Seward of Caton, asked him to draw up plans to insert shop premises into three of the four old houses (which were built originally as a mansion house) which they owned on the east side of China Street adjacent to the Castle Hotel. The Seward property in the area stretched from 44–45 Market St to Sun Street and the 'Music Room'.

Robert John Skilling (1883–1952) was born at Carlisle, where his father, Andrew a blacksmith, had arrived from Scotland, subsequently moving to Lancaster. R J Skilling worked for many years for Lancashire County Council at Preston before establishing his own practice at 88 King Street, Lancaster. He designed Jubilee Hall on China Street for the Trustees of the Lancaster Brotherhood Society between 1935 and 1937. His extensive career included over 100 plans for houses in Lancaster and many minor town-centre works. He died in Bentham in 1952.

H A Thomas was a Bradford architect who was called in by the Trustees of the YMCA in 1942 to extend the original 1907 building – a rare wartime civil commission because the building had been taken over for war work. Little more is known about him.

Thomas Barrow, the second son of John Barrow a Lancaster draper, lived in Baldrand, a villa built in the grounds of his brother's Bowerham House. Between 1873 and 1898 he submitted 28 building plans to Lancaster Borough, while remaining in the family drapery business. They were mostly small commissions for cottages, houses, warehouses, offices and shops in the town centre or Bowerham. Two plans were for premises in China Street in 1895 towards the end of his modest architectural career.

James Lockhart built houses and worked as a publican. He asked Robert Thompson to build shops and offices at 39 to 43 China Street – only No. 43 materialised as a house and shop. In July 1899 his plan to build 21 houses on Brunton Road (originally Dog Kennel Lane) was approved and built piecemeal and the houses were inspected throughout 1900. His interest in China Street was short-lived

Robert Thompson was born at Cartmel in Furness, the son of a stone mason. The family lived in a cottage by the gates of Holker Hall. He moved to Lancaster in 1888 and in 1889 he became a builder and contractor, marrying in 1892 and living at 13 Dalton Square. He built a large house for his family at 'Slyndales' where he died in 1931. His large building and contracting business continued after his death, including the Odeon Cinemas in Lancaster and Morecambe. His earliest cinema was The Picturedrome in Lower Church Street for James Atroy. He is noted for two schemes in China Street – the prominent Castle Chambers (1896) with the purpose-built photographic studios overlooking the Castle Hotel, and a house and shop for James Lockhart (1899).

Discussion

It took around 40 years to build up both sides of the new China Street. This was the work of many architects, some well known for their many works in Lancaster and beyond, and others largely forgotten. They have given us the range of architectural styles we see today, wider than found in most streets in Lancaster. Recently there have been a number of refurbishments to the buildings of China Street, often to convert them for student accommodation.

Author profile

Colin Stansfield was born in Manchester and is a resident Freeman in Lancaster. He is a retired civil servant. His interest is mainly in the architects working in North-West England between 1751 and 1951. He is a life member (and one of the founders) of the 20th Century Society. Email: colinstansfield970@gmail.com

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