
CHAPTER 7

The Design and Organisation of Houses: 1740 to 1800

Surviving houses dating from after c. 1740 outnumber those in the earlier period by two to one. By this date, the centre of Whitehaven, the only part where buildings still remain, had already been parcelled out in private ownership although, as Matthias Read's painting of 1736 indicates, much of it still contained gardens of empty plots. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, the building boom of the 1730s and 1740s in Brackenthwaite had its counterpart in the more established parts of town where, particularly from about 1740, much of the vacant land was sold and built upon. In addition, many earlier houses were rebuilt, updated, enlarged or divided into several occupations. The majority of houses in the surviving central area are thus of the mid and late 18th century.

In Chapter 6, small houses were discussed first and larger ones later because the small houses were both more numerous and more typical of the regional character of the town. The relationship between one or two-cell houses with stone newel stairs and great merchants' dwellings was minimal. But, in the later 18th century, the differences between larger and smaller houses are less distinct. The regional character of the smaller houses is less striking; they have more in common with small urban dwellings throughout the country, and many of them may be seen as reduced versions of their larger neighbours. For this reason the order of the previous chapter has been reversed and large houses are here discussed first.

LARGE HOUSES

By the middle of the century, the number of large plots available in the town had declined and no plots were granted of the size that Senhouse, Feryes and Lutwidge had obtained earlier. Many wealthy men made do with premises erected by their predecessors, but some were still able to acquire relatively large sites: the three largest surviving houses of the mid to late 18th century, 43/44 Duke Street [Pl 72, Fig 16], 14 Scotch Street [Pl 25, Fig 62] and 80 Lowther Street [Pl 88] were built on plots 25 yds, 21 yds and 19 yds

wide respectively. The buildings were basically double pile and three cells wide. Unlike the earlier houses, they have no surviving evidence of contemporary and non-domestic wings projecting forwards, but both the Duke Street and Scotch Street houses had rear wings of domestic function, and a slightly later rear wing was added to 80 Lowther Street. This did not, however, mean that the domestic accommodation was necessarily greater than in earlier houses, for 14 Scotch Street and 80 Lowther Street were only two storeys high, a notable feature in Whitehaven where buildings were predominantly of three storeys. No 43/44 Duke Street had three storeys, and other houses of three storeys with double-pile plans and three cells across the front were 17 Irish Street [Fig 44], which was built slightly earlier than the others in the group, and 141/142 Queen Street [Fig 54].

Not all Whitehaven's wealthy could obtain wide plots, or wanted three-cell dwellings, and several finely detailed houses were built with only two cells across the front. Nos 1 [Pl 73] and 2 Lowther Street were reduced versions of 14 Scotch Street and 80 Lowther Street, only two storeys high, whereas 79 Lowther Street [Pl 86, Fig 18], 10 Roper Street [Fig 59] and 2 College Street [Fig 34] had the more normal three storeys. All were of double-pile plan with central entrance and staircase and two rooms to each side. To these may be added 42 Queen Street [Pl 89, Fig 52], now reduced in width on the ground floor, and 30 Roper Street [Pl 74, Fig 17], which likewise had four rooms to a floor but was entered from the side.

The owners of most of these houses were among Whitehaven's most prominent inhabitants, and the majority of them required stabling for horses at the back. Several of the plots were wider than the original house or were corner sites, leaving room for a way through to the rear, while at 1 and 2 Lowther Street a carriageway passed between and beneath the houses, each of which had part of the accommodation above. However, one or two of the smaller examples such as 10 Roper Street and 2 College Street, are set slightly apart from the other double-pile houses by lack of access to the rear.

Whatever their size, most of these houses were built for merchants and gentlemen. Unlike the earlier buildings, none of the merchants' houses has surviving warehouse wings, although it is clear that their owners, usually in the tobacco trade, would have required warehousing. The merchant, Henry Littledale, of 14 Scotch Street, had 5 yds vacant beside his house which is shown on the 1790 map [Pl 9] with a long range of building running back from the street; this was replaced by a domestic wing in 1861. At 42 Queen Street, John Lewthwaite, merchant, had a 4-yd space to the side of his house which likewise contained a long building in 1790, now demolished. Possibly both ranges were warehouses.

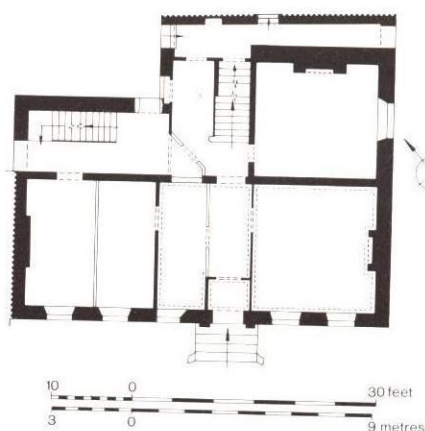


Fig 16 43/44 Duke Street



Pl 72 43/44 Duke Street

In other cases, warehouses were detached. Edward Tubman, merchant, of 80 Lowther Street owned a separate plot at Lons 6 Catherine Street and the surviving warehouse on the site may be the same as was there in 1774.¹ James Spedding, Lowther's agent, who built 30 Roper Street c. 1745, bought an adjoining plot, Lons 26 Roper Street, in 1775; today, this is the site of Stout's warehouse [Pl 74], probably of late 18th-century date with a small, heated counting-house on the first floor.² Further, the cellars at 30 Roper Street were formerly reached by a wide doorway from the pavement now blocked, and had a wide archway between the two unheated front compartments, so they may have been used for storage.

Merchants and men of business not only required warehouses but, as discussed in the previous chapter, often needed offices within their houses from which to conduct their business. Evidence of such offices is difficult to obtain, for later conversion to wholly domestic or wholly business premises has tended to obscure previous arrangements. The houses with three-cell frontages may have been used differently from the smaller dwellings. The 1736 painting suggests that 17 Irish Street, belonging at that time to John Tiffin, gentleman, had a second entrance doorway. The ground and first floors [Fig 41] have been greatly altered and the whole house refenestrated, but the cellars retain evidence of the original division into three heated rooms. The main entrance was probably into a hall opposite the staircase, and the second doorway opened into the room at the far end. This could have been separately occupied, but it may have given access to an office. Illustrations of merchant and gentry houses around the 18th-century maps



Pl 73 1 Lowther Street

of Manchester, Leeds and York include several dwellings with two entrances.³ Sometimes, these led to two independent dwellings; in others, an entrance at the end of the façade may have provided service access; but occasionally, as in a house in Micklegate, York, one doorway seems to have opened into a small, heated room which led nowhere.⁴ It is possible that this, like 17 Irish Street in Whitehaven, was an office.

Most people in Whitehaven, as elsewhere, had no second front doorway, so any separation of business and domestic accommodation was achieved internally. Architectural drawings in a collection from Kings Weston give us some insight into how such arrangements were handled in the 1720s. Three of the drawings are for merchants' houses.⁵ They indicate that, if the house was large enough, a front room to one side of the entrance hall was called the 'compter' and was entered close to the front doorway. In drawing No 98, 'design of a house for a merchant', of 1724, the rear room on this side was easily reached from the front room and was called the 'private parlour'. A manuscript, bound at the back of the volume of drawings, relates to

this drawing and states, first, that the large entrance vestibule was to be used 'for the Conveniency of Common people attending till they can be spoken to, or Strangers Servants to wait in'; second, that the compter should be close to the vestibule so that 'People of Business may not have far to go', and third that, in the private parlour beyond the back stairs, 'the Master may treat with any Dealer, or drink a glass with a Friend without disturbing the Family'. The rooms on the other side of the vestibule were a parlour and withdrawing room for family use. Warehouses and 'offices' (ie services) lay at the rear of the house.⁶

An unexecuted plan for the Red House, Appleby, built in 1717 for Lord Thanet's steward, identifies the room functions and the plan as built differs little in the main details. A large and unheated entrance hall, called the lobby, opened between the smoking-room and the dining-room. It may have served as a waiting-room for the office and clerk's closet which lay at the rear of the house, although these could also be reached more directly from a back doorway. A second Appleby plan, for the White House, rebuilt in 1754 for the agent of Sir James Lowther of Maulds Meaburn,



Pl 74 Stout's six-storey warehouse and 30 Roper Street on the corner of Roper and Scotch Streets

The first edition Ordnance Survey map of Whitehaven in 1863 suggests that a few back-to-back houses may have been built. A group of six appear to be illustrated at Mount Pleasant, another group on Peter Street near Union Terrace, and others at Key Place and at Robinson's Fold on Queen Street. None survives but they are suggested by the arrangement on the map of two attached houses whose side boundaries directly line up.

SERVICES IN MID 18TH-CENTURY HOUSES

In the early 18th century, many houses, even quite large ones, used the main room as the kitchen. The probate inventories show that 101 Duke Street, 34/34A Church Street and 143 Queen Street had hall/kitchens, even though the latter two had three ground-floor rooms. Separate rooms for kitchens at the time were the prerogative of only the wealthiest men. Where they existed, probate inventories and surviving evidence suggest that they usually occupied ground-floor rooms. Only in a couple of cases is there possible evidence for basement kitchens, and the only evidence for detached kitchens lies in the 1736 painting which illustrates a number of small, heated, single-storey buildings in backyards whose use is unknown.

In the later 18th century, the majority of people probably still had no specialised kitchens and cooked in the main room. But, as the century progressed, increasingly modest houses began to show signs of a separate kitchen. Until the 1740s, most larger houses still had ground-floor kitchens, as at 151 Queen Street [Fig 13] in the 1730s, the house in Golden Lion Court [Fig 11] in c. 1740, and James Spedding's house at 30 Roper Street [Fig 17] in c. 1745. But, from about 1740, basement kitchens became more common.

As discussed by Isaac Ware in 1768, most London houses had cellar kitchens which he found unacceptable if below ground, but a commodious way of building if the ground floor were raised above a well-lit and well-aired basement.¹⁴ Indeed, he would probably have approved the arrangement of 1 Lowther Street [Pl 73], 23/24 Roper Street [Pl 77] and 43 Queen Street [Fig 53] where the house was set back so that the basement windows opened into substantial areas. But most houses lay flush with the street front and had only narrow areas projecting into the street to light the basement windows. The majority of these have subsequently been filled in, wholly or partly blocking the windows. This, together with the dampness of many cellars, has resulted in cellar kitchens being later abandoned. Only a few survive, like that at 30 Church Street, which retains a handsome built-in dresser [Pl 80].

Identifying the position of a kitchen is not always easy, and some houses obviously had more than one. This is clear even from the probate inventories where 16 inventories between 1680 and 1730 describe houses with a house or hall and a kitchen, and 10 dating between 1704 and 1736 have kitchens and back kitchens.¹⁵ The first group occur mainly in inventories belonging to gentlemen and people with goods valued at more than £100 and it is likely that



Pl 80 30 Church Street, dresser in cellar kitchen

the house or hall was not usually used for cooking. Inventories in the second group specifically refer to two kitchens. This practice, already in existence in the early 18th century, increased as the century progressed. At 17 Irish Street, built in the 1730s, two fireplaces with attached ovens survive in two of the cellar rooms; and in 1783 the house was advertised to let with various amenities, including a back kitchen which was presumably in the yard. John Bragg of 147 Queen Street mentions in his journal that his back kitchen was built in 1769, implying that he already had a kitchen, even if it was only the main room of the house. In 1784, 134 Queen Street was advertised with a cellar kitchen and a back kitchen; in 1785, 144 Queen Street had a back kitchen; and at 151 Queen Street, where the main kitchen of c. 1733 lay on the ground floor, a back kitchen across the yard was illustrated on the plan of 1815.

Since kitchen fireplaces were not always of great size, it is difficult to be certain from the surviving evidence whether detached kitchens were the only kitchens to a house, or were back kitchens of the type mentioned above. Some houses may have been built with a single detached kitchen, as at 41 Irish Street [Fig 43], an early 18th-century house enlarged later in the century. The cellar is unheated, the stack in the rear room is slight and the status of the owner suggests he would require the ground-floor room for his personal or business use. It is likely, therefore, that in the late 18th century the detached kitchen was the main kitchen of the house. Other examples of original detached kitchens which survived until recently were at 10, 11 and 12 Howgill Street [Fig 40] and 33 and 34 Scotch Street [Fig 28].

A further complication arises because some houses were divided into several occupations and two kitchens were therefore required to serve two families. At 31 Duke Street

no chimney-stacks and contained warehouse in 1850. E wing contained stables in 1850, with heated chambers above.

Site Lons 24 Duke Street, 45 yds front, 90 yds back, granted 27 July 1708 to Mr William Feryes, merchant (CRO D/Lons/W/BG/Duke Street, 13/8). He died 19 Aug 1710 and will of 27 June 1710 mentions his 'new house' (LRO WRW C 24 Oct 1710) which later sources estimated as costing £2,400 (PRO E134/4 Geo II Hil 12 and 14). By 1752, owned by John Gale, Esq (CRO D/Lons/W Rentals/6, 1752), empty in 1762, but taxed on 26 windows in the 1770 Window Tax. After further sales (deeds with Brockbank, Tyson and Co), bought in 1850 by trustees of Port, Harbour and Town of Whitehaven (CBC Deeds 1) and refurbished by William Barnes in 1851.

GEORGE STREET

Nos 71/72 Three storeys and cellar, double-fronted on corner site, built against contemporary double-depth house on Scotch Street [Pl 78, Fig 25], late 18th century. Gabled façade with central entry into stair hall and room to either side. Kitchen in basement. Restricted site meant lateral stacks in order to back on to those of 35 Scotch Street. Dog-leg stair with closed string, square section balusters and Tuscan newels. Later divided into two dwellings.

Site part of plot 45 yds front, 9 yds 6 in back along Scotch Street, granted 5 Dec 1775 to Mrs Frances Harrison, widow (CRO D/Lons/W/BG/George Street/15/5). There were no Lons numbers at this time. In 1798, owned and occupied by John Harrison with a tenant on site (PRO 1R 23/12 f140).

HOWGILL STREET

Nos 2, 3, 4, 5. Four houses of three storeys, single-cell [Pl 20, Fig 39], c.1740. In varying stages of alteration and decay but in each the entrance was originally directly into room away from stack and projecting stair-turret at rear. No 4 has doorcase with scrolled pediment [Pl 32]. Later addition at rear.

Site part of Lons 21 Irish Street, 11 yds front, 30 yds back, granted 16 Oct 1734 to Jane Lemon, widow 1743 Cumulative Rent Book f48. Plot divided by 1741 and this part owned by

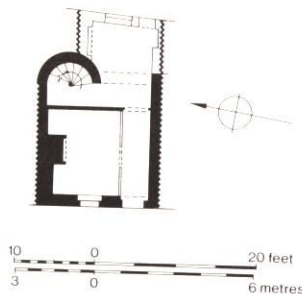


Fig 39 4 Howgill Street

John Richardson, carpenter. Buildings illustrated on March 1742 block plan (CRO D/Lons/W/BG/Howgill Street, 21/4). In the 1762 Census f33, No 2 occupied by Richardson, others by carpenter and two sailors.

Nos 10, 11 Two houses of three storeys and cellars, single-width, double-depth [Pl 21, Fig 40], 1762–70. Handed plans with entrance passages leading to rear stairs. Cellars unheated. Shared external passage within No 11 leads to yards with detached kitchens. Dog-leg stairs have turned balusters and carved cheeks to risers. Doorways have triangular pediments on consoles.

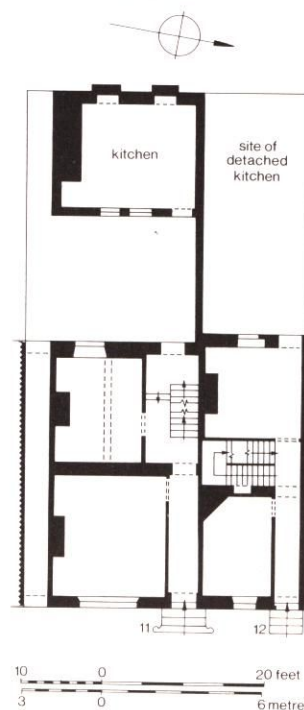


Fig 40 11 and 12 Howgill Street

Site part of Lons 4 Howgill Street, 18 yds front, 31 yds back, granted 7 July 1742 to William Graham, merchant (CRO D/Lons/W/BG/Howgill Street, 21/5). Houses not built by the 1762 Census. By the 1770 Window Tax divided into two tenancies and each paid tax on 10 windows.

No 12 Three storeys and cellar, single-width, double-depth [Pl 21, Fig 40], 1762–70. Restricted plot resulted in corner fireplace to narrow front room and central transverse stair. Unheated cellar, evidence of detached kitchen in yard.

Site part of Lons 4 Howgill Street, *see* Nos 10, 11.

IRISH STREET

No 17 Three storeys and cellar, double-depth, three rooms (13½ yds) wide [Fig 41]; built of brick 1730–6. Interior altered and façade refenestrated and rendered 19th century. Original layout deduced from cellar and Matthias Read

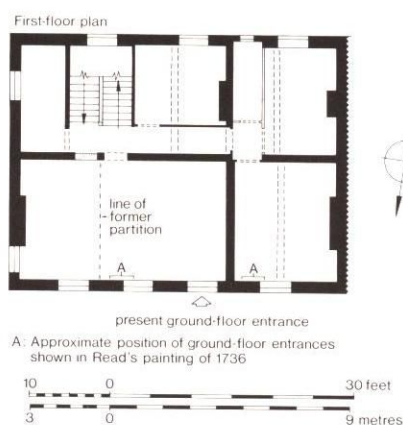


Fig 41 17 Irish Street

painting of 1736. Three fireplaces in cellar suggests that all three front rooms were heated; main doorway probably opened into central room opposite stair. Painting shows five-bay façade (now four) and suggests second doorway opened into W room. Cellar has two fireplaces with ovens, of uncertain date but probably indicating basement kitchen from start. No original detail survives on upper floors except closed-string staircase with boarded-in balusters.

Site part of Lons 18 Irish Street which occupies irregular area beside Holy Trinity churchyard, 35 yds 1 ft front, granted 20 Mar 1718/19 to Carlisle Spedding, gentleman (CRO D/Lons/W/BG/Irish Street, 22/9). In June 1730, referred to as 'ground of John Tiffin of Cockermouth, gentleman'; in June 1740, as 'house late of Mr Tiffin' (deeds, Whitehaven Library, 18 Irish Street). From the 1741 Rental onwards, known as 'Minister's house' in Rent Books, owned in the 1762 Census f35 by Revd Thomas Sewel and occupied, at least between 1762–80, by Revd Thomas Spedding, second son of Carlisle. Taxed on 18 windows, 1770 Window Tax. In 1783, advertised to let as 'genteel dwelling house' containing 'several good lodging rooms, two parlours, a back kitchen and every necessary convenience' (Cumberland Pacquet, 12 Aug 1783).

No 18 Three storeys and cellar, double-fronted with rear wing and stair-turret [Pl 48, Fig 42], 1730–6. Central entrance originally opened into larger E room. W room has panelled cupboard [Pl 40] built over external side passage and fireplace whose flue arches over passage to gable stack. Room at rear also heated but fireplace small and late, so may be added; large fireplace in E cellar suggests this may have been kitchen before cellar turned to separate occupation. Bolection-moulded fireplaces in W room on first floor [Pl 45] and E room on second floor. Three two-light mullioned windows on second floor. Formerly detached and heated outbuilding in backyard may have been detached kitchen.

Site part of Lons 18 Irish Street, see No 17. This part, 9 yds front, 40 yds back, purchased 10 June 1730 by Thomas Ritson, glazier (deeds, Whitehaven Library, 18 Irish Street).

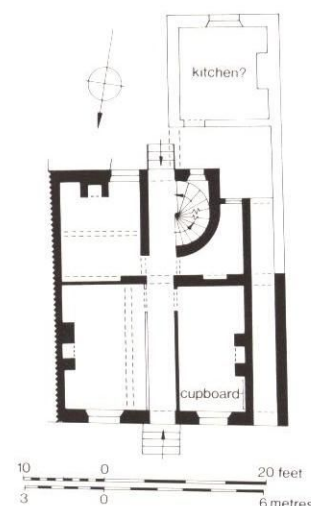


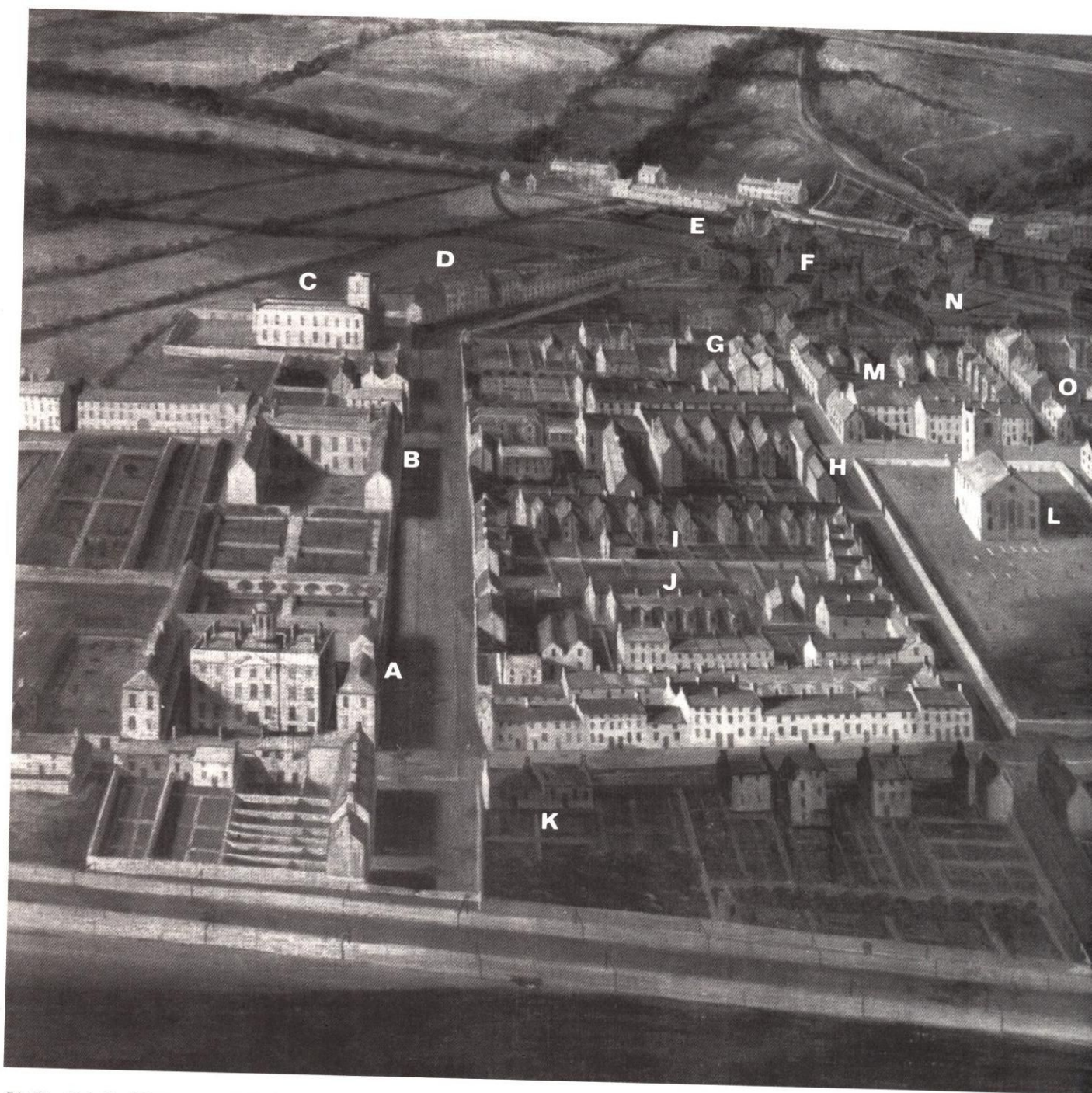
Fig 42 18 Irish Street

House illustrated in Read painting, 1736. In the 1762 Census f35, owner/occupier Thomas Ritson, plumber, with labourer in cellar. His widow taxed on 7 windows 1770 Window Tax. In 1779, described as 'one large double three-storey stone messuage . . . or dwelling house' with 'a small house in the back yard annexed thereto with the kitchen, cellar or cellars . . .' (deeds, as above).

Nos 34, 35 Two houses of three storeys and cellars, single-cell [Pl 19], c.1735. Fronts are brick, rendered. Arranged as mirror-image pair with entrances next to central external passage within No 34, away from stacks and projecting stair-turrets. Various brick and stone additions at rear which formed separate dwellings.

Site Lons 19 Irish Street, 11 yds front, 30 yds back, granted 14 Oct 1734 to Henry Hutchinson, plasterer (CRO D/Lons/W/BG/Irish Street, 22/18). On 29 Nov 1734, Spedding wrote 'Hayton and Hutchⁿ. are going on with Each 2 Houses in Irish Street . . . They Build their Fronts of Brick, wch looks very Neat, is much liked & will be follow'd by most of our future Buildings' (CRO D/Lons/W2/1/76/29 Nov 1734). Divided in two, 1741 Rental. In the 1762 Census f36, No 34 owned and occupied by Joshua Rogers, joiner, with sailor in back house; No 35 owned and occupied by John Wilson, sailor, with sailor and widow in two back houses.

No 41 Three storeys, c.1742, enlarged 1760s with cellar under [Fig 43]. Straight joint in stonework of carriageway and former roof-line visible in attic indicate originally double-fronted house probably served by projecting newel stair; cupboard with scrolled pediment [Pl 42] reset in rear range. In 1760s, altered to make carriageway through to rear. W front room turned to entrance hall and carriageway, rear range added with back room and new staircase with open string, simple carved cheeks to risers and clustered newel inlaid with ivory star on handrail [Pl 84]. Cellar unheated and detached kitchen and outbuildings probably erected at this time.



Pl 58 Detail of Prospect of Whitehaven from Brackenthwaite by Matthias Read, 1736 (reproduced courtesy Whitehaven Museum)

- A Cupola, Lons 24 Duke Street
- B Lutwidge Mansion, Lons 52 Lowther Street
- C Holy Trinity Church
- D Thomas Spedding's house, 17 Irish Street, Lons 18
- E 44/45 Irish Street, Lons 7 Irish Street

- F 151/152 Queen Street, Lons 36 Queen Street
- G John Gilpin's house, Lons 43B Queen Street
- H Robert Gregs's house, Lons 4 Lowther Street
- I Houses with rear wings, Schoolhouse Lane
- J Houses with rear stair-turrets