

Huddersfield Heritage



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|--|------------------------------|
| 1 - St George's Square | 9 - The Riding School |
| 2 - Estate Buildings | 10 - Lawrence Batley Theatre |
| 3 - Market Place | 11 - Parish Church |
| 4 - Brick Buildings | 12 - Beast Market |
| 5 - Former Temperance Hotel (M&S site) | 13 - Byram Street |
| 6 - The Town Hall | 14 - Old George Inn |
| 7 - Former Examiner offices | 15 - Mechanics' Institution |
| 8 - Library & Art Gallery | 16 - Former Wholesale Market |
| | 17 - Former Booth's factory |



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A town centre trail

Introduction

Huddersfield's first parish church was established on its present site in about 1100, although the settlement around the church was no more than a village until the late 18th century. The present town centre is almost entirely a product of commercial and industrial development since that time. This leaflet offers a walking tour of the main features of historical and architectural interest in the town centre. It has been prepared jointly by Huddersfield Civic Society and Huddersfield Local History Society, with funding and support from Kirklees Council.

1 - St George's Square

The Square is the centrepiece of the Victorian 'new town' and dates from the 1850s. The focal point is the Railway Station (1846-50), a grade 1 listed building described by one architectural journalist as "more of a palace than a station, a kind of stately home with trains in". The architect was James Pigott Pritchett ('Pritchett of York') and the builder was Joseph Kaye, responsible for many of the town's Georgian and Victorian buildings.

Clockwise from the station are:

- **The George Hotel** (1850, by William Wallen & Charles Child). It was here that the Rugby League was established in 1895, and the hotel offers an interesting museum about the sport and the Huddersfield Giants.
- **Lion Buildings** (1852-4, by Pritchett). This was built for mixed commercial uses; the lion is a fibreglass copy of the original, which was in Coade stone, a ceramic stoneware.



- **Britannia Buildings** (1856-9, by William Cocking), occupied for many years by the Huddersfield (later Yorkshire) Building Society; the ground floor was converted into a banking hall for the Society by local architect Clifford Hickson in 1926.



- **Tite Buildings** (1856), a woollen warehouse by Sir William Tite, who also advised on the urban design of the new town as a whole.

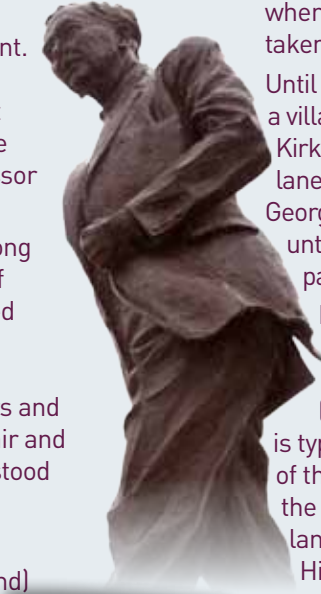
The 'new town', with its grid of streets to the south-east of the station, was the vision of George Loch, agent to the Ramsden estate, which owned the town centre until 1920. Loch had already been instrumental in bringing a through railway to Huddersfield on a line which opened up the opportunity for development. But the open square itself owed more to Joshua Hobson, a campaigning journalist and radical politician who was clerk to the Improvement Commissioners – predecessor of the Borough Council – at the time.

Until the late 20th century the Square, along with the Market Place, was at the heart of local politics; mass meetings here marked the major issues of the day. The statue of Huddersfield-born Prime Minister Lord (Harold) Wilson (1916-95) is by Ian Walters and was unveiled in 1999 by then PM Tony Blair and Lady Wilson. A statue of Sir Robert Peel stood in the Square from 1873 to 1949.

2 – Estate Buildings

Estate Buildings (1871-2, by W H Crossland) was built as the Ramsden estate office. The Ramsden family owned the manor of Huddersfield from 1599 to 1920, when the estate was sold to Huddersfield Corporation (earning the nickname 'the town that bought itself'), and their fingerprints can be found on every aspect of the town's development. Crossland was a local architect who gained a national reputation with other Gothic Revival buildings, notably Rochdale Town Hall and Royal Holloway College, Egham, Surrey.

Turning left down Westgate towards the Market Place, note Byram Arcade on the left (1881/2, again by Crossland). This was a retail development by the Ramsden estate; Byram was the name of their seat near Pontefract, and their coat of arms – from which Huddersfield Corporation's derived – appears over the entrance. Opposite is Westgate House, a mid-19th century building with a 1923 steel frontage by Pascal Steinlet of Newcastle.



3 – Market Place

The right to establish a market at Huddersfield was granted to the Ramsdens, as lords of the manor, in 1671 and the market cross, bearing their coat of arms, was erected soon afterwards, though the stonework has been repeatedly renewed. This is the 'centre' of Huddersfield, from where distances on milestones were measured, and where many public meetings and political protests have taken place.

Until the late 18th century Huddersfield was little more than a village winding along the East-West axis of present day Kirkgate and Westgate, surrounded by fields. From 1768 a lane running south was opened up as New St, but the old George Inn (see point 14) closed off the square to the north until 1852, when John William St was driven through as part of the 'new town' development.

Market Place displays many stages in the town's development. Today it is surrounded by banks. Lloyds TSB (1912, by Gibson, Skipwith & Gordon) is typical of the 'Edwardian baroque' style of the time, with later carved panels on the outer doors depicting four local landmarks, the Parish Church, Castle Hill, Railway Station and Civic Centre; while RBS is in an ornately detailed Italianate style (by William Cocking, c.1860). To its left is the arched entrance to Market Walk (known to many as 'Wappy Nick', though for reasons lost in time), and on that side of the Market Place is a glimpse into the early 19th century yards which occupied much of the town centre.

In 1888 a large Gothic drinking fountain, designed by R W Edis, was erected in the Market Place – a gift to the town from Sir John William Ramsden. It was moved to St Paul's Gardens, at the bottom of Ramsden St, in 1922, and after World War II to Greenhead Park, where it stands today.



4 – Brick Buildings

This was built as a row of shops by the Ramsden estate in 1770, using bricks left over from their nearby Cloth Hall (1765/6) (see below). Apart from the Victorian new town, it was from 1765-80 that the estate paid greatest attention to the town's economic development, with other investments including the Broad Canal and a new slaughterhouse and butchers' shambles on the opposite side of New Street.



5 – Former Temperance Hotel (M&S site)

Until 1909 this was the site of Thornton's Temperance Hotel, a focal point for the town's strong temperance and radical movements. In the 2nd half of the 19th century Joseph Thornton presided over so varied a range of lectures, discussions and activities here that the hotel soon became known to its devotees as 'The Centre of Light and Knowledge'. The present building dates from 1933.

Opposite, at the side of the HSBC bank, Cloth Hall St led to the Cloth Hall of 1765/6, which stood where Sainsbury's is now visible at the top of the street. Built by the Ramsden estate to provide a central market for cloth, which was out-growing the facilities of the Market Place, churchyard and various yards, it was struggling for business by the late 19th century and was demolished in 1930, giving way to a cinema. However elements of its entrance were saved and now stand in Ravensknowle Park, a mile away on Wakefield Road.

Now continue south along New St - 'new' in the late 18th century, and the town's major commercial street since the late 19th century - and turn left at the Prudential Assurance building (Alfred Waterhouse, 1897/8) into Ramsden St.

6 – The Town Hall

Huddersfield was incorporated as a Borough in 1868 and the Town Hall, by borough surveyor John Abbey, was built in two stages between 1875 and 1881. The richly-decorated concert hall provides a magnificent setting for performances by the world-famous Huddersfield Choral Society (founded in 1836) and other choirs and orchestras.



7 – Former Examiner offices

For many years this was the office of the *Huddersfield Examiner*. The town had two independent newspapers from the mid-19th century - the *Conservative Chronicle* (1850) and the *Liberal Examiner* (1851). The latter continues as a daily paper today, though now owned by a national group.



8 – Library & Art Gallery

The town's first purpose-built central library was designed by E H Ashburner and dates from 1937-40. The sculpted figures, by James Woodford RA, represent the youthful spirits of literature and art. The site was previously occupied by Ramsden St Congregationalist Chapel, one of several town centre chapels now demolished.

The modern shops facing the library front the controversial Queensgate Market (J Seymour Harris Partnership, 1968-70), the town centre's only post-war listed building. Renowned for its unique 21 freestanding reinforced concrete roof shell umbrellas, and for Fritz Steller's ceramic sculptures on the Queensgate (ring road) elevation, which echo the roof's paraboloid forms, its striking modernism is celebrated by some and deplored by others; the demolition of its Victorian predecessor in King St (by Edward Hughes, 1880) is lamented by many.

Now descend the steps in the far right corner of the Piazza - through one of the Market Hall ceramics! - and turn left on the ring road below.

9 – The Riding School

Designed by William Wallen in 1848, this building was originally a military riding school and headquarters of the 2nd West Yorkshire Yeomanry Cavalry - hence the sculpted horses on the facade. Down the years it has also served as an armoury, music hall - appropriately, the Hippodrome - cinema and bar.



Across the ring road is the main entrance to the University of Huddersfield, which can trace its origins to the Young Men's Mental Improvement Society of 1841, which soon became a very successful Mechanics' Institution (see point 15). St Paul's Church (John Oates, 1829) is now a concert hall; to its left the Harold Wilson Building is by local architects Abbey Hanson Rowe (1999), while beyond St Paul's to the right is the elaborate Gothic Ramsden Building (Edward Hughes, 1881-4), built as the first technical college. Within the campus is the meeting point of the Broad and Narrow Canals, which provided connections to the east and west coasts respectively.

10 – Lawrence Batley Theatre

When it was built in 1819, Queen Street Wesleyan Chapel was the largest in the country, with around 2000 seats. The design has been attributed to Charles Watson, partner of J P Pritchett, and the builder was Joseph Kaye. After some decades of mixed fortunes, the building reopened as the Lawrence Batley Theatre in 1994 (Mr Batley being a local businessman who supported several projects in the town).

Queen Street, Cross Church Street and King Street form a small grid of new streets laid out by

the Ramsden estate in the early 19th century and Queen St survives (or rather half-survives, on one side only) as a handsome Georgian street, with the former Court of Requests - now a club - and stately terraced housing. Turning down King Street to the right, one can find several early 19th century commercial yards, recently renovated in connection with the Kingsgate shopping centre. As David Wyles writes: "Here more than anywhere else in Huddersfield the atmosphere of domestic squalor and restless industry of the early 19th century town is preserved. Houses and workshops are tightly packed into settled and flagged courtyards." But the trail route continues ahead along Cross Church Street.



11 – Parish Church

A church on this site was first provided around 1100 by the de Laci family, the principal Norman landowner after the Conquest. The present St Peter's Church (J P Pritchett, 1834-6) is the third on the site. Notable inside are the altar canopy and east window by Sir Ninian Comper (1921); a leaflet available inside details other points of interest. In the churchyard to the north the most prominent tomb is that of Joseph Kaye (1779-1858), the 'builder of Huddersfield'. However the Parish Church rebuild was one job he did not get, and the wrongly-laid stone has led to continual problems of decay since the mid-19th century.



12 – Beast Market

As Huddersfield grew as a trading centre, the market spilled down the hill from the Market Place. Cloth was marketed in the parish churchyard until the Cloth Hall was built in 1766. Immediately to the east of the churchyard, Beast Market lived up to its name until a new livestock market was built by the Corporation in the 1880s. The tall brick chimney is all that remains of an early 20th century jam factory. Running south from here, Venn Street commemorates the Revd Henry Venn, vicar of Huddersfield from 1759-71, who was a well-known evangelical and ally of John Wesley.



13 – Byram Street

On the west side of the Church, Byram Street, like Byram Arcade in Westgate refers to the Ramsden family seat near Pontefract. Kirkgate Buildings, opposite the church, was another Ramsden development designed by W H Crossland (1880), its 'Queen Anne' style contrasting with his Gothic Estate Buildings. Don't miss the striking shop front of Neaversons (by Sharp & Law of Bradford, 1935); the interior is also well-preserved.



14 – Old George Inn

Around the corner in St Peter's Street is the facade of the 18th century George Inn, which stood in the Market Place (see point 3). It was moved here in 1852, when the old George was demolished to make way for John William St and replaced by its successor in St George's Square.

Turning right into Northumberland Street, the present Post Office (C P Wilkinson, 1914) faces its less imposing predecessor by Crossland (1874/5).



15 – Mechanics' Institution

Designed by Travis & Mangnall of Manchester and built in 1859-61, this was the first purpose-built home for the Mechanics' Institution, which had been founded in 1841 and was among the strongest in the country. The institutes offered liberal and technical education for skilled workers, and today's University of Huddersfield is a direct descendant of the Institution. In 1886 the building became the Friendly & Trades Club. After years of dereliction, the conversion to creative lofts was by Brewster Bye of Leeds (2002).



16 – Former Wholesale Market

Now a retail market, this building was designed by the first full-time Borough Surveyor, Richard Dugdale, and put up in 1887/8. Dugdale was also responsible for the design of Greenhead Park (1881-4), just to the west of the town centre. The Market's renovation in 1980 brought out the fine decoration applied to its functional structure.



From here it is easy to return to St George's Square via Brook Street and John William Street – noting in passing the striking 'Ruskinian' Marble Works (1863), originally the premises of marble masons Fisher & Dyson.

17 – Former Booth's factory

A few yards to the right along John William Street, at the near corner of Viaduct Street, is the former site of clothing manufacturer H. Booth & Sons Ltd. The factory's former south wall can be seen bounding the present Tesco yard.

On Friday 31 October 1941 Booth's factory was destroyed in Huddersfield's worst fire, caused by a smoker's pipe left alight inside a raincoat pocket when work had just commenced. 49 people, mainly women and girls, were trapped in upper floors and lost their lives. Some jumped to their deaths; others managed to scramble free or were rescued from the flames.

The victims were interred in a communal grave in Edgerton Cemetery, a mile away, where a large memorial records the names of all those who died.

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Further information and contact details

Further information about Huddersfield Civic Society can be found at www.huddersfieldcivicsociety.org.uk The Society publishes *The Buildings of Huddersfield: Five Architectural Walks* by David Wyles, to which we are indebted for much architectural detail in this leaflet.

Huddersfield Local History Society can be found at www.huddersfieldhistory.org.uk The website includes a digital edition of *Discovering Old Huddersfield* (in 5 volumes) by Gordon & Enid Minter, which offers detailed historical tours in and beyond the town centre, and background notes by Keith Gibson and Albert Booth on the buildings of Huddersfield.

The site also has links to other local history walks.

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