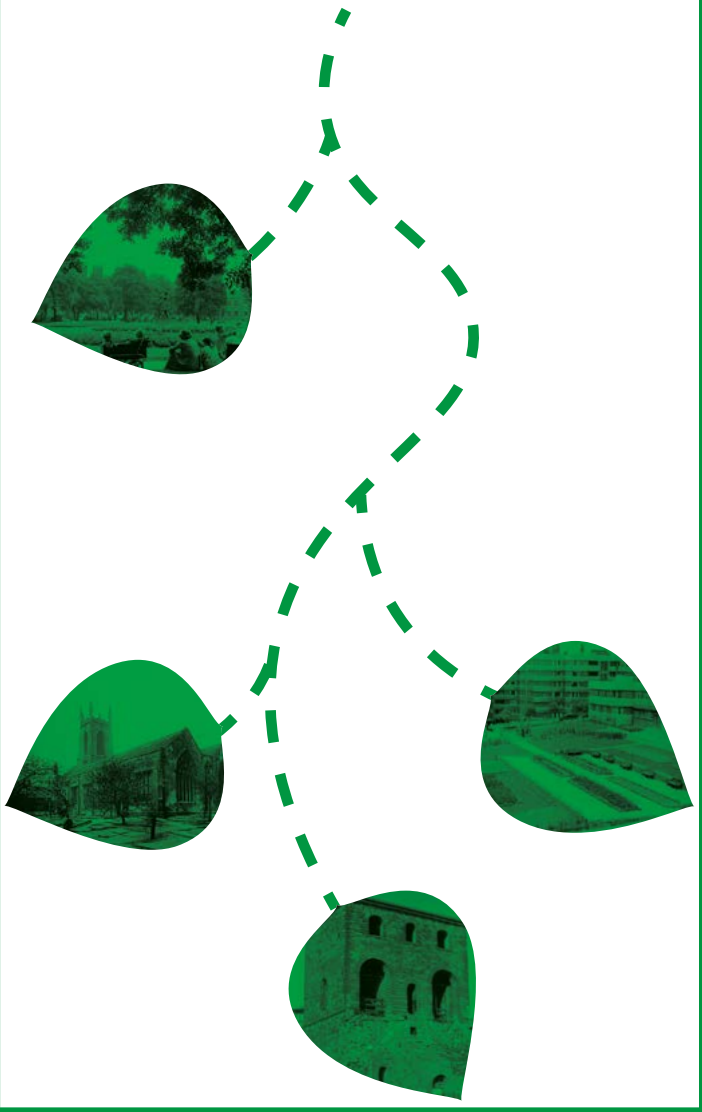


# LEEDS CITY CENTRE NATURE TRAIL



This year for Heritage Open Day we are doing things a little bit differently; instead of opening up our building we are opening up our city centre for you to explore and enjoy while finding out more along this year's theme of Hidden Nature. The city centre is becoming more and more a home to nature, giving a calm escape from the hustle and bustle and habitats for our insect and animal friends, including a few beehives on the roof spaces of office blocks and residential buildings.

For those of you wanting to enjoy the tour from home, articles on [secretlibraryleeds.net](http://secretlibraryleeds.net) include heritage images and maps of the locations. For those of you heading out to do the walk (approximately 2 hours) you will need an internet capable mobile device. Don't forget to stay safe and socially distance as you go along.

To learn more, visit our blog at:

[www.secretlibraryleeds.net](http://www.secretlibraryleeds.net)

This map has been produced by the Local & Family History Library at Leeds Central Library. You can visit the library to discover more about your local area and research your family history.

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## 1. Park Square

The Georgian style square was built between 1788-1810 beginning as land owned by the Wilson family, whose plan to create a high-class residential estate saw them lease plots to architects and builders to create homes for the upwardly mobile and wealthy, notably merchants, clergy, lawyers and surgeons. As well as access to a private garden residents had private pews and interment rights at the church of St Pauls on the south side of the square. The private central garden allowed the residents close proximity to green space and the commercial centre while maintaining a distance from the industry and river which at that time was more a business thoroughfare than a picturesque riverside.

This residential utopia lasted until 1878 when John Barran built a large warehouse and cloth cutting works on the south side next to the church, however beautiful its Arabic-Saracenic style was (Thomas Ambler) this new move towards mass produced clothing and the arrival of daily commuters and increase in smog led to the wealthy residents moving out of the city centre and business offices to move in.

Park Square was at one point called the Harley Street of the North due to the large number of Doctors holding offices here. No. 8 was home to Dr Edith Pechey, the first woman to practise medicine in Leeds and the third woman to become a doctor in the UK. A campaigner for women's rights Pechey spent over 20 years in India as a senior doctor at a woman's hospital and was involved with a range of social causes. In 1916 Pechey represented Leeds Suffragists at an International Women's Suffrage Alliance Congress in Copenhagen.

*Leave the park along Park Square East heading towards The Headrow and the Leeds Central Library where you will find Victoria Gardens.*

## 7. Penny Pocket Park

Beginning as part of the churchyard and graveyard of Leeds Parish Church (later Leeds Minster), over the years as the city grew land became a premium and the grounds and graveyard were split from the church and divided up by roads and railway lines.

The view of the park from York Street shows a tended lawned incline with trees and flower beds leading up to the railway line, much work has been done to create the park as originally there were few trees, however if you follow St Peter's Street under the viaduct you come to a much larger and more interesting part of the park.

The incline on the other side of the railway line holds rows of flat gravestones which appear to have been laid somewhat askew, however all of this is exactly as designed. An Act of Parliament allowed for the railway line to bisect the graveyard yet instead of creating an arched viaduct that would have destroyed the graveyard below, a solid embankment was legally required. Gravestones were lifted and large amounts of soil were placed on top of the existing graves to create the incline, each gravestone was then re-laid in the same position as before.

The graveyard was closed for burials in the 1830s at a time when this area of Leeds was crowded and unsanitary and instances of body snatching were becoming more frequent. Instead, the wealthy of Leeds bought £25 shares in the newly acquired and private St George's Fields cemetery.

In 1912 part of Penny Pocket Park became the responsibility of the Thomas Wade Trust, who have worked since 1530 to ensure the provision of open spaces to the people of Leeds.

*Once you have explored both sides of Penny Pocket Park, cross over Kirkgate and heading into the grounds of Leeds Minster of St Peter's.*

## 2. Victoria Gardens

Prior to 1930 the area now known as Victoria Gardens was a busy, built up block. It was demolished in the 1930s and in December 1936 it was decided to create a Garden of Remembrance in front of the Municipal Buildings and the Art Gallery. This was opened on 28th October 1937.

Over time more memorials have been added. The Leeds Pals and Leeds Rifles have a joint memorial as do those Victoria Cross holders born or buried in Leeds. More recent additions include the WWI memorial bench, the 75th anniversary of the D Day landings light installation and a WWI soldier silhouette. In 2015 the Yorkshire Society unveiled a plaque in honour of Jane Tomlinson and in 2017 an International Workers Memorial was unveiled. Additionally the Leeds boxer, Nicola Adams, has a golden postbox signalling her gold medal at the London 2012 Olympics as well as a 'Paving the Way' plaque from the MOBO awards.

An unmarked oak tree and basalt pillar are the works of German artist Joseph Beuys. This has been located in Victoria Gardens since 1998. There is also a paving stone engraved with the words 'You are a rock', part of a collaborative art project - Mene Mene - for Situation Leeds in 2005.

In 2011 the gardens were redeveloped by Groundwork Leeds. Victoria Gardens continues to be an active part of Leeds life with protests and celebrations, exhibitions and fairgrounds all making good use of this civic space in the heart of Leeds.

*Continue along Calverley Street, crossing Great George Street Mandela Gardens.*

## 3. Mandela Gardens

The garden in front of the Civic Hall was laid out in 1983 and dedicated to Nelson Mandela in support of his anti-apartheid movement. The dedication ceremony took place on 10th December .

## 8. Leeds Minster

With the loss of the original graveyard (now Penny Pocket Park) due to new roads and railway lines, the land surrounding Leeds Minster is much smaller than a church of this size and importance should warrant, but the stretches of grass, mature trees and flat gravestones used as paving make the area a space of calm and reflection despite being next to one of Leeds' busiest city centre thoroughfares.

While not the oldest church in Leeds this is possibly the oldest site of worship in Leeds with records showing a church here as far back as the 7th century. This first church burned down in 633AD and another built in its place, this one lasted until the 14th Century when it too burnt down. The third church fared much better making it intact to the 18th century when it was heavily rebuilt and renovated by Dr Walter Hook the Vicar of Leeds.

The new church, built in the Gothic Imitation style seated 1600 and cost £30,000. Reopening and re-consecration occurred in 1841. During the extensive tear down and rebuild the remains of one of Leeds' oldest surviving relics was discovered; eight fragments of a Saxon cross dating back to 900-950 AD were removed from the church and returned, reassembled, in 1876 as part of the refurbishment.

The current Grade I listed church officially became a Minster on September 2nd, 2012 when it was rechristened 'The Minster and Parish Church of Saint Peter-at-Leeds'.

Cross the graveyard and exit onto The Calls, turning right. When you reach Centenary Bridge on the left, cross over the River Aire and at the end of the bridge take an immediate right down onto the waterfront edge. Follow this path until you reach the water gardens at Navigation Walk.

In 2000 the area in front of the Civic Hall was redeveloped in Millennium Square and Mandela Gardens were reimagined by city Architect John Thorpe into the space at the bottom of the square adjoining Great George Street, including a water feature and stone seating alongside a bronze sculpture by Kenneth Armitage entitled 'Both Arms', designed to convey a friendly, welcoming atmosphere.

On April 30th, 2001 the gardens were rededicated, this time by Mandela himself as he was made an Honorary Freeman of the City.

There are three plaques in the garden, the first reads: 'These gardens were named in honour of Nelson Mandela symbol of resistance to Apartheid in South Africa at a ceremony held on 10th December 1983, N. Mandela – The Struggle Is My Life – 26th June 1961'. The second plaque was used in the re-dedication of the new gardens and reads: 'The Mandela Garden, this garden was rededicated by Dr Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Honorary Freeman of the City of Leeds, 30th April 2001'. The third plaque reads: 'To mark the occasion of the first election open to all citizens to be held in South Africa April 27th 1994'.

In 2005 the gardens were made over again, this time to become home to the Leeds City Council 2004 Chelsea Flower Show entry entitled "Freedom for the Future". The entry celebrated ten years of democracy in South Africa and happened in partnership with the Leeds twin city of Durban, South Africa.

*Head up Great George Street towards Upper Briggate, once past St John's Centre you will find on your right the Merriion Gardens of Rest.*

## 4. Merriion Rest Gardens

Opened in 1933 they were a gift to the city from Thomas Wade's Charity, his 1530 will stipulated that money should be used to benefit the people of Leeds.

Behind St John's House once stood the 500- seater New Briggate Synagogue and garden (1879),

## 9. Navigation Walk

The Leeds waterfront was hugely important to the development of Leeds as a trading town. During the 17th century the river was used as a source of water for the corn mill, the fulling mills, and the dye houses on the river bank. In 1699 Merchants obtained an Act of Parliament and built the Aire and Calder Navigation and by 1700 boats could travel inland as far as Leeds, which was now an inland port, with links to London and Europe through the ports of Hull. As the railways grew and roads and turnpikes expanded it became easier to transport goods via road than river, and as mills relied less on water the industry shrank and the waterways fell into dereliction.

In 1973, Leeds Civic Trust published a report entitled 'Leeds-upon-Aire', proposals for a complete renewal of the waterfront area with new living accommodation and leisure and entertainment facilities. Twelve years go by before any real development begins but slowly old warehouses and wharves are converted into dwellings and businesses and life returns to the riverside.

The Aire & Calder Navigation Dock becomes Victoria Quays a £3.8million redevelopment built in the 1980s by Barratts, one of the first residential developments built from a mix of new and converted buildings. 120 apartments are created on the site that includes the old Flax House (adjacent to the water) a grade II listed building that once acted as a flax, hemp, grain and flour warehouse, and Flyboat House the building that despite its conversion to accommodation retains the arch at the base with water access underneath. The dock is planted with waterlilies and has a fountain to aerate the water, the grasses and reeds becoming home to breeding waterfowl including coots and moorhens.

*Follow Navigation Walk out onto Dock Street, turn right and head towards Bridge End, cross the Leeds Bridge and take a left onto Swinegate, then your second left onto Sovereign Street.*

demolished in the 1930s when the synagogue moved with the Jewish population towards Chapeltown.

The three-quarter acre site is maintained by trustees of Wade's Charity, containing lawns, trees, walkways, benches and a sundial in the centre. The garden was renovated in 2006 winning a Landscape Award, it had become vandalised and was no longer a pleasant place to visit. The new design however included a safer open aspect and four new entrances along with access for wheelchairs and pushchairs through the gardens and into St John's churchyard via the re-laid York stone paths.

The gardens hold memorials to lives lost in the World Wars.

*Leave the Gardens by the rear gates and head into the grounds of St John's Church.*

## 5. St John's Church

Built by local philanthropist John Harrison in 1632-1634, he endowed the immediate area with almshouses and a separate chapel, used as a Charity School from the 1720s - though the present building dates from 1815: '*The institution clothed 80 poor girls in blue and trained them for domestic service*' (Blue Plaque) it still stands today as the offices for Age UK and home to the Arch Café next to the church grounds.

The tended green space of the churchyard incorporates lawns with featuring matured deciduous trees whose canopy compliment the ashlar stone of the church tower. Re-laid gravestones feature the local population of times past, including 'town musicians, local inn keepers and a cow doctor'. Also buried within the grounds is Thomas Wilson, the Master of the Charity School from 1750, and an important collector of valuable historical documents. Several of his transcriptions of Medieval and early-modern materials are held at the Central Library.

Leave St John's Church yard using the stepped archway down onto Upper Briggate, turn right and

## 10. Sovereign Square

Sovereign Street is an old street named for Queen Victoria but it is the relatively new Sovereign Square with its lawns and pathways, planted beds, ornamental trees and moments' walk to the banks of the Aire that have brought to the area a return to the green spaces not seen here since before the 1800s, it's come a long way from its broken up Isle of Cinders origins.

During the 1800s this part of the waterfront began expanding with mills and warehouses built across the isles and upon the sandstone walls of the goits. By the early 1900s the goits had been filled in and most of the buildings demolished as part of the Sovereign Street/ Swinegate improvement works. One building that survived was the Victoria Flour Mill, redeveloped for modern use with a restaurant on the ground floor. Next to the park stands 3 Sovereign Square, built on land that once housed mills and warehouses. When these were torn down the Tramways Depot stood here from 1914 until 1959, when the demise of the tram meant the depot was no longer needed. Next it became the Queens Hall, a culturally iconic venue which hosted numerous music performances including The Beatles in 1963, The Rolling Stones in 1964, The Clash, Roxy Music, Joy Division, Black Sabbath and many more. By 1989 the hall needed extensive modernisation, instead the hall was demolished and for over 20 years the land was an open air car park awaiting redevelopment.

*Now for a longer walk, leave Sovereign Street and go back onto Swinegate turning left and following the road all the way up to City Square. Keeping the Queens Hotel on your left walk along Wellington Street and go left at Northern Street, at the end of here take a right onto Whitehall Road and walk until you find Tower Square.*

then left on to The Headrow, Follow the road onto Eastgate and down to the Playhouse Gardens

## 6. Playhouse Gardens

Between the newly built Leeds City College and the Leeds Playhouse extension you will find a triangular shaped one acre terraced garden, this fully accessible garden sits upon land with a history dating back to the 1600s.

Quarry Hill flats began in 1938, the aim was to house over 3000 people on a 10.5 acre site in state of the art flats built to a modernist design. Unfortunately the flats stood for less than 40 years as a string of problems including expensive repairs, poor waste disposal and structural problems led to their demolition, 1975-78.

The site was redeveloped and in 1990 it became home to the £13.5million West Yorkshire Playhouse, which replaced the Leeds Playhouse, a community-based repertory Theatre Company founded in 1970, formerly based in the grounds of Leeds University. In 2019 the WYP was revamped again with a new frontage added, facing the bus station, and reverted to its original name of the Leeds Playhouse.

Today the bottom of the lawned gardens with planted beds and trees stands where the iconic arched entrance to Oastler house once stood, the garden a gateway to Leeds Cultural District, an area that is home to Phoenix Dance, the Northern Ballet, Yorkshire Dance, BBC North and the City of Leeds College of Music.

Walk along St Peter's Street towards the viaduct, on your left you will pass a small garden at St Peter's Square with a sculpture of a stainless steel theatre curtain representing the performing arts present in this area.

*Cross over towards York Street and opposite you will see the first part of Penny Pocket Park.*

## 11. Tower Square

Tower Square began life as the Central Station Railway complex stretching from Wellington Street to Whitehall Road and the Tower is the only remaining building of a site once filled with railway lines and station buildings. The Grade II listed tower lifted trucks from the lower level goods station to the high level passenger line above. The station opened in 1848 and closed 1st May 1967 when rail travel was consolidated into the one city centre station. The last train left Leeds Central on 29th April, a memorable send off as railway staff placed detonators on the track which they exploded off as the train rolled down the track and away from the station for the last time.

The site became the Aireside Retail Park for a while, then in 2013 development began again and by 2016 Tower Square opened, anchored by the old lifting tower. The now landscaped piazza is home to plants, trees and lawned areas surrounded by a number of restaurants, cafes and bars and home to many outdoor events including food fairs, big screen sporting events and performances, however since 2008 Tower Square has also been the home to a rather large group of residents, a colony of honeybees, looked after by the Leeds Bee Keepers Association.

As you stand facing the tower and look to the left you might catch sight of the only other railway remnant, rising high above the Aire stands the old viaduct that carried the railway line, now disused there has been much talk over the years of using the old line to create a skyline garden for the city centre.

*You have now reached the end of our Hidden Nature Heritage Open Day walk but that is not all there is to the natural beauty of the city centre, check our Secret Library blog for more of our favourite green spaces just outside the tour if you feel like exploring more.*





# LEEDS CITY CENTRE NATURE TRAIL

Portland Crescent 1913, now  
site of Mandela Gardens

3 MANDELA  
GARDENS

2 VICTORIA  
GARDENS



Wartime static water

4 MERRION  
GARDEN



Merrion Rest Garden, 1937

5 ST JOHN'S  
CHURCH



St John's Church

1

PARK SQUARE



Park View, 1951

6

PLAYHOUSE  
GARDENS



Quarry Hill, garden view

DUKE STREET

DYER STREET

YORK STREET

7 PENNY  
POCKET  
PARK



Penny Pocket Park,  
graveyard incline

8

LEEDS  
MINSTER



Leeds Minster

9

RIVER  
AIRE

NAVIGATION WALK



Victoria Quay, 1980s

10

SOVEREIGN  
SQUARE



Tramways Depot/Queen's Hall

11

TOWER  
SQUARE



Tower Square, 2002