

# **Doncaster Circular Walk**

*'Growth of a market town'*



**Walk summary:** A short, historical walk around the heritage of the market town of Doncaster. You will visit the river, canal and railway, all of which helped the town to grow and prosper.

**Distance:** 2.6 miles / 4.19 kilometres

**Duration:** approximately 1 hour not including stops

**Terrain:** Urban walking with some steps and a relatively flat footpath along the river

**Nearest Car Park:** St James' Car Park, DN1 3AQ or Frenchgate Centre, DN1 1SR

## ***1. Doncaster Train Station***

### **Start at the Train Station.**

Doncaster Railway Station was built in 1849 to replace a temporary building that was built only a year before. It has undergone several small changes since 1938, most notably becoming connected to the Frenchgate Shopping Centre and Interchange. From the station you can see the old front to the town's Theatre which opened on Monday the 27th of March 1899 with a production of "La Poupee," that had transferred from the Prince of Wales Theatre in London.

**Exit the station car park and turn right onto the main road. Cross the road at the pedestrian crossing and turn right. Take the first left which leads towards the Frenchgate Centre. Continue ahead past the Frenchgate Centre, until you reach the crossroads.**

## ***2. High Street***

**Turn right down High Street.** On the left, opposite the Tourist Information Centre, is the Mansion House; the centrepiece of the High Street for over 250 years. It is one of four surviving civic Mansion Houses in the country. It is a Grade I listed building built in 1748 and is used for meetings of Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council, and

by the civic mayor of the town for official receptions. Unlike its three counterparts that were built as Mayoral residences, Doncaster's Mansion House was created solely for entertainment purposes. Whilst there were several rooms within the building to provide accommodation, it was never intended to be used as a residence for the Mayor. It was designed by architect James Paine who designed many country houses in the North, including Cusworth Hall, which you may catch a glimpse of later.

Outside the Mansion House are four bronze sculptures of rose trees, each representing a different season, by artist Richard Perry. Notice the old Savings Bank on the corner of Scot Lane which has a plaque dedicated to "William Hurst". This Doncaster architect also designed the Subscription Rooms, found a little further along the High Street. Today only the portico remains of the former Subscription Rooms, a major venue for betting during Doncaster's St Leger Race Week.

**When you are ready, turn left and along Scot Lane.**

### ***3. Doncaster Market***

At the end of Scot Lane is Doncaster market. Doncaster's market can trace its origins right back to the Roman times when the local population established a 'vicus' outside the walls of the Roman fort to trade with the garrison stationed there. Today's market is on the very same spot and has benefitted from Doncaster being on the Great North Road through the centuries. There are in fact around 10 separate markets all huddled together around the Market Place.

**Continue ahead through Market Place and around the left hand side of the Corn Exchange.**

In the 19th century a Corn Exchange was built at the heart of the market area. It was designed to be a concert hall as well as a market building and Elgar conducted the London Symphony Orchestra here in 1909. A young Winston Churchill also spoke here about his experiences during the Boer War.

Continue past the Wool Market, the green cast-iron Victorian open market on the right hand side, and through the Irish Middle Market, where cattle were historically traded.

More recently, Doncaster Market with its 400 plus stalls has won various awards including the BBC's Best Food Market in Britain. The Market is open every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday

**Enter the car park, and head left towards the imposing St George's Minster. Cross the road at the pedestrian crossing and enter the Minster, which has been present for over 8 centuries.**

#### **4. St George's Minster**

The church occupies the same site as the Roman fort of Danum. An 18 metre stretch of the fort wall was discovered by excavation some years ago and can be viewed at the north east end of the grounds. This was the beginning of the market-town of Doncaster. Located on the Great North Road (A1), the town was an ideal location for passing traders and workers.

A Norman fortification is known to have occupied the site and it is probable that the materials from that building were used in part, to build the early church but a precise date for its foundation is not possible. In 1853, a fire burned down the medieval church and it was replaced by the current Victorian building, designed in the gothic-style by architect George Gilbert Scott with the clock face being designed by Lord Grimthorpe and made by the maker of the clock faces for 'Big Ben'.

The organ in St. George's Doncaster is the work of Edmund Schulze of Paulinzelle in Saxony, and dates from 1862, four years after the completion of the present church building. The firm of Schulze had exhibited an organ in the Exhibition of 1851 and this marked the beginning of a wide influence in this country. The Doncaster instrument is their largest organ.

**Leave the Minster through the front gate, onto Church View road. Safely cross the road to follow the road. You will see the Canal Depot to your right as the road bends round to the left. At the end of the road ascend the metal, spiral staircase onto North Bridge.**

## **5. North Bridge and St Mary's Bridge**

**Turn right and walk along the bridge, noticing the Doncaster crests underneath each lamp post that depict the River.**

North Bridge Road is carried over the railway, an immensely important part of Doncaster's heritage. Looking to the left you can see the station and the adjacent Railway Works or 'the plant', established in 1853 by Great Northern Railway. Among the locomotives the works produced were the Stirling Singles, the Ivatt Atlantics and the Gresley Pacifics, including the world-famous Flying Scotsman, the first locomotive to achieve 100 mph and also run from London King's Cross to Edinburgh Waverley non-stop; and Mallard which achieved the top speed of 126 mph on 3 July 1938 to become the world's fastest steam locomotive, a record that she still holds to the present day.

The works continued building all kinds of rolling stock and carriages. During World War II, like other workshops it joined in the war effort, producing, among other things, Horsa gliders for the D-Day airborne assault.

In 1957, the last of over two thousand steam locomotives was built and carriage building finished in 1962, but the works was modernised with the addition of a diesel locomotive repair shop. More recently new diesel shunters and 25 kV electric locomotives have been built, plus Class 56 and Class 58 diesel-electric locomotives.

The bridge then crosses the navigation before going over the River Don by St Mary's Bridge. Until 1910 this bridge was previously part of the Great North Road. The current North Bridge was completed in 2003.

**Shortly after passing the last lamps, cross the road you've been walking beside at the pedestrian crossing and then turn right to follow the path as it curves downhill to the road.**

## **6. HMP Doncaster**

The prison lies between branches of the River Don, River Don Navigation and River Cheswold and appears to be on an 'island'. Cross over into the road opposite to follow the signs towards HMP Doncaster.

**After crossing the bridge walk through the visitors car park on the right to pick up a footpath taking you to the River Don.**

### ***7. Crimpsall Sluice***

**Turn left** and you will soon pass Crimpsall Sluice, on the River Don which was built during the 1950s to serve both as a flood defence structure and for water level regulation in the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Canal. By the late 1990s it was deemed to be unserviceable and replaced with a fixed weir which allowed a rock ramp to be built in the old course of the river. Prior to this, fish had problems ascending the old sluice due to the difference in height of the water but now the area has significant numbers of fish above the rock ramp but also living within the structure itself. The island in between the rock ramp and the sluice is a haven for wildlife.

**Carry on down the path and you can see Cusworth Hall, which is a museum and gallery, on your right on the horizon.**

### ***8. River Don***

**Turn left and follow the path along the left hand side of the River Don.** You'll soon pass below arched willow bows before reaching the imposing wall of the prison and Young Offenders Institute and a manicured avenue of pruned hornbeams. **Continue on to reach a bridge over the water.**

### ***9. River Cheswold***

**Carry on over the bridge.** The river on your left is the River Cheswold, which connects the River Don and the canal and is reputedly the shortest river in Britain. The canal is connected to Marshgate Lock which you will soon see on your right.

### ***10. Spiral staircase***

**Where the footpath ends, go up the metal spiral stairs and back onto North Bridge. Turn right and at the end of the bridge follow the road around to the right and through a tunnel to reach the train-station.**

## References

- Doncaster Civic Society, Doncaster Town Trail Map (2016), leaflet
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