



BISHOP AUCKLAND HERITAGE TRAIL

BISHOP AUCKLAND HERITAGE TRAIL CIRCULAR ROUTE AROUND BISHOP AUCKLAND TOWN CENTRE

With optional detours

The main walk takes approximately 1 hour over 2 miles and burns around 200 calories

This is a circular route so your starting point can be anywhere on the Trail. We suggest a good place to start is the **Town Hall** in the **Market Place [1]**.

The French Gothic revival style Town Hall was originally built by public subscription in 1861 and has undergone major refurbishment since being saved from demolition in the 1980s by the efforts of the **Bishop Auckland Civic Society**. It is now a thriving cultural hub for the town.

The town of Bishop Auckland is situated on high ground between the rivers Wear and Gaunless. The history of the town can be traced back to the Romans. It has formed part of the See of the Bishop of Durham since the 11th Century and up until the Industrial Revolution was a “clean, quaint-looking old place”. It developed as an industrial town to coincide with the rapid expansion of the railways and coal mining in the 19th century which prompted extensive building and development.

There are some optional detours included in the Trail which focus on specific aspects of Bishop Auckland heritage: Auckland Castle and grounds; Newton Cap Bank and/or Viaduct and Princes Street/Etherley Lane

THE TRAIL

From the Town Hall walk towards **North Bondgate [2]** and the car park on the right-hand side – there is a good viewing point northwards over the River Wear Valley. The view takes in the river, Newton Cap Viaduct, the Kynren site and the site of Newton cap Colliery. The former colliery was next to the village of Toronto, previously Newton Cap village. It was renamed by the original landowner who was in the Canadian city at the time when he heard coal had been discovered on his land.

On leaving the car park, look for the wrought iron railings with “shops” written on them; take the “ginnel” (alleyway) behind the railings into **Fore Bondgate [3]**.

Amble down the street taking in the quaint and quirky buildings and shops. The Bondgates – Fore, North (Back) and High Bondgate – are one of the oldest parts of the town dating back to Medieval times. At one time, there was a village green extending from High Bondgate through Fore Bondgate up to the Market Place. Houses in this area were built on long, narrow plots in typical Medieval fashion and were home to the “bondsmen” (who most likely worked for the Bishop of Durham) and other trades and crafts people such as weavers, cobblers, and smiths.

Interesting buildings along Fore Bondgate include the old **Assembly Rooms** and **The Bay Horse [4]**. The Assembly Rooms were upstairs at **The Shepherds Inn** (now Zair's Café) and were used for a variety of purposes, including the local Magistrates' Court, before the current Town Hall was built. The reputedly haunted "Doctor's Tunnel" was once part of Shepherds Inn although it was more of a public right of way under an extension to the inn. Further along Fore Bondgate you will find The Bay Horse pub. A public house has been on this site since the 16th Century and once upon a time was prominently located in the centre of the then village green. There is an information board at the Market Place end of Fore Bondgate

From Fore Bondgate walk onto High Bondgate. This was once the location of the Police station, where the infamous serial killer, Mary Ann Cotton, was taken after her arrest in July 1872 for the murder of her young stepson. A former pub, The Sun Inn, also on High Bondgate was where Cotton took her meals during her committal hearings in the court in the Assembly Rooms. A new housing development, Clayton Court, stands on the site of the Sun Inn which was taken down in the 1970s and has been rebuilt brick by brick at Beamish Museum.

Continue along the left-hand side of High Bondgate to the roundabout junction then turn left onto **Bob Hardisty Drive** which follows the route of one of the seven railway lines which converged in the town. Cross over Sadler Street to continue along Bob Hardisty Drive. The multi-storey **Vinovium House** is ahead of you on the left (named after the Roman fort and settlement of Vinovia, now Binchestester Roman Fort and open to visitors) at the junction with **Tenters Street [5]**. Along this street there is an imposing red brick building. This was the former Post Office for the town with a distribution yard to the right of it. Opposite the old Post Office building is the site of the Majestic, later Odeon, Cinema. In the cinema's heyday the length of the queues for the film often meant audiences would regularly be too late for the beginning of the film and would then to sit through the second, or "B", feature and adverts for the second screening just to see what they had missed.

The name "Tenters" gives a clue to a long-forgotten industry that used to take place in this area – "tentering" or stretching wet woollen material over a series of hooks. Further down Tenters Street towards Newgate Street, is the Newgate Shopping Centre. This was once the location of the town's auction mart.

Optional Detour: continue along High Bondgate to the roundabout. Take the opposite (second) exit on the roundabout to remain on High Bondgate which merges into Newton Cap Bank. Notice the 19th Century water fountain or "pant" for animals and the adjacent information board on the left-hand side at the junction with Etherley Lane. Follow the steep hill down towards the River Wear and SKIRLAW BRIDGE which is unusual in that it has one rounded arch and one pointed arch. The bridge was originally built by Bishop Skirlaw in the 14th Century and was one of the main routes in and out of the town until the Newton Cap Viaduct (visible from Skirlaw Bridge) was saved from demolition by concerted public effort and converted to road use (opening in 1995) to ease traffic congestion. The bridge is also the site of "Palfreys Leap" – legend has it that in 1744 local prize fighter, Edward "Neddy" Palfreys leapt not once but twice from the bridge, a jump of around 14 meters. To be fair, the first "leap" was accidental, but this did not deter Neddy from repeating the event a second time to entertain the crowds.

Return to Bob Hardisty Drive and continue onwards until you reach the roundabout at the junction of Bob Hardisty Drive, Princes Street, and Newgate Street. At this junction you will find **Theatre Corner [6]**. This was once home to the Eden Theatre managed for many years by Arthur Jefferson, the father of Stan Laurel – you will spot his statue on the corner. This junction was also the home to **Rossi's Café**, a café and ice cream parlour held in very fond regard by the people of Bishop Auckland – many a romance flourished over a frothy coffee in Rossi's! Both the theatre and café were demolished in the 1980s for road-widening purposes, but the memories live on.

Turn right onto **Newgate Street**. You are now on what is believed to be the original route of Dere Street, the old Roman road from York to Corbridge - now the main shopping street in the town. There are many fine buildings along the length of the street dating from the 18th to 20th Centuries and reflecting the commercial and industrial fortunes of the town at the time. Bishop Auckland boasted some fine department stores in recent history: The Co-operative, Gill's and Doggarts are still fondly remembered by older residents

Optional Detour: walk up Princes Street to St Peter's Church where Stan Laurel was baptised and where Sir Edward Elgar's "The Music Makers" had its world premiere. Turn left down Gibbon Street and continue to the junction with Waldron Street on the left-hand side. Number 22, Waldron Street was the home of Arthur Jefferson, manager of the Eden Theatre and father of Stan Laurel. Follow Waldron Street around to Surtees Street, turn right and walk up the road to Etherley Lane. At the junction, turn left onto Etherley Lane and look out for number 5, West House, and the blue plaque explaining the house's link to Edward Elgar. The owner of the house at the time of Elgar's visits was a member of the Kilburn family, iron masters, who had their works in the town where they made huge castings for ships, bridges and the like. You can either retrace your steps back to Gibbon Street where you will turn left and follow Gibbon Street to the end and the footbridge across Bob Hardisty Drive taking you back to Tenters Street OR continue down Etherley Lane back to the junction with High Bondgate where you will turn right to go down High Bondgate back to Fore Bondgate and Finkle Street.

Cross the road at Theatre Corner and continue down Newgate Street to **The Four Clocks Centre [7]**. The Four Clocks Centre (so named because of the ornate clock tower with a clock on each face) was formerly a Wesleyan Methodist Church and is now a community centre open to the public and with a cafe. It is home to a permanent display about the industrial and railway heritage of the town including the impressive 19th Century banner for the Bishop Auckland Branch of the National Union of Railwaymen.

Next to The Four Clocks Centre you will see what remains of Brougham Place, built in the 1830s as a row of single-story dwellings for workers in the local mines and gas works. Cross the road and turn left down **Chester Street [8]**, part of the old "industrial quarter" of Bishop Auckland.

Whilst on Chester Street, take in the graffiti on walls donated by local businesses created by a local art collective, including a large-scale graffiti portrait of Stan Laurel.

Walk through the alley between Chester Street and **Railway Street**. On the opposite side of the road stands **The Hippodrome Theatre [9]**, home to **Bishop Auckland People's Museum**. The first-floor museum above the bingo hall exhibits items focusing on the social history and heritage of the town (small entry charge for 18+).

The Hippodrome Theatre was built in 1909 as a music hall and variety theatre. The theatre boasted the largest auditorium in the town seating 1800 people. From 1914 to the mid-60s the theatre was a cinema and was once part of the Essoldo group of cinemas. From 1966 onwards, the theatre has been a bingo hall. The Hippodrome Theatre obtained Grade II Listed Building status in 2012.

As the name suggests, Railway Street was closely connected to the railways in Bishop Auckland. At one time, the town was the centre of seven railway lines all of which needed support services. Railway Street was the home of Auckland Engine Works (currently the site of a Calor Gas shop) owned by Lingford, Gardiner & Company founded in the 1860s as "builders, hirers and repairers of locomotives" for the many local collieries in the area and the railways. The company owned a large railway forge and branched out into bicycle manufacture.

Lingford, Gardiner & Company were eventually taken over by Wilson's Forge in 1930; Wilson's Forge was in existence in the town from the 1840s until the 1990s and was famous the world over for the manufacture of steel, iron, and brass products. The site of the forge is now a supermarket. Many of the old Lingford, Gardiner & Co workshops on Railway Street are still in use today; one of the most notable is the former Drill Hall on Union Street. You might also keep a look out for Lingford, Gardiner & Co manholes and drain covers in the area which were made at the railway forge.

Walk to the end of Railway Street and turn left onto **South Church Road**. Opposite the junction with Railway Street, you will see the **Lodge Of King James I Academy [10]** which now provides storage for the collection of the **Durham Amateur Football Trust**.

Cross over the road using the pedestrian crossing at the entrance of the King James I Academy.

The school was founded in the 17th Century and the first school building on the current site was built in 1864. The girls' grammar school on the site was built in the early 20th Century - there was a distinct albeit invisible and never-to-be-crossed "line" between the boys' and girls' schools until the 1960s when the two schools were amalgamated. There are a several Grade II listed buildings on the site. A famous old alumni of the boys' grammar school was Stan Laurel; one of the school buildings named in his honour was destroyed by fire in 2007 and is now being rebuilt and converted into social housing.

Next to the building works is the entrance to **Bishop Auckland Cricket Club [11]**. Up until 2002, this was also the home of Bishop Auckland Football Club, also known as “Two Blues”. Two-thirds of the football pitch was also part of the cricket pitch outfield, and the football spectators could only watch the matches on two sides of the ground.

Bishop Auckland FC has a long and illustrious history starting in the 1880s when theological students studying at Auckland Castle formed a team. Many of these early players were from Oxford and Cambridge universities and it is the Universities’ colours that still make up the team’s strip. The new home of the “Two Blues” is Heritage Park at Tindale Crescent just outside the town centre. Perhaps the most famous player to emerge from Bishop Auckland FC was Bob Hardisty. This is the same Bob Hardisty that has a main road in the town named after him.

Bob Hardisty’s footballing career began with Bishop Auckland FC in the 1930s and ended as coach for Manchester United with Matt Busby in the 1950s via a stint at Darlington FC in the 1940s. During this time, Bob helped Bishop Auckland win the Northern League seven times and the Amateur FA Cup three times. He was also represented his country at three Olympics in 1948, 1952 and 1956.

Bishop Auckland Cricket Club was founded in 1853, most likely playing matches on fields and open ground along South Church Road. The club has been in its current home on Kingsway since the early part of the 20th Century and as mentioned above, shared the ground with Bishop Auckland Football Club for many years.

The old football stands on the ground have now been demolished and have been replaced by Boundary Court housing development.

Continue past the cricket ground and turn right at the junction onto **Kingsway [12]**. On the right-hand of Kingsway was the location of the former St Anne’s School, a “National School,” built on a site known as “Belvedere,” since demolished except for the front elevation and now (2022) being redeveloped. Next door to St Anne’s is Bishop’s Sports Bar, once the entrance to the football ground.

As you walk along Kingsway, on the left-hand side you will see the rear of buildings on Newgate Street; this area is currently (2022) earmarked for further development. On the right-hand side you will see **The Lightfoot Institute [13]**. The building opened in 1882 as a Young Men’s Church Institute and was named after the then Bishop of Durham, Joseph Barber Lightfoot. The building served as the town’s library until the 1990s and has now been partially converted into apartments.

A little further along Kingsway, the road is bisected by Victoria Avenue. On the left-hand side are **The Mechanics’ Institute** and **The Masonic Hall [14]**. The Bishop Auckland Mechanics’ Institute was established in the early part of the 19th Century and occupied a few locations in the town before the building on Victoria Avenue was constructed in the 1880s. The aim of the Mechanics’ Institute movement was to educate the “working classes” by covering a broad range of topics from the arts, literature, science, and technical instruction. The Institute boasted a lending library and

reading rooms complemented by lectures, exhibitions, trips, and social gatherings. Matthew Richley, the noted 19th Century historian of Bishop Auckland (*"History and Characteristics of Bishop Auckland"* published 1872) was a stalwart of the Mechanics' Institute.

Continue walking along Kingsway passing Regent Street on your right. Take the next right hand turn down **Durham Chare [15]**. This was once one of the main routes into the town before a new road layout was designed and built in the 1920s through the Market Place. At the bottom of the hill is **Castle Chare** and the **Drinking Fountain [16]** built in 1873 by the Temperance Society, originally for the benefit of both people and animals, and recently restored. To the right of the fountain, along Durham Chare is the Gaunless Bridge built in the early 19th Century. Beyond the bridge was the site of Ferens Mill producing flour and animal feed; there has been a mill on this same site since the 16th Century; it is now the site of The Willows housing development. Take a moment to read the information board close by the drinking fountain then head up the steps (N.B this is a steep climb of approximately 60 steps) which takes you back to Kingsway. Please cross the road with care to continue along Castle Chare and into the **Market Place [17]**.

Optional detour: As you enter the Market Place, turn right to view the neo-Gothic gatehouse to AUCKLAND PARK comprising the Bishop's Palace or Auckland Castle, residence of the Bishops of Durham for 800 years and 150 acres of parkland. The many attractions within the complex including St Peter's Chapel (open to the public) and the Castle itself, once the home to a world-famous collection of 17th Century paintings by Zurbaran depicting Jacob and his twelve sons which are now in The Spanish Gallery. The parkland offers a selection of designated walks in delightful, wooded environment home to a variety of flora and fauna. There is also a Georgian deer house, an 18th century icehouse and a recently restored walled garden, as well as the Faith Museum due to open Autumn 2023.

The origins of the Market Place date back to the 13th Century. It was once the genteel centre of the town with many fine residences dating from the 17th Century onwards. Those on the south side of Market Place at one time boasted extensive gardens heading down towards the River Gaunless. Many of the buildings in the Market Place have recently been redeveloped by The Auckland Project such as the Mining Art Gallery and Spanish Gallery. The latter comprises the former Barclays Bank built in the 19th Century (then the Backhouse Bank) and the adjacent building, also 19th Century, once the former home of the Barrington School and the site of Pollards Hall. The recently refurbished 19th Century Town Hall offers the weary walker the chance for a sit down in the café and a look around the current exhibition on display in the light and airy gallery.

It's well worth taking a circuit around the Market Place to take in the fine buildings and short detours around Silver Street and Wear Chare.

A notable resident of the Market Place was William George Armstrong, the innovative engineer, industrialist, and philanthropist who lodged with the headmaster in what is now the "Fifteas Team Room" (No. 9, Market Place) when he attended King James I Grammar School at around the age of 16. Armstrong met his future wife in Bishop Auckland,

Margaret Ramshaw, who also lived on the Market Place with her family. The two became childhood sweethearts and later married in 1835.

The War Memorial near The Mining Art Gallery was originally located near the railway station; it was dedicated in 1922 and commemorates the fallen from WWI up to very recent conflicts.

Your return to the Market Place ends your tour.

This walk has been produced with support and contributions from:

- Bishop Auckland Civic Society
- Bishop Auckland People's Museum
- Durham Amateur Football Trust
- Mrs Barbara Laurie

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