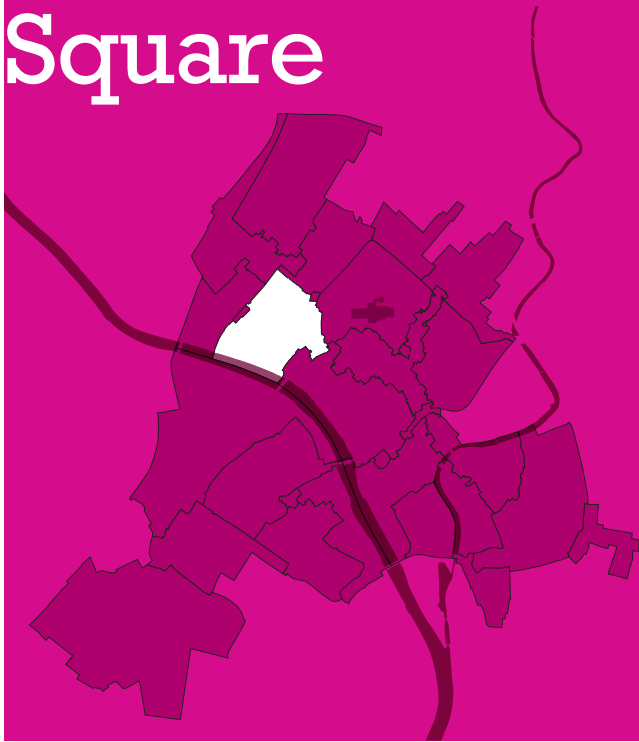


Character Area Four: Museum Gardens and Exhibition Square



Overview

This area has a very rich history sometimes only hinted at by ruins or fragments of buildings. It did not evolve in the same way as other areas of the city centre as there was not a compact network of ancient streets that became densely built up. Rather, there were several medieval institutions which meant that most land remained in the same ownership until the mid-18th century.

A very important group of ecclesiastical and civic buildings were built over 1000 years in and around what is now Museum Gardens. This open space is the largest and most pleasant in the city providing a quiet refuge away from the traffic noise and pollution of the inner ring road. This area still provides much of York's cultural attractions including the Theatre Royal, City Art Gallery and Yorkshire Museum.

Boundaries

This area consists of Museum Gardens and surrounding streets. The north eastern and western boundaries are formed by the wall of St Mary's Abbey. The south western boundary is formed by the River Ouse. The eastern boundary is defined by the Regency terrace on St Leonard's Place.

Bootham Bar is considered in this character area because of its relationship with Exhibition Square.

Historical development

Museum Gardens contains the last surviving wall of the Roman fortress with the large 4th century Multangular Tower. In 1999, excavations begun by Channel 4's Time Team adjacent to the Library discovered the remains of the Roman defences and significantly revised their dating.

In about 937 a hospital was founded in this corner of the fortress and was originally known as St Peter's after a chapel on the site dedicated to the saint. Fire in 1137 severely damaged the hospital which was rebuilt along with a new chapel dedicated to St Leonard. The hospital was seized by Henry VIII during the Dissolution of the Monasteries

and used for a short time as the Royal Mint. In the 18th and 19th centuries, parts of the building were destroyed by the widening of Museum Street, the creation of St Leonard's Place and the rebuilding of the Theatre Royal. Standing remains of the medieval fabric survive inside the Theatre Royal and there are some ruins in Museum Gardens next to the Central Library.

In the 10th century, the area beyond the fortress wall was the Earlsborough, a fortified residence of the Earls of Northumbria. The site was chosen so as to take defensive advantage of the Roman fortress wall on one side. The fortified area was on similar lines to what would become the precinct of St Mary's Abbey.

The Abbey was founded by King William II when he visited the city in 1088. It was home to a monastic community which became one of the wealthiest Benedictine houses in England. The ruins seen today date from the 13th century and are the result of the Dissolution of the Monasteries ¹.

Several structures remain from the medieval city defences in this area. The most notable structure is Lendal Tower built shortly after 1300. It was one of a pair on either bank of the Ouse that held a chain across the water. In the 17th century the Tower was extended to become a water pumping station, first powered by waterwheel, then horses then steam. In the late 18th century, Lendal Hill House was built adjacent to the Tower and had hot and cold baths. In 1846 a separate engine house was built and the Tower became offices for York Waterworks.

The King's Manor was built 1485-1502 for the Abbot of St Mary's but after the Dissolution, the house became the residence of the President of the Council in the North, the northern seat of Tudor and Stuart government. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the building was enlarged but this stopped in 1641 when the Council was abolished. The buildings were then leased as apartments until 1833 when Yorkshire School for the Blind was established there.

Restoration and expansion followed and since 1963 the Manor has been used by the University of York.

In 1827 York Philosophical Society took over the Abbey grounds which had been leased by Lord Grantham from the Crown. The Society wished to build a new museum and a condition of the sale was that scientific gardens should be established. The Society excavated the Abbey ruins, put their finds into the newly built Yorkshire Museum and established a botanic garden, all for the use of Society members. The current layout of the Gardens dates back to Sir John Naesmyth's design of around 1844. The following year the grounds were extended by the addition of the remains of St Leonard's hospital. This is the extent of Museum Gardens today which have been open to the public since 1961.

In 1831 it was proposed to build a new crescent, St Leonard's Place, to connect Blake Street and Bootham. This is the only 'classical' planned street in York and required the demolition of Bootham Bar's barbican and a section of the city wall ②.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, many buildings were built for culture or entertainment during the 'season' when wealthy families would come to the city from the country. These included The Assembly Rooms (1730), Theatre Royal (several phases from 1744), Museum Chambers (1825) and De Grey Rooms (1841-2).

The City Art Gallery was built in 1879 by Edward Taylor for the second Yorkshire Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition, inspired by the Great Exhibition in London of 1851. Exhibition Square was laid out at the same time but the statue of York artist William Etty was erected later in 1911 ③. Unfortunately this space is now surrounded by a large number of bus stops which compromise the setting of the historic buildings.

Today the Museum Gardens are a popular public park, the largest in the city centre. The Gardens have hosted Mystery Plays and travelling exhibition pavilions. In the evenings the ruins have been illuminated and the most elevated positions used for viewing firework displays.



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The City Art Gallery and Exhibition Square in the late 19th century

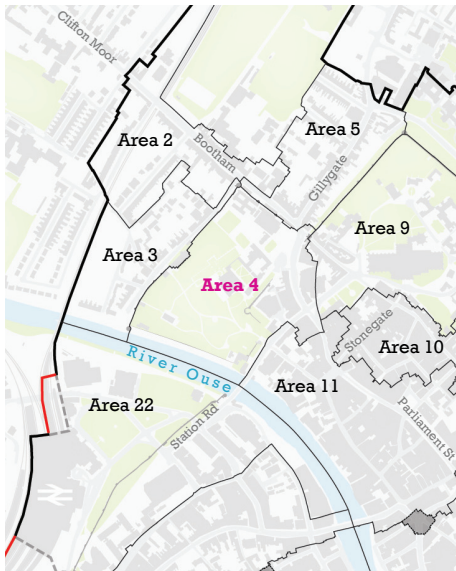
Ambience and use

This area has contrasting ambiances. The peaceful Museum Gardens are a welcome escape from the noisy and polluted inner ring road. The high number of tourist attractions in the area and its proximity to the central shopping area means it is often busy with pedestrians. St Leonard's Place and Exhibition Square have crowded bus stops during peak times but even here there are little pockets of space to relax, such as in front of the City Art Gallery.

Part One: Understanding the City > Character Areas > Four: Museum Gardens and Exhibition Square

- 1 Medieval Abbey buildings and ruins
- 2 Buildings from 16th - 19th century fronting Exhibition Square
- 3 19th terrace of townhouses converted to office use
- * Landmark
- Abbey Wall and Roman Wall
- Railway
- Character area boundary

Area 4 location plan



Introductory plan



Designations







Museum Gardens has the greatest concentration of designations in the Conservation Area. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Registered Park and Garden and contains Grade I listed buildings such as the King's Manor and Yorkshire Museum. The Assembly Rooms on Blake Street are also Grade I.

The houses on St Leonard's Place, Theatre Royal and De Grey Rooms are all Grade II* listed. The City Art Gallery and Library are Grade II listed.

Due to the high number of listed buildings, there are no others of historic interest which could be considered Buildings of Merit. Equally, there are very few modern buildings in the area and none detract from its appearance.



The Grade I listed Yorkshire Museum, set in Museum Gardens which is designated as both a Registered Park and Garden and Scheduled Ancient Monument

-  Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  Grade I Listed Building
-  Grade II* Listed Building
-  Grade II Listed Building
-  Registered Park and Garden
-  Character area boundary



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Streets & Spaces

Museum Gardens

The current layout dates back to Sir John Naesmyth's design of around 1844, undertaken in order to unify the separate areas of planting. He designed a circuit path to link the two entrances and provide the best views of the ruins and buildings. Some changes to the design were made in 1981 including an additional path through the centre and some rockeries.

The central path leads past the Observatory, built in 1832 as an octagonal single storey building with conical roof. It once contained the largest refracting telescope in the world.

The Gardens have four main entry points: Museum Street, Marygate, a path between the Council car park and King's Manor and from Library Square past the Multangular Tower. This latter route is quite hidden and rather under used.

A long stretch of the riverside walk passes the Gardens and there is direct access to the Gardens via gates adjacent to Lendal Tower and the Hospitium. However, these are not particularly obvious entry points for visitors. The railings date from 1844 and are by the John Walker Foundary.

From the Yorkshire Museum, the Gardens slope downhill toward the River Ouse and there are views across the southern part of the city. From Lendal Bridge and the lower part of the Gardens, there are excellent views up to the Museum and the theatrical Abbey ruins.

Although there is significant bunding along the river, the lower parts of the Gardens suffer badly from flooding. They are considered part of the 'functional floodplain' of the Ouse.



Museum Gardens is separated from the riverside by Grade II listed railings and floods regularly

Exhibition Square

Exhibition Square ② was purposely designed as a public space in front of the City Art Gallery. It has fantastic views of Bootham Bar and the Minster. In the summer there are some cafe tables for the Gallery but the number of bus stops makes the space noisy and polluted. It is also a useful area for visitor groups to gather.



The square adjoins other open spaces, which together form a significantly larger area. These adjoining spaces include the King's Manor forecourt ①, an area of parking that serves the City Council ④, a series of bus stops and large stand alongside St Leonard's Place ⑥, the junction in front of Bootham Bar ③, and a small courtyard next to the Theatre Royal ⑤. The six spaces are currently segregated from each other, and have different owners and a variety of uses.

This area is well fronted by a number of significant public buildings, including King's Manor (now occupied by the University of York), the De Grey Rooms, Theatre Royal, and a grand 19th century terrace presently occupied by City of York Council. However, due to the poor arrangement of the public spaces this feels like a very fragmented area.

King's Manor forecourt is a composed of a lawn surrounded by a tarmac path and is an important setting for the building's front entrance. The space is separated from Exhibition Square by historic iron railings and gates. Although the lawn is a private space, it is available to the public since the gates are never locked. University traffic passes through the space to access the car park to the west. The



The overall area is fragmented as individual spaces have separate owners and functions

- ① King's Manor Forecourt
 - ② Exhibition Square
 - ③ Junction in front of Bootham Bar
 - ④ Car park for council offices
 - ⑤ Courtyard for Theatre Royal
 - ⑥ Bus stand
-  Building frontage
 Entrance to building



Exhibition Square sits alongside several other public spaces, that when appreciated together form a considerably larger public / semi-public space

forecourt and railings date from about 1900 when the Headmaster's House was built by Walter Brierley and have recently been refurbished.

The former City Council car park is separated from the other spaces by a low wall and mature trees. It contains a fragment of the Roman fortress wall from which there is a fine view of the Minster. The open quality of the space adjacent to the city wall and around the wall fragment (which remains in Council ownership) provides them with a setting and views that would be diminished by inappropriate development.

A large bus stand adjoins the south of Exhibition Square, and spills out onto St Leonard's Place. It is occupied by standing buses for much of the day, and heavily compromises the ambience and air quality of both Exhibition Square and St Leonard's Place. The size and position of bus stops impedes pedestrian movement.

The spacious junction in front of Bootham Bar is cluttered with railings and a staggered crossing which hinder pedestrian movement and impinge on views of the Bar.

The small courtyard next to the Theatre Royal is opposite the Council car park. This is raised above street level and screened from the road by mature trees. In warmer weather it provides a pleasant outdoor extension of the theatre's café.



Railings and road markings compromise the setting of Bootham Bar

Buildings

Behind the City Art Gallery is a derelict area with some Nissen huts. Although this area cannot easily be seen, its importance stems from its role in the setting of the Gallery and the Abbey walls.

Unlike other areas of the city, this character area is home to a collection of large public buildings and ruins.

Ruins

There are three groups of ruins in this area. The earliest are those of the Roman fortress wall which is the most extensive and only visible section left. Its most impressive feature is the Multangular Tower which dates from the 4th century but has 13th century upper level. It would have originally been about twice as high and is referred to as 'multi-angular' because it is a 14 sided shape.

Parts of St Leonard's Hospital are sited next to Museum Street and the Library. These include the ruins of a vaulted passage, undercroft and chapel dating to the 13th century.

St Mary's Abbey ruins are the most impressive in scale and consist of the main walls of the Abbey's 13th



The remains of the 13th century chapel of St Leonard's Hospital



The dramatic ruins of St Mary's Abbey set in Museum Gardens

Large buildings

This area has the greatest number of stand alone historic buildings in the Conservation Area, many by well known architects.

The earliest is the Tudor King's Manor which was built over an older building on the same site. The earliest phase of building was 1485-1502 and is represented by the block now used as the main entrance. Blocks to the rear were added in the 16th century and further additions to the west in the 17th century. The Manor was restored and extended again from 1870 to 1900 for use as a school. The last extension took place in 1963 when the building became occupied by the University of York.

There was a hiatus in construction until the 18th century when Yorkshire's leading citizens and landed classes erected a building purposely designed for entertainment and social activities. The Assembly Rooms date from 1731-2 and were designed by Lord Burlington on the basis of a Roman precedent as interpreted by Andrea Palladio, a Renaissance architect. Burlington was arguably the most influential architect of the 18th century and this building is one of his most important and well-known works. The exterior was rebuilt in 1828 by Pritchett and Watson. The building was used for social gatherings such as dances and now houses a restaurant.



The Assembly Rooms built 1731-2, though this facade dates from a hundred years later



Grade I Listed King's Manor, which dates back to the 15th century (left) and the Victorian Headmaster's House (right)



A carved early 17th century doorway at the King's Manor

by Andrea Palladio, a Renaissance architect. The exterior was re-built in 1828 by Pritchett and Watson. The building was used for social gatherings and now houses a restaurant.

The Theatre Royal was built in five phases to account for both changing functional needs and architectural preferences. The first building dated from 1744 but the façade was re-built in 1834-5 by John Harper in a Tudor style. The building was re-built again in 1877-9 by George Styan, the city engineer, in a Gothic style using limestone. This is the exterior as seen today although the interior was re-built again in 1901-2 by F.A. Tugwell of Scarborough. A concrete and glass side extension was added in 1967-8 by Patrick Gwynne and R.A. Sefton to house a foyer and café. It received a Civic Trust award.

The De Grey Rooms were built by subscription to the designs of G. T Andrews 1841-2. The building's primary purpose was to accommodate the Yorkshire Hussars during their visits to the city but the rest of the time it was used for social events such as concerts and balls. It is an elegant classical building with distinctive elongated round headed



The De Grey Rooms, designed by G. T Andrews 1841 -2

The Theatre Royal was built in several sequences and is therefore composed of a variety of distinct architectural styles, including a modern concrete and glass extension.



windows and attractive iron railings. The building is being converted into a studio theatre, workshop and costume department for the Theatre Royal.

The trend for building cultural institutions continued into the 19th century. The Yorkshire Museum was built 1827-30 by William Wilkins. He specifically wanted a Greek classical style to distinguish the Museum from the city's gothic buildings. The façade is stone with a large central portico formed by columns supporting a pediment. A concrete extension was added in 1912 by E. Ridsdale Tate.

The City Art Gallery was built in 1879 by Edward Taylor for the second Yorkshire Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition. The building is in an Italian 16th century or 'Renaissance' style; there is much floral embellishment and some decorative panels. The building was restored 1948-52 after bomb damage.

The only 20th century civic building is the Central Library built in 1927 by Brierley and Rutherford. It is in a 'neo-Georgian' style which was a modern interpretation of classical style; it uses red brick as the main material with decorative elements in stone.

*The City Art Gallery built
1879 faces Exhibition
Square*



*20th century Neo-
Georgian Central Library*



Terraced houses

St Leonard's Place contains the only buildings in the area built for residential use. It was a new street begun in 1834 but not finished until 1842. The terrace of nine houses was designed by John Harper; the exteriors are identical but the interiors differed depending on what each owner wanted. The terrace is unusual within the city because of its crescent form and formal planned symmetry. The houses are currently occupied by York City Council but are soon to be vacated.

*Terraced townhouses
on St Leonard's Place,
1834 – 1842*



Traffic & Movement

The route along Museum Street and St Leonard's Place is part of the inner ring road and is therefore heavily used by cars and buses. Many of the bus routes stop along these streets and Exhibition Square, resulting in noise and pollution. There is also a significant level of pedestrian congestion around the stops as large shelters block free movement.

The most important junction is that of St Leonard's Place and Bootham. Street clutter and staggered crossings impact upon the pedestrian experience of this junction and views of Bootham Bar. This is discussed in more detail in Gillygate (character area 5).

There is some car parking in two private car parks – one inside King's Manor and one belonging to York City Council. These car parks are not particularly intrusive and hidden by planting or buildings. On the other hand the disabled spaces provided directly outside the Central Library do negatively impact upon the setting of the medieval ruins of St Leonard's Hospital.



Buses contribute to congestion along St Leonard's Place

Issues & Opportunities

Strengths

- Museum Gardens has a unique ambience in the city - it is a place where visitors and locals can relax, absorbing both the natural and historic elements of the surroundings. It is important that any changes to the Gardens ensure that this special balance is maintained.
- The area contains a series of very important buildings which illustrate the cultural life of York across the centuries
- There are two famous Key View, including that of Bootham Bar and the Minster from Exhibition Square (No .21)
- The open space of the former Council car park allows views of the City Walla and provides a buffer to a fragment of Roman fortress wall. These qualities should not be lost to inappropriate development.



Key View 12 to Bootham Bar and the Minster from Exhibition Square

Weaknesses and opportunities

There are several short term interventions which could improve this area:

- The Central Library forecourt has recently been paved over to make it a more appealing public space. This provides a better setting for the library and neighbouring ruins than the previous tarmac. There still an opportunity to improve links with St Leonard's Hospital and the Multangular Tower as a route into Museum Gardens. This small green space could be enhanced for library users.
- Unnecessary street clutter in front of Bootham Bar should be removed and crossings simplified. This will improve views and pedestrian experience in general.
- There is a small amount of street clutter at the junction with Duncombe Place. Given this is a key view to the Minster, this should be reduced where possible.
- Access to the river directly from Museum Gardens is not obvious. An approved scheme to develop the engine house next to Lendal Tower proposes to incorporate an entrance from a raised riverside terrace. If this goes ahead, it would enhance entry from the river.

In the longer term, the potential of the adjacent public spaces of Exhibition Square, King's Manor and the former Council car park needs to be explored. The separate landowners should be consulted and a public space masterplan prepared to identify how the spaces could be better integrated and be made more functional and attractive. It should be noted that the small section of Roman wall within the car park is still under Council ownership and any new setting needs careful planning.

As stated in the 'Strengths' section, Museum Gardens has a special ambience that should be maintained. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to better link the space to the city and increase access points. The result of this is not necessarily to encourage more people to use the gardens, rather to offer regular users more entry options and reduce pressure on the central pathway.

The route into Museum Gardens at the side of the Council car park (Manor Lane) should be better emphasised and linked into that from the Minster to Bootham Bar.




There is great potential to better integrate spaces around Exhibition Square in the longer term

The area to the rear of the City Art Gallery should be considered a 'development opportunity'. In this context, this means that it could be enhanced through restoration or removal of Nissen huts depending on their significance, plus landscape improvements. Any works in this area would need to take into account the sensitivity of the site which is part of the original Abbey precinct, adjacent to Museum Gardens, and within the setting of several listed buildings and key views to the Minster.

Existing

-  Existing entrance / Gated entrance
-  High volumes of traffic
-  Abbey Walls and railings along southern side of Museum Gardens define pedestrian movement
-  Landmark
-  Abbey and Roman Wall
-  Riverside walk

Opportunities

-  Public space improvements to Exhibition Square and St Leonard's Place

Views

-  Strategic fixed with focal point
-  Strategic dynamic
-  Strategic dynamic panoramic
-  Local fixed with focal point
-  Local panoramic
-  Potential to extend local dynamic panoramic through redevelopment and enhancement of riverfront
-  Key view from outside the character area - refer to section 3.5



Issues and Opportunities