

HULL'S GUILDHALL & NEARBY BUILDINGS AND MONUMENTS.



The magnificent building which is Hull's Guildhall runs from the junction of Lowgate and Alfred Gelder Street at the east end to Quay Street at the west end. A road, strangely named Hanover Square, runs around to the rear of the Guildhall. Beyond and parallel to Hanover Square lies Guildhall Road which runs back in the direction of Victoria Square.

The conical tower next to the Guildhall tower actually housed the Hull City Archives until 2010 when they were moved to the purpose built History Centre off Freetown Way, just to the north of our tour.



This photograph shows the Guildhall Tower at its east end, with the conical former archive building to its left, and a converted warehouse that served the adjacent Queens Dock. You will remember that this dock is now Queens Gardens.

The other buildings of great interest in the immediate area include:

The Maritime Buildings.

This is the building immediately next to The City Hotel, opposite the front entrance to the Guildhall. A Grade 11 listed building, unfortunately it is not in the best state of repair. It was designed by Hull architects Gelder and Kitchen in 1900. A Blue Plaque nearby commemorates the part that John Good and sons Ltd, who were shipping agents for the Finland Steamship company, played in assisting over 300,000 Scandinavian immigrants through Hull to America between 1891 and 1924. John Good and Sons were based in the Maritime Buildings.

A statue of another famous Hull Shipping line owner, Charles Henry Wilson stands at the junction of Lowgate and Alfred Gelder Street, in front of the City Hotel, next to the Maritime Buildings. More can be seen on these gentlemen and the part they played in Hull's Maritime History, in the section entitled The Great Migration.



St Mary's Church, in Lowgate, about which more later in this article



Three John Scotts pub, which was formerly the main Post Office for Hull, and way before that, in the 15th Century Suffolk Palace, owned by a wealthy local family, the De La Poles, but seized by Henry VII and left to his son, Henry VIII in his will. Again, more later about this site and the original Main Post Office for Hull, now closed and moved. It is now converted into the Three John Scotts Public house.

The buildings and monuments below are either opposite or just across the road from the Guildhall.



Also close by is the monument to William Wilberforce, Hull MP and campaigner for the abolition of slavery in the 18th century. As you may know by now this statue used to be on the Monument Bridge but is now in the campus of Hull College. It was moved as part of a new traffic plan and more information on this is contained in the audio and written guide. This can be seen from the corner of the former archives building at the corner of Guildhall Road or you can take a closer look by walking up Wilberforce Drive on your left and crossing at the pedestrian crossing opposite the College.

THE GUILDHALL

The Guildhall, which you have reached on stage 8 of the walk, is the main administration office of Hull City Council. It faces east, which was the direction which most of Hull's commerce faced when constructed, looking towards the High Street and the Market Place. Like many Cities the commercial centre has now moved and faces to the West.

Hull's Guildhall is a fine example of Baroque Revival Style architecture. Designed by Sir Edwin Cooper and built by Quibell Son & Green of Hull between 1906 and 1914. It was granted Listed Building status in 1973.

The main frontage on Alfred Gelder Street has pavilions at either end and a clock tower at the centre. The façade has three large sculpture groups by Scottish sculptor Albert Hodge; one at each of the pavilions representing maritime prowess and strength, and one on the front centre representing justice. Made from several huge blocks of Portland stone, one is a female figure, most probably Aphrodite, (often erroneously described as Boadicea), rising from the waves on a chariot type vehicle pulled by two horses with fish-like tails. One is a figure in a chariot flanked by lions, thought to be Britannia, representing strength, and the central sculpture is a male figure with a large book on his knee, representing Justice. These magnificent statues are amongst some of the most impressive works of sculptural art in the UK.

The site of Hull's Guildhall has known many changes since 1333 when an early building hosted Corporation Business between the Major and the Aldermen. It was known as a Moot, or Common Hall and was situated at the Southern end of Market Place, beyond the Statue of William of Orange. A second hall was built to the north of the original during the 1630's and this was demolished to make way for Queen Street in 1805. A third hall - known as a Guildhall, was built between 1862 and 1866 on Alfred Gelder Street. This was built in the Renaissance style, to the designs of Cuthbert Broderick. The eastern end of Sir Edwin Cooper's designed Guildhall lies on the site of Broderick's Guildhall in Lowgate, which is at the opposite end of one of the roads leading from the junction with the Guildhall.

The Guildhall was built to incorporate the Police Courts, and the name can still be seen embossed in the black ironwork of the western doors. In 1952 these courts became the Magistrates Courts. The building also housed Quarter Sessions, a middle tier form of Court until Crown Courts were devised in 1970. This Court eventually moved across the road to the Modern Crown Court in 1998, together with the County Court.

A complete holding cell block was incorporated in the Guildhall and a van dock built for prisoners coming from these jails, half way along Guildhall Road. This can still be seen today. Guildhall Road is the short road around the back of the building and can be reached on foot.

In one case in 1882, a trawler skipper named Otto Brand was charged with murdering a trawler lad. He appeared at a Court in the predecessor to this building on the same site. Found guilty, he was hanged at Leeds jail. Many other prisoners charged with murders and the like started their journeys to justice in this building and ended them on the gallows at Leeds Armley Prison.

You can enter the building via the large doorway on the Eastern edge of the Guildhall and the helpful Reception staff are situated on the left. It is possible to organise a tour of the Guildhall but a week's notice is required. If you don't have the luxury of time, you can get a sense of the building internally along the main corridor, ending with the Statute of the founding King who granted Hull a charter way back in the 1200's – King Edward I. If you are fortunate enough to take a tour you certainly won't be disappointed; you will see the civic part of the building, the Mayors Parlour, reception rooms, the Council Chamber and the magnificent Banqueting Hall. The corridors are oak lined, with carvings of fruit, flowers and vegetables adorning the doorways. There are also ships crests on the walls, depicting the maritime history of Hull and its relationship with visiting merchant and war ships.

The Guildhall Time Ball

When the Guildhall was built, a Time Ball was placed atop the clock tower. A Time Ball is a mechanism which enables navigators aboard ships to verify the settings of their marine chronometers. It is operated by being dropped down a central pole, usually at 1pm. It was raised 5 minutes earlier to alert the ships, then with 2-3 minutes to go it was raised the whole way. The time was recorded when the ball began descending, not when it reached the bottom. It was and still remains the only maritime timepiece on a municipal building, one of only 60 still existing in the world and is the tallest in the UK. During the blitz on Hull during the Second World War, the Guildhall was badly damaged and the Time Ball ceased to be used. In 2004 a 23 bell carillon was added to the tower and in 2013 mechanised winding equipment for the clock was installed.

In 2016 the council launched a successful appeal to raise sufficient funds to restore the Time Ball. The work began in February 2021 and a local construction company Hobson and Porter removed the existing replica ball and installed a new one. This was not a simple process, and the work involved replacing the internal mechanism, renovating parts of the clock tower and its stonework, repairing the lantern and putting in a new electrical installation to supply the mechanism.

In September 2021 the Timeball, together with a weathervane modelled on an 18th century merchant ship, were lifted back into place, onto a mast 60 metres above the ground. A giant 72m crane was used to perform this tricky manoeuvre! The Timeball and weathervane are covered in 23.5 carat, double thickness English gold leaf. The whole edifice is something to behold, and the citizen's of Hull are rightly proud to see it back where it belongs: Another vital part of Hull's Maritime Heritage.

Incidentally the Lord Mayor of Hull also carries the ceremonial title of Admiral of the Humber, one of only 3 Mayoral Titles in the Country to also carry the rank of Admiral, the others being the Mayors of Chester and London.

When Queen Victoria visited Hull in the 1850's it is said that she did so reluctantly in view of Hull's refusal to admit her ancestor Charles I. The story has it that Prince Albert persuaded her to make the visit. A painting of Prince Albert can be seen in the Lord Mayor's parlour. It is very unusual to see a picture of Albert alone – usually he is portrayed with Queen Victoria.

That is not to say they arrived separately, or that they had had a difference of opinion. As far as is known they hadn't had an argument, but Albert's enthusiasm for Hull certainly was known and much appreciated.

As you come out of the Guildhall, and across the road to your left is the tall column, atop which is the statue of Hull's William Wilberforce, MP for Hull and Campaigner for the Abolition of Slavery. This stands in the centre of Hull College's campus. It is 90ft high and was constructed in 1834 at a cost of £1250. It was moved here from Monument Bridge in 1935. When it was dismantled, the statue and column were cleaned, moved and rebuilt. It had been suggested that it be moved for the Hull City of Culture in 2017, but the cost of more than one and half million pounds was deemed to be too prohibitive. Monument Bridge is described in Stage 2 of the tour.

Opposite and built at more or less the same time as the Guildhall, is the former Main Post Office. This is now The Three John Scotts Pub and the floors above have been converted into luxury apartments. The building has similar design features to the Guildhall, and has a large archway leading into what was the Post Office yard. This was used for housing horse drawn and then mechanical Post Office vehicles. The most remarkable thing about the pub is its odd name – The Three John Scotts. This originates from three rectors of the St Mary's Church which is opposite here across Lowgate and next to the modern Combined Court building. Three successive vicars served here, all called John Scott; grandfather, son and grandson. Convenient for those who had difficulty with names but confusing for many!

Let's begin with the outside of St Mary's, or to give it its proper title – St Mary the Virgin. This ancient church dates back to the early part of the fourteenth century. In our photograph you can see the pathway under the arch in Lowgate and over to the right, the main entrance to the Guildhall. The Church was first finished in 1333 – some thirteen years after the main church nearby, Holy Trinity – now The Hull Minster. It is built on the site of former chapels and you will see a lane to the left hand side - Chapel Lane. An arresting feature is the tower, which straddles the footpath into Lowgate. In the 1440s the Church was re built and in 1507 the Tower was added but not well built and fell down 11 years later. In 1697 it was re-built, and it still stands today. It was built over the footpath to accommodate some widening of Lowgate. Some of the church glass in the chancel windows is from the 1300's and depicts three crowns: the symbol of the City of Hull.

The interior of this wonderful building really is too good to miss if you have time. There is a door inside the tower arch and another door accessed through the small church yard to the right as you face the Church. A major internal restoration of the Church was carried out in the reign of Elizabeth 1 in the 1500's. As you go in you are immediately struck by the ancient, medieval atmosphere.

Look to the top of the pillars holding up the Church and you will see carved fish, weasels and leopards! The altar is from the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1 and the organ dates back to 1751.

Back outside, look over again at the The Three John Scotts. If you wish to go in for refreshments, remember you will be going into the former Main Post Office. The main entrance to the pub is where the main entrance to the Post Office used to be, in Lowgate with the post office yard round the corner in Alfred Gelder Street.

But before that, on this corner once stood Suffolk Palace, home of the wealthy Hull merchant Robert de la Pole and his family, until it was seized by Henry VII and bequeathed to his son, Henry VIII. In 1539 Henry VIII went to York to meet the King of the Scots (James) who did not turn up. Would we blame him! Henry went back to London via Hull and stayed at Suffolk Palace.

It is thought he went bowling in Bowlalley Lane, a very early form of a bowling alley, although this is not certain. However, he certainly ordered greater fortification for Hull, including the whole of the East Wall down to the River at what was Sammy's Point (now The Deep). He had an awareness of the strategic importance of the City. He sailed across the Humber with his Queen, Anne Boleyn, disembarked in Lincolnshire and travelled back to London.

At the Corner of Bowlalley Lane is a building that had been a shipping exchange, an insurance office, a Youth Court, then a pub. It is said that a maid at Suffolk Palace found herself pregnant to a lord of Suffolk Palace and hung herself in the orchard in the palace grounds. Cleaners at the building when it was used as a Court are said to have seen a grey lady ghost and smelt apples in the autumn! Make of that what you will but Suffolk Palace was constructed where The Three John Scott's pub is now and there was indeed an orchard on the site. Incidentally Suffolk Palace became Hull's Armoury, the one coveted by Charles 1. (see the section on the Civil War).

We think you will agree that the area around Alfred Gelder Street and Lowgate covered in this section of the Walk certainly has it's fair share of fascinating architecture and historical facts.