

Queen Victoria Square



It could be said that Queen Victoria Square is the heart of the city of Hull and it is where our Hull Heritage Walks begins.



In the 1800's this area was very different to how we see today, an insalubrious area, with a warren of back streets and slum housing. Following an historic visit by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1854, improvements to the city began to take place, beginning with the clearances of the slum housing.

By 1890 Hull Mayor and Architect Sir Alfred Gelder had put forward plans which would completely change the city centre.

Although many of these buildings were damaged beyond recognition in the terrible blitz on Hull during the second world war, Queen Victoria Square with its fine buildings rose like a phoenix from the ashes to be, with a few changes through the years, the wonderful Square we see today.

QUEEN VICTORIA STATUE



Beginning in the centre of the Square, we have the imposing 35ft high bronze Statue of Queen Victoria, in full regalia, crowned with the Imperial Crown, holding the orb and sceptre and flanked by two figures; the 'Mistress of the Seas', with a trident in one hand, and a ship in the other, and 'The Dominion of the Land', with a globe in one hand and a small building representing power in the other. The statue was designed by architect J S Gibson and sculptor H C Fehr, and was unveiled in 1903 by the Prince and Princess of Wales.

Beneath the Statue, and also of some historic importance are some public toilets. These were unveiled in 1925. Both the statue and the toilets were given Grade II listed status in 1994.

On a whimsical note, it has been said that Queen Victoria Square is the only place where you can see the redoubtable Queen upon the throne!

Now, let's look at the buildings surrounding Queen Victoria beginning clockwise with The City Hall.

HULL CITY HALL



Another Grade II listed building, The City Hall was designed in the Baroque Revival Style in 1900 by the first City Architect Joseph Hurst.

He worked in close consultation with Frank Matcham who was a renowned architect working on many theatres throughout the country.

Work started in 1903 when the foundation stone was laid by the Princess of Wales and it was completed in 1909.

With its impressive copper coloured dome, said to be based on that of St Paul's Cathedral in London, it is quite magnificent. There are four hand carved figures around it, each one representing one of the arts. Above the impressive main entrance is a balcony.

The City Hall has been used many times over the years by returning heroes of the sporting world etc but perhaps one of the most memorable occasions was when in 1930 the city of Hull welcomed back its very own heroine Amy Johnson, after her historic solo flight from London to Australia, in her Gipsy Moth, Jason. There are newsreels of the day that recorded her rapturous homecoming in Queen Victoria Square. In 1911 an organ, built by Forster and Andrews of Hull, was installed in the main hall. It remains one of the largest working organs in the country.

During WW11, like so many buildings in Hull, the City Hall was extensively damaged in the blitz, and was forced to close. However, it rose as a phoenix from the ashes and reopened in 1948, following refurbishment to the building and the organ.

The Mortimer Suite with its beautiful domed ceiling and stunning atrium, has been an art gallery and an exhibition hall, but it is now used for various meeting and functions.

Nowadays Hull City Hall hosts an eclectic range of events; rock bands, pop groups, comedy, orchestras, drama and opera, Local choirs and societies hold their annual events here and the University of Lincolnshire holds its graduation ceremonies here.

THE MARITIME MUSEUM



Across Victoria Square, in front of the Queens Gardens stands The Maritime Museum. With its triangular design and three domes, this striking Grade 11 listed building is perhaps the grandest Victorian building in Hull City Centre. It was designed by C G Wray in the Italianate style and built at a cost of £90,000 in 1871.

This magnificent building is highly decorated with dolphins, fish scales, and many other symbols signifying Hull's proud maritime heritage.

Opened in 1872 it was originally the Headquarters of the Hull Dock Company who were responsible for running all the town's docks. At that time it stood at the junction of Princes Dock and the Queen's Dock. In 1930 Queen's Dock was closed and then filled in and is now the attractive Queen's Gardens we can see behind the museum today.

In 1974 it became the Museum of Fisheries and Shipping and when in 1975 Hull City Council purchased the building it became The Maritime Museum.

The museum's stated mission is "To preserve and make available the maritime history of Hull and East Yorkshire through artefacts and documents".

Since 2020 and with the aid of the Lottery Heritage Fund, the Museum has been undergoing an ambitious refurbishment.

Conservation work outside and inside is set to reveal the former glory of this stunning building, with improved access and new exhibitions showcasing old favourites and previously unseen material. There will be access to one of the domes, providing wonderful panoramic views across the square and the city beyond. When it re-opens in 2025 it will be the centrepiece of Hull's Maritime City Project, and will be a world class museum, one befitting 800 years of maritime history of Kingston upon Hull.

THE FERENS ART GALLERY



The Ferens Art Gallery, standing to the front of Queen Victoria, is a completely different style to the City Hall and the Maritime Museum. In 1917, Thomas Ferens, a significant benefactor to Hull, bought the redundant Church of St John the Evangelist, and offered the site for the construction of a new art gallery. He gave £35,000 towards the building costs.

London based architects S N Cooke and E C Davies were chosen, and they also designed chairs and other furnishings for the gallery and court spaces.

The builders were the local firm of G H Panton and Sons. Work started in 1926 and that same year the Prince of Wales, later to become Edward VIII laid the foundation stone.

The gallery is built of Portland stone, and is an impressive example of the Classical style with interior columns and Greek key borders. There are twin Corinthian columns, a pedimented doorway, a classical swag frieze, and a stone balustrade along the roofline at the front. The main entrance door is made of bronze with cast lion ornaments. The entrance halls are made of grey coloured mottled marble called Branco del Mare. This marble was almost lost at sea due to fire on board ship on its way from Italy, but luckily the ship was able to dock at Brest harbour and transfer its cargo to another boat that was bound for Hull.

Today, The Ferens houses one of the finest regional art collections in the country, from sixteenth century Dutch and Flemish Masters onwards. It has some fine Marine Paintings by artists such as John Ward, William Frederick Settle, Henry Redmore and Thomas Jacques Somerscales.

There are many notable works by artists including Lorinzetti, Frans Hals, Canaletto, Frederic Lord Leighton, Stanley Spencer, Helen Chadwick and Gillian Wearing. The list goes on.

In 2017, as part of Hull's UK City of Culture the Gallery underwent a £5.2m refit, and the prestigious Turner Prize was presented at the Ferens that year.

Today, the Ferens holds many and varied exhibitions and continues to be one of the foremost Art Galleries in the UK.

THE PUNCH HOTEL



Standing next to the Ferens Art Gallery and across the road to the City Hall, is the Punch Hotel with its ornate and colourful frontage. The original Punch was built in 1845 and was demolished in 1894/5. In 1896 it was rebuilt by the Hull Brewery company in its present form, facing the new square rather than the old lane, which is now lost beneath the entrance to the Princes Quay shopping centre. It's a great example of the craftsmanship and design of the era and it gained Grade II listed protection in 1973.

In 1898 the building was criticised for scaring horses coming into the city.

A letter to the Hull Daily Mail at that time said the new figure of Punch of the front of the hotel had caused the horses to rear up in terror.

The Punch has many fascinating ghost stories attached to it, and strange phenomena are still reported to this day.

The Punch is still one of Hull's popular pubs and eating places.

