

Welcome to historic Bishop Auckland. Throughout the town there are a number of information boards, linked by walks, bringing to life our cultural and natural heritage, from the Romans to Stan Laurel. We hope that this series of leaflets describing the walks and points of interest will help you enjoy discovering County Durham's "best kept secret".

Bishop Auckland Town Trails



Market Place

A Stroll Around the Market Place

Looking around the Market Place you can see a number of very grand houses. During the early 1800s most of the wealthiest houses in Bishop Auckland were located here. Before the town had a mart, live animals were bought and sold in the Market Place.

The Market Place was a venue for punishment. Punishments included stocks and the 'Truant's Clog' - a log of wood weighing about two stones attached to the ankle by padlocked chains. In the lower part of St. Anne's Chapel was a lock-up known as 'the black hole'.

The Former Town Hall

When is a Town Hall not a Town Hall? When it is a Temperance Hotel, Conservative Association offices, an indoor market, an air raid shelter, Turkish baths and a public toilet. These are just some of the uses the Bishop Auckland Town Hall has been put to in the past. It also staged regular concerts and theatrical performances. On 2nd December 1919, Sir Edward Elgar conducted a selection of his own work played by the Leeds Symphony Orchestra. The Town Hall was also the setting for "Industrial Week" exhibitions, organised to promote manufacturing and commerce. In the early 1950s the Hall was renovated and improved, including the provision of a new sprung dance floor and modern lounge bar.

The Town Hall served as the administrative centre of Wear Valley until the mid-1970s. After a period of uncertainty over the building's long term future, a joint venture between Wear Valley District Council and Durham County Council led to the restoration of the building and its magnificent transformation into a new arts complex including a library, tourist information centre, theatre, restaurant, ballroom, conference area and art gallery. The Town Hall occupies a prime site in the Market Place and is a Grade 2* Listed building in the French Gothic revival style. Well worth a visit.

A view of the Market Place and Deggarts Department store.



Look around you:

Your walk begins in the Market Place.

1. The Town Hall was built in 1862 but closed in 1988 when it was feared it had no future. In 1991 refurbishment work began and it was then reopened to the public.
2. In 1781 St. Anne's was rebuilt by subscription, with the grammar school and the Justices' Room on the ground floor and the chapel above. In 1797, Bishop Barrington added a square tower with pinnacles. The lower storey served as a Market House and the ancient Market Cross was pulled down. The current church was built in 1847.
3. Old Bank Chambers was a branch of Backhouse's Bank run by the prominent Quaker family of Darlington, who in 1896 combined with another leading Quaker banking family, Barclays.
4. A little castellated tower in Silver Street, built by Bishop Booth in 1459, as an entrance to the college in the castle grounds.
5. As you approach the Bishops Palace Gateway you can see the old college buildings on the left, with a cobbled road way and a gateway topped with a clock tower.
6. Barclays Bank moved from Old Bank Chambers into new premises in the Market Place in 1870. Having stood derelict for a number of years they have now been renovated revealing period features.

