



LRSA City Trail 1984
Retracing the Guided Walk in Leicester's City Centre

LRSA

Leicestershire + Rutland Society of Architects

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Introduction

This guide book helps you to retrace the 'LRSA City Trail 1984', a guided walk through the city centre of Leicester.

The leaflet lists the original 25 terracotta plaques still in place and gives a description of the views from each location.

The guide also includes a summary of the changes in the city centre during the 40 years since the original trail was laid out.

Background

For a number of years the Leicestershire & Rutland Society of Architects has been investigating the mystery of the terracotta foxes on numbered plaques in the centre of Leicester.

We were contacted regularly by members of the public, who had spotted a plaque or two, noticed the LRSA inscription, and asked us about the story behind them, as well as for a map of their locations in the city.

Unfortunately we couldn't provide either, but we were intrigued and started to search for the foxes and research the origins of the trail.

The plaques were curated in 1984, by the Leicestershire & Rutland Society of Architects, and made by Ibstock, the local brick manufacturers.

The terracotta signs are fixed to buildings throughout the city centre, inscribed with the words 'City Trail LRSA 1984', featuring a running fox and an individual number, and the name of local brickmakers Ibstock.

They are about 25 by 25 centimeters in size, mostly fixed at a height of around 2.5 meters and orange in colour, similar to the typical Leicester red brick of Victorian buildings.

Some are prominent and easy to spot against a rendered white surface, others blend into a background of orange brickwork, one has been painted over and one is covered by ivy, so you will need to look closely around you to find them all.

We have researched the trail, found its potential origin, discovered a likely predecessor, retraced the trail and discovered how much the townscape has changed in the past four decades.

There were at least 37 plaques, most likely to be the total number too, 25 of these still exist today.

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1984 was a busy year for architectural and historical festivities, it was the 'Festival of Architecture Year' and 'British Heritage Year'.

Leicester City Council and the LRSA published a folded leaflet called 'The City Trail: Explore the Corners of Leicester - A perambulation around some of the corners of Leicester'.

Copies of this map still exist, it features photos and descriptions of noticeable buildings on street corners, which were marked with letters.

Historians Sally Hartshorne and Colin Hyde shared with us their article "Town Trails in Leicester", published by the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society in the Leicestershire Historian No 55 (2019):

"The City Trail - Explore the Corners of Leicester (1984)' was [...] produced by the Environmental Committee of the Leicester and Rutland Society of Architects and the City Engineers Department, Leicester City Council, in association with the Fosse Camera Club.

This used both wall and pavement plaques - that can still be seen - to guide the walker through the city. The wall plaques marked the 1984 Festival of Architecture and the pavement plaques commemorated British Heritage Year.

This had high production values, was a large foldable paper trail, and featured photographs as well as a map. The theme of the trail was street corners and the text highlighted the different ways in which they contributed to the townscape of Leicester."

A photograph of the 'The City Trail - Explore the Corners of Leicester (1984)' is included in the annex of this guide.

The pavement plaques have, not surprisingly, all disappeared, given the frequency of re-paving projects in the city centre, which leaves us with the wall-mounted plaques. We have found 25 of these in what their most likely original positions.

The reason that we don't know for certain about the numbers and locations is that we have not been able to find a map with their positions, any written records relating to the creation of the trail itself or any memories from architects who were involved in the LRSA at the time.

Therefore we overlaid the original 'Explore the Corners' walk over the layout of **today's** city centre and created a couple of maps to compare the positions of the lettering use for the 'Explore the Corners' walk with the numbers displayed on the 'LRSA City Trail' plaques.

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This exercise showed a general proximity of the LRSA plaques to the route of the walk, however there are fewer plaques than lettered markers, and their positions do not match precisely.

The reason for this variation is a significant difference in how many of the LRSA plaques are meant to be used: they mark vantage points from which to observe the city scape, not buildings which should be looked at themselves.

A good example of this is plaque No 12, found on a humble building at the corner of Guildhall Lane and Coronation Place, a non-descript sul-de-sac:

Its position becomes obvious as soon as you turn around to look at Leicester Cathedral, the Guildhall to the right and the corner of Looseby Lane and Guildhall Lane on the left.

A dozen of the '**LRSA City Trail**' are missing, mostly in clusters, and the locations of these missing signs illustrate where the city centre has changed the most.

The 'New Walk Centre' of the 1970s has been demolished (Nos 1 and 2), the Shires / Highcross shopping centre has been built (Nos 15, 17 to 19) and large retail signage now obscures many facades, exactly at the height of the plaques.

This guide takes you to the original 25 terracotta plaques still in place and gives a description of buildings and cityscape seen from each location.

Our commentary also comments on the changes in the city centre since the original trail was laid out in 1984 and points out significant new buildings now in place in 2024.

On the walk you will pass numerous 'Heritage Panels', which have been erected in the past decade. These will provide detailed information on many of the buildings on the trail, so we encourage you to take advantage of these boards.

And our recommendation is to look up and observe the top of the buildings you pass, many have retained their original grandeur at high level.

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Plaque 1:
New Walk and King Street

We begin the trail at the junction of New Walk and King Street, at the prominent turret-like corner window of the red-brick Victorian building No 19 King Street. There is no original terracotta plaque from 1984 left in this location, but it is a good spot to start our walk.

The panoramic view starts on the lefthand side with a group of Georgian buildings along **New Walk, Leicester's unique** Georgian pedestrian promenade leading from the town centre up the hill to Victoria Park. It was laid out in 1785 across then un-built land between Welford Place and **Leicester's first** race racecourse and became the most desirable address in Leicester for a century.

These buildings, all Grade II listed, and New Walk, also Grade II listed, were here when the LRSA City Trail was created in 1984, but the group of buildings on the righthand side is a very recent addition to the city.

The new apartments clad with red brick and the glazed offices were completed in 2018 and replaced the former New Walk Centre, the **council's main offices** between 1975 and 2015.

The development included the creation of the semi-circular public open space before you and has brought life back into this part of the city.

The trail now heads north along New Walk towards Welford Place.

Plaque 2:
Welford Place

The original 1984 plaque has been lost, probably during the demolition of the New Walk Centre.

We cross this busy intersection of major roads via the traffic island at the top of New Walk, past the statue of John Biggs, former mayor, magistrate and member of parliament for Leicester in the 19th century, on the way to the righthand pavement along Newarke Street.

Plaque 3:
Stibbe Lofts, Newarke Street

Standing underneath the terracotta plaque you are looking at a street scene that has changed beyond recognition from 1984.

The Sue Townsend Theatre in front of you, known as the Phoenix Theatre then, was obscured from view by collection of buildings along Newarke Street, and has only become visible when the multistorey car park on the left was built and the site in front was cleared.

Sue Townsend was a local writer and the creator of Adrian Mole, the fictional character who's diary describe his early childhood in Leicester.

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Plaque 4:
The Charlotte, Vaughan Way

The panoramic view from this vantage point underneath the lettering of the former pub includes one of the oldest and one of the most recent buildings in the city and a newly created public square, which forms the entrance to the campus of De Montfort University.

Right in front of you is the Magazine Gateway, a Grade I listed structure built in 1400, which formed part of the nearby Leicester Castle.

Back in 1984 this important building was inaccessible and isolated from its setting, as it was surrounded by the inner ring road on all sides. The Vaughn Way has since been reduced in width and realigned to one side only, and the monument is now the focus of Magazine Square.

To the left of the Magazine Gateway you see the Hugh Aston Building, clad in patinated green copper, which opened in 2009 as part of De Montfort University's expansion, and the adjoining Hawthorne Building behind, one of the oldest buildings on the campus.

Plaque 5:
Magazine Square

The historic plaque no longer exists, so the next suggested vantage point is on the other side of the road, in front of the Magazine Gateway.

The square is overlooked by the Magazine, the Hugh Aston Building on your left and, most importantly, by the Hawthorn Building, opened in 1897 as the first building for the Leicester Municipal Technical and Art School, which later became the Leicester Polytechnic and eventually De Montfort University.

To the right of Magazine Square is a mural depicting a Buddhist Bhikkhu, tigers and elephants, a tribute to the success of Leicester City Football Club and its Thai owners in 2016.

Plaque 6:
Heritage House, Castle Street

Turn right, walk along Vaughn Way and turn left into Castle Street. You have reached one of the less remarkable views on the trail, which was dominated by the Southgates underpass in 1984 as much as it is today.

In the past the vehicle movement to and from the bus depots on either side of the road will have added to the overall impression of a traffic thoroughfare, so at least the two large Halls of Residence for students built in since 2000 have brought back a more appropriate use for this urban environment.

The trail now takes you down the quiet Castle Street, away from the noise and to an important part of Medieval Leicester, the remains of the castle and one of its oldest churches.

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Plaque 7:
Boundary wall of Castle House, Castle View

The view from this spot is intriguing and probably much more rewarding today than it was in 1984.

The previously mentioned bus depot on the opposite side of the street has been replaced by student accommodation and the recent development at 41 Castle Street is one of the better examples of this typology.

The raised embankment on the righthand side creates an interesting resting place and a view of the Grade I listed church of St Mary de Castro and cemetery with its mature trees.

Follow the curved cobbled street up the hill and step through the archway into Castle Yard.

Plaques 8:
Castle Yard

The original plaque is no longer in place and it is difficult to say where its location was in 1984, so we have decided to include the most obvious spot in our walk, the remnants of Leicester Castle.

The archway belongs to Castle House, a Grade II listed building from the late 18th century, which makes it the youngest member of this group of heritage assets.

On your left is the main elevation of St Mary de Castro, founded around 1007 by the first Earl of

Leicester as the chapel attached to the castle in the 13th century. The church was extended and altered continuously throughout the next centuries, including work by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1853.

Leicester Castle was part of the medieval town fortification, built over the Roman town walls, most likely around 1070. The remains now consist mostly in the form of the castle mound, a Scheduled Monument, which is accessible through the iron gate in the red brick wall on the opposite side of the courtyard.

The main building in front of you is the Great Hall, Grade I listed, built on site of castle in 1695. It was later converted into a periodic Assize Court and was the Leicester Crown Court until 1981.

The changes to this panorama since 1984 are not immediately noticeable, but are significant. St Mary de Castro has lost its octagonal spire which had to be dismantled in 2014 when it was at risk of collapse due to faulty repair work in the 1920s, and the Great Hall was converted in 2016 into **De Montfort University's Business School**.

The trail now turns back through the archway along Castle View and turns left in Castle Street. Follow the road on the lefthand pavement until you reach St Nicholas Circle and turn left again.

Walk along St Nicholas Circle until you get to a set of traffic lights on your right, opposite a gates

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to Castle Gardens, cross both sets of lanes until you reach Bath Lane ahead of you.

Plaque 9:
No 5, Bath Lane

The view from this spot stretches along the Grand Union Canal. On the left are the mature trees of Castle Gardens, with the striking stone piers of the Grade II listed West Bridge in front.

The second bridge has been added since 1984, so traffic now dominates this location, despite the fact that Bath Lane itself has been narrowed.

The artwork in front of you is a reference to the former dyeworks on the land, which were demolished and replaced with the apartments on your right in 2006. It features expressions from the trade and reflects the transformation of material through the dyeing process.

Turn left and follow the trail uphill towards the city centre, along the lefthand pavement of St Nicholas Circle.

On the way you pass very important Roman remains; the City Trail did not include a plaque in this location, but these structures are too important to be ignored:

Jewry Wall is said to be west side of a basilica from 125 AD of Roman masonry of freestone and bricks, with two arches in alcoves and a niche between on east side. It is situated on the east

side of the excavated site which features the remains of Roman Forum and Roman Baths, all Grade I listed. The adjacent Jewry Wall Museum, itself Grade II listed, displays the history of Roman Leicester.

Continue up the hill past the churchyard of St Nicholas and over the Vaughn Way underpass.

Plaque 10:
Forresters Institute, St Nicholas Place

The cityscape in front of you has changed beyond recognition: Jubilee Square, the new public space at the western end of the High Street was created very recently in 2014 on land which was used as a mundane carpark in 1984.

In medieval Leicester this was a market place, so its new purpose as a focal point in the city centre is very appropriate; it was named Jubilee Square to commemorate the visit of Queen Elisabeth II during the Diamond Jubilee of her reign in 2012.

We now aim for the Grade II listed pillar of the High Cross, built in 1577 as a shelter for traders with a circle of eight pillars holding up a dome, of which just this one remains. As part of the landscaping work to create Jubilee Square it is now easily accessible in a prominent position.

Turn right at the High Cross, walk to the corner of Guildhall Lane and Applegate and stand in front of the black railings of Wygston's House.

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Plaque 11:

Wygston's House

The missing plaque was probably in this spot and, like the previous location, now offers a view that is very different from that of 1984 and not just because of the recently created Jubilee Square.

Behind you is the Grade II listed **Wygston's House**, Leicester's oldest house, originally a timber-framed merchant's residence from circa 1490, which was extensively altered around 1760 with a new front range.

It has been used as a penitentiary, an annex of Wyggeston's School, council offices and a museum, before the building was adapted for today's use as a bar and restaurant in 2017.

Halfway along St Nicholas Place on your righthand side are the premises of BBC Radio Leicester, the first BBC Local Radio station in the country launched in 1967, which has been broadcasting from this new home since 2005.

Both the BBC's public building and Wygston's House provide active frontages along the square's newly created sides and ensure a constant flow of pedestrians.

We now follow the trail along Guildhall Lane on the right, past the side entrance of the BBC building, up to Coronation Street on the left.

Plaque 12

Corner of Coronation Street and Guildhall Lane

This is one the most intriguing vantage points of the City Trail, as well as one of the most difficult plaques to find, on one of the narrowest streets in the city centre, a non-descript sul-de-sac.

Its position becomes obvious as soon as you turn around to look at Leicester Cathedral and the Guildhall to the right. These are among the oldest, most significant and most visited buildings in the city, on one of the most important thoroughfares since the middle ages.

At first glance it appears that not much has changed in this view since 1984, but while the **buildings' facades have not been altered**, their interiors have been transformed.

The medieval Guildhall, Grade I listed, was built for the Corpus Christi Guild around 1390, enlarged and extended by the addition of ranges to the east and west up to 1490, before a domestic wing was added in the 19th century.

In 1993 a comprehensive programme of repair and restoration was undertaken for the building's use as a community facility, museum and entertainment venue, to ensure continued use of one of Leicester's most important historic assets.

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Work to the Cathedral Church of St Martin has been on-going since 2013, triggered by the discovery of the remains of King Richard III in Leicester in 2012, in preparation for the reburial of the king in 2015 in the cathedral.

The Grade II* listed church is predominantly a Victorian building, including the tower and spire completed in 1867. The interior was reordered in 2014 to create a fitting environment for the new tombstone of Richard III.

Externally the work included new landscaping to the south of the cathedral, its main elevation, and the construction of a new visitor centre.

If you want to visit Richard III's grave, please use the entrance on the opposite side of the church and return to Guildhall Lane afterwards to continue the walk, where two more plaques follow in quick succession.

Plaque 13:
Corner of St Martins East and Guildhall Lane

This view is more rewarding now than it was in 1984, it is also more peaceful thanks to the absence of cars. Guildhall Lane and most of the city centre was not yet pedestrian-friendly then, something we now take for granted.

The buildings around us have remained the same though, with the exception of the new visitor behind Leicester Cathedral centre on the right.

Plaque 14:
Corner of Looseby Lane and Silver Street

This is a busy junction of two medieval roads, which fascinated the architects so much in 1984 that the walk passes it twice; on the first stop we point out two particular aspects:

The view back along Guildhall Lane includes the gables of the Guildhall in the distance, but it is dominated by the striking silhouette of the cathedral spire against the sky, framed by the brick facades along the curved street below.

The building opposite is The Globe, one of the oldest public houses in Leicester, established possibly as early as 1720 to brew ales with spring water from its own well beneath the building.

We continue past The Globe along Carts Lane up to the High Street and stand in front of the nearby entrance to the Highcross shopping centre.

Plaque 15:
High Street entrance to the Highcross centre

The original plaque has disappeared, as has the entire Union Street that was here in 1984, but you can still see the elaborate corners of the two buildings once overlooking this street corner either side of the inserted entrance canopy.

The High Street itself was a busy road at the time, dominated by busses heading to and from the Clock Tower, but no longer a popular shopping

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destination itself, so plans for a new shopping centre had been discussed since the 1970s.

The development of the shopping mall, called The Shires, eventually opened in 1991; most of the existing buildings along High Street were retained, so fortunately its effect on the street scene was limited and footfall increased.

Continue the walk along High Street towards the Clock Tower and look for plaque on the facade of the Royale Arcade on your right.

Plaque 16:
Royal Arcade, High Street

This is the first of three covered arcades the walk will pass by, and the first time we encounter this particular arcade, which will be covered in more detail later on the walk.

In the past two decades busses have been re-routed away from the High Street and it is now one of the busiest pedestrian routes in the city.

Plaques 17 and 18:
High Street

We were unable to locate either of these plaques, they may have been removed during the development of the Shires / Highcross shopping centre or during work to other buildings on the High Street. Large retail signage now obscures many facades at the typical height of the plaques, so they may still exist but are now invisible.

Continue along High Street until you reach the main entrance the the Highcross centre. To the left of the entrance you will notice that a second street was partially absorbed into the shopping mall: this was once part of New Bond Street.

The next leg of the City Trail crosses private land, so you will only be able to continue on the original route if the shopping centre is open. If the entrance doors are shut, you can continue the walk along Silver Street, which is right behind you, and continue with Plaque 26.

If the doors are open, proceed into the Highcross and walk towards the curved ramp on the right. Halfway up the ramp you turn to the right and head for the glazed exit doors in front of you, which lead to New Bond Street.

The original plaque is no longer present, so we suggest that you walk halfway up the road and stand on the lefthand side, between the two street name signs on the buildings opposite.

Plaque 19:
New Bond Street / East Bond Street

This is a charming collection of well-proportioned buildings and in 1984 this was probably a well-used road to and from the High Street.

The development of the Shires in 1991 changes this to such an extent that the lower half of New Bond Street was lost almost without a trace, and

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It is more than unfortunate that the road is now cut off from the busy street life around the clocktower, it clearly deserves more footfall.

The Shires development turns its back to the street and relegates it to a service road for loading bays; the token gesture of oversized shop **windows and pithy facade decorations don't** create active frontages that would complement the buildings opposite.

We now proceed to the top of the road and cross St Peters Lane.

Plaque 20:
Cherry Tree Public House, East Bond Street

This is possibly the vantage points on the trail which has changed the most, almost beyond recognition, only the houses along East Bond Street on the left.

The Shires was added in 1991 with all the urban design faults described in the previous paragraphs, and St Peters Lane was severed, its righthand leg became a cul-de-sac to another service yard of the shopping centre.

Fortunately, the extension of the mall in 2008 on the other side of St Peters Lane was designed more carefully. The leisure activity behind the expansive glass facade creates interest for passers-by throughout the day and the apartments above provide architectural interest.

Walk along the pavement of East Bond Street past the pub until you get to the gate for the Great Unitarian Chapel on your right.

Plaque 21:
Great Unitarian Chapel, East Bond Street

The Grade II listed chapel was built in 1707 and is considered one of the earliest brick buildings of importance in Leicester, together with the Great Meeting School from 1859, also Grade II listed.

The historic buildings and their mature trees are surrounded by much larger buildings, so they have an uneasy relationship with their context. They would sit proudly in a small town but struggle to do so in this urban environment.

This was already the case in 1984, when the land opposite the Great Meeting School was occupied by a supermarket and a multistorey car park, now replaced by the 2008 Highcross extension. The plot opposite the Great Unitarian Chapel was developed for offices in the 1990s, with brickwork patterns that makes it easy to date the building.

The trail now turns heads into Butt Close Lane to the corner of The Salmon on the lefthand side.

Plaque 22:
The Salmon Public House

The actual plaque is missing, but this is its most likely location, which offers more historic and architectural interest than it appears at first.

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On the lefthand side of Blake Street is No 3 Darker Street, the oldest example of a master hosier's house and hosiery workshops in Leicester, dating back to 1852. It is Grade II listed and now propped up by scaffolding due to its poor structural state, but in 1984 it was still occupied.

On your right, building behind the mature tree, you can see a larger timber clad building, set back from Butt Close Lane.

This large five-storey warehouse is Grade II listed, it was built in the 1830s with a partially external timber frame. Large braces support the overhanging eaves and prominent timber buttresses project through the external walls on the lower floors, creating a memorable elevation for such a utilitarian building.

At the bottom of the hill turn right into Church Gate, a road that sits over the eastern edge of the original Roman settlement.

Plaque 23:
No 66, Church Gate

The building itself is a peculiar design, a combination of Art Deco and Leicester Orange brickwork, crowned by an elaborate large fluted top. The listed warehouse we saw from the last spot is actually hidden behind this brick building.

The street scene opposite is a mix of ornate Victorian buildings and humble Georgian houses,

with two focal points on the left: The Langtons furniture store features a rendered white Art Deco tower and, in the far distance, the Grade II listed St Margaret's church, which gave its name to this street.

Plaque 24:
No 53, Church Gate

The Clock Tower is within two minutes of this location, but like many streets to the north of the city centre it lacks footfall and feels neglected.

In 1984 there was certainly more activity on the street, but little has changed with regard to the buildings around you. The street scene is humble, and while the scale of the facades increases towards the Clock Tower, it is not clear why this stopping point was included in the City Trail.

Plaque 25:
Church Gate Tavern PH, Church Gate

The LRSA was very fond of Church Gate in 1984, as this third stop in the street shows, and the upper floors of Italianate facade to which the terracotta plaque is fixed are worth admiring.

This cannot be said of the entrance to the Highcross shopping centre opposite, which came at the cost of demolition of Victorian properties and was executed without reference to its historic context; the canopy was added later when the mall was rebranded.

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Please continue along Church Gate, head straight for the street corner of Gallowtree Gate and East Gates, turn and face the Clock Tower.

Plaques 26 and 27:

Corner of Gallowtree Gate and East Gates

Two of the original plaques have been lost, but this corner was very probably a stop in the City Trail. There was much to observe at the heart of the city centre in 1984 and there is now, as this key location offers a 270° panorama.

On the very righthand side is Gallowtree Gate, which follows the eastern edge of "Ratae", the original Roman settlement.

In 1984 none of the streets were pedestrianized, so cars and especially busses dominated the view, with associated noise and fumes.

The junction of Humberstone Gate and Gallowtree Gate is overshadowed by the **Haymarket Centre, Leicester's first shopping** mall. This is an uncompromising 1960s design, but despite its bulk it does provide active frontages along the main streets, unlike the Shire development three decades later.

At the centre of the view is the Clock Tower, Leicester's Grade II listed landmark and meeting point, built in 1868 as a refuge for pedestrians crossing this busy junction of five major roads, which once even included tram stops.

Behind the Clock Tower and to the left of the Haymarket Centre is Belgrave Gate, the original Roman road from Leicester to Lincoln, which entered the Roman fortress at this point.

Straight ahead, overlooking Church Gate, is the former Eastgates Coffee House. The building is Grade II listed because as a purpose-built coffee house it is part of the architectural legacy left by the Temperance movement. The building has retained its elegance despite later alterations and a change to the current retail use.

Further to the left is the entrance to the Highcross, the aforementioned former New Bond Street and the long view down the Hight Street.

On the far left of the panoramic view is Silver Street, where the trail is heading next.

Plaque 28:

Malcolm Arcade, Silver Street

The next noticeable building on the walk is the Silver Arcade, which you are passing on your left on your way to the next plaque.

Built in 1891, this striking Grade II listed arcade contained three floors of shops and is lit by a generously glazed roof above. The upper levels have been converted to other uses, but the entire building has retained its grand interior and is worth a quick detour on the way.

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The actual stop on the trail, the Malcom Arcade, is underwhelming and there is not much to admire in its vicinity, neither in 1984 nor now, so we move straight on to the next plaque.

Plaque 29:
Royal Arcade, Silver Street

The LRSA was so fond of this arcade that it features twice on the City Trail and you have already seen its High Street elevation (Plaque 16).

However, you may not recognize the arcade, as the Victorian Silver Street facade and the top-lit arcade behind it is entirely different to the Art Deco appearance on the High Street.

Plaque 30:
The Globe PH, Silver Street

This is the second time the walk passes this particular junction. Standing below the plaque you see an astonishing group of eight Grade II listed buildings: four along the lefthand side of Guildhall Lane and four on the righthand side of Looseby Lane, including No 20 in front of you.

The view today is almost identical to what you would have seen in 1984, a medieval street lined by well-preserved Georgian and Victorian buildings, occupied mostly by independent shops.

Please walk along Looseby Lane and stop at the lefthand corner with St Martins.

Plaque 31:
No 15, St Martins

Starting on the left, this view features a row of humble buildings with independent shops facing the imposing facade of the former Pares's Bank, Grade II* listed, which opened in 1902.

It is considered an excellent provincial example of Baroque Revival commercial architecture and is testament to the scale of commercial activity in Leicester at the start of the 20th century, executed in Portland stone with a granite plinth.

In 1984 this building was still operated by the Westminster Bank; in 2016 it was converted into a restaurant, and fortunately the impressive half-panelled square banking hall with its shallow dome and central skylight was preserved.

On the opposite side of the road is the former Savings Bank, built in 1874 on a much smaller scale with a simpler material palette, but the red brick is complemented by delicate stone details in an elaborate Gothic style.

Like its neighbour, the Grade II listed was converted in 2016 into a deli and restaurant and much of the banking hall has been retained.

Grey Friars, the name of the road between the two former banks, indicates that this is a significant location within the historic townscape: the land either side of the street was

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once the north-east corner of the precinct of the Franciscan friary known as Greyfriars.

Following the dissolution of the friary in 1538 was demolished and the site levelled, subdivided, and developed over the following centuries, resulting in the Georgian and Victorian buildings on the righthand side of the view, very unchanged from what it would have looked like in 1984.

In 2012 an archaeological investigation successfully identified the site of the Greyfriars church and, more spectacularly, the location of the shallow grave of King Richard III.

The burial site has been incorporated into the Richard II Visitor Centre, which opened in 2014 opposite Leicester Cathedral to your right; the discovery of **the king's** remains has visibly and economically transformed this part of the city.

The next plaque is literally around the corner: walk along St Martins on the left and then turn right into Hotel Street.

Plaque 32:
Former National Westminster Bank, Hotel Street

Ahead of you is an eclectic mix of frontages, which disguises the fact that you are in fact looking at one large Victorian building. The ornate shop fronts have been altered so the original consistency along the pavement has been lost,

but the impressive glazed row of windows on the first floor is intact throughout.

The original factory-made luggage, hence the name of the restaurant which operated on the upper floors between 1990 and 2013.

The most significant change to the area happened at the time that the City Trail was laid out: the creation of **St Martin's Square, which** you can see on your left. The archway leads to a small square at the centre of the development, which also connects to Silver Street and Cank Street.

This is a welcome alternative to the large-scale shopping malls elsewhere in the city and has stood the test of time well, a clever insertion of new retail space behind existing buildings with the added benefit of more pedestrian routes.

The next plaque is on the other side of the street.

Plaque 33:
The Market Tavern PH, Hotel Street

Today the buildings facing you on the other side of the street all cater for diners and drinkers, but in 1984 they were all banks, including the impressive Grade II listed building at 5-9 Hotel Street directly opposite.

It was built in 1915 in an exaggerated Neo-Greek style with gigantic Doric columns, initially as offices for an insurance company and later converted into a bank with a central banking hall.

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The Edwardian banking hall and its oval cupola has been retained together with the original fittings including panelled counters, iron screens, marble wall cladding and ornate plaster ceilings, worth a quick visit if the bar is open.

On your right is No 6 Hotel Street, also known as Clock Chambers, thanks to the prominent clock on the first floor. Similar to the adjacent Case building the elevations include shop fronts along the pavement and a continuous glazed facade across the first floor, using modern windows with small frames and large glass panes.

The Market Tavern behind you is Grade II listed, a plain building dating from the early 19th century. The most architectural interest is in the delicate joinery of the ground floor windows, which is difficult to appreciate due to the dark blue paint applied crudely across windows and doors, signage, downpipes and the terracotta plaque.

Thankfully the next plaque is easier to spot and literally next door.

Plaque 34:
Knight & Garter PH, Hotel Street

The plaque is fixed to a peculiar building, which would sit comfortably in a suburban context with its in scale and appearance, but stands out for its vernacular revival style in this central location.

It is Grade II listed, built in 1904, with two unique entrances: on your right is a corner entrance with a random Tuscan column, around the corner a wide vaulted entrance below a stone arch.

In the past this building was also known as The Saracen's Head Public House, and on maps from 1984 it is labelled as Saracen's Head Hotel.

Across the street are the City Rooms, among the most elegant Georgian buildings in the city. The Grade I listed building opened in 1800 and was originally intended to be the first hotel in Leicester, this is how Hotel Street got its name.

It was opened as the Assembly Rooms in time for the annual gathering of aristocracy and gentry at Leicester Races in September 1800. The ballroom on the first floor was originally used for banquets, balls, meetings and auctions, while the ground floor was used as a coffee room.

After an extensive refurbishment by private owners, the City Rooms reopened in 2006 for the originally purpose of hosting social functions and an associated boutique hotel.

Please cross the street and walk along Hotel Street past the City Rooms with the elaborate railings and stone canopy. The next plaque is located on the brick elevation on your left at the corner with Horsefair Street.

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Retracing the Guided Walk in Leicester's City Centre

Plaque 35:
No 20, Hotel Street

The panoramic view at this junction starts on the lefthand side with the clock tower of the Town Hall, Grade II* listed, built in the Queen Anne style, a Victorian revival of English Baroque.

It opened in 1876 on the site of the old cattle market and replaced the medieval Guildhall, which you passed earlier on the walk, which was no longer adequate to accommodate the local government of a rapidly growing industrial town.

The entrance to Market Street is framed by two buildings of similar footprint and scale with matching chamfered corners, but very different appearances.

The post-war elevations on the left are plain, most noticeable is the glazed first floor elevation which separates the ground floor shop fronts from the stone-clad upper floors and adds a strong horizontal emphasis, while the Victorian building on the right does the opposite and features vertical bay windows and pilasters.

The building is linked to the lower properties to its right, the entire group were once the Gas Showrooms and associated offices and in 1984 may have still be used for this purpose. The conversion into a restaurant and offices above took place around 1990.

Finally, the building on the very righthand side of the view is an unintentional amalgamation of the previous two: an elaborate facade with numerous vertical bays and slender windows, clad with a just one type of stone, giving it the austere appearance of a Scottish tenement block.

Please proceed now along Market Street to the penultimate plaque on the righthand side.

Plaque 36:
No 15, Market Street

The charm of this street comes from the diversity of its buildings, which vary in height, width, style and age. The last development was carried out as recently as 1988 when the shop units on the lefthand side were added, so these post-modern elevations did not feature in this view in 1984.

Fortunately, **they are modest in scale and don't** distract from the fascinating group of five buildings opposite, starting with the Art Deco elevation of 10-12 Market Street, an elegant composition of tall windows above a curved shopfront with a simple black and white colour scheme, executed with such conviction that the simplicity is its greatest strength.

The narrow building next door has been altered, much to the detriment of the lower floors, but the peculiar columned balcony of the second floor is a quirky eye catcher.

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The Midland Auction Mart displays its opening date prominently in its facade, executed in such a flamboyant Italianate style that the building appears almost too small for its grandeur. It is surprising that this property is not listed, especially as the facade is virtually unspoiled.

The Midland Auction Mart is flanked by another tall white rendered facade, this time very slender due to the narrow plot. While the shop front is partially obscured by an awning and signage, the focus is on the double height Crittall window between the pilasters, the ornate balcony and the light fitting styled as a street lamp post.

The final facade to note from this vantage point is No 20 Market Street, a celebration of windows and arches, brickwork and stonework. The dark grey render around the ground floor opening is clearly not original, but it appears like a restraint plinth which allows the upper floors to stand out.

While you continue to the end of Market Street you can appreciate the variety of elevations and roofscapes at the top of the facades.

Plaque 37:
Former Central Lending Library, Belvoir Street

This is the final plaque on the trail, close to the starting point on King Street on the left, at the junction of five street and overlooked by a set of imposing landmark buildings.

The first of these is Former City Lending Library, to which the plaque is fixed. Built in 1831 as meeting hall for the Liberals, the Grade II listed building is now occupied by the Adult Education College, but in 1984 it was in use as a library.

The Former City Lending Library is joint with the immediately adjacent Hansom Hall, also Grade II listed, now also used by the Adult Education College. Built in 1845 as a Baptist Chapel, it features a prominent rounded facade and was designed by the architect Joseph Hansom, the inventor of the horse-drawn cab.

The panoramic view starts on the left with the flamboyant building between Wellington Street and King Street, the former offices of the General Accident Fire and Life Assurance Corporation. The combination of mock medieval timber frame on the sandstone base tries hard to look historic, but was only completed in 1932. It does, however, form a real landmark terminating the vista along Market Street.

On the other side of King Street is Phoenix House, a functional 1970s office building, which does not contribute to the street life due to its raised ground floor, gloomy entrance and windowless corner, regrettable back then as much as today.

Fortunately, the shop fronts along King Street do create active frontages and the outdoor seating on both sides create an inviting atmosphere.

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The entrance to Market Street is flanked on the left by Nos 33-49, an unusually large building on this street. The consistency of the shop fronts has been lost and the different types of awnings add to the visual confusion, but on the upper floors you can admire the coherent façade, crowned by four gables on top of the elevation, and the elongated turret on the street corner.

The final building to be described on our walk is the Gresham Building, formerly the Fenwick Department Store. Unlike the building opposite this is not one plot, but was formed instead by expanding into adjacent properties along Market Street, Belvoir Street and Bowling Green Street.

It started with Nos 36, 38 and 40 Market Street, two shops designed in 1880 and 1883, which are Grade II listed. The corner of No 40 is a striking cluster of components, combining the recessed entrance behind a polished red marble column with curved corner bays and the turret-like gables projecting forward from the roofscape, making it a such a feature in the townscape.

The premises were amalgamated in the early 1900s and in 1962 the entire block of buildings with frontages on Market Street, Belvoir Street and Bowling Green Street was bought by Fenwick, the nationwide chain of department stores from Newcastle.

The shop fronts with their distinctive green fascia boards were inserted the following year and painted in the corporate colour, a striking and recognizable green and this is how the building presented itself in 1984.

The store closed in 2017 and the buildings were converted into an aparthotel with bar and restaurant and office space, which opened in 2021. As part of the conversion the shopfronts and signboards were replaced with designs based on **historic precedents, so today's appearance** is closer to the original store than it was in 1984.

We have found no evidence of any further plaques beyond this point, so this vantage point is a fitting location to conclude the walk.

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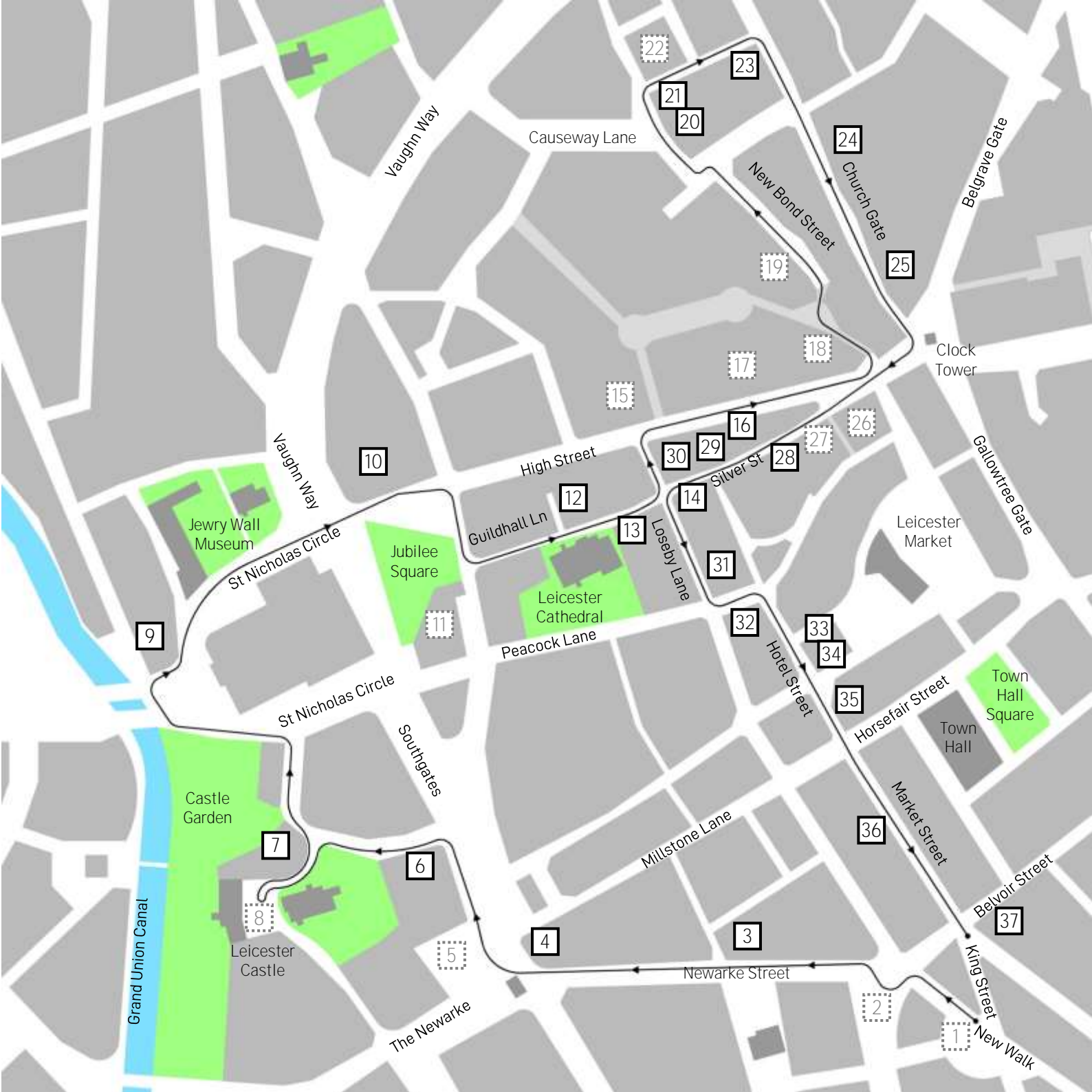
Retracing the Guided Walk in Leicester's City Centre

Map

Estimated route of 'LRSA City Trail 1984'
overlaid over 2024 map of city centre

List of plaques

- 1 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 2 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 3 Stibbe Lofts, Newarke Street
- 4 The Charlotte PH, Vaughan Way
- 5 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 6 Heritage House, Castle Street
- 7 Boundary wall of Castle House, Castle View
- 8 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 9 No 5, Bath Lane
- 10 Forresters Institute, St Nicholas Place
- 11 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 12 Corner of Coronation Street / Guildhall Lane
- 13 Corner of St Martins East / Guildhall Lane
- 14 Corner of Looseby Lane and Silver Street
- 15 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 16 Royal Arcade, High Street
- 17 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 18 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 19 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 20 Cherry Tree PH, East Bond Street
- 21 Great Unitarian Chapel, East Bond Street
- 22 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 23 No 66, Church Gate
- 24 No 53, Church Gate
- 25 Churchgate Tavern PH, Churchgate
- 26 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 27 *missing* [possible previous location]
- 28 Malcolm Arcade, Silver Street
- 29 Royal Arcade, Silver Street
- 30 The Globe PH, Silver Street
- 31 No 15, St Martins
- 32 Former National Westminster Bank
- 33 The Market Tavern PH, Hotel Street
- 34 Knight & Garter PH, Hotel Street
- 35 No 20, Hotel Street
- 36 No 15, Market Street
- 37 Former Central Lending Library, Belvoir Street



Grand Union Canal

Castle Garden

Jewry Wall Museum

Causeway Lane

High Street

Leicester Cathedral

Newarke Street

New Bond Street

Market Street

Clock Tower

Leicester Market

Town Hall Square

The Newarke

Southgates

Guildhall Ln

Millstone Lane

Hotel Street

Horsefair Street

Belvoir Street

Gallowtree Gate

Belgrave Gate

Church Gate

Vaughn Way

Vaughn Way

St Nicholas Circle

St Nicholas Circle

Peacock Lane

Silver St

Loseby Lane

King Street

New Walk

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LRSA City Trail 1984

Retracing the Guided Walk in Leicester's City Centre

Annex: Explore the Corners

Original leaflet and descriptions from
'The City Trail - Explore the Corners of Leicester'.

The City Trail

Explore the Corners of Leicester

A publication by the Leicester and Rutland Society of Architects and Leicester City Council to mark Festival of Architecture Year and British Heritage Year, 1984.

A perambulation around some of the corners of Leicester

Introduction

Leicester is an ancient city first settled before the Roman invasion. The Romans made it into a small town. During the Anglo-Saxon period it is thought to have been the local capital of the Kingdom of Mercia. The Middle Ages brought prosperity and the establishment of the town as an important Market Centre. Victorian Leicester produced an explosion in the size of the city. The population rose from 40,942 in 1881 to 241,179 by 1901. The city has grown since that time but not at such a great rate.

On the walk you will see buildings or the remains of them from all of these periods from the Roman settlement onwards.

The Walk

One of Leicester's assets are its street corners. They are specially designed to act as a visible sign to help you find your way around the city streets.

There are a number of ways in which this can be carried out:

The square - a corner that is square, as when one is in either direction as in (A) - West End Place/New Walk, White Friar 1845 or has a projecting sign as in (B) - The Serenata Head, Hotel Street/Market Street

The junction - where two streets meet at an acute angle there is a difficult design problem. It was solved very nicely at (A) - New Walk/King Street by flanking the corner with a circular bay.

Curved corners can be gentle as in (C) - The Leicestershire Club, Pocklington's Walk/Newgate Street, Goddard and Vogel 1870 or very sharp as in (D) - St. Martin's/Losty Lane.

There is the recessed corner set back from the other two elevations. It can be curved as (E) - High Street/New Road Street or angled. As with the curved, an angled corner as at Alan Hirste (H) - Newgate Street/Market Street, or can be sharp as at (M) - St. Martin's/Chapel Lane, Edward Bayly 1871 and (N) - Pocklington's Walk/West End Place. Note how the corner at (M) is further emphasised by the public work.

There are places where we find a continuation of the typical (D) - Market Street/Baker Street. This corner has an angled top, curved middle and is separate at the bottom. Another way of marking a corner in a town is with a turret that stands above the roof of the building. (K) - High Street/Castle Lane has a projecting circular bay and a turret (W) - Market Street/West End Place has a spirelet and (L) - Newgate Street/Upper Brown Street) an octagonal domed projecting bay.

Certain buildings are associated with the street corner. The Public House (O) - The Saloon, Bell Close Lane/West Street) and the corner shop have become a symbol of urban life.

Two adjacent corners set as a frame. The entrance to the Royal Arcade (P) - Silver Street has angled corners with a central recessed one to lead us one that through where it is also turn of streets, as you turn from St. Martin's into Hotel Street look at how the building frames you into Clark Street.

Finally there is the Chain Corner (I) - Castle Gateway/Castle Street, not much to be seen, it is both quiet and safe.

How would you describe the following corners?

C City Council Offices
J Millstone Lane - Southgate
K Southgate - Castle Street
L St. Nicholas Circle - Vaughan Way
M Highways Street - High Street

T Appleby - Guildhall Lane
W Guildhall Lane - Castle Lane
Y High Street - Union Street
GG High Street - Silver Street
AA New Road Street - South Road Street
EE Churchgate - Mansfield Street
FF Southgate - Galloway Gate
KK Silver Street - Losty Lane
LL Millstone Lane - Mayes Street
VV City Learning Library, Bellvue Square - Wellington Street
XX Wellington Street - King Street

Other buildings of interest on the walk are:

F The Electricity Sub station, Newgate Street. An unusual building in the classical style of the 1880s which blends unobtrusively into the streetscape.

M St. Mary de Castro Church, 13th Century, much restored by Sir George Gilbert Scott in the 1860s. The facade of the Castle building which the courtyard as of the 19th century. Behind it is a medieval building.

N The Tea Factory - The original factory built to the designs of William Pier in 1848 has had a modern reflective glass extension (Coulter Street, Susan Partners 1960) which reflects the beauty of the canal and the trees facing it.

P The Roman Baths, Museum and Vaughan College. Note how the columns of the modern building (T. Darwin, 1962) are carefully designed to line through with the ancient Roman walls. The church of St. Nicholas behind us, is of Anglo-Saxon origin, evidence of which can be found inside. The tower is of early Norman origin.

Q Wyganton House now a museum. The building facing onto Appleby Street was built in the late 18th Century. Behind it a 19th century timber framed section.

V The Guildhall was erected for the German Crown Guild in the 14th century. From 1485 to 1876 it acted as the Town Hall and Police Station. The cells are still there and can be visited as the building is now a Museum.

BB The Great Meeting, 1336 it is one of the earliest brick buildings in Leicester. The classical colonnade in the front is a later addition. A corner of the school built in 1811 in the Gothic style.

DD Timber Warehouse - Beautifully restored, the unassuming vernacular building is typical of many that have long since disappeared.

H The Club Inn - an eighteenth century public house, a typical Georgian house in an equally happy style.

NN The National Westminster Bank, St. Martin's was built in 1900 to the design of E. Peckin Pick. Portland Stone and grand classical details make it a most impressive composition.

SS The Town Hall was built to the designs of J. J. Haines in 1876. It was the subject of considerable controversy. Haines' original design included a bay to project into the square. Note how the Clock is placed in a recess on the corner of Mansfield Street as a symbol to locate the position of building. If you stand on the street on the other side of the arcade facing the main entrance door, you can now claim to have been in Every Street in Leicester.

TT The Mansfield Auction Mart, Milnes & Smith 1876, is a purpose built Auction Hall. Look at the decorative above the arches with iron and the door of Mercury.

We have looked at just a small number of buildings on the route and it can be seen what beauty there is around us. Look above the skylights, you will see many more from architectural viewpoints.

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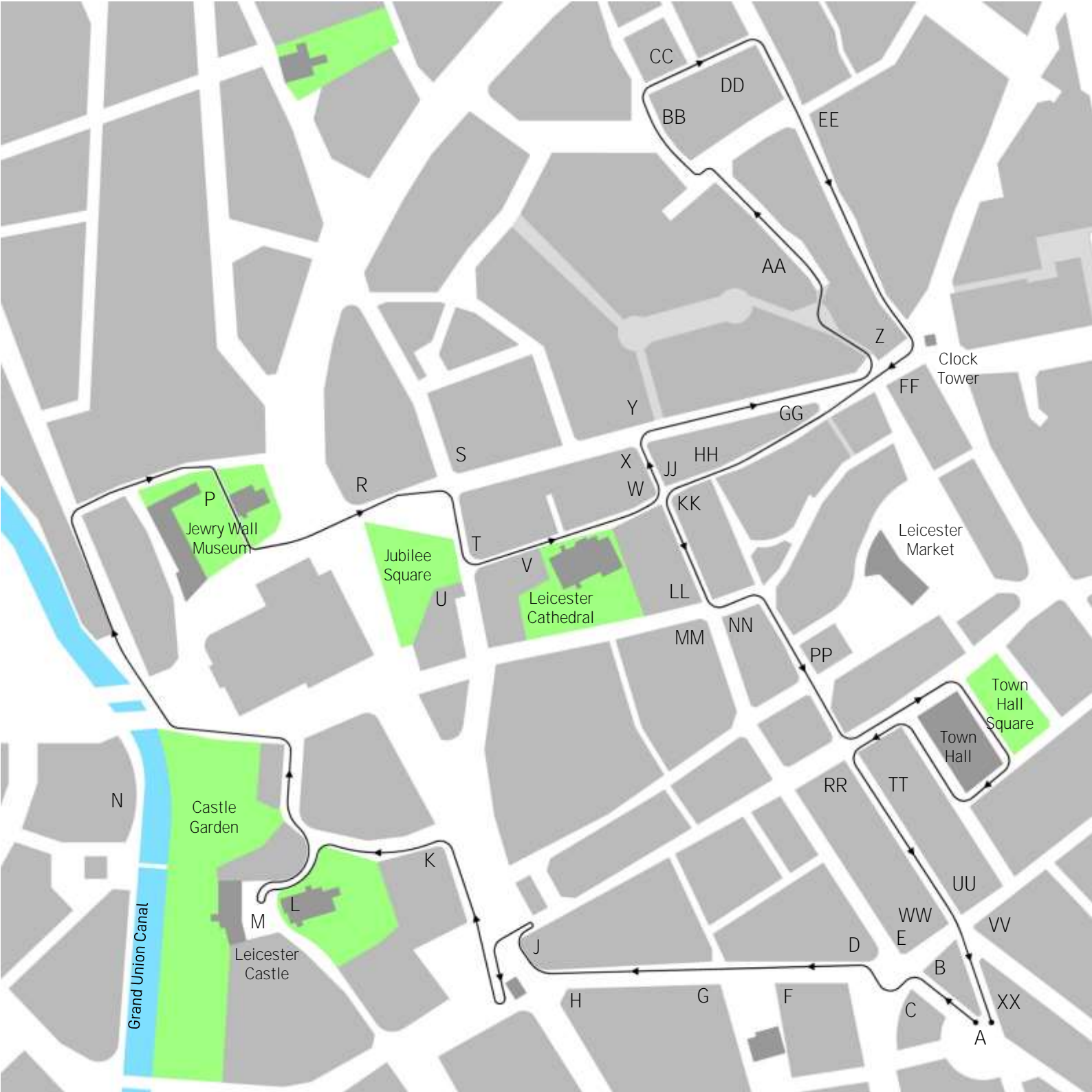
Retracing the Guided Walk in Leicester's City Centre

Map

Route of "The City Trail - Explore the Corners of Leicester" overlaid over 2024 map of city centre

List of buildings

A	New Walk / King Street	Z	High Street / New Bond Street
B	Welford Place / New Walk	AA	New Bond Street / South Bond Street
C	Welford Road / Welford Place	BB	Great Meeting Chapel, East Bond Street
D	Pocklington's Walk / Newarke Street	CC	Butt Close Lance / Blake Street
E	Pocklington's Walk / Welford Place	DD	Timber Warehouse, off Church Gate
F	Electricity Sub-station, Newarke Street	EE	Churchgate / Mansfield Street
G	Newarke Street / Upper Brown Street	FF	Eastgates / Gallowtree Gate
H	Newarke Street / Oxford Street	GG	High Street / Silver Street
J	Millstone Lane / Southgates	HH	Silver Street / Royal Arcade
K	Southgates / Castle Street	JJ	The Globe PH, Silver Street
L	Castle Gateway / Castle Street	KK	Silver Street / Loseby Lane
M	St Mary de Castro, Castle View	LL	Loseby Lane / St Martin's
N	Pex Factory, Westbridge Close	MM	St Martin's / Greyfriars
P	Roman Baths & Jewry Wall Museum	NN	Greyfriars / St Martin's
R	St Nicholas Circle / Vaughan Way	PP	Hotel Street / Market Street
S	Highcross Street / High Street	RR	Millstone Lane / Market Street
T	Applegate / Guildhall Lane	SS	Town Hall, Town Hall Square
U	Wygston's house, Applegate	TT	Midland Auction Mart, Market Street
V	Guildhall, Guildhall Lane	UU	Market Street / Belvoir Street
W	Guildhall Lane / Cart's Lane	VV	Belvoir Street / Wellington Street
X	High Street / Cart's Lane	WW	Market Street / Welford Place
Y	High Street / Union Street	XX	Wellington Street / King Street



Grand Union Canal

Castle Garden

Jewry Wall Museum

Jubilee Square

Leicester Cathedral

Leicester Castle

Leicester Market

Town Hall

Town Hall Square

Clock Tower

CC

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