

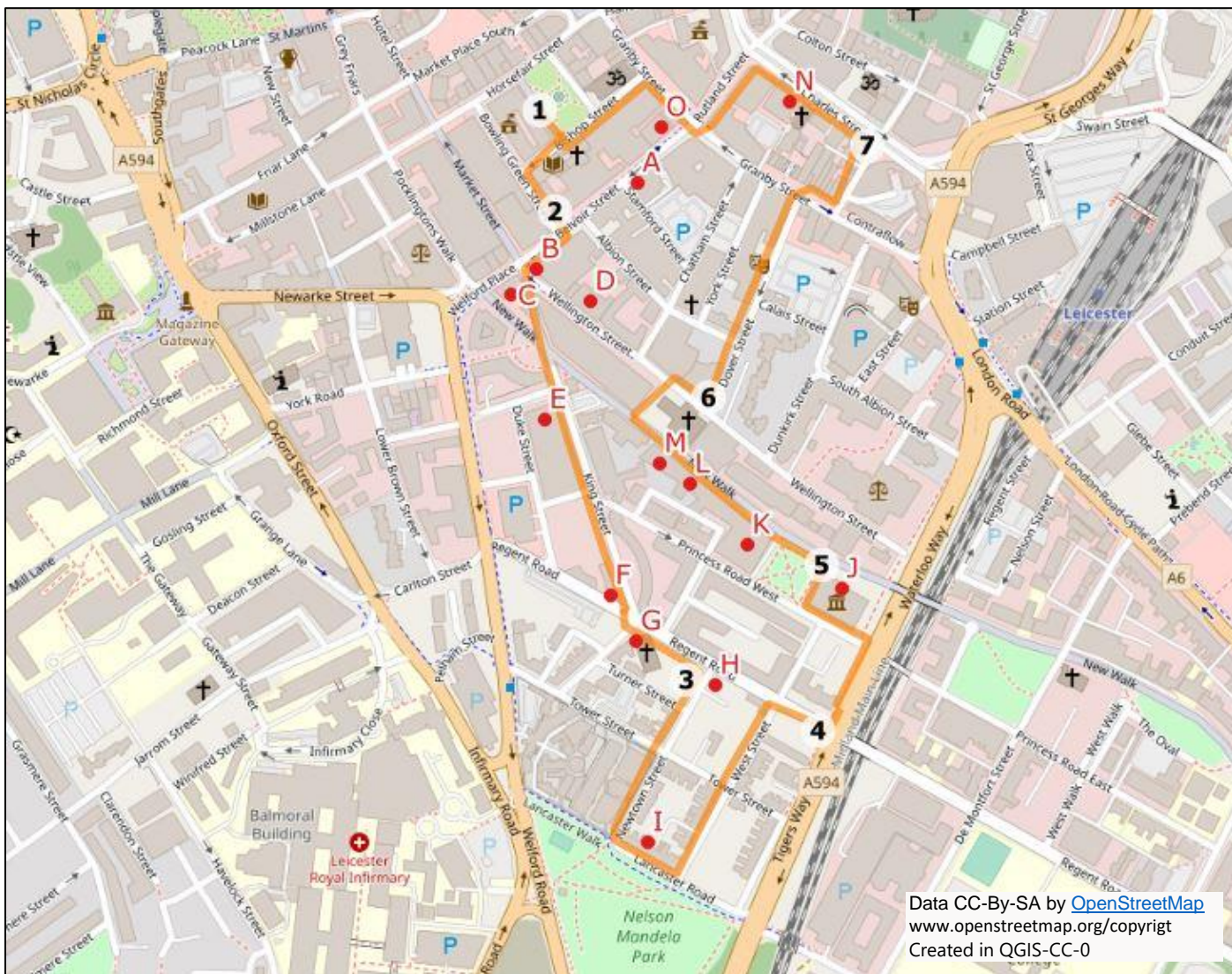
Buildings designed by William Flint in Leicester city centre

Start location: Town Hall Square, off Horsefair Street, Leicester LE1 9BJ

Time taken: 45 minutes (steady, pace)* **Distance:** 1.5 miles 2.5 km **Circular route**
 Allow extra time for the information stops.

Description:

A short walk through Leicester city centre passing a number of buildings designed in the classical style by architect William Flint around the middle of the 19th century.



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- Main route
- Alternative route
- 1 Stage / waypoint
- A Point of interest

*Time is calculated at a steady pace of 2mph, if walked without stopping. Allow extra time to look at points of interest and read the information.

This route was developed by staff and volunteers for Leicester City Council:

www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walks



Walk starts:

Town Hall Square, off Horsefair Street, Leicester LE1 9BJ.

Safety tips:

- Take care crossing roads. Use pedestrian crossings where present, especially at the major junctions.
- Watch for cyclists in the city centre, including on pavements and on pedestrianised New Walk.
- Caution on Belvoir Street, Welford Place and lower King Street where pedestrians and cyclists officially share space and take care when crossing the Granby Street cycle lane.
- In places along the route, some pavements are narrow, cracked or uneven, so tread carefully.

Introduction

William Flint was born in Leicester in 1801, the son of a school master. His early family home was in The Newarke before moving to King Street by the time he reached his teens. As a young man, Flint was apprenticed to a local builder, John Edwin and he learned what he needed to start out in his primary profession as an architect. The profession of 'architect' had by then crystallised into something specialist and distinct from the builder. Then in 1826, aged 25, Flint set up on his own. He held a part-time post for the Town Council as 'Borough architect and surveyor', in which he was very active. In today's terms, Flint would be considered a consultant or project manager and a supervisor of building works. He worked on a range of different buildings, including residential, ecclesiastical, industrial and commercial, often working on improvements to properties. Examples of each can be seen on today's walk. Like most successful people of his time, Flint was industrious and completed his projects at pace. At the height of his career in the early 1850s he completed one project per month, often in partnership with others. Flint's buildings are mostly (but not entirely) in the classical style, the buildings are simple and attractive.

Route directions:

1. Leave Town Hall Square and turn right on Bishops Street and cross to the opposite side when safe to do so. Turn left on Bowling Green Street and continue to the next junction.

(A) Former warehouse. Look left along Belvoir Street to the junction with Stamford Street. What was Zizzi's restaurant was originally built as a warehouse in 1858, designed by Flint. Next time you pass, look at the top to see the classical decoration.

2. Cross ahead over Belvoir St with care towards the former Belvoir Street Chapel, the attractive white curved building and turn right on the far side. Watch for cyclists on the pavement here and on Welford Place, it is shared space. Pass the Leicester Adult Education College and cross over the Wellington Street/King Street junction. On the far side pause on this corner.

(B) Former Library and Public Meeting Rooms (aka the Liberal Club)

Turn to look back at the large attractive white building on the corner of Welford Place and Wellington Street. This is an early and classic Flint building, built in 1831 when he was 30 years old and is referred to as a "classical masterpiece" by his biographer, Mark Mitchley. It served as the Library and Public Meeting Rooms and was used by the Radicals (Liberals), who were unable to hire buildings from the Conservative town council. It was also home to the Literary and Philosophical Society. The venue was used for educational talks – a popular activity of the day – and for concerts. The Hungarian composer and pianist Franz Liszt played there in 1840.

(C) Phoenix House

Now turn to look along Welford Place towards the traffic lights. On the left beyond the red-brick office block and before the junction is the original Phoenix House, built 1842 for Leicestershire and Midland Fire and Life Insurance Company (the Phoenix is apt). It was designed by Flint in Classical Greek Revival style and is described in one of Pevsner's *Buildings of England* guide books as "now the finest neo-Greek façade left in Leicester". The building is now office space for Leicester City Council. You may want to take a closer look, then return to this corner.

(D) Former Ward & Sons warehouse

Look further down Wellington Street, adjacent to the former Library and Public Meeting Rooms is another Flint building, originally designed as a warehouse for Ward and Sons Printers. It is now Connexions employment hub for young people.

From the corner, enter King Street which is lined with small shops and cafes. Pass large modern glass and brick offices and continue on King Street to the junction with Marlborough Street.

(E) Former R Harris & Sons knitwear factory,

At the junction of King Street and Marlborough Street stands the former textile factory building of Richard Harris. It was designed in 1845 by Flint in the Italianate style. Harris was once Mayor of Leicester, an MP and a committed member of the Baptist church (which had a large following in Leicester then). He stood by his principles and treated his employees well.

Continue on King Street, keep to the left-hand side. On the wall just before the Kings Head pub is a heritage information panel giving a short history of King Street and its changing use from residential to industrial. Continue onwards, crossing side roads with care. On your left pass The Crescent, with another heritage information panel worth reading. Note the cream building opposite – we'll take a better look in a moment. Continue ahead to the junction with Regent Road.

(F) Crescent Cottages

Turn back to view the building at the corner of King Street and Regent Road. This Regency cottage and terrace is another of Flint's early works dating from 1836. This attractive classical style building was listed in 1950. It was originally houses then later offices, but is now returning to residential use.

(G) Holy Trinity Church

Turn to take a look at the church. It was built in 1838 in early classical style by Sidney Smirke. Flint enlarged the church in 1852 but the drawings don't survive so it's difficult to say which sections can be attributed to him. This is one of the difficulties when looking at the history of buildings - we don't always know who did what when! The church was then remodelled in 1872 by SS Teulon in High Gothic style.

Bear left around the corner and cross towards the church at the pedestrian crossing. Turn left on the far side and continue on Regent Road to the next side road, Newtown Street. Pause on the corner.

(H) Kent House

At Newtown Street note the classical design of the end house which features a bold pediment (triangular) gable. The council's Conservation Area Statement suggests this terrace of housing from 2 Newtown Street to 73 Regent Road may be one of Flint's works, although not certain.

3. Turn right into Newtown Street and continue on, crossing side roads with care. Pass residential housing then after crossing Tower Street continue beside the high walls of Leicester prison.

Leicester Prison

This was built between 1825-28 and designed by William Parsons.

At the end of Newtown Street (by Nelson Mandela Park), turn left on Lancaster Road, noting the attractive three-storey housing along here.

(I) Lancaster Terrace

These were built by Flint for a developer, John Holland, who auctioned them off upon completion in 1857. These three-storey houses have a nice sense of proportion and space with three rooms on each floor. Flint built a lot of housing like these but not much has survived.

Carefully cross Lancaster Road to enter West Street and continue on the right-hand pavement. Cross Tower Street and continue ahead to reach Regent Road.

West Street

The classical 'Regency' style became less fashionable by the 1850s and 1860s and you can see examples of later styles in the houses at the northern end of West Street, which date from the last quarter of the 19th century. As you leave West Street onto Regent Road note the terrace on the right-hand corner, Southfields Cottages at 77-95 Regent Road. Built in 1841, these are not thought to be Flint's work but copy the Greek classical style of his larger terrace of houses on Upper King Street. These are thought to have been built by Midland Railway for middle-management.

Turn right on Regent Road and continue to the traffic lights and busy dual carriageway.

4. Use the pedestrian crossing to cross left (Regent Road) then continue beside the busy road (Waterloo Way). The pavement heads uphill. Turn left on Princess Road West to pass the back of New Walk Museum then turn right to enter Museum Square. Continue onwards to New Walk and pause there to look at the museum.

(J) New Walk Museum

This building, designed by Hansom, was originally a school for the children of non-conformists (who didn't want to send their children to Church of England schools). We mentioned earlier that the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society used the Public Meeting Rooms on Wellington Street, but they also built up a collection of artefacts and wished to find a suitable building to house and display them. They considered the Three Cranes Hotel on Humberstone Gate, but came around to converting this school into the town's museum. A conversion was needed and Flint was employed to retrofit the school into a museum, incorporating a lecture theatre and a school of design. The Council (or *Corporation*, as it was then called) provided £500 for the work which took place between 1846-9. Flint's fee was £34.10.6d (£4,600 now).

5. Head a short distance down New Walk to the terrace of houses overlooking Museum Square (watch out for cyclists along New Walk).

(K) Museum Terrace

In 1850 the council wanted to develop this land, which at that time was a field used for horse racing and cavalry exercises. Flint was engaged to draw up plans and he provided drawings for houses which had the appearance of a single grand house with a 'palace-front'. The Council went on to sell the land to a

developer, Mr Swain, but with the condition that Flint's design be used for the housing. In the 1920s the building was a Hydro, a hotel/health centre. As history played out, the Council now own the terrace.

Continue down New Walk until you reach the old red-brick Priory of the Holy Cross Catholic Church on the right. Look at the attractive houses opposite at numbers 23-25 and then a little further along at numbers 7-17.

(L) 23-25 New Walk

A pair of attractive Regency cottages built in the 1820s and designed by Flint, an example of his early work.

(M) 7-17 New Walk

Housing built in 1852 for hosiery entrepreneur, Joseph Hames. New Walk was a fashionable part of town and a desirable place to live. While the houses have very little adornment, they are unquestionably stylish; these would have been upmarket houses. It's not entirely clear whether they were designed by Flint but his name is on what survives of the plans, in conjunction with his then partner, Charles Wickes. The building later became offices but is mostly now housing again.

After the Catholic Church turn right on Park Street. Cross Wellington Street with care and turn right on the far side.

6. Turn left into Dover Street and continue on, crossing side roads, to reach Granby Street. Cross Granby Street with great care – watch for motor traffic and also for cyclists as you cross the cycle lane (caution: the cycle path operates in contra-flow to the motor traffic: check both directions to cross). On the far side turn right on Granby Street, then turn left into Northampton Street.
7. Turn left on Charles Street, pass the offices then pause by the church.

(N) Charles Street Baptist Church

Designed by Flint in 1830 when still in his 20s. The church was built to accommodate Leicester's growing number of Baptists, as the town's other three Baptist churches were full beyond capacity. Of the other denominations at that time, the Unitarians were prominent and there was no shortage of Methodist and Congregationalist chapels, but no denomination had such large and growing congregations as the Baptists. The Baptists' treasurer was Richard Harris, the businessman for whom Flint later designed a knitwear factory (the one we passed in King Street). The original plan was to adapt a warehouse on this site but the walls were too weak to accommodate the gallery so a new Baptist church was speedily built. It was completed in around 9 months, cost £3,759.11s.4d and opened in January 1831, seating about 700 people. When the building is open it is well worth taking a look at the chapel's interior, with its curvy gallery and light and peaceful ambience. There's a museum at the back about a Leicestershire man called William Carey, once Minister here, who went out to India and founded a university and translated the Bible into several languages.

Flint designed some other churches and chapels, some of which have been demolished (the Curzon Street Methodist church and the Gallowtree Gate Congregationalist church). Although nearly all Flint's work was in Leicester, one example is the Congregationalist chapel on the way into Harborough.

8. Continue on Charles Street then at the main junction turn left on Rutland Street. Continue to Granby Street. Here, pause to look at the building diagonally opposite you, at the corner of Belvoir Street and Granby Street.

(O) The News Room of 1898, on the site of the Reading Room (or 'General News Room') of 1836

This beautiful building was built in 1898 as the General News Room, designed by William Goddard. It replaced an earlier building that was considered to be Flint's masterpiece in classical Greek Revival style and would have been iconic, had it survived. It was decided in 1836 that Leicester needed a Reading Room, something between a club and a library. This site was identified and a competition was held, inviting plans. Of the 34 plans submitted it was Flint's design that won the committee's vote. Flint's estimate was £3,000 but the project went £114 over budget, resulting in a furore. The Reading Room had a lantern window (a huge skylight) and was gas lit. It opened from 8-10am and 1-5pm (but not Sundays, after a vote among the subscribers). The building was demolished in 1898, mainly so that Granby Street could be widened.

You may choose to finish the walk here. Alternatively, cross Granby Street then Belvoir Street with care, turn right on Granby Street and left on Bishop Street to return to Town Hall Square. We hope you have enjoyed discovering some of Leicester's architecture and history on this self-guided route. There are more self-guided trails to discover at: www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walks

Acknowledgements

Route developed by volunteer Jim McCallum for Leicester City Council.

References:

William Flint, Leicester's Classical Architect. A biography by Mark Mitchley.

<https://www.fowrcl.org.uk/2019/06/14/william-flint-leicesters-classical-architect/>

Phoenix House – in the Leicester Mercury:

Building once described as 'quiet, dignified and refined' has finest neo-Greek facade left in Leicester

<https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/history/building-once-described-quiet-dignified-1943503>

Leicester City Council's New Walk Conservation Area Statement

<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/r34jlwea/new-walk-conservation-area-character-appraisal-2020.pdf>