

THE LACE MARKET TRAIL

The Lace Market is a historic quarter-mile square area of Nottingham. It was the centre of the World's lace industry during the British Empire and is now a protected heritage area. It was an area of salesrooms and warehouses for storing, displaying and selling the lace.

Below you can find the description of a walk around the Lace Market Trail, including photos and interesting facts about some of the buildings. To help set the scene, first there is a brief history of Nottingham up until about 1900:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NOTTINGHAM

A Saxon chief named Snot settled here and named it Snotengaham (the homestead of Snot's people) although evidence has been found of cave dwellers before this as early as the Iron Age.

In 867 Danish Vikings took control. The town was at the northernmost reaches of the Danelaw. Land to the north was controlled by the Norsemen - Norwegian Vikings. Later the Anglo-Saxons regained control and the town became a strategic gateway to the North, gaining in importance. The Saxons settled in the area that we now know as the Lace Market.

In 1067/1068 a wooden castle was built on the orders of William the Conqueror to support his expansion Northwards. The 'S' was dropped from the town's name. The Normans settled around the castle, this was also known as the French area.

Throughout the medieval period Nottingham was immensely important strategically. In the time of Henry II (1154-1189) the town became the meeting place of Parliament. Richard I (1189-1199) only spent 1 year of his reign in the country - the rest was spent on crusade - and much of this one year he was in Nottingham because his brother John (who reigned after him 1199-1216) was his Regent and also Earl of Nottingham. The legend of Robin Hood is, of course, set during this period.

During the reign of Edward II (1307-1327) his Queen Isabella and her lover Roger Mortimer seized power in 1326 and forced him to abdicate in favour of Edward & Isabella's son Edward (Edward III), acting as his Regents. When Edward took control himself in 1330, Mortimer was captured at Nottingham Castle and later hanged. Mortimer's Hole refers to the secret tunnels/passageway under the castle and into the royal apartments. Stories differ as to whether Mortimer was caught in the passage trying to escape or that the passageway was used by Edward's men to gain access and seize him in the Queen's bedroom.

By the time of Edward IV (1461-1483) during the Wars of the Roses, Nottingham Castle was Edward's chief fortress and royal palace. It was much extended and beautified. Richard III (1483-1485) also loved the castle and made it his principal residence. It was from here that he rode to defeat by Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth Field. Henry VII left many castles, including Nottingham, to decline.

By the time Charles I raised his Standard in Nottingham in 1642 at the start of the Civil War, Nottingham was still vastly important but the castle was already in ruins. However, Nottingham remained a significant town and gained from important trade connections gained over the centuries. In the 17th Century it was one of the chief centres for the wool trade, particularly wool dyeing and cloth making, which in turn led to the growth of the hosiery trade. In time, the skills developed in that trade led to the development of the lace industry. By the late 17th Century the population had risen to 5000 from 1000 in the 11th Century. It then grew to 29,000 by 1801 and over the boom years of the lace industry reached 240,000 by 1901 and 260,000 in 1911.

Pre 1800 maps show substantial houses in the area around St Mary's Church, with large gardens and orchards. Nottingham was known as 'The Garden City'. This changed as the gentry were replaced by the lace industry, leading initially to the building of cottages with attic workshops, most set down small courts. Some larger houses became factories making St Mary's Gate the industry's centre by 1840. Warehouses then spread East and West, imposed on a medieval street grid.

Two key inventions originating from Nottinghamshire gave rise to the thriving local industry. In 1589 William Lee developed a framework knitting machine which enabled the manufacture of large volumes of lace. In 1808 John Heathcote developed a hand operated machine which marked the beginning of the local lace industry. This was later refined by John Leavers, who speeded up the process to make entirely machine-made lace.

In the Jubilee year of Queen Victoria's reign (1897), Nottingham became a city in recognition of its importance to the Empire as the global centre of the lace industry.

THE LACE MARKET TRAIL

This walk through the historic Lace Market area starts at Weekday Cross and can easily be done in a couple of hours with plenty of time to admire the buildings en route. The numbers on the map correspond with the locations described below.



1 Weekday Cross

From here there is a real sense of the development of Nottingham as a city. Weekday Cross stands on the site of the Saxon marketplace. Looking to the West along Low Pavement lies Nottingham Castle, the centre of the Norman/French settlement.



To the East is the site of the Saxon settlement which is now the Lace Market area. To one side of High Pavement there are buildings which were formerly lace warehouses, dating from the 1800's, while on the other is the new Nottingham Contemporary art gallery, built in 2007 and incorporating a lace design on the walls to emphasise the heritage of the area. Below this spot stretches a huge network of caves where the original people of the area would have lived. So we are standing in a unique spot, with centuries of history all around us.

2 High Pavement

The walk starts through the Saxon, or English, town along High Pavement, the paved way, the main thoroughfare of the Lace Market. The steps at the side of the Nottingham Contemporary are on the site of Garner's Hill, which led down to the notorious slum area of Narrow Marsh.



3 Queen Victoria plaque

The Queen Victoria Jubilee Plaque (between numbers 7 & 9 High Pavement) was erected in 1897, the year Nottingham was made a city to mark its importance to the Empire as a global centre for the lace industry.



4 High Pavement Chapel

The Grade II listed Pitcher and Piano pub/restaurant building was a former Unitarian Chapel, dating from 1876. It has magnificent stained glass windows, including one designed by Burne-Jones, one of the Pre-Raphaelites.



5 County House

County House (next door to the Cock and Hoop pub) was originally a medieval building that was re-modelled in 1833 as the Judge's Lodgings. Note the Georgian sash windows and the squat neo-Greek Doric columns of cast iron.



6 Shire Hall

The Shire Hall, now the Galleries of Justice museum dates from 1375-76. From 1449 onwards it also became a gaol, much extended over the centuries and eventually having a separate women's gaol added in the late 1800's. Note the poorly corrected spelling mistake of the stone masons, the Ionic columns at the front of the building and the Roman symbol of justice over the entrance.



Up until 1868 public executions were held on the front steps, where a gallows would be erected. After this date executions were held inside the premises – this decision was influenced by the events after the hanging of William Saville (the notorious Colwick Spinney murderer). In those days executions drew huge crowds of spectators. Eyewitnesses to the event report seeing a seething mass of humanity crammed together in the narrow streets. As the crowd dispersed and the head of the mass reached the even narrower ally of Garner's Hill with its steep flight of steps leading down to Narrow Marsh disaster overtook as men, women and children tumbled down the stone steps. At least 8 people are known to have died and over 150 were seriously injured in the crush.



7 St. Mary's Church

St. Mary's Church is mentioned in the Domesday Book and possibly dates from at least 100 years before that. The present building is the third known to have stood on the site and dates from 1475. It stood at the centre of the Saxon town. Built in the Perpendicular style, much restorative work has had to be completed, the last major structural restoration during 1844 - 1848. This was needed because the tower pillars were leaning due to the excavation of burial vaults (to provide security from body snatching) that had de-stabilised the foundations. Either side of the main gates there are memorials to Nottinghamshire men killed in World War One, including 107 from Carlton (in the Willows) and 54 from Gedling.



8 Commerce Square, Malin Hill & Short Hill

Passing through Commerce Square, with its 18th century warehouses, to Malin Hill - an ancient pathway which led down to Cliff Road and the Narrow Marsh.



Conditions in Narrow Marsh were described in an 1845 Commissioner's Report as "So very bad as hardly to be surpassed in misery by anything within the entire range of our manufacturing cities".

At the base of Malin's Hill are Short Stairs, leading to Short Hill which runs parallel to Hollowstone. Malin's Hill was too narrow and steep for carriages to enter the Lace Market and so Hollowstone and High Pavement were widened for the increasing lace traffic.



9 Garden City

Numbers 26 and 28 High Pavement (to the right of the Cock and Hoop on the earlier photo) are an example of the elegant early 18th century houses that were built in this area when it was known as Garden City. The gentry lived here in large houses with formal gardens and orchards.



10 St. Mary's Churchyard



Back into St Mary's Churchyard, at the back of the church stands a memorial to Nottinghamshire firefighters killed during their work.



11 Kayes Walk

Outside the churchyard around the junction of St. Mary's Gate and Kayes Walk was the centre of the genteel market town of the early 17th century. Number 49 St. Mary's Gate/number 5 Kayes Walk is an example of a later house, early 19th century. Number 1 Kayes Walk stands at the front of the site of Plumtre House, named after John de Plumtre - a Mayor of Nottingham, and demolished to build a lace warehouse, the Grade II listed Jacoby building.



12 Stoney Street

Turning onto Stoney Street, we are now entering the heart of the Lace District. In the 19th century Nottingham became a worldwide centre of machine lace production and distribution. "Brown" (undyed) lace and finished goods were sold. Nottingham developed a strong independent export market. In an industry dependent on fashion, finishing and marketing were critical. Local businesses were well represented at the 1851 Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace.



At its height, buyers came from all over the World; there were over 130 lace factories and over 15,000 people were employed, many of them women. But working and living conditions were dire. Children as young as 5 were employed and 14/15 hour days were common. In fact, Lord Byron made a speech in the Lords in 1812 deploring the misery of the workers. The gentry moved out when the lace industry took over the area, but refused to sell adjacent lands. It wasn't until the Enclosure Acts in 1845 that land outside the city could be used but building did not commence until the 1860's.

13 St. Mary's Burial Grounds

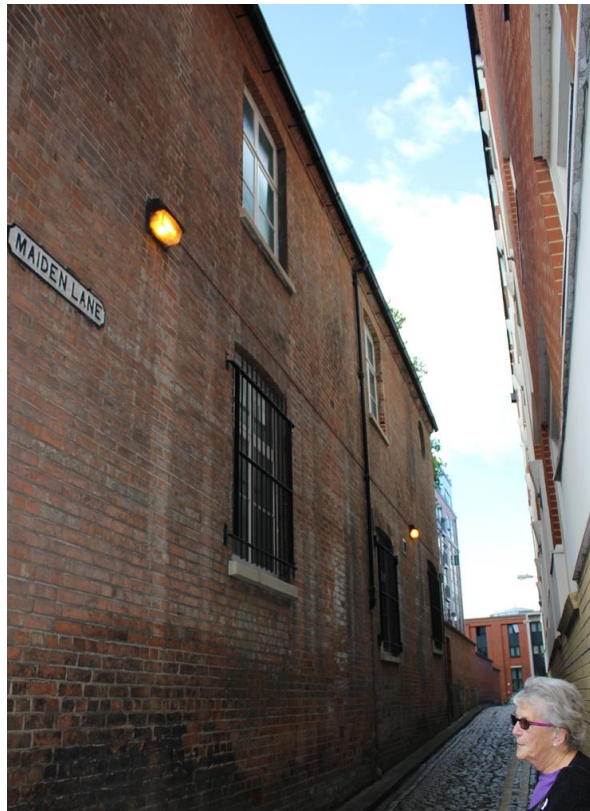
Grave robbing became common in the 19th century to satisfy the demand for bodies from medical schools for use in experimental work. "Grave clubs" were established, groups of men organised to guard new graves at night. A popular song of the time:

And all night let stout men
The Vestry watch within
And to each man give a gallon of beer,
And a keg of Holland's ginn.
Powder and ball and blunderbuss
To save me if he can
And each five guineas if he shoot
A resurrection man.



14 Maiden Lane

An original narrow cobbled street, thought to have been given its name due to the prostitutes who worked here!



15 The Adams Building

Built in 1855 and designed by T C Hine for Thomas Adams, the wealthy lace manufacturer, philanthropist and evangelist. Built in an E shape to maximise light and space, the building included a chapel, dining room, library, washing facilities and a heating/ventilation system. Adams revolutionised workers' conditions by giving them a 9 hour day! A visiting doctor from Manchester described the factory girls as "So healthy and fresh they could have been hay making, not lace making". The building was designed with an Italianate frontage and was meant to impress buyers.



16 Broadway & the Birkin buildings

Also designed by T C Hines, again in an Italianate style, Broadway is a curved street with the Richard Birkin building standing on the curve facing Stoney Street, to attract passing foreign merchants. The view of Broadway from St Mary's Gate is similarly impressive. The Birkin building backs onto the Jacoby warehouse, also on the site of Plumtre House. Note the initials of the architect & the tools of his trade - dividers and square - above the archway entrance, also the bee, emblem of Richard Birkin. Inside the archway are the Birkin coat of arms & an arched window believed to be from the original Norman St Mary's Church.



17 St. Mary's Gate

No. 27 St. Mary's Gate was built in the late 18th century, described by Pevsner to have a "Sumptuous interior" including fine fireplaces, staircases and ceilings. Note the carriage entrance carved into the frontage when the building became a lace warehouse, which disrupts the arcading. Sadly decaying now and brickwork covered over in cement.

18 Rear of the Adams building

With a covered arcade and loading bays this was designed as a service area but gives a good view of the design of the building.



We hope you have enjoyed this brief tour of the Lace Market. If you have any interesting facts that could be added to this page, please contact the Webmaster via the on-line form on the [\[Contact\]](#) page.