

# Walk Three: *The Society Circuit*

This longer route reveals the gap between rich and poor in Victorian Hexham. Distance approximately 2½ km (1½ miles). Allow 1 to 1½ hours.

Enjoy the Lord of the Manor's pleasure grounds, find out the revolting recipe for making leather, and why Hexham had its own Holy Island.

Start your walk in the Market Place, at the graphic panel in front of the Abbey. You can use the map to find your way.

**Don't forget there are also written instructions and more information overleaf.**

## 1 Market Place

Hexham grew steadily in the 19th century. Some could afford grand new homes, but many lived in cramped unsanitary houses. Imagine what life was like in 1810 when there were buildings squashed between the Moothall and Abbey!



## 2 Gibson's Pharmacy

This shop was formerly Gibson's Pharmacy. Look for J P Gibson's initials – he was a renowned photographer who recorded life in Victorian Hexham, as well as an amateur archaeologist. His son, Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, was a well known poet.

## 3 The former White Hart Inn

A Robb's store opened here, on the site of the White Hart Inn, in 1919. The family had already been trading in Hexham since 1818. William Robb, who died in 1892, was a great campaigner for better conditions in town.

## 4 The former Midland Bank

This ornate building opened in 1896. Look at the carvings on all sides of the building as you pass. Can you find Queen Victoria and a collection of coins?



## 8 Hencotes

Hencotes was another small settlement outside the medieval priory wall. Today it is lined with elegant villas and specialist shops.



## 10 Cockshaw Burn

It's hard to believe, but this area was once the filthy, smelly centre of leather production in Hexham. Look out for leathery street and pub names – and spot artworks in the burn.



## 11 Holy Island House

In the 17th century, the small Catholic community established a Mass House here in this poor industrial suburb. It acquired the name 'Holy Island' as result!



## 12 Henry Bell's Office

The Bell family ran their wool and leather business from here. Leather made Hexham's merchants wealthy but the grimy yards and poor workers' housing were hidden away behind grand offices and warehouses. Conditions were better by the end of the 19th century, and local businesses like Bell & Sons contributed to improvements in the town.

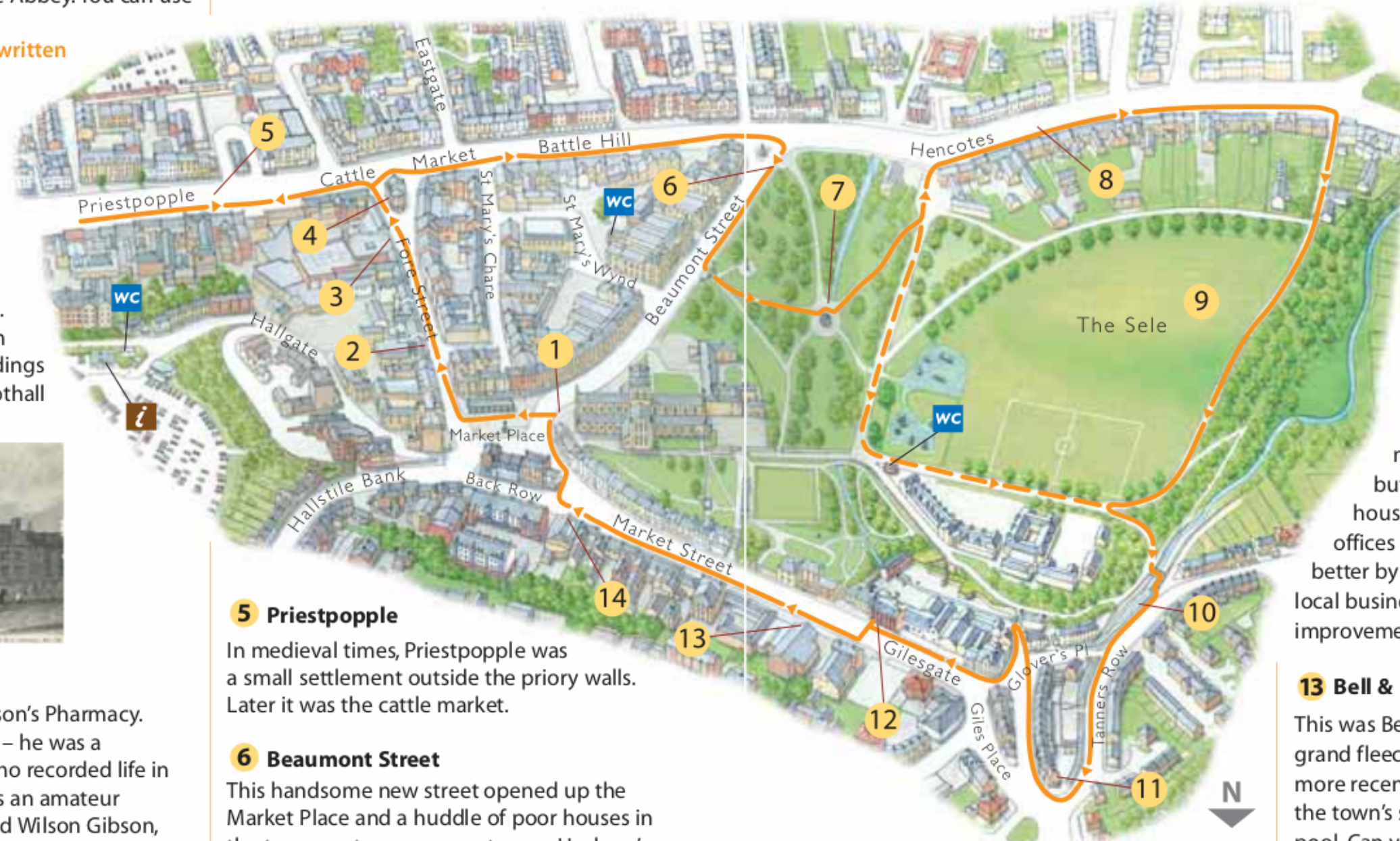
## 13 Bell & Sons' Warehouse

This was Bell & Sons' grand fleece warehouse, more recently used as the town's swimming pool. Can you find Henry Bell's initials on the building?



## 14 Salvation Army Barracks

This opened in 1884 on the site of the Mason's Arms Inn. Look out for the Army's fire and brimstone message!



## 5 Priestpopple

In medieval times, Priestpopple was a small settlement outside the priory walls. Later it was the cattle market.

## 6 Beaumont Street

This handsome new street opened up the Market Place and a huddle of poor houses in the town centre were swept away. Hexham's Board of Health fought hard for such improvements.

## 7 The Bandstand

This was a gift from Henry Bell, a local wool merchant and tanner, in 1912. It celebrated the opening of the Abbey Grounds as a public park.

## 9 The Sele

The Lord of the Manor, Sir Walter Blackett, had opened his landscaped grounds – the Sele – to the public in 1753. His descendant, Lord Allendale, presented the Sele to the town in 1908 and sold his garden in 1911 to form the Abbey Grounds.

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**Walk Three: The Society Circuit** (see the map on the previous page for more details).

## **From the Market Place 1 to Gibson's Pharmacy 2**

Cross the Market Place towards the Moothall then turn right up Fore Street. Look for the ornate black shop front on your left, opposite the turning to Meal Market.

The shop's frontage was carved by a Belgian refugee in 1916. The furnishings and contents of the pharmacy are now in the Science Museum in London!



## **From Gibson's Pharmacy 2 to the former White Hart Inn 3 and the former Midland Bank 4**

Continue along Fore Street. Stop just before the street splits. Look to your left at the red brick and stone store front. Once the White Hart Inn, this building was also used as a magistrates' court and a posting house for the Newcastle to Carlisle mail.



Now take the left hand fork past the ornate, curved building, formerly the Midland Bank.

Can you find this smiling sheep amongst the carvings on the old bank? It reminds us that much of Hexham's wealth in Victorian times came from leather and wool.



## **From the former Midland Bank 4 to Priestpopple 5**

Turn left along the main road, which is Priestpopple. On the other side of the road you will see the County Mills building, once a maltings and flourmill, with trees in front of it. The grand 18th century Priestpopple House stands beside it.

## **From Priestpopple 5 to Beaumont Street 6**

Retrace your steps to the ornate bank, then carry straight on up Battle Hill. Stop at the crest of the hill. On your right is Hexham Community Church.

This shows how Battle Hill looked early in the 20th century. It is now one of the main shopping streets in the town.



### **What battle happened on the Hill?**

None that we know of! The hill was probably named after a house that stood here in medieval times ('botl' is the Old English word for a house).

Cross carefully at the junction with Beaumont Street to reach the graphic panel outside the gates of Abbey Grounds. The panel shows the street when it was first laid out.

The statue at the end of Beaumont Street is Colonel Benson, a local man who was a hero of the Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa.



## **From Beaumont Street 6 to the Bandstand 7**

Walk down Beaumont Street towards the Abbey. Turn left into the park at the gates opposite the Queen's Hall. Where the path forks, keep left to reach the bandstand.

## **From the Bandstand 7 to Hencotes 8**

Stand with your back to the bandstand steps and take the snaking path in front of you, keeping the burn to your left. At the small gateway in the wall turn left to reach the main street. This is Hencotes. Turn right here (unless you wish to avoid steps in the next section of the route).

## **Alternative route from Hencotes 8 to Cockshaw 10 avoiding steps**

To avoid steps later in this section of the route, turn around and re-enter the park. Walk straight down the slope to the play area and toilets. Turn left here and walk past the school. Where the path forks, take the right hand path, which leads downhill. Walk down the slope and cross the burn on the metal bridge. Turn right then stop. Rejoin the trail at number 10.

## **From Hencotes 8 to the Sele 9**

Walk along Hencotes, which becomes Temperley Place. At the top of the hill, turn right into the narrow lane beside The Fox pub. Walk up the steps and carry on straight ahead beside the grassy Sele. This gives you a great view down over the town and across the Tyne Valley.



Carry on, taking care down the steps. Look down the first track on your left to see the artworks in the burn.

These unusual sculptures have been integrated into new flood defences along Cockshaw Burn. The giant oak 'pegs' and flowing metal work are designed to catch debris.

David Williams  
Photography



## **From the Sele 9 to Cockshaw Burn 10**

Continue along the main path until it curves right towards the Abbey. Turn sharp left here, along a path with railings that leads downhill. Walk down the slope and cross the burn on the metal bridge. Turn right then stop.

*continues...*

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## From Cockshaw Burn 10 to Holy Island House 11

Tanneries, for making leather, once lined the burn here. Walk beside the burn until the pavement ends. Cross over carefully and continue, keeping the burn on your right. Pass the end of Tanners Row. At the T-junction turn right, looking out for the Pant (fountain) of 1858. Continue round to the right. On your right is Holy Island House. Can you find the date when it was built above the door?



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## From Holy Island House 11 to Henry Bell's Office 12

Continue past Holy Island House up a narrow street towards the Old Tannery Inn. Walk straight ahead between the pub and Glovers Place, into Tanners Yard. Water still runs through the yard, which was an important part of the town's tannery area. Find out more at the next stop.

Return to the Old Tannery Inn (formerly the Skinners Arms – look at the stonework on the frontage). Walk around the pub and up the hill – this is Gilesgate. Walk as far as Number 8, with columns at the door, then turn right into the archway just beyond it. Look for the trail marker on the wall.

Bell & Sons were skinners and tanners (preparing skins and making them into leather) and wool staplers (buying and selling wool). They also made artificial manure!

One son, Henry, paid for Hexham's bandstand. The other, George, was a member of the local Boards of Health and Schools (and played rugby for Northumberland).



Walk down the passageway to find a graphic panel in front of you. It shows the smelly, messy business of making leather.

## From Henry Bell's Office 12 to Bell & Sons' Warehouse 13

Go back out to Gilesgate and cross the road. Then carry on up the hill. Look out for a trail marker on the next building.

This warehouse was built in 1885 and used to store wool. Some of the firm's wool was used to make carpets in Halifax.



Henry Bell is remembered by the initials on this building. Look out for a memorial to his brother George within the east window of the Abbey.

## From Bell & Sons' Warehouse 13 to the Salvation Army Barracks 14 and Market Place 1

Carry along Gilesgate, which becomes Market Street. The building on your left just before the turning to Back Row is the Salvation Army Barracks. Stay on Market Street to return to the Market Place.

