

Selby's Riverside Roundels

Metal panels in a riverside setting that tell the town's history

This redevelopment of the riverside was opened to the public in August 2009, and comprised this riverside area, the adjacent Amphitheatre and improvements to the Market Place. It was created as a result of consultation through the Selby Town Team and Renaissance project, largely funded by Yorkshire Forward. The intention was to open up the waterfront as a pleasant and profitable public space, and to extend this development south along the river to the former shipyards. However, the project foundered before this aspiration could be fully realised



The winding path that comprises the Timeline leads from the Amphitheatre to the foot of the road bridge. At regular intervals along it are metallic paving strips containing roundels with icons referring to key features of Selby's history. As well as the roundels there are swirling patterns meant to represent eddies in the Ouse. These relief patterns make excellent subjects for brass rubbing. These strips are the work of sculptor Ailsa Magnus.

Central to the area is the sculpture "ReLaunch" featuring 4 figures important to Selby's history. They can be thought of as the 4 M's, namely :

a Monk (referencing Benedict and the Abbey)

a Miller (Selby's agricultural links, and the mills that used to line the Ouse)

a Miner (the Selby Coalfield of 1974-2004 - hope of a brighter future that wasn't to be) and

a Marine Engineer (to represent 500 years of shipbuilding on the Ouse).

The sculpture sits on a plinth of hand-made bricks designed to show the river wave or aegir. This is another piece of Magnus' work.

The area as a whole is laid out with specimen planting and benches, intended to make the area a pleasant place to relax. The whole development won a Civic Society "Good Design" award, and plaques at the start of the walk record this.

The development occupies an area of houses and a chapel, formerly known as Johnny's Day Nook - or 'The Nook' for short, and the one remaining house bears that name.

The walls that separate the Timeline from Ousegate are part of Selby's flood defences, and the gates into the Timeline are closed at times of high water. Johnny's Day Nook properties were regularly flooded.

Details of the strips

Paving Strip 1 : Saxon Settlement

The earliest-known history of Selby mentions Anglo Saxon settlements thought to have been present from the 5th century AD onwards, when the area was little more than low-lying marsh land. The derivation of the name "Selby" is unclear. There are several theories. One maintains that it's short for "Seal Town" due to such creatures coming up on the tide. Others say that due to sailing craft docking here, it is a shortened form of "Sail Town". Another idea holds that in Anglo Saxon dialect, the word meant "Lucky Village".

The most widely-accepted explanation involves a mixture of Anglo Saxon and Viking. "Seletun" features in the Anglo Saxon chronicle for 779 AD. "Sele" is Anglo Saxon for a willow copse. Marshy conditions are ideal for willow, and "-by" is the Viking ending meaning "town". "Seleby" is thus an amalgam of two major cultural influences of the first millennium, meaning "The town by the willow copse".

Paving Strip 2 : Cultural conflux

Vikings sailed along the River Ouse for many centuries in their characteristic longships. It was along the river that the hordes came to fight at the battles of Stamford Bridge and Fulford in 1066, and it was through Seleby that the tattered remnants of their army returned home after thorough and ignominious defeats. Stories tell of 300 invading ships coming up the Ouse to moor at nearby Riccall, yet such were the scale of Norse losses at the two battles that fewer than 10% of those boats returned to the fjords. Viking remains were uncovered near Riccall in the 1950s.

Paving Strip 3 : Monks and Monarchs

Abbot Benedict founded Selby Abbey in 1069. Depending on which sources you read, he was either a holy man following a vision or on the run from the Abbot of Auxerre, in southern France, having stolen one of the Abbey's holy relics. Benedict's vision instructed him to build an Abbey once three swans were sighted together. Such a trio was sighted slightly upriver of the Timeline's site, leading Benedict to construct a wooden church on what is now Church Hill. His representation here, akin to a "Green Man" alludes to the mystery of his story.

The QR code documents on Benedict and Germain explain the story in greater detail.

The child who was to become King Henry I was certainly born in the winter of 1068/69, and all sources point to Matilda giving birth in Selby whilst husband William was engaged in military matters. Henry ruled England from 1100 – 1135. He was responsible for legal and financial reform and oversaw a period of peace and reconciliation in England, yet fought wars in France. He was renowned for his appetite in both bedchamber and dining hall. He sired at least 25 children, and died of gluttony! The QR document on Henry tells his story.

Paving Strip 4 : Abbots and Agro

Abbot Hugh, who succeeded Benedict, began the present Abbey building. 1069, 1609 and 1906 are a play on numbers, being crucial dates in the Abbey's history. 1069 was the founding, 1609 the year the tower collapsed and 1906 saw the great fire. Unfortunately for the theory of divine numerical intervention, nothing of note seems to have happened ecclesiastically 1096 or 1690, and it is unlikely that this document will be available for consultation in the year 6091.

The Abbey building survived King Henry VIII's 'Dissolution of the Monasteries' and became Selby's parish church in 1618. The Battle of Selby in 1644 was part of the English Civil War. Fairfax's men won the day for the Cavaliers, Selby was captured from the King and the Parliamentary army was able to proceed across the Ouse by ferry, or possibly a temporary bridge, to besiege York. Later agro, involving miners blockading the Toll Bridge in the 1985 strike is not referred to here.

Paving Strip 5 : Stars and Stripes

In the Abbey is a stained glass window showing the heraldry of the de Wessington/Washington family of Durham, forebears of George Washington, the first President of the USA. The mixture of red and white stripes and spurs are thought to be the basis of the "stars and stripes" American flag.

The special relationship of linked hands across the Atlantic has been marked in many ways, not least with the involvement of American and Canadian World War II aircrews stationed at several of the many airfields in the Selby District. An annual service of thanksgiving for their sacrifice is held in the Abbey and Ye Olde Fraternite of Selebians granted honorary membership of their organization to the Royal Canadian Air Force in 2012.

Paving Strip 6 : Markets then and now

Selby has had a market on Monday for around 700 years. The date of 1324 refers to a request to renew the market charter. Selby's market remains in its traditional place by the 17th century Market Cross, close to the Abbey. This demonstrates the link between faith and commerce that established Selby's importance.

Its open-air auction is one of the few now remaining in Yorkshire and an excellent arena to observe typical Yorkshire folk. The market continues to provide a wide variety of produce and services. , Bank Holiday Monday events in the summer are a reminder of when a market day would fill the whole town, and monthly Farmers' markets maintain the availability of truly local produce.

Paving Strip 7 : Indigenous Industry

All the trades listed once had a base in Selby, and it is a sad reminder of changing times that all of them have gone from the town in the last 50 years or so, although names remain to remind. For instance, the flax industry was linked to the Flaxley Road area, baulks of Baltic timber were stored in Raff yards as marked on old maps at The Quay and Tyson's Ironworks is now a business centre along Ousegate.



The most famous of these trades was undoubtedly shipbuilding. For a town 60 miles from the sea to have a marine industry may seem to the outsider a little odd, but the natural advantages of a tidal river, local sources of materials and a skilled workforce meant that shipbuilding in Selby lasted for half a millennium. Cochrane's yard, at the far end of Ousegate, is described in detail in another QR document.

Scientist Smithson Tennant, of Finkle Street discovered the elements 76, Osmium (Os) and 77 Iridium (Ir), Jonathan Hutchinson was an eminent Victorian doctor and Thomas Johnson a 17th century botanist. All have their own QR documents

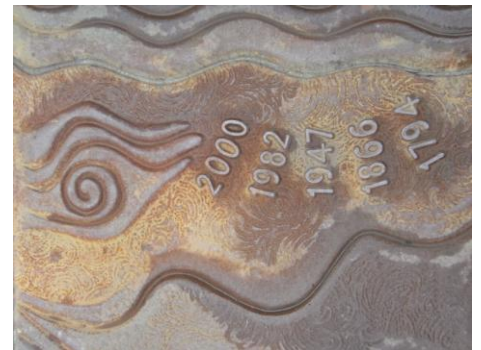
Paving Strip 8 : Transport and Sport

Selby was such an important centre of trade that new methods of transporting goods came early to the town. The Selby Canal, opened in 1778, provided an improved export link for West Riding merchants. Selby Railway Station, the first in Yorkshire, repeated the trick over 50 years later, opening in 1834. A QR document describes the railway in more detail.

Selby has had many sporting heroes. Top-flight footballer Steve Sherwood, sprint champion Stanley Englehart, and David Foster, inventor of an early form of table tennis. Foster is featured in a QR document. The most recent was John Sherwood, brother of Steve, gaining bronze in the 400m hurdles, behind David Hemery in Mexico in 1968. Selby Town football club have been in existence in various guises for over a century, and local cricket and rugby clubs have equally worthy heritages.

Paving Strip 9 : Floods, Tides and Torrents

Being so close to a tidal river that also drains much of Yorkshire's uplands, Selby has always had a tendency to flood. The years featured are those when the water has been at its highest. In 1947, only the Market Place around the Abbey stayed dry. Heroic efforts by troops were needed to prevent inundation in 2000, and the mighty walls were tested again in 2005 and 2012



Paving Strip 10 : Paper, Power, Potions, Pickles

Rostron's 1930s paper mill was between canal and river, along Ousegate, closing, as Rigid Paper in 2009. Drax Power Station continues to supply electricity to the National Grid and support to many activities in Selby. Nearby plants at Eggborough and Ferrybridge provide familiar landmarks on Selby's horizon, and are responsible for the supply of a large percentage of the nation's power. Yorkshire Chemicals, with their factory by the canal on the site of the former dyeworks provided the potions and Fletcher's Sauce factory in Barlby, now Greencore, made many a tasty relish, with British Sugar and J&E Sturge on Barlby Bank adding sugar and citric acid to the mix.

Paving Strip 11 : Monks and Miners

On the one hand, a spiritual power that promised life everlasting, dominated the town for over four centuries, on the other, a down-to-earth industry that believed its energy could be equally long-lasting.

Although the monks were evicted by Henry VIII after almost 500 years, the spiritual influence and oversight of the Abbey remains a strong influence in town.

The discovery of a huge deposit of thick-seamed Barnsley coal promised jobs for life and a secure supply of coal into the 22nd century. Controversial in its founding, a combination of unfavourable geology and politics meant that the mines lasted barely 30 years with final closure in 2004. The pits did break production records in their heyday, but mining has arguably left little lasting mark on the town

Paving Strip 12 : The future's in our hands

To complete the timeline, what better than for local children to make string models of their hands and cast them to leave a clear message as to who should really shape the town's destiny?

Other items on site.



A display board also records that Selby is on the Trans Pennine Trail. Devised in 1989 and opened in 2001, it is a coast to coast, multi-user trail stretching for over 200 miles linking Southport and Hornsea, with branches in many directions, using many old transport paths and rights of way, whilst avoiding busy roads where possible.

National Cycle Route 65 passes by on the far bank. Until very recently, local industry, as outlined in Paving Strip 10, all close to the Riverside Gardens were major employers. When the hooter blew at 5pm, local roads would be filled by cyclists wheeling their way home.



The plaque commemorates local lawyer Jeremy Hodgson, who died after suffering a viral illness in the mid-1990s. Round Table honorary member at law firm Crombie Wilkinson, Neal Porter said: "Jeremy was a friend as well as a young Round Tabler. He died leaving a young family and so the garden was dedicated to his memory."

Taking it further

Sustrans, the environmental and transport charity have information about the National Cycle Network

Patricia Scott's monumental "History of Selby" can be borrowed or bought at Selby library.

Selby library also has Farley's intriguingly titled "Selby: the first 3 million years" which can fill in many of the stories behind the strips.

The full vision of the 'Renaissance' plans for Selby's waterfront can be seen at Selby library's archives

Ailsa Magnus' website is www.ailsamagnus.com



(Photo courtesy of Ailsa Magnus)

This is how the site looked before the Renaissance project began in 2005. Originally the Timeline was planned to integrate with a 'multi million pound private sector development' planned at the south end of the waterfront site. Whilst the Timeline was completed, the associated project was never begun.