

Socialscene

Out and about in Oldham

life in Oldham

Oldham Town Trail: Centre of Oldham

Distance: Less than two miles.

Time: One to one and a half hours at leisurely stroll, but allow for stops to look at points of interest.

Calorie burn: 200+

How do I get there?: Head for the centre of Oldham and pick up signs for Gallery Oldham.

Public transport: The choice of buses are numerous from all outlying parts of the borough. Call GMPTE on 0161 228 7811 for bus details.

Parking: You will probably have to pay and display.



THIS week we move back into the town and, more specifically, Oldham town centre with a historic and architectural trail.

This is more of a stroll than a ramble and it is suitable for all age groups with plenty of places to stop off, do a bit of shopping or grab refreshment.

1 We start the walk at Oldham Library on Union Street. (This is a Victorian Gothic building which was officially opened in 1883. It housed an industrial exhibition for two years until the funds could be raised to buy books and open it as a library in 1885. 50,000 people turned out for this second opening.)

Turn left and left again into a small park at the side. (About half way up the side of the library wall are relief carvings of the likes of Mozart, Handel, Chaucer and Raphael. To the left of them and above is the original town crest of Hugh de Oldham.)

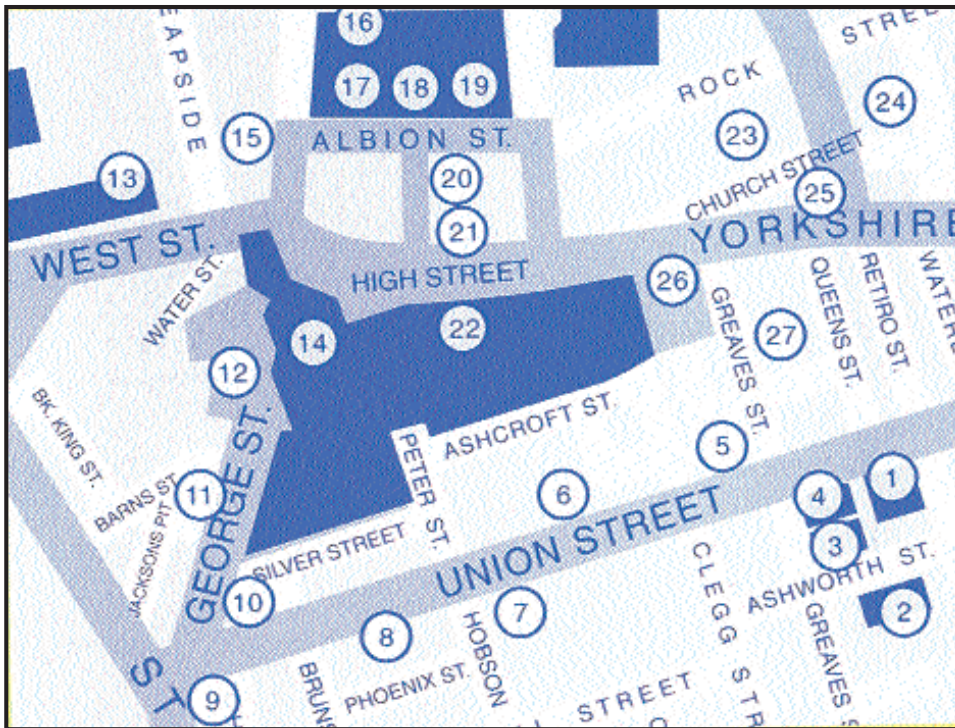
2 Carry on through the park to the modern Gallery Oldham, which opened in 2002. (Entry is free and there are a variety of contemporary and traditional exhibitions, as well as great views across Oldham.)

3 Come out of the Gallery and turn into Greaves Street and head up it towards Union Street. (You will pass the old Quaker Meeting House on your right, complete with stone lions that once graced the Victoria Market Hall until it was burnt down in 1974.)

4 Carry on up to the corner of Union Street and at number 84 is the former Post and Telegraph Office that is now home to Oldham Local Studies and Archives.

Know your centre

This is our seventh feature in a series of articles aimed at encouraging people to get out and about, explore the borough and get healthy in the process. With the help of the Oldham Ramblers' Association, Oldham Council and Countryside Rangers we hope to reintroduce you to the places of beauty and interest on our own doorstep. This week we move away from the countryside and back into the town as we look at the buildings of interest in Oldham centre.



5 Turn left and continue up Union Street. On the right hand side you will see the old Lyceum. (Built in 1856 it was originally an educational club and the stock exchange.)

6 Continue up and you will pass the Prudential Assurance Building. (Alfred Waterhouse, who designed the town halls at Manchester and Rochdale, built this in 1901.)

7 A little further along, opposite the job centre, is Phoenix House. (The large bird above the entrance is not a phoenix but a heron after the developer Heron.)

8 Carry on to Brunswick Square, set back behind an archway on the left hand side of the street. (The arch and fountain are from a Methodist Church that once stood on the site.)

9 Continue up Union Street to the pedestrian crossing and the build-

ing on your left was the grand Theatre. (This was once the town's most prestigious theatre, where the likes of Gracie Fields appeared. It became a nightclub in the Sixties and The Beatles performed. It has also been a cinema and bowling alley.)

10 Cross over Union Street towards George Street and into Pocket Park. (Oldham Council was the first local authority in the North West, in 1972, to appoint a public art officer and this is a well-known spot.)

11 From the park walk up George Street and try to imagine it prior to 1820 when it was just a collection of thatched cottages. On the corner of David Street, on your left, is a chapel built in 1815. (Oldham was a cradle of Methodism and Wesley himself visited the town). Turn left down David Street and right into a small back street called Jackson Pit.

(This is one of the oldest parts of town and home to many of the poorer residents. There was once a stagnant pond here and a ducking stool.)

12 Walk up Jackson Pit and turn right and immediately left onto George Square. Carry on past the public art and up to the left and turn right just before the Three Crowns and into Water Street and the arcade. (The arcade follows part of an ancient route believed to pre-date the Roman times.)

13 Turn left out of Water Street and onto West Street, where you are faced with a view of the Civic Centre. (Recently voted Oldham's most hated building by our readers, it was built in stages between 1964 and 1977.)

14 Cross to the entrance of the Civic Centre for a view of Spindles Shopping

Centre and then cross the pedestrian crossing and walk up the small pedestrianised road between the shops. Turn left onto Henshaw Street and follow it to the corner of Tommyfield Market Hall and Albion Street.

15 Look on either side of the shop signs on your left and you will see some stone capitals at the top pillars, representing tradesmen.

16 Walk along Albion Street, keeping Tommyfield on your left. (Before 1830 the town market was on the site of the Spindles. The idea was to then move it to Yorkshire Street, but the traders said no and set up where they still reside. Over the years the market was also the focal point of political rallies, fairs, circuses and courting couples.)

17 Among the row of shops on your left is the Tourist Information Centre.



18 Further along this same row is Lever's Fish and Chip Shop. (A blue plaque commemorates this as the origin of fish and chips.)

19 Nearby is a large stainless steel drinking fountain called H2O and made by the Hollinwood Welding and Engineering Company.

20 Opposite this, at the top of Curzon Street, is a seat in the shape of a mill roof and chimney. Set into the ground around it are the names of local businesses.

21 Continue down Curzon Street and left onto High Street. On your left is the Hilton Arcade with fine wrought ironwork. (Look

closely at either side of the lamps and you can see the faces of Gladstone and Disraeli, the leading political figures of the time in 1893).

22 Almost opposite this is MacDonalds (This is on the site of the first Yates' Wine Lodge opened in 1884). Turn left onto Lord Street and cross over. To the left of the bank is Church Lane. Walk down here and the third door on the left is a Georgian house. (This was the home of Captain Chippendale of the Manchester Yemorary whose job it was to prepare secret reports on any local radicals).

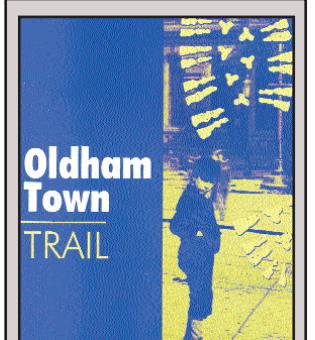
23 Next to this is the former County Court, built in 1894. (Before this it was a horse-powered cotton mill). Continue to the church steps to the church and enter the grounds.

24 St Mary's Church was built in 1830 and is Gothic. In contrast, the interior is almost Rococo. (The vestries were built in 1967 using stone from St Peter's Church, which was knocked down for the Town Square Shopping Centre). Leave at the main gate and church steps.

25 At the bottom of the steps is the War Memorial. (Built of bronze in 1922 to commemorate the Oldham men who died in the Great War. In the base is a roll of honour for the Second World War.)

26 From the memorial cross the road to the Old Town Hall. (Winston Churchill was declared a member of Parliament for Oldham on these steps in 1900). Go to the left of the building and down Greaves Street.

27 On Greaves Street look out for the Edgar Wood Building built in 1901. (Wood was so influential in the Arts and Crafts movement his plans for the building were exhibited at the Royal Academy). Continue to the end of Greaves Street and you will find yourself over the road from the library and your start point.



This week's walk is available as a leaflet from any tourist information point in Oldham, including libraries.

Next week: Don't miss our guide to a great circular and scenic Oldham

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