

**CITY  
CENTRE  
ROWNTREE  
WALK**

**FROM  
CHOCOLATE  
COMES CHANGE**



## City Centre walk

This walk takes you round some of the hidden corners of Rowntree history in central York. It gives a sense of the family's origins and business interests as well as their main philanthropic concerns. It begins by the main doors (west front) of York Minster, but it can be joined at any point.

### Duration

1 Hour

### Calories

(in KitKat fingers)  
2 fingers

## Boer War memorial

Walk down Duncombe Place on the left side, noting on your left the war memorial dedicated to the soldiers who died fighting the Boers (Afrikaners) in the second phase of the Boer War (1899-1902). The Liberal Rowntrees took a strong stance against this war.

### Imagine 🍌

The Rowntrees' relatives in Scarborough, drapers and grocers, who were victims of a mob attack (known as the *Schreiner riot*) in 1900 for their support of the Afrikaners' cause.

### Look out for 🔍

In passing note the redbrick building with a corner turret (now Gray's Solicitors). This was the former York Dispensary for the poor that moved here in 1899 and provided early hospital services.

### Chocolate fact 🍫

In 1899, Queen Victoria wanted to send a gift of chocolates to her troops in South Africa. She commissioned Fry, Cadbury and Rowntree to fill the order for 123,000 tins. As anti-war Quakers, all refused to accept payment, and donated the chocolate instead.

### Link to next place 🔗

At the traffic lights **cross the road** and continue walking in the same direction on the right side of the road. Stop at the square in front of the **City Library** in **Museum Street**.

## Explore York Library

The Rowntrees actively campaigned for a public library against opposition by the city fathers, who thought money should be spent on bridges rather than on free newspapers for the Irish immigrants. In 1881 the first library was built at Clifford Street—you will pass this building later on your walk. The present library site was opened in 1927, designed by Brierley and Rutherford.

**Look out for** 🔍

The plaque just inside the main door giving the name of Joseph's youngest son, Oscar Frederick Rowntree, who was Lord Mayor of York at the time of the library's opening.

**Link to next place** 🔗

Continue walking towards the river, pausing to note **Museum Gardens** on your right.

**Museum Gardens**

The home of Yorkshire Philosophical Society. Joseph and his father were founding members.

**Imagine**

How in 1896 Seebohm Rowntree asked that the Museum Gardens be opened as an experiment free of charge on the afternoon of race days, while the factory was closed. He argued that an alternative leisure activity would help prevent drunkenness and gambling.

**Link to next place** 🔗

At the **main entrance of the gardens take the crossing** to the other side of the road and continue walking towards the bridge. **Lendal Bridge** was built between 1860 and 1863 with support from William Tuke. As you walk over the bridge look at the present day **Aviva HQ**. Imagine this view in the past (*see image below*), where the first Rowntree factory once dominated the cityscape.

**Link to next place** 🔗

Turn **left at the lights** and straight away **sharp left** in the direction of the river into **Tanner's Moat**. Follow the road round to the right into **Wellington Row**.

### Tanner's Moat

You are standing on the original site of the Rowntrees' factory, bought from the Tuke family by Joseph's younger brother Henry. Joseph joined the business in 1869 and took over after his brother's early death in 1883.

#### Look out for

The gap in the wall at North Street Gardens. This riverside walk was once part of the original factory grounds.

#### Chocolate fact

Actually, it's not so much about success built upon chocolate—but rather upon fruit pastilles. Frenchman Claude Gaget offered his services to Joseph Rowntree on the promise of finding the formula for fruit jelly sweets. Joseph initially thought his early efforts were fit for nothing but to be flung into the River Ouse. But Fruit Pastilles came to be unrivalled in the country. Gaget's boiling pans turned out four tons of gums and pastilles a week and in 1887 a flat horse-drawn lorry was needed every day to take the output to York station.

#### Imagine

This area once comprising the few scattered buildings of the first factory: an iron foundry, several cottages and a tavern, all alongside the old railway station which until 1877 was situated on this side of the city walls.

This area adjoins Skeldergate, the area in York that Seebohm Rowntree identified as having the highest level of population density in the city (349 people and 91 houses per acre).

#### Link to next place

Continue along the pedestrian riverside walk. As you leave **North Street Gardens** on the side of the Hotel note the plaque to John Snow, a contemporary of the Rowntree family, born in North Street. Called the '*Father of Epidemiology*' he worked on tracing the sources of cholera. (Quite close nearby, opposite the Royal York Hotel next to the railway station, is the **cholera burial ground** still visible today with its graves from the outbreak in 1832.)

At **Ouse Bridge** cross back over the river. Follow the road round to the right into **Nessgate** and then into **Clifford Street**. On the right note the former York Institute (today **York Dungeon**) which was the location of York's first library. Turn left into the small lane called **Friargate**.

### Friends Meeting House

The most important Quaker building in the city, and one of the largest 'meetings' in the country outside London. Quakerism in York, well-supported by institutions such as the Quaker Schools, The Retreat and the Rowntree factory, had flourished since the late seventeenth century. The present Meeting House dates from 1884 and is on the site of the first Meeting House founded in 1674.

The Rowntrees' life and work was underpinned by their Quaker faith, which emphasised quiet service, public responsibility, and trustworthiness. As non-conformists, they remained outside the establishment's mainstream and they viewed the world with a dissenting eye.

### Look out for 🔍

The cast-iron columns on the exterior that once formed part of the gallery which was built to accommodate a fast growing membership. At its height up to 1200 Quakers came here for regular meeting.

### Imagine 🗨️

Attending the silent Quaker Meeting for Worship which Joseph attended thousands of times, yet he is only remembered for speaking publicly ('ministering') once.

### Chocolate fact 🐟

As a good Quaker, Joseph Rowntree thought that the trustworthiness and quality of his products would be sufficient to sell them, so he was initially suspicious of the need for advertising. Later he changed his mind, and Rowntrees came to have some of the most sophisticated advertising in the country.

### Link to next place 🔗

At the top of **Friargate**, turn left onto **Castlegate**. Behind you is the site of the original Quaker girls' school (see [Out of Town walk](#)) and the site of the Tuke cocoa, chocolate and chicory business. This was sold to Henry Rowntree in 1862 before he moved to Tanners Moat. Turn right into **Coppergate**. Follow the road past **All Saints' Church** and through the lights at the junction with **Piccadilly**. Continue until you reach **12 Pavement** (today **Pizza Hut**) on your right.



### Joseph Rowntree's birthplace, Pavement

Before the new street Piccadilly was made, no.12 was no.28 Pavement. This building stands on the site of the birthplace of Joseph Rowntree where his father was a master grocer.

Joseph and his elder brother John took over the business after their father's death in 1859, and by 1872 they had been joined by another partner, Thomas Hills. They also occupied 26 and 27 Pavement (formerly Herbert House—today Jones's Bootmakers).

Architectural evidence suggests that the original Georgian building was replaced around 1870. Though it is never explicitly stated, this situation must have brought some mental anguish for John Rowntree as he fell into debt—an unacceptable state of affairs for a Quaker businessman. He asked to bring back his son Theodore who had been apprenticed in Scarborough and with the intention of changing '*the fortunes of this once prosperous business*'. The upper floor image (pictured below) shows the central stairwell as it looks today. (No public access)

#### Look out for 🔍

The blue plaque to the left of the restaurant's front door, celebrating the site of the birthplace of the building's most famous occupant.

#### Chocolate fact 🍫

Several early Rowntree products were sold from the Pavement address, such as 'H.I. Rowntree's Lichen Islandicus, or Iceland Moss Cocoa', or 'H.I. Rowntree and Co's Improved Homeopathic Cocoa'. The address 28 Pavement is printed on the labels of these products. Many Rowntree products advertised their healthy qualities as being '*rich and nourishing*' or as '*building bone and muscle*'.



#### Imagine 🧠

The ground floor as a thriving grocery store, with a dozen or so apprentices (including George Cadbury, the founder of Cadbury's of Birmingham) living in the upper floors. Imagine too lively conversations about Liberal politics, business practice, sugar, tea and coffee prices.

#### Link to next place 🔗

Turn down the **passageway** next to the building into the medieval alley running alongside the shop.

## Lady Peckitt's Yard

Joseph Rowntree Senior owned many of the buildings in this interlocking warren of buildings, separated into four parts, including the grocery premises, a drapery premises, shops and warehouses. In several of the upstairs rooms in this Yard, the Rowntrees taught literacy skills at their Adult Schools. One man in five and one woman in three in Victorian York could neither read nor write. Part religious, part educational, the Adult Schools were also concerned with leisure—embracing the moral education of the whole person.

### Look out for 🔍

As you go down the side of the present day building you can see how extensive the footprint of the original premises was.

### Imagine 💭

Joseph at the age of 21 when he first took charge of a class of nine men—he was nearly 60 when he finished teaching at the Adult School every Sunday morning. In this way he remained close to the life of the poor and illiterate of York and took an interest in their everyday ups and downs.

### Link to next place 🔗

Follow **Lady Peckitt's Yard** as it turns left and pause when you reach **Fossgate**.



### Fossgate

Fossgate, one of the main routes into the city from the east, is on the boundary of what was one of the poorest areas of York.

Seebohm Rowntree's maps of this area show '*39 public houses, one for every 174 of the population ... many of the yards in the courts are unpaved, and the brick ash pits and midden privies (toilets), cleared only at intervals, abound.*'

#### Look out for 🔍

The **Blue Bell Inn** to your left, one of the original Edwardian pubs dating from Seebohm's time. Also, on the opposite side of the road look out for the building dating from 1911 that was York's first purpose-built cinema, the Electric Cinema, popularly known as the *Laugh and Scratch*—a 'flea pit'.

#### Chocolate fact 🐟

Joseph Rowntree wrote widely on temperance and '*the drink misery*', and part of the reason he went into the manufacture of chocolate was to provide an alternative drink to alcohol.

#### Imagine 🗨️

A slum area filled with the din of slaughter houses, pigsties, breweries, overcrowding, insanitary conditions and inadequate water supply in a low-lying part of the city. It was cleared in the 1930s, at the same time as a new estate was created at Tang Hall, the layout of which was inspired by garden villages such as New Earswick (see [New Earswick walk](#)). Two reports by Seebohm Rowntree, in 1899 and 1941, show the improvements that were made in that period. He calculated that the proportion of the population living in abject poverty had been reduced by more than a half.

#### Link to next place 🔗

Continue a little further as far as the **Foss Bridge**.

### Foss Bridge

The Foss Bridge (*pictured right*) was rebuilt in 1812 replacing the earlier one built in 1403.

#### Imagine 🗨️

When he became an honorary freeman of the city in 1911 Joseph looked back on the improvements that had taken place in the city's infrastructure. '*Before 1866 the Foss was little better than an open drain. I distinctly remember how, as a child, I used to run quickly over the Foss Bridge to escape the stench from the water.*'

#### Link to next place 🔗

Retrace your steps and turn right into the small alley called **Straker's Passage** (opposite the **Merchant Adventurers' Hall**).





## Straker's Passage

One of the few remnants of the back-to-back houses of the Hungate area, this yard gives a sense of the density of housing and conditions in this part of York.

### Imagine 🗨️

The growth of York's Irish population between 1841 and 1851 from 500 to nearly 2000 as part of mass immigration from Ireland to Britain. The 1881 figures show that one in every three children born in this area would die before their first birthday. Seeböhm Rowntree wrote in 1901: *'A few of the women work in the fields during the summer time ... many of the young persons, both girls and boys, are employed in factories ... a number of narrow and often sunless courts and alleys branch from larger streets and it is here that the poverty is chiefly found.'*

### Chocolate fact 🐟

No chocolate drinks here—bread, dripping, onions and tea were more likely staple fare for the poorest in these streets.

### Link to next place 🔗

From Straker's Passage, **turn right** by the **BT telephone exchange building** and look for a small gap to the right of the curved brick wall ahead of you. Join the **walkway alongside the River Foss**, past the multi-storey car park until you see the stylish **steel foot-bridge** (opened 2011) crossing the river. Pause here or perhaps go up onto the footbridge to take in the views of the former Hungate site.

## Rowntree Wharf

The foremost industrial landmark in York, the former Leatham's flour-mill towered over the slums of Hungate. In 1935 it became the Rowntree Company's navigation warehouse, but this use declined in the 1960s with the rise in road transport.

### Look out for 🔍

The building's five stories and nine-storey water tower, converted into flats and offices by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 1989.

### Imagine

River transport, and the unpacking and loading from this warehouse, which continued to receive gum arabic and cocoa beans directly from the Hull docks until the 1960s. Today this part of the river is not navigable.

### Hungate

Hungate has been the subject of archaeological investigation in recent years, and Seebohm Rowntree's maps have shed nuanced light with their records of the individuals who lived and worked here and variations in house sizes. Research has revealed the diversity of the community of a proud, tight-knit place *'where people scrubbed their front doorstep every day, and certainly didn't think of themselves as living in a slum'*. Today the Hungate is a new residential quarter.



### Link to next place

**Don't cross the footbridge**, but walk back the way you came, as far as the **BT building**, and then continue by walking straight ahead up **Black Horse Passage**.

### Black Horse Passage

In the nineteenth century this was a clandestine connection between the commercial centre of York and the slums of Hungate, and an area known for poverty, crime and prostitution.

### Look out for

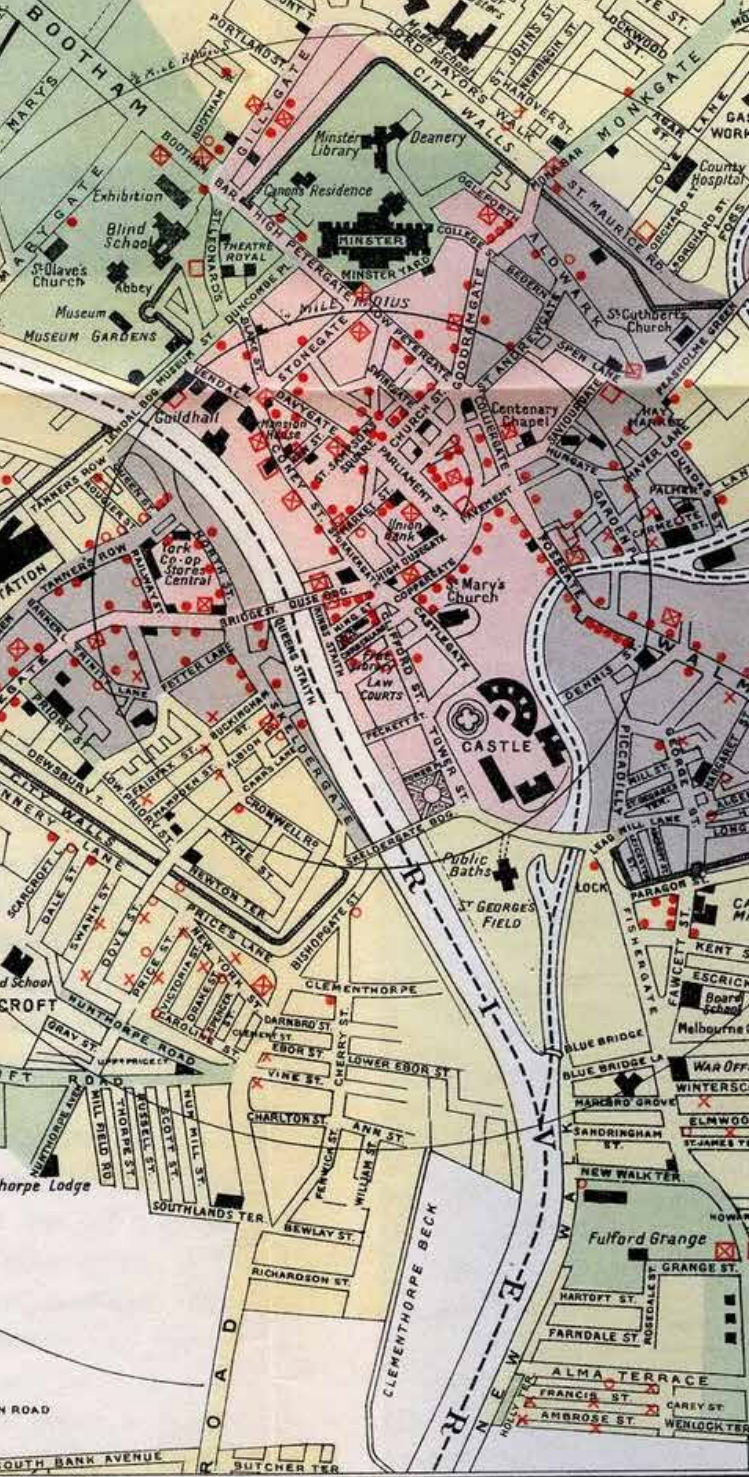
The high wall to the left demarcating the respectable commercial city centre, and note the archaeology of the ground-level brickwork.

### Imagine

This unkempt passageway in the harsh winter of 1845, when Joseph Rowntree Senior somewhere nearby established a soup kitchen to feed the desperate poor. This soup kitchen was immortalised in his son's Memorandum of 1904 setting up his Trusts that insisted on addressing the root causes of social evils: *'The soup kitchen in York never has difficulty in obtaining adequate financial aid, but an enquiry into the extent and causes of poverty would enlist little support.'*

### Link to next place

You'll now be on **Stonebow**. Turn left to return to the city centre **market and shopping area**.



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