

Victoria Viaduct Walkabout



As the walk takes you across busy roads please beware of the traffic

Today's National Westminster Bank, on the corner of the Victoria Viaduct and English Street, was built as the reconstructed Bush Hotel in 1877 [dated on the upper stone work]. It was built, with a ground floor shop, for James Watt of the firm Little and Ballantyne. Two cash machines mark the site of the hotel entrance. Originally English Street had run uninterrupted across what is today the entrance to the Viaduct. When the Viaduct was built English Street was broken through by the demolition of the Old Bush Hotel to form access to the new road and bridge. Blackfriars Street is so called as it leads to the Blackfriars Convent. Chapman's furniture shop is on the site of the old Bush Hotel's stables. Originally Carrs Bread and Flour Co. shop, this building dates to 1878.

Tesco was built in 1970 on the site of the Viaduct Hotel. West Walls is so named as the City Walls extend along here to the Castle. Central Plaza Hotel was built in 1880 [date on panel on the West Walls side of building along with the City Arms] for Mr Westmorland who had a chain of hotels. Built on a grand scale, its full height can be appreciated further along where the Viaduct crosses Backhouse Walk. Mr Backhouse, Mayor in 1740, lived here and this was his walk from his house to the English Gate. The next building has a pediment date of 1892. Over the entrance to the building, today Viaduct House, are the initials of James Watt who built this property for Little and Ballantyne in replacement for the Bush Hotel Shop. Little and Ballantyne, nurserymen, had a Royal Appointment, hence the coat of arms on the top of their building overlooking the railway lines. This building is dated 1881 and was Laing's first large contract in the city.

On the Viaduct we can see latticed patterned cast iron work. Following electrification of the main line in 1974 the lattice work was boarded in. [to prevent possible electrocution]. The granite commemoration stone on the Viaduct records that the Viaduct was opened on 20.09.1877 by Princess Louise, one of Queen Victoria's daughters. The Viaduct gave a high level route into the new suburb of Denton Holme, carrying the road over the station and goods avoidance lines. On the Viaduct are ornate lamps, 1990 reproductions of the originals. Modern road development has changed the layout of the Viaduct as we go down and cross the Viaduct Estate road. This whole area, including the upper Viaduct car park, was the site of the gas work from 1847; their offices fronting onto the road with the cylinders and retorts behind. The gas works was originally at the much lower level, but household dumping following the closure of the gasworks in 1924 has considerably raised the level of the ground. Past the concrete entrance to the underpass and onto the Nelson Bridge, which was recently widened; look underneath to see the new cantilever support work. The plaque on the bridge records the laying of the foundation stone of the bridge on 25th June 1852 by T.Nelson who gives his name to the bridge. In the creation of the Victoria Viaduct the Nelson Bridge was raised and another inscription records that work in 1876.

Looking across the River Caldw we can see on our right collapsed railings on the wall above the river. These are the only remaining sign of the gas works. The railings also allow us to gauge the original level of the land, before it was built up with refuse in the 1950s. On the left we can see the new flood protection wall and riverside path which is on the site of the goods avoidance line. Lidl's is on the site of the former Denton Holme Goods yard of 1881 which served the Midland and North British railways. Follow the road around and cross Charlotte Street at the lights opposite the Dunelm store

The garden at the top of Randall Street was originally the site of terraced housing. Charlotte Milbourne Dixon, nee Randall, lived and owned property in this area. Three local streets are named after her. Sheffield Street is named after one of her daughters who married into the Sheffield family. On Randall Street we see some attractive Flemish bond terraced housing with decorative string coarse work. Note the old blue enamel Randall Street sign at the intersection with Lorne Street. Lorne Street has attractive sets and is named after The Marchioness of Lorne, Princess Louise, who married the Marquis and who opened the Viaduct. Facing us is Mitchell Dryers. The engineers Pratchitt, the forerunner of Mitchells, moved onto this site in the 1860s and made, among other things, steam boilers.

Cross over Denton Street and go into Thomas Street. Note the EWS [Emergency Water Supply] sign painted onto the wall with an arrow pointing towards the River Caldw and the marker 120 yards. In the WWII blackout the letters directed fire fighters to the nearest water supply. Elm Street and Lime Street are so named after a timber yard which was in this area. At the end of Elm Street you can see the street layout before the construction of the Viaduct, Denton Crescent disappearing under the new bridge. This is the original level of Nelson Bridge before it was raised in 1876. Up the stairs and right towards the Viaduct. Looking down from the bridge we can see the former avoidance goods line, now turned into a riverside walk. The goods lines were closed in 1984 following a railway accident that destroyed the railway bridge over the Caldw. The piers from this bridge have been lifted out and make a feature on the walk.

Further along on Nelson Bridge we see another stone listing those contributing to construction costs in 1852. On the other side of the Caldw a railway line struck off from the goods avoidance line and went under Nelson Bridge to supply the gas works. It was also later used to supply the electricity works. The 1930s rear extension of the electricity works faces the river in an Art Deco style. Today this is part of The Enterprise Centre. The former Unitarian Church of 1888 at the corner of Nelson Bridge and James Street has also been incorporated into the centre. Next along James Street is the 1915 brick extension to the Electricity Works, and after this the original 1899 Electric Lighting Station [original wording under the Enterprise sign] with the City Coat of Arms and name of the Mayor. Unusually the building retains its original railings. Next along James Street is the Hudson Scott Metal Box factory.

Cross the road at the lights and head back towards town. The Victorian Health suite was the 1909 Turkish Baths which still retain many original features inside. Next is the baths

with its foundation stone of September 4th 1884 and engraved glass dated 1884. The modern baths is a 1974 extension and was built over the former Wood Street. The steps past the Baths leads to the cobbled Mill Street, a part of the original street formation which was all changed by the erection of the Victoria Viaduct. A little further we can look down onto the roof of a concrete bunker erected during World War II to house an emergency generator. Behind, with bill boards, is the station wall extension of 1881.

As the Viaduct crosses the main line there is an entrance ramp to the station. This was knocked through in 1881, hence the different stonework. From here we look down onto portacabin structures put up in the former goal yard in 1966. We can also see the former SMT garage built in Art Deco style in 1937 on the site of the 1868 single cell gaol block. Their car showroom [now the Bedshop] fronts onto the Viaduct and has Art Deco motifs. Next along is Bush Brow, named after the Bush Hotel. There is another EWS sign here. Next is a former furniture store of 1932, B and M stores today. High up on the exterior are two projecting stones which would have supported flags. Next is the former Burton's store. At ground level are granite stones inscribed with the names of the Burton family who laid the foundation stones in 1933. Note the floor tiles at the closed up entrance into the former billiard hall housed on the first floor. Art Deco motifs can again be seen on the exterior of the building. Next on English Street is the Woolworth building of 1932, built over what had been an extension of Blackfriars Street and the demolished gaol wall

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