

Halifax Town Centre Banking Trail

The following walk has been designed for people who may enjoy an easier walk around our town.

The origins of modern banking go back to the Industrial Revolution, when small market towns across England were transformed into manufacturing centres. In Halifax, the textile industry dominated. People flocked from the countryside to work in the new mills and factories. Between 1801 and 1851, the population nearly trebled, rising from below 9,000 to above 25,000.

In December 1852, a small group of men gathered in the Old Cock Inn, Halifax. Their aim was to set up an investment and loan society, for the mutual benefit of local working people. Those with spare cash could invest it; others could then borrow, using the funds to acquire a house. Lenders would receive interest on their savings; borrowers would be charged it. The head office moved, first to Waterhouse Street, and then to the corner of Crossley Street. Such was the Society's success that it was able to build grand new offices on Princess Street, moving there in 1873. The Society's name is carved around the window on the corner of the building facing the Town Hall where our journey begins. From the Halifax Town Hall cross to the corner of Princess Street

1. Halifax Permanent Benefit Building Society Headquarters

Princess street was created when John Crossley started to develop this part of town in 1851. At the top corner of Princess Street is the former Halifax Permanent Benefit Building Society Headquarters which was built in 1871-73 to the designs of Samuel Jackson of Bradford. Office space was rented in the Old Market, and an announcement placed in the Halifax Guardian. People queued at the Society's office each Friday night, eager to join the new venture. By pledging themselves to its rules and paying regular subscriptions, investors and borrowers alike became members. Within a year, the Society had 584 members, and a further 144 depositors. More than £9,000 had been lent, with another £2,000 agreed for homes being built. Directly across from Halifax Permanent Benefit Building is former Halifax Joint Stock Banking Company.

2. Halifax Joint Stock Banking Company, Princess Street

The Halifax Permanent Benefit Building Society Headquarters is now known as Princess Buildings, It was previously used as the Council tax office and is now more general Council offices. It was originally opened as The Halifax Permanent Benefit Building Society in 1858 and much extended in 1887 as the local office of the Halifax Joint Stock Banking Company. Note the fine Oriel window and the moustached faces at first floor level.

Continue forward to Southgate precinct where there are some interesting Victorian stone facades. To the left you will see the Halifax Market that stretches almost the

length of the precinct and as you pass Wilkinson's store turn right and you have reached the Old Cock Yard.

3. Old Cock Inn, Southgate

It is believed that the inn was originally built as a house for the Savile family. One authority dates the oldest part as 1581, though another suggests the very first years of the seventeenth century as more likely. On the first floor is the fine 'Oak Room' which contains some very interesting old panelling, glass and plasterwork. In December 1852, a small group of men gathered in the Old Cock Inn, Halifax. Their aim was to set up an investment and loan society, for the mutual benefit of local working people. Those with spare cash could invest it; others could then borrow, using the funds to acquire a house. Lenders would receive interest on their savings; borrowers would be charged it. By Christmas that year, the Halifax Permanent Benefit Building Society was formally established.

From there go back to the Southgate Precinct and turn right towards Alexandra Street. When you reach Alexandra Street, turn right looking at the frontage of the Art Deco Alexandra Hall as you do so. By 1929 the buildings were already full and a further building programme was started which ran on till 1932. This included the trebling of the strong room and the building of the Alexandra Hall, a café and several shops, as well as extra offices.

At the top of Alexandra Street, stop. Look to the right and you will see the formidable Headquarters of the Halifax opened in 1973: to the right you have arrived at Commercial Street. This street was created about 1880 when the Corporation acquired the necessary land, built the street and then sold off the surplus land on either side to developers. On the corner where you stand is the Halifax Building Society Local Office.

4. Halifax Building Society Local Office, Commercial Street

These premises were originally known as York Buildings and were built in 1904-5 for Alexander Scott Limited, who were silk mercers, drapers, hosiers, dressmakers and milliners. The property was acquired in 1919 by the Halifax Permanent Benefit Building Society and the major alterations which followed took two years, including the complete re-fronting and addition of the granite pillars. Following the merger of the two Halifax societies in 1927, the premises were extended.

After the Society moved into its new Head Office in 1973, this building became the local office for Halifax.

It is interesting to realise that at the time of the merger in 1927, the two local societies (Permanent and Equitable) were the largest and second largest in the country and the merger thus produced the largest Building Society in the world.

5. Lloyds Bank, Commercial Street

Lloyds Bank was originally the Halifax and Huddersfield Union Banking Company and it opened in 1898. Of particular note are the four massive Norwegian granite pillars in Corinthian style. Inside can be seen an unusual stained glass ceiling and some good plasterwork. The whole building cost £14,273 when new and it is interesting to note that restorations of the leaded glass lay lights and the roof lights alone cost £16,500 when done in 1975.

The General Post Office was built in 1887 by Henry Tanner and enlarged in 1926-27 to provide room for the first local automatic telephone exchange. Walk up the left-hand side of Lloyds Bank, which is Rawson Street. Cross to the left-hand pavement and go up as far as the first street on the left, Powell Street. Stop at that corner and look across Rawson Street to Somerset House.

6. Somerset House, Rawson Street

This splendid building was erected in 1766 as a house for John Royds, a leading local banker. The architect was the famous John Carr of York.

The house was originally 17 bays wide and stretched right down to Commercial Street and up behind Wade's bookshop. The building contains some of the original plasterwork done for John Royds. In the salon, Royds himself is depicted as Neptune in the plasterwork, with his wife as Britannia. Four of their daughters appear as nymphs and his five sons are shown in medallions over the doors.

Two years after it was built, Royds entertained King Christian VII of Denmark here, whilst the King was passing through on a grand tour of Europe.

John Royds died in 1781 and the Rawson family took over the banking business and operated it from these premises. In 1831 it became the Halifax and Huddersfield Union Banking Company and continued at Somerset House until 1898 when they moved the business to new premises at the bottom of the street (now Lloyds Bank).

At the far left-hand end stands the Trustee Savings Bank at the junction with Silver Street, which was built in neo-Gothic style about 1880 for the Halifax Commercial Banking Company.

7. Martins Bank, Silver Street

This is one of the more spectacular pieces of banking architecture in the UK to have ended its days as a pub. Martins Bank had two branches in Silver street, thanks to its constituent banks. No.16 comes from the Halifax Equitable in 1927, and No.2 from the Halifax Commercial Bank in 1920. No 2 Silver Street was the original office of Messrs Hainsworth Holden Swaine and Pollard, who operated a banking service as long ago as 1779. No 2 and No 16 Silver Street were then run together as branches of the newly created Martins Bank from 1928 until 1946, when No 2 was

closed. It remained as a branch of TSB bank/Lloyds Banking Group until 2009. As we continue on Waterhouse Street, gaze upon the magnificent domed building on the corner of Crown Street. This is the NatWest Bank.

8. Natwest Bank, Waterhouse Street

NatWest, is a major retail and commercial bank established in 1968 by the merger of National Provincial Bank (established 1833 as National Provincial Bank of England) and Westminster Bank (established 1834 as London County and Westminster Bank). This domed building made from Portland stone, was built in 1926 and originally opened as the National Provincial Bank. This is arguably one of the finest pieces of banking architecture in the town. In 1971, the National Provincial merged with the District Bank and Westminster Bank to form the National Westminster Bank / NatWest Bank.

9. Yorkshire Penny Bank, Waterhouse Street

The first significant building of architectural and historical interest is the Yorkshire Bank building. The Yorkshire Penny Bank as its roots here in Halifax with the Victorian Philanthropist, Colonel Edward Akroyd launching the idea in Leeds under the name of the West Riding Penny Savings Bank on the 1st of May, 1859. The Waterhouse Street branch was originally opened in 1886 but was later demolished. The current building was designed in an Art Deco style and was opened on the 1st of December, 1935.

We hope that you have enjoyed this walk and tell your friends to come and visit our beautiful, historic town.