

Looking at **Signs & Symbols on the Shopfront** provides a view into the past lives of Selby shoppers. When many town centre buildings were built, literacy levels were much lower than they are today. So signs and symbols were a kind of code to give hints about what trade to expect in a particular shop. As you tour the town, find out some meanings behind the codes!

Start at the **Market Cross (1)** in front of the Abbey. A market cross was the ancient symbol of the centre of trade in a town. Monday markets are still held around the spot. Head away from the Abbey and go right down Finkle Street.

On the right is the **Blackamoor Head (2)**. Pub signs tell many a story, mostly obvious, but "Blackamoor" refers to Northern African slaves. The pub has had this name for at least 200 years.

Images of hops and vines, the staple ingredients of beer and wine, trace around the metal supports to the sign, telling tippers what's on offer.

At numbers 14 and 16 Finkle Street, motifs in window frames are stylised **Acanthus leaves (3)** representing creative power and inspiration. The message was clear: "Shop here ladies, and get your retail therapy".

Opposite, high up, you'll notice "**Addinals Yard (4)**". Around Selby are signs, of varying ages and styles, for yards and courts. They were often the site of small-scale industries like boot-making, basket-weaving and even butchers' slaughter houses. These places also had homes for many families, often in cramped conditions. Along Micklegate are also **Hope Yard (5)** and **Preston's Yard (6)**.

Robert Street (7) branches off to the left of Finkle Street. The image of a fierce head at the keystone warns off would-be troublemakers.

Continue ahead to enter Micklegate. More Monday market stalls are here. On the left is the former **Co-Operative building (8)**. The spirit of the Co-op was to work together. Bees work together, so atop the building are carvings of beehives.

Further along is "**Mee and Parvin's (9)**" tobacconist's sign showing colourfully the wares available.

The shopfront of the **former dress shop** at the end of the street **(10)** is garlanded with carvings of swags of flowers. This is a symbol of feminine beauty, a very appropriate motif for a dress shop!

Turn right, being careful on the narrow pavements. As the highway opens out, on the right of Church Hill is the **Masonic Hall (11)**. Panels above the doors have the **square and compass** design. These are two masons' tools, but here represent the need to keep one's conduct well-ordered.

Go up Church Hill, right down Wren Lane and turn left when you return to Micklegate.

On the **Post Office** wall is a mosaic **(12)** representing life in Selby. Created by local children in 1995, detailed study will pick out many local references. More mosaics are on the nearby flood defence wall in James Street and in Church Lane.

Past the Post Office is the **Griffin Inn (13)** and in the triangular pediment at the top is a Griffin. This is a mythical beast, which stood for strength and vigilance. Are these the qualities our forebears got by drinking at the sign of the Griffin?

Continue through the yard at the back of the Londesborough. Monday market auctions take place here. Open air public auctions such as this are now rare.

Proceed through the gates and look across Market Place to a more modern icon. Above the entrance to **Market Cross**, in paint that is now very faded, is "**H. 9'0 (14)**". This meant that a hydrant was nine feet from that wall and a fitting is still there. "**H**" and "**SV**" for stop valve plates are common. A good one is on the Abbey rails on The Crescent.

Turn left and walk towards the Abbey. By the doorway to the **Londesborough (15)** is the carving of a head of a jolly old fellow. He is **Bacchus**, the Roman God of wine. You'd hope to have a good time if Bacchus was a regular at a bar you were about to visit!

Opposite, on the corner of Gowthorpe and James Street, above the current **HSBC bank entrance (16)**, are carvings of the Selby swans. Many buildings in Selby have these images, celebrating the story of the founding of Selby Abbey in 1069 when Abbot Benedict saw three swans. Any building with this symbol usually indicates either church or municipal influence.

Cross Market Place to James Street.

Along James Street, above what is now a **carpet depot**, is a metal fixing **JHT 1908 (17)**. This is the mark of Tyson's iron founders based in Ousegate. "JHT" were the initials of John Herbert Tyson.

Retrace your steps and turn left up Market Lane, passing the typical **red and white barber's pole (18)**. A white towel mopped up the red blood spilt if the cut-throat razor went wrong!

Turn right at New Lane and at the top is the former **Selby Local Board Office (19)**, the centre of civic organisation in Selby in Victorian times. There are more swan carvings here.

Look across Gowthorpe. Carriage archways in fine stone and high quality windows show the **George Hotel** and **Grey Horse** frontages **(20)**. Grand architecture for grand inns, but both closed by 1985.

Now cross the road and down a dead end alley. To the left of this frontage, old **painted signs** for the **Nagshead Inn** and **garaging (21)** can still be made out. Return towards the Abbey.

Hanging over the street are the familiar three brass balls of a **pawnbroker (22)**. The balls were originally three gold coins, to represent the riches of the medieval London banking family, the Lombards. It is only a joke that it's a two-to-one chance that you won't get your possessions back.

The frontage of the **New Inn (23)** has "**Selby Ales**" lettering still visible. Maltings buildings remain in Ousegate and Bondgate, but commercial brewing in Selby ceased a few years ago.

You might need a brew of one sort or another to take in all the symbolic information you have just seen!



This leaflet is part of a series covering Selby's Hidden Heritage. This circular walk is approximately a mile long. Some places have narrow pavements; please take appropriate care.

The other leaflets in the series are:

First Rate Ousegate: Stroll along the street that was Selby's hub.

Plaque Parade: A tour around sites linked with famous people and events in Selby's history.

Selby in the 20th Century: Some surprising examples of modern architecture.

Selby Canal Towpath Tour: From the industrial lock basin to tranquil countryside, by the Canal.

Selby has a rich and proud heritage in shipbuilding, agriculture, manufacturing and transport. By observing what remains and looking at how new developments have absorbed these influences, the often-hidden history that is all around us can be brought to light.

The maps used are illustrative only. Information is accurate at the time of writing in Spring 2009.

If you would like a large print copy of this publication or for further information on all the topics covered in these leaflets contact Groundwork North Yorkshire on 01757 703758 or email northyorkshire@groundwork.org.uk.

There is a huge range of sources and expertise concerning local history at Selby Library. Contact them on 0845 034 9540 or email selby.library@northyorks.gov.uk.

For information about the Selby Civic Society contact 01757 268418.

Selby's
Hidden
Heritage

Signs & Symbols
on the
Shopfront

This project is supported by:



Guide to the walk



Finkle Street

Signs for back yards.

Decorative shop fronts, with carvings in wood and stone.

A variety of pub signs and a bracket with hops and vine.

Micklegate

More decorative carvings and attractive signs, including tobacconist sign.

Mosaics. Site is part of the Monday Market.

Church Hill

Masonic panels above doorways.

Market Place

Market cross.

More carvings, mosaics, open-air auctions and market stalls.

War-time water signs and a wine-drinking god.

James Street area

Additional modern mosaics.

Carvings of swans.

Classic barber's pole.

Gowthorpe

Old hotel façades.

Painted signs and the faded lettering of bygone firms.

Pawnbroker's sign.

