About the Music Trail

Huddersfield's musical traditions are rich and varied, ranging from brass bands and organ-building to sound systems and Bhangra. This introductory walk was created by students and staff at the University of Huddersfield, as part of its ‘students as researchers’ strategy. Albert Preston and Ciaran Lourdes-Binsley in History, and Sarah Wells in Textile Practice, worked with professors Rachel Cowgill (Music) and Paul Ward (History) to research and create the trail.

Images: Sarah Laurel, Kirklees Image Archive, apart from Huddersfield Town Hall Concert Hall, Courtesy of The Huddersfield Examiner.

Information

For more information about Discover Huddersfield or to learn more about the project and how to get involved, please get in touch through the following media:

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Discover Huddersfield
Irish performance, including folk has long been a venue for traditional music. Huddersfield’s Irish Centre, which is next door to the Philharmonic Orchestra. Next door to the Centre is the Fitzwilliam Street Philharmonic Society – founded in 1862 by Unitarian minister, J.H. Thomas. The Society performs in the Parish Church of St. Peter’s Parish Church. The Parish Church organ was built by Conacher’s (see 5) in 1908, and is a three-manual instrument with 52 speaking stops. The detached console is on the south side of the church and the organ pipes stand to the east. In the churchyard, there is a monument to Huddersfield-born Sir Walter Parratt, Master of the Queen’s Music and choir in the Parish Church. By subscription in 1812 for an organist and choir in the Parish Church.

Vinyl Tap has been trading since 1986 and re-opened its shop in John William Street in 2012. It is one of the largest traders in vinyl records in Britain. Vinyl Tap Tap has been trading since 1986 and re-opened its shop in John William Street in 2012. It is one of the largest traders in vinyl records in Britain.

Peter Conacher created his organ-building business when many new chapels and churches were being built. In 1873 he opened new organ works in Springwood. They were the largest and best equipped in England and with their large steam engine, full complement of machinery and eighty craftsmen, produced around thirty large organs a year.

The bandstand opened in 1884, providing a platform for prestigious brass-band concerts. Brass bands were enormously important in the musical culture of northern England. They performed free, open-air public music for audiences from the 1840s.

Ivanhoe’s nightclub – originally the Grand Picture Theatre – was the scene of the last UK performance by the Sex Pistols. They gave a Christmas Day benefit for children of striking firefighters in 1977 and played a gig in the evening for Huddersfield’s punks.

The Town Hall’s richly decorated concert hall (built 1878–1881), featuring the magnificent ‘Father Willis’ organ provides an outstanding setting for Huddersfield Choral Society, founded in 1836; the Mrs Sunderland Music Festival, named after ‘The Yorkshire Queen of Song; and concerts by brass bands, orchestras, choirs and popular artists. It has hosted notable performances for Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and for British Bhangra, dance and music.

The University houses one of the leading music departments in Europe in the striking Creative Arts Building. Each November it hosts the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, an international festival of new and experimental music, established in 1979 by Richard Steinitz. Many giants of contemporary music have attended premieres of new work, including Cage, Stockhausen, Boulez, Xenakis and Reich.

The Hippodrome represents Huddersfield’s rich culture of saloons, concert rooms and music halls. Opened in 1905 by Edwardian male-impersonator Vesta Tilley, the Hippodrome, converted from an 1896 military riding school, could seat 2,000 people. Upper storeys and a decorative iron-and-glass entrance canopy were removed during its later conversion.

38 King Street was home to the TV repair store of Mat Mathias, who built custom-made amplifiers for sound systems during the 1960s and 1970s. Mathias amps were favoured as their design was based on a valve system that emphasised the bass, making them perfect for reggae. Matamp is now a market leader in guitar technology based in Meltham.

The University’s archive, Heritage Quay, which is open to the public, includes the British Music Collection. St Paul’s Hall, formerly a church, converted into a concert and performance space in 1980, contains an organ built by Wood of Huddersfield (est. 1966), which features regularly in organ recitals and other public concerts.

Venn Street housed the town’s main reggae clubs (now demolished). Internationally known stars such as Gregory Isaacs, Freddie McGregor and Millie Small played there. The main venue changed its name from the West Indian Social Club to Cleopatra’s and then to Silver Sands and stood as a bastion of multiculturalism.

Discover Huddersfield offers new ways to experience this amazing Yorkshire town, through guided walks, talks and trails. See Huddersfield at its very best: grand listed buildings and small independent shops; a place for radicals from the Luddites to the Sex Pistols; birthplace of Rugby League; a town rich in creativity, stories, heritage and the odd ghostly encounter.