

# GRAINGER TOWN (I)



## Wooden mice, Dominican friars, Marks & Spencer's Penny Bazaar, and an Earl.

**Starting point:** Monument Metro station / Grey Street

Length of walk: 1.5 - 2 hours

When it comes to grandiose views, Earl Grey - former Northumberland MP and Prime Minister - has got it spot on. He's the fellow perched atop **1. Grey's Monument**, casting his gaze down the street which he gave his name to. Grey Street (voted the most beautiful in the country by the listeners of Radio 4 and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment CABE) is indeed a magnificent sight and the work of visionary property developer Richard Grainger (B.1797). Starting in 1834, Grainger set about transforming Newcastle, with his classically designed streets all part of his "City of Palaces" blueprint. Grey's Monument itself is regarded by many as the centre of modern Newcastle and was erected in 1838 to commemorate Earl Grey's achievements in passing the Great Reform Bill of 1832.

Behind the Earl is Blackett Street and the

Blackfriars



Emerson Chambers building, a fine example of the Art Nouveau style. If you cut down between this building and the Newcastle United clubshop (a black and white scarf is optional at this



Central Arcade

stage), you'll discover **2. Brunswick Methodist Chapel**, one of the earliest of its type in North East England. Back onto Blackett Street, turn right, and continue along and you'll find **3. Old Eldon Square** on your right. This houses the city's war memorial: a bronze statue of St. George - the patron saint of the Northumberland Fusiliers - slaying a dragon. Continue along Blackett street, and under the bridge, and you'll see **4. St. Andrew's Church**, on Newgate Street. Structurally the building contains more 12th century work than any other in the area making it "the oldest church of this town" and to the rear of it you can see a short stretch of the medieval town wall (more of which, later).

Continue along Newgate Street and you cannot miss the arresting façade of the

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**5. Co-op building** (which originally housed the Co-operative Wholesale movement), a great example of the Art Deco style, popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Pop into the North or South tower and take a look at the stairwells with the little human figures carrying the handrails, another superb Art Deco touch. Adjoining the Co-op is

**6. The Gate**, home to a plethora of swish bars and restaurants. You'll notice the glass and steel sculpture 'Ellipsis Eclipses' by Danny Lane on the corner outside. Between The Gate and Tiger Tiger (opposite), head down beneath the glass pedestrian bridge (it has The Gate written on it) and turn right onto Dispensary Lane which will bring you to

**7. Blackfriars** and a real step back in time. The first thing you'll notice is the noise. There is none. This little haven is one of Newcastle's hidden gems and, befitting the quiet air, was once home to Dominican friars who arrived here in 1239. The church that was once here was destroyed during Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, but its outline is still visible today. The building the friars used as their eating area is now an award-winning bistro/restaurant, Blackfriars, which also has tables outside on the greenery, so you can grab a bite to eat in the tranquil air of this delightful square. Alternatively bring your own sandwiches for a picnic.

Following through a little archway towards the top end of Blackfriars (straight ahead from where you entered it), takes you onto Stowell Street, home to Newcastle's Chinatown. You'll be greeted by a wonderful array of aromas informing you that you've reached the best Chinese restaurants in town! Turn left and at the end of Stowell street you'll see the West Walls, the longest section of the original town walls - built between 1280-1283 to protect the city - still surviving today. Following the wall down the slope will lead you onto Westgate Road, where you'll see **8. The Journal Tyne Theatre** (opened in 1867), one of the most important theatres in the country, housing its original 19th century stage machinery. Continue down Westgate Road, over Clayton Street, and you'll reach the **9. Newcastle Arts Centre** on the

right hand side. In the open courtyard of the centre are the remains of a corner of a Roman milecastle. The Arts Centre is also a great place to pick up a gift and houses a gallery and a potter's studio. Continue down the road to see the graceful

**10. Assembly Rooms** (built in 1774) on the left, and a little further,

**11. St. John's Church** on the corner of Grainger Street. Inside the church are a range of interesting features including a commemoration to Richard Grainger himself. Also pay careful attention to the wooden choirstalls in the north aisle and see if you can spot the little wooden mice which were carved by the Yorkshire craftsman Robert "mousey" Thompson, who developed that particular trademark as an indication that he and his fellow craftsmen were "as poor as church mice".

Back out and onto Grainger Street and again, your chance to take in the magnificence of Grainger Town's buildings as you head back towards Grey's Monument. Along the way, be sure to stop off at the **12. Grainger Market**, the covered market on your left hand side. Thought to be designed by John Dobson - who worked closely with Grainger - the market contains many shops which have been in the same family for generations, and is still home to one of the original Marks and Spencer's Penny Bazaars (built in 1895, with its shop front being the smallest, and oldest, still surviving today.)

Finally, just before Grey's Monument and Monument Metro station, you'll see the beautifully tiled Edwardian **13. Central Arcade** (1906) on your right hand side. This is another of Grainger's creations and the perfect way to end your stroll through Newcastle's "golden heart".



Grey's Monument