



This walk starts in The College at the back of the Cathedral. The College is where the 18th-century Prebendaries (Canons of the Cathedral) lived when they were resident in Durham. From here they could walk out to the riverbank paths. Follow their steps through the Dark Entry archway that leads under the house with the castellated roof.

Trail

Grade

Accessibility

Distance

Time

walking

easy to moderate

some steps and short steep slopes

1.5 miles (2.41km)

1-2 hours

KEY

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Route of trail

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Footpaths on the woodlands and riverbanks

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Direction of trail

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Go back in the direction you have come from

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Steps

➤

Steep slope



1 Prebends' Walk

Turn left at the end of the Dark Entry and begin to walk down the gravelled path. On your left is a gated terraced walk. Terraced walks with views were popular in 17th and 18th-century England. Today Prebends' Walk is used as a private garden.

2 Prebends' Bridge

Continue on the main downward path to Prebends' Bridge. The foundation stone of this bridge was laid in 1772 and the bridge was finished in 1778. It was built at the expense of the Cathedral to replace a stone bridge which was swept away in the Great Flood of 1771. On Prebends' Bridge, look to your left to the far riverbank where the abutment of the previous bridge is still visible.

Continue across the bridge, noticing the balusters on either side. In 1797 coal wagons were banned from using the bridge and by February 1798 balusters on the bridge had been broken. The Cathedral clergy offered a reward of 25 guineas for the conviction of 'the Person or Persons who did pull down, break and destroy a whole range of Bannisters together with Battlement upon the New Bridge'. A week later the reward was raised to 50 guineas.



3 Sir Walter Scott's poem

At the end of the bridge, part of a poem by Sir Walter Scott is engraved on a stone plaque. Look above the verse to see one of the most iconic views of the Cathedral.

Walk up the hill to see the small cottage on the left. This was the first gatekeeper's cottage for Prebends' Bridge, finished in 1781. In 1834 a new gatehouse was built further up the hill, by the main road. The gate there is still used to restrict vehicles from crossing Prebends' Bridge.

Behind the sealed archway ahead is a long tunnel which would have been in use around 1800, when there were coal mines nearby.

Retrace your steps to Prebends' Bridge and turn left past the tall pyramid of stones. This was built in 1996, using stones from an eroding pinnacle at the north-east end of the Cathedral.



4 The Riverbank Mills and Weir

Continue along the riverside footpath until you reach the mill, which over the years has been known as Banks Mill, the Corn Mill, and South Street Mill. Go to the seating area at the far side of the mill. This is a good place to take in the strategic position of the Castle and Cathedral. They would have been at the top of a quarried gorge, with a moat-like river below, before the trees softened the landscape.

There has been a mill on this site since medieval times, although it was rebuilt following the Great Flood of 1771. In 1902 it was agreed to extend the riverside path around the back of the mill to make a route to Framwellgate Bridge. On the opposite side of the river is the Old Filling Mill.

5 The Footpath to St Oswald's Church

Return to Prebends' Bridge, staying on the same side of the river; take the main footpath ahead along the riverbank, towards St Oswald's Church. In 1755 the Dean and Chapter agreed to spend up to £20 'repairing and widening the walk from the [earlier] New Bridge to Elvet churchyard'. On the right



is evidence of quarrying which continued in the hillsides above Prebends' Bridge until at least 1809, when stone from what was known as the New Bridge quarry was offered for the building of a new gaol in Durham.

This walk would have had many features of an 18th-century pleasure garden – light and shade created by trees and grassy groves, a crescent-shaped curve in the river, the eye catcher of St Oswald's church tower, a rocky grotto and a pretty little cascade. Keep to the main path, passing three streams which flow into the River Wear. The third stream was used to drain water from nearby Elvet Colliery. This is a good place to turn back towards Prebends' Bridge. As you get closer to Prebends' Bridge, see the view of the mill and riverbanks framed within the arches of the bridge.

At Prebends' Bridge cross the river. Look up to see the medieval city wall and the Water Gate arch ahead. This gateway was enlarged in 1778 to allow for carriages. At the end of the bridge, turn right and take the path down to see the Count's House.



6 The Count's House and Banks Cottage

The classical building commonly known as the Count's House is believed to have been built in the 1820s. It is named after Polish 'Count' Joseph Boruwlaski who was only 3 feet 3 inches tall. He was the tenant of Calamanco Hall, or Banks Cottage as it was later called, which stood on the flat ground between here and Prebends' Bridge. He lived there from 1810 until he died in 1837 aged 97, looked after by the two Miss Ebdons, daughters of the Cathedral organist. Joseph Boruwlaski's clothes are preserved in Durham Town Hall, along with his violin and portrait. This small classical summer house would have been at the end of his garden. Banks Cottage was pulled down in 1851.



7 The Old Filling Mill

From the Count's House take the lower riverside path back towards Prebends' Bridge. The walk passes under the bridge, past modern sculpture and boathouses then continues to the Old Filling Mill. There have been mills here since medieval times; its current name comes from use as a textile mill around 1800. More recently the mill has been used as an archaeology museum.

From here the wide main path will take you back to Prebends' Bridge, the Dark Entry, and the Cathedral. For an alternative route back to the Cathedral, walk from Prebends' Bridge through the Water Gate arch to the picturesque cobbled street called South Bailey. This route leads gently uphill to a medieval stone entrance gate on your left. Go through the archway to return to The College and the Cathedral Cloister.

Image credits
Front cover: An engraving from Robert William Billings's book *Architectural illustrations and description of the cathedral church at Durham* (1843), from the Collections of Durham Cathedral (DCL, Plate 22).
Inside front cover: A map of Durham City (1595), from the Collections of Durham Cathedral (DCL, Print 45).

We hope you enjoy your visit to Durham Cathedral and its heritage woodlands and riverbanks. If you'd like to receive information about services, events and other ways of being involved with the Cathedral such as volunteering, please contact events@durhamcathedral.co.uk or call 0191 386 4266.

Thank you to staff and volunteers from Durham Cathedral Library, as well as Durham University Library Special Collections, for their assistance.

This trail has been developed by local people who took part in the History of the Cathedral Riverbanks research course, after many hours searching for evidence in the Cathedral archives. The trail is approximately 1½ miles long and can take as long as you like. There are eight stops altogether, each revealing fascinating secrets about the hidden heritage of the Cathedral's woodlands and riverbanks. We hope you will enjoy the walk.

In the 19th century, when colourful gardens became popular, the Cathedral bought shrubs for the riverbanks. In the 20th century, Rhododendrons and large numbers of bulbs were planted. Local residents were asked to donate plants from their gardens as the riverbanks became more like a woodland garden.

"This prospect, perhaps, is not to be equalled in the environs of any city in the known world", wrote William Hutchinson in his *History of Durham*, published in 1787.

Welcome to Durham Cathedral's heritage woodlands and riverbanks. This history walk will explain how the riverbanks landscape was developed by the Cathedral clergy in the 18th century to create a parkland setting for the Cathedral.

Before the 17th century, the Cathedral's riverbanks would have been defensive bankides, with old quarry faces and working mills. In the 17th and 18th centuries the Cathedral clergy created a picturesque landscape, with many of the features of parkland more usually found in great private estates. Walks were laid out to create scenic views of the Cathedral, River Wear, streams, bridges and tree-lined banks.

In the 18th century, planting schemes used different shades and textures of trees to provide contrast throughout the seasons. As early as the 1730s the Cathedral clergy decided to plant the riverbanks with trees. A lot of work was done in 1758 when 500 young Beech trees, 420 Sycamores, 14 English Elms, 7 Larches, 4 Chestnuts and 2 Poplars were bought and planted on the riverbanks, at the Cathedral's tree nursery nearby and at Shincliffe.

The eighteenth-century woodlands and riverbanks at the heart of Durham City provide a unique setting for the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Durham Cathedral and Durham Castle. With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Durham Cathedral's Heritage Woodlands and Riverbanks Project has rejuvenated this historic landscape, creating more opportunities for people to engage with the area through improved physical access, a programme of events and outdoor education sessions, and other learning and volunteering opportunities.



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This trail is one of a series, to help residents and visitors to Durham become more aware of the rich natural and cultural heritage of the woodlands and riverbanks.

Other trails in the series include: Pilgrimage, Geology, Photography and Nature.



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WOODLANDS & RIVERBANKS HISTORY TRAIL

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