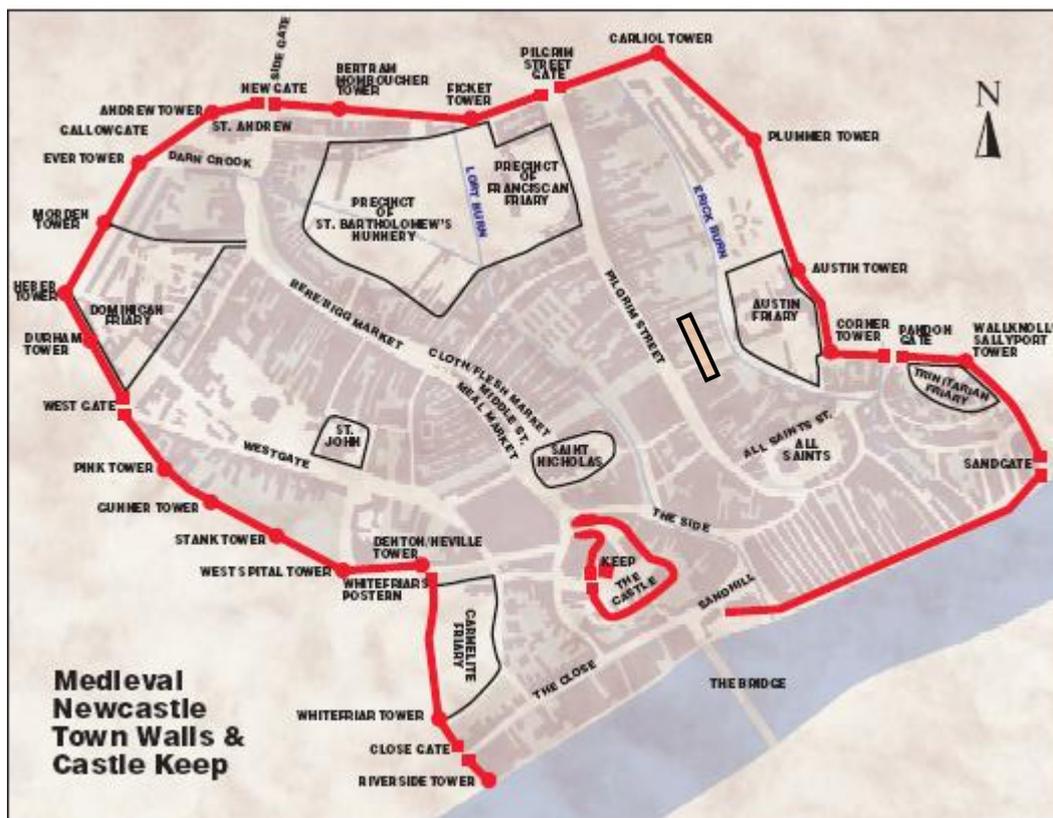


## 55° North: what lies beneath.

Beneath the shadow of 55° North lie three important places in Newcastle's long history: Austinfriars, the Holy Jesus Hospital, and Pilgrim Street.

### Austinfriars

To the immediate east of 55° North, the central motorway underpass cuts through the ancient boundaries of the Augustinian friary of Austinfriars, established in 1290 within the new town walls.

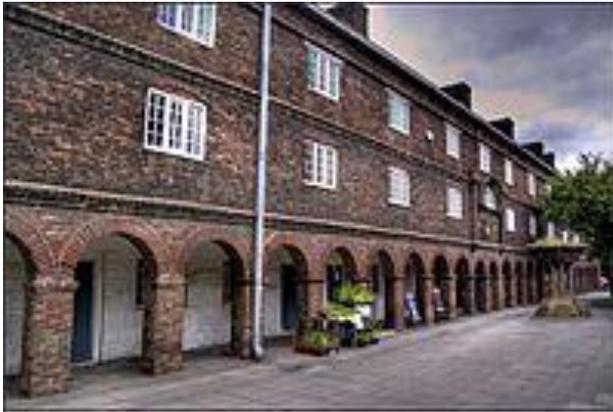


1. Medieval Newcastle showing Austinfriars and Pilgrim Street, with 55° North superimposed.

The friary was an important centre both locally and regionally. It was traditionally the lodging place of English kings whenever they visited or passed through Newcastle. In 1503 Princess Margaret, eldest daughter of Henry VII of England, lodged at the friary on her way north to join her new husband, James IV of Scotland. The Discovery Museum in Blandford Street houses an effigy of a 15<sup>th</sup> Century knight found within a few yards of where 55° North now stands. However at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539 only the prior, 7 brethren and 3 novices lived there. The friary buildings and lands were sold to the lesser gentry, new nobility, town merchants or borough corporations, and the site was re-named the King's Manor. All that remains of the friary today is part of the sacristy wall.

## The Holy Jesus Hospital

In the next century the Holy Jesus Hospital was built on the site of the friary. Other buildings included a House of Correction, a tallowhouse for the Butcher's Company, Blackett's Hospital, the Hospital of the two Davisons, the charity-school of All Saints, and a workhouse. The Holy Jesus Hospital building survives to this day, but as we shall see, only just.



*2. The Holy Jesus Hospital (later the Joicey Museum) as it looks today.*

The Holy Jesus was an almshouse rather than a hospital, funded by public subscription to house retired Freemen, their widows or unmarried sons or daughters. Most of its residents qualified for lodging through age and impoverishment. On the 55<sup>0</sup> North side of the hospital stood a police station, closed in 1880, and replaced by a soup kitchen. The hospital itself remained in use until 1937. The building then spent forty six years as the John George Joicey Museum, surviving the construction of the Swan House roundabout by a whisker. The museum closed in 1993, and the building was refurbished. It now houses the National Trust's Inner City Project, which continues a 700 year long history of charitable work established by the friary and carried forward by the hospital.

## Pilgrim Street

For hundreds of years Pilgrim Street was the main route from the town bridge to the Pilgrim Gate in the north side of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century Town Walls (where Northumberland Street now begins). It got its name from the many pilgrims visiting Our Lady's Chapel in Jesmond or the holy relics of St. Francis at Greyfriars at the head of the street. It was also, perhaps inevitably, a street of "greate innes". The area suffered badly during the English Civil War, when Newcastle stayed loyal to Charles I, but recovered to become what was described as "fairest street in the town". The area within the Town Walls where Carliol Square now stands was a popular walk for the 18<sup>th</sup> Century gentry of the district, while further south the wheat market was held in the area now occupied by 55<sup>0</sup> North. Pilgrim Street became narrower at it neared the river, and ended in two branches, one running east down the steep Dog Bank and the other west to connect with the foot of The Side.

The 55<sup>0</sup> North area of Pilgrim Street covers the most easterly part of the great 19<sup>th</sup> Century city centre redevelopment overseen by Robert Grainger and his architect John Dobson. Its outstanding

feature was the Royal Arcade, built in 1831-2, which ran straight across from Moseley Street, through the centre of the building shown.



3. *The Royal Arcade, looking north up Pilgrim Street. The haycart is entering Manor Street, which led on to Manor Chare, a less steep route down to the bridge than via The Side further to the West.*

The Royal Arcade building included offices, a Post Office, banks and a steam vapour bath. However, the Arcade itself was not a commercial success, due to its peripheral location in the City Centre, and its proximity to the new Carlisle Square Gaol built by Dobson in 1827. You can get an idea of what the Arcade might have been like from the Central Arcade near Grainger Market.



4. *The Royal Arcade in 1960.*

The character of Pilgrim Street was changed radically by the opening of the Tyne Bridge in 1928. Increased vehicular traffic over this new high level route into the city centre demanded that Pilgrim Street be upgraded, and it become part of the A1 London to Edinburgh Trunk Road. The writing was on the wall for the Royal Arcade.



5. The Pilgrim Street approach to the Tyne Bridge

### **The 1960s Redevelopment**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a long decline in Newcastle's industrial base. By the 1960's there was strong impetus for the city to modernise and, in particular, to accommodate the increase in road traffic by greatly improving access into and through the city centre. The most radical aspect of this redevelopment was the building of the central motorway from Exhibition Park to the Tyne Bridge, with its double-decker design, deep underpasses, and massive access roundabouts.

This 19<sup>th</sup> Century map shows how the 60s redevelopment relates to the old street pattern around the southern end of Pilgrim Street. The Royal Arcade site is roughly two thirds down the superimposed outlines of 55<sup>0</sup> North and the roundabout, just north of the now obliterated Manor Street. The Holy Jesus Hospital is in light blue.



6. Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century map of the Pilgrim Street area, with 55° North superimposed



7. The 1965 construction of the east side of the roundabout, skirting the Holy Jesus Hospital (by then the Joicey Museum). The ex-police station on the left and the other brick buildings behind the hospital were demolished.



*8. Houses on the east side of Pilgrim Street in 1965, about to be demolished.*

The Royal Exchange was demolished in 1964, although there was a plan to rebuild it using the original stone. While this never happened, you could pop into Lineker's bar at 55<sup>o</sup> North and check out the replica constructed from wood and plaster in the 1970's.

The new building that rose in its place was named after the region's famous scientist, Joseph Swan, 19<sup>th</sup> Century inventor of the light bulb and the dry photographic development process. Its architect was Sir Robert Matthew.



*9. Swan House taking shape. It was completed in 1969.*



10. *Swan House in the 1970s. The smaller darker building was Australia House, which processed the applications of many thousands of would-be emigrants until it closed in the 1980s.*

It is fair to say that the modernist style and imposing scale of Swan House received a mixed reaction. In the 1970s it was voted one of the biggest eyesores on Tyneside by *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* readers.

Over the last two thousand years the area that 55<sup>0</sup> North overshadows has been occupied by armies, friars, the dispossessed, prisoners, the police, charity workers, office staff and even Premiership footballers, and has seen the passage of countless pilgrims, royals, nobles, gentry, merchants, herdsmen and £10 poms. Now the crowds are of shoppers, clubbers, fans on the way to St James Park, and Great North Runners, while tens of thousands of vehicles a day pass around and below to and from the Tyne Bridge. If you believe in ghosts, you've come to the right place.

**Steve Turner, August 2012**

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