

YEAR OF WRIGHT

Derby Museums and The National Gallery



WALKING TOUR OF DERBY

Discover 18th century artist Joseph Wright and the city at the centre of his world.



£2.00 SUGGESTED DONATION

WELCOME

Discover the 18th century artist Joseph Wright (1734–1797) through a walking tour of his home town and the centre of his world — Derby.

You're invited to discover some of the locations that made Wright, from where he was born and lived, attended school, and got married, to the places where he worked and the homes of important patrons. For a final stop, you can enjoy a drink where Wright may have picked up coaches to London.

Who is Joseph Wright?

Born in Derby in 1734, Joseph Wright of Derby is an internationally renowned artist, whose paintings and works on paper adorn the walls of major galleries the world over. Famed as a "painter of light" and for his association with key members of the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment, he is now considered to be one of Britain's most interesting and wide-ranging painters.



Self-portrait at the age of about forty, Joseph Wright, oil on canvas, c.1772.

DERBY MUSEUMS' COLLECTION

Derby Museums is home to the world's largest collection of Wright's work, spanning the breadth of his life and career. The story of his life and art is told in the Joseph Wright Gallery, where a large selection of his paintings, including iconic works such as *The Orrery*, are on permanent display. Here, you will discover what it is about Wright's work that continues to draw people to Derby from all over the world.



Arkwright's Cotton Mills, by day, Joseph Wright, oil on canvas, c. 1795-1796.

The Joseph Wright Study Room is home to Derby Museums' remarkable collection of over 300 of Wright's drawings, prints, letters and other archive materials related to the artist. At Pickfords' House, a further selection of his paintings can be seen as part of the domestic interior style of a Georgian town house.

You can also view the Derby Museums collection at josephwrightofderby.com

THE ALCHEMIST

The German alchemist Hennig Brandt discovered phosphorus during an experiment with fermented urine in 1669. Like other alchemists, Brandt had been trying to make the Philosophers' Stone; a magical substance that could turn base metals into gold. Wright's painting appears to have been based on a description of the making of phosphorus in a book about chemistry by Pierre-Joseph Macquer, which was shared with him by the Liverpool chemist, Matthew Turner. Wright's scene focuses on the first sign of phosphorus which appears as a jet of blue light from a hole in the flask. Wright captures the precise moment of discovery: the alchemist and his assistants freeze in awe as a blue glow erupts from the flask. Phosphorus is a natural resource that is essential to life. As a fertiliser, it plays an important role in meeting the food needs of our world's growing population. Most phosphorus comes from the mining of phosphate rock, which in the 1700s occurred with little thought for the future.

The Alchemist, in Search of the Philosopher's Stone, discovers Phosphorus, and prays for the successful conclusion of his operation, as was the custom of the ancient chymical astrologers, Joseph Wright, oil on canvas, 1771 (reworked and dated 1795).



THE ORRERY

When Joseph Wright first exhibited this painting in 1766, it inspired high praise. It remains one of his most famous paintings. At its centre, a red gowned philosopher presents a lecture on astronomy using a clockwork model of the solar system called an 'Orrery'. When it was painted, scientific lectures and demonstrations were popular forms of public entertainment. In Derby, where there was great interest in science and technology, such lectures were held regularly at the Town Hall. These events, combined with the astronomy interests of Wright's friend Washington Shirley, 5th Earl Ferrers, who bought the painting, may have inspired him to paint this picture. His choice of subject was unprecedented at the time and his dramatic use of light captured the public imagination.



A Philosopher Giving that Lecture on an Orrery, in which a Lamp is put in the Place of the Sun, Joseph Wright, oil on canvas, 1766.

OUT OF THE CITY AND INTO WRIGHT'S DERBYSHIRE



Willersley Castle, by day, Joseph Wright, oil on canvas, c. 1795-1796.

Wright spent plenty of time in Derbyshire too. Here is a taste of some spots you can visit.

Wright took many trips to **Matlock Dale**, including **Cromford**, **Matlock** and **Matlock Bath**. He was attracted by the reputed health benefits of its spa waters and the beauty of the surrounding scenery. He painted some of these locations, such as Sir Richard Arkwright's **Cromford Mill** and his home **Willersley Castle**, both of which can still be seen today, and compared with the paintings at Derby Museum & Art Gallery. In fact, one of Wright's very first landscape paintings, *An Earthstopper on the Banks of the Derwent*, features a view of **Church Rocks** within the valley near Matlock Bath as its dramatic backdrop.

Other noted Derbyshire locations are **Dovedale** and **Dale Abbey**, which appear in many of Wright's works, and **Staunton Harold**, the original home of amateur astronomer Washington Shirley 5th Earl Ferrers, who owned Wright's masterpiece *The Orrery*. **The church of St John the Baptist**, where Wright was married to Anne Swift in July 1773, can also still be found in the small hamlet of Ault Hucknall near Chesterfield.

For more information, please visit derbymuseums.org/yearofwright



This walking tour leaflet was produced thanks to the generous support of The National Gallery Trust.



derbymuseums.org

Welcome to Wright's Derby, 300 years ago

TRAIL MAP



1 Derby Museum & Art Gallery Home to the Wright Collection.

Begin at the Museum & Art Gallery, home to the world's largest collection of Wright's work. In the Joseph Wright Gallery, see paintings from across Wright's career, from his earliest painted self-portrait and his world-famous 'candlelights', to the landscapes that preoccupied him in his later years. From there, head up to the Joseph Wright Study Room to see a wide selection of his drawings, as well as personal items and a large collection of books and exhibition catalogues featuring his work.



2 The Obelisk The site of Wright's birthplace and childhood home.

Upon exiting the Gallery, walk along Sadler Gate and turn left onto Irongate where a marble obelisk commemorating Joseph Wright stands. This memorial was commissioned by Derby City Council in 1992 and marks the site of Wright's birthplace and the house in which he is thought to have produced some of his most famous paintings, including *The Orrery* (Derby Museums) and *The Air Pump* (National Gallery, London). The house was demolished for road widening in the early 1900s.



3 Derby Cathedral Wright's grave marker resides here.

Continue along Irongate to Derby Cathedral, where Wright's grave marker can be found at the end of the right side aisle. This magnificent building, with its 16th century tower and 18th century nave, was a parish church in Wright's day known as All Saints. Wright himself worshipped at nearby St Alkmund's Church, and it was there that he was buried, following his death in 1797. When the church was demolished in the 1960s, his grave marker was moved to the Cathedral for safekeeping. A plaque at the location of the old St Alkmund's Church shows the site where Wright was buried. **A**



4 College Place The former home of Daniel Coke, radical MP and Wright's patron.

Exit the Cathedral and turn right into College Place – once the home of Daniel Parker Coke, a radical MP and an important patron of Wright's later work – before heading towards the Museum of Making.



5 The Museum of Making View a map of Derby and other objects to understand Derby during Wright's lifetime.

The museum occupies the site of a silk mill established in 1721, widely believed to be the world's first fully mechanised factory. The displays here give a sense of how Derby and the surrounding area changed during Wright's lifetime to become a leading centre of the Industrial Revolution. Look out for the painting *The East Prospect of Derby*, which shows the town as it appeared in the decade before Wright's birth, and the impressive map of Derbyshire created by his close friend Peter Perez Burdett.



6 Full Street Site of the former home of Wright's elder brother, Richard.

Take a stroll up Full Street to St Michael's Churchyard. It was in a large house here that Wright's elder brother Richard, a surgeon, lived and worked. Wright, his wife, and young family, lodged with Richard at least twice during the late 1770s. Evidence suggests that Wright also used rooms in his brother's house as a painting studio during this time.



7 Old St Helen's House Wright's studio from 1779.

In 1779, Wright moved into Old St Helen's House on King Street. Since demolished, this home sat roughly opposite the current St Helen's House, which was built by the Derby architect Joseph Pickford in the late 18th century.



8 27 Queen Street Wright's last home.

The brief walk to the site of Old St Helen's passes the remains of Wright's last home at 27 Queen Street. Previously home to Wright's friend, the clockmaker and geologist John Whitehurst, the house was leased by the artist in 1793, who remained there until his death in August 1797.



9 Pickfords' House The former home of Wright's client Joseph Pickford and family, whom Wright painted.

A short walk brings you to Pickfords' House on Friar Gate, where Wright's client Joseph Pickford and his family lived and worked. Joseph was an architect whose patrons included the potter Josiah Wedgwood, whilst his wife Mary was a businesswoman with interests in textile production. Wright painted their children, Thomas and Joseph, and it is likely he visited the house to discuss the commission and perhaps to supervise the hanging of the completed portrait. Some of his paintings are on display here, giving an idea of how they might have been seen in a home at that time.



10 Old Grammar School St Peter's Churchyard, formerly a school Wright attended.

OFF ROUTE OPTION: From about 1746, Wright was educated at Derby's Free Grammar School in St Peter's Churchyard.



11 Darley Grove Where Wright played the flute with his friend and patron, Reverend Thomas Gisborne.

Retrace your steps to the new St Helen's House, where it is a short walk to get to Darley Park. Here, you can follow in Wright's footsteps and take a stroll down Darley Grove. It was here that Wright enjoyed playing the flute in the company of his friend, Reverend Thomas Gisborne.



12 Darley Park Formerly the grounds of Darley Hall, home to Wright's client Robert Holden, whom he painted.

The path runs alongside Darley Park* and the remains of the grounds that once surrounded Darley Hall. **C** This was the home of one of Wright's clients Robert Holden, whom he painted in about 1780. As you reach a cross junction on the path, you can continue along the grove to Darley Abbey village or turn right to walk across the park towards Darley Park Tea Rooms and Darley Abbey Mills.

*You may prefer to use the accessible riverside path to walk through Darley Park.



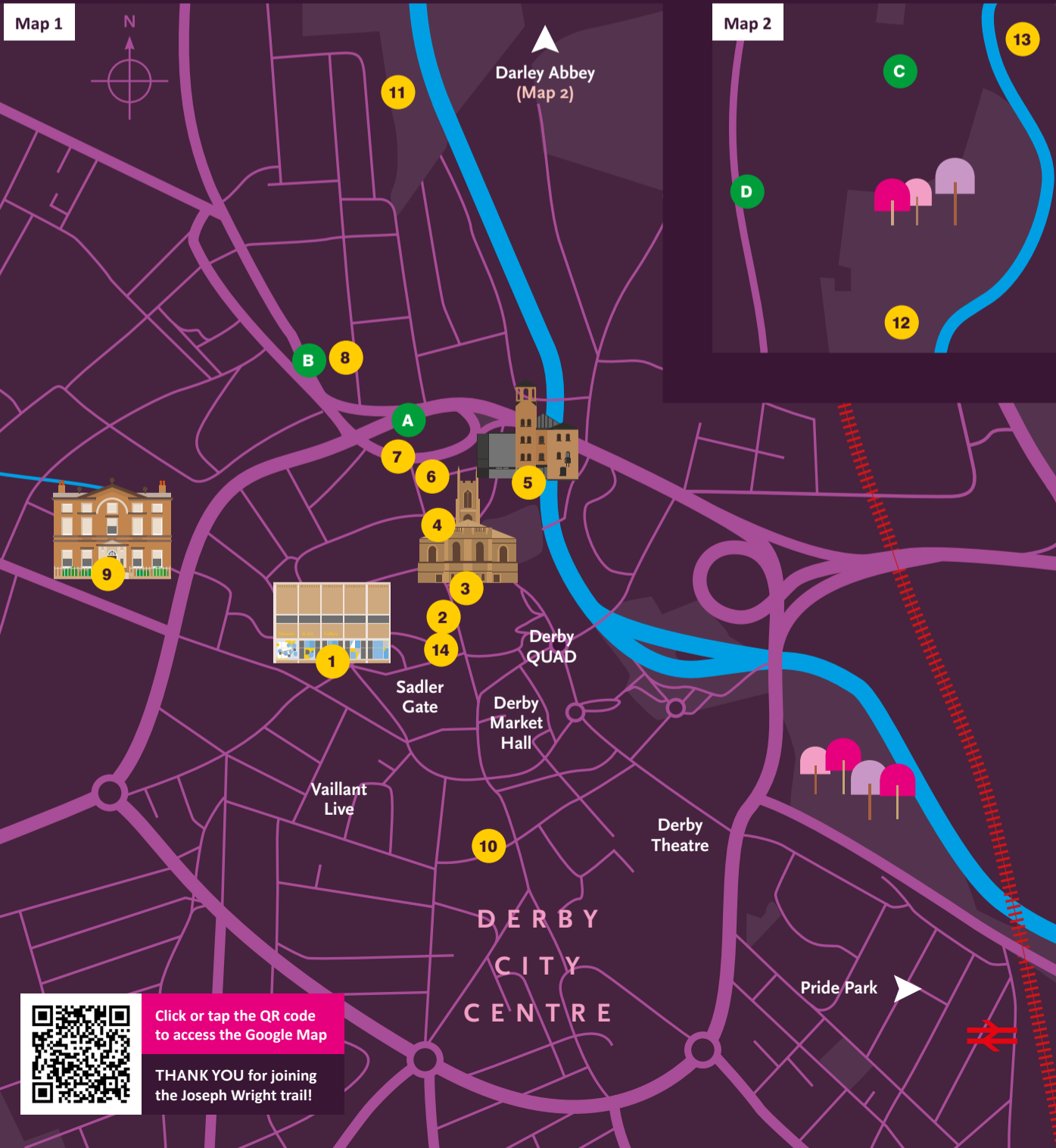
13 Darley Abbey Mills and Village Pick up a bus to return to the city centre.

The current mill buildings date back to 1792 and – with the Museum of Making and others – form part of the Derwent Valley Mills UNESCO World Heritage Site. Explore this historic mill village, including 18th century terraced millworkers' cottages and the monastic 15th century Abbey. From here it is a 30 minute walk back to the city centre. Alternatively, take a ten minute walk to the top of Mileash Lane in Darley Abbey village where the Trent Barton 'sixes' bus route will take you back into the city centre. **D**



14 The Old Bell Hotel Formerly a coaching inn, which Wright likely used to travel to London.

Relax after a day of exploring with a visit to The Old Bell Hotel on Sadler Gate. A former coaching inn, it was here that a regular coach service stopped on its way from Manchester to London and back again. Wright almost certainly boarded the coach here bound for the capital, where he exhibited his work at the annual exhibitions of the Society of Artists and later, the Royal Academy of Arts. Perhaps he enjoyed a drink at the inn before he left.



Click or tap the QR code to access the Google Map

THANK YOU for joining the Joseph Wright trail!