

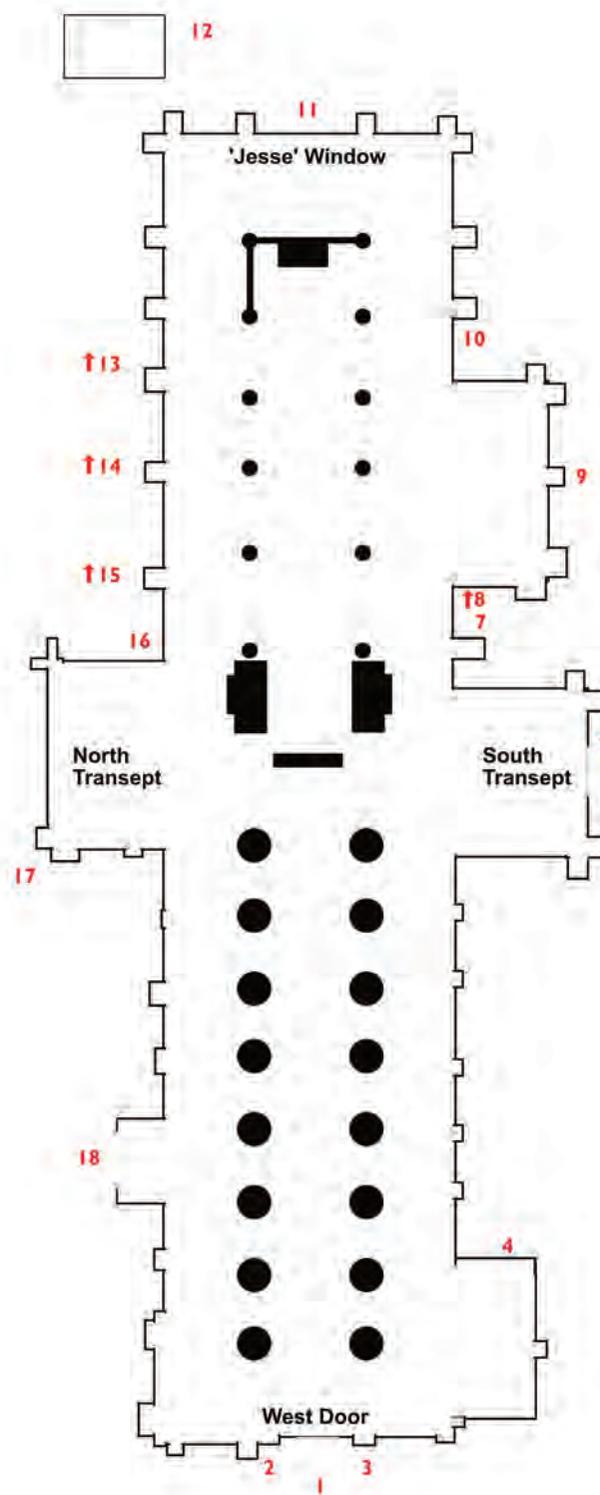
Selby Abbey

A Sculpture Made Of Sculptures



Sculpture Walk Part One Outside The Abbey

Follow the numbers around the Abbey
Arrows show where you need to really look up!



Start Here!

Face the West Front, with the town centre behind you

Selby Abbey is magnificent. Over 950 years of history embodied in local stone. It is easy to become used to it, and forget the little secrets it likes to show us if we take a few moments to look.

The Abbey is mostly carved stone, with the original building made of stone from Monk Fryston, just 8 miles away. It can appear monolithic, a huge hulking building which nevertheless wears its beauty lightly.

With this walk we will try to see the Abbey in another light. That it is, in fact, one glorious sculpture constructed from a myriad of smaller sculptures joined together. Keep an eye out to see how the straight lines, curves and rows of arches link the more obviously sculptural parts of the building. All the parts are equally important in constructing what we perceive as the entire Abbey.

From afar, we see the one. Close up, we see the many. Join us as we take a closer look!

1 To begin, walk towards the West Front of the Abbey and arrive at the main doors. Look at the variety of carvings making up the 5 distinct '**orders**' (layers) of the arch surrounding the doors. Our first view, and even the doorway is a 'sculpture made of sculptures'!



This part of the Abbey dates back to the 13th Century. There are some recent repairs to the outer order above the doors. On the outermost order there is a sticking-out rim known as a '**label**', '**hoodmould**' or '**dripstone**'. This serves the purpose of redirecting water away from the other orders below.

2 - 3 To the left of the 800 year-old doorway is a much more modern sculpture – a statue of King George V... and to the right of the doorway is his Queen, Mary. These were put in place as part of the restoration process after the devastating fire of 1906.

4 Walking right, around the corner and on the far side of what is now the Abbey office, is an old door with small figureheads, one with a very fetching moustache! Despite their relative newness, the soft sandstone from which they are carved is already showing weathering.

5 Continue along the south side of the Abbey, looking up to see the variety of practical decorations such as **waterspouts** which are visible higher up. Stop outside the South Transept doors. While these have lovely decoration of their own, look up to see the transept tower windows, and again figureheads to either side. These appear to be pious kings, their crowns veiled somehow.

6 And even further up and behind the South Transept we can see the main tower of the Abbey and note the finely detailed – almost fractal – **pinnacles** (large pointed decorations) and **finials** (the uppermost detailed part of the pinnacles) to each corner. Between and facing us is a statue of a Bishop, with what must be a very fine view of Selby and the surrounding area!



7 Moving to the right of the doors, looking up we see the first of our **Grotesques**! More commonly – though wrongly - called ‘**gargoyles**’, these figures are fanciful decorations and often based on mythical beasts. They are not called grotesque because of their appearance, but from the Italian ‘grottos’ where they were first found. Gargoyles are normally found on the end of waterspouts. Are there any gargoyles on the waterspouts above?

Follow one of the lower pinnacles down, and below it is a figure literally ‘pulling a face’. It has its fingers in its mouth, gurning at us!



8 Behind and to the right of this rude creature is a more modern grotesque, depicting a winged cow-like creature. Whatever it is, it looks quite happy up there!

9 Slightly right is another modern grotesque at the base of a patch of restored pinnacle (this part of the Abbey dates from the 14th Century). This time it is another mythical beast – a dragon with particularly fine wings and a strange bemused expression on its face.

10 A little further right, heading towards the corner of the building, look above the lower windows. Can you find a familiar face from somewhere not far up the Ouse? We'll let you guess who it is!

11 Around the corner now, to view the East or 'Jesse' window. While the glass is best viewed from inside, from here we can see the incredible **tracery** of the stonework. Imagine putting together those slender columns or '**mullions**', topping them with delicate arches and flowing shapes... just amazing! One could expect the mullions to be supported by cross-beams (**transoms**), but not here. The window looks lighter and much less dense without them, and the glasswork is shown off all the better.

12 Now turning around to face the border wall, there is a small building to the left. Wander over there to find some of the stones the Abbey has replaced over the centuries. Some are more general blocks, but one is a sculpture of a figure with arms in front. We are given an idea not only of the detail it must once have held, but also of the effects of several hundred years of Yorkshire weather on stone.

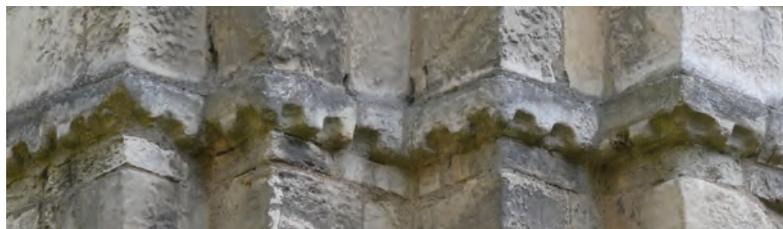
13 - 15 Turning back to face the Abbey, we head along the North side. Our interest here is up, up up! There are two substantial levels of sculpture, arches, grotesques, pinnacles and finials to see. Take a look along the first row of **balustrades** and pinnacles to see the figures. Can you tell if they are male or female? Happy or sad? Angelic perhaps? How would you describe them?

Similar figures can be seen (with good eyes, binoculars, or a zoom lens!) on the top row of balustrades. Along this part of the North wall we can also find more grotesques. Which is your favourite?



If you have excellent eyesight (or binoculars!) don't miss the very top of the main tower, where bishops and kings seem to have befriended some mischievous looking imps.

16 Before getting to the North Transept sticking out from the main body of the Abbey, look for a grotesque near the corner. It is very modern, and depicts the voyage of the monk Benedict from Auxerre in France to Selby, where he founded the Abbey around 1069AD.



17 Moving on, past the door of the North Transept (look up to see another remarkable window structure) and to the transept corner we come to some of the oldest parts of the Abbey, dating from the 12th Century. Architecture from this period is known now as '**Romanesque**', and there are a lot of Romanesque parts remaining in the Abbey. Here, running along and around the corner is a decorative '**string course**'. No function, just decoration! Where it ends, the Abbey gets a bit younger (dating from the 14th Century).

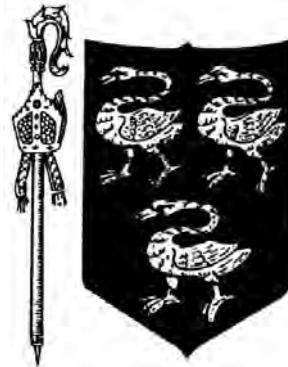
18 There is one more glorious door in the North side of the Abbey, and it is worth stopping to see the amazing '**orders**', like we saw earlier on the East door. Both date from the 13th Century.

All that's left to do is head on round the corner to find ourselves back at the West Door. If you wish to see more of this 'sculpture made of sculptures' the Sculpture Walk continues inside the Abbey!



This sculpture trail has been designed by artist Alun Kirby, as part of Unfolding Origins. Unfolding Origins is a Chrysalis Arts project that aims to support the creation of new artworks inspired by North Yorkshire’s archival collections and to develop exciting new ways for the public to engage with this resource. The project is a collaboration between North Yorkshire County Record Office (NYCRO), Chrysalis Arts Development (CAD) and other partners including Selby District Council and Richmondshire District Council and has received funding from Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund and ArtUK.

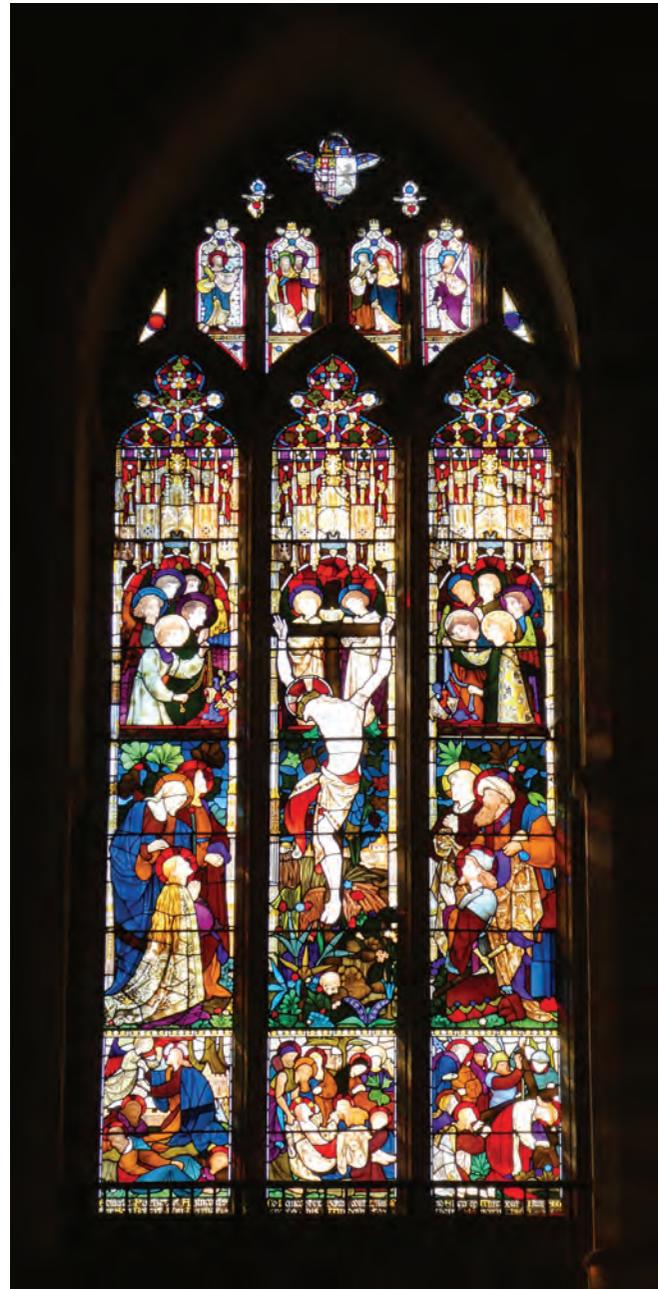
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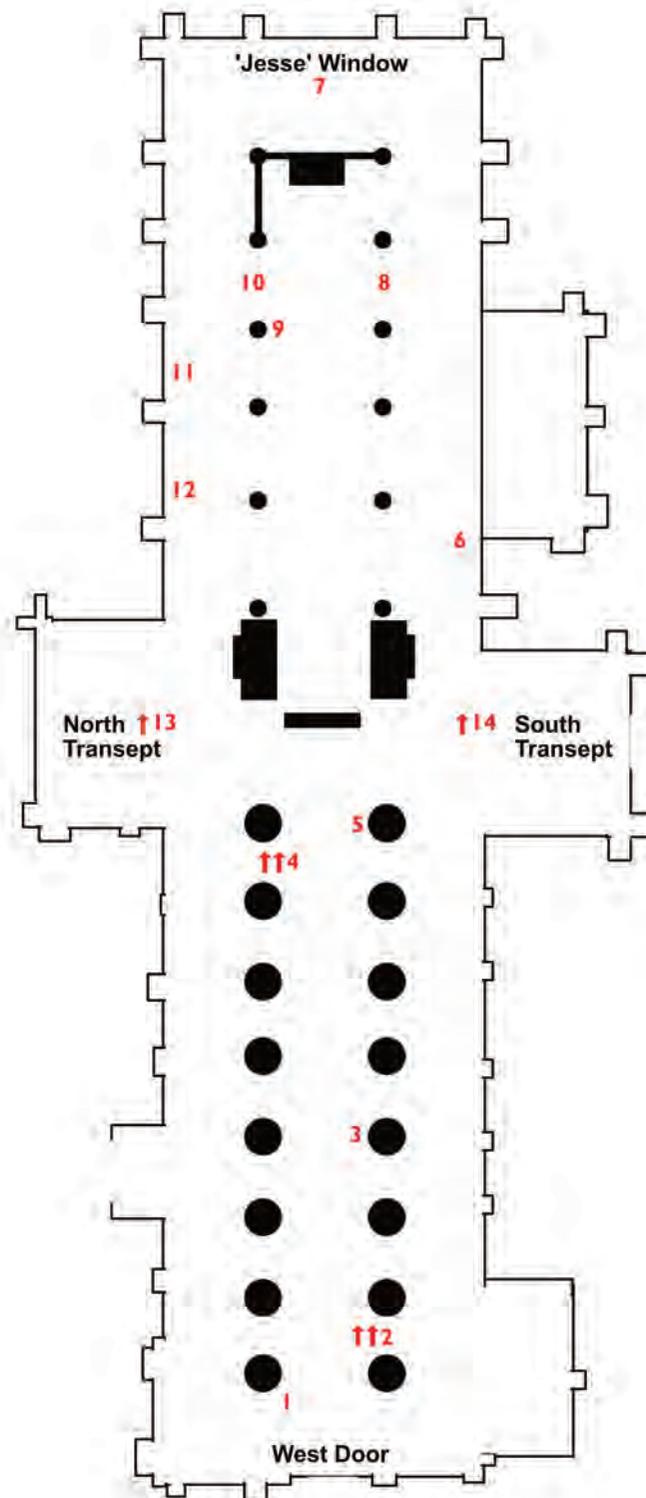
Selby Abbey

A Sculpture Made Of Sculptures



Sculpture Walk Part Two Inside The Abbey

Follow the numbers around the Abbey
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Start by the West Door!
Face down the Nave, with the doors behind you

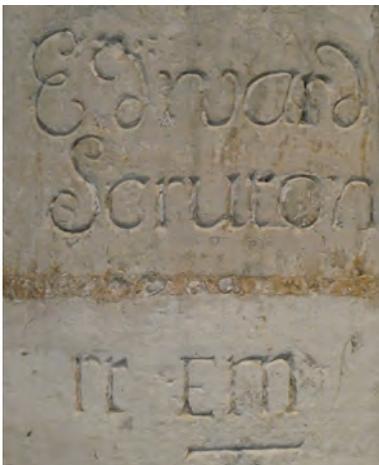
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1 We begin at the West Doors of the Abbey, at the entrance to the Nave. The West Front and the three pairs of **pillars** closest to it date from the 13th Century. Take a moment to imagine building something like this over 800 years ago.



And to bring those times a little closer, turn around to face the full length of the Nave and then look at the first pillar to your left. There are numerous '**mason's marks**' around it, signs left by the craftsmen responsible for creating this monument. Can you see some parallel lines? A cross? More obvious is some graffiti - initials and the beautifully carved name 'Edward Scruton'. Who he was we shall perhaps never know!

See if you can spot other masons marks on the nearby columns.

2 Moving a little down the Nave, raise your eyes high to the left and right, to see how the main columns along the Nave are the base of three layers of interconnecting **arches**, each layer smaller than the previous one. The upper layers are known as the **clerestory**, or 'clear storey' – a structure intended to let in light and fresh air.



This construction shows the idea of a sculpture made of sculptures - the lines and curves link to each other, and give a sense of harmony and delicacy rather than making us feel trapped between such high walls of stone.

3 The fourth row of columns onward are even older, dating from the 12th Century. The **'Abbot Hugh' column** is covered with a criss-cross design. Can you spot it?

Columns look simple, but look closer and these too are made of a range of elements joined together. From the bottom upwards, we might have a **plinth** – a square block supporting the base of the column. The **base** itself is carved into 'rolled' forms known as a **torus**. Where there are two 'rolls' they may be separated by a concave **'scotia'**! This leads into the main **shaft**, here mostly plain.



At the top of the shaft is the **capital**, an often complex set of carvings providing a transition between the column and the **impost block**, which is usually square and supports an arch above. Phew!

If you can, take a look at the capitals (carved uppermost parts of each column) to see how the styles vary even within the Nave. Some are relatively plain, others have leaves and other forms in them.

4 Almost at the end of the Nave, look left and up to see what happens when the foundations sink under a building like this! The 'wonky arches' are well known, but it gives us the chance to take in the arches themselves. Each arch has several carved **'orders'**, or layers of carving which make it up. The most amazing 'orders' in the Abbey are found above each of the main doorways, with five layers.

5 Just before we leave the Nave, we can spot evidence of one reason why the Abbey dates from many different centuries. On the final column on the right there is a silvery-grey stain running almost the full height of the column. This is a memory of the night in 1906 when a fire destroyed huge parts of the Abbey, and the lead from the roof melted and ran in great streams down the column. Fainter stains can be seen on a wall opposite as well.

6 Moving past the South Transept, head right along the South aisle of the Chancel. On the right wall are a series of small columns with intricately carved **capitals** (top pieces). This area is quite modern, renovated and restored after the fire. Look carefully at the capitals, and spot animal forms added by local stonemason Tom Strudwick.

7 At the end of the Aisle and left, we come face to face with the East (or 'Jesse') Window. It's easy to be amazed not by the glass itself, but look at the delicacy of the stone frame. Its **tracery** simply enhances the glass, never getting in the way of this incredible spectacle. For such a large window, this is fine work indeed. From our sculptural viewpoint, we can fully admire how the flowing forms and arches of the window join effortlessly with its surrounding greater arch, and from there into the structures of the Choir and Chancels.

8 Retracing our steps back along the South Aisle, we pass through a doorway on the right taking us into the 14th Century Choir, right in front of the Altar. There are several things of note here, not least the wooden carving of the Altar itself!

9 Now, take your eyes on a little interconnected journey,... Facing to the left of the altar is a **column**, which leads to its ornate **capital**, from which springs not only a multi-ordered arch (leading to the next column), but also a sticking-out bit known as a **corbel**. This one is in the form of a grotesque. On its back sits a **plinth** for a statue (look around - not all the plinths are occupied), in this case of a bishop. The statue is crowned by a **pinnacle** (or **finial**), topped by another corbel which supports a slim column attached to the wall.

This slim column rises to another fine **capital**, from which blossoms a series of stone supports which blend perfectly into the main wooden roof joists. These in turn lead to finely carved **bosses**, where several joists meet. From floor to ceiling in one interconnected sweep, this is our 'sculpture made of sculptures' in a nutshell.



While you're there, note how the curves formed by the joists reflect the arches of the upper clerestory and even the Jesse window itself.

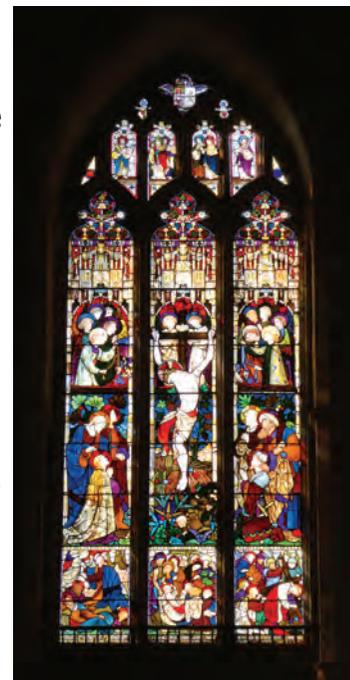
10 Once you have satisfied your eyes with the magnificence of the Choir (not forgetting the ceiling), leave by the door opposite where you came in, to enter the North Aisle. On the right will be the Washington Window, but we will head left, back towards the Nave.



11 Now look carefully at the wall to your right as we pass it. There are a series of small capitals, like those carved with animals we saw on the South Aisle, but with these the secret is on the inside. You might need your phone torch to see it properly, but inside one or two of these capitals is a secret. Can you find them?

12 A little higher up, towards the end of the Aisle, is a strange square hole in the wall. There may be a step to help you view it (please ask if not). It is known as the '**Leper Squint**', and was the only way for people with leprosy (a mildly contagious, disfiguring disease) to view the services inside the church during medieval times. It is over 9 feet long, and would have led to the outside of the Abbey, as lepers were not allowed inside.

13 - 14 All that's left to do is head back to the centre of the Abbey, between the North and South Transepts. Take a moment to reflect on the scale of this sculpture, and note the four huge '**crossing arches**' which border this central area. Look back East and West, and see the different ways the roof joists and bosses connect with the walls in the Nave and Choir. Take in the grandeur of the Altar with the East Window behind, and hopefully see the West window with sunlight streaming through and remember where we started, with a few scratched marks on a column made over 800 years ago by someone who perhaps never saw the Abbey completed.



Thank you for joining us on this walk. If you've not done it already, and wish to see more of this 'sculpture made of sculptures' there is another Sculpture Walk sharing some of the secrets found outside the Abbey!

This sculpture trail has been designed by artist Alun Kirby, as part of Unfolding Origins. Unfolding Origins is a Chrysalis Arts project that aims to support the creation of new artworks inspired by North Yorkshire’s archival collections and to develop exciting new ways for the public to engage with this resource. The project is a collaboration between North Yorkshire County Record Office (NYCRO), Chrysalis Arts Development (CAD) and other partners including Selby District Council and Richmondshire District Council and has received funding from Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund and ArtUK.

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