

Gracie Fields

Purple Plaque Trail



Following in the footsteps of Rochdale's biggest star

This trail marks places of significance in the life of the late Rochdale-born singer, actress and comedian, Dame Gracie Fields.

The plaques' purple colour is unique to this trail and distinguishes them from the wide range of blue plaques in the town.

Gracie Fields was born in Rochdale in 1898 and went on to become an internationally famous singer and Hollywood star. She was the highest paid actress in the world during the 1930s.

Many of Gracie's biggest moments, from being encouraged to enter her first singing contest to her first professional performance, took place here in her hometown of Rochdale.

The trail takes in many of these important sites, as well as the statue of Gracie, which was erected in autumn 2016 as a permanent tribute to Rochdale's favourite daughter.



Gracie with Councillor Charlie Crowder J.P. (Mayor of Rochdale) on the day she was made a Freeman of the Borough in 1937.

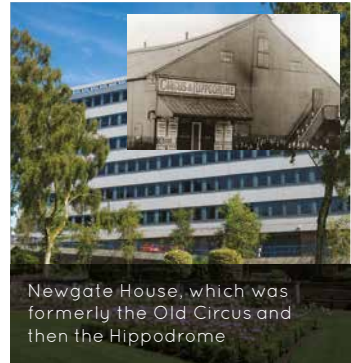
The trail

Start at Rochdale's Grade I listed town hall

The balcony at the front of the building is where Gracie received her Freedom of the Borough in 1937. Gracie's plaque can be found on the front of the building. From here, you can also see Gracie's statue in Town Hall Square, just off Packer Street.

From here, you can cross the road (The Esplanade)

Walk across the stunning Rochdale Memorial Gardens, one of the borough's green flag parks. Towards the back of the gardens, on the right hand side, you will see the back of Newgate House, which was formerly the Old Circus and then the Hippodrome. Gracie's plaque is on the wall underneath the walkway just behind the trees and plants.



Walk back to The Esplanade and turn left to walk towards Rochdale's historic bridge and river

If you walk past the river you will see the Art Deco building and former theatre and cinema, the Regal Moon, which is now a pub, in front of you.

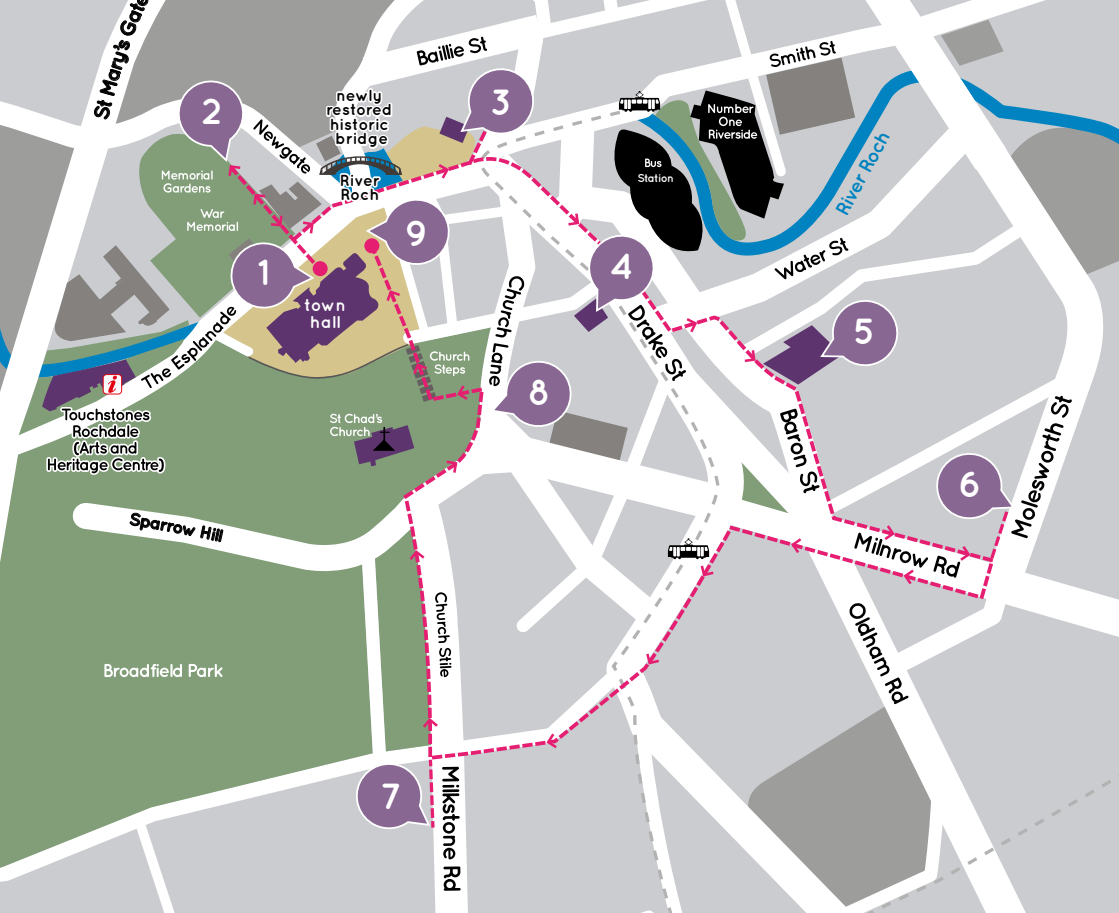
Once in front of the Regal Moon

If you turn around, you're facing Drake Street, which the trams travel up and down. Walk up Drake Street for a few minutes and you will find Champness Hall, which was built in 1925, on your right.



Did you know?

Champness Hall has also played host to other singers over the years, including Elvis Costello.



- 1. Rochdale Town Hall**
The focal point of Gracie's many return visits to Rochdale.
- 2. Former Hippodrome**
Gracie's first professional performance took place at the hippodrome in 1910.
- 3. The Regal Moon**
Gracie performed a charity concert here in April 1949 on her return to the town. There is a photographic display of Gracie on the walls inside the pub.
- 4. Champness Hall**
Gracie marked her return to broadcasting after the Second World War at the Champness Hall, when 'Our Working Party' was broadcast live from here in 1947.
- 5. Baron Street**
Opposite here, at number 10 Baron Street, before it was demolished, stood Gracie's childhood home from 1902-1910. Around the corner, at 45 Kenion Street, the theatrical boarding house, where Gracie was first discovered, once stood.
- 6. Molesworth Street**
The site of the famous fish and chip shop where Gracie was born in the upstairs bedroom.
- 7. 2 Milkstone Road**
Formerly the sight of the Schofields' off licence. Bertha and Ada Schofield were close family friends of the Stanfield family, and Gracie always visited them on her return visits to Rochdale up to the 1960s.
- 8. St Chad's Parish Church**
Gracie's parents, Jenny and Fred Stanfield married here in 1897. Gracie Fields was also baptised as Grace Stanfield here in 1898.
- 9. The Statue**
This captures Gracie performing during the 1950s. It was created by award-winning sculptor, Sean Hedges-Quinn.

From here, cross over Drake Street

You will find Water Street directly in front of you. Walk down Water Street and take the first right, which is Baron Street. Walk up Baron Street for a minute or so and you will see the building with Gracie's plaque (now Stones Window Blinds) on your left.

Did you know?

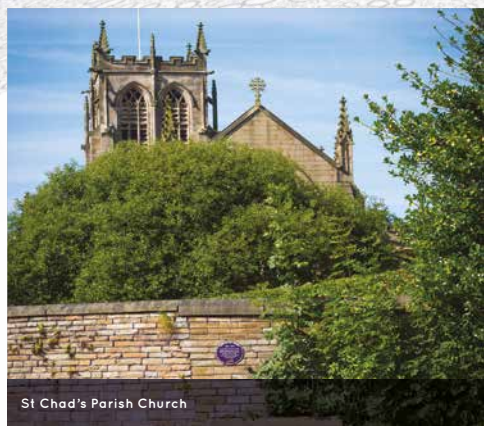
Kenion Street later became famous for its recording studios, where bands like Joy Division made music.



From here, keep walking up Baron Street. At the top, take a slight right onto Oldham Road. Walk a short distance up Oldham Road and you will see Milnrow Road on your left. Turn onto Milnrow Road and walk down for a few minutes. Take your second left onto Molesworth Street. Almost immediately on your left you will see Gracie's plaque on a wall.

Head back down Milnrow Road to where it meets Oldham Road

Once you get to Oldham Road, cross over. You will still be on Milnrow Road. Walk down for a short distance and take the next left onto Drake Street. After five or ten minutes, you will find Milkstone Road on your left. Gracie's plaque is on the Milky Way ice cream bar, which is a short way down on your right.



From here turn around and head back to Drake Street

Where Drake Street meets Milkstone Road, cross over and walk down Church Stile, which should be directly in front of you. Keep walking down this road and you will see the oldest church in the borough, St Chad's, at the end. Take a right when you get to St Chad's and start to follow the road downwards. You will see Gracie's plaque on the outside of the church's perimeter wall at the top of Church Lane (where the cobbles start).

Head back into the church grounds

Walk past the church towards the old steps at the back of the graveyard. When you reach the bottom of these steps, you will be back in Town Hall Square, where the trail started.

Our top tips

While at the town hall, why not take a tour or enjoy afternoon tea in its Clock Tower Dining Room?

rochdale.gov.uk/townhall

To find out more about the wider history of Rochdale and our Blue Plaque Trails, visit Touchstones Museum and Art Gallery on The Esplanade (open Tuesday to Saturday).

The River Roch and historic bridge close to the Regal Moon were re-opened in summer 2016 after almost a century underground.

Find out more at: **rochdale.gov.uk/riverroch**

Why not pop into St Chad's Church while you're on the trail? It has a host of stunning features and is believed to be of Saxon origin. It also has the font on which Gracie was christened and the altar where her parents were married.

