

Open Treasure Exhibition — Durham Cathedral

Buying a ticket. To pay to see the exhibition you have to buy a ticket from the desk near the south door entrance to the Cathedral from the cloisters, and opposite the north door entrance. There is a section of the desk which is made lower for wheelchair users, but you have to catch the attention of the sales staff in order to be served there or you are likely to be ignored. I was helped by one of the volunteer stewards. Perhaps the sales staff need to be more aware of the needs of disabled people.

Entrance to the exhibition. The exhibition starts in the Monks Dormitory which is on the first floor and is accessed via a staircase or a lift from the cloisters just by the south door entrance to the Cathedral. I used the lift, which will accommodate most manual and electric wheelchairs. I think only a small mobility scooter will fit. The door to the lift opens and closes automatically, and you have to press the button continually to travel. I was told that there should have been a member of staff to assist anyone using the lift. If assistance is needed, I think it would be readily available, even for a disabled visitor visiting by themselves.

The exhibition. There is a welcome desk, with staff to check tickets and provide a printed guide. I did not ask, but I would guess that large print versions of the guide are available; at various points through the exhibition there are large print booklets which provide all the printed information on and around exhibits which those with impaired vision might find difficult to read. Staff are on hand to supplement the information; I found them invariably helpful. There is plenty of space for wheelchair users to access all the exhibits, and to read all the information. Visitors exit the Monks Dormitory via a pair of automatic doors, the first of which has to close before the second will open. This is because this next area of the exhibition contains manuscripts from the Cathedral library which need a controlled atmosphere. On my visit, this area of the exhibition focused on animals, real and imaginary, as they appear in artefacts, books and manuscripts. The exit from this area is via another pair of double doors leading onto a landing with stairs, and a lift, down to the ground floor. This lift is similar to the one I used to access the Monks Dormitory, and there were staff available to help if it was needed. The foyer on the ground floor provided access to the final area of the exhibition — the Prior's Kitchen. This area will in future focus on the Cathedral's patron saint, St Cuthbert, but for the time being contains various items of metal ware belonging to the Cathedral. Again, there was ample space for wheelchair users. The exit from the Prior's Kitchen is via a short corridor leading to the cloisters, near the entrance to the cafe/shop area. The corridor is narrow but I understand there is an alternative if needed.

Toilet facilities. There is a disabled toilet just off the ground floor foyer outside the Prior's Kitchen. It is quite small but I was able to use it without difficulty. It is certainly easier to use for a wheelchair user than the one provided in the toilet block outside the external door leading to the cafe/shop.

Car parking. There are no longer any designated parking places in The College for blue badge holders. This is a matter for some regret, and for an explanation. The paucity of designated parking places for blue badge holders on the peninsular — a World Heritage Site — was a significant problem before these spaces were removed. Given that the Open Treasure Exhibition has been made accessible to people with disabilities, and that there are real difficulties facing such people when they wish to visit the World Heritage Site, it is surprising to find that those difficulties have been made worse by the decision to remove parking spaces for blue badge holders in The College.