

Fountains Abbey Visitor Centre

Location: Ripon, Yorkshire, UK

Client: National Trust

Completed: 1992

Awards:

- Civic Trust Award
- RIBA Award
- BCI Awards Special Commendation
- Europa Nostra Medal of Honour

The open courtyard form of the Visitor Centre and its use of natural materials create a distinctive place on the approach to Fountains Abbey, and in doing so enrich the experience of visitors to this wonderful World Heritage Site.

The site is high up above the valley of the River Skell and Fountains Abbey, which John Aislabie included into the landscaped gardens of Studley Royal in the early 1700s.

The position of the previous facilities encouraged most visitors simply to walk along the valley, turn around and retrace their steps. The location of the new Visitor Centre encourages a more circular and subsequently more rewarding route around the estate, and glimpsed views of the Abbey from the new Visitor Centre's approach road create a sense of anticipation and discovery.

The external elevations of the building are made of dry-stone walls under clerestory glazing, itself protected by steeply pitched stone tile roofs with oversailing eaves.

This hard outer "shell" contrasts with the softer, lighter courtyard elevations: timber framed glazed screens under double-curved lead covered roofs, extending their eaves to form a generous covered way.



A surprise view of the abbey tower can be seen from the visitor centre courtyard.



The visitor centre is stitched into the existing landscape and contributes a new one.



Curved lead roof with dry stone walls combine traditional materials with modern forms