



Hidden Gems in York

Look up and around all the time when you're walking through York – you will see little faces looking down at you, peculiar old signs and fascinating details on York's old buildings. Take Monk Bar for instance. Perched on the two towers of the bar are six stone figures, all seemingly ready to rain down boulders on passers-by. Along Stonegate, at the entrance to Coffee Yard sits the bright red "Printer's Devil", a carved sign that indicated the location of the print works up until the 18th century. The apprentices, who carried the hot plates, were known as the printer's devils. The figure of an American Indian at 76 Low Petergate is the former advertising sign of the tobacconist – the boy's kilt and headwear represent tobacco leaves. Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, sits on the corner of Minstergates, leaning on a pile of books, to advertise the bookseller's shop below, where authors and literary readers met as members of one of Britain's earliest book groups.

York is crammed with museums, attractions, shops, restaurants, pubs and magnificent architecture. Here are a few that are less well known but every bit as deserving of the visitor's attention.

Micklegate Bar Museum

Micklegate

Often described as one of York's best-kept secrets, this fascinating museum is a great starting-point for a walk along the city wall. Micklegate Bar has stood guard over the main road entering York from the London direction for around 800 years, and to this day royalty pass through this gateway when on an official visit. Traitors' heads used to decorate the battlements, and the whole gory but colourful history of the place is told inside.

Richard III Museum

Goodramgate

Located in the imposing gateway of Monk Bar at the entrance to Goodramgate, this is the only one of York's four Bars or gateways whose wooden portcullis is still in working order. The museum presents a reconstructed, modern day Trial presenting the case both for and against Britain's most notorious King – was he an evil, hunchbacked monster who brutally murdered the "Princes in the Tower", or a loyal, courageous ruler, unfairly maligned by historians? Make up your own mind here. Tel: 01904 634191, email: info@richardiiimuseum.co.uk. Website: www.richardiiimuseum.co.uk

Bar Convent Museum

17 Blossom Street

The history of Christianity in the north of England is explained in this charming museum housed in a Georgian building which is also a working convent, licensed café, gift shop and one of York's most unusual guesthouses (eighteen bedrooms are available). The beautiful chapel was hidden in the centre of the building to avoid detection at a time when Roman Catholics were subject to persecution. The Bar Convent Museum is the oldest active convent in the country.

Press contact: Jo Dodd, Tel: 01904 643238, email: info@bar-convent.org.uk. Website: www.bar-convent.org.uk.

Holy Trinity Church, Goodramgate

Adjoining Lady Row on Goodramgate – York's oldest row of houses, is a little gateway that would be all too easy to miss, but leads to Holy Trinity Church, one of York's finest medieval churches, hemmed in and hidden by buildings on all sides. In this secret garden of tranquility, the ghost of Thomas Percy, Earl of Northumberland is supposed to wander, searching for his head – he was beheaded for high treason. The church escaped the 19th century reformers and has retained its original character, with box pews and medieval glass, including a stunning east window dating back to 1470.

St Mary's Abbey

Museum Gardens

The statuesque ruins of St Mary's Abbey lie in Museum Gardens, the grounds of the Yorkshire Museum. The picturesque setting has been used as a backdrop to open-air theatre on many occasions, including the York Mystery Plays. St Mary's was once the most important Benedictine monastery in northern England.

Statue of Constantine the Great

Deansgate

The striking statue of an elegantly reclining Constantine complete with sword is positioned outside the Minster, a fitting reminder that a great Roman military headquarters once stood on this very site. Nearby is the single surviving pillar excavated from Constantine's fortress.

Margaret Clitherow's House

This tiny Shambles house was home to butcher's wife Margaret Clitherow, a Roman Catholic who sheltered priests from persecution. She suffered for her selfless bravery by being deliberately crushed to death beneath a door in 1586. The house is now a shrine to her memory, and one of the most peaceful and simple chapels in the whole of York.

York Brewery

Take a tour of York's award-winning independent brewery, to see each stage of the brewing process. Tasting of the end products – including Stonewall and the stronger Yorkshire Terrier – are of course included!

Tel: 01904 621162, website: www.york-brewery.co.uk

York Cold War Bunker

Visitors are able to take a guided tour of a semi-submerged secret bunker on the outskirts of York. At the height of the Cold War, Britain had a total of 1,561 nuclear shelters, designed to withstand severe bombardment. The shelter was one of the best surviving examples of its type in the UK, and the first to be designated a Scheduled Monument. Complete with original fixtures and fittings, visitors can

experience an atmosphere as authentic as that found in films such as the Ipcress File or the TV serial Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy. Visits to the Bunker will be by pre-booked guided tour only. To make a booking please ring Clifford's Tower on 01904 646940. Visit www.english-heritage.org.uk

Tucked Away Treasures

Tucked away in York's historic cobbled streets, medieval timber halls and fine town houses sit amongst York's bigger attractions and off the beaten track.

Barley Hall

2 Coffee Yard, off Stonegate

This meticulously restored medieval townhouse, right in the heart of York's historic streets, was once home of Alderman William Snawsell, Goldsmith and Lord Mayor of York. Its remains were found behind centuries of buildings in the atmospheric ginnel Coffee Yard. Step back in time and discover what life was like for the Alderman and his family in the 15th century. Costumed guides or an audio tour – presented by York-born Judi Dench and Robert Hardy – fill you in on the building's colourful history.

Press contact: David Scott, Tel 01904 543426, email: davidpascott@googlemail.com. Website: www.barleyhall.org.uk.

Mansion House

St Helen's Square

In the centre of York there's a hidden gem, a building rich in the city's history, and just waiting to be discovered. Behind its imposing facade, through the blue door is a remarkable story of the Lord Mayors of York and their entertainment for the good of the city! Since 1725 the house has been the home of the Lord Mayors of York and houses one of the finest civic collections in the country, including fine silverware, clocks and furniture. Guided tours every Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 11am, 12.30pm and 2pm lasting approximately 1 hour. Email: mansionhouse@york.gov.uk, Tel: 01904 552036.

Treasurer's House

Minster Yard

A beautiful house, attractive gardens, welcoming tearoom – and some of the most famous ghosts in York. Originally the Minster's Treasurer lived on this site; it was his responsibility to run the Minster efficiently. The present building dates from the late 16th century, and was a private residence, but the name stuck. It is now home to a magnificent antiques collection, and is run by the National Trust. And the ghosts? A company of Roman foot soldiers, who appeared through a cellar wall in 1953 – the terrified young plumber who saw them, described their garb in meticulous detail – and experts later confirmed that the house is indeed built over a Roman road.

Press contact: Jane Whitehead, Tel: 01904 624247, email: Jane.Whitehead@nationaltrust.org.uk, website: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/treasurershouse/

Merchant Adventurers' Hall

Fossgate

The splendidly named Merchant Adventurers were one of medieval York's most prestigious guilds. These were the overseas traders, the men who helped make the city rich, and their guildhall reflects their exalted status. The building is one of the best preserved of its kind in Europe, and has stood largely untouched for over 600 years.

Tel: 01904 654818, website: www.theyorkcompany.co.uk

Fairfax House

Castlegate

Perhaps nowhere sums up Georgian York as well as Fairfax House, one of the most distinguished 18th century town houses in Britain and now the ideal backdrop to the Noel Terry Collection of Furniture, also one of the finest of its type. Built in 1762 a stone's throw from Clifford's Tower, the house, charming and perfectly proportioned, is a perennially popular visitor attraction.

Tel: 01904 655543 website: www.fairfaxhouse.co.uk

Quilt Museum & Gallery

Peasholme Green

The Quilt Museum and Gallery is Europe's only museum dedicated exclusively to quilting and textile arts, and opened in June 2008 in historic St Anthony's Hall. Originally built as the headquarters of a religious guild in the 15th century, St Anthony's Hall has a colourful past – as a workhouse for the poor, a magazine store during the reign of Charles I, a military hospital, a prison, and a school. The beautiful medieval spaces have been restored and adapted to accommodate the Museum and its wide range of displays and activities.

Tel: 01904 613242, website: www.quiltmuseum.org.uk

Exploring York

Ginnels

Lady Peckett's Yard, Coffee Yard, Mad Alice Lane, Whip ma Whop Ma Gate. The names alone are irresistible. A network of 'ginnels' or alleyways winds through the historic core of York as it has done for centuries, each with a story to tell. You can explore almost the whole of the city centre using these medieval shortcuts. *The Snickleways Guide to York*, by Mark Jones, is on sale at Visit York Information Centre at 1 Museum Street.

King's Staith

Nowadays a pleasant hopping-on point for boat-trips, King's Staith was once a busy working quay. Plenty of good pubs and cafes in the vicinity make this a great place for sitting and watching the world go by. River cruises supplied by YorkBoat.

Tel: 01904 628 324, website: www.yorkboat.co.uk

Take a walk in York...

Lady Peckett's Yard, Coffee Yard, Mad Alice Lane, Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate. The names alone are irresistible. A network of 'ginnels' or alleyways winds through the historic core of York as it has done for centuries, each with a story to tell. You can explore almost the whole of the city centre using these medieval shortcuts. York has its own name for these tiny lanes –

‘Snickleways’ – a word coined by a local tour guide made up of the word ‘Snicket’, ‘Ginnel’ and ‘Alleyway’. YorkWalk, established in 1990, offers a programme of themed walking tours of York throughout the year. Many of these explore the hidden York, and unwind the fascinating history of the city. These include, amongst others:

Inaccessible and Hidden York

A unique chance to enter parts of York never open to the public, to descend into cellars and Roman remains, and explore secret passages, crypts, medieval churches and hidden Georgian interiors.

The Graveyard, Coffin and Crypt Tour

A chance for visitors to explore the hidden city of the dead; descend to a secret crypt, sample Roman and medieval coffins and visit plague sites.

Historic Toilet Tour

A saga of convenience from Roman hygiene to C19th attempts to prevent ‘nuisance’ and promote public decency. Also visitors are able to sample the dubious comforts of medieval garderobes.

Guy Fawkes Trail

Visitors can explore the (several!) birthplaces and haunts of one of York’s most infamous sons – Guy Fawkes of Gunpowder Plot fame.

For more information visit www.yorkwalk.co.uk Tel: 01904 656244 Email: admin@yorkwalk.fsnet.co.uk

Press contact: Kay Hyde, PR Manager, Visit York. Tel: 01904 554451 Email: kh@visityork.org

For those who prefer self-guided walks and tours, Visit York has produced a series of nine walking trails for the city, including Medieval Churches, a Railway Heritage Trail, A Rowntree Trail – taking visitors on a tour of the city’s chocolate heritage, a Roman Trail and many more. For full details visit www.visityork.org/explore

The Retrace York City Rubbings Trail

The Retrace York City Rubbings Trail is an experience for visitors on the city walls. A map of York has been split up and scattered around the city’s ancient walls. Visitors can assemble a complete map, travelling around the walls in any direction, by taking a rubbing of each panel. The panels highlight a route around the historic defences and also reveal some of York’s fascinating past along the way. The trail’s aim is to encourage children to walk the whole way around the city walls and experience areas of the city which are not normally used.

Please note the information above may be subject to change.

For any further information and your free guide to York, please contact: York Visitor Information Centre, Tel: 01904 550099, email: info@visityork.org or visit the website at www.visityork.org.

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