



Medieval Churches in York

As the rose is the flower of flowers,
so this is the house of houses

www.visit-york.org/explore

The story of York's medieval churches

Did you know that in medieval York there were around 40 churches, eight monasteries and friaries and countless chapels and chantries. This leaflet will help you explore some of York's lesser known treasures, the surviving medieval churches. It may take a day or more to visit all of the churches featured inside. Take your time, each and every one is worth it.

In the beginning

Christianity first came to York at the time of the Roman occupation as a forbidden faith whose followers could expect to be persecuted. The Romans worshipped a variety of gods, goddesses and dead emperors and in York there were temples to Mars, Mercury, Venus and even the Persian god Mithras. It was the coronation of the Roman Emperor Constantine, here in York in AD 306, that changed forever the fate of Christianity. In AD 312 Constantine declared religious tolerance throughout the Roman Empire. Christianity flourished and the oldest Christian churches in York and all over Europe trace their origins right back to this time.

The fall and rise of Christianity under the Saxons

After the Roman occupation, Christianity declined in the North of England. In 625, however, the pagan King Edwin of Northumbria married Ethelburga, a Christian Princess from Kent who insisted on bringing her priest, Paulinus, with her to York. Two years later, Edwin converted to Christianity, built the first York Minster and was baptised there. In the centuries that followed more and more Kings and Noblemen became Christians. Christianity became the major religion of Britain and the Church became rich, powerful and politically influential.

Medieval wealth and power

The Church dominated life in medieval Britain. Everyone was expected to attend church, and pay a tenth of their earnings to it. Monasteries grew wealthy and powerful and churches were richly adorned with carvings, paintings and stained glass. St Mary's in York was the richest abbey in the North of England and owned vast tracts of land all over Britain. By 1428 there were 39 churches in the city, eight monasteries and friaries and countless chapels and chantries. Nineteen medieval churches are still standing and many are featured in this leaflet.

The Reformation

Between 1536 and 1539 King Henry VIII smashed the power and seized the wealth of the monasteries in England. In York, virtually all of the glorious monastic buildings were confiscated, sold and torn down for their scrap value. Only traces of St Mary's Abbey and Holy Trinity Priory remain. In 1547, all traces of catholicism were stripped from churches. Shrines were destroyed, chantries closed, and statues were desecrated.

When Mary, became queen, she set about undoing the recent Protestant changes, restoring catholicism as the official faith and persecuting Protestants by the thousands. When Mary died in 1558, Elizabeth was crowned, established The Church of England, and resumed the persecution of Catholics! In York, many Catholics, both lay people and clergy, were publicly executed for their faith at the Tyburn (near where York Racecourse now stands).

Fire and Brimstone

In 1644, during the English Civil War, York was besieged by the Parliamentary Army. St Denys', Walmgate and St Olave's, Marygate were severely damaged by cannon fire and according to legend, Sunday morning services in the Minster were disrupted by cannon balls, shattering windows and bouncing off pillars (the story goes that, instead of evacuating the building, the congregation sang louder and louder to drown out the noise!). The Royalist Army eventually surrendered to Sir Thomas Fairfax on the condition that his forces would not loot the Minster. Under Puritan rule, worship in York was stripped to its bare essentials - music, pomp and ceremony were forbidden and plainer Puritan sermons took their place.

Today, York's churches reflect the numerous denominations of modern Christianity and welcome all visitors; whether you come to look at art and architecture, enjoy a moment of peace, or to become involved with the life of the church. Regular services are still held in the majority of churches. All city churches are grateful to receive donations towards their care and restoration. Please give generously and don't forget to sign the visitor book.

The start of the Walk is at York Minster

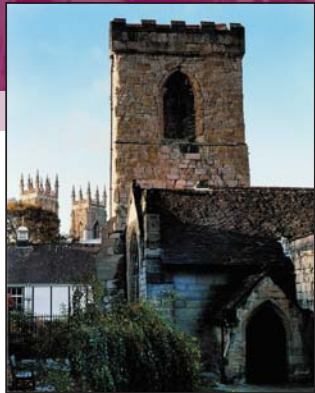
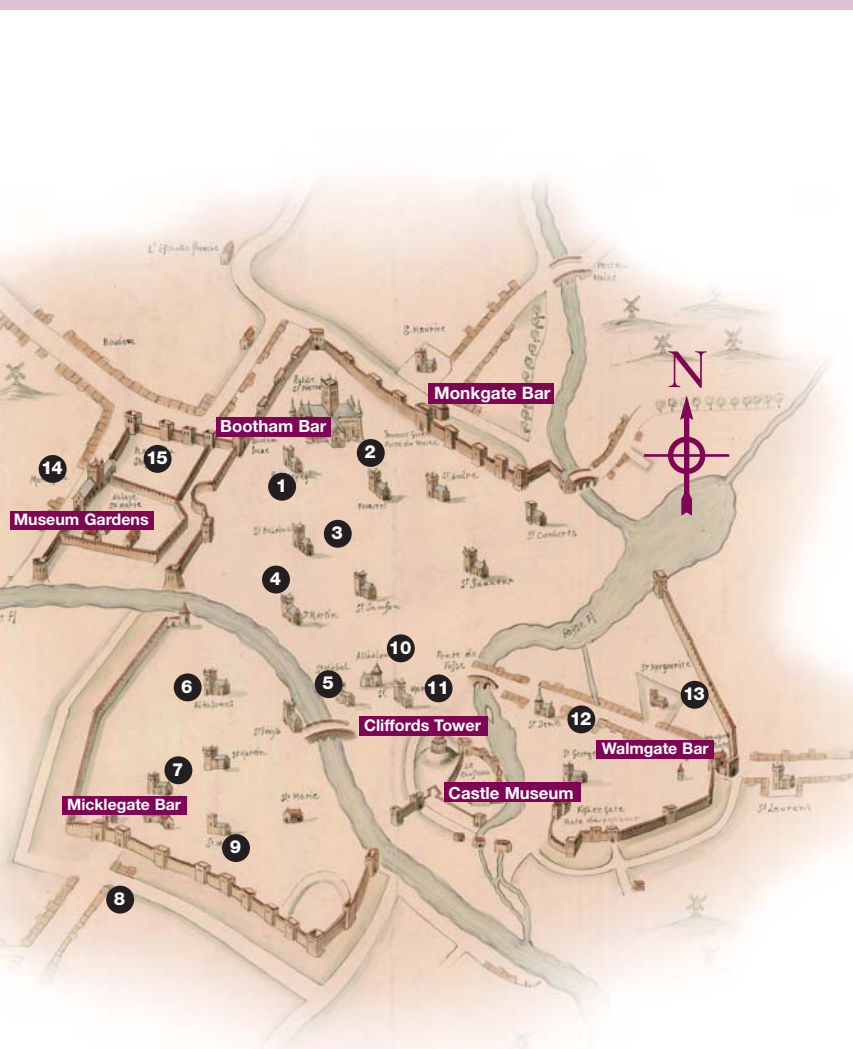


York Minster
Open 9:00am – 6:30pm. Contact 01904 557216.
Admission charges apply.

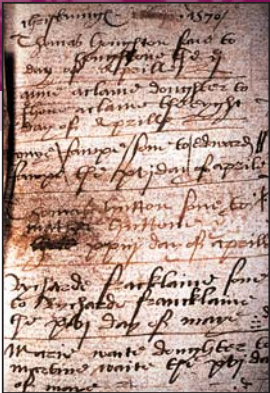
York Minster is the mother church for the North of England and the heart of this historic city. The first Minster was built for the baptism of King Edwin of Northumbria in 627. The present building was begun in 1220 and took 252 years to construct. Roman, Saxon, Viking and Norman remains lie within it and beneath it. York Minster is the largest Gothic Cathedral in Northern Europe and inside you will find a treasure house of 800 years of religious art and some of the finest 14th and 15th Century stained glass in the world.

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Holy Trinity Goodramgate



Guy Fawkes baptismal entry

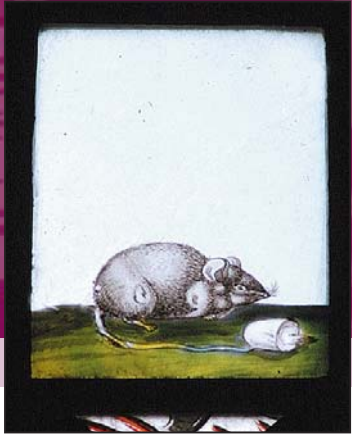
1. St Michael le Belfry, High Petergate

**Open most Mon – Sat
11 - 4. Contact 01904 624190**
St Michael le Belfry is so named because it stands in the shadow of the Minster bell towers. It was completed in 1536. In 1570, Guy Fawkes was baptised here. The magnificent reredos behind the altar was painted by York-born artist William Etty whose statue now stands in front of the Art Gallery.

2. Holy Trinity, Goodramgate

**Open April - September
Mon to Sat 10 - 5, Sun 12 - 5
October - March Tues to Sat 10 - 4.
Contact 01904 613451**
Holy Trinity, the second oldest of York's medieval churches, stands in a secret oasis of calm in the heart of the city. It escaped the wave of Victorian refurbishment that swept over so many of York's churches and is the only church in the city to retain its original box pews. In Georgian times, each family had their own pew. Wealthy families sat at the front, and poorer families at the rear of the church! The church is now in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust
www.visitchurches.org.uk.

Location for the start of the walk which is 10 minutes walk from the Railway Station, close to car parks at Marygate and Union Terrace and very close to the Park & Ride terminus on Museum Street (Green Line).



Details from the stained glass in St Helen's

3. St Helen's, St Helen's Square

Open Mon – Fri 10 - 5.

Contact Rev Anthony Hodge, 01904 625186

Extensively restored in the 19th Century, only the magnificent Baptismal font gives a clue to St Helen's Norman origins. There is also medieval glass in several windows, one of which features the badge of "The Worshipful Company of Glaziers", recalling medieval times when Stonegate was home to a thriving glass painting industry and St Helen's was the glazier's guild church.

4. St Martin le Grand, Coney Street

Open Mond – Fri 10 - 5.

Contact Rev Anthony Hodge, 01904 625186

St Martin's today occupies only the south aisle of the original, much larger church. The building was severely damaged by bombing during World War II and stood in ruins for decades afterwards. In 1968 it was re-consecrated as a "shrine of remembrance for all men who died in the two world wars". The organ was a gift from the German Government as a token of reconciliation. The magnificent St Martin window, depicting the life of St Martin of Tours, originally stood in the west wall of the 15th Century church.

5. St Michael's, Spurriergate

Open Mon - Fri 10 - 4, Sat 9:30 - 5.

Contact 01904 629393

Once a parish church with a dwindling congregation and few funds, this ancient church was reborn in 1989 as a wonderfully atmospheric place to relax in the heart of York and now offers people good food, fair trade goods and a listening ear amid the beautiful church features.



Medieval Angels in All Saints North Street

6. All Saints, North Street

Open for visitors Mon – Fri 10.30 -mid-afternoon. Contact Dr Robert Richards 01904 728122 / 0771 8749959

Probably the finest of York's medieval Churches, and the site of many visions of the Virgin Mary. The Chancel roof (supported by a re-used Roman Column) features spectacular painted angels carved in 1470. In the north aisle are two famous stained glass windows. The first, called "The Corporal Acts of Mercy" (c1410) portrays a good man as he visits the sick, clothes the naked and feeds the hungry. The next, called "The Pricke of Conscience"(1410), is the medieval equivalent of a horror movie and depicts the last 15 days of the world. In one window on the south aisle keen-eyed visitors may even spot a man wearing medieval spectacles!



Stocks for criminals in Holy Trinity Micklegate

7. Holy Trinity, Micklegate

Open most Mon – Sat.

Contact 01904 623798

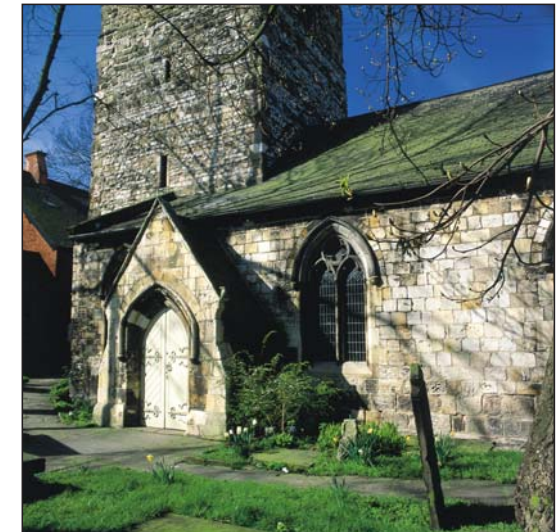
Once a substantial Priory, Holy Trinity was the starting point for the annual performance of York's Mystery Plays in medieval times. The city's stocks remain in the churchyard today.



8. Bar Convent Museum, Blossom Street

Open 10 – 4 Mon to Fri, closed Christmas, January, & Easter. Contact 01904 643238

The history of Christianity in the North of England is explained in this charming museum housed in a Georgian building which is also home to the oldest active convent in the country. The beautiful chapel was hidden in the centre of the building to avoid detection at a time when Roman Catholics were subject to persecution.



9. St Mary's, Bishophill Junior

Open 12 – 2, Wed & Fri, Apr –Sept.

May be open by appointment.

Contact 01904 623798

Hidden away in the lanes behind Holy Trinity, St Mary's is the oldest church in the city. Parts of the tower date back to Saxon times (11th Century) and contain re-used masonry from Roman times.



10. All Saints, Pavement

Open most Mon – Sat. Contact Rev Simon Stanley 01904 674524

All Saints, Pavement is the guild church of the city. Inside you will find the crests of York's ancient guilds: the Merchant Adventurers, Merchant Taylors, Butchers, Freemen, Cordwainers, Building and Scriveners. It has often served as the civic church of York and 39 Lord Mayors have been buried here. John Wesley once preached from the 17th Century pulpit, which is emblazoned with the words "Where there is no vision, the people perish". The 15th Century octagonal lantern on top of the tower was lit every night to guide those approaching the city through the wilds of the Forest of Galtres which surrounded medieval York.



Mary, Margaret and John, All Saints Pavement

11. St Mary's, Castlegate

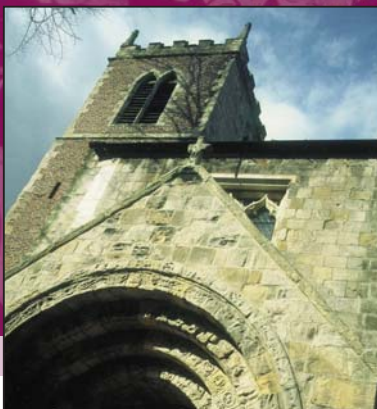
Contact 01904 687687 to check opening times

Now an exhibition centre in the care of York Museums Trust. A graceful 15th Century spire sits on top but the piers inside provide clues to Norman and even earlier phases of building.

12. St Denys', Walmgate

Open daily Easter – Oct, closed on race days. Contact 01904 632319

There has been a church on this site since Saxon times, and probably a Roman shrine before that. Only a small part of the huge medieval church remains. It was topped by a 116 ft spire, which was damaged during the Civil War siege of 1644, and finally destroyed by a lightning bolt in 1700. Walk through the carved Romanesque doorway to find the oldest stained glass in the city. Can you spot the angel playing a hurdy-gurdy?



13. St Margaret's, Walmgate

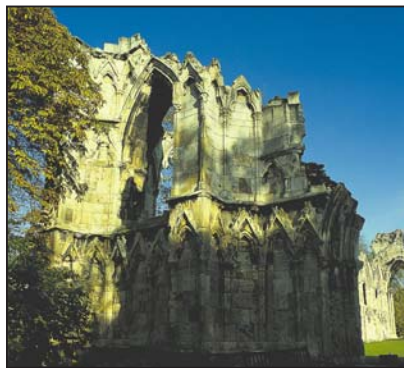
Open daily during the week. Contact 01904 632220

Declared redundant as a church in 1974, St Margaret's is now the National Centre for Early Music and echoes with music and song. The fine Romanesque doorway, carved with the signs of the zodiac, mythological beasts and the Labours of the Months, was rescued centuries ago from a medieval leper hospital that stood just outside the city walls.

14. St Olave's, Marygate

Open Mon – Fri 10 - 5, contact Rev Anthony Hodge, 01904 625186

St Olave's was founded in 1055 by Siward, Earl of Northumbria. He dedicated it to St Olaf, the patron saint of his native Norway. It became the church of the Benedictine order in York, but as the number of monks in that order grew, a bigger church was needed, so St Mary's Abbey was established. St Olave's was heavily damaged during the Civil War in 1644, when Parliamentary soldiers fired cannon from its tower.



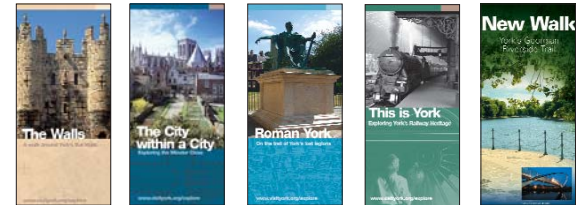
15. St Mary's Priory

Open daily until dusk

St. Mary's Abbey was founded by King William Rufus in 1088 and for four hundred and fifty years it was the wealthiest and most powerful abbey in the North of England. Its monks lived and worked under the strict Benedictine rule. The buildings of the Abbey were pulled down and its vast wealth taken by Henry VIII when he dissolved the major monasteries in 1539 to fund his wars with France.

Exploring York

York has a rich and colourful history that dates right back to Roman times. All around are clues to its past. Walking through the streets of York is the best way to unravel its many stories and to savour the rich architecture and archaeology at every turn.



Exploring York walking trails are available from the Tourist Information Centres and other outlets in York. All the trails are available online from: www.visitork.org/explore

Tourist Information Centre

To book accommodation in York and for all other visitor enquiries: Tel: 01904 621756 Website: www.visitork.org

Park and Ride Bus Services

Buses run every 10 minutes or less

White Line (from Askham Bar on the A64)	01904 551400
Yellow Line (from Grimston Bar on the A1079)	01904 551400
Green Line (from Rawcliffe Bar on the A19)	01904 551400
Red Line (from the Designer Outlet A19 / A64)	01904 551400
Silver line (from Monks Cross on the A1036)	01904 551400

Shopmobility / Disabled Access

Visitors are welcome to use the excellent facilities of the Shopmobility scheme. Scooters, powered wheelchairs or manual wheelchairs are available. Shopmobility is located on level 2, Piccadilly Car Park. Tel: 01904 679222

Useful Telephone Numbers

• All emergencies	999
• York Police Station	01904 631321
• York District Hospital	01904 631313
• Lost property city centre	01904 551677

Acknowledgements

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Visiting churches in Yorkshire

The Churches Conservation Trust
North Yorkshire Church Tourism Initiative

www.visitchurches.org.uk
www.yorkshirechurches.com



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