Association of Voluntary Guides to the City of York

Accessible Tour – Detailed Tour

The meeting point is at the AVG sign board at Exhibition Square. The accessible tour begins by going left around the Art Gallery and into Museum Gardens, via St Mary's Abbey and returns to Exhibition Square before proceeding into the City Centre.

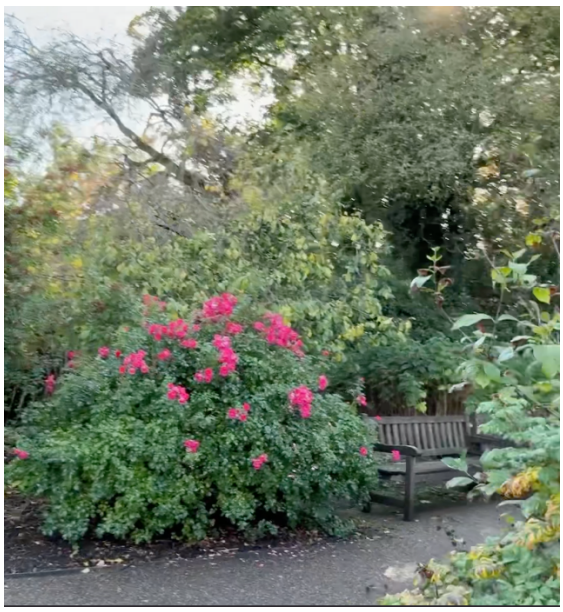


Although the area around York was inhabited by Celtic tribes (in Yorks case the Brigantes) York is said to have begun when the Romans arrived in AD 71. The 9th Legion came up from Lincoln and chose as the site of their fortress, ground that was slightly higher and protected by 2 rivers the Ouse and the Foss. In AD60 the 9th Legion was mauled by the Icieni Tribe under Boudica. So they were heavily armed and not about to take any nonsense from a load of Northerners. It must have been quite daunting for the locals to see the Romans marching through their land and even more so when they stopped and started to build a fort. We will talk about the Romans when we look at some of their buildings but while we are in this neck of the woods it's a good opportunity to mention something about Yorks role in the English civil war, for this I need you to skip forward 1600 years to 1644 and imagine you are here on Sunday 16th June. King Charles I believed he had divine power and could do more or less what he wanted but Parliament which held the purse strings disagreed so the King took up arms against his own people. It divided families and the country as a whole.



York declared for the King and was therefore regarded as a Royalist stronghold. Parliamentary forces laid siege to the city in fact 3 Parliamentary armies surrounded the city and had been doing so for a number of months. The last Parliamentary army to arrive was that of the Earl of Manchester who wanted to get on with things so he dug a tunnel under the wall in front of us and filled it with gunpower. Unfortunately for him he made 2 big mistakes: the first was that he did not realise the water table in York was close to the surface and so his tunnel began to fill with water and secondly he did not inform the other generals camped around York of his plan otherwise they could have organised a diversion. He had a choice to fire the gunpowder or lose it to the water. He chose to fire it. It brought down the wall and that tower since restored and some 200 to 300 Parliamentary soldiers climbed through the rubble, where they were met by Royalist Musketeers who killed or captured them. The Parliamentary soldiers were trying to reach the Kings Manor. The King wasn't there but it would have been a serious threat to the city of York. The Royalists had taken steps to defend the city by filling it with soldiers and canons. The siege failed to take York but on the 2nd of July 1644 the Royalist army broke out of York. At first the encircling Parliamentary forces did not know where the Royalists under Prince Rupert were going and as a result they did not catch up with them until much later. In fact having spent the day digging in, the Royalist forces were lighting their cooking fires for their evening meal when the Parliamentary forces arrived and despite the time, decided to attack them. But they could not break their defences. The cavalry were having their own battle on the two flanks. On the right flank the fight was roughly even and both sides had retired to lick their wounds. Over on the left flank, the Royalist Cavalry were winning. This was noticed by the Parliamentary Cavalry General on the right flank who decided to take his cavalry across the battlefield and engaged the Royalist cavalry and beat them but rather than allow his cavalry to chase the fleeing Royalist cavalry he stopped them and turned them through 90 degrees into the largely unprotected flank of the Royalist Infantry decimating them. The Parliamentary general who did that was Oliver Cromwell. Royalists flooded back to York

and later in July a deal was struck to allow the Royalist army to leave the city thus saving York from any further damage.



The site of the Edible Garden is where the Royalist army had its field hospital. You might wonder why the plants grow so well. Could it be from the blood and bones dripping from the surgeons table?



The church that you can just see through the trees is St Olaves and before the Normans arrived, in other words before 1066 that church held all of this land that was owned by Siward, Cnuts man in York but William could see the advantage of having the land owned by a Norman Baron and therefore took the land from Siward and moved his church to one side. The church is mentioned in the Anglo Saxon Chronicle for the year 1051 because that was when Siward died and was buried there. It is dedicated to St Olaf the patron saint of Norway.

Walk round to the museum entrance. Discuss the Philosophical Society and their head office now the museum and how York's soil is mostly anaerobic which means that perishable items are preserved.



This is St Mary's Abbey

Brother Steven and fellow monks came from Whitby to establish a Benedictine Abbey in York. Around 1089, built of wood it burnt. By 1220 the monks had made enough money to build this massive stone structure. They did it by taking possession of farms and business left to them by those who wanted the monks to pray for them to ensure their entry into heaven. These walls were built not, in defence of York but by the monks to protect their wealth from the general public who were living in poverty and with disease while the monks were selling a stairway to heaven and eating fresh meat and fish along the way. It led to riots.

So, what went wrong for the monks? Answer Henry VIII. Henry needed money plus the Pope would not grant him an annulment, so he was in a fix. What was happening in Europe at that time? Answer Martin Luther who although a devoted Christian was becoming more and more unhappy with the practice of being able to buy your way into heaven. The straw that broke the camels' back in this regard was when the Pope sent an emissary, Tetzel into Europe to sell indulgences to raise money to mend St Peters Basilica in Rome. At that point Martin Luther apparently nailed a paper to the door of Wittenberg University containing 95 theses thus heralding in the Protestant Revolution. Back in England Henry said I'll have some of that and kicked the Pope into the long grass, declared himself head of the English church and began to close the Abbeys thus cutting off the money that was going to the Pope. You might think that the general population rejoiced when the Abbey was closed given the riots there had been against their wealth but not so. The monasteries provided work and pay without which people could starve, plus there was no love in the largely catholic north to follow Henry and to accept him in place of the Pope. It led to open rebellion in the form of mass protests, for example "The Pilgrimage of Grace" a protest involving around 30,000 people who wanted the monasteries reopened. The leaders were arrested and executed. In 1538 Henry felt the need to resurrect the Council in the North. This is a body of trusted local people who under the control of a president appointed by the King, will ensure the Kings instructions are carried out locally. He kicked the Abbot out of his house and installed his president in the building that became the Kings Manor and the seat of central power for the north. We will look closer at the Kings Manor as we go round to its front. The Coat of Arms shows the joining of the crowns in 1603 when James VI of Scotland became James I of England as well.

When the monastery closed the locals used the site as a rubbish dump. It became an eye sore. The Philosophical Society agreed to clean up the site and what you now see is the result of that work. Today the area is used by the city for enactments, plays and music concerts. The river does sometimes flood to cover this area.



Discuss the Multangular Tower.

The story of Robt Holgate.

Back to the Art Gallery and cross over to Bootham.

Point out the heart of York and turn to go into Deans Park {bad cobble stones]



Head to site of Archbishops palace

All that remains of the 12th century building is its wall and chapel. The Archbishops palace is today south of York on the river Ouse at Bishopsthorpe

The Chapel – now home to the Minster library and records that go back to Anglo-Saxon times. In 1483 Richard III became king and one of his first acts was to invest his son as the Prince of Wales in an attempt to continue the Plantagenet line. Unfortunately his young son died soon afterwards and he, Richard III, was killed at the battle of Bosworth in 1485. 22nd August – it was a Saturday.

Return to the palace wall for the memorial. Tell Kohima story. Find seating close to the Minister. Discuss the Minister that is a mixture of English Gothic because it took 250 years to build and over that time fashions changed.

One possible reason why it took so long to build is the plagues that killed people working close with each other like stone masons. The Black Death was just one of many that killed a third of the population. Work began in 1220 and enough of the church was built to consecrate by 1472.

Tell about the penguins in the tower. Back out of Deans Park to go left into the liberty. Mention Guy Fawkes

Guy Fawkes was raised and schooled in York. Radicalised by seeing Catholic lords being executed for their belief – Thomas Percy 7th Earl of Northumberland beheaded on The Pavement in York and Margaret Clithrow who died under torture. Guy Fawkes tried to kill King James [protestant] but was caught and on his way to be hung drawn and quartered fell off the scaffold and broke his neck thus robbing the King of a suitable death and cheating the public of an afternoon's entertainment.



Constantine – declared Emperor in York in 306, but had to wait a bit longer to be able to sit comfortably with a broken sword. He had to see off the other contenders first and it was not until 328 that he could put his feet up. When he could sit comfortably he went on to accept Christianity and played a leading role in legalising Christianity.



Round to East End window

John Thornton received £46 plus £10 bonus for completion on time 1408. Window depicts creation as per Genesis. Thought to be the biggest collection of Medieval glass in the world and probably the luckiest because it survived the destruction of Henry VIII, and the English Civil War, thanks to Thomas Fairfax, and it was taken down to avoid bomb damage during WWII .

Looking across the road at St Williams College that housed the Vicars Choral. The Latin root word for vicar is “vice” meaning an alternative. Vicars stood in for the church clergy who because of their reading and writing capability were often called away on civil business. It was built in 1645.

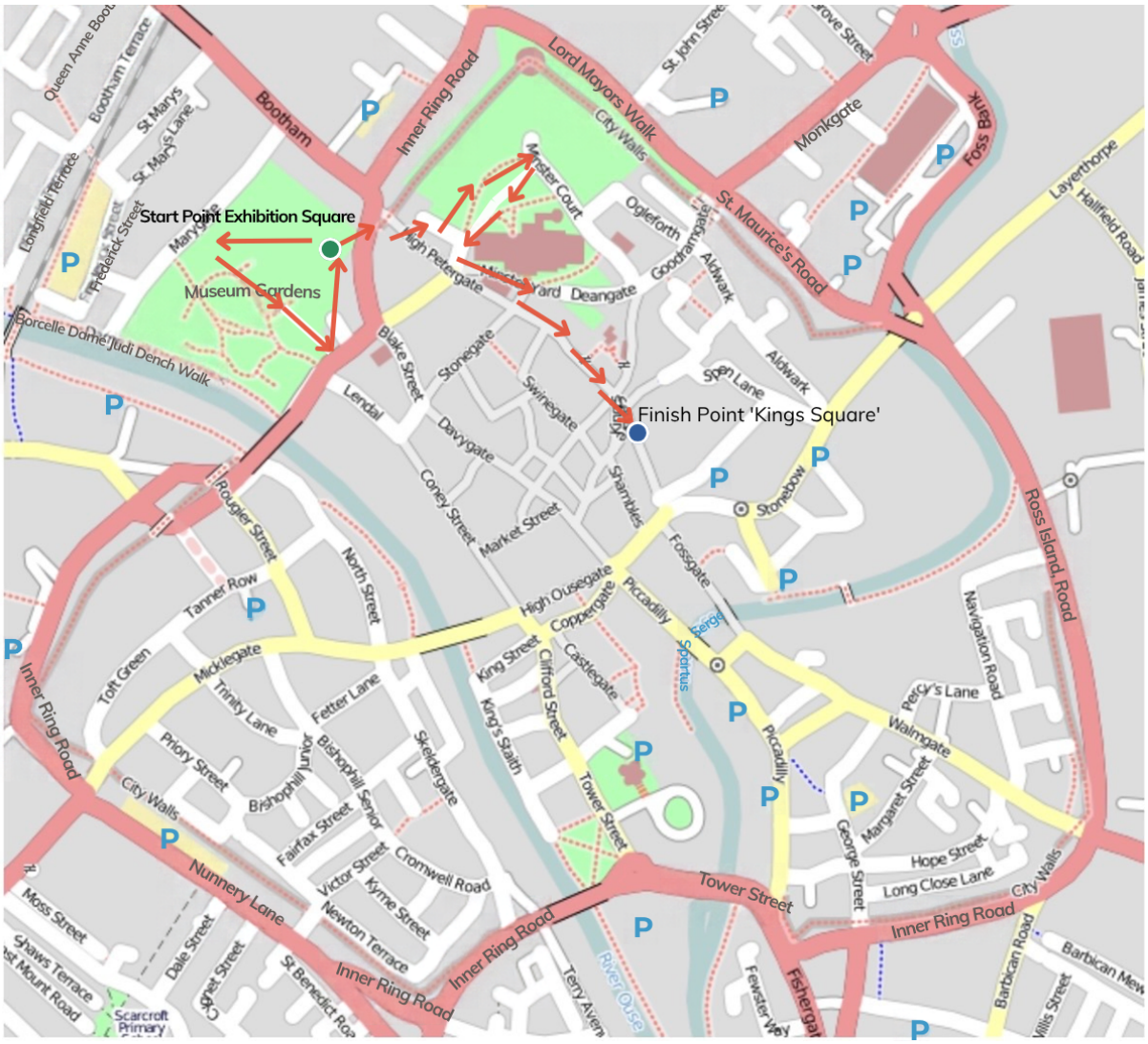
The Chapter House. Where the Chapter meet to conduct the Minister business. Mention here that the English Civil War was a watershed for York. Walls thought to have been adequate defence proved useless against canons. The Council in the North that pulled in business was closed and the established church was being challenged by the non-conformists. But York picked itself up and built a reputation as a city of culture and leisure with horse racing, the Assembly Rooms and riverside promenades.

The Roman column. Found under the Minister when workmen went down to underpin the church. They discovered the Minister was built on the site of the Roman headquarters.

Down Book Lane and what would have been a gated entrance into the Minister Liberty, church land and authority within the city of York.

Along Lower Petergate – mention Viking word gata. Check if gate into Horn Lane is open if so we have a way into Holy Trinity. If not then on to Kings Sq.

Viking is what they did, not the correct name for who they were. They were Danes. They usually raided along the coast until AD 865 when for the first time, they wintered over in Lincolnshire and came up to York in AD 866. Made it their capital of that part of England they held. "The Danelaw." They remained in York until AD 954 when the last Viking, Eric Bloodaxe was expelled and then killed. These Vikings took Anglo Saxon wives and settled in the land. The Romans didn't get as far as Scandinavia so Viking knowledge about Romans would not have prepared them for stone houses with underfloor heating. What must they have though when they saw big stone towers? William the Conquer was a Viking a direct descendant of King Rolo.



Melvyn Neale September 2026