

## Castle Museum

### **YORK MUSEUM TRUST**

York Museums Trust is one of only eight non-national general museum services in the country, which has 100 per cent designated collections. This means that all its collections are designated for their national importance.

The Trust was formed on 1 August 2002 and it is responsible for the development and management of York Castle Museum, Yorkshire Museum, York Art Gallery and York St Mary's. York Museums Trust was created to run these public museums with the purpose of delivering a better service to both the citizens of York and visitors to the city.

### **YORK CASTLE MUSEUM**

York Castle Museum gives you the chance to relive childhood memories and to share them with your children and grandchildren.

Visit the 1950s living room and imagine settling down on the brown settee, watching its black and white TV showing the Coronation in front of the fireplace.

Visit the 1940s kitchen, where you would have coped on rationed food and hung your washing on an old-fashioned pull-down airer.

For younger visitors, see the revolution of 1980s fitted kitchens. See old toys, 1970s platform shoes, and beautiful wedding dresses from throughout the 20th century.

Experience life as a Victorian. Walk down cobbled streets and peer through windows of shops long gone. Take a journey through four hundred years of life in Britain, from parlours to prisons, marriages to the mill house. Discover a city at war and stumble into an underworld of highwaymen.

The buildings that house these fabulous displays have their own history. They were originally prisons. All sorts, from debtors to murderers, were jailed here. Some were even hanged here.

### **COLLECTIONS**

There are currently three main collections at the York Castle Museum:

- **Social History**  
The Castle Museum houses a remarkable collection of objects telling a story of every day life from the past four hundred years. With over 98,000 objects in the collection it is one of the best compilations in the Country.
- **Military History**

A dramatic trophy of arms introduces the museum's superb collection of arms, armour and militaria.

The exploring armour gallery allows you to do just that. From medieval to civil war to modern day body armour, visitors can learn and experience the realities of battle protection.

The Castle Museum also has one of the most comprehensive collections of English Civil War armour in the country.

- **Costume History**

Costumes and textiles are amongst the most fragile objects in the Museum collections. Items are displayed in low light levels and are regularly replaced in order to preserve them for the future.

The museum's collection is one of the largest and finest in this country and only a fraction is on display at any one time. The collection includes men's, women's and children's clothes and accessories, household furnishings and needlework and covers over two hundred years.

## **PRISON HISTORY**

### **York Castle Gaol**

The year 1705 saw the completion of the new county gaol. It was to house felons; the men and women of Yorkshire who were accused of the most serious crimes. It was also to accommodate debtors; those unfortunate enough to have fallen into debt and imprisoned on the instigation of their creditors.

The new gaol was built on part of the site once occupied by York Castle. Prisoners had been kept in the castle since the 13th century, but the existing buildings had fallen into poor repair. The courthouse, rebuilt in 1674-75, and a jury house also stood within the confines of the castle.

The architect is unknown, but it was possibly William Wakefield; a trained lawyer rather than a professional architect. A native of Yorkshire, Wakefield also designed Duncombe Park and Gilling Castle.

The building was to be modern and functional. Men and women were to be kept separate and those awaiting trial and those convicted were also to be separated. The debtors were to be housed in a different part of the building to the criminals, and even the debtors were to be divided into three classes reflecting their situation.

The finished building was a handsome example of English Baroque architecture; built to reflect county pride. The upper floors were occupied by the debtors, the left hand wing by the governor of the gaol and the right hand wing by the chapel. At the very lowest level, flanked by earthly justice in the form of the governor and divine justice in the form of the chapel, were the cells for the felons. Separate outside exercise yards were also provided for each type of inmate.

By 1900 York Castle had ceased to be a civil prison. It was handed over to the military authorities that used it as a detention barracks. The military too left the buildings in 1929 and the site was sold to York Corporation. In 1935 the last of the prison buildings to be built

became the first to be demolished along with the gatehouse and the walls. The city had intended to build civic buildings on the site, but only the foundations were ever completed. In 1938 York Castle Museum opened in the Female Prison, becoming the permanent home of the Kirk Collection of Bygones. In 1952 the Debtors' Prison too became part of the Museum.

### **Half Moon Court**

This wonderfully recreated Edwardian (1901 – 1910) street was built in the half moon shaped part of the original prison yard.

The shop fronts are a far cry from the original use of the area, given it was here that the shackles would be cut off prisoners before trial, execution, deportation or release. Haunting wall carvings are a sombre reminder of the prisoners that left their messages on the walls for us to read.

Visitors can peer into Harding's Drapery store and wonder at the bizarre collection of bric-a-brac that includes ostrich feathers, hat pins and table linens. The early 20th century Edwardian Street includes the garage of Wales and Son with its 1899 Grout Steam Car, an ironmonger's and a public house. In the street a gypsy caravan, a street piano, and a butcher's van can be seen, complete with sausages!

### **Kirkgate**

The most famous part of York Castle Museum is Kirkgate, a recreated Victorian street, complete with a Hansom cab and a stagecoach.

The street was designed by Dr. John Lamplugh Kirk, the founder of the museum, a doctor who worked in North Yorkshire in the early 20th century. He recognised that a whole way of life was disappearing around him and so began a collection of objects, which soon outgrew his house. This became the core of York Castle Museum's exceptional collection.

Visiting Kirkgate creates a real sense of entering another age. There is gas street lighting, cobbles, a mounting block and rows of shop windows, all original to the period. The numerous shops include an apothecary's with its jar for leeches, a toyshop, a gentlemen's outfitters and, of course, a Victorian sweet shop. There is also a candle maker's workshop with boilers for melting tallow, a fire station with engine and a police station complete with padded cell.

Visitors can step back in time and experience the sights, sounds and smells of Victorian Britain, meet the characters behind the shop doors and discover what life was like in a time that changed the world. Kirkgate has long been the museum's most popular display, with its cobbles and real shop fronts stocked with fascinating goods from the past.

### **The York Castle Prison Exhibition**

Now you can get a flavour of what life was really like in the original cells of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Prison building and see some of the most infamous inmates brought to life in this exciting new exhibition.

Experience a brutal and crooked prison and meet their most notorious prisoner: the legendary highwayman, Dick Turpin. York Castle Prison focuses on the lives of eight former inmates,

including Turpin. The others include the last woman to be burnt at the stake in Yorkshire, a Luddite, a notorious turnkey, a man who was beaten so badly in prison he died and a young tearaway who went on to lead a successful life in Australia.

There is also a database of former prisoners and victims where visitors can check their own family name. York Castle has been a site of justice and incarceration for almost 1,000 years. William the Conqueror built the first castle in 1068 and we know from written references that it had a prison. The site is still a seat of justice today; the 18th Century Courthouse is now York Crown Court. It still has holding cells and people accused of serious crimes are still tried there as they have been for almost 1,000 years.

York Castle Prison is part of the museum and there is no extra charge for visiting.

**York Castle Museum is open daily 9.30am to 5pm.**

General Enquiries: Eye of York, York, YO1 9RY, Tel: 01904 687687, email: [castle.museum@ymt.org.uk](mailto:castle.museum@ymt.org.uk), website: [www.yorkcastlemuseum.org.uk](http://www.yorkcastlemuseum.org.uk)

Media contact: Lee Clark, Media co-ordinator, Tel: 01904 687670, email: [lee.clark@ymt.org.uk](mailto:lee.clark@ymt.org.uk)

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

**Press contact:** Kay Hyde, PR Manager - Visit York Tel: 01904 554451, email: [kh@visityork.org](mailto:kh@visityork.org) website: [www.visityork.org](http://www.visityork.org)