

## **YORK AND ITS CHURCHES**

“York has England’s finest set of medieval town churches. It has also been successful in bringing them back to life...and...they remain a wonderful complement to York Minster, evoking some sense of an English city in the late Middle Ages, each neighbourhood owing allegiance to an often tiny place of worship, enclosed by lanes and alleys.”

From England’s Thousand Best Churches, by Simon Jenkins.

From the dawn of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, when Pope Gregory chose York to be the **centre of Christianity** in the north of England, the city has had a remarkable ecclesiastical history.

In 627 Edwin, King of Northumbria, was baptised in a new wooden church built for the occasion, later to evolve into York Minster. The Venerable Bede writes vividly of the church’s foundation. The Domesday Book lists eight York churches in 1086, plus the then Minster (not the existing one). By 1428 a taxation return was listing 39 churches in the city.

Today, nineteen medieval churches are still standing and regular services are still held in the majority of them. All city churches are grateful to receive donations towards their care and restoration and visitors are encouraged to sign their visitor books.

### **York Minster**

The Minster – second in importance only to Canterbury Cathedral in the Church of England – dominates York, the largest Gothic Cathedral in Northern Europe and one of the greatest artistic achievements in Christian Europe. Two hundred and fifty years in the building, nearly 200 feet high, and ranging in style from Early English to Perpendicular, it was begun by Archbishop Walter de Grey, perhaps the greatest of all York’s archbishops. Work began on the massive undertaking in 1230 on the site of a wooden Saxon church and Norman cathedral. Ruins from Norman times and Saxon gravestones lie within today’s structure. Earlier still, this was the site of a Roman fortress of major strategic importance, when York was known as Eboracum.

With more original medieval stained glass than any other church in England (the east window is the size of a tennis court), and endless examples of master craftsmanship, the Minster is an awesome and awe-inspiring place.

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### **Holy Trinity, Goodramgate**

Holy Trinity is truly a hidden gem, the second oldest of York’s medieval churches with original box pews and rare 15th century stained glass of the highest order. The church is reached through a gate next to the row of medieval dwellings known as Lady Row. Dating largely from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (though the foundations are

12<sup>th</sup> century) the church has a rare saddleback pitched roof. Holy Trinity is one of 300 redundant churches now cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust.

### **Holy Trinity, Micklegate**

Once a substantial Priory, this Holy Trinity church 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.

### **All Saints, Pavement**

A fine Guild church with a beautiful 15<sup>th</sup> century lantern tower. Outstanding features include a 13<sup>th</sup> century knocker on the door, a 15<sup>th</sup> century lectern and a 17<sup>th</sup> century pulpit from which John Wesley preached.

### **All Saints in North Street**

The finest medieval stained glass of all York's churches is to be found here, in particular the window from 1425 which depicts the fifteen signs of the end of the world, which was at that time expected to occur in 1500.

### **St Helen's Church, St Helen's Square**

Largely built in the 14<sup>th</sup> and extensively restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there is medieval glass in several windows recalling the time when Stonegate was the centre of the medieval glass painters.

### **St Olave's Church, Marygate**

This well-loved 11<sup>th</sup> century gem is situated on the line of the city walls.

### **St Michael-le-Belfrey, High Petergate**

The centre of a thriving evangelical congregation, St Michael's is a substantial church with a fine 18<sup>th</sup> century reredos by York-born artist William Etty. The baptismal record of one local lad by the name of Guy Fawkes can be found near the entrance to this church.

### **St Denys, Walmgate**

Set in the centre of a traffic island, the church is much reduced in size but it is still well worth a visit to see its glorious medieval stained glass and a fine Norman doorway. This church was once known as the fishmongers' church as Walmgate was the fishmongers' street in medieval times.

### **St Mary's Church, Bishophill**

Hidden away in the lanes behind Holy Trinity, St Mary's is the oldest church in the city and it retains a peaceful, restorative character.

### **National Centre For Early Music**

St Margaret's Church, Walmgate, York

[www.ncem.co.uk](http://www.ncem.co.uk)

The refurbishment of St Margaret's church and the creation of the National Centre for Early Music was made possible thanks to a grant from the National Lottery, through the Arts Council of England. Its magnificent Romanesque doorway and fine brick tower have once again been revealed in all their glory. The centre runs an annual programme of musical events including the Early Music Festival, usually held in July and the Early Music Christmas festival in December. The centre also organises York's Mystery Plays, which take place every 4 years and are performed at different venues in the city. **Press contact:** Melanie Paris, Tel: 01904 632220, email: [melanie.paris@ncem.co.uk](mailto:melanie.paris@ncem.co.uk).

**Bar Convent Museum**

17 Blossom Street

[www.bar-convent.org.uk](http://www.bar-convent.org.uk)

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 (fifteen 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. It is the oldest active convent in the country. **Press contact:** Richard Masefield Tel 01904 643238, email [info@bar-convent.org.uk](mailto:info@bar-convent.org.uk).

**Bishopthorpe Palace**

[www.bishopthorpepalace.co.uk](http://www.bishopthorpepalace.co.uk)

Home to the Archbishop of York for over 750 years, Bishopthorpe Palace is surrounded by nine acres of beautiful grounds – an idyllic location on the river Ouse. The garden also contains rare trees and spectacular displays of spring flowers and rhododendrons. A more recent addition is the Garden of Remembrance for Diana Princess of Wales. Tel: 01904 707021.

**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).

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