

Snickelways- YorkWalk

The City is honeycombed by a maze of hidden alleyways, all with colourful stories. The Snickelways enable you to travel back in time through some of York's most picturesque backwaters

This fact sheet has been provided by YorkWalk. Established in 1990, YorkWalk offers a programme of themed walking tours of York throughout the year. This information is intended to assist journalists with information on different York themes and has been written to give a flavour of York's themed walking tours.

Other tours include the Historic Toilet Tour, the Graveyard, Coffin and Plague tour, the Guy Fawkes Trail and the Bloody Execution Tour...to name just a few. Tel: 01904 622303, www.yorkwalk.co.uk

Mark Jones coined the word "Snickelway" in 1983 to describe all the picturesque alleys in his book, which is beautifully illustrated with fine line drawings.

The word is made up of three existing words:

Snicket - passage between walls or fences

Ginnel - passage through building

Alleyway - narrow street or lane

Other dialect words for Snickelway include:

Jiggers - Liverpool

Backcracks - St Helen's

Opes - Plymouth

Wynds - Co. Durham/Scotland

Twitchells - Hertfordshire

Jitties - Leicestershire

Twittens - Tunbridge Wells

BOOTHAM BAR

In York "all the Streets are Gates, all the Gates are Bars and all the bars are Pubs". 'Gate' is from the Viking 'Gata' meaning a street; 'Bar' is French 'Barre' meaning a barrier or toll bar; and 'Pub' is of course a Public House.

THE HOLE IN THE WALL (First Snickleway on tour)

The name derives from: Either 1. It refers to Bootham Bar; 2. Or to a gateway into Minster Walls; 3. A prison, where Hole in the Wall pub now is, in which prisoners had to beg for food through a hole in the wall; 4. Or refers to punishment of immuring naughty monks, priests and nuns for sexual misdemeanours in the Middle Ages. It is said they were walled up in a tiny cell in the Minster prison near the west door of cathedral. (Alternative title of the alley is 'Peculiar Lane' because it led to the ecclesiastical peculiar or exempt jurisdiction of Minster Yard); 5. Minster's civil prison where prisoners were not fed, but had to beg for food through a window or hole in the wall; 6. Pub adjoining Minster called 'Hole in Wall', which it is said you could get into during the service via a new blocked up doorway or 'hole in the wall' to get a drink.

COFFEE YARD

Named after a late 17th century coffee house down here, the first one in York. But it was a printers area in 18th century, hence the 'Printer's Devil' which may represent the youngest apprentice in a printer's workshop, still called printer's devil!

BARLEY HALL

This is the 14th century 'Hostel of Nostell Priory', built in 1360-1 as the Town House of Prior of Nostell, to stop the Monks going out to sample the nightlife! Later in the 15th century, it was leased to Alderman Snawsell. After the Reformation a right of way grew up through what had been screens passage of hall. It is now being restored to its late 15th century appearance by the York Archaeological Trust, though only a quarter of its original timber survives.

GRAPE LANE

Was once Grope Lane, the medieval red light district, much frequented by the lesser clergy. The medieval deanery main gate stood where Freshney's Hotel now stands looking right into it all! Here stood St Benet's Church, which owned many of the run down houses of ill repute in Grope Lane.

FINKLE STREET

Crooked Street from Germanic 'Winkel' – corner. Had a bend and narrowing on it to control passage of cattle, etc. out of St Sampson's Square (the market). It was also known as 'Mucky Pig Lane' as it led to Swinegate, the pig market. Or 'Mucky Peg Lane' – after a dirty lady.

MAD ALICE LANE

Alice was hung in 1823 for poisoning her husband - she pleaded insanity but to no avail. Some say Madam Alice Lane . . . ! Alternatively 'Waiting Women's Lane'!

UPPER HORNPOT LANE

This was the street of the Hornworkers and their rubbish pits. Also known as Cut Throat Lane! A lot of empty medieval purses were found in medieval rubbish pits here and in Mad Alice Lane – relics of medieval muggings!

COLLEGE STREET

It gets its name after St William's College, founded in 1461 to control activities of chantry priests who served in Minster. It is also known as 'Little Alice Lane', perhaps after a friend of chantry priests slim enough to slip in through the windows for nocturnal visits!

TREASURER'S HOUSE

In February 1953, Henry Martindale, an 18-year-old apprentice heating engineer, claims he heard a weird sound, faint at first, but then louder 'like a wireless coming through the wall'; then it became apparent it was a horn being blown. Then he saw Roman legionaries in twos led by a horseman in cellar, marching through, all cut off at knees! He was fixing central heating pipes and fell off his ladder onto his backside. He hid in a corner on seeing ghosts, and was off work for two weeks with shock. He cannot have been lying as he later became a policeman. Believe it if you wish! This story came to prominence in 1971 due to his description of insignia and uniforms of legionaries, the Roman road found 18 inches beneath cellar and the Tourist boom!

BEDERN

Means 'House of Prayer'. It was founded in 1349 to control activities of Vicars Choral of Minster who had reputation for 'colourful nocturnal habits'! Even had a bridge across road to prevent them getting in street. The chapel and dining hall still survive – the latter is now a guildhall, but was formerly a warehouse for Wrights Pork Pie Factory.

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH

Goes back at least to Doomsday, and incorporates Roman sandstone blocks. Was closed at Reformation and in 18th century became a brothel, with a stable adjoining.

KING'S SQUARE

The cat on rooftops is the trademark by York Architect, Tom Adams. When he was an architectural student he drew a tom cat on his designs and now he puts cats on buildings he is pleased with.

SHAMBLES

Street of Butchers – point out benches (flesh - shamels = Shambles), hooks etc. and Butcher's guildhall. In the 18th century, overhanging houses cut back to let in more air and light, and to reduce fire risk; roofs put over to protect the meat from rain and slops from chamber pots.

WHIP-MA-WHOP-MA-GATE

'Whitna Whatna Gate' – was a street! The shortest street in City? Or it could refer to whipping of adulterers in the 16th/17th centuries.

BLACK HORSE PASSAGE (Presumably named after a pub)

This was a short-cut from Fossgate/Walmgate with 28 pubs to the red light district. Black Horse Passage was typical of the many alleys and the warren of slums in this area until it was cleared after First World War, and Stonebow was driven through. Particularly in the late 19th century it was an area of poverty, crime and prostitution. This is said to be why the more

respectable homes of Fossgate had high brick walls to separate them from Black Horse Passage.

In 1855 a scandal broke in York: Inspector Turner, in charge of the night shift in York's police force, was discredited, as it came to light that he was lessee of several houses of ill repute in the Stonebow buildings area and so was living off immoral earnings. When questioned, these 'Nymphs of the Pave' revealed that 1 in 6 of their identifiable clients were policemen – often on night duty! One policeman was arrested on Aldwark for being drunk and disorderly, absenting himself from his beat, entering a house of ill repute not in discharge of his duty, and being improperly dressed at the time of his arrest!

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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