



# The City within a City

Exploring the Minster Close

[www.visityork.org/explore](http://www.visityork.org/explore)

## The City within a City

Exploring the Minster Close

Did you know that for many centuries there was, within the busy medieval walled city of York, another wall! Behind that wall was another city: the Liberty of Saint Peter, a city within a city.

The Liberty of St Peter had its own laws, courts and prison. It contained the Archbishop's Palace and Cathedral and was governed by the Dean and Chapter of York. But things have changed greatly since medieval times. The Archbishop's Palace has disappeared, the walls and gates have come down and the area is now called the Minster Close. The Minster Close is still a little oasis of calm in a busy city, but nowadays visitors are welcome to come in and look around, to visit the Treasurer's House and St Williams College, Dean's Park and the Library and, of course, York Minster itself.

This trail will explore the history and characters of this, the historic heart of York, and will take approximately 2 hours to complete.

### History

The importance of the Minster Close stems back to Roman times. The legendary Roman 9th legion arrived here in AD71, and quickly began building a fortress as a defence against the local Celtic tribe, the Brigantes. The fortress of Eboracum, as the Romans called it, was designed to house the entire legion - up to 6,000 men and at its centre stood a huge headquarters building or Principia. It was here that Constantine the Great was proclaimed Emperor in AD306. In AD312 Constantine became the first Roman Emperor to declare religious tolerance throughout the Empire. It seems like a wonderful accident of history that the spot where Constantine was proclaimed Emperor later became the site for one of the greatest Christian cathedrals in Europe! The remains of the Roman Legionary Headquarters can be seen in the Minster's Undercroft, Treasury and Crypt, where visitors are taken through 2000 years of history.

In medieval times, life in the Minster Close was dominated by the Archbishop and the Dean and Chapter of York. The Minster Close was also home to the chantry priests, who lived in St William's College and the Vicars Choral, who sang in the Minster, and lived in the Bedern area, about 100 yards to the south east. Although their living quarters were outside the walled Minster Close, the Vicars Choral earned a degree of infamy in the city for getting drunk and starting fights before running back to the Minster Close to escape prosecution by the City authorities.

### Eating and Shopping

The Minster Close is still a lively place today, with many shops and places to eat on College Street, Petergate, High Petergate and Goodramgate. The tearooms at the Treasurer's House offer freshly prepared food, baked on the premises, including many traditional Yorkshire recipes. In St William's College Restaurant homemade food is prepared daily from fresh ingredients with modern English and Mediterranean flavours. During the summer months there is pavement and courtyard seating where you can enjoy freshly ground coffee, a light snack or full meal in magnificent surroundings with the Minster towering above.

### Services

The Dean and Chapter of York invite all visitors to attend a service at the Minster. Service times are usually:

#### Sunday

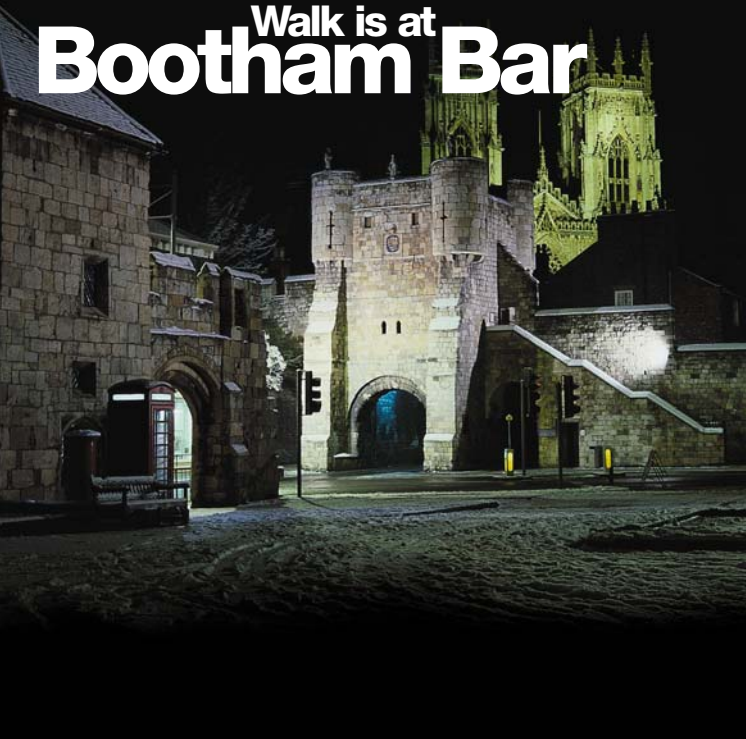
08:00 Holy Communion  
10:00 Sung Eucharist  
11:30 Choral Matins  
16:00 Choral Evensong

#### Monday - Saturday

07:30 Matins  
07:50 Holy Communion  
12:30 Holy Communion (not on Saturdays)  
17:00 Choral Evensong (said on Mondays)



# The Start of the Walk is at Bootham Bar

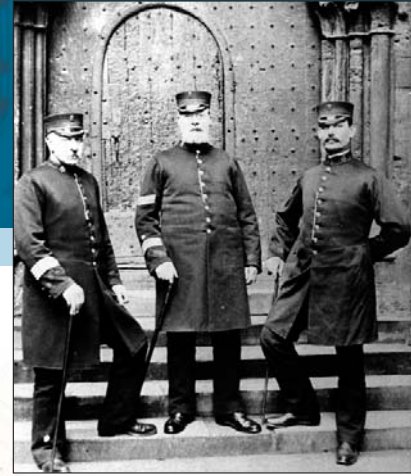
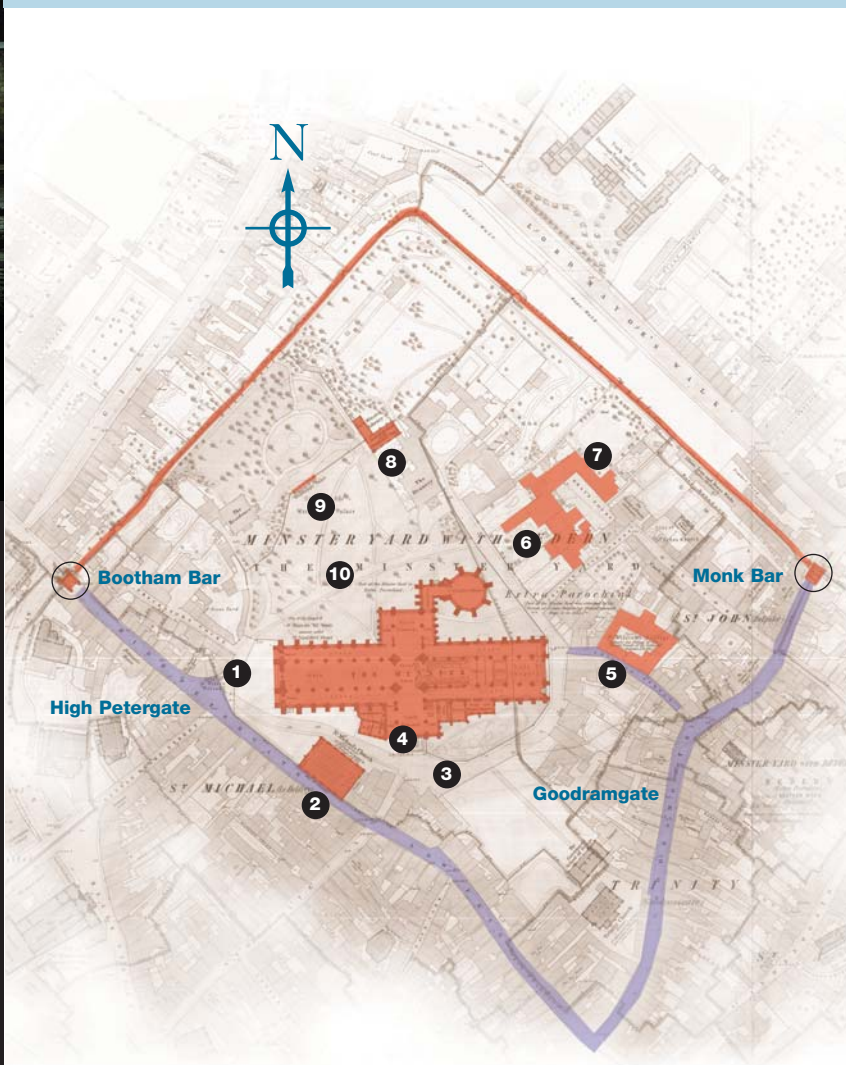


Stepping through Bootham Bar is like stepping back in time. There has been a gateway here for the last 1900 years. On this site stood one of the four gateways into the Roman fortress of Eboracum. Further down High Petergate, past Reed's Cafe, there was, until around 1800, another massive gate inside of which was the Liberty of St Peter. In medieval times the Liberty was a city within a city, a private area with its own laws. It was governed by the Dean and Chapter, the ruling body of the Minster, and was the most important part of historic York.

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 Musuem Street

# The City within a City

## Exploring the Minster Close



Minster Police in times past

### 1. Peter Prison

You are now standing on the site of the old Peter Prison, York Minster's very own jail and gallows! It may seem odd that a church would have hung people, or had its own prison, but as the Liberty of St Peter had its own laws, it needed its own prison to punish offenders. The Peter prison was used until 1837. Nowadays, York Minster still has its own police force, one of only two cathedrals in the world to do so.



Guy Fawkes and his fellow conspirators

### 2. St Michael le Belfrey

It may seem a little odd sitting right next to and dwarfed by the Minster, but when St Michael le Belfrey was built in the 1530s only the great and the good went to church in the Minster. St Michael's was built as a parish church for the ordinary people of York. In April 1570, one of York's most famous sons was baptised here: Guy Fawkes. In 1605 Guy Fawkes was caught trying to blow up the houses of Parliament with 36 barrels of gunpowder, as part of a Catholic plot to kill King James I. For his part in the conspiracy he was publicly hung, drawn and quartered. This treasonous plot is remembered every year in Britain on Bonfire night November 5th.





Photo of the collapsed column as found by archaeologists beneath the Minster

### 3. Constantine and the Roman Column

The statue by the South Door of the Minster shows Constantine the Great who was proclaimed Emperor of Rome, here in York, in AD306. This event, which changed the course of world history, probably happened in the headquarters of the Roman fortress, which was built on the site where the Minster now stands. This enormous building was unearthed in the 1960s, when it was discovered that the Minster Tower might collapse, and work was begun to strengthen its foundations. Underneath archaeologists discovered the large pillar, which now stands opposite the statue. Constantine was the first Roman Emperor to become a Christian, and it was he who decreed that Christmas should be celebrated – it seems appropriate that this magnificent church now stands on the spot where he was made Emperor 1700 years ago.

### 4 York Minster

York Minster is the most important church in the North of England. It is the Cathedral church of the Archbishop of York, who is head of the Northern Province. In medieval times, the Minster was served by a small army of priests: from the ruling Dean and Chapter to the lowly chantry priests and Vicars Choral. The first York Minster was built in 627, and was probably a humble, circular, wooden building, very unlike today's great Cathedral. The Minster you see today was begun in 1220 and took thousands of men over 200 years to complete. It was built to glorify God, and to symbolise the richness of His kingdom on Earth. It holds the largest and most important collection of Medieval Stained Glass in the World and the entire building is adorned, inside and out, with elaborate carvings in stone and wood.



Adam and Eve; York Minster contains some of the finest stained glass in the world



St William's college

### 5 St William's College

Named after St William of York, Archbishop in 1153, whose tomb lies inside the Minster, the College was built between 1465 and 1467 to house the Chantry priests and is the only surviving building of its kind in the country. St William's has a fascinating history of aristocratic connections and haunting tales and behind its timber-framed facade lies a world of medieval raftered halls and chambers. The rarely seen "painted chamber" is a reconstruction of a chantry priest's living quarters and is occasionally open to the public. The Chantry Priests had a hard life and were certainly no angels. Step back in time through the stone archway to the enchanting cobbled courtyard and beyond to find out more.



Treasurer's House

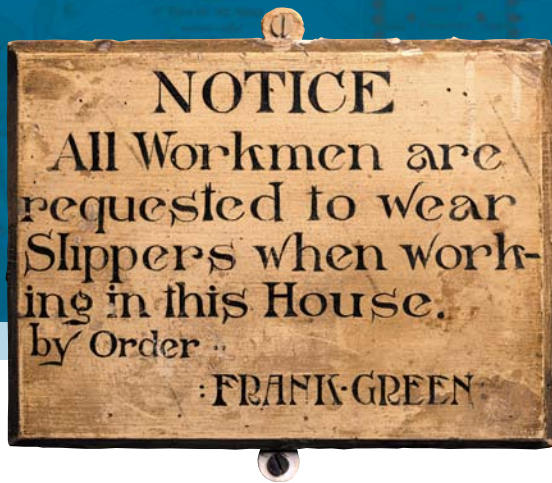
### 6. Treasurer's House

For many centuries this was the home of the medieval Treasurers of York Minster. The house is built on top of a Roman road and legend has it that the House is haunted by Roman soldiers who still march along the road beneath. You can find out more on a cellar tour, if you dare! Behind the 17th century façade of Dutch gables lies the work of a remarkable Yorkshireman, Mr Frank Green; a Victorian industrialist and patron of the arts. After Mr Green bought the house in 1897 he created a series of period rooms as a setting for his fine collection of antique furniture. He was rather a perfectionist, specifying exactly where each piece of furniture should stand with stud-marks in the floor, which are still there today!



Frank Green and his household

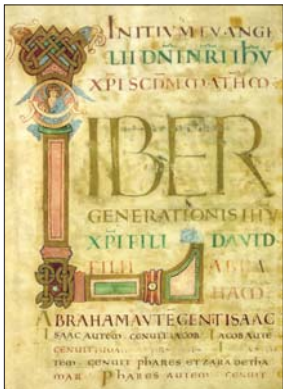




A notice to workers at Treasurer's House

### 7. Gray's Court

From this private courtyard, you can see two historic properties; Treasurer's House on your left, and Gray's Court straight ahead. Together they formed the residence of the Minster Treasurers from the 11th century to 1547. Still called Gray's Court after the family who lived there for almost 200 years, the area is divided by Plane trees which were planted in cities as they could withstand the soot-laden atmosphere of Victorian cities.



A detail from the one thousand year old Anglo Saxon 'York Gospels'

### 8. Library

As you walk along the cobbled road towards the Library, you pass several Canons' houses on your right. The Canons of York Minster are part of the ruling body, the Dean and Chapter. At the end of the road is the Deanery behind which stand the city walls. A walk along the walls from Monk Bar to Bootham Bar which is a wonderful way to see this city within a city.

The Library was built around 1230 as a private chapel for the Archbishop of York. It is now home to the Minster's archives and the largest cathedral library in the country, and contains many treasures. Amongst its collections is a prayer book, which belonged to Catherine of Aragon, the first of Henry VIII's six wives and the Anglo Saxon 'York Gospels', one thousand years old.



Great Peter returns home to the Minster in 1927

### 9. The Arcading

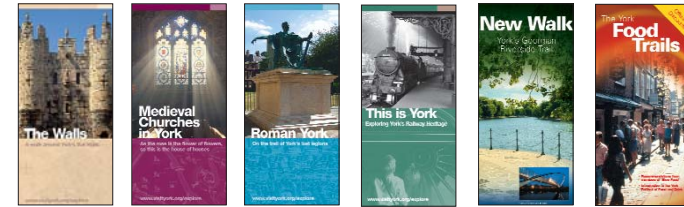
The arches to the rear of Dean's Park were once part of a covered walkway linking the main buildings of the Archbishop's Palace to his Chapel (now the Library). The palace, built in the 1200s, would have been where the Purey Cust hospital now stands. The covered walkway allowed the Archbishop to walk from his home to his church without getting wet!

### 10. Dean's Park

Dean's Park is a peaceful place to relax on a summer's day. Shady trees and squirrels make it a great place for a picnic! From Dean's Park you can see the North Side and Chapter House of the Minster. If you are here at noon, you can hear the booming chimes of Great Peter, the Minster's largest bell, which hangs in the North West bell tower. It weighs 10 tons, and is one of the deepest-toned bells in the country! Standing in this secluded part of the city, it is possible to imagine how private the Minster Close once was. For centuries the Minster Close has been home to Archbishops, Deans, and clergymen who have served this remarkable Cathedral, and governed this city within a city.

## 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 ways 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.visityork.org/explore](http://www.visityork.org/explore)

### Tourist Information Centre

To book accommodation in York and for all other visitor enquiries; Tel: 01904 621756

Website: [www.visityork.org](http://www.visityork.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

First Stop York would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions made to this guide by Eleanor Course, Louise Hampson, Amanda Daw, Jane Whitehead, Sandy Clarke, Steven Hemming and Rory McCarthy. All images courtesy of the Minster Archives except: cover image, aerial photo, St William's and Bootham Bar courtesy of York Tourism Bureau, Treasurers House images courtesy of The National Trust Photo Library / John Hammond. Graphic design by Picturedrum.



This guide has been published by the First Stop York tourism partnership. Every effort has been made to ensure that details are correct at the time of going to print (March 2004) and we cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions. Copyright for all the text in this leaflet belongs to the City of York Council.