

## **INNACCESSIBLE YORK – MICKLEGATE AREA & GEORGIAN YORK**

*A tour of some of the least known parts of York across the River Ouse, including some rarely open Mediaeval churches and Houses, and some stunning Georgian interiors.*

### **MICKLEGATE HOUSE**-now Backpackers Hostel

This is one of the finest Georgian town houses in York, as grand as Fairfax House in its day. It was built by 1752 by the architect John Carr for John and Mildred Bouchier of Beningbrough Hall; their initials, crest and the date are to be seen on the drainpipes. They along with other members of the Gentry and Aristocracy would come to York for entertainments-Horse Racing, the Theatre and the Law Courts-which would result in a few public hangings! The condemned criminals would pass along Micklegate on their way to be hung on the Knavesmire, sat on their own coffin and wearing a shroud. The most famous to pass this way was Dick Turpin in 1739.

The house is a rebuild of any earlier house or houses, as the internal layout is odd; at the back the north wing goes further back than the south; the right hand servants' door may have been the front door of one of the two houses amalgamated to form this one; and the cellar has re-used (ships?) timbers and 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> C brickwork in what is now the Cellar Bar.

The staircase is very fine with superb carved balusters and a plaster ceiling by the Italian artist Cortese, who did the ceilings at Fairfax House. It includes busts of Newton and Shakespeare. In the Cellar the older brick vaults are visible and it is possible to look into some of them-former wine cellars, pantries and servants rooms. A fascinating look at Upstairs/Downstairs!

### **JACOB'S WELL, TRINITY LANE**

This is probably the finest late mediaeval house in York. It was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> C as a house for some of the Chantry priests of Holy Trinity Priory. Upon the dissolution of the Monasteries, Isabella Warde last prioress of St. Clement's Nunnery retired to this house, and lived here till her death in 1569. Later it became a pub-hence Jacob's Well i.e. a watering hole. The porch comes from the former Wheatsheaf Inn in Davygate and was moved in 1907. Look at comical carvings of husband and wife having a violent argument on the right side of the porch; on the right is the woman now a happy widow! The mischievous Devil mask on the right is very amusing.

The building was restored by Charles Anelay in the 1992, and the topmost brick storey removed-it was over heavy for the timber frame.

The Upper Room is used by the Butchers Guild as a Guildhall since they had to vacate their Hall on the Shambles in 1992. There is a fine view of the ruins of the Choir of Holy Trinity Priory from upstairs. In the main downstairs room is the 18<sup>th</sup> C Insurance plaque, originally outside, and corresponding insurance certificate, dating to the days when it was an Inn.

### **ST. MARY, BISHOPHILL JUNIOR**

Despite its name one of the oldest churches in York, and presumably the daughter church of the nearby St Mary Bishophill Senior, which may have Roman origins. It is the only complete roofed standing pre-conquest Viking period church building in York. Was already perhaps 100 years old when William the Conqueror landed; Eric Bloodaxe may have seen it. It is the only standing church Tower not burnt down by

William the Conqueror in 1069, or rebuilt. The Tower is entirely built of re-used Roman stones from the nearby Walls, but the top stone are used as foundation and the Roman foundations in the top-so it is the Roman walls upside down!

Inside the huge Tower arch is thought to be a re-used Roman arch, perhaps from some great public building, forum or Roman predecessor of Micklegate Bar.

By the Tower arch is a fragment of an Anglo-Scandinavian cross-shaft, perhaps part of a preaching cross predating the church building.

### **ST MARTIN-CUM-GREGORY CHURCH**

THE saddest and most under used mediaeval church surviving in York. No longer used for worship, it has had a number of abortive new uses, including a Mother's Union Centre and a Shelter for the Homeless. It was used for Jumble and book sales, but this is not now possible due to defective wiring. Current proposals for re-use include a Stained Glass Museum and a Greek Orthodox Church.

Though most of the structure is 15<sup>th</sup> C, the 18<sup>th</sup> brick tower has re-used Roman stones in its base and one of these has been further re-used as an Anglo-Saxon cross shaft with vine-scroll on it. In the 19<sup>th</sup> C excavations in the churchyard revealed remains of a Roman Temple of Mithras. A fine carving of the god is now in the Yorkshire Museum. This cult involved bizarre initiation rites, such as being buried alive, passing through fire and being covered with bull's blood and was very popular with the Roman military. St Martin was a soldier saint (he cut his military cloak in two to give half to a beggar) –perhaps the early Christian church was putting a church to a Soldier-Saint here to suppress a pagan temple once popular with soldiers.

There is a memorial window by the York glass painter William Peckitt to his two daughters who died before him. The next window east is a memorial to Peckitt himself, done by his widow. It look a bit as if she has emptied his galls drawers to make the window, which looks a bit like a Victorian lavatory window. A nearby window has some anti-Jacobite graffiti: - "I hope this may be a place for true Protestants to resort to, and never be ruled by Papists. God Bless King George the 2<sup>nd</sup> and Billy of Cumberland, whom God long preserve"!

### **HOLY TRINITY PRIORY** (1089-1538)

This is the oldest monastic site in York, as there was a 'Minster of Canons' here before Norman Conquest. It was destroyed in fire in York in 1069 in the Harrying of the North. In 1089 it was given to the Benedictine Abbey of St. Martin of Tours (Marmoutier) and became a daughter house or Priory. Most of present church rebuilt after great fire in York in 1137 and dates from late 12thC.

It was dissolved by Henry VIII 1536-8, but it continued as a parish church after dissolution. In 1551 the Tower fell in a gale and destroyed the choir and transepts. So the church is now only half the height, length and width of pre-dissolution church. But it is the only monastic church in York still in use.

Notice mediaeval stocks, only 5 holes. Legend that there was a one legged sailor permanently drunk, so made a set of stocks for him and 2 normal people! Truth is that they were being broken up for firewood about 100 years ago and vicar rescued them, but one end was lost.

## **BAR CONVENT**

The Convent was founded in a private house in 1686 by Frances Bedingfield of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the Continent. Rebuilt 1765-9 by Atkinson. As a Catholic institution it was illegal until 1791. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> C the Nunnery was attacked by a mob that was driven away by the Archangel Michael, who appeared on the roof. To this day a picture of Michael appears above the door

The CHAPEL is a hidden Georgian gem, based on the design of a church in Rome. It was designed by Atkinson 1765-9 and is concealed from outside gaze, as it was technically illegal until granted a licence in 1791. That is why it has 10 exits, all leading separately out, to many different staircases and a priest hole with a secret passage to street. The domes are concealed under skylights, and the windows are high up or able to be blocked by rising shutters to keep out prying eyes. The Chapel is practically invisible from the garden below.

The Chapel houses the hand of St Margaret Clitherow, martyred in York in 1586 for her catholic faith by being crushed under a door.