

## IN THE STEPS OF MYSTERY PLAY

**A walk following in the steps of the medieval Mystery Plays, following the exact route of the pageant wagons. Also visits to churches to see what medieval man thought God, angels, saints and devils looked like and to the Halls of the medieval Guilds, which staged the Plays.**

### The Guilds

Mystery - Mastery in Craft.

Guilds grew up from 13th C. as religious confraternities, and later turned into Trade Guilds, e.g. Guild of John the Baptist became Taylors. 4 Guilds had own Halls - Merchants, Taylors, Butchers and Haberdashers, the rest shared common halls like the present Guildhall and St. Anthony's Hall (Borthwick).

Each Guild performed a play; the number varied from 47 to 57.

The themes often reflected the Guild's trade.

Shiprights	-	Building of the Ark
Fishers and Mariners	-	Noah's Ark
Vintners and Taverners	-	Wedding at Cana (Water into Wine)
Bakers	-	Last Supper
Sausemakers	-	Death of Judes (his intestines spilled out!)
Butchers	-	Massacre of Innocents
Goldsmiths	-	3 Kings
Merchants	-	Last Judgement

### All Saints, North Street

Medieval Hammerbeam roof with Angels playing musical instruments and Stained Glass Windows exceptional-this illustrates how the mediaeval citizens viewed the appearance of Christ, his Angels and Saints and gives a clue to costumes. There are also representations of the donors, the sort of people who financed and watched the plays.

### Occasion of Play

Originally religious plays connected with Feast of Corpus Christi which was late May/early June depending on date of Easter. This was a celebration of the Consecrated Host, and was first ordained in 1264. The Feast was first celebrated in York in 1325, and the plays seem to have grown up and been written down in the 14th C. The corpus christi Guild dates to 1408. The City Council controlled the plays, though they were put on by individual guilds. The council charged wealthy citizens for the privilege of having a 'station' by their house so the citizen could erect stands and charge people to sit in them to watch, or view the plays from an upper window.

The plays became suspect after the Reformation (1527-1558) and were last performed in 1569. They were revived for the Festival of Britain in 1951, and performed in the ruins of St. Mary's Abbey every four years or so until 1988; in 1992 they were performed in the Theatre Royal for the first time. Each year has seen wagon plays in the streets, notably in 1988, 1992 and 1994. They are in the streets every evening 22nd-30th June, 1996.

### Performance

The Pageant waggons and props were stored in sheds on Toft Green, which was an open field then used for practicing Archery. The first performance of the first play - 'The Creation' - was at Dawn at Holy Trinity Priory Gates, Micklegate. Each play was performed there and at each subsequent station in turn, ending with the Last Judgement at about noon at Holy Trinity Gates. The last performance of the Creation must

have been at about 2 pm at Pavement, and the last performance of the Last Judgement at Sunset at Pavement.

The actors were all men or boys, and amateurs, though occasionally professionals took some roles. The play was in Middle English, with some songs in Latin.

From Holy Trinity Priory the plays then went down Micklegate, over old Ouse Bridge, along Coney St to:-

#### The Guildhall

15thC. Hall 1447/8 for Guilds of St. Christopher and St. George. These were suppressed at Reformation. Also used as a Common Hall for various trade guilds and by City Council. In 1483 Richard III was entertained here on his first visit as King. Bombed out 1942 and rebuilt. Timbers of oak and stained glass window of history of York are noteworthy.

#### Stonegate

One station mid-way, one at Minster Gates. Mulberry Hall (1434) a good example of a rich merchants house, from which you could watch the plays.

Deviate via Barley Hall to see a house of c.1360, restored to late 15thC. appearance.

#### Pavement

So called because first paved street in York, from early 14thC. Last performance here.

Go and look at Merchant Adventurers Hall of 1357, another good example of Guildhall, if time; and late 12thC. sanctuary doorknocker of All Saints Pavement Church, which represents the Jaws of Hell swallowing up the Sinner as at Last Judgement.