

THE BLOODY EXECUTION TOUR

Visit the historic execution sites in York. See turrets where heads were impaled, the site of public executions, and where Margaret Clitherow was crushed to death. Hear of Dick Turpin's last hours and how the authorities made the 'punishment fit the crime'.

At **Micklegate Bar** tell about Heads on spikes and hanging, drawing and quartering, which was the punishment for traitors and rebels. It was first used on William Wallace in the late 13th C. It was the punishment for treason, which was regarded as the worst and most unnatural of crimes (in Dante's Divine Comedy, traitors are in the very lowest level of Hell). Treason, therefore justified the worst punishment. You were dragged through the streets, hung until not quite dead, and cut down alive. Your private parts were then cut off, cooked and you were forced to eat them. You were then drawn, which involved pulling your guts out while still alive; a particular skill was to rip the heart out, while you were still alive so you could see it beating while you were still alive. Then you were quartered, and the bits boiled in salted water and covered in pitch to preserve them. This was carried out at York Castle or on the Knavesmire and the four quarters set on the four Bars of York, and the head on Micklegate Bar, but sometimes on the other Bars or Foss or Ouse Bridge if Micklegate Bar was full! The heads would remain in place for years, no doubt gradually disintegrating on passers by! Hanging, drawing and quartering ensured the body received no Christian burial, and many feared this more than the death itself. Many daredevil Highwaymen in the 18thC feared **gibbeting**-exposing the corpse in an iron cage- for this very reason. It was thought that this meant the spirit could find no rest in the afterlife.

You can see the main road out through Micklegate Bar towards the **Knavesmire**; this was the route taken by many -including **Dick Turpin**- in the 18thC on their way from York Castle Prison to be hung in public. In those days condemned criminals had to ride to their execution, sat on their coffin and wearing a shroud. The public hangings were at the 'Three -Legged Mare' Gallows at Tyburn on the Tadcaster Road. Here the Bookmakers from the Racecourse would take bets on the Racing and how long it was going to take for criminals to die on the gallows!

The last heads (William Connolly and James Mayne - an Irish Protestant and Scots Catholic) were put up on Micklegate Bar after the **Jacobite Rebellion** in 1746. The Jacobite prisoners were brought down from Scotland for trial and execution and held in York Castle Prison. 70 were sentenced to Death by hanging, drawing and quartering. At the last moment a reprieve for most came through, though they had to draw lots. Those who escaped death were transported to the Colonies. In the event only 22 of the 70 were executed, but in some cases the reprieve was at the last moment-John Jellons was actually being dragged on a hurdle along Castlegate when his reprieve came through! The rest were hung, drawn and quartered including James Reid, a Scots bagpiper; this was seen as very unfair as he had not borne arms and the rebel soldiers condemned with him were reprieved. The unfairness and barbarity of the treatment of the Jacobite rebels appalled many in York and ensured this was the last time that hanging, drawing and quartering were used. The heads were stolen in 1754 by Jacobite sympathizers-William Arundel, helped by an Irish tailor. He was fined and imprisoned in the prison on Old Ouse Bridge. Despite offering a large reward the City Council failed to get the heads back. About a century ago the turrets of Micklegate Bar were found to still have the iron rings, which had held the spikes for severed heads. Towards the end of the 19th C workmen were digging a drain at the back of the Castle Prison. They discovered about 20 bodies, some of which lacked skulls and the bone were all disjointed. These were thought to be the skeletons of the Jacobite rebels executed in 1746 and buried in a mass grave.

BITCHDAUGHTER TOWER- Archbishop Scrope (1350-1405)

Ricahrd Scrope, Archbishop of York 1398, opposed Henry IV; for this arrested at Bishopthorpe and executed with a sword in a barley field near St Clements Nunnery, Clementhorpe. He was buried in the Lady Chapel of the Minster and venerated as an unofficial Saint

BAILE HILL-HARRYING OF THE NORTH

This mound is one of the two Motte and Bailey castles erected by William the Conqueror in York- the other is Clifford's Tower. In 1069 the city of York rebelled -for the third time-against the rule of William, and joined

forces with the Vikings to drive out the Conqueror. In the chaos of this rebellion the city was burnt to the ground by a fire started by the Norman defenders of the Castle. William was so incensed by this rebellion that he swore a terrible oath of revenge 'by the splendour of God'. Using York as a base, he carried out the 'Harrying of the North', with armed knights moving to and fro between York and the Tyne, burning and destroying. The whole of the North was laid waste and it is estimated that more people died of the starvation that resulted than by the sword; it has been estimated that 100, 000 died in this holocaust. William is reported to have said on his deathbed "I...caused the death of thousands by war and starvation, especially in Yorkshire...I descended on the English of the North like a raging Lion, and ordered that that their homes and crops and furnishings should be burnt at once and their great flocks and herds of cattle and sheep slaughtered everywhere....I was the cruel murderer of many thousands both young and old of this fair people".

CLIFFORD' TOWER-from St George's Field

In 1190 several hundred Jews perished by mass suicide and massacre at hands of an anti-Jewish mob. In 1322 Roger de Clifford hung alive in chains from tower for rebellion against Edward II, hence the name of the Tower. In 1536, Robert Aske, one of the leaders of the Pilgrimage of Grace, protesting against the closure of the Monasteries, suffered the same fate; he took over a week to die. **Public hangings** held in St. George's Field outside prison C.1800-1868. Tens of thousands used to come and watch, and special trains run for the spectators. People could take hours to die and bookmakers would take bets on how long you were going to take a-dying! Another popular entertainment was ducking scolding women in the castle ditch. The door on the right of the Castle led out to the Gallows, which were high up on the green mounds so everybody could have a good view! After 1868 the hangings were in private behind the curving wall; people still came to watch and a flag was raised when the hanging took place. The last hanging took place here in 1900, but the 'New Drop' still survives. This area of the Castle was also where criminals awaiting transportation were held-they took their exercise in Half Moon Court where their graffiti may still be seen.

The Luddites, taking their name from a mythical Ancient British King Lud, were protesting at the mechanization of the textile industry and the loss of hand weavers' jobs. They originated in the Nottingham area, but spread to the West Riding. In 1813 some of them committed acts of violence and destruction at Cartwright's Mill in Huddersfield and were committed to trial at York castle Prison and condemned to death. On 16th Jan 1813, the day after their sentence, 17 of them were executed, in relays guarded by the military to prevent disturbance. In the event the city was described as quiet and gloomy on the day of their execution. 'By this severe judicial visitation, 14 wives were made widows and 57 children became fatherless. Thus ended the execution of this most terrible day'.

In the early 19th C you could be hung for as little as picking a pocket of something worth a shilling or more, such as a silk handkerchief, cutting down trees in a garden or avenue, breaking down a fishpond, or concealing the death of a bastard child. Juries were often reluctant to convict when they knew that this might result in the execution of a woman or child, or a man with a large family to support.

YORK CASTLE-DICK TURPIN

Born 1705 Hempstead near Saffron Walden, Essex. He went to school, trained as butcher and sold meat stolen by night. 1734-5 he joined Gregory Gang, a vicious gang of housebreakers who tortured householders into revealing whereabouts of valuables. Most were caught and hung 1735, but Turpin escaped. In 1737 he set up with Tom King as highwayman in Epping Forest. When ambushed by the authorities at Whitechapel, Turpin accidentally shot Tom King and escaped. Eventually he moved north and changed his name to John Palmer. Settled in Ferry House Inn, Brough, and became horse 'dealer' (stealer). On 2nd October 1738, he shot a gaming cock in main street of Brough, and then threatened to murder somebody who complained. He was committed to trial at Beverley, then York for breach of peace. Early 1739 wrote to his brother. Letter was seen in Hempstead and his old schoolmaster recognised handwriting and travelled to York to identify 'John Palmer' as Dick Turpin. On 22nd March he was tried for horse stealing and condemned to death. On the night before his execution he held a party in the condemned cell, got a new suit of clothes for his execution and fired mourners for his own funeral. He was executed on the Knavesmire 7th April 1739; he behaved with great assurance on gallows. Buried in St. George's Churchyard, where buried in quicklime as 'body snatchers' tried to steal it. Black Bess and most of the legends of Dick Turpin first appear in 1834 in the novel 'Redwood'.

Ride from London to York actually done by 'Swift Nicks' John Nevison in 1676 to provide alibi.

York Castle Prison was built in 1705 to house debtors and felons waiting trial on capital charges, or awaiting execution or transportation. The Assize Court and Female Prison date to 1777.

York Castle was the scene in the late 13th C of the last **Trial By Combat** in England. The two monasteries of Kirkham Priory and St Mary's Abbey York disputed a piece of land between Thixendale and Birdsall in the Wolds. They appointed armed Knights to beat the hell out of each other-the one that one won the case as clearly God was on his side!

ALL SAINTS PAVEMENT-Execution of Earl of Northumberland

In **Pavement** adjoining often took place high-class executions, by the axe. These included the Earl of Northumberland, executed in 1572 for his part in the Northern catholic rebellion against Elizabeth I. He was executed on a new scaffold set up for that purpose. His sword was first symbolically broken at the altar of St Crux church. His body was buried in St Crux churchyard in an unmarked grave by his servants. Replicas of his Helmet, Sword and Gauntlets were hung up in the church, but transferred here when St Crux was demolished. His head was set on Micklegate Bar, from where it was stolen 2 years later. It said to have been buried in an unknown churchyard; according to legend his headless body is sometimes seen in search of his head!

THE SHAMBLES – SHRINE OF ST. MARGARET CLITHEROW

Margaret Clitherow was born in 1556 and baptized Margaret Middleton in St Martin-le-Grand church. In 1571 she converted to Catholicism and also married John Clitherow, a wealthy butcher, who was much older than her. She did not live in the house, which is now her shrine, but in the houses opposite – numbers 10 & 12. She hid priests in her house and had the Mass said in secret, which was very dangerous when England was in imminent danger of invasion by the Catholic super-power Spain, and Catholic priests seen as spies. She was imprisoned several times in York Castle for these activities. On 12th March 1586 she was arrested for harbouring Jesuits and allowing Mass to be said in her house. She was also accused (falsely) of immorality with the priests. She was tried in the Guildhall, but refused to plead, to prevent the trial starting thus protecting her children and associates from being called as witnesses. For refusing to plead she was condemned to 'peine forte et dure' (long and hard pain), originally a torture designed to make people who refused to accept trial by jury. She was held in the prisons in the bowels of Ouse Bridge. She was martyred by the old Tollbooth at the south end of Ouse Bridge on 25th March 1586. Clothed only in her nightshirt, she was crushed under a door with progressively heavier stones put on it and a sharp stone under her back. Her body was thrown on the public dunghill, but her hand was rescued and remains as a relic at the Bar Convent to this day. She was canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1970