

GEORGIAN YORK

18th C York was a vibrant Society centre frequented by the Gentry and aristocracy who came here to socialize, flirt, clinch a marriage and partake of entertainments-the Races, Theatre, dancing, tea drinking and watching public hangings!

OLD THEATRE ROYAL

OLD THEATRE ROYAL built on vaults of St. Leonard's Hospital (12thC). First Theatre on site opened by Mrs. Keegan 1744 (very first purpose built Theatre opened 1734 on site of Purey Cust). The Theatre was illegal in York until 1769, when it obtained Royal Licence. It was the first provincial theatre outside London (Covent Garden and Drury Lane) except in Norwich and Bristol.

'Golden Age' of Theatre in York was late 18thC under management of Tate Wilkinson (1770-1803). Great actors who visited include John Kemble, Edmund Kean, and Mrs. Sarah Siddons (who began her stage career in York at Theatre Royal) and later Sarah Bernhardt. A popular actress was Mrs. Jordan, who played male parts, so she could show off her legs. She was mistress to Duke of Clarence (later William IV)!! She appeared in York when she arrived from Dublin in 1782 and stayed at Theatre Royal for 3 years. Appeared regularly to raise money for Duke of Clarence and his illegitimate children over next 30 years.

ASSEMBLY ROOMS

Completed 1735, designed by Lord Burlington. Present Facade by Pritchett 1828 as old portico blocked street. Inspired by 16thC Italian architect Palladio and based on Roman Architect Vitruvius 'Egyptian Hall'. The interior is the first archeologically inspired Neo-Classical interior in Europe. Designed for card-playing, tea drinking and dancing, by Aristocracy while coachmen and sedan-chair men drank and gambled in the basement!

ST. HELEN'S SQUARE

MANSION HOUSE 1725-7 by John Etty. The official residence of Lord Mayor ever since. York had a Mansion House 25 years before London, whose Mansion House was finished in 1752!

St. Helen's Square was a graveyard until 1745 when it was cleared to give better access to the Assembly Rooms. Go along BLAKE STREET to new ST. HELEN'S GRAVEYARD on right just past New Street. Point out graveyard has risen above street level due to depth of bodies. By 19thC such graveyards were very full, and a health hazard due to shallow graves - a dog was once seen running along Coney Street with a human leg in its mouth! Also polluted water supply led to cholera and typhoid.

CONEY STREET

ST. MARTIN-LE-GRAND Little Admiral on 15thC church bombed on 29th April, 1942 ('Baedecker' Raid). Clock dates back to 1688 but present clock and admiral date from 1778 heavily repaired after war. Admiral used to turn mechanically to follow sun. Using a Cross-Staff to determine latitude against sun or star.

Go into Judges Court on left hand side - here Judges on Assize were lodged when they came to York for Assizes prior to 1806, after which lodged in Judges Lodging on Lendal.

CASTLEGATE-FAIRFAX HOUSE

Built 1755-6 by Carr, and remodelled by Lord Fairfax of Gilling Castle to console his unmarried daughter Anne, jilted almost at the altar. A very fine example of a town house of nobility. Scene of much feasting; opening party 1763 consumed 34 bottles of wine and 48 pints ale - 18 guests! Normal daily quota for Viscount and his daughter was 1 bottle sherry + 2 bottles port!

YORK CASTLE

It was in Debtors Prison that Dick Turpin held. Public hangings held in St. George's field outside prison C.1800-1868. Thereafter hangings in private, and last used as prison in 1900.

DICK TURPIN

Born 1705 Hempstead near Saffron Walden, Essex. Went to school, trained as butcher and sold meat stolen by night. 1734-5 joined Gregory Gang, a vicious gang of house-breakers who tortured householders into revealing whereabouts of valuables. Most caught and hung 1735. 1737 set up with Tom King as highwayman in Epping Forest. In ambush by authorities at Whitechapel, Turpin accidentally shot Tom King and escaped.

Eventually moved North and changed his name to John Palmer. Settled in Ferry House Inn, Brough, and became horse 'dealer' (stealer).

2nd October, 1738, shot a cock in main street of Brough, and then threatened to murder somebody who complained. 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. 22nd March tried for horse-stealing and condemned to death. Executed on Knavesmire 7th April, 1739; 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 first appears in 1834 novel 'Redwood'.

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

NEW WALK

In the 1730's the 'New Walk' was created from this point along the river bank towards Fulford, so that the upper classes could promenade and show off their finery away from the dirty narrow streets of the city. One hazard, or perhaps delight, of this was that men used to swim nude in the river. So the city council decreed that 'men exposing themselves naked in the water be prosecuted for a nuisance'!

To service the needs of high class citizens using the New Walk Davy Tower was converted into a public toilet. This was known as the 'Sugar house', which shows that 'sugar' is a very old euphemism for shit!

MICKLEGATE has many fine 18thC houses where gentry used to spend winter for York Season.

MICKLEGATE HOUSE (now Backpackers Hostel) was built by John Carr for John Bouchier whose country house was Beningbrough Hall.

On same side further up is No. 114. Here in 1803 Joseph Hansom who later invented the Hansom Cab (House currently a Pizza House).

BAR CONVENT

Founded 1686 by Frances Bedingfield in a private house. Rebuilt 1765-9 by Atkinson. Former Poor School on corner built 1845. Still a Nunnery of Institute of Blessed Virgin Mary. Courtyard glazed over 1860's.

CHAPEL 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, and a priest hole with a secret passage to street

