

## LITERARY YORK

### Museum Gardens-Kate Atkinson

'*Behind the Scenes at the Museum*'. Kate went to St Anne's school, failed her PhD viva; she is divorced with a daughter. In 1988 won the Women's Own Short Story award and in 1995 when 45 years old she won the £21,000 Whitbread Book of the Year Award, beating Salman Rushdie. The story is based on a dream after walking by the Festival of Britain Room at the Castle Museum. In an interview she stated she was 'not in favour of nuclear families'.

### St Marys Abbey-Mystery Play

The name derives from Mystery - meaning 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. 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

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. Wagon plays in the streets have been performed on occasions. In 2002 they were performed under the sponsorship of the York Guilds, both in the streets and in Museum Gardens. The Guilds sponsoring were the Merchant Adventurers, the Merchant Taylors, the Scriveners, the Master Builders, the Cordwainers and Guild of Freemen. Dame Judi Dench played Mary in 1957.

### St Olave's Church-Siward

Siward was a Viking earl of Northumbria and ruled the North from the Earlsborough here in York for 30 years.

He died in 1055. According to tradition his heart was buried at St Olave's and his body on Siward's Howe.

Siward figures large in Shakespeare's '*Macbeth*' and leads Birnam wood on Dunsinane Castle.

### 54 Bootham – Birthplace of W.H. Auden (1907-73)

Wystan Hugh Auden was born here on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1907. His father was a doctor and his mother musical; they moved to Birmingham in 1908.

His introduction to poetry was "One Sunday afternoon in '22 a friend suggested that I should write poetry; the thought had never occurred to me...". His most famous poem is probably '*Night Mail*' for a film made by the Post Office and LMS Railway in 1936 about the Travelling Post Office from London to Glasgow, with music by Benjamin Britten-this can be seen in the National Railway Museum.

It begins "Here is the Night Mail crossing the Border, Bringing the cheque and the Postal Order"

His poem also figured in the film '*Four Weddings and a Funeral*'.

"He was my North, my South, My East, my West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song,  
I thought that love would last forever, I was wrong"

Another famous poem is about the thoughts of a Roman soldier on Hadrian's Wall

“Over the heather the wet wind blows  
I've lice in my tunic and cold in my nose  
The rain comes pattering out of the sky  
I'm a Wall soldier, and I don't know why  
The mist creeps over the hard grey stone  
My girl's in Tungria, I sleep alone”

### **Gillygate - Ann Victoria Roberts**

She was born in York in 1945. She wrote novels while her husband was away at sea, and read a 19<sup>th</sup> C lady's diary, which led her to research. 'Louisa Elliott' is a romantic novel set in the 19<sup>th</sup>C

### **Old Theatre Royal –Duncombe Place**

Built on vaults of St. Leonard's Hospital (12<sup>th</sup>C). 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.

The 'Golden Age' of Theatre in York was late 18<sup>th</sup>C 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.

### **York Minster -The Venerable Bede (673-735AD)**

Monk of Jarrow, biblical scholar and the 'Father of English History'. Born near Sunderland and educated at Wearmouth and Jarrow. His *'History of the English Church and People'* was written in Latin, completed in 731AD. Almost all we know about Anglo-Saxon York is derived from Bede.

“The King's baptism took place in York on Easter day April 12<sup>th</sup> 627 AD in the church of St Peter the Apostle, which the King had hastily built of timber ...Soon after he gave orders to build on the same site a larger and more noble Basilica of stone...” It is not known where Edwin's Minster was but scholars think it may have been in Dean's Park.. Soon after Edwin was killed in battle and the Church was completed by his successor King Oswald.

### **Site of Archbishop's Palace – John Aston**

Describing the area in 1639 he says “ Statues of lions, boars and apes which from the top of the steeple please the eye, but otherwise are shows only to delight children, the chief pleasure being the near adjacency to the town walls, which affords him the means to cast several mounts and degrees one above another, the upmost viewing the whole country on that side. The people (of York) are affable and freehearted, yet vainglorious and love to be praised. In their feasts they are very luxurious and given to excess.” (*Cheshire Gentleman's Journal*)

### **Minster Five Sisters Window- Charles Dickens**

Charles Dickens made several visits to York to give public readings from his works. It was said that “interest is increased tenfold by the exquisite and powerful reading of the author”. He stayed with John Cammidge the Minster Organist, attended the Sunday morning services and listened to the organ.

In *'Nicholas Nickleby'* the coach breaks down at Grantham and the travellers tell each other tales to while away the time. One of these stories is that of the Five Sisters. Alice may be based on Dickens own sister who died the year previous aged 17. The story is based in the reign of Henry IV though the window is 150 years older than that. The sisters were warned by an aged monk not to waste their lives in frivolous pursuits and become nuns instead. They ignored his advice, all died in turn and their embroidery designs incorporated into the window.

### **Minster Library-Statue of Alcuin (c.732-804) on new wing**

Born in York, Master of the Minster School, but headhunted by Charlemagne King of the Franks and later the first Holy Roman Emperor to be Master of the Palace School at Aachen. Alcuin was in effect Minister for Education and joined his Court to assist in educational and cultural reforms in the Empire

He wrote a poem about York '*On the Saints of the Church of York*'

"...My heart is set to praise my home  
And briefly tell the ancient cradling  
Of York's famed city through the charms of verse.  
It was a Roman Army built it first...  
High walled and towered  
The City is watered by the fish rich Ouse  
Which flows past flowery plains on every side;"

### **Treasurers House – plaque to Laurence Sterne, author of 'Tristram Shandy'**

Born 1713 in Ireland, died 1768 of pleurisy and buried at Coxwold. His body was stolen by grave robbers for dissection, reburied and reburied in 1969. Jacques Sterne, Precentor of York Minster was his Uncle and his great-grandfather was an Archbishop. His Father was a soldier so his childhood involved a lot of moving about; his father died when he was 2 his He studied at Jesus College Cambridge, became Prebend of York Minster, and eventually Rector of Coxwold, where his house, Shandy Hall, may still be visited. He wrote a '*Political Romance*', a scandalous set of stories based on the Minster Clergy, which was burnt by the Archbishop. He then produced the novel '*Tristram Shandy*' in 1759; 500 copies were printed in York and within 2 months it was a sensation! It cost 5/- a copy and made him well off, though it was not considered the done thing for a gentleman to write for profit. The story begins with his conception, which is almost interrupted by his mother saying "Pray, my Dear, have you not forgot to wind up the clock?" Sterne wrote some of Tristram Shandy here.

### **Treasurers House –Elizabeth Montague**

Born in 1718, married at 22 to the grandson of the Earl of Sandwich, who was older than her father. "Gold is the chief ingredient in the composition of earthly happiness". Her only child died aged 1. So she formed a literary society of drawing room meetings. She was called the 'Queen of the Blues', the original 'Blue Stocking' as some of the members of the circle wore bohemian blue worsted stockings instead of the more usual white ones-the 18thC equivalent of 'come in your jeans'. She made it respectable for women to publish their work and was admired by Dr Johnson. She published a Literary Criticism of Shakespeare, and also found time to run her husband's estates and collieries. Garrick was a member of her circle and recited Shakespeare in a natural voice instead of the ranting style fashionable at the time

### **Minster Chapter House-Celia Fiennes (1662-1741)**

She toured England on horseback in the reign of William III; this was hazardous for a woman at that time. She never married but wrote a lively travel journal, which was not written for publication and remained unprinted for 200 years. In 1697 she was on her way to see her cousin at Burton Agnes Hall. "Here is a Mint for coining the old money and plate into new milled money. I saw them at work and stamped one half crown myself. They dispatch work very fast and have coined several thousand pounds, I see all parts of the work about, the pounding, the boiling, the refining and making bars and cutting out in the mill and baking and stamping, all but milling which they are sworn to keep secret."

### **Minster Lady Chapel-Candace Robb**

Modern author writing mediaeval Whodunnits like Ellis Peter and the Brother Cadfael series. She has researched mediaeval history and literature for many years, having studied for a PhD in Mediaeval and Anglo-Saxon literature. On visiting York she was struck by its potential as a setting for a mediaeval novel and started work on '*The Apothecary Rose*'. The Lady Chapel is in her second novel set in the time of Edward III and Archbishop Thoresby; Owen Archer is blinded in one eye and becomes a spy; the novel is full of things like severed heads and poisonings!

### **St William's College-Charlotte Richardson**

Born in 1775 in very unfavourable circumstances, and went to the Grey coat School at 12. At 16 she became a servant and rose to be a cook. She began to collect books and write poetry. At 27 she married a shoemaker and opened a shop. Both were taken ill and he died 2 months after the birth of their first child. Her previous mistress published her poems in 2 volumes and she earned enough to open a small school. She wrote the following in 1808 when recovering from a severe illness.

“ACOMB, once more thy tranquil shades I hail  
And breathe again the invigorating breeze...”

### **Monk Bar Museum-Richard III**

Shakespeare's play of 1593 like all Tudor propaganda was very anti-Richard. Josephine Tey wrote *'The Daughter of Time'*, a detective novel, in 1951. Basically the detective comes to the conclusion that Richard III was innocent of the Murder of the Princes in the Tower, when friends bring portraits to him while in hospital.

### **Minster Bookshop plaque-Miles Coverdale (1488-1568)**

Born in Coverdale off Wensleydale. Biblical translator.

-William Tyndale in 1525 produced a translation of the New Testament into English direct from the Greek original, assisted by Coverdale. Tyndale had to flee to Germany but was eventually strangled and burnt at the Stake.

### **Stonegate – statue of Minerva**

On Wolstenholme's bookshop of c.1800 on corner of Low Petergate. Minerva is sat on pile of books with owl of wisdom.

### **Stonegate-Coffee Yard**

Were 23 fashionable bookshops on Stonegate in 18<sup>th</sup> C. Note the 'Holy Bible 1682' sign. In the late 17<sup>th</sup>, early 18<sup>th</sup> C there were many printers around here-hence the Printer's Devil statue. This is because the youngest apprentice got this name as he was held responsible for all the errors and practical jokes, and to this day the junior worker in a Printing workshop is called the 'Printer's Devil'. York's first Coffee House opened in about 1670. In the early days of newspapers they were expensive and so often read in Coffee Houses. Thomas Gent took over a workshop after marrying the owner's niece. He produced a newspaper known as the 'Mercury', which he changed to 'The Original York Journal' or 'Weekly Courant'. In 1759-60 John Hinxman printed the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of *'Tristram Shandy'* in York, borrowing money to do so; but the York edition was deliberately suppressed to benefit the London market.

### **Assembly Rooms**

Built to the designs of Lord Burlington 1735 and used for socializing, dancing, card playing and flirting by the upper classes. The Duchess of Marlborough, widow of the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke and victor of Blenheim, wrote to her daughter that the columns, 'stand as close as arrow of nine pins. Nobody with a hoop petticoat can pass between them. Three feet is the breadth behind the pillars on each side, which is no use...' The room was, of course, designed by a man!

### **Guildhall- Daniel Defoe**

Defoe was born 1660, and died 24<sup>th</sup> April 1731. He was imprisoned for bankruptcy and political misconduct, and on one occasion spent 3 hours in the pillory. He was 59 when he wrote *'Robinson Crusoe'* in 1719. It was one of the earliest novels. Defoe visited York in 1720 and he is commemorated by a figure of Robinson Crusoe high up on the left in the stained glass window of 1960 by Harvey in the Guildhall. The novel begins with Crusoe saying "I was born in the year 1632 in the city of York of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull." The novel is based on the true-life story of Alexander Selkirk, a sailor marooned on an island off Chile for four and a half years, a story Defoe had known of since 1712.

### **The Site of the George Hotel (now a shop, 'Next')-Anne & Charlotte Bronte**

Anne stayed here, with Charlotte, on her way to Scarborough, where she died on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1849, aged 29 though it says 28 on her gravestone. In a letter from Charlotte, Anne is described as "very much emaciated, far more than when you were with us, her arms no thicker than a little child's. The least exertion brings a shortage of breath. She goes out a little every day, but we creep rather than walk." She was dying of consumption; Ellen, a friend, wrote "To Minster at York, the George Hotel. She was fragile, but in a new bonnet and wheeled in a chair". Ellen wrote to Mrs Gaskell "The Minster was an overwhelming pleasure, not for its imposing and impressive grandeur only, but because it brought before her susceptible nature a vital sense of the greatness of our divine architect

### **Opposite Black Swan Inn Coney St –Shelley**

The site of an old coaching inn. Shelley stayed here in Oct 1811 on a visit to his friend Hogg, but the reality of a dull autumn evening, rain and mud disenchanted him. ‘York Minster was lost on him’.

### **Site of Black Swan Inn Coney St-Tennyson (1809-92)**

Site now occupied by BHS. Visited by Tennyson 7<sup>th</sup> July 1852. Found it was the HQ of the Tory Party at the General Election. “ Great racket, shutters up. Had to get in through a brawling mob to get back for my dinner.”

### **Ouse Bridge- John Evelyn (1620-1706)**

Evelyn was a country gentleman of wide literary and scientific tastes, and a founder member of the Royal Society. Evelyn wrote of York in his diary for 17<sup>th</sup> August 1654 “To York, the second city of England, fairly walled of a circular form, watered by the brave River Ouse, bearing vessels of considerable burdens over which a stone bridge emulating that of London and built upon. The middle arch larger than any I have seen in all England, with a rivage or wharfe all of hewn stone which makes the river appear very neat.”

York was renowned as a shopping centre in Viking times-it is described by an anonymous monk of Ramsey Abbey in the 10<sup>th</sup> C as ‘crammed with merchandise, too rich to describe, of traders who come from all parts, but especially Danes’!

York has always been a Mecca for bargain hunters. An 18<sup>th</sup> C historian, Francis Drake, writes “country gentlemen...have found ... York is so much cheaper than London. The great variety of provisions makes it very easy to furnish an elegant table at a moderate rate” However this had its down-side as “Feasting to excess with one another is strongly in use at York ... it is for this reason their constantly living on solid meat that few of the inhabitants are long lived...”!

### **Skeldergate - Archbishop Scrope (1350-1405)**

Archbishop of York 1398, opposed Henry IV; for this arrested at Bishopthorpe and executed at 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. He figures in Shakespeare’s ‘*Henry IV*’.

### **York Castle Prison- James Montgomery (1771-1854)**

He was educated by the Moravians at Fulneck and started writing poetry early. He was imprisoned her twice in the 1820’s for writing radical literature. He is now mainly remembered for his famous hymns, many of which have a captive theme. These include the popular carols ‘*Angels from the Realms of Glory*’ and ‘*Hail to the Lord’s Anointed*’:-  
“He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free  
To take away transgression, and rule in equity.”

### **Micklegate Bar – Harry Hotspur and the Wars of the Roses**

Harry ‘Hotspur’, son of the Earl of Northumberland and the Percy heir, was so called because of his speed on horseback. He was killed at the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403 rebelling against Henry IV.

‘Hotspur’ was buried at Whitchurch, but people said “Hotspur lived” so he was dug up and his corpse displayed in Shrewsbury Market, then ground with salt between two millstones, then hung, drawn and quartered. His quarters were sent to London, Chester, Newcastle and Bristol and his head to York. The original package tour?!

‘*Henry VI*’ Part 3, Act 1, Scene 4, the Battle of Wakefield Dec 1460. Queen Margaret, wife of Henry IV, orders the execution of the rebel Richard, Duke of York, father of Edward IV and Richard III.

“Off with York’s head and set it on York’s gates, So York may overlook the town of York”

This really happened; the head was put on Micklegate Bar, looking inwards, with a paper crown on. However the next year after the Battle of Towton on Palm Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> March 1461, his son Edward, Duke of York defeated the Lancastrian army and became Edward IV; his father’s head was rapidly taken down and replaced with Lancastrian heads!

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