

# The City of York

## Background

York is one of the most beautiful, historic cities in England. The city is located at the confluence of two rivers, the Ouse and the Foss, and has been a site of human habitation for over 6,000 years. The modern city has a population of about 130,000 people and is twinned with Dijon (France) and Munster (Germany).

## Early history

The Romans arrived in 71 AD and named their settlement Eboracum. It became one of the most important Roman cities in the empire, and was twice the home of the Roman Emperor. After the Romans left in the C5<sup>th</sup> York was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Northumbria, and the area covering northeast England and some of what is now southern Scotland.

## The Vikings and Normans

The Vikings invaded in 867 AD, and York, known as Jorvik by them, was the centre of their area of control until the arrival of the army of William the Conqueror in 1068. To keep control of the North of England, William ordered the construction of two castles in the city, making it the only place outside London to have two castles. Clifford's Tower, part of one of the original Norman castles, survives today.

## Medieval York

The city has about 5kms of city walls remaining, including a section protected originally by a moat. In 1212 the city was given its Charter, making it a self-governing city, which it continued to be until local government reforms in 1974. The first Mayor was appointed in 1217, and the city grew and became prosperous as a result of trade. York was in fact the capital of England for a brief period in the C14<sup>th</sup> and it remained a major city in England up to the Civil War.

## The Minster

Pope Gregory selected York as the northern centre of his plan to bring Christianity to Britain, and the city was the seat of an Archbishop from 735 AD. The initial stone church that became the Minster, or Cathedral, was built in the mid-C7<sup>th</sup> and some of the building you can see today was started in 945 AD. The modern-day cathedral was constructed in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, and contains some of the best medieval stained glass in the world, particularly the Rose Window. As the largest medieval gothic cathedral north of the Alps it is one of the must-see sights of the city.

## The Railways

York was on the side of the King in the Civil War, and was badly damaged by the Parliamentary army in 1644. From that point on the city declined in importance, and through the C18<sup>th</sup> was noted only as a centre of fashion, rather than trade or political importance.

However, the fortunes of the city changed dramatically with the development of the railways, with York benefiting from being halfway between London and Edinburgh. The first inter-city railway in the world was located just a little further north of York, running from Stockton to Darlington in 1830. The city has one of

the oldest railway stations in the world. The first train from York to London operated in 1840, and in 1877 the city had the largest station in Britain. York grew rapidly in the second half of the C19<sup>th</sup> and became an Arts and tourism centre, as well as a home to a large percentage of the British chocolate-making industry. The city is now home to a major Railway Museum as a tribute to its past.

Famous people from York include Guy Fawkes, who tried to blow up the British Parliament in 1605 and is commemorated during Bonfire Night each 5<sup>th</sup> November; former England football manager, Steve McLaren; W.H. Auden, poet; and Dame Judi Dench, actress.