

THE YORK TOUR—EASTER 1979

Because of Miss Beck's illness the York Tour had been postponed for a year. Nevertheless it was well worth waiting for. There were no untoward incidents and this freedom from trouble was entirely due to the careful preparation by Miss Beck. The book token given to her was indeed little more than a token of our appreciation. Forty three people went on this tour, some of them well known from previous tours and some with us for the first time. Most of them look forward to the next tour.

Fine weather added to the success of the tour. Both outward and return journeys gave us magnificent views of the Yorkshire Dales. Within minutes of arriving at York we set out for the Treasurer's House. The first Treasurer of the Minster took up residence in 1100, but after the Dissolution the last one left in 1547 saying 'since being plundered of its treasure, it had no further need of a treasurer'. The office of Treasurer was recreated in 1936 but from 1897 to 1950 the house was in the possession of Frank Green of Nunthorpe Hall. He restored both fabric and furniture and then presented it to the National Trust, together with sufficient endowment for its upkeep. Truly a most impressive house.

Each evening after Dinner we had a talk to prepare us for the following day's activities. On Tuesday evening Dr Addy spoke about excavation in York, but he also outlined the history of York from 71 A.D. On Wednesday evening Mr Wenham spoke about medieval York and beyond. These prepared us for our visits to the archaeological digs both medieval and Viking. On Thursday evening Mr Benson from the Castle Museum prepared us for our visit then while on Wednesday morning Dr Gee gave an illustrated talk on the Minster immediately before our visit. On Friday evening, by way of light relief, more than half of us went to the Theatre Royal to enjoy a performance of Pinero's 'The Magistrate'.

Without the services of the coach during our stay we had to walk to each assignment—old and not so old—we made it each time. Wednesday was devoted to the Minster. As in every cathedral we have seen, restoration work was being carried on. Here the south transept was blocked with scaffolding as the 15th Century timber vaulting was being restored. As always in the northern churches there was a small Easter garden with its fresh flowers and illuminated empty tomb. But nearby, according to writing on the wall of the beautiful Chapter House was another flower.

'*Ut iosa flos fluorum, sie est domus istadomorum*'. Indeed this beautiful Chapter House with its many small carvings of happy, sad, sullen or cheeky faces was indeed, a flower of flowers. The Crypt, in and under which remains of Roman and Norman York can be seen, also contains a font where it is said Edwin was baptised at Easter 627. Any child born within the walls of York has the right to be baptised there. Perhaps even more fascinating was the walk through the Undercroft. This was revealed when hundreds of tons of masonry were removed during the recent renovations. The blocks of cement held round the four piers by stainless steel bands now make the Minster safe. In the Crypt of the Norman Minster now revealed is a priceless collection of silver and silver-gilt ware presented to the Minster and dating from the thirteenth century to the Queen's silver jubilee.

Our archeological morning took us first to a medieval site, the Bedern, where once the College of the Vicars Choral had straddled this short street. Far more impressive because considered of international importance was the Viking Dig in Coppergate. Both have been undertaken by the York Archaeological Trust, but the latter is a long term project. Many valuable items have already been found. It is hoped to verify the facts about Viking York, and if time and money allow, to discover remains of Roman York. Volunteers were working on both sides, some of them Norwegian students over for the vacation.

On Thursday afternoon we visited the Merchant Adventurers' Hall and St Mary's Heritage Centre—the Hall, headquarters of the wool trade and from which all cloth was exported since York was a town of the Staple, stands low near the River Floss. It is subject to flooding and was flooded twice last winter. In the great hall are two pairs of scales for weighing wool, marked 'Made in Liverpool 1793'; while hanging from the ceiling and round the walls are all the gilded banners. From here we passed to St Mary's Heritage Centre—an excellent example of using a building no longer needed as a church. In coloured screens maps, models, plans and films we saw the story of 1000 years of the making of York—from Roman Eboracum to Anglo-Saxon Eoforvic, from them to Danish Jorisk and then to Norman York.

The Castle Museum is more than a mecca for children. Thousands of them visit it each year to see the streets of old fashioned shops, not least of them Terry's Sweet Shop with real sweets. Apart from that fascinating area there are the more usual type of rooms crammed with many different sorts of objects. Below in the prison cells are replicas of many different craft shops, each with tools of the trade, to say nothing of the condemned cell with its iron bed.

Two last visits were to the Minster Library, now housed in the former chapel of the Archbishop's palace and to the Kings Manor House. The original library had been set up by Alcuin in the 8th Century, but the present one contains 70,000 volumes and attracts students and queries from all over the world. The Kings Manor House was originally the home of the Abbot of St Mary's Abbey—from a rear window we could see the remaining wall of the Abbey against which the York Mystery plays are performed every three years. We sat in the Council Chamber which had been the meeting place of the Council of the North after the Dissolution. Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Stafford, lived here as President of that Council and his portrait still hangs in the Council Chamber. Charles I had used it as headquarters at the outbreak of the Civil War.

Finally, we returned via the University of York. The landscaping may be excellent, the use of site and groupings of buildings round the artificial lake may be praiseworthy, but we found the buildings drab in the extreme. Perhaps an excellent lunch at Derwent College modified our opinion of this modern University.

Hilda Edwards

HISTORIC SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE
AND CHESHIRE