


May 1981.



This is
YORK

G.S. Calvert



The civilised way to arrive in York is by train at one of the long curving platforms under the spectacular arched roof of the Station. A masterpiece of Victorian engineering. This station was said to be the largest in the world when it was opened in 1877. It's known to tourists from all over the world who come to York for a glimpse of living history.

April 1981



The moment we step out of the Station entrance we are looking at one of the things for which York is so famous. The Medieval City wall with the Minster in the distance through the trees. And, if it happens to be Spring, we get a bonus by way of a wonderful display of daffodils in bloom.



Crossing the road towards the steps which lead up onto the wall, we come across a small well-kept burial ground. This is the place just outside the City wall where they buried the victims of a Cholera epidemic in 1832

June 1981



Climbing the steps onto the wall we get a very good view of the wall itself with Lendal Bridge leading over the river towards the Minster. A famous view this. In fact, they say there are three holes in the pavement here where many generations of keen photographers have stood their tripods and photographed the Minster in all its glory.

Aug 1980



And of course, I am one of them. With a long focus lens to bring it just a bit closer it makes an imposing picture. And no set of slides about York is complete without this one.



At the end of this stretch of wall, Lendal Bridge crosses the River Ouse. Before the bridge was built, there used to be a ferry across between the two towers.

John Leeman was the last of the ferrymen and he was compensated for the loss of his livelihood with a horse and cart and fifteen pounds in cash.

The large tower on the far side is Lendal Water Tower, and it is not so long ago that it contained a steam pumping engine which supplied York with water from the river.

June 1981



Lendal Bridge is a beauty in cast iron. It was built in 1863 to give access to the railway station. According to the records, the first structure they put up collapsed into the river within a week. It was hauled out and taken away to Scarborough where it now forms part of the famous Valley Bridge. It was replaced by the present bridge. But even that wasn't quite right ...

May 1981



When they got the roadway over it and the footpaths built up they found that the parapets were too low. I don't know whether anybody fell over into the River, but they had to put another section on the top to increase the height of it. The decorations on this bridge are magnificent and those lamp standards are unique.

July 1980



They are well worth a closer look.
Funnily enough, if you show this picture to people who have lived all their lives in York, a surprising number of them can't identify it. I suppose a lot of people just never notice the beauties of their own locality.

July 1980



There's a good view from the bridge of the pleasure boat yard and the Guild Hall. The Guild Hall was badly damaged by bombing in the Second World War and a lot of restoration work had to be done, mainly on the roof and the walls at the end nearest the camera. The boat will take you for an hour's pleasant trip down the river to see the Archbishop's Palace which is on the Riverside three miles away at Bishopthorpe.



Just over Lendal Bridge, in the Museum Gardens, we find the ruins of St Mary's Abbey. There isn't much left of the Abbey itself. Only a few stumps of the main columns and a bit of arched wall.

Aug 1980



It was founded nearly 900 years ago in 1089 by the Benedictine order and at one time it was the most Important Abbey in the North of England.

Aug 1980



The best preserved bit of the Abbey is the Hospitium which was the place where the Monks entertained their guests and sheltered travellers.



It is now a sort of museum with Roman things in it, and those stone coffins are of Roman origin. They were dug up at various places in the City and put there on display. Like many things in York, it makes a good subject for the camera.



This place was a part of the Abbey. In fact, it was the Abbot's house, built in 1280. When King Henry VIII fell out with the Pope and destroyed all the Abbeys and Monasteries, he took this house as his northern residence and it became known, as it is known today, as the King's Manor.



The coat of arms over the doorway is that of a later King – Charles I. The Kings Manor is now a part of York University, but you can still go in and look around if you want to.



In the Museum Gardens is an old Roman structure called The Multangular Tower. This was a corner tower of the original Roman fortress of Eboracum and is the oldest thing of any substantial size in York



Inside the tower the lower part, including the red brick courses, is Roman work while the upper part in larger stones was erected later in Medieval times. The stone coffins, like the others, were dug up from elsewhere during various excavations.



Close by, in Exhibition Square, is a part of the old Abbey wall. This bears a plaque which reads
“This Gateway was broken through the Abbey wall in 1503 in honour of the Princess Margaret, daughter of Henry VII, who was the guest of the Abbott of St Mary’s on her journey north as the bride of James IV of Scotland. It is known as Margaret’s Arch.

May 1981



Alongside the arch is the rather imposing City Art Gallery, built in 1879. The two painted scenes on the upper façade depict the death of Leonardo Da Vinci, and Michelangelo carving the statue of Moses. The statue in front of the Gallery is that of the artist, William Etty, who was born in York in 1787, and whose efforts resulted in the preservation of much of the City Walls.



William Etty's statue is gazing permanently at one of the best known views in York, Bootham Bar, with the Minster towers standing majestically behind it. This is probably the most attractive of the York bars. It dates from Norman times, and was the defensive bastion on the main road north to Scotland. A flight of steps leads on to the wall here and we can walk along it to Monk Bar.



On a nice day this is a lovely walk, quiet and peaceful, and very picturesque. It takes us round the northern and eastern sides of the Minster and, in fact, it follows the line of the Roman Fortress wall.

Aug 1980



Around here are the houses and offices of some of the Church dignitaries, and there are some magnificent views of the Minster itself.

April 1981



All the houses in this area seem to have large, beautiful gardens and obviously the gardeners take a great pride in their work.



It's possible to continue walking along the walls, but Monk Bar is a good place to come down to earth again and have a look in the streets.



Monk Bar is the eastern gateway to the City.
It's 63 feet high, and the carved figures on the top are holding heavy stones to drop on the heads of intruders.
No doubt a fashionable thing to do at one time.
It stands on the line of the Roman Fortress Wall and was erected in the 13th Century on Roman Foundations.



The street leading to Monk Bar is Goodramgate, and along here is a row of quaint old houses called 'Our Lady's Row'. They were built in 1316, and are the oldest houses in York. Some guidebooks say they are the oldest in England.



They are well preserved and, no doubt, they have been well preserved inside. But outwardly, if you discount the shop signs, they are pretty well in their original condition.



At the end of the row is a little gateway referred to in some guidebooks as Trinity Arch. These gates were made in the same year as the Battle of Waterloo, 1815, and they lead into the churchyard of the Holy Trinity.



This little spot is a bit of a surprise in the middle of a bustling city. The Church contains some very interesting items if you're keen on that sort of thing, and the churchyard is a very good place to sit and rest and eat your sandwiches.

May 1981



There's another bit of history in Goodramgate. The timbered building on stilts is all that is left of an ancient covered walkway which once crossed the road to the little alleyway opposite, next to Romano's. Down there is Bedern where the Minster choirboys used to live in medieval times.

March 1981



The covered way was built so that they could walk from their houses to the Minster.
Obviously, violence and mugging are not peculiar to the 20th century.
Between there and the Minster is College Street and St William's College.

May 1981



This seems to have had a varied history since it was built in 1467. In it's 500 year life it's been a college, a block of apartments for the Minster Priests and, during the Civil War, King Charles I had his printing press and his Royal Mint installed in it.



Nowadays it consists of a few offices, a restaurant, a brass rubbing centre and a well-used meeting place for all sorts of societies and organisations.

Jun 1981



From here we can start a circular tour round the Minster close. The old building there is the Minster library containing most of the old records and registers. But originally it was the Chapel of the Archbishops' Palace.



The Chapel, and the short length or arched wall are all that now remains of the Palace which was moved outside the city to Bishopthorpe after the Reformation.

March
1981



Minster Court is a lovely quiet little corner, an ideal place to live if you like the quiet life.

March
1981



I imagine it's owned by the Church and occupied by Minster people.
Notice the little plates fixed to the walls. These are old fire insurance plates.

March
1981



It seems that in days gone by when you insured your house against fire each insurance company had its own fire brigade, and only they would put your fire out.

March
1981



Hard luck if you had a fire and the wrong brigade turned up.

March
1981



Next door to Minster Court is the Treasurer's House. The Treasurer was in charge of the Minster, it's lands and of course it's treasures. During the Reformation it's treasure was plundered so much that the Keeper became superfluous, they'd call it redundant today, and the house passed into private hands until 1930 when it was given to the National Trust and opened to the public.

July 1980



It stands on the site of the old Roman Imperial barracks and in the cellars are traces of the barracks. In its present form it's regarded as a fine example of a 17th Century town residence.

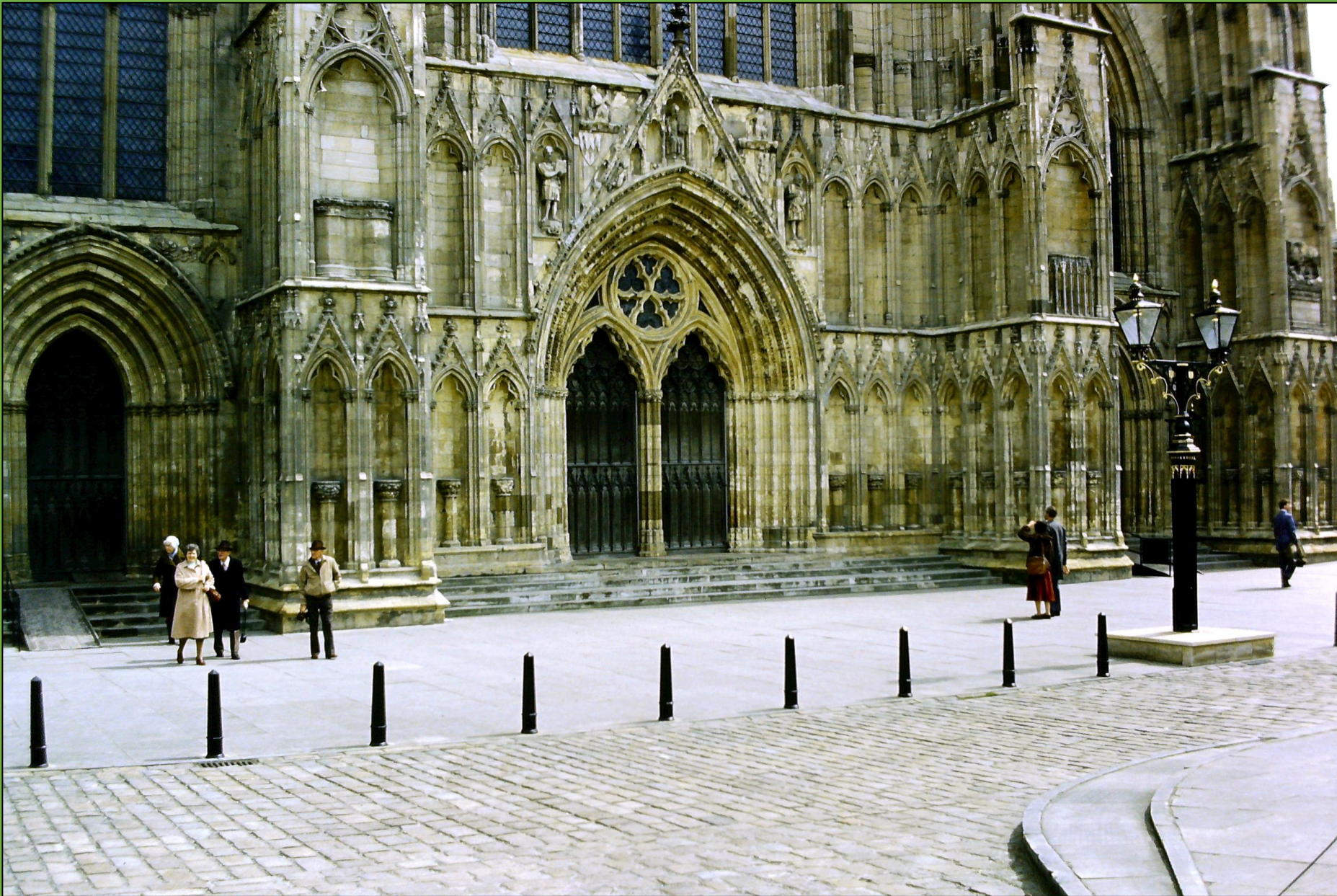
May 1981



Just outside the Close in Duncombe place we find the Red House. This was built in 1718. Note the 19th Century torch extinguisher to the right of the doorway The Corporation tried to buy this house soon after it was built as a residence for the Lord Mayor but the negotiations fell through, so they built the Mansion House instead. We'll have a look at that later.



Now we come to the Minster itself. This view of its famous West front is taken from outside the Red House itself. The Minster's official title, I believe, is the Metropolitan and Cathedral Church of St Peter. It was begun early in the 13th Century and took over 250 years to complete.



To be a Cathedral, a Church must be the seat of a Bishop or Archbishop and of course York has an Archbishop. A Minster is a centre of Christian teaching.

May 1981



It's the largest Gothic Church in England. 524 feet long and 249 feet wide.

April
1981



The height from the floor to the ceiling inside is over 90 feet,



And that massive main tower is 234 feet high.

If you have a good head for heights you can climb to the top of it. You start off by climbing a staircase inside the corner of the south doorway. And half way up you have to cross a narrow external catwalk just like the one seen here at the edge of the green roof.

May 1981



You finish the climb up a narrow spiral staircase inside the main tower itself. It's a bit nerve-wracking perhaps but the reward, when you've recovered your breath, is a splendid view over the city and the surrounding countryside.

July 1980



York is not just a City of major items like the walls, the bars and the Minster. Oh no. As you walk the streets there's an absolute feast of things to see, like the figure of Minerva, Goddess of wisdom and drama sitting up there with her books and a wise old owl.

May 1981



She sits over the corner of a street called Minster Gates. The street where the book binders and book sellers lived in days gone by.

May 1976



She looks out along Stonegate, perhaps the favourite street in York for tourists. On a Sunday morning early in the year you can be practically on your own in Stonegate

June 1980



But a Sunday morning in Summer, even though the sun isn't shining, is a vastly different proposition. Tourists from all over the world flock here in their thousands and you can stand around for hours and hear hardly a word of English.



Mind you, Stonegate is worth coming a long way to see. The Olde Starre Inne dates from 1644 and is the oldest pub in York. That sign across the street was put up in 1733. They need a sign like that because the pub itself is hidden in a little courtyard off the street.



Look at some of the shop fronts. Thank Goodness you can do that without spending money. Greenwoods for instance, a genuine antique of an antique shop.

August
1980



And Mulberry Hall. Just look at that. Dated 1434.
That's not reproduction work. Its quite genuine 15th century building

July 1980



The only modern features here, apart from the shop signs, are the flowers in the hanging baskets. Many of the streets of York are decorated like this in the Summer, and it adds to the reputation of York as a City of great charm and beauty.

January
1979



The hanging baskets are still beautiful, even in the middle of Winter, but presumably these flowers are artificial. Still, it shows the efforts they make to keep the streets attractive at all times.

August
1982



This is the Stonegate Devil, sitting up in the Gods on what used to be a Printer's establishment. He's a reminder of the old time Printers' Devils, the boys who used to fetch and carry the type.

August
1982



Another old building has this figurehead on its corner support. Yet another example of the fascinating things to be seen in the York streets.



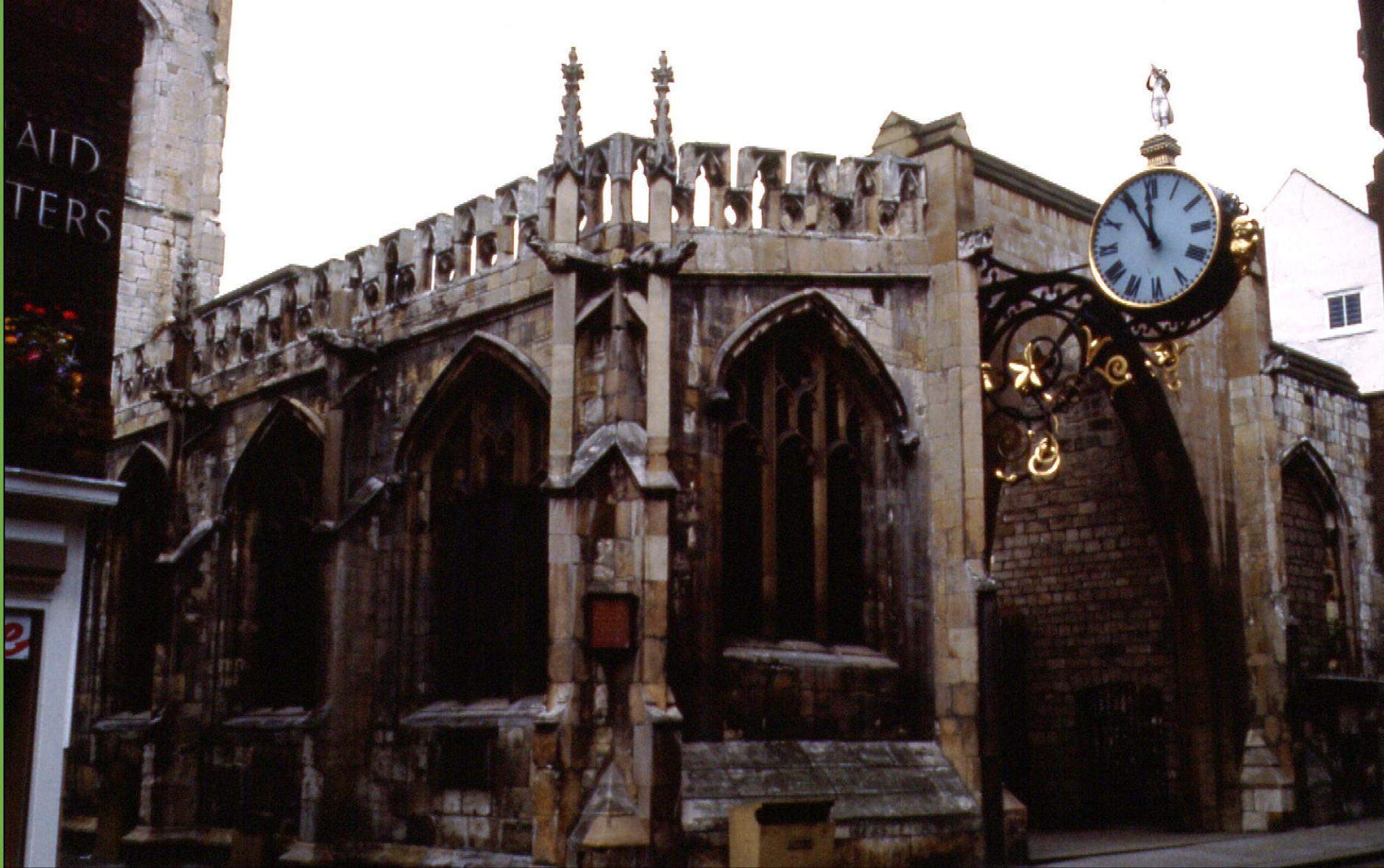
A very well-known figure in York is old Napoleon. He's been around for many, many years, and used to stand outside one of the City's tobacconists shops near to the River. Many times during his career he has had to be fished out of the River after mischievous practical jokers have done with him. He's stood at the door of two or three different shops in the last few years and his present post is at this kiosk in Lendal.

August
1980



In St Helen's Square we find the Mansion House. As we learned earlier, this was built when the Corporation failed to buy the Red House. It was designed by Lord Burlington and completed in 1726. Ten years later, London copied the idea, and later still so did Doncaster. These are the only three such buildings in the country. And only the York Mansion House is actually used by the Lord Mayor as a residence during his term of office

July 1980



Just along Coney Street from the Mansion House is St. Martin's Church and clock. The Church was destroyed by bombing in the Second World War but has since been restored, partly as a Chapel, and partly as a garden of rest.

August
1980



Amazingly, the clock survived.



The figure on top is known as the Little Admiral. He survived the bombs, but the head of Old Father Time on the side was not so lucky and they had to make a new one.

An interesting thing about this clock, there are no works in it. The mechanism is in the Church tower 70 feet away, moved by long rods which enter the clock through a tube next to the 9 o'clock mark.

March
1981



Coney Street is probably the main shopping street in York, but I sometimes wonder how many shoppers take the time to look at the interesting buildings that the shops live in.
This is a tobacconist and is just as charming inside.

August
1980



There's a lot of this sort of thing to be seen in York.
This is the arms of the Beckett family of Merchant
Bankers who owned the bank until 1924.

July 1980



Further along the street is Boots the Chemists. Just look at the upper part of their shop front. It's amazing, but not many people ever think of looking up there.



And yet look at that. Fantastic isn't it? They don't make 'em like that nowadays you know. This is another of those pictures that many York citizens couldn't identify if it were not for the shop sign. It's remarkable, but anybody who lives in York will tell you there is a clock on Boots' shop but not more than 1 in 10 could say what the shop front itself is like

August
1980



Just around the corner is All Saints Church with its lantern tower. In the old days a lantern used to shine out from here at night to guide travellers to the City. It still shines out as a memorial to those who were killed in the air raids on York in World War II.



This Church is well-known for its sanctuary door knocker which is supposed to depict a poor human being in the jaws of Hell.



Only a few yards from All Saints Church is another interesting old relic. The house of Sir Thomas Herbert. He was a gentleman of the bedchamber to King Charles I, whatever that entailed. The house was built in 1557. It looks a bit rickety from the outside, but a very careful watch is kept on it and repairs are done when necessary.

August
1980



In St. Sampson's Square there is a rather interesting pub which used to be called 'The Mail Coach'. When it was being renovated about 1970 they discovered in the cellars traces of Roman work. They opened it up and found a Roman bath house complete with water ducts and all the bits and pieces that Roman bath houses were made of. Its all now preserved in the cellars and the pub was renamed 'The Roman Bath'.

August
1976



Outside in the Square you may be entertained in Summer by Barrel Organ Phil and his monkey.

July 1980



Kings Square is usually well populated. People sit there to eat their lunch from the nearby fish and chip shop and to listen to the open air preachers or to a group of students busking for a bob or two. You get a lot of that in York, and some of them are very good.

May 1976



Through the far end of Kings' Square is probably the most famous street in York, The Shambles. It's still nothing more than a narrow cobbled street with the houses almost touching at the top. But at least the drains have been covered up.



‘Shambles’ was the old name for the street of the butchers and many of the shops still have the wooden benching at the front where the meat was displayed.

July 1980



Most of the shops are now craft or gift shops, jewellers and pottery shops, but they all do extremely well out of the tourist trade.



One of them is the shrine of the blessed Margaret Clitheroe. She was a young butcher's wife at the time when Henry VIII had his disagreement with the Pope and outlawed the Roman Catholic Church. But she refused to give up her faith and in 1586 she was charged with hiding some Catholic Priests in her house. She was put to death by having a heavy board placed across her chest and piled high with stones until she was crushed to death.

She was canonised in 1970 as St. Margaret of York.

August
1980



Just off the Shambles we come across this delightful old house which is well worth a photograph. Strangely enough, I have not been able to find anything about this place in the guidebooks, so its origin remains a mystery so far as I am concerned.



A short step away is Fossgate, and along here we find a little stone bridge over York's second river, the Foss. An interesting item here is the row of little metal rings set into the lower part of the parapet wall.

April 1981



When this bridge was built in 1812, this was where they used to have the pig market and the rings were put in for tethering the pigs.

April 1981



Foss Bridge is rather a pretty one, and it looks well from a little way down stream.
This view is taken from Piccadilly.



Right next to the bridge in Fossgate is the Hall of the Merchant Adventurers. This ancient place dates from the 14th Century when York was, believe it or not, the centre of the wool export trade. It was quite a port at that time and ships loaded with wool sailed off down the River bound for foreign parts.

August 1980



The Guild of Merchant Adventurers was the ruling body of this trade and this was their headquarters. The Hall is still in its original state and it's not at all what you would expect to find behind that doorway.



Pass through that door and you are immediately transported 600 years back in time. This is not a rebuilt facsimile, it's the genuine article, beautifully preserved over the centuries.



This is it from the back which faces onto Piccadilly. Those are the original 14th Century timbers and the original brickwork. One floor of the Hall was the main centre for the transaction of business and the lower portion was divided into apartments in which lived the poorer members of the Guild.



At the end of Fossgate we come to Walmgate and a little old house known as the Bowes-Morrell house. This too is a genuine 14th Century house which has been carefully preserved. It was acquired by the York Civic Trust in 1966 to stop it being pulled down in a re-development scheme which, as you can see, has gone on all around it. It was named after the late John Bowses-Morrell who was chairman of the Civic Trust at that time.



From there we can see Walmgate Bar which is the south-eastern gateway to York. This is the only Bar that still has a Barbican, which is the chamber between the outer and inner gateways.



The inner side of the bar contains a timber-framed and plaster house which was erected in Elizabethan days. Although it's still a charming house to see it must have been quite a sight in the old days because the Chamberlain's accounts of 1584 refer to many embellishments on it, such as Royal Coats of Arms and lions in both wood and plaster.

June 1981



It isn't far from there to the site where York Castle used to be. When the remains of the Castle were removed, this is where they built the Law Courts, which are still in use, and the Debtors' Prison and the Womens' Prison. The two prison buildings are now linked by a modern entrance block to form the world famous Castle Museum.



Clifford's Tower is the only remaining part of the old Castle.
This was built in the 13th Century to replace a wooden tower which was destroyed by fire.

April 1981



Crossing the River by Skeldergate Bridge, we get a good view of the Tower and the gardens which run down to the riverside.



At the other end of Skeldergate Bridge is Bale Hill. The tower which once stood on this mound was a twin to Clifford's Tower. And together they formed the City defences at the point where the River flows between them.



Skeldergate Bridge is another of the City's Fine Bridges, similar in style to Lendal Bridge. This one was opened in 1881 and until recent years one of the spans, I think it was the right hand one, could be raised to allow high-masted sailing ships to get to the wharves in the City.



Walking along the riverside, back to the City centre, we come to Ouse bridge which takes one of the main streets over the River. This is the oldest bridge over the Ouse in York, having been built in 1810. Although there have been bridges of one sort or another at this point since the 12th Century. We can turn left at this bridge and walk up Micklegate to another City gateway.

August
1980



Micklegate Bar is the main entrance to York from London and was therefore the usual place for ceremonial receptions of Royalty and other distinguished visitors, including our own Queen in 1971.

Being the most used of all the City gates, this was where the heads of executed traitors and rebels were displayed on long poles above the bar.

Here we can climb upon the wall again and walk along to the steps where we started this tour.

August
1980



We're now back near the railway station. We haven't been very far in terms of distance, perhaps 2 miles or a little more, but we've seen quite a lot. There's very much more still to see, but in putting together a talk like this the problem is not so much what to include, but what to leave out. In any event, the best thing to do is to go to York and see it for yourself. You'll have a day to remember.



But do go by train. And don't forget your camera.



In Loving Memory of Gordon Stanley Calvert (1929-96)