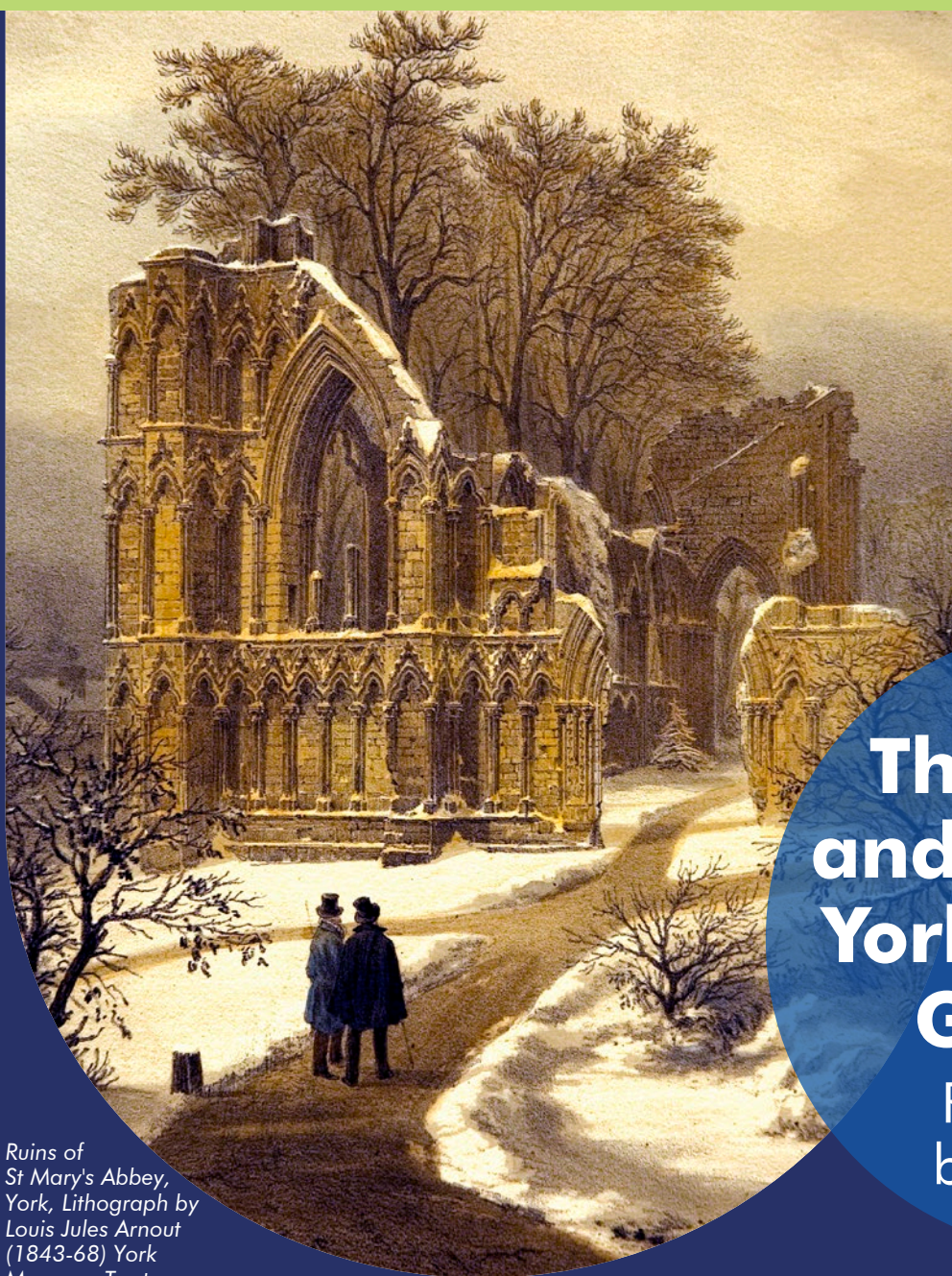


# HERITAGE HUNTERS

YORK MUSEUM GARDENS

2024



*Ruins of  
St Mary's Abbey,  
York, Lithograph by  
Louis Jules Arnout  
(1843-68) York  
Museums Trust*

## The People and History of York Museum Gardens

Researched  
by Residents

York Museums Trust



**explore**  
Libraries and Archives



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York Museums Trust was formed on August 1, 2002, as an independent charitable trust to manage the museums and gallery service previously run by City of York Council. Supported by the Council, York Museums Trust is responsible for York Art Gallery, York Castle Museum, Yorkshire Museum and Gardens and York St Mary's.

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Explore provides the public library and archives service for the city of York. Explore runs 15 libraries including York Explore – our flagship library and home of the City Archive – 5 Reading Cafes, a mobile library, and a home library service. We provide public libraries and archives under a contract with the City of York council.

**NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND**

The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), formerly the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), distributes a share of National Lottery funding, supporting a wide range of heritage projects across the United Kingdom. The NLHF have awarded funding to York Museums Trust to support this Heritage Hunters project.

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York and District Family History Society is dedicated to supporting anyone doing their family history no matter where they are from. You can see more on our website, Facebook and X (Twitter) @Yorkfhs

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**CAVEATS AND LIMITATIONS**

This project supports people to start researching history. We are not academic historians but we are people who want to know more about where we live. Support is given to learn the basics but please be aware that researchers may not have uncovered everything about their topic in the timeframe of the project, or have minor inaccuracies.

Heritage Hunters visiting the Museum Gardens for inspiration, Photographed by Philip Newton



Welcome

**MUSEUM GARDENS**

**2024**

**H**eritage Hunters is an annual project by York Museums Trust but this issue is slightly different from previous magazines. We have been awarded funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, allowing us to delve into the unique heritage of the Museum Gardens, a beloved green space managed by YMT on behalf of the City of York. Unlike our previous magazines that focused on residential areas, this issue highlights a city-centre location well-known as a free, public space where people meet, enjoy nature, or pass through on their commute. However, much of the site's rich history remains untold to those who visit. We invited our previous Heritage Hunters, to uncover and share stories about the people, buildings, plants, and activities connected to the gardens.

In this issue, you'll discover the rich history and people connected to York Museum Gardens. These stories include York's first purpose-built public swimming pool, the life of Henry Baines, the first curator of the museum and gardens, as well as a personal connection from one of our researchers, whose grandmother fed Canadian Airmen during the Second World War in what is now known as our Artist's Garden.

The research presented has been carefully edited to retain the distinct voices and perspectives of our contributors. This magazine is not meant to be a comprehensive account, but rather a starting point for further exploration and dialogue about the importance of the Museum Garden's to the history of the city. We hope it sparks continued research and the sharing of even more stories, enriching our understanding of this important aspect of York's heritage.

To find out more about the wider NLHF project please contact York Museums Trust.

**Philip Newton,**  
York Museums Trust

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To finish this special issue of Heritage Hunters, Yvonne takes us on a journey through the gardens pointing out things you will see. Hoping you too will enjoy the walk here as much.



# WHAT'S HIDDEN BEHIND THESE GATES?

By Yvonne Baker

There are books and manuscripts stacked cover to cover,  
So precious and fragile no one can pore over.  
Beetles and butterflies are hidden away, never seeing the light of day.  
Pottery and fossils are stored together, and underground lie piles of  
stuffed fur and feather.  
There are so many pieces from around this globe, a historian's dream if  
allowed to probe.  
The grounds are filled with ancient and protected trees,  
With an abundance of flowers for the birds and bees.  
Ruins of an Abbey and outbuildings can be found, there are more than  
Romans or Vikings in the grounds.  
There's the Hospitium which is truly amazing,  
And an observatory once used for star gazing.  
The Multangular Tower was built layer upon layer,  
and according to records once housed a Bear.  
St Mary's Tower where once records were held in store,  
you might hear singing and voices that soar.  
The walls were built to keep out the invaders,  
But down by the river in poured the traders.  
This is a Jewel in the crown of York's green spaces,  
Sure to bring joy and put smiles on faces.

Looking out the gates of the Museum Gardens, to Marygate, York Museums Trust



Although I had often visited York before I came to live here a year ago, I had never entered the Museum Gardens, where the abbey ruins are one of the most beautiful and poignant sights in the city.

The extraordinary craftsmanship of the masonry alone is testament to the faith and commitment of the people who built it. I came to realise during my research that there are conflicting accounts of the abbey's foundation and building: the recording of history was to all intents and purposes a literary art in the twelfth century, and approaches to historical accuracy were much more fluid than they are today. Most of the documents relating to the foundation would have been compiled by people who had a vested interest in recounting events in such a way that they reflected well on the writer or his (it was always 'his') community. In this case, both Whitby and York abbeys produced a foundation account of St Mary's. Thus, the attentive reader will notice some discrepancies between my account and Alan Powell's, also in this publication. Scholars will never know the absolute truth of the various contemporary accounts of the abbey's foundation and early years, which makes the stories all the more fascinating.

The skyline of York in the 12th century, dominated on all sides by the sheer grandeur of the Abbey and the Minster perched on the highest point of the city, must have been an impressive sight. Walking past the fern garden in the Museum Gardens, one can observe bits of columns and tracery in use as part of the rockery; bits of abbey stone have been found used as building material all over the city, for the ruins were regarded as a quarry for building materials. For all that, the romance of the ruins has always attracted artists, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Thomas Girtin and J M W Turner.

Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0

## Hidden treasure UNDER ST MARY'S ABBEY

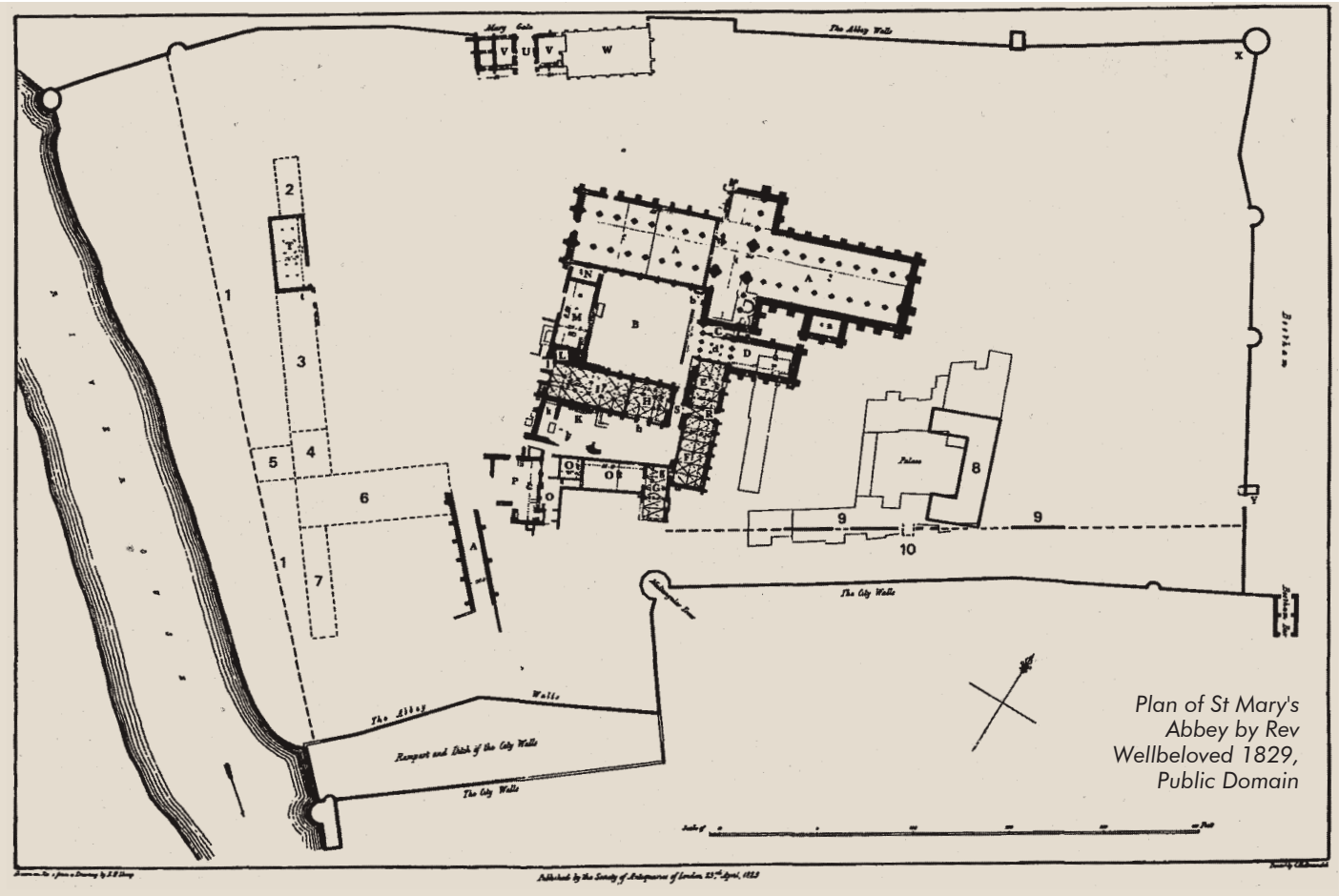
### Foundation

The story of the foundation of the abbey is confused, but a contemporary manuscript in the British Library contains an account purportedly by a monk called Stephen, which was widely accepted in the twelfth century: Stephen had joined the monastic community of a monk called Reinfrid at Whitby, where he was apparently immediately elected abbot; because Reinfrid and Stephen had different visions for the community, Stephen and some of the monks transferred

to Lastingham, where William the Conqueror had given permission in 1078 for a new church and monastery to be built. Benedictines traditionally set up their monasteries in cities, and Stephen would have been eager to move to the wealthy and prestigious city of York; in 1086 he achieved his ambition when he was given St Olaf's church and four acres of land by Alan, a count of Brittany who had been rewarded with vast lands in Yorkshire by William the Conqueror for his part in the battle of Hastings. Although the

transfer to York had been approved by the king, a dispute with Archbishop Thomas of Bayeux of the Minster about the ownership of the land immediately followed (the first of many such disputes) and was only resolved in 1088, when the Conqueror's son, William II (William Rufus), visited York and gave Stephen a more substantial piece of land, thus enabling the abbey to move to its present site in what are now the Museum Gardens. From this point, the abbey was regarded as a highly prestigious royal foundation: ▶





William Rufus cut the first turf in 1088 in the presence of many senior bishops, archbishops and nobles of France and England, and assumed patronage of it.<sup>1</sup> Thus began the building of the original Romanesque abbey church.

Why should both King Wiliam I and King William II be so eager to be involved in the foundation of an abbey in York, so far from the centre of power in London? The Conqueror is said to have allowed the move to York 'because wickedness abounded in the city... [and] the citizens would benefit from the example of holy men' (Burton, Monastic order, p. 40); at his death he is said to have been full of remorse at the blood shed during the 'harrying of the north', a series of campaigns he waged during the winter of 1069–70 to subjugate the unruly northern part of his kingdom. Rufus, it seems, was more pragmatic in his approach to this troublesome region and sought to establish a loyal political base there. Inevitably, the royal connection meant the abbey attracted many large endowments and tracts of land from wealthy nobles, and in due course St Mary's Abbey York became the wealthiest abbey in the north of England, and one of the richest in the

whole country. As ever, wealth attracts wealth, and under Henry I (1100–35) and Henry II (1154–89) the abbey continued to acquire land and other possessions, and 'there was scarcely a noble family which was not involved in some way with the York abbey, scarcely a corner of Yorkshire that was untouched by its expansion' (Burton, Monastic order, p. 43). Monasteries, like castles, were visual symbols of the power of the Conqueror. The abbot was appointed to be a bishop, and was occasionally summoned to Parliament, for which he kept a house in London. In 1088 there were three monastic houses in Yorkshire (Selby, Whitby and York); by 1215 there were over sixty.<sup>2</sup>

Abbey buildings and sculptures

What we see of the Abbey today are the remains of a Gothic church and monastery built between 1271 and 1294 on top of the original Romanesque church of the late eleventh century. In addition to the usual buildings found in monastic cloisters (church, chapter house, infirmary, refectory, dormitory, etc), there were barns, a bakehouse, a

brewhouse, cowper house, mill, stables etc. What is today known as the Hospitium was a large barn, and was apparently never used as a guest house as the name implies.

An astonishing chance discovery was made in 1829 soon after the gardens had been acquired by Yorkshire Philosophical Society. It was reported in the York Herald for 17 January 1829: during the creation of a path across what had been the nave, the stones that had formed some window tracery was discovered 'in nearly as perfect a state as if they were just from the hands of the workmen'; this was followed by the discovery of a statue, the chiselling of whose drapery 'was bold and free, and it had also been richly coloured and gilt'. A few days later, 'no fewer than seven statues were uncovered, which the hand of barbarism had employed to form the foundation of [a] massive wall; they are each five feet nine inches in height, have a very strong and expressive appearance, and are clad in antique drapery'. They were found buried face-down at a depth of about two and a half metres (eight feet). René Marcourse remarked in 1951 that 'the sculptures have not perhaps been accorded that degree of recognition which they deserve' (p. 3),

Monastic life and the Rule of St Benedict

Life in a Benedictine monastery was based on the Rule of the fifth-century St Benedict of Nursia. What to us may seem a harsh régime of prayer and work was devised to be relatively moderate in comparison with harsher orders. Daily routine was based around prayer in the church, spiritual reading and manual work such as copying manuscripts or agricultural work; according to Benedict 'Idleness is the enemy of the soul. The brethren, therefore, must be occupied at stated hours in manual labour; and again at other hours in sacred reading.' Sung services occupied over nine hours a day, work three to four hours, and spiritual reading one and a half. After the church, the chapter house was the most important building of the monastic complex. Here, a chapter of the Rule was read aloud, and matters of business and misdemeanours were attended to. Meals were taken in silence while a monk read from a spiritual work. The abbey also provided employment for an army of lay brothers, who did

most of the manual work. In 1132 a group of Cistercians received hospitality at St Mary's en route to founding an abbey at Rievaulx. This contact with the stricter order caused a group of senior monks of St Mary's, including prior Richard, to express their shame at the general apathy and non-observance of the spirit of the Rule; they began to desire reform for themselves from within, including the reintroduction of manual labour, rejection of revenue from spiritual services, and the adoption of a simpler lifestyle. They even proposed getting rid of some of their many endowments. Perhaps inevitably there was opposition to this vision, notably by Abbot Geoffrey: 'The enormity of what was proposed should not be underestimated. St Mary's was the largest and most prestigious abbey in the north... a royal foundation. That its endowments should be dismantled and its grandeur undermined was unthinkable' (Burton, Monastic order, p. 105). The Archbishop supported Richard and tried to reconcile the two parties, but in the end thirteen monks were ejected from St Mary's and given land by the Archbishop



Warning in Old English to 'keep yourself I God's care and remember that if death happens to you it is only an adventure' YORYM: HB43, photographed by Cecilia Bainton

to found a monastery on a desolate and isolated spot near Ripon. Thus began Fountains Abbey. Interestingly, two monks returned to York as they found conditions at Fountains unbearably harsh. While some men may have joined St Mary's in order to be fed, housed and possibly even educated, it is clear that this little band of reformers left York spontaneously, in search of poverty, seclusion and the spiritual life.



Statue of St John, YORYM : 2008.200



Statue of an unknown apostle, YORYM : 2001.1125,



Statue of Moses, YORYM : 1998.28

and although they have subsequently received some recognition (Norton, Burton, Wilson), it still seems to be the case that they have not been brought to the attention of the general public. I could not even buy a postcard in the museum of what Christopher Norton calls 'the crowning glory of the medieval collections of the Yorkshire Museum', 'works of exceptional quality and of international significance' and 'one of the most exciting discoveries ever made in the field of the history of sculpture in this country' (Norton pp. 255–56).

Theories abound about where the sculptures were originally set and when and why they were taken down and buried, but there is no academic consensus around any one theory. What seems to be certain is that they date from the earlier Romanesque church, and indeed the style of the carving of the robes is consistent with late-twelfth century work. Both the interior and the exterior of the abbey church would have been opulently



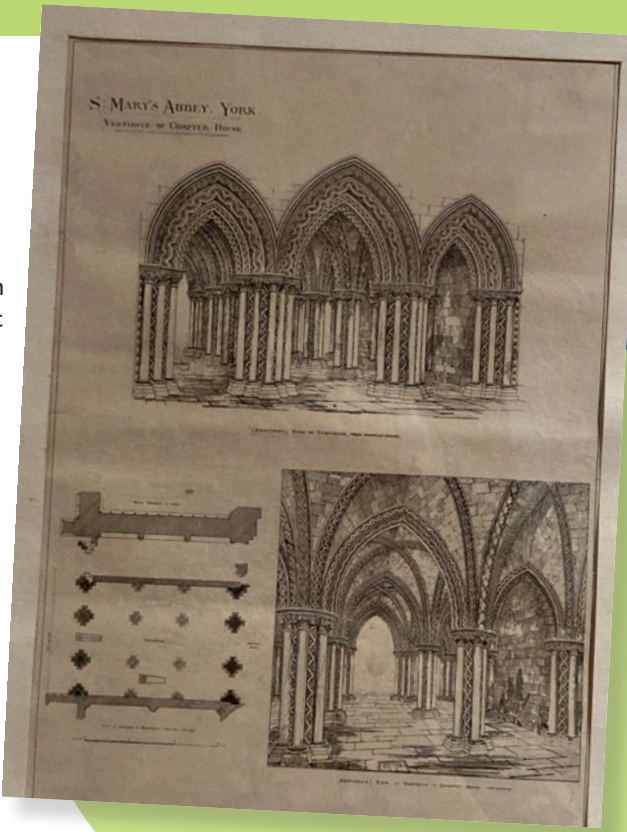
► and colourfully decorated to the glory of God, and the sculptures were no exception: they were richly polychromed (painted in bright colours) and gilt, probably forming part of a collection that depicted twelve prophets and the twelve apostles, and were presumably intended as an example of holiness for the monks. The fact that the original gilding and colouring of the drapery were readily visible in 1829 suggests that they did not adorn the west front, as some have suggested. Others think they may have decorated the choir screen or the nave pillars.

Another theory, now widely accepted as probable, associates them with the chapter house, the second most prestigious building of the abbey after the church. The chapter house at the abbey was not unusual in having an elegant vestibule with a richly and colourfully decorated twelfth-century arcade; architecturally, the arches are transitional between Romanesque and Early Gothic (i.e. late twelfth century), having both rounded and pointed arches and abstract ornament and foliage carvings.

The figures are widely regarded as the most important late-twelfth-century sculpture to have survived in the country. There is general agreement that the sculptures, though influenced by contemporary French style, were carved in England. They are likely all to be of the same date, and, like the

chapter house arches, to reflect the transition from Romanesque to Gothic.

Of the sculptures that can be identified, Moses is portrayed with horns, an iconographic convention in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, possibly because of some confusion around a translation of the Hebrew term *qāran* in Exodus 34. In the Hebrew Scriptures, horns had positive associations (Wikipedia), and the term is now understood to mean 'shining' or 'emitting rays' (somewhat like horns), which may be an allegorical way of saying 'glorified'. In his left hand Moses holds the tablets of the Law (the Ten Commandments) and in his right, the bronze serpent which he set up in the desert to heal the Israelites from poisonous snake bites. St John the Evangelist is also identifiable by his youthful clean-shaven appearance. The delicately carved drapery gives the figures an apparent freedom of movement typical of the twelfth-century early Gothic period, which drew widely



Architectural illustration of how the interior of the Chapter House may have looked, York Museums Trust

upon classical sources for inspiration. Technical investigations have shown that Moses' face was bright pink, his lips bright red, hair gold, and tunic of the extremely expensive lapis lazuli. John's robe was rose-red. Sadly, exposure to the air after their discovery caused the strong colours to fade, leaving only traces behind. We can only imagine the impression they must have given when they were in their original position.

Several features of the sculptures are typical of the transition from Romanesque to Early Gothic: the remarkable freedom of movement, fluency and elegance to the carving of the drapery; the poses ranging from more rigid (Moses) to more lifelike in the case of John, who looks as if he is about to step forward to greet us; the hands sensitively modelled. All this confirms a late-twelfth-century date of execution. Marcourse (p. 7) concludes that they are unlikely to have been carved much before 1220.

It is easy for us in the twenty-first century to forget how visually drab much of everyday life was in the Middle Ages; fabrics and buildings used by ordinary people would have been brown and grey, so these colourful figures would have been an uplifting sight.



St Mary's Abbey reconstructed Chapter House arches at the Yorkshire Museum, photographed by Cecilia Bainton

We now fast forward to the sixteenth century and the sad business of the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. St Mary's was the subject of a visitation (in effect an inspection) by Archbishop Lee of the minster in 1534. The purpose of such events was to check that the abbey was being run properly, and to correct any abuses that were found. Although it is often alleged that the monasteries were suppressed as houses of vice and immorality, there is conflicting evidence around this. The official visitors (in effect, inspectors) were over-zealous in finding only what they were looking for, or rather, what they had been told to find, and gave credence to unsubstantiated hearsay. Thus, while they alleged that Abbot Thornton of St Mary's Abbey was over-familiar with a married woman, that he wore richly adorned expensive garments, that wine was sold on the premises, there is no concrete evidence for this. As David Knowles acknowledges (p. 303), 'the conflict of evidence leaves us without clear, simple and overwhelming proof of the general depravity of the monasteries'. Henry VIII's response to the visitation was to accuse the monasteries of 'nourishing vice and abominable living'. (Jennings, p. 215, and Knowles pp. 302, 327–28). Eventually, of course, the king's wish to seize the monastery and its contents to swell his war coffers came to pass in 1539, when the abbot and monks

surrendered and received a pension. From then until the site was acquired by the Yorkshire Philosophical Society in 1828 the abbey site was the property of the Crown.

There is little doubt that the generally conservative population of the north desired the preservation of the monasteries, which gave considerable help to the poor; they regarded the life of holiness to be of benefit for the common good. Let us give the last word to the good and gentle Robert Aske, leader of Pilgrimage of Grace, who grieved for suppression of monasteries, 'one of the beauties of this realm... all gentlemen much succoured in their needs with money, their younger sons there succoured, and in nunneries their daughters brought up in virtue, ... [abbeys were] great maintainers of seaways and dykes, maintainers and builders of bridges and highways [and] such other things for the commonwealth', where 'people had not only worldly refreshing in their bodies but also spiritual refuge'.



Tiles from St Mary's Abbey, YORYM : HB137, HB163, HB164, HB165, HB180, HB187, photographed by Cecilia Bainton

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1 My account of the foundation of the abbey mainly follows Janet Burton, 'St Mary's Abbey and the city of York'. Reprinted from the Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1988 Annual Report. I have also drawn upon Janet Burton, *The monastic order in Yorkshire 1069–1215*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, and Christopher Norton, 'The buildings of St Mary's Abbey, York and their destruction' *The Antiquaries Journal*, vol. 74, March 1994, pp. 256–88  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581500024446>  
2 One might ask why a big new abbey was built in York when there was already a large ecclesiastical institution there, and why the abbey not attached to the Minster. Intriguingly, the Minster was being rebuilt between 1080 and 1100, so was almost contemporary with the building of the original Romanesque abbey church.  
3 Bernard Jenkins, *Yorkshire monasteries: cloister, land and people*, Otley 1999, pp. 8–9  
4 Norton, pp. 269–70. Norton draws on a Chronicle for 1315 and a survey of 1545 for this information. See also Rev. Charles Wellbeloved, 'Some account of the ancient and present state of the Abbey of St Mary, York, and of the discoveries recently made in excavating the ground on which the principal buildings of the Abbey formerly stood', *Vetusta Monumenta*, 5 (1835), pp. 1–7





Ancient Britons, Description of Great Britain and Ireland (c.1574), British Library, accessed via Wikimedia Commons

# THE DREAM OF Goilla Phoil

**71AD**  
It was the eve of Imbolc, on the gently sloping North Bank of the Uisce Brigid, among the ancient yew and giant oak trees, at the shrine of the Mother Goddess of the Brigantes. 'Brigid, the Druí and Ban Druí were making preparations for the great mid-winter festival of Imbolc.  
Across the river, Giolla Phoíl mac Eíon na tairngire mac ebrauc, was standing on the earthen rampart

that stood protective around his homestead, looking across the river at the sacred site.  
The sound of the chanting and incantations carried clearly in the still air of late afternoon. The young warrior was in a pensive mood, these were troubling times for the Brigantes. The great Queen, Cartimandua, has made a pact of non-aggression with the Romans, and has become a client kingdom of Rome. By so doing

she was hoping to avoid conflict and keep her kingdom intact, On the other hand, her husband, Wenutius, was not convinced at the sincerity of the Romans and argued for a more aggressive approach.  
Giolla was unaware of any other forces that may have caused the rift in the royal household. Although of the same royal line as the Queen, he shared the view of Wenutius. Things had become more unsettled in Brigantia when the Queen divorced Wenutius and had married his chariot driver, Welociacus.  
Things had got so bad that a force of Roman soldiers had come north to rescue Cartimada and had taken her to safety at Lindum.  
Giolla Phoíl was roused from his musing by a gentle voice at the foot of the rampart, calling his name. He could tell by the blue-hooded cloak she wore that it was a Ban Druí; again she called his name and told him to come to the gate. He opened the gate and bid her enter. She refused, she handed him a flask, saying 'Drink this potion after you eat tonight, but do not drink mead, ale or wine, only fresh spring water.' In awe, and without speaking, he took the flask from the hooded figure, she turned and walked gracefully back towards the river, the waters of which were glowing blood red in the rays of the setting sun.  
Giolla Phoíl ate a hearty meal of stewed pork, drank the potion given to him by the Ban Druí, and almost immediately felt desperately tired. He went to bed alone and fell into a deep sleep.

**2-71AD**  
The sun was shining brightly, glistening on the wet muddy banks of the Uisce Brigid. Giolla Phoíl was standing on the ramparts of the homestead, gazing in amazement at the scene before – gone was the mighty oak, gone were the sacred, ancient yews. A great mound of earth with stout timber fortification on top encircled the place where the Holy Shrine had been.  
Instead of the rhythmic chanting of the druí and Ban Druí came the harsh tones being barked out in a language that Giolla could not understand by men in the garb of the Romans.

A quick look behind him to reassure himself that his home was still there; it was, but standing quiet. Seemingly without any effort on his part, Giolla was standing inside this mighty fortress. Row after row of tents stood before him. Suddenly one of the strangers spoke to him.  
Giolla was more than a little surprised to find that he could understand what the stranger was saying to him: 'You see that chap there, just come through the gateway on the black horse, well that is Quintus Petillius Cerialis, Governor of Briton. He's not as good as he thinks he is. Lost all the Ninth Legion, ten years ago, in the fight against one of your Queens. That was before my time with the IXth, came over here from Gaul, two years back. Got a good job here, I'm a standard bearer, Lucius Rufinus is my name, and you are?'  
Before he had a chance to answer, the scene was changed, the wood and

earth fortress was now of stone, the tents replaced by rows of solid structures. The whole place eerily quiet.  
**120AD**  
Giolla Phoíl was standing next to one of the guards in the room above the Porta Sinestra. The guard seemed not to notice him, his gaze firmly fixed on a small band of men, dishevelled and wounded, limping along across the field of Mars.  
Giolla recognised them by their uniforms: Roman Legionnaires. As they moved closer in a sort of stumbling march, he saw that the one who seemed to be in charge was the Roman he had met earlier. Lucius Deccious Rufinus. Slowly, as if walking into a mist, the returning soldiers from the IXth, faded and were lost to view.

**121AD**  
The mist had gone, Giolla was now on the corner tower of the fort. Uisce Brigid to his left, the field of Mars ahead was once again filled with marching men. The 'Primus Pilus' (First spear – senior centurion) was sitting astride a horse, shouting commands. The standard, blowing in the breeze which now bore the image of a blue boar (the emblem of the VI Legion) was in the care of Julius Sempitimus Geta.  
The troops of the garrison were being drilled mercilessly. Tomorrow was to be the greatest day in the history of the fortress. The most northerly outpost, to become a capital of the whole Roman Empire with the arrival of the emperor himself, Publius Hadrianus. The emperor was coming by boat; a new jetty with lavish ornamentation has been constructed on the riverbank in front of the main gateway into the fortress. Giolla could see it clearly from his vantage on the corner tower.



Photography of a reenactment event with Roman Soldiers, Wikimedia Commons, Caligula 10's wife



Tombstone of Lucius Duccius Rufinus, YORYM : 1998.19, photographed by Philip Newton



Location of Roman Fortress, Annex and Civilian Settlement (after Nuttgens 2001, 7)

**211AD**  
Once more the scene was changing, it was midwinter, what few trees remained were leafless; the feast of Imbolc had just taken place. Giolla could sense a subdued mood within the fortification, although, there was heightened activity. News had arrived early that day (4th February) that the Emperor, Septimius Severus, had died at his villa, situated on the south-facing, gently sloping hillside of the west of the Colonia, between the Road to Calcaria and Isurum Brigantium.  
Giolla was standing near the newly built temple to Mithras, while the emperor's body was expected to arrive later that day, to be made ready for cremation.



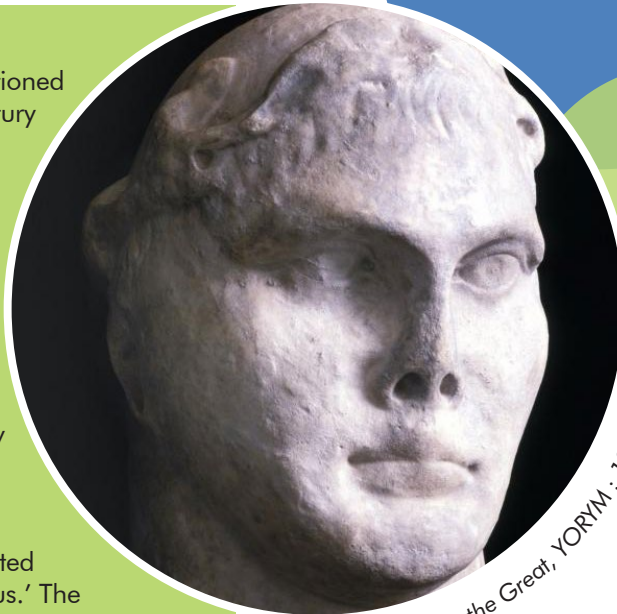
## 306AD

The troops of the Ninth Legion and the auxiliary troops stationed at Eboracum were assembled in formation, century by century on the field of Mars. The Celt, as if floating high above, had a bird's eye view of the procedure. He watched as a group of men left the Praetorium, mounted on fine looking horses. The thought came to Giolla how much taller these were than the nimble ponies that had pulled his chariot.

His gaze followed the mounted men as they left the fort by the main gateway, turned right and rode to the field of Mars. How standing on one of the interval towers, immediately behind the governor, the tribunes and a fine-looking man in his mid-thirties, who has a look of authority about him. This was Flavius Valerius Constantinus.

He spoke to the assembled army. 'I am sad to say that my father, our Emperor Constantius, died last night. Rome is now without a head.' It was one of the tribunes who shouted towards the troops. 'We think it should be you, Constantinus.' The assembled troops took up the chant 'Constantinus, Constantinus!' Spear butts pounded the ground, shields were clashed together, the noise was deafening.

So it was that Giolla Phoil witnessed the declaration of the new Emperor, known to history as Constantine the Great, in a field outside the fortress of Eboracum at the very place where Brigid's Shrine had once been.



Bust of Constantine the Great, YORIM : 1998.23, York Museums Trust

foretold that it would be a boy child and that he would achieve greatness. Just after midday Eadwine, son of Aella, King of the Kingdom of Deira was born.

## 588AD

Two years later, Aella was killed in battle by Aetherith, offspring of Aethlric, King of Bernicia. Aelfritha fled Eoforwic, with her to children Eadwine and Acha and sought sanctuary with Cearl, King of Mercia, her brother-in-law.

## 606AD

Eadwine returns to his homeland, with his new bride Cwenburgh, daughter of Cearl of Mercia and reclaims Deira.

## 616AD

His sister Acha marries Aethelfrith of Bernicia, and the two kingdoms united under Eadwine's rule.

## 617AD

Eadwine has a new larger house built on what had been the field of Mars but now known as Galmano.

## 624AD

Queen Cwenburgh, Eadwine's wife, dies in childbirth.

## 625AD

Aethleburgh, daughter of Aethebort of Kent, comes to Eoforwic with her priest, Paulinus and marries the pagan Eadwine.

## 626AD

An attempt on the King's life is made by men from Wessex, at his home in Galmano. Eadwine decides to convert to Christianity. The wooden idol of Wodan, that stood on almost the same spot as Brigid's Shrine was pulled down and burnt. A Christian Minster was erected on the site and consecrated by Paulinus.

## 627AD

Eadwine is baptised into the Christian faith along with the pagan priest Coifi.

## 683AD

Giolla Phoil mac Eion na Tairngire, was standing in the market square of Galmano, facing the royal palace. A cold, bright, windless day at the time of leaf fall, Giolla watches as Queen Aethelburg and her children, aided by house servants, is busy putting personal belongings on to an oxcart. Archbishop Paulinus is standing in the doorway, urging greater speed. The cart moves slowly down to the Usa where a boat is moored and ready for departure.

News arrived earlier that morning, that King Eadwine and two of his sons Osfrith and Wadfrith, had died in the Battle of Hatfield Chase. Queen Aethelburg, now fearful for her own and her children's lives, was returning to her native Kent.

King Edwin, defeated, died at Hatfield on 12 October 633 by Cadwallon King of Gwynedd and Penda, King of Mercia.

## 740AD

The Celt is surprised to find himself standing at the back of a stone-built room, at the edge of Galmano. At the other end of the room is a sad-eyed old man in plain garb, addressing in the Latin tongue a group of boys seated on stools in front of him.

One child catches the attention of Giolla, a fair-haired, bright looking boy who seems to be more attentive than the rest. He was being spoken to by the master reprovingly "Flaccus Albinus Alcuinus, I understand that you have been using your Anglian name, "Ealhwine". How many times must I remind only the mother tongue of Rome is to be used in this school?"

Alcuin smiled faintly and said 'Sorry'.

Coppergate Helmet, YORCM : CA665, York Museums Trust



Britain peoples circa 600, Imeowbot, from The Historical Atlas by William R. Shepherd, 1926, Creative Commons 3.0

## 865AD

Giolla the Britton was on top of the Minster tower, newly completed, an addition to the church, dedicated to Saint Peter. The church in which the first Christian King of Northumbria had been baptised, almost 240 years ago.

In front of him, only a few steps away was the river which he knew as Uiser Brigid, now called 'Usa', immediately to his right was Earlsburg, to his left, and dominated by the corner tower of the legionary fortress was the headland, with cattle grazing in it. The Anglian settlement of Galmano was now almost exclusively the domain of the Earls and their close kin.

The Angles and the Romano-British were by now so intermingled as to be indistinguishable, living together within the old fortress and colonia, but

not always peacefully. As Giolla Phoil, was watching the activities along the riverbank he saw two strange ships coming upstream. The large square sail hanging limp, the bunts propelled on the rising tide by a row of oarsmen.

As the large boat approached the landing jetty he saw a long-haired man, taller than most, a weather-beaten face under a polished steel cap, standing in the prow, a heavy war spear in his hand. Before the boat had reached the wooden staging the riverbank was filled with Anglian

## 430AD - Anglian

'This is the tale of the Anglian hero, as told in the mead hall by Skarlde the Bard'.

It tells of the deed of the noble Sarefugl

*Honourable offspring of the shield bearer Saebald*

*Warrior son of a warrior father*

*Raised as a child on a dark wooded 'holt'*

*Fire-forged fighter, fierce foemen defater*

*Noble Bee-raider, wild wandering wolf.*

The Romans had gone, the great fortress deserted. The field of Mars was now pastureland for the cattle of the Romano-British who had remained in Eboracum. These were a mixture of many races, retired veterans and those descendants from across the Roman Empire as well as the Britons, with whom they had intermarried.

Giolla Phoil and Eion Na Tairngire were there when Eborus Tillius Rufus met with Skalda the Anglian envoy, in the old forum building of Eboracum. Eborus (Celtic mother, Roman father) was the leader of the council that now oversaw the running of part of lower Britain from Cataractonium in the north to Danum in the south.

Since the abandonment of the great wall by the legions, raids by the wild tribes of the North have become ever

more frequent. In Britain there was a shortage of men of fighting age. So many had been conscripted and shipped to other parts of the great Empire. The council had asked for help from the Angles.

Skalda, the envoy, was here to talk terms. Giolla hears the Britons offer the Angles lands outside the colonia, outside the old fortress, land that had once been known as the field of Mars. Oaths of good faith were taken. Skalda 'by the hammer of Thunor, the sword of Tiw' and the oath 'Ring of woden Eborus by his Gods Jupiter and Mars and by his vice-consul, Senacus, by his Christian God, Jesus Christ'.

Before the next full moon rose, three boats of Angles had landed at the riverside near the old corner tower, from which vantage point the Celt watched with great interest. He saw Eborus greet Shefugl, the leader of the Angles. Although oaths had been sworn, Giolla sensed a feeling of mistrust between the two parties.

## 586AD

The scene had again changed, Giolla now saw a number of thatched roofed wooden dwellings on what had once been the field of Mars and the Shrine to Brigid. In one of the larger structures. Aella, offspring of Yffe, was pacing the floor. Aelfritha, his wife was about to give birth. The Wicca had



Image of Viking invaders, Folio 9v of Miscellany on the Life of St. Edmund, 1130, Morgan Library



warriors, with swords, shields and spears at the ready. When he saw the massed warriors, the tall stranger lowered his spear and grinned. 'I am Ragnor, King of the Danes and Swedes, I wish to speak to Aella, King of the Northumbrians.'

Aella stepped forward: 'I am King of the Northumbrians. What do you want?' He asked abruptly. 'Some fresh meat would be nice.' Ragnor replied, 'One can have too much of pickled herring and salted cod.'

Still wary, Aella, invited Ragnor and his two crews ashore, in all about one hundred and twenty men. As they passed the Minster of St Peter,

Aella saw Ragnor look at it with great interest.

That night a great feast was prepared in the mead hall at Earlsburg. Aella had heard about these rough, pagan Norsemen, so as a precaution, he had sent the wifemen in to the old fortress and advised them to secure the gates. As the mead, ale and wine flowed, Ragnor became ever more boastful. He told Osberht, brother of Aella, how he intended taking the lands of the Angles and the Saxons with just two boat full of his Vikings. He said, 'The Angles had grown soft, too much farming, not enough fighting.'

Aella overheard the remark and knew that he had been right in not trusting Ragnor. He, like so many of his men, who had been on short rations for weeks, had one hornful of ale too many and dosed off to sleep. Aella saw his chance and had the giant Dane and his companions locked in chains. Aella realised what a danger Ragnor could be to his Kingdom, so the King of Northumbria had the King of the Danes and Swedes executed and his body cast into a pool of eels. (Legend has it that Ragnor was cast into a pit of snakes.)

### 866AD

It was in the feast of Cadfan, November first, that Giolla Phoil, from a vantage point on the school roof, watched as the two armies of Vikings approached Eoforwic. One party was led by Ubba, Glithrun and Siddor, part of the invaders that had landed in the south, earlier that summer; the other war band was led by Ivarr and Halfdann Ragnorsson. From the Kingdom of Dyflin (Dublin), sons of Ragnor Lodbrok, here to seek revenge for their father's killing.

### 867AD

On the feast day of Saint Cuthbert of Northumbria, 20th March, Giolla the Celt saw a large gathering of Anglian warriors making camp at the edge of the great fortress. Battle was joined next morning, Aella, King of the Northumbria was killed, his troops defeated. This started the rule of the Danes.

### 927AD

Giolla Phoil mac Eion was once more on top of the Multangular corner tower of the old fortress. Below him, drawn up were two mighty armies, one, those with allegiance to the Jorvik Vikings, the other, larger force led by a tall warrior, in his early thirties, a golden crown adorned his helmet.

With much clamour, the ringing of the swords on shields, loud fearsome war cries and the blaring blast of war horse, the two armies joined battle. The Vikings gave way, some fled, some cast down their swords and axes. The Anglo Saxons, under their King Aethelstan, had taken the day.

With the capture of Jorvik, Aethelstan

became the first King of all Angle-land. The Celt standing in the King's tent, erected on the field that had once been sacred to the Briton, heard Athelstan say: 'It is hard to believe, that despite the riches of this place, there are so many sick and poor people here. I think that this would be the ideal spot for a house of care.'

### 939AD

The Celt, from his vantage point on top of the hospital of St Peter, built by the authority of Athelstan, on land sacred to Brigid, watched as the army of Norsemen once again fought for and won the settlement of Jorvik.

### 952AD

Giolla watched as Erik Haraldsson, son of Harold Fairhair, bid goodbye to his wife Gwenhild, and his large army rode across Brigid's field northwards towards the land of the Scots and Picts.

### 954AD

The Briton was watching as Erik Bloodaxe, 'Brother Killer', left Jorvik for the last time as he left for Stainmore.

### 1050AD

#### St Mary's Abbey

Giolla looks on as the newly built Minster and school are dedicated to St Olaf Haraldsson (King of Norway 1015-25) on Galmanho.

### 1055AD

The Briton watches from his perch of St Olaf's Minster as the widow Aelfflaed leads the mourners at the funeral of Siward Digal (the stout) Earl of Northumbria, son of Beorn Estrithsson from the church to the burial ground nearby.

### 1068AD

'William the Bastard', Duke of Normandy, King of England (son of Richard (II) Duke of Normandy by Herleva, daughter of Fulbert, the tanner, a serving maid at Richard's court) was discussing tactics with Alain de Bretagne, AKA Alan Arrouz, Lord of Richmond, and Kinsman of Willam, in the large tented pavilion, erected on the open grounds between St Olaf's Minster and the Roman wall, known to Giolla as 'Bridgid's Field'.

After the uprising of the 'five lions' of Jorvik, William was determined to crush any challenge to his authority and was planning with Alan Rufus how to extract revenge.

### 1070AD

The handbell is ringing, an emaciated priest cries to his God for mercy and an end to the suffering of his people. Giolla Phoil, is standing in the graveyard of St Olaf Minster, as yet another burial is taking place. William the Bastard's revenge has been ruthless. The Harrying of the North has caused the starvation and death to so many of the English.

### 1075AD

In an attempt to atone for his part in the Harrying, Lord Alan Rufus of Richmond gives land near Galmanho to the monk, Stephen of York, and his money to enlarge the religious sites of St Olaf and St Peter.

### 1086AD

#### Doomsday book

It was on the Feast Day of St Paulinus of Euforwic, October tenth, that the Celt saw a band of travellers arrive at the gatehouse to the little religious enclave that had been established on what had been Brigid's field.

By their outfits, Giolla knew them to be holy men, he hears one of the monks speak to the gatekeeper. 'May we see Father Stephen, we are from Lastingham, we have been walking for almost seven days. Brother Petrus is old and needed much help on the journey.'

The gatekeeper replied, 'Abbot Stephen, gently correcting the misnomer, 'is unwell at the moment, but come in, you are expected.'



William the Conqueror, Bayeux Tapestry, Public Domain



## 1087AD

It was late summer when Giolla Phoil mac Eion saw the messenger from the great castle downstream from the monastery arrive at the gate. His message was simple: 'The King is dead.' Later that year, Abbot Stephen of Eofurwic dies. The ancient Briton, watches as his remains are interred on the holy site.

## 1088AD

The new abbot arrives, Stephen from the Abbey of St Hilda at Whitby. (St Hilda, great niece of King Edwin of Northumbria, was baptised at York, at the same time as Edwin.) On his first visit to Eofurwic, the new King, William Rufus gives more land to the monastery.

## 1089AD

The King, with great ceremony, lays the foundation stone for the new abbey church; at the same visit he lays the foundation stone for a new hospital and renamed after St Leonard, instead of St Peter. (St Leonard de Noblac, 496-545AD, a Frankish saint.)

## 1093AD

The watcher was in a spacious room inside the plain, stone-built house of Abbot Stephen of Whitby. A log fire burning in the hearth cast shadows, flickering onto plain walls. The Abbot, grey haired, was seated at a polished oak table, about to start his evening meal. A plain repast of bread, butter, cheese, eggs and apples, newly harvested from the abbey orchard, washed down with goblets of weak ale.

A knock on the door, answered by Brother Guiliam: standing on the threshold was a strongly built man, his surcoat indicating that he was from the castle downstream from the monastery. Stephen bid him enter. 'Sad news, Lord Abbot, we have just heard, your benefactor, Lord Alan de Bretagne, Lord of Richmond has died in Erawic.'

Caption under image of Lord Alan de Bretagne – Alan 'Rufus' de Bretagne died in his 54th year; at the time his estate was valued at £11,000. The equivalent of £81 billion in 2024. This would have made him the 9th most wealthy man in history.

## 1112AD

The devout man of religion, Abbot Stephen of Whitby, passed away in this year, having served in the office for almost twenty-five years. He has seen the building of the abbey church, the establishment of a thriving monastery and the rededication of St Leonard's Hospital. He firmly established the rules as advised by the order of St Benedict. He was succeeded by Abbot Richard of Bedale.

## 1131AD

The Celt Giolla Phoil found himself standing at the front of the new abbey church of St Mary, with a view down the long nave. In front of him, on the high altar in a plain wooden coffin lay the mortal remains of the late abbot, Richard (de Lastingham). He was one of the monks the Celt had seen arriving, forty-five summers past, forsaking the harsh rule of the Celtic monastery for the more enlightened rules of St Benedict.

The church was full of people; towards the front were lines of black-garbed monks, behind them stood the lay workers at the monastery – cooks and scullery workers from the kitchen, forestry workers who kept the complex supplied with timber. Further back were the tenants of the monastery, and to the rear stood the few old womenfolk who had been allowed to attend.

Giolla had been transported to the rectory, a few precious books, hide-bound, were on the shelf. The room was filled with the abbey's monks, a sombre scene with all the black habits. A polite discussion was taking place; although an old man, Richard's passing had been sudden, and a new abbot was needed urgently. Gaufried de Easthope was elected by a very narrow majority; he was seen by many to as being too lax in his devotion.

The Briton looks on as Prior Richard de Huntindune and thirteen of the dark garbed brothers leave the abbey precinct, walk down to the river and climb into one of the rivercraft waiting there. They headed off upstream on the rising tide. They were to become the founders of Fountains Cistercian Monastery.

## 1132AD

As the Prior Richard De Huntindune and his fellow Benedictines left the monastery there were very few there waiting to see them go. They departed the precinct whilst the monks were at the divine service of Terce. It is barely a week since the riot occurred that caused the rift within the community. There has been a feeling of unrest since Gaufield had been, controversially, appointed Abbot, matters boiled over on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary when the Abbot had overindulged on some wine recently arrived from France.

He was so intoxicated that he was unable to attend the fifth service of the day. Robert de Gargrave, later Saint Robert de Newminster, publicly condemned Gaufield for this breach of behaviour of one in his position of power.

An argument followed; prior Richard and twelve other monks side with Robert. This soon degenerated into a brawl on the forecourt of the abbey church. These fourteen were confined

to their cells until judgement could be made. It was decided that they should be exiled from the monastery at York. They made an appeal to the Archbishop Thurstan who granted them some land beside the River Skell, a tributary of the River Ure. This was easily accessible by boat. This eventually became the Cistercian Monastery of Fountains Abbey.

## 1133AD

It was on the first day of January, the feast day of Mary, Mother of God, that Giolla Phoil, again found himself in the Abbots House. A heavy covering of snow was on the ground outside. It was the first time for the divine service of Vespers.

Brother Richard was in the Abbot's parlour; Gaufried was lying in a drunken stupor on the floor's rushes, vomit staining his chin and habit. The young monk hurried from the room to return a short while later, accompanied by the Prior, Savaricus. The Abbot's heavy drinking has become a serious issue for the community at St Mary's. The Celt was there when the envoy from Archbishop Thurston advised Gaufield to step aside from this role of responsibility. It was on the Feast of the Epiphany that Giolla Phoil saw the former abbot being helped to the infirmary close to the river, and committed to spend the rest of his life there.

## 1189AD

The red-haired Celt was now beside the newly completed Gate House, on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, shortly after Prime, when he saw Abbot Robert de Harpham and six well-armed lay workers ride past him. They were to meet up with Geoffrey, illegitimate son of King Henry III, newly appointed but as yet, unordained Archbishop of York and a number of the leading citizens of Everwic, including two of the Jewish leaders, Josce and Benedict. This group, along with soldiers from the castle garrison, were to ride to Westminster for the coronation of King Richard I, at which the Archbishop of York was to officiate at the crowning of his half-brother.

## 1190AD

It was the Feast Day of Saint Finian Lobhar, the leper, the Shabbat Hagadol, the great Sabbath before Passover, for the fifty or so Jewish families who lived in Everwic. Giolla Phoil found himself standing at the northeastern corner of the Abbey precinct.

There was a large gathering of the townsfolk and many other armed with sticks, staves and knives. They were being addressed by a dark-haired, high-born Norman nobleman, sitting astride a fine looking horse. Richard Malebisse was heavily in debt to the money lender, Josce. He had no means or intention of repaying that debt. Two more of his henchmen, also debtors, were standing at the rear of the crowd, inciting the violence.

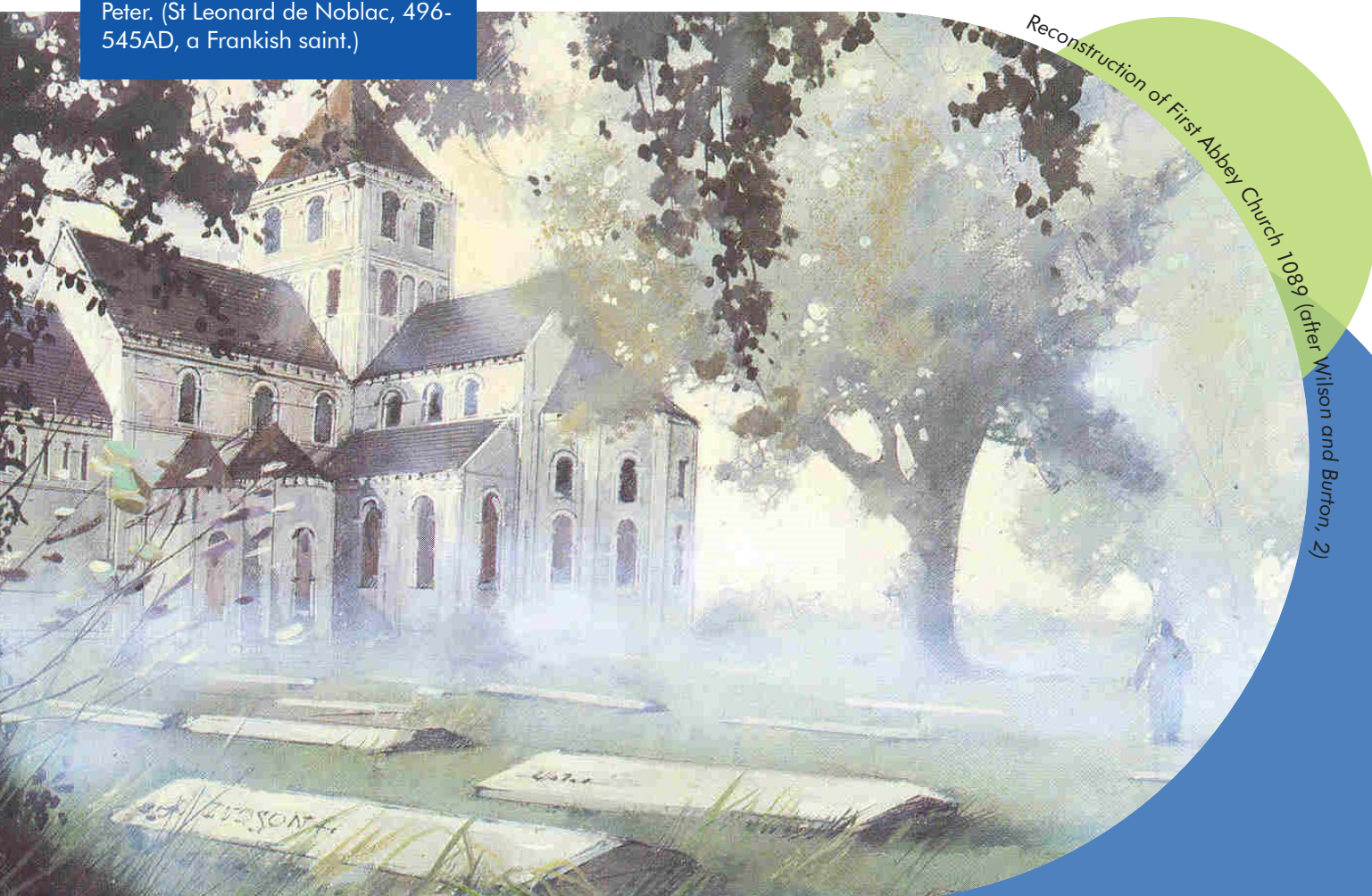
Passions ran high, and stoked by lies told by Richard, the mob set off, first to the house of Benedict, a fine building on Konig Strata. This was looted and all inside murdered without any mercy being shown. The Celt noticed that within the monastery, the brothers and the lay workers had taken the precaution to arm themselves in case the mob should turn on them. Later that day, flames and smoke could be seen rising from the wooden tower within the castle itself.

## 1191AD

It was the Feast Day of Saint Michael the Archangel at the time of the Autumn equinox, Giolla Phoil was in the Abbey courtroom standing behind Abbot Robert de Harpham's chair; beside him sat the bursar and a scribe. Standing facing them was Eustace de Lowdham, the shire reeve of Everwic and Snottingham and the Keeper of the Gaol at Everwic. He was being questioned by Robert. 'What are you doing about it? This is the third time his month that goods have been stolen on their way to St Mary's, by Robert de Hode, and his gang.'

Eustace, a bully of a man usually, felt cowed within the confines of the court chamber.

'All that I can tell you is he is a wolfshead, outside the law', mumbled the shire reeve, 'I am told that he is



Reconstruction of First Abbey Church 1089 (after Wilson and Burton, 2)



▶ the son of a miller, a yeoman, from somewhere between the rivers Sheaf and Loxley over in the West Thirthing.'

He got into a fight with two of my men over the collection of the new grain tax; one was very badly injured, Robert fled, and he is now roaming the 'great wood'. I am getting reports about from \* Snottingham, Sheaffield, Wachefel, Pontefracto and Wedrebi\*.

We go to one place, there are tracks leading everywhere, it's impossible to know which one to follow, even the blothunds cannot track him.

The Abbot seemed less than impressed by these excuses from the shire reeve regarding Robert de Hode.

A half groat of Edward III, from the Skipton Bridge Hoard, 1363-9, York Museums Trust



### 1328AD

It was on the feast day of St Sebastian, 20 January, that Goilla Phoil mac Eion was standing by the Abbey's water gateway; beside him were Abbot Alan de Wasse, William de Melton, the archbishop of Everwic and the boy king Edward III. They were awaiting the arrival, by boat, of the princess Phillipa of Hanault (Belgium).

She was to stay in the royal quarters within the Abbey, prior to her marriage to Edward on the 24th (January).

The king himself was staying at the Franciscan Friary near Everwic castle. The royal quarters within the abbey were very well protected. Everwic was now the seat of government (1327-35) and the King's Chancery was also within the monastery enclosure.

### 1503AD

Giolla Phoil again finds himself at the Abbey entrance, this time alongside Abbot, Robert Wanhope and other senior brothers awaiting the arrival of the Princess Margaret Tudor, daughter of King Henry VII England. The thirteen-year-old child was

taking a few days' rest in York before continuing on the long journey to Holyrood to marry the thirty-year-old King James IV of Scotland.

The young Margaret was to be accompanied by Thomas Savage, Archbishop of York, along with the Archbishop of Glasgow were to marry the couple at Holyrood Abbey on 8 August.

### 1528AD

Eion's son is in the library of the abbey, watching Brother John Grayson reading, in silence, his new copy of the Vulgate bible that has just arrived from Paris.

### 1536AD

The Celt finds himself within the richly furnished apartment of William Thornton, Abbot of St Mary's; with them, travel-stained, is an envoy of King Henry VIII. The traveller takes a parchment scroll from his satchel sealed with the king's mark and hands to the Abbot. William breaks the wax seal and reads with disbelief and horror the King's intention to abolish the monastery, and that all the gold and other precious objects with are now the property of the king.



Left: Undercroft of St Leonard's Hospital, photographed by Philip Newton

### Footnote

Some, all, or none of these events may have occurred in the manner revealed in the dream of Giolla Phoil.

Giolla Phoil is in the great Abbey church along with the brothers and the two hundred lay workers as they are addressed by the lawyer, Robert Aske, as he proposes that a delegation go to London and make a plea to the king, asking him to change his mind.

### 1539AD

It is Christmas Day, the Briton Giolla Phoil is standing at the altar of the Abbey church, all is dark and silent, no lights, no chanting, no monks.

### 27 Aug 2024AD and 71AD

Giolla Phoil nac Eion na Tairngire mac Ebrauc found himself in a small room in a strange large building. Through the two large windows he could see a neatly maintained parkland, with many people strolling around aimlessly. In the room seated at two tables pushed together were four women, and three men. One elderly grey haired man started to speak: 'it is about Giolla Phoil mac...'

It was at that moment that the guard dogs and hounds started a great clamour, and the ancient Celt was rudely awakened.



St Mary's Abbey today, York Museums Trust

# THE ORIGINS OF THE YORKSHIRE MUSEUM – a Regency story

Have you ever wondered why the Grecian style building in the Museum Gardens is called the Yorkshire Museum and not the York Museum? This is the story...

If you stray into the Museum gardens you will come across the very impressive Yorkshire Museum a Roman/Greek style building that was completed only in 1830 – recent in York terms.

A drawing by N W Whittock in that year (1830) showed a group of elegant Regency folk, with the backdrop of the ruined abbey of St Marys.

How did all this come to be?

Strangely enough, it was not initially a York project; at a meeting of the Bath and West England Agricultural Society, the building of the museum was suggested. The meeting was reported by the newspaper, the York Courant, in 1822.

It seems that a cave, discovered in 1821 in Kirkdale, North Yorkshire,

was full of the bones of elephants, rhinos, hippos, hyenas, and elks. This was an amazing find in so unlikely a place as North Yorkshire.

The cave had been investigated by Professor Buckland of Oxford University in 1821.

One of the earliest visitors was a York man, Colonel William Salmond, an amateur geologist, whose wife was a notable figure in Catherine Cappe's and Faith Gray's group of pioneering radical women who made such a difference to the quality of life for the poor of Regency York.

It was to be William Salmond who took a noted professional geologist William Smith to Kirkdale to show him the cave, encrusted as it was, in stalactites which had been mixed in with the bones.



The New Museum, with Part of the Ruins of St. Mary's Abbey York, 1829, N. Whittock, York Museums Trust



Salmond then persuaded other York gentlemen to get involved in finding out more.

The bones of the animals found were not native to Britain as far as anyone knew. The finds were in short, incredible.

Elephants and rhinos roaming the North Yorkshire moors?

Incredible, and yet the bones were absolute proof of their presence in Yorkshire.

In those days of the late 18th and early 19th century geologists still sought to 'harmonise' two equally authentic accounts of earth's history – the geology of the stratified rocks found in the cave with the Holy Bible, with its clear origin of the earth story.

The cave, Professor Buckland deduced, had been a den for hyenas – 'relics of the deluge' and the bones were the food remains of the animals they had scavenged.

The find had a major impact on intellectual society in York.

The proposal to build a museum and 'school of the arts' was first suggested by the editor of the short-lived Yorkshire Observer.

York was dwindling as a centre of business at that time. The industrial revolution had led to the mushrooming of small towns like Leeds Sheffield and Birmingham into large cities, and new Societies were springing up all the time. Birmingham notably had its 'Lunar Society' headed by James Watt, Matthew Boulton and Joseph Priestley.

The York middle classes felt it was time for them to become a presence too – hence the formation of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society (YPS).

The first meeting of the YPS took place on December 7th 1822 between William Salmond and two other York men – James Atkinson and Anthony



Cartoon of William Buckland by William Conybear, from *The Life and Correspondence of William Buckland*, 1822, by Elizabeth Gordon

Jaw of a Hyena, found in Kirkdale Cave, YORYM : G1201, York Museums Trust



Thorpe, at Atkinson's house on Lendal or Upper Coney Street.

A prospectus was published, and the story began.

One thing was evident – that the Society was to be non-exclusive. It was to throw its membership open to all classes. The Society subscription was to be kept as low as possible.

William Salmond was the first geologist to explore and map the site of the Kirkdale cave.

His colleague Anthony Thorpe was a legal man and a partner to William Gray of Gray's Court and Jonathan Gray, William's son, who became the first treasurer of the Society.

Other notable members were prominent York Regency figures: Sir William Strickland and the Reverend Charles Wellbeloved who had founded the York Subscription Library in 1794. James Atkinson even at the age of 80 was a fit and active contributor to the YPS – a surgeon by profession at York County Hospital.

A leading light to emerge from the small group of men who formed the Society in 1822 was William Vernon, son of the Archbishop of York.

Surprisingly Vernon was not encouraged to join the clergy – in fact he was sent away at the age of twelve to sea, as a midshipman during the Napoleonic Wars. He served much of his time in the West Indies. After his return from war Vernon was ordained and became the Vicar of Bolton Percy. He devoted much of his time to chemistry – and to the YPS.

In 1823 the home of the YPS was to be in Low Ousegate adjoining the 'new' Ouse bridge.

It was seen as 'good cheap and permanent accommodation' and remained the home of the YPS for seven years.

By 1830 the YPS membership exceeded the Leeds and Manchester Societies, with more than 500 members.

The room in Low Ousegate began to be filled with artefacts donated

from all over the country. As the exhibits increased, by March 1824 Vernon was suggesting the possibility of building a new tailor-made home for the exhibitions. There was an amusing anecdote that the rooms in Low Ousegate were so cramped and full of artefacts that visitors often had to lie flat on their backs to look at some of the specimens on display as they had to be positioned anywhere there was space!

Vernon reckoned that the sum of £3000 should enable the opportunity to 'raise a building' to become a lecture hall and museum. A site was chosen called 'Manor Shore' close to the river and on land occupied only by St Mary's Abbey, which lay in ruins.

John Kenrick, another member, described the area as a 'most forlorn and desolate' place – the ruins of the abbey constantly being ransacked for its stones to re-use for building materials.

The fundraising exceeded all expectations, £4500 being donated almost immediately by the leading members of York Regency society. A London architect, William Wilkins, was hired to design it with a York resident architect, Richard Hey Sharp, supporting Wilkins's work.

Eventually the ground for the building was approved by the City of York council and the Government, on condition that that the remainder of the purchased land be made into a 'botanic gardens' for public use and scientific purposes.

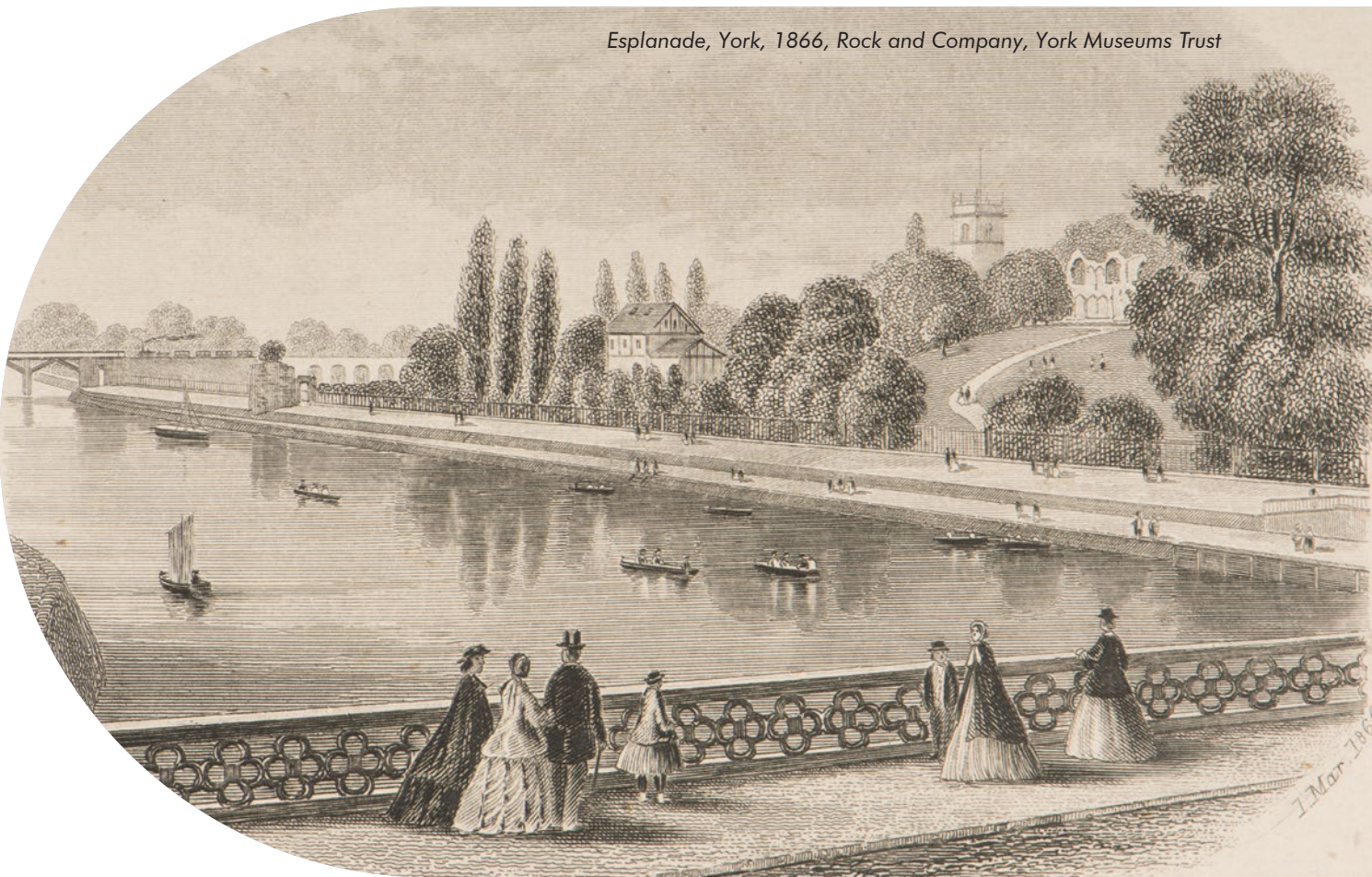
The annual rent was one pound and eight old pennies £1 0s 8d.

The Archbishop of York, Vernon's father, laid the foundation stone of the Yorkshire Museum in 1827. And so began the Yorkshire and Museum Gardens, which officially opened on the 2nd of February 1830.

References

*The best book on early Yorkshire Philosophical Society is A. D. Orange, Philosophers and provincials: the Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1822 to 1844, YPS 1973*  
*Also good is David Rubinstein, The nature of the world: the Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1822–2000, YPS 2009*  
*And From cave to cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, YPS 2022*  
*All available in York Explore Reference Library.*

Esplanade, York, 1866, Rock and Company, York Museums Trust



YORKSHIRE PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY 1822–1900:  
What about women?

The Yorkshire Philosophical Society was formed in 1822, when 'natural philosopher' was the term used for a scientist, and our traditional name has been retained.

The Society's primary aim is to promote public understanding and involvement in the academic disciplines of the natural and social sciences. From its earliest days the Society sought to promote the study of the natural sciences and antiquities.<sup>1</sup>

In 1828 part of the grounds of St Mary's Abbey were given to the Society by royal grant. It built the Yorkshire Museum there in 1829 to house their collections, and

also created a botanic garden. An astronomical observatory was later built in the grounds.<sup>2</sup>

The rare female names on the long lists of patrons, officers, and curators in the early days are highly prominent royal persons. It is somehow sad to think about all that knowledge and specimens accumulated in one place, exciting lectures, and discussions – but never being accessible to the curious minds of women of that era.

YORKSHIRE PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY: PATRONS, OFFICERS and CURATORS 1822-1890

Commencing dates shown are when AGM held, Jan or Feb of that year

PATRONESSES	Address	From	To	B: born. D: died
HRH the Princess Victoria, then HM the Queen		1835/6 1837	1837	B 1819. Accedes 1837
HRH the Duchess of Kent [Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, mother of Queen Victoria]		1835/6	1861	B 1786, D 16 Mar 1861
HRH the Princess of Wales [Alexandra of Denmark, wife of Prince Albert Edward]		1867		B 1844



During the first 33 years of the YPS a total of 702 men were elected to membership, and 6 women (although only three in their own right – three were allowed to retain the memberships of their deceased husbands, which would become customary practice). Roughly 67% lived in York or its immediate vicinity, 30% further out in the three Yorkshire Ridings, and just 3% elsewhere in the country.<sup>4</sup>

All sources used in this research quote years, numbers and money involved with women joining the Society. If honest, I cannot get my head around comparing them, but what I get is that the main concern then was how much financial contribution the organisation would get if they relaxed the rules. They recognised that there was an interest from payable ladies that could be used for the Society’s benefit. Forward-looking maybe YPS was, but revolutionary not enough, to admit that women’s minds could contribute to the knowledge accumulation for Society.

This list (below) of 6 women in 33 years as subscribers looks like not much, but it at least shows us that some of the ladies could get across these borders of gender restrictions, especially if their circumstances or position were accordingly high level. It is doubtful that there are notes of whether and how many applications were rejected. Interestingly, the two ‘Mrs’ decided to keep their subscriptions after their husbands died, even if it was an unnecessary

expenditure for them in the eyes of society. The decision in 1897 to allow married women to become members independently of their husbands provided that they paid the full annual subscription. There were, however, when the revised list of members was published in 1890, fewer women and county members and the number of clergy was modest.<sup>5</sup> Women then were dependent not only financially on their husbands, but also on their permission to join social activities. Joining activities outside their household would mean spending more of the money that was available for them and not always regarded as

necessary in the opinion of their family or society. Two of them – Miss Stringer and Miss Cattle – were running schools, and their position as school mistresses as well as their highly educated minds would be a good point for being accepted as subscribers. 1850 Eliza Stringer, then Superintendent or Head Mistress of the York Quaker Girls’ School, (from 1857 called The Mount), was elected to membership of the Society. She occasionally took girls from the school to attend lectures on chemistry or astronomy.<sup>6</sup> In early 1885 membership slightly exceeded 350, and 60 members were women. This was not far below a fifth of the total and a considerably higher percentage than in 1877. Honorary officers and Council members, however, remained exclusively male, a triumph of contemporary folly, but probably inevitable in late-Victorian society.<sup>7</sup> Two ladies from society’s highest echelons would easily pay their yearly subscriptions of £2. Would they choose to be members of the YPS because of

their interest in science and nature, or because of class expectations or peer pressure to support or join a newly organised group? That would need to be looked at in different research. Son of the Archbishop of York, Admiral Octavius Venable Vernon (Harcourt) 1793–1863 married a lady who was the first woman in YPS membership list, Anne, daughter of William Gater and widow of William Danby, in 1838. They lived at Swinton Park, near Masham in North Yorkshire. They had no children.<sup>8</sup> Anne’s brother-in-law William ‘was at heart a scientist. He was involved with the founding of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society and the British association for the Advancement of Science and was fellow of the Royal Society.’<sup>9</sup> Presumably, there were many interesting conversations about science and latest discoveries over family dinners. Octavius was educated locally and entered the navy at the age of twelve, and his five sisters were all educated at home.

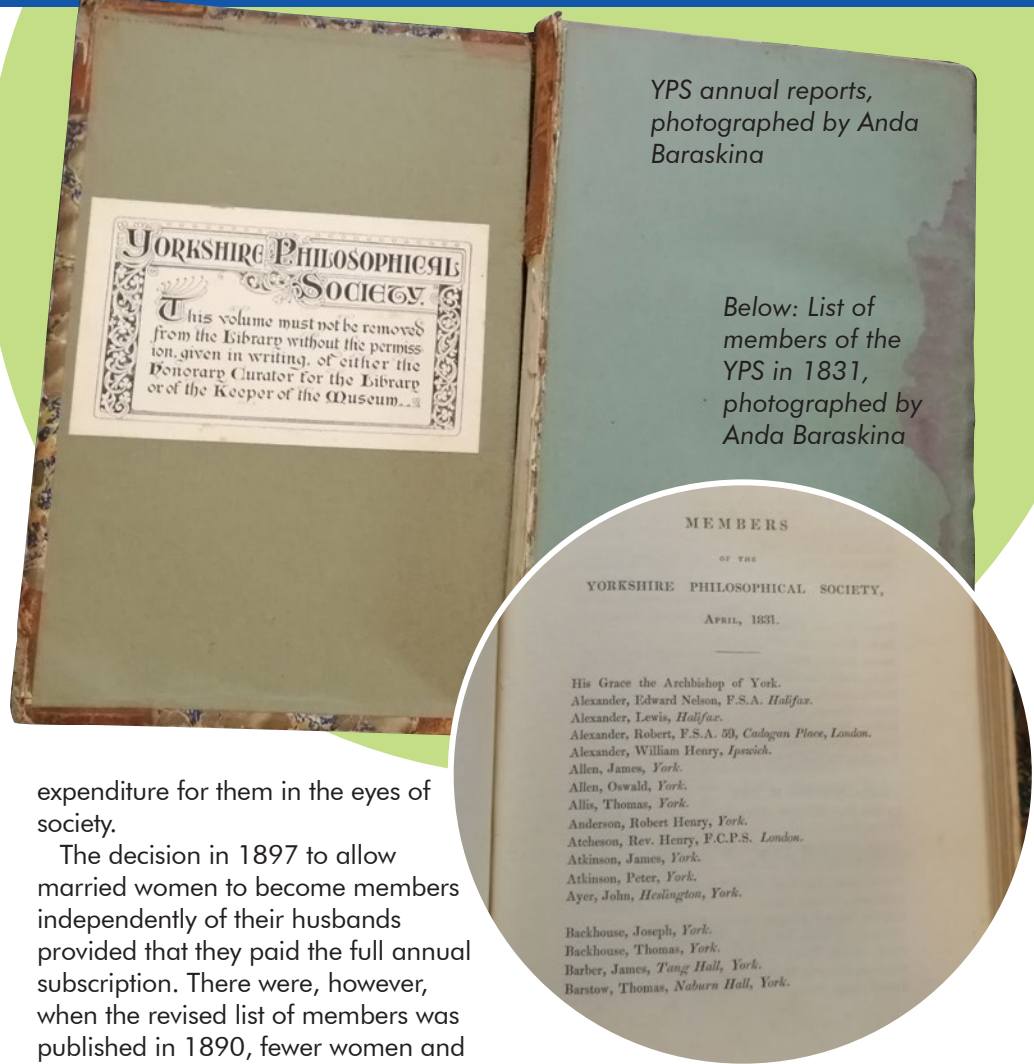
Index of YPS Members 1855–90

This index, still a work in progress for YPS, contains some 1580 names (as of April 2023), comprising all members elected prior to 1855 who

were still living then, together with all who were elected in subsequent years up to 1890. In many cases, years of birth and death and other biographical information are lacking; it is hoped that they will be added over the coming months, although perhaps not researched as extensively as in the Index for 1822–55. YPS also intends to add names of those elected over the rest of the 1890s in due course. ‘Lady Subscribers’ and ‘Associates’ (men) are also included. Not full members, they had access to the Museum and Gardens for a reduced annual subscription of £1. Ladies had had this option since the Museum opened in 1830, men only from 1850, but none were listed before 1855. Whereas in 1855 the full membership stood at 323, plus 52 lady subscribers and nine associates, by 1890 it had risen to 443 full members, plus sixty lady subscribers and twenty associates. Two significant changes since 1855 were that 51 of the full members were now women, up from only six; and the number of full members not living in York but ‘residing in the County or beyond its limits’, 83 in 1855 or roughly 25%, was reduced by 1890 to just 26, about 6%. So York residents now made up by far the bulk of the membership.<sup>10</sup>

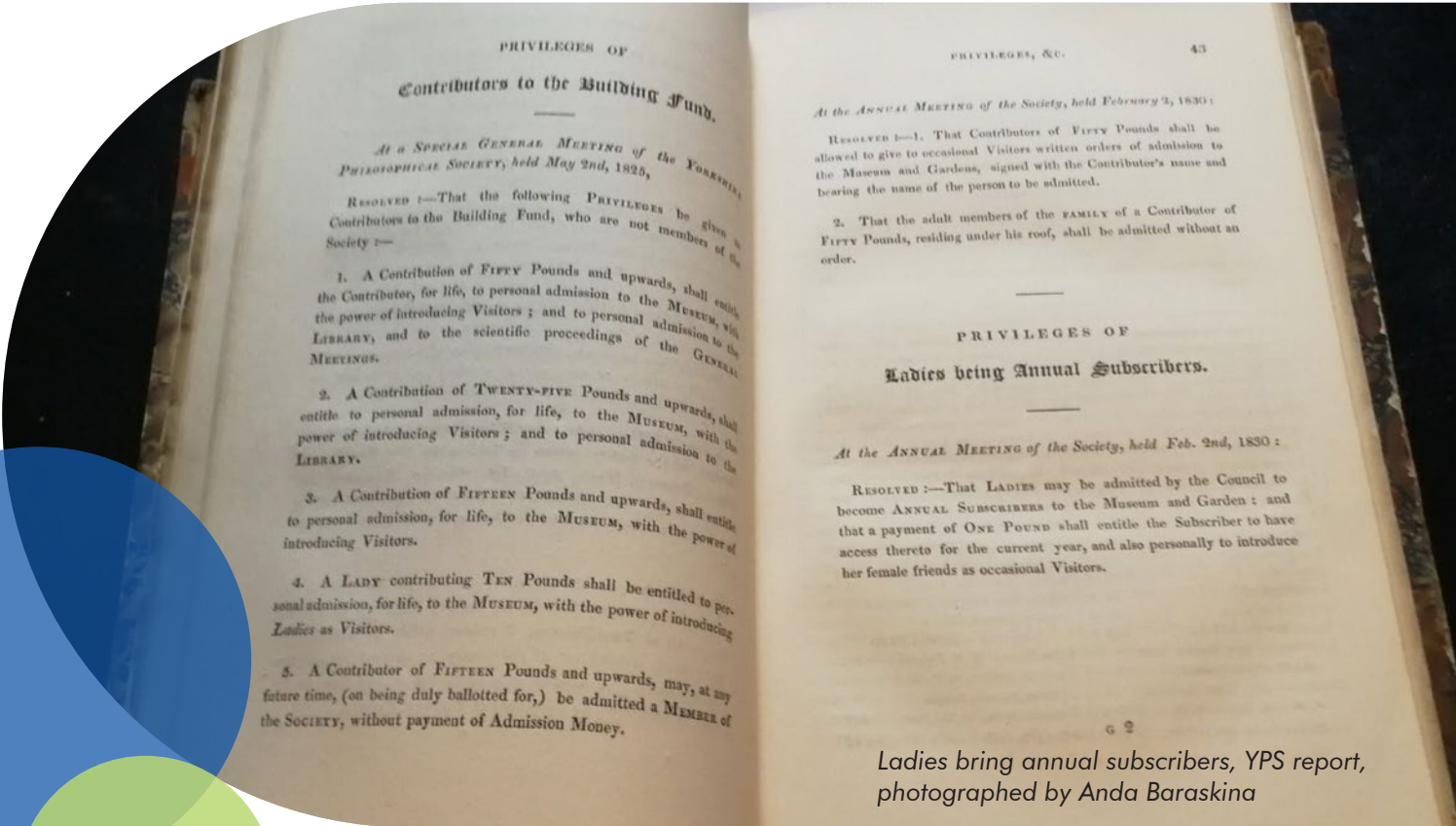
By early 1840 membership had grown to 329, a gratifying increase from the original 86 in a relatively short period. The figure may be compared favourably to about 550 in the early twenty-first century, when the population of York has multiplied. Admission of both men and women is conditional only on paying the necessary subscription fee; average disposable incomes have risen immensely and social barriers to membership have declined. In 1843 forty women non-members paid an annual £1, and eleven more paid £10 or over for access to the museum and gardens.<sup>11</sup> Though the Council recommended no more than 25 orders for the admission of visitors per member per year, such an agreement still did not prevent members from admitting too many people who paid for admission as well as guests of members. The Society’s finances were far from secure, writes David Rubinstein in his book The Early Years, 1822–45: ‘The discoveries added to the cost of the building, however, and the decision in 1828 to raise the annual subscription of Yorkshire-based members to £2, primarily to pay the keeper’s £60 stipend and develop the gardens, did not close the financial gap. Nor

Yorkshire Philosophical Society: index of members 1822–55 (last revised April 2023)					
Surname	First names/Title	County	Address	Dates	Notes
*year of election to membership					
Danby	Mrs [Anne Holwell]	[Yks]	[Swinton Park nr Masham]	1834 -1837	1796-1879. FIRST WOMAN RECORDED, paying £2 annual subscription, until remarrying. Marr 1822 Wm Danby (1752-1833 below, his 2 <sup>nd</sup> wife). Later Anne Holwell Danby Vernon Harcourt, having marr secondly (1838) Capt, later Admiral, Octavius Vernon Harcourt who D 1863. Account of her funeral, <i>Harrogate Advertiser</i> , 5/7/1879.
Stringer	Eliza [Miss]	Yks	York [1 Castlegate (Castlegate House) 1851], Friends' School, Castlegate 1855	1850	FIRST WOMAN ELECTED. B 1815 Islington, Middx. School-mistress of academy of 27 girls from all parts of country (1851C). Appointed 1847, retired 1853, married John Perry 1856 (Leicester district). This was the Friends' (Quaker) Girls School, founded in Trinity Lane 1784 by William and Esther Tuke (see Tuke D and S below), discontinued 1814, resumed in Castlegate House 1831, removed to the Mount 1857, renamed the Mount School (York Explore Archives, ref MOU/3).
Shipton	[Ann Catherine], Mrs	Yks	York [Burton Lane]	1854	c.1814-1898. Second woman elected. Widow of next. B Mitcham, Sy.
Shipton	Thomas [Esq]	Yks	York [Burton Lane 1851]	1851 -1854	1801-1854. Merchant. B Brotherton. Address, Grimstone Villa, nr Dunnington [1843]. Auction of ginger, chicory etc, after he died, <i>Hull Advertiser</i> 16/12/1854.
Milbanke	The Dowager Lady [Elizabeth]	Yks	York [St Mary's 1855]	1855	c.1783-1873. Annuitant. Widow of Sir John Peniston Milbanke, 7 <sup>th</sup> Bart (1776-1850) of Halmaby Hall, Croft nr Darlington (Burke). B Newbury, Berks.
Phillips	Thomas	Yks	York [sic: Helmsley, Bridge St 1851C]	1853 -1855	c.1785-1855. Land agent to Lord Faversham, Helmsley, for 30 years.
Phillips	Thomas, Mrs [Phillis]	Yks	York [St Mary's 1861C]	1855	c.1785-1864. Widow of previous.
Cattle	[Isabella] Miss	Yks	York [25 Bootham 1858]	1855	1818- 1905. Isabel Cattle, ladies school, 25 (now 61) Bootham. In 1861C running school at Sowerby, nr Thirsk, with sister Marianne.



YPS annual reports, photographed by Anda Baraskina

Below: List of members of the YPS in 1831, photographed by Anda Baraskina



Ladies bring annual subscribers, YPS report, photographed by Anda Baraskina



could the opening of the gardens and museum to women and their guests in 1830 for an annual fee of £1; though a woman corresponded, and fossil collector wrote to the society approvingly: 'I admire your liberal regulation with regard to Ladies.' The subsequent annual report noted, however, that only £9 had been raised from this source.<sup>12</sup>

Some members used their privileges in excessive ways and the idea of inviting a friend or two for them not to pay then the entry fee accrued to some savvy Yorkshire men. 'In 1846 Council had to reprove seven members who had issued orders for the admission of hundreds of visitors: one was responsible for the admission of no fewer than 250 persons.'<sup>13</sup>

While the Society developed from 1844 to 1854, county membership had fallen by a third, and overall membership to the end of 1854 to 311. The Council looked for decisions to improve ratings and one of them was that widows of deceased members could continue to pay their husbands' subscriptions without payment of the initial fee. It would not allow for big financial improvement but would allow existing memberships to keep going and offer some economy for ladies when they were considering cutting back financially.

Membership rose after the dip in the early 1850s to 358 in 1857 and 376 in 1858. For the first time, the names of women began to appear on the membership lists, a concession presumably motivated by a desire for members and income. Their admission

was unusual, though not unique in Yorkshire philosophical societies, but it may have occurred at an earlier date than in most other places.<sup>14</sup>

Could it be that YPS pioneered these matters before others or even led by example? Was the calculation for extra earnings the main point there or was this a good basis for supporting ladies to take part in this men-only community? Yorkshire is famous for the 'How much?' attitude and even if it was the main purpose from the leadership point of view that worked well for the women's side, they used it.

One woman was in membership in February 1852, three in June 1855, eleven in February 1858, 21 in 1860. Some were women who in accordance with the terms of the decision made in 1855 had been allowed to continue the membership of the deceased husbands, others were clearly granted membership in their own right. In March 1859 a woman member expressed her desire to discontinue her membership and become a 'lady subscriber', a category whose numbers were greater than those of women in ordinary membership. The continued existence of this category was encouraged by the fact that lady subscribers paid only £1 a year as opposed to the £5 entry fee and annual £2 of full members. A breach had now been made in a previously all-male fortress. Despite their second-class status, illustrated by the fact that no women were elected to the Council or as vice-presidents, they continued to contribute to the society's finances, though perhaps less generously than

if they had enjoyed equal status with men. Women were also reported as present at monthly and annual members' meetings. A report of a meeting in June 1855 reported: 'There was a larger attendance of ladies and gentlemen than usual.'<sup>15</sup>

A new departure was signalled in 1866 with the election of the first two women honorary members. This was in gratitude for the gift to the society of 'a very perfect and beautiful collection of British Birds which had been the property of Arthur Strickland. The collection was purchased from his executors by Emma Trevenen, Strickland's sister, and presented to the society, which proceeded to make her and Strickland's widow honorary members. Among the visitors in 1866 were the Prince and Princess of Wales who agreed to become patrons of the YPS.<sup>16</sup>

Membership still stood at about 375 in 1877, including no fewer than 47 women who were now entrenched as ordinary subscribing, though in practice inferior, members.<sup>17</sup>

YPS was connected with some women's lives on a deeply personal level. Being sisters and daughters of well-renowned botanist Henry Baines meant that when they lived with their father, their address was the YPS. Juliet Burton's article will tell you more about Henry Baines, elsewhere in the magazine.

Henry Baines (1793–1878) spent most of his life in the place that was to become, largely due to his lifetime's work, York's Museum Gardens. Henry was instrumental in acquiring and rearing plants for the gardens. Many of the plants in the gardens were donations. YPS annual reports between 1829 and 1859 record donations of plants from 43 individuals, from nursery gardens – including the Backhouses – and from botanic gardens, including those at Birmingham, Hull, Liverpool, Chiswick, Kew, Calcutta and Ceylon. This network of individual botanists and botanical gardens was cultivated and enriched by Henry, who shared and exchanged many hundreds of plants over his long career. The Baines family was living in the basement of the Yorkshire Museum which, with five daughters and a servant, must have been rather crowded. A report from the family's medical attendant led the YPS to note that 'it is extremely

desirable that another Residence should be provided for Mr Baines and his family on the Scite [sic] of the present Greenhouse and Stove', that is, between the museum and the city wall adjoining the Multangular Tower. However, nothing further happened until, in 1843, the society received the 'Princely Legacy' of £10,000 from a vice-president of the society, Stephen Beckwith, who may have been the family's medical attendant. The house was built at a cost of £346 6s and the YPS noted that 'This improvement has been so successfully executed, that while the desired accommodation has been obtained at a moderate cost, the style of the building, harmonizing with the architecture of the adjoining adjacent palace, will, it is hoped, be considered as adding an appropriate embellishment to the site.' Now known as Manor Cottage, the house currently serves as offices for Yorkshire Museum staff. Henry Baines retired in 1870 but continued to live in Manor Cottage until his death on 1 April 1878. His daughter Fanny and his wife Rebecca moved to the Lodge where Fanny became gatekeeper, retiring in 1914 and remaining at the Lodge with a pension from the society until her death on 22 May 1916. The Baines family life had spanned three centuries in the Museum Gardens. While researching 'The Most Fortunate Situation, The Story of York's Museum Gardens,' Peter Hogarth was excited to discover that the Yorkshire Museum has the 'neat box of Minster oak' in its store; inside it is an envelope containing Fanny Baines's handwritten account of her father's life.<sup>18</sup>

Baines was dead, but his family ties with the YPS lived on. His daughter Fanny wrote to the Council soon after his death in April 1878. She expressed her gratitude for the pension which has been paid her father after his retirement but pointed out that family illness had posed a heavy financial burden for him. She asked if she could become gatekeeper to the society and if her 83-year-old mother could live in the new lodge. Fanny Baines was appointed to the post during her mother's lifetime, at a wage of fifteen shillings a week.<sup>19</sup>

Such income wasn't great, and usually women received half the wages of the men. But it was a lovely gesture from the Council to agree to Fanny's request and grant her not only a job



Window and staircase in the YPS Gatehouse, photographed by Anda Baraskina



but also to live in the Lodge. In pictures from my recent visit to the Lodge, you can see a bit of staircase leading to its first floor.

In 1888 the wage of a female museum attendant (working from 7 am to 6 pm) was raised to twelve shillings a week and Fanny Baines was awarded Sunday as a rest day after ten years' service.<sup>20</sup>

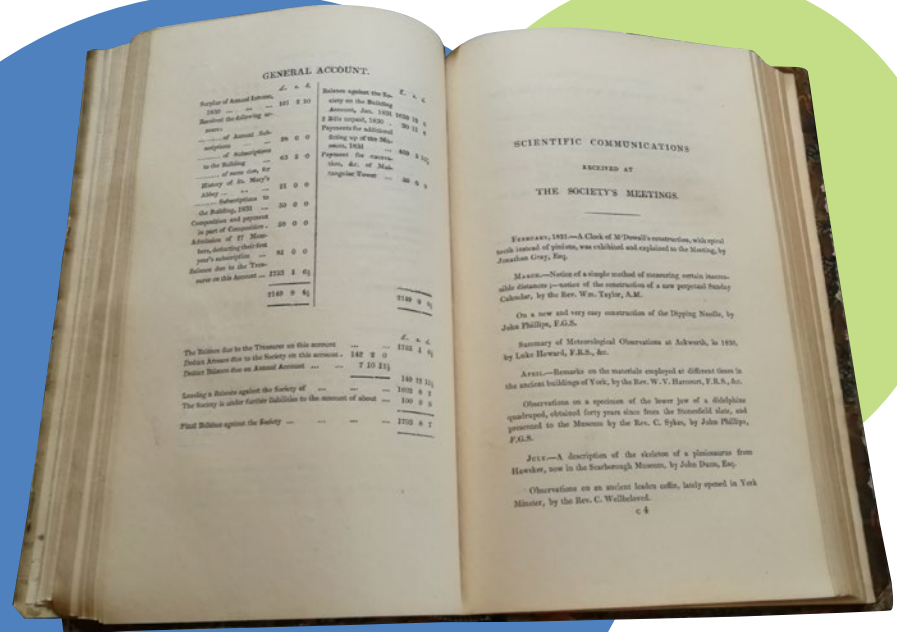
There is no mention of women members taking part in discussions, but one can presume that even if they did their opinion would not be written down because of gender prejudice. This aspect would need to be researched deeply, going through every member's meeting records. Though occasionally women are mentioned like 'Miss More, a rare woman speaker in these meetings, delivered a paper dealing with the painter William Etty in 1901.'<sup>21</sup>

Following the accession to the throne of Queen Victoria in 1937, YPS appointed her, and her mother the Duchess of Kent, as their royal patronesses. They had visited the Museum and Gardens as paying guests; during their visit they led the way for the gardens to be opened to the public in future. When the Queen passed through York in 1857, she was entertained to lunch at the Royal Station Hotel and her table was adorned with a flower of the Victoria Regina lily grown in a tank in the Museum Gardens.

Sarah Sheiks also writes in her book that 'Queen Victoria was to remain the patroness until her death in 1901.' It is not clear whether the presence of a woman on the throne made much difference to the attitude towards women in the short term, but certainly by the mid-nineteenth century one can detect changes occurring. Notably, in 1830 a lady called Etheldred Bennet, who was an early geologist and had built up one of the most extensive geological collections of the age, wrote a letter to Dr Goldie of the YPS to thank him for sending her the Annual Report. She said 'I admire your liberal regulation with regard to Ladies, and if I lived within reach, I should surely avail myself of it.' She arranged to send specimens from her own notable collection of shells and fossils to the Society for their displays. She was in correspondence with John Phillips about the arrangement and identification of her specimens. There are many accounts of ladies attending the Museum, mostly in groups as guests or family of members of the Society, and ladies are listed among the subscribers to the Society, if not as full members.<sup>22</sup>

York was developing an interested and better-informed populace. The YPS responded in some ways, for example, among the lady members of the Society in the 1890s, we start to see the arrival of more independent and professional women; Miss Gwyn of the York County Hospital joined in 1895, as did Miss Clair Miller of the Crescent College.<sup>23</sup>

The whole list of women who were the YPS members and their life stories would be a great source of





research itself, but unfortunately that is not possible in this short project. Anne Phillips, 1803–62, was the sister of John Phillips, a renowned geologist. As an adult she emerged as a well-educated woman and was able to assist John in many of his expeditions and enterprises, acting as his housekeeper and companion both in York and in Dublin and Oxford until her death in 1862. On their return journey (1929 from Luxemburg) he is said to have got Anne to assist him in some geological work at Le Havre. Her reputation as a geologist was confirmed when Phillips was undertaking a survey of the Malvern Hills Worcestershire in 1842.<sup>24</sup>

Her findings were published, and John Phillips used them in his lectures on the Malvern Hills at the Royal Institution. The Royal Institution claims that Anne Smith may have been a member.<sup>25</sup> As I mentioned before, considering other sources, it looks as if YPS was more progressive than other organisations or even society itself in recognising women's rights. But partly it was out of consideration for boosting the Society's income by letting women visit gardens themselves as paying visitors or becoming subscribers.

I think this lenience towards giving more freedom to ladies could also come from the founder's

own positive family life and being surrounded by educated, clever, and loyal women. Archbishop Harcourt, Henry Baines and John Philips are examples mentioned in this essay, but there must be many more yet undiscovered stories of women supporting their male relatives in everyday work or research. This work had been soaked up in the achievements of men usually without any footnote or acknowledgment. Finding such examples and showing them to us all is one of the main tasks of this and other research in Victorian-time women's lives.

But progress is non-stoppable and thankfully changes come even in such gender-stout organisations such as YPS. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society has elected Professor Deborah Smith OBE DSc PhD as its honorary president! First female name in the President's list.

York's oldest science charity has elected a first female president in its 202-year history. She said: 'It is both an honour and a privilege to take on the YPS presidency at such a pivotal time for the advancement of science and our understanding of the natural world. I am keen to share my enthusiasm and passion for science and encourage wide public participation in our evolving



Professor Deborah Smith, Yorkshire Philosophical Society

programme of exciting events.<sup>26</sup> Former Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, Professor Deborah Smith, retires from the University of York on 31 December after a successful 15-year career in research and senior management roles at York.<sup>27</sup>

I would like to deeply thank Frances Chambers, clerk of YPS, who kindly allowed me to visit the Lodge itself, and to take photos of the Annual Reports as illustrations of this research, which also contain the lists of subscribers in the bound books.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Yorkshire Philosophical Society (ypsyork.org) 25/07/2024 17:10

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ypsyork.org/about-yps/yps-history/> 25/07/2024 17:15

<sup>3</sup> YPS-PATRONS-OFFICERS-etc-1822-90-25.4.2023.pdf (ypsyork.org) 25/07/2024 17:20

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ypsyork.org/resources/yps-archive/members\\_1822/](https://www.ypsyork.org/resources/yps-archive/members_1822/) 25/07/2024 17:45

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 44

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 34

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 43

<sup>8</sup> Tony Vernon- Harcourt. Edward Vernon- Harcourt. The last Aristocratic Archbishop of York 1757-1847. Sacristy Press, Durham. 2023, p218

<sup>9</sup> Tony Vernon- Harcourt. Edward Vernon- Harcourt. The last Aristocratic Archbishop of York 1757-1847. Sacristy Press, Durham. 2023, p119

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ypsyork.org/resources/yps-archive/index-of-yps-members-1855-1890/> 25/07/2024 18:30

<sup>11</sup> David Rubinstein. The nature of the World. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1822-2000. Quacks Books, 2009, p15

<sup>12</sup> David Rubinstein. The nature of the World. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1822-2000. Quacks Books, 2009, p11

<sup>13</sup> David Rubinstein. The nature of the World. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1822-2000. Quacks Books, 2009, p 22

<sup>14</sup> David Rubinstein. The nature of the World. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1822-2000. Quacks Books, 2009, p 26

<sup>15</sup> David Rubinstein. The nature of the World. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1822-2000. Quacks Books, 2009, p 26

<sup>16</sup> David Rubinstein. The nature of the World. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1822-2000. Quacks Books, 2009, p 30

<sup>17</sup> David Rubinstein. The nature of the World. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society 1822-2000. Quacks Books, 2009, p 33

<sup>18</sup> <https://yorkcivictrust.co.uk/heritage/civic-trust-plaques/henry-baines-1793-1878/> 02/09/2024 15:33

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 37

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 42

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 46

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 33

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 37

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 24

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Sheils. From Cave to Cosmos: A history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. 2022, p 25

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/24104596.yorkshire-philosophical-society-elect-first-female-president/> 25/07/2024 17:35

<sup>27</sup> Professor Deborah Smith retires after 15-year career at York - News and events, University of York 25/07/2024 17:30

# The Observatory

## YORK MUSEUM GARDENS

There is a tiny hidden building not far inside the gates, surrounded by trees and bushes with flowers chosen to represent the stars or planets. This is the Observatory.

Given the opportunity to see inside this wonderful and forgotten building I couldn't say no. This is the oldest observatory in Yorkshire and is listed as the oldest working one in Yorkshire. William Pearson of the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) offered the York Philosophical Society (YPS) a telescope and all necessary equipment to fit out an observatory; all they had to do was construct the building. It took six years for the YPS to raise the £600 (approximately £20,000 today); the building was constructed in 1832–33. First used in 1840, the curator at the time was W. L. Newman. The most famous was H. D. Taylor, optical manager of Cooke and Sons telescope makers in York. Taylor would go on to develop the Cooke Portrait Lens, the precursor to most modern camera lenses. No great discoveries were made, but all events in the 19th and 20th centuries were observed. On 19th November 1783 Edward Pigott discovered a comet. He is the only person to date to have discovered a comet from York. It was, however, in 1784 that their studying of the stars really paid off. 10th September 1784 would become a night to remember in York. To begin with John Goodricke discovered that the star Beta Lyra was varying in brightness, a short while later Edward Pigott discovered that Eta Aquila was also varying in brightness. A few weeks later, on 23rd

October 1784, yet another variable star, Delta Cepheus, was found to be varying by John Goodricke. Unfortunately this was the last discovery made by the partnership. On the 16th of April 1786 John Goodricke was elected a fellow of the Royal Society. He was only 21, yet tragically four days later, on 20th April 1786 he died, probably from pneumonia. John Goodricke was buried at Hunsingore near Wetherby. Edward Pigott left York in 1793 and moved to the city of Bath where he continued to observe the stars and discovered two more variable stars. These were R Corona Borealis and R Scutum.

One reason for building a small observatory in a city centre was not actually astronomical but for timekeeping. Time was often expressed in a vague sense – you would wait for the 'morning stagecoach' rather than one due at a specific time. But with the advent of the industrial age and the railways people wanted greater accuracy. The clock donated by Dr Pearson, which tells the time based on observations of the positions of stars, is still in situ, reading real or star time. In its day it was the most accurate timepiece in York, and it would cost you sixpence to check your timepiece against it. It unfortunately was also telling us that we were 4 minutes and 20 seconds behind London, which led to many missed trains because of the time difference.



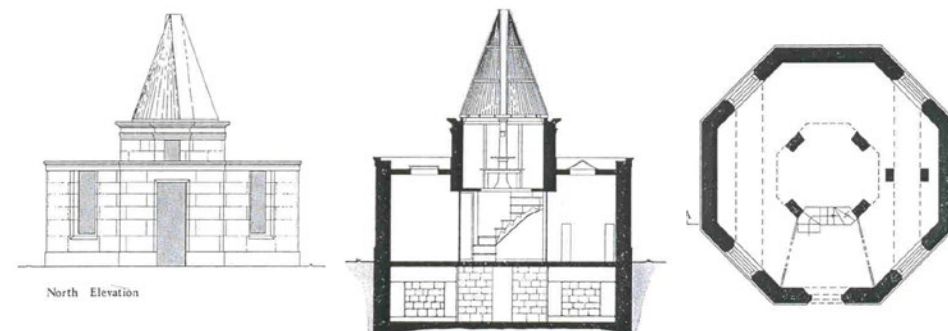
York Observatory, photographed by Yvonne Baker

With the arrival of the Telegraph system, standard time sometimes known as railway time was introduced. GMT was not introduced until 1880 as the Definition of Time Act had to be passed by Parliament to make it legal. Many of the scientific items are housed in the Observatory.

After WWII the building fell into disrepair and the original telescope disappeared sometime in the 1950s. By the 1970s the York Observatory was in danger of demolition. Fortunately for us, a public campaign by the YPS raised £50,000 to restore it to its original glory in 1981. Sadly it has a distinct musty/mouldy smell about it. I'm not sure if they use the observatory regularly but would suggest revenue could be made from paid entry to the building: when we were looking at it, other visitors were asking if it was open to the public. I hope that the YPS will once again rekindle interest in this fine building and reopen it to the public where astronomers of the future can come and live a part of the past.

**Note from Philip:** The observatory is run by our volunteers and will be hopefully back open soon after having some repairs done to fix the mouldy smell!

Building plans and information provided by Phillip Newton  
Heritage Hunters  
Photographs by Yvonne Baker



Plan of the observatory (after RCHME 1975, 44), York Museums Trust



# Henry Baines

## AND THE FAMILY WHO LIVED IN THE MUSEUM

If you walk through the Museum Gardens and out past the Multangular Tower and the fernery, towards the path beside the King's Manor, you will see a house with a blue plaque on it. This house is Manor Cottage, and the blue plaque remembers 'Henry Baines 1793–1871, inspiring botanist – Creator of the Museum Gardens.' The cottage is now the offices for the Yorkshire Museum staff but at one time it was the home of Henry and his family.

Henry Baines with his wife and four younger daughters. Photo Royal Galleries of Scotland



Manor Cottage, photographed by Juliet Burton

Blue plaque for Henry Baines, photographed by Juliet Burton

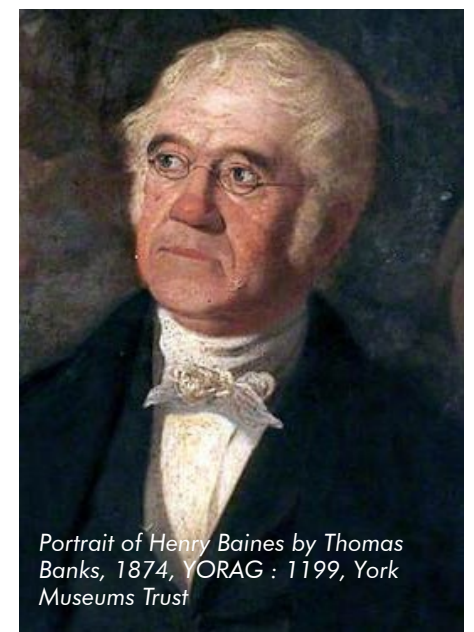
Henry Baines spent 40 years as the sub-curator of the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens. He is probably the most important individual in the creation and development of the Museum Gardens, and no publication about the Museum and its gardens would be complete without Henry being included in it.

Henry not only worked in the Museum and its Gardens, but he and his family lived there. Henry spent virtually his whole life – as a child and adult – living in the gardens, and he and his wife brought up their five daughters there. I wanted to know more about this family who actually lived in the Yorkshire Museum and in the Museum Gardens.

I am hugely indebted to Peter Hogarth and Ewan Anderson for the information in their book 'The

most fortunate situation' The Story of York's Museum Gardens (2018). The book gives a wealth of detail about Henry and his input in the gardens which I cannot hope to equal in a magazine article. Many of the facts about Henry throughout this account must, therefore, be attributed to Peter Hogarth and Ewan Anderson and to their sources, which include minutes of the meetings of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society (YPS).

However, I want to tell the story not just of Henry as sub-curator but also of him and his family. I have pieced together Henry's story using not only the book, but other sources which include birth, death, marriage, census and newspaper records, among others. Having sight of Henry's daughter Fanny's brief handwritten account of her father's life has also been helpful.



Portrait of Henry Baines by Thomas Banks, 1874, YORAG : 1199, York Museums Trust

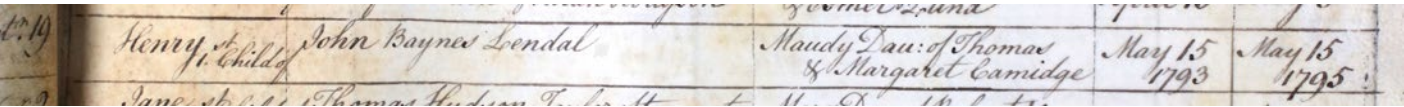




St Leonard's Hospital, photographed by Juliet Burton

EARLY LIFE

On 15 May 1793 Henry was born, in his own words:  
*'in a small cottage over the cloisters of St Leonard's Hospital, then occupied by a Mr Suttle as a wine merchants vaults [probably Thomas Suttle, Wine Merchant of Skeldergate\*]. The first time I put a spade into the ground, it was in his garden... I was then 12 years of age.'*  
(York Herald 3 December 1859)  
(\*Bailey's Northern Directory)  
Looking at the ruins of St Leonard's Hospital today, next to the main York Explore Library, it is difficult to picture it as a dwelling of any kind. In a painting of the Museum Gardens by J. Storey in 1860, St Leonard's Hospital is already in ruins, so it is hard to imagine a family (and a wine merchant's) occupying the space in the late 1700s. However, the hospital was much more extensive in the 18th century and there were several buildings in that area, used variously as dwellings, 'farm buildings, a boatyard, stables' (Historiette.co.uk Exploring History) before St Leonards



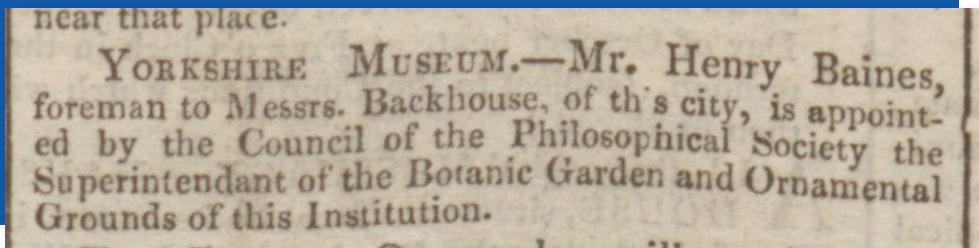
Henry Baines baptism record, St-Michael-le-Belfry, 1795, ancestry.co.uk

IN HALIFAX

Some time in his youth, Henry moved to Halifax where he was employed as a gardener. How this came about is not clear. A brief biography by the York Philosophical Society has speculated that Henry may already have been working for the Backhouses at this time, the renowned owners of nurseries and gardens in York, and that they placed him in Halifax as one of their outreach gardeners (York Philosophical Society Newsletter August 2020).  
While there he mixed with other 'working men, who studied botany, entomology and ornithology' (Henry's words in York Herald 3 December 1859).  
These men included 'Samuel Gibson, Abraham Stansfield, John Nowell and William Wilson' (Peter Hogarth for York Civic Trust). As these four men were either the same age as Henry or younger and described by Henry as 'working' at the time rather than as the academics they later became, I think we can speculate that Henry had just as much influence on them as they had on him. I also wonder if Henry undertook some form of horticultural/botanical/ornithological study with them while in Halifax, since he seems to have returned to York with a significant amount of knowledge.  
While in Halifax, Henry married a Rebecca Bartle from Hull. They married on 2nd April 1823. Henry was 30 years old, and Rebecca was 27, so neither was particularly young to be marrying in the early 19th century. Henry is described a gardener in the record of their marriage, and both are recorded as living in the parish in which they were married so they appear to have lived, at very least, near to each other if not in the same place. Their first daughter, Ellen, was born in Halifax around 6th January 1824, which is when she was baptised.

BACK IN YORK

Sometime shortly after Ellen was born the family moved back to York. Their second daughter Mary was born in York in March 1825. Mary's baptism record shows that she was baptised on 20 March at Holy Trinity in Micklegate, the parish in which the family lived.  
There is a burial record at St Michael le Belfrey in 1826 of a John Baines and it is probable that this was Henry's father. It is highly likely that Henry's mother Maude moved to live with Henry and his family not long after this. Her death record in April 1836 shows her living in the 'Museum' where the family resided from 1829.  
On the move back to York, Henry worked initially for the Backhouses, whose nurseries were at that time, in Tanners Row (Cecilia Bainton, Heritage Hunters Magazine Acomb & Westfield 2024) which is probably why the Baines family lived in Micklegate, as did the Backhouses. Henry was promoted, over the next three years, to become foreman of the Backhouse nurseries.



Yorkshire Gazette 26 September 1829, British Newspaper Archive

THE MUSEUM AND MUSEUM GARDENS

In 1829 Henry was appointed sub-curator of the newly established York Philosophical Society Museum. This was 'located in a building next to Ouse Bridge' (Fanny Baines (FB)). Henry was responsible for moving the 'curiosities' to the new site of the Yorkshire Museum where it stands now. As the museum next to Ouse Bridge had no garden, it is a bit of a mystery as to how Henry, a gardener, was appointed to the post of sub-curator. However, as the YPS had already acquired the land for the new museum at Manor Shore, with a view to also developing botanical gardens, Henry may have been – and proved that he was – a perfect choice. Peter Hogarth suggests that Henry was recommended by the Backhouses; Thomas Backhouse being a member of the YPS.  
Whatever his skills as a gardener, Henry also proved to be highly skilled in other areas. While he was able to 'cultivate the garden with scientific diligence' and immediately obtain 'over 500 plants' (FB) for the YPS he was also able to give his services to  
*'the Antiquarian department... putting together correctly scattered of fragments of mosaic work... equally at home in other departments, the collection of birds was arranged under his superintendence, a great many were stuffed and mounted by him, the collection at that time being considered a very fine one, great service was rendered in the micrological department... arranging and looking over the various departments, Insects, Butterflies, Moths, Skeletons... various objects were prepared for the microscope, and when he had procured a lathe, he took great interest in cutting stones, sections of fossil wood &c.'* (FB)  
Henry worked under the supervision of John Phillips, the Keeper or Curator, but there is no doubt that he was more than able to apply himself to a variety of tasks and it does suggest that, whilst in Halifax, and possibly also in York, Henry had undertaken some kind of study not only in gardening and botany but



Henry's visiting card 1862, with kind permission from RHS Lindley Collections



also in other related disciplines. However, it was in the management of the new Museum Gardens that Henry excelled. His remit was extremely wide, and examples of his tasks (among many many others) were:

- Obtaining plants
- Making purchases e.g. manure, an engine for watering the garden
- Preventing children from 'playing ball or otherwise behaving improperly' (probably not just visiting children but also his own!)
- Erecting greenhouses
- Visiting other Botanical Gardens to exchange plants
- Selling the stone dug up when the Manor Shore was remodelled.

Henry appears initially to have had the assistance of one: *'active Boy... to assist him in the garden, & to go on errands, at a low rate of wages, in consideration of the instruction he would receive in the garden'* (YPS Minutes 1830 in Hogarth and Anderson)

But I think we can assume that this staffing level was increased over the years, since by the time of his retirement Henry was able to hand over to a Head Gardener, John Fielden.

Henry grew plants himself from seed and also accepted donations from YPS members including the Backhouses. But he appears to have had connections in other botanical gardens across the UK and to have sourced plants from all over the world. He may well have had contacts through the YPS, or through other botanical gardens, who could bring back specimens from as far afield as Mexico, Brazil, Panama, West Indies, India, Burma, Australia and New Zealand. Henry laid the foundations for the wide variety of

plants that we see in the Museum Gardens today. Henry did seem to have travelled a great deal himself, both within Yorkshire and across the country, making connections with other botanists and botanical gardens in the UK in order to enhance the collection in the Museum Gardens.

At one point, according to his daughter Fanny, he applied for a position of Curator of the Manchester Botanical Gardens in 1832 but 'failed by one or two votes'. I cannot help wondering whether he really would have wanted to remove his family from York, where Henry had his roots, to a position where he would perhaps not have received such favourable terms. He never applied for positions elsewhere again, and although John Phillips asked Henry to join him in Oxford when he moved there, Henry could not be 'prevailed on to do so'. (FB)

A GROWING FAMILY

While the family still lived in Micklegate and Henry worked for the Backhouses, Henry and Rebecca had a third daughter, Anne, who was born in March 1828 – baptised on 17th March in Holy Trinity Church, Micklegate.

When Henry assumed his post with the Museum in 1829, he was offered

a salary of 52 guineas per year (approximately £9,500 today [Bank of England Inflation Calculator]). This was not a huge sum for a man with a family, but he was also provided with free accommodation for himself, Rebecca and their daughters, in three rooms in the basement of the Museum. His salary was later raised to £70 plus £20 for a 'Servants Wages, Board, and materials for cleaning the house' (YPS minutes 20 February 1832 in Hogarth and Anderson) and within just over ten years of commencing as Sub-curator he was on an annual salary of £100 a year. He appears to have received various bonuses from time to time. Accommodation was always included in the deal.

Having seen the cramped conditions in the basement of the Yorkshire Museum, and the possible three rooms in which the family lived, I can only imagine that it was the rent-free nature of the offer which persuaded Henry and Rebecca to move there from Micklegate. Initially, six people occupied the three rooms: Henry, Rebecca, the three small girls, Ellen, Mary and Anne, and Henry's mother Maude. On 12th January 1833, another daughter, Fanny was born; baptised on 21st January 1833 at St Olave's Church. On 17th October 1835, the fifth daughter Maria arrived;

	William G. J.	Son	6m			
123	Manor Shore	Henry Baines	Head	Mar	57	Gardener Sub-curator at the Yorkshire Museum
		Rebecca J.	Wife	Mar	56	
		Ann J.	Daughter	W	23	
		Fanny J.	Daughter	W	18	
		Maria J.	Daughter	W	15	
		Mary Walls	Visitor	Mar	26	Henry's Wife
		Emily M. Walls	J.		2	J. Daughter
124	Manor Yard (School for the Blind)	James Agars	Head Master	Mar	35	Master & Agent Manager of the Institute
		Margaret Agars	J. Wife	Mar	27	
		Ellen Maynell	Mahon	W	44	
		William Isaac		W	29	Schoolmaster's Assistant
		Alby Newman		W	29	Teacher Basket-making
		William H. Hudland		W	26	J. Music
Total of House		I J U B		Total of Persons		7 13

also baptised at St Olave's. So, in 1835 there was a family of 8 living in the three rooms in the basement of the Museum. In April 1836 Henry's mother Maude died. Her burial took place at St Olave's Church which sits almost within the Museum Gardens. Even without Henry's mother, there can hardly have been room for a servant of any kind to live in.

The census on Sunday 6th June 1841 (the first national census of any organised kind) records those present in the dwelling as Henry, Rebecca, Mary aged 16, Ann aged 14, Fanny aged 9, and Maria aged 5 (ages tended to be approximations). There is no servant recorded as resident and also no sign of Ellen. (Maybe the servant came in daily and had Sundays off.) My search found an Ellen Baines, of the right age and birthplace, living, or staying, with a Sarah Hewitt aged 50, in Baildon not far from Halifax. If this is Henry's daughter Ellen it may be that she was staying with a friend of the family or possibly learning a trade, as Sarah Hewitt appears to have been a seamstress, and all the neighbours are recorded as weavers.

In the same year, a medical report from a doctor attending the Baines family suggested that the three rooms in the basement of the Museum were not entirely healthy being 'extremely damp' (YPS minutes 3 May 1841 in Hogarth and Anderson). It seems astonishing that the YPS proposed building a completely new house for the family, rather than simply moving them somewhere else. The house was eventually built in 1843 when a Vice President of the YPS specifically requested that some of his legacy

should be used to build the new house. Peter Hogarth suggests that this benefactor, Dr Stephen Beckwith, may have been the medic who had declared the three rooms unhealthy in 1841. The house was built, very sympathetically to the surrounding buildings, where it stands now at the back of the King's Manor and between the multangular tower and the Museum. It was called Manor Cottage.

The house itself, for a family of six (possibly seven if Ellen had returned) was still quite small. The width across the front of the house belies how narrow it is inside from front to back. It appears to comprise two rooms and a small hall downstairs: two rooms upstairs and a small attic room. Nevertheless, Henry had the house rent-free from YPS and was no doubt anticipating some of his growing family leaving to start their own adult lives.

Several of the girls may have attended the York School of Design which was established by artist William Etty in 1842 in Little Blake Street (now Duncombe Place). Ellen Baines is mentioned in a Yorkshire Gazette article in December 1845 as receiving a prize at the York School. Both a 'Maria' and an 'Anna' Baines are listed in a later article in June 1852 as being pupils at the school. It may be that Mary and Fanny could also have attended. The school was part of a national government scheme set up to promote art and industry. It seems extraordinarily forward-thinking of Henry to arrange for his daughters to attend – even as adults, since Ellen would have been 18 by 1842 when the school opened.

On 13th April 1848, Mary married Matthew Walls, a cabinet maker, in St Olave's Church. Henry was important enough in Yorkshire for Mary's marriage to be reported in the Yorkshire Gazette on 15th April and in the Bradford Observer on 20th April.

The 1851 census finds almost all the family at 'Manor Shore' – the wider description of the address in the Museum Gardens – including Mary, who appears to be visiting with a daughter Emily aged two years. (Matthew is recorded at an address in St Saviourgate, which was presumably the Walls' family home. According to the census record Matthew had now become Secretary of the York Institute of Popular Science and Literature, which was a library and provider of day and evening lectures in a wide range of practical trades (York Explore Archives/Index). This was the forerunner of what would eventually become York Technical College.

There is again no sign of eldest daughter Ellen at Manor Shore in 1851, and I was unable to find her definitively anywhere else in the census records. She may have been visiting, or living, elsewhere on the day of the census and was not recorded.

On August 28th, 1852, Ellen married Robert Ward, from Helmsley, at St Olave's Church. Robert, the son of a saddler, was a jeweller. Shortly before the marriage, Robert had been lodging in York with the family of David Graham, a naturalist and described as an 'animal preserver' (Yorkshire Gazette October 1848) and almost certainly a friend of Henry's. This may be how Robert and Ellen met.

Anne got married on 30th October 1855, also at St Olave's Church.

1851 Census, findmypast.co.uk





She married Thomas Joseph Banks, the son of a wood turner, who was to become a nationally renowned landscape and portrait painter, who exhibited his work at the Royal Institute. Perhaps she met him at the York School of Design. Thomas's works can still be found in galleries and for sale today and he has a painting of Henry Baines, his father-in-law, in the York Art Gallery. Like Mary's, Anne's marriage also merited the notice of the Yorkshire Gazette (November 1855)

HENRY'S BOOK – THE FLORA OF YORKSHIRE

In 1840, Henry published a book, the Flora of Yorkshire, with an introduction by John Phillips, the Keeper of the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens. According to his daughter Fanny this was 'a work of great pains and labouring.' Fanny describes a review in the 'Sheffield Patriot,' at the time of the book's publication describing the book as: 'one of the most interesting of local floras we have ever met with. It certainly has its defects, but its merits make us overlook them... for he has lightened the tedious language of the mere botanist, by several apt and practical reflections, which he might have carried to further extent, but we suppose the bulk it would have made of his book frightened him.'

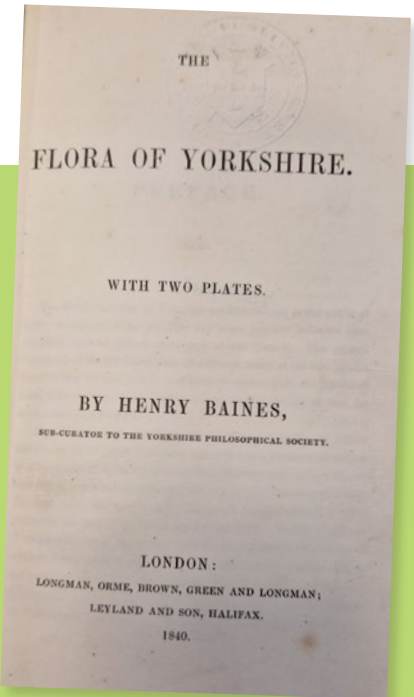
The imminent publication of the book was advertised in the Yorkshire Gazette with details of the intended contents and a request for subscribers to contact Henry. The cost of the subscription was to be seven shillings and sixpence, with the book promised for summer 1838 (Yorkshire Gazette March 1838). In fact the book was not published until 1840.

The book is a catalogue of plants, and details of where they can be found across Yorkshire. Henry

although I have been unable to find any announcement of Ellen's marriage in any newspapers.

The household in the little house in the Museum Gardens was therefore reduced to four people by 1855: Henry, Rebecca, Fanny and Maria. On the day of the 1861 census, we find Rebecca at home with Fanny and Maria and a visitor from Halifax, Ann Richardson, possibly a friend of one of the girls as she was of a similar age. Henry is not at Manor Cottage,

but a further search finds him visiting Mary, Matthew, Emily and their second child, also called Henry, in Bradford. Matthew was now Secretary and Librarian of the Bradford Mechanics Institute, a similar institution to the York Institute of Popular Science and Literature.



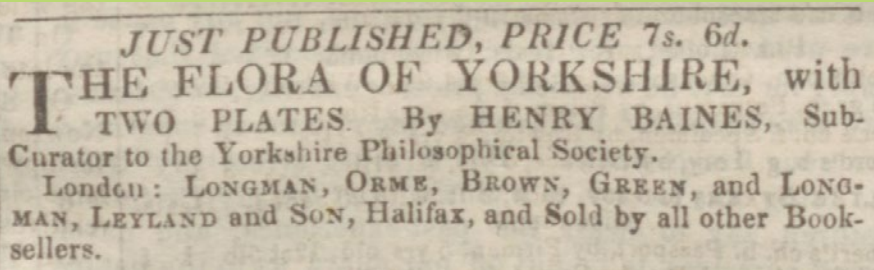
Flora of Yorkshire Frontispiece, photographed by Juliet Burton

When published in 1854, the book was advertised at: '5s or 10s bound with the original work' to be 'sent free by Post on remitting 5s 6d or 10s 6d by Post-Office Order; or Postage Stamps' (Yorkshire Gazette December 1854)

By 1857, Henry was still publicising his book, but the cost had dropped to 2 shillings with free postage (Yorkshire Gazette June 1857).

It appears that Henry was to lose money on this second edition too: 'Pecuniarily both (editions) were a loss to him' (FB). It seems he was not good at managing money, 'it being a difficult matter with him to keep his scientific expenses within bounds' (FB).

However, I am sure that Henry would be delighted to know that Flora of Yorkshire can still be bought today, either in the original form, as a digital download or as a very recent reprint. There are also three copies in the York Explore Library.



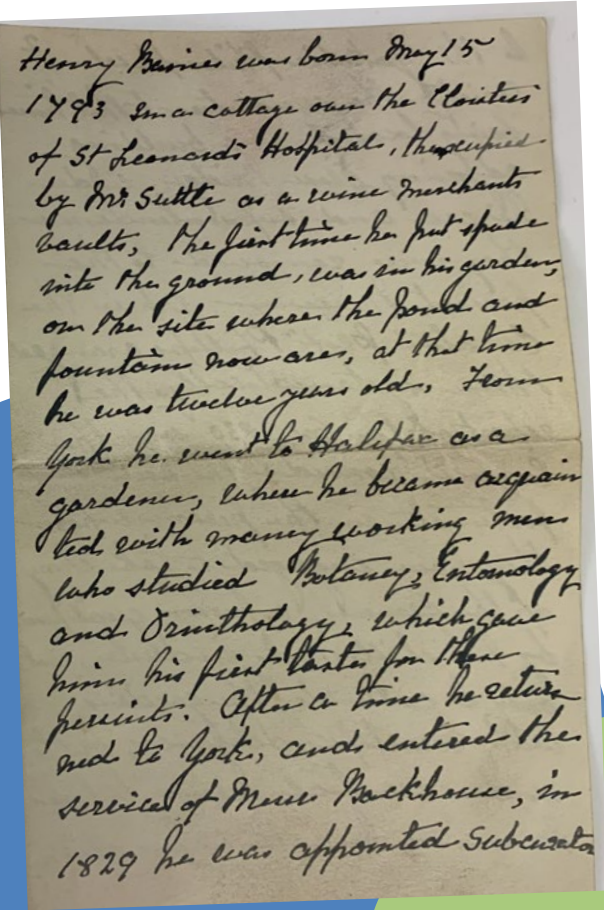
Yorkshire Gazette 19 September 1840, Nritish Newspaper Archive

PRIZES AND REWARDS

From his return to York onwards Henry distinguished himself with a number of awards from the York Horticultural Society mostly for his 'exotic' or 'hardy bouquets' but also for other flowers and plants and notably for growing plants to 'perfection by being enclosed under glass shades, totally excluded from the air' (Yorkshire Gazette June 1836)

By 1833, Henry was the secretary of the York Horticultural Society. He seems to have exhibited less as secretary but was responsible for registering members, organising the shows and minuting the meetings. In 1835 a new York Horticultural Society was launched after a 'very stormy' meeting (Yorkshire Gazette March 1835) as there were 'upwards of ninety subscribers to the new society who have previously supported the old society but are not satisfied with the manner in which it has been conducted' (York Herald March 1835)

Apparently, there was dissatisfaction in the differences between the amounts awarded for prizes in the different classes. The Horticultural Society was to relaunch itself several times over the following few years. Henry resigned as secretary in 1837



First page of Fanny Baines account of her father's life, York Museums Trust



Minster Oak Box, YORCM : Audit.282, York Museums Trust

and was commended for the 'zeal and ability with which he performed the arduous duties of secretary over the previous ... years' (Yorkshire Herald March 1837).

As secretary Henry may have entered fewer exhibits in the horticultural shows but newspaper articles continue to mention his commendations, or the names of his gardeners, as winners in a variety of classes. And in 1856 his youngest daughter Maria took 'all the prizes' for her exhibit of wax flowers (although there was, admittedly, 'no competition') (Yorkshire Gazette July 1856)

By the 1840s Henry had become a judge for Horticultural Society shows 'locally and in other towns' (FB) while continuing to enter some exhibits in the York shows himself.

Even having resigned as secretary, Henry still seemed to continue to play a significant part in organising Horticultural Society events and in supporting the new secretary. He was the major player in initiating the Horticultural Exhibition of 1853 when the York Philosophical Society decided to show 'new, rare and useful plants' (Hogarth & Anderson) in the Museum and Museum Gardens rather than the

usual mundane offerings from local gardens and nurseries exhibited by the Horticultural Society. Henry sourced and collected rare and –notably – economically useful specimens from around the world, and the result was a horticultural exhibition of a completely new kind. The exhibition was extremely successful. According to Henry's daughter Fanny, 'the exhibition was visited by over 6000 persons and over £300 was taken at the gate'.

In 1836, Henry Baines was awarded the Banksian medal of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), named after Sir Joseph Banks, one of the founders of the RHS, and first awarded in 1820. In the early 18th century when Henry received the award, it was 'awarded to exhibitors of objects brought to general meetings' (RHS Affiliated Societies online)

In December 1859, the Lord Mayor of York, William Husband, presented Henry with a wooden box of Minster oak (presumably oak reclaimed from York Minster (possibly after the fire of 1829)) in which was £200 guineas, collected from donations from YPS members and other friends of Henry's. This, along with a testimonial, which was printed in full in the Yorkshire Gazette, was in recognition of his 30



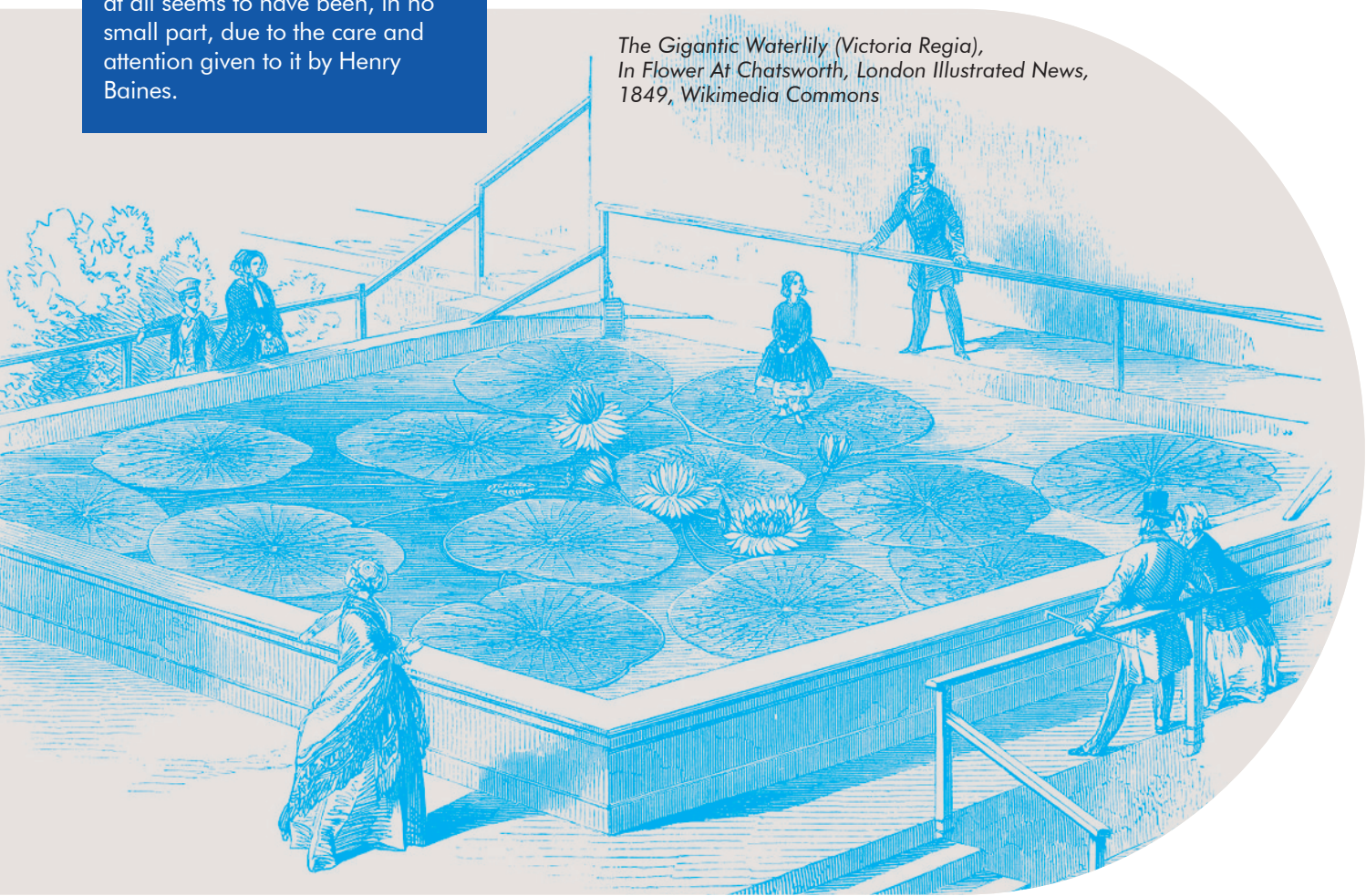
THE 'QUEEN OF THE WATERS'

Henry was largely responsible for the cultivation of the giant Amazonian Lily, Victoria Regis, known as the Queen of the Waters. The water lily was obtained by the YPS in 1850 and was so big that it had to be installed in its own water tank in a specially built heated greenhouse. The public was to be charged a shilling to come and see the flower in bloom and sixpence when there was no flower. Unfortunately, the first specimen died, and Henry had to obtain another one from Chatsworth House. This one did flourish although it did not flower often. Apparently, when Queen Victoria visited York briefly in 1857 for lunch at the Station Hotel, the only flower from the Victoria Regis was placed on her table. Presumably, this reduced the viewing price, in the Museum Gardens, from then on, to sixpence. The Victoria Regis does not seem to have survived long term but the fact that it survived at all seems to have been, in no small part, due to the care and attention given to it by Henry Baines.

years' service to the YPS and the Museum. Two hundred guineas was a phenomenal sum of money for a gift – worth more than £22,000 today (Bank of England Inflation Calculator). On the lid of the box was a silver plate inscribed to express the Society's and friends' 'high approval of his Character & Conduct'. (The lid was 'inlaid by Mr Ward' (Yorkshire Gazette December 1859) – almost certainly Henry's son-in-law Robert). The box itself is now in the York Castle Museum's collection and I am grateful to Philip Newton, Community Participation Manager for the York Museums Trust, for finding it, along with its contents – Fanny Baines' original handwritten account of her father's life and the original testimonial to Henry from the Yorkshire Gazette. Unfortunately, there was no sign of the 200 guineas.



Henry's testimonial the Yorkshire Gazette December 1859, York Museums Trust

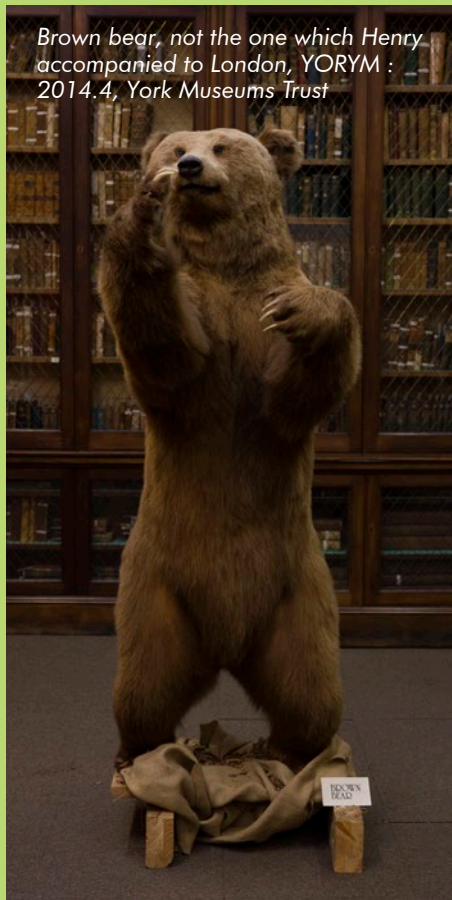


The Gigantic Waterlily (Victoria Regia), In Flower At Chatsworth, London Illustrated News, 1849, Wikimedia Commons

HENRY AND THE BEAR

Perhaps my favourite story about Henry is the one about the bear which took place in 1831. In the early days of the Museum Gardens, there was a small menagerie. Fanny Baines states that there was 'a bear, a golden eagle and several monkeys' (FB from YPS Annual Report 1916, from Hogarth and Anderson) although Fanny was not born until 1833 so was likely recalling what her father had told her. Rumour has it that the animals, including the bear, were housed in the multangular tower. In 1831 the bear escaped and chased the curator, Professor John Phillips and the Reverend Vernon Harcourt (the first president of the YPS) around the gardens so that they were obliged to seek refuge in an outhouse. How this was immediately resolved is no longer known but apparently this was not the first time the bear had escaped. Shortly after this, the menagerie was closed. The

bear was offered to the London Zoological Gardens, who 'accepted the gift and instructed that the bear be sent to them as an outside passenger on the stage coach'! (YPS website on John Phillips). The stagecoach departed for London from outside the Black Swan in Coney Street (York Museums Trust online) with the bear on board, accompanied by the sub-curator Henry Baines. However attractive the idea is of Henry and the bear sitting side by side on the stagecoach to London, sharing snacks and chattering, it appears that the YPS commissioned the making of a cage for a bear for the sum of £4 (YPS Annual Report 1830, from Hogarth and Anderson). This may mean that the bear travelled as luggage rather than as a passenger. Nevertheless, this will have been an interesting and somewhat nerve-wracking journey for Henry.



Brown bear, not the one which Henry accompanied to London, YORYM : 2014.4, York Museums Trust

LATER LIFE

Sadly, on 16th April 1862, Henry's eldest daughter Ellen died at the age of 38. Ellen and Robert were living in Davygate and had 5 children, Rebecca, Henry, Robert, William and Arthur. Ellen's death was reported in the Yorkshire Gazette, as she was both the wife of Robert Ward and the daughter of Henry Baines. A baby girl, Ellen Maude Ward, daughter of Robert Ward, jeweller, and of Ellen Ward was baptised on 18th April 1862, so it seems that Ellen may have died in childbirth. The following year there was another death in the family when Henry's son-in-law, the husband of daughter Mary, Matthew Walls died. Mary and Matthew appear to have returned to York from Bradford where they had been just two years before. According to the 1871 and 1881 censuses, Mary remained in York, living in Lord Mayor's Walk with daughter Emily, by then a governess, and taking in two children as boarders. Mary may have struggled to make ends meet as just ten years later she was living alone in a street off Lord Mayor's Walk and

working as a 'plain sewer'. Although Henry might have been expected to retire when presented with the oak box in 1859, at the age of 66 years, he continued as sub-curator of the Museum and in charge of the grounds for another ten years. In addition to these responsibilities, Henry also gave several lectures to the York Institute Naturalists Club (of which he was an honorary member) and other societies. And he was 'ever ready to give his services, and particularly to help young people in studies of botany' (FB). By 1865, Henry was distinguished enough to need his own visiting card; not just an ordinary card but a card with his photograph on it which must have been expensive for him. Henry would have left this card with friends and acquaintances to display alongside other calling cards from noteworthy visitors. One of Henry's visiting cards is now held in the Royal Horticultural Society's Lindley Collection alongside the cards of other notable horticulturists and botanists. In 1869, at the age of 76, Henry did

tender his resignation. His resignation was accepted but he was allowed to continue as sub-curator of the Museum without being responsible for the grounds. Rather surprisingly he was to undertake this very reduced role on the same salary as before, and even when he retired completely two years later, his pension was set at the same £100 per year and he – and his family – were permitted to remain in Manor Cottage for the duration of his life. Henry, by this time, was becoming unwell. The 1871 census shows that the family did, eventually, have a young servant living with them. This suggests that the house was becoming too much for Henry and Rebecca to manage even with Fanny and Maria still there to support them. There is no evidence in any of the censuses that Fanny or Maria had any employment. Indeed, Maria may also have been in poor health as, on 26th March 1877, at the age of 42, she died. Henry died, at the age of 84 on 1st April 1878. I cannot find a will; it seems that he died



‘a very poor man, having been afflicted with disease for a period of many years, and having been put to constant and great expense by his family’ (FB in letter to YPS 10 April 1878 in YPS minutes in Hogarth ad Anderson).

On 18th June 1878, his effects and ‘an extensive and rare collection of herbaria, collected by Mr Baines covering a period of 50 years’ were auctioned and ‘satisfactory prices were realised’ (Yorkshire Herald June 1878).

It is testament to the regard in which he was held, that his daughter Fanny and his widow Rebecca were granted Fanny’s request to live in the Lodge of the Museum Gardens after Henry’s death, where Fanny took on the role of gatekeeper for a small salary. Rebecca died in March 1882. Fanny was to live in the Lodge for the rest of her life, supported by the YPS with a pension

after her retirement, and looked after by a housekeeper.

Henry Baines was, without doubt, extremely significant in the development and maintenance of the Museum and the Museum Gardens. He spent most of his life working for the Museum and, specifically, establishing and managing its grounds. Above all he seems to have been a thoroughly nice man:

‘he was anxious, in season and out of season, so to conduct himself that he should be courteous and agreeable to all with whom he came into contact’ (Yorkshire Gazette December 1859)

Henry and his family lived in the most unusual circumstances and made alliances with creative and forward-thinking people. He has a well-deserved blue plaque and would equally merit a memorial or statue somewhere in his beloved gardens. Or



Henry in September 1844, with permission from National Galleries Scotland

maybe his memorial is the Museum Gardens, and we can give a special thought to him, and to his family, every time we walk past Manor Cottage or, as I like to call it, ‘Henry’s house’.

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The hutments, York Museums Trust



# THE MUSEUM GARDENS DURING THE Second World War

On the 29 April 1942 during the Baedeker raid two bombs fell in the Museum Gardens.

One struck the King’s Manor and started a fire causing some damage. A second bomb hit the foundations of the apse of the eastern termination of the Norman abbey church, completely destroying it. The bomb also caused a lot of damage to the museum building (unknown how many artefacts were damaged or destroyed). Around May 1942 a number of huts were built behind the York Art Gallery that were used as a hostel for the Royal Canadian Air Force [RCAF]. These huts or ‘hutments’ as the military referred to them, served as a safe space for

the members of the RCAF to stay in when they were on much needed leave when visiting York. After the war, the huts were used for different reasons but mainly educational purposes until they were demolished in 2011. Unfortunately, practically no one knew of their history, and nothing was preserved for future generations to study and learn from.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all the military and civilian personnel who gave up so much and those who continue to keep us safe and free from tyranny.





The lounge in the hutments, York Museums Trust

Image of the education plaque, York Museums Trust

# The Hutments

## 1945–2011

Following on from Stephen's account of the Hutments during the war, I wanted to add a little bit to his story, and to continue it from after the war until the end of the hutments.



The sleeping quarters and dining hall in the hutments, York Museums Trust



My grandmother, Amy Norton, worked in the kitchen of the Hutments during the war, feeding the Canadian servicemen. She was 29 when war broke out, with three small boys at home. My grandad was older, and was never called up to fight, so I like to think that this was her way of contributing to the war effort. The one and only story that we know about that time was that, when she was at work, if there was any food left that day, the airman in charge would tell her to 'take it home for the boys.' My dad said it was the first time he had seen an orange, as the Canadians received food parcels containing lots of goodies sent over from Canada, so

it was very kind of them to share their food with my family.

After the war ended, the Hutments were adapted for educational use by York Council. They were firstly used as an emergency training college for teachers, as the government at the time had raised the school leaving age, so more teachers would be needed. They also provided living accommodation for a matron on site. This would later be used by the Principal of the Adult Education Centre.

In 1949 the Hutments became the Marygate Centre of Further Education, with an emphasis on providing courses for women and girls, and this college continued until the 1970s, though other courses were added. Some of the courses at the time included classes for women in housecraft

and allied activities, a basic catering course, which by the late 1950s had become a City and Guilds course, a day continuation school for girls, and evening and weekend adult education courses. At the same time, one of the former dormitories was used by the York School of Art as a space for practical activities such as printmaking and photography. There is a record, that, in 1952, it was proposed to run a class for folk dancing (American square), alongside the other activities, and that dressmaking, tailoring and childcare were added as further courses.

It is recorded that there was always a canteen attached to the educational buildings. My mum remembers that my grandmother continued working at the Hutments after the war, and that as part of her job, as well as catering for the students, they made school meals for primary schools in York, which were then delivered in big silver trays. My grandmother stayed in the education sector until her retirement, becoming the head cook at the College of Arts and Technology on Tadcaster Road. This is where many of the courses that were based in the city centre, including the Hutments, were moved to, I think in the 1960s and 1970s. The art courses, though, seem to have lasted the longest and from recollections seem to be the last to leave. My grandmother may well have known some of the pupils who moved to the new college with her.

From 1981 the buildings were used by the Yorkshire Museum as storage space and as a workroom. In 2011 they were emptied in preparation for demolition. As the buildings were of prefabricated and asbestos construction, the demolition was ordered for health and safety reasons. The Hutments were duly demolished in 2011/12.

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### My Sidney

I have known about Sidney Melmore since I was seven and we moved into his house in Acomb after he died, and we still used to receive letters for him even after his death. In the last Heritage Hunter project, we looked at Acomb, so I was able to find out more about him. In his working life he had been a 'geologist, mineralogist and crystallographer', and it seems that these things were important to him all his life. One of the things that I discovered was that he was a member of, and on the committee of, the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, based at the Yorkshire Museum in the Museum Gardens. Once again, I was crossing paths with Sidney. To know that he was in the same place as my grandmother at the same time, and that the two of them may well have crossed paths, I found intriguing. So what was Sidney doing at the time of the Hutments? In 1939, at the outbreak of war, he was on the council of the museum, and a curator there too, and at one meeting he prompted a discussion about moving the geological specimens held in the museum down to the basement for safe keeping. The council decided against this, preferring to cover the exhibits with boards as needs

arose. Sidney brought the idea up again in 1940 – he was obviously very passionate about his area of expertise and keeping it safe – but by then the Post Office were using the basement as a communications centre. In 1941 and 1942 valuable specimens were removed to the Lake District for safety. During the Baedeker Raid over York in April 1942 a bomb did drop very close to the museum, so Sidney had been right to try to protect the museum's artefacts. Nevertheless, 'seven large bathtubs' of broken glass and fossils had to be thrown out.

During 1942–43 he was observed to be a 'sensible and practical' curator, working under an 'overwhelming burden of a curatorial backlog' by a volunteer soldier from Fulford Barracks, who had previously worked at the British Museum. Sidney continued to work on curating the museum's collections throughout the war. He finally retired from his post at the museum in 1945 due to failing eyesight. He died in 1969, aged 75, and I find it sad that in his later life he might not have been able to see his beloved fossils, minerals and crystals. I have never seen a photograph of Sidney, but these two Heritage Hunter projects have certainly built up a picture of him for me.



The courtyard of the hutments before demolition, York Museums Trust

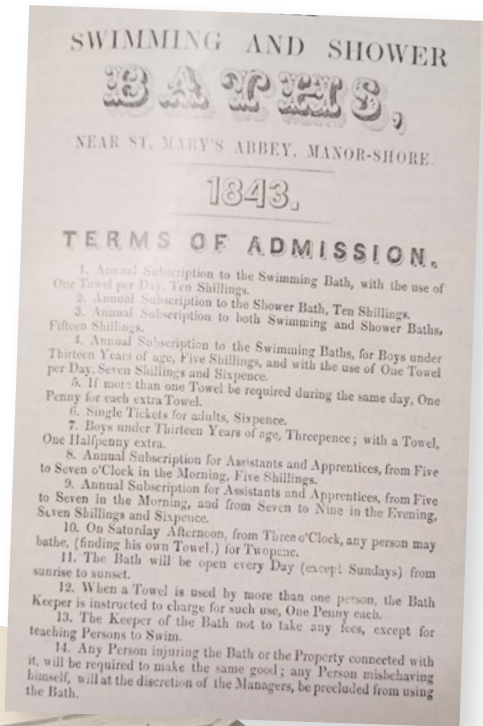


# What lies beneath:

## LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MARYGATE SWIMMING BATHS 1837-1922

Over 100 years ago York's first public swimming pool was abandoned after 85 years of service. Now filled in, there is no trace of the baths which were located in The Museum Gardens and a popular attraction.

Admission Poster taken from YPS Annual Report 1969



The baths in the 1920s, York Explore, HMU/P/17/162

Cold water bathing became increasingly popular in the 1700's as medical advice advocated the therapeutic benefits. Spa towns catered for the wealthy and middle classes, some even built plunge pools in private gardens. Swimming and even washing for many people in York took place in rivers with their inherent risks. However, at the start of the 19th century public bathing pools were being opened, for example in Bath in 1815 and Leeds in 1834.

In York a public meeting was held in 1834 at The Merchant Adventurer's Hall with the aim of providing a bath in the city. A prominent local physician, Dr Baldwin Wake, spoke of the benefits of cold-water bathing and learning to swim, (there had been a recent drowning in the Ouse.) As a result, The York Swimming Bath Company was formed and although shares were not issued until 1836, they approached The Yorkshire Philosophical Society Council (YPSC) about a site in the Museum Gardens. Dr Wake had been elected to the council in 1833 and became a vice president in 1836, so YPSC agreed to allocate 1 acre of land adjoining the Abbey wall and the river, known as Manor Shore. In March 1837, a lease was arranged between the two parties. The Bath company agreed to pay a rent of £20 per year (£2000 at current prices) with specific conditions, including that the baths would be for public use and the construction of a tunnel for wastewater to open into the river near Lendal. Water was to be supplied by the York Waterworks Company for £5 per year for 97 years.

Work on constructing the baths began in May 1837, and it is believed the design was by Samuel and Richard Hey Sharpe, Richard had designed the interior of the museum. The baths were 110 feet by 80 feet with a depth of 3' 6" increasing to 6' with water fed in through an ornamental dragon's head and a fountain was placed in the centre. A cottage was built for the bath keeper with changing rooms either side and an 8'6" brick wall and trees surrounded the pool. Showers and water closets were installed and a new entrance from Marygate was made. A letter in the York Herald some years later described them as the 'most admirably constructed baths



The Gardens of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, York by J Storey C 1860, York Museums Trust

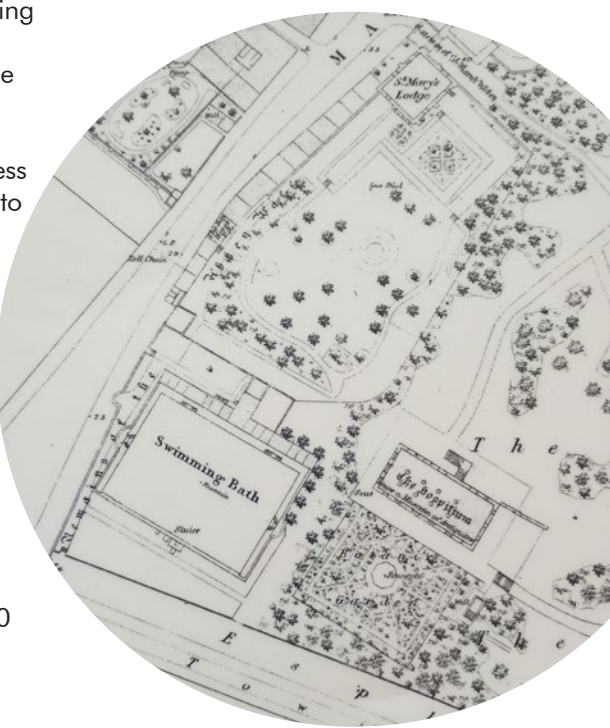
in the kingdom' The post of keeper of the bath with a salary of £15 per year, preferably married, and to teach swimming was advertised. William Settle, an employee of the gardens, became the first keeper of the bath, a post he held for 30 years. On August 7th, 1837, the baths were opened for inspection and swimming commenced the following day. The bathing season then ran every year from 1st May until 30th September 6am to 9pm, and annual tickets which included the use of a towel were very popular. It should be noted that the baths were only open to men and boys, twice weekly women only sessions were first advertised in 1886.

In 1843 the first summer fete was held at the baths, a success, it was repeated the following year but less well attended owing to poor weather. Nevertheless, Walker's Brass Band provided entertainment and swimming and diving competitions were held. The under 15s were able to enter the 'Hopeful Stakes' in which they swam four lengths of the pool.

The popularity and financial success of the baths led the YPSC to decide to take back control of this part of the gardens. In 1845, they purchased the lease from the Swimming Bath Company for the bath and all its constructions for £1475, the equivalent of £150,000 today. The following year was a particularly hot summer, and the baths made a profit of £112 10s 6d (nearly £11,000) The site continued to make a good profit for YPS for a few years allowing the keeper's salary to be doubled to £30 in 1852 and repairs made to the cottage. Unfortunately, there was a loss of £75 in 1850 because of a

dispute with the York Water Works Company who now wanted to charge £30 per year and the supply of water was stopped. The water had to be changed using fire engines and 20 men, taking 5 days. To manage the water supply YPS decided to install their own steam engine to pump water from the Ouse but there were objections regarding the height of the chimney which obstructed the view of the gardens. Eventually a contract with the New Water Company to supply water for £20 per year was agreed and a return to profit occurred the following year. The accounts for 1857 show a gross profit of £147 13s 7d with costs for water £20, keeper £30, repairs £13 6s 11d. The profits for the

1852 Map of York, Explore Archives, photographed by Sara Townsend



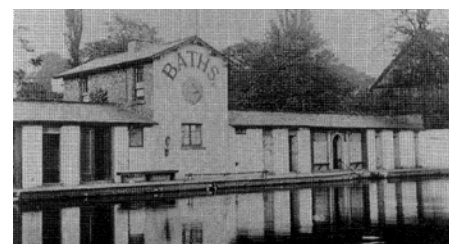


baths were very variable during the 1860s, always weather dependent, and also impacted by the opening of Yearsley Baths in 1859. As it took 3 days to empty and refill the pool, there were also concerns about the cleanliness of the water. Letters in the local press claimed that the water was only changed every 3 or 4 weeks despite being used for washing as well as bathing and referred to the pool as 'pea soup'. On a Saturday, the most popular washing day, up to 600 bathers attended and it was estimated that 3500 men and boys used the baths in July 1858. The letters were published anonymously signed 'Clean Water' and 'A Would-be Bath Frequenter'. A new steam engine to pump water from the Ouse was finally installed in the early 1870s but was found to be incorrectly positioned making it noisy and unsafe and so it had to be removed, fortunately a new agreement was reached with the water company.

In 1867 William Settle, the bath keeper, was warned about his 'intemperance' and despite a pleading letter was evicted before the 1868 season. The proximity of The Bay Horse Public House, on Marygate adjacent to the Abbey Wall was possibly too much of a temptation.

(The pub, and cottages alongside were condemned and demolished in 1893. A new pub was built on the opposite side of the road in 1894, and this handsome building is now a restaurant.) At this point YPSC decided to contract out the running of the baths and thereby receive a steady income of £40 year. Edward Calvert was awarded the contract to run the baths and continued to do so for 6 years until his death in 1873.

J. T. Burton, another YPS employee, was chosen by YPSC to take over. He ran the baths for nearly 20 years, and they became known as Mr Burton's Baths. In 1884 the Yorkshire Gazette published a detailed report of the York Minster Choir School Swimming Sports Day attended by the Dean of York and prizes presented by Lady Emma Purey Cust. A Swimming Gala for the York Amateur Swimming Club, the York School for the Blind and the Police in 1888 was described in the York Herald. The schoolboys had been taught to swim by Mr Burton and three of them dived from the top of the wall. There were exhibitions of 'ornamental and scientific swimming' including undressing on the surface of the water. A Mr Naylor performed the 'Monte Cristo Sack Feat' in which he was tied up in a sack and thrown in



The Swimming Bath, 1892, Nicholas Richardson, Bootham School Photographic Society

the water. This was then followed by a demonstration of a drowning rescue! The event ended with an 'amusing tea party' demonstrating the baths were important for bathing and swimming but also for recreation and socialising.

1892 saw significant changes at the baths including the publicising of Miss Watt as a Certified Teacher of swimming and diving. Mr Burton had started to get into arrears with his rent from 1888 and his contract was terminated in 1891. John Haughton Hill took over part way through the season and he was effectively given an allowance for repairs as he did not pay any rent for 2 years. He undertook a significant refurbishment ready for the 1892 season, building private slipper and shower baths in the old engine house. They were 'erected according to the latest improvements in sanitary science' and there was now a constant supply of fresh water. These additions were no doubt a product of his previous profession of engineer. He was born in 1852 one of eight children and his family had moved to York by 1861. In the 1871 census he was an apprentice engine fitter and married Sarah, a housemaid at Bootham School in 1875. Shortly before he took over the baths, he was initiated into the Agricola Lodge of the Freemasons based at Castlegate House near Clifford's Tower. A few years later in 1899 he became Worshipful Master, the chair of the Lodge, although surprisingly he resigned from the Lodge in 1901. The census of that year lists him as living at the baths and his occupation is Baths Lessee and Sub Postmaster. He was very enterprising, opening a kiosk selling sweets and biscuits to bathers and even lowering the level of the water in the winter months to make a skating rink. He was also involved in building projects around Burton Stone Lane and even in Scarborough.



Grave of John and Sarah Hill, photographed by Sara Townsend

J H Hill's initial lease term was for 5 years but it was renewed up to 1911 when Bootham School offered to take over with a plan to install a roof which would allow year-round use. St Peter's School objected, possibly because the baths had always been for public use.

Mr Hill therefore continued to hold the lease until 1923 although he became unwell before then and in fact the baths were last used in 1922. He died in 1924 age 71 at Longfield Terrace only a stone's throw from the baths where he had spent 30 years of his life. He left £10,143 in his will which would be worth over half a million pounds today and is buried in York Cemetery.

York corporation expressed an interest in taking over the baths, but extensive repairs were needed at this stage, including a new water drain, and the proposal was not passed. After being in use for 85 years the baths were simply abandoned and allowed to become derelict. It was not until 1969 that the pool was filled in, possibly with unwanted items from

the museum, and the associated buildings demolished. The area was grassed over although the pool was rediscovered when the flood bank was built in 1985.

In 2018 the York Press published a photo of the baths and invited readers to send their memories. Not surprisingly because the baths had closed nearly 100 years previously these were of the abandoned pool. Someone remembered local youngsters using it as a playground and recalled the dragon's head still in place. Another, that it was used by the scout troop for their bonfire celebration.

It's interesting to note in our current period of high inflation that the lease rental for the baths stood at £40 per year from 1869 until 1922 and the admission charge of 6d for adults and 3d for children was unchanged during the entire lifetime of the baths!

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Philip Newton, Jack Sharpe, Cecilia Bainton and 'David Poole.

### Alan Hardwick writes:

**Les Benson grew up around Marygate and swam in the Ouse from the 1930s:**

All t'school holidays were all spent in river at bottom of Marygate. It was very rare you weren't in your 'cossie' as you called it, you know. You shot down there in the morning in your cossie, ask your mum for a sandwich till teatime, used to be back then, you know, like there till teatime.

I used to be a good swimmer. I've dived off Lendal Bridge, off Scarborough Bridge, off New Bridge [Clifton Bridge]. I've swum to New Bridge and back again from Marygate, yeah, in them days. I loved it. And the servicewomen, women that used to lie on them banks, and watch us...

I remember once, diving off t'jetty. We used to dive down to t'bottom, pick things off bottom and I saw this thing glinting, and I brought it up and it was a cigarette case with this photograph of an army chap and a woman on it, and about half a dozen soggy cigarettes. They must've been dropped out of a boat or something. I handed it in to t'police. I never heard about that, I never went back to see if it'd been collected...

**York Oral History Society Archive**

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J.J.Hill, his wife and grandson, about the First World War, YPS Annual Report 1969



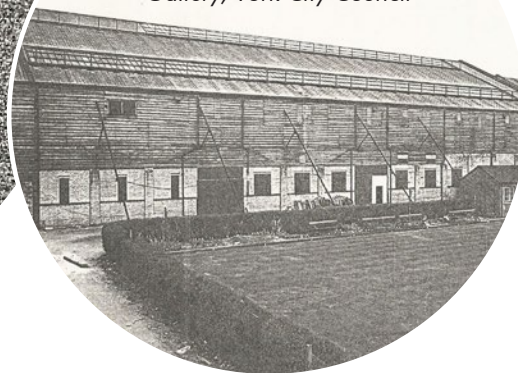


Bowlers in 1926, C. Green, W. Sugden, A.A. Keech, I. Hattee, The York Press

Site of the YPS bowling green, photographed by Alan Hardwick



The bowling green, in what is now the Edible Wood, behind York Art Gallery, York City Council



During the raid, when the Exhibition Building was burning at the back of the Art Gallery, this man worked for the Selby telephone and cable company, doing all the cables for airfields. They kept their wagons in there and he drove them out into Marygate and about a fortnight later the firm awarded him £25 or something for saving the wagons, which was a fortune! And the police were gonna prosecute him for not having a driving licence!

By this time, Bert and Edith Keech had moved from the Minster Inn to the De Grey Rooms in Exhibition Square:

It was frightening that night of the raid, you know. The Minster Inn, all the windows were in, we couldn't get out to go to his mother, you see. It was awful. And a boulder from the Museum Gardens came on to the balcony of the De Grey Rooms. We were down in the bottom [of the De Grey Rooms], in the grotto.

Exhibition Square also featured in the memories of Phyllis Haddacks:

We used to do a lot of voluntary work in the war. One of them was helping to make camouflage nets and they used to lay them out in front of the Art Gallery, and sew them because there was plenty of space to do it there.

Edith Keech recalled her husband's band-leading days at the De Grey Rooms:

Bert was a great pianist, he had his own band of course, but he used to love to play at intervals without the full band. He was a character was Bert.

She also recalled VE Day at the end of the war:

It was absolutely wonderful, everybody behaved themselves, it was great. And Bert said to them, 'I've charged you all these years, everybody comes in free.

And they were dancin' in the square.



The De Grey Rooms today, photographed by Alan Hardwick

Bert Keech was quick to take advantage when bowling resumed after the war. He won the National Singles Championship in 1945, was an England International from 1946 and England Captain in 1953. He toured the USA with the British Isles team in 1947. Edith recalled:

Yes, he won the Florida pairs whilst he was there.

In 1949 the Bootham and District Bowling Club moved from the Museum Gardens to Bert's private green in Sycamore Place, further down Bootham. In 1964 the Minster Bowling Club was formed and played on the green the Bootham Club had previously used. The green was replaced by the Edible Garden between 2013 and 2015.

Bert and Edith continued to run the De Grey Rooms after the war. Edith recalled:

Bert died in '54 – we had it on a lease, you see, and I carried on 'til '63, as a restaurant and a dance hall; then discos were coming in and that was not my cup of tea, and I didn't renew my lease.



The Edible Wood, photographed by Alan Hardwick

After his death in 1954, the Bootham and District Bowling Club was renamed the Bert Keech Bowls Club to honour his memory. It continued in existence until 2008. Edith Keech died in 2013 at the age of 99.

# Bowls, 'Baedeker' AND BERT KEECH

From the York Oral History Society archive.

York Oral History Society has a collection of over 1000 interviews with York residents collected since 1982, mostly covering the period from 1900 to the 1960s. So, I was hoping to find some memories of the Museum Gardens there, just as many York residents

today will have their own memories, whether it be the peacocks, military salutes, band concerts, the Mystery Plays, or just relaxing in the grounds. However, very little mention of the Museum Gardens could be found, probably because the Gardens were not open free-of-charge to the public until 1961, when their management was transferred from the Yorkshire Philosophical Society to York City Council.

Within living memory there were two bowling greens within the current Museum Gardens site. Coincidentally they occupied roughly the same area as an earlier bowling green where a bloody Civil War battle took place during the Siege of York in 1644. One of the bowling greens, adjacent to St Olave's churchyard, was laid out by the Yorkshire Philosophical Society in 1900 for the benefit of its members. The other, further north on what is now the Edible Garden, was constructed by York City Council in 1912–13 at a cost

of £232 8s 5d for the newly-formed Bootham and District Bowling Club and could be accessed directly from Marygate.

One of the founder-members was Mr Keech, landlord of Marygate's Minster Inn, which served as the club's headquarters. His son Bert, born in 1906, learned to play on the club's bowling green and went on to captain England in 1953.

Bert married Edith in 1941. When interviewed in 1999, looking at a photograph of a group of bowlers, Edith said:

This is a very old one. This isn't Bert, it's his father. He beat his father! This would be the Bootham and District Bowling Club, and they played opposite the Minster [Inn], on that green there now that there is.

The area along Bootham was badly bombed during WWII in the 'Baedeker' raid on 29 April 1942. Les Benson grew up in the Marygate area and was interviewed in 1986:



The Minster Inn, photographed by Alan Hardwick

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## Acknowledgments:

I would particularly like to thank fellow York Oral History Society member David Poole for sharing his knowledge of the history of bowls in York.

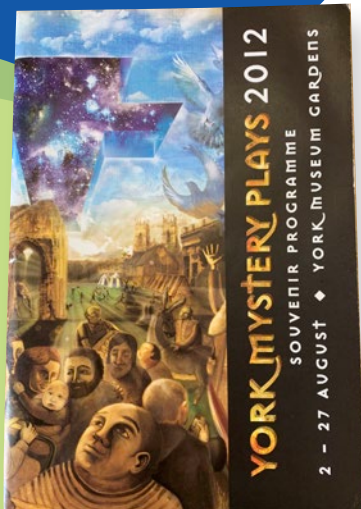
## Photo credits:

The photo of 4 bowlers from 1926 is thought to be from the York Press. It was reproduced in the History of the Bert Keech Bowling Club produced in 1987. Left to right, those pictured are C. Green, W. Sugden, A.A. Keech, I. Hattee The photo of the bowling green in front of the Exhibition Building may be from York City Council. The bowling green opened in 1913 and the Exhibition Building was demolished in 1942, so the photo must be from between those dates. The remaining photos were taken by Alan Hardwick on 5 September 2024.



# MY ONE AND ONLY TIME on the stage

My one and only time on the stage took place in the Museum Gardens in 2012. My friend Kathy and I decided we would like to take part in the York Mystery Plays, which would run from 2nd to 27th August.



Programme for the 2012 Mystery Plays in the Museum Gardens, photographed by Philip Newton

We were just two of the 500 people, not just from York, who wanted to take part in what would prove to be an amazing production watched by 33,000 people seated in a 1,400 covered theatre which had been constructed against the magnificent backdrop of St Mary's Abbey. We auditioned and started rehearsals in May as part of the ensemble. There would be two casts, the Potters and the Carpenters; our cast was the Potters. The plays would be set in the 1940s–1950s costume. When waiting to be given our costume, a lady in front of us came out with a beautiful 1940s dress. I said to Kathy 'I bet we come out with dungarees'. What happened? We both ended up with dungarees, together with turbans, as we were to be Land Army girls. The directors were Damian Cruden of York Theatre Royal and Paul Burbridge of York Riding Lights Theatre Company, with the support of York Museum Trust, and City of York Council, together with many other sponsors. The plays played a major part in the 800th anniversary celebrations of the granting of York's Civic Charter. Other fringe events also

took place in the Museum Gardens. After a gap of 400 years, in 1951 the medieval cycle of York Mystery Plays were revived as part of York's contribution to the Festival of Britain celebrations. Canon J. S. Purvis, a local history archivist, transcribed the modern plays from Latin into English. In this production the part of Jesus was played by Joseph O'Connor. A young York actress also took part as an Angel; in 1954 she played the Angel of the Resurrection, and in 1957 the Virgin Mary. This actress, now as they say 'a National Treasure', was Dame Judi Dench. A York actor, not well known in 1976, played Jesus; his name was David Bradley, perhaps better known now as Angus Filch the caretaker in the Harry Potter films, and Walder Frey in Game of Thrones, as well as many TV appearances. Other actors who went on to find success included Ian McShane, Christopher Timothy and Robson Green. These plays took place in the Museum Gardens every four years until 1988, then due to rising costs had to move to York Theatre Royal. A special production took place in York Minster to celebrate the Millennium. From Creation to the Last Judgement, these plays form one of the greatest stories ever told.

The exact year when the plays first started in York is not known as historians differ on the exact date. The York Memorandum Book of 1399 says 'The said pageants are maintained and supported by the commons and the craftsmen of the same city in honour and reverence to our Lord Jesus Christ and for the glory and benefit of the same city.' These plays started out as Corpus Christi Plays, and were put on by the religious guilds, of which King Richard III and his wife were members. These were held the Thursday after Trinity Sunday and could happen between any Thursday from 21st May to 24th June. It seems that the Corpus Christi



Sandra, bottom right, in her costume, Sandra Wadley

plays then became the York Mystery Plays. Their name is a reference to the Guilds who were responsible for the Play's production, 'mystery' being derived from the Latin 'ministerium' meaning trade or craft. These plays were self-contained episodes from the Bible, from Creation to the Last Judgement. For example, the shipwrights would put on Noah's Ark. These plays were first performed on wagons, stopping at twelve different 'stations' around the city, starting around 4.30am, and according to modern calculations finishing at midnight. The York Cycle of Mystery Plays ended in 1569, with the rapid rise of Protestantism, which rendered the plays a relic of the old faith. However, in the Museum Gardens before 1951, York had held the York Pageant of 1909. This pageant covered 3,000 years of history, it ran from 26th to 31st July, and apparently 5,000 people came to watch it. It consisted of seven episodes, starting from the Iron Age, 800BC, and ended with the Civil War and the

Siege of York. Romans, Vikings and Normans appeared in the Pageant, together with the massacre of the Jews in Clifford's Tower of 1190, and the Battle of Towton, which was just one of many during the Wars of the Roses. The final tableau consisted of York school children of the day.

My friend and I both agree that we were so glad that we had the opportunity of performing in the Mystery Plays, our one and only time on the stage. We have some lovely memories and met some lovely people. Would we do it again given the chance, yes without a doubt.

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Watercolour of York Mystery Plays in 1972 by Betty Gabrielow, 1977, YORAG : 2019.39, York Museums Trust



# A Visit to YORK MUSEUM GARDENS

As you walk into the gardens you are met with instant history. From the beautiful gates to the lodge house, home to the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, to the ruins of St Leonard's Hospital Infirmary, and you've only just entered the gardens!

Immediately in front of you is an area designated to the refuelling of the visitor, and places to rest weary feet. Welcome to York's Botanical Gardens, home to some amazing, protected trees aged approximately 80 to 150 years old which provide pockets of much-needed shade on a hot sunny day. To the right there you will find a path leading you toward the Yorkshire Museum, full of many wonders of the world! Dinosaurs and skeletons, with some of the most exquisite jewellery and artefacts, with marble statues with stories to tell, all hidden inside – but there's so much more to see. In front of the Museum, you can find green vistas to picnic on or just relax and rest. Past the Tempest Anderson border you will see the bones of St Mary's Abbey standing tall and stretching out along the back wall. If you follow around to the back of the ruins, you will find an often-missed walled garden. Through a



gate you will find an edible garden which will lead you to the back of the York Art Gallery, where you can see the back of St Mary's Tower – all part of the original walls surrounding the Abbey.

If you return to the ruins and walk straight down the middle look to your right and see the back of St Olave's Church graveyard containing the last resting place of William Etty. Under an archway there is an area that has been designated for feeding the birds and in front of that is the rocky. There is a short path leading to St Mary's Lodge and another set of gates leading to Marygate. If you follow this route down to the river there is another tower to see. But keeping to the pathway, the gardens lead you to one of the only surviving outbuildings belonging to the Abbey, the Hospitium; this has had numerous uses during its lifetime but now it is used as an events hall. You can see almost to the river from here, where once traders would have delivered their goods to the Abbey. Lots more open spaces to see from here and an uphill walk leads you to almost the end of your tour. Hidden behind trees and bushes is the final building to see, a little Observatory, no longer in use but the place of some amazing

discoveries; it houses the clock used by Yorkshire Philosophical Society and those that could afford the sixpence to get the correct time in York. There is a slope leading down to a set of gates where you can gain access to the river, or you can see the main gates from the Observatory. Look left and see an amazing Monkey Puzzle Tree just behind that there are sometimes birds of prey displays. There is something for everyone in the gardens, even if it's just to get away from all the noise outside.



Photographs by Yvonne Baker

Further information can be found on the links below:  
<https://www.yorkmuseumgardens.org.uk/about/history-of-the-gardens/>  
<http://www.historyofyork.org.uk/themes/viking/church-of-st-olave>  
<http://www.historyofyork.org.uk/themes/victorian/william-etty-artist>  
<https://www.yorkmuseumgardens.org.uk/about/the-hospitium/>

Photographs by Yvonne Baker



## Project reflections FROM PHILIP

This was a new way of doing Heritage Hunters. We brought back previous researchers to look in to an area, York Museums Trust cares for. I was worried at first that people would not be interested in the Museum Gardens as they are not 'residents' but as you will have read, living in or near a space does not stop people becoming interested in its history and people. What our researchers have discovered, in just over a month, is extraordinary. They have uncovered stories forgotten by YMT, or not researched enough, shared personal connects and memories and have been inspired to visit, create imaginative stories, all of which truly bring the gardens to life.

This issue is part of a wider project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, that aims to better understand the uniqueness of York Museum Gardens, and pilot new ways to encourage more people to experience nature and heritage in the heart of York. If you would like to know more about the NLHF project, contact York Museums Trust.

We hope to do similar projects to this one in the future where researchers focus their work on part of YMT's collections or buildings, but we will continue to work with residents to look into the unique histories of where they live. If you would like to get involved with future projects, get in touch.

### Thoughts from our participants

"The Museum Gardens project has been so enjoyable. It has been a real opportunity to have discussions with the other participants and to learn so much about York that I didn't know before. The research is totally absorbing and has made me want to go on and find out much more."

Juliet

"I would like to say how nice it was to be able to share stories about ordinary people who may otherwise never be known about outside of their families but who now have gained a wider audience."

Jenny

"I was born in York and lived here all my life here and I never knew that there was a swimming pool in the Museum Gardens!"

Sandra

"Being part of this project reminded me just how much history, nationally and internationally, can be found in York it was most enjoyable."

Alan P

"No surprises that many of us stay for the next, and next and the next project with Heritage Hunters. It is so good to have a good company and digging up past!"

Anda

### Where to go to get more information

If you would like to find out more about researching local history, York Explore can help with enquiries and you can find more information on York Museums Trust website.



**York Museums Trust**



**explore**  
Libraries and Archives