

AUDIOSCRIPT

The city of York, which stands on the River Ouse in the northern English county of Yorkshire, has a very long history. It was founded by the Romans in 71 AD, and by medieval times was one of the most important cities in England.

William the Conqueror built the castle in about 1070 to control the city, but all that remains is the keep, called Clifford's Tower. The city is still surrounded by its medieval walls. Very few towns in England have any trace of their medieval walls nowadays, and these are the best preserved. The four main gatehouses, which give entry to the city, were very useful in medieval times to levy taxes on goods coming into the city.

There are many medieval buildings, including half-timbered houses. The Merchant Adventurers' Hall is one of the most important medieval buildings in the city. It was founded in 1357 to promote economic activity and trade. The River Ouse was an important thoroughfare, and merchant ships arrived in York with cargos of wine from France, furs from the Baltic and cloth from today's Netherlands, making York wealthy. The first church on the site was made of wood and built in 627.

The present Minster, as the cathedral is called, was built in the 13th century and is mainly constructed of cream-coloured Magnesian limestone, which is found nearby in Yorkshire. The Minster is a supreme example of perpendicular Gothic architecture, which laid stress on soaring vertical lines, high windows with pointed arches, huge rose windows and decorative fan vaulting. There are 128 stained-glass windows in the Minster. It is the largest area of stained glass in the world and the creation of anonymous medieval craftsmen. Black Purbeck marble from the south coast of England was often used for tombs, especially for those of archbishops.

The choir stalls were reserved for important churchmen and monks, one of the few social groups who could read and write. One of the glories of York Minster is the King's Screen, with 15 sculptures of kings of England, from William the Conqueror to Henry VI, who was murdered in 1471. York was famous for its cycles of mystery plays, put on outside the Minster to entertain the populace, but also to warn them to behave or go to hell after death. The city of York, a rich source of medieval culture in the north of England.