

GHOSTS & GHOST WALKS

York – with its history of conflict and many tragic events – boasts more than its fair share of ghoulies, ghosties and things that go bump in the night. In fact, in 2006 the International Ghost Research Foundation declared York to be ‘Europe’s most haunted city’, and sometimes it seems as though a ghostly figure with a score to settle is in residence in just about every street or ginnel. Here are just a few...

Legendary Legionnaires

One morning in 1953 apprentice plumber Harry Martindale was installing a new central heating system in the cellars of the Treasurer’s House in the shadow of the Minster. Suddenly he heard the distant sound of a horn, which became gradually louder. Then a great carthorse emerged through the brick wall, ridden by a dishevelled Roman soldier. He was followed by several more soldiers, dressed in green tunics and plumed helmets. It looked as though they were walking on their knees – their lower legs and feet were nowhere to be seen. Then the ghostly crew moved into a recently excavated area, and it became clear that they were walking on an old Roman road, the Via Decumana, which had been buried 15 inches below the surface. When a bewildered Harry scrambled upstairs to safety, the Treasurer’s House curator reportedly said to him, “You’ve seen the Roman soldiers, haven’t you?” It seems the ghoulish visitors had been spotted on several previous occasions.

Brothers in crime

St William’s College, the beautiful medieval building behind York Minster, which is today a much sought-after conference venue and popular eatery, harbours a ghost with a very guilty conscience. Apparently in 16th century York, two brothers were lodging at the College and, desperate for money, hatched a plan to rob a wealthy priest from the Minster. They mugged him, stole his jewellery and purse – and slit his throat. The younger brother was overcome with remorse, and the older sibling feared he would give the game away. He reported his brother to the authorities, and stood by while he was tried and hanged for murder. The elder brother died soon after, racked with guilt. But his unhappy spirit paces the floors of St William’s College to this day.

Mad Alice

Lund’s Court (linking Swinegate and Low Petergate) was formerly known as Mad Alice Lane, in honour of Alice Smith who lived in the lane until 1825, the year she was hanged at York Castle for the perceived crime of insanity. Does her spirit still haunt the alleyway?

The Grey Lady

A theatrical ghost, the Grey Lady haunts a room behind the dress circle of the Georgian Theatre Royal. In medieval times, as the story goes, this was part of the old Hospital of St Leonard, which was run by an order of nuns. One young nun fell in love with a nobleman and the pair became lovers, but when her scandalous behaviour became known she was thrown into a windowless room – now part of the theatre – which was bricked up to become her living tomb. A gruesome tale, but apparently if the nun in her grey habit is spotted in the dress circle it's a good omen for that night's production!

The Funeral Guest

Once known as the most beautiful of York's many ghosts, this long-haired, elegant apparition has frequently appeared at All Saints Church, Pavement, one of the city's most striking churches, and is in the habit of welcoming funeral processions at the door. Perhaps, a turbulent spirit who was herself denied a Christian burial?

A Ghostly Tudor Lady

Could the finely dressed Tudor lady who walks through walls at the King's Manor be the ghost of Queen Catherine Howard, who was King Henry VIII's guest here in 1541? The lady carries roses in her hands, and the part of the building where she has been spied was once the Rose Garden. Catherine, the fourth of Henry's six wives, was executed shortly after her stay, and possibly the fact that she entertained her lover Thomas Culpeper in the Manor didn't help her chances of a long and happy marriage to the fickle Henry.

The Headless Earl

Thomas Percy, Earl of Northumberland, was executed for treason in York: as a staunch Catholic he had plotted against the Protestant Elizabeth I. He was beheaded in 1572, and his head stuck on a large spike on Micklegate Bar as a warning to anyone else with similar ideas. There it remained for many years until eventually recovered and buried in the churchyard of Holy Trinity church in Goodramgate. The body of the Earl has been seen on many a night staggering between the graves, searching for his mislaid head.

Ghost Trail of York

Contact: Greg Preston. Email: gjp.gt@tiscali.co.uk

Tel: 01904 633276

7.30pm every evening from Minster entrance (West End) – no need to book. Traditional tales, Victorian tragedies and true accounts of ghostly phenomena. www.ghosttrail.co.uk

Original Ghost Walk of York

Contact: Mark Graham. Email: ghostwalk.ofyork@talk21.com

Tel: 01904 764222

8pm from the King's Arms Pub, Ouse Bridge – no need to book. An exploration of the world of folklore, legend and dreams. Expert storytellers reveal all kinds of secrets about the ancient city of York. www.theoriginalghostwalkofyork.co.uk

Ghost Creeper Tour

Contact: Gary Stevenson. Email: inquiries@ghostcreeper.com

Tel: 07947 325239

7.30pm every Friday, Saturday and Sunday from November to June, and every night from July to Halloween (31 October) outside Jorvik Viking Centre – meet the Ghost Detective of York. Follow him as his evening tour takes folk along narrow passageways and dark streets to investigate bloodcurdling tales of scandal and death. Simply dressed in his trademark Homburg hat and black cravat, he will take visitors to parts of old York that even some long-standing residents never knew existed. www.ghostdetective.com

York Terror Trail

Contact: Damian Freddi. Email: info@yorkterrortrail.co.uk

Tel: 07923 543342

6.45pm every night, meet in front of York's most haunted pub, the Golden Fleece Inn – be ready for a history tour of the horrors of York. No need to book. www.yorkterrortrail.co.uk



Ghost Walk Experience

Contact: James Trewitt. Email: info@abbottours.co.uk

Tel: 07809 442282

7pm every night, meet at the Roman Column next to the Minster – The tour that visits Monk Bar Gate Tower, winding along York's mighty walls, visitors will be lured to Harlot Hill Tower where the groans and moans of those that were slain can still be heard... www.ghostwalkyork.co.uk

The Ghost Bus Tours

Contact:

Farhan Naser. Email: farhan@theghostbustours.com

Tel: 08445 678666

7.30pm & 9pm every night from Exhibition Square, Outside York Art Gallery - the creepy conductor will show visitors the

sights while on-board a classic 1960s Routemaster bus. Learn about the sinister side of many of York's most famous landmarks including Clifford's Tower, York Minster and Dick Turpin's grave... www.theghostbustours.com

The Bloody Tour of York Presented by MAD ALICE

Contact: Alicia Stabler. Email: info@thebloodytourofyork.co.uk

Tel: 07584 855443

6pm from outside St. William's College every Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Mad Alice will take visitors on a 90 minute walking tour of the city. Down Snickelways and side streets recounting the gruesome and grisly past of the city. Stories of invasions, executions and heads on spikes are rife on every corner. As are tales of some famous historical characters. www.thebloodytourofyork.co.uk

For more information and to book your stay in York:

Visit www.visitYork.org

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