

ROYAL YORK

George VI said the history of York is the history of England. Over the last two millennia the city has been visited by at least 6 Roman Emperors, numerous Anglo-Saxon and Viking Kings, almost every medieval monarch from William the Conqueror (though he did burn the place down!) to Henry VIII, and numerous more recent and foreign Royalty. It certainly has a proud history as a Royalist stronghold, and today, is the oldest Dukedom in England, along with Gloucester.

Dukes of York

The title of Duke of York is usually conferred on the Sovereign's second eldest son and so, throughout history, York has always played a leading role in royal life.



Edmund, son of Edward III, was the first Duke of York in the 14th century and founder of the House of York. His father, Edward III, was married in **York Minster** in 1328 to Phillipa of Hainault. Prince William of Hatfield, one of their sons who died when he was only a few months old, is buried in the Minster; the royal tomb still lies in a canopied niche in the North Choir Aisle.

The title passed down to Edmund's son Richard, and to his grandson Richard, the Rebel Duke of York, whose head was impaled on a spike and displayed on top of **Micklegate Bar** as a traitor. Shakespeare puts these words in Queen Margaret's mouth: "Off with his head and set it on York's gate, so York may overlook the Town of York".

His son, the 4th Duke of York, who became Edward IV, defeated Henry VI at the battle of Towton and had his father's head taken down and replaced by four Lancastrian heads!

Edward IV in turn passed the title to his younger son Richard in 1474, but Richard's life, along with his brother's, was short and unpleasant after his father died. Edward's brother, also Richard, famously locked the Princes in the Tower and, history relates, murdered them to take the throne for himself as Richard III.

But questions still hang over the whole sorry affair. Was Richard III really a brutal murderer, or was he, as many would argue, a loyal and courageous ruler? He was greatly loved and respected in York. This was the man, after all, who defeated Henry VI's Lancastrians in the Wars of the Roses. The **Micklegate Bar** and **Monk Bar Museums** delve into Richard's life; indeed, the memory of Richard III is still very much alive in York. A commemorative plaque to Richard III stands in **Dean's Park** and a Requiem Mass is held for Richard almost every year in **York Minster**. The Society of Friends of Richard III also promotes Richard's life in York.

Henry, later Henry VIII, was created Duke of York in 1494. Here, the **King's Manor** takes up the story. Now part of the University of York, the King's Manor dates back to the 13th century, when it was the

residence of the Abbot of St Mary's Abbey. After the dissolution of the monasteries, the building was retained by the crown and many monarchs stayed here, including Henry VIII, with his 5th wife Catherine Howard, and James VI of Scotland on his way south to be James I of England; in his honour, a magnificent gateway was added to King's Manor with figures representing Justice, Prudence and the Sun.



James might not have felt quite as comfortable at King's Manor had he known that a stone's throw away, next to the Minster was the Church of **St Michael-le-Belfrey**, where Guy Fawkes was baptised in 1570, having been born in nearby Stonegate. In 1605 he almost succeeded in blowing up James I at the State Opening of Parliament.

James' son, Charles I, became Duke of York in 1604. As King, he established the Council of the North at King's Manor, making York the capital of the North, and he stayed here immediately before Civil War broke out. His coat of arms is still above the doorway. During the Civil War and the Siege of York, King's Manor became the Royalist headquarters.

When the city finally fell to the Parliamentarians, it was only saved by the intervention of Sir Thomas Fairfax. Although a Parliamentarian general, Royalists have a lot to thank Fairfax for today, as without his intervention York would undoubtedly have lost much of its historic architecture. A plaque in memory of Fairfax has recently been erected by **York Civic Trust** just outside Micklegate Bar.

Today parts of King's Manor are open to the public and this is the starting point for many historical walks around the city.

It was George III's son who was the Grand Old Duke of York - a competent but not outstanding general and founder of the Royal Military College Sandhurst.

The next Duke of York was George V, Prince Andrew's great-grandfather, followed by George VI who became Duke of York in 1920 before succeeding to the throne. The Duchess of York was, of course, the Queen Mother and York took her to their hearts. She visited many times, unveiling the Five Sisters window in **York Minster** and the city's WWI War Memorial in 1925. In 1936 the couple became King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. The Queen Mother's visits to York continued, and she opened the magnificently restored **Guildhall** in 1960, a building which has seen many royal visitors in its time.

Other Royal connections

Of course the Minster has witnessed many royal events throughout history. In 1961, this was the scene of the Royal Wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Kent; among the guests were no less than three queens, the Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth II (cousin of the Duke of Kent) and Queen Ena of Spain. In 1972, the Queen distributed Maundy Money at the Minster, and the flagged walkway past the Minster was named '**Queen's Path**' in honour of this visit. She toured the Minster again in 1988, four years after the huge fire of 1984.



York was proud to have been chosen as the venue for **Royal Ascot in 2005**, an event which certainly attracts its share of royalty and brings with it the usual traditions, pageantry, style and fashion. The city surely has the right pedigree to hold such an event and **York Races**, particularly the **Ebor Festival** every August, is no stranger to royal visitors.

And of course if you want to stay somewhere on a royal theme – where else but the Principal, York, previously known as the **Royal York Hotel**? This splendidly restored Victorian hotel, right next to the station, even entertained Queen Victoria to tea when she arrived at York station on her way to Balmoral.

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