

HAIL EBORACUM/YO YORK 2011

Thursday 23rd June

What is it with viruses and holidays this year? Alan succumbed to a sore throat and all the ensuing trials of a so-called common cold five days before we left, while I woke on the morning of our departure feeling distinctly common in the cold department. However, we soldiered on and called for Alan's brother Douglas as arranged at 09:00, hoping that he would escape the viral vileness.

Our car journey was tedious, although we stopped at Sedgemoor Services and Tamworth Services. The temperature had been 13° Centigrade, but managed to creep up to an underwhelming 18° C by the time the Sat Nav delivered us safely outside the Holgate Hill Hotel at 16:00. This sturdy, handsome and homely hotel had been built in 1847 as an Italianate villa, once the home of a York merchant.

We were warmly welcomed by a friendly lady who seemed to personify the wry chattiness of a Yorkshire person and transported our cases to our rooms armed with some helpful knowledge and free tourist literature. Our double en suite bedroom was small but comfortable and most importantly, possessed a kettle, a small supply of teabags and other drink-making items, as well as some biscuits.

After briefly unpacking, Douglas knocked on our door and we perused the tourist literature together. The town (or small city, to be precise) was only about a mile away, so we ignored the bus stop right outside the hotel and started to walk. The weather had been fine when we arrived, but was becoming very overcast. Fortunately, my desire to explore a new place was overcoming my desire to lie down on a comfortable bed to sleep – and the drugs were helping too.

Of course, York is actually an incredibly old place. Before the Romans had invaded in 71 AD, the area was ruled by Celtic Brigantes. After the Ninth Legion had subdued 'Brigantia', the camp they had set up became a permanent fortress, known as Eboracum (place of the yew trees). A civilian town grew and Eboracum evolved into one of the leading cities of the Roman Empire.

This ended when the Romans left and in the 5th century, the Germanic tribes of the Anglo-Saxons invaded. York became Eoforwic, centre of the independent kingdom of Northumbria, ruled by Anglo-Saxon warlords. One such warlord was Edwin, whose wife was a Christian. A timber church was built on the site of a holy well, so Edwin could be baptised there – the first cathedral of York Minster.

In 866, Eoforwic was overrun by the wonderfully named Ivar the Boneless and his hordes of Danish Vikings. Eoforwic became Jorvik, a major river port that was part of the Viking trade routes throughout northern Europe. The last Viking ruler of Jorvik, Eric Bloodaxe (scary), was driven out of the city by King Eadred of Wessex, who united Northumbria with the southern kingdom.

William the Conqueror came to York in 1069 to subdue northern rebellion, whereupon York prospered and the rebuilding of the Minster began. Over the next 300 years, York became the second largest city in the country and the northern capital of England. In following centuries, the Wars of the Roses, the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the Civil War, the Siege of York and the political and economic changes of England all had an effect on creating the city of today.

Speaking of today, many people seemed to be walking home from work along the relatively modern part of York, outside the city walls. The traffic became very busy as we approached Micklegate Bar, the main gate to the city. In York, the gates through the city are known as bars and the streets are known as gates, which somehow seems wonderfully Yorkshire.

The four-storey gatehouse loomed upwards into the lowering sky, as we waited for the traffic lights to change. Heads of traitors were once displayed on spikes above Micklegate Bar, including the head of Richard, Duke of York. There were thankfully no decaying heads today, though, the only rebellion being a frustrated pedestrian who ran across the road without waiting for the lights to change.

One of our first impressions of York was the large number of pubs and eating places, dotted frequently amid the modern-day shops. As we walked further into the heart of the city, the delightfully named old streets became very narrow and it was almost impossible to walk along without gazing up at the compelling incongruity of a modern shop within an ancient building.



Ancient showcases modern

At the end of one street, the unmistakable towers of York Minster emerged, looking huge – or was it just that the streets were very small? Its presence was implacable, inviting further investigation and no doubt rather a lot of skyward photography. For the moment, however, it had started to rain quite heavily and so we hastily retraced our steps to where we had espied the Slug and Lettuce by the bridge we had crossed earlier, offering views over the river Ouse.

I was happy to sit down at a window-seat. My throat was sore, but the next two hours were spent comfortably in the warm and dry, as we ate, drank, talked and watched geese swimming up, down and across the murky water. Raindrops plopped onto the river and passers-by slogged along underneath umbrellas.

By about 20:00, the rain had stopped and Douglas suggested a stroll alongside the river. On the way, we passed by Clifford's Tower, where lots of geese were hunkered down on its grassy banks for the night. It was obviously a favourite spot, as the pavement nearby was hazardous with wet pellets of goose poo.

We walked along the riverbank for a short while, but it began to rain again and I was longing to rest, so we walked fairly quickly back to the hotel. Our first foray into York had promised a full, productive week – I just hoped that my sore throat and developing headache didn't promise a full, productive cold.

While perusing the tourist literature:

Doug: They've got a Quilt Museum here, Kay.

Kay: Stuff that!

Friday 24th June

I managed to sleep fairly well, but woke up snuffly with a lingering headache. However, painkillers, a small but quietly fulfilling breakfast and the lure of a new day in which to explore such a historic city was enough to spur me into action.

It was a partly sunny morning, so the plan was to walk the city walls at our own pace. Other people were rushing by as we left the hotel and walked the mile or so into the city, so it was difficult keeping out of their way on narrow parts of the pavement, but we soon reached Micklegate Bar and the start of the wall walk.



Micklegate Bar, main entrance to York

York's city walls are the most complete example of medieval walls still standing in England and it's fascinating to realise that beneath the stonework are the remains of earlier walls dating as far back as Roman times. When the Romans invaded in 71 AD and built a fort on the banks of the river Ouse, the building of the city walls originated from the rectangle of walls serving as the fort's defence.

The Roman walls survived until the Viking invasion of 866, when they were buried under an earth bank topped with a palisade (a tall fence of pointed wooden stakes). This was then replaced in the 13th and 14th centuries by the stone walls that exist today. The medieval walls included four main gates, known as bars (Micklegate, Bootham, Monk and Walmgate). The smaller Fishergate Bar was added circa 1315 and Victoria Bar in the 19th century.

By the late 18th century, the walls were no longer needed as city defences and began to deteriorate. In 1800, the Corporation of York applied for an Act of Parliament to abolish them, but there was much opposition and thankfully the Corporation was thwarted. It was too late to preserve some parts of the walls, but since the mid-19th century, they have been restored and maintained.



Bitchdaughter Tower along a typical stretch of wall

After climbing the steps at Micklegate Bar, we walked along the wall that was narrow in some places with a significant drop on one side that wasn't always guarded by railings. I was growing to love the unusual names I'd been noticing in York and was delighted to come across Bitchdaughter Tower on the wall itself. Who the bitch daughter was, one can only guess...

We all managed not to fall off the wall onto the grassy depths below, until the wall stopped for a while and we had to go down steps to road level in order to cross Skeldergate Bridge. Clifford's Tower stood proud and impossible to miss amid the throng of the now busy York morning.

After rejoining the wall at Fishergate Tower, the number of wall-walking people increased, along with the number of trees and the number of Douglas's inane witticisms. I was beginning to feel achingly viral once again, so requested a coffee stop whenever we could leave the wall. This happened to be at Walmgate Bar, the only bar with an intact barbican (outer fortification).



Walmgate with its barbican

After passing by the Bowes Morrell House, we came across Whip-Ma-Whop-Ma-Gate, the shortest street in York. I naturally whipped out my camera and managed not to whop it anywhere, but the street sign was a bit worse for wear. I was in a similar state, so a hot mocha in the Jorvik Café was a timely lifesaver.



Bowes Morrell House

After rejoining the walls, we walked along a low stretch, due to the ramparts being restored many times. The wall stopped as we reached the Red Tower, at which point there had once been an impassable swamp. From here we walked along Foss Islands Road until rejoining the wall again at Peaseholme Green.

This section of the wall ran parallel to a road called Jewbury, with special interest being two towers and the remains of an ice house. We then arrived at Monk Bar, the north-east gate of the city walls. This housed the Richard III Museum, although we didn't go in. I would like to remedy this oversight at some point!

Instead, we continued along walls that gave us a view of the Minster towers, parts of which were disappointingly (but obviously necessarily) encumbered with scaffolding. There were interesting gardens way below us, which I often stopped to gaze at, as I realised I was running out of energy.

It was time for lunch and since the wall ended again at Bootham Bar, we entered the city along High Petergate and looked for a shop where we could buy a snack. After five minutes or so of witless wandering, we found a bakery-type shop and bought sandwiches and cakes that we ate sitting on a low wall somewhere, among countless other people enjoying the heat of the now sunny day.

There wasn't a great deal of wall left after lunch, as we found out when we walked down St Leonard's Place, past York Minster and back up on to the wall at Lendal Bridge over the river Ouse. It was then the final stretch until we had come full circle and once again reached Micklegate. I was amazed that I'd lasted the walk as well as I had in my viral condition, but it had been so interesting that sheer determination had sometimes carried me along.

Since we were all wilting at that point, we headed towards a nearby Costa Coffee and enjoyed a refreshing cold drink. It was such a relief to sit on comfortable seats inside an uncrowded shop and take our time sipping the delicious coolness.

Douglas suggested we finish the afternoon by going on a 45-minute Ouse cruise (minus alcohol) and some river relaxation seemed a great idea. It was just a short distance to where a red and white cruise boat was waiting to leave shortly at 15:30. We climbed to the upper deck, where it was a little windy, but it gave us a good view, as there were hardly any other people on board.



Lendal Tower beside the Ouse cruise boat

The boat soon started and cruised along to another landing stage, where a few more people joined. There was a clear, informative commentary for most of the time, as various features were pointed out. The most interesting was St Peter's School in the middle distance, where Guy Fawkes once attended. At the river's edge, some of the inmates were messing about with various boats and canoes.

It became very windy sitting up aloft, but it wasn't long before the boat turned around and we eventually cruised back to our starting point. It was still windy after we left the boat and walked back to the hotel in order to have a much-needed cup of tea and a quiet rest, until reconvening at 18:00.

Once again we walked from the hotel into the city centre along streets that were rapidly becoming familiar. We'd noticed an appetising looking Italian restaurant the previous evening, but despite attempts to locate it, we found ourselves in a different Italian restaurant. This was mainly because I was tiring rapidly and also because while we were standing outside deliberating where to go, we were handed a voucher for a discounted meal inside.

The restaurant was fairly spacious, but warm. We ordered a pizza each and a bottle of red wine. For myself, this was a mistake, because as the room filled up with more people, so it became hotter. The food, the room, the wine and the virus all combined to give me uncomfortably hot, flushed cheeks the entire time we were there. The pizza was very tasty, but we all left some of the thick crust.

A young man had started to play the piano soon after we arrived and although he was very good and what he played was typically Italian, I found it a bit too loud. Possibly if I'd been completely well, I would have enjoyed the atmosphere, but the day had taken its toll and I longed for coolness, peace and quiet.

York was anything but peaceful and quiet as we walked slowly back to the hotel. Friday night in the city was obviously taking off, with bouncers standing at the entrances of the many pubs and clubs. Groups of young people and groups of drunk people were wandering noisily along and it was with some relief that I stepped inside the comfort and safety of the hotel. Alan and I went straight to our bedroom, while Douglas went to the bar...

While walking the city walls:

Doug: I would have thought there'd be ice cream for sale.

Kay: Why?

Doug: Walls.

Saturday 25th June

Rather a ghastly night. I'd gone to bed completely unable to breathe through my nose and although I must have achieved oblivion from about 01:30 to 04:30, that was it and I was awake for the day, still unable to breathe nasally and feeling slightly panicky because of it. However, a cup of tea at 07:00 helped.

Breakfast also helped, although I must have looked grim. It had rained in the night and was cloudy, but the forecast promised a dry day, so we decided on a trip to Whitby. Alan said he felt OK to drive and I looked forward to sitting in a car instead of pounding the York pavements – my calf muscles were protesting!

The drive was fine once the trusty Sat Nav had helped to extricate us from York. We then proceeded along the road towards the coast, but by about 10:45 decided to stop for coffee at Pickering, a historic market town and gateway to the North York Moors. It was obviously a popular place, but we found space in a corner shop that sold Italian coffee. It was here that the miracle happened and I could finally breathe a little through my nose again.

We strolled around Pickering a little before continuing our journey, which soon took us on the road through the moorland. I was trying to recognise the Hole of Horcum, Douglas was interested to see glimpses of RAF Fylingdales and Alan was stuck driving the car behind a coach all the way down to the coast. Although the sky was still mostly cloudy where we were, we could see that where Whitby was nestling by the sea, the sun was shining. This brightened us as well, as we made it to Whitby safely and the car was parked without any mishap.

At midday on a Saturday, Whitby was absolutely packed with people. We walked a little way along the crowded street and saw a fish and chip café that had spare seats inside, so we dived in and enjoyed some jolly fine Whitby fish and chips.

Having noticed unmissable Whitby Abbey on top of the east cliff almost as soon as we'd arrived, we were strangely drawn towards it – which was actually along the harbour to the old town of Whitby, through a shop-lined street teeming with people and up 199 steps. As we climbed the steps in full sunshine, my calf muscles stepped up their protest, but the view as we climbed was great:



The harbour entrance

First of all, there was a bird's eye panoramic view of the harbour entrance, where a few boats were coming in or going out way down below. Then there was the picturesque view of the abbey itself, still a small distance away above us. Then there was the church of St Mary's with its rows and rows of gravestones.

Yes, the gravestones! I was completely fascinated by their bizarre appearance that had obviously come about from being pitted to extremes over the years by the vagaries of the weather. Row upon row of them stood defiantly on the cliff top, some of them leaning over at crazy angles and some of them with hardly any writing left at all. It was no wonder that Bram Stoker had found his inspiration for *Dracula* here, because the atmosphere on the windswept cliff top as we picked our way respectfully in around the gravestones was wild, free, emotive and headily Gothic. I have never been remotely aligned with anything Gothic. I have never even felt any particular need to read *Dracula*, but I was hopelessly, shamelessly entranced and I still have absolutely no idea why:



Entranced by gravestones

The romance of the place was heightened by a wedding in the church – such a special setting. Tourists were milling around curiously as we reluctantly left the churchyard to slumber on with its ancient secrets and walked to the abbey ruins.



Wonderful Whitby Abbey

The first monastery was founded in 657 by King Oswy of Northumbria for men and women and its first ruler was the royal princess Abbess Hild. Caedmon was a lowly cowherd at the abbey, but was inspired in a dream to become a monk and was later famous as an accomplished and inspirational Christian poet.

During this period, there were two factions of Christianity at the abbey, Celtic monks from the north and monks influenced by Rome from the south. In 664, a synod was held to decide certain matters, including the interesting questions of whether the monastic tonsure hairstyle should be continued and whether the Celtic or Roman date for Easter should be adopted. The Roman faction won.

It appears that the monastery was attacked by Vikings around 867 and was almost destroyed. After the Norman Conquest, however, it was re-established as a Benedictine monastery and for a while it was one of the wealthiest in the country, although building costs over the next few decades pushed it into debt. The Dissolution of the Monasteries was its final downfall.

The next hour or so was an enthralling experience for me as we walked around the ruins, stopping often to gaze up in awe at the lofty heights and take photos of what once must have been a beautiful, decorative, finely-detailed building. Even the stone it was built from looked remarkably handsome and added to the wonder – and I'm pretty sure I've never called building stone handsome before.



Handsome pillars

I was in another world and even managed to forget I was viral for a good while. However, nothing lasts for ever and we slowly wended our way back to reality, which in this instance was to a handy ice cream van parked outside the abbey entrance, where the coldness of an ice cream really soothed my throat.

Whilst standing on the east cliff at the abbey, I'd noticed the iconic whale bones of Whitby across the harbour on the west cliff and as we still had an hour's car parking left, it seemed a good idea to see them in the flesh (or the bone, to be pedantic). This required a walk in the hot sun down the 199 steps, through the narrow, crowded streets, across the harbour and up unfamiliar streets to where the massive whale's jaw bone arched up to the sky.

The original whale's jaw bone arch had been erected sometime after 1853, followed by a replica presented to Whitby by Norway in 1963 and then the current replacement donated from Alaska in 2003. Whitby's fishermen had been engaged in whaling from 1753 to 1833. I felt it morbidly necessary to touch the bone, which felt like concrete and gave rise to conflicting emotions.



Memorial to a whale?

Our time in Whitby was almost finished, which echoed exactly how I felt. I had a banging headache, my calf muscles were still hurting, I was hot, exhausted and aching all over. I trailed into a nearby Co-op after Alan and Douglas (where they bought some sandwiches and strawberries for tea) and then dragged one foot after another back to the car. It was so blissful to sit down and take drugs. Unfortunately, we were held up for a while by a multiple car pile up on the way back to York, but eventually returned safely to the hotel.

Douglas mentioned going for a stroll around York in the evening, but there was no way on Earth I could even have attempted that. To appease Douglas, we instead availed ourselves of the small bar in the hotel, but even then I couldn't stand the pace and left Douglas and Alan to it, while I crawled gratefully up the stairs to our bedroom and the welcoming softness of the bed.

At the abbey:

Kay: I suppose they lived on a diet of mainly fish here.

Alan: At least they had no problem cooking it.

Kay: Why?

Alan: Friars.

Sunday 26th June

I slept comparatively better, although still woke up for the day ridiculously early at 05:15, feeling achingly viral. If only the silly virus had invaded me at least a week before... However, I was very much looking forward to visiting the Jorvik Viking Centre, having wanted to visit for at least a quarter of a century.

After a much welcome cup of tea in bed (with drugs) after Alan had woken, we took ourselves to the dining room for a reviving breakfast of grapefruit, cereal, toast and more tea. I then felt ready for some more York pavement pounding.

It was a sunny morning and the temperature was rising perceptibly as we walked along the reasonably quiet Sunday morning pavements to Micklegate and into the inner city. Ten minutes before opening time at 10:00, people were already queuing outside the famous Jorvik Viking Centre at Coppergate, created by the York Archaeological Trust. In 1972, small trenches below Lloyds Bank had revealed up to 29.5 feet/9 metres of archaeological layers that dated mostly to the Viking age. The moist, peaty layers had preserved the organic remains of much that normally rots on most archaeological sites.

When the council later proposed major redevelopment in Coppergate, further excavations took place. In May 1976, rare traces of Viking timber buildings were found below some modern basements. The dig was excitingly extended to cover 10,764 square feet/1,000 square metres and from 1976 to 1981, archaeologists revealed exciting and ground-breaking finds, as archaeologists do.

It was cool inside and almost immediately we were standing above remains of buildings more than 1,000 years old, on the glass-floored gallery that showed a recreation of the original Coppergate excavation. It felt odd to walk on the glass, looking inquisitively downwards, but a handy archaeologist (nattily dressed in Viking costume) was standing by to answer any questions.

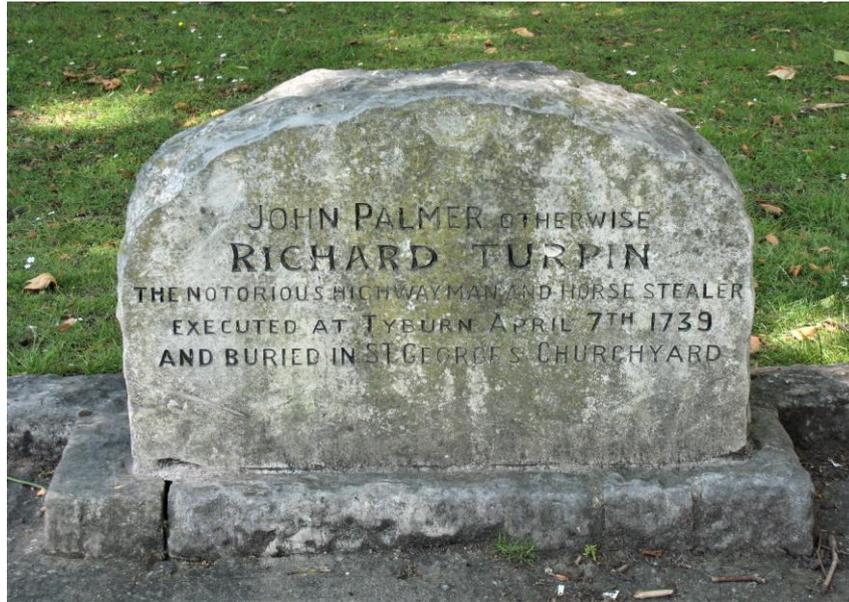
There were plenty of displays and explanatory boards to peruse, but the main thrust of the visit for many is probably the ride in a suspended six-seater 'time capsule' through the Viking settlement of Jorvik, with detailed animated, talking figures depicting typical scenes and even a few smells prevalent at the time. To be honest, I couldn't smell anything, but that was probably because the virus was still playing its viral tricks. It didn't matter though, because a running commentary from Dr Alice Roberts relayed through headphones in the time capsule was enough to convey all I needed to know about everyday Viking life.

All too soon our time journey ended and we rejoined the real world among more displays and exhibits. 20,000 objects of individual interest had been unearthed during the dig, so there was plenty to see and read about, as well as some very well-constructed interactive displays. A 'Viking' member of staff was making coins and a few delighted children went away with a coin of their own.

The final section showed skeletal remains of horrific battle wounds that was fascinating in itself. Altogether it was a well-informed, educational, interesting centre, with approachable archaeologists on hand if more information was wanted. As a visitor attraction, it seemed able to engage the interest of visitors at whatever level they required and I highly recommend it.

We emerged into a hot York Sunday morning, so located the nearest coffee shop for a reviving drink. While we were there, we perused the handy York Insight Guide that I'd previously purchased and decided our next mission would be to find the grave of Richard Turpin, aka Dick Turpin aka John Palmer.

This resulted in a walk of about 20 minutes through the busy streets, but the grave was located quite easily in St George's churchyard. There seemed to be the remains of a party scattered around, so we had to spend a few minutes clearing away pieces of paper, bottles, matches and birthday candles. Who would want to celebrate a birthday on the grave of Dick Turpin? Curious!



The infamous Dick Turpin's grave

Our next stopping place was Clifford's Tower in the heart of old York, but this time we ascended the 55 steps to the entrance and then (after paying) ascended the steps to the top. It was midday and very hot, but we were rewarded with a great view over the surrounding city below. Having noticed that some of the walls leaned outwards alarmingly, I later endeavoured to find out some history.

Clifford's Tower is the ruinous keep of York Castle that was originally built on the orders of William I after the Norman Conquest. The first motte and bailey castle was destroyed by rebels and Vikings in 1069, but after that it was rebuilt and reinforced, serving as an important fortification for the north of England.



Clifford's Tower (York Castle keep)

In 1190, the Jews of York had cruelly been told either to convert to Catholicism or be killed (religion being used as a weapon again). Around 150 of them sought protection in the castle from an angry mob, but their position became untenable.

Rather than renounce their faith or perish at the hands of the mob, they decided on an act of collective suicide and the castle was set on fire. Some chose to die at each other's hands, while others died in the flames. A few of them surrendered, promising to convert to Christianity, but they were killed by the angry crowd. A sombre but simple commemorative plaque at the bottom of the tower is a potent reminder of extreme religious and racial intolerance.

Why the name Clifford's Tower, you may ask, as I did after I'd left the tower. The answer is unclear, as it was originally known as King's Tower. The name may be a reference to Roger de Clifford's hanging at the tower in 1322 for opposing Edward II, or it may be a reference to the Clifford family's claim of being hereditary constables of the tower. I definitely prefer the former option.

After descending the steps, it was lunchtime, so we hot-footed it into the thronging streets. Yes, the temperature was still rising. My throat was better, but the nose blowing had begun in earnest. We decided to buy a sandwich at the first possible shop, near the shambolic street aptly named The Shambles.

At the same moment that we spotted a shop, Alan spotted a spare seat among all the other seats that were already being sat upon in the nearby sitting area. Douglas and I went into the shop to choose some food, while Alan bagged the seat – literally, as he put his camera bag down on the seat beside him.

When I joined Alan on the seat, I sensed he was bristling. A stony-faced woman was sitting the other side of him with her partner. When she snootily rose and left a few moments later with her partner trailing behind her, Alan told me how she had approached the seat, obviously wanting him to move his camera bag. When he hadn't, she'd sat down on the seat without a word, on his camera bag!

After lunch, we again strolled through the milling crowds, or the madding crowds to be literary, on our way to the Yorkshire Museum and Gardens. York is one of those delightful places you can walk through and notice so much of interest on your way somewhere that it takes a while to reach your destination.



The upper part of Barley Hall

It took us a while to reach our destination. To be honest, this was also because Douglas had picked up a leaflet for guided tours around York's snickelways, the intriguing narrow passageways between the main streets, often medieval and often imaginatively named, such as Black Horse Passage and Mad Alice Lane. An attempt was made to follow the leaflet's map, but it was hopeless without a guide. It did lead us through Coffee Yard, though, where we came across the astonishing Barley Hall (photo above), the oldest parts of which date to 1360.



A fascinating clock en route

At one point, I was standing outside Bettys (no apostrophe) Café Tea Rooms gazing in wonder at the cute, colourful little almond macaroons displayed in the window, pondering on the possibility of spending 98p each on such small but perfectly formed food items that could so easily disappear in one mouthful. Douglas came along, saw what I was looking at and marched straight inside to the shop part, emerging with three for later in the afternoon.

Trying to locate the Museum Gardens was unfortunately giving us a spot of bother. One likely-looking public garden we entered hopefully on the way turned out to be a memorial garden, although the Boer War Memorial inside it was ornate and very interesting. I could hear organ music emanating from the Minster close by, which I found to be quite soothing and atmospheric.

We eventually made it to the Museum Gardens (housing the Yorkshire Museum) and found they were awash with people enjoying the hot Sunday afternoon amid the flower beds and the remains of an old abbey. Seeking coolness (Alan and me only) and education, we paid the museum's entrance fee and spent the next hour or so looking around the exhibitions of Roman York and Medieval York, as well as an exhibition called *Extinct: A Way of Life*. It was most enjoyable and interesting, but as usual I wished I could retain much more of what I'd seen.

It was time for mid-afternoon refreshment, so we went outside and sat at one of the convenient tables there to consume the almond macaroons Douglas had been carefully carrying around in a Bettys paper bag. I thought it was a good idea to take a photo of them before they disappeared, but while arranging them artistically on the aforementioned paper bag, the green one slipped through my fingers and rolled on to the ground. Amid the ensuing expostulations of horror, I was mortified as a woman at the next table leaned over, picked up the offending object and handed it back to us. It was still intact, but I could hardly look at her for embarrassment and took the damn photo quickly!



Not Fat Rascals, but Miniature Macaroons

Having demolished the macaroons in a trice, whatever that may be, we left the Museum Gardens and sought some liquid refreshment in the form of iced drinks at the previously visited and most comfortable Costa Coffee. We must have been slightly disoriented, as it took a while to locate the place. At one point we walked past a group of amazing drummers performing in a pedestrianised area and were drawn to stop and watch, as well as listen.

At this point, my legs were once again in danger of losing the will to walk, but at least I felt I was winning the viral battle. We decided to mosey back to the hotel, although Douglas decided to mosey onwards to the local pub, while Alan and I moseyed to our bedroom and relaxed with our books and a cup of tea. We even stretched to a biscuit, all the moseying must have depleted our energy levels.

The three of us met up later and walked into the centre, where we took the easy option of the Slug and Lettuce again. It was so hot and sunny sitting by the window that we were forced to relinquish the river view for the comfort of the sunblind, but two rum and Cokes slipped down very easily, river view or not.

After we'd eaten, it seemed a good idea for another evening stroll along the river. A lot of other people were also strolling along and the riverside pubs were still overflowing with people enjoying the last vestiges of the sunny Sunday. We had been so lucky with the weather, but I can't deny that I was incredibly glad to return to the hotel once again in order to sleeeeep...

During the evening:

Alan: I didn't know the Slug and Lettuce was a chain.

Doug: It's not, it's a bar.

Monday 27th June

I woke a few times coughing in the night, but didn't really surface until 06:20, which was definite progress. I still felt somewhat tired and viral, but it was a sunny morning and RHS Harlow Carr beckoned for Alan and me. Douglas had opted to visit York's Railway Museum, which would be more interesting to him. The three of us were the only ones at breakfast, which felt a little peculiar.

As we drove the mainly straight road to Harrogate, the temperature at 09:30 was already 23° C and the radio mentioned it being this year's hottest day so far. On arrival at Harlow Carr, we were strangely drawn into Bettys (still no apostrophe) Café Tea Rooms, where we enjoyed a cappuccino for £3.25 each. It was pricey, but the serving staff were dressed in decorous black and white, the atmosphere was genteel in a modern sort of way and the cappuccino was good.

A long-awaited exploration of the garden followed, which was made easier by a complimentary map of the different areas of planting. Our cameras were in constant use and we were delighted to find some flowers we hadn't seen before. I also noticed that their northern alliums were quite a few weeks behind our southern ones – for which I was glad, as they helped to create a brilliant display mixed with the bright pinky purple salvias and beautiful blue eryngiums.



Colourful planting

It became a bit too hot for comfort out by the largely exposed flower beds, so we gradually made our way to the wooded area. The wild flower meadow was disappointing, simply because there were no poppies. This seemed odd, as we've driven past many fields of poppies in this area, although have so far failed to see such a field where we can safely stop the car to take photographs. We sat down to eat a banana purloined from the hotel dining room, with a cereal bar and water, before continuing our walk through different areas of the woodland, which somewhat randomly offered Doric columns, a compost bear and a wind turbine.



Alan sits and smiles

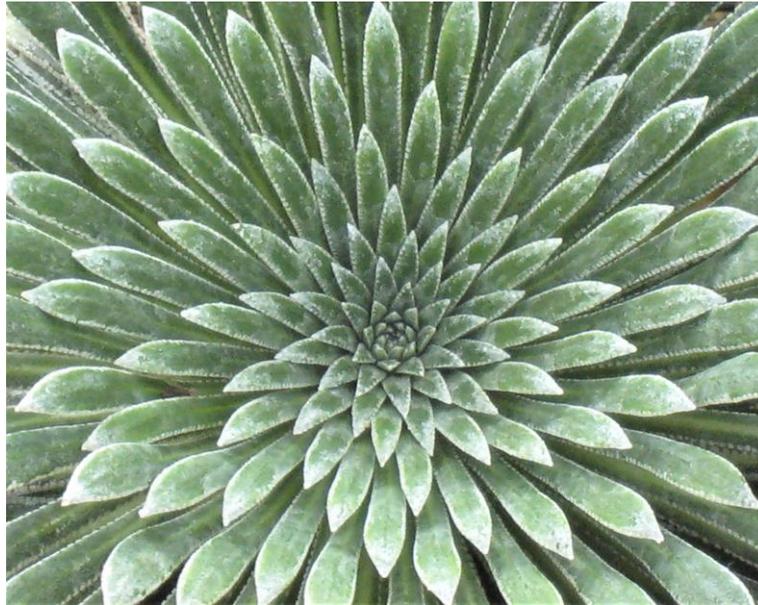
We then found ourselves approaching *Gardens Through Time*, which were show gardens displaying typical landscaping and planting through the ages, from 1815 to present contemporary trends. We'd somehow managed to approach this from the wrong end and thus walked backwards through time, but it didn't seem to matter. Botched time-travelling aside, I enjoyed this display very much indeed.

It was a brilliant time of year to visit, as there was so much in full flower. The only problem was that it had become windy and photographing floppy flowers in gusty wind is quite a challenge, although it was fun with the poppies:



A floppy poppy or three

Our final destination was the Alpine Zone, which was mainly in a glass house. Here there were cooling fans and both end doors were open, as otherwise we would have been seriously steamy. Again, we saw varieties of alpines we'd never seen before and as I love alpines anyway, I thought it was a fabulous display.



Saxifraga longifolia

We were flagging a little in the heat and reluctantly decided it was time to move on. After a quick look at the plant centre and gift shop, we took our leave of Harlow Carr. How I wish it was closer to home! The temperature had shot up to 32.5° C as we drank water and decided to visit York Lavender, not too far away and situated in the somehow romantically named Howardian Hills.

The drive back across the top of York was slow and tedious, mainly due to traffic congestion. When we arrived at York Lavender and got out of the car, it was extremely windy but still hot. The entrance was free, but to be honest this was probably because it was quite a small place. Having once visited the amazing Norfolk Lavender, I must confess I was expecting something bigger.

Perhaps we were a little tired and jaded and would have preferred a cold ice cream rather than a cup of tea in the tea rooms with pretty, lavender-coloured tablecloths... However, we walked to where the lavender was blowing around in the warm wind, passing by some colourful wild flower planting on the way. We could have walked further, but decided just to look at the plants for sale and the gift shop that sold many interesting lavender items. All we wanted to do then was go back to the hotel for a free cup of tea, a biscuit and a rest.

At 18:00 we met up with Douglas, who told us all about his enjoyable visit to the Railway Museum. He had unfortunately somehow managed to twist his ankle on the York cobbles during the afternoon, but had sensibly been resting it for a couple of hours and it was already feeling better. Meanwhile, as we set out for the evening, I didn't need to walk very far along the by now familiar pavements to know that my feet were already beginning to hurt. It occurred to me that it would have been interesting to have a pedometer on this holiday.

I even began to hobble a bit as we finally reached the centre and looked around for somewhere different to eat. It took a while, as we stopped to take a few photos now the streets were no longer thronging with people. We were asked if we wanted to go on a ghost walk of York by a strange young man dressed in ghoulish garb, but declined. At least, I think it was a young man...



Where has everybody gone?

Thankfully, the Italian restaurant we'd walked past on our first evening (Bella Italia) was finally located and we spent a very pleasant couple of hours in cool, comfortable surroundings, enjoying some good food, lively conversation and a couple of bottles of fruitily refreshing rosé wine. A few spots of rain were desultorily dropping on us as we walked back to the hotel, but we didn't mind and we didn't really get wet anyway. It had been a good evening.

At Bella Italia:

Alan: This is good, I'd have this again.

Doug: I'd settle for a fresh one if I were you.

Tuesday 28th June

Our penultimate day already. I'd woken in the night with aching, restless legs, but managed to sleep on until 06:45, when the nose blowing began. I was still very much aware of the virus, but it was gradually losing its grip. I wondered if Douglas had already lost his grip when he presented me with a postcard of a red painted devil at breakfast time. I hope it hadn't reminded him of me?

The day was overcast as we set off for Pickering and a ride on the steam train to Goathland and back. Once more we passed by a field full of poppies, but as we were aiming to catch the 11:00 train, we didn't have time for any photography. We wondered if the poppies seed themselves or are purposefully grown?

Pickering was reached by 10:35 and by the time the car was parked, the tickets bought and facilities used, it was time to board the train. It was a lot emptier than our first steam train ride had been on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway from Grosmont to Goathland in 2008 and the 50 minutes or so passed quickly.

After a relaxing ride past much green scenery, we alighted at Goathland station and headed towards the small café, where seating was appropriately some old railway carriage seats. As it was midday, we ordered a large toasted teacake each with our coffee and then walked up the hill into Goathland, aka Aidsensfield in the longstanding but no longer filmed television series *Heartbeat*.



Douglas (or Ernie the fastest milkman?) at Goathland station

It was noticeably less crowded than it had been in 2008, with less wind, fewer roaming sheep and less sheep poo on the pavements. The Goathland Hotel still sported an Aidsensfield Arms sign and Scripps's Funeral Services was still there dual-tasking as Aidsensfield Garage, with its old petrol pump and a few old cars.



An unusual garage and funeral service

It was also still a tourist shop inside, as were almost all the shops on the block, or the village green in Aidsensfield terms. After we'd looked inside them all, we thought we might as well indulge in an ice cream, which we ate sitting on a wooden bench opposite the car park, watching the world go by.

At 14:30, we ambled down the hill to the station to watch the steam train come in. It arrived in suitably steamy style as we employed our cameras to not much avail. I'd been interested to learn that in 2001, Goathland station had been transformed into Hogsmeade station in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

On boarding the train, there was confusion about reserved seats, but we settled comfortably after walking up and down one of the carriages a few times and the train retraced our morning journey along the tracks. All too soon we arrived back at Pickering, where we walked into the town for a drink in the Italian coffee shop we'd found on our initial visit. It was then a straightforward drive back to York.

As we walked into the centre once again in the early evening, we couldn't make up our minds where to eat, so ended up in the Slug and Lettuce for the third time. However, we had to sit in the main body of the building, rather than at the side with a view over the river. It was a curry special evening, but although Alan and Douglas took advantage of this, I opted for scampi and chips.

We were finished and outside again by 19:45, so strolled around the streets of York for nearly an hour. Just like the previous evening, droplets of warm water were descending from the sky, although it never actually rained. This is good, because both Alan and Douglas say they've lost their umbrellas.

By the time we returned to the hotel, I was finding it difficult not to hobble and when I inspected my feet, noticed I had a big blister on one of my heels. It was indubitably good to take the pressure off the offending object and lie down.

At some point during the evening:

Doug: I'm surprised we haven't seen a pub with the most obvious name.

Kay: Go on...

Doug: The Yorkie Bar, of course!

Wednesday 29th June

Slight regression in the sleeping department, as our small bedroom was stuffy, I was coughing and Alan was snoring. However, it was a sunny morning, there was a fresh plaster on my heel and breakfast revived the compromised parts.

Having previously dithered about several options, we'd settled on a further exploration of York for some final photography on our last day, with a cunning plan to visit the famous streets first of all before hordes of people descended. This didn't go entirely to plan, because when we arrived, there were hordes of delivery vans clogging up the narrow streets instead. Well, a few...

At one point, while the three of us were standing on the pavement in Stonegate, a white van mounted the pavement behind us and continued to drive along. Douglas and I heard it and were forced to move as far back as we could out of its way. Ahead of us, though, Alan was engrossed in taking a photo. We watched in amazement as the van continued to drive slowly but menacingly forward until it touched Alan, who was on the pavement, after all! There wasn't even a polite beep of the horn to alert Alan. Pavements for pedestrians?

There was another photographic incident when a film crew was shooting a scene in Stonegate, involving a couple in period costume walking through a doorway. Alan almost became an unwanted extra as he walked closer in to take a photo of the building in question, but when he realised what was happening, he apologised politely to the Security guy. The film crew were also storing camera equipment and refreshment facilities in the courtyard that housed the in-situ remains of the oldest dwelling house in the city, dating to around 1180.



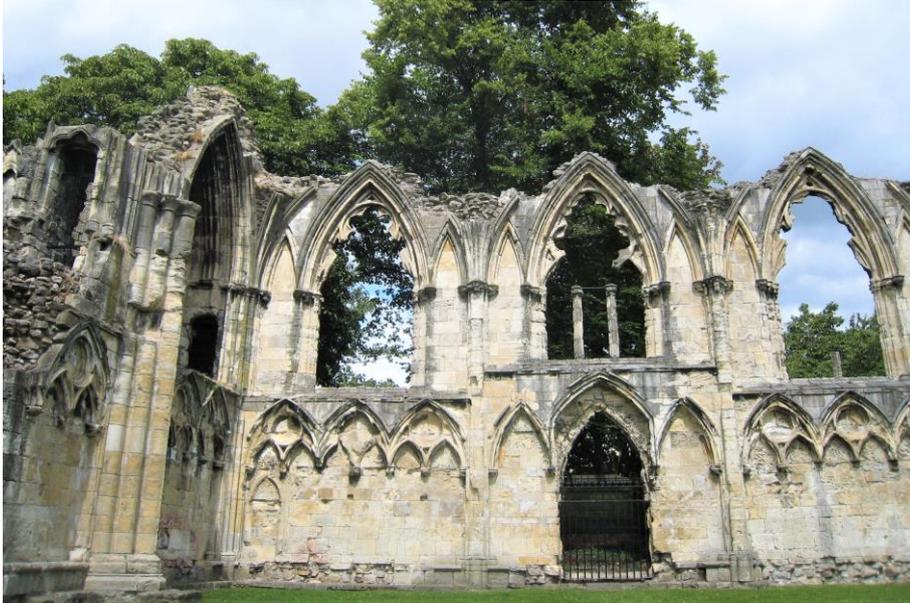
York Minster in the sky

However, we did our best and then walked on to York Minster, where we came across some modern-day stonemasons outside the cathedral working at their craft, which was fascinating and clearly very skilful. We also took photographs of a statue of Constantine the Great, the first Roman emperor to embrace Christianity. Over the road we noticed a 4th-century Roman column that had been found during excavations in the Minster's south transept.



Constantine the Great

It was time for a mid-morning drink, so we located a Caffè Nero and chilled out for a while, especially Douglas, who had a mint milk shake. As we were quite close to the museum, we decided to go into the gardens for a wander around the remains of St Mary's Abbey. First built in 1088, the ruins of St Mary's Abbey are all that remain of one of the most powerful Benedictine monasteries in England. The stone walls that surrounded the abbey, built in the 1260s, are the most complete set of abbey walls in the country. York does well for walls!



Remains of St Mary's Abbey

In fact we gradually discovered that the 10-acre Museum Gardens contain much more than originally realised. The museum itself was created in the 1830s by the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, as well as the botanical gardens that contain approximately 4,500 plants and trees. As if that wasn't enough, there is the Hospitium, the Multangular Tower, remains of St Leonard's Hospital chapel and undercroft – we would have needed much more time to investigate everything.

As it was, we were diverted by the sight of some old Roman sarcophagi close to the abbey remains, although before that we'd been diverted by a lifelike statue that somehow looked very familiar (and who asked me to take a photo of him):



Douglas the Poser

As for the sarcophagi, I have since found out that some months before our visit, three of them had been discovered when one of the old museum stores was being cleaned out. Two of them had originally been found in front of York Castle Museum, while the original site of the other one was uncertain.

The other sarcophagi arranged within two rows had previously been sited in the ruins of St Leonard's Hospital. They had been placed in two rows to show the way Romans would typically arrange their sarcophagi, with a path running down the middle. Although Romans generally preferred to cremate their dead, burying them in sarcophagi had become fashionable in the 3rd century.

One sarcophagus had been made for a woman called Aelia Severa according to the inscription, but upon discovery in 1859, had contained the remains of a man. There was one that belonged to a child and the fact that the child had been buried in a sarcophagus signified that s/he was from a wealthy family. Another sarcophagus belonged to Julia Victorina and her four-year-old son, Constantius, commissioned by her husband, a veteran centurion called Septimius Lupianus.



Sarcophagus of Julia Victorina and Constantius

After this unexpected find, we went into the museum again, as I for one had failed to realise the importance of some things I'd seen on the first visit. There were fewer people there than on our first visit, which was a bonus and we also watched a short introductory film about the timeline of events in York history.

Following all this educational input, we took advantage of a nearby Costa Coffee for some lunchtime sustenance, but when we emerged it looked as if it might rain. While Alan had found his umbrella in the car boot after breakfast, Douglas had definitely lost his, he had no idea where (it wasn't in the car boot).

Alan and I had one more place we wanted to photograph, the York snickelway called Mad Alice Lane. Alice had been hanged in 1823 for poisoning her husband and she would have been pretty mad about that. We achieved our photographs with no trouble, although two men were in the lane painting one of the walls – but they didn't look mad and presumably neither of them was called Alice.

The next item on the agenda was for Douglas to buy an umbrella, as the sky was looking ever more threatening. This was achieved in Marks and Spencer and an executive decision was then made to visit York Castle Museum, where we would be able to keep out of the now steadily falling rain.

York Castle Museum was founded in 1938 and is housed in prison buildings erected on the site of York Castle in the 18th century, namely the Debtors' Prison built in 1701-1705 with stone from the castle ruins and the Female Prison that was built in 1780-1785. We first looked at a display about prison life in the cells of the Debtors' Prison, which gave a good idea of its dreadful conditions.

Although there was historical information, the main theme of the museum was about everyday life, with recreated rooms from different periods, including a Georgian dining room, a Victorian parlour and a 1950s front room. There were several displays of toys, much of interest about World War II and a groovy exhibition of the 1960s, complete with music. I even saw a Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* LP record, a copy of which I once owned.

Another interesting display depicted the journey from birth to death, from 1700 to 2000. There was a Victorian hearse to add to the experience and I found it fascinating, although Douglas found it too morbid. Personally, I found our final visit too morbid, or at least, too dark and dismal. This was Kirkgate, a recreated Victorian street, named after the museum's founder, Dr John L Kirk.

On leaving the museum, the rain had stopped and it was sunny again. We were tired as we walked back to the hotel, though, even Douglas! It was therefore a relief to rest for an hour or so before we met up to walk into York centre through Micklegate for the last time (although we did intend to come out).

We returned to Bella Italia for our final evening meal in York. It was emptier than before, but the food was just as good. Alan had pasta, while Douglas and I had a pizza each, plus a bottle of rosé wine to share. For dessert we each had a Godfather Special, rather like an ice cream meringue and decidedly delicious.



Golden Minster in the late evening sun

We emerged happily onto the York evening street and decided it would be a good idea to walk around a little to use up some calories. We ended up at the Minster, which looked very golden in the late evening sun.

That was more or less it, our week in York completed, apart from breakfast the following morning and the ensuing tedious homeward-bound drive. Despite the virus, I did enjoy the visit and remain amazed at how York is steeped in accessible history. Even the place names are delightful. I didn't like the modern drinking social evening/night aspect of the city at the weekend (360+ pubs in York) but that's sadly prevalent almost everywhere in the UK now.

Whitby was an unexpected delight and other nearby places also seem well worth a visit. RHS Harlow Carr was bliss, so I'd jump at the chance to go there again. Yes, I could easily spend another week in York and thereabouts to see the places we missed, armed now with a bit more background knowledge. I came away with sore feet (despite my Merrell sandals) but happy in the knowledge that I'd finally walked the ancient streets of Eboracum ... Eoforwic ... Jorvik ... York!

While walking past York Minster:

Doug: Well, I'll say this about York, it minsters well to its visitors.

Kay: Stop!

*

