

# Minster Navigators

Journey through time



*Welcome to York Minster, one of the most beautiful Christian buildings in the country with a history stretching back to the Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Normans. York Minster continues to be an awesome place of worship where people come to pray, learn and experience the presence of God.*

Pupils can complete their York Minster timeline as they move around the building or fill it in at the end of their journey through the Minster.

A word bank is included and in the pupil trail, these words are highlighted in **bold text**.

**Encourage pupils to take a minute to stop and look up. Ask them for their first impressions of the building. What words might they use to describe what they can see?**

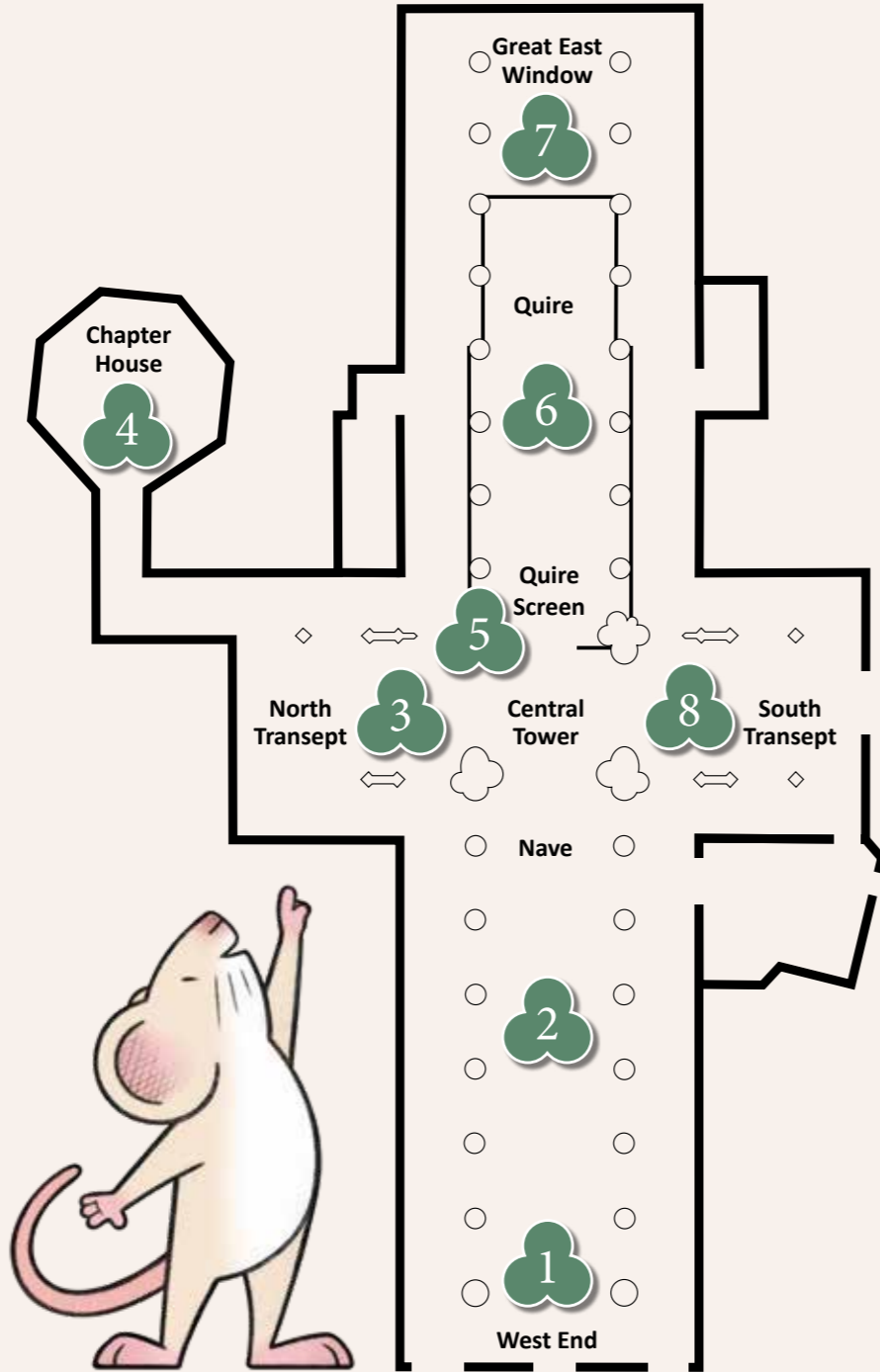
In AD 71 the Romans arrived in York and Roman remains have been discovered below this building. The first York Minster was built in 627 by King Edwin of Northumbria. See if your pupils can find this date on the floor near to where you are standing. York Minster was damaged by fires, Viking attacks and the Norman Conquest. Following this, William the Conqueror sent Thomas of Bayeux to become Archbishop of York and Thomas built a huge new Norman Minster between 1080 and 1100. Around 1225 Archbishop Walter de Grey began to transform this building into a Gothic Minster and the building was finally consecrated and declared finished in 1472.

**Useful Terminology**

The official name for York Minster is the Cathedral and Metropolitan Church of St Peter in York. The word 'metropolitan' refers to the Minster being the Mother Church of the Northern Province which means that the Archbishop of York looks after the other bishops in the North. Canterbury has oversight of bishops in the South.

York Minster is therefore a Minster and a Cathedral. The word Minster is an Anglo-Saxon word to mean either a monastery or a mission church. York Minster was never a monastery, but it was a mission church that reached outwards to spread the Christian message. The word Minster has come to mean a large or important church. York Minster is also a cathedral because it houses the cathedra, the seat of the bishop or in our case, the Archbishop of York.

**A brief history of York Minster**



**1 The West End**

**Norman Architecture**  
Thomas of Bayeux's Minster was Norman in style. It would have had lower ceilings, fewer windows and rounded arches.

**Gothic Architecture**  
The current York Minster is called 'Gothic' and is characterised by pointed arches, high ceilings, flying buttresses and large windows. Encourage pupils to have a look all around them. How many arches can they spot in 30 seconds? They can ask a friend to time them as they count. They can then look carefully at the shape and patterns on the arches and draw one of them in their box.

**Height and Light**  
In medieval times it was believed that God was literally 'up there' in Heaven. The medieval builders wanted to build higher and taller, and the adoption of the pointed arch allowed them to do this because pointed arches can carry more weight than the old Norman rounded arches. Consequently, they were able to create larger windows that flooded the space with light. Some Christian writers at this time thought that light represented the presence of God and so the lighter the building, the more God was seen to inhabit the space.

**St Peter**  
If pupils turn to face the doors, they will notice the statue of St Peter. You can draw attention to the key St Peter is holding. It represents the key to Heaven and the authority that Jesus gave Peter to lead the Church after his death. As the Minster is dedicated to St Peter, you will find keys all around the building, for example, in the stained-glass windows, heraldic shields and in the Chapter House floor. The association of St Peter with keys comes from Mathew's Gospel where Jesus said that he would give Peter the keys to Heaven.

- Suggested Questions**
- What are your first impressions of the Minster?
  - Looking around you, what words could you use to describe the building?
  - Why do you think the building is so tall?
  - When do you think it was built?
  - What can we learn about St Peter from how he is dressed and where he is standing?
  - What questions do you have?

**2 The Nave 1291**

The foundation stone for the Nave was laid in 1291. The word 'Nave' comes from the Latin word *navis* which means ship and could represent Christians on their journey towards God as they move up the building from west to east. The ceiling also looks like the upturned hull of a boat. All services took place at the east end of the building until the mid-19th Century when they also started happening in the Nave.

The Nave was the scene of a major fire that took place in 1840. A clock mender called William Groves accidentally started a fire with a candle in the south west tower and the roof burnt down. Fortunately, a historian and artist called John Browne had published a book the year before containing beautiful illustrations of the Minster and so these were used to reproduce things like the bosses on the ceiling.

Children will spot the red and gold dragon high up in the Nave. Dragons sometimes represent evil and medieval knights were thought to fight dragons. We have a stone carving of a knight opposite the dragon which could well be St George. Dragons were also thought to guard treasure.

This dragon can move up and down and there is a hole in the neck. Pupils can try to work out what the dragon might have been for. The answer is we don't actually know! Our best theory is that the dragon was attached to a long chain and was used to lift the heavy lid of a baptism font or possibly a reliquary, (a casket containing relics of the saints).

York Minster's own record of holy relics included a piece of the True Cross and bones of St Peter.



- Suggested Questions**
- How is the Minster similar or different to other churches you have been to?
  - What objects do you recognise from other churches you have been to?
  - Why might the Cathedral represent a ship of souls?
  - What might the Nave dragon be for?
  - Why do you think dragons sometimes represented evil?



# 3

## The Five Sisters Window 1250

This is one of our oldest medieval windows. It contains a plain grey/green glass called *grisaille* (greyness) with detailed geometric patterns. When the window was created, it would have been much brighter and let in more light. However, previous restorations, general dirt and numerous repair-leads have given the window its darkened appearance.

The window is also a memorial to women of the Empire who died in the First World War. A woman called Helen Little had a vision after the war of the window opening out into a beautiful garden filled with women. She thought the window should be the 'sisters window for the sisters', and so she and a woman called Almyra Gray helped to raise money for a memorial because she said that there were many memorials to men at that time but none to women.



There are several different stories about this window. Pupils can read the theories below and circle the one they find most convincing. They can then talk to their partner and see if they agree. There is no one right answer but this will encourage pupils to justify their views.

**1.** The window is named after five sisters who were known for their beautiful embroidery. Alice, the youngest sadly died and so her sisters had the window designed in her memory to represent the patterns in their needlework.

**Evidence:** The Five Sisters of York are first mentioned in a history book called *Eboracum* which was published in 1736. Their story was then told in more detail in Charles Dickens's novel *Nicholas Nickleby* around a century later.

**2.** The window is named after Cistercian monks who influenced the plain, geometric style of glass.

**Evidence:** We know that the Cistercians were important religious people in this area and they had similar windows in their churches. They had also banned the use of colour or people in their glass because it distracted people from focusing on God. 'Sisters' could be short for 'Cistercians'.

**3.** The window was influenced by Islamic art.

**Evidence:** In Islam, geometric patterns are sometimes used to decorate holy books and buildings and the Five Sisters Window was created around the time when people were visiting the Middle East for the Crusades.

### Considering the Evidence

Naming the window after the five sisters of York is fairly convincing because this is mentioned in a history book, however, this book was still written nearly 500 years after the window was created. Pupils might also find evidence from a novel less convincing. It is likely that the window was influenced by the local Cistercians, but whether 'sisters' comes from 'Cistercians' might be less convincing. The link with Islamic art may be persuasive because geometric patterns are seen in Islamic places of worship and this ties in with trips that Christians made to the Middle East but this doesn't explain the name.

# 4

## Chapter House 1280 – 90

The Chapter House was built a few decades after the Five Sisters Window and is where the business meetings of the cathedral would take place. It is still used on occasions today. The Dean, responsible for running the cathedral would meet here each morning with his Chapter, or committee. The acoustics are amazing and if the room is quiet, you can hear someone speaking clearly even if they are on the other side of the room. If nobody else is in the room with your group, you could ask them to sit in the stone seats and play a game of 'Simon Says', whispering the words to demonstrate the acoustics.

The distance from the floor to the ceiling is around 20m and is the same height again from the ceiling to the top of the roof.

The windows are dedicated to Jesus and various saints. Left from the door: St Catherine, St William of York, Mary, Jesus, St Peter, St Paul and 5 different saints in the right-hand window.

The top middle roof boss depicts a lamb and represents Jesus who was called 'The Lamb of God' by St John the Evangelist. A lamb was an early symbol to represent Jesus before he was depicted in human form.

The floor tiles are more modern and date from the 19th century, created by the Minton tile factory. There are three sets of tiles containing St Peter's keys that pupils can find on the floor and more keys can be seen on the ceiling.

Encourage pupils to sit down on a stone seat and look up. What carvings can they see? They can draw one in their box. They can then move around to discover other carvings and discuss their favourite. The range of carvings is intriguing and raises questions about what they might mean. There are animals, mythical creatures, faces, royalty, foliage and much more.

### Suggested Questions

- How does this space make you feel?
- What words could you use to describe this space?
- What shape is this room? What other mathematical shapes can you see all around you?
- Can you find the key floor tiles? What do the keys represent?
- What animal carvings can you find?
- Why do you think these carvings are here?

# 5

## The Quire Screen (Pulpitum) 1450

Our Quire Screen, also called a *Pulpitum* separates the Nave from the Quire. The word *pulpitum* means platform. Ours is decorated with kings who were on the throne during the time the Minster was built, and we think they might have been painted with bright colours.

Starting at the left of the screen you will find William the the Conqueror, William Rufus, Henry I, Stephen, Henry II, Richard I, John. To the right, Henry III, Edward I, Edward II, Edward III, Richard, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI.

Pupils can check their predictions of who was the first King by looking at the names below the feet and they can find out how long each king reigned for from the numbers next to the names.

Some statues carry a sword whilst others have a sceptre. It is interesting to think about why some Kings have one and not the other, or maybe hold both.

Henry IV is an interesting carving. He was strongly disliked in York for his involvement with the deaths of Richard II and our own Archbishop Richard Scrope. He has what looks like remnants of dark paint under his chin and there is a story that paint was thrown at the statue when it was installed to by people of the town still angry with the King.

Pupils can discuss which king might be an odd one out. There are a number of possible answers which they can discuss with a partner. One could be St Stephen due to the short skirt he is wearing. It was thought he had usurped the throne from Matilda and the masons could be showing their disrespect to Stephen by carving him this way. Alternatively, an odd one out could be Henry VI who was created a few centuries later than the other kings and the statue is smaller and he is holding a Bible rather than the sword or sceptre.

### Suggested Questions

- What are the Kings holding?
- What creatures can you see below the feet in the gold border?
- Which king might be an odd one out?
- Which kings are similar to or different from the others?
- Can you find angels hidden in the stonework above the kings?
- What instruments are they playing?



# 6

## The Quire 1361

The Quire is where the choir sing and some of the services take place. The word can be spelt with a 'ch' but is often spelt with a 'q' to distinguish it from the singers. Members of the public could attend services here from the Reformation period onwards.

The foundation stone for the east end of the Minster was laid in 1361 but the wood you can see is from the 19th Century. This is because the Quire was set on fire in 1829 by a man called Jonathan Martin. He was a troubled man who had many bad things happen to him when he was young that probably affected his mental health. Jonathan was very critical of the Minster and the formal services that took place here. He also thought God would punish the priests because they were un-spiritual, eating too much food and drinking too much wine! Jonathan had a dream where he saw smoke coming out of the Minster and he thought this was a sign from God to set it on fire.

### The Outcome of the Fire

Jonathan Martin was caught and put on trial. He was found guilty but this was turned to 'not guilty' due to 'insanity' because he was found to have not been in his right mind. He was therefore locked up in a mental health institution, Bedlam in London and was there until he died nine years later after a short illness.

### Suggested Questions

- Can you see the shield of St Peter?
- What would you draw on a shield that represented your family?
- Why do you think Jonathan Martin was so critical of the Church?
- Why might Jonathan have thought God was telling him to set the Minster on fire?
- What do you think should have happened to Jonathan Martin?

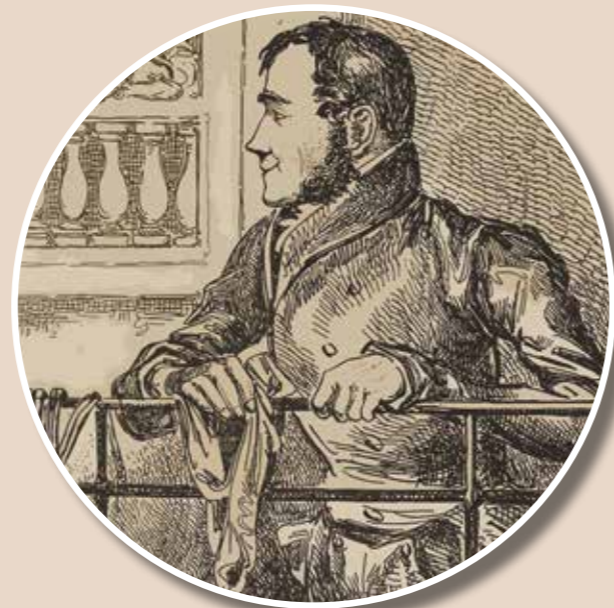
### The Consequences of the Fire

These are some of the consequences of the fire. Pupils can determine which consequence might have had the biggest impact on the Minster. There is no one right answer and this activity will help to develop reasoning skills as pupils justify their views.

1. The Dean and Chapter said the Minster needed a watchman day and night. This became the Minster Police who still work here today.
2. Jonathan Martin was locked up for the rest of his life.
3. Many tombs were destroyed in the fire along with the organ, organ music and choir stalls.
4. John Browne used scaffolding from the fire restoration to draw his illustrations of the Nave bosses after the 1840 fire.

### Interesting additional fact

Jonathan Martin had a younger brother, John, who was a well-known artist and whose work can be found in the Tate Britain among other places. He was known for painting huge apocalyptic scenes of fire and destruction. When an onlooker saw the fire burning, she is said to have stated that it was a scene worthy of a John Martin painting, little knowing it was his brother who had caused the fire!



# 7

## Great East Window

The Great East Window is one of the marvels of the Minster. It was created in 1405 and took three years to complete. Encourage pupils to sit down at the back of the chapel and take time to look up at the beautiful stained glass panels. See if they can spot an image of God at the top of the window. He is holding a book with the words *Ego Sum Alpha et Omega* which means 'I am the Beginning and the End'. (Alpha et Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet). This is important because the window represents the beginning and end of time. It depicts images of the Creation story in Genesis (the first book of the Bible) and the Apocalypse as described in Revelation (the last book of the Bible).

The window is very bright and you can see the images clearly. It was restored recently with each panel moved and repaired before being placed back in the window with protective glazing.

The window was designed by a man called John Thornton. We still have a copy of the contract that tells us John was given the task of cartooning (drawing) all the main images himself and was paid £56 which included a £10 bonus. This would have been many thousands of pounds in today's money.

In the top square panels, pupils can spot images from the Biblical creation story. For example in the centre you can see fish and birds and on the right hand side Adam and Eve are visible with a fruit tree. Further down on the left you can see a red dragon from the book of Revelation.

There are many other interesting features to spot from periods throughout the Minster's history. The reredos (carved picture) below the window depicts the Nativity and was created in memory of Queen Victoria in 1905.

### Suggested Questions

- What can you see in the window?
- What animals can you spot?
- Can you find the dragon?
- Can you spot some fish and birds towards the top of the window?
- Can you see the carved picture called a Reredos below the window?
- Who do you recognise in this carving?
- Do you think the Reredos is old or modern?

# 8

## South Transept from 1225

This was the first part of the Gothic cathedral to have been built from 1225 onwards and is the site of the most recent fire. In 1984 lightning struck the Minster. It was set on fire and the roof above you was destroyed. As you face the south doors, on your right next to the crucifix you can see evidence of molten lead on the walls as it poured down from the ceiling.

When the roof was rebuilt, the children's programme Blue Peter launched an appeal for children to design new roof bosses. Ask pupils to spot the six winning designs on the ceiling. They include a man in the moon and a whale! This shows that the Minster is still changing and evolving today. Pupils can consider how these designs are similar or different to other things they have seen in the Minster.

### Construct the timeline

If they haven't yet done so, pupils can now complete their timeline of the Minster to reveal how it has changed and changed over time.



### Timeline Answers

- 71** The Romans settled here
- 627** King Edwin built the Anglo-Saxon Minster
- 1080** Thomas of Bayeux built the Norman Cathedral in **20 years**.
- 1225** The Gothic transformation of York Minster took roughly **250 years**
- 1250** There are **5 Sisters**
- 1280** The mathematical shape representing the Chapter House is an **Octagon**
- 1450** There are **15 Kings** on the Screen
- 1472** The Minster was **consecrated/finished**
- 1829** The fire was in the **Quire**
- 1840** The fire was caused by a **candle**
- 1984** **Bosses** were created by children

# Word Bank

- Apocalypse** The Greek word meaning 'revelation' and the name of the last book of the Bible which talks about the end of the world.
- Bible** The Holy Book of Christians.
- Boss** A wooden or stone carving on the ceiling that pins the beams together and covers the join.
- Cathedral** Usually a large church that has the seat of the Bishop.
- Chapter** The committee who run the Cathedral, the people who make the decisions.
- Cistercians** A group of monks who wanted to reform the Church and lived very simply.
- Crusades** Where Christians from Europe travelled to Jerusalem and other holy places to fight Muslims in the 11th – 13th centuries.
- Dean** The priest who is in charge of running the Minster.
- Minster** A church built in Anglo-Saxon times that spread the teachings of Christianity. It has come to mean a large or important church.
- Nave** The large, open part of a church or cathedral where services often take place. Nave is the Latin for ship.
- Relics** Small items important to medieval Christians such as a piece of wood from the cross of Christ or bones or hair from a saint.
- Revelation** The last book of the Bible, also called the Apocalypse.

# Discover More!

Book a facilitated session with our Learning Team to get more out of your visit to York Minster.

Two-hour visits are led by expert guides and pupils will explore the historical, spiritual and architectural wonders of York Minster as they discover its unique story. Thought-provoking workshops will engage pupils in creativity, discussion and debate.

For more information and to book a workshop, scan the QR code below.



We hope your group have enjoyed learning more about the stories and history of the Minster and that they will be able to apply their knowledge to other places they might visit. We look forward to welcoming you back in the future.