

York's Historic Music Venues Trail

**Showcasing York's varied and historically significant
music venues past and present**

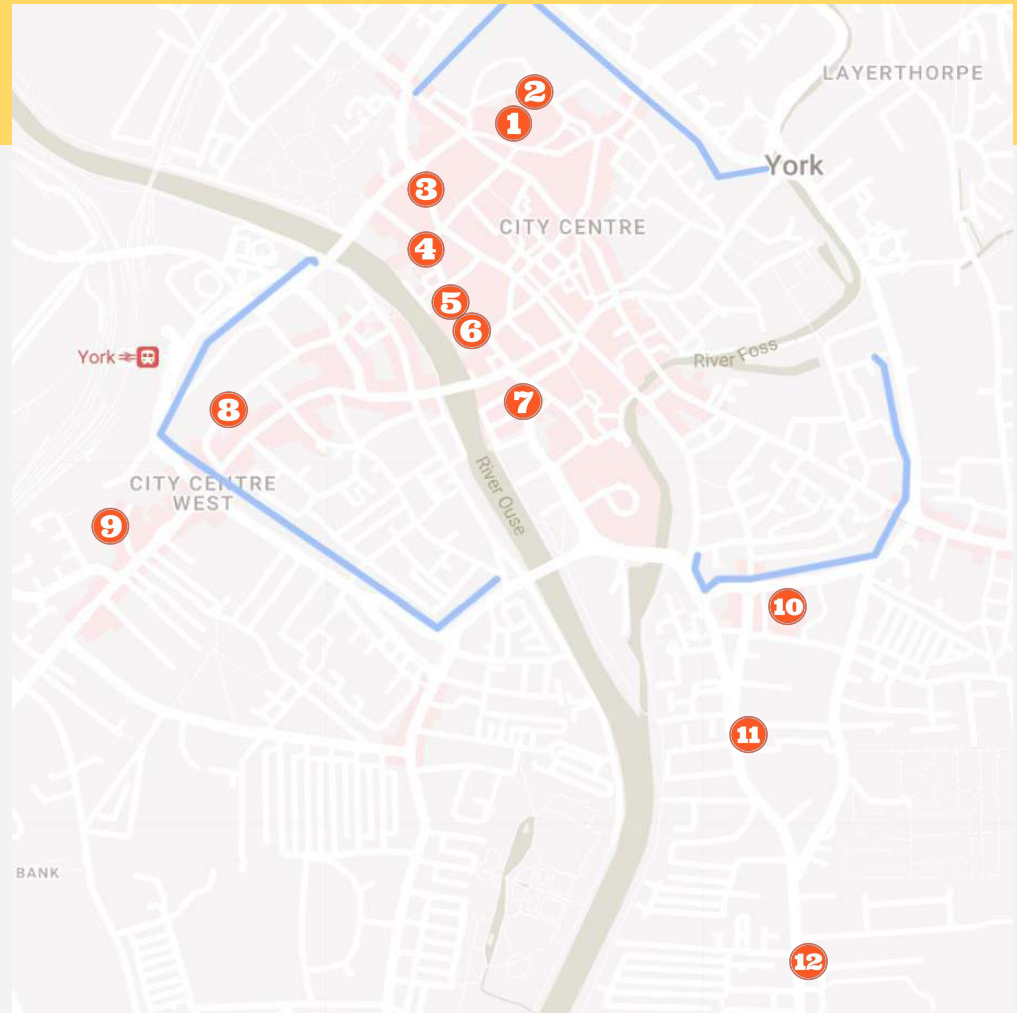


Compiled by:
Lizzie Hodgson
Chris Sherrington
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© John Wolstenholme, View of the Interior of York Minster

There has been a Christian church on this site since the 7th century. From the 13th to the 20th century, the singing of services was overseen by a highly skilled group of clergymen called the Vicars Choral, based in [Bedern](#). Today's Minster choir is one of the UK's finest and was also the first to admit girl choristers. Composer and organist [Francis Jackson](#) (1919-2022) was Director of Music at the Minster for 36 years.



© York Press, The Howl & The Hum outside York Minster, May 2021

The Minster acts as a venue for all kinds of music concerts. During the recent pandemic, a local alt-rock band, [The Howl & The Hum](#), live-streamed a concert from inside the Minster.



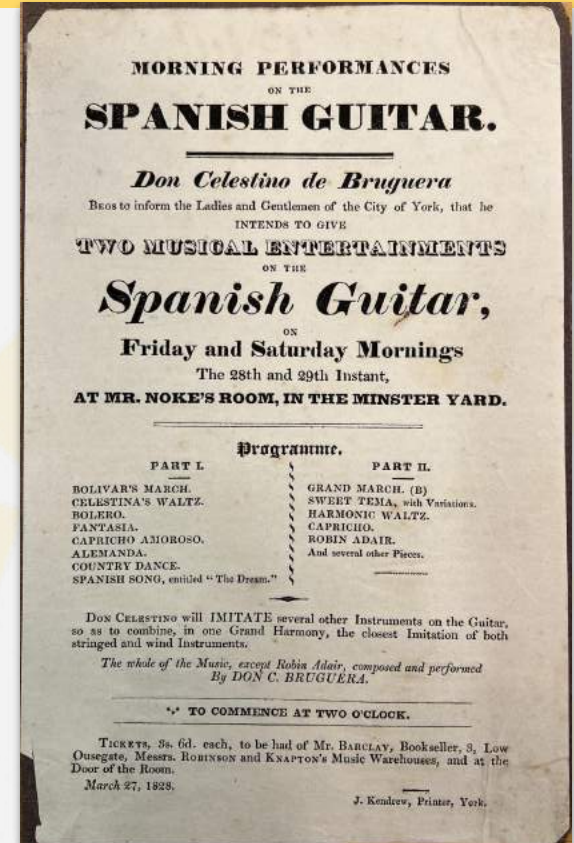
Click to Listen to the York
Minster choir Spotify Playlist

Mr Noke was a member of the highly musically skilled Vicars Choral at York Minster. He was creative in supplementing his modest clergyman's income. He used his rooms in Minster Yard to host lectures, society meetings and small secular musical gatherings.

Mr Noke hosted the particular performance advertised to the right in 1828. The performer was a creole guitar virtuoso of Catalan heritage, Don Celestino de Bruguera. He toured Britain, Germany and America in the 1820s. His instrument, the Spanish guitar – closely related to our classical guitar – was very popular at the time. By scheduling the concert on a Friday and Saturday morning (many years before the idea of a 'weekend' was introduced and popularised) Noke and de Bruguera were pitching their entertainment exclusively to the leisured classes.



Click to Listen to examples of 19th-century Spanish guitar music



The Assembly Rooms, Blake St

*The Assembly Rooms were built in 1730-35 for elite social gatherings and **dancing**.*

The venue is now an ASK Italian restaurant, but the interior spaces have largely been preserved intact and it is still used for civic events such as Mayor making and Remembrance Sunday.

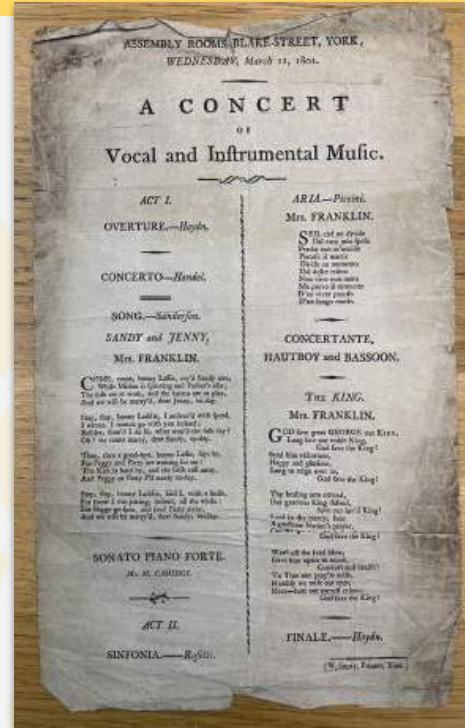


© York Museums Trust (Ref:YORAG : R1482)



© York Minster Library (Ref: (HC)/HC/16)

Subscription concerts were popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. These required payment up front for the series, in order to attend, and were a regular feature of the Assizes. Many of the aristocracy and gentry came into town while the visiting judges presided over trials.



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© Elizabeth Hodgson, The Frontage of York Mansion House.

York Mansion House is the Official residence of the Lord Mayor of York. It was built in grand Georgian style in 1725 and has been a hub of social and musical events ever since.

Mansion House now houses the Waits' chains. These were worn by the City Waits, musicians employed and liveried by the Lord Mayor to play at public occasions such as the annual Lord Mayor's day and Race days. The Waits were in continuous existence from the early 14th century for at least 500 years.



© City of York Council. The City Waits playing at the recent Royal Visit.

The Waits have been revived as they were in their 16th-century heyday. They continue to give concerts and play at public events such as the royal visit in 2022.



Click to Listen to a Spotify Playlist of the York Waits

Site of The George Inn, 19 Coney St

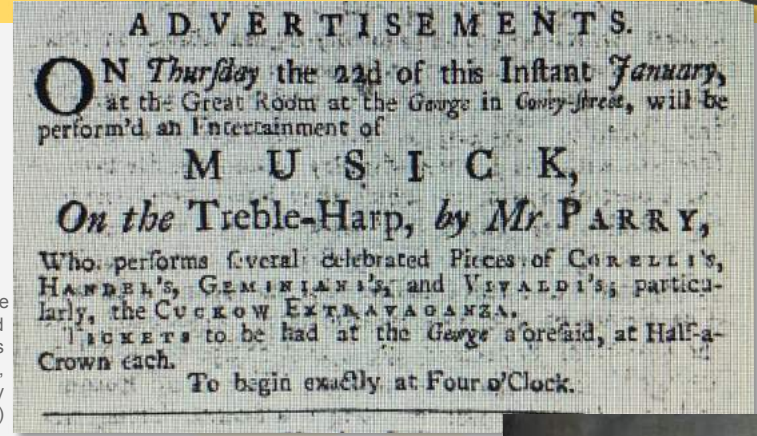
The George was the oldest and grandest of York's coaching inns. In the 17th century, the George would have been a loud and bustling place, full of travellers, workers, horses and coaches. The richly decorated 'Grand Room', located over the inn's gateway, acted as a meeting and concert space for the people of York.



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(Ref:PHO/3/1284)



© Elizabeth Hodgson, The Remains of the
Frontage of the George Inn



© York Explore
Libraries and
Archives
(York Courant,
20 January
1733)

In the 18th century, the *York Courant* frequently reported meetings of the 'Musick Assembly' and advertised concerts by visiting musicians such as the blind Welsh harpist John Parry (1710-1782).

Click to Listen
some of Parry's
compositions



© Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum Wales.
William Parry, *The Blind Harpist*, John Parry.



© YorkMix,
Exterior of the
Willow Disco.

The Willow Disco was a cult favourite among York students and locals alike from its opening in 1973. This unique venue played an eclectic mix of techno, pop and vintage rock favourites until the early hours of the morning. It started life as a Cantonese restaurant with live music, then DJs, with punters having a boogie at the end of the meal; eventually the disco became more popular than the restaurant.



Click to Listen to a Spotify
Playlist of popular music
played at The Willow

The venue was run by the Fong family, whose patriarch Tommy was as much a key part of its charm as the giant tub of free prawn crackers at the bar. The closing night in 2015 was attended by hundreds of patrons paying their respects to this beloved venue.



© DJ Max, Interior of the Willow Disco.



© Photo by R.M. Calamar, CC BY 2.0 - no changes made

In its opening season the venue also hosted the first public showing of a film in York - Professor Herbert's animated pictures, via his 'Biograph Box'. Film would become a regular offering until well into World War One, and in 1958 (operating as the SS Empire) the stage was removed and floor levelled to offer roller-skating, bingo and wrestling.

This historic venue was converted into a music hall from two pre-existing buildings - a corn exchange and warehouse - dating from 1868. It opened in 1902, with a pantomime (*Little Red Riding Hood*) featuring the Australian-born music-hall star [Florrie Forde](#) (1875-1940). Restored in 1989 with careful attention to its art-nouveau decor, the Grand Opera House is now part of the Ambassador Theatre Group, hosting touring productions of operas, musicals, theatre, and comedy.

Florrie
Forde



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© Chris Sherrington, remains of the abandoned Fibbers site whilst hosting squatters in Summer 2021

Fibbers hosted thousands of acts and promoted local bands including Shed Seven, The Howl & The Hum, Glass Caves, and Skylights, at this venue, as well as national touring artists following on from its legacy at the Stonebow House site.

This site on Toft Green has hosted a variety of nightclubs and music establishments since 1987, including Toffs, Tru, Tokyo, and most recently Fibbers.

Fibbers relocated to this site in 2014 from its earlier location at Stonebow House, where it had been founded in 1992 by local promoter, Tim Hornsby.



© Marc McGarraghy, Tim Hornsby on site after closing in 2020



© Chris Sherrington, Fibbers venue signage, 2019

The closure of the venue in 2020 and threat that it would be developed into offices sparked outrage and was the catalyst for the formation of York Music Venue Network.

With support from councillors, YMVN called for amendments to the developer's plans and in December 2022 it was announced that a new venue would be built on the site.



© Marc McGarraghy, Slow Readers Club perform at Fibbers, Toft Green, 2019



© Chris Sherrington. Club and Institute Union Certificate hanging in The Crescent



© Rachel Cowgill. Photograph hanging in The Crescent.

This former working-men's club is over 100 years old and is now a thriving community venue.

To the left is the club's certificate of membership of the Club & Institute Union. Below that is a photo of the resident band from the 1920s – an early jazz string ensemble, with piano, violin, banjos and trap drum kit.

On the right is a poster for a recent gig with gothic rock band The Mission (co-promoted by TV's Over and DV8). The poster has been signed by band members.

Click to Listen to music by
The Mission on Spotify



© Chris Sherrington. The Mission Poster

The largest entertainment venue in the city, York Barbican opened in 1991 adjacent to the city swimming baths. Named after the nearby Barbican part of the walls on Walmgate, this venue was built to provide sports and entertainment facilities, and hosts the annual UK Snooker Championship as well as multiple music concerts. After closing amid controversy in the early 2000s, the venue reopened after renovations in 2011 and is now operated by ASM Global.



© Chris Sherrington, Poster for The Unthanks outside York Barbican, 2022



© Chris Sherrington, The Human League perform in 2016



© York Press, York Barbican in 2011 at reopening

The Barbican has hosted a variety of performers including Peter Kay, Ricky Gervais, Little Mix, Manic Street Preachers, Gary Numan and Morrissey. It also has a strong history with local band Huge, who performed to open the venue in 1991, then again when it reopened, and continues to perform there annually.

11 Site of The York Rialto, 68 Fishergate

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The Rialto was bought and converted into a ballroom and cinema in 1925 by Jack Prendergast. Jack became internationally well known and was able to attract world-class artists, such as Louis Armstrong (pictured to the right), the Hallé Orchestra and Gracie Fields. Jack's son became the famous film composer John Barrie (of James Bond fame) and cited his upbringing at the Rialto as inspiration.



© The York Press.



© The York Press.

The venue has seen many famous faces over the years, including Cliff Richard, Mick Jagger, and the Beatles! The venue later became a nightclub called The Cat's Whiskers, which operated until the 1980s. The building was demolished in 2003 and its replacement was demolished in 2022. The new building on the site will be named 'Rialto house'.



© The York Press.

A former pub built to entertain the troops in 1801, it is now a 150-capacity grassroots music venue hosting 200+ shows annually. Originally named The Barrack Tavern, it changed name after the Strensall IRA bombings in the late 1970s and was transformed in 2014.



© Chris Sherrington.
Signature of the band
Her's, from February
2019



© Chris Sherrington. Zak Ford (This House Is
Haunted) signs the wall of the venue



© Chris Sherrington. The Fulford Arms,
2019, after its new paint scheme



© York Explore Libraries and Archives. The Barrack Tavern c.1880.

Today the walls are adorned with hundreds of signatures of some of the artists who have performed on the venue's stage, including Idles, The Wildhearts, The Sherlocks, Bull, Leland Sklar, This House is Haunted, and The Howl & The Hum. The wall also acts as a memorial to Her's, who tragically died on tour in America after the [release of their album](#) and performance at the venue in 2019.