

# Behind York’s medieval walls, history unfurls

► **YORK**  
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I could fit oversized antiques into my luggage; Banks Music, which has been in business since 1756 (the year Mozart was born), has electric guitars as well as classical sheet music for brass and wind instruments; and Monk Bar Chocolatiers, housed in a 600-year-old former butcher shop with sloped beam ceilings, satisfied my curiosity about that rose-flavored British confection known as Turkish Delight. Be sure to amble down The Shambles; the narrow street dates to 1086.

**5:30 p.m.** York is a perfect place to discover the charms of British beer. One of its oldest pubs, the convivial Old White Swan, offers a large selection of seasonal English ales with names like Cropton Dangleberry, Nethergate Azzaparrot, and Thornbridge Kipling. My advice is to not think of your pint as warm, flat beer; rather, consider your freshly pulled cask ale as unfiltered, unpasteurized, and without artificial carbonation.

When you are ready to eat, walk to Oscar’s Wine Bar & Bistro, where you can get generous portions of tasty burgers and salads. For something spicy, the Viceroy of India, just outside the city walls, offers a delectable assortment of traditional and specialty Indian dishes.

**7:30 p.m.** Check in at the National Centre for Early Music in St. Margaret’s Church. In addition to medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque music, it features jazz, folk, and world. For something spooky, show up at the bottom of The Shambles by 7:30 for the Ghost Hunt of York, the nightly walking tour visiting York’s haunted locations.

**SATURDAY 10:30 a.m.** Head to one of the gateways — called bars — and amble along the top of York’s magnificent medieval walls. Built circa 1240-1340, the walls almost didn’t survive the first half of the 19th century, when the City Corporation (City Council), complaining about their age, the high cost of maintenance, and so forth, decided to simply demolish them. Only vigorous public outcry saved them. Although perfectly pleasant now, they were a bit grisly in their glory days: From the 14th century



PHOTOS BY LISA HOWARD/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

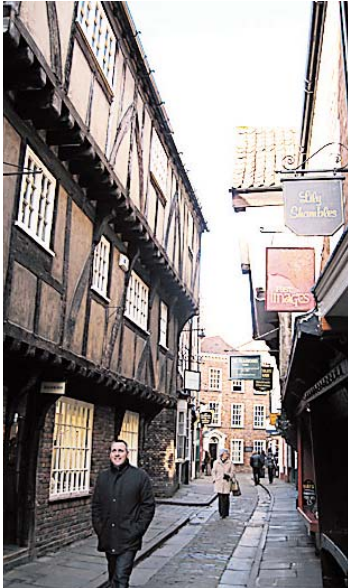
On the grounds of the Yorkshire Museum are the ruins of St. Mary’s Abbey, once the most powerful Benedictine monastery in England. The Shambles is a narrow street dating to 1086.

until 1746, the gateways displayed on spikes the decapitated heads of executed traitors. A note to anyone else with vertigo: Portions of the walls do not have railings.

**11:30 a.m.** The stats for York Minster are bodacious: the largest medieval Gothic church in northern Europe, the largest medieval building in England, and one of the largest medieval stained glass windows in the world. York Minster was completed in 1472, after 250 years of construction, but the site goes back to Roman times. In addition to the interior, visitors can visit the undercroft, treasury, and crypt, which has Norman and Roman remains, or climb the 275 spiraling stone steps to take in the view from Central Tower.

**1:30 p.m.** Although Bettys Café Tea Rooms at St. Helen’s Square is more famous, revive yourself with a cuppa at its cozy offspring, Little Bettys. On cold, gray days (any month of the year in England) fires warm the hearths of this upstairs tearoom. Little Bettys offers full tea service, plus soups, salads, and sandwiches or simply order a pot of tea from the 11 varieties, and a scone with strawberry jam and clotted cream.

**2:30 p.m.** York has several museums to choose from. The



Jorvik Viking Centre, especially popular with children, is built on the site of a 10th-century Viking village. The tour begins with a video in which two winsome youths progress backward in time — represented by costume and hairstyle changes — until they reach the 10th century. Visitors then board a narrated ride that carries them through a reconstruction of the village as it looked, sounded, and smelled in 975.

The York Castle Museum, housed in two former prisons, has a diverse collection of house-

hold objects dating to 1600. Be sure to notice nearby Clifford’s Tower; the 13th-century keep is all that remains of York’s medieval castle.

The Yorkshire Museum is closed until August for renovation, but on the grounds you’ll find the fabulous ruins of St. Mary’s Abbey, at one point the most powerful Benedictine monastery in England. Before Benedictines, though, there were Romans. A corner of a Roman fortress, the Multangular Tower, is also on the garden grounds.

**7 p.m.** For tasty modern British cuisine that uses local ingredients and won’t empty your wallet, book a table at 31 Castlegate. Located in an elegant Georgian-era house, the restaurant has an early-bird dinner menu with set-price two- and three-course meals. The offerings change to reflect seasonal produce, but standout dishes include a creamy cauliflower and Gruyere soup, roast venison with bubble and squeak, and a delectable sampling of fruit-based desserts.

**10 p.m.** Head up Stonegate, the original Roman highway, to mingle at the bohemian Evil Eye Lounge, a shop, bar, and Internet cafe. Enter through the shop and make your way to the bar where you can get a variety of beverages including lavish cocktails and

## If you go . . .

**Where to stay**  
**Best Western Dean Court Hotel**  
Duncombe Place  
011-44-190-462-5082  
www.deancourt-york.co.uk  
Doubles from \$244.  
**York Hilton**  
1 Tower St.  
011-44-190-464-8111  
www.hilton.co.uk/york  
From \$195.

**Where to eat**  
**31 Castlegate**  
31 Castlegate  
011-44-190-462-1404  
www.31castlegate.co.uk  
Entrees \$17-\$23.

**Evil Eye Lounge**  
42 Stonegate  
011-44-190-464-0002  
\$5-\$15.

**Little Bettys**  
46 Stonegate  
011-44-190-462-2865  
www.bettys.co.uk  
Tea \$5-\$24.

**Oscar’s Wine Bar & Bistro**  
27 Swinegate  
011-44-190-465-2002  
www.oscarswinebar.com  
Entrees \$11-\$20.

**The Old White Swan**  
80 Goodramgate  
011-44-190-454-0911

**The Viceroy Of India**  
26 Monkgate  
011-44-190-462-2370  
www.jinnah-restaurants.com/  
Viceroy  
Entrees \$9-\$15.

**Where to shop**  
**Anti-Gravity**  
8 Colliergate  
011-44-190-463-1696  
www.anti-gravity.co.uk

**Banks Music**  
18 Lendal  
011-44-190-465-8836  
www.banksmusic.co.uk

**Monk Bar Chocolatiers of York**  
7 The Shambles  
011-44-190-467-2963  
www.monkbar.com  
**The French House**  
74 Micklegate  
011-44-190-462-4465  
www.thefrenchhouse.co.uk

**What to do**  
**Clifford’s Tower**  
Tower Street  
011-44-190-464-6940  
www.english-heritage.org.uk/  
cliffordstower  
Adults \$5.35, children \$2.75.  
**Ghost Hunt of York**  
The Shambles  
011-44-190-460-8700  
www.ghosthunt.co.uk  
Adults \$7.60, under 16 \$4.50.  
**Jorvik Viking Centre**  
Coppergate  
011-44-190-454-3400  
www.jorvik-viking-centre.co.uk  
Adults \$9.80-\$17.50, 5-15  
\$6.90-\$13.  
**National Centre for Early Music**  
Walmgate  
011-44-190-465-8338  
www.ncem.co.uk

# Traditional English menus, with an eye to modern day

► **LONDON**  
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bendum restaurant and author of several cookbooks, including the much-acclaimed “Roast Chicken and Other Stories” and the just released “The Vegetarian Option,” and he smirks. “The smell of my mother’s rabbit pie in the old Aga stove. She’d pick wild rabbit up for a sixpence and braise it for two hours until it was falling apart and serve it with red currant jelly,” he says. “I couldn’t wait.”

Nostalgia, it turns out, is a mixed bag. “There are a lot of boiled things and things at grammar school called dead man’s leg and suet jam roly poly. That’s suet, flour, and bicarbonate spread with jam wrapped in muslin and steamed,” Hopkinson says, grinning in a way that suggests he knows it’s hard to appreciate. “It had a cousin called apple hat with sliced apples, brown sugar, and flecks of butter where all the apples go gooey and soft,” he says, his eyes going to a happy, faraway place, accompanied by a big, happy “Hooo . . .”

Dead man’s leg and apple hat might not be common finds on menus anymore, yet they make decidedly strong connections between the stomach, the mind, and the past. “Chefs will doll it up a bit, but there’s a resurgence of British cooking that’s about simple food,” Hopkinson says. “Mom made boiled, sliced leeks in a white sauce with lamb and mint sauce. That’s one of my most favorite things. You’ve got the lamb gravy and specks of fat from the skin all mixed together at the bottom of the plate — it just calls for a spoon . . . before second helpings so you can do it all again.”

Farther west, in Southall, I find an Indian neighborhood so entrenched that the train stop signs are in English and Punjabi. Rumor has it, you can buy a pint at a local pub with rupees. Only a few miles from Hopkinson’s flat, I’m both effectively in another country and completely in London.



## If you go . . .

**Where to eat**  
**Mangal**  
10 Arcola St.  
011-44-20-7275-8981  
www.mangal1.com  
BYOB Turkish grill, \$15.  
**Rochelle Canteen**  
Arnold Circus  
011-44-20-7729-5677  
www.arnoldandhenderson.com  
Lunch \$13-\$25.  
**St. John Bread and Wine**  
94-96 Commercial St.  
011-44-20-7251-0848  
www.stjohnbreadandwine.com/home/

Lunch plates, \$3-\$20.  
**Tiffins Club**  
249 Amhurst Road  
011-44-20-7254-8459  
Takeout only, \$3-\$12.

**Where to stay**  
**The Hoxton**  
81 Great Eastern St.  
011-44-20-7550-1000  
www.hoxtonhotels.com  
From \$76.

**Hotel Boundary**  
2-4 Boundary St.  
011-44-20-7729-1051  
www.theboundary.co.uk  
From \$305.

I collar a pair of locals, ask where to eat, and moments later, I am sitting at Chandni Chowk in front of dishes of paneer samosa, triangular pastry filled with ricotta-like cheese and peas, and bhalla chaat, lentil crackers with chickpeas, potatoes, chutney, and raw onion. They seduce the taste buds then burn them, sometimes coming on smooth, at other times strong. Single bites can contain spicy, sweet, creamy, earthy, raw and scorched, crisp and bubbled into submission. Chandni Chowk isn’t perfect, but it’s very good and a great first stop in this community.

The idea of London as an unstirred melting pot may also be part of what makes the food so

good. “The difference between here and America is that people who migrate to the US become American before being an Arab. Their own cuisine isn’t something they’re living,” says Anissa Helou, chef, instructor, author, and London food trend spotter, at her loft in the trendy Shore-ditch section of Hackney. “I’ve been in London 36 years and when people ask where I’m from, I should say London but I say I’m Syrian and Lebanese. I didn’t have fish and chips until 10 years after I moved here. We’ve all become British, but most ethnic communities feel their identities retained here.”

Had the local food been better as these communities evolved,



PHOTOS BY JOE RAY/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Chef Simon Hopkinson serves a plate of meat and potato pie (his mother’s recipe) in his London kitchen. F. Cooke in the East End has made pie and mash for 145 years.

the melting pot may have been stirred more. “When I came here, there was no good food to be had. If I wanted to eat well, I ate abroad,” Helou says, recalling the fresh fruits and vegetables of her youth, then the last few decades of London’s culinary history. “It was pretty disgusting,” she says, smiling and blushing, “I ate disgusting food.”

Things got better. “It took a long time after I arrived before it got good. Bibendum was one of London’s first great restaurants, and from the ‘80s onward, there would be a few good restaurants popping up. Now I can reel off great places all over town,” she says. “The fun thing is that now there’s a very varied offer.”

We go to lunch at St. John Bread and Wine, one of two St. John restaurants under the eye of chef Fergus Henderson that have helped rekindle interest in traditional British food. We try a foie gras and duck liver paté with a light and buttery texture accentuated by the warmth and crunch of the toast it’s served on, then go whole hog and try a hearty caul-wrapped pork offal “meatball.”

A few days later, my London host Lexy takes me to Albion, her favorite new English food “caff.” We have a starter of pork crackling, the layer of crispy fat that forms on top of a roast. It’s a carnivore’s ultimate snack food, both snowy soft and shattering

with crispiness, served warm and accompanied by hot applesauce. (It should also come with a portable defibrillator and a little sign that says, “Warning, this may stop your heart.”) Afterward, I try a steak and kidney pie, the UK equivalent of chicken pot pie. It comes with a pot of gravy on the side. I realize that with gentle prices and high quality, there’s no reason something this wholesome should have fallen out of favor.

For a full dose of nostalgia, I find Bob Cooke slinging pie, mash, liquor, and eels behind a counter at Hackney’s F. Cooke. “Pie ‘n’ mash is East End,” says Cooke, who, at 55, is the last in a 145-year-long line of cockney Cookes who have owned this and other nearby pie shops. “We’re all named Fred or Bob.”

This shop on the road known as Broadway Market, near the beautiful London Fields, has tiled walls, marble tables, low wooden benches, and sawdust on the floor. Cooke’s clients are stocky locals, artsy types, and tourists who wait at the counter for a steaming tower of meat pies and mashed potatoes, often with a curious green parsley sauce known as “liquor.” Everything is ordered in units and eaten with a fork and spoon; knives haven’t been available here for years. One pie and one mash makes for a handsome lunch, but a pair of stout brothers walk in. They each order three, and finish them off in 10 minutes.

At the bench under a paper titled “It’s my favourite meal” by Eleanor Jackson, age 10, I tuck into a plateful and the pie spills out gravy. “It may be on the lower stratum of food,” says Cooke, “but there’s a nostalgia for it. The people who know it, they come back. We had a pair of old girls who came in for lunch every Saturday at noon for 50 years. You could set your watch by it.”

“Pie and mash,” concludes Cooke, “keep you young.”

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