‘Revealing York Minster’ – the newest and largest cathedral visitor attraction in the UK

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'Revealing York Minster’ tells the story of the last 2000 years at the historic site, from the Romans to its modern day custodians.

The contemporary chambers of the Undercroft are built in a space created in emergency excavations during the 1970s which uncovered a hidden history of the site, including the remains of a Roman barracks, an Anglo-Saxon cemetery and the foundations of the Norman Minster – the forerunner of the present cathedral. The new attraction weaves the story revealed by these discoveries into an immersive and interactive journey through two millennia of York’s history, featuring artefacts never before on public display. Visitors will be able to see, touch and hear 2000 years of history.

York Minster has stood at the heart of the city for centuries, but even before that, this site was instrumental in the growth of York, from a military barracks into a major conurbation. This means that the land upon which the cathedral now stands has been a centre – military, political, social and theological – for that whole time, influencing not only regional but national history,” comments the Dean of York, the Very Reverend Vivienne Faull. “For the first time, Revealing York Minster brings together the archaeological discoveries and the written archives – dating back to the 7th century. But this is not just a story about the past: it will provide visitors with an insight into the evolution of the city, and York Minster’s central role within that, right up to the present day with a glimpse at the people who work behind the scenes, making use of the very latest technology.”

Key aspects of York’s dramatic history covered in the new attraction include:

- The Romans (71 to approx. 410AD): from the first establishment of a barracks at the site, to Constantine the Great, who ruled the Roman Empire from York, and made Christianity the official religion of the Empire – effectively, York was the birthplace of Christianity in Europe. Newly-installed glass floors enable visitors to see some of the remaining Roman walls beneath their feet
- The Anglian and Anglo-Saxon periods (around 410 to 866AD), which followed the withdrawal of the Romans from Britain: it is one of the least understood periods in British history but new evidence unearthed below York Minster suggests that this continued to be a thriving period for the city, with its own Royal mint and new buildings replacing Roman ones
- The Vikings, who arrived in York in 866: in fact, it was a Viking lord called Ulf who gifted the land on which the current cathedral stands to the Chapter of York, using an elaborately carved elephant tusk as a deed of transfer. The 1000 year-old Horn of Ulf has been preserved in superb condition and forms a focal point of the underground displays
- The late Saxon and early Norman period, when the first stone Minster was built: with the foundations of the Norman Minster still visible within the Undercroft, a fascinating illuminated manuscript known as the York Gospels will be on public display for the first time. Although nearly 1000 years old – it is thought to have been initially brought to York around 1020AD – this priceless book is still used in ceremonies in York Minster today
- The present day, when York Minster is not only a working place of worship but regarded as cultural masterpiece inspired by faith; a 21st century Church and international icon. The modern perspective is viewed through the

eyes of the people who make the building live and breathe today, incorporating a video presentation which captures the essence of a ‘day in the life of the Minster’.

The final section of the Revealing York Minster experience is the Treasury - one of the original, medieval underground chambers, which houses many of the ceremonial items collected over the centuries for use in services. Again, in any other setting, these would be priceless antiques untouched behind plate glass cases, but not here: for example, those attending key services in the cathedral today may see these priceless chalices once again filled with wine as they continue to play an important role in its life.

“As visitors wander through the attraction, they will notice that this is not simply about history made in the past – York Minster continues to make history today, and indeed, this attraction will form a new significant part of the timeline for the Minster,” adds Mark Hosea, Project Director of York Minster Revealed. “This is a place visited by kings and queens for centuries, and the work being done within the cathedral today – whether looking after worshippers or conserving priceless stained glass – ensures that time never stands still here. The process of bringing together all this information about York Minster has itself created a new legacy for future generations recorded in minute detail, whilst the conservation work taking place all around the building, on the Great East Window and on the masonry, will ensure that our grandchildren and great-grandchildren can continue to enjoy this magnificent building.”

Admission to Revealing York Minster is included in the admission price, and sits alongside The Orb, a contemporary gallery of medieval masterpieces in stained glass taken from the Great East Window, East End exhibitions on the work of the glaziers and stonemasons and, of course, the wider visit to the Minster, including free tours with superbly knowledgeable guides, and the Chapter House. The new attraction is expected to add a further hour to a visit.

Admission prices for York Minster are £10 for adults and £9 for concessions and are valid for a full 12 months. Children get in free with a paying adult. Revealing York Minster opens to the public on Saturday 25 May 2013.

Revealing York Minster is the latest part to be completed of the £20 million York Minster Revealed project, a five-year project generously supported by a £10.5 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which incorporates the largest restoration and conservation project of its kind in the UK. The 108 restored panels from the Great East Window will be reinstalled by the summer of 2016.

Notes to editors

The York Minster Revealed project is a five-year project scheduled for completion in early summer 2016. It is the largest restoration and conservation project of its kind in the UK. The cost of the whole York Minster Revealed Project is £20 million, of which £10.5m has been generously supported with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The remainder of the fund has been raised by York Minster.

State-of-the-art multi-media galleries, new displays of historic collections and interactive interpretations will create new learning opportunities for all ages. Also improved access to the South Transept, Undercroft, Treasury and Crypt will totally transform the experience of visiting York Minster. York Minster website

Further information

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