

# Yorkshire

A Very Peculiar

# History





# Where the 'eck is Yorkshire?



Is it possible there are people in the world – or even in Britain – who do not know where Yorkshire is? Apparently there are, and if you happen to be one of them, you need to read the next few pages.

There was a time, not so very long ago, when British schools displayed huge roll-down maps of the British Isles on classroom walls, and school atlases had pages, usually at the front, devoted to British geography. This was how children learned about the nation's rivers, mountains, towns, transport networks and counties. Show them a map with the outlines of the counties,



*Map of Great Britain showing  
the location of Yorkshire, the  
largest county in England.*

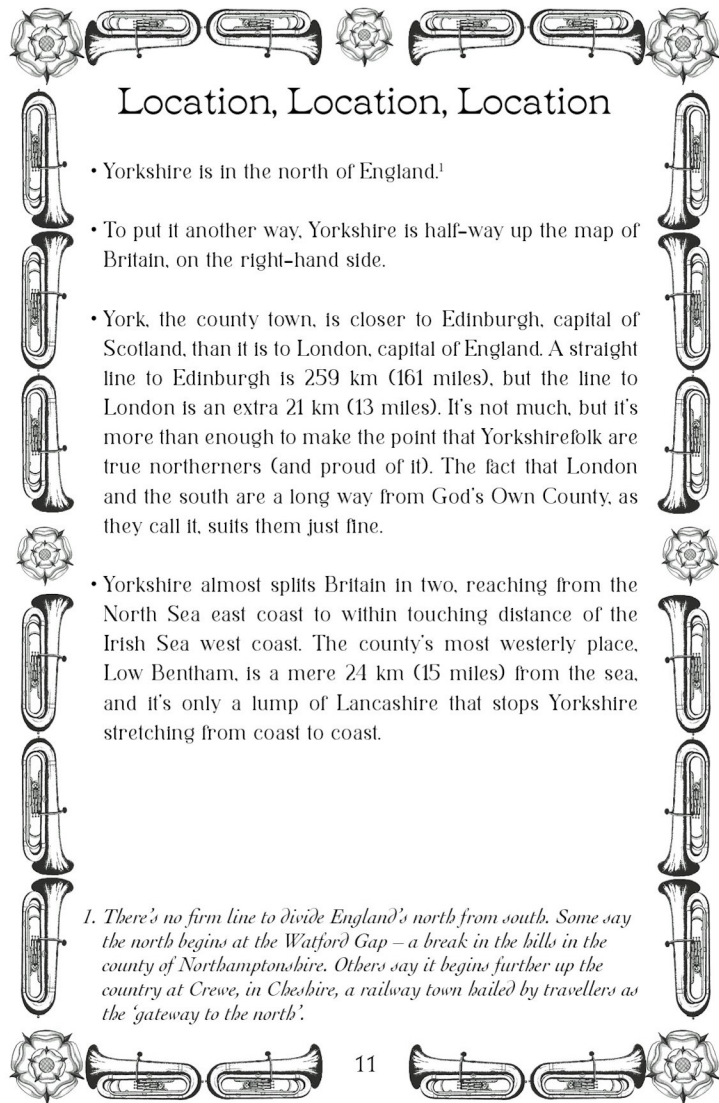
and they'd be able to name a good number of them, especially those close to where they lived.

It's different today, and children can sail through their school years without learning that the Severn is Britain's longest river (354 km / 220 miles), that Ben Nevis is the highest mountain (1,344 m / 4,409 ft), or that there are 86 historic or traditional counties.<sup>1</sup> Give today's youngsters an outline map of British counties to name, and many would be left blank, or misplaced (counties, that is, not children).

Could you do any better? Could you pick out, say, Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire, Brecknockshire from Radnorshire, or Morayshire from Banffshire? Could you be certain of pointing to Yorkshire and – heaven forbid – not its arch-rival Lancashire?

So, for the benefit of the geographically-challenged, here are a few basic facts to help you locate the fine county of Yorkshire on your mental map of the British Isles.

*1. 59 in England, 54 in Scotland, 15 in Wales.*



## Location, Location, Location

- Yorkshire is in the north of England.<sup>1</sup>
- To put it another way, Yorkshire is half-way up the map of Britain, on the right-hand side.
- York, the county town, is closer to Edinburgh, capital of Scotland, than it is to London, capital of England. A straight line to Edinburgh is 259 km (161 miles), but the line to London is an extra 21 km (13 miles). It's not much, but it's more than enough to make the point that Yorkshirefolk are true northerners (and proud of it). The fact that London and the south are a long way from God's Own County, as they call it, suits them just fine.
- Yorkshire almost splits Britain in two, reaching from the North Sea east coast to within touching distance of the Irish Sea west coast. The county's most westerly place, Low Bentham, is a mere 24 km (15 miles) from the sea, and it's only a lump of Lancashire that stops Yorkshire stretching from coast to coast.

*1. There's no firm line to divide England's north from south. Some say the north begins at the Watford Gap – a break in the hills in the county of Northamptonshire. Others say it begins further up the country at Crewe, in Cheshire, a railway town hailed by travellers as the 'gateway to the north'.*

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Hopefully, this has fixed Yorkshire 'up north' in your mind, and you should have the idea that it's big. In fact, it's Britain's biggest county. From north to south Yorkshire is about 152 km (95 miles), and west to east 183 km (114 miles).

Yorkshire is so big that when the Vikings arrived in the AD 800s, they carved it up into three pieces which eventually became known as the Ridings of Yorkshire. The North, West and East Ridings served the county well for more than one thousand years. Civil wars and world wars came

### Ridings of Yorkshire

Why Ridings? Because the Viking word for the three pieces was 'thrithjungr', which became the Old English word 'thridding'. Try saying it – what does it sound like? Thridding became the modern English word 'riding'. It simply means 'thirds'.



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and went, and the Yorkshire Ridings survived the lot until, on 1st April 1974, the government scrapped centuries of heritage across England and Wales.

It might have been April Fool's Day, but no-one was laughing. When the Local Government Act of 1972 came into force in 1974, Yorkshirefolk woke up to a new-look county. Their ancient Ridings had gone, and were replaced by the new counties of North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire. But it was more than a change of a few old names. Civil servants had redrawn the county boundaries, and in a stroke of their pens did more to change the shape of Yorkshire than at any time since the Vikings.

What's it like today? Well, for most Yorkshirefolk, Yorkshire means the historic county of Yorkshire – the county as it was before the government tinkered around with it in 1974. It's that definition that this book will try and stick to, and as you turn the pages you'll be given an insight into the long, and sometimes peculiar, history of Yorkshire.



# Prehistoric Yorkshire



**Y**orkshire's story begins a very long time ago. So long ago, you've got to go back to the end of the last Ice Age, which was about 10,000 years before the present day.

It's hard to say where Yorkshire's first people came from. There's a good chance they came from far away, perhaps from the mainland of Europe. If they did, they wouldn't have needed boats to make the long journey - they could have walked all the way. That was only possible because at the end of the last Ice Age the eastern side of Britain was joined to Europe by a land bridge - a big chunk of low-lying land

**T**HE NEW PLOUGH  
MADE SHORT  
WORK OF THE  
VILLAGE FIELD.

'Urry up, or  
we'll 'ave you for  
us dinner!

