

# Spires, bombers andimps

This East Midlands city has long boasted a beautiful cathedral, a famous stone sculpture and a commanding Norman castle, but the recently opened International Bomber Command Centre marks an important new historic attraction for visitors. **YORK MEMBERY** takes a stroll about town

The view from the top of Lincoln Cathedral, which towers over the city and surrounding countryside, is surely as stunning today as in centuries past. On a clear day you can see three counties: Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.

Tucked away in the easternmost part of the East Midlands, Lincoln – which takes its name from *Lindum Colonia*, a Latinised version (it was originally colonised by the Romans) of the Celtic name *Lindon* – is a city steeped in history. Famous for its cathedral and castle, it now has a third must-see historic attraction, the International Bomber Command Centre, which opened in January 2018.

A “tale of two cities”, as my free walking tour guide Brant observed, Lincoln is divided between an “upper” and “lower” city. The two are connected by a picturesque cobbled street that today is lined with boutiques and art galleries – the top part of which is named, appropriately enough, Steep Hill.

First off, head to Lincoln Cathedral, parts of which date back to Norman times. In the early 14th century a 160-metre (525ft) spire was added to the main tower, making it the world’s tallest building, but it was blown down in a storm in 1547. Be sure to book a place on a roof tour before visiting the place of worship, which appears in the film *The Da Vinci Code* as a double for Westminster Abbey, and is also home to the Lincoln Imp, a grotesque which has become the city’s symbol. Walking along the wooden walkway above the spectacular vaulted roof and then looking out from the bell-ringers’ terrace was an unforgettable experience.

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A stone’s throw from the cathedral is Lincoln Castle, which also dates back to Norman times. Its commanding position helped ensure Norman control of this rebellious part of their new domain, and a walk around the stone walls gives one a sense of how formidable a structure it was in its heyday. The castle – home to one of the four surviving copies of the original Magna Carta – was centre-stage during the two battles of Lincoln in 1141 and 1217, and was besieged during the Civil War.

It also houses a former Victorian prison where men, women and children as young as eight were held for crimes ranging from stealing a bible to highway robbery and murder. Just make sure you vacate the premises before the castle shuts for the night.

### Military memorial

It’s worth making time for a refreshing cuppa at Bells Tea Shop, with its gabled ceiling, and choosing a “down the decades” sweet bag (sugared almonds were popular in the 1930s and aniseed balls in the 1940s) at Goodies Sweets. Refuelled, visit the impressive International Bomber Command Centre, just outside the city.

Dominated by the Memorial Spire – based on the dimensions of the wingspan of a Lancaster bomber – it is encircled by the “Walls of Names” paying tribute to the near 58,000 Bomber Command veterans who lost their lives during the Second World War. The youngest was 16 and the oldest was 60. The centre, which has a fascinating exhibition centre, also emphasises the international dimension of Bomber Command: a third of its aircrew were Canadian, and there were also volunteers from Poland, the Czech Republic and beyond.

My one regret? That I left it so long to visit this most historic of cities. **EM**

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For more information, go to [visitlincoln.com](http://visitlincoln.com); [lincolnfreewalkingtour.co.uk](http://lincolnfreewalkingtour.co.uk); [internationalbcc.co.uk](http://internationalbcc.co.uk)

The West Front of Lincoln Cathedral, one of the country’s finest Gothic buildings, as seen from the walls of Lincoln Castle



Lincoln Castle, pictured at sunset on New Year’s Eve in 2018, is home to an original Magna Carta of 1215



ABOVE: The Lincoln Imp is found inside Lincoln Cathedral and has become a symbol of the city  
 XXXX RIGHT: The Memorial Spire at the International Bomber Command Centre overlooking Lincoln

