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As the last leaf falls on York's 50+ Festival, the joy keeps growing

As we close this year's 50+ festival, the memories stay rooted

On Wednesday 1 October, the International Day of Older People, this year's Festival came to a close after an action-packed ten days celebrating and connecting older citizens across York.

Featuring over 100 activities, ranging from history talks, language taster sessions and walking netball to over-50s ballet, home and driving safety and *Deal or No Deal*, the Festival offered something for everyone, whether you fancied cake and connection, fish and chips, origami or a *Strictly*-inspired dance.

The finale followed Saturday's special celebration, where crowds of residents and visitors gathered to enjoy the joyful 50+ Grand Parade and a host of musical delights in the heart of our city.

Addressing the Grand Parade, **The Sheriff of York, Paul Doughty** expressed: *"Today, we come together to celebrate the contribution older people make to our city through family life, community, work, volunteering, creativity and care. It is quite simply a show of energy, talent and resilience and we're a stronger city when all ages are valued and included. I want to thank YOPA and Age UK York for your vision and leadership and the tireless efforts of volunteers. The role of older people has never been more important - older people enrich York."*

Professor Dianne Willcocks, vice chair of York Older People's Assembly added: *"The 50+ Festival is a real celebration of the resilience, sense of fun and love of life that older people demonstrate and their real desire to contribute to community and wellbeing. Old friends were reunited, sharing happy surprises in their different hats, while new friendships were formed, especially with some of the younger members of our parade. Visitors may have discovered a fresh perspective of our city: not only one of history and*

heritage, but also a community of elders looking forward, embracing connection and celebrating life in later years.”

Rachael Maskell, MP for York Central, speaking at the closing event, said: *“The 50+ Festival is an incredible opportunity for people to build social connections. As Chair of the APPG for Ageing and Older People, I’ve seen how, as people get older, they can sometimes become more isolated. Events like this provide a chance to meet others and try new activities, like I did with walking rugby. It’s all about enrichment, friendship and caring.”*

Simon Holmes, CE Age UK York reflected: *“An older population in York is something to celebrate. There are challenges but there’s also lots of fun. Given the success of the festival, we held a bonus event at the very start - a Slipper Social which generated a queue before we even opened. It’s all built on collaboration and we owe so much to our partners. The togetherness, the singing and the dancing created such a wonderful atmosphere - a true reflection of the best things about our city.”*

Jenny Collieson Vice-Chair of Age UK York highlighted: *“The Festival Steering Group would like to extend a huge thank-you to everybody who contributed to our 20th anniversary celebration - the local businesses and organisations sponsoring our activities and showcasing what they can offer and all the many individuals and community groups providing events and support in so many ways to help make this year’s programme such a full and diverse one.”*

Particular thanks go to key sponsors Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Harrowells and SPARK, the musicians, performers and film makers, The Rotary, friends from the voluntary sector and commercial backgrounds, York St John University Students Union, the Cool Kids Club on the Knavesmire, key hosts York Museums Trust, York Theatre Royal, St Sampsons Centre, Explore and Patch, the material producers and the organising committee.

York’s only festival dedicated to the over 50s has truly been enriched by the goodwill of the people of York, young and old alike, shining a brighter light on older members of our community and their place in our wider society.

Hear from a few people involved in the amazing celebrations:

- **Jim Cannon, outgoing YOPA Chair** - Our aim of giving a voice to older people has been seriously done. The 50+ Festival has been recognised far and wide.
- **Dick Powell, Rotary Club York and Ainsty** - The 50+ festival is all about keeping active and having fun.
- **Vanessa Simmons** - Pianist, composer and piano teacher - I'm here to promote the resources available to people and provide light entertainment. The festival is a good thing to celebrate the idea of growing older – we should cherish this.
- **Maureen O'Hare**, YOPA committee member - Jenny and Dianne have done an amazing job. It's terrific that we have an organisation solely for older people.
- **Nicola Betts, Community Musician** - It's wonderful to be included in the 50+ Festival. It's a great festival which spreads the word about how important singing is for your emotional, social and physical wellbeing.
- **Maureen Wilson**, YOPA committee member - I support the 50+ festival because it shows there's a lot for the over 50s to do in York. The festival brings it all together.
- **Jenny and Lynn, u3a Yorkshire and Humber** - We're very proud to be here today to support u3a, raising awareness for everyone who's older.
- **Efosa**, Students' Union President for Postgraduate Experience York St John University. I've always loved spending time with older people since I grew up with my grandmum, so it's wonderful to come together and celebrate this festival.
- **Malcolm and Natasha, u3a** - The 50+ festival is a worthwhile initiative that shines a light on older people in York. We're all volunteers, working to raise awareness of the isolation that can sometimes come after retirement.
- **Dot and Audrey and Malcolm** - It's a fabulous event. Very well organised and enjoyable with a good crowd and good music.
- **Laucinda Roberts, Jorvik Silver Swans** – So pleased to be involved. Silver Swans is as much about social wellbeing as it is about the cognitive benefits that come from continued learning.
- **Tarin Marie Puckering, Alzheimer's Society** - We had a successful stall (Sea of Forget Me Nots) in the library to raise awareness of dementia with around 88 visitors.
- **Barbara Fairs, MySightYork** - I've been involved in the festival for a number of years. We held a sighted guiding taster and lip reading taster. We offer people a large print version of the 50+ festival brochure or transcription.
- **Sarah Edwards, St Sampsons Centre** - We've seen people coming into the centre looking for information and saying – we've seen you in the brochure.

Find out more

- Find out more www.yorkassembly.org.uk/50-festival-2025/
- Email us yorkfiftyplus@gmail.com
- See social posts



Ends

About YOPA

York Older People's Assembly (YOPA) is an independent local charity which has advocated for, celebrated and supported older people across York and North Yorkshire since 2001. We are an organisation of older people, for older people and we work to achieve full citizenship for diverse older people across and within the wider community.

We aim to:

- Represent the views of older people in York to decision makers locally and nationally.
- Inform older people about services that are available.
- Identify where needs are not being met.
- Work with the local authority and others to make York an age-friendly city

As part of the 50+ Festival, this is the third year in which YOPA has successfully led a city-wide collaborative for International Day of Older People.

About Age UK York

Age UK York is an independent local charity which has been working in the local community to help older people for over 50 years. We have 100 dedicated staff and over 400 volunteers helping us to deliver services and activities for older people in York. Age UK York provides free, confidential and impartial information and advice on a range of issues relating to older people and those who care for and support them.

We offer a wide range of services to older people in York to enable them to live better lives. This includes information and advice, benefits and money advice, befriending services, carer respite service, Day Clubs and Home From Hospital support. All our work is aimed at improving the lives of older people in York. Age UK York encourages older people to speak out about local and national issues. We are here to make more of life in York.

About the International Day of Older People

Each year on October 1, people across the world mark United Nations International Day of Older People to raise awareness of opportunities and challenges faced by ageing populations, and to mobilise the wider community to address challenges faced by older people. The theme for 2025, is the role older people play in creating resilient, sustainable societies.



The Grand Parade
The Sheriff of York, Paul Doughty
Professor Dianne Willcocks, vice chair of York Older People's Assembly
Ben Fry, York Town Crier



Simon Holmes, CE Age UK York
Rachael Maskell, MP for York Central
Professor Dianne Willcocks, vice chair of York Older People's Assembly



The York Silver Swans after delighting audiences with their performance of an adage and a Mazurka at the closing celebration.

Joyful paraders

