

ROMAN YORK

Discover that the imprint of Imperial Rome is still present in the City under the modern streets.

The origin of the modern name of York is from Roman Eboracum to Dark Age Caer Ebrauc, Anglo-Saxon Eorfwic, Viking Jorvik and modern York.

MULTANGULAR TOWER

Romans came 71AD under Emperor Vespasian. Petilius Cerialis advanced from Lincoln with IX Legion "Hispania" previously on Danube and Pannonia (now Austria/Hungary). Legion about 5400 men. Eboracum - Place of Yew Trees or Eburos. 50 acre Legionary Fortress built in turf, rebuilt in stone C.100AD. Multangular Tower built to take a catapult in early 4thC (in reign of Constantius Chlorus?) to combat Anglo-Saxon menace. York was seat of 'Dux Britanniarum' and capital of Province of Britannia Inferior. Multangular Tower built of 'saxa quadrata' (squared stones) and tile layer, which was to bond inner and outer faces of wall.

Go inside Multangular tower. Note how ground level has built up within city due to accumulation of rubbish. Roman coffins from outside city - of millstone grit for durability. Note one has been used as horse trough. Note ledge on Multangular tower at top and spine wall to take weight of catapult.

ANGLIAN TOWER - Layers of History

Area excavated 1967-72 into bank of city walls and layers of defences revealed. Earth banks represented by cobbling.

Eboracum (71-410AD)

'Roman Bank' is turf rampart of 1stC which had timber battlements. Legions left York in 407 to take part in dynastic struggles of Roman Empire. 410 Rescript of Honorius: "henceforth British cities had to look to their own defence". The formal end of Roman Britain.

Caer Ebrauc (410-C600)

The British name for York in the days when York part of the Celtic kingdom of Elmet.

Eorfwic (C600-867)

English conquered York C600, and may have patched up Roman Walls with crude Anglian Tower. Under Edwin York became capital of Kingdom of Northumbria (C620).

Jorvik (867-954)

Vikings conquered York under Ivor the Boneless in 867, and York under Viking rule until the death of Erik Bloodaxe in 954. Vikings did not build in stone, and Roman walls crumbled and disappeared under earth banks with timber walls, hence the 'Dark Ages Bank'.

York (954-present)

The Normans raised the height of the bank again in about 1069 after York burnt down and when the present walls were built in 13thC, the Roman walls had disappeared under earth banks, so the present walls built higher than and to one side of the Roman walls.

BOOTHAM BAR on site of Porta Principalis Dextra. (Right Hand Main Gate). The archway incorporates re-used Roman stones and coffins. Possibly used by Hadrian as he may have come to York in 122, to build Hadrian's Wall. Born Spain AD76, Emperor 117-138.

The Roman walls excavated and visible just East of Monk Bar date to the time of:-

SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS born in Leptis Magna in Tripolitania N. Africa 146AD. Emperor 193-211; came to York 208 - despite arthritis! Brought sons Caracalla and Geta to get them away from luxury and decadence of Rome. He died here and was cremated and ashes returned to Rome. Empire bequeathed to sons Caracalla and Geta, but Caracalla killed brother to become sole ruler.

TREASURER'S HOUSE

Feb 1953 Henry Martindale an 18 year old apprentice heating engineer claims he heard a weird sound, faint at first, but then louder 'like a wireless coming through the wall; then it became apparent it was a horn being blown. Then he saw Roman legionaries in twos led by a horseman in cellar, marching through, all cut off at knees! He was fixing central heating pipes, fell off his ladder onto his backside. He hid in a corner on seeing ghosts, and was off work for 2 weeks with shock (this I have heard all first hand from Harry). He cannot have been lying as he later became a policeman. Believe it if you wish! Story came to prominence 1971 due to his description of insignia and uniforms of legionaries, and the Roman road found 18" beneath cellar.

One theory is that the ghosts are of the lost Ninth Legion (IX Hispania) which disappeared C.120AD and was replaced by the Sixth (VI Pia Fidelis Victrix) which remained until 407AD. In fact, the Ninth Legion was transferred to the Rhineland and then to Mesopotamia, and there it disappeared.

CHAPTER HOUSE LANE - Via Decumana of the Roman Fort. Was once 70 Roman feet wide like all Roman roads in York. The road surface has been found 15 feet below the street. The Road has been narrowed by the Eastward expansion of the Minster - in fact Goodramgate grew up from Viking times to avoid the Minster and Chapter House Street. Chapter House Street lined up with the site of the Porta Decumana.

MINSTER - Note East End leans out 4 feet, due to Minster breaking its back across Roman Headquarters building beneath. This was one of causes of collapse of Central Tower in 1407 and which led to underpinning of Tower 1967-72. Note : Markers in grass on lawn between Choir and South Transept showing site of Walls of Roman H.Q. Building (Pinnicipia).

ROMAN COLUMN - Re-erected from H.Q. Building of Roman Fort - discovered under Minster in excavations of 1967-72.

STATUE OF CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

Constantine was proclaimed Emperor in York in 306AD on the death of his father Constantius Chlorus (Emperor of the Western Roman Empire 293-306). Constantine defeated his main rival in the West, the pagan Maxentius, at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge 312. On the night before the battle Constantine had a vision of a cross and was told 'In this sign you shall conquer' and attributed his victory to Christ. He published edict of Milan 313 which granted toleration to Christianity. Constantine built first St. Peters in Rome and presumably a church in York, as there was a Bishop of York at Council of Arles in 314. This bishop of York was so poor that he claimed his travelling expenses to the council. Constantine became ruler of the whole Roman World after defeating Licinius, his rival in the East at the Battle of Chrysopolis in 324. He founded a new capital for the Empire in 329 - Constantinople. He was only baptised as he lay dying in Nicomedia (in Asia Minor) in 337, and was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. Constantine was the first Christian Roman Emperor.

The statue of Constantine was unveiled in 1998 and was designed by Philip Jackson. It represents Constantine after The Battle of the Milvian Bridge contemplating a broken sword, which also forms the shape of a cross: the symbolism is that the battle is over, the sword broken, and Christianity has triumphed.

CROSSROADS OF STONEGATE - PETERGATE is the crossroads of Roman York. Petergate is the Via Principalis; Stonegate Via Praetoria and Minster Gates led to Principia/H.Q. Building.

Go along Petergate - note bend in road. Mediaeval road is probably avoiding collapsed ruins of Roman Bath house. Petergate once 70 feet wide - shrunk due to collapse of Roman Buildings and encroachment by houses.

KING'S SQUARE - on site of Porta Principalis Sinistra (Left Hand Main Gate) and probably later seat of Viking Kings (including Eric Bloodaxe) using derelict Roman gateway.

KING'S SQUARE - ERIK BLOODAXE

Eric Bloodaxe, the Last Viking, King of York, was son of Harold Fair Hair, King of Norway. Killed his 5 brothers with battle-axe and became King, hence his name. Driven out of Norway as was unpopular "Cruel and pitiless in battle, delighting in war; a bad-minded, gruff and silent man" according to his contemporaries. He was at one time King of the Viking Kingdom of Dublin. King of York, as Vassal of King Athelstan, in 947, but driven out 948. Returned in 952, and killed in ambush in 954 on Stainmore, where his burial mound is still seen. King's Square, formerly Coney Garth, is probably the site of the residence of the Viking Kings of York. His mortal enemy Egil was a poet who composed a rude poem about Erik. Egil got shipwrecked and taken before Erik, who got ready to kill him. But the sun had set so Egil got a night's respite, and composed a flattering poem about Erik thus earning his release. (You could not kill your enemy after sunset in Viking society, as the soul could not find its way to Valhalla in the dark!).

ROMAN BATH PUB

Rebuilt in 1930-1, and in creating a cellar part of a Roman Bath House was found. A Roman Bath was similar to a sauna, or Turkish bath, with a series of rooms, heated by an underfloor heating system or hypocaust, fired by a charcoal furnace. One undressed and went through a series of rooms getting progressively hotter; then the dirt was scraped off by a slave with a strygil, in the 'Caldarium' or very hot room, before taking a cold plunge in the 'Frigidarium' or cold room. The Roman Bath has remains of the caldarium with its apse, and the Frigidarium cold plunge, with its thick tile base. The bath house was too small for the whole legion and was perhaps for the officers. The remains date to the 4thC, and the masonry is very similar to that of the Multangular Tower, and re-uses tiles of the 6th and 9th Legions.

ST. HELEN'S SQUARE (Church to Constantine's mother)

Constantine's mother, Helen (or Helena) (C.250-330AD). Born at Drepanum, in Bithynia (now Asia Minor) - later renamed Helenopolis, and she was possibly originally an Innkeeper's daughter. She is said to have been a courtesan and the Venerable Bede describes her as the 'concubine' of the Roman General Constantius Chlorus.

She bore him Constantine at Naissus (modern Nis in Yugoslavia) on the Danube. When Constantine Chlorus became Emperor in 293, he divorced her. But Constantine greatly honoured his mother and upon becoming Emperor made her Dowager Empress. She converted to Christianity in 312AD, aged over 60, but was so devout that contemporaries thought she had been so since childhood. She dressed quietly, gave generously to Churches, to the poor and prisoners, and made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Here she is said to have discovered the true cross, on the hill of Calvary, where a great Church was rising at her son Constantine's orders. She died in the Holy Land, and she was buried in Rome. Helen is a Saint in both Eastern and Western Churches, but her son Constantine is a Saint only in the Eastern Church!

The site of Porta Praetoria leading to bridge across Ouse is in the square. The Mansion House preserves the alignment of the Roman Road to the bridge and as Common Hall Lane under the Guildhall. The stone was brought to build the Minster this way from the river - hence STONE-GATE.