

INACCESSIBLE YORK – TURRETS & BATTLEMENTS

A unique opportunity to descend to Roman remains, explore dusty mediaeval towers with bloody stories and survey York from mediaeval turrets and barbican.

EAST ANGLE TURRET

The Roman Walls here were excavated c. 1900 and the bank removed. They are thought to date to c. 200 AD and the time of Septimius Severus. They are built of 'Saxa Quadrata' or squared stone like the Multangular Tower. The first square tower is an interval tower. The next one is the East Angle Turret, which is diagonally across the Roman fort from the Multangular Tower. The dark stone wall behind and retaining walls are modern. The East Angle Turret and stone wall replaced an earthen bank, which survives in the bottom of the East Angle Turret, beneath what was a floor-it is the oldest thing visible in York, dating back to 71 AD! In the angle between turret outer wall and retaining wall is a carved stone with the inscription 'COH X'- the tenth cohort which built and guarded this part of the fort (as in Via Decumana-street of the Tenth). A cohort was 6 Centuries i.e. 480x 80 men (a century was 80 men) and there were 10 cohorts in a legion.

There is a good view of HARLOT HILL TOWER here.

It is the Tower with 'Pepper-Pot' Turrets was rebuilt in the 19thC. There may once have been a postern here leading out to 'Love Lane' (Now Cloisters Walk). There is much debate about what the arches under the walls were used for but these names may give a clue!

Behind the hall on the walls (not visible from down here) are a pair of garderobe seats, which acted as a public toilet in the middle ages. The steps up to them from the Merchant Taylors Hall still survive. These must have been a very 'public' convenience, in full view of the city; and as you sat on them, you must have hoped to God that nobody fired a bow & arrow up them! These are the oldest surviving public toilets in York.

RED TOWER

This is so-called as it is the only tower built of brick. It was rebuilt in 1490 after a rebellion against Henry VII. Originally much higher, as its base now buried five feet due to draining of Foss Islands swamp in 1850's. The projection was a garderobe emptying into swamp, which seems to have all but encircled the Tower. The tiled roof dates to the 19thC when the tower was patched up as a Brimstone Manufactory.

In 1490 there was a dispute between the Tilers building the Tower and the Masons, who resented them getting the work. The Masons smashed the tools, kilns and work of the Tilers and threatened to mutilate them. In 1491 they carried out their threat: the master-tiler John Patrick was murdered by emasculation, and Masons, including William Hindley - Minster Master Mason, were prosecuted but never convicted – they hid in the sanctuary of the Minster precinct.

WALMGATE BAR

The lower part of the Bar and its arch date from 12thC. The upper part and Barbican are early 14thC but heavily restored after rebellion of 1489, Civil War Siege of 1644 and in 1840. The Barbican has a pronounced sag in the left-hand (north) wall due to interception of mine (underground passage) in the Civil War Siege in June 1644. The Bar still has its portcullis and 15thC gates. The wooden extension to give the Bar-Keeper better accommodation was added c.1584. The railings around the roof were said to have been added as they kept pigs on the roof! The Bar was lived in until 1960, the last one to be inhabited. It was then a bookshop- the origin of the Barbican bookshop, then a Scout room and latterly a Rock Band practice room! Currently

Calvary Chapel occupy the Bar and operate a coffee shop. You can go out onto the Barbican - watch your head! Barbican is a French word of uncertain origin, but is probably not related to the word Bar, which is from French 'Barre', a barrier or wooden toll bar.

FISHERGATE POSTERN

The most complete Postern on the walls. Postern means 'back gate' and is related to 'posterior'. It dates to the 14thC and was rebuilt in 1505 when the defences were strengthened and the Postern rebuilt. Note the garderobe showing River Foss surrounded Tower.

The interior is now used as an Art Gallery and Studio. The floor levels have been altered in the past- they are now back at their mediaeval levels. There is also evidence of a staircase as well as the spiral stairs. The garderobe is very well preserved. The top floor was originally a flat-topped battlement with a watch tower; it was roofed over in the early 17th C and used as a Dovecot.