

## CITY WALLS

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The city walls in York date back to Roman times, being originally built of earth and wood in 71AD. They were rebuilt in stone in the 3rd & 4th centuries AD. The Anglo-Saxons patched up the roman defences, while the Vikings and Normans replaced them with earthen ramparts. They were rebuilt in stone in the 13th century for defence against the Scots.

The walls were prepared for siege in 1745 when Bonnie Prince Charlie led the Jacobite Rebellion, but never tested. The last time the walls were defended was 1757, when rioters, protesting at taxation to support the militia, threatened the city. In the late 18thC the walls became ruinous. In 1800 the city resolved to pull down the walls by Act of Parliament, but the government or George III himself is reported to have refused assent. So the city council decided to obtain their ends by attrition. Skeldergate Postern was demolished in 1807, but

Archbishop Markham sued the council for loss of tolls he was entitled to exact at Lammastide, and further demolition was more cautious. William Etty, among many others, campaigned against demolition and for their restoration as an amenity. Sir Walter Scott offered to walk from Edinburgh to London in 1826 if it would save Micklegate Bar Barbican.

The walls, and castle, are largely owned by York City Council, and are listed as ancient monuments. York City Council maintains the walls, under the guidance of English Heritage, though the work is usually performed by outside contractors.

The Bars and Posterns were manned continuously by resident Bar keepers, and up until the late 18thC the Bars and Posterns were closed at dusk and opened at dawn. The gates were also closed twice a day on Sunday to keep people in to prevent them visiting country ale-houses instead of attending church as they should.

From 1501 door knockers were added to the Bars for "Scots and other vagabonds and rascals" to knock at before entering the city. It is said that the statute allowing citizens to shoot a Scotsman on sight, provided he uses a crossbow, has never been repealed!



## Multangular Tower

Added c.300 as a projecting nine-sided bastion, probably to take a catapult to fire at Anglo-Saxon invaders coming up the Ouse.

## Bootham Bar



Heads were impaled spikes after hanging, drawing and quartering, which was the punishment for traitors and rebels. It was carried out at York Castle or on the Knavesmire and the four quarters set on the four Bars of York, and the head on Micklegate Bar, but sometimes on the other Bars or Foss or Ouse Bridge if Micklegate Bar was full! You may like the story of Harry 'Hotspur', killed at the Battle of Shrewsbury 1403 in rebellion against Henry IV. He was buried at Whitchurch, but people said "Hotspur

lived" so he was dug up and his corpse displayed in Shrewsbury Market, then ground with salt between two millstones, then hung, drawn and quartered. His quarters were sent to London, Chester, Newcastle and Bristol and his head to York.

## Monk Bar

The Portcullis still survives and is complete with its winding mechanism. It used to be lowered on Sunday afternoons prior to World War I. The last time it was dropped was in 1953 to celebrate the Queen's Coronation. The ropes broke, and the Portcullis fell and embedded itself in the road! It took several days to raise it again. Just in front of the portcullis, in the high recess above the road, were machicolations or murder holes, through which missiles and boiling liquids could be poured.

## On the walls near Merchant Taylors Hall

Behind the hall on the walls is 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. It was originally much higher, as its base is now buried five feet due to draining of the 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 19th century, 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 the 12th century. The upper part and Barbican are early 14th century but were heavily restored after the rebellion of 1489, the 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 15th century 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.

## St. George's Churchyard – Dick Turpin (Near the Wall at Fishergate Bar)

Dick Turpin was born in 1705 in Hempstead near Saffron Walden, Essex. He went to school, trained as a butcher and sold meat stolen by night. In 1734-5 he joined Gregory Gang, a vicious gang of horse-breakers who tortured householders into revealing whereabouts of valuables. Most of them were caught and hung in 1735. In 1737, Turpin set up with Tom King as highwaymen in Epping Forest. In an ambush by the authorities at Whitechapel, Turpin accidentally shot Tom King and escaped. He eventually moved north and changed his name



to John Palmer. He settled in Ferry House Inn, Brough, and became a horse 'dealer' (stealer). On 2 October 1738, he shot a cock in Main Street of Brough, and then threatened to murder somebody who complained. He was committed to trial at Beverley, then York for breach of peace. Early in 1739 he wrote to his brother. The letter was seen in Hempstead, where his old schoolmaster recognised his handwriting and travelled to York to identify 'John Palmer' as Dick Turpin. On March 22, he was tried for horse-stealing and condemned to death. Executed on Knavesmire on 7 April 1739, he behaved with great assurance on gallows. He was buried in St George's Churchyard in quicklime as 'body snatchers' tried to steal it. Black Bess first appears in 1834 novel 'Redwood'. The ride from London to York was actually done by 'Swift Nicks' John Nevison in 1676 to provide an alibi.

## York Castle

1068 - First castle of earth and wood built by William I.

1069 - Destroyed in Rebellion and rebuilt again in wood.

1190 - Several hundred Jews perished by mass suicide and massacre at hands of an anti-Jewish mob. Tower rebuilt in wood.

1245-60 - Castle rebuilt in stone and Clifford's Tower built in stone by Henry III.

1322 - Roger de Clifford hung alive in chains from the tower for rebellion against Edward II, hence its name.

1360 - Clifford's Tower reported as cracked from top to bottom – hence the lean.

1684 - St. George's Day Salute went wrong and destroyed most of interior of Clifford's Tower.

York Castle was a Debtors Prison and public hangings were held in St George's Field outside prison c.1800-1868. Thereafter hangings were in private, and York Castle was last used as a prison in 1900. It was a military prison until 1929. The central circular green of the Castle is the 'Eye of Yorkshire', and was reckoned to be the centre of the Three Ridings.

## Micklegate Bar

This was the main royal entry from the south, and used by every King of England from William the Conqueror to Henry VIII, except Richard the Lionheart and Edward V. The principal place for display of traitor's heads notably:

1403 - Sir Henry Perry (Harry Hotspur)

1460 - Duke of York after Battle of Wakefield (crowned with paper crown). Shakespeare puts these words in Queen Margaret's mouth: "off with his head and set it on York's gates; so York may overlook the Town of York". Taken down by Edward IV in 1461 after battle of Towton and replaced by four Lancastrian heads.

1746 - Last heads put up after Jacobite rebellion, and stolen by a Jacobite tailor in 1754. (William Connolly and James Mayne - an Irish Protestant and Scots Catholic)

c.1800 - Bar ceased to be locked at night as Bar Keeper's children lost key while playing!

This fact sheet has been provided by **YorkWalk**. Established in 1990, YorkWalk offers a programme of themed walking tours of York throughout the year. This information is intended to assist journalists with information on different York themes and has been written to give a flavour of York's themed walking tours. Other tours include the Historic Toilet Tour, the Graveyard, Coffin and Plague tour, the Guy Fawkes Trail and the Bloody Execution Tour...to name just a few. Tel: 01904 622303, [www.yorkwalk.co.uk](http://www.yorkwalk.co.uk)

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