Mike Higginbottom
INTERESTING TIMES

SAMPLE PAGES

The 44-page, A4 handbook for <u>Historic York</u>, with text, photographs, maps and a reading list, is available for purchase, price £15.00 including postage and packing.

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Historic York

Queen's Hotel, Queen's Staith Road, York, YO1 6DH

Friday April 3rd-Sunday April 5th 2009

interesting breaks with interesting people
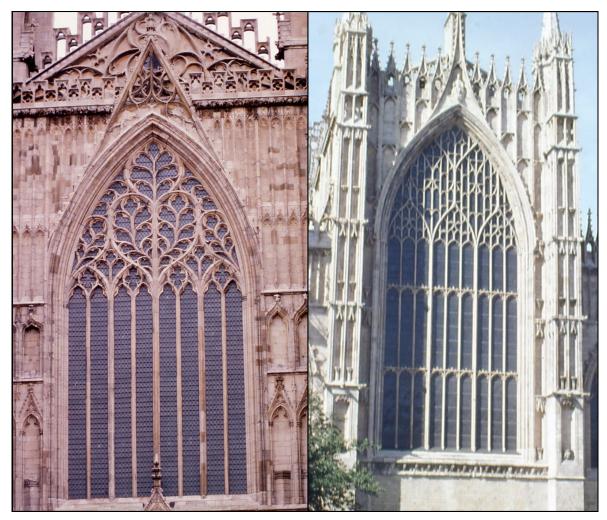
Eboracum: Roman York

York has been a significant settlement for almost two thousand years,– a route to and a bulwark against Scotland, a Roman fortress, a prosperous Viking port, seat of government for both Church and State from Norman times, in its post-medieval decline a social, judicial and market centre for Yorkshire and, from Victorian times, a major railway junction and manufacturing centre. Even its industry – chocolate – is palatable. In the twentieth century it judiciously exploited its tourist potential and, belatedly, became a university town. It is an appropriate home for the National Railway Museum and, in realising the possibilities of exciting archaeological digs within the Minster and at Coppergate, it fostered further examples of the developing art of museum display.

The original siting of a settlement here was determined by the coincidence that the Yorkshire Ouse crosses the terminal moraine of an Ice Age glacier at the point of its confluence with the Foss: a firm land-route across the marshy vale found the lowest practicable bridging-point at a site easily defensible being largely surrounded by water. The Ouse also provided a route to the sea, at the limit of tides and therefore navigable to ocean-going ships in Roman times and for many hundreds of years afterwards.

The Roman fort at York, *Eboracum*, was initially founded in AD 71 by a detachment of the *Legio IX Hispana* from Lincoln (*Lindum*) in their campaign to subdue the indigenous tribe, the Brigantes. The fifty-acre fortress, originally wooden, was gradually strengthened until by AD 107-8 it formed a considerable stone enclosure, some of which is still visible. This outer rampart formed a rectangle: the present walls follow its line from Bootham Bar to just past Monk Bar; its other two corners were located at St Leonard's Priory (the Multangular Tower) and at Feasgate. The *principia*, or military headquarters, stood on part of the later Minster site, and the two main streets of the fortress-city, the *Via Principalis* and the *Via Praetoria*, are still indicated by the lines of Petergate and Stonegate respectively. These streets pierced the walls at four gateways, *Porta Principalis Dextra* (Bootham Bar), *Porta Decumana* (Gray's Court, behind the Treasurer's House), *Porta Principalis Sinistra* (King's Square) and *Porta Praetoria* (St Helen's Square).

This last led to a bridge over the Ouse slightly downstream from the modern Lendal Bridge and into the civilian *colonia*, a trading centre the status of which indicates that *Eboracum* was by the early third century among the four or five most important towns of Roman Britain, alongside Colchester, Gloucester, Lincoln and London. In AD 213 the *colonia* was designated capital of the province of *Britannia inferior*. The total city-area is estimated to have been about 200 acres, and the population could have been in excess of 10,000 at its maximum, of which perhaps 6,000 would be soldiers.

Limited excavation has shown that the civilian settlement supported major public buildings, including bath-houses and numerous temples, was serviced by public

York Minster West Window   **York Minster East Window**

It is likely that Simon's nave was intended to stand with the Transitional choir, but once the Decorated work was completed the earlier building, though built with great craftsmanship, inevitably seemed unsatisfactory. Nave and chapter-house were not roofed until the mid-fourteenth century, after which reconstruction of the choir commenced, beginning with the east end, in 1361. Two distinct stages of construction are discernible both inside and out, separated by the felicitous positioning of eastern transepts which do not break beyond the building-line of the aisles. The eastern section, with its distinctive external double tracery, was the work of William de Hoton, succeeded in 1369 by Roger de Patrington, and the choir, in which the double tracery is brought inside, was completed early in the fifteenth century by Hugh de Hedon, who was responsible for the great east window (1400-5). It is noticeable how the builders of the eastern arm respected their predecessors' earlier work to the west, but incorporated to advantage the Perpendicular features of their own generation's best practice.

It was in the course of joining the choir to the crossing that the Early English central tower collapsed: the vast replacement, probably designed by William of Colchester, whose unpopularity with the York masons caused him serious physical injury, has an

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the western towers (south-west, 1432-56; north-west, 1470-4) were also built. It seems likely that a project to include a belfry-stage was at some point abandoned. The crossing gives an impression of soaring lightness, but even though its vault is of timber, its great weight on the Early English piers and Norman foundations eventually proved almost impossible to sustain. There is a total of 16,000 tons of stone, glass, timber and lead above the floor of the crossing.

Something more than good fortune has preserved this great and remarkable building with its uncertain foundations and vast timber vaults. It is no stranger either to fire or the scaffolding of restorers. On February 1st 1829 the choir was burnt out by one Jonathan Martin, whose grievances against the clergy were emphatic but unclear and who was afterwards declared insane. (He was at his confirmation, by his own account, "astonished at the wonderful size of the bishop", and he took to an abusive correspondence with the clergy, who tended to exclude him from their churches because of his antics: one note began, "Blind Hypocrits, You serpents and vipers of Hell, you wine-bibbers and beef-eaters, whose eyes stand out with fatness…" and another made the more sinister prophecy, "You whitent sea pulkirs…your Gret Charchis and Minstairs will cume rattling down upon your Gilty Heads.") In 1840, after restoration of the choir had been completed, a carelessly abandoned candle set the south-west tower alight, sending the bells to the ground "with a deep hollow sound" and gutting the nave.
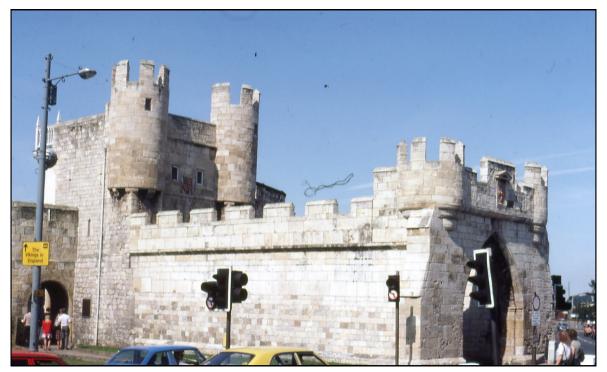

York Minster (1984)

Mansion House   Fairfax House

Georgian York

After the Civil War, York settled down to its peaceful, prosperous existence as a political, social and market centre, and as a staging post on the Great North Road, the third most populous city in England after London and Norwich. A local edict of 1645 forbade construction of timber-framed houses or thatched roofs. Among the quantity of fine eighteenth-century houses in and around the city there are two particularly distinguished Georgian public buildings – the **Mansion House**, 1725-30, probably by William Etty (not by Lord Burlington, as is sometimes asserted,) in which the Lord Mayor customarily resides during his or her term of office, and the **Assembly Rooms**, 1730-2, which certainly are by Lord Burlington, though the present façade by J P Pritchett & Charles Watson dates only from 1828 and the interior was altered by J B & W Atkinson in 1859. Horse-racing had begun on the Knavesmire in 1730, and was embellished by the local architect John Carr's Grandstand of 1754 (demolished 1925).

The best-known Georgian town-house in the city is **Fairfax House** (possibly early 1740s, but remodelled by John Carr *c*1759-62, for Charles, Viscount Fairfax).

Walmgate Bar

and proudly bears the scars of the Civil War sieges of which it bore the brunt. The inside face supports a curious Elizabethan structure, apparently a house, with Tuscan and Ionic columns and a balustraded top. The extra arches to either side were again cut in the nineteenth century.

The next section of wall overlooks on the outer side the splendid new **Barbican Pool** and on the city side, near **Fishergate Bar**, **St George's Church**, in the graveyard of which can be found the inscription –

> Richard Palmer *alias* Richard Turpin notorious highwayman and horse stealer executed at Tyburn April 7th 1739.

This section ends at the **Fishergate Postern**, which stood beside the King's Pool. From here the defences need careful piecing together in the imagination because of the considerable changes that have occurred on the Castle site and on the formerly marshy banks of the Foss and the Ouse which flank it. A good clear account of the Walls, very useful at this particular point, is the anonymous *Walking the Walls* (Village nd).

The best place to rejoin the walls across Skeldergate Bridge is at **Old Baile**, the twin motte to Clifford's Tower. The walls are relatively featureless, except for the view of the Saxon tower of **St Mary Bishophill Junior**, from here to the great **Micklegate Bar** (originally "Micklelith" or "great gate") commanding the road to London. Here too side arches have been cut and the barbican, together with another timber house like the one at Walmgate Bar, has been destroyed. This was the point of entry for sovereigns in state, and for barefoot archbishops on their way to enthronement in the Minster. From the turrets traitors' heads were displayed, including that of Henry Percy, Shakespeare's Hotspur: the last two heads, of Jacobite rebels, were stolen by a

Holy Trinity, Micklegate

13th century; chancel 1887; west front 1902-4.

St Andrew, St Andrewgate: 15th-century; redundant as early as 16th century; after many changes (including use as a stable, a brothel and an infants school, now occupied by the Christian Brethren).

St Cuthbert, Peasholme Green: mentioned in Domesday, incorporating signs of Saxon work and Roman materials; 15th-century, wide, aisleless, barrel-vaulted; now the parish office for St Michael-le-Belfrey.

St Denys, Walmgate: 14th-century north aisle; rest of surviving church 15th-century; 13th-/14th-stained glass; nave demolished and Norman doorway reset 1798; tower by Thomas Pickersgill, 1847.

St Helen, Davygate: Medieval (earliest record 1235); church heavily re-built 1857; 15th-century octagonal lantern rebuilt by William Atkinson, 1875-6).

St John the Evangelist, Micklegate: Some Norman work, but mainly 14th-15th century; top of tower 1646; chancel shortened 1850; now an arts centre.

St Margaret, Walmgate: 14th-century rebuilding of church documented from 12th century; tower 1684-5; partly rebuilt by Thomas Pickersgill,