

The Museum Gardens



Minster from Museum Street

Start your walk at the gates to the Museum Gardens. As you stand in front of them, looking towards the Minster, you will see that across the road to your right there is no sign of the Roman fortress wall that once stood here; it was demolished in the Middle Ages. The only trace now left is the outline of a Roman defensive interval tower, excavated by York Archaeological Trust in the 1970s. Its plan is laid out in the flooring of a service yard/car park behind the shops on the Minster side of this street. When this Roman wall became redundant and was demolished, a new short length of defences was built to connect Lendal Tower, behind you at the riverside, to that part of the Roman defensive line that was left intact. You can see that rampart, crowned by a wall, behind you.



Museum Gardens

Enter the Museum Gardens and at the first fork in the path turn left so that you walk around the gardens in a clockwise direction. This path will take you down a slight slope towards the River Ouse, which can be seen on the other side of the railings.

In Viking times the river would have been important for trade and communication, linking the city to the coast through the Humber, and, for smaller boats, to the south and west through its tributaries. Navigators would have made use of the tide to travel upstream, although sometimes they might have had to resort to rowing. The river also had shoals that required careful navigation.



The River Ouse

In the longer term, the demands of military and ecclesiastical building in the city increased the river traffic. Stone was shipped up the Rivers Wharfe and Ouse, roofing lead came downstream from Boroughbridge, and some window glass came from the Continent. Over the succeeding centuries, York merchants came to dominate the region's trade, exporting wool (later replaced by cloth) and lead, via the river network, to the Netherlands, Germany and the Baltic, along with smaller amounts of farm produce such as hides and butter.



The Hospitium

With the river on your left walk towards the Hospitium building and down the small set of steps, turning right to go through the arch in the wall. This half-timbered building from the 14th century is one of the oldest surviving timber-framed structures in York. The Hospitium was the guest hall for pilgrims and other visitors to St Mary's Abbey. The stone-built ground floor dates from 1310, while the timber framing above was added a hundred years later. The building has been heavily restored and a new roof was erected in 1930.



St Mary's Abbey



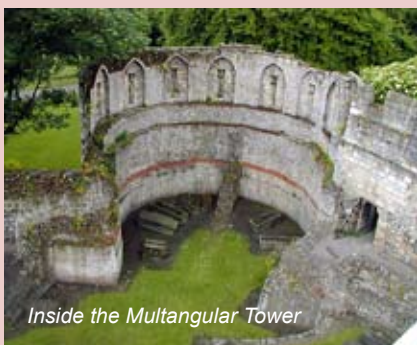
Yorkshire Museum



The Multangular Tower



Vaulted passageway into St Leonard's Hospital



Inside the Multangular Tower

Follow the path up from the Hospitium now, towards the ruins of St Mary's Abbey; go straight across at the cross roads and through the walls of the abbey, with the main ruins on your left. The Abbey of St Mary was a Benedictine abbey founded by King William II of England in 1088 when he laid the foundation stone of a Norman church which no longer remains. Following a dispute and riot in 1132, a party of reform-minded monks left St Mary's to establish the Cistercian monastery of Fountains Abbey. The surviving ruins of the monastic church date back to a rebuilding programme begun in 1271 and finished by 1294.

Turn right at the fork in the path and walk in front of the Yorkshire Museum. Just beyond the Museum you will see the remains of the Multangular Tower on your left. It has been called the Multangular Tower since 1683. Between 1315 and 1683 it was called Elrondyng. However, the tower is much older than its first mention in the records.

It was first built as part of the Roman stone defences that replaced the earlier timber stockade and towers here in the early 3rd century AD. This south-west wall of the Roman fortress overlooked the River Ouse and the civil town (called the colonia) on its opposite bank. This wall has been described as one of the grandest examples of military architecture of its age. There was a multangular tower at each end of the wall. The Multangular Tower in Museum Gardens is one – the other is buried underneath the street Feasegate. There were six other towers, three on either side of a central gateway that guarded the entrance to the fortress. The centre of the wall's facade and the cornices (mouldings at the top) of the towers were decorated with thin red bricks. The corner towers were at least 10m high.

You will see the inside of the Tower shortly, but for now carry on walking back towards the entrance to the Gardens. Just before you reach there, take the left-hand path, which will take you into the site of St Leonard's Hospital, one of the largest hospitals in medieval England.

Pass under the covered walkway and sharp left to stand under the remains of the vaulted ceiling, which is probably a part of the hospital's infirmary, built at the expense of John Romanus, Treasurer of York Minster in the earlier 13th century. The rear of the Roman fortress wall, stretching away on your left-hand side towards the corner tower, was never meant to be seen; it would have been covered by the earthen rampart that buttressed the inside of the defences.

Walk on and you will find yourself inside the ruins of the Multangular Tower. The Multangular Tower and the lengths of wall to either side of it are the only sections of the Roman fortress wall that have survived above ground. It was probably built during the reign of the Emperor Severus who was in York between 209 and 211.

The tower has ten sides and is now 9m high. Originally there would have been three floors on the inside and a roof on top. Only the bottom 6m of this surviving masonry is Roman. The tower and wall continued as defensive features long after the Romans had left, and the upper part of the tower is late medieval in date.



The Anglian Tower

Turn right as you reach the wall to find the remains of a structure known as the Anglian Tower, and you will also be able to examine evidence of how the city wall was built up over the centuries. You will see that the medieval city wall is slightly beyond the line of the Roman fortress wall – as the defences were successively heightened with rebuilt earth ramparts in the Anglo-Saxon, Viking-Age and Anglo-Norman periods, the line of the defences gradually shifted outwards until the medieval wall came to be built. Some of the stages by which this happened are represented in the successively higher ramparts shown in cross-section beyond the Anglian Tower.

The Anglian Tower is a square tower with two narrow doorways. Its front projects slightly from the front of the Roman wall, but its two sides would mostly have been obscured by the Roman rampart that also covered the back face of that wall. It was covered by medieval ramparts until it was rediscovered in 1839, and excavated in 1969. It had been built in a breach in the Roman wall, although there is no evidence for the exact date of its construction. All the Roman and later ramparts which originally covered the remains of the Roman wall between the Multangular Tower and the Anglian Tower were removed in the 1970s.

Retrace your steps to the doorway through the wall and at the path turn right. Follow the path past the King's Manor until you emerge at the City Art Gallery. If you cross the road here you can pick up the city walls at Bootham Bar.

