

Fishergate Postern Tower



Why is it located at this point?

Because this section of the city walls end here



**Why do
the walls
end
there?**

**The walls
ended at
the
flooded
river Foss**



***George Nicholson 1829 (York Art Gallery)
See how the ground and fence
slope down to the river***

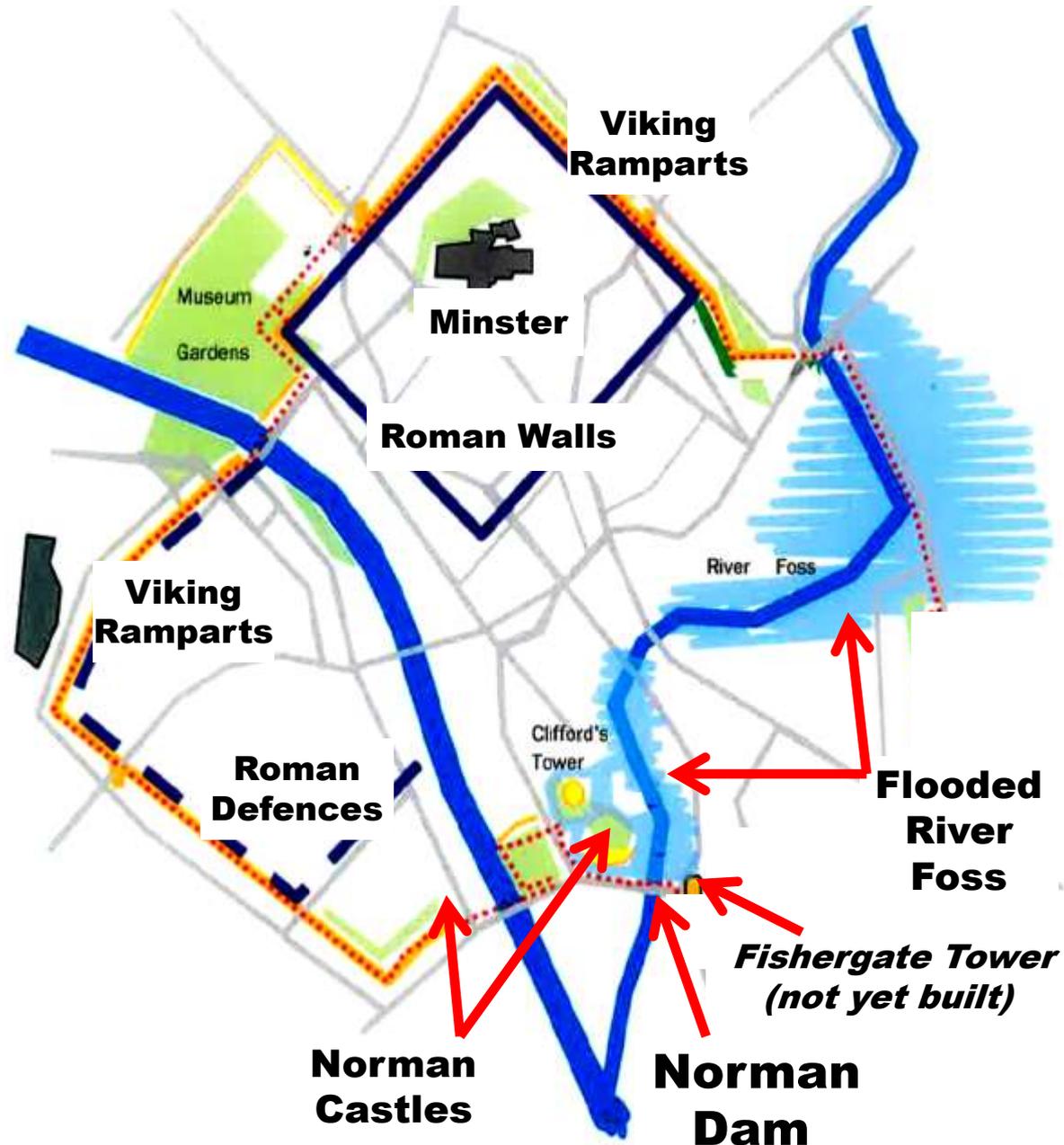
Is there still evidence of the river next to the tower today?

Yes. The 'plinth course' around the tower steps down as it follows the slope of the buried river bank



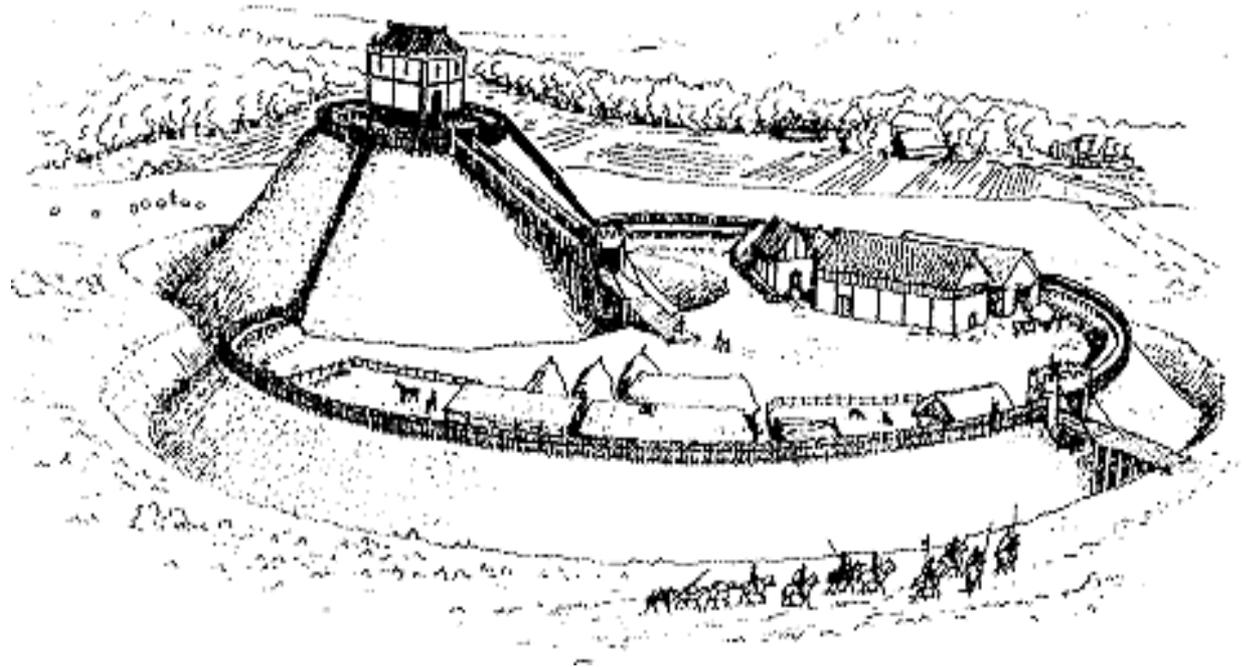
Why was the river Foss flooded?

In 1068, William the Conqueror dammed the river Foss to raise water by approx. 6ft. This flooded his castle moat and protected the south east of the city



**In 1068,
William's
castle keep
was built in
timber on top
of an earth
mound and
within the
timber walls
of the outer
bailey**

***Norman
timber
castle
shown on
the Bayeux
tapestry***



***A typical a motte & bailey castle, with
a moat and drawbridge***

This model of York Castle shows the motte and bailey in the 1300's with the stone walls and castle we see today.



The flooded river Foss is close to the bailey walls, with the moat crossed by a drawbridge at the south gatehouse. This was demolished after the civil war

Where was the dam?

The Norman dam runs under the modern dual carriageway over the river Foss, from the Castle to Fishergate Tower



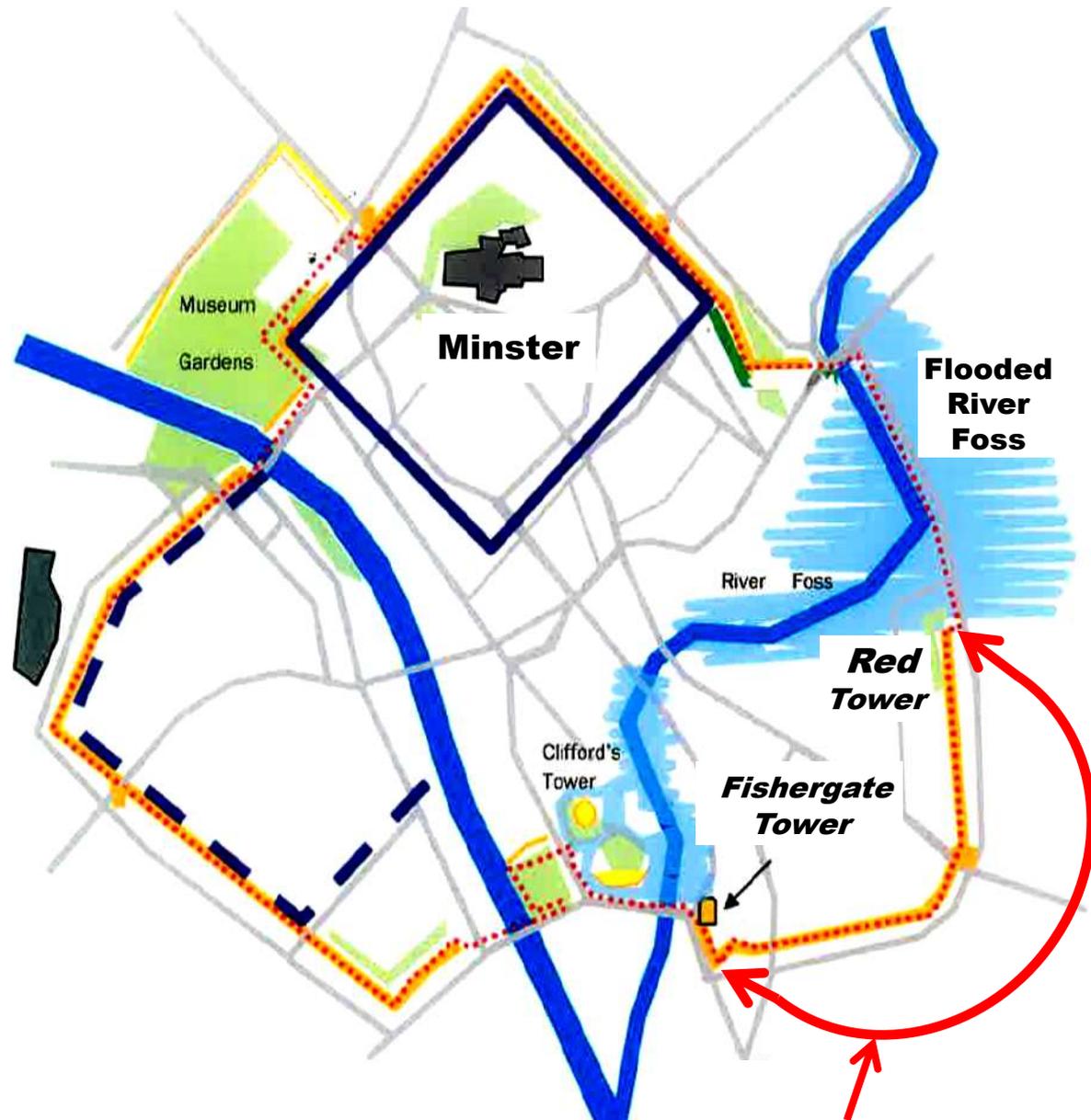
The Norman dam cut off navigation into the city until 1794, when a lock was built to lift barges the 6ft rise in water levels.



The original lock was enlarged in 1856 to allow larger barges to reach Leetham Mills. Castle Mills was also demolished at this time.

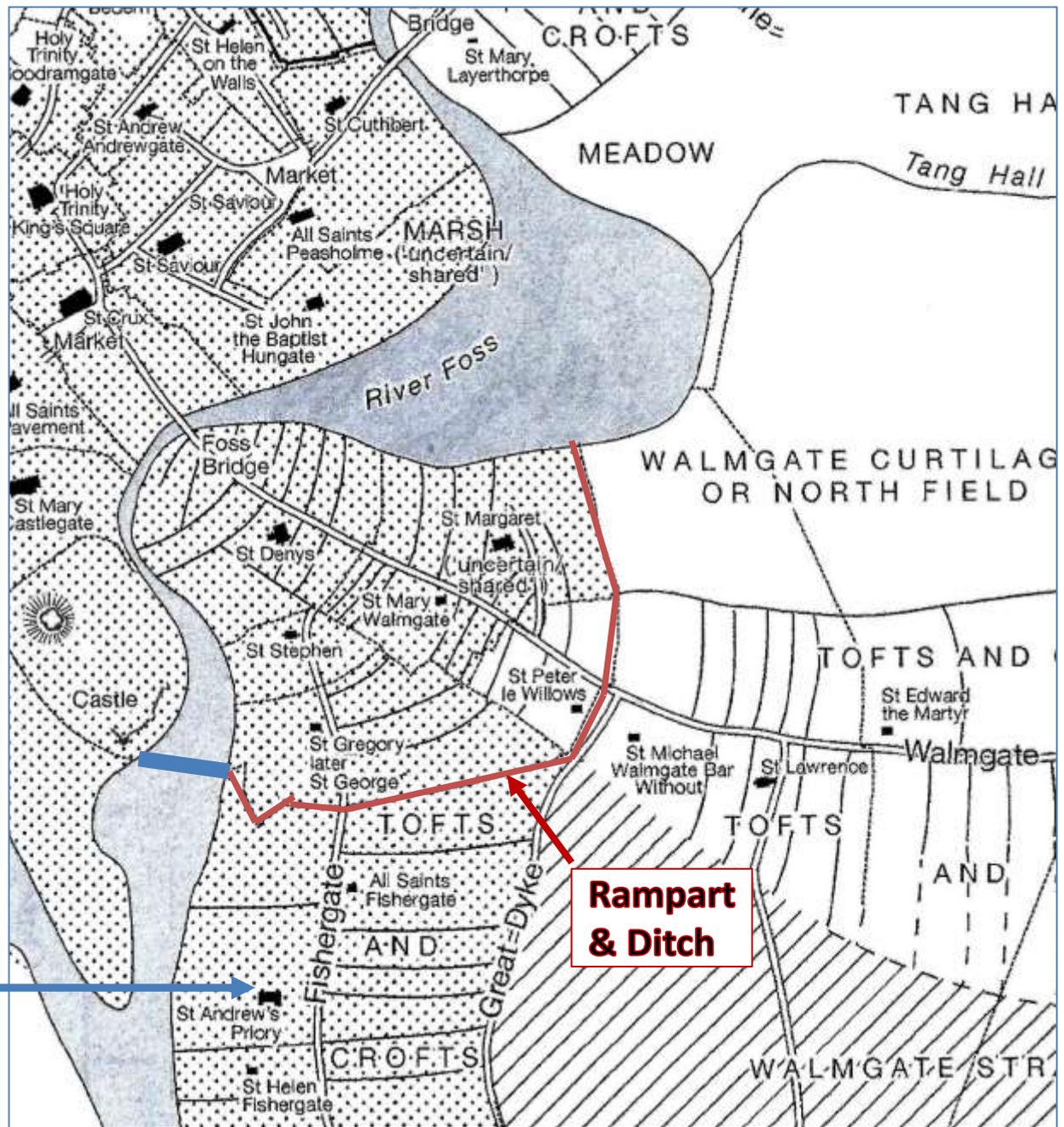
If the flooded river Foss protected the south east of the city, when and why were the walls built here?

This part of the city grew and needed better protection

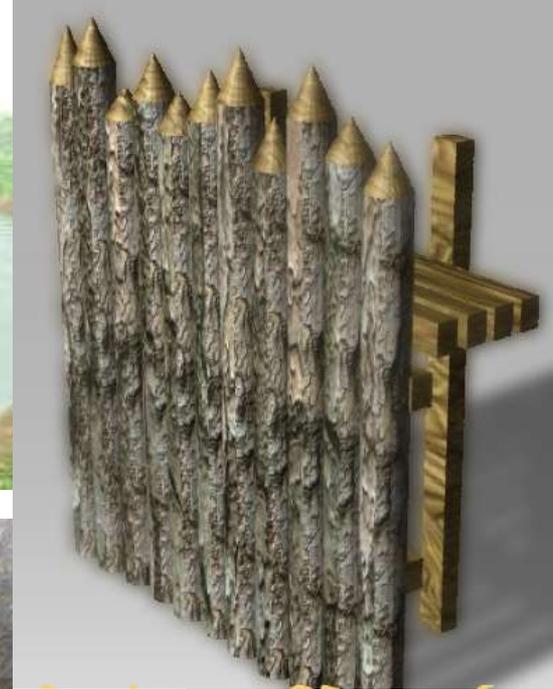


Around 1160, an earth rampart and ditch was built around Walmgate

The ditch and rampart cut off southern Fishergate from the city. Rich families moved into the city centre and Fishergate began to depopulate
St Andrew's Priory was established in 1202. (Map: Sara Rees Jones)



What kind of defences did they build?



It was a high earth rampart with a deep wide ditch in front.



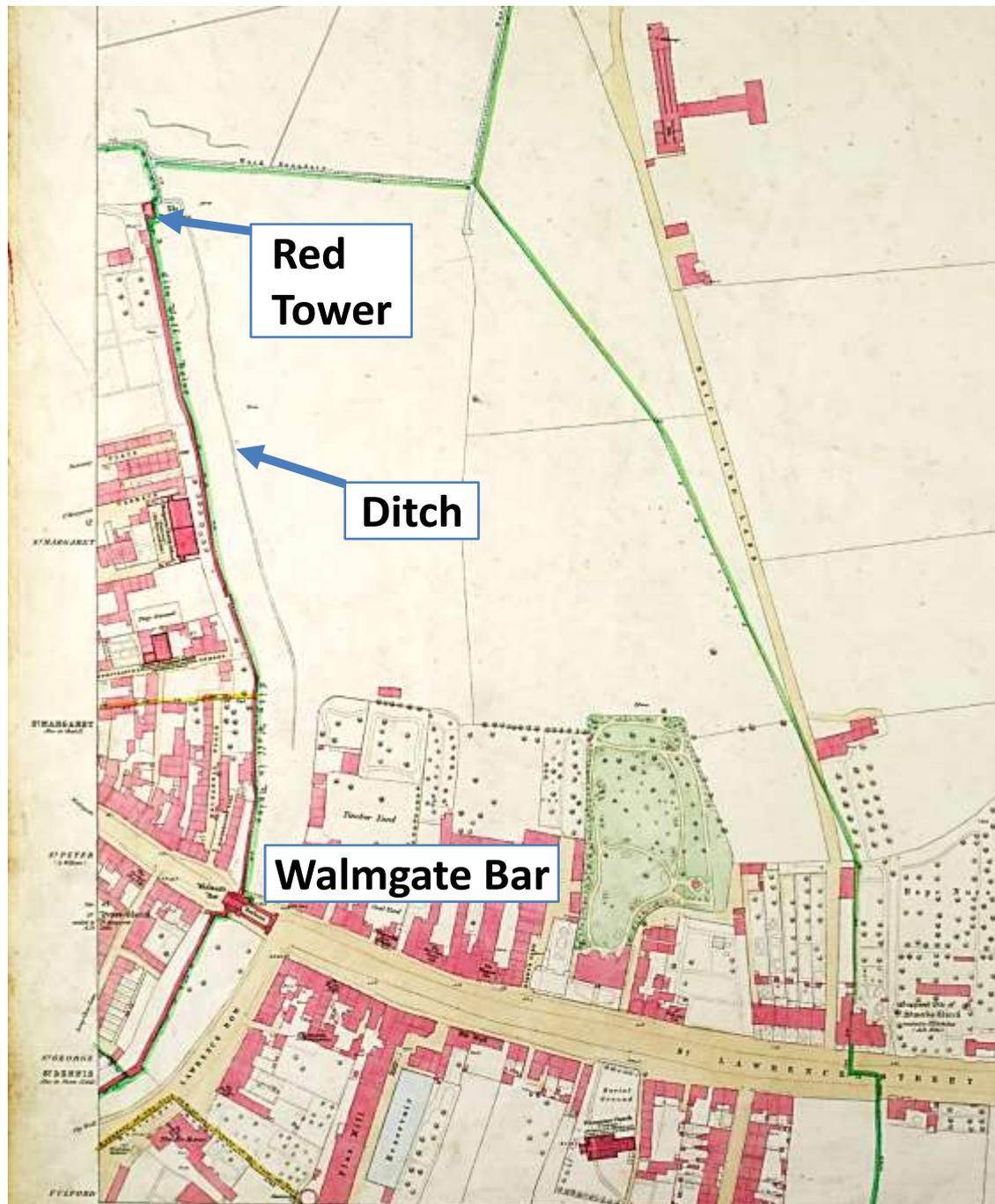
The wall along Lord Mayor's Walk still has a ditch – but it's mostly filled in.

A timber palisade on top gave extra protection

Water flowed along the ditch from the Kings Fishpond and discharged into the Foss at Fishergate.

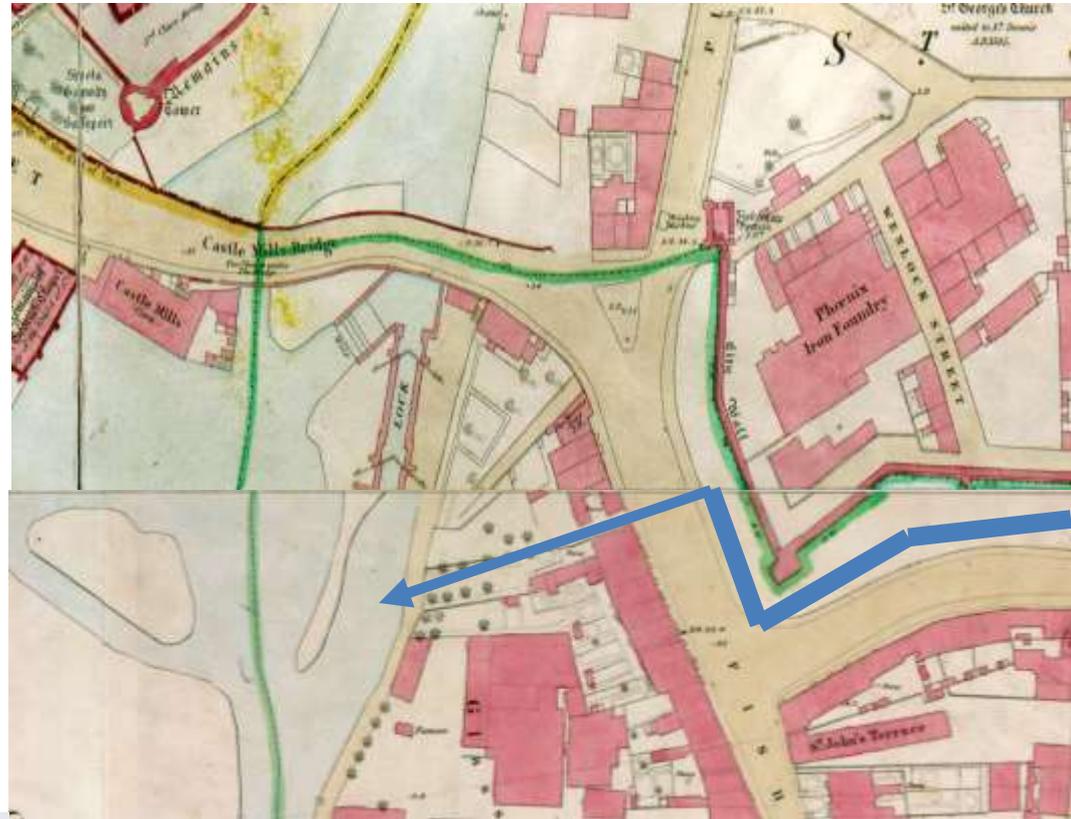
Some of the ditch was still there in 1850, just before Foss Islands Road was built.

(Map: York Historical Atlas)



The ditch ran around the foot of the rampart and discharged into the Foss below the Norman dam.

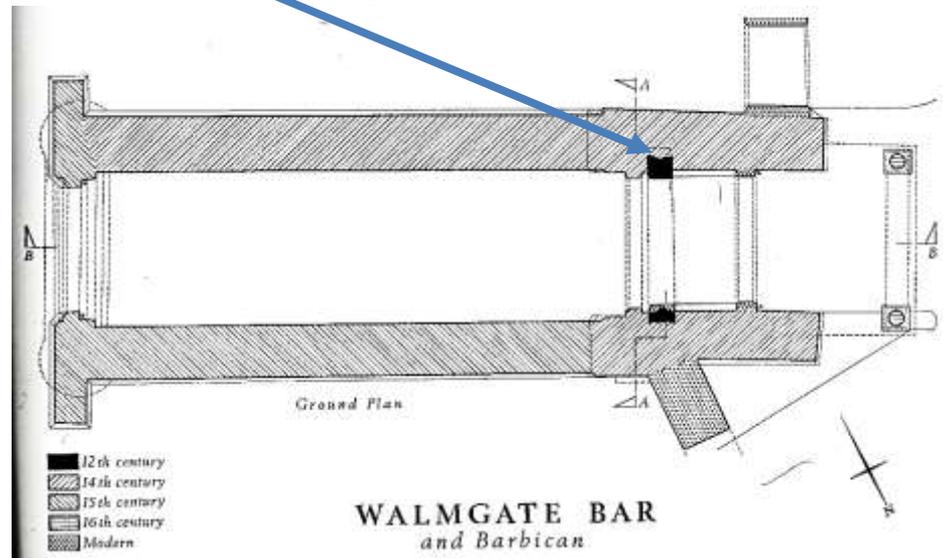
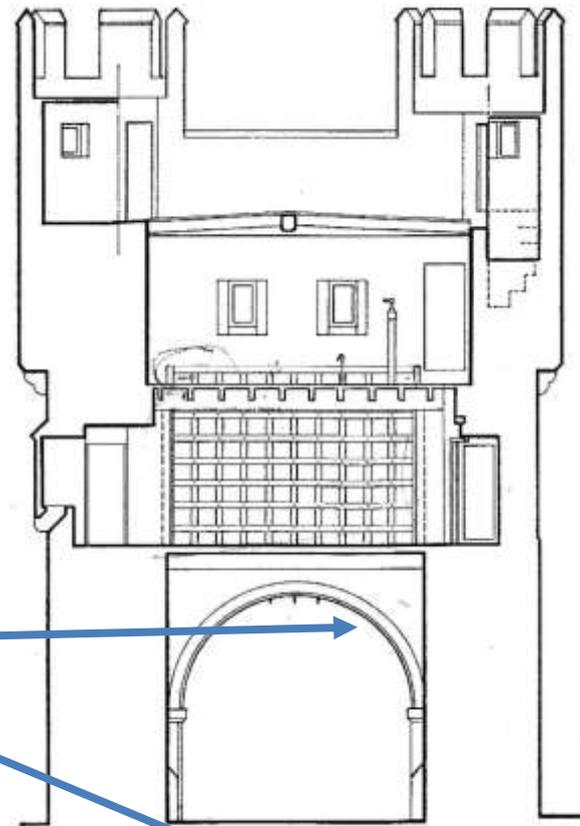
There is still a low-spot here today - and perhaps a long lost culvert too? (Map: York Historical Atlas)



Floods in 1978 or 82? (York Press)

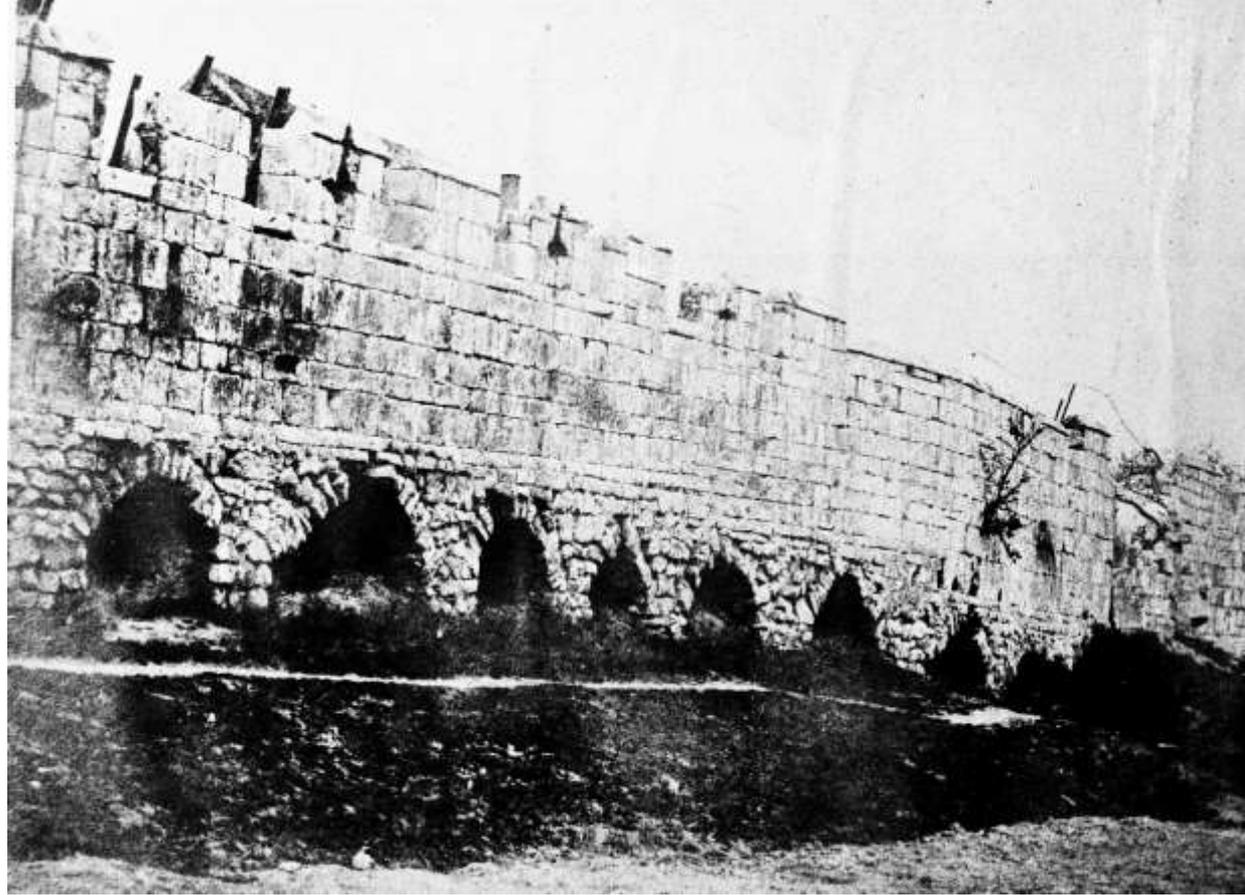
Was there a Tower and/or Postern Gate at Fishergate at this time?

Walmgate Bar has masonry on the inner arch of the main gate dating from the mid 12th century, so perhaps there was a Postern Gate in the earth and timber rampart at Fishergate too. (Image: RCHM)



When did the masonry walls replace the timber palisade around Walmgate?

There is a contract of 1345 in the City Archives to build this section of wall



Master mason Thomas de Staunton was contracted to build a wall 22'-6" (7m) high between Fishergate Bar and the river Foss. Then he built the rest of the walls around Walmgate to Red Tower (Photo: York Explore)

Was Fishergate Tower built at the same time as the walls?

No.

The present tower was built 150 years later than the adjacent walls.

In 1345, a small tower was probably built to protect the Postern Gate.



The first masonry tower may have looked somewhat like Fishergate Corner Tower, opposite Festival Flats

The first record of a tower is in 1388, soon after the walls, when it is referred to as the 'New Tower'. Later, it is named after Robert de Talkan. He was Mayor in 1399 and may have paid for it to be built.



The Postern Gate was probably built at the same time as the adjacent walls and Talkan Tower (1345 - 1388).

Why was the New Fishergate Tower built 150 years later?

It probably owes its construction to the 'Yorkshire Rebellion' in 1489, when Fishergate Bar was burnt and subsequently walled up.

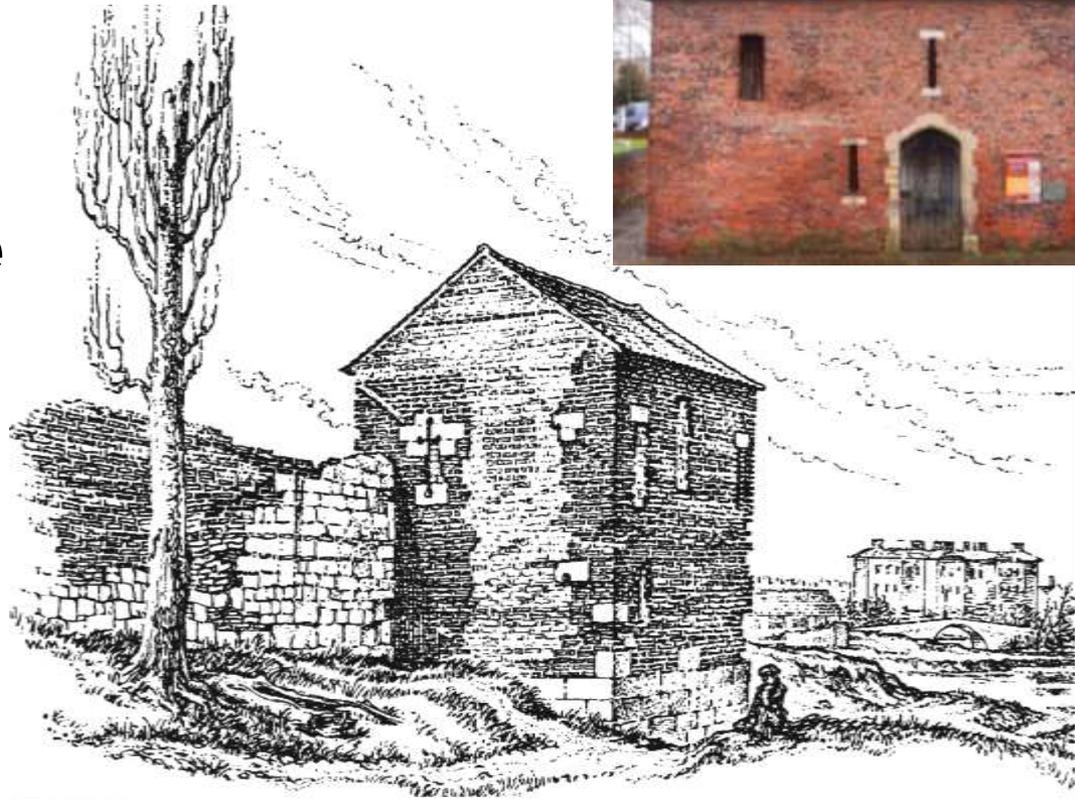


Burnt stones can still be seen on Fishergate Bar

The rebellion was against Henry VII's new taxes and shows lingering resentment in York for his defeat of Richard III

Henry VII visited York on a number of occasions and instructed that the city defences be strengthened.

Red Tower was built in 1490 to replace the small structure that marked the end-point of the walls at King's Fishpond.

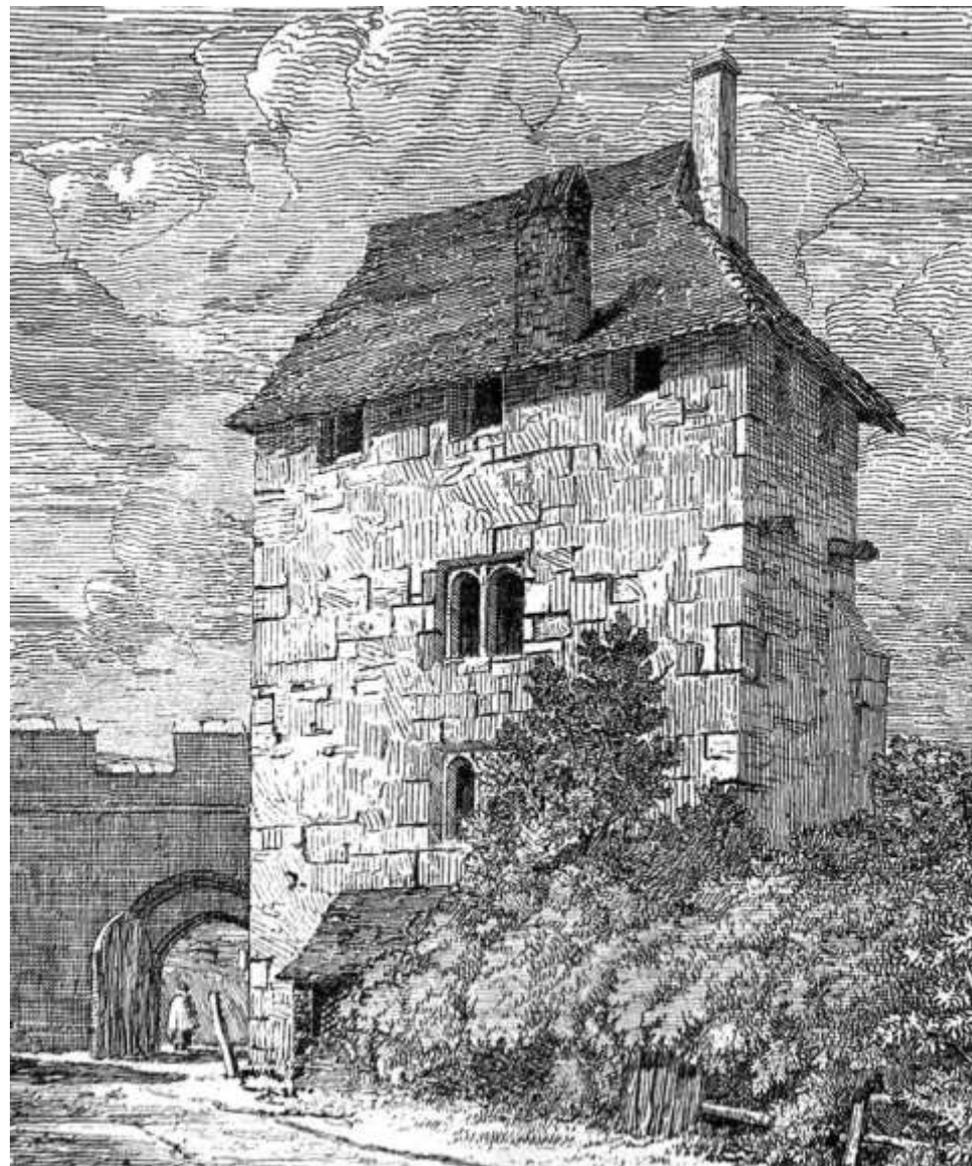


© English Heritage
<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>

Prior to its Victorian reconstruction, limestone masonry could be seen at the bottom of Red Tower, possibly the remains of the original pre-1490 structure?

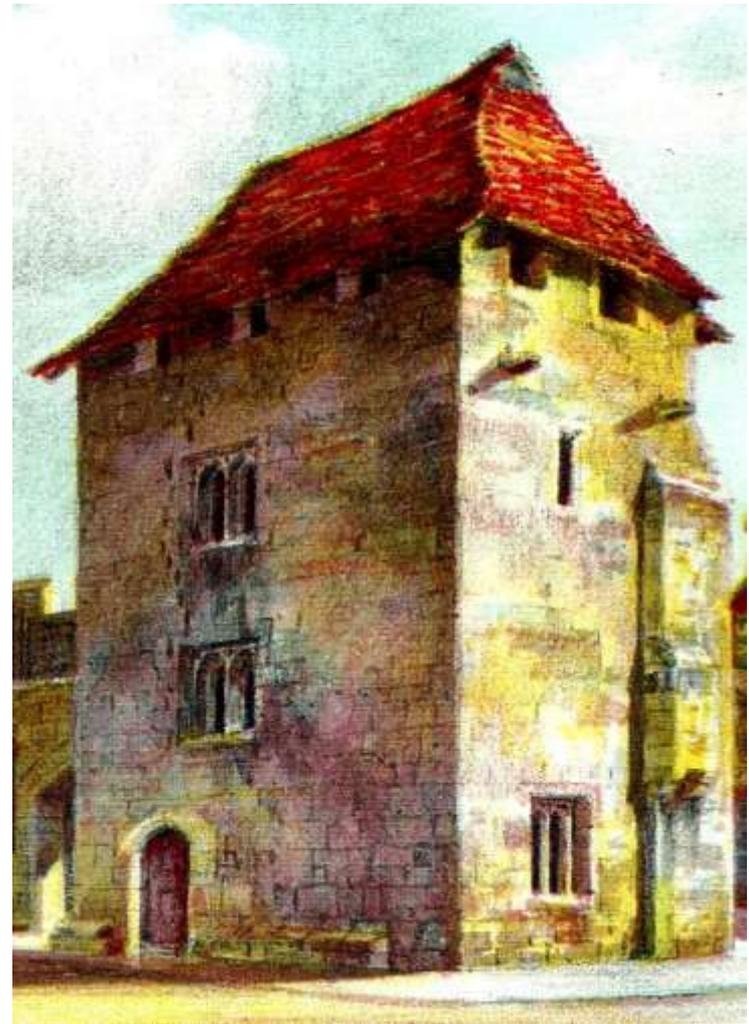
**Unlike Red Tower,
Fishergate Tower
was at a 'Postern
Gate'**

**Closing Fishergate
Bar made the
Postern Gate more
important,
so in 1502 the City
Corporation
authorised building a
'*substantial Postern
Tower*'.**



**An early 19th century view of
Fishergate Postern Gate &
Tower from within the walls
(Photo: York Explore)**

The Tower of 1505 is built to a high standard, using finely cut ashlar masonry inside and out. There are mullioned windows in each room and a garderobe (toilet) off the 1st floor family room, probably making it better than usual accommodation for ordinary people.



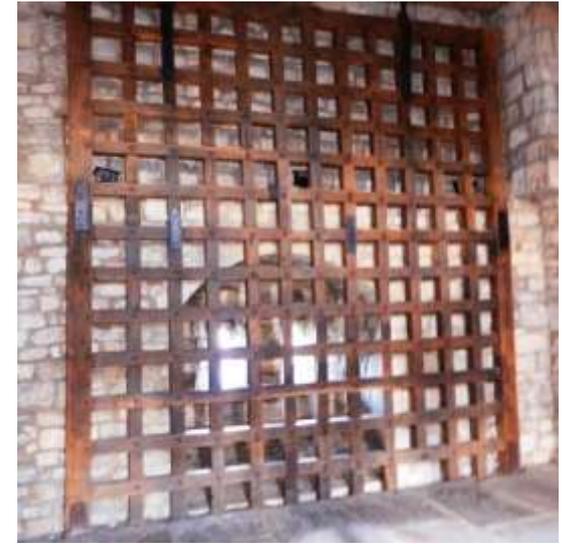
*The rent for the tower was 1s-4d per year in 1503, but increased to 10s in 1507, after it had been rebuilt
(Photo: York Explore)*

**You can see
how the Tower
has been
attached to the
earlier Postern
Gate and
adjacent walls
by looking at
variations in
the masonry**



‘The Postern Gate is of 14th century character, but was re-set in the 16th century’ – (Royal Commission Vol. II). ie. the gateway is contemporary with the 1345 walls but it was re-configured to fit in with the tower in 1505.

The Postern Gate still has hinges for the door and grooves for a Portcullis



Portcullis in Bootham Bar

There would have been a winch on the platform above the door to raise and lower the portcullis



Portcullis lifting winch in Monk Bar

Did the tower look like the one we see today?

**Yes.
Except that it had a lead roof like Monk Bar, with battlements and a watch-tower projecting 10ft above the roof level.**

Views of Monk Bar from the Minster



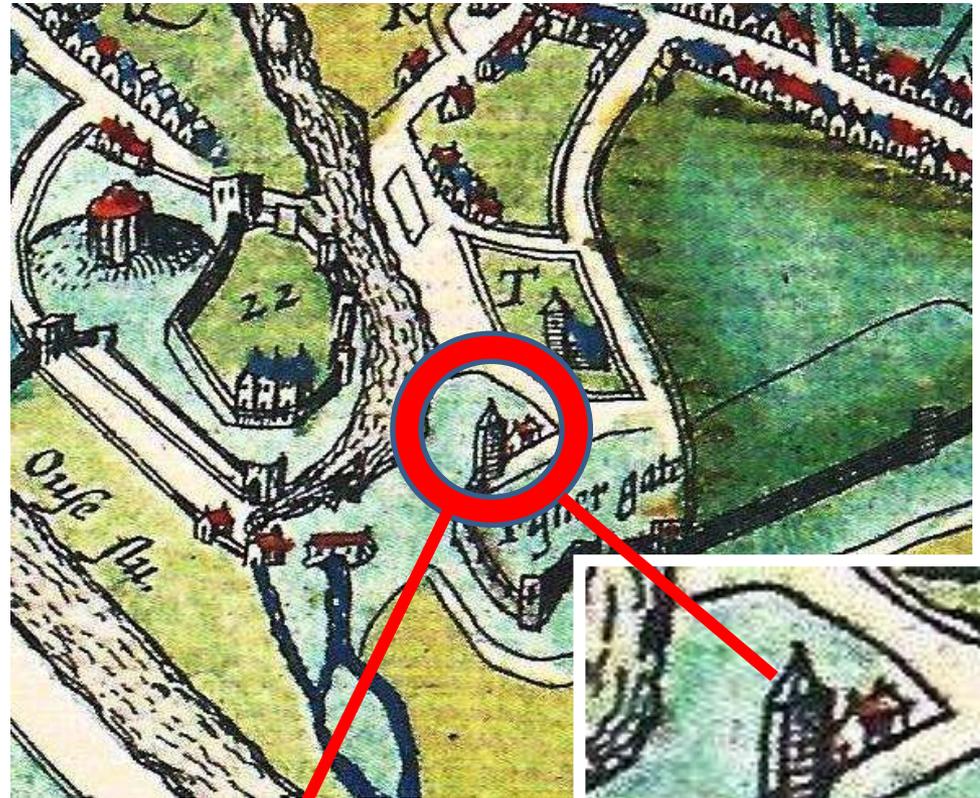
Note the lead roof, sloping from the centre ridge to the sides



**When was the
hipped roof added
and why?**

**John Speed's
1610 map shows
the tower with the
roof we see today.**

**The roof provided
another room
without reducing
its defensive
capability**



*John Speed's map showing
Fishergate tower with a
'pointed' roof.*

*Other towers around York have
similar roofs*

**Was the tower
ever used in
defence of the
city?**

**During the siege
of York in 1644,
Walmgate Bar and
Red Tower were
badly damaged
and records show
money was spent
afterwards on the
walls at
Fishergate**



***Red Tower
in 1776***



***Walmgate
Bar being
repaired
c1810***

***There was a skirmish during the
Siege at the junction of Cemetery Rd
& Fulford Rd, possibly at a windmill***



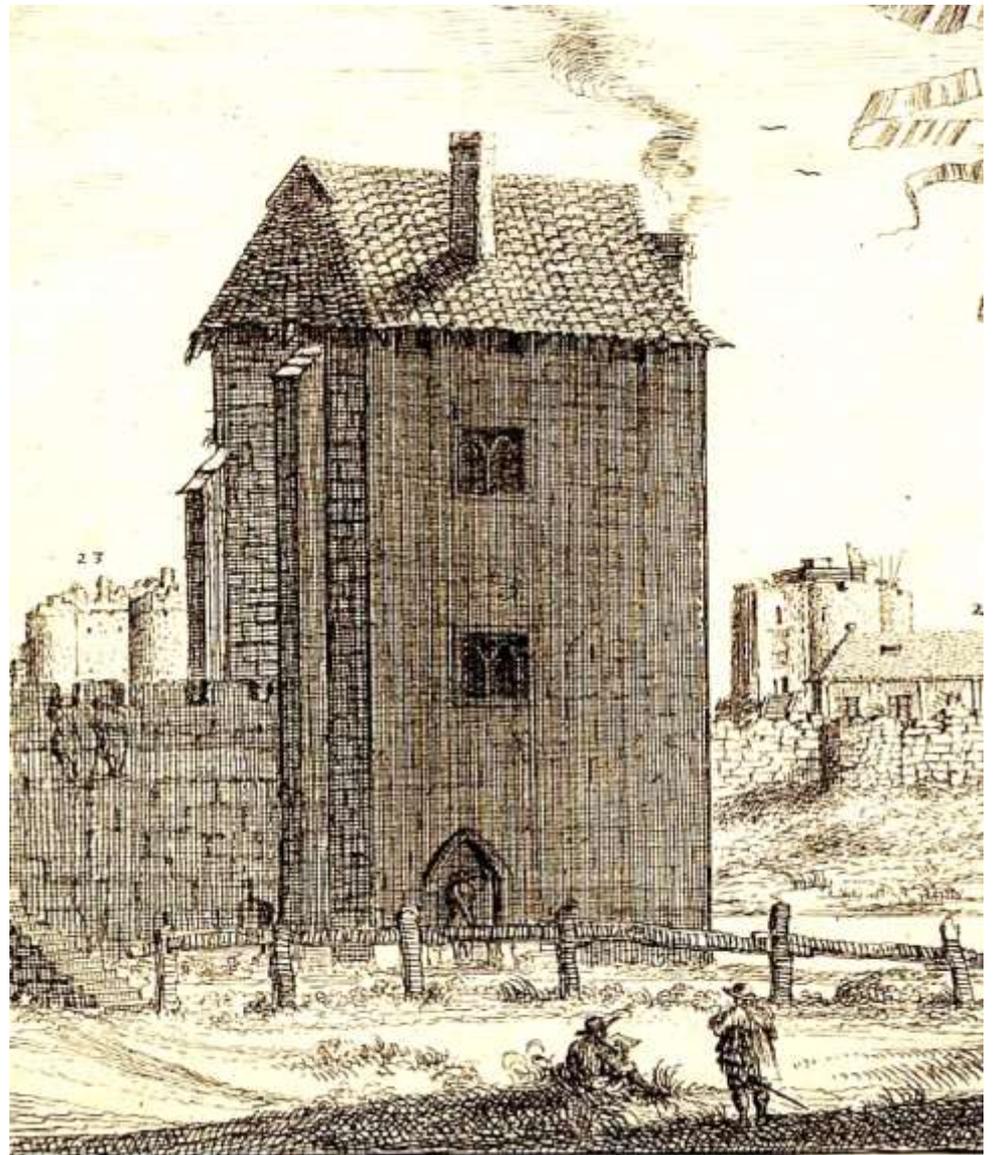
The walls turn south at Fishergate, giving a longer length of battlements for more defenders to fire on attackers approaching the castle



What is Fishergate tower like inside?

The ground floor room is for the Watchman, with two family rooms above, and also a large attic room under the roof.

A narrow spiral staircase connects all the rooms.



Smoke is rising from the chimney of the 1st floor family room in this 1678 picture by William Lodge.

(Image: York Explore)

The ground floor has a large fireplace to keep the watchman warm.



The small door leads to the spiral staircase.



Fireplace

The first floor room has a mullioned window and a cupboard, hewn out of the wall some time after construction



The tower construction method can be seen inside the cupboard, with lime-bound rubble between the fine ashlar masonry.





Although there are hinges in the corners of the windows, there is no evidence that the windows were originally glazed. However it would seem odd build a high quality masonry building in 1505 without glazed windows.

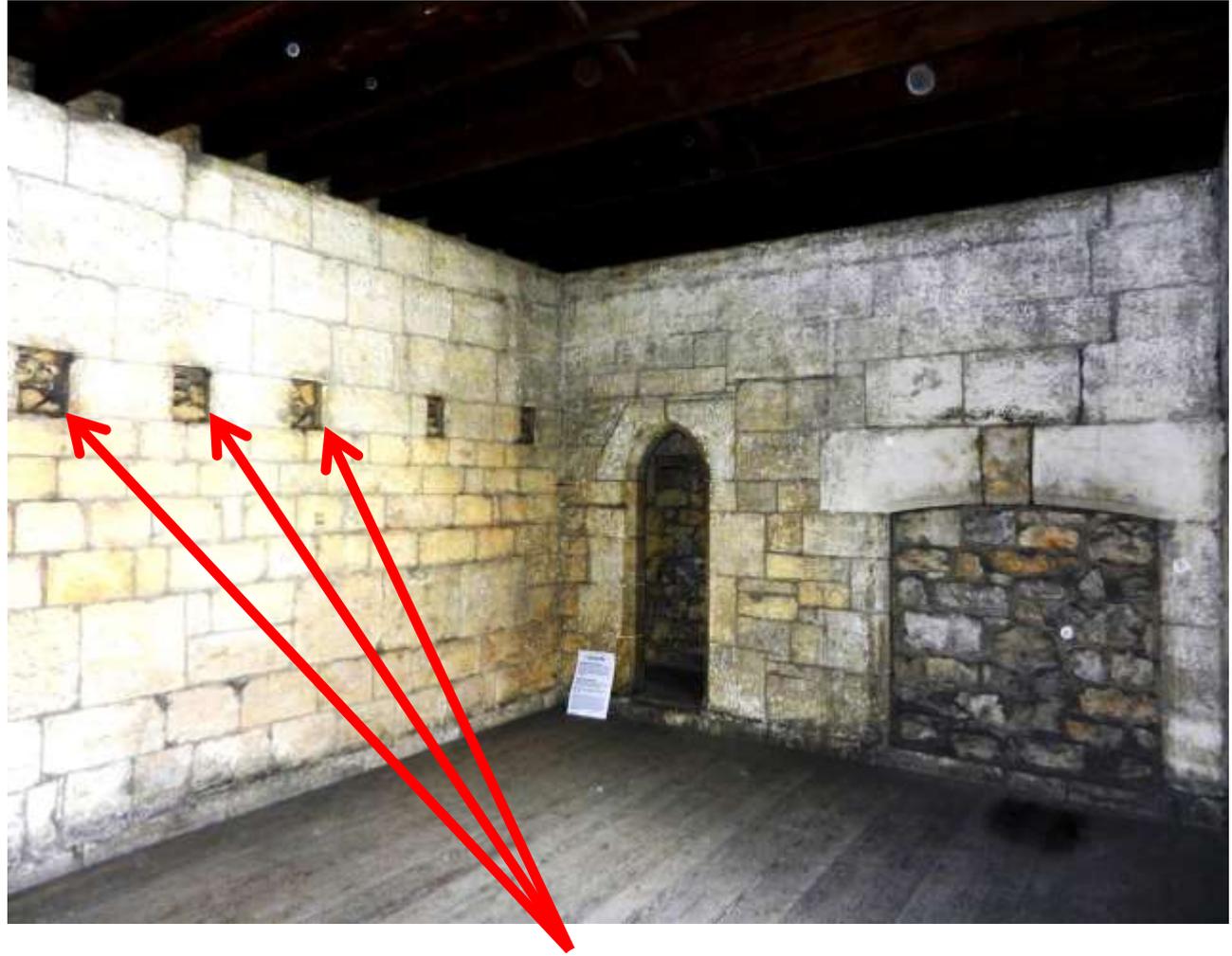
The large fireplace on the first floor has been blocked and its chimney removed from the roof.



A small door leads to a garderobe, which discharged into the river Foss.



The first floor room also has a line of sockets in the walls, the purpose of which has long puzzled historians.



One possibility is that they supported a mezzanine floor, providing a warm sleeping and storage space above the family room

The second floor room has a small window looking towards the castle and another looking up Piccadilly

This room currently houses a display of pictures of Fishergate Tower and the local area



Sockets in the walls held large timbers supporting the weight of the lead roof. Monk Bar still has the same arrangement.

The roof-top room still has its battlements

These are now glazed and visitors can see views of the walls and Fishergate.



The flue from the ground floor fireplace can be seen, rebuilt in brick, but only the cut-out masonry remains of the 1st floor flue

The roof was built using some second hand timbers.

There are many original roof tiles, held in place by wooden pegs.



One purlin has slots and may once have been part of a house. The main cross-beam has peg holes

The spiral staircase is narrow and very dark in places.

One of the first priorities of the 'Friends' is to install lighting and a metal handrail



Before the roof was added, the stairs continued up to a look-out turret.



The last time the city walls were actively defended was during the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, after which they fell into serious decay.

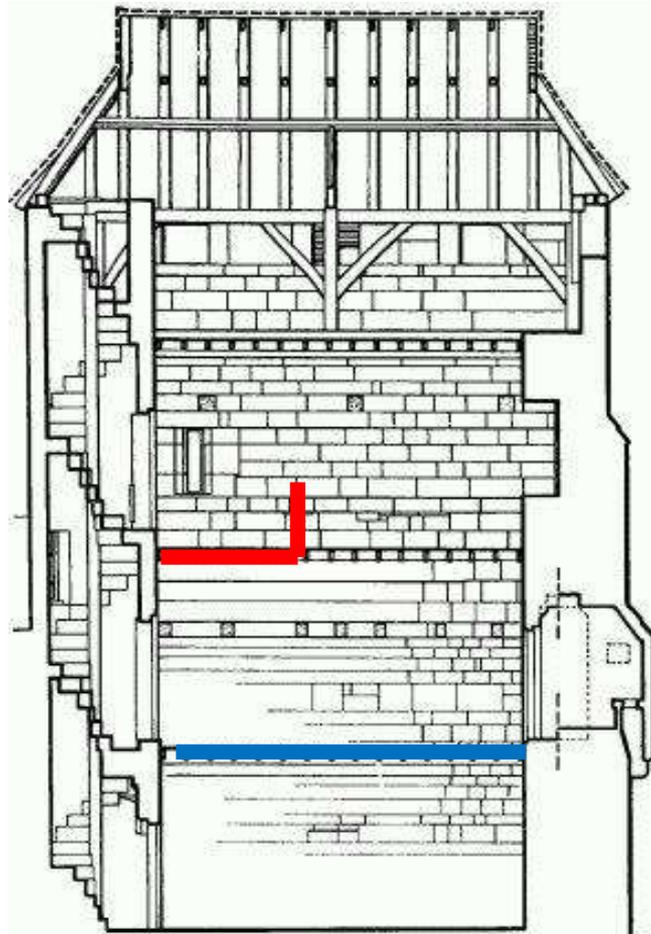
The exposed arches next to the Postern Gate show how the walls were built.



H F Lockwood, 1834 – the cattle are waiting to go to the nearby market and the stones are from the wall repair works. (Image York Explore)

What happened after the tower was needed for defence?

In 1818, the antiquarian William Hargrove wrote....
‘up the stairs is a room with a form of music gallery, railed around and entered from the winding staircase’



Section A-A

This account suggests that the part of the second floor was removed, so musicians could play for people dancing below on the first floor.

(image: RCHM)

Hargrove also says his father was told by Sir John Inglilby of ‘concerts of music and dancing in the tower’

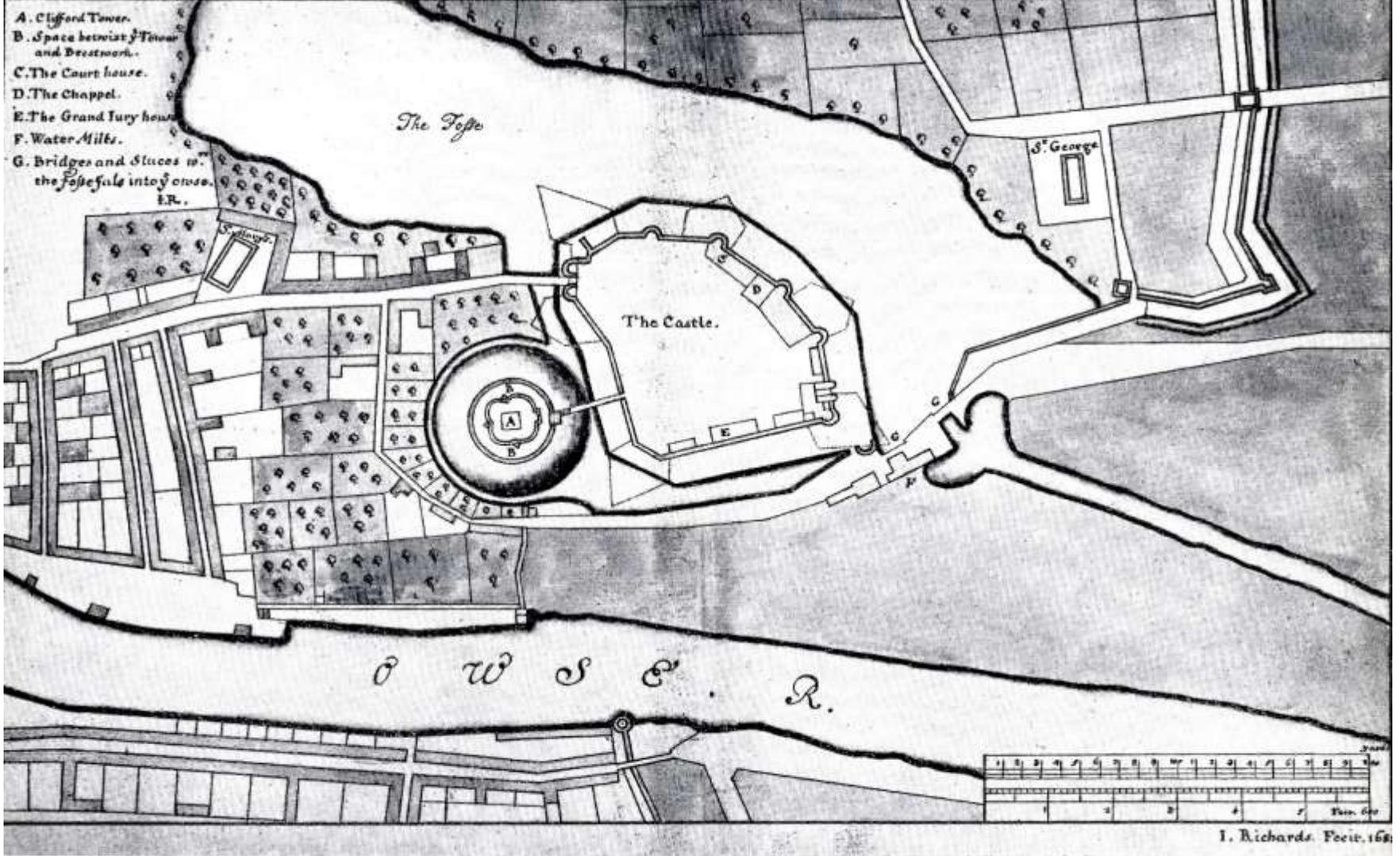
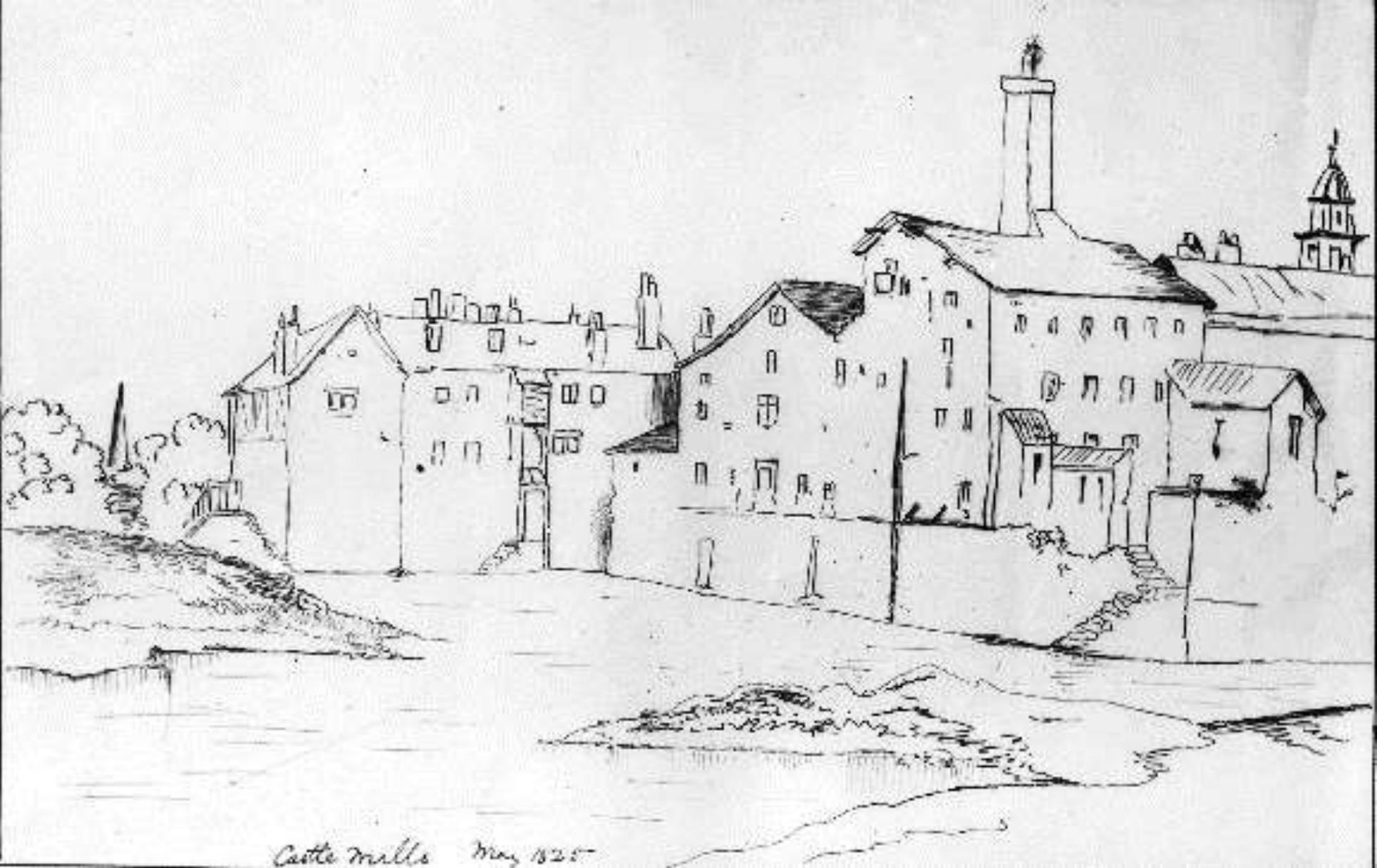


PLATE 62. YORK CASTLE. Plan, drawing by Jacob Richards, 1685.

This 1685 map by Jacob Richards, shows the dam, causeway and bridge over the river Foss, Castle Mills and its sluices, and Browney Dyke. The path through the Postern Gate goes up Mill Lane to St Georges church.

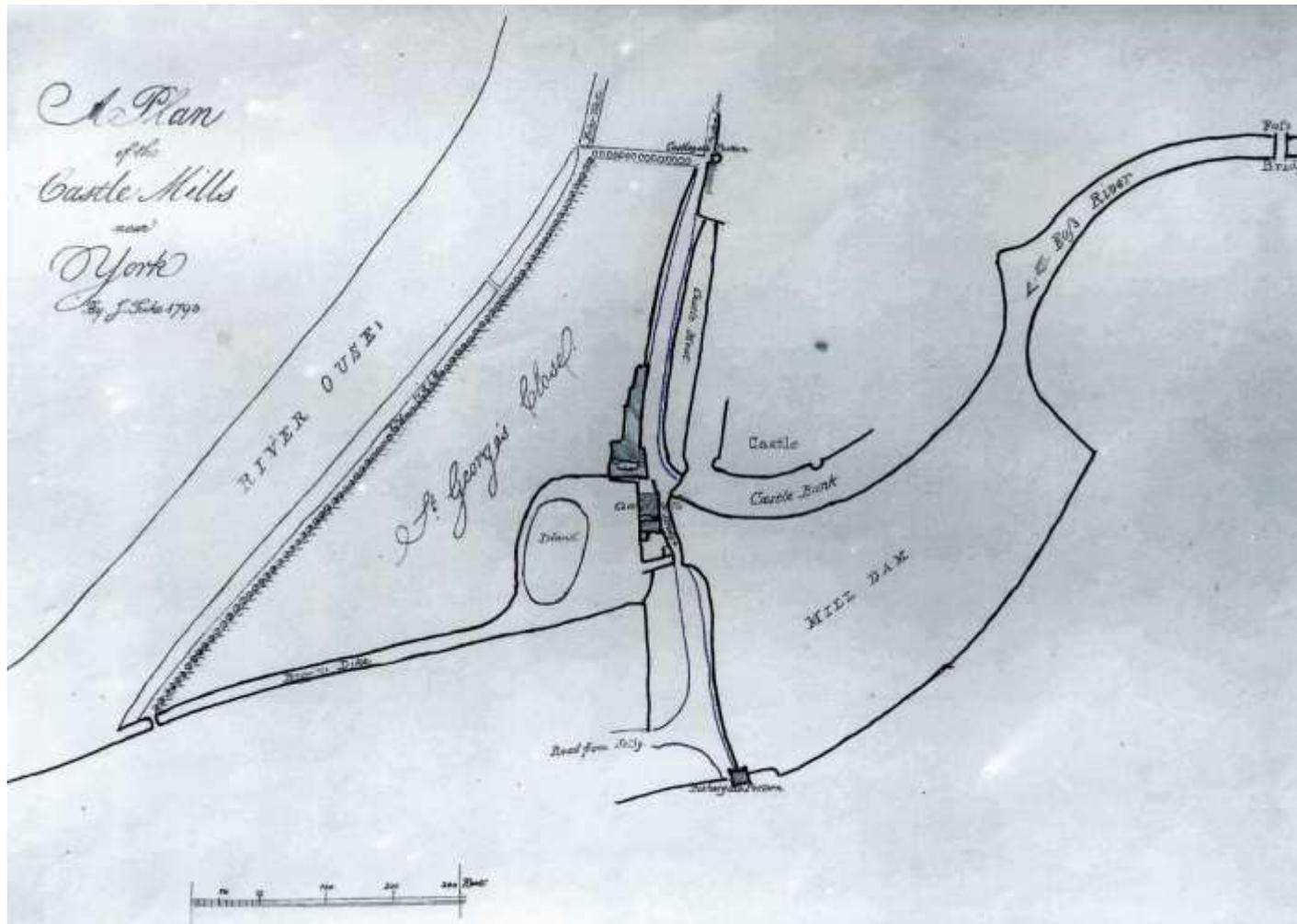


A view across the Debtor's Prison with Fishergate beyond. Francis Place c.1710



**Castle Mills and the former St George's Chapel from
Browney Dyke, by George Nicholson 1825**

(Image York Explore)

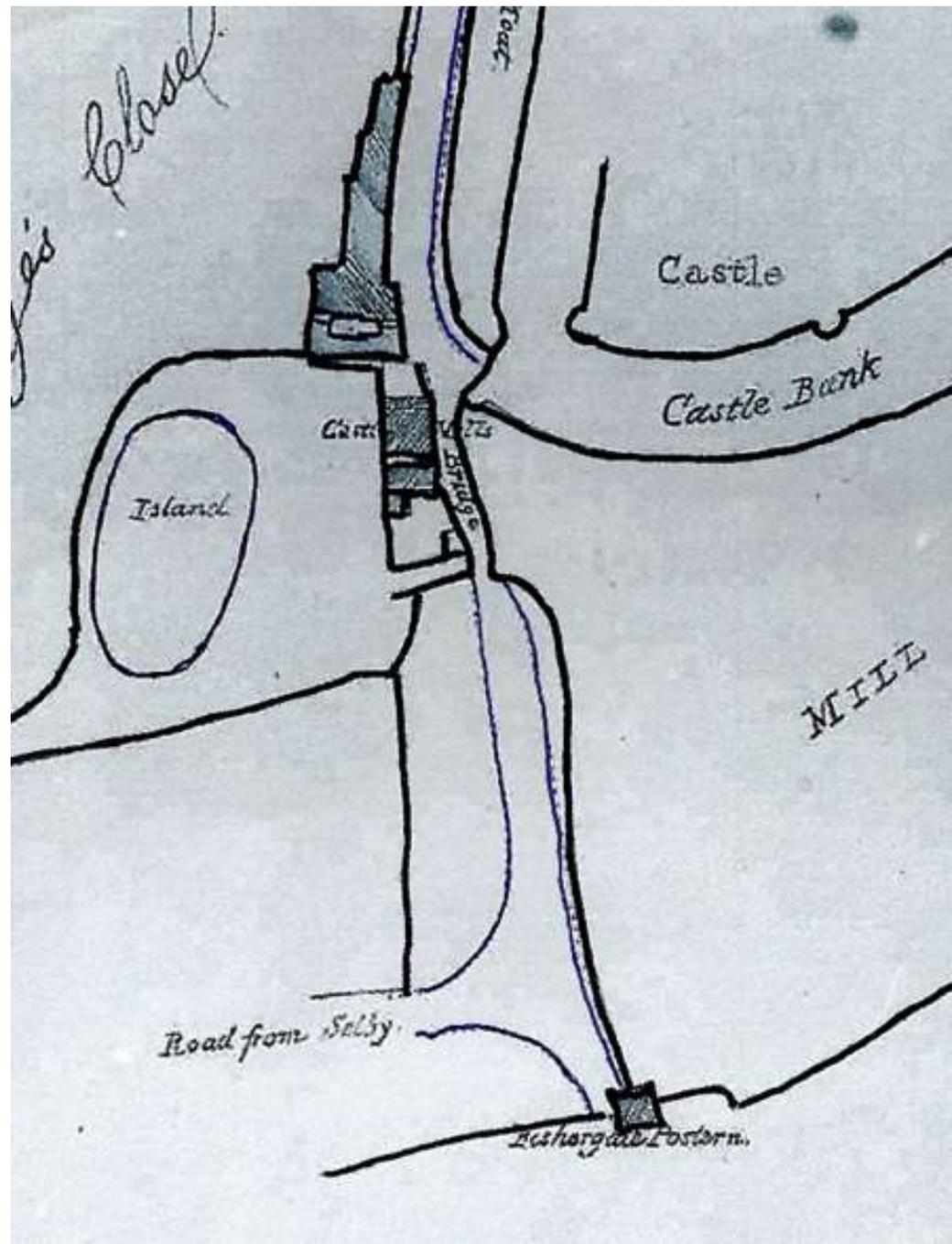


This map of the Castle Mills area was made by John Tuke in 1793, probably in preparation for construction of the River Foss Navigation the following year.

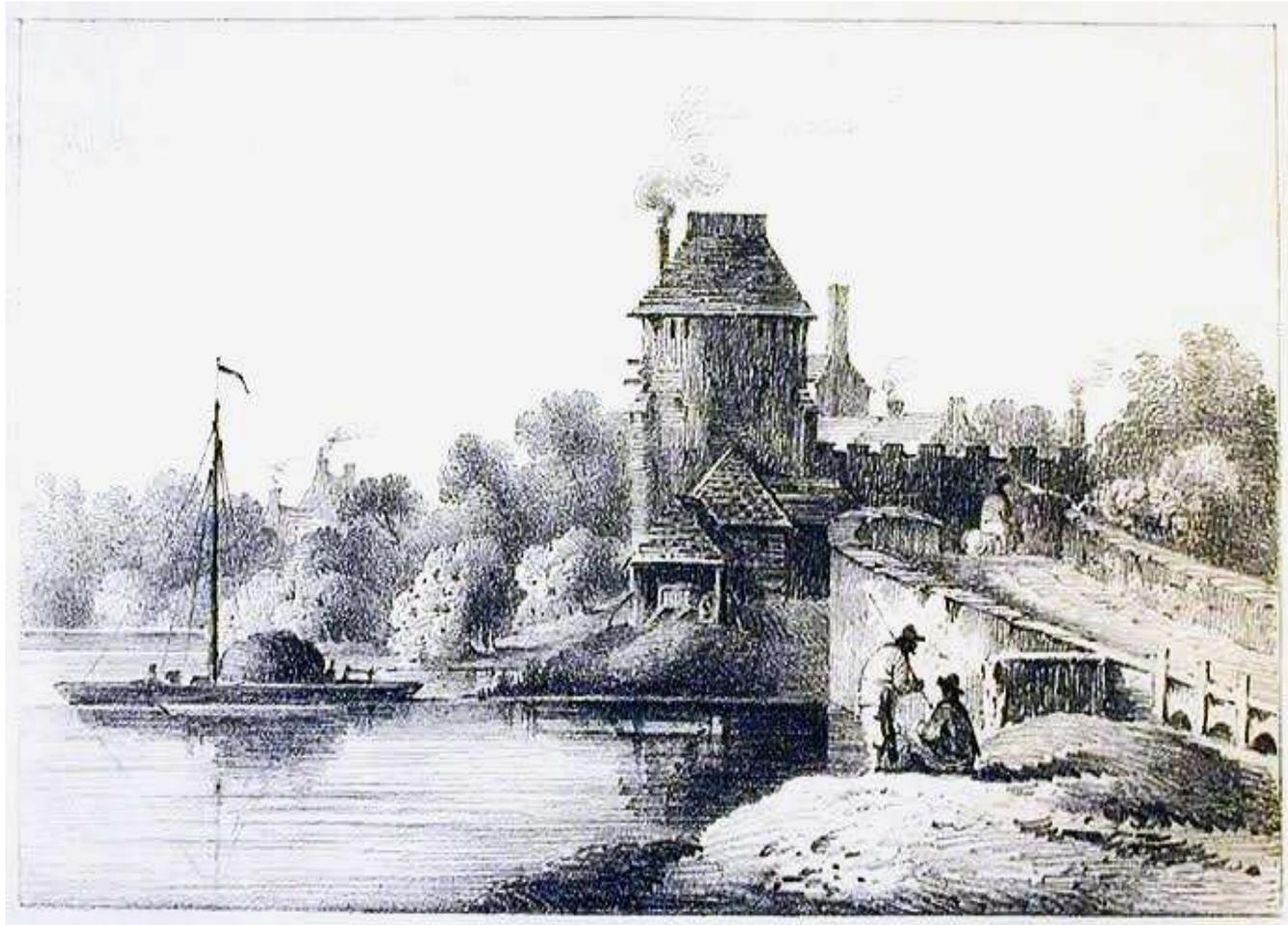
(Image York Explore)

As well as showing the banks of the Foss (Mill Dam) as lapping the corner of the Postern Tower, it also shows the causeway over the dam, the bridge over the river channel, Castle Mills and the Windmill Inn, formally St George's Chapel

(Image York Explore)



**Water still
came close
to the tower
after the
canalisation
of the river
Foss in
1794.**



Marianne Nicholson c1810 (Image York Explore)
**Looking towards the tower from the castle,
with the new bridge and culverts leading to
Castle Mills on the bottom right.
Smoke is drifting from the 1st floor chimney
and Phoenix Foundry is behind the tower.**

Some catalogues wrongly record this picture as Layerthorpe Postern



***George Nicholson c1825 (the same view as his cousin Marianne!) (Image York Explore)
A moonlit view towards the tower with a wagon passing over Castle Mills bridge.***

Looking downstream towards the tower, with the wide river Foss in the foreground, the castle on the right and Phoenix Foundry on the left.



George Nicholson 1825 (Image York Explore)

Note the timber shed and the ground sloping down to the Foss.

The Foss was bought by the City 1853 and improved and narrowed, providing good access to the industrial heart of the city

**Many 19th
century
pictures show
the tower with a
large shed built
against the
outer wall**

*Henry Cave c.1813
He wrote that
“the structure is
a beautiful piece
of masonry, and
is now
occupied by a
poor family”*



This view of the tower exaggerates the size of the Minster and shows the tower of St Crux Church, demolished in 1887

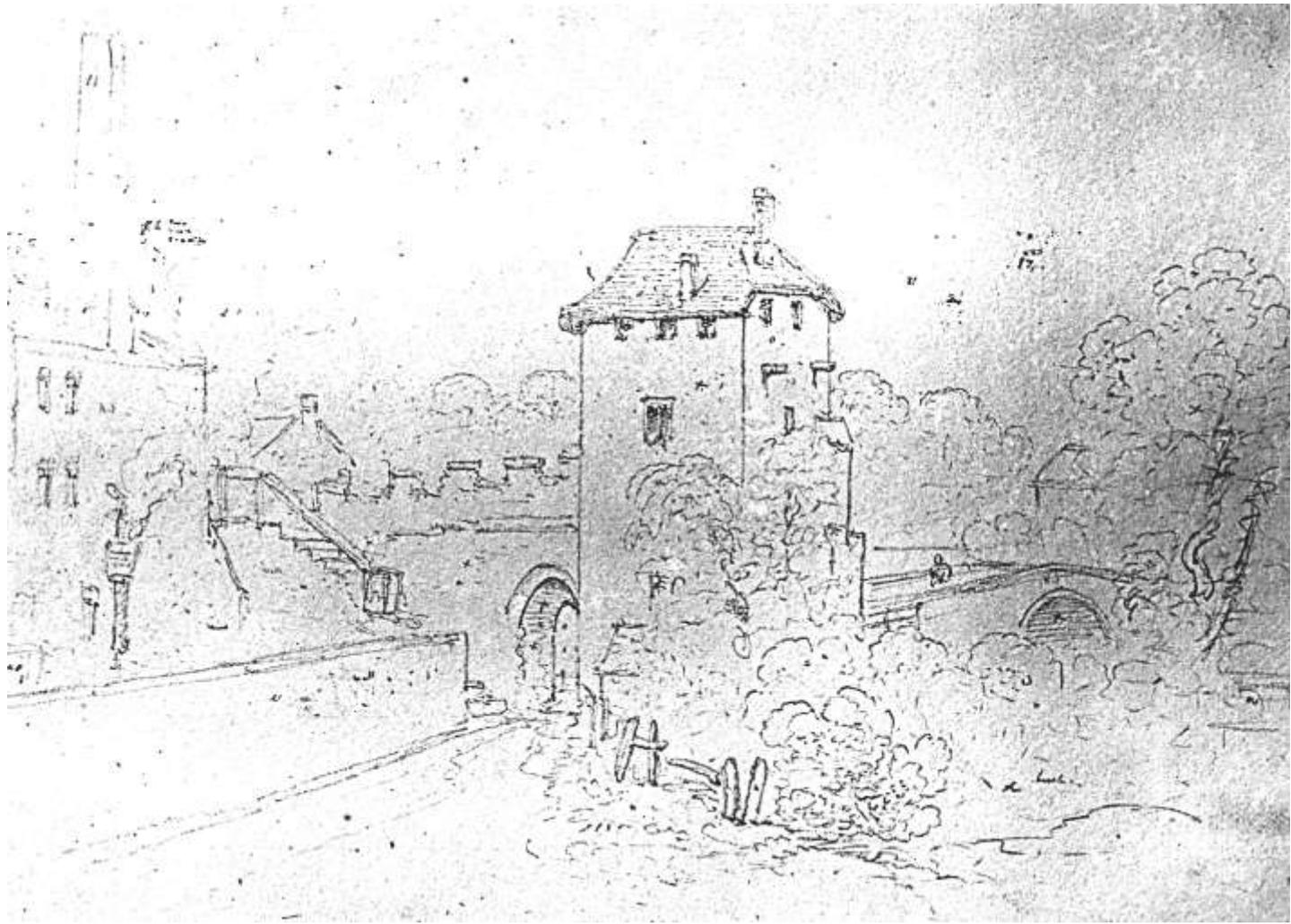


A. G. Vickers c1835

The walls are in a bad way, with parts of the battlements missing.

Smoke rises from the ground floor chimney, showing the tower is probably being lived in

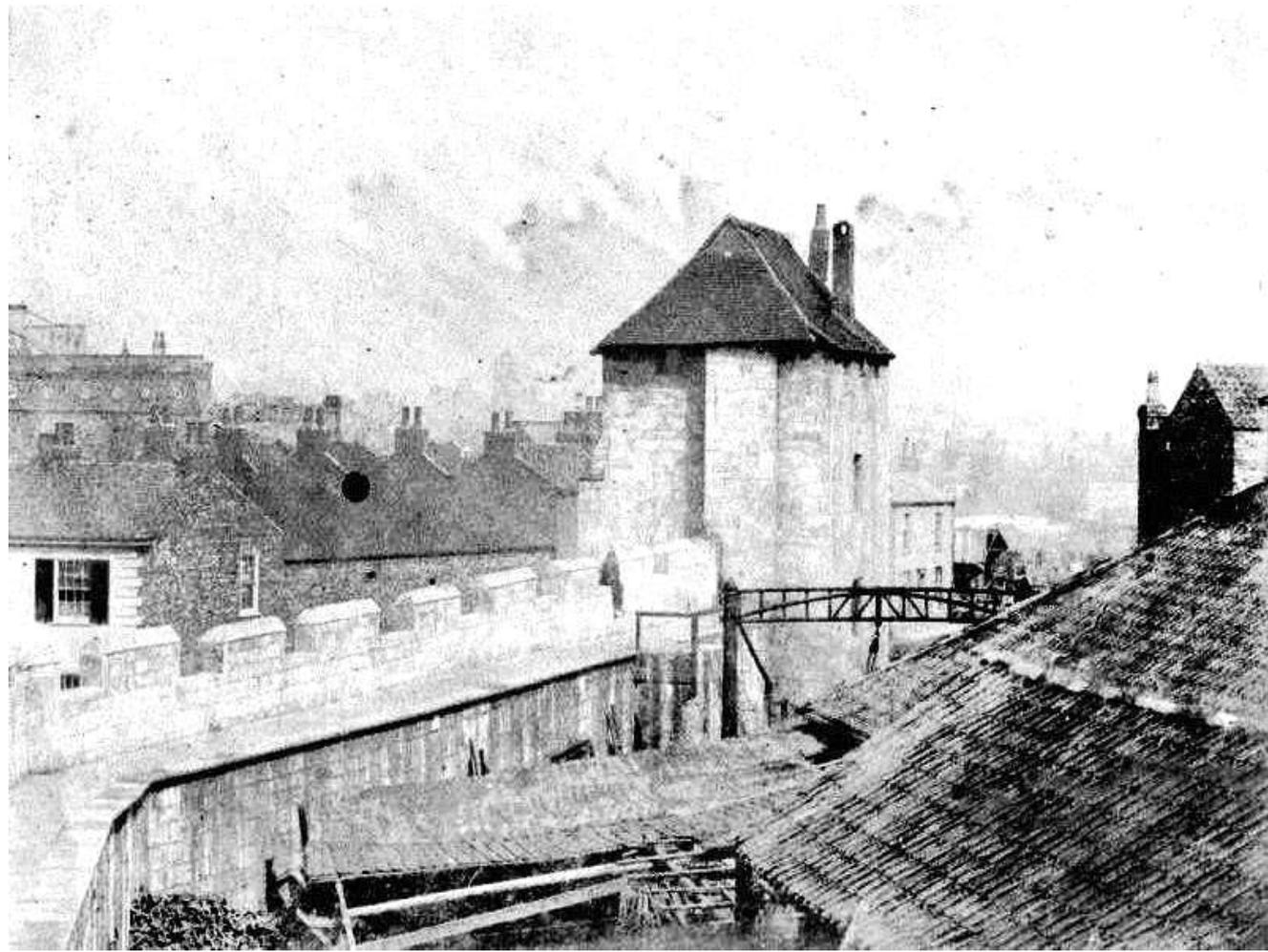
Phoenix Foundry is on the left, apparently with a flaming torch outside!



George Nicholson 1825 (Image York Explore)

The new masonry bridge over the Foss Navigation can be seen on the right.

**The roofs
of Phoenix
Foundry
come close
to the
walls in
this early
photograph**



George Pumphrey c.1853 (Image York Explore)
**Pumphrey was a photography
pioneer, first using Daguerreotype's
and then moving to Fox Talbot's
process**

There are sloping marks on the south walls of the ground and 1st floors.

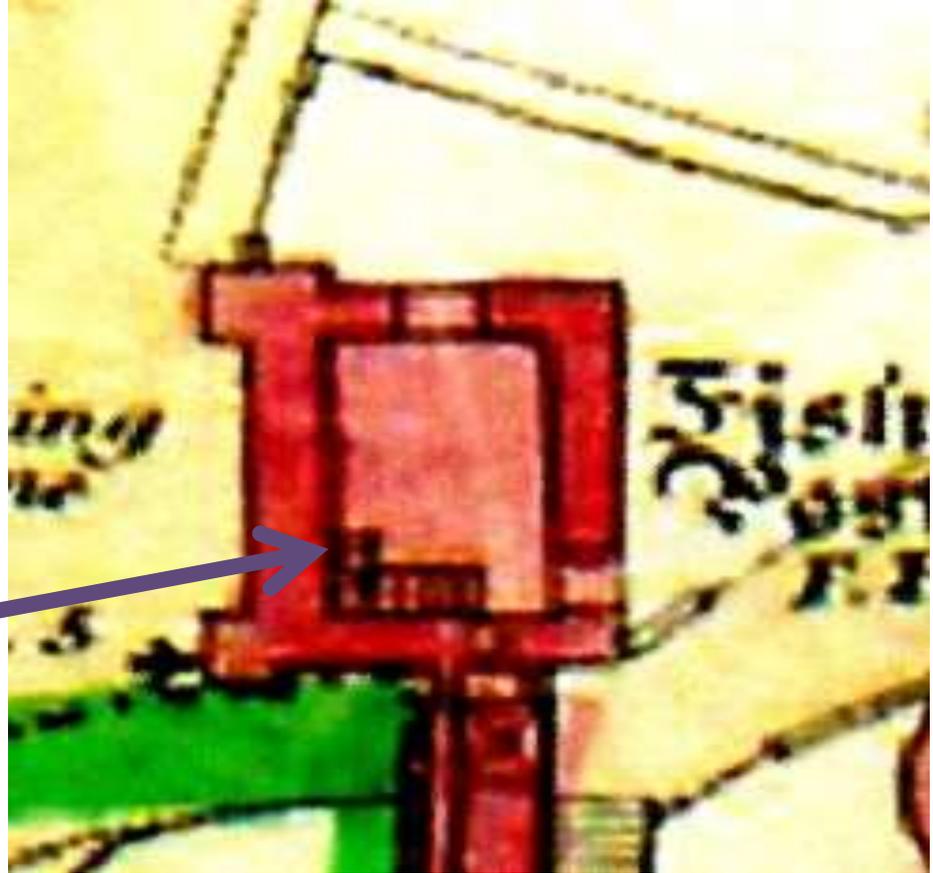
The tower was restored in 1838, so perhaps this is when the stairs were installed.



A staircase would have made access easier in the 19th century, when the tower was no longer needed for defence.

The wooden staircase can be seen in Tucker's 1852 map of York, which shows stairs in the same position as the marks on the wall.

The stairs were removed when the tower was restored again in 1960.



In 1840 a baby was registered as having been born in the tower. The father was Thomas Swann, a bricklayer who was probably running his business from the tower and living there with his family. (Image: 1852 map of York, CYC)

**Another view
from the
same point,
with the
County Gaol
dominating
the distant
Minster.**



**Phoenix
House is on
the corner
of Piccadilly**

John Evelyn c.1910?
**Housing in Leicester Street, behind
the Phoenix Foundry.**

Phoenix Foundry rented the tower, probably as a store.

By this time the walls have been restored and the access stairs look just as they do today.



John Evelyn c.1910?

The tower is very much as it does today and it looks as if the 1st floor chimney has already been removed

Acknowledgements:

**Fishergate Fulford
& Heslington Local
History Society
and the
Friends of York
Walls would like to
thank all who have
provided images for
this presentation.**



**Particular thanks go to:
YAYAS, Imagine York & York Art Gallery**

**The Friends of
York Walls need
volunteers to
open Fishergate
Tower.**

***Would you like
to help?***

