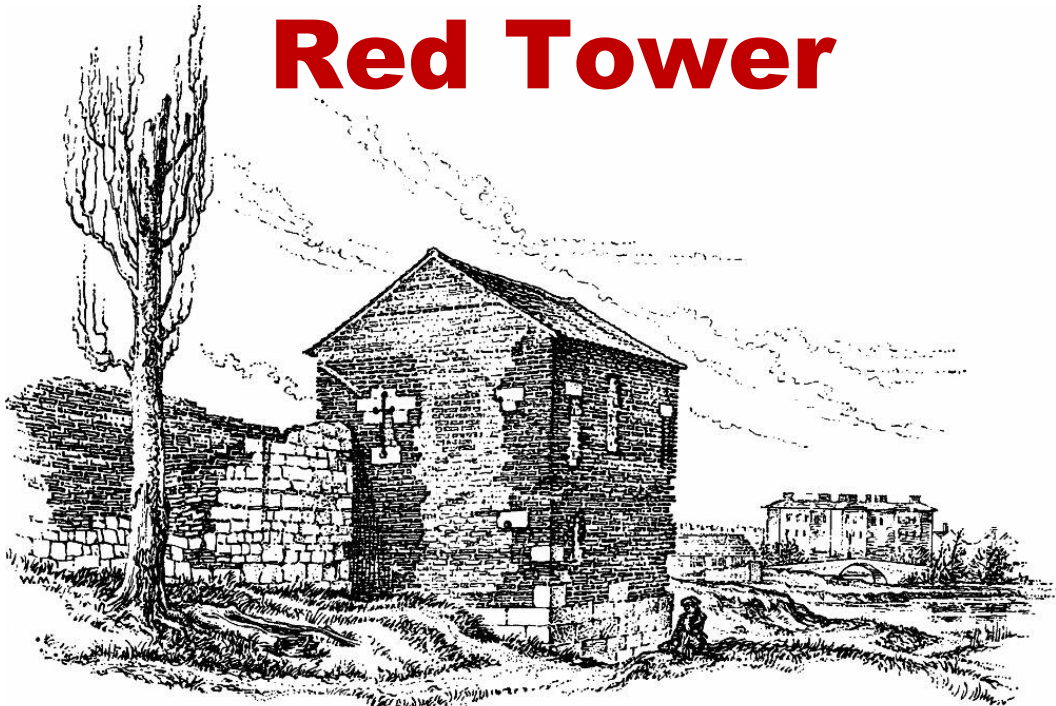


Red Tower



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Why Is the Tower Here?

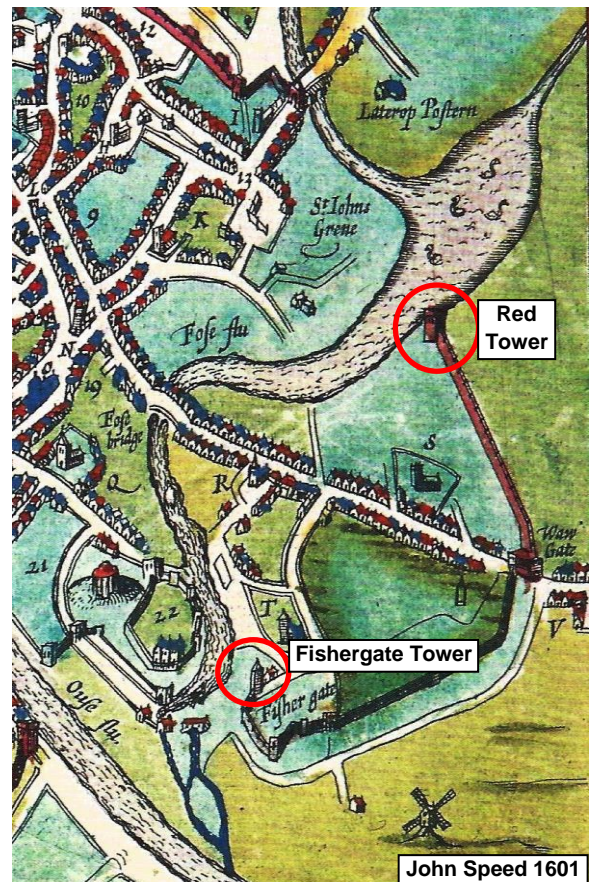
The Romans only walled their government and civilian areas, ie. around modern Minster and Micklegate. During the Viking period and later, the walls were rebuilt and extended, but nothing was constructed around Walmgate until the 12th century.

John Speed's 1610 map (opposite) shows the medieval city walls around Walmgate ending at the Red Tower next to the 'Kings Fishpond'.

The lake was formed in 1068, when William the Conqueror dammed the river Foss at Fishergate, raising the water level by 2m (6ft).

The water filled his castle moat and also flooded the river Foss. Water originally covered a larger area than Speed shows and provided an effective defence as it spread over low ground to the east of the city and also some distance up Tang Hall Beck.

Today, it is difficult to imagine the large expanse of water covering Travers Perkins, Morrisons and the surrounding area, but the ground level has built up a lot over almost a thousand years and even now, looking back along the walls you can see how they begin to rise as they move away from the lake and Red Tower.

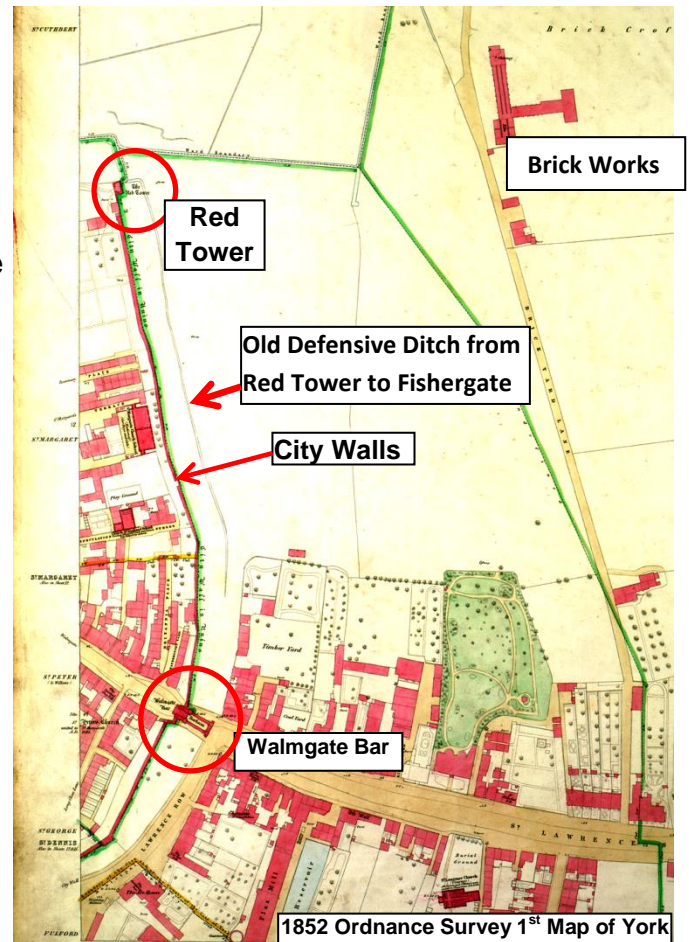


The First Defences around Walmgate

The first reference to defences on the east side of the river Foss is to a gateway at Walmgate Bar in 1155. The style of the inner arch is from that period, so this is probably when the first earth rampart and timber palisade defences were also built around this part of the city.

It is also likely there was a timber 'tower' where the rampart and palisade ran into the water of the Kings Fishpond.

A deep ditch was dug in front of the rampart, along the modern route of Foss Islands Road and Paragon Street, and discharging into the Foss near Fishergate Postern Tower. There are records of the city corporation granting fishing rights, so the channel must have been quite wide.

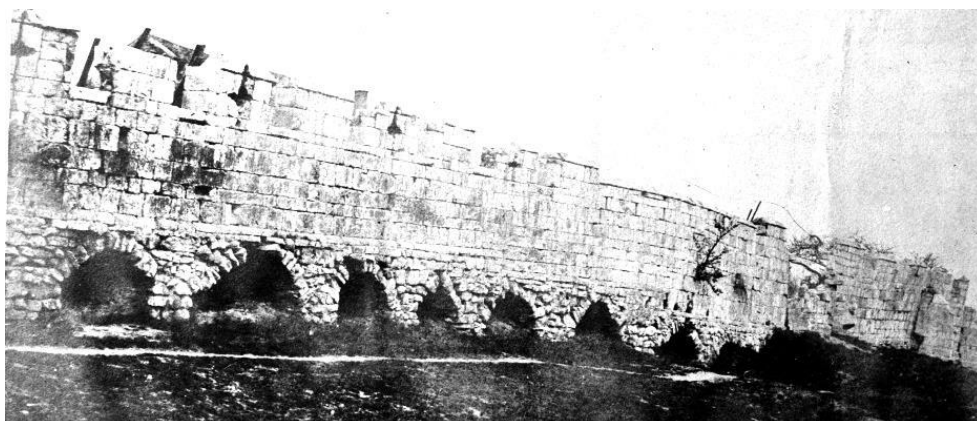


Part of this ditch existed until Foss Islands Road was built in the mid-late 19th century, and is shown on this 1st Ordnance Survey map of York, published in 1852.

A contract of 1345 exists in the City Archives for replacement of the timber palisade at Fishergate with the masonry walls we see today. Master Mason Thomas de Staunton was paid £7 per perch to build a wall 6 ells (22.5ft) high, and 7-8ft thick.

Although there is no surviving documentation, it is probable the walls between Red Tower and Walmgate were built around the same time or soon after, as the contract included an option for building walls elsewhere in Walmgate on the same terms.

It is also very likely that these walls ended with a masonry 'Tower' on the site of our Red Tower, perhaps similar in scale to the corner tower in Fishergate.



The walls around Walmgate are built on arches, still visible today.
Photograph by William Pumphrey 1853 - Evelyn Collection

History of Red Tower

The present building is largely the result of Victorian restoration, but incorporates some materials and features from the original tower.

Before his defeat in 1485, Richard III agreed spending with the city corporation to repair and improve the walls. Negotiations continued with his successor, Henry VII, who visited York a number of times to impose his authority and ensure the loyalty of the city.

Around this time, the Mayor, William Todd paid for 60yds of wall repairs near Fishergate Bar in 1485 (see the plaque this on the Bar) and was knighted by Henry VII in 1487, after the city repelled a rebel attack on Bootham Bar.

Unrest continued, and in 1489 a further rebellion severely damaged both Walmgate and Fishergate Bars, after which the latter was walled up. In 1491, the king was still ordering repairs and improvements to the city walls, bars and defensive ditches, and for guns and powder to be obtained. Similar instructions were issued by the Mayor to every Ward in the city in 1493.

These works must have included Red Tower, as it was under construction in 1490. Fishergate Tower was ordered to be built soon after, in 1503.

Red Tower is the only brick tower in the city, hence its name. The lower levels of the Tower appear to be masonry, so either the brickwork was built on an existing masonry structure, or stone was used as it was more durable when subject to saturation in the King's Fishpond.

The top of the tower was originally similar to Monk Bar, with a flat lead roof and battlements, as did Fishergate Postern Tower.

The tower was first mentioned by name in 1511, when artillery was assigned to it. After repair in 1541 and 1545, it was regularly leased.

Today, the tower is only two stories high, but infilling the Kings Fishpond and building Foss Islands Road in the 19th century has raised the ground level, burying the original ground floor.

Red Tower Murder Mystery

The City Corporation decided they couldn't afford to have Red Tower built in stone and decided to use bricks, which were cheaper and probably made nearby. The masons' guild controlled all work in stone in York, and was angry that the tower was to be built by Tilers (tilers were also bricklayers).

This sparked a vicious feud and the tilers soon complained that they were being threatened and their tools were being broken or stolen. They and asked for protection from the Corporation, but in 1491, a tiler, John Patrick, was murdered.

A leading official of the masons' guild, William Hindley (the Master Mason at the Minster, responsible for the great screen of statues of the kings of England), and Christopher Horner, were charged with murder. It is said that at first, Hindley could not be arrested by the city authorities because he stayed in the Minster area, which was controlled by the archbishop.

Hindley seemed totally unashamed, and it is reported that he employed a man to shout news of his imprisonment through the streets of York, so that all who had business with him should know where to find him. No one was convicted of the murder, probably reflecting the high status and influence of masons in the city, compared with tilers.

The tilers finished the Red Tower, but no other brick towers were built.

The bricks were probably made in the long established brick works that still existed in the area in the 20th century and can be seen on the 1852 map, in what is now the James Street area.

Civil War Damage

During the Siege of York in 1644, Red Tower, Walmgate Bar and adjoining walls, suffered major damage when cannon on Lamel Hill and in St Lawrence's churchyard bombarded the area.

Although it was June/July and flows in the Foss were likely to be minimal, the marshy ground and King's Fishpond must have presented a significant obstacle, preventing the Parliamentary army from entering the city.

In the latter stages of the siege, preparations were made to cross the river Foss near Layerthorpe. This would suggest that Red Tower and the adjacent walls were well defended by the Royalists.

After the siege, some initial repairs to the walls were started in February 1645, including enlarging the ditch in front of Red Tower. Work also commenced on Walmgate Bar in October of that year, financed by fines on the Royalists. Repairs continued to 1648, as the date once visible on the Walmgate Barbican confirms, and further repairs were undertaken on the walls between Walmgate and Red Tower in 1673.



Note the masonry cornice on top of the walls which were originally topped by a crenelated parapet

Red Tower Before Restoration. Frank Green or P Bradden 1767 – Evelyn Collection

Restoration and Repair

A book by Henry Keep of 1680 describes the city as being 'encompassedwith strong, lofty, magnificent and new walls which add much to the grace and beauty as well as to the strength and security of this city'.

However, a drawing of 1776 by Frank Green (or P Bradden?) shows the Red Tower in a very decayed condition, with one wall missing and no roof.

Although walls and other Bars had been repaired, perhaps Henry Keep hadn't seen Red Tower, or was just speaking wistfully.

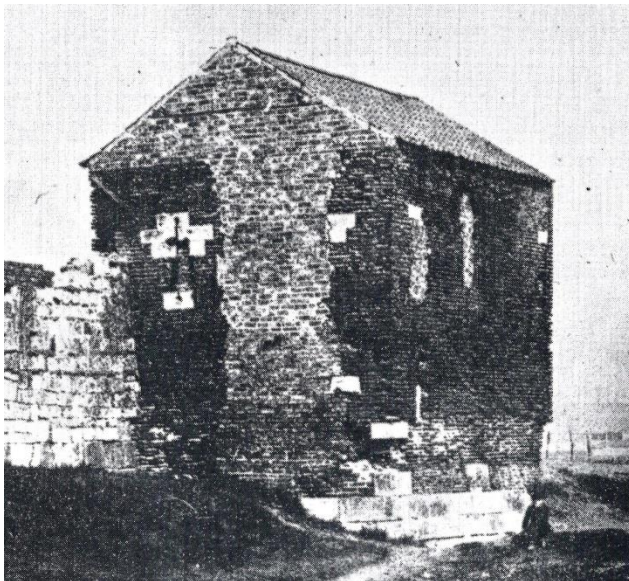


George Nicholson 1825. Evelyn Collection

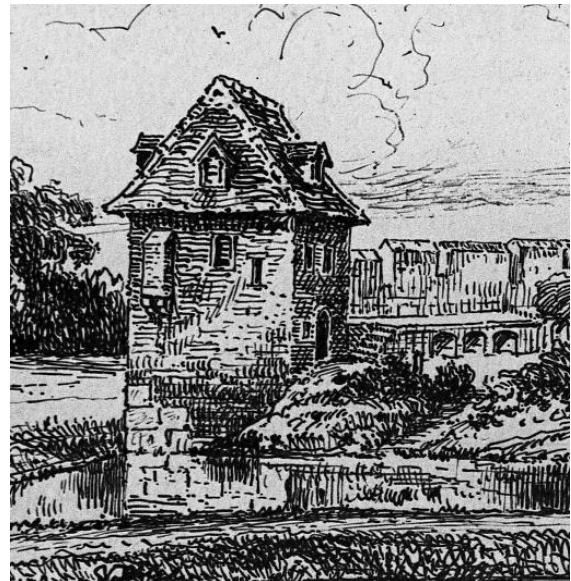
Some repairs had been undertaken to Red Tower by 1800, when it is known to have been rented as a stable, and a drawing dated 1825 by George Nicholson, shows it with a pitched tile roof, but also one lower corner wall missing.

Around this time it was known as 'Brimstone Tower' possibly derived from its use as a store or manufactory of gunpowder.

William Pumphrey, the pioneering York photographer, shows Red Tower in 1853 with the same roof as George Nicholson, but by this time the walls have been repaired, albeit somewhat crudely, but sufficient to safeguard the building.



Red Tower with a pitched tile roof after preliminary restoration. William Pumphrey – 1853 (Hugh Murray)



Ridsdale Tate's imagined view of the Red Tower after George Fowler-Jones' 1857/58 restoration

Victorian Reconstruction

York Corporation took over the Foss Navigation in 1854 and the Kings Fish Pond was filled in, raising ground levels in the area around the tower.

As part of these developments, the architect George Fowler-Jones undertook a major reconstruction of the Tower in 1857-58. This is how we see it today, with dormer windows in the hipped tile roof, a replica garderobe and 'arrow-slit' windows.

Floor levels have been raised to correspond with higher ground outside and do not correspond properly with the windows. The first floor is reached by a ladder.

The external bricks are Tudor in size and texture and may be original, but inside, Fowler-Jones has used Victorian bricks. The door is also likely to be from the Fowler-Jones restoration, but the concrete ground floor and first floor timbers probably date from works in 1958.

Although not so characterful as Fishergate Tower, the building is of considerable interest and charm, particularly the 1st floor, where light filters through the arrow slits shutters and dormers. The setting is attractive too, with the door facing away from the busy road and surrounded by a nice wall and garden. Adjacent steps to the wall-walk bringing frequent visitors.

Unfortunately, the current wooden staircase to the 1st floor does not have sufficient head-room and is unsuitable for public use. However, this can be replaced without altering the character of the building, perhaps by a 'ship's ladder' type similar to those recently installed at Holgate Windmill.

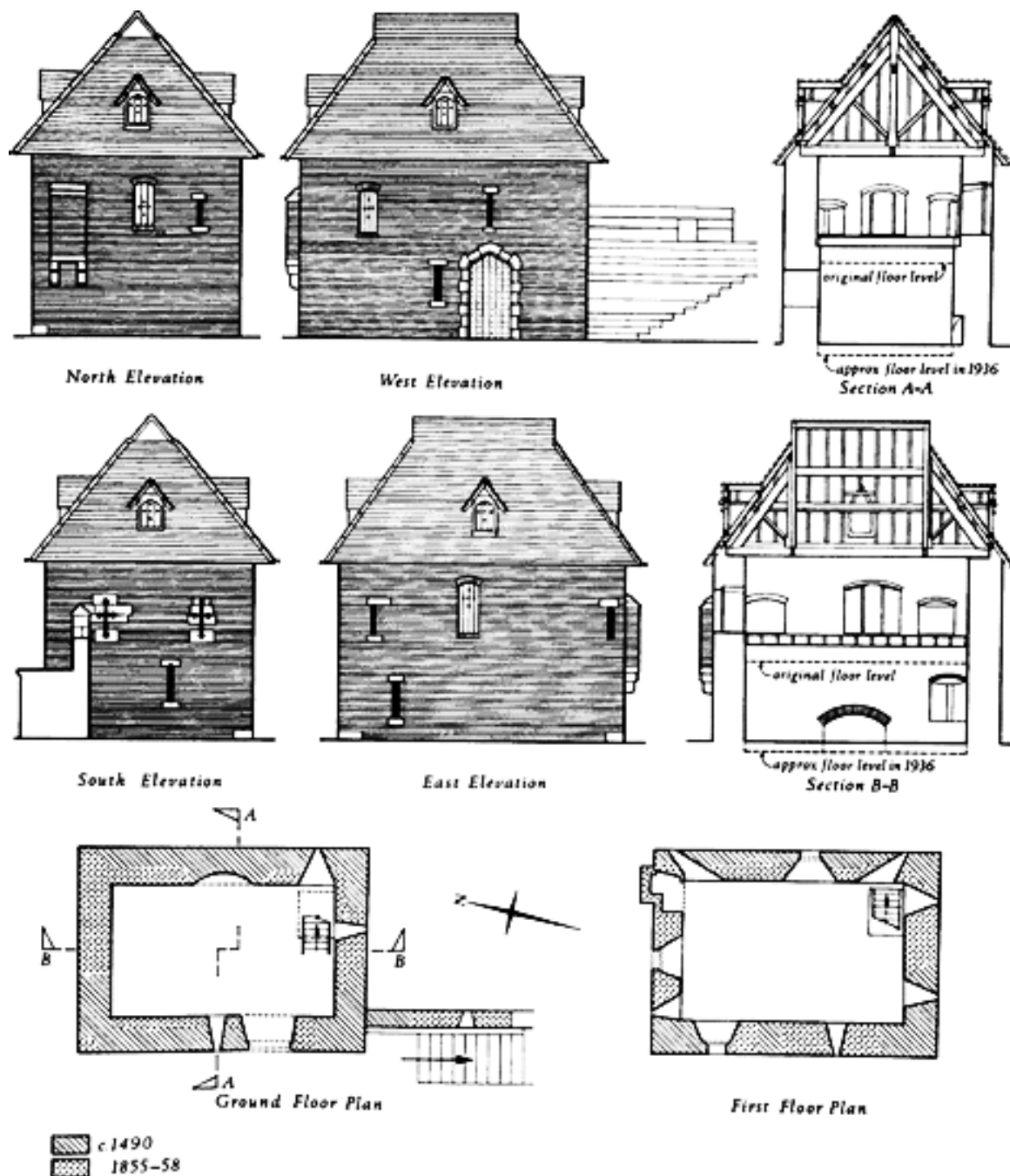
Red Tower is a building with much potential; as a gallery, café, walls history centre, perhaps all three - or more?



1st Floor Room - January 2014



Ground Floor Room – January 2014



THE RED TOWER



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Architectural Drawing of Red Tower by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments

Compiled by Christopher Rainger, for the Friends of York Walls. January 2014

Thanks to the Victoria County History, The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, Simon Mattam of the Friends of York Walls, York Archaeological and York Architectural Association, York Art Gallery, York City Archives, The Evelyn Collection and Imagine York.

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