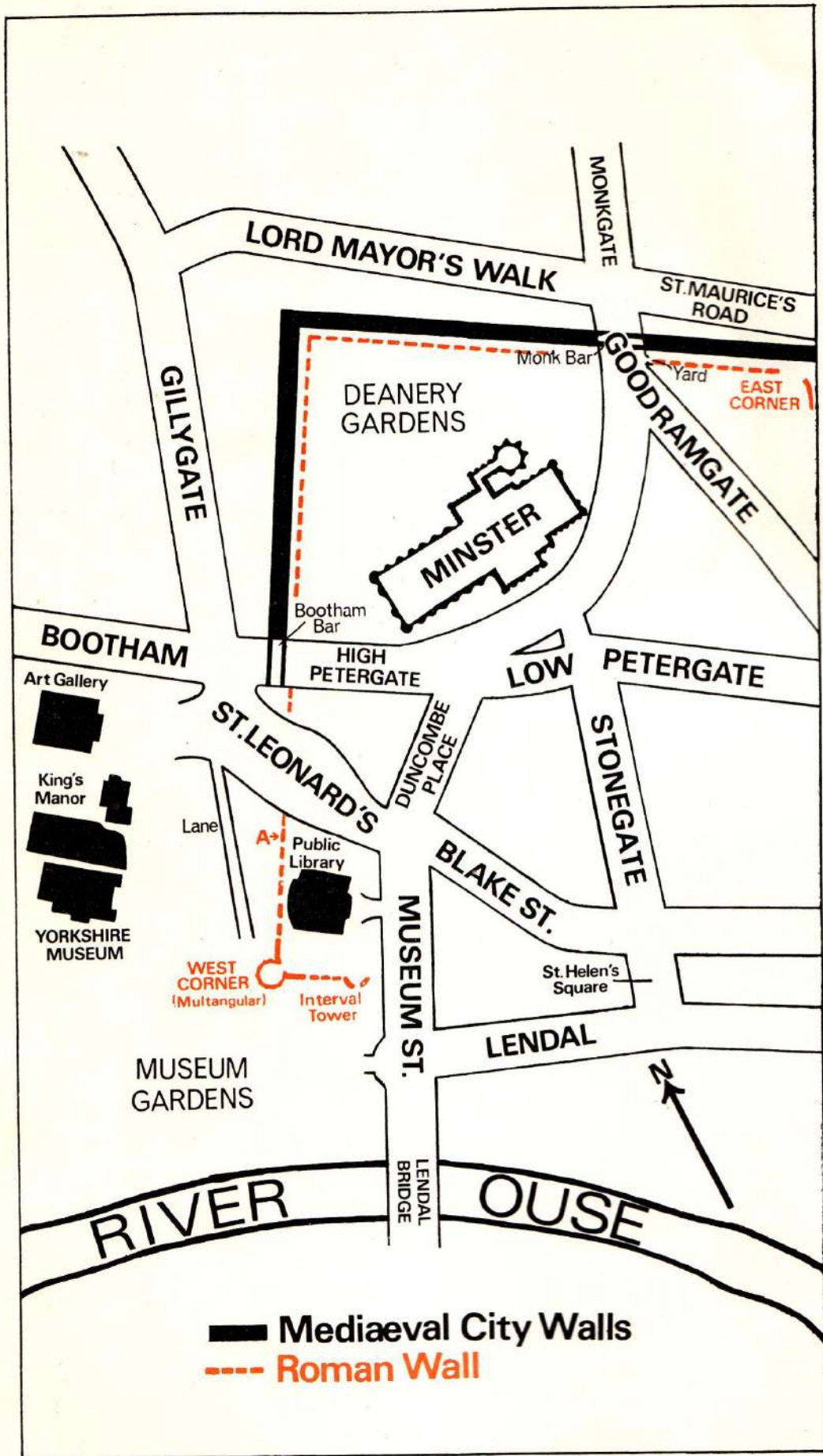


A
Short Guide
to the
Roman Fortress
at York

Yorkshire Architectural and
York Archaeological Society



**A Short Guide
to the
Roman Fortress
at York
as it is today**

THE FIRST Roman fortress at York (Eburacum) was probably built in A.D. 71. Between c. A.D. 80 and the late 3rd century or early 4th century it was rebuilt or major alterations were made on four occasions.

The original defences were of timber and little remains of them or of the first reconstruction in stone, but considerable stretches can still be seen of the walls at the East and West corners of the fortress built during the later reconstructions. They survive in places to their full height except for the surmounting battlemented parapet and it is possible, as nowhere else in Britain, to appreciate the whole arrangement of stone wall, earthen bank, inner wall and towers.

This booklet has been designed to help you to find these remains for yourself with the minimum of effort and to know something of the lives of the men who built them.

YORKSHIRE ARCHITECTURAL AND
YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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Acknowledgement

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A HANDBOOK FOR VISITORS

Roman York from A.D. 71 not limited to the fortress but describing the whole of Roman York, giving greater detail, more photographs, and a permanent souvenir of your visit, is published by the Society in association with the Sessions Book Trust (price 80p, post free £1).

The Legionary Fortress

A convenient place to begin a tour of the visible remains of the Roman Fortress at York is the East Corner, which may be reached from Monk Bar by entering the yard to the right of the Bar and walking to the far end of the grassed area—please turn to the map on page 2. The remains of the East Corner Tower are preserved in a revetted hole.

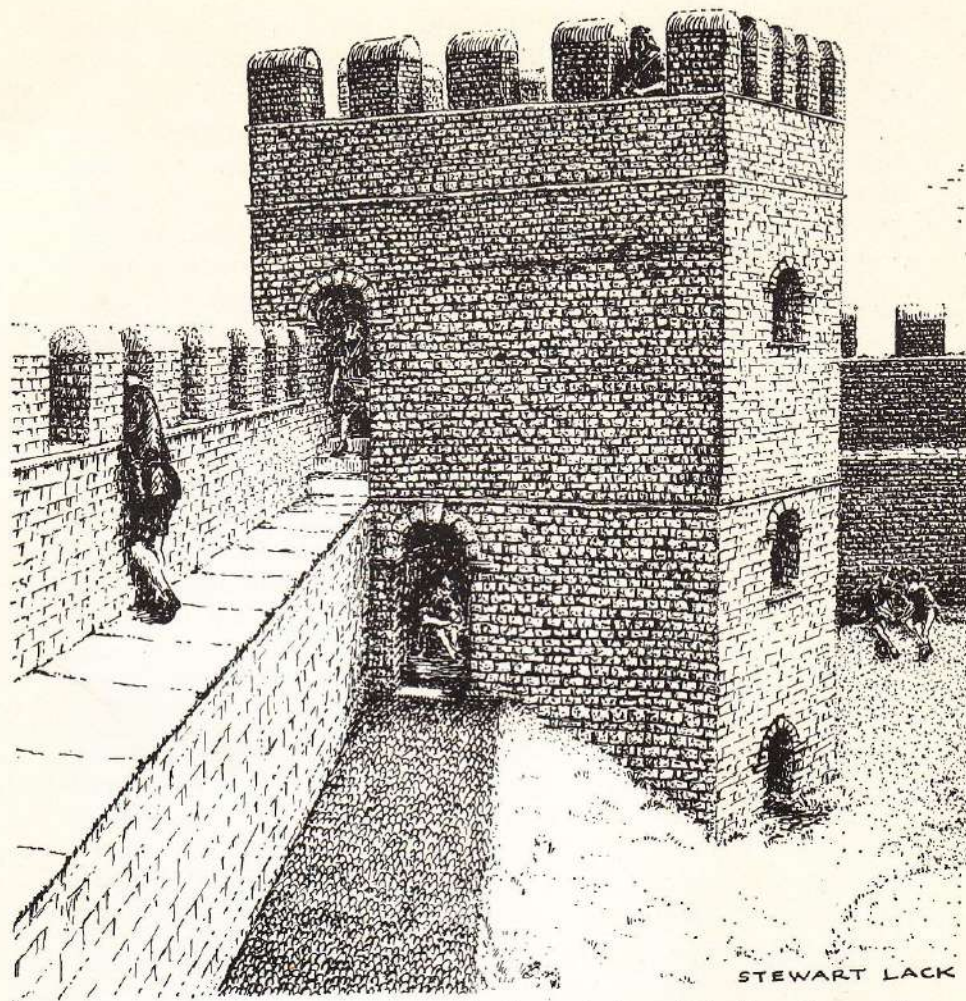
The fortress wall emerges from below the medieval walls (locally known as the Bar Walls) at a height of 16 feet and then reduces to its footings, the curve of which can be traced around the angle. The wall is 6 feet wide at the base narrowing to 5 feet at the top. It is made of grouted limestone rubble (including tiles and dressed stones from earlier buildings), and is faced inside and out with neat blocks of white Tadcaster limestone. The Roman name for Tadcaster was *Calcaria*, 'the limestone quarries'. If you look closely, and the light is good, you will notice on the outer face of the wall a stone carved COH X signifying that the legion's 10th cohort was responsible for building this part of the wall. Notice the heavy projecting plinth at the base of the wall and projecting cornice that marks its top. Elsewhere a battlemented parapet rose above the cornice but here there was a tower.

The surviving stonework of the tower dates from the late 2nd or early 3rd century but on earlier foundations. The clay mound within the ruins is a relic of the 1st century defences cut back to accommodate the stone walling. The floor of the tower basement rested on the clay and the basement chamber only 5 feet high was entered from a manhole at the back. On the Monk Bar side of the tower the present earth level against the fortress wall corresponds to that of a cobbled walk which ran along the top of an earth bank. The tower was probably entered at this height.

On the way back to Monk Bar you will see the inner face of the fortress wall exposed at this walk level almost to the Bar. The remains of an interval tower can be seen 40 yards nearer to the Bar, one of an original six on this side of the fortress.

Before continuing along the walls, it is convenient to walk from the Bar to the Minster where, opposite the South Transept, a Roman column has been re-erected. It derives from the great hall (*basilica*) of the headquarters building (*principia*) of which fragments of walling, mural paintings and foundations are to be seen in the Undercroft Museum within the Minster. This great building approximated in size to the Nave of the Minster but on an oblique alignment. Erected early in the 2nd century, probably a decade after the first stone defences, it survived as a roofed building late into the Saxon period.

By returning to Monk Bar and walking along the Bar Walls to Bootham Bar, it is possible to follow the line of the



Conjectural view of the East Corner Tower

Roman wall (buried in the mound below you) along two sides of the fortress and to enjoy the fine views of the Minster precincts. Bootham Bar is on the site of a Roman gate and the street within, Petergate, is on the line of the main cross street (*via principalis*) of the fortress.

From Bootham Bar, cross St. Leonard's Place (where a few feet of the Roman Wall can be seen at point A on the map, page 2) to the lane alongside the King's Manor. This lane leads to the Museum Gardens and the West Corner Tower. The tower is part of the S.W. front of the fortress which was rebuilt at the end of the 3rd or the beginning of the 4th century on a grand scale. There were two vast angle towers, six majestic interval towers and, presumably, an imposing gatehouse. These gave to the fortress front the grandeur that befitted the headquarters of the *Dux Britanniarum*, the new commander of all the land forces in Roman Britain.

The West Corner or Multangular Tower has been considerably patched with medieval and modern masonry, but Roman work still stands to a height of 19 feet with 11 feet of medieval superstructure. Scale demands that the tower should have originally stood considerably higher. Where the curtain wall joins the S.E. side of the tower you can stand at the original Roman ground level. Note the sharp

re-entrant angle between wall and tower. In Roman times this angle was overlooked by an embrasure, remains of which can be seen inside the tower.

The curtain wall differs from that at the East Corner. It has no heavy plinth or stone cornice but instead a band of red brick which is not only decorative but served to bond the facing to the core of the wall, and originally where now there is a capping course of larger stones, there was a brick cornice. You can see remains of this where the wall is broken.

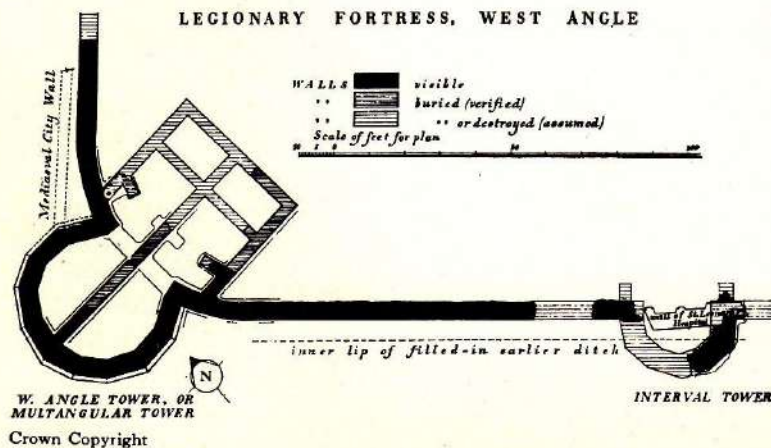
The foundations of the S.E. side of the first interval tower are exposed near the exit from the gardens into Museum Street.

To see the inside of the Multangular Tower, enter the grounds of the Public Library from Museum Street or the Museum Gardens.

The inside has a stone and brick facing similar to the outside. The small holes were probably for scaffolding used during building, and have since lost their filling or never had any. The tower was divided by a wall, part of which can still be seen. The coffins within the tower are Roman from various sites in York.

The inner face of the curtain wall—which can be seen on both sides of the tower—was left rough where it was covered by the earth mound carrying the rampart walk. The mound has been levelled but the arrangements must have been similar to those at the East Corner. Here, however, the parapet walk had to be carried by a bridge of two arches across the entrance to the external tower and through a larger building behind it. The masonry attached to the inside of the curtain on each side of the tower belong to the walls of this building, and on the South side a further piece of walling parallel to the curtain is the base of one side of the bridge.

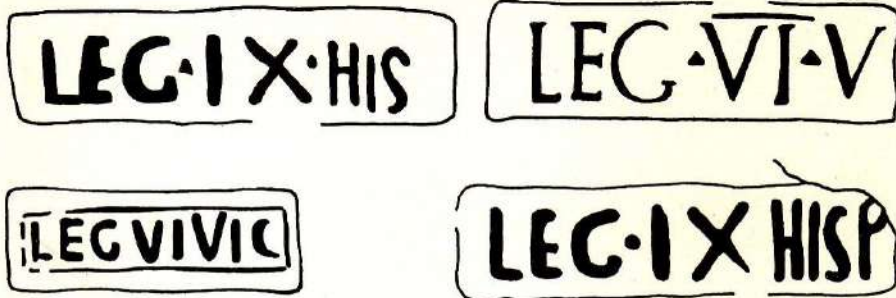
Opposite the entrance to Museum Gardens in Lendal may be seen the foundations and lower walling courses of the second interval tower to the SW temporarily displayed on an undeveloped site but eventually to be permanently displayed. In St. Sampson's Square the remains of the legionary baths are visible through a viewing area in the bar of the Roman Baths Inn (normal licensing hours). The fine remains of a main sewer can be seen by prior arrangement with the York Archaeological Trust, 47 Aldwark.



The Roman Army

There were two kinds of troops — *legionaries* and *auxiliaries*. The auxiliaries, divided into cohorts (infantry) and *alae* (cavalry), 500 to 1,000 strong, were subordinate to the legionaries. They were worse paid, worse equipped than the legionaries, and qualified for Roman citizenship only after 25 years' service.

The garrison at York consisted of a legion, at first LEGION IX HISPANA (or Spanish) and then LEGION VI VICTRIX (or Victorious).



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Tiles bearing legionary stamps in the Yorkshire Museum

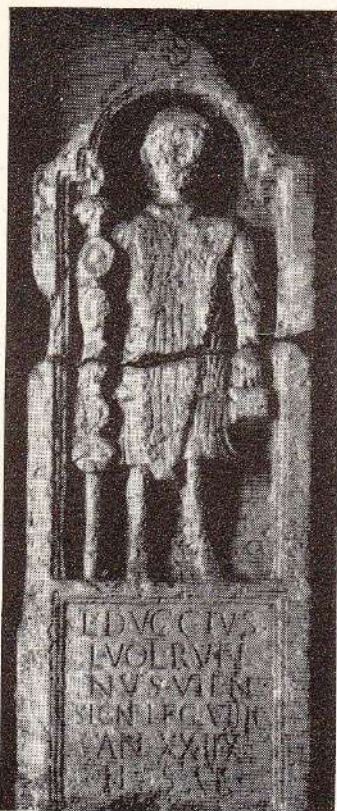
No auxiliary cohort or *ala* is known to have been stationed at York but an altar was found in the area of the civil town which had been dedicated by a prefect or commandant of an auxiliary cohort. His name was Publius Aelius Marcianus.

The legion was a large, self-contained fighting corps of between 5,000 and 6,000 professional soldiers, all Roman citizens. It was mainly infantry but included a cavalry unit, artillery, sappers, engineers and a variety of specialised craftsmen such as armourers, smiths, masons, carpenters, boat-builders and pilots.

The commanding officer, the *legatus legionis*, was normally not a professional soldier, but a man who served tours of three or four years in a career which involved military or administrative posts throughout the empire and of which the culmination was the consulship. His second-in-command was the *praefectus castrorum* or *legionis*, an ex-centurion of long service. There were also six staff officers or tribunes of whom one was of senatorial birth, a young man at the outset of a career similar to that of the *legatus*. The century was the basic unit of the legion and consisted of about 80 men under the command of the centurion and his second-in-command the *optio*. The centuries were further grouped into maniples and cohorts. There were ten cohorts numbered I to X, of which the first, commanded by the senior centurion (*primus pilus*), contained ten centuries (10 x 80 = 800 men), and the remainder, commanded by the next senior centurions, each six centuries (9 x 6 x 80 = 4,320 men: total 5,120 in the legion).

Memorial Stones in the Yorkshire Museum

These show that Romans from many countries served in York.

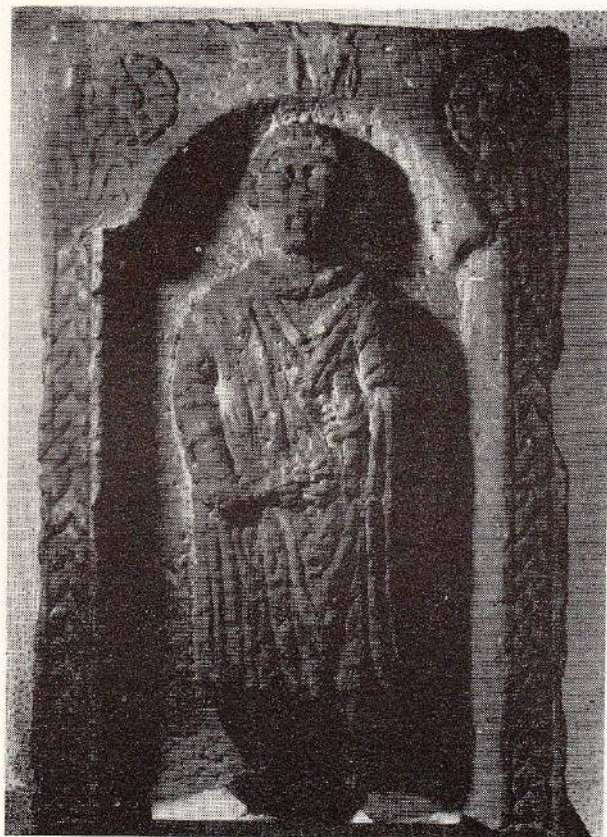


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◀ L. DUCCIUS RUFINUS was a Gaul from Vienne which is now in central South France. He died at the age of 28, serving at York as a standard bearer of the Ninth Legion. His tombstone shows him in military undress with wax tablets in his left hand and a standard (the colours of a legion) in his right hand. Each maniple and cohort had a standard, that in the charge of the first cohort was the famous Roman Eagle and was the most important. The standard Rufinus holds is identified as that of a maniple by the upraised hand at the top of the shaft.

Rufinus came from Gaul. An unidentified soldier of the Sixth Legion came from Novaria, west of

Milan in north Italy, and another soldier of the Sixth Legion called L. Baebius Crescens came from Augsburg in Germany.



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▲ *A legionary smith or armourer*

◀ *A centurion of the Sixth Legion holding the vine twigs symbolic of his rank. The bull's head above the centurion's head is the badge of the legion*

The Roman Garrison at York

LEG. IX HISPANA came to Britain in A.D. 43 from Pannonia (south of Upper Danube), was established at Lincoln by A.D. 47; engaged in campaigns among the Brigantes (whose territory included York) while commanded by Caesius Nasica in A.D. 51-2; was cut up by rebels during revolt of Boadicea A.D. 60-1; moved to York when the Romans occupied Brigantian territory in A.D. 71; was transferred from Britain in the time of Hadrian and suffered some disaster in the East as a result of which it was disbanded before A.D. 165. LEG. VI VICTRIX came to Britain in A.D. 122 from Xanten on the Rhine; took part with other British legions in building Hadrian's wall, turrets and forts; replaced the Ninth Legion at York; remained until the Roman garrisons were withdrawn from Britain at the end of the 4th century, when its place was taken by German mercenaries whose cemeteries have been found on The Mount and at Heworth.

Some Soldiers

P. MUMMIUS SISENNA RUTILIANUS was one of the commanding officers (*legatus legionis*) of the Sixth Legion at York. His career started with a minor office in the civil court and military service with Legio V Macedonica on the Lower Danube. He was successively *quaestor*, *tribunus plebis*, and *praetor* and then became *legatus legionis* with the Sixth Legion at York. Later he was appointed consul, governor of Upper Moesia and finally proconsul of Asia. He was patron of Tibur, near Rome, and there the Augustales honoured him in A.D. 172 with an inscription describing his career.

*QUINTUS ANTONIUS ISAUERICUS and CLAUDIUS HIERONYMIANUS were two commanding officers who appear on inscriptions at York:



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*SEPTIMUS LUPIANUS, a centurion, was *ex evocatis*: meaning that after he had served his full time as a soldier in the Praetorian Guard or one of the Urban Cohorts at Rome, he was promoted to centurion in the Sixth Legion of York.

He procured a beautifully carved sarcophagus for his young wife and their infant son. Hewn from a single block of millstone grit and measuring 7 ft. 4 ins. by 2 ft. 6 ins. wide by 1 ft. 11 ins. high, the coffin bears an inscription which may be translated:

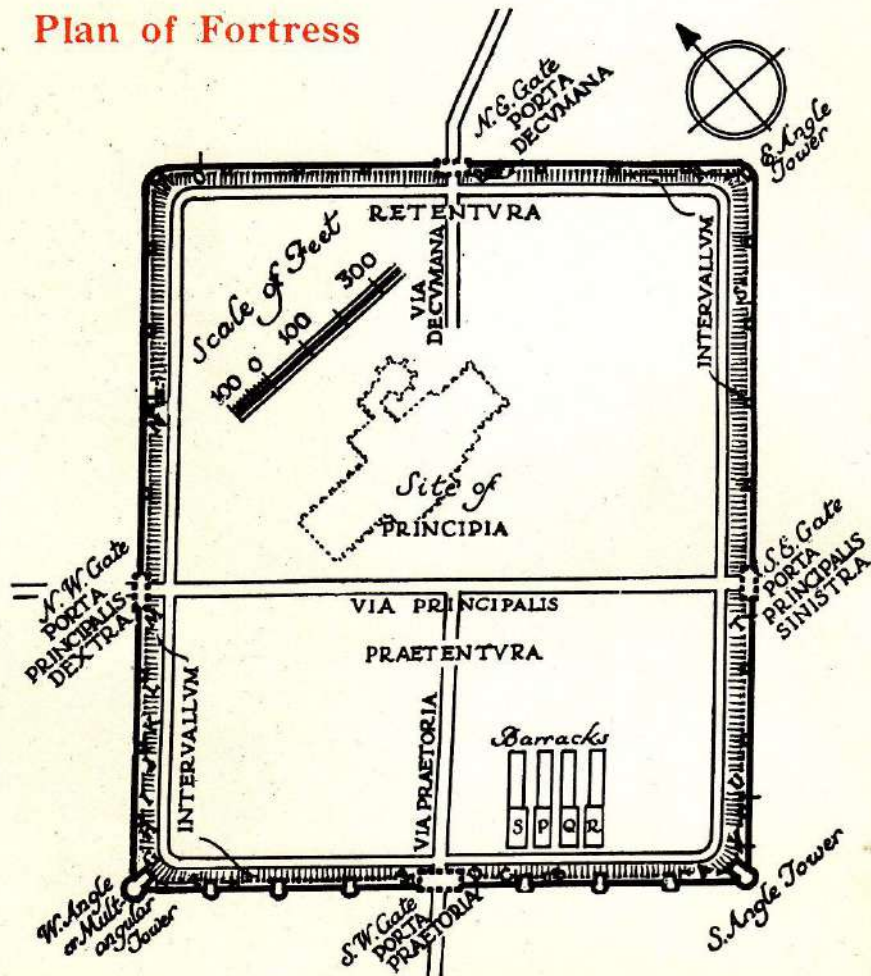
To the spirits of the underworld and in memory of Julia Victorina who lived 29 years 2 months and 15 days and to Constantius who lived 4 years 21 days and 11 months, Septimius Lupianus centurion *ex evocatis* placed this memorial to his wife and son.

*L. CELERINIUS VITALIS, a *cornicularus*, was in charge of the clerical staff attached to the Headquarters of the Ninth Legion. He dedicated an altar to Silvanus, god of the wild and of hunting.

*MARCUS MINUCIUS AUDENS, a pilot of the Sixth Legion, who guided the transport ships up the River Ouse bringing their cargoes from Africa, Italy and Gaul, to the mother goddesses of which countries he dedicated an altar.

*—These inscriptions on stone are in the Yorkshire Museum.

Plan of Fortress



The Fortress

- PLAN— a rectangle with rounded corners and long axis orientated N.E.-S.W.
- SIZE— 1,590 feet by 1,370 feet, or 50 acres.
- GATES— there were four, one on each side. The main gate or *porta praetoria* was in the centre of the S.W. side (St. Helen's Square, opposite the entry to the Guildhall); the rear gate or *porta decumana* in the centre of the N.E. side (under the medieval wall in Lord Mayor's Walk opposite Grove Lane); the two lateral gates were S.W. of the centre of their respective sides, the *porta principalis dextra* in the N.W. side (on the site of Bootham Bar), the *porta principalis sinistra* in the S.E. side (under King's Square).
- STREETS— the cross street or *via principalis*, connected the two lateral gates on the line of Petergate and the *via praetoria* ran on the line of Stonegate from the *porta praetoria* to the centre of the *via principalis*.
- SEWERS— An advanced sewerage system served the fortress. A considerable length of a main sewer between the bath house and Petergate survives off Church Street and a fragment of another is reconstructed in the Yorkshire Museum.
- INTERNAL BUILDINGS the headquarters buildings were central, fronting on to the *via principalis* and extending back from it under the Minster. The barracks occupied most of the fortress. They were arranged in blocks in pairs and remains of two pairs were found in Davygate under Cresta House and Anglia Building Society. Each block housed a century. The legionary baths, on the Turkish-bath principle, were inside the fortress and fragments are preserved under the Roman Bath Inn, St. Sampson's Square.

History of the Fortress Defences

Ninth Legion

- (1) **A.D. 71.** The winter quarters of a campaigning legion were built at York. The area of the defences was stripped of turf. A corduroy of fresh cut branches was laid down, on which earth dug out from the surrounding ditch was built into a bank faced with turves.
- (2) **c. A.D. 80.** During Agricola's governorship, more permanent defences were erected on the spread remains of (1) above. These consisted of an earth bank laid on oak beams, revetted with turves, surmounted by a timber palisade and towers, and surrounded by a double ditch.
- (3) **A.D. 107-8.** The S.E. gate was rebuilt in stone and work started on a stone wall in front of the earth bank and filling in the inner ditch. Stone towers were built inside the defences, and the other gates reconstructed. The work may have been interrupted. The headquarters building was not rebuilt in stone until a decade later. A fragment of a Hadrianic building inscription has been found outside Bootham Bar.

Sixth Legion

- (4) **Late 2nd or early 3rd century.** The whole of the defences were rebuilt on securer foundations. To this date belong the surviving remains at the East Corner.
- (5) **Late 3rd or early 4th century.** The defences were again rebuilt except for the section from the N.E. to S.E. gates which includes the East corner. On the S.W. side imposing projecting towers were built but elsewhere the towers remained internal. The N.W. gate was rebuilt at this time using carved fragments from monumental tombs. To this period belong the surviving remains of the Museum Gardens.



Stone in the Yorkshire Museum, from the S.E. gateway here conjecturally completed