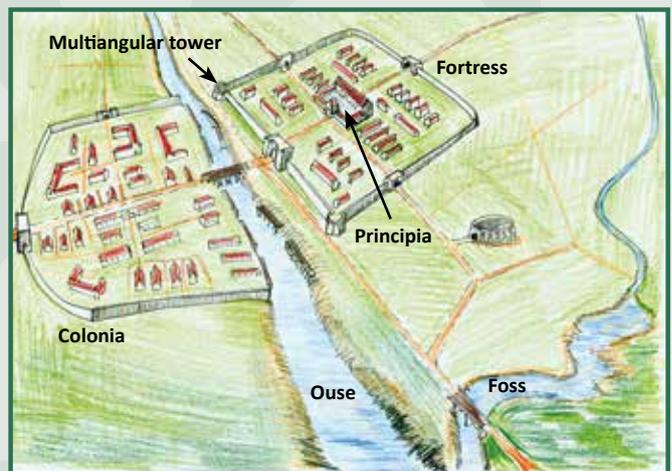


## THE ROMANS AND YORK

### The Foundation of York

The Romans are generally thought to have founded the city of York, but it is possible that there was a native Celtic settlement here before they arrived. The name that the Romans gave the site was Eboracum, which, to them, meant "Place of the wild boar", but this is possibly a misunderstanding of an original Celtic name meaning "Eburo's place." What is certain is that in AD 71 the Emperor Vespasian sent a new military governor to Britain, Petillius Cerialis, with instructions to subdue the Brigantines, a powerful tribe occupying much of what is now northern England. The Queen of the Brigantines, Cartimundia, was facing rebellion led by her husband Venutius. The Romans took advantage of the situation by intervening in order to gain overall control. Cerialis moved the Ninth Legion from Lindum (Lincoln) and stationed it on the slight ridge between the rivers Ouse and Foss. Here the soldiers built a rectangular fortress of earth and timber and this was the beginning of Roman York.

Much of southern and eastern Britain had been conquered by this time but Eboracum was to be the main headquarters for the troops who were trying to conquer the rest. It was defended by two rivers and could be supplied by sea because it was possible to bring large vessels up the Ouse. Later, the defences were strengthened by Governor Agricola, but it was not until early in the second century that the timber palisade was rebuilt in stone by the Sixth Legion. (Precisely what happened to the Ninth has always been something of a mystery). These defences were again reconstructed in about AD 200. The final developments occurred about a century later when most of the defences were remodelled. This was when the great multiangular corner tower, still visible in the Museum Gardens, was built.



# THE ROMANS AND YORK

## The Principia

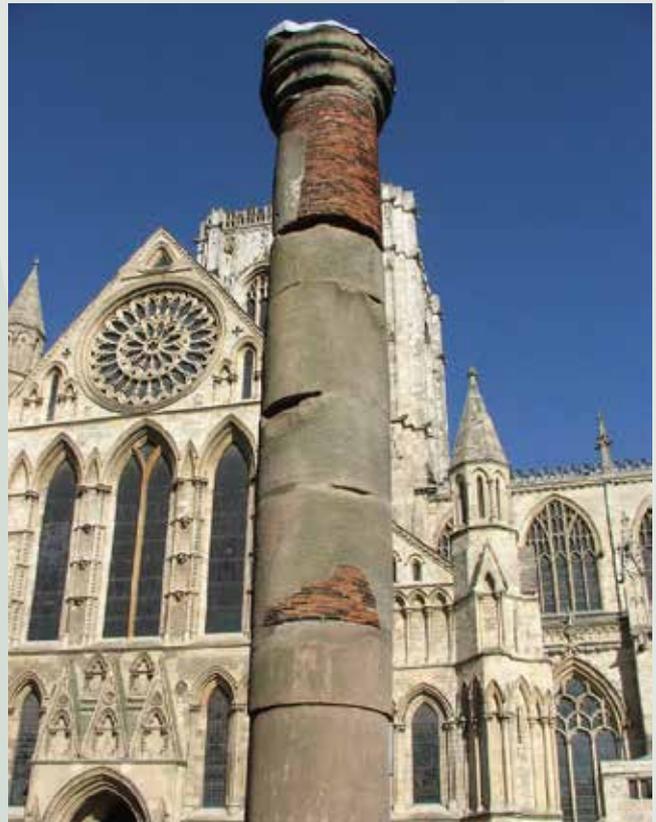
At the centre of the fortress stood the military headquarters, or principia. Substantial remains of this still lie beneath the Minster, and archaeologists have been able to work out what it looked like from what they have found. One of the columns from the great hall, or basilica, has been re-erected in Deangate, and this gives a very good impression of the scale and importance of the Roman building. Even a section of painted plasterwork has survived, and this, along with other Roman items, may be seen in the Foundations.

## The Colonia

Meanwhile a large civilian settlement or Colonia, had grown up on the other side of the Ouse. This, too, was defended by walls and would have been connected with the legionary fortress by a bridge over the river. The remains of a number of buildings, including houses, workshops and a temple to the god Serapis have all been found here, and it is thought that a discovery (in Micklegate) may be the foundations of the palace where the Emperor Severus died, in AD 211. Severus was cremated and his ashes returned to Rome, but numerous Roman burials have been found, especially outside the walls of the colonia. We have learnt a great deal from these.

In AD306, Constantius Chlorus died whilst visiting York. He had been campaigning with his son, Constantine, who was immediately proclaimed Emperor of the West by their troops. This proclamation almost certainly took place in the large courtyard of the principia. As usual there were other candidates elsewhere in the Empire, but Constantine succeeded in reaching Rome and defeating his rivals. Later, he became

the first Emperor to convert to Christianity. There were definitely Christians in York by late Roman times, but no church of that date has yet been found. They may have worshipped in private houses - at least until Constantine made Christianity legal in AD 312.



The Principia



The Emperor Constantine

## THE ANGLO SAXONS

When the Romans withdrew from Britain at the beginning of the fifth century, a number of Germanic races saw an opportunity to extend their territories by crossing the North Sea and settling in the eastern parts of what we now call England. (England, in fact, simply means 'Angle Land'.) These were the Angles, Saxons and Jutes - now known collectively as the Anglo Saxons. Their invasion of Britain was part of a more general westward migration of people. As the Roman Empire crumbled, and as the threat from the Asiatic tribes steadily expanding out of the steppes increased, the people of Europe found themselves under constant pressure to move on.

In Britain, this pattern was repeated. As the Anglo Saxons came in, so the native, Romanised Celtic population gradually withdrew into the western hills. It is now thought that many stayed behind and traded with the settlers, but the overall pattern was one of retreat. This is why Wales and Cornwall are still Celtic regions. If King Arthur really lived, he was one of these Romano Celts, fighting to hold the Anglo Saxons at bay. (There is even a legend that he temporarily liberated York, but there is no reliable evidence for this.)

At first the Anglo Saxons established separate, independent kingdoms in eastern England. By the early seventh century there were seven kingdoms and these are often referred to as the Heptarchy. The kingdom of Kent was the first to adopt Christianity, when King Ethelbert was converted as a result of the missionary work undertaken by St Augustine of Canterbury.



The Anglo Saxon Heptarchy

# THE ANGLO SAXONS

King Edwin (617-632) united the two kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia to create Northumbria - most of England north of the Humber. Like most kings at the time he had no fixed capital but Eoforwick (York) became his principal city. He overran Elmet, probably the last Celtic enclave east of the Pennines, and even conquered Anglesey and Man.

Northumbria was now the largest and most powerful of the Anglo Saxon Kingdoms, and Edwin was declared Bretwalder -literally the "Wielder of Britain" and the other kings were supposed to pay tribute to him. Christian Kent, however, did not, and King Penda of Mercia was almost constantly in conflict with him. Edwin's conversion to Christianity (following his marriage to Princess Ethelburga of Kent) gave Penda an excuse for all out war. Edwin was killed and Christianity in Northumbria suffered a temporary setback, until it was restored by King Oswy.

Conflict between the Anglo Saxon Kingdoms continued sporadically for a further two centuries, but the steady growth of Christianity had a unifying influence, and the Viking attacks provided a common enemy. Probably the most famous of the later Anglo Saxon Kings was Alfred the Great, who prevented the Vikings from conquering Wessex. Northumbria effectively became a viking kingdom, but was eventually regained by the Anglo Saxons when they recaptured York in 954.

Finally, in 972, the remaining Anglo Saxon kingdoms were officially united when Edgar was consecrated king over all of them. England had finally come into being as a nation state, but some of the original kingdoms survived as earldoms until 1066 and the arrival of the Normans. Harold Godwinson, who was killed at Hastings, had been Earl of Wessex before becoming King of England and his brother, Tostig, was Earl of Northumbria.



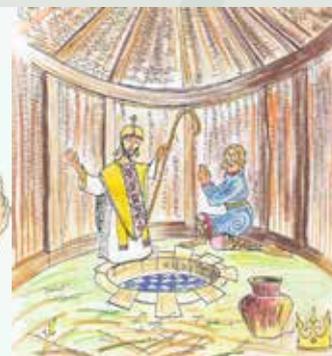
King Edwin of Northumbria



Ethelburga of Kent



Edwin & Ethelburga marry in 625



Edwin converts & is baptised in the first Minster in 627

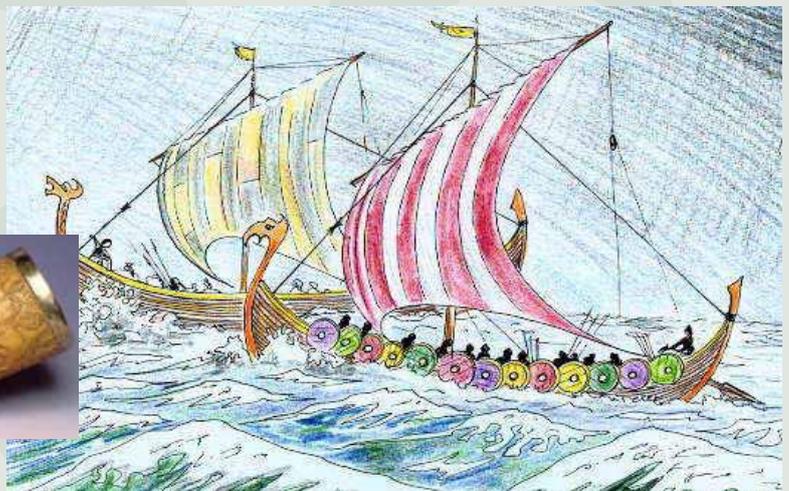
# THE VIKINGS

Since the spectacular discoveries in Coppergate, York has become famous as a Viking town, and many visitors to the Minster ask if it has any Viking connections. The simple answer is no - the present Minster was begun by the Normans and most of the building dates from centuries after the viking era. History though, is seldom that simple! The Normans were originally Vikings anyway. Their ancestors had left Scandinavia and settled in northwest France just as other Vikings had settled in England. The word 'Norman' means 'North Man' - another word for Viking.

Before the Normans came, however, there was definitely a Minster in York. It began life as the wooden church built for King Edwin's baptism in 627 and, although it was quickly rebuilt in stone, we still do not know exactly where it was. When the Vikings captured York in 867, it is quite possible that they damaged this Anglo-Saxon Minster. After all, the Vikings were still pagan at

this time and they had a reputation for raiding churches! However, we have no direct evidence that the Minster was attacked and it is unlikely that it was totally destroyed because a Viking king, Guthfrith, was buried there in 895. Presumably, he had become a Christian.

As the Vikings gradually settled down, inter-married with the local people and converted to Christianity, it became increasingly difficult to say who was a Viking and who was an Anglo-Saxon. Nowadays, historians tend to use the term "Anglo Scandinavian" to describe this mixed race. A number of gravestones dating from this period have been found under the present South Transept, and are displayed in the Foundations exhibition. One of these Anglo Scandinavians was called Ulf. He made a gift of land to the Minster and also gave a great drinking horn as a symbol of his generosity. It may still be seen in the Undercoft.



# THE VIKINGS

In 1066, the King of Norway invaded northern England with a huge Viking army. Like William the Conqueror, he believed he had a right to the throne of England and he defeated the local army at Fulford, just outside York, but did no damage to the city itself. After all, he wanted these Anglo-Scandinavians on his side. A few days later, however, he was defeated and killed at Stamford Bridge by King Harold of England's Saxon army.

After the Normans had defeated Harold at Hastings, they began their conquest of the rest of England, including the Anglo-Scandinavian north with its strong Viking influences. The people of York resisted fiercely, and their great rebellion of 1069 resulted in the burning of the city and the Minster itself when the Normans hit back. There is one final twist to the story. In 1075 a Viking prince, called Cnut, invaded England with a fleet of two hundred ships.

He decided not to attack King William himself but went to York instead and carried out what must have been the last true Viking raid on the city. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, they "broke into St Peter's church, carrying away much property from the interior".

This suggests that the Anglo-Saxon Minster had not been totally destroyed during the revolt against the Normans. It is ironic, perhaps, that the only real Viking damage for which we have any direct evidence should occur after the Norman Conquest! It was possibly after this attack that the Norman Archbishop of York, Thomas of Bayeux, decided to start from scratch and build a new Minster on a new site. The site he chose is where the Minster stands today, and much of his work can be seen in the foundations of the present building.

