

SELF-LED ACTIVITY

WHY BUILD A TOWER HERE?



Recommended for

KS2–3 (Geography, History)

Learning objectives

- Investigate the physical geography of the area around Clifford's Tower (and York Castle).
- Use vocabulary to describe key physical features of the landscape around Clifford's Tower.
- Understand the strategic significance of York Castle's position.

Time to complete

Approx. 30 minutes



A view of Clifford's Tower from the southwest.

SUMMARY

This activity will help students understand the geographical and strategic location of Clifford's Tower; why the Normans built a castle here and how the city of York developed over time.

Start by watching the 'Mini Guide to Medieval Castles' video (1 min 55 secs) on our YouTube channel.

Students should record the key considerations for the Normans when building castles. These include:

- building on high ground, so the castle can be seen by everyone in the area, sending a clear message that the Normans are in charge of the area
- building on high ground, with a clear view of the landscape around it so that approaching enemies can be seen
- making use of natural defensive features in the landscape that will prevent enemies attacking the castle, i.e. rivers
- building close to a water source
- building near to land that can be used for farming and growing crops.

Discuss how far York Castle fits this general model of Norman castle-building. Clifford's Tower is built on an artificial mound which gave good visibility over the local area. One of the main reasons for the castle's location includes its position in-between two rivers and York's use as a crossroads and trading centre.

Students should identify key reasons for building a castle at York using the Ordnance Survey (OS) maps of the surrounding area and York City Centre on p.35. They should identify key geographical features around York that made the Clifford's Tower site the ideal place for a castle (i.e. rivers, high ground) by annotating them on the first map. Then, they should use both maps to complete the questions on the sheet to show their understanding of why fortifications were built in York.

TOP TIP

When studying these modern maps, students should be cautioned to distinguish modern features from those that existed in the 11th century. For instance, geographical physical features like hills and rivers may remain the same but there were no main 'A' roads.

KEY FEATURES AND CONSIDERATIONS

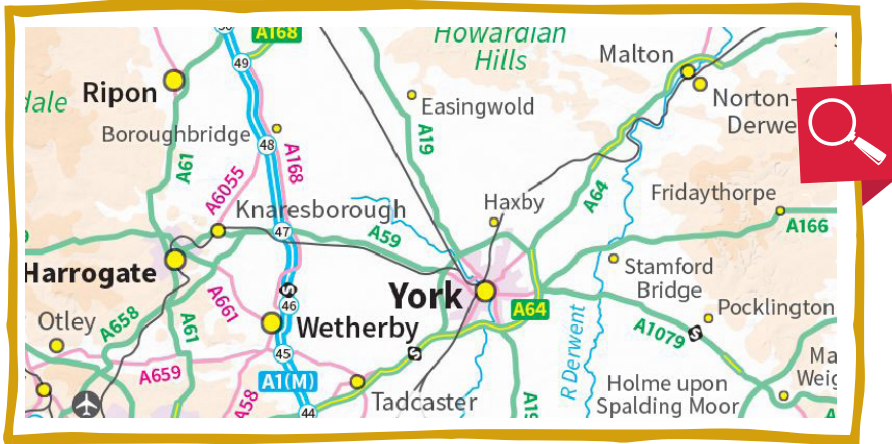
[for discussion once students have identified features on the maps]

- The rivers were important trade routes during the Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods and the Middle Ages, and helped York become a large and important trading centre.
- Two major Roman roads linked York with other settlements in England, making it an important strategic location. Ermine Street ran from London to Lincoln and York. Dere Street ran northwards from York, crossing the Stanegate at Corbridge near Hadrian's Wall and continuing up to what is now Scotland.
- York Castle sits in-between the river Ouse and the river Foss. This was important for the defence of the castle as river crossings acted as key areas of control. Whoever controlled the crossings could control who moved through the area and collect tolls (payment for crossing) from them.
- The city had a large population which needed to be controlled. William I needed castles in the north of England where his authority was more vulnerable to challenge (by foreign invaders or English rebels). York was also the seat of one of the two archbishops in England. The archbishop's authority had to be balanced against the power of the Crown.
- The river Ouse crosses a raised ridge that passes across the Vale of York.
- William I flooded some of the land to the east of York Castle to create the King's Pond (which no longer exists). He took land belonging to the minster to build a second castle on the opposite bank to the original structure.

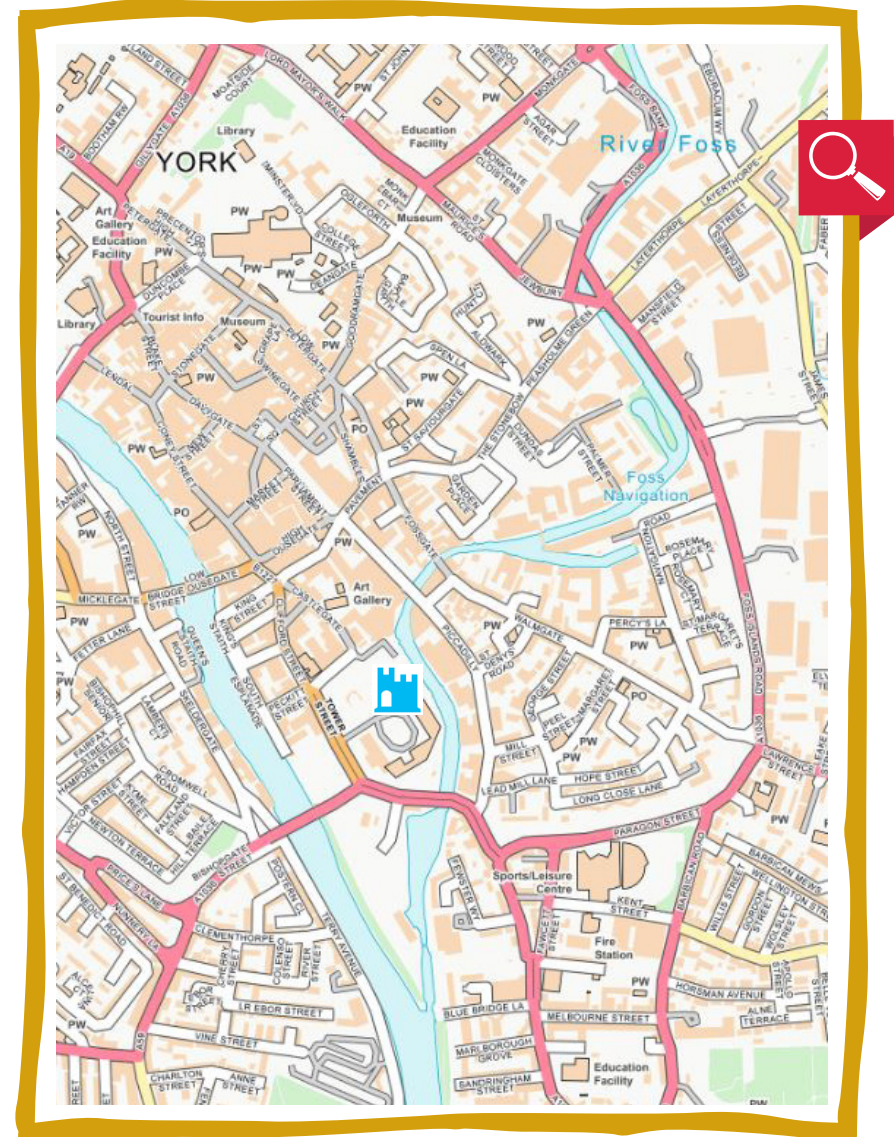
MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Use the modern map in this activity alongside the 16th century map by John Speed on page 53, Source 7, to highlight how the city of York has grown and developed. Ask students to locate key features and chart how they have changed over time. They should pay special attention to buildings like York Castle, Clifford's Tower, York Minster, the city walls and natural elements like rivers. Students should detail what they notice about the development of these features over time and explain why they think this was.

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- 1** **Annotate** the physical features of the landscape around York that you can identify on the map above (e.g. rivers, high ground).
Tip: This map uses shading to show high ground.
- 2** **Use** the map above and the map of York City Centre on the right to give three reasons why the Normans chose to build a castle here in the 11th century.
Tip: Consider hills, rivers and roads in your answer.



SOURCE 7



Detail from a 17th-century map of York by John Speed showing Clifford's Tower, the city walls, bridges and major roads. © Cambridge University Library