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# An Account of Life on Hudson Bay

In 1733, Joseph Robson joined the Hudson's Bay Company as a stonemason for a three-year tenure. His task was to build Prince of Wales Fort (present-day Churchill, Manitoba). In 1744, he returned to Hudson Bay for another three-year term. This time he was "Surveyor and Supervisor for the Buildings" at York Factory and later Prince of Wales Fort.

Robson explored as much as 80 kilometres up the Nelson River and published many topographical maps. Robson also created charts that recorded the river's course and its surroundings, made tables of winds and tides, recorded the costs of building Prince of Wales Fort, and sketched detailed plans of the two forts.

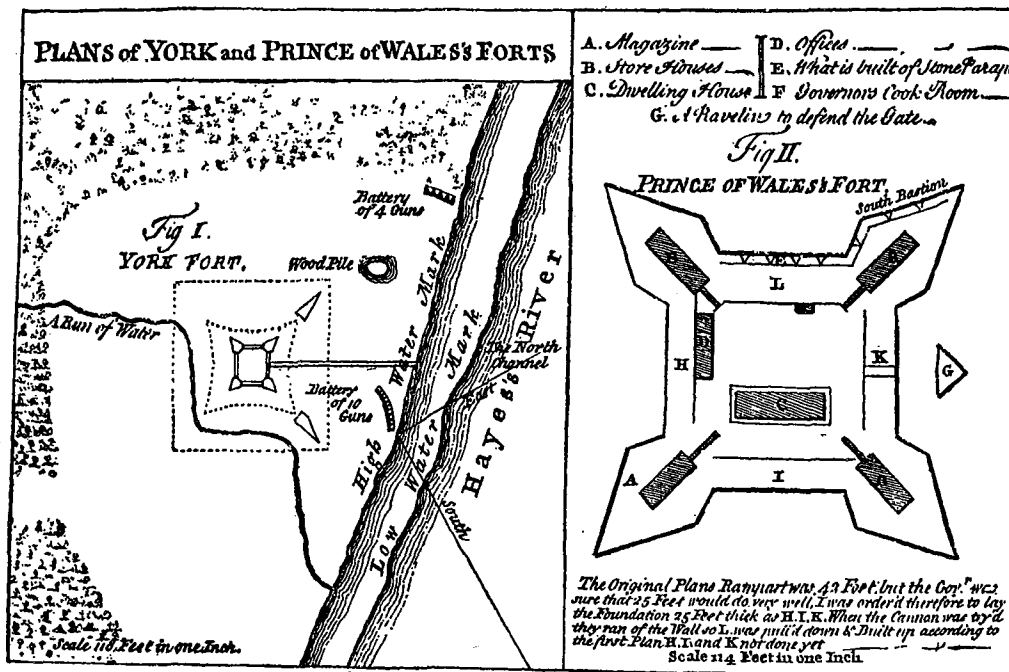
His maps, records, statistics, and sketches, as well as his impressions of the HBC's policies and business, were published in 1752 in a book called *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's-Bay*. His

work included several sharp criticisms of the HBC. In particular, he told stories about the oppressive behaviour of some of the company's factors and he condemned their refusal to explore the western interior. He is famous for his comment that the HBC slept while the French captured the continent:

The Company have for eighty years slept at the edge of a frozen sea; they have shewn no curiosity to penetrate farther themselves, and have exerted all their art and power to crush that spirit in others.

Robson's book is a valuable source of primary evidence for historians. It was the earliest book of its type to record first-hand knowledge of what working for the HBC was like.

Figure 3-13



1. Based on Figure 3-13, what do you think was the primary concern of the British in constructing the fort?
2. Why do you think Robson's critique of the HBC has attracted so much attention from historians? Read portions of Robson's book, which is available online.

Go to the *Shaping Canada* web site and follow the links to find a copy. What information did he find most significant? How is this information significant today?

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