

A Contemporary Map of the Defences of Oxford in 1644

By R. T. LATTEY, E. J. S. PARSONS AND I. G. PHILIP

THE student of the history of Oxford during the Civil War has always been handicapped in dealing with the fortifications of the City, by the lack of any good contemporary map or plan. Only two plans purporting to show the lines constructed during the years 1642-6 were known. The first of these (FIG. 24), a copper-engraving in the Wood collection,¹ is sketchy and ill-drawn, and half the map is upside-down. The second (FIG. 25) is in the Latin edition of Wood's *History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*, published in 1674,² and bears the title 'Ichnographia Oxoniæ una cum Propugnaculis et Munimentis quibus cingebatur Anno 1648.' The authorship of this plan has been attributed both to Richard Rallingson³ and to Henry Sherburne.⁴ We know that Richard Rallingson drew a 'scheme or plot' of the fortifications early in 1643,⁵ and Wood in his *Athenae Oxonienses*⁶ states that Henry Sherburne drew 'an exact ichnography of the city of Oxon, while it was a garrison for his Majesty, with all the fortifications, trenches, bastions, etc., performed for the use of Sir Thomas Glemham' the governor thereof, who shewing it to the King, he approved much of it, and wrot in it the names of the bastions with his own hand. This ichnography, or another drawn by Richard Rallingson, was by the care of Dr. John Fell engraven on a copper plate and printed, purposely to be remitted into Hist. and Antiq. Univ. Oxon. lib. 1. between p. 364 and 365.⁷ It becomes fairly clear, however, from a close study of Wood's account of the fortifications, and of the map which is the subject of this paper, that the plan which Wood reproduced is the precise mathematical scheme drawn by Rallingson in 1643, and not the record of the actual fortifications drawn by Sherburne in 1645 or 1646.⁸

¹ Wood, 276^b, f. 30.

² Lib. 1, between pp. 364 and 365.

³ Magrath, *Queen's College*, 1, 267.

⁴ D.N.B. s.v. Sir Edward Sherburne.

⁵ Wood, *Annals*, II, 462.

⁶ 1691-2 ed., II, 704.

⁷ Governor of the garrison Oct. 1645-June 1646.

⁸ For a further discussion of these plans, see F. J. Varley, *The Siege of Oxford* (1932). Varley concludes that the plan published by Wood is certainly not Sherburne's.

It follows, therefore, that an original plan of the fortifications by Sir Bernard de Gomme, dated 1644, is of considerable importance.¹ This map (PLATE XXII) was purchased by the Bodleian Library in 1935 from Messrs Zaehnsdorf of London, and is now (Bodl.) MS. Top. Oxon. b. 167. Bernard de Gomme was a Dutch military engineer, born at Lille in 1620. He accompanied Prince



FIG. 24

THE DEFENCES OF OXFORD, 1644
from a copper-plate engraving in the Wood collection.

Reproduced from F. J. Varley, 'The Siege of Oxford,'
pl. iv, by courtesy of the Delegates of the Clarendon
Press.

Rupert to England, was knighted by Charles I, and served with the Royalist army as engineer and quartermaster-general from June 1642 to May 1646. At the Restoration de Gomme received a life pension of £300 from Charles II, was

¹ For a technical description of the fortifications see Lieut-Col. W. G. Ross, 'Military engineering during the Great Civil War, 1642-9,' *Professional papers of the Corps of Royal Engineers*, XIII (1887), pp. 150-1.

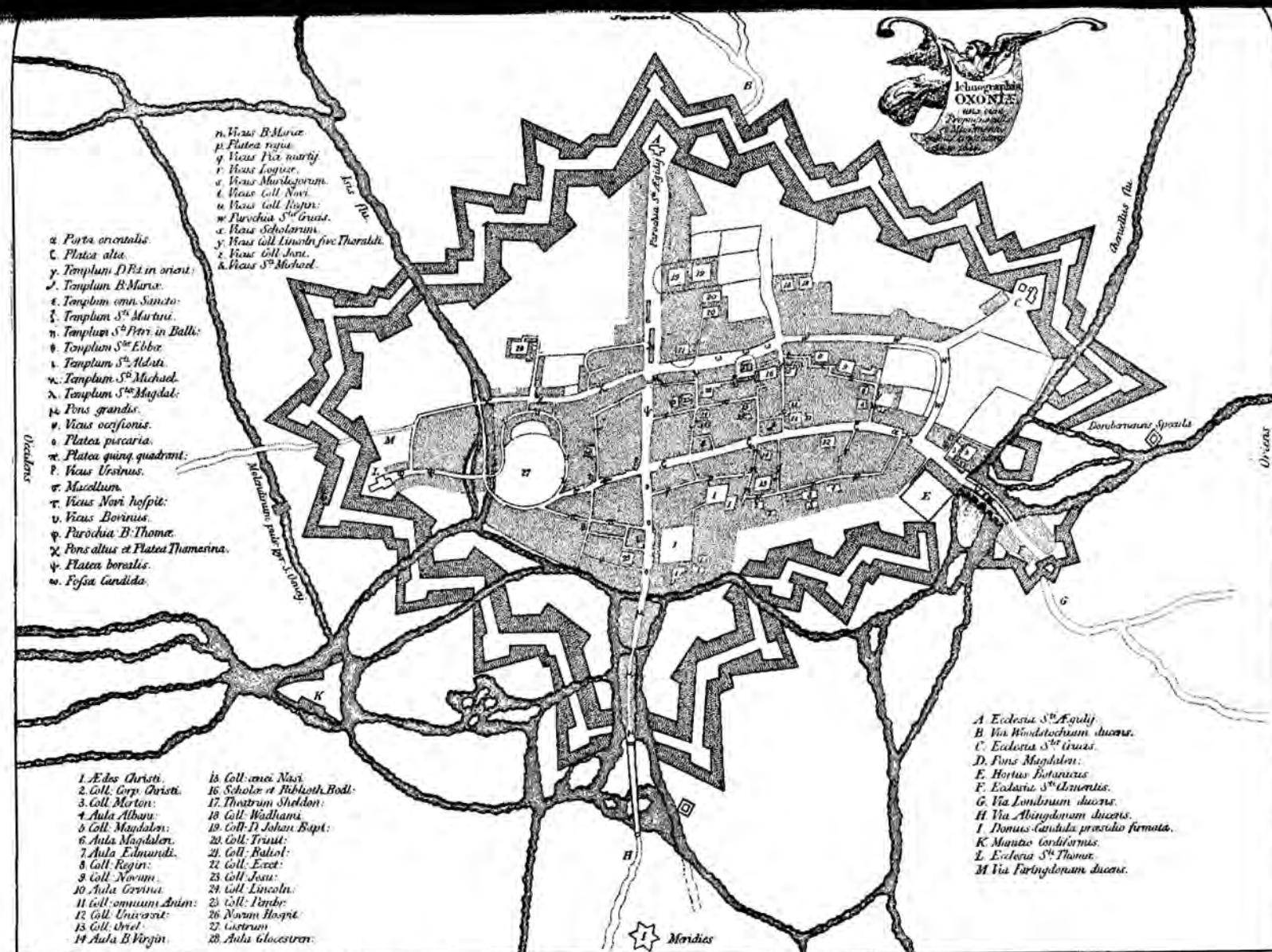


FIG. 25. RICHARD RALLINGSON'S PLAN OF THE DEFENCES OF OXFORD, 1648.

Reproduced (after Shelton) from Wood, 'Historia et Antiquitates Universitatis Oxoniensis.'

made engineer-in-chief of all the King's castles and fortifications in England and Wales in 1661, and in 1682 was appointed Surveyor-general of Ordnance. He died in 1685 and was buried in the chapel of the Tower of London.¹ Many of his maps and plans of fortifications survive in the British Museum, but all differ in some ways from this map of Oxford.

The map is on one sheet of paper measuring $19\frac{1}{8} \times 28\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and the lines of fortifications, roads and rivers were first indicated by pricking and then completed by means of a stylus or possibly a sharp wheel. The rivers, streams and wet ditches are coloured blue; the streets and roads are light brown with the outlines emphasised by light dotting. An error in the plan to the south of the Castle was corrected by pasting a rectangular piece of paper over it. The date was originally written as 1645 but was later corrected to 1644 in a hand which could be de Gomme's. There are signs that de Gomme did not know the city well at that time, for in the key at the bottom left-hand corner St. Clements is written in another ink over some name in pencil, as if he was not sure at first of the correct name; St. Ebbe's is spelt St^e. Abbin; and Northgate is written where the road passed through the fortifications on the north side, not at the Northgate proper. The signature and other writing have been compared with de Gomme's 1644 plan of the fortifications of Liverpool, which is now in the British Museum (MS. Sloane 5027 A. f. 69). This Oxford plan is certainly his, but there are interesting points of difference. All his maps are on paper and all have pricked outlines, but no other map is so untidily pricked as this, and no other has stylus lines. De Gomme's usual practice was to join the pricked marks with careful pencil or ink lines; in this Oxford plan he scratched his lines and apparently did so hurriedly and even carelessly. Another sign of speed in the work is the fact that Christ Church is represented by a rough pencil outline. The length of wall on the south side which is represented by a dotted line is doubtless a projected scheme of building, of which there is a parallel instance in de Gomme's later map of Portsmouth (B.M. Add. MS. 16371 B). All his later maps are far more elaborate in colour and design than this Oxford map, and even the contemporary Liverpool map surpasses this in care and colouring, though not by any means in interest or wealth of detail.

Owing to the inadequacy of the plans of Wood and Rallingson (p. 161), the actual emplacement of the line of fortifications erected round the City during the years 1642 to 1646 was in many places open to doubt. Although sections of it are marked on David Loggan's map of 1675 and on other later maps, and a few traces of the works are still visible to-day (p. 170), there were many gaps in the chain. De Gomme's map, however, is so careful in its outlines

¹ For details of de Gomme's life, see D.N.B., *s.v.*

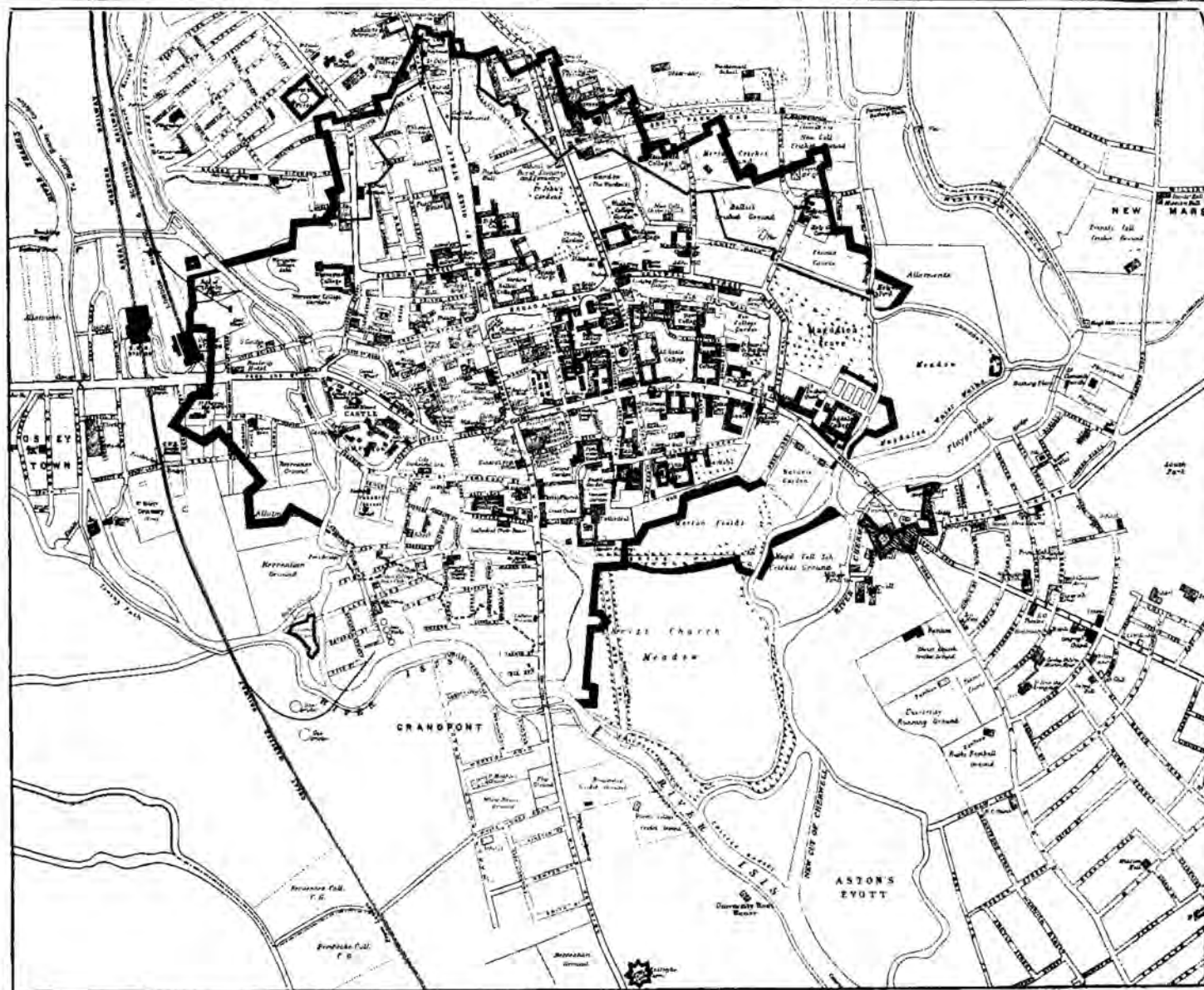


FIG. 26. DE GOMME'S PLAN OF THE DEFENCES OF OXFORD, 1644, traced on a modern map of the city.

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and accurate in its details that it has proved possible (FIG. 26), with the aid of Loggan's map and our other knowledge, to trace the fortifications on a modern map of the City with a considerable degree of certitude. From this tracing it is now possible to see where the defence works were erected, where the main guards were situated, and where the river was blockaded.

The earliest defence works were started as soon as the King had issued his proclamation of August 9th, 1642 declaring war; these were situated on the north side. Here there are two lines on de Gomme's plan; one, thin and irregular, the other showing a regular tenaille trace. The former was presumably constructed during the years 1642 and 1643. It was first suggested on August 11th, 1642 by Sir Richard Cave,¹ at a meeting of representatives of the City and University convened to discuss defence plans, that a 'line with redoubts and a foot-pace' should be constructed on the north side from the Cherwell to the Thames. The two members of Parliament for the City, John Whistler and John Smith, spoke against the proposal lest Oxford should become 'the seat of a war,' but despite their protestation work was commenced at the beginning of September.² John Whistler noted, probably with pleasure, that 'the scholars do night and day gall their hands with mattocks and shovels.'

These first efforts were destroyed, together with other defence works, by the order of Lord Saye during the time the City was in the hands of the Parliamentarians, which lasted from September 12th until the middle of October.

The King entered Oxford on October 29th and although he left for London on November 3rd, work was recommenced, and on the 22nd an earthen wall was constructed from Magdalen Bridge to the Botanical Gardens. The King returned on November 29th and immediately steps were taken to make the City secure from attack.

Fortifications were begun to the north of St. Giles' Church, in the New Parks, and near St. John's College walks on December 5th, and by the 21st, there was great activity on the north, north-east, and north-west.³ The works about Merton College and the Cherwell were started on March 14th, 1642/3 and, towards the end of April, the massive structure in St. Clement's guarding Magdalen Bridge. This was designed by Richard Rallingson,⁴ the author of the plan of the whole garrison reproduced in the Latin edition of Wood's *History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*.

The next works to be taken in hand were those in Christ Church meadow, running parallel to Grandpont Street, which were started early in June.⁵

¹ He held a command in the West of England, and was killed at Naseby.

² H.M.C. Portland MSS., I, 59.

³ Wood, *Life and Times*, ed. Clark, I, 74.

⁴ Wood, *Hist. and Antiq.*, ed. Gutch, II, 462.

⁵ Wood, *Life and Times*, I, 100.

CIVIL-WAR DEFENCES OF OXFORD

In September and October it was considered that the fortifications constructed during the past year were insufficient, and thoughts were entertained for newly fortifying the City.¹ This project was carried forward, and on March 11th, 1643/4 an order was given for timber to be taken from near Gloucester Hall for the new fortifications.² All these new fortifications are those which are shown by heavy black lines in the tracing of de Gomme's plan.

During the following months great efforts were made to finish the fortifications,³ and Sir William Waller writing to the Committee of both Kingdoms on July 20th said, 'I find Oxford much stronger fortified than it was when I was here last, the new works being finished, and the whole north side pallisadoed.'⁴

References to the work done on the fortifications are few from this time until the surrender of the City, but it may be assumed that a great deal was accomplished, though perhaps spasmodically, both in construction and repair.⁵

The strength of the new fortifications is shown in Col. Fairfax's report of May 3rd, 1646, which described the line as being 'very high, having many strong bulwarks so regularly flanking one another, that nothing could be more exactly done; round about the line, both upon the bulwarks and upon the curtain, was strongly set with stormpoles; upon the outside of the ditch, round the line, it was strongly pallisadoed.'

This report is confirmed by a contemporary pamphlet entitled *P. Ruperts Marching out of Oxford*⁶ which asserts that there was 'a complete line of strong works on the north outside the wall, from Isis to Cherwell, and also beyond Magdalen Bridge, and regular works on the West and South.'

At strategic points outside the fortifications, guards were established and on de Gomme's plan are mentioned Dovers Speare, which is situated in Addison's Walk, opposite to St. Clement's Church; Eastgate, where the elaborate fortification already mentioned (p. 166) was erected; Eastwyke Farm, an outpost along Abingdon road; Harts Sconce, a small fortified island in the Thames, opposite to the Gas Works; Osney mill where powder was made; Rewley, just beyond the fortifications on the west, and Northgate, guarding the road from the north. These guards were maintained by a tax levied upon the parishes of the City, and, with others, cost £14 10s. 6d. a week.⁷ The rivers were of the utmost importance in the schemes of defence. On the north a

¹ Wood, *Hist. and Antiq.*, II, 468.

² Salter (H. E.) and Hobson (M. G.), *Oxford Council Acts*, 1626-1665, p. 382.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 384; Harleian MSS., 6802, f., 112, 120; Walker, *Historical Discourses*, p. 13.

⁴ *Cal. S.P.D.* 1644, p. 363.

⁵ Wood 276A (341).

⁶ Madan 1882 (*Oxford books*, II, 427).

⁷ A full list is given in Salter, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

trench was dug for some way along the outside of the fortifications situated in New College cricket ground, and was joined to the Cherwell, thus forming an excellent ditch. By means of dams and cuts the Cherwell was made to overflow the meadows of Christ Church and Cowley, and 'boomes' were placed across the Thames below Folly Bridge, Harts Sconce and High Bridge to guard the river. Those below Folly Bridge and High Bridge and another beyond Rewley are shown on the plan, and they remained there until after the City had surrendered.¹

The labour required for all these defence works was required mostly from the inhabitants both of the City and of the University, but a great number of them refused to perform their allotted tasks. This neglect caused orders to be continually issued commanding every person to do his share at the fortifications, and penalties and fines were exacted for disobedience. External help was enlisted; men were brought in from the neighbouring counties, and prisoners of war were forced to wield pick and shovel. The expense of the fortifications was a constant drain upon the financial resources both of the University and of the City. Each College and each parish was taxed,² but the taxes, like the compulsory work at the fortifications were resented, and the King was obliged to issue orders threatening punishment if payment was not made.³

The results of these great efforts were not allowed to stand long after the City had surrendered. On March 2nd, 1646/7 the House of Commons ordered the new works to be 'sighted and dismantled' and this action brought an eventful period of Oxford history to a close.

A COMPARISON OF DE GOMME'S PLAN WITH OTHER EVIDENCE⁴

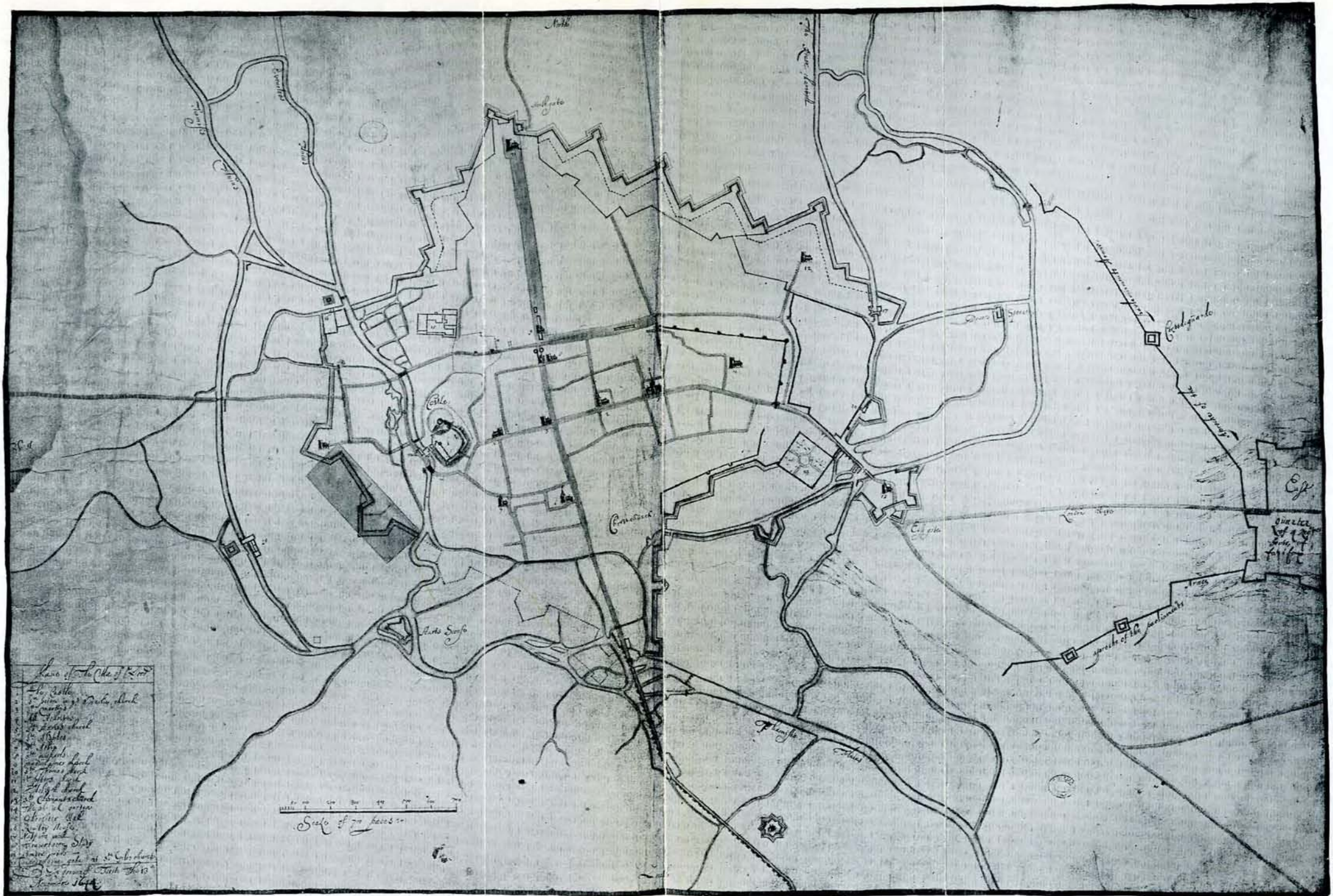
Until the discovery of de Gomme's map it was extremely hard to link up the vestiges of the seventeenth century fortifications of Oxford with either of the known plans. It was clear that 'Oxforde as it now lyethe Fortified by his Maj^{ties} force an. 1644' was, as Wood said, 'made very false,' for the whole of the interior of the city is inverted from North to South (FIG. 24). But we might go so far as to infer from it a simple form of palisaded bank running in fairly straight sections from point to point and interrupted by forts at the cardinal points of the compass. A man with a barrow is shown SE. of Magdalen bridge, indicating

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 379, 382.

³ Harleian MSS., 6802, f. 112.

⁴ This section has been written by Mr. R. T. Lattey.



CONTEMPORARY PLAN OF THE DEFENCES OF OXFORD, 1644, BY SIR BERNARD DE GOMME.

Reproduced by courtesy of the Curators of the Bodleian Library, Oxford

CIVIL-WAR DEFENCES OF OXFORD

that this part of the works was unfinished, and we know that this section was of late construction.

The Rallingson plan on the other hand (FIG. 25) showed an elaborate system

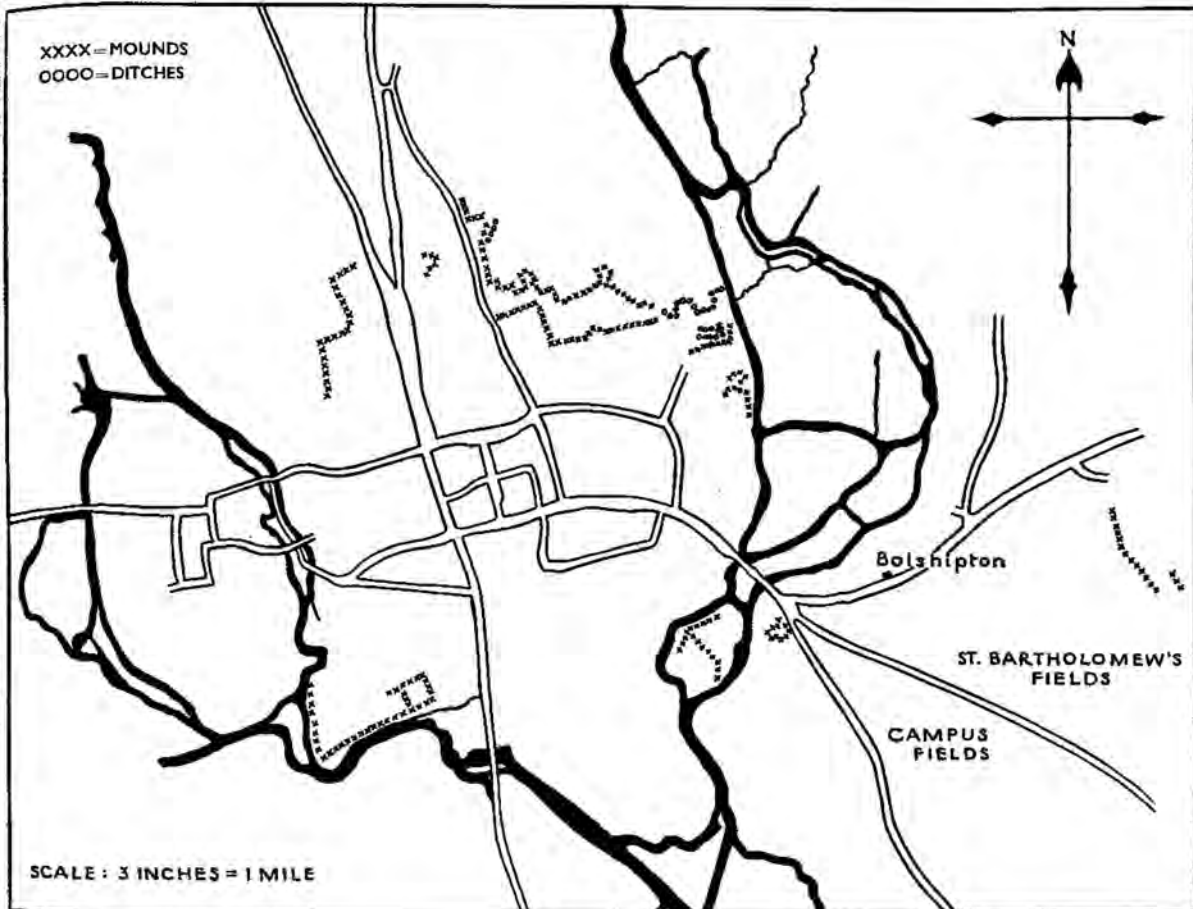


FIG. 27

SKETCH-MAP OF OXFORD

showing the site of those portions of the Civil-War fortifications traceable to-day, or recorded by Loggan (1674), Davis (1797), and Ordnance Survey Maps.

Based on the 6-in. Ordnance Survey Map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

of bastions, and the vestiges traceable to-day and indicated in maps of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seemed compatible with this in parts, but

incompatible in other places. Banks such as that in St. John's garden or that which formerly ran along the frontage of Rhodes House might have been forms of landscape gardening; if, on the other hand, they were part of a system of fortification it was hard to link them up with a clearly marked bastion in the SW. corner of the Parks. De Gomme suggests that there were two schemes, presumably the inner line being simpler and earlier while the later, more complex scheme partly masked it.

Historically¹ we know (p. 166) that the crooked trench in the form of a horn or bow dug by scholars near the end of St. John's gardens in August 1642 and the gates of timber near Magdalen bridge and at Smithgate were ordered to be demolished when Lord Saye and Sele entered the town on 14th September. But, so soon as he withdrew, fresh plans for works were set on foot, the timber gates were renewed, an earthen wall was thrown up from Magdalen bridge to the Physic Garden and a 'new' trench made near the old ones across Parks Road. We have therefore, presumably, to deal with an early period in which immediate steps were taken to deal with the more obvious openings for hostile attack. Later (1644) a systematic scheme for the whole city was put in hand with de Gomme as expert adviser.

In April 1643, Wood records 'De primis loquor munimentis; quae enim postea extruebantur Beckmannum² architectum habuere.' This suggests a replanning of the whole lay-out and the beginning of a scheme such as is indicated by Rallingson's map. De Gomme's map was made towards the end of 1644 when all was finished except the SW. portion.

In the accompanying sketch-map (FIG. 27) the evidence has been based primarily on observation in the field, secondly on the O.S. 6 and 25 inch maps of 1876, thirdly on Davis' map of 1797, and fourthly on Loggan's map of 1675.

THE MAIN FORTIFICATION

Beginning at Magdalen bridge, the mound in the angle between Iffley Road and Milham Ford Road was more pronounced thirty years ago, when it was used as allotment gardens; the owners frequently found old bullets there. This was evidently the site of the star-work shown by de Gomme and also by Loggan. There is now no trace of the cut made in the island south of the bridge, nor of the bank facing the end of the Broad Walk. It seems likely that this was the device which caused so much trouble to Fairfax in 1645 that he was obliged to capture the sluices at the end of May.

¹ Our present knowledge of the historical evidence is summarized in F. J. Varley, *The Siege of Oxford* (O.U.P., 1932).

² Beckman was a Swede; in February 1644 he put a garrison into Hilsden House and in December, 1644 he was captured in Mr. Speaker Lenthall's house at Bessel's Leigh.

CIVIL-WAR DEFENCES OF OXFORD

Going counter-clockwise from Magdalen the next trace we come to is at the bottom of the present Manor Road ; here Loggan, Davis, O. S. and living memory agree in siting various mounds which can easily be made to form parts of either the earlier scheme or the later. Taking the earlier first, we may trace part of this as a bank running along the dividing line of Merton and Balliol grounds to the house known as King's Mound. According to Loggan this ran to the corner of Wadham garden where it turned northward and is probably the bank which is there to-day ; it then presumably turned west and was there until Rhodes House was built.

Of the later and more elaborate works there are no traces until we come to the University Museum and its surrounding laboratories.

In digging foundations for the Electrical Laboratory in 1909 a section was made of a trench, V-shaped and about 10 feet wide by 8 feet deep, and clearly forming part of the work indicated by O.S. which can still be detected to-day inside the Parks. A crack in the wall of the Clarendon Laboratory suggests that the same trench ran under that building.

When the University Museum was built in 1858 the Delegates' Minutes contain two suggestive passages :

'To this must be added £200 for Extra Works in laying the Foundations of the Building, caused by the necessity for excavating the Ground in some parts considerably below the average depth, provided for in the original estimate.' (21st. Ap. 1858).

'It was agreed that the Master of University shall give such directions as he may think fit, as to the levelling of the ground in front of the Museum by using the soil now raised up in a Mound on the ground, the hole on the South side to be filled up by Messrs. Lucas.' (7th. Aug. 1858).

A crack in the wall of Keble near the west end of the chapel is compatible with the idea that the trench ran northward about this point ; after this we reach a built-up area where all traces have been obliterated and information from old maps is all that is left to us. The banks shown by Loggan north of Gloucester Green are not easy to identify with either of de Gomme's lines ; and 'Remains of the Trenches' shown on Davis' map on the site of the present Gas Works seem quite unconnected with anything de Gomme marks. The work described as 'Harts Sconce' or 'Munitio Cordiformis' on an island site now used as a recreation ground has entirely disappeared. On both de Gomme's and Rallingson's maps this is a curiously isolated affair and the remains shown by Davis may be those of canals used to approach the island.

Eastwyke Farm is on a raised mound, but the present building of the Farm probably dates from before the Civil War, so that the mound is almost

certainly earlier too. Its present form does not suggest any military significance and it was probably designed as a protection against flooding.

THE FAIRFAX LINES

In May 1646 it is recorded,¹ 'Whereupon at a Council of War at Hedington, it was resolved to fix their Quarters. Their first to be upon Hedington Hill, where was ordered to be made a very strong and great Work or Intrenchment of capacity to receive and lodge 3000 men. Also that a bridge should be made over the river Cherwell, close by Merston. That another quarter should be established between Cherwell and Isis, that is on the North side of the City, wherein it was intended that most of the Foot should be lodged, that being all the Ground they had to make an approach near the Walls. Which matters, I say, being resolved, were quickly dispatched even to admiration, and a line also began to be drawn from the great Fort at Hedington Hill straight to St. Bartholomew's Common road and from thence to Campus pits, or thereabouts, all within Canon shot.'

Whitlock² tells us that 'the approaches were so near, that officers and soldiers of either parties parleyed one with another.'

All this is consistent with de Gomme's map which indicates a line beginning near the University Football Ground and running to a Leaguer round about the junction of Divinity Road and Morrell Avenue. From here a line is shown ending about Magdalen and Trinity Grounds. It is only in South Park that one can hope to find any traces of this to-day. A bank which may be part of the Leaguer is noticeable behind the eighth block of houses in Morrell Avenue. Until about 1870 the South Park was divided by hedges and ditches and though the banks, shown by the trees in them on O.S. maps, may have a purely agricultural significance, they are not inconsistent with a possible military work.

¹ Wood's *History*, Ed. Gutch, under date 3 May, 1646.

² *Memorials civil and military of English affaires*, under date 12 May, 1646.