

The City Wall and Ditch in the Clarendon Quadrangle

By JOHN DANIELL
(with a note by E. T. LEEDS)

EARLY in July 1938 work was begun on the trench destined to contain the concrete tunnel connecting the new Bodleian building with the old. It was to run across Broad Street beneath the boundary wall of the Sheldonian Theatre and thence, passing between the Clarendon Building and the Sheldonian, would enter the north wall of the Bodleian, which had to be pierced to give access to the basement of the Library. The ground plan (FIG. 28) of the Tunnel is traced from the architect's drawing which was kindly lent by Messrs. Benfield & Loxley.

The trench was approximately 11 ft. wide and was constructed so as to slope towards the new building; below Broad Street the depth was 27 ft., while beneath the old Bodleian building it was only 15 feet.

It was known that the tunnel-trench must cut through the line of the City Wall and Ditch. The position of the Wall had been found and recorded in 1899, when exploratory excavations were carried out in the Clarendon Quadrangle under the auspices of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society. At that time foundations of a bastion were discovered and a plan of the whole work was made by Mr. Mardon Mowbray. In addition a series of photographs taken by Mr. Taunt well illustrate the extent of the excavations on that occasion.¹

During the progress of the work it became possible to co-ordinate the new excavation with that of 1899, and by superimposing the line of the tunnel-trench upon Mr Mowbray's plan its relation to the City Wall and the bastion has been verified (FIG. 28).

At the beginning of the excavation a large quantity of loose stones and rubble, which had been used to make up the ground, came to light below the surface-gravel of the Clarendon Quadrangle a few yards north of the Bodleian wall. Many of the stones were faced; some showed traces of mouldings and chamfers,

¹ For an account of the work see F. H. Penny and W. M. Merry, *Buried Oxford Unearthed* (1899). Mr. Mowbray's plan and a set of Mr. Taunt's photographs are preserved in the Society's library.

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but no evidence of any sort of wall which would correspond to the City Wall was forthcoming. A very fine powdered stone-dust was mixed with the rubble. However, as the gravel and rubble were removed farther along in a northerly direction, some solid masonry began to appear. At first it seemed that the City Wall had been struck at this point, but it soon became evident that the masonry belongs to a faced wall running flush with the east side of the trench, *i.e.* roughly north to south. It proved to be the west wall of the bastion, curving eastwards at the north end until it disappeared in the side of the trench. In this wall was an entry or passage just over $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft. wide. It was a happy coincidence that one side of the bastion should have been again so clearly revealed.

The plan of the excavations of 1899 shows that the entry into the bastion was uncovered and dug out at that date, proving to be about 4 ft. in length through the thickness of the wall. Photographs taken at the same time show that the other end of this passage, inside the bastion, contained the bases of the jambs of a doorway and from the marks on these stones it is evident that it was fitted with a massive door.¹

Skelton (*Oxonía Restaurata*, II, fig. after pl. 100) reproduces a 'Plan of the Lands and Tenements, etc., which stood formerly on and about the site purchased by the University for the erection of the Clarendon Printing House. Drawn by Benjamin Cole, December 4th, 1713' (PLATE XVI). There was at that date 'a passage from ye Theatre Court to Cat Street,' which broadened considerably towards the east, and was bounded on the north by a wall on the line of the City Wall. North of this were several houses and tenements on the site of the Clarendon Building. The bastion, described above, is marked on Cole's plan as, 'The tenement in the Round Tower on the City Wall,' which suggests that the City Wall, though perhaps rebuilt in places and having houses built against it, was in any case partly standing in 1713. Immediately east of the bastion and built against the City Wall are marked 'Mr. Wildgoos and Mr. Cooper's Houses.'

The Sheldonian Theatre, completed in 1669, had, of course, been standing for over forty years, when Cole drew his plan, and he marks the 'Theater Court Wall' running from the north-west corner of the Bodleian to what is now the south-west angle of the Clarendon Building. It was built as a boundary-wall between the 'Theater Court' and the tenements to the east. This wall, or rather its foundation, was discovered in the course of the present excavations; it proved to be so massive and solid that picks made no impression upon it, and the compressor had to be brought into use to demolish it. The tunnel-trench was driven diagonally across the line of this wall.

The City Wall, where it ran across the tunnel-trench, was rather disappointing. The line was clear enough, but it had been extensively robbed, so that

¹Taunt's photograph, no. 10896.

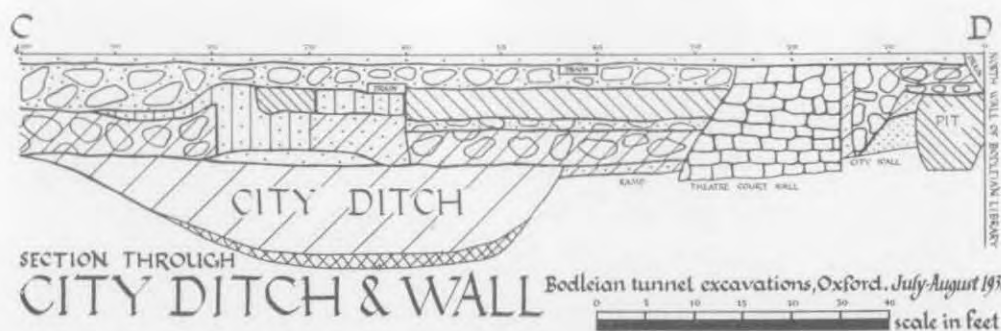
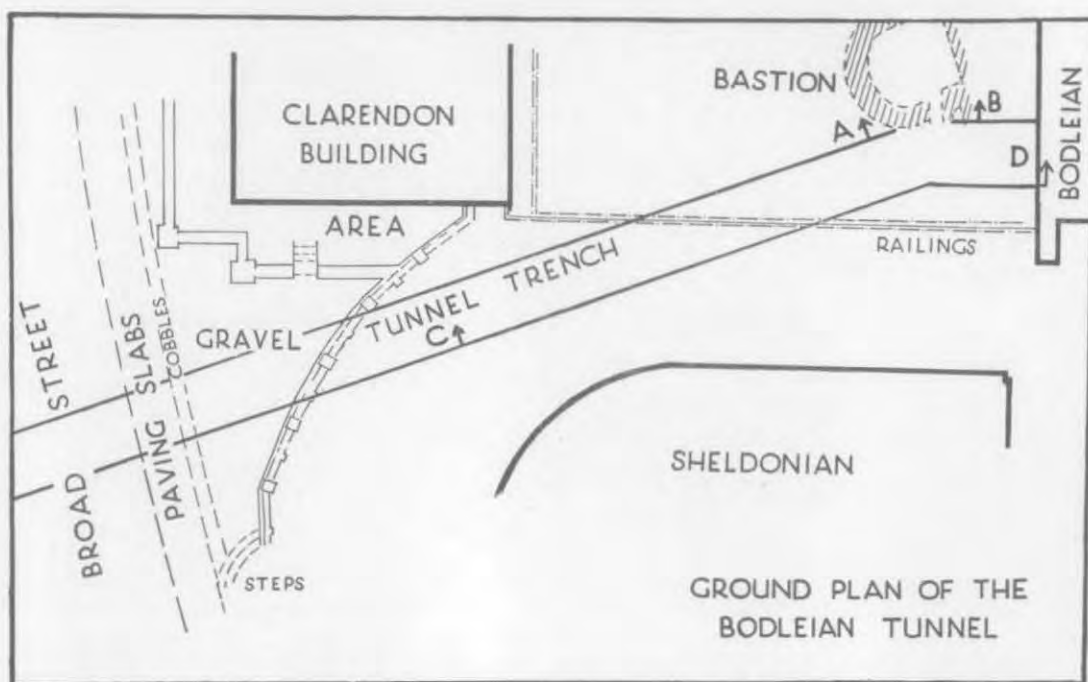


FIG. 28

PLAN AND SECTIONS OF THE EXCAVATIONS IN THE CLARENDON QUADRANGLE, 1938.

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little more than rubble and loose stones was left. It is quite possible that it was despoiled of its stones when the ground was levelled at the time of the erection of the Clarendon Building, or it may have been destroyed at this point during the building of the Theatre Court Wall. Some damage may even have been done during the excavations in 1899, since, to judge from Taunt's photographs, the City Wall, as then exposed, was in fairly good condition.

The bastion must have been considerably altered when it became a tenement. Taunt's photographs show very well how later additions had been made to the outer face forming a sort of 'lean-to' which subsequently slipped away. The passage in the bastion-wall was later found to lead directly to a well outside. This was discovered at the bottom of the tunnel-trench, about 7 ft. away from the Wall; it was stone-lined and might have produced interesting pottery dating from the time when the bastion was in use as such. Unfortunately the well could not be cleared out to the bottom and it now lies sealed beneath the floor of the tunnel.

As already mentioned, the foundations of the Theatre Court Wall were extremely massive. Originally they carried a wall as tall as the section abutting on the north-east corner of the Old Ashmolean Building, not merely the iron railings, which must have been substituted when the Clarendon Quadrangle was completed. It is remarkable that the 17th century builders should have trusted to the mud of the City Ditch as a foundation, a fact that evoked no little surprise from the 20th century contractors.

As in the section on the east side of the trench, so too on the west side a ramp of earth and gravel could be detected sloping from the foot of the City Wall to the Ditch, though (as can be seen in the section), it had been almost obliterated during the construction of the Theatre Court Wall.

Immediately north of the wall of the Bodleian, and just inside the City Wall, a large rubbish-pit was found extending down into the ballast to a depth of 12 feet. It contained a small bronze scale-pan, pottery and animal bones, especially of pig.

The pottery was all of a purely domestic character, including only a few pieces of glazed wares. These comprised some half dozen fragments of 'baluster' pitchers, two or three pieces of the glazed sandy fabrics, best known in the fat-bellied, sagging-based, tripod pitchers with dull green glaze, and other odd sherds with pale green glaze, deep orange glaze decorated with incised wavy and horizontal bands and yellow spots on a dark green ground. The bulk of the material, however, consisted of pieces of sagging-based unglazed cooking-pots varying in quality from coarse brown mixed with grit to finer light brown and black. Rims show a wide range, narrow, flat-topped, broader

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with a median groove, one with scalloped outer edge, and others with a fat rounded profile (FIG. 29).

All the heaviest fragments were found towards the base of the pit, so that no determination of stratification was possible. Nevertheless the time-range must be comparatively short and may be judged to indicate a household rubbish or cess-pit, which did not remain in use beyond the 14th century and was first brought into use as early as the 12th.

From the base of the bastion-wall a ramp about 12 ft. wide, composed of earth and gravel, sloped down gently to the inner lip of the City Ditch. The portion exposed unfortunately yielded no pottery, only animal bones.

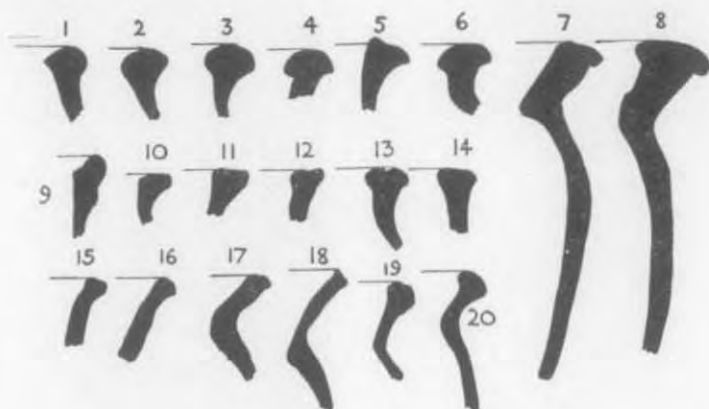


FIG. 29

SECTIONS OF RIMS OF COOKING-POTS FROM THE RUBBISH-PIT
INSIDE THE CITY WALL (p. 156). $\frac{1}{2}$.

Beyond this point it was found that the City Ditch showed to better advantage on the west face of the trench; the complete section (FIG. 28) was, therefore, compiled from observations made on that side.

Apparently no effort was made to discover anything about the Ditch in 1899, for no mention is made of it. In fact no plan showing a complete section of the Oxford City Ditch at any point seems to exist. The plan made on this occasion is therefore of special interest, even though the conditions under which the cutting of the trench was carried out made it impossible to obtain a record incontestably accurate in all its details. It was obvious that the ground had been very considerably made up and levelled in 1714, or just after, when the tenements on the site were demolished and the 'Clarendon Printing House'

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erected : in fact stone-dust and rubble from the demolished houses and builders' rubbish from the Clarendon Building lay over the top of the Ditch to a depth of 11 or 12 feet.

The City Ditch proved to measure about 20 yards in breadth ; it was flat-bottomed for c. 25 ft. with an average depth of 11 ft., the bottom itself being about 22 ft. below the present ground-level. It sloped down quite steeply from the ramp on the south side ; on the north side the slope was much more gradual. The greater part of the filling was composed of black compressed mud and vegetable refuse in which were mingled broken bones and miscellaneous rubbish of all sorts. This rubbish consisted of large quantities of pottery, much leather, well preserved by the mud, spurs, knives, keys, pipes and other objects, described in greater detail below.

The lowest two feet of the filling were of a very different composition, consisting of dirty gravel. This layer also yielded large quantities of pottery, together with a few iron objects. These, as will be noted, are quite distinct in type and date from those in the 9 ft. of black mud above.

The thick deposit of levelling stone and rubble over the Ditch (*supra*) produced little. From close below the surface came an imperfect mug of Lambeth Delft with a fox in blue on the inside of the base and round the outside within a decorative border [BEWAR]E OF THE FOX ; otherwise only sherds of late imitation slip-wares, Nottingham ware and other late 17th or early 18th century wares.

The remains from the two layers of the ditch itself were again quite clearly distinguishable in date and character. Those from the upper 9 or 10 ft. range between 1500 and 1700 as outside limits, but the greater part must, as the earlier history of the site seems to indicate, be datable within a still closer compass, between 1550 and 1650. The pottery, mostly fragmentary, included bellarmines and other stone-wares, tygs, mugs, pipkins, pancheons, dishes, and household crockery of all kinds, with black, yellow and green glaze ; drug-pots in Lambeth and Bristol Delft ; besides a few fragments of imported Italian wares.

Between twenty or thirty spurs chiefly of steel or iron came from this layer ; for the most part they were datable to the early 17th century ; some may have been earlier. Most were badly corroded. One had its heel-strap preserved entire ; others their buckles and other fastenings. Here may be recorded a fine pair of bronze spurs, of Civil War type which was found far outside the ditch buried with the skeleton of a horse, only 2½ ft. below the pavement in Broad Street, *i.e.* close to the edge of the original Broad Street.

Table-knives with bone-handles occurred in large numbers, mostly in very poor condition. One acorn-topped pewter spoon was also found. Other metal-work consisted of iron padlocks, triangular and spherical, keys, a farrier's tool, bronze chest or box garniture, one of them the half of a hinge with

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confronted dolphins, a finely engraved brass book-clasp, and some 20 or 30 French or German jettons.

Of two leaden sealings found, one, a mediaeval piece, not from the Ditch but from the debris of the City Wall, has a castellated fortress, and a legend of which S.VLI . . . alone is decipherable; the other, from the Ditch, a smaller specimen, bears on one face CR and a shield with a mullet between 3 crescents; the reverses of both are mutilated.

The lowest layer of the Ditch, considering its thickness (only 2 ft.), produced a surprising quantity of pottery. This was entirely mediaeval, mostly 13th to 14th century baluster jugs and the like, and, as in the upper deposit, mainly in fragmentary condition. Only one baluster-jug with green glaze trellised with ferrous stripes, and a green glazed jug, possibly 14th century, could be restored. In the same deposit a small jug of dark brown ware with a brilliant brown-green glaze was found complete: it must belong to the 15th or even 16th century. A few rusty iron spurs and keys were also found at this level; also green glazed drug-pots.

The conclusion seems to be that the Ditch was kept moderately clean and free from rubbish until perhaps the early 16th century, when, ceasing to have any value as a city ditch, it was permitted to be used as a rubbish-dump, no doubt when houses began to spread outside the City Wall in this quarter.¹

Evidence of this spread came to light at about 10 ft. below the southwest corner of the Clarendon Building, near the outer lip of the ditch, where there was a strong oaken platform supported on six thick stakes. It may well have been used as a tipping-platform for carts depositing rubbish in the Ditch.

NOTE

by E. T. LEEDS

At what date did the Ditch fall into disuse in this quarter? Leonard Hutton in his account of Oxford (written between 1625 and 1632) records that from Bocardo eastwards to Smith Gate 'the ditch is altogether dammed up with rubbish and small cottages builded thereon,' while 'the rest of the ditch [*i.e.*, beyond Smith Gate] yet hath water standing in it under the town wall . . .' That is not to say that the Ditch north of the Bodleian had been levelled up by 1578 (the date of Agas's map, PLATE XVII, A). In 1608 Thomas Acton leases four tenements and three gardens inside the Wall and one garden outside. This garden might well be on the slype *i.e.* on land immediately north of the Wall

¹ Compare Agas's and Loggan's views of 1578 and 1675 (PLATE XVII).

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reserved by the City. In 1615 he leases an area $49\frac{1}{2}$ ft. by $154\frac{1}{2}$ ft. north of the Wall together with the Tower (bastion) close to the north-west corner of the newly erected Schools, so that the wall was probably still standing in part, and from Hutton's account even about 1630. A lease of 1640 of the same area taken by Joan Tredwell tells the same tale.

By 1649, however, the position has altered. The land is now divided into a strip $72\frac{1}{4}$ ft. N.-S. and varying from $22\frac{1}{2}$ to $27\frac{1}{2}$ ft. E.-W. at the west end, while the remainder now measures 115 ft. E.-W., and N.-S., $88\frac{1}{4}$ ft.¹ at the east end and 57 ft. at the west end.

It is known that in 1615 it was stipulated that the bastion should be moved farther northward, to allow of a cart-way between the north-west corner of the Bodleian and the bastion. Probably all the stipulation implies is that some portion was shorn off the south side of the bastion.

This plot at any rate appertains to a tenement in the lane by the Bodleian, and clearly indicates that the Ditch must have fallen entirely into disuse some time before 1649, the date of the first known lease. It was not of course levelled up to a height of 11 ft. above the Ditch as now, but had a concave surface from north to south as may still be seen south of the Old Ashmolean Building and behind the shops towards the eastern end of Broad Street.

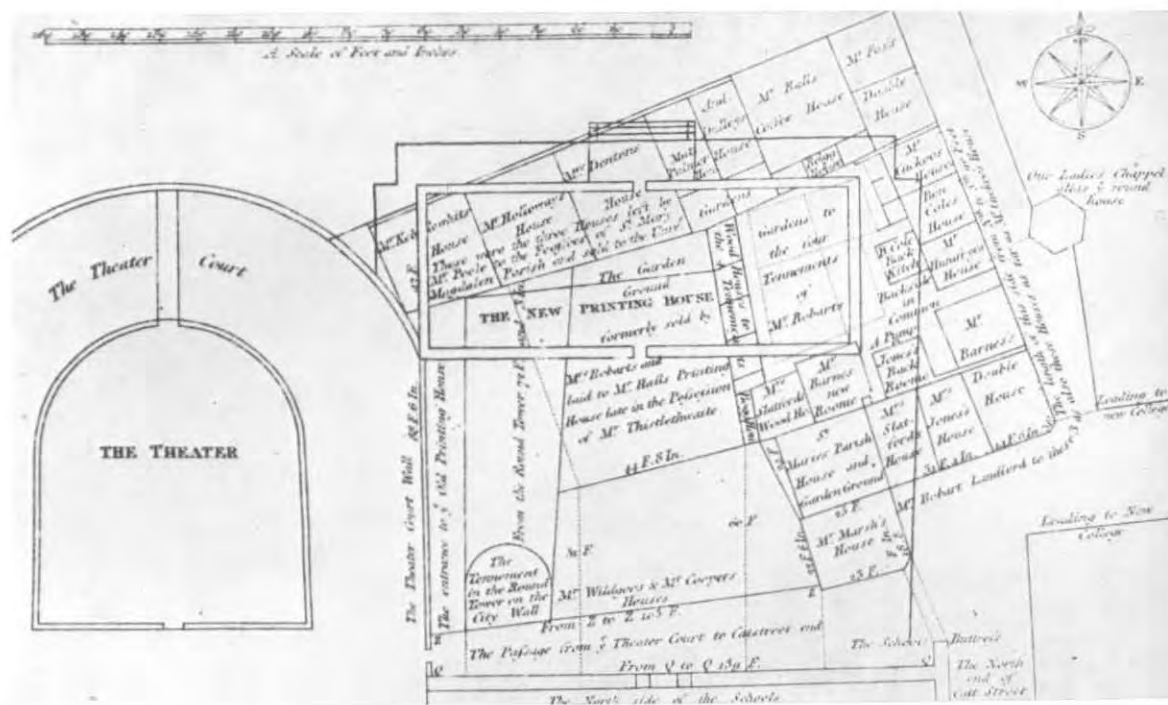
The trench opened for the tunnel fell, except for a short stretch at its northern end, within the limits of the western plot leased by Tredwell in 1649 and the next tenement eastwards, now partly within the Clarendon Quadrangle and partly within the Theatre area. The greater part of the Ditch exposed must correspond very closely to the site of the first Printing House erected in 1669, which is to be seen in Loggan's view of 1675 (PLATE XVII, B) as a long low building backing westwards on the wall of the Theatre area. No signs of foundations of such a building were revealed, nor were rubbish-pits, dug into the ditch, detected at any point in the tunnel-trench.

All the material within the ditch should therefore date not later than c. 1630 (Hutton's record of damming), and much of it may be far earlier. Only from the upper layers of the levelling were later finds to be expected, and indeed most of the material from the upper layer of the Ditch itself must date before 1615, when Acton received land north of the Wall in lieu of other land occupied by him on the northern side of the Bodleian Quadrangle.²

By that date the University had erected three tenements against the Wall farther eastwards towards Cat Street. It is quite clear from Benjamin Cole's plan (PLATE XVI), surveyed before the erection of the Clarendon Building, that

¹ This is probably an error. It seems impossible to get any plot facing Cat Street of this length from N.-S. In Cole's survey of 1713 (PLATE XVI) this measurement is $58\frac{1}{2}$ ft.

² H. E. Salter, *Oxford City Properties* (O.H.S. vol. LXXXIII), p. 293.



COLE'S SURVEY (1713) OF THE CLARENDON QUADRANGLE
(after Skelton, *Oxonia Restaurata*, II, fig. after pl. 100).

S.



N.

PORTION OF AGAS'S BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF OXFORD,
DRAWN IN 1578.

S.



N.

PORTION OF LOGGAN'S BIRD'S-EYE VIEW
OF OXFORD, DRAWN IN 1675.

After *Old Plans of Oxford* (Oxford Historical Society, vol. xxxviii).

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the plots of the leases of 1649 go with the tenements facing the Bodleian, and it may fairly be assumed that, while the Wall may have remained as a back-wall of the houses, it was pierced to afford access to the gardens developed over the top of the Ditch. Except for what had to be demolished to enlarge the cart-way north of the Bodleian, it is not absolutely necessary to suppose that other parts of the Wall underwent more than modification.

One point seems clear, namely that, if allowance be made for some additional length in the section surveyed by Mr. Daniell arising from the fact that the tunnel-trench did not cross the ditch on the same line as the boundary of the western plot on Cole's plan,¹ Mr. Daniell's measurements coincide reasonably closely with the $72\frac{1}{4}$ ft. length of the western plot, plus the $12\frac{1}{2}$ ft. width of the cart-way on Cole's plan, especially if it may be assumed that the householder on the north side of the Ditch had already jumped a claim on the northern slope. That is to say, the western plot includes the greater part of the width of the ditch.

Anthony Wood, writing in 1660 about the Ditch along Broad Street, records its stoppage as far back as the reign of Richard I, a fact hardly borne out by the evidence of the archaeological material discovered in the tunnel-trench, but speaking of his own time adds, 'of what breadth and depth I cannot justly say neither can we judge of that part of the trench yet remaining being that little as t'is incroached upon and become almost a common ditch.'² He is probably speaking rather of the part west of the Turl, because the Ditch was already overstridden by Tredwell's, if not by Acton's, holding.

The *terminus ante quem*, here suggested for the conversion of the Ditch into gardens shows the enormous change that must have taken place in the thirty years after Agas drew his bird's-eye view (PLATE XVII, A). It may be wondered, indeed, whether even by his day the Ditch had not begun to be turned to useful purposes. But, taken as a whole, the material recovered from the Ditch suggests that the sealing occurred, as already indicated, in the early years of the 17th century.

¹ The difference in length of this plot and those to the east of it, shown in Cole's measurements, appears quite plainly in Loggan's view.

² A. Clark, *Wood's City of Oxford*, 1 (O.H.S. vol. xv), 263.