

# Excavations in Merton College, Oxford, 1970

By T. G. HASSALL

## SUMMARY

*A section of Oxford city wall dug in Merton College Grove (SP51670600) did not locate the late Saxon defences but showed that a stone wall was built here in the early 13th century on an alluvial deposit.*

## INTRODUCTION (FIG. 1)

AT the suggestion of Professor R. H. C. Davis, the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee included a small research excavation within its 1970 programme of rescue work.<sup>1</sup> The Acting Warden and the Fellows of Merton College kindly allowed the excavation to take place during July and August. The Garden Master, Dr. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, was particularly tolerant in permitting the desecration of the Grove. The excavation was supervised by Mr. Andrew Rogerson. Mr. Hugh Richmond was responsible for the site survey and for the published site plan and section. The photographs were taken by Mr. David Carpenter.

The dating of the surviving stretches of Oxford's city wall and the nature of the late Saxon defences are major outstanding problems of the city's archaeology.<sup>2</sup> Various excavations have taken place at points on the wall and gradually a pattern is beginning to emerge.<sup>3</sup> The only stretch of wall that had not been

Abbreviations used in this article are as follows:

*Brodrick, Memorials* G. C. Brodrick, *Memorials of Merton College*, O.H.S., iv (1885).

*Dark Age Britain* E. M. Jope, 'Saxon Oxford and its region', *Dark Age Britain, Studies presented to E. T. Leeds*, ed. D. B. Harden (1956), 234-258.

*Hassall, 1970* T. G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford, 1969. Second Interim Report', *Oxoniensia*, xxxv (1970), 5-18.

*Jope, 1943* E. M. Jope, 'Medieval Pottery from Merton College, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, viii/ix (1943-44), 102-106.

*Jope, 1951* A. G. Hunter and E. M. Jope, 'Excavations on the City Defences in New College, Oxford, 1949', *Oxoniensia*, xvi (1951), 28-41.

*Jope, 1952* E. M. Jope, 'Late Saxon Pits under Oxford Castle Mound', *Oxoniensia*, xvii/xviii (1952-3), 77-111.

*Jope, 1958* E. M. Jope, 'The Clarendon Hotel, Oxford. Part I. The Site', *Oxoniensia*, xxiii (1958), 1-83.

*Salter, City Properties* H. E. Salter, *Oxford City Properties*, O.H.S. lxxxiii (1926).

*Salter, Survey* H. E. Salter, *Survey of Oxford*, I, O.H.S., N.S., xiv (1960).

*Salter, Walls* H. E. Salter, 'A Lecture on the Walls of Oxford', *Records of Mediaeval Oxford* (The Oxford Chronicle Co. Ltd., 1912), 76-84.

*Sturdy, 1961* David Sturdy, 'Recent Excavations in Christ Church and Nearby', *Oxoniensia*, xvi/xvii, 19-37.

<sup>1</sup> I am extremely grateful to Professor Davis for all his help and encouragement and in particular for his views on the development of late Saxon Oxford. I also wish to express my personal thanks to all those people whose names appear in the text as having assisted in the excavation in various capacities.

<sup>2</sup> The problems associated with the wall have been discussed by the late Rev. H. E. Salter, Professor E. M. Jope and Dr. Hilary L. Turner, see: *Salter, Walls*, 76-84; *Jope, 1951*, 28-41; *Dark Age Britain*, 241-243; Hilary L. Turner, *Town Defences in England and Wales* (1970), 121-122.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1, p. 46.

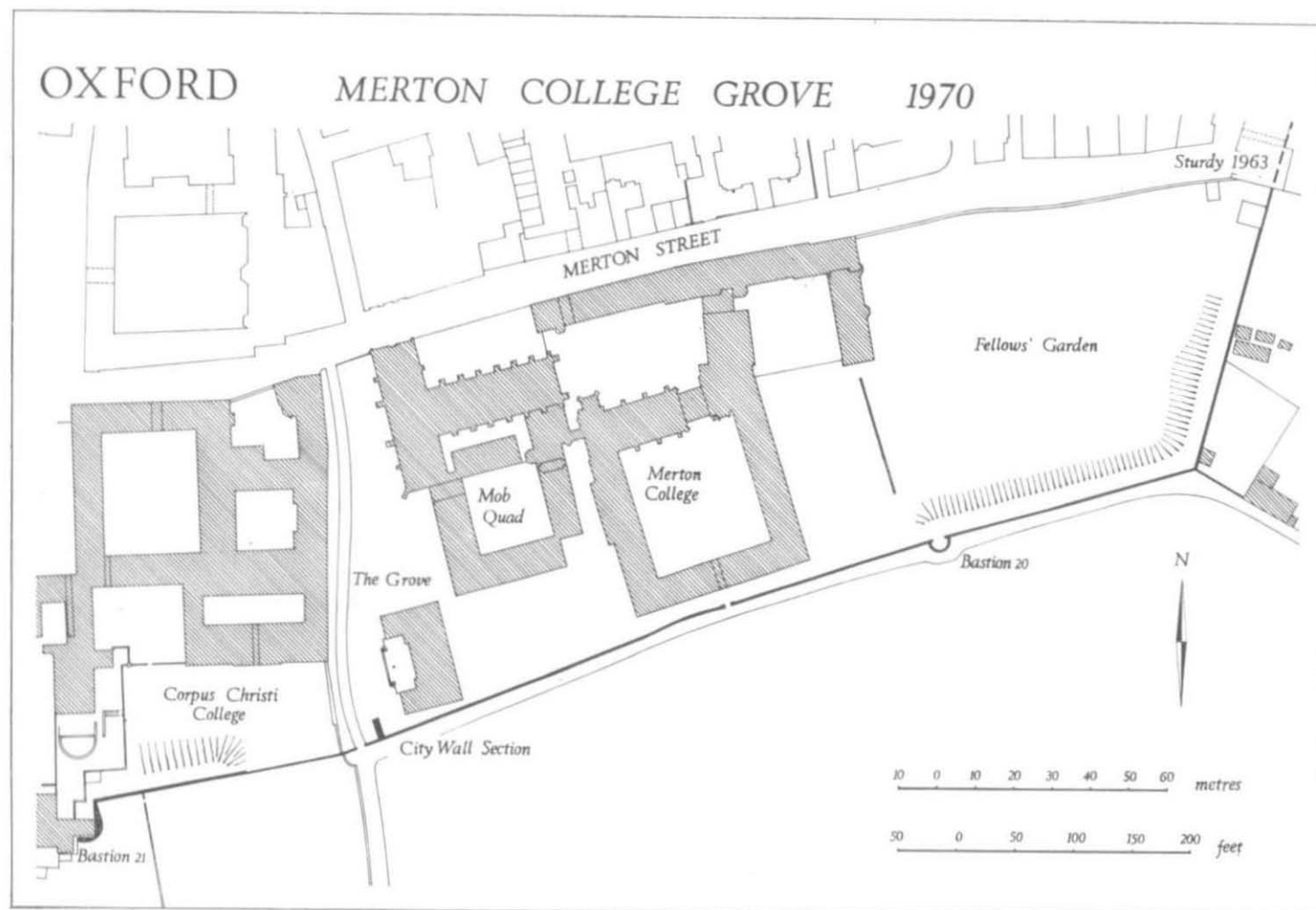


FIG. 1

*Based on the City of Oxford Central Area 1:500 survey, by permission of the City Engineer.*

examined until 1970, was that defining the southern boundary of Merton College. The excavation was therefore carried out to discover the construction and dating of the wall and to provide comparative evidence for the current excavations of the wall in St. Ebbe's.<sup>4</sup>

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The line of the wall on the south side of the city has been discussed at length both by the Rev. H. E. Salter and by Professor E. M. Jope.<sup>5</sup> The assumption has always been that the southern line of the medieval wall followed the extreme tip of the second gravel terrace, at the junction of the gravel and the alluvium which overlies the first gravel terrace. The medieval wall was thought to follow the line of its Saxon predecessor, although the recent reassessment of the Burghal Hidage must leave this question open to doubt.<sup>6</sup> Indeed it is possible that the area of Oxford within the medieval walls east of a line defined by Catte Street and Magpie Lane, may have been an undefended suburb outside the walled town of the Burghal Hidage period. If this theory is correct, then this eastern suburb must have been defended with a wall some time prior to the Norman Conquest, possibly in the early 11th century.<sup>7</sup>

The defence, which antedated the stone wall, was presumably of earthen construction. H. E. Salter used the evidence of strips of waste lying parallel to the wall to support this assumption.<sup>8</sup> He reasoned that the waste strips marked the full width of the Saxon rampart, replacement of which by a stone wall would create a vacant space to the rear of the new work. The observation by Mr. David Sturdy of the possible Saxon rampart in Exeter College, Broad Street, and in Merton Street, supports this concept.<sup>9</sup>

On the *Map of Mediaeval Oxford*, Salter also shows strips of property inside the eastern section of the south wall.<sup>10a</sup> When the city acquired the wall and the waste from the king in 1199 it did not acquire these strips, which were granted to Merton College by the king himself and not by the corporation.<sup>10b</sup> A possible explanation for this anomaly is that the presumed earth defence had been replaced by a stone wall before 1199 and before the series of murage grants, which began in 1226.<sup>11</sup> Thus these strips of property had ceased to be waste before 1199, and so had remained with the king. There is slight documentary evidence that as early as 1122 the earthen rampart, immediately to the west of the property later acquired by Merton College and adjacent to St. Frideswide's Priory, was replaced by a simple stone wall.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Hassall, 1970, 15-18.

<sup>5</sup> Salter, *Walls*, 76-84; *Dark Age Britain*, 241-243.

<sup>6</sup> David Hill, 'The Burghal Hidage: the establishment of a text', *Medieval Archaeology*, XIII (1969), 84-92, footnotes 13 and 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*; this suggestion is discussed in Jope, 1951, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Salter, *Walls*, 78.

<sup>9</sup> Notes and News, *Oxoniensia*, xxviii (1963), 91.

<sup>10a</sup> H. E. Salter, *Map of Mediaeval Oxford*, (1934), Maps 2, 3, 5.

<sup>10b</sup> See below for the details of the acquisition of these strips of property by Merton College.

<sup>11</sup> Salter, *Walls*, 76.

<sup>12</sup> *Dark Age Britain*, 243, footnote 43.

Walter de Merton began to acquire properties next to the wall in 1266.<sup>13</sup> Among the first of these was one of Oxford's few identifiable *mansiones murales*.<sup>14</sup> This property lay immediately to the north east of the excavation site on what is now Mob Quad. In addition to responsibility for the repairing of the wall, the property also possessed the advowson of St. John's church.<sup>15</sup> Peter son of Herbert was the owner of the property in 1217, and he sold it to the Abbot of Reading in 1235.<sup>16</sup> The Abbot failed to fulfil the obligation of repairing the wall, so that the property was duly seized by the mayor and bailiffs.<sup>17</sup> The property was only restored to the Abbey after royal intervention. By 1266 the property was empty and Reading sold it to Walter de Merton.<sup>18</sup> A small building was uncovered in the north east corner of Mob Quad during an excavation in 1922. This building was found to antedate the Mob buildings of 1309.<sup>19</sup> Professor E. M. Jope studied the pottery from the site and came to the conclusion that most of it was probably in use before that date.<sup>20</sup> This pottery assemblage agrees in date with the pottery from the 1970 excavation discussed below.

The site of the excavation and some neighbouring land was acquired in 1318, on condition that the College did not dig next to the wall, plant trees or build houses.<sup>21</sup> The property was to have gates constructed at its eastern and western ends, to allow for repairs and inspection of the wall; the keys of the gates were to remain in the custody of the mayor and bailiffs.

To the north of the excavation lay Gutter Hall. This Hall was held in 1279 by Philip de Eu, who paid 14 pence to Walter Feteplace and it was worth 2 marks.<sup>22</sup> Philip was succeeded in 1306 by William Estdene and in 1317 by John de Greynvile.<sup>23</sup> Greynvile granted the Hall to Master John de Abingdon who, in turn, granted the tenement to Merton in 1331.<sup>24</sup> Gutter Hall derived its name from the gutter which ran across the site. The significance of this gutter and its relation to the wall are discussed below.

By 1318 Merton College was in possession of all the land next to the wall on the sites of what are now Merton and Corpus Christi Colleges.<sup>25</sup> However, Merton College did not gain the freehold of the strip of land adjacent to the eastern wall until 1854, although it had been renting this land from 1327.<sup>26</sup>

A few facts relating to the history of the south eastern section of the wall are known. The surviving bastions, numbers 20 and 21, and the south east corner

<sup>13</sup> Salter, *Survey*, 211-212, 247-253; B. W. Henderson, *Merton College* (1899), 11 and 57.

<sup>14</sup> H. E. Salter, 'An Oxford Mural Mansion', *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. J. G. Edwards, V. H. Galbraith, E. F. Jacob (1933), 300-301; Salter, *Survey*, 251, South East Ward no. 204.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Jope, 1943, 102-106.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1317-1321, 124.

<sup>22</sup> Salter, *Survey*, 251, South East Ward no. 205.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> B. W. Henderson, *Merton College* (1899), 11 and 57.

<sup>26</sup> Salter, *City Properties*, 114-5.

bastion, now demolished, were almost certainly later insertions.<sup>27</sup> In 1266 the College was allowed to build a postern, but this gate was blocked in 1611.<sup>28</sup> The new back gate constructed at that time was closed in 1727 and replaced by the present entrance to the Meadows.<sup>29</sup> Right of access to the wall was always retained by the mayor and bailiffs; in 1285 the College was accused of obstructing access.<sup>30</sup>

During the 18th century the wall was greatly modified. In 1711 the lease relating to the eastern strip of land belonging to the corporation specified that inside the wall the land was 'now converted into a handsome Terrass walk with a summer house at the north end'.<sup>31</sup> In 1716 a part of the wall was rebuilt and the walk at its foot, 'Deadman's Walk', was raised to a higher level.<sup>32</sup> In 1754-56 the south wall of the Grove was pulled down and replaced.<sup>33a</sup> The state of the wall in the 1770's is clearly shown in the drawings of J. B. Malchair (PLATE VII, A and B). The present wall in the Grove was built c. 1924.<sup>33b</sup>

#### THE EXCAVATION (FIGS. 1 and 2, PLATE VIII)

*Description.* A trench 1 metre wide (east-west) and 2 metres long (north-south) was dug immediately to the north of the present wall of Merton Grove. The trench was later extended to the north by 3 metres across the line of the small tarmac path which runs parallel to the wall. The excavation was continued down to the water table and on to clay immediately below. If any trace of the late Saxon defences had been encountered, the trench would have been greatly extended, but since only the medieval wall was uncovered, it was decided not to enlarge the excavation. It was also intended to dig a second trench to the north of the first to test the archaeological potential of the Grove proper. However, it was learnt that in the one suitable spot, a static water tank had been constructed during the last war and later back-filled.

*The Walls.* The modern wall of the Grove was found to overlie an earlier stone wall; this modern wall did not have a foundation trench but rested on a layer of clean mortar (layer ①). The earlier wall, Phase II, was also without a foundation trench, but layer ⑦ may have been deposited during the construction of this wall. The Phase II wall rested on the footing of another, Phase I. Both the Phase I and II walls were constructed of corralian random rubble stones, crudely coursed, with a lime mortar. The top of the surviving Phase I wall had been partially robbed. The footing itself was stepped: the upper half was set in a foundation trench, layer ⑪, and it projected over the lower half. The Phase I footing rested in alluvial material, layer ⑫.

<sup>27</sup> Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *City of Oxford* (1939), 161.

<sup>28</sup> *Wood's History of the City of Oxford*, ed. A. Clark, I, O.H.S., xvii (1890), 247.

<sup>29</sup> *Brodrick, Memorials*, 106.

<sup>30</sup> J. E. Thorold Rogers, *Oxford City Documents*, 1268-1665, O.H.S., xviii (1891), 206.

<sup>31</sup> *Salter, City Properties*, 114-115.

<sup>32</sup> *Brodrick, Memorials*, 126.

<sup>33a</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33b</sup> ex inf. Merton College Bursary.

# OXFORD MERTON COLLEGE GROVE CITY WALL SECTION 1970

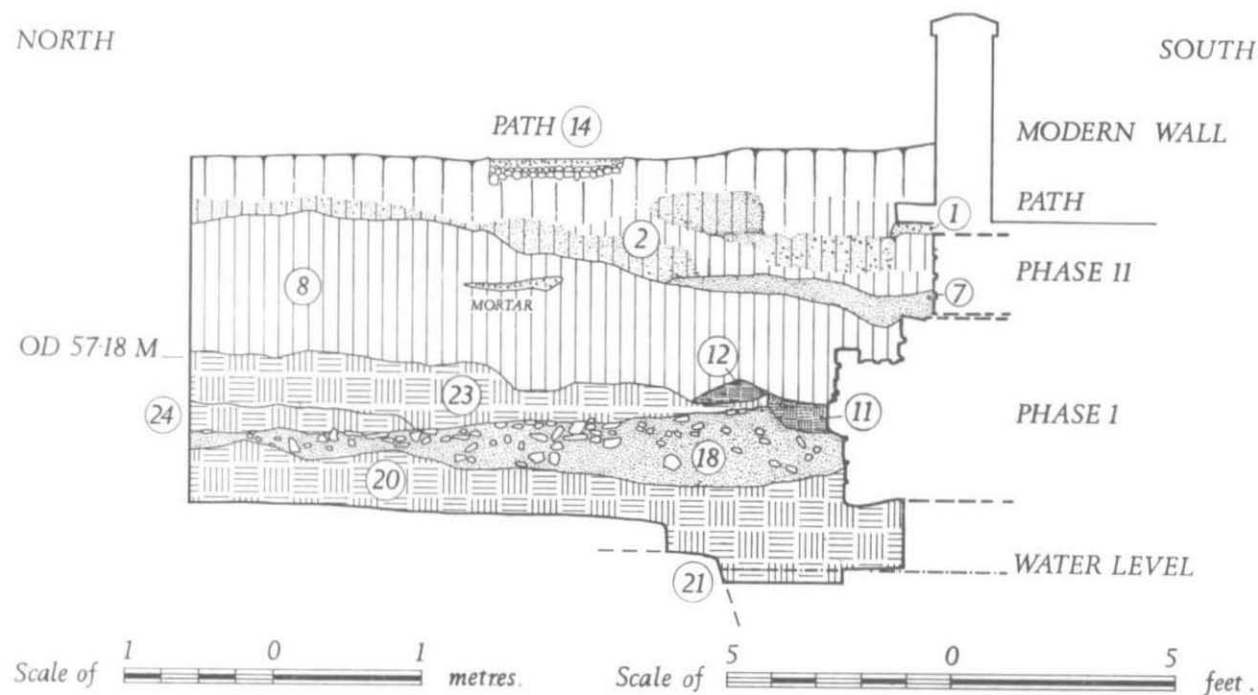


FIG. 2

*Layers.* The following layers were excavated ; not all appear in the published eastern section of the trench :

- ① Mortar, very clean, lying under modern wall. No finds.
- ② Top soil, dark grey with patches of gravelly soil, heavily disturbed by roots. This layer also includes layers ③-⑥, ⑤ and ⑥, although only layer ② appeared in the east section. Post-medieval and medieval sherds.
- ③-⑥ See ②. No finds.
- ⑦ Sandy soil with pebbles and shells, resting against the footings of the Phase II wall and presumably associated with that wall's construction. No finds.
- ⑧ Loam of varying texture, at times very clayey. This layer also includes layers ⑩ and ⑪. The lower step of the Phase I wall was sealed by layer ⑧. One post-medieval sherd, otherwise all medieval pottery, small lead object.
- ⑨ Stone and mortar construction of Phase I wall. Also includes layer ②. No finds.
- ⑩ See ⑧. 12th-13th century sherds.
- ⑪ Clay and soil fill of foundation trench of upper half of Phase I wall. 12th-13th century sherds.
- ⑫ Clay, blue-grey in colour and very hard, possibly the up-cast from layer ⑪. 12th-13th century sherds ; bones.
- ⑬ See ⑩. No finds.
- ⑭ Tarmac of modern path removed after the extension of the trench northwards.
- ⑮ See ⑧. No finds.
- ⑯ See ③. 12th-13th century sherds ; bronze object (Fig. 4).
- ⑰ See ③. 12th-13th century sherds.
- ⑱ Clay with sand and stones. This is the same layer as ⑬ and ⑱. 12th-13th century sherds.
- ⑲ See ⑩. No finds.
- ⑳ Clay, very sticky ; probably an alluvial deposit. This layer continued under the Phase I wall which was slightly dug into it. Immediately behind and below the Phase I wall this layer dipped below the level of layer ⑲ and further excavation was prevented by the water level. 12th-13th century sherds ; bones ; iron horse-shoe.
- ㉑ Blue clay, possibly natural.
- ㉒ See ⑨. No finds.
- ㉓ Loam with clay forming continuous layer with ⑯, ⑰ and ㉔. No finds.
- ㉔ See layer ㉓. No finds.
- ㉕ See layer ②. No finds.
- ㉖ See layer ②. No finds.
- ㉗ Stone and mortar construction of Phase II wall. No finds.



*Interpretation.* The Phase I wall must date from the early 13th century. It was set in what appeared to be an alluvial deposit, layer 20, and not as might have been supposed, on the natural gravel. Layer 20 can be accounted for by the presence of the Gutter and this point is discussed below. The construction of the Phase I wall requires explanation and two possible theories can be advanced. First the alluvial deposit, layer 20, was sealed by layer 18, the lower half of the Phase I wall was then built with its external face tight against the side of its foundation trench, but the upper half of the footing was then made within a wider foundation trench, layer 11. The upper part of the wall was found to overhang slightly. This projection might be explained by a local correction in the wall line during construction. Second, it is possible that this wall was built in two phases, the lower part being constructed on a slightly amended line at a later date, although on inspection, the Phase I wall showed no break between its upper and lower halves.

Before the deposition of layer 18 there can have been no solid ground surface here. This layer may indicate an attempt to create a solid working surface, or possibly a pathway. Either way, layers 23 and 24 must have been laid down on top of layer 18 before the building of the upper part of the Phase I wall, since its foundation trench, layer 11, has cut through both layers 23 and 18 and the up-cast, layer 12, also rests on layer 23. Layer 8 then represents the build-up of the ground level of the Grove during the later medieval period, terminated by the construction of Phase II wall. Only one post-medieval sherd came from the top of this layer. Layer 7 must be the building debris from the Phase II wall, but unfortunately it produced no sherds so that exact dating remains uncertain. From its appearance, this wall could be medieval, since the material of which it is built is identical to that of the Phase I wall. But it is more likely that the Phase II wall represents a post-medieval wall on the line of the city wall. This interpretation is supported by the post-medieval sherd from layer 8. A reasonable explanation is that the Phase II wall is simply a garden wall, possibly that constructed in 1754-56.<sup>33</sup>

#### THE FINDS

##### *Pottery*

Pottery was recovered from layers as follows :

- ② Post-medieval : 17th century : earthenware, also clay pipes. Medieval of various dates. Fabrics : gritty coarse wares, sandy coarse wares, sandy wares, hard buff sandy wares, also roof tiles, glazed and unglazed.
- ⑧ Post-medieval : stoneware. Medieval of various dates. Fabrics : soft shelly ware (including Fig. 3, 8/2), gritty coarse wares, sandy coarse wares, sandy wares (including 12th century tripod pitcher), buff sandy wares (including base of a large double-shelled lamp), also roof tiles, glazed and unglazed.

<sup>33</sup> Brodrick, *Memorials*, 126.



- ⑩ Medieval : 12th-13th century. Fabrics : gritty coarse wares, sandy coarse wares, sandy wares (tripod pitcher), sandy grey ware, also unglazed roof tiles.
- ⑪ Medieval : 12th-13th century. Fabrics : gritty coarse wares, sandy coarse wares (including Fig. 3, 11/1), also unglazed roof tiles.
- ⑫ Medieval : 12th-13th century. Fabrics : sandy coarse wares, sandy ware (tripod pitcher type), also unglazed roof tiles.
- ⑬ Medieval : 12th-13th century. Fabrics : gritty coarse wares, sandy coarse ware, also roof tiles glazed and unglazed.
- ⑭ Medieval : 12th-13th century. Fabrics : gritty coarse wares, sandy coarse wares, sandy ware (tripod pitcher), sandy pinkish ware, also glazed roof tile.
- ⑮ Medieval : 12th-13th century. Fabrics : sandy coarse wares, sandy wares (tripod pitcher).
- ⑯ Medieval : 12th-13th century. Fabrics : gritty coarse wares, sandy coarse wares (Fig. 3, 20/1), sandy ware (tripod pitcher).

The above assemblage appears to agree in date with the previous finds of pottery from Merton College.<sup>34</sup> There are no sherds obviously earlier than the 12th century ; there is, for instance, only one piece of soft soapy shelly ware, reminiscent of St. Neot's ware, from layer ⑧. This sherd is of unusual form and is illustrated in FIG. 3 :

- 8/2 Rim sherd of cooking pot in soft soapy shelly ware of St. Neot's type. The form is difficult to parallel with published sherds from Oxford. It is not clear whether it came from a narrow necked cooking pot or a jug. In form it resembles a sherd from under the castle mound.<sup>34a</sup> However, the Merton example is of a different fabric and lacks decoration on top of the rim.

Gritty coarse wares are, generally speaking, rather scarce on this site, and sandy coarse ware cooking pots are the most characteristic sherds. Such pottery is difficult to date closely, but in view of its association with sherds of tripod pitcher type, a late 12th-early 13th century date seems acceptable. One typical sherd of this fabric from layer ⑪ is illustrated in FIG. 3 :

- 11/1 Rim sherd of cooking pot in grey sandy fabric, light brown external surface, everted, thickened at the top.

From layer ⑯ came three other sherds of sandy ware, all apparently from one unusual vessel, illustrated in FIG. 3 :

- 20/1 Rim sherd, base angle sherd and body sherd (not illustrated) of an unglazed, straight-sided pot in sandy grey ware with light brown exterior. The rim is a simple flange, the body is very thick, ranging from 1.2 mm. to 1.5 mm. with marked internal rilling : the base seems very thin in comparison with the thickness of the sides. Each sherd has been perforated from the outside with small holes, approximately 0.8 mm. in diameter. This vessel was probably used as a colander. It

<sup>34</sup> *Jope*, 1943, 102-6.

<sup>34a</sup> *Jope*, 1952, 82 and 101.

has been suggested that flatter dishes with single perforations might have had a variety of uses including curfews, chafing dishes, bee-skips and milk skimmers.<sup>34b</sup>

The majority of the glazed pottery from the securely stratified layers associated with the city wall construction was of tripod pitcher type. This pottery is thought to have ceased production by the early 13th century.<sup>34c</sup> None of the sherds excavated possessed any of the late characteristics, such as thumbing on the base.

There were very few sherds of fine buff sandy fabrics of the later 13th and 14th centuries. Soon after the completion of the excavation, however, Mr. Dafydd Kidd discovered part of a jug during building work near the Lodge and this sherd is published in FIG. 3 :

us/1 Top of a jug in very fine buff ware, simple pouring lip and rim, plain strap handle, marked rilling inside beneath the rim and outside the shoulder, mottled green glaze. ?14th century.

Mrs. Eleanor Beard and Miss Susan Walker drew the pottery.

*Floor tile.* From layer ② came the corner of an unkeyed floor tile with a five petalled flower. It is similar to Loyd Haberly CXLII,<sup>35</sup> but this Merton

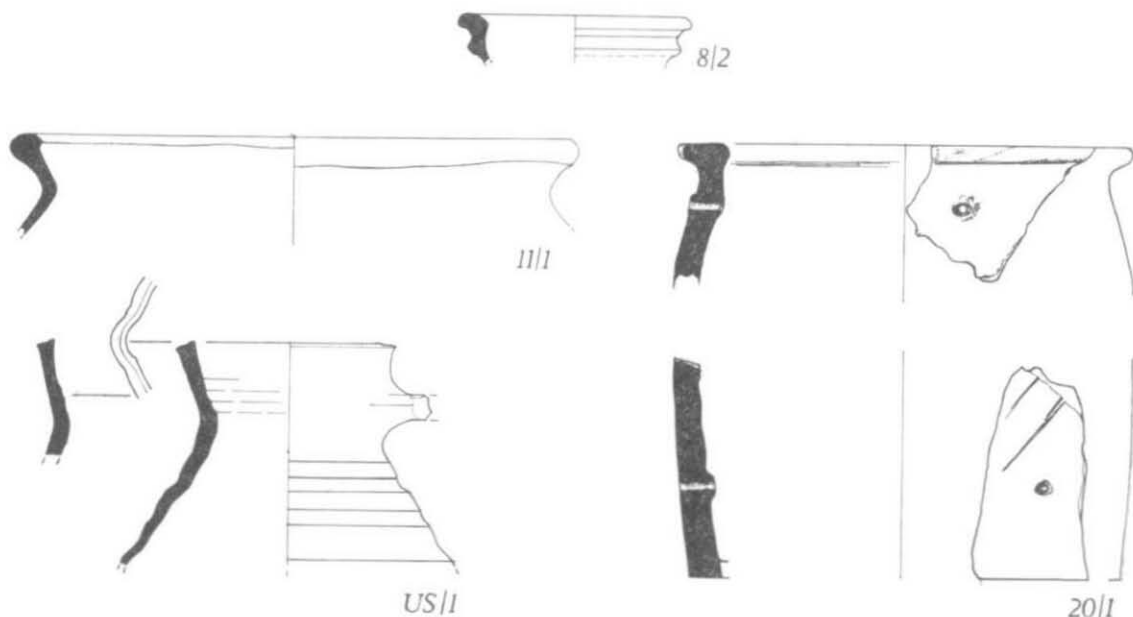


FIG. 3

Merton College, Oxford. Cooking pots. St. Neot's ware: 8/2; sandy ware: 11/1. Perforated vessel in sandy ware 20/1. Green glazed jug in fine sandy ware, us/1.

<sup>34b</sup> E. M. Jope and R. I. Threlfall, 'The Twelfth-Century Castle at Ascot Doilly, Oxfordshire: its History and Excavation', *Antiquaries Journal*, xxxix (1959), Fig. 12, B.1; N. P. Thompson, 'A medieval pit at Great Somerford', *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, Vol. 65, Part B (1970), 167-171.

<sup>34c</sup> Jope, 1958, 54-55.

<sup>35</sup> Loyd Haberly, *Medieval English Paving Tiles* (1937), 190.

example is unpierced in the centre. Mr. David Ganz reports that there does not appear to be an extant example of this tile in Merton.

*Metal Objects.* Three metal objects were found : from layer ⑧ a bent lead object 6 cm. long with round section 4 mm. in diameter, sharpened at both ends, of uncertain use ; from layer ⑩, a bronze mount (Fig. 4) with 3 iron rivets ; from layer ⑳, an iron horse shoe, heavily corroded.

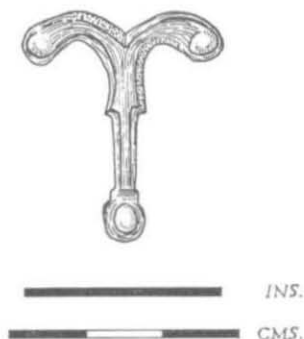


FIG. 4

Merton College, Oxford. Bronze mount with iron rivets, 12th-13th century. 1:1.

*Bones.* The excavation only produced animal remains from layers ⑫ and ⑳. The lack of animal remains reflects the absence of rubbish pits on the site. Professor B. J. Marples has kindly looked at the bones and reported as follows :

⑫ *Ox* : Part of a left jaw, old, with very worn teeth ; small, heavy, mineralized fragment.

⑳ *Ox* : Part of pelvis with the acetabulum, rib fragment ; *Sheep* : Part of a skull with the base of a horn ; fragment of tibia ; 4 small bone fragments.

The finds are at present being stored by the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee.

#### DISCUSSION

The excavation showed that in Merton Grove at least, the gravel of the second terrace is absent. The assumption that the course of the city wall on its southern side was dictated by the gravel terrace may have to be reviewed. This new evidence from Merton is comparable with evidence from St. Ebbe's, which also shows a complex relationship between the gravel terrace and the city wall.<sup>36</sup> However, the Merton excavation was on a very small scale, and it would therefore be unwise to draw too many final conclusions about the gravel terrace at this point. It may be that the alluvial deposit, layer ㉑, represents a local indentation in the gravel associated with the later medieval gutter. Mr. David Sturdy has suggested that St. Frideswide's may stand out on a promontory of gravel to the west of this site.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Hassall, 1970, 15-18.

<sup>37</sup> Sturdy, 1961, 30.

The evidence of the 1970 excavation places the building of the city wall in the Grove to the early 13th century, when the murage grants begin. It is probable that the existence of the gutter may make this particular site atypical. The gutter is a culvert which runs from Merton Street in a diagonal line from north-west to south-east across the Grove, under Merton New Buildings and, presumably, out under the city wall.<sup>38</sup> Anthony Wood noted that there were several arches at ground level at this point on the wall, the top of one of which is still visible,<sup>39</sup> and these could have been associated with the out-let of the gutter. This culvert may be the canalizing of a wider and more meandering stream. The inverted 's' line of the path into the Meadow from Merton Street preserves a medieval property boundary. This sinuous line contrasts markedly with the straight line usually taken by property boundaries. It is tempting to see in this line an echo of the early course of an open stream which may ante-date the building of the Phase I stone wall. It would be interesting to know whether the original gutter was a natural or an artificial stream. In either case, it might perhaps have served to delineate the eastern end of the Saxon burgh, if, as now seems probable, the town was smaller in the 10th than the 11th century. If this hypothesis is valid, then the existence of the gutter may explain the striking absence of any defences earlier than the 13th century stone wall in the Grove. The eastern suburb, if it existed, may have been enclosed by an 11th century defence, but on the evidence at present available, the gutter must have remained open. Future excavations must test the relationship between the gutter and the nature of the 13th century and earlier defences. To the west of the Grove there is evidence of a 12th century stone wall, adjacent to St. Frideswide's, as indicated above.<sup>40</sup> To the east, Mr. David Sturdy's sightings in Merton Street in 1963 and the evidence of the Rev. H. E. Salter based upon the strips of property would certainly imply that the stone wall round the south east corner of Merton College must have had an earthen predecessor.<sup>41</sup>

From the evidence of the pottery, it would seem that the area of the Grove had been inhabited only for a short period in the 12th century. Once the Grove had been acquired by Merton College it does not seem to have been used for the deposition of rubbish, hence the lack of pits. This may reflect Merton's undertaking in 1318 not to dig behind the wall. If this pattern is repeated along the line of the wall, then any early rampart may be relatively undisturbed.

#### CONCLUSION

The wall in Merton Grove dates from the early 13th century, probably from the second quarter. The excavation has posed further questions: the pre-13th century defence still needs to be located, and the gutter requires proper examination. It is quite clear that further excavation in Merton College and Corpus Christi would be very worthwhile.

<sup>38</sup> Salter, *Survey*, 251, South East Ward no. 204.

<sup>39</sup> Wood's *History of the City of Oxford*, ed. A. Clark, I, O.H.S., xv (1889), 246; cf. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *City of Oxford*, (1939), 161.

<sup>40</sup> *Dark Age Britain*, 243, footnote 43.

<sup>41</sup> See above p. 36.

## APPENDIX I

## PREVIOUS EXCAVATIONS ON THE CITY WALL AND DITCH. (FIG. 5)

The first recorded excavation of the city wall was in 1583, when a dispute arose between Merton College and the corporation. In order to settle the point at issue a search of the city wall was made near the old Indian Institute.<sup>42</sup> Since that time there have been many sightings of the wall and ditch during building works as well as actual excavations.

During the 19th century Mr. J. H. Parker recorded the observation of the ditch at the east end of St. Michael's church, at the northern end of Turl Street and in Exeter College.<sup>43</sup> Further sightings were made in the early 20th century and these are referred to by the Rev. H. E. Salter.<sup>44</sup>

The first modern excavation (site 1) took place in 1899. This excavation by the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society settled the disputed line of the wall west of Smith Gate and also produced evidence for an enigmatic early wall running southwards parallel to Catte Street.<sup>45</sup> In 1928 the wall in New College was examined by Dr. J. N. L. Myres and Professor C. F. C. Hawkes.<sup>46</sup> In 1939 when the Old and New Bodleian Libraries were linked by the tunnel, Mr. J. Daniell recorded the only complete section through the city ditch (site 2).<sup>47</sup>

In 1948 and 1949 the Oxford University Archaeological Society under the direction of Professor E. M. Jope began a series of investigations on some problems connected with the city wall. On the Canal Wharf site (site 3), now Nuffield College, the line of the western end of the northern town wall was found to be associated with the building of the Castle c. 1071 and this stretch of wall must deviate from any earlier town boundary line.<sup>48</sup> Further excavation in New College (site 4) showed that the wall there was constructed in the 13th century.<sup>49</sup>

In the 1950's the city wall continued as a research project of the Oxford University Archaeological Society. In 1954-5 Mr. David Sturdy located the line of the wall east of the Southgate (site 5) and also showed that a large ditch or water course lay immediately to the south of the Saxon town.<sup>50</sup> Another excavation by Mr. P. J. Fowler in 1958 failed to locate the wall in St. Michael's Street, but in the same year Mr. David Sturdy observed the edge of the city ditch outside the old Ashmolean.<sup>51</sup>

In 1963 Mr. David Sturdy again observed the city ditch north west of the Sheldonian Theatre and made two further observations of the wall in Exeter

<sup>42</sup> Salter, *Walls*, 83.

<sup>43</sup> J. H. Parker, *Early History of Oxford*, O.H.S., III (1889), 237-8.

<sup>44</sup> Salter, *Walls*, 76ff; H. E. Salter, 'Introductory', *Oxoniensia* I (1936), 5; H. E. Salter, *Corrigenda*, *Oxoniensia*, II (1937), 203.

<sup>45</sup> F. H. Penny and W. M. Merry, *Buried Oxford Unearthed* (1899).

<sup>46</sup> Jope, 1951, 29, note 5.

<sup>47</sup> John Daniell, 'The City Wall and Ditch in the Clarendon Quadrangle', *Oxoniensia*, IV (1939), 153-9.

<sup>48</sup> *Archaeological Newsletter*, II (April, 1950), 178-80; Notes and News, *Oxoniensia*, XIII (1948), 70-2; *Ibid.*, XV (1950), 109; *Ibid.*, XVI (1951), 28; Jope, 1952, 78, 80.

<sup>49</sup> Jope, 1951, 28-41.

<sup>50</sup> Sturdy, 1961, 19-27.

<sup>51</sup> Notes and News, *Oxoniensia*, XXIII (1958), 134-5, 137.

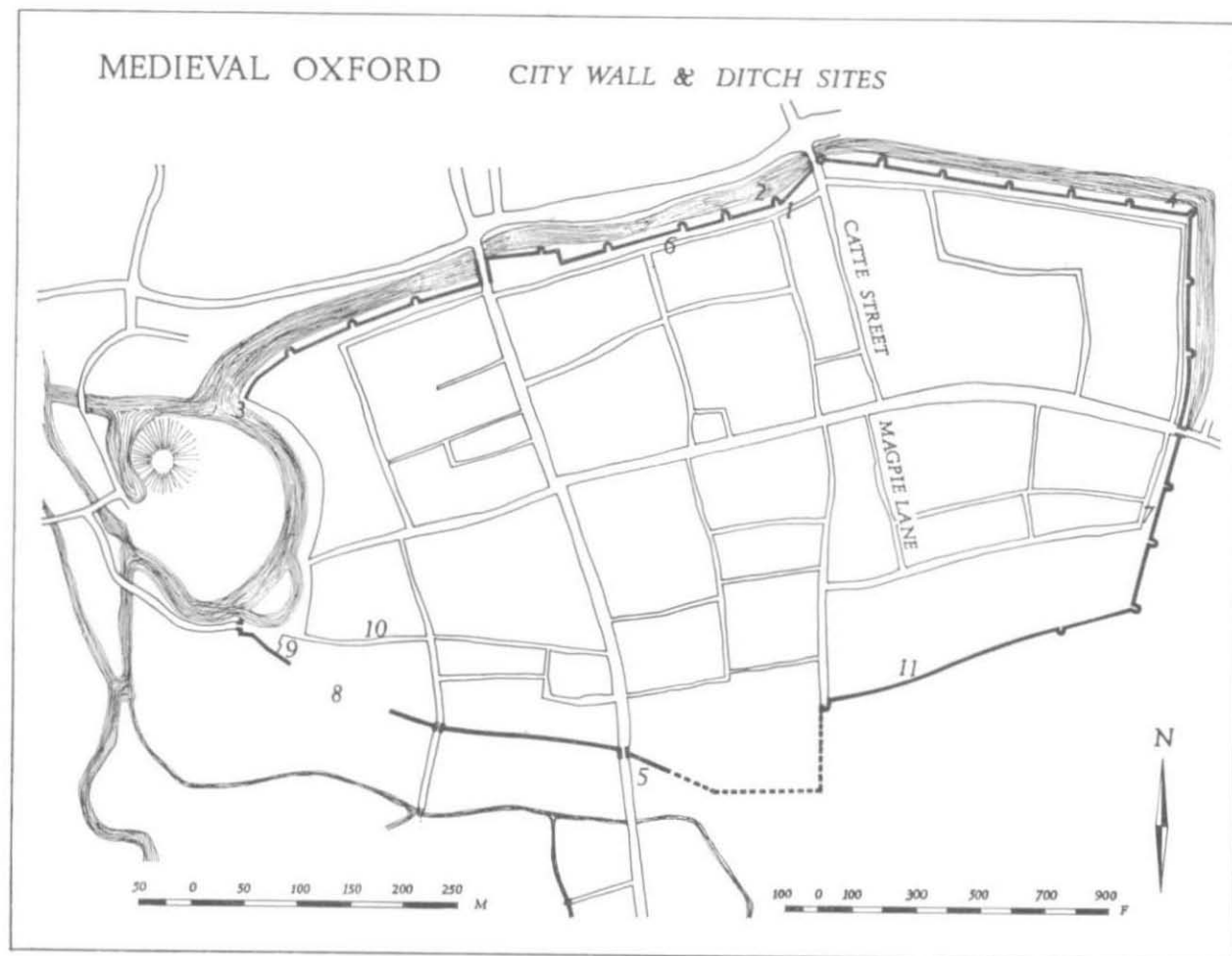


FIG. 5

Medieval Oxford, the walled area, showing the more important previous excavations on the city wall and ditch, see Appendix I for the Key to the numbered sites.

College and Merton Street.<sup>52</sup> In Exeter College (site 6) south of the line of the wall there was a layer of 3' 3" of redeposited red loamy top soil overlying 9" of top soil above the undisturbed gravel. Although no finds were recovered, this deposit strongly suggested a bank in late Saxon times on the line of the medieval wall. In Merton Street (site 7) there appeared to be a similar deposit under the new Warden's lodgings.

The excavations in St. Ebbe's in 1969 failed to locate a pre-13th century wall under the Greyfriars (site 8) while a section of the wall (site 9) to the west of the Greyfriars showed no sign of the late Saxon defences.<sup>53</sup> In 1970 the excavations in Church Street found a late Saxon ditch (site 10) pre-dating the street; this ditch might have been part of the original western defence of the town.<sup>54</sup>

- Index of Sites.*
1. Clarendon Quadrangle, 1899.
  2. Clarendon Quadrangle, 1939.
  3. Canal Wharf Site, now Nuffield College, 1949.
  4. New College, 1949.
  5. Christ Church, 1954-5.
  6. Exeter College, 1963.
  7. Merton College, 1963.
  8. Greyfriars Church, 1969.
  9. Prince's Street, St. Ebbe's, 1969.
  10. Church Street, 1970.
  11. Merton College, 1970.

*The Society acknowledges with gratitude a publication grant from Merton College.*

<sup>52</sup> Notes and News, *Oxoniensia*, xxviii (1963), 91.

<sup>53</sup> Hassall, 1970, 15-18.

<sup>54</sup> This ditch is discussed on pp. 3-6.



PLATE VII



A. Pencil and water colour sketch of Merton College, Oxford, in June 1772 showing the Grove, the wall and Bastion 20. Corpus Christi College, sketch books of J. B. Malchair No. 111  $\Phi$  F 1. 10, 33.



B. Pencil sketch of the wall at Merton College Grove, Oxford, in May 1771 ; Corpus Christi College, sketch books of J. B. Malchair, No. 1  $\Phi$  F 1. 8, 17.

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PLATE VIII



The footings of the city wall in Merton College Grove, Oxford. Composite photograph from the north; the 13th-century city wall, the phase I wall, is below the broken line, resting on alluvium. Scale = 2 m.

*Photo: D. Carpenter*