

# Excavations on the Outer City Wall of Oxford in St. Helen's Passage and Hertford College

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## SUMMARY

*Excavations in St. Helen's Passage and Hertford College by the O.U.A.S. uncovered a postern gateway through the outer city wall of Oxford (FIG. 1). This wall, whose existence was previously known only from documents, is unique among medieval town defences in this country, and may represent an abortive late 13th-century attempt to apply principles of concentric castle architecture to the defences of Oxford.<sup>1</sup>*

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE defences of the north-east corner of Oxford have been a matter of controversy since they were first built. In the middle ages they were a continual cause of litigation between the City and Merton College, the owners of Holywell Manor, about the boundaries of their respective land holdings. In more recent times the disputes have been between historians and about the line of the defences and the existence of an outer wall. The fact that the city walls of Oxford were double from Smithgate to Eastgate was first pointed out by the Reverend H. E. Salter in 1912,<sup>2</sup> as reconciling the existence of the city wall on Agas' Map of 1578 with a city council minute of 1583<sup>3</sup> which agreed 'That Mr. Chamberleyne shall cause the foundacioun of the Town Wall to be searched by Tolderveys, that hit may be knowen unto the Warden and Fellows of Martyn College that they have no right to any howse or ground within the same Wall'. The inner wall survived to be pictured by Agas whereas the outer wall had completely disappeared by Smithgate, and, surviving only at foundation level to the east, was not deemed worthy of inclusion.<sup>4</sup> Although Salter supported his assertion of the existence of two walls by reference to a number of medieval documents and a map of 1660, preserved in Merton (FIG. 2), which shows the walls, some modern authorities have not seemed to accept the existence of them both. The Royal Commission<sup>5</sup> followed Salter, but E. M. Jope and A. G. Hunter,<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I should like to thank Hertford College for the opportunity to excavate; their building contractors, Stoneshire Construction Ltd., for permitting us access to the site in the later stages; Sebastian Rahtz and the other members of the O.U.A.S. who assisted in the excavations; Mark Robinson for analysing the soil samples; the Warden and Fellows of Merton College for permission to reproduce the Holywell Map; John Blair and the Librarian of New College for help with documentary research; Annie Lipson for typing the manuscript; and Brian Durham and Tom Hassall of the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee for their encouragement, help and advice.

<sup>2</sup> H. E. Salter, 'Lecture on the Town Walls of Oxford', *Records of Medieval Oxford* (1912), 76-84.

<sup>3</sup> W. H. Turner (ed.), *Records of the City of Oxford* (1880), 433.

<sup>4</sup> Agas' plan is otherwise inaccurate in the detail of this area in that he places the New College bell tower on the wrong side of the inner wall.

<sup>5</sup> R.C.H.M., *City of Oxford* (1939), 160.

<sup>6</sup> E. M. Jope and A. G. Hunter, 'Excavations on the City Defences in New College, Oxford, 1949', *Oxoniensia*, xvi (1951), 28.

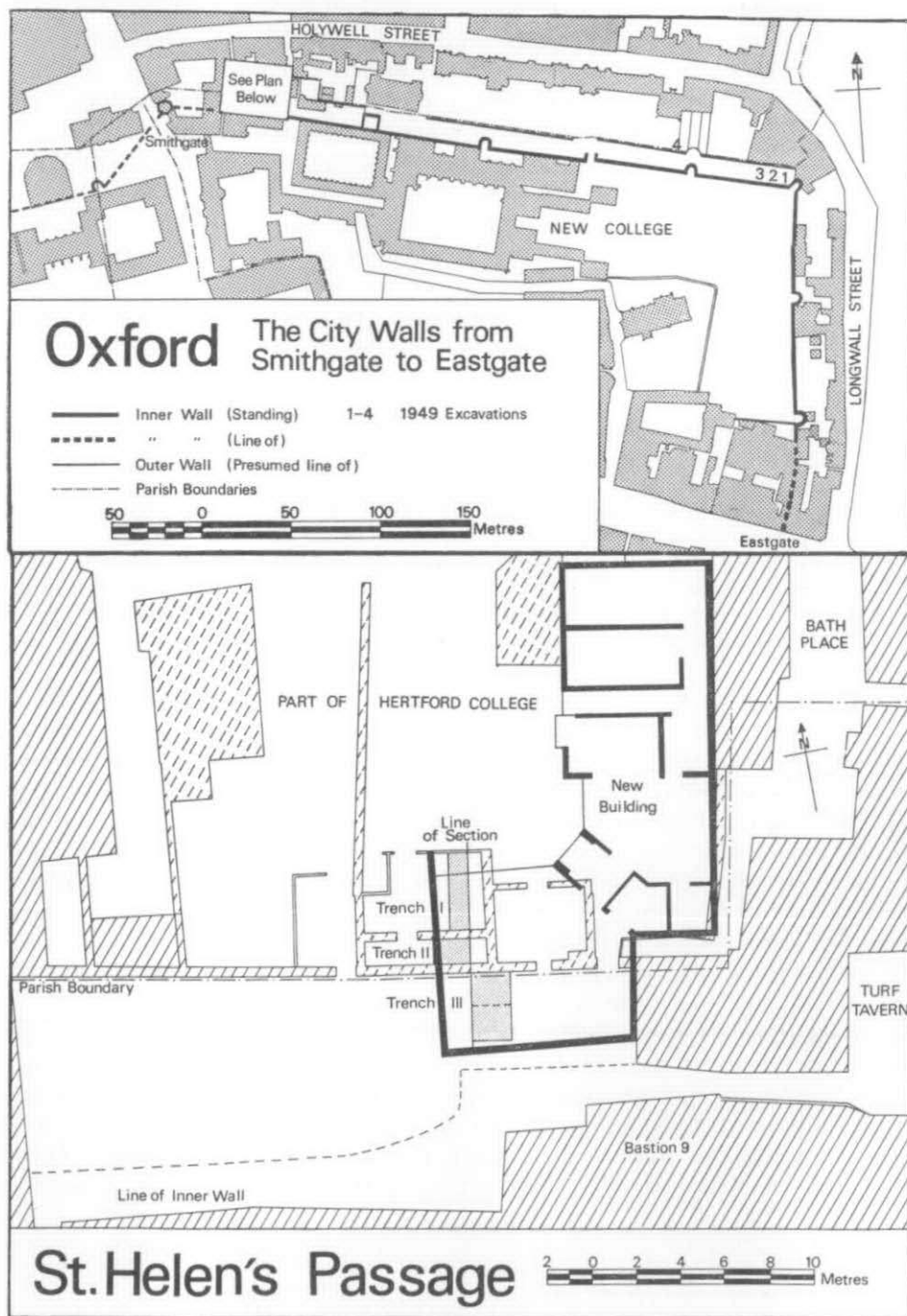


FIG. 1  
 Location Plan.

who conducted excavations in 1949 on the inner wall in New College, and actually dug one trench against the line of the outer wall, though finding no medieval structure, did not discuss the outer wall in their report, and the most recent work on medieval town defences<sup>7</sup> likewise ignored the existence of the outer wall of Oxford.

There are a number of medieval documents which refer to two city walls from Smithgate to Eastgate. A rental of 1387<sup>8</sup> describes a tenement of John de Windsor near Crowell<sup>9</sup> as between the walls of the town and records John Shireburn as holding land from Smithgate to Crowell between the town walls. That the double walls continued to the Eastgate is demonstrated by a lease of 1336 to Joan Levett<sup>10</sup> of land between the two stone walls on the north side of Eastgate. From the archives of Merton College<sup>11</sup> we have a rather one-sided account of a '*diuturna lis et contentio*' between the college and the city about the city ditch, which contains a description of the two walls.

Et ita contentio e placita 9 annorum terminata sunt videlicet quod dicta placea duarum acrarum in qua illa fossa constructa erat pertinet ad collegium tamquam ad dominos de Halywell. Et ut apparet in antiquis rotulis et munimentis collegii, murus exterior ville, prope fossam illam, etiam situatur in eadem placea, ita quod dicta placea se extendit usque ad murum interiorem ville, quoniam murus ille exterior, ut in ipsis rotulis reperitur eciam lite pendente, fundatus et constructus erat super dictam placeam. Pretendabant enim villani istud ad defensionem ville fecisse, cum tamen in parte occidentali de Smythgate, ubi debilior pars ville est, nec tamen foveam, nec eciam talem murum construxerunt.

The earliest reference to the two walls comes in a lease of 1311<sup>12</sup> of land within the wall granted to the Trinitarian Friars with easement of walls and bastions, stipulating ingress and egress for burgesses through two posterns to plots of land between the two stone walls. This deed is a renewal, so it seems that the two walls existed by 1300.

In the reign of Edward III the city devised a new system of maintaining the walls and began to lease land on condition that the lessee undertook this burden. Thus in 1388<sup>13</sup> the inner wall through New College was granted to William of Wykeham provided he kept it in repair. The inner wall came to be known as New College Wall, in contrast to the outer wall which became the Town Wall (FIG. 2). At the end of the medieval period the city ceased to maintain the outer wall, which rapidly disappeared, while the inner wall maintained by New College has survived to the present day. Once the defences had fallen into disuse, the increase of population of the city and the scarcity of building land led to the use of the area of the city ditch for building purposes and, as the 1583 minute demonstrates, it again became a subject of dispute. Agas' plan of the city in 1578, as we have seen, shows only the inner wall, while the area of the ditch is represented as vacant land. Hutten's *Dissertation on the Antiquities of Oxford* (c. 1625-30)<sup>14</sup> describes the ditch at Smithgate

<sup>7</sup> H. L. Turner, *Town Defences in England and Wales* (1970).

<sup>8</sup> Salter, *op. cit.* note 2, 83.

<sup>9</sup> A well outside the north-east corner of the town. See FIG. 2.

<sup>10</sup> H. E. Salter, *Oxford City Properties*, OHS, LXXXIII (1926), 368, Appendix ix, 1.

<sup>11</sup> H. E. Salter, *Registrum Annalium Collegii Mertonensis*, OHS, LXXVI (1921), 37. This appears under the entry for 2 April 1484, but begins 'Memorandum quod anno 9 Edwardi filii Edwardi . . .'

<sup>12</sup> Among New Coll. MS. 12114-12191.

<sup>13</sup> Salter, *op. cit.* note 2, 84.

<sup>14</sup> In H. Hurst, *Oxford Topography*, OHS, XXIX (1899), 127, 137.

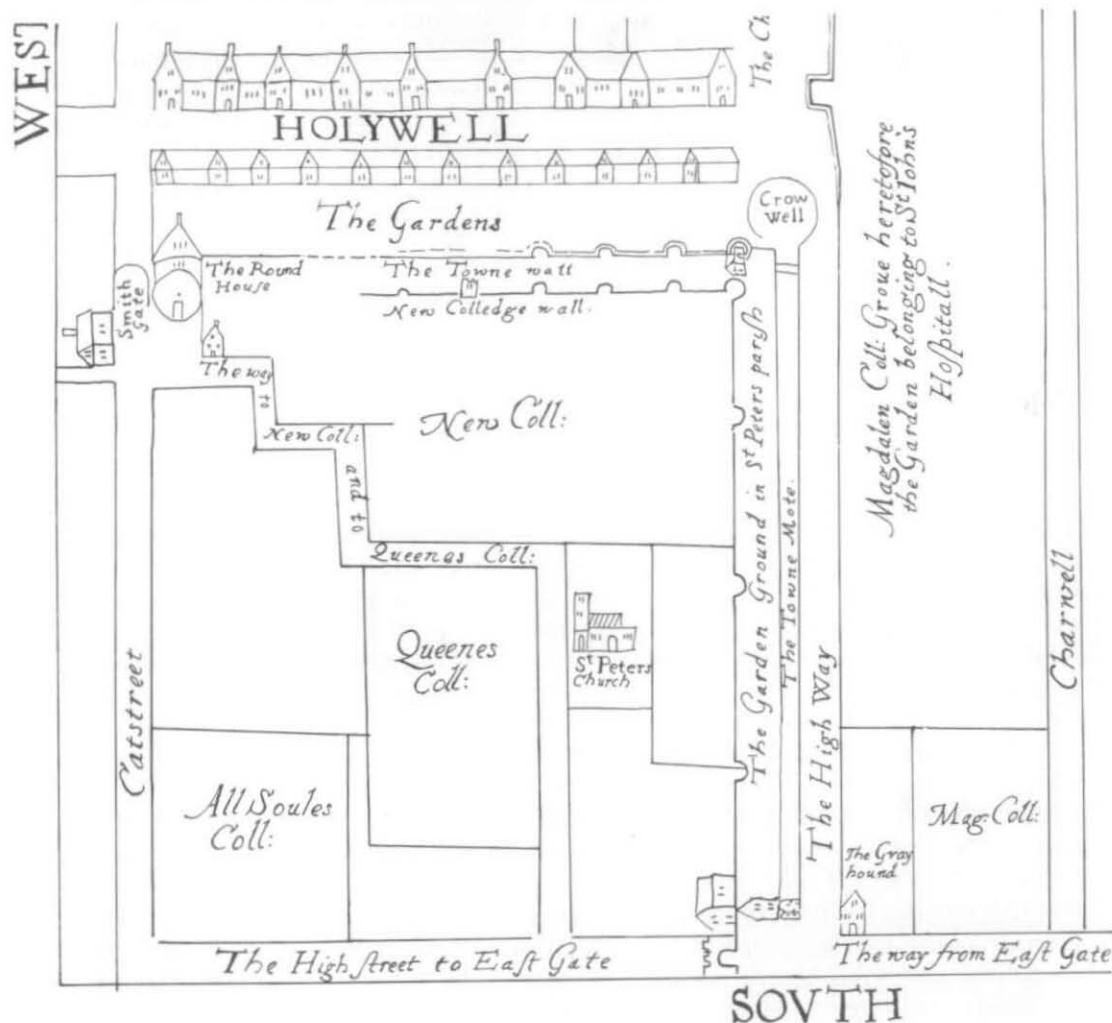


FIG. 2

Detail from a map of Holywell Parish in 1660, preserved in Merton College Library.

as 'altogether damn'd upp with Rubbish and small Cottages built thereon'. To the east it continues: 'The rest of the Ditch hath yet Water standing in it under the Towne Wall, enclosing on the one side New College, and on the other Tenements leading to Holywell Church'. By 1660 the Merton map shows houses along the south side of Holywell Street, and Loggan in 1675 shows only three vacant plots in the entire range. It is recorded<sup>15</sup> that some of these houses were built in 1615 to provide accommodation for the people in Cat Street dispossessed when the eastern part of Bodley's new schools were built. Anthony Wood, writing between 1661-6,<sup>16</sup> records that the houses on the south side of Holywell except for those at Smithgate,

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>16</sup> Wood's *City of Oxford*, I, OHS (1889), 383.

had been built within the last thirty years. Presumably once the houses along Holywell were built, the process of infilling the ditch up to the outer wall was quickened to provide gardens for these houses. The Merton map (FIG. 2) shows the outer wall (the Towne Wall) surviving with bastions in 1660 and on Loggan's map it is represented as a low parapet with bastions corresponding to those on the inner wall. The land between the two walls from the Octagonal Chapel to Crowell, which belonged to the city, was at first leased together, but in 1667 that to the east of New College bell tower was leased separately.<sup>17</sup> The rest was gradually subdivided and about the end of the 18th century several small tenements were built in Hell Passage, including a public house called the Spotted Cow, now the Turf Tavern.<sup>18</sup> The outer wall becomes less distinct and in a lease of the Slype in 1826<sup>19</sup> it is simply described as a 'low wall separating the premises demised from the gardens in Holywell'.

A similar pattern is visible along Longwall Street. Anthony Wood<sup>20</sup> records that there was a delegacy in February 1670/1 with a view 'that the town ditch on the east side of New College Wall be drained, that buildings may be erected on it'. The area of the ditch to the west of Longwall was originally part of a large city property which included five houses in the High Street (Nos. 56-60).<sup>21</sup> As the land became more valuable, the tenement was gradually split up, for building purposes, the southern portion of Longwall being separated in 1660, the rest, which was later subdivided, being separated in 1666.<sup>22</sup> The line of the outer wall can no longer be traced along this side; presumably, because here the city owned the land on both sides, it was demolished to obtain an unobstructed site.

The outer wall was last seen<sup>23</sup> in the summer of 1910 when the garage on the corner of Longwall was built. A hole was sunk on the north face of the town wall to a depth of thirteen feet where gravel and running water were found. The wall was roughly built and about two feet thick with black mud against its face, but its foundations were not reached. The moat was found to be not more than fourteen feet deep at this point. In 1949, excavations<sup>24</sup> were conducted in New College; three trenches were dug against the inner wall, showing that to have been built post-1200, and although the possible existence of the outer wall is not mentioned in the report, one trench<sup>25</sup> was excavated against its line 'to see if there were traces of an earlier (medieval) wall below [that existing] which seems to have been built between 1643<sup>26</sup> and 1673'.<sup>27</sup> The excavation stopped at water level, having found so far no remains of an earlier wall.

Today the line of the outer wall can be traced from the octagonal chapel at Smithgate, following the line of the parish boundary to the east, along the back of the Indian Institute, across part of Hertford College, and along the wall (now partly

<sup>17</sup> Salter, *op. cit.* note 10, 321 ff.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 321, 324-5.

<sup>19</sup> New Coll. MS. 4390.

<sup>20</sup> Wood's *Life and Times*, II, 216.

<sup>21</sup> Salter, *op. cit.* note 10, 308 ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 314-5.

<sup>23</sup> Salter, *op. cit.* note 2, 83.

<sup>24</sup> Jope and Hunter, *op. cit.* note 6, 28.

<sup>25</sup> No. 4 on FIG. 1.

<sup>26</sup> i.e. between Hollar's 'Bird's-eye view of Oxford' (1643) and Loggan.

<sup>27</sup> Jope and Hunter, *op. cit.* note 6, 34-5.

demolished) on the north side of St. Helen's (Hell) Passage, running thirty-six feet in front of the inner wall. There is a parish boundary mark in the kitchen of the Turf Cottages, where the parish boundary turns north to include the Turf Cottages and the garden of the Turf Tavern within the parish of St. Peter in the East. The explanation of this diversion into what was the city ditch is unknown, but it is more likely to reflect a later property encroachment than a feature of the medieval defences. The line of the outer wall then runs through New College, where it is represented by the low step to the north of the roadway running along the Slype. It is recorded that William of Wykeham, when building New College chapel, obtained permission<sup>28</sup> to demolish a length of the town wall and rebuild it four feet to the north. This operation, since the inner wall runs straight, must refer to the outer wall, being designed to prevent the blocking of the Slype by the new bell tower, although the construction of New College Library will have removed any evidence for this. From the east end of New College, at the scene of the 1949 excavation, to the north-east corner of the town, where the parish boundary leaves the line to swing north, the step has become a wall revetting a drop of about two metres from the Slype into the former ditch. In front of bastion 13<sup>29</sup> on the inner wall, there exists a corresponding bastion on the outer wall. The Merton map (FIG. 2) and Loggan both show a number of bastions on the outer wall in front of those on the inner wall. It has been suggested that this represents landscape gardening of the 17th century; this seems unlikely, because the line is also a parish and property boundary, and, unless the bastions existed already, it would have been necessary to purchase a plot of land for each one. Thus, although the fabric of the bastion may not be medieval, it is likely that the feature itself is. From the north-east corner of the town to Eastgate the line of the outer wall has disappeared, and the only evidence for its existence remains documentary.

#### THE EXCAVATIONS 1974-5 (FIG. 1)

In Michaelmas Term 1974, the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee asked the University Archaeological Society to conduct an excavation, with the kind permission of Hertford College, across the presumed line of the outer wall in St. Helen's (Hell) Passage and 55 Holywell Street, to ascertain, in advance of development, whether any traces of the wall survived.

#### *Trenches I and II* (FIG. 3)

Trench I was excavated by the building contractors as a trial pit inside the outbuildings at the back of 55 Holywell Street, to the north of the boundary wall with St. Helen's Passage. The trench was 3.80 m. long and went down to a level about 1.80 m. below the flagstone floor of the outbuilding. The section thus revealed was cleaned and drawn.<sup>30</sup> Immediately under the flagstones there was a layer, about 0.40 m. thick, composed of rubble and mortary earth, representing make-up connected with the construction of the standing outbuildings. Below this layer the

<sup>28</sup> Salter, *op. cit.* note 2, 83.

<sup>29</sup> The bastion numbering follows that of the R.C.H.M.

<sup>30</sup> By Brian Durham of the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee, to whom go my thanks.



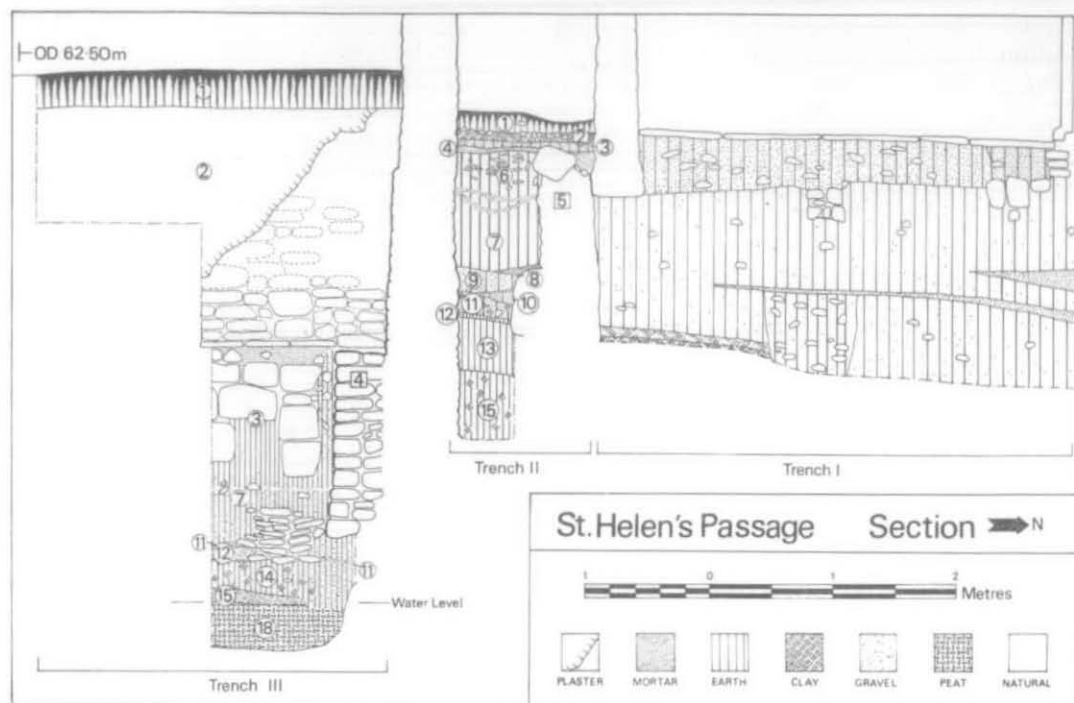


FIG. 3

trench cut through the remains of two small walls, presumably the foundations of earlier outbuildings. Beneath these there was an amorphous layer of earth containing rubble and mortar, about 1.50 m. thick, down to the bottom of the trench at the north. Running through the layer were two bands of mortar which sank towards the north presumably towards the deeper parts of the city ditch. Underneath the lower band of mortar, there was a pit, cut into the layer, containing more rubble. At the south end of the trench, underneath the earth and mortar, the lowest layers were two bands of clay, the upper yellow in colour, the lower dark brown; these also fell away to the north.

Trench II was dug in the narrow space to the south of Trench I, between the standing outbuilding and the boundary wall. It measured 1.10 m.  $\times$  1.70 m. and its greatest depth was 2.60 m. below the ground surface. Under Layer 1, which consisted of garden debris and tiles from the roof of the outbuilding, was a cobble path set in brown clay (Layer 2), on top of a thin layer of sandy brown earth (Layer 3). Underneath this was a layer of mortar (Layer 4), covering, on the north side, a wall (5), and on the south side a layer of black soil containing large numbers of clay roof tiles and broken wine bottles (Layer 6). Layers 4 and 6 presumably represented the disuse and demolition of the earlier outbuilding to which Wall 5 belonged. The bottom of Layer 6 was marked by a thin spread of mortar, beneath which was Layer 7, consisting of black garden soil which had built up during the period of use of the earlier outbuilding. Beneath Layer 7, on a level with the lower mortar band

in Trench I, there was a thin layer of decayed mortar (Layer 8) which was over the offset foundation of Wall 5, and was presumably debris from the construction of the wall. This foundation, consisting of two courses of large limestone blocks, was unusually massive for a mere outbuilding. Probably the builders were unsure of the recently dumped ground and built accordingly. The layers beneath Layer 8, through which the foundation was cut, were brown sandy loam (Layer 9) over mortary yellow brown earth (Layer 10). Layers 11 and 12, clayey earth and dark brown earth, were presumably the same as the layers at the bottom of Trench I. These overlay layers of lighter brown earth (Layer 13), sandier earth and stones (Layer 14) and brown clayey earth and stones (Layer 15). Layer 15 was completely excavated to reveal the top of Layer 16 which consisted of stones and mortar. This layer might have been debris from a refacing or rebuilding of the boundary wall, which had been of one build from a point 2.30 m. higher up at the level of Layer 4, above which the limestone blocks were much larger. However, further examination of Layer 16 was not possible since the trench was becoming uncomfortably cramped and was abandoned.

The pottery from the lowest layers of Trench II was of 17th-century date—stoneware and red-brown glazed wares; that from Layers 9 and 10, one metre higher up, was similar, which suggests a rapid build-up of material due to deliberate dumping. Thus Trenches I and II confirm the picture given by the documentary sources of the later stages of the back-filling of the city ditch with 'bones, rough earth, sweepings of churches and refuse of the leather merchant'<sup>31</sup> after the construction of the houses along the south side of Holywell Street, to provide gardens for these houses and a foundation for their outbuildings.

### *Trench III* (FIGS. 3 and 4)

Trench III was excavated on the south side of the boundary wall in St. Helen's Passage. Originally it measured 3.00 m. × 1.50 m., but was reduced to 1.50 m. × 1.50 m. for reasons of safety. Underneath the topsoil (Layer 1) the cellar of one of the cottages built c. 1800 was encountered, filled with loose brick and stone rubble (Layer 2). The west side of the trench was against one of the walls of the cellar on which traces of the staircase down were visible. The original flagstone floor of the cellar survived 2.20 m. below the present ground surface. Below the mortar foundations of the flagstone floor there was a layer of dark earth containing large blocks of rubble (Layer 3). This had been cut through by a pit (5, not on section) which contained 18th-century pottery. Also under the flagstones, the boundary wall was found to be set on an earlier wider wall (4), the outer city wall. On closer inspection it was noticed that the trench was sited neatly across a doorway through the wall, which had been blocked with mortared rubble (FIG. 4, Layer 4/1). The only explanation of a door at this level is a postern gateway through the outer wall. Lower down, the blocking of the door seemed to be composed of smaller stones bonded with less mortar (4/2). At right angles to the eastern doorpost was a wall, presumably revetting that side of the passage down to the postern. Under Layer 3 was a similar layer (7) containing more gravel, which overlay layers of rubble (8),

<sup>31</sup> Hurst, *op. cit.* note 14, 125.



and earth and gravel (9). These layers must represent tumble from the wall and infilling of the passage down to the postern after the latter had fallen into disuse and been blocked.

During its period of use, the postern seems to have been approached from a stairwell, about 0.80 cm. wide, whose sides were revetted with retaining walls (6 and 10) (PL. V, A). A gravel path surface (11), containing a step, was encountered at the bottom of this stairwell under Layer 9. This path lay on top of a layer of stones set in grey clay (12), under which there was a layer of dark gravelly earth (14), which overlay another layer of stones set in grey clay (15), similar to (12). These in turn overlay a pit containing brown peat-like material (18).<sup>32</sup> It was not possible to excavate Layer 18 completely, since it lay below the water table, although its bottom was plotted, cut into the natural gravel. While constructing the postern the builders must have laid down Layer 15 as a foundation for the path through the postern. However, this subsided into the pit and it was necessary to fill the hole before laying another layer of clay and stones to found the path. Since Pit 18 had contained standing water, and it is unlikely that the outer wall existed with a gap in it at this point, the postern must be original and therefore the date of the material from Layers 12, 14 and 15, should give that for the construction of both. Unfortunately 12 and 15 were sterile and all that can be said about the minimal amount of pottery from Layer 14 is that it would not be inconsistent with a date in the 13th century. The outer wall, therefore, seems to have been built against the side of the city ditch; at the same time a postern was constructed, using a pre-existing pit cut into the side of the ditch for a stairwell, by revetting its sides and constructing steps down to the required level.

#### *Trench IV (FIG. 4)*

The final stage of the excavation, which may be called Trench IV, was undertaken in September 1975 before the foundations of the new building were laid, after the contractors had mechanically excavated the cellars of the former cottages in St. Helen's Passage and an area to the north of the Wall. Approximately 9.0 m. of wall, from which one course had been removed, was revealed and this was photographed and drawn.<sup>33</sup> A number of different building phases could be discerned. Phase 1, which was that encountered in Trench III, extended approximately 5.0 m. from the western end and was composed of hard limestone blocks bonded with orange mortar. The postern gateway was an original feature of this phase, although its west jamb had fallen slightly inwards, leaving a gap in the wall. The end of this Phase 1 wall was not squared off, although no obvious robber trench was visible. To the south of the Phase 1 wall and to the west of Trench III the continuation of the stairway down to the postern was visible (8); this had been backfilled to provide a firm footing for the cottages, but two large stones (5) may represent the top surviving step, with its construction trench (5/1) to the west. Phase 2, to the north of Phase 1 at the west end, seemed to represent a refacing of the wall, with stones bonded with buff sandy mortar. Phase 3 involved a further refacing of the

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>33</sup> This work was also carried out by Brian Durham, to whom my further thanks go.

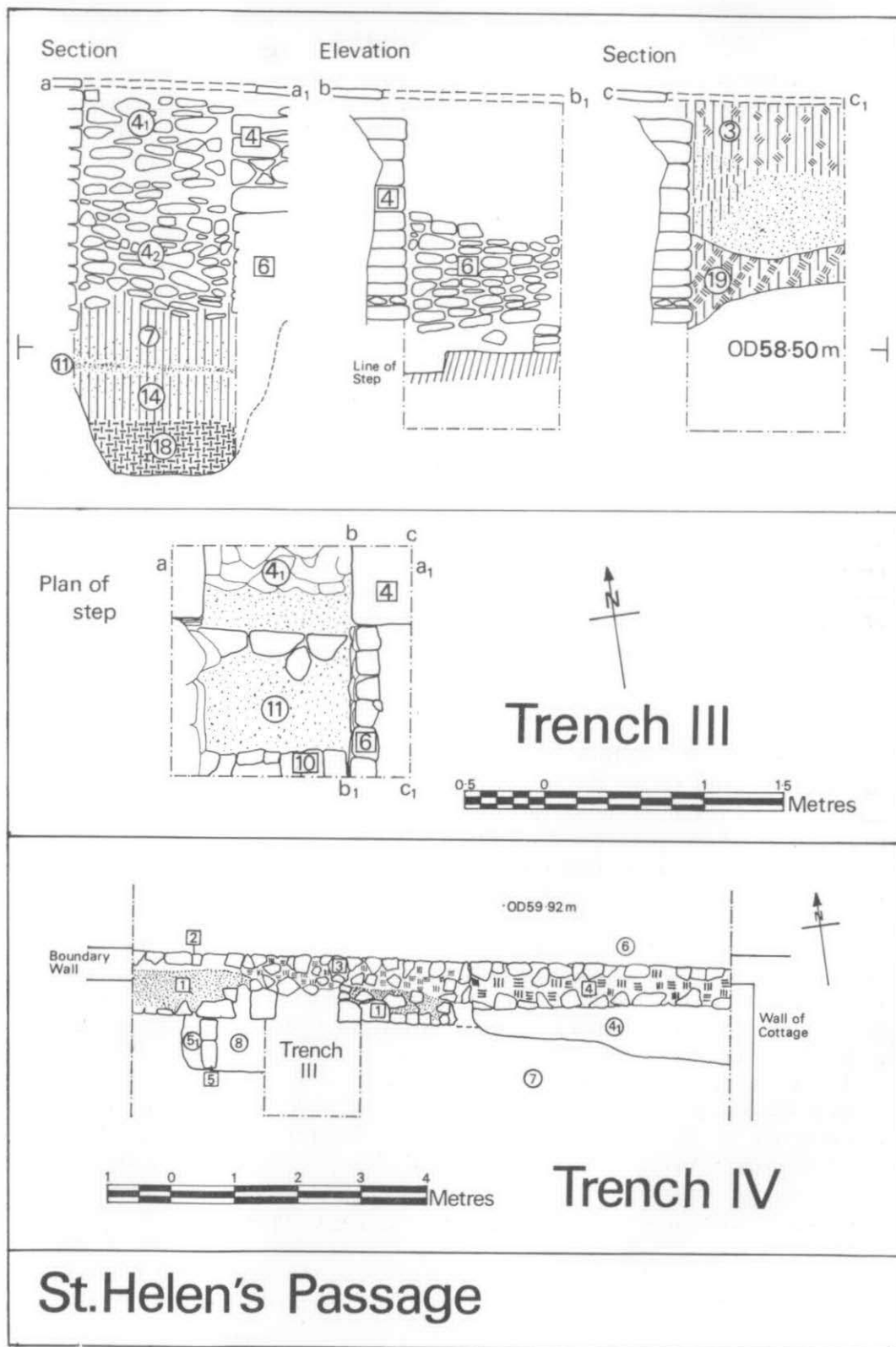


FIG. 4

wall and the blocking of the postern with stones packed with pale brown clay. Phase 4 was a rebuilding of the eastern 4.0 m. of the wall using softer white stone packed with yellow-brown clay. The front face of the wall seemed to be sealed by a layer of grey silt<sup>32</sup> containing 17th-century clay pipe fragments. Phase 4 was narrower than the earlier phases and its function must have been that of simple boundary wall. Its line deviates slightly from that of the later boundary wall, although coinciding with the parish boundary mark in the kitchen of the Turf Cottages. A bastion on the outer wall might have been expected, corresponding to the inner wall bastion in St. Helen's Passage, but no traces were noticed in the contractors' foundation trenches.

#### DISCUSSION

The excavations of 1974/5 have shown that the outer city wall of Oxford does exist in the appropriate position. However, this merely serves to highlight further problems as to its function and extent. It appears to be a feature unique among medieval town defences in this country. There are continental parallels in the showpiece walled town of Carcassonne in southern France and the Theodosian Wall of Constantinople,<sup>34</sup> but others are hard to find. Possible parallels in this country lie rather in the realm of castle architecture. Here a number of examples spring readily to mind—the Tower of London and the Edwardian concentric castles of North Wales, notably Rhuddlan, Harlech and Beaumaris. The earliest of these, Rhuddlan Castle in Flintshire, was begun in 1277<sup>35</sup> and was substantially complete by 1283. In its design can be detected the innovating hand of the chief master mason, the Savoyard, James of St. George, who also directed the building of Harlech and Beaumaris. The castle consists of an inner ward surrounded by a diamond-shaped curtain wall with drum towers at the north and south extremities, and double drum tower gateways on the east and west. The outer ward is surrounded by another curtain wall, rising on three sides out of a dry moat. Interspaced along this wall are bastions, some containing sally-ports down into the moat. The experimental nature of the design is suggested by the fact that the bastions degenerate into buttresses round the wall and that the sally-ports that were constructed were later blocked. It has been suggested<sup>36</sup> that the outer town wall of Oxford was merely a wall revetting the south side of the city ditch, but given the strong probability of the existence of bastions along its length, it is likely that it was more substantial than this, and as at Rhuddlan, consisted of an upstanding curtain wall. It further seems unlikely that the idea of concentric town walls predates the concentric castle, and it is worthy of note that none of the *bastides* constructed during Edward I's Welsh campaign in connection with the castles boast more than one line of defences. Thus it would not be unreasonable to suggest a date for the construction of the Oxford wall between 1280 and 1300. Within this period there is one murage grant recorded,<sup>37</sup> that of 1285, for four years. The previous murage grants to this

<sup>34</sup> See H. M. Colvin (ed.), *History of the King's Works*, I (1963) 370. The polygonal towers and banded masonry of Caernarvon Castle recall the Theodosian Wall so strikingly that A. J. Taylor suggests the presence in Edward I's circle of someone personally familiar with it.

<sup>35</sup> A. J. Taylor, *Rhuddlan Castle* (1955), 5.

<sup>36</sup> R.C.H.M., *op. cit.* note 5, 160.

were in 1257 and 1263, for five years each, but a royal charter,<sup>38</sup> dated 26 March 1257, mentions that the town had permission to build bastions for the advantage of the King and Community of Oxford. It seems unlikely that the city would embark on the construction of an outer wall before the inner one had been completely provided with bastions, although it is conceivable that it was the outer wall that was to be provided with bastions. However, in the absence of more extensive archaeological investigations these suggestions remain speculation. It is also known<sup>39</sup> that to provide manpower for the engineering work involved in his Welsh campaign, Edward scoured the whole country for labourers, and masons and carpenters were pressed into service from Lincoln, Nottingham, Gloucester, Leicester, Warwick and Oxford. Is it possible that such contact with the latest developments in military engineering spurred the citizens of Oxford into grandiose designs for the defences of the city? The lack of apparent threat to the city at this date is no obstacle. Provision of city defences was a continuing duty for corporations, not necessarily stimulated by threat of war. In fact, Exeter, Winchester, Lincoln, Leicester, Nottingham, York and Southampton were all engaged in wall-building operations at this time.<sup>40</sup>

The existence of the postern in the original design also poses further problems. It cannot have led anywhere other than into the city ditch, and although Rhuddlan Castle also had sally-ports down into the moat, there the moat was dry. Why did the city of Oxford require such a watergate? One possible answer is provided by a lease of the moat in 1378 to one Adam de la Ryver<sup>41</sup> which mentions fishing rights, and the postern may have provided the holder of such rights with access to the moat on city property. Hurst, in fact, describes the ditch in this area as the city fish ponds.<sup>42</sup>

The final problem is why the outer wall runs only from Smithgate to Eastgate. The point raised by the Merton commentator<sup>43</sup> is a reasonable one. Why did the wall not extend along the whole northern side of the city? The only reasonable suggestion is that it was intended to, but after the first flush of enthusiasm and as the costs of the enterprise mounted, the city began to take a more realistic view of its defence needs and abandoned an over-grandiose scheme.

#### APPENDIX

##### NOTE ON BIOLOGICAL REMAINS. By MARK ROBINSON

Two samples from the site were briefly examined for biological remains. A very small sample from the bottom of Pit 18, in Trench III, proved to be almost entirely cereal straw. It also contained Muscidae puparia, grass seeds, a clover floret and a seed of *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* (Ox-eye daisy). Further work is required on this deposit before an interpretation can be made, but perhaps it represents the sweepings of a stable thrown down the pit/well.

<sup>37</sup> Salter, *op. cit.* note 2, 77.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.* note 35, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Turner, *op. cit.* note 7, Appendix C.

<sup>41</sup> Salter, *op. cit.* note 9, 368, Appendix ix, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Hurst, *op. cit.* note 14, 135.

<sup>43</sup> See note 10.

A 3lb sample of grey silty loam (Layer 6 in Trench IV), the upper fill of the town ditch, was washed through a 0.5 mm. sieve and 155 seeds recovered. They were almost all from plants of disturbed ground including *Chenopodium* sp ; *Sambucus nigra* (Elder) ; *Urtica dioica* (Stinging nettle) and *Ranunculus* (Buttercup). There was only a single seed from an aquatic or marsh plant, *Carex* sp. (Sedge). This indicates that the ditch was no longer wet by the time that Layer 6 was deposited and the layer was probably garden soil.

*The Society thanks the Department of the Environment for a publication grant for this paper.*

PLATE V



A. St. Helen's Passage, Trench III. Stairwell to postern through the outer city wall.

*Ph.: Brian Durham*

OXFORD WALL



B. The remains of the pre-dissolution east face in 1974, with two original windows flanking inserted door.

*Ph.: Philip Riden*

OXONIENSIA, XLI (1976)

MONASTIC FRAGMENT AT WADHAM