

ART. IX.—*The demolition of Carlisle city walls.*
By D. R. PERRIAM.

Read at Edenhall, September 3rd, 1976.

BY the end of the eighteenth century the medieval city walls of Carlisle (Plate I) had fallen into such a state of disrepair (Plate II) that a decision had to be taken on their future. The improved road system, which for the first time allowed coaches and waggons to pass easily over the treacherous Shap Fells, had considerably increased Carlisle's importance as a centre of communication, but the narrow gateways into the city were a serious inconvenience to such forms of transport, as well as limiting the density of traffic.¹

As early as 1788 it was realised that it was necessary to open a more convenient entrance to the city from the south: "no material improvement is now wanting but a passage through the Citadel to Botchergate, for which purpose, it is said, the Earl of Lonsdale has applied for a grant of the ground".² The difficulty was that the English Gate, the gateway to the city from the south, was on the West Walls, beside the western bastion of the Citadel and it was impossible to make a direct entry to the city from Botchergate without taking a detour round the very narrow Caldew Brow (Plate III).

However, the decision to remove any part of the city walls was not within the powers of the local authority, but the responsibility of the Government, and it was in 1793 that the press noted "a surveyor is to be sent from the board [of ordnance], to inspect the state of the city walls of Carlisle, which are very

¹ Hutchinson, vol. 2, 666, records that in 1794 200 horses were employed in Carlisle in pulling waggons and carts alone.

² *Cumberland Pacquet*, 17 September 1788.

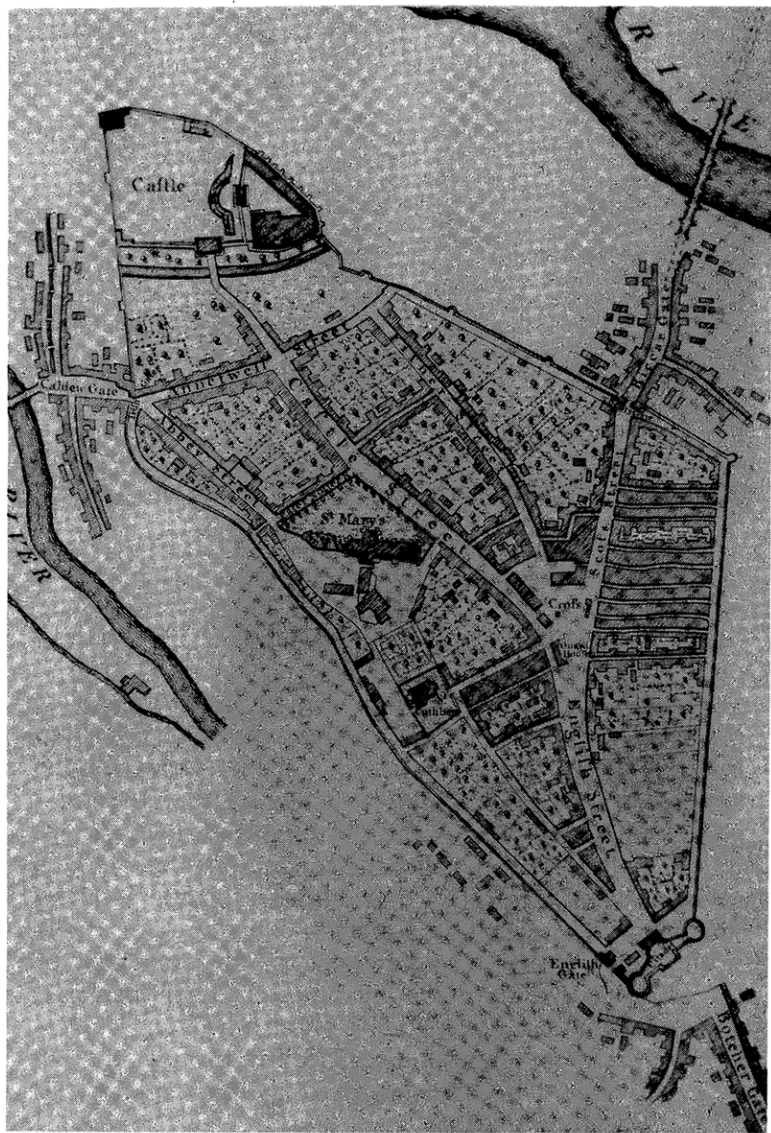


PLATE I.—Carlisle City Walls, from Hodkinson and Donald's map of Cumberland, published 1774.

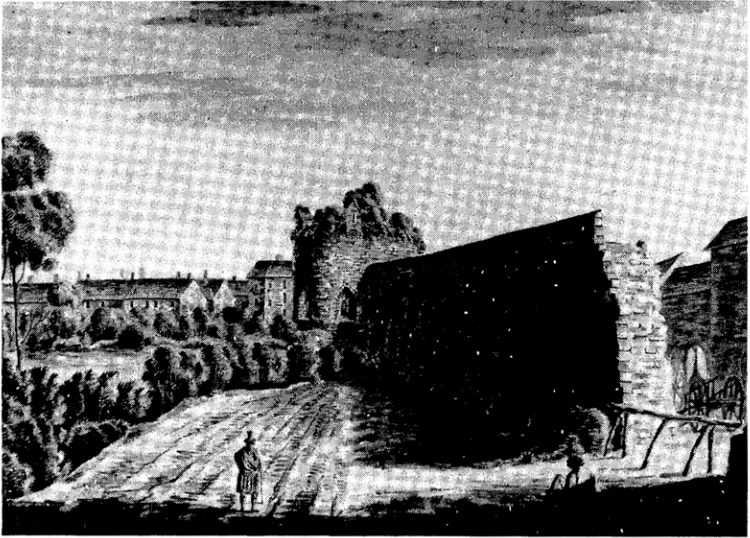


PLATE II.—A view of part of the East Walls *c.* 1792, showing the state of disrepair at that period. From a painting by Robert Carlyle (1773-1825) in Carlisle Art Gallery.

ruinous, and it is hoped they will either be repaired or entirely removed".³

The report, if it was ever written, would seem to have had little effect, for in 1800 a traveller recorded in his diary, "the walls are in general very ruinous and must now be a complete nuisance to the town's people. In some places the parapet is thrown down, in other places it is in tolerable repair, but the whole is so completely neglected that I am informed it is no uncommon practice for a person who lives near the walls, when he wants a few stones, to get a part of the parapet thrown down by boys or otherways and convey the stones away in the night time".⁴

By 1803 there was a general feeling towards a state of improvement in Carlisle, the demolition of the city

³ *Cumberland Packet*, 16 April 1793.

⁴ Diary of David Hodgkinson's visit to Carlisle, 2 June 1800, printed in "Round Carlisle Cross", by J. W. Brown, 1951, 119.

walls being the main part of this improvement. The county magistrates believed “[the] Citadel and Bastions, walls and sites, together with the stones of the old walls surrounding the city, are of small value and not of any public utility, yet the same would be of very great use and benefit to the County . . . for the purpose of erecting a sufficient and proper Shire Hall, Court House or Court Houses and other offices for holding the Assises”,⁵ whilst the Clerk of the Peace for Cumberland, in a letter to Lieutenant-General Dirom,⁶ thought that “there does not appear any reasonable objections to taking down the walls and disposing of the materials, etc., — but as it is in contemplation to rebuild the bridges across the Eden, I should conceive it more likely Government might be disposed more readily to give the materials towards those bridges than the others on account of convenience; should you and Mr Telford mention in your report the improvement to this city by removing the walls, I think it would be an act for which the inhabitants of this city would be thankful”.⁷

But the general public had very little chance to express their feelings on the subject of the city walls and when a public meeting was held at the Town Hall in September 1803, “for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of applying to Parliament for an act to promote the future improvement of the city”,⁸ the clauses had already been decided: “the opening of a passage through the Citadel to the south; removing the obstructions in streets and public

⁵ An Act for building Courts of Justice for the County of Cumberland and for other purposes relating thereto, 47 Geo. III, Sess. 1807.

⁶ Alexander Dirom, 1757-1830, of the British Army, who lived at Mount Annan, Dumfriesshire, accompanied Thomas Telford as he surveyed part of the route of a new road between Port Patrick and Carlisle, which was to improve the military communications between England and Ireland. Through his involvement in discussions with the Government about the new road, Dirom was able to suggest the advantages of the demolition of Carlisle city walls, on behalf of the city and the county.

⁷ CW2 lxxi 250.

⁸ *Carlisle Journal*, 1 October 1803.

passages; paving the side of the streets; lighting the town, etc.”⁹

The result of the meeting, which was attended by those business men and landowners who had most to gain from the removal of the walls, was that the clauses “were severally agreed to without the smallest opposition and several gentlemen of the town were appointed commissioners”.¹⁰ The carefully disguised clause “removing obstructions in streets and public passages”, was more clearly expressed by the press: “one very serious disadvantage will always attend this city and its extension: as long as the walls remain standing it can never properly spread itself: every little corner, owing to the town being thus circumscribed, is built upon, to the great annoyance of the comfort of the inhabitants; whereas if all obstructions were at once removed, the town would uniformly extend itself”.¹¹

It is difficult to assess what public opinion was at this time, with regard to the demolition of the city walls, because so few records have been kept, but on a visit to Carlisle in 1803 with her brother and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Dorothy Wordsworth “walked upon the city walls which are broken down in places and crumbling away and most disgusting from filth”.¹² She went on to say she was disappointed with the general appearance of Carlisle and she would have no doubt sided with those people who wanted to see the city walls demolished, but to a person like Sir Walter Scott who had a much closer association with the city,¹³ feelings were so strong that he was

⁹ *Carlisle Journal*, *op. cit.* The paper goes on to say “we think every commendation due to the gentlemen of the corporation, who have been so active in promoting the meeting and in framing the act”.

¹⁰ *Carlisle Journal*, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Carlisle Journal*, 8 October 1803.

¹² *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, edited by William Knight, 164, 16 August 1803.

¹³ Scott married Charlotte Carpenter in St Mary’s Church, Carlisle, on 24 December 1797.

still able to say in 1828 on a visit to the city, "I have not forgiven them for destroying their quiet old walls and building two lumpy things like mad-houses [the Law Courts]. The old gates had such a respectable appearance once."¹⁴

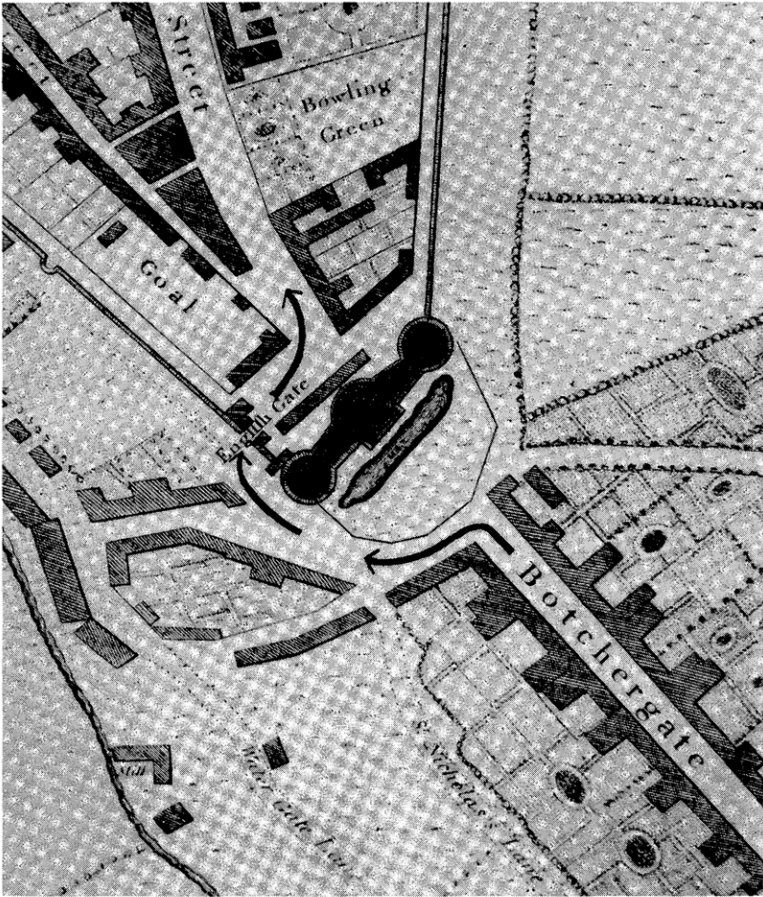


PLATE III.—The inconvenience of the southern entrance to the city through the English Gate. From a map by Robert Carlyle, published in *Hutchinson* (1794).

¹⁴ *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, 1890, vol. II, 151.

Everyone waited patiently for the Act to be passed but in June 1806 the press were confident enough to announce "to the inhabitants of this flourishing city, the many and important improvements about to take place. The walls are to be entirely taken down by the representations of General Dirom to Government and the waste lands allotted [*sic*] to the Corporation, who, we have no doubt, will make such use of them, as will lend to the benefit of the city. The county gaol is to be enlarged, as likewise the very spacious court yard for the use of the debtors. Court-houses are to be erected in the Citadel; and the new bridge over the Eden, of which Mr Telford (civil engineer) has prepared a superb plan, is in a train of forwardness".¹⁵

It was not until 1807 that the Act, to build new Court Houses and to open an entrance to the city from the south (Plate IV), was passed. The following year work began on the demolition of the western bastion and half-moon battery of the Citadel. "The plan consisted of preserving the lower part of the old Eastern Bastion, providing it with a new protective masonry skin, increasing the height and fitting out the interior as a Court.¹⁶ The Western Bastion was completely raised [*sic*] to the ground and it was proposed to erect a new tower fitted as a Court but sited further west . . . similar hall and offices were to be provided here as were to be extended from the Eastern Tower".¹⁷

Work continued on building the Courts until 1809 when it was found necessary to stop. Some disagreement had arisen over Thomas Telford's design, for in 1810 Robert Smirke was appointed Architect "to proceed with the completion of the Court Houses in such a way and manner as he shall think most advantageous to the County".¹⁸ The building of the

¹⁵ *Carlisle Journal*, 7 June 1806.

¹⁶ CW2 xvi 91-96 confirms this.

¹⁷ CW2 lxx 209.

¹⁸ CW2 lxx 215.

Courts had by now reached such a stage that the original plans could not be drastically altered, but in the case of the Eden bridges, for which Telford had also submitted designs, no building work had started and Smirke was able to redraw the plans.

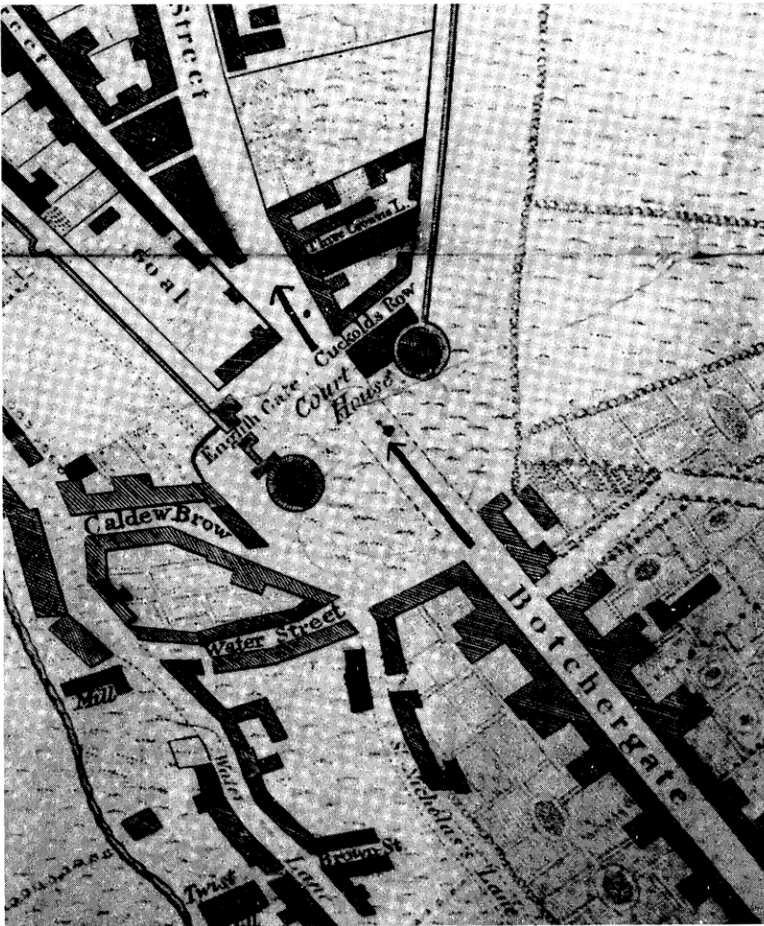


PLATE IV.—The new entrance to the city from the south, created in 1808 with the demolition of the Citadel. From Jollie's *Cumberland Guide and Directory* (1811).

The slow progress which had been made in the building of the Courts and the new Eden bridges hampered the plans to demolish other parts of the city walls. But when Francis Jollie, the editor of the *Carlisle Journal*, decided to remove part of the walls on his own initiative, in conjunction with some new houses he was erecting in what is now East Tower Street, he was ordered to build up the breach and replace all the stone within one week or criminal action would be taken against him.¹⁹

A map of Carlisle in 1810, which Jollie reproduced in his *Cumberland Guide and Directory*, showed the city walls and gates still intact, apart from the removal of the Citadel. But by March 1811,²⁰ the English Gate was demolished and in May²¹ the Irish Gate was removed, while an oil painting of 1811²² shows the North Walls in a partial state of demolition. Work began on the building of Eden bridges in 1814 and in February 1815 the Scotch Gate was taken down and the stone used to fill part of the causeway between the two bridges.²³

Another map of Carlisle published in December 1815²⁴ (Plate V), showed the complete removal of the North and East Walls, but the West Walls, apart from the earlier removed Irish Gate and English Gate, were still intact. Unfortunately the foundations of the English Gate were entirely removed in September 1817,²⁵ in building offices in connection with the Courts.

Between 1815 and 1821, the demolished North and East Walls formed the foundations of new roads that were being laid out in anticipation of the rapid

¹⁹ CW2 lxx 213.

²⁰ *Cumberland Pacquet*, 19 March 1811 (I am grateful to Mr T. Patten for this reference).

²¹ *Cumberland Pacquet*, 14 May 1811.

²² A view of Carlisle from Stanwix, painted by Frederick F. Fielding (Carlisle Art Gallery).

²³ CW2 lxxi 256.

²⁴ *Magna Britannia*, Daniel and Samuel Lysons, 1816, vol. IV, 56.

²⁵ *Carlisle Patriot*, 20 September 1817.

expansion of the city. The levelled East Walls formed the street named at first "New Horse Market",²⁶ which soon afterwards became Lowther Street, while the North Walls became East Tower Street and West Tower Street,²⁷ separated by Scotch Street.

Once the fate of the walls had been decided, the future of the West Walls hung in the balance, but Robert Carlyle gave one of the reasons why these walls were saved: "the River Caldew runs parallel to the western line of the wall and the rampart forms a natural termination, as there is a considerable descent from the inside of the wall to the verge of the river. Thus circumscribed both by the river and the inequality of the ground, it would be impossible to try to extend the City in this quarter."²⁸ "But," he said, "tho' it cannot be extended, it may be considerably improved", and he suggested the levelling of the West Walls and their replacement with "an iron palisade".

At each end of the West Walls, however, further encroachments were made when in 1823 part of the wall near the former Irish Gate was demolished "to build a neat little house",²⁹ and a considerable length of wall was removed when work began on building the new County Gaol in 1824.

With the exception of the construction of the Victoria Viaduct in 1876, when more of the West Walls were demolished, the threat to the wall was no longer from demolition but from buildings being built against it and thus effectively covering the wall from view. The

²⁶ Francis Jollie suggested the laying out of this street, 7 October 1811, CRO D/Lons/L.

²⁷ So named because of the towers on the strongly defended North Walls.

²⁸ "Hints on the Improvement and Extension of the City of Carlisle", MSS., July 1808, CRO/D/Lons/L. After having advocated the total destruction of the city walls, Carlyle goes on to say, about the trees supposed to have been planted by Mary Queen of Scots in the Castle grounds, "these precious reliques of antiquity, were with an unaccountable disregard to every thing bearing the name of civilisation, consigned to the axe". The same may be applied to the city wall!

²⁹ *Carlisle Patriot*, 26 April 1823.

Central School was the first building to be thus constructed in 1813³⁰ and this was followed by the Police Station in 1840. A certain amount of refacing work was carried out on the West Walls in the 1840's and it is possible that the steps at the Sallyport and the Town Dyke Orchard are of the same date.

This shrouding of the West Walls had not gone unnoticed by the townspeople because in 1851 a letter of protest was published in the local press, "observing by the report of the proceedings of the Town Council, that a request has been made to the Corporation for permission to erect a place of worship on the site below and adjoining the West Walls, I beg, as an old inhabitant, to state some reasons for resisting the application. The view from the footpath has always been admired as one of the finest in the neighbourhood, and it has the advantage of being the most accessible — a circumstance which places it within the reach of every stranger who is disposed to spend a few hours in our ancient city. But, sir, if the Corporation proceed to sell lot after lot of the ground below the walls, in a few years the whole space will be covered with buildings and the public will be deprived of this beautiful walk."³¹

Public opinion would seem to have been roused by the building of the Fawcett Schools on West Walls, next to the Police Station, between 1850 and 1851 and these opinions may have swayed the council's decision, for the church was never built. But in the area of English Damside, the worst slum area in the city, planning decisions would never seem to have been made and warehouse after warehouse was built against the walls covering the whole of the southern

³⁰ Robert Smirke chose the site of this school, CRO Ca/2/209/76. The building is now used as a discotheque.

³¹ *Carlisle Journal*, 24 January 1851.

stretch between the Sallyport steps and the County Gaol.³²

In complete contrast, however, work today has been carried out to try to uncover as much of the remaining city walls as is possible. Road construction in front of the Castle and along West Tower Street in 1973, gave a number of opportunities to expose parts of the walls; buildings were removed from Irish Gate Brow to reveal more clearly the section of West Walls, leading up to the Castle, which includes the fifteenth century Tile Tower;³³ part of the North Walls, between the end of West Tower Street and the Castle, were cleared of a build-up of soil,³⁴ landscaped by the contractors and consolidated by the Department of the Environment; and in West Tower Street, excavations were carried out to discover what remains of the North Walls were below the modern surface.³⁵ From the results of these excavations it is possible to deduce that further remains of the North Walls are under East Tower Street and the same applies to the East Walls beneath the present-day level of Lowther Street.³⁶

Finally, when the West Walls car-park was opened in 1973, the Corporation landscaped the area immediately beneath the walls and cleared the site of the old

³² A note appeared in the *Carlisle Journal*, 7 February 1829, concerning one of these warehouses: "as workmen were preparing a foundation for a new warehouse about to be built by Mr Taylor, behind the West Walls, a little north of Mr John Ferguson's new building, a considerable portion of the old wall fell in, leaving a large and dangerous chasm in the road, nearly opposite the old Roman Catholic Chapel. By this accident a vaulted passage, within the wall, and running parallel with it, is exhibited. The place was not unknown, having been used for some years past as an ice-house". This is the chamber reproduced by Lysons (*op. cit.*) and marked on the 1866, 10 ft to 1 mile scale, O.S. map, which was probably part of the sewerage system for the Blackfriars Convent.

³³ CW1 ii 58, the modern brick lining, on the inside of this part of the wall, was put there in c. 1834.

³⁴ CW2 lxii notes, 326-327.

³⁵ CW2 lxxiv notes, 211-212.

³⁶ CW1 iv 337-349, H. U. McKie records that the foundations of the Scotch Gate stand to the height of 4 ft 6 in. below the modern surface and remains of the East Walls were discovered during the laying of sewerage pipes in the 1850's.

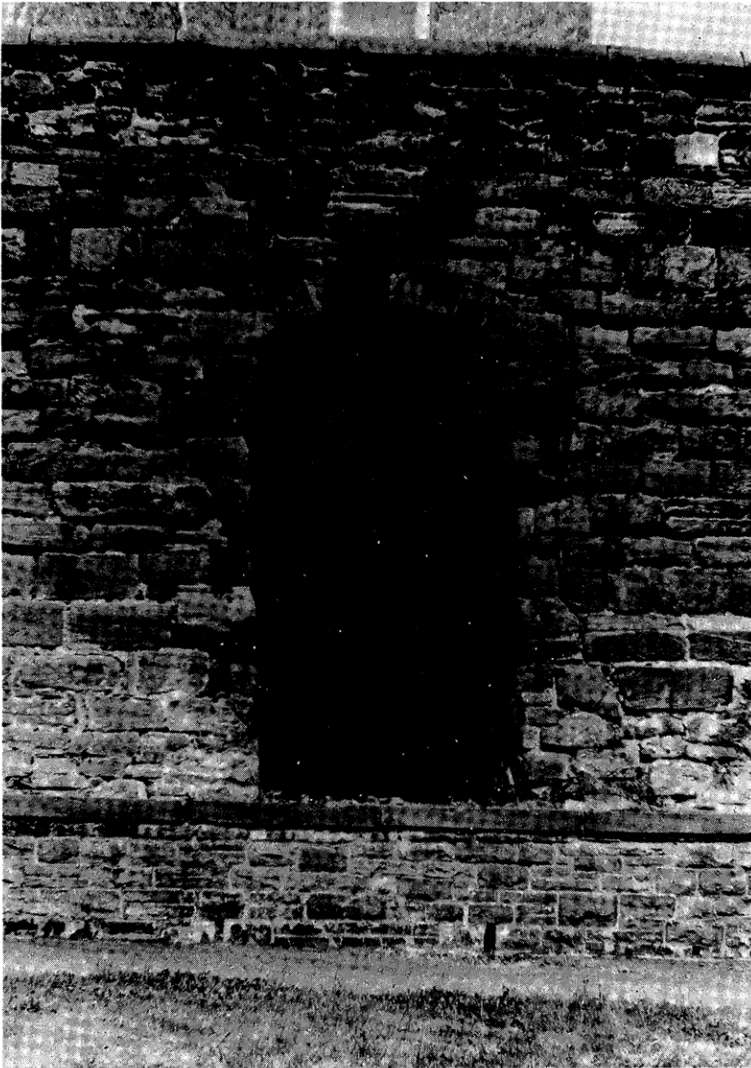


PLATE VI.—The Sallyport Gate at the present day.

mortuary — connected with the former Police Station — to reveal the Sallyport Gate.³⁷ (Plate VI.)

Conclusion.

It is doubtful whether any further stretches of the city walls will ever be exposed for permanent open display, although as has already been pointed out, there are remains of the walls *in situ* under the modern road surfaces. Only if demolition work is carried out on property built against the West Walls, will any substantial amount of wall be revealed, but it is in the "Lanes" redevelopment area that any serious excavation work can be carried out. If alterations are made to the street line of East Tower Street, then the walls beneath could be examined to prove, once and for all, if any part of the medieval city walls were built on Roman foundations.³⁸ Until such time as conclusive excavations are carried out, this problem will remain one of the most important unanswered questions in the long and detailed history of the city walls.

³⁷ Public attention was drawn to the dilapidated state of the West Walls in the *Carlisle Journal*, 28 June 1968, 16-17.

³⁸ Robert Hogg, *Cumberland News*, 9 February 1973.