

## THE FRENCH BASTIDES AND THE TOWN PLAN OF WINCHELSEA

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Hardly more than a superficial glance at the town plan of Winchelsea is needed to suggest a comparison with the southern French towns which are grouped under the generic names of 'villes-neuves' and 'bastides.' For Winchelsea, though now occupying little more than a quarter of the original site, and to the hasty visitor appearing to be but a pleasant village of a few hundred inhabitants, yet retains more of the elements which go to make a typical 'bastide' than any other of the English towns of medieval origin; so that a study of its plan inevitably implies a comparative survey of those towns in France from which it takes its origin. I am, therefore, proposing primarily to treat of the town and the general conditions which gave rise to it, from this comparative point of view, endeavouring at the same time to show the extent to which it derives its 'chessboard' type of plan and general arrangement from its French precursors of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries.

It would not be easy, and, for the immediate purpose, it would be unprofitable, to endeavour to ascertain the origins of the 'chessboard' town plan which, as adopted in France, came to be known as 'bastide' or, alternatively, 'ville-neuve.' It would perhaps impart a mild exhilaration if it were possible to point to classical prototypes—Priene, Piraeus, Turin, Timgad, etc., and assert that the medieval planners were consciously working on lines suggested by these cities of a pre-Christian era. At any age, however, when a town has to be laid out anew, as an entity, it would appear to have been the obvious solution to set it out chequer fashion, in rectangular blocks, with streets crossing at right-angles, on as level a site as was available. There can be no doubt that the medieval planner chose the method which was easy and which at the same time happened

best to suit his purpose, just as his classical predecessors had done. The southern French towns of Roman origin had not succeeded in retaining their original plan, and cannot have been consciously copied.

It is to the monastic houses that we must look for the beginnings of the recrudescence of formal town building which is so interesting a feature of French life in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The greater conventual establishments had, by the end of the eleventh century, created a large number of small country towns, then called generically 'Sauvetés.' The name is significant, suggesting as it does their primary importance as places where, in a troubled world which had hardly recovered from the assaults of Northmen and Saracens, men could find that comparative immunity from aggression which was granted to the religious houses and their possessions. Benefits from these towns accrued to the abbeys in that their lands, which otherwise were lying waste, were peopled and cultivated, and so became a source of increased revenue.

The economic gain was obvious, and the kings and 'grands seigneurs' took up the parable, but in their case with an emphasis on the military character of their new foundations.

Town building on a large scale would appear to have eventuated partly as one result of the appalling devastation wrought in Languedoc by the pious Crusaders from the north who swooped down on the unfortunate country with the objects of plunder, and the stamping out of the Albigensian heresies. The new owners of the almost depopulated country were still liable to be faced with occasional opposition on the part of the larger towns, and as a means of combating them, and also for the purpose of defending their frontiers, the lords built fortified towns, modelled on those already erected by the religious houses. As an incentive to attract inhabitants, grants were made of privileges, generous in those days, which allowed them a certain measure of freedom, while they had also the protection of the town walls. The degree of independence gained by settlers varied from town to town, but

broadly speaking it can be said that they were enfranchised from serfdom and endowed with some security from the irregular exploitation to which they had hitherto been accustomed. The inhabitants were in part soldier burgesses, very much of the type which formed the basis of the population of the Roman 'colonia.' There were also freemen who for one reason or another had been emancipated; and, in spite of the strength of feudal principals at this time, serfs who had fled from the seigneurie to which they had been born were by no means uncommon. The towns, in the main, were peopled by men drawn from the rural districts, and not from other cities.

The first of the bastide builders of the thirteenth century whose names are more generally familiar are Louis IX of France, and his brother Alphonse of Poitiers. The latter, by marrying the heiress of the Count of Toulouse became the lord of a large part of Languedoc. The towns founded by Alphonse are not, perhaps as striking as Aigues-Mortes and New Carcassonne, built by St. Louis; but the creations of the former are numerous, and he made extensive use of them as a means of government and frontier defence, while at the same time they contributed to his revenues and added to the number of his dependants. Villefranche-de-Rouergue, built by him as a capital, was famous for its size and strength, and was given yet additional notoriety by the Bishop of Rodez who, fearing injury to the prospects of his own town by reason of its proximity to Villefranche, excommunicated anyone who should build a dwelling in the new, upstart, town.

A considerable step in the development of the economic value of the bastide was taken by the Lord Edward, son of Henry III of England, and afterwards King as Edward I. In the past much attention has been devoted to his numerous unhappy campaigns against the Welsh and Scotch, to the neglect of his undoubted success as a civilising agent, particularly in that part of Southern France which we call Gascony. For three hundred years from the middle of the twelfth century Gascony was connected with the

English crown, and a large part of its prosperity can fairly be attributed to Edward. In 1252, when he was about fifteen, he was granted, as part of his patrimony, the governorship of the Dukedom of Aquitaine, which had been growing restive under the competent but heavy hand of the Seneschal, Simon de Montfort.



FIG. 1

It is interesting to note that one of the first and chief cares of Edward was to intervene on behalf of the wine merchants of Bordeaux, whose trade was being made impossible by the exactions of Montfort's officials—interesting, since thirty years later it is largely with a view to encouraging and protecting the wine trade with Gascony that he interested himself in the building of New Winchelsea.

Edward found his new domain threatened not only by fierce internal factions, but also by Alphonse of Poitiers on the north and the King of Navarre on the south, and although he was absurdly young by our modern standards it is certain that the two or three years he spent in this, his first visit to Gascony, he

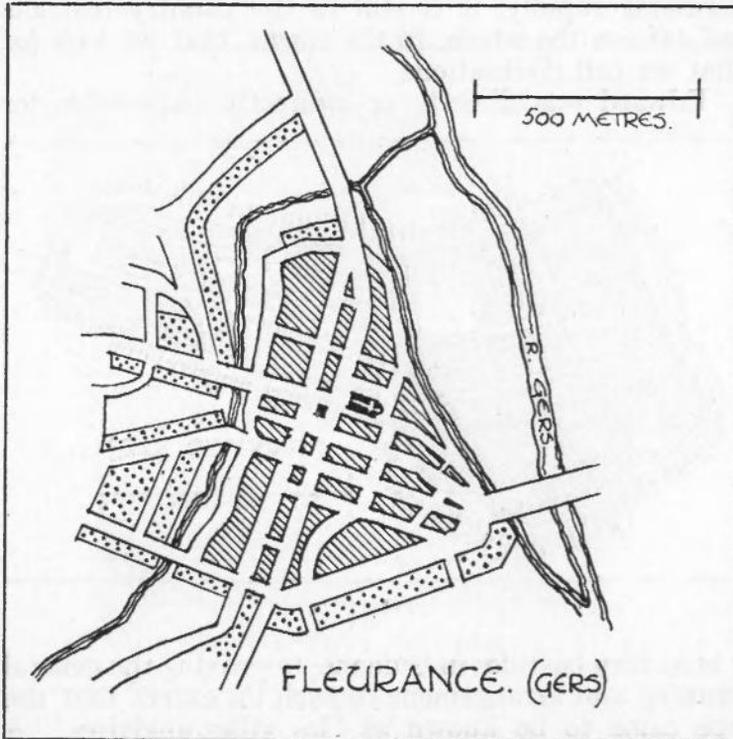


FIG. 2

was not only profiting by his experience, but also came to realise the defensive and, even more, the economic possibilities of the bastides.

His task of government was made difficult in that it was almost impossible to define the privileges and obligations of the communes—the existing towns whose growth had been gradual, and who were so strong as to be a potential menace. While anxious to win over these towns as a counterpoise to the more

powerful barons, he was also desirous of the creation of other towns, controlled by and dependent on himself, with charters also which did not defy interpretation. Such places would not only act as a check on the communes, but, as strongholds, would provide safeguards for the economic life of the countryside. Although trading and commerce were at this time increasing rapidly, it is still to the country districts and not, on the whole, to the towns, that we look for what we call civilisation.

Edward was directly or indirectly responsible for

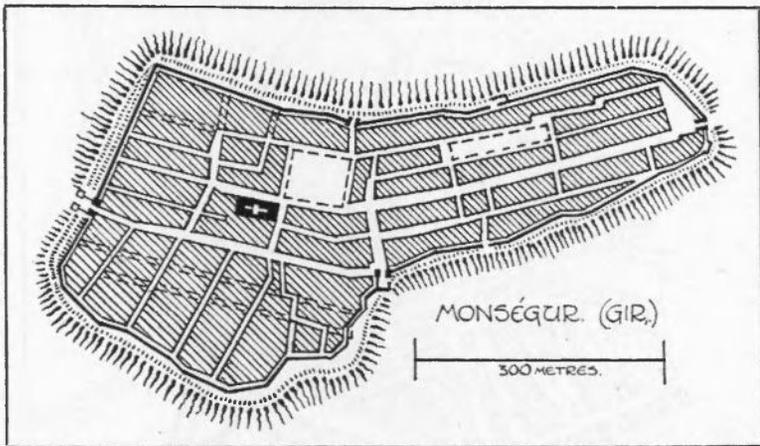


FIG. 3

at least fifty bastides in Guienne, improving the general planning and arrangement to such an extent that the type came to be known as 'les villes anglaises.' A French commentator, with just a suspicion of umbrage, writes that the English, in this as in so many other matters, were able to carry out the idea to perfection, but that they were *not* the inventors.

The 'villes anglaises' were built either on royal land, or by agreement with a landowner who would be only too glad to be assisted by his overlord in the acquisition of an added value to his estate. The royal representative in the town was the bailiff—other public officials were few, so that the bastides were conducted by the inhabitants. In the bastides, in

fact, we get a comparative negation of individual as opposed to communal interests which is rather striking, coming as it did in a period of history when individualism was so very marked.

SITE.—The sites of the bastides were chosen with the immediate local needs in view, and where possible the military and industrial aspects were combined with an endeavour to permit of the town being set

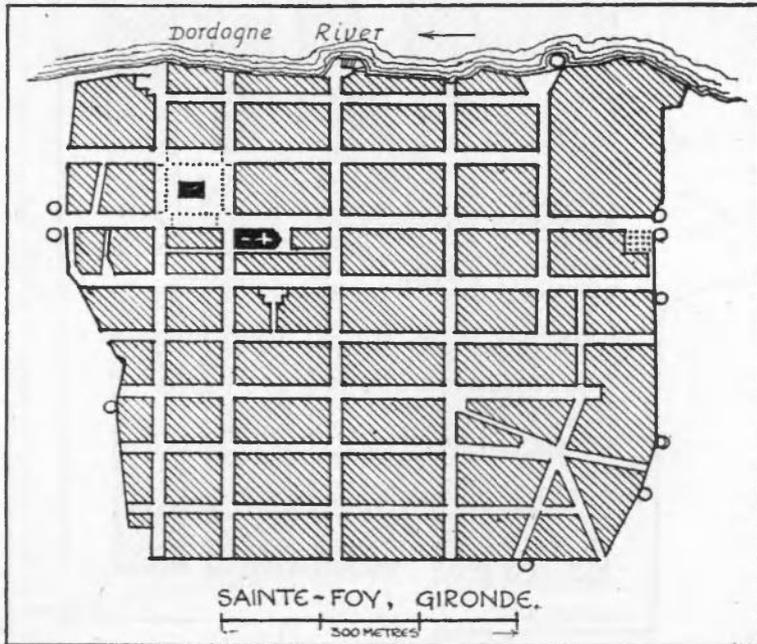


FIG. 4

out on a basis of rectangularity, both as to outline and detail. The obvious and most advantageous site from a defensive point of view, was a hill top. If it took the shape of a plateau, so much the better. Edward had a particularly discerning eye for an appropriate site, and, more than other bastide builders, was inclined to stress its importance. Rectangular sites which had at the same time a defensive value were comparatively rare, and a number of the better known bastides have an outline which is anything but

rectangular. Libourne (Fig. 1), built for Edward by the Englishman Roger of Leyburn, had not only a considerable strategic value by virtue of its position

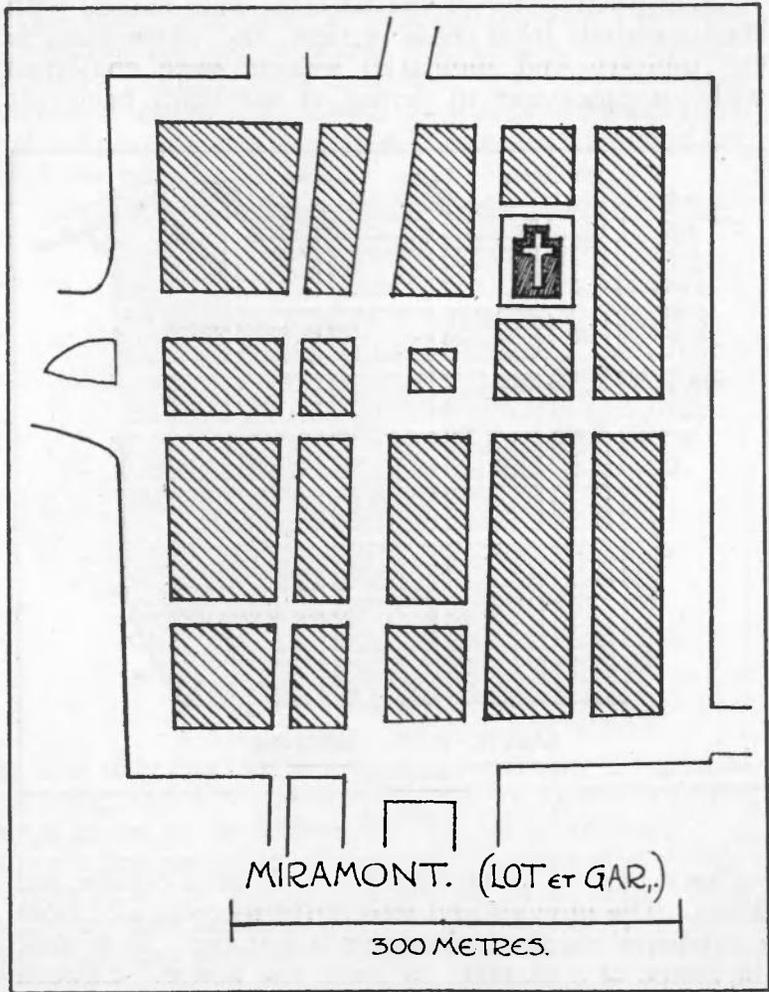


FIG. 5

at the junction of the rivers Dordogne and Isle, but owed its commercial prosperity to the same fortunate situation. Fleurance (Fig. 2) has lost a certain amount of its original outline, but it is still possible to recognise

the early oblong, following the course of the narrow valley of the river Gers. Monségur (Fig. 3), built for Eleanor of Provence and one of the first of the 'villes anglaises,' is not unlike Winchelsea in shape. Sainte Foy (Fig. 4), built by Alphonse de Poitiers about 1255, has a rectangular plan, with the market place set conveniently near the harbour. Miramont (Fig. 5) is also rectangular. Villefranche-de-Rouergue (Fig. 6),

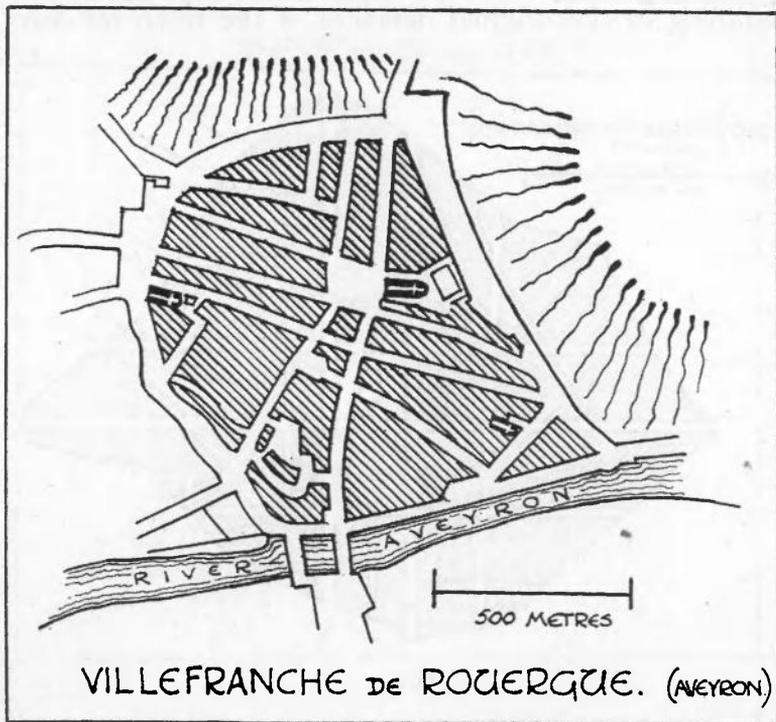


FIG. 6

surrounded by hills, has a site which is more nearly circular and presents obstacles to a 'gridiron' arrangement of its streets by reason of the unevenness of the ground. Sauveterre-de-Guienne (Fig. 7) is multangular, but very carefully set out within its walls, while Revel (Fig. 8) provides an example of the improvement—or mischief—according to predilections—that can result from the creation of wide and spacious

boulevards. Villeneuve-sur-Lot (Fig. 9) has its market place again provided at a point convenient for the river and quays.

Monpazier (Fig. 10), built by Edward about 1284, is probably the most complete and regular of all, and serves best to illustrate the general principles which governed the 'lay-out' of an ideal bastide.

In the majority of cases the first concern was the protecting wall, and the lord invariably made the building of the original defences of the town his own

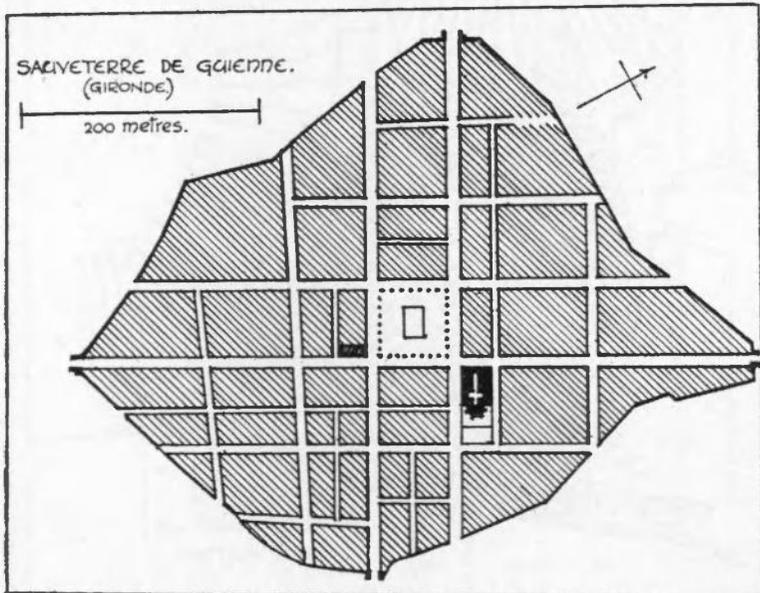


FIG. 7

concern, though their upkeep devolved on the inhabitants, who were allowed the necessary materials from the lord's forests and quarries. In the early stages the defence might be little more than a ditch and palisaded vallum, the gateways alone being of stone. Rectangular so far as the site would allow, the town would have in each side one or more gateways in the wall or rampart, through which the principal roads would lead into the heart of the town. Immediately within and following the line of the wall was a passage or

street, usually, but not always, fairly narrow, which gave access to the wall and its defensive towers,—the 'pomerium,' that is, which is a feature common not only to the bastides, but to practically all walled towns of the Middle Ages.

Within the walls the streets are set out at right angles so far as is possible, so that the blocks,

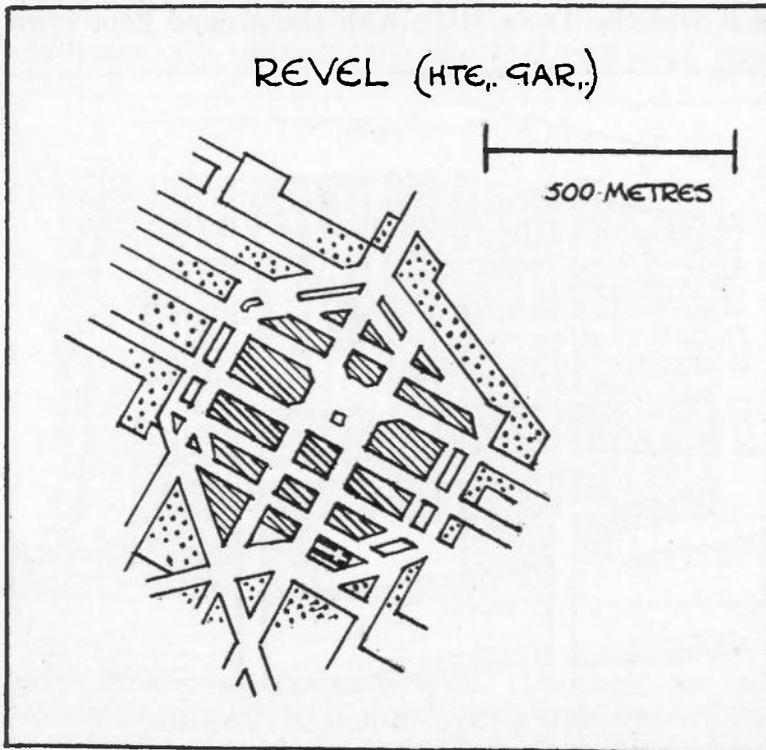


FIG. 8

or 'insulae,' were in squares or rectangles. The main roads led immediately into the town, and where they intersected was the market place. In some towns they are carried along each of the four sides of the 'place' as open arcades, known as 'cornières,' below the first floor of the buildings which enclose the market.

Monpazier (Fig. 10) provides a complete example of the normal arrangement except that it has an

ingenious method of avoiding an awkward right-angled bend for vehicles entering or leaving the market place, the entry from the intersections of the streets being provided by chamfering off the angles of the buildings at each of the four corners (Fig. 11).

The houses facing the square were the most sought after, and were occupied by the wealthiest and most important of the inhabitants. Within or on one side of it was the Town Hall, with the ground floor open

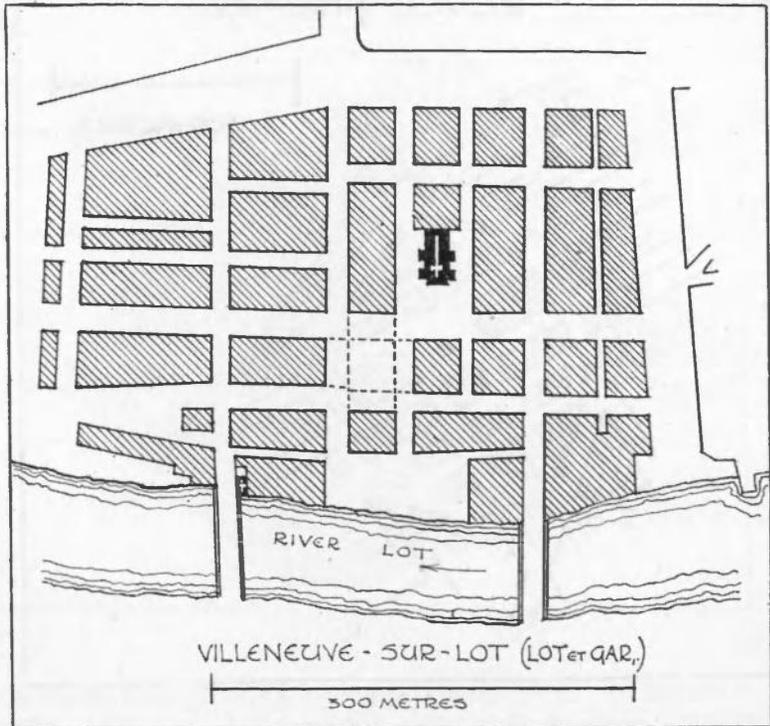


FIG. 9

at the sides, very similar to some of those which still exist in some of our smaller English towns.

The market place was not of necessity in the heart of the town, but was preferably where most accessible to the harbour when the town was also a port, as in the case of Libourne and Sainte Foy (Figs. 1 and 4).

The church, often fortified, was usually in a square

leading out from one corner of the market. Almost invariably, where the church is not so placed, it would appear to have antedated the town and could not easily be incorporated so as to conform with the usual method of planning, and yet was sufficiently sacrosanct to be thought worthy of preservation.

Monpazier is not a large town (437 yds. by 240 yds.), and is set on a plateau, obviating the necessity for a moat. Of the original walls those to the north and south are still existent, but the east and west sides

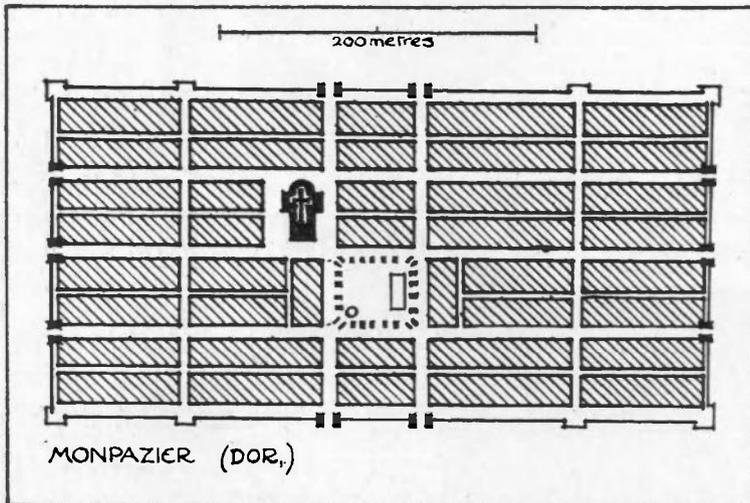


FIG. 10

have almost disappeared. The burgages are all rectangular, and equal in size, though there was nothing to prevent a man having more than one holding. Each of them faces on to one or another of the main streets and backs on to one of the lesser streets. To diminish the danger from fire, to assist the street drainage, and possibly also as an aid to easy defence, the tenements are in pairs, separated by a narrow passage about six feet wide. The main streets are about 26 feet in width, the others ranging from 24 ft. 6 in. to 18 ft. 6 in., and the arcades are about 19 ft. 6 in. wide. The plots themselves are uniform in size and have sufficient space for a garden at the back of most of the houses.

The above figures are very similar to those which governed the lay-out of Monségur. The charter for this town states that the inhabitants shall be obliged

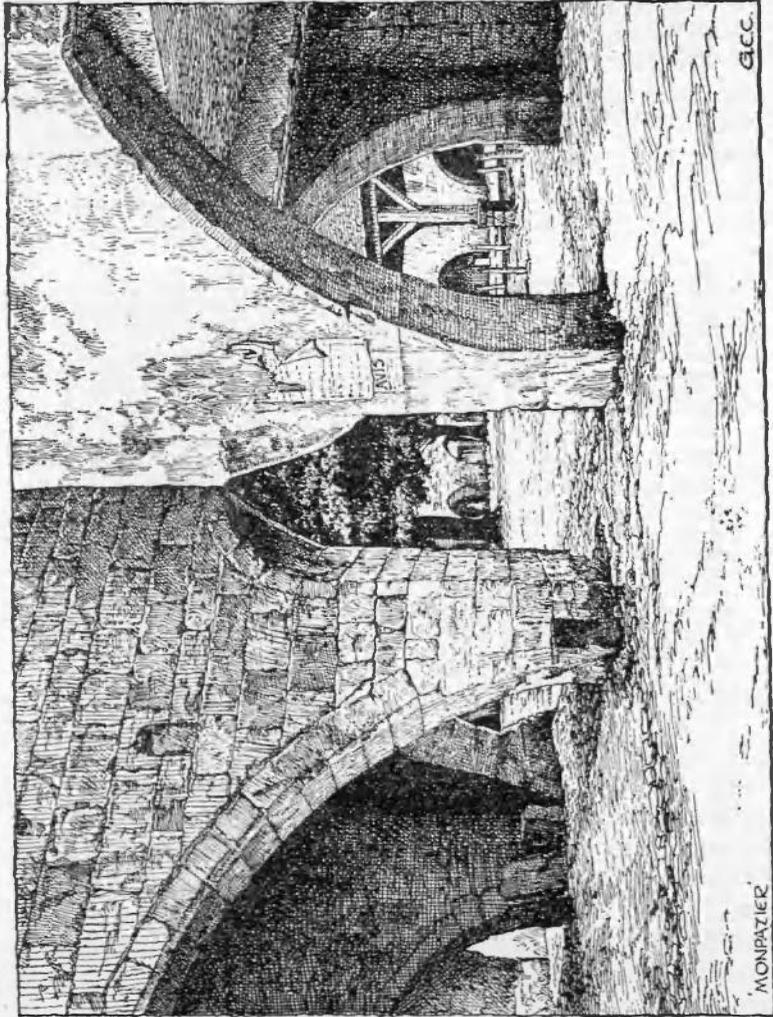


FIG. II

to build their houses, one third the first year, beginning with the main front, one third the second year, and the rest at their convenience. The necessary wood, again, could be taken from the royal forests,

and the fosse and walls were to be built by the king. In so far as it related to the walls, the king's part of the bargain was not carried out, and the inhabitants had to manage as best they could.

Exigencies of the site made it, at times, impossible to place the gates centrally in each of the walls, with the result that the market place is not always in the centre of the town, but the basic conception of its being at the intersection of the main streets always holds good. The lord's castle is not often included as an integral part of the line of defences, though it may be near at hand. Edward always reserved for himself a portion of the land within the town, usually occupied by his bailiff. Part of his policy in Guienne was to make grants of land without the town precinct, the majority of the citizens being rural cultivators. Also without the towns were the cemeteries—here again there is no evidence to show that the Roman precedent was consciously followed, the determining factor being lack of space.

In the foregoing much abridged account of the French bastides an endeavour has been made to include and stress those characteristics which are either common to the English bastide of Winchelsea, or are remarkable by their absence where one might reasonably expect them to recur in that town.

NEW WINCHELSEA.—Briefly, the events which led up to the foundation of New Winchelsea are as follows: The Old Town, of pre-Conquest origin, but whether Roman or not is uncertain, lay about a mile south-east of Rye, the better part of three miles east of the present town. It emerges definitely into history in the twelfth century, and was granted a Charter by Henry II with privileges and liberties which practically meant its inclusion in the confederation of the Cinque Ports. Winchelsea prospered, so far as can be gathered from the records, as the result of systematic piracy, and year by year, with almost monotonous regularity, complaints, not only from foreign, but also from English towns, were presented to the king; ships and their cargoes having been seized or sunk, and their crews more often than not thrown overboard

or massacred. The town sided with De Montfort in the Barons' war, with the result that in 1266 Edward, after heavy fighting, took the place by storm, and, having executed the leading pirates, it seems that he was on the whole so lenient that it is evident that already he looked upon the town as a potential source of strength to the Crown, and therefore did not wish it to be completely destroyed.

The thirteenth century was distinguished by a large number of phenomenally violent climatic disturbances, some of which resulted in serious flooding of low-lying coastal districts. In particular the vicinity of Old Winchelsea suffered severely, and on several occasions the sea encroached on the town's defences. In spite of repeated efforts to strengthen the retaining walls it became more and more obvious that the sea could not be kept in check. Towards 1280, Edward, now King, visited the town with a view to its being rebuilt in a more favourable position. As a trading centre and as a link with Gascony it was too valuable to be allowed to be ruined beyond recall, and, as is well known, the encouragement of English ports and trading towns is one of the most striking features of the policy of that astute King. The English market for wine was invaluable to the Gascons, which is almost certainly the reason why they were content to put up with the rule of English kings for three centuries. In a term of four years, shortly after the building of New Winchelsea, this country imported nearly a quarter of a million gallons of wine, mainly from Guienne, a considerable proportion of which wine was shipped to Winchelsea. In return there was an ever increasing demand for wool and corn from England. Large numbers of Gascon merchants visited this country and were even allowed to lodge elsewhere than in the special quarters reserved for foreigners. They were, in fact, granted special privileges which at times gave rise to jealousy and protest from English merchants, though the mutual interests were such that definite cleavage was avoided.

Winchelsea then, as one of the most important of the southern sea-ports, was to be revived as such.

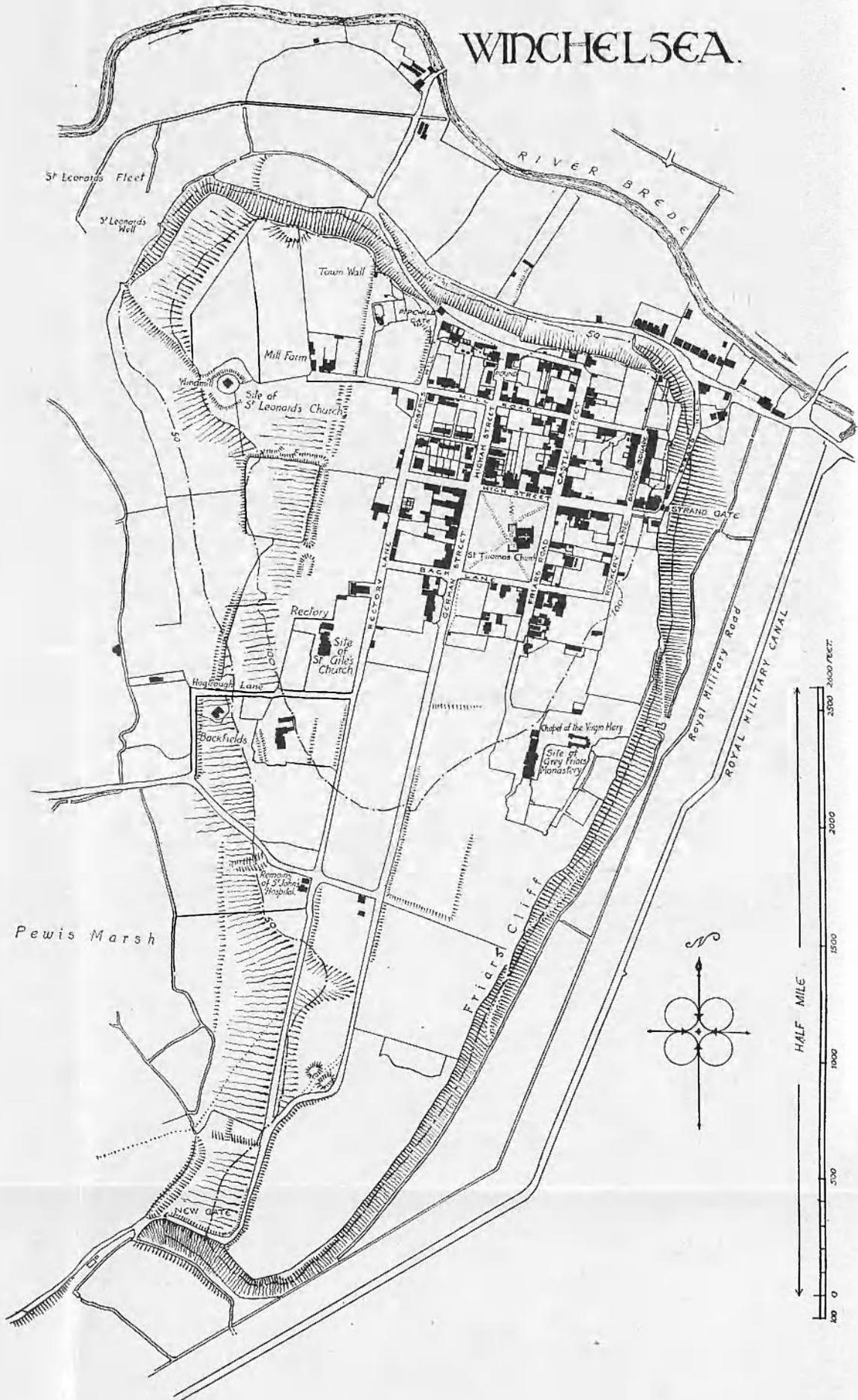
The political considerations were outweighed by the economic motive, and Edward did not in this case, as with most of his bastides in France, have to take into account its potential value as an offset to other, more privileged, and therefore more independent, towns. Nor was it necessary to visualise it as essentially a market for the adjoining countryside, since the majority of its inhabitants were to be seafaring men and traders, and not the rural cultivator who predominated in the French towns. Military needs had to be taken into account, though here again the necessity for strong walls was not so compelling. England itself had recovered from the unhappy Baron's War, and was prospering under a centralised government, so that danger was only likely to come from Normandy and out of the sea, a danger which could best be faced on the sea itself and by the ships of the town. The site for the new town was obvious. Three miles to the west the plateau, about 150 acres in extent, called the Hill of Igham, rose 100 feet above the estuary of the River Brede. The settlement called the town of Igham, on the western side away from the sea, cannot have been much more than a village. Roughly speaking pear-shaped on plan, the sides of the plateau most open to attack from the sea, that is, the north, east, and south, are precipitous. The slope on the west side, though in places fairly steep, is more gradual. The hill-top itself, while on the whole level, has a downward tendency as it trends southwards. The estuary of the Brede, considerably wider than now, ran under the northern cliff, and it was here that the harbour was to be constructed as a river port, some distance away from the open sea.

At the King's command his steward took the necessary steps to acquire the Manor of Igham, partly by exchange and partly by purchase. The composition of the committee of three appointed for the initial purpose of setting out and assessing the burgages is of interest. Stephen of Pencestre, or Peshurst, had been made Warden of the Cinque Ports. Henry le Waleys was a wealthy merchant whose interests both in England and Gascony were so considerable that he

not only held at one time the office of Mayor of London, but at another the mayoralty of Bordeaux. The third, Itier Bochart, called Itier of Angoulême, was a noted builder of bastides, and was summoned from Bordeaux.

The men of Winchelsea would appear to have been reluctant to disinter themselves from their old town, and two years later the terms of a new Commission suggest that although the lines of the new town had been set out, the intended inhabitants had not as yet commenced building on the burgages assigned to them. They were now assured that their old liberties and charters should be renewed, so that there was no question of drawing up new charters such as were granted to the French bastides. But, as in France, the King was determined to keep the control of the new town in his own hands and it is possible that the barons (or freemen) were fighting shy of this, to them, superfluous condition, and interest in the new venture was still lacking. Edward was called to Bordeaux in 1286 and could not easily hasten matters ; but in the following year the inevitable disaster supervened and a sudden and abnormal flood completed the ruin of the old town, so that such of the inhabitants as escaped were forced to find a new home. A few months later John Kirkby, Bishop of Ely, acting on behalf of the absent King, conceded to the barons the preponderating share in the management of the new town, and from thenceforward building was carried on at a quicker pace.

As with all medieval towns, it would seem to be logical to consider first the defensive system. The walls, of primary importance to the bastides, were not at that time considered to be vital to Winchelsea, and it is unlikely that anything approaching a completed wall of stone ever existed. The late fourteenth-century chronicle called that of Thomas of Walsingham states that the town even at so late a date was not surrounded by a stone wall, but with an earth rampart and, on the edge of the precipitous northern cliff, with the addition of a crenellated wooden stockade of about the height of a man. In 1295 the town was given permission to levy a customs duty for five years to



provide money for the walls, the five years evidently being considered long enough for the completion of the work. Yet, nearly thirty years later, in 1321, a similar permission was granted for a seven-year period, and instructions issued to strengthen the defences by a ditch. Running roughly north and south between the site of St. Leonards Church and Hogtrough, or Dead Man's, Lane (Pl. I) are the foundations of a wall, about 2 feet 6 inches thick, which may be part of an inadequate town wall, or a retaining wall to a sunk road of uncertain date, remains of which appear on the east side of the foundations. If this as a wall ever became more than a pious hope, it was rejected by 1321, since in that year the Abbot of Fécamp complained that the mayor and barons of Winchelsea had at the King's command enclosed 15 acres of his town of Igham—that is, the lower part of the same slope—within their new scheme of defences.

Gateways were built commanding the roads leading into the town; the Strand Gate has some detail which dates it about 1330; the Pipewell, also called the Land and Ferry Gate, was probably rebuilt early in the fifteenth century; and the New Gate, at the southern end of the town. The latter is strengthened by the steep cliff on the south side, and on the west side are the remains of a ditch running for about 100 yards to the north (Pl. I). It is certain that the wall as projected would include a gate to defend the access by the road leading from Icklesham, but if one was ever built it has now entirely disappeared, as has all trace of any wall which may have existed between this point and the New Gate. Making due allowances for its probable uses as a quarry for the building of the sixteenth-century Camber Castle out on the marshes, it is difficult to believe that a wall with a perimeter of more than  $2\frac{1}{4}$  miles, or, if we take only the more open, western, side of the town,  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of wall, would, if it ever existed, have so completely disappeared. There were buildings of considerable size within the town which we know were also used as quarries, making it still less easy to account for the non-existence of even fragmentary traces of a wall of such an extent. The

ease with which the French took and sacked the town on several occasions does not argue substantial walls ; and finally, in 1386, when some French ships, carrying a wooden palisade for use as a base camp, were captured, the palisade was set up around Winchelsea as a defence—surely superfluous if there had been walls. It would seem, however, to be likely that the ' pomerium ' which existed in all the bastides, was also intended, at any rate along that part of the western face where the foundations exist. The lie of the land and some earthworks suggest the possibility of a line of defences, but not necessarily walls, along the south side of where were probably Quarters 28, 29 and 30 (Fig. 12). In France, as has been said, the defences in the early stages of building of some of the towns consisted of a ditch and palisaded vallum with gates alone of stone ; and this apparently is very much what occurred at Winchelsea. But here the ultimate need for stone ramparts was not considered so vital, or perhaps was not driven home before the town was taken and so drastically handled by the French that it never recovered sufficient strength to complete them. A belated attempt was made in 1414 by the citizens to enclose their town within a wall of lesser circuit. One small portion of this still exists at the north-west angle of Quarter No. 4, together with some part of the ditch adjoining, but the latter does not appear to have been carried at the most beyond Quarter No. 21 (Fig. 12).

INTERIOR.—A Rental of 1292 sets forth the projected internal arrangement of the town. It was to comprise 39 Quarters, varying from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $3\frac{1}{4}$  acres in extent, and bordering on eight streets which, from particulars given, must, towards the northern end of the town in any case, be those which run east and west. The number of streets which run north and south is not specified so that the lay-out of part of the town, the southern half, that is, is problematical. A number of attempts have been made to reconstruct the complete plan, but all of them are of necessity theoretical up to a point, and can only be so unless the spade can be brought into action. The plan (Fig. 12) shows only those features which remain of the medieval town

# WINCHELSEA.

SKETCH PLAN SHOWING EXISTING  
REMAINS OF MEDIEVAL TOWN PLAN.

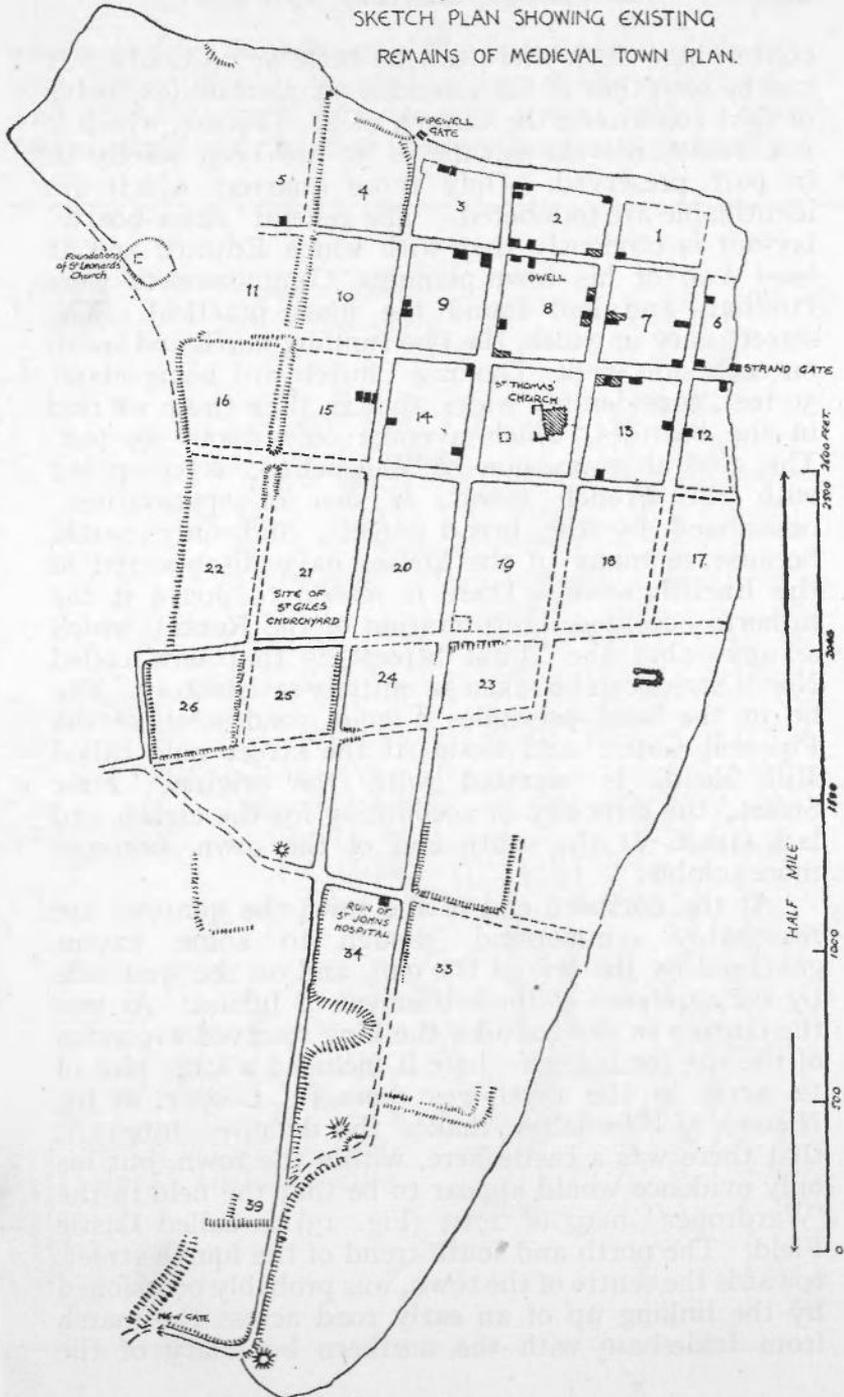


FIG. 12

concerning which there can be little or no doubt. It can be seen that of the intended 39 quarters (exclusive of that containing the Church of St. Thomas, which is not numbered) the outline of 32 has been wholly or in part preserved. Only those quarters which are identifiable are numbered. The general 'chess-board' lay-out is obviously that with which Edward and at least two of his town-planning Commissioners were familiar, and had found the most practical. The streets vary in width, the two running north and south on each side of St. Thomas' Churchyard being about 50 feet, considerably wider, that is, than those we find in the bastides, which average only about 25 feet. The general impression of Winchelsea, as compared with the French towns, is one of spaciousness, occasioned by the broad streets, and only partly because so many of the houses have disappeared in the English town. There is reason to doubt if the hitherto accepted interpretation of the Rental, which assumes that the 'First Street' is that now called North Street can be taken as entirely satisfactory. The lie of the land precludes a good road west of the Pipewell Gate; and again, if the street now called Mill Road, is equated with the original 'First Street,' the difficulty of accounting for the eighth and last street, at the south end of the town, becomes more soluble.

At the northern end of the town the quarters are reasonably symmetrical, though to some extent governed by the line of the cliff, and on the west side by the existence of the settlement of Igham. As was the custom in the bastides the king reserved a portion of the site for himself—here it included a large plot of 12 acres in the north-west corner. Cooper, in his *History of Winchelsea*, makes the definite statement that there was a castle here, within the town, but his only evidence would appear to be that the field in the 'Wardroper' map of 1763 (Fig. 13) is called Castle Field. The north and south trend of the fourth street, towards the centre of the town, was probably occasioned by the linking up of an early road across the marsh from Icklesham with the northern boundary of the



likely that Edward would have scrupled to have turned them out, had their land interfered with his planning.

The houses in the new town were carried right on to the building line, as invariably in France, and again, would seem in the majority of cases to have had a space for a garden at the back. The Church of St. Thomas of Canterbury, transferred from the old town, has a quarter to itself, not, of course, mentioned in the Rent Roll. On plan it is noticeable, in the first place because of its strict orientation, at odds with the axis of the quarter in which it stands; and in the second place because of its fragmentary nature. Here again ambition outstripped performance and it is unlikely that the church, planned on an impressive scale, was ever much more than it appears to-day. The necessity for a fortified church such as is common in Gascony, was not felt, though on more than one occasion such a church would probably have saved many of the inhabitants from massacre.

The remarkable series of tombs within the church hardly come within the scope of this paper except in so far as they suggest that the barons of Winchelsea were men of substantial wealth, who could afford to rebuild their homes and their town on generous lines; and were far more independent than the very mixed, and, on the whole, indigent population which was gathered together to people the bastides of France. Towards the south-west corner of the churchyard there was, until late in the eighteenth century, an isolated bell tower of at least two stages, the bells of which were probably installed as much for use as a 'tocsin' as for church purposes.

The Church of St. Giles was evidently second in importance to that of St. Thomas, and was only allotted the southern half of the twenty-first quarter, and even so had to keep part of the site for use as a graveyard. The 'bastide' cemeteries had always to be without the walls, but if the question were ever raised in the planning of Winchelsea, there can be no doubt that the hitherto accepted custom in this as in some other respects prevailed over any new fangled

notions the architects may have had in mind, though it is possible, of course, that the churchyards of St. Thomas and St. Giles were only used as cemeteries at a later date.

St. Giles' Church has now disappeared almost entirely. Our only surviving representation is on the Corporation Seal, of early fourteenth-century date.

**THE GREY FRIARS.**—Within a few years after the arrival of the Franciscans in England they had obtained a footing in Old Winchelsea. In the new town they were permitted to retain a four-acre site which had already been presented to them on the eastern edge of the hill of Igham, a precinct humble in size as befitted the modest pretensions of the Mendicant orders. As their work was extra-claustral, in and about the town, we would not expect their house to have the careful and complicated planning of the monastic houses. Even the church was not a necessity, though at Winchelsea the walls of the choir and some fragments of the nave are practically all of the Friary that now exists above ground. The choir, of about 1310, although 69 feet in length is one of the shorter of the choirs of Franciscan churches in England. It is, however, peculiar in this country in that it alone has the three-sided apse which is almost uniform in their Continental churches. It is possible that we have evidence here of the unusually close contact of Winchelsea with the Continent (Fig. 14).

At the junction of choir and nave was the narrow bay or passage called the 'Walking Place,' common to their English churches, and above which was erected the bell turret, either in stone or timber. Here we have a feature for which I can find no Continental parallel. Our only available source of information, and that not too precise, which helps towards a reconstruction of the domestic buildings, is Buck's drawing of 1737. This shows a cloister south of the nave, with a cross range on the south side which probably included the frater with a large pulpitum, and is carried along east of the east range of the cloister.

**THE BLACK FRIARS.**—There are no remains above ground which can be identified as beyond doubt

forming part of the house of the Black Friars, and such documentary evidence as still exists relative to its situation is quite inconclusive. In 1318, Edward II disregarded a stipulation in the charter of the new town which excluded any religious house other than

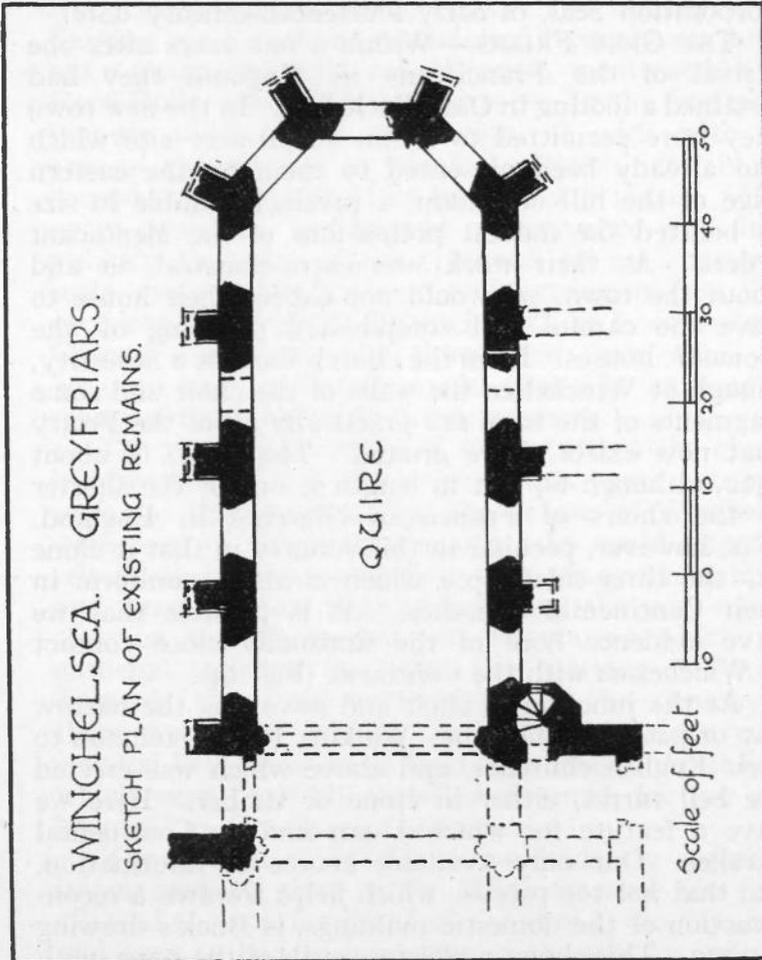


FIG. 14

that of the Franciscans, and granted part of a twelve-acre site to the Dominicans in a vacant spot specified as being at the south end of the town, called the King's Place. This may be the plot called the King's

Green (Fig. 13), which, as late as the eighteenth century, was still of twelve acres. For twenty years later we find the Dominicans asking permission to move, as their house was far distant from the town, so that the people seldom attended service there, and made little contribution to their expenses. We do not know the location of the new site, but it appears to have been even more unsatisfactory, since the house, the friars complain, was now threatened by the sea. The final resting place is still unknown. The plot called Fryer's Orchard on Wardroper's plan is a possible site, but the name alone has no special significance. The sixteenth-century inventory of their property mentions land in a number of places in the town, and includes at least one other orchard.

**MARKET.**—The question of the market site also presents difficulties. Hitherto the generally accepted position is the field called Monday's Market, south-west of the Grey Friars reservation (Fig. 13). The evidence is hypothetical and anything but conclusive, resting primarily on tradition, arising out of the name Monday's Market. In view of the invariable, and indeed, quite obvious arrangement whereby in the bastides as newly planned towns, the market places were at the intersections of the main streets leading as directly as possible from the gates, and remembering that the original lay-out of Winchelsea was in the hands of men who had been either bastide builders or were familiar with the type of plan, it is difficult to arrive at the conviction that the site chosen here should be so far away from the main gates leading from the harbour, and, in fact, quite awkwardly situated for access.

If argument by analogy serves any useful purpose, the obvious site would be Quarter 9 (Fig. 12), north-west of the church, in which case it is almost impossible to reconcile the arrangement of the quarters as set forth in the 1292 Rental. But we are not justified in accepting the Rental as a literal catalogue of the town and its tenants—it is in great part a suggested scheme for the allocation of plots to applicants—what we should perhaps call a prospectus. It is significant

that the Bailiff's account book of fifty years later, in referring to one of the quarters, gives the original names of the plot holders as set forth in this rent roll, from which it would seem unlikely that the quarter had up till then been occupied.

CELLARS.—Winchelsea is remarkable in that it

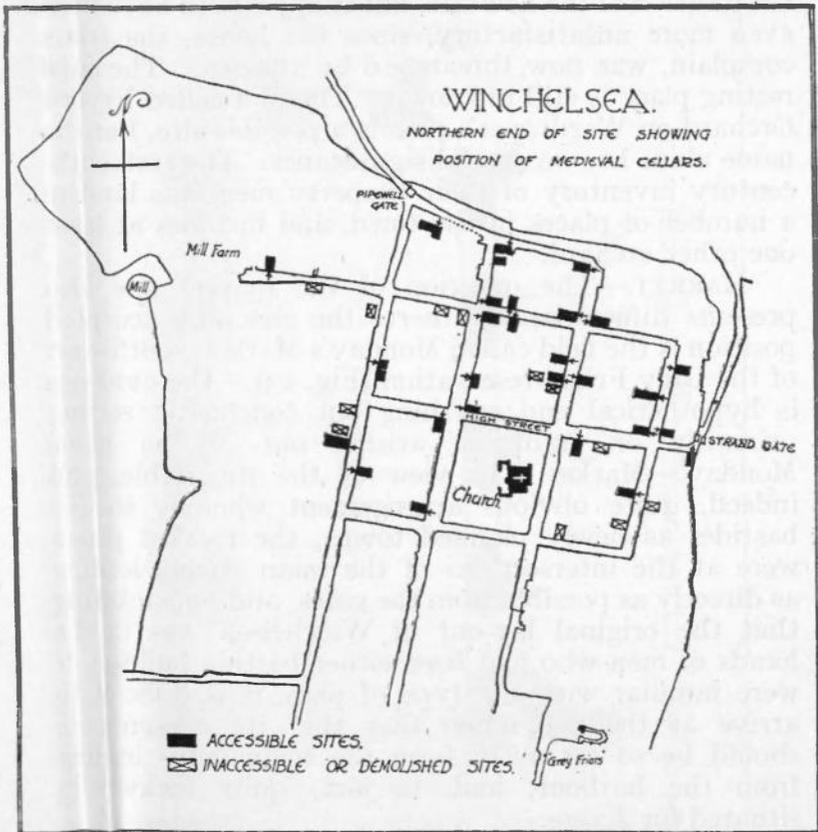


FIG. 15

retains from thirty to forty vaulted cellars of *circa* 1300, very much in the condition in which they were first built. There can be little doubt that a considerable number still exist which have been built over so that access is not now possible; some are beneath what is now meadow land; and in places there are sinkings in the earth on the alignment of the old streets which



WINCHELSEA : CELLAR BENEATH THE SALUTATION INN

suggest with something approaching certainty a cellar, the vault of which has either fallen in or been demolished (Fig. 15). In practically every case access was by a stone stair leading down from the street immediately in front of the houses, the openings being saved from being death-traps by having hinged flaps as doors. They are lacking in uniformity of plan and arrangement, but in the majority of cases they are divided into oblong bays by cross ribs forming arches which might be either segmental, pointed, or elliptical. Some of the more carefully built have quadripartite vaulting; and the largest, beneath the barn in Quarter 15, is in three compartments, two with quadripartite, and one with ribbed barrel vaulting. The cellar beneath the Salutation Inn (Pl. II) is probably the most interesting in that it has carved and moulded corbels to the ribs, which identify it as belonging to the town built by Edward I.

The cellars were obviously an integral part of the scheme of building when the town was first devised, and it is also reasonably certain that they were constructed with the definite object of storing the large quantities of wine to be shipped from Gascony.

Of the harbour, the *raison d'être* of the town, there is little that can be recorded, and there is nothing now which even suggests its existence, except a tumbled heap of foundations beyond the north-west corner of the cliff, the date of which, even so, is problematical.

It was beneath the steep cliff at the north end of the town, where the River Brede ran on its way to the sea, Winchelsea being on the estuary and not open to the sea itself. The quay was on the narrow strip of land between the foot of the cliff and the river.

The wild freaks of the sea continued in the fourteenth century, so that the marshes around the town were still subject to frequent flooding which resulted in increasing difficulty in preventing the harbour from becoming silted up and useless.

The town, for this and other reasons, had not been a success. The inhabitants were seamen, partly fishermen and merchant traders, partly king's men, and always pirates; and as such were more interested in

shipbuilding than in town building. Year after year they were called upon to provide ships for the Scottish and Welsh wars, so that for months at a time they were out of reach of their homes.

The town had to be built from the first stone and there can have been but little time for the work. It would seem to be certain that comparatively few houses in the southern half of the town were any more than a temporary structure of wood. After a few short years in the early part of the fourteenth century, disasters came thick and fast. A large part of the town was burnt in 1326—whether or no by the French is not certain. The beginning of the Hundred Years' War not only hampered the merchants by inevitable restrictions and the requisitioning of their ships for purposes of transport, but the town was also an obvious mark for French raids. The Black Death took heavy toll and it is unlikely that new buildings would be commenced for some years at any rate by a people so stricken. Already, in 1342, the Bailiff's accounts show that ninety-four tenements were uninhabited, and apparently had never been occupied. In 1360 the town was again taken by the French and so woefully maltreated that the bailiff's return of six years later tells us that 385 tenements were then waste land. The unfortunate remnant was again sacked in 1380, so that it seems almost incredible that people should have been content to return to the site. Nevertheless, by 1448 there was sufficient of a town for the Bretons to think it worth while making yet another assault, and yet another bonfire of the buildings. The subsequent history is one of slow decline, during which the only material change of the town plan was the slow disappearance of the buildings and streets, and their transformation into meadowland and garden. Signs of foundations, intriguing and in many cases not easily lending themselves to interpretation, are widespread.

It would, in fact, be difficult to suggest to the medievalist with a '*cacoethes fodiendi*' a site more unusual and more likely to repay him with results than Winchelsea.