

94.38

Exeter City Defences (Friernhay and Snaggle Tower) 1980 - 1990

94-38

Raport

**EXETER CITY DEFENCES
RECORDING OF THE EXTERIOR ELEVATION
OF THE CITY WALL BETWEEN FRIERNHAY
AND SNAYLE TOWER, 1980 AND 1990**

by

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Introduction

This report deals with two small individual pieces of fieldwork carried out on the fabric of the wall in the western part of Exeter, to either side of the site of the Snayle Tower at the western corner of the city (SX 9155 9243). Both were done in response to threats from building or maintenance work to the fabric of the wall, normally to a tight schedule and without funding. These constraints conditioned the approach to recording inasmuch as detailed records and drawings were beyond the scope of the work, and the record of observations was less than the ideal as a result. The projects reported on here are as follows:

Hillyfield House/Snayle Tower 1980. J.R.L.Thorp undertook monitoring work on the wall at the western corner of the city whilst repairs were being carried out, and additional buttressing was being constructed in this year. The repair work comprised the removal of some ancient facework and its replacement with new (partly in stone, partly in brick) and the construction of two massive brick buttresses on the site of the Snayle Tower itself, and the erection of a further large brick buttress to support the wall where it acts as a revetment to Bartholomew Terrace (in the gardens of Hillyfield House). The record of this work is confined to a photographic record of the appearance of the wall before the additions were made (Pls 10,13 and 21-22, below).

Friernhay/Bartholomew Yard 1990. In 1990 repairs were carried out to the exterior facework of the city wall in this area under the auspices of Exeter City Council. Large trees which had been growing close against the face of the wall were felled, the facework cleaned and repointed and the iron railings above were painted and their coping stones consolidated. During the course of this work, which took place over several months in the spring of 1990, Exeter Museums Archaeological Field Unit made a systematic photographic record of the exterior elevation (Pls 1-9), and kept notes on observations which aided the interpretation of the structural history of the wall.

It is the purpose of the present report to present the results of these pieces of work. In the period between 1990 and the present the study of the wall has been considerably advanced by the preparation of a study of the fabric of the wall (divided into two parts, interior and exterior, as arranged at present: Blaylock 1993 (a) and (b)). The fabric description of the relevant stretches of wall stands as it is given in the fabric surveys (sections 14-16; Blaylock 1993(a), 26-28; (b), 18-19), but it is thought that the work would benefit from specific description, accompanied by some of the illustrative material derived from the recording. Thus the descriptive commentary given below is based on that of the fabric surveys, but amplified to give a greater level of detail; and the report is illustrated with photographs taken at the time of the surveys and subsequently, in a programme of systematic photography of the wall carried out in 1993-94.

The description below is arranged in the same order as the fabric survey of the wall, i.e. beginning at the north-west and moving in an anti-clockwise direction around the western corner of the city, following a topographical order rather than observing the order in which the work was done. The photographs (Pls 1-23) are arranged in the same order and, whilst not quite representing a full overlapping coverage, give a clear representation of the character of the masonry in this section of wall, and (in part) compensate for the lack of drawings. Some of the photographic illustration here is taken from the systematic coverage of the full circuit of the wall compiled in 1993-4, to supplement archive material and to provide as full an illustration of the fabric as possible.

General Topography of the Area.

The city wall at this point follows a line at the top of a steep slope which is still visible in the modern topography of the city. The Longbrook valley, to the north west, is at its deepest at this point, just before it flows into the River Exe; and the valley of the Exe itself is flanked by high cliffs downstream of its confluence with the Longbrook, a feature which was used to good advantage when the line was chosen for the wall. In fact this section of the city wall occupies the most naturally defensible position on the whole circuit, saving only the castle enclosure at the northern corner of the city. For much of the length under consideration here the topography remains much as it was on the

construction of the wall, sections of original, or ancient, plinth survive in places to testify to the approximate ground surface level. At the north-east end of the Friernhay section, however, the construction of the 'Catacombs' in 1837, and other works associated with Bartholomew graveyard, have led to a substantial build up in the ground level which obscures part of the ancient builds (although the masonry of the 1830s is most directly affected by this build-up). Inside the wall the picture is rather different; ground levels have built up to the full height of the wall, no doubt in part because of the use of Friernhay as a cemetery; but also through the general accumulation of occupation material within the city. The cloistered nature of this part of the intra-mural area, as well as the protection which the latter-day usage as a cemetery has given to the area outside the walls, has served largely to prevent any damage to the character of this quiet part of the city through modern development.

Description I: Friernhay

The first 46.8m from the boundary of the Friernhay yard is composed entirely of work coeval with the catacombs and graveyard of 1837 consisting of a low sleeper wall of mixed stone type supporting the railings of Bartholomew yard (Blaylock 1993(a), section 14.1). The most typical work of this period is distinguished by the use of the veined variety of volcanic trap which is said to come from Pocombe, and by monolithic granite gateposts, coping and other details; this is seen at its most characteristic to the north-west, in section 13.6. No fabric is visible on the interior other than the iron railings which are contemporary or later than the work of the 1830s.

Section 14.2: (22m.) Large, well-squared, rectangular blocks of breccia in regular courses of varied height. Occasional intermixture of volcanic blocks, and some intervening thinner courses of pale grey volcanic stone; the scheme not fully consistent (Pls 1&2). Possible putlog holes are seen in one of the thinner courses, although the lack of putlogs on other levels reduces the likelihood of this identification. The stone is bonded in hard white, gravelly mortar; slates and small volcanic stones are used throughout for the levelling of blocks. Several blocks of a breccia plinth are exposed at the south-west end of the build, where the present ground level is at its lowest; the plinth was a plain projecting offset course, without a chamfer, although there is one volcanic block in the middle of the run which may bear the remains of a chamfer (reused from an earlier plinth?). The plinth of this build is one course higher in level than that of the next section to the south-west (14.3), but both plinths indicate the approximate level of the ancient ground level in this area.

The junction between sections 14.2 and 14.3 (the earlier build) is untidy (Pl. 3); there is a difference of some 0.10m. in the planes of the two sections (14.3 stepping out from the earlier build), with a narrow area of exposed core at the junction of the two builds. This is interpreted as the position of a buttress, integral to build 14.3, which was incorporated into build 14.2 (or rebuilt at the time of its construction), and then removed at some later time. Both builds show work which is bonded to the buttress scar, and the breccia blocks of the later build to the north-east also show some differential weathering which may have been caused by the protection given by the quoin of the buttress.

On grounds of stone type and of style, the date of this section is late medieval or 16th century. Further refinement of this is possible, however, by reference to the Receiver's accounts of the city for the early 16th century. The account for the year 1530-31 contains the following entries:

'Richard Tute for the makeyng of 70 fotte of New Wall yn Freren hayes & Fendyng off [finding of] all Stufte' £27 13s 4d.

'The same Richard for makeyng of 6 fotte more ther of the same Walle' 48s.

'Richard Tute for Ryddyng of Robyll from the Same Wall' 10d.

(Exeter City Archives, Receiver's Account Roll [RAR] 1530-1531, m. 5d.)

Richard Tute was involved in much of the work on the wall at this period, some years earlier (referred to as Towte) he had been paid for similar work in rebuilding the wall near West gate (RAR 1527-1528, m. 4d.). Additionally there was further work done on the walls in Friernhay (/Frerenhay) in 1527-28, and near the church of All Hallows on the Walls and, again, in Fryrenhay in 1539-1540 (RAR 1539-40, m. 3d.). Friernhay is a specific toponym, applying only to the area within the course

of the wall and the present Bartholomew Street West; it may not have reached the south-western length of wall beyond Snayle Tower, so references in the accounts to this area can only really refer to the sections here numbered 14 and 15. The section under consideration here is 22m in length, slightly less than the 76 feet (23.16m), but the later work in the wall to the north-east could easily account for the loss of some of this build, is consistent in material with work of the early 16th century, and (with the exception of the 19th-century wall to the north-east) is the only candidate for identification with Richard Tute's work in Friernhay since in the remaining lengths of wall there is not a free section of 76 feet available, outside of more ancient sections of wall.

Section 14.3: (14.5m.) Well coursed volcanic blocks, courses of variable width, some courses and occasional individual blocks very deep (Pls 4&5). The stone is predominantly pale grey in colour, some of it is brownish; individual blocks are weathered, especially towards the base; hard white mortar; slates used as levelling in joints. A chamfered plinth in poor condition survives at the north-east end of the section (Pl. 4), but from c.4.5m. into the build the plinth is removed and replaced with underpinning of breccia and brick. Towards the south-west end of the build the plinth probably stepped down (with the natural slope of the ground) as good facework survives here to a lower level than that of the surviving plinth; there are also some very large blocks in the facework at this point. The plinth and some of the facework are probably Roman, fulfilling some of the criteria for the identification of Roman work described elsewhere (Blaylock 1993(a), 2-3): large squared but weathered blocks; uniform colour and texture; a rough plinth with a weathered chamfer of a variable angle. Some of the upper courses may be a later rebuilding, incorporating reused stone; but if this is so it is not easy to see a break, or set limits on the original and later builds. One course of masonry at the top is rebuilt to support the granite base for the railings of Friernhay yard.

Section 14.4: (6.8m.) This section is essentially a continuation of the previous build, but with extensive repairs to the facework giving it a different appearance (Pl. 6). The additional masonry comprises irregularly coursed work of small volcanic stone, some of it veined in texture; breccia (15%); plus some chert and brick. The coursed and uniform volcanic blockwork of the previous build rides over 14.4, and some continuous courses can be traced running through. The composition and characteristics of the two builds are very different, although in any given area it is difficult to trace a clear division between them. In other words, 14.4 is a patching and underbuilding of build 14.3. A projecting course of rubble work at the base of the wall may have been constructed in imitation of the plinth. The presence of breccia and brick together here suggest a late post-medieval date for these repairs.

Section 14.5: (5.4m.) Irregularly coursed volcanic stone with some veined textured stone, all quite uniform in texture and colour (dark purple), some Triassic sandstone as an occasional extra. Putlog holes, as well as the composition suggest a late-medieval date. No plinth or other lower limit visible, perhaps buried by raised ground level (as the plinth, where last seen in section 14.3) was stepping down. Abutted by 14.4 (Pl. 7); and by 14.6 (Pl. 8). The junction of 14.5 with 14.6 coincides with a change in the angle of the wall (Fig. 2, and Pl. 8), the junction is awkward as if something has fallen away at this point, and there is some patching of the facework with unsquared veined volcanic masonry to repair the raggedness of the join. The facework is abutted by a buttress of breccia ashlar at 1.10-2.00m. from the north-east end of the build. It is constructed with a sloping top and a chamfered string course or plinth on three faces at present ground level (the uncertainty over ancient ground level in this area, cf. above on the plinth of the wall itself, makes it likely that the buttress continues down for another stage). This is a late medieval or early post-medieval addition. A profile was published by Burrow (1977, Fig. 12 [All Hallows]). The top of the buttress was rebuilt in 1990 (after the photographs of Pls 7-8 were taken).

Section 14.6: Coursed facework predominantly of breccia blocks, but with some volcanic trap, Triassic sandstone, plus two blocks of hard white limestone (Bath or Portland) and one of Ham Hill stone (Pl. 9). These accidentals suggest a later date than the overall appearance of the build, so perhaps 18th century in date. There is a change in the coursing and style of the facework, 2.5m. short of 14.7, from the mixed composition described above to wholly breccia facework, which is noticeably less weathered and whose courses do not fully align with those of the rest of the section. This may be a separate build, or may represent protection by a structure against the face of the wall (a predecessor to Barbican Steps?).

Section 14.7: (5.5m.) The wall is obscured by Barbican Steps (Pl. 9); the structure of which is later than the railings of Friernhay yard, therefore mid-late 19th century.

Description II: Hillyfield House

This section is 41m. in length and contains interesting and ancient masonry. The main build of the section (15.3) has two ancient buttresses, towards the south west end of the section, and one modern buttress at the north-east end, whose construction in 1979-80 provided the occasion for the photographic recording of this area (Pl. 10).

Section 15.1: (2m.) Modern entrance to Hillyfield House garden, and obscured by steps (Pl. 10).

Section 15.2: (5.5m.) A section of rebuilt wall containing mainly re-used material (Triassic sandstone and volcanic trap), but with some exotics: a greenish-grey ?York stone, and several early-looking bricks. The work abuts section 15.3 to the south west (Pl. 10); probably 18th or 19th century, coeval with new building at Bartholomew Terrace? The parapet is a separate, later, build containing breccia (as is all of the parapet of section 15).

Section 15.3: (33.5m.) To an extent this is a composite of several builds; the wall here is generally obscured by climbing plants (wisteria, so a little more accessible in winter than summer). The general character of the wall, however, is uniform enough to warrant its description as one, although patched. The build is punctuated by buttresses at xx (the modern one), xx and xxm. from its north-east end, which sub-divide the section into convenient parts: (a) c. 4.5m. of well-coursed large Triassic sandstone blocks of varying depth; poorly jointed in that the style of masonry pays little attention to vertical bonding of the blocks (Pls 10-11); parapet rebuilt, as above. The build ends in the modern buttress (Pls 11 & 12), but the photograph of 1980 shows a break in the masonry in the wall now obscured (Pl. 10). (b) 10-11m. to the south west of the buttress is completely obscured by wisteria, when the fabric is visible again it is of broadly similar composition, although with rather more volcanic trap than in sub-division (a) (Pls 13 & 14). The second buttress (Pl. 15) is composed of 60% Triassic sandstone plus volcanic trap and breccia, the topmost courses are rebuilt in a variety of exotic stones. (c) Beyond the second buttress the facework is still predominantly of Triassic sandstone, but is heavily rebuilt or patched and contains an appreciable quantity of breccia (Pls 15 & 18). The distinction between the facework and the rebuilt parapet is also less clear-cut here than elsewhere. (d) The third buttress is mainly of breccia, with a weathered plinth of volcanic trap (Pl. 16). The top has been rebuilt recently; one block of Bath stone on a quoin (pl. 18) suggests that the whole buttress was rebuilt, perhaps in the 19th century. (e) For the final stretch of this section (Pls 17 & 19) two builds are distinguished, again representing rebuilds of a common original build: the first 3.5m. is mainly of Triassic sandstone but has some breccia mixed in; the second stretch, also 3.5m., is of roughly coursed work of volcanic trap, breccia and Triassic sandstone running as far as the modern brick buttress on the site of the Snayle Tower (16.1, below). Immediately short of the brick buttress is a chase in the wall face representing the rear wall of the 19th-century buildings of Paradise Place (cf. the O.S. Town Plan at 1:500 of 1876).

If the widespread use of Triassic sandstone in this stretch of wall (and the rather ragged masonry style seen in the 'purest' section of facework at the north-east end) are a reliable indicator of date, the original build of this section ought to lie in the early medieval period, perhaps in the 12th or 13th centuries (Blaylock 1993(a), 1-2; 3); it has even been suggested that the use of this stone in some areas might have a pre-conquest origin (*ibid.*, 13). Of the builds described above only the first, (a), may be undisturbed masonry of this date, *in situ*. The remaining sections are all affected by patching or rebuilding to some extent. Some, at least, might be attributable to the Civil War, when an artillery battery was sited on and earth mound piled up over the Snayle Tower; and, no doubt, other alteration and repair work was necessary (Stoyle 1990, 14-15). Still more must relate to the 18th and 19th centuries when the present buildings on Bartholomew Terrace were constructed (DoE 1974, 13).

Description III: Snayle Tower and the wall to the south west

Section 16.1: (5m.) The site of the Snayle Tower, a structure presumably erected in the 13th century, along with the other semi-circular bastions on the circuit of the walls. The tower is shown by numerous cartographic sources of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries; the date of its removal is not precisely known. The tower is described in terms that suggest that it was still standing by Jenkins in 1806 (1806, 18); but by February 1813 the site was described as the '...spot where the Snayle Tower formerly stood.' (Exeter City Archives, Chamber Minute Book 17, 162; 15.02.1813). No specific expenditure for the removal of the tower has been traced in the city archives. Despite this categorical evidence the tower continued to be depicted on engraved maps of the city until 1835; although it does not appear on two of the most reliable, and therefore key, maps of the early 19th century: those of Hayman (Jenkins 1806, frontispiece) and of Coldridge (1819).

Given the history of the structure just outlined, the fabric which survived on the site of the Snayle Tower, and which was recorded in the photographs of 1980 (Pls 21 & 22), must have dated to the early 19th century, or later, i.e. after the removal of the bastion. Some time later a small terrace of houses was built at right angles to the wall, butting against it, known as Paradise Place or Ash Grove. This was demolished in the 1950s or '60s. When the present facework was under construction in 1980 a trench was dug at the base of the wall on the site of the tower; although this gave useful archaeological observations at a level beneath (and regarding a period earlier than) the city wall (Bedford and Salvatore 1992, 88-90), it showed that, below ground, the only fabric to survive was the brick foundations and partially-upstanding walls of the Paradise Place Houses (cf. a brick arch visible at the extreme left hand side of the photograph in Pl.22).

The work of 1980 involved the removal of the greater part of the facework and its replacement with two massive sloping buttresses of brick (Pl. 20), and new brick facework between (and a little new stone facework at the base of the wall). Extensive rebuilding was done top the parapet at the same time, both in this section, and to that to the south west (Pl. 23).

Section 16.2: (1.5m.) A short length of facework of large squared breccia blocks, rather weathered, plus some volcanic trap and Triassic sandstone fragments at the west end (Pls 22 & 23). This might be a remnant of fabric associated with the Snayle Tower (in which case it might date to the early post-medieval period or later), or more probably it represents a part of the infill of the site of the tower after its removal in the early 19th century. If the latter is so then the eastern limit of the build may coincide with the limit of the tower.

Section 16.3: (8m.) Remnants of good-quality medieval type facework of squared volcanic blocks in regular courses; heavily patched with small volcanic rubble facework of a late date (?re-using core stone plus occasional exotics such as South Devon Limestone and beach pebbles) (Pls 21-23). Survives as runs of blocks in single courses, occasionally more. Presumably 14th or 15th century in date.

Section 16.4: (24m.) The wall continues in equally good-quality squared blockwork to that in the 'background' of section 16.3, distinguished only in that it is rather better preserved (thus a lot less rubble patching to distract the eye), and in that there is a high incidence of white Triassic sandstone in the later section (Pls 21 & 22; this could have been re-used from another, earlier, build of this section). Three levels of putlogs. Presumably of similar date to that suggested for 16.3. Later alterations in the shape of a rebuilt parapet and a crude niche with rendered inner faces, of obscure purpose, below 7 Bartholomew Terrace (Pl. 21); a flight of steps is shown on the large-scale town plan of the O.S. (1:500; 1876) at this point, although it is difficult to see how they might have related to this feature.

Conclusions

This section of the city wall, in one of the less-frequented areas of the city, contains a representative collection of builds and fabrics, typical of the wide span of styles and periods represented in the wall as a whole: One candidate for Roman work (14.3); considerable evidence for work in the post-

conquest period (if not just before), in the shape of large-scale use of Triassic sandstone in sections 15 and 16; one of the rare opportunities in the study of the wall convincingly to relate an entry in the rich documentation of expenditure on the wall to a specific section of the fabric (14.2); as well as a representative selection of later builds and repairs; all are worthwhile observations resulting from the work reported on here.

It may be noted that it has proved possible to write and illustrate a report on the structural history of this section of wall without the illustrative aid of a drawing, although this is made much easier by the general nature of the construction in this area: one of sequential rebuilds rather than a palimpsest of patches and repairs (even so the section 15.3 is difficult to describe clearly in this way without a drawing). It should also be emphasised that the act of drawing (or the close examination that accompanies it) often gives rise to new observations which are not made during less detailed examinations; such detailed observation has not been carried out here. Nevertheless the process of observation and survey reported on here represents a rapid (and relatively cheap) method of attaining an illustrated description of wall fabric, albeit built up over a number of years, from disparate observations.

Acknowledgements

The photographic and survey work which has provided the basis of this report was carried out by J.R.L.Thorp, P.J.Weddell and D.B.Sinclair for sections 15 and 16, during repair works to the wall in 1980. The similar exercise on section 14, in Friernhay, was done by the present author during repointing in Spring 1990. I am grateful to P.J.Weddell and R.W.Parker for discussion of aspects of the work. The illustrations for this report were prepared by G.Young (photographic printing) and Sarnia Blackmore (line drawings) and Tom Dixon (photographs and production).

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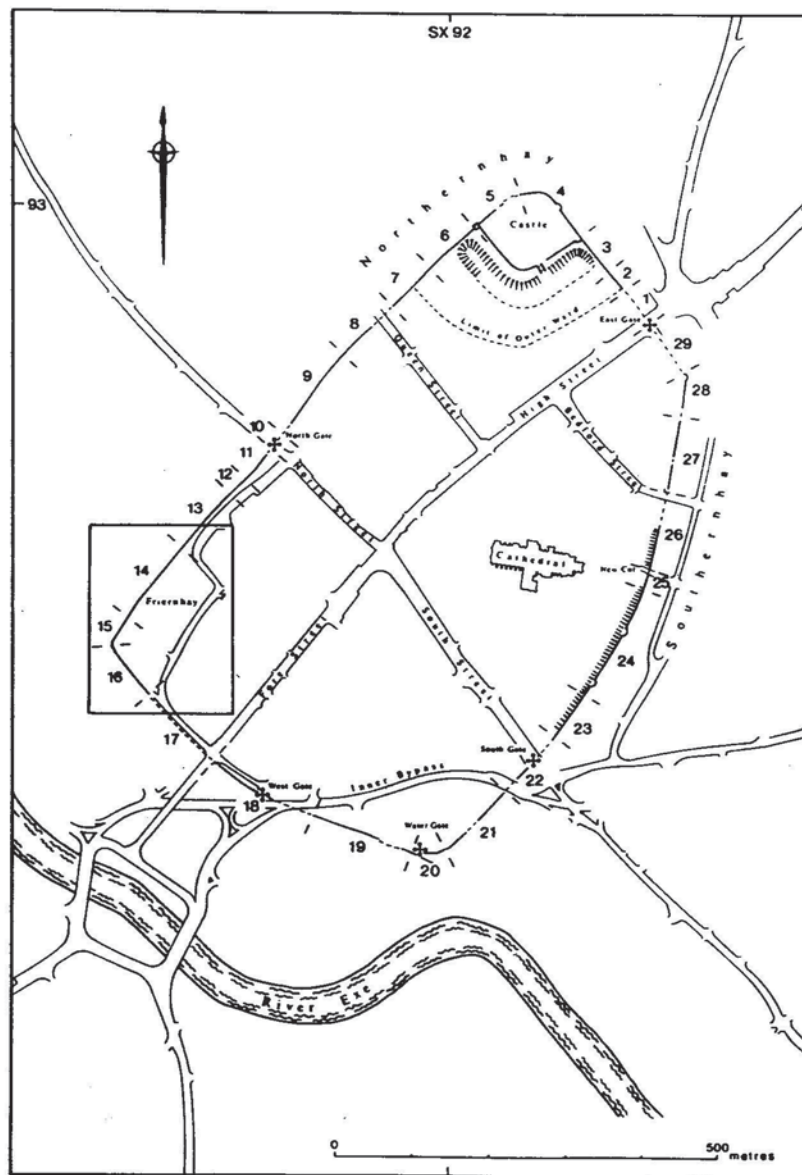


Fig. 1 General map of Exeter, showing city wall and the numbered sections of the gazetteer.

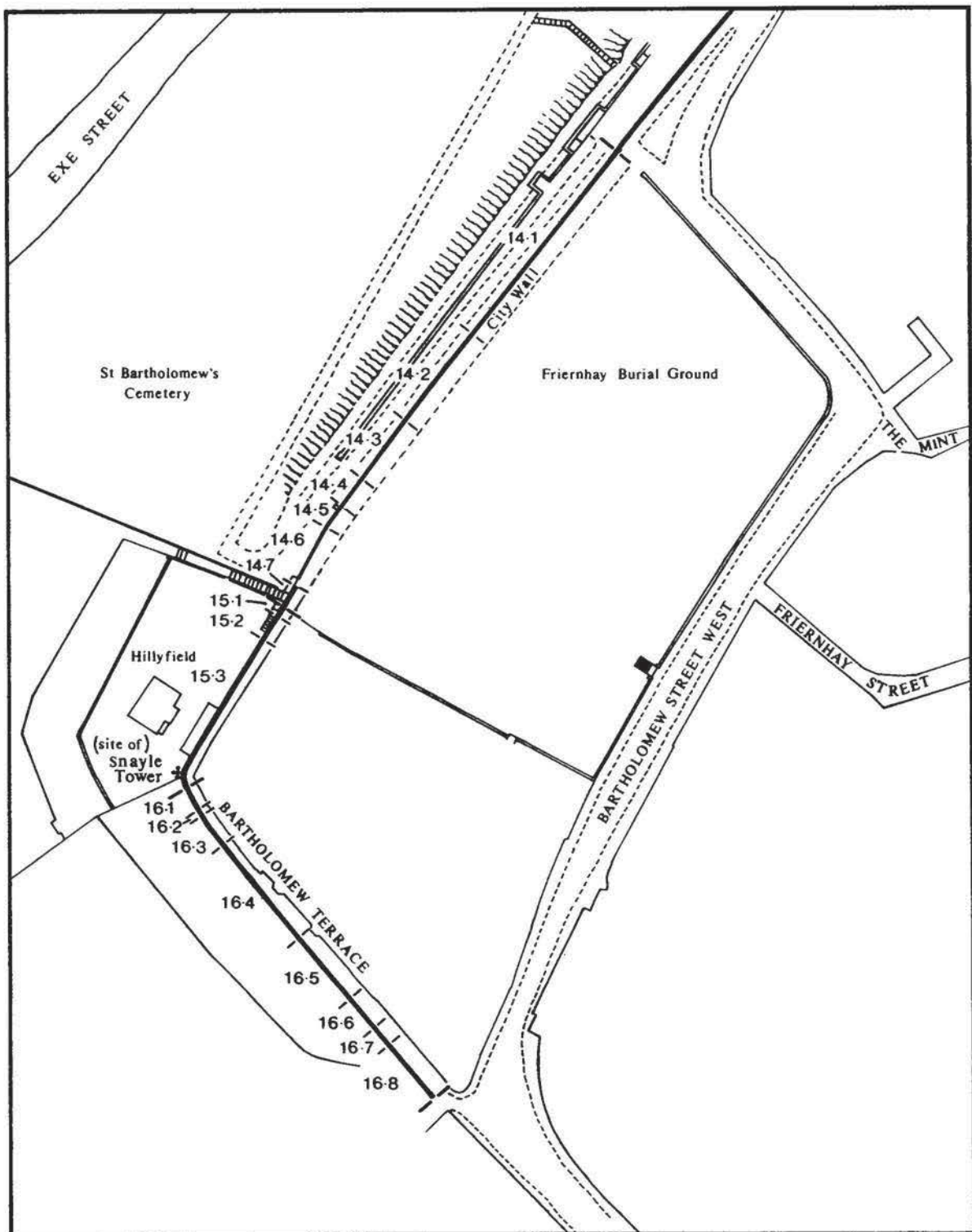


Fig. 2 Map of Friernhay and Bartholomew cemetery, based on O.S. 1:500 plan (1876).



Plate 1 Section 14.2, central part looking east in 1994, showing characteristic masonry style.



Plate 2 Section 14.2, from south-west end, looking east (repairs in progress, April 1990).



Plate 3 Junction of sections 14.2 and 14.3, looking south.

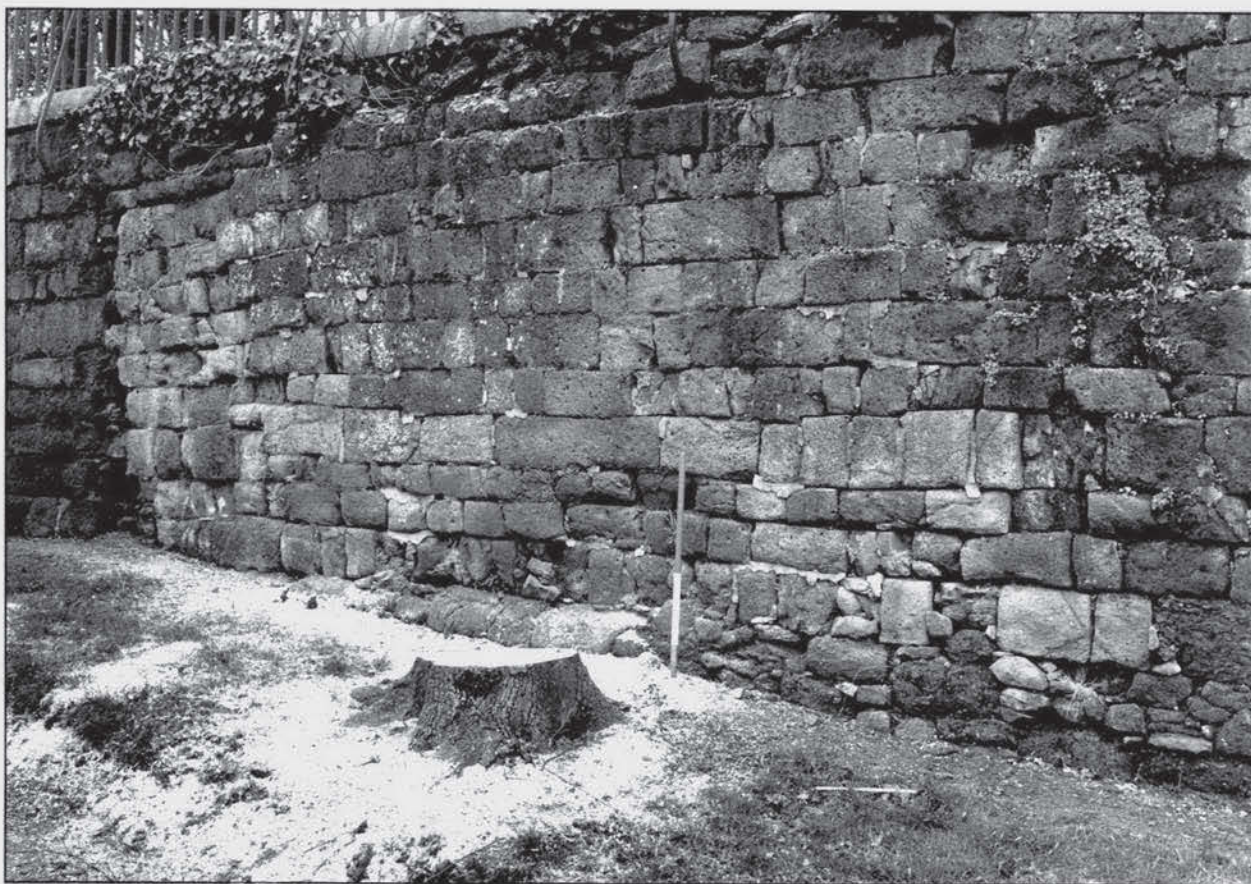


Plate 4 Section 14.3, north-east, note weathered plinth, looking east.



Plate 5 Section 14.3, south-west part, looking south.



Plate 6 Section 14.4, looking south.



Plate 7 Section 14.5, looking south, with buttress.



Plate 8 Section 14.5, looking east, note junction with 14.6 to right of picture.



Plate 9 Section 14.6, looking south.



Plate 10 Sections 15.2 and 15.3 in 1980, prior to the building of a new buttress, looking east.



Plate 11 Section 15.3 in 1994 with brick buttress.



Plate 12 General view of brick buttress in 1994.



Plate 13 Facework between the first and second buttresses, below 2-3 Bartholomew Terrace.



Plate 14 Facework between the first and second buttresses, below 3 Bartholomew Terrace, with the second buttress in the background.



Plate 15 Elevation view of the second buttress.



Plate 16 The third buttress and facework to the south west, oblique view looking east.



Plate 17 General view of the third buttress and facework of section 15.3 to either side, looking east.



Plate 18 General view of the facework to the north-east of the third buttress, looking south.



Plate 19 Section 15.3, southwestern extremity and brick buttress on the site of Snayle Tower.

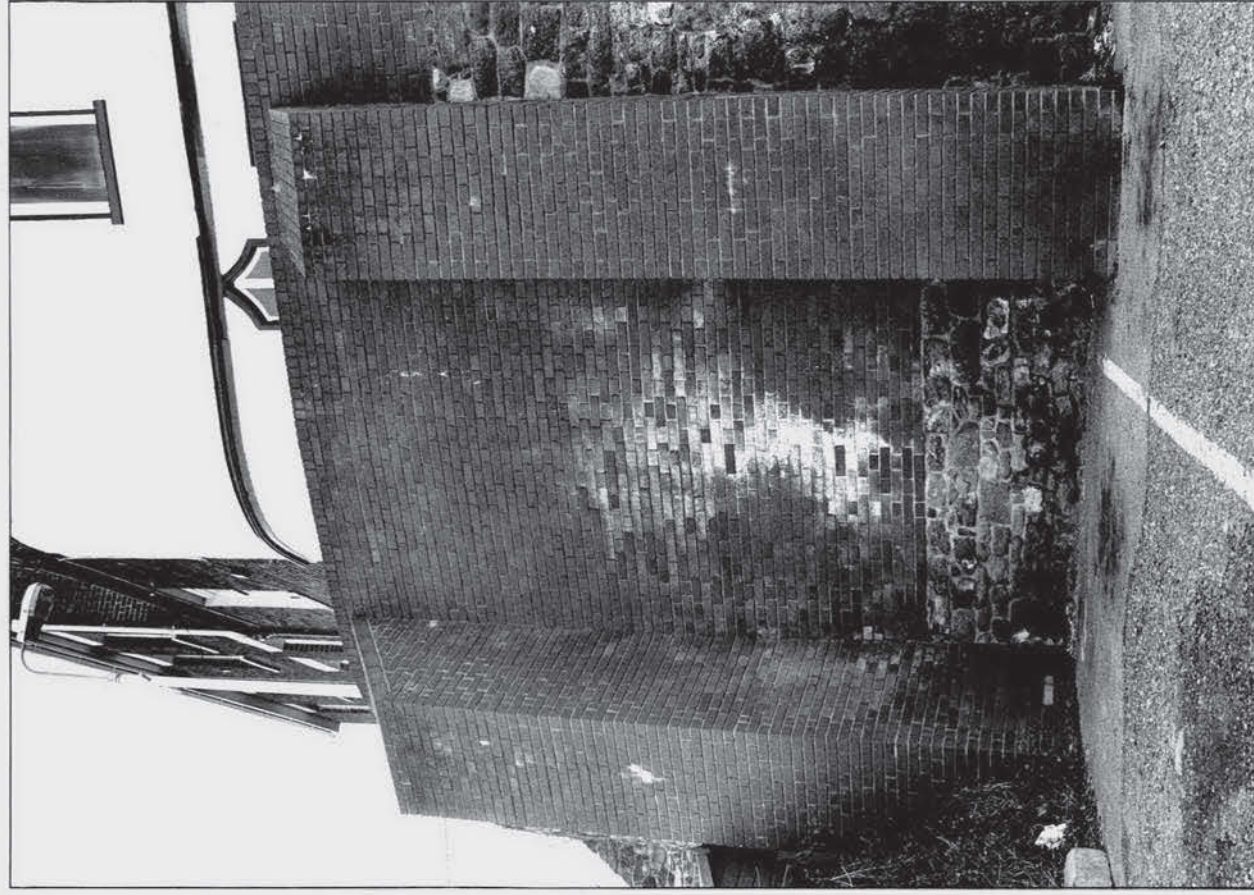


Plate 20 Two brick buttresses and intervening facework on the site of Snayle Tower, constructed 1980, photographed 1994.



Plate 21 Sections 16.4 (foreground)-16.1 before repairs in 1990, looking north.



Plate 22 Sections 16.1-16.4 before repairs in 1980, looking north-east.



Plate 23 Sections 16.1-16.3 in 1994.