

VIII.—THE TOWN WALL OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE: CONSOLIDATION AND EXCAVATION IN 1968

Barbara Harbottle

SUMMARY—The first part of this report is devoted to a reconsideration of the western re-entrant, since it now seems clear that this angle reflected a change of policy in the course of building the town wall from north to south, and that it was not, as has been suggested, the junction of a new extension to the north with an old line of defence to the south. There follows a discussion of the date of completion of the wall as a whole, probably not much earlier than the middle of the fourteenth century, and a summary of what is known about the character and later history of the south-west sector. The newly preserved stretch of wall, which shows three or four periods of construction, is described in the second part, and the final part covers the excavation, which produced a partial section of the wall and a set of dimensions for the structure for which there is no precise parallel in Newcastle.

In the spring of 1968 the Ministry of Public Building and Works consolidated that stretch of town wall which lies immediately south of Forth Street (NZ 24836380), and financed an excavation of the wall north of Close Gate (NZ 24876363). Since both points lie on the south-west sector of the town's defences it seemed desirable to record the two activities in a single report.

The History (fig. 1)

The stretch of wall to be considered lay between the western re-entrant angle on the north and the Tyne on the south. On the wall just west of the angle was Denton or Nevil Tower, and just south of it a postern, sometimes called the White Friar Postern. Some 200 yards nearer the river, at a point where the gentle downhill slope becomes a precipitous

1:3 drop was White Friar Tower, and across the Close at the bottom lay Close Gate. From there the wall ran to the "Riverside" tower.

Re-entrant angles were tactically inexpedient and therefore unusual in medieval defences. That the town wall of Newcastle should have two requires explanation and, though both probably represented alterations to the original line of the wall while building was in progress, the reasons for the two alterations were different, and only the western re-entrant will be discussed here.

There can be little doubt that the wall was built from the north side of the medieval town southwards, and that it was being constructed along both the east and west perimeters at much the same time. On the east side some sort of defence existed in 1298 near the house of the Austin Friars,¹ and in 1300 the mayor and burgesses were planning to extend the wall through the precinct of the first Carmelite house on Wall Knoll.² On the west side in 1280 the Dominican friars obtained a licence to make a gate through the new wall,³ and by 1290 the foundations of the wall had been begun through the grounds of the hospital of St. Mary,⁴ whose enclosure lay on the south side of Westgate between West Spital Tower on the west and Denton Tower on the east. The western re-entrant was therefore being approached from the west.

There was then a pause of some twenty years until 1311, when some local people complained against the proposed line of the wall, suggesting that the town would be safer and its inhabitants less inconvenienced if the wall and ditch passed "by the mill of the hospital of Our Lady in Westegate", and the king ordered an enquiry.⁵ The sheriff of Northumberland, who conducted the enquiry, accepted the new line for the reasons given, and added that the wall should be made by

¹ *Cal. Inq. Misc.* I, 632.

² *Northumbrian Petitions*, ed. C. M. Fraser (S.S. 176, 1961), 19-20.

³ *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1272-1281*, 397.

⁴ *Ibid.* 1281-1292, 388.

⁵ *Cal. Chancery Warrants* I, 341.

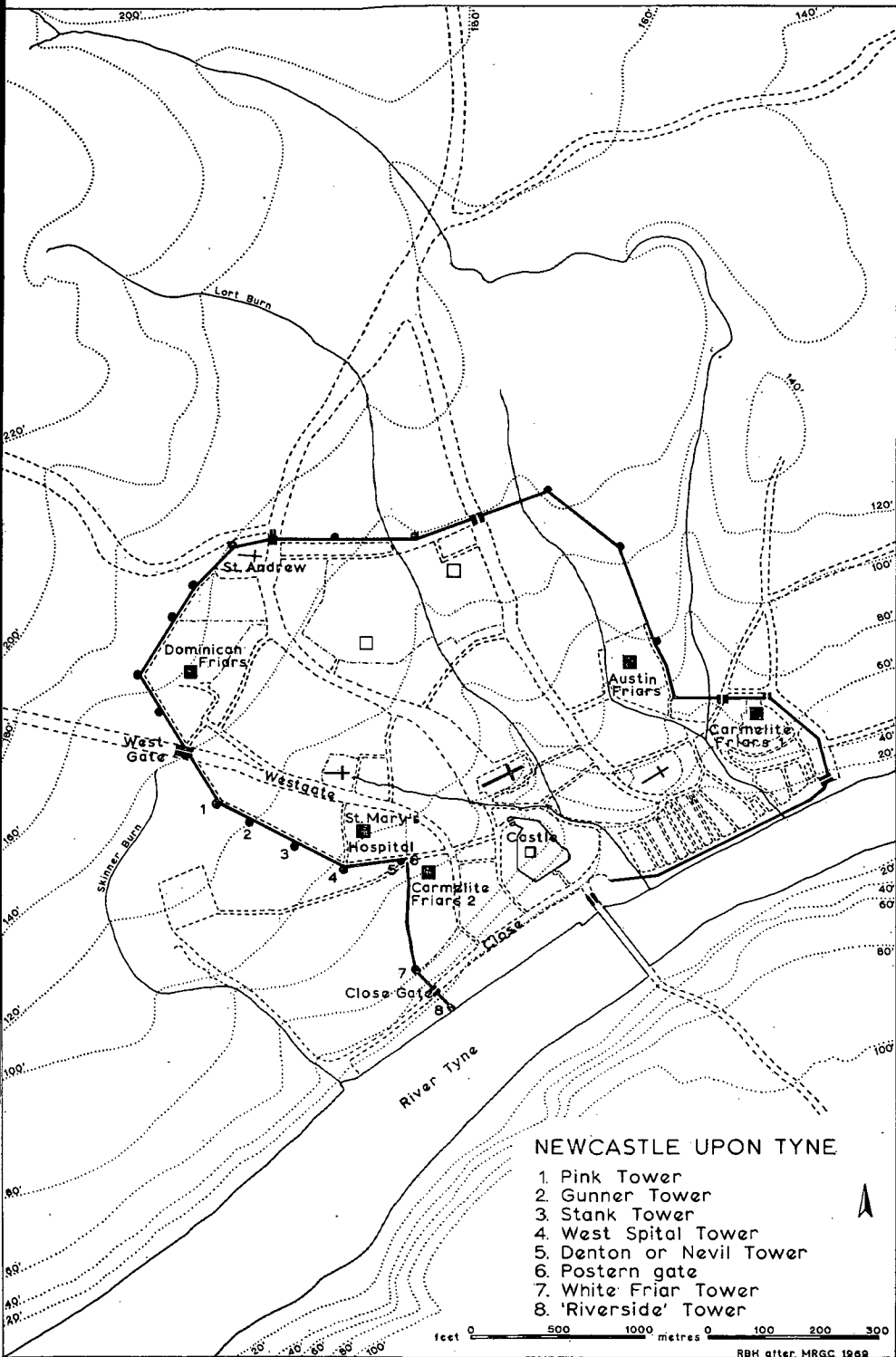


FIG. 1

the mill and "thence directly to the Tyne" so that more of the town would be enclosed.⁶ On 14 August of that year a mandate to this effect was duly sent to the mayor and burgesses of Newcastle, with the further comment that the wall and ditch would thus "include less space".⁷

That the re-entrant represented the change of policy forced by the events of 1311 seems virtually certain. The report of the enquiry and the royal mandate which followed both implied a major alteration in the direction of the wall, and the only such alteration east of West Spital Tower occurred at the re-entrant. The siting of the postern so close to Denton Tower supports this view since it was unnecessary and extravagant to have both, and if the re-entrant had been part of the original plan the separate functions of these buildings would surely have been combined in one structure, as at Wall Knoll Tower. Finally, there can be little doubt that the wall, as built south of the angle, was that stipulated in the mandate. According to Bourne, the mill of St. Mary's hospital stood on the *Hoga*, the bank above Close Gate,⁸ and so presumably in the vicinity of White Friar Tower. The south-easterly direction of the wall from this point would have brought it, as required, direct to the water of Tyne.

There remain two questions to be answered, first why for twenty years building did not proceed beyond the precincts of the hospital, and secondly why the townspeople objected to the original plan for the wall and suggested a new one. There is no obvious solution to the first problem. Perhaps the rumblings of local discontent had been heard in Newcastle long before they reached the ears of the king, perhaps the mayor and burgesses had chosen to concentrate their efforts on the construction of the south-east sector of the town wall,⁹ either because they were held up in the

⁶ *Cal. Inq. Misc.* II, 24.

⁷ *Cal. Close Rolls 1307-1313*, 369.

⁸ Henry Bourne, *The History of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1736), 127.

⁹ See above p. 72 for 1298 and 1300. By 1307 the wall had been taken through the precincts of the Carmelite friary I, *Cal. Chancery Warrants* I, 263.

south-west or for some other unknown reason. It is possible that the outbreak of war with Scotland in 1296 was the cause of the delay, but it is impossible to do more than suggest the answer to this question.

To decide why the new line of the wall southwards from the re-entrant should be preferable to the old is difficult without knowing the initial proposal which gave rise to the petition, and it thus seems worth making a guess at the original line, based on commonsense, the topography and the direction of the wall west of the re-entrant. The plan of the mayor and burgesses must surely have been to enclose as much as they could of the built-up part of the town within a line which was both strategically sited and yet, for reasons of cost, as short as possible. A study of the line of the wall from West Gate to Denton Tower in relation to the streets and contours shows, first, that it lay south of Westgate and therefore included the houses and the hospital of St. Mary along this, one of the three most important streets in the town, but excluded ground which was still open in 1770.¹⁰ Secondly, it becomes obvious that the wall is sited on the higher ground between the Skinner Burn and the burn which flows north of Westgate and down the Side to the Lort Burn. It thus seems likely that the changes in the direction of the wall at Pink Tower and West Spital Tower were designed to keep it running centrally down the gradual slope of this spur, and if the line of the wall between West Spital and Denton Towers is projected eastwards it reaches a point on the west curtain of the castle, which occupies the extreme end of the spur. That it might have been the original intention to continue the wall to the castle seems a distinct possibility, since the castle would thus be incorporated in the new defensive system instead of being relegated to a passive role inside it, and the amount of new building required would be at least slightly reduced. The castles of Carlisle,¹¹

¹⁰ Hutton's map.

¹¹ Mid. sixteenth-century plan reproduced in *MPBW Guide to Carlisle Castle*; plan of 1684-5 in *CW* 1, XIII (1893-94), opp. 172; *A.J.* 115 (1958), 243.

Durham,¹² (in the first stage of the walls), and probably Alnwick,¹³ to cite only local examples, were used in this way, although it must be admitted that their situations would have made them difficult to ignore.

While this theory is open to a number of objections,—for example if the wall were to be continued from the castle to the river it would still be difficult to avoid having a re-entrant angle,—such a line from West Gate eastwards would conform to the criteria set out above until it reached the re-entrant. Beyond that point the wall would still be strategically sited, but it would have to be constructed through the built-up area so excluding the property of some people, e.g. the Carmelite friary II,¹⁴ necessitating the demolition of the houses of others, and surely giving rise to more than the usual volume of complaints. The re-direction of the wall southwards from Denton Tower would have met such complaints, and conformed to the requirements laid down in 1311. As finally built it enclosed an area larger than that suggested above, an area which was presumably fairly densely occupied, with the Carmelites' precinct in the west, the streets of Back Row and Bailiffgate in the east, and the Close to the south. And the wall and ditch on this new line would have included "less space", if one may interpret this to mean less space covered with buildings.

While it seems likely that the construction of the defences southwards from the re-entrant was begun in or soon after 1311, it is not possible to say in which year it was completed. The defences consisted of the wall, with its gates and towers, and the ditch, and there is reason to suppose that in this sector the ditch was finished first. In c. 1316 the burgesses of Newcastle petitioned the king to remit the annual town rent because of the expenses they had incurred in enclosing all

¹² Plan based on O.S. map in *V.C.H. Durham*, III, 92, and *A.A.* 4, X (1933), opp. 132.

¹³ M. R. G. Conzen, *Alnwick, Northumberland. A Study in Town-Plan Analysis* (The Institute of British Geographers, Publ. No. 27, 1960), fig. 5 and p. 41.

¹⁴ *A.A.* 4, XLVI (1968), 165, 170.

the town with a ditch and most of it with a wall.¹⁵ Years, however, were to pass before the wall was completed, and licences for murage, of which the earliest was granted in 1265,¹⁶ were being constantly renewed throughout the first half of the fourteenth century.¹⁷ As late as 1341 the king granted a licence for a further seven years because he had learned that "the works for enclosing the town were not finished",¹⁸ although they were apparently strong enough to withstand a Scottish assault,¹⁹ and he repeated this grant in 1348.²⁰ He was still anxious about the state of the defences in 1350, but on that occasion expressed concern over the "many defects" in the walling²¹ and, while this could be interpreted as either incomplete work or a need for repair, most subsequent licences for murage were explicitly intended to raise money for repairs,²² from which it may be inferred that the whole circuit of the wall was probably standing by about the middle of the century. The only certain evidence for the date of erection of the stretch from the western re-entrant to the river lies in the petition of c. 1333 for compensation for land given up for the wall and ditch, and without knowing the location of the property of all the petitioners it is possible to say only that by that date the defences had been constructed through the precinct of the Carmelite Friars.²³

It would be fair to ask why the ditch (or the King's Dykes, as it was called) was finished first, and the completion of the wall so delayed. While it is probable that a ditch would have been planned as an integral part of the town's

¹⁵ Constance M. Fraser, *The Town Ditch of Newcastle upon Tyne*, A.A. 4, XXXIX (1961), 382-3.

¹⁶ *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1258-1266*, 415.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 1301-1307, 259 (1304); 1307-1313, 200 (1309), 359 (1311); 1313-1317, 516 (1316); 1321-1324, 114 (1322); 1330-1334, 268 (1327, 1332).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 1340-1343, 271, and *Cal. Close Rolls 1343-1346*, 50-51.

¹⁹ Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, Vol. III, 1339-1342 (Brussels, 1867), 437-9.

²⁰ *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1348-1350*, 127.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 556.

²² *Ibid.* 1364-1367, 341; 1370-1374, 154, 326; 1381-1385, 485.

²³ *Northumbrian Petitions op. cit.*, 197-8.

defences, there is no mention of one before 1311,²⁴ and indeed the interval of thirty years between 1280, when Edward I allowed the Dominicans to have a postern through the new wall²⁵ and 1312, when Edward II granted them a licence for a drawbridge over the "new dyke",²⁶ indicates that the ditch was begun much later than the wall. On this evidence Dr. Fraser reasonably suggests that work was actually started on the King's Dykes in 1311/1312, and started as a direct result of the Scottish invasions of that period²⁷ since a ditch would be the quickest and cheapest line of defence to construct in an emergency. Why the Scots raids of 1296 and 1297 into the Tyne valley²⁸ did not frighten the inhabitants of Newcastle into action earlier remains a mystery.

Danger may have been a spur but it must also have been a delaying factor, and it can scarcely be doubted that the Scottish wars of the first half of the fourteenth century would have increased the problems inherent in the construction of a major work such as the town wall. Almost every year from 1311 to 1323 the Scots invaded and harried Northumberland, and these raids were repeated in 1327,²⁹ 1333,³⁰ 1341³¹ and finally in 1346, when David II of Scotland met with a crushing defeat at the battle of Neville's Cross outside Durham.³² Mr. Middlebrook has described the disturbing effect that the passage of English armies would have had on everyday life in Newcastle,³³ and there must have been times when it was difficult, if not impossible, to obtain the skilled

²⁴ *Cal. Close Rolls 1307-1313*, 369.

²⁵ *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1272-1281*, 397.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 1307-1313, 461.

²⁷ *A.A.* 4, XXXIX, *op. cit.*, 383.

²⁸ *N.C.H.* X, 77-78.

²⁹ G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce* (London, 1965), 281-3, 336-53, 356-60.

³⁰ *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. J. Stevenson (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1839), 272; Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, I, ed. H. T. Riley (R.S., London, 1863), 196; *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa*, II, ed. E. A. Bond (R.S., London, 1867), 369.

³¹ *Melsa*, *op. cit.*, III (1868), 49; Froissart, *op. cit.*, 437-9.

³² *Letters from Northern Registers 1265-1415*, ed. James Raine (R.S., London, 1873), 387-9.

³³ S. Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1951), 23.

labour and building stone required to complete the wall, not least because of a shortage of money. The destruction of crops, livestock and property by the enemy, and the practice of the men of Northumberland, as elsewhere, of paying large sums for temporary truces meant that the northern counties were soon poverty-stricken, and as early as 1313 Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland were exempted from taxation until the end of Edward II's reign.³⁴ No port could thrive when its hinterland was impoverished, and when trade fell off so would the murage, since this tax was levied on goods brought into the town for sale. It also appears that the money thus collected was not always spent on the purpose for which it was intended, though embezzlement was not, of course, confined to times of war. In 1335 the king appointed three new collectors of the murage, adding that for certain reasons he did not wish the previous collectors "to intermeddle further in the collection",³⁵ and he followed this up in 1339 with a commission of enquiry into "alleged misappropriation of the money levied by the collectors of the murage".³⁶

When at last completed, the defences occupied a strip of ground approximately 100 feet wide. This figure is based on the claim for compensation made in c. 1333, when all the claimants stated they had lost land of varying lengths but of the common width of 6 perches,³⁷ a perch in modern terms being 5½ yards. Within this strip space was presumably allotted to a lane or open space along the inner face of the wall, the wall itself, which varied from 7 to 10 feet in thickness (see below, pp. 88, 90), the ditch, said to have been 22 yards wide³⁸ and 15 feet deep,³⁹ and some open ground

³⁴ For a detailed survey of the effect of the war on the northern counties see Jean Scammell, Robert I and the North of England, *English Historical Review*, 73 (1958), 385-403.

³⁵ *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1334-1338*, 175-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 1338-1340, 276.

³⁷ *Northumbrian Petitions*, *op. cit.*, 197-8.

³⁸ John Brand, *The History of Newcastle upon Tyne*, I (London, 1789), 6.

³⁹ Sheriton Holmes, *The Walls of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, A.A. 2, XVIII (1895-96), 8. The evidence for this depth is unknown, since the ditch was

beyond the outer lip of the ditch. It has been suggested that there may well have been no berm between the ditch and the wall,⁴⁰ and though there is no evidence for an actual lane within this sector of the wall,⁴¹ (unlike other parts of Newcastle), it is unlikely that buildings would have encroached upon it between the postern and just north of Close Gate since the wall here ran through the friary precinct and the gardens on the bank above the Close.

Since the towers and gates on this stretch of wall have long been demolished a description of them is necessarily based on nineteenth-century comments and illustrations. Denton Tower was semi-circular in plan, like almost all the towers on the town wall of Newcastle, and resembled the towers on the western part of the wall in having one vaulted room on the ground floor and a platform above.⁴² The postern, as shown in a water-colour of 1847, consisted of a passage through the wall a few feet south of the re-entrant, with a small square turret projecting from the curtain on its south side.⁴³ This turret is not shown on the perhaps unreliable reconstruction of the postern as it might have been in 1600, and while the passage must have had wooden doors the statement that it also had a portcullis cannot now be proved.⁴⁴ White Friar Tower was unique among the Newcastle towers in having an octagonal basement, with a circular room on the first floor,⁴⁵ and an external flight of stairs against its north-east side to give access to the wall walk.⁴⁶ Although the interval between this and Denton

largely filled up by the late eighteenth century (Brand, *op. cit.*, I, 6), and Holmes' drawing in the Town Wall of Newcastle, in Gallowgate, *A.A.* 2, XVIII, 112, does not show a full section of the ditch.

⁴⁰ Parker Brewis, *The West Walls of Newcastle upon Tyne. Between Durham and Ever Towers*, *A.A.* 4, XI (1934), 11-12.

⁴¹ Eighteenth-century maps of Newcastle by Corbridge (1723), Hutton (1770), etc.

⁴² *The Walls of Newcastle upon Tyne*, illustrated from drawings by George Bouchier Richardson, ed. C. H. Hunter Blair, *A.A.* 4, XIV (1937), pl. XIII, fig. 1; *A.A.* 2, XVIII, 9.

⁴³ *A.A.* 4, XIV, pl. XIII, fig. 1 and 125.

⁴⁴ M. A. Richardson, *The Local Historian's Table Book*, III (1843), 51.

⁴⁵ *A.A.* 4, XIV, pl. XII and 125.

⁴⁶ M. A. Richardson, *op. cit.*, V (1846), 231.

Tower was bigger than average, White Friar Tower was well sited, being within view of both the re-entrant and of Close Gate at the foot of the slope. Close Gate itself is poorly recorded and illustrated, but seems to have been one of the lesser gates on the wall, having a vaulted passage between flanking walls without guardrooms, and three upper storeys.⁴⁷ This south-west sector of the town wall was terminated by the "Water" or "Riverside" tower, which appears to have been oblong in plan and to have stood at least three storeys high.⁴⁸ The only illustration of it yet found suggests that it had been considerably restored, and further comment on it would be pure speculation.

Three stretches of curtain wall still survive,—the piece preserved in 1968 (see below pp. 85-87), a long section in Hanover Square and through the Northern Clubs' Federation Brewery almost as far south as White Friar Tower, and a stretch of unknown length on the slope down to Close Gate where the excavation was carried out (pp. 87-91). Although only the inner face of the Hanover Square portion is now visible, and the lowest courses of that probably buried, the wall here stands to the top of the parapet. When this part of the wall was restored after World War II it was reported that some 70 feet of the core consisted not of mortar but of loam,⁴⁹ providing some support for the traditional belief that this was the site of one of the breaches made by the Scots in 1644.⁵⁰ So steep was the slope between White Friar Tower and Close Gate that the wall walk was here built as steps, the Breakneck Stairs,⁵¹ and it is worth noting that the fall of the ground must almost certainly have forced the builders to construct this part of the curtain uphill from south to north.⁵²

Major incidents concerning the wall as a line of defence

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* II (1842), 398-9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* V, 349.

⁴⁹ *P.S.A.N.* 5, I (1951-56), 105-107.

⁵⁰ *P.S.A.N.* 3, I (1903-1904), 161.

⁵¹ Brand, *op. cit.*, I, 7.

⁵² I am grateful to my colleagues, Mr. C. N. Fox and Mr. J. R. Bland, for making this point.

were few, and it is possible that its very existence was, for most of its history, a sufficient deterrent to potential foes. The confrontation with the enemy in 1341 seems to have been brief. Encamped before the walls the Scots were surprised by a party of two hundred, who sallied forth from a postern, captured the earl of Moray and withdrew; the angry Scottish counterattack which followed failed to gain entry to the town.⁵³ Bourne assumed that this postern was the White Friar postern,⁵⁴ perhaps partly because Gray sandwiched his account of the incident between his comments on Close Gate and West Gate,⁵⁵ and though perfectly possible there is no positive proof that the sortie was made from this spot.

The siege by the Scots in 1644 was a very different matter, since on that occasion they were equipped with artillery, and all the hitherto latent disadvantages of walls three hundred years old and rising ground to west and north were soon apparent. It is thought that one of the Scottish batteries was sited at or near the Forth, from where it could cover the town wall from West Gate to Close Gate,⁵⁶ and it seems to be agreed that a breach made in the wall just north of Close Gate was the result of artillery fire.⁵⁷ A mine sprung at White Friar Tower made a second breach,⁵⁸ and both were used by Scottish troops to enter the town.⁵⁹

Reconstruction of the damaged parts of the wall was put in hand in 1647, and there is reference to a committee concerned with the repair of a breach c. 56 yards long "att the Friars", which Brand fairly assumed to mean the Carmelite Friars,⁶⁰ and to the repair of the piers of Close Gate.⁶¹ It is

⁵³ Froissart, *op. cit.*, 437-9.

⁵⁴ Bourne, *op. cit.*, 17.

⁵⁵ William Gray, *Chorographia or A Survey of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1649* (Newcastle, 1884), 35.

⁵⁶ C. S. Terry, *The Siege of Newcastle-upon-Tyne by the Scots in 1644*, *A.A.* 2, XXI (1899), 213.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 216.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 215.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 216-217.

⁶⁰ Brand, *op. cit.*, I, 4n.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7n.

difficult to be certain about the precise position of the breach at White Friar Tower. Most of the evidence—the phrase “att the Friars”, the length of the gap, the nature of the wall in Hanover Square, and the level ground west of the friary—suggests that the damage was north of the tower, but it has nevertheless been said that this particular breach was visible in the wall south of the tower at the time of its demolition.⁶²

The whole circuit of the wall survived into the second half of the eighteenth century, and was thus available in 1745 to act for the last time as “a Bullwark against the Scots”. Repairs were once more undertaken,⁶³ and most of the gates, including Close Gate and the White Friar postern, were blocked up.⁶⁴

Even while the wall was still regarded as a defence many of the towers and gates upon it were put to non-military uses, several being taken over by the town’s companies for meeting-houses. White Friar Tower was thus used for most of the seventeenth century and part of the eighteenth, the masons occupying the upper room until they departed to the Plummer Tower in 1742, and the mettors sharing the lower storey with the wallers, bricklayers and plasterers until the latter moved to Denton Tower in 1711, where they built a brick meeting-room on top of the medieval structure.⁶⁵ The “Riverside” tower had a similar function, being for a time the home of the house-carpenters and later the sail-makers.⁶⁶ That these buildings on the wall could serve a variety of purposes is shown by the temporary use of Close Gate as a prison after 1771 in place of the tower on the bridge,⁶⁷ and the conversion of White Friar Tower into an icehouse by Isaac Cookson when he rented it from the council in 1776.⁶⁸

Apart from the removal of the wall along the Quayside in

⁶² Terry, *op. cit.*, 215-6.

⁶³ Brand, *op. cit.*, I, 9n., quoting an inscription in the wall over the postern.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7n.

⁶⁵ M. A. Richardson, *op. cit.*, V, 321, and *A.A.* 4, XIV, pl. III, fig. 3.

⁶⁶ Brand, *op. cit.*, I, 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7, and M. A. Richardson, *op. cit.*, II, 398.

⁶⁸ Brand, *op. cit.*, I, 8n.

or after 1762,⁶⁹ the town's defences remained more or less intact until the last decade of the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ By that time increasing trade and an expanding population had forced the council to begin the replanning of the roads in Newcastle, and was to lead to extensive building outside the wall and eventually to the coming of the railway. This meant, inevitably, the destruction of the wall where it lay in the way of new development, and by c. 1850 the worst of the damage had been done in the west and north of the town.

Demolition began with the removal of the gates, since these impeded traffic on the existing main roads, and on the south-west sector of the wall the first structure to disappear was Close Gate, which was taken down in 1797—"the gateway being narrow, awkward and dangerous".⁷¹ The next to suffer was the postern, but although two writers say this was removed in 1805⁷² G. B. Richardson's water-colour of 1847 shows the lower part still standing,⁷³ so perhaps only the top half was destroyed at the beginning of the century. There is also some doubt about the date of demolition of the "Riverside" tower and the wall linking it with Close Gate. Mackenzie wrote as though the tower no longer existed,⁷⁴ and both tower and wall are shown by broken lines only on Oliver's map of 1830, but M. A. Richardson put the date 1846 against his picture of it.⁷⁵

There was then a pause until the 1840s, when the construction of Hanover Street and the railway resulted in further demolition of the wall in this part of Newcastle. White Friar Tower and the wall immediately adjoining it to the south were pulled down in 1840-1,⁷⁶ and Hanover Street

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5 and n.

⁷⁰ Hutton's map of 1770 shows the wall almost undamaged, though a number of footways were opened beside the gates in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Brand, *op. cit.*, I, 11, 14, 15-16.

⁷¹ E. Mackenzie, *Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1827), 107.

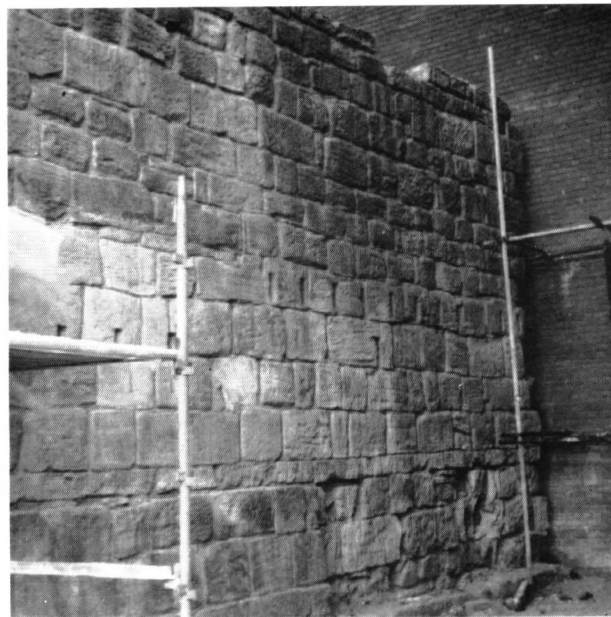
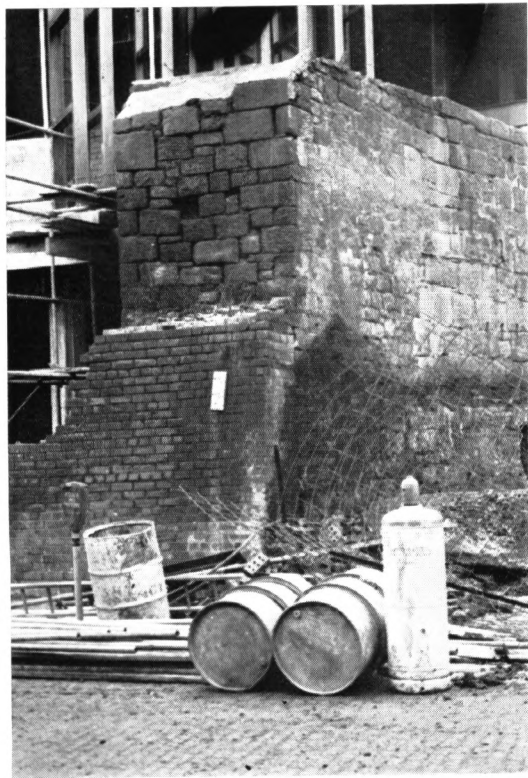
⁷² *Ibid.*, 108, and M. A. Richardson, *op. cit.*, III, 51.

⁷³ *A.A.* 4, XIV, pl. XIII, fig. 1.

⁷⁴ Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, 107.

⁷⁵ M. A. Richardson, *op. cit.*, V, 349.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, V, 164, 200-201, 230-2.



Phot: O. J. Weaver

The town wall south of Forth Street. The outer face during and after preservation.

is shown as complete on Oliver's map of 1844. Denton Tower and the postern were removed to make way for the railway tracks leading to the Central Station, and appear to be in the hands of a demolition gang in G. B. Richardson's drawing of 1847.⁷⁷ A further section of the wall south of the postern must have disappeared towards the end of the nineteenth century when the railway track was widened and Forth Street extended to the east.⁷⁸

The subsequent history of the wall in this area was largely one of neglect until the middle of this century, and much of it became hidden, either because buildings were erected against and in places over it, as between Hanover Street and Forth Street, or because the rubble of demolished houses was left to lie on top of it, as seems to have happened between Hanover Street and the Close. It does appear, however, that the gap between the surviving Forth Street and Hanover Square stretches of wall was made in the first half of the twentieth century. The party which Sheriton Holmes conducted round Newcastle on 6th July, 1895, saw the wall along the back of Orchard Street in an almost complete condition,⁷⁹ and no such gap appears on the Ordnance Survey map of 1900.

Preservation (see plates VIII-IX)

In the course of redeveloping the area south of Forth Street for the Northern Clubs' Federation Brewery Limited a length of the town wall was freed from later buildings and subsequently repaired and consolidated. The work of unpicking the wall and its consolidation was carried out by the Ancient Monuments department of the Ministry of Public Building and Works in March and April 1968, assisted by a grant from the Newcastle City Council. This section of the report is included at the suggestion of and based on notes kindly made available by Mr. O. J. Weaver,

⁷⁷ *A.A.* 4, XIV, pl. XIII, fig. 1.

⁷⁸ O.S. map of 1900.

⁷⁹ *P.S.A.N.* 2, VII (1895-96), 90.

assistant inspector of the Ministry.

The remaining section of the wall at Forth Street was just over 50 feet in length and was in a poor condition, having a brick wall against its west face and a varying thickness of rubble and brick on top of the medieval stonework, which in places survived to a height of 18 feet. At its north end the wall ended in a flush face of irregularly coursed stones which appeared to be very late work, and when the brickwork against the west face of the wall was removed the last few feet of this, the outer face, was also shown to be of this poor quality stonework, small in size and irregular. Its late date was confirmed on examination of the core which at this point was of loose rubble and sand and easily distinguishable from the hard, mortared core of the medieval wall.

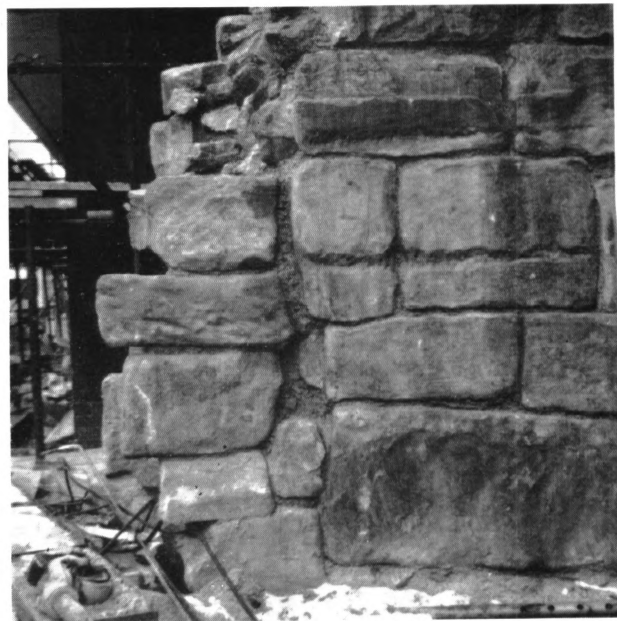
However, the bottom three courses of this northern tip of the wall, here *c.* 7 feet thick, were of larger stones, regularly coursed, and having below them a chamfered plinth. At its south end this ended abruptly in a straight joint against the very large cubical masonry of which the greater part of the west face was built.

The rest of the wall south of the straight joint had no plinth but instead three squared offsets on the outer face, and one on the inner, and was 6 feet 3 inches thick above the top offset. While most of the west face consisted of cubical stones of a constant height of 15 to 15½ inches though varying in length from 9½ to 19 to 38 inches, there was in the upper part of the wall a patch of eight courses which was a later repair although, judging from the solidity of the core and quality of the masonry, it was probably medieval.

On the evidence of the masonry there appear to be a maximum of four periods of building in this stretch of wall. The first period, and presumably the original post-1311 construction, must surely be represented by the chamfer and courses immediately above it in the northern tip. The straight joint and change in the style of construction south of it suggest that the wall was here rebuilt from ground level, and



Phot: O. J. Weaver



The town wall south of Forth Street. The chamfered plinth and straight joint during and after preservation.



1. The site of the excavation from the south-east,
in the spring of 1969



2. The outer face of the town wall above Close Gate

though probably medieval there is no documentary evidence with which to date it. The narrower courses above the cubical masonry are therefore third in the sequence, although it is not clear whether they must be considerably later, so forming period 3, or could be merely the top courses of the rebuilding of period 2. The irregular stonework, with its poor core, at the north end of the wall is last, and since there is no reason to suppose that this stretch of wall was damaged during the Civil War this repair must have resulted either from the panic measures undertaken in 1745, or from the tidying up after the extension of Forth Street eastwards in the 1890s.

In the course of the preservation work and as a result of road widening, a length of 9 feet at the north end of the wall including almost the whole of the exposed chamfered plinth was removed. This left the wall standing to a length of almost 42 feet, and to a height of 18 to 19 feet, presumably to just below the level of the parapet walk.

The Excavation (plates X-XI, and figs. 2-4)

The excavation across the line of the wall north of Close Gate was carried out at the suggestion of the Newcastle City Planning Department, and financed by the Ministry of Public Building and Works, to whom I am also indebted for the loan of equipment and for shuttering the trench. I am grateful to the Newcastle Warehousing Company for permission to excavate on the west side of the wall, to all who assisted with the work, in particular Mr. C. D. Moffat, Mr. D. Peel, Mr. and Mrs. J. Slade and Mr. E. Slade, and to Mr. J. E. Parsons and Mrs. M. Daniels for reporting on and drawing the slipware plate (fig. 5).

The trench was laid out near the foot of the hill at a point where the inner face of the wall was visible, and where the ground on the outside was nearer level than elsewhere. It was soon apparent, however, that it would be impossible in the available time to remove the great quantity of accumulated rubbish which lay up against the outer face of the

wall and over the presumed line of the ditch, and indeed if this stretch is ever to be fully exposed it is now certain that it will have to be excavated and the overburden disposed of by mechanical means. The site as a whole has been derelict for many years, and as will be seen from plate X, fig. 1, is occupied by grass-covered ruined buildings and heaps of rubble.

The wall itself was 10 feet wide, and stood 14 feet high from the top of the footings to the parapet walk. The foundations were shallow, consisting of two to three courses of rough sandstone blocks about 1 foot 4 inches deep, and they

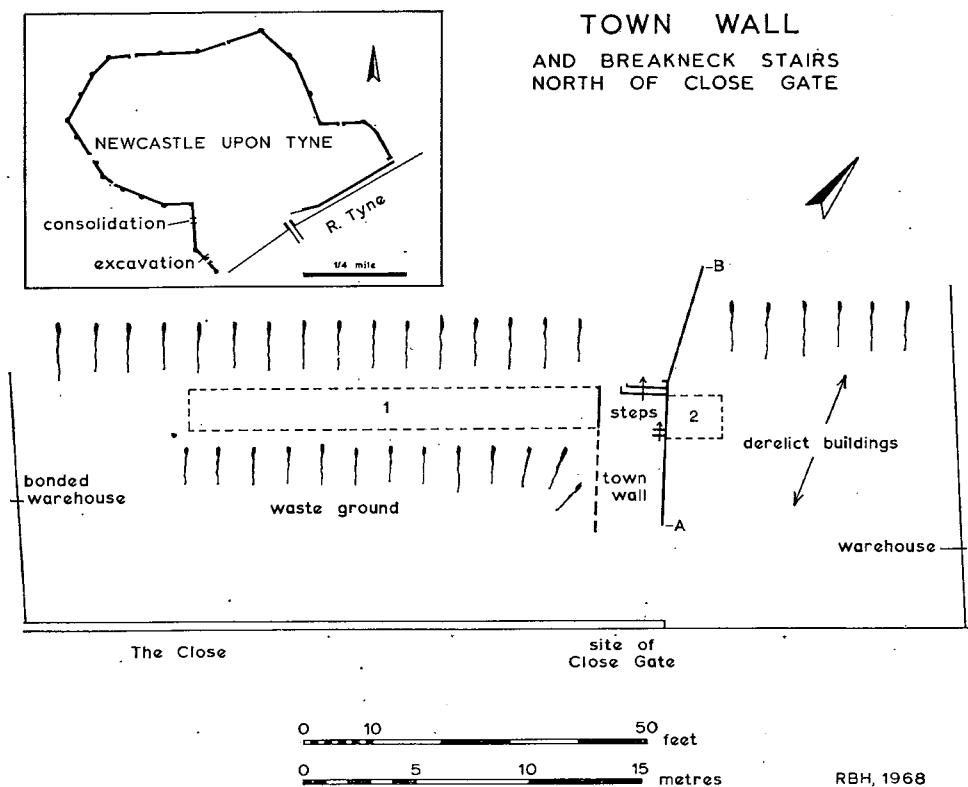


FIG. 2

TOWN WALL AND BREAKNECK STAIRS

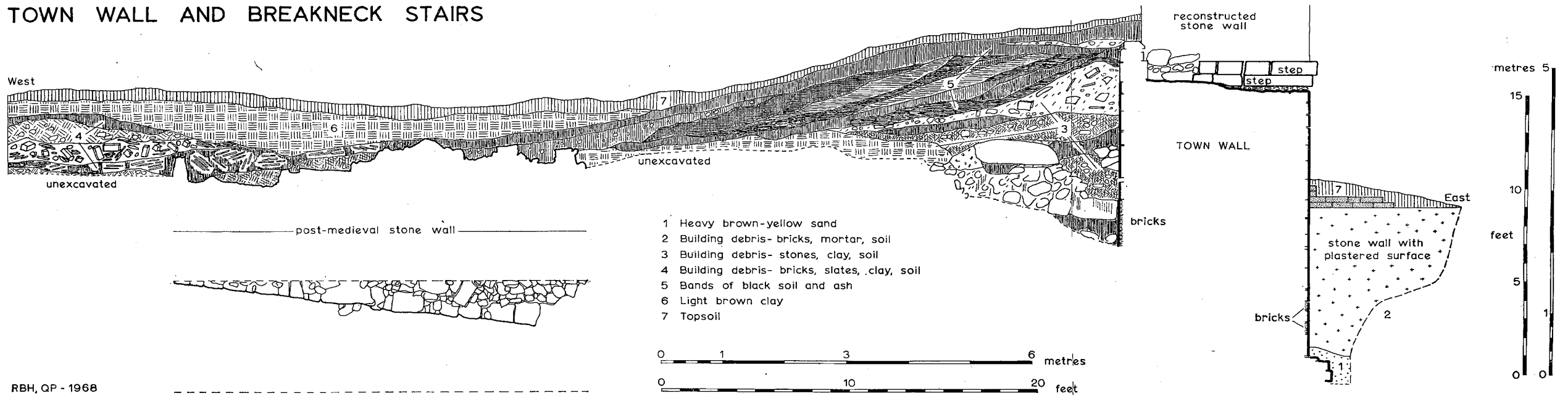


FIG. 3

projected a maximum of 1 foot 3 inches from the wall face. Above them on the inside were some $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet of coursed rubble, and above that twelve courses of ashlar, now rather weathered and in places patched. On the outside there was a large insertion of brickwork and above this eight courses of medieval ashlar and two replaced courses. The surface of the parapet walk had been largely robbed, thus exposing the solid rubble and mortar core of the wall, but two steps of the walk were uncovered in the north section of the trench, and three more showed in elevation. The walk levelled out within the excavated area, but whether it in fact stepped down again to the south was not clear. With the exception of one course on the outer face the parapet wall, too, had disappeared, and its original width is uncertain.

Within the limits of the excavation the stratification on either side of the wall had no medieval significance, dating as it did from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. O.S. maps suggest that the ground to both east and west was unoccupied by 1900, and it seems likely that the west side was abandoned first, since the building debris (layer 3) was covered by successive tipplings of ash (layer 5) thrown from the top of the medieval wall, which was presumably accessible from the building on its east side. Whether the debris of layer 4 was the result of the demolition of another structure on the site, or merely of tipping on waste ground, is not clear, but it was reported with certainty that the clean brown clay (layer 6) had been thrown down the hill in the course of erecting a new building in Hanover Street a few years ago. The top of the wall, where excavated, was found to be covered with 2 feet of black soil beneath a concrete floor, and this deposit yielded an oddly mixed group of pottery and clay tobacco-pipes ranging in date from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.

Discussion

The dimensions of the town wall varied from one part of Newcastle to another, and it is therefore not surprising

to find that there is no precise parallel for this piece north of Close Gate. Here it is certainly wider than any stretch which has been measured, since the thickness recorded elsewhere ranges from c. 7 feet between the Heber and Morden Towers⁸⁰ and in Hanover Square,⁸¹ to $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet east of Wallknoll Tower.⁸² It is also lower than the only fully recorded section, that in St. Andrew's churchyard, where the wall stood 20 feet high from the top of the footings to the parapet walk,⁸³ and than the stretches in Hanover Square and beside Forth Street. If Hooppell was right, and allowing for the possibility that he included the parapet wall of perhaps 5 feet, one of the highest portions may have stood between Corner Tower and Wallknoll Tower, where he described it as being 30 feet.⁸⁴

With regard to differences of detail there is little to be said. The shallow foundations can be paralleled elsewhere,⁸⁵ and through failing to reach the foot of the outer face it is impossible to say whether or not it had the chamfered course or courses recorded on other parts of the wall,⁸⁶ and still visible on either side of Durham Tower. It certainly did not have any internal chamfer, but as this feature has been noted only on the wall in St. Andrew's churchyard it is possible that it did not exist on other parts of the circuit. Perhaps of greater importance is the character of the stonework itself, since there do not appear to be other examples of the use of coursed rubble in the face, and the cubical type of ashlar referred to and illustrated in the past⁸⁷ is not dominant here.

There is little reason to suppose that the peculiarities of the excavated piece of wall were the result of rebuilding, in

⁸⁰ *A.A.* 4, XI, 5.

⁸¹ *A.A.* 2, XVIII, 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*

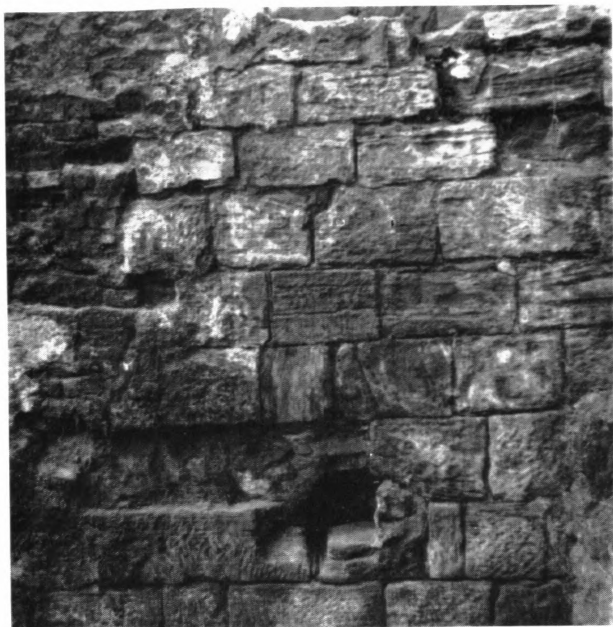
⁸³ *Ibid.*, 112, and reprinted in *A.A.* 4, XI, 12.

⁸⁴ Rev. R. E. Hooppell, *The Town Wall of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in Pandon Dene*, *A.A.* 2, XI (1886), 237.

⁸⁵ *A.A.* 2, XVIII, 112.

⁸⁶ See illustrations in the articles previously cited by Hooppell, Holmes and Brewis, and the drawings of G. B. Richardson.

⁸⁷ *A.A.* 2, XVIII, 3.



1. The town wall above Close Gate
The upper part of the inner face



2. The town wall above Close Gate
The lower part of the inner face

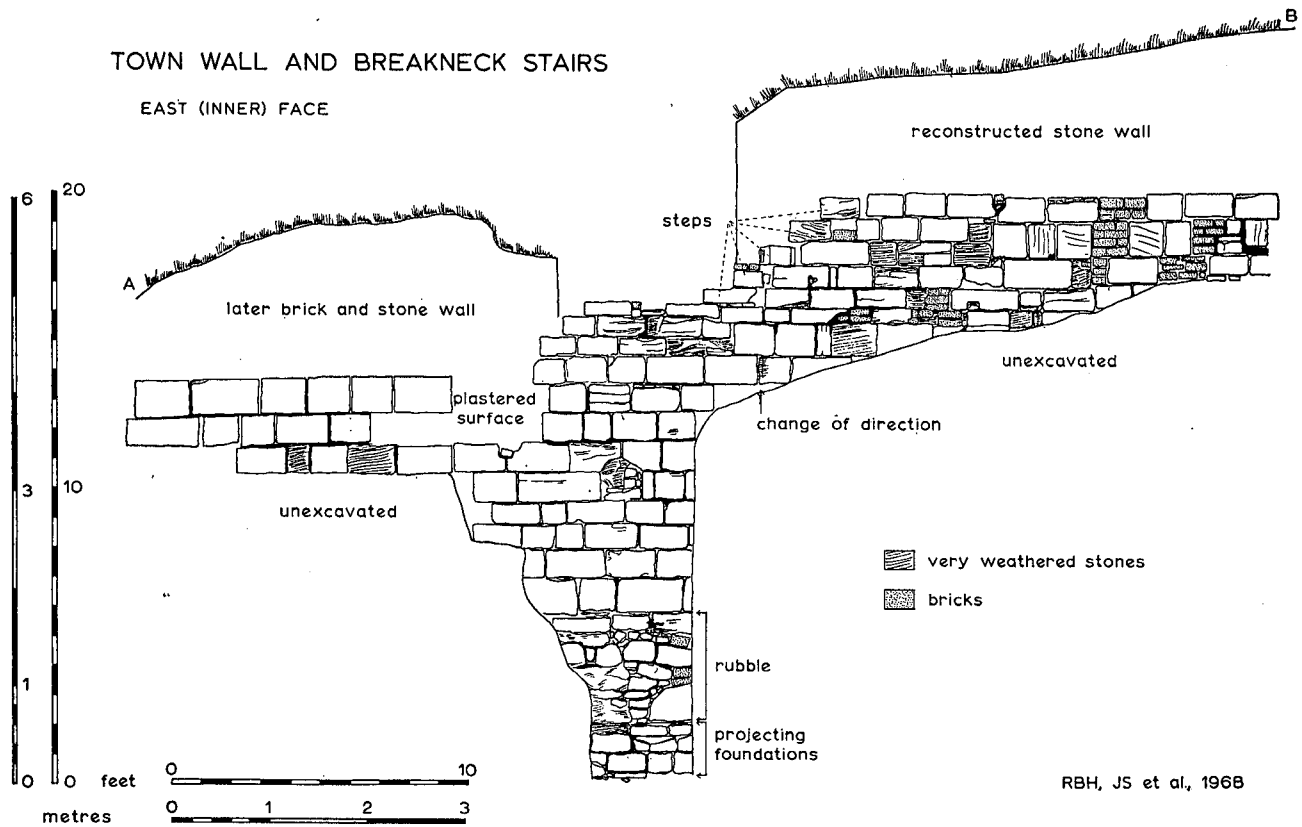
spite of the well-attested damage to the defences in the vicinity of White Friar Tower and Close Gate. Its squat shape was perhaps intended to make it more stable on a precipitous hillside, but could also be regarded as more economical if money were short since the amount of ashlar required for a wall 14 feet high and 10 feet thick was three-tenths less than for one 20 feet by 7 feet, even though the cubic quantity of building material would be the same for both. The construction of part of the face with rubble would be another way of reducing the cost. Apart from the patching with brick, the wall showed almost no sign of later interference; the core was solid, the faces were sheer, and—on the whole—the ashlar courses were even. The exceptions to this were the three lowest stone courses on the outer face, where there could well have been a minor alteration (plate X, fig. 2), and some changes in height in the blocks at the north end of the inner face (fig. 4). The latter, however, could be explained by the need to begin the courses on the parapet walk at a height suitable for steps, i.e. 9 inches or less, before adjusting them to the more normal 12 to 14 inches in the wall face. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that this piece of wall stands very much as originally built, and that any unusual features were the result of building on sloping ground, a need for economy, the late date of completion, or any combination of these factors.

THE FINDS

J. E. Parsons

Everything described below was recovered from the black soil overlying the top of the town wall, and can be subdivided into:

1. Fragments of pantiles.
2. Fragments of clay tobacco-pipes, ranging in date from the mid-17th to the early 19th-C. This group consisted of five bowls, one being 19th-C., and seven pieces of stem, one of which



RBH, JS et al, 1968

FIG. 4

bore the mark of John Thompson, 1663-1713.⁸⁸

3. Potsherds, dating from the late Middle Ages into the 19th C. Of these, one was a wall sherd from a late medieval jug or jar in black fabric, with a dark green glaze, and with a body diam. of c. 10 ins., and the bulk consisted of pieces of 17th-C. jugs and skillets in chestnut and dark brown, and dark green glazed wares. The only sherds which seemed to merit individual description and illustration are described in 3a.
- 3a. Fragments of a large trail slipware plate (drawn as if complete in fig. 5). Although initially wheel-thrown, the base has been knife-trimmed and there is a slight concavity of the base centre not uncommon on this type of vessel. The fabric is typically medium hard, refined, and generally reddish-buff in colour. On the upper surface and rim edge a pattern of trailed white slip is covered by a clear galena glaze. Continuous finger tip impressions on the outer edge have given a "piecrust" character to the rim. The clear glaze has given a reflected pale lemon appearance to the white slip and a bright chestnut colour to part of the fabric surface. The remainder of the fabric surface merges into a sage green owing to reflection change brought about by light grey areas of otherwise reddish buff fabric.

The slip pattern comprises two main zones, one occupying the greater part of the centre and a repetitive design around the wide rim.

A curvilinear design radiates in cruciform manner from a central motif of the same form. Although irregular in execution, each motif consists of a wide outer curving band surrounding a thinner but similar trail of slip. In the centre of each design are a number of spaced blobs of slip, the maximum being seven. The four outer patterns have a further trail motif extending towards the rim, each at right angles to the one adjacent. A second feature, a "half leaf", is trailed offset from the centre. It is possible that the illustrated pattern is incomplete owing to insufficient sherds being available to allow an accurate reconstruction.

The wide rim surface pattern consists of repetitive double curving lines with a "leaf and berry" (fruit?) motif above and below the junction point respectively. Interspaced between these motifs hangs another "berry" from the lower curved line.

The plate, with its discolouration, scars, warping and possible variability in thickness, suggests a "second" rather than a first quality piece. The scars are either caused by spacer sherds or are contact marks from another plate.

⁸⁸ J. E. Parsons, *The archaeology of the clay tobacco-pipe in North-East England*, *A.A.* 4, XLII (1964), 254.

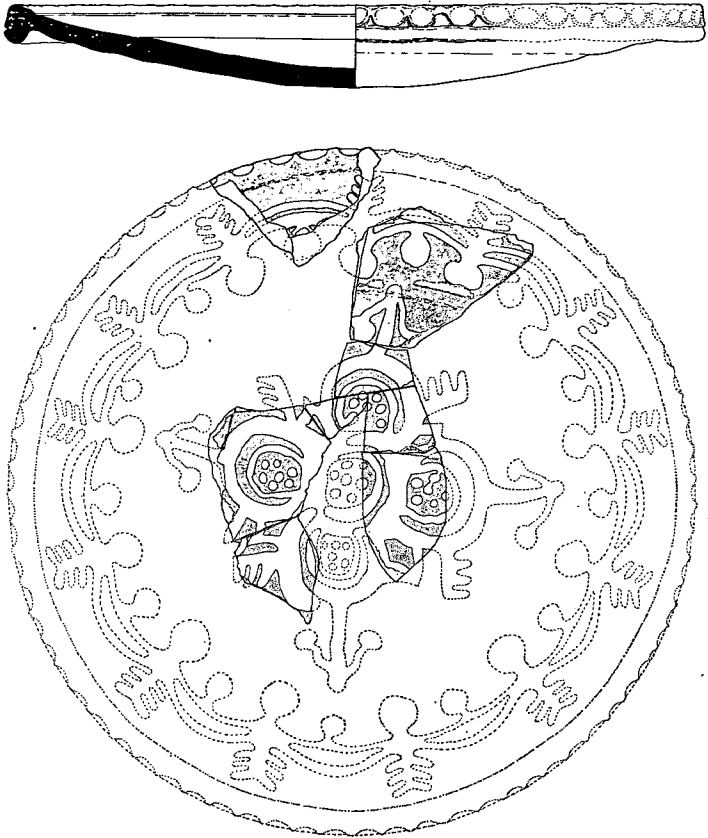


FIG. 5 (4)

The place of manufacture is somewhat problematic. Although the plate has many characteristics which place it in the "metropolitan ware" category, e.g. type of slip pattern and lack of overall base slip, the "piecrust" rim is usually found earlier, on Staffordshire ware. Affinities can be seen with the Harlow, Essex, slipware but as this can be said for 17th-C. slipware from other sources, e.g. Pottersbury, Northants, the kiln source remains a problem for the time being. Considering trade links and the preponderance of "metropolitan ware" from excavations in

the north-east, the most likely suggestion is that the plate is "metropolitan" and of a mid 17th-C. date. No identical example is known to the writer but a thrown dish now in Stoke-on-Trent Museum bears a somewhat similar but geometric basic central design.

The original inspiration for 17th-C. slipware decoration appears to be via Italy and not derived from the "Cistercian" forms of early 16th-C. slipwares. Rim diam. 36 cms., average thickness 1 cm. Date c. 1650?

