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The West Wall of Glevum

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THE WEST WALL OF GLEVUM

by ST. CLAIR BADDELEY

AS to the west, or riverward, wall of Roman Glevum (together with its Norman additions), there are today sufficient reasons for believing that throughout the entire length (S-N), it has been completely deleted. For whatever may have remained of it at its southern end, under the documentary name of 'Old Castle', in Norman days, has since then served as the immediate and most natural quarry for the king's own castle, its keep, or *turris*, and its gates and precinct-walls :—there having been reserved for its Barbican, (or 'look-out'), merely the long-surviving *agger*, or mound, formed by the south-west angle, even that which appears in Kip's view and in the 'prospect' of Gloucester by T. Lewis,¹ c. 1750. This was later demolished (as Fosbroke² shows) about 1819. Equally, however, at the opposite or northwest angle of the wall the successive rebuildings and extensions of the abbey of St. Peter, of the priory of St. Oswald, and of the church of St. Mary de Lode, and their respective precinct-walls and gates, have accounted for the destruction of everything save the original double-arched west gate standing (probably until about A.D. 1200), between College street and Berkeley street, or just east of the modern Shire-hall. The building, however, by Nicolas Walred of Henry II's fortified west bridge-gate, as a formidable city-and-river-defence, deprived the earlier west gate of its greater significance, while it allowed the city to methodically expand itself riverward ; with

¹ Cf. *Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, vol. II, 165-7.

² Cf. *History of Gloucester*, p. 126.

result that St. Bartholomew's priory and St. Nicholas church sprang up in the following, or 13th century, and doubtless the said old Roman west gate served their architects also for equally convenient quarry.

The portion of a western wall (of which the late John Bellows 50 years ago viewed when exposed but a very small portion), at about 26 feet west from Berkeley street, and which he took, not unnaturally, from its obvious direction (S-N), as part of the expected, tho' missing, Roman west wall—we have now more solid reasons for regarding as a 17th century 'rifaccimento' of some post-medieval one. It was found not only buttressed, though it showed a normal five-feet of thickness; but proved to lack proper early foundation whatsoever. Its entire remaining height (14 ft.) was made up of materials pillaged and altered from various earlier (non-Roman) structures and put together with every sign of haste and lack of craftsmanship: many superior blue lias flag-stones being used up in it. It was cleared (1909) by Mr R. Phillips, then county-surveyor, to its base, or 14 ft. below Shire-hall level, photographed by the present writer, and a day or two later demolished to make way for the eastward extension of the latter building to Berkeley street. Near it at 60 feet from Westgate street, occurred a well-mouth, carefully masonried, with mutton and ox bones. Was not this the site of the Berkeley town mansion?

At the same date, a little eastward of it, toward Berkeley street, was noticed a small, but certain, unexpected movement of dirty water in a moist hollow of some darker soil. We were now permitted to have exposed there a hard rubble-bed proving to be several feet in thickness, and containing remains of blackened pointed stakes regularly set in a workmanlike ancient manner, as I have already described and illustrated.³

³ *Archaeological Journal*, 1921, LXXVIII, 269.

This was found to be carefully overlaid with stone flags, altogether rather suggesting the Roman berm that certainly lay below the vanished west wall: though no true trace of such wall was actually evidenced; but

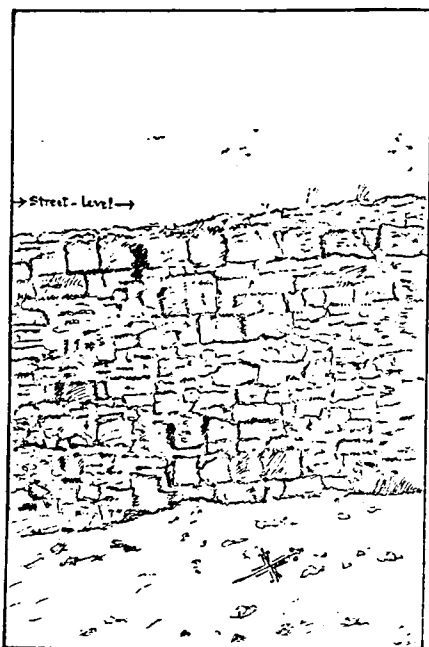


Fig. 2

Late 15th century fragment of wall, Berkeley Street, Gloucester, 1909

only a flagged medieval lane, or path(?) pointing southwards. We, therefore, may now reproduce both the latter feature, and, for the first time, the picture of the above-described neighbouring wall with its peculiarities, as it stood until demolished (fig. 2).

It will be readily understood that these notes made day by day, on the spot, and by the courtesy of the county surveyor and his assistant, radically modified and settled

our view as to the real position and line-site of the missing west wall of Roman Gloucester—at any rate, of the section thereof that (until 1818) must have made for the former southwest mound once used as the Norman Barbican (but today part of the Corporation Electricity Station). Thereof, Mr Counsel wrote Fosbroke that (1817-19) the men were removing (by order) the old Barbican-mound and were finding many Roman coins, including one of Valens. Further, Mr Counsel (himself a cautious student of the topography of Gloucester), conjectured that the 'firm and lofty work' referred to by Corbett as having been effectively planted with guns during the siege of Gloucester, 1643-4, might well be identified with the Barbican, the most conspicuous ground-elevation remaining through the centuries to the city. It is only too probable (cf. Kip's view,⁴ fig. 1) that it was the same Mound—with water flowing in its ancient ditch (later moat to the castle) or foss, on its way to join the Sudbrook (and so fall to the Severn)—that had given rise to Saxon and Norman references to 'Old Castle', and even to Ethelward's 'Arx Gloucestræ'. It might be added that the building of the New Castle (completed c. 1110 by Walter, the sheriff, for Henry 1) at such an adjacent site as to appropriate this mound for its outlook, or Norman Barbican, was (we may conjecture, at least), the direct outcome both of expert consideration and of topographical tradition. As Fosbroke first pointed out⁵ early alienations in fee by St. Peter's abbey of tenements and land in Castle street and at Old Castle occur together. (Cf. the squared mound, once more, as it is seen in Lewis's prospect of the city taken from Llanthony Causey, to the immediate right of the fenced and gated

⁴ From *The Ancient and Present State of Glostershire* by Sir Robert Atkyns, 1712. The plate is inscribed to Thomas Brown, Alderman of Gloucester, who was elected to office 2 December 1691, and resigned April 1712. Cf. Minute-book of the Corporation of Gloucester.—EDITOR.

⁵ *History of Gloucester*, p. 126.

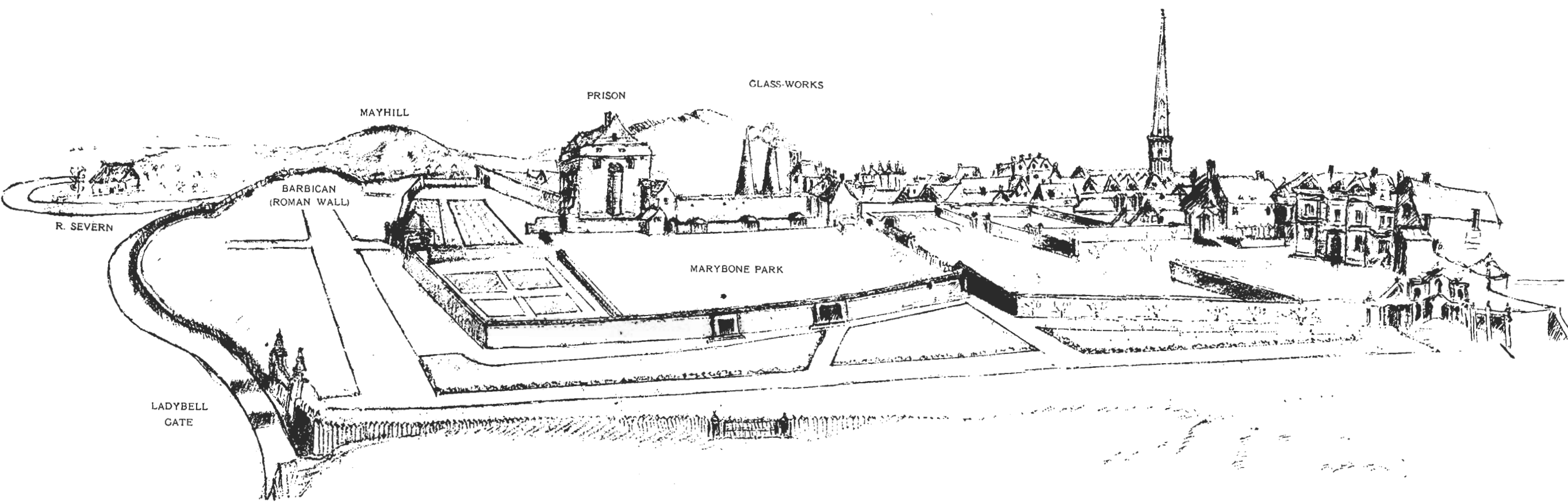


Fig. 3. SOUTHWEST DISTRICT OF GLOUCESTER

Drawing based on a watercolour by Robins, c. 1750, in the possession of Sir Francis Hyett, Painswick House

enclosure in the foreground backed by the tower of the cathedral standing far behind it).

The consequence of all this, therefore, is not favourable to the view due (as in the Ordnance-sheet of Gloucester) to recognizing the fragment of a late wall herein described as part of the line of Glevum's Roman west wall. For, from our evidences, the southwest angle of Roman Glevum to the Commercial road should fall about 60 feet eastward of where it is thereon printed. It should also have been rounded like the other angles, etc. The eye could then at once have recognized that the symmetry of the Roman town was of course normal instead of being abnormally splayed out westwards. No doubt the draughtsman has simply (in full agreement with the above-described, and now demolished, 15-17th cent. 5-foot wall) made use of that to provide for us the western line of Imperial Roman Gloucester, though for that it never could have served.

In addition to the evidences gathered as to the common site of 'Old-Castle', of the Norman keep (*turris*), barbican, bailey, and ditch (A.D. 1110), commanding the southwest flank and the former Severn bend and island (*eyot*)—namely at and upon the rounded mound of the former Roman wall and ditch—we close this note by adducing a sketch (fig. 3) founded, with critical precautions, upon a painting in the possession of Sir Francis Hyett, of the above southwest segment of the city, known as Maribone Park, as enclosed and supposed to be laid out about 1725-40.