

## GLOUCESTER'S WALLS AND DEFENCES IN EARLY TIMES

by D.J. PARKER

### The first Defences are Built

The early Britons called the town Caer Glou, during the Roman conquest it was called Glevum, being conquered by Aulus Plautius about 44 AD under the emperor Claudius. The Romans established a military station here for the purposes of checking the invasions of the Silures or South Welsh from the west of the Severn. These people were brave and strong using every opportunity to attack the Roman held areas.

Consequently it is to be expected that the Romans would have fortified and eventually walled the town, proof of this being verified by the archaeological excavations carried out. No Roman inscriptions have been found on the walls to indicate who built them but John Bellows (1) claimed that it was most likely the Second Augustan Legion; however other authorities disagree.

The last Roman legion left Britain in 426/427, leaving the Britons masters of the town until it was taken from them by the Saxons c.570 who eventually drove them beyond the Severn into Cumbria. About 670 (2) Wulfer son of Penda, repaired the city which had been considerably damaged during the wars, "and having enlarged and beautified it that according to Bede it was one of the noblest cities in the kingdom about the beginning of the eighth century". It is probable that the city walls at this time were not neglected as towns without walls were not considered safe places.

Following the invasion by the Danes, Rudder says "836 or soon after the Danes possessed themselves of this place and pitching their tents here lorded it over this part of the country, and made themselves masters of the Forest of Dean, and a great part of Herefordshire". It seems probable that at this time the town will have been ransacked and the walls and gates damaged.

### The Norman Period Onwards

There is little information available following the Roman period until the Norman invasion when William the Conqueror "having settled the southern parts of the kingdom, came to Gloucester, and liking the situation, caused the north, east, and south sides of the town to be fortified with battlemented stone walls and gates to repel the Welsh who had given much trouble in the time of Edward the Confessor (3). He also instigated the erection of a castle on the south west side of the town. The inference of his actions suggest that the earlier walls and defences must have been in a poor state.

About this time the Westgate which would have been near the junction with Berkeley Street is said to have been removed by the Normans to obtain stone.

A new castle (or maybe an addition to the previous one) was completed by Walter the sheriff for Henry I c.1110 and the first known Westgate bridge was built in the reign of Henry II by Nicholas Walred, clerk. From recent discoveries it consisted of six arches over the Severn. Ieland, (mid 16th century) mentions only five arches; much later the bridge was reduced to four arches.

In 1172 it is recorded that Jorworth, Lord of Caerleon-upon-Usk destroyed the nearby countryside with fire and sword up to the gates of Gloucester and Hereford (4).

The castle which now formed part of the towns defences, was also a royal residence and was frequently being added to and repaired. In 1230-1250 the walls were being crenelated, the kings chapel enlarged and much additional work carried out (5). It also had a moat with several bridges over it, but it is not certain how the moat was kept filled, although Kip's engraving (1712) showed a stream near the castle. There may also have been a great bridge over the Severn adjacent to the castle at this time.

At places around the circuit of the town walls, remains of interval or angle towers have been found. Speed's map (attached) shows one of these immediately east of the Southgate, this is probably the one featured in a grant made to the Friars Minors (Grey Friars) dated 31st July 1246 allowing them to hold schools of theology in the turret of the Kings Wall (6). This would be behind the houses in Parliament Street today and possibly on the city side of the wall.

The Eastgate also had its educational uses as it was used for a charity school in 1260, (Rudder says it was used in 1272 for this purpose) and it was later used as the house of correction (Bridewell) (7).

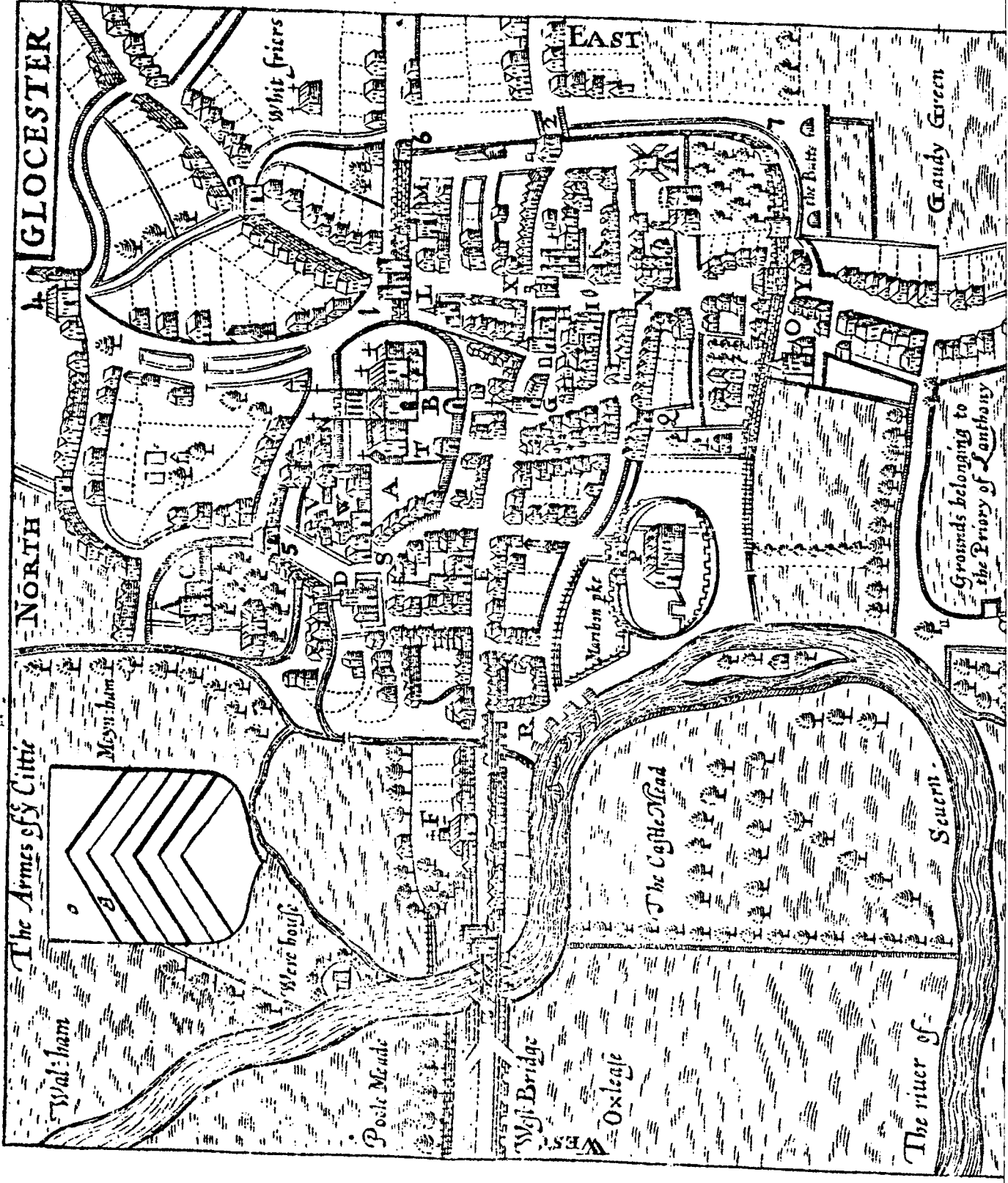
During the Barons War in 1264 Simon de Montfort the Earl of Leicester laid seige to the town and took it in four days. The inhabitants redeemed themselves from plunder by the payment of £1,000 (8). However Prince Edward (son of Henry III) and the Earl of Gloucester beseiged it on the north side and entering a breach which they made in the wall leading to St. Oswalds Gate (Blindgate) took it from Leicester (9). Many of the burgesses were put to death and a great part of the town destroyed.

Following the assaults on Gloucester during this period, the king ordered the levelling of certain buildings which had afforded protection to the rebels and endangered his men in the castle, and commanded a new dyke to be made about the town (10).

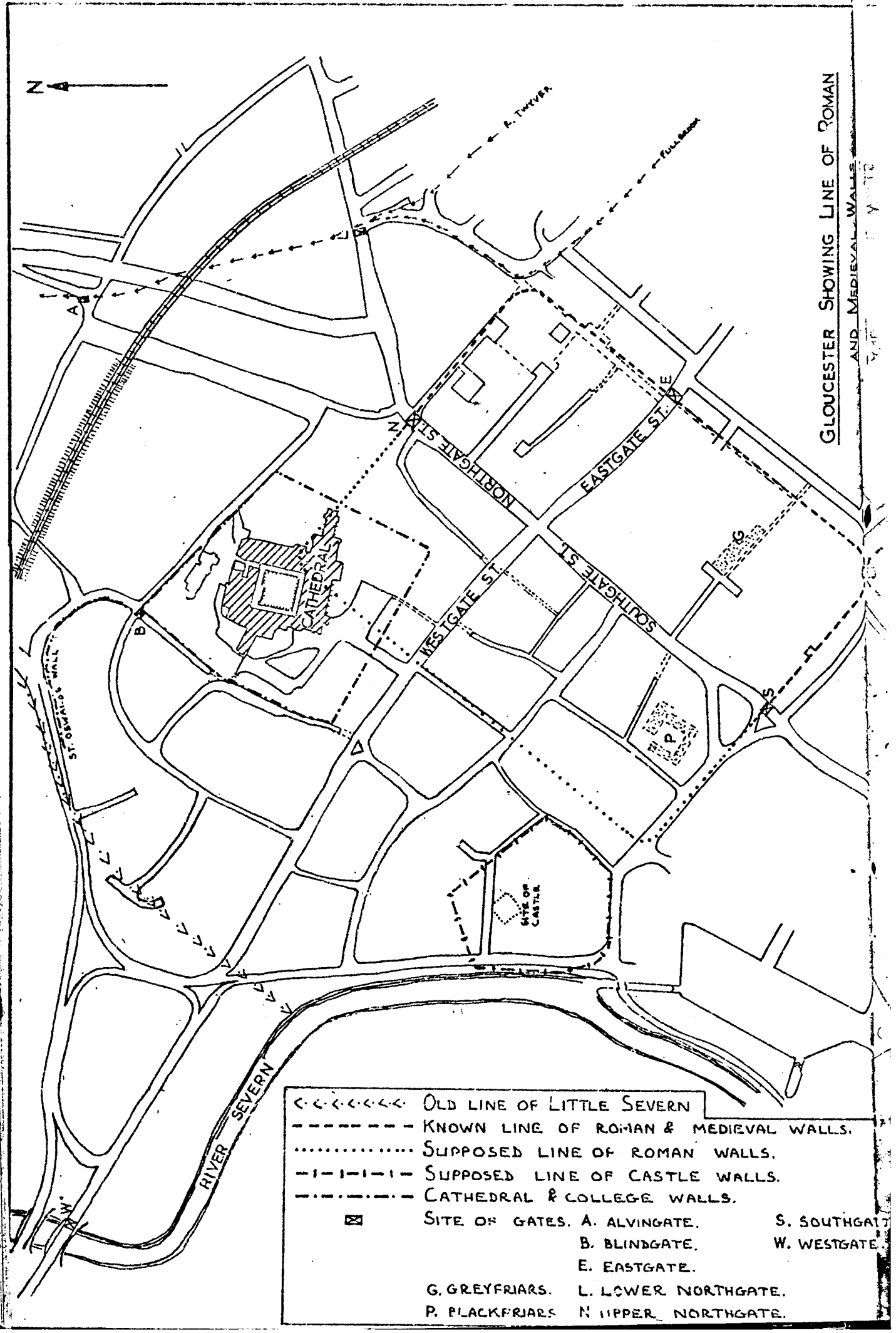
"By the following century more positive measures to maintain the condition of the walls were taken (11)" 1345 October 1st - King Edward III to the bailiffs and men of Gloucester. We have, at the request of Thomas de Bradeston and in aid of the repairing and sustenation of the walls of the town aforesaid, granted to you that from this date until seven years you may take of goods for sale coming to

- KEY
- P CASTLE
  - Y SOUTHGATE
  - Z WESTGATE & BRIDGE
  - 1 UPPER NORTHGATE
  - 2 EASTGATE
  - 3 LOWER NORTHGATE
  - 4 ALVINGATE
  - 5 BLINDGATE
  - 6 ALMESHAM POSTERN GATE
  - 7 GOOSDITCH

GLOUCESTER  
FROM SPEED'S MAP OF



GLoucester SHOWING LINE OF ROMAN AND MEDIEVAL WALLS



- |         |                                       |                            |
|---------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ←←←←←   | OLD LINE OF LITTLE SEVERN             |                            |
| -----   | KNOWN LINE OF ROMAN & MEDIEVAL WALLS. |                            |
| .....   | SUPPOSED LINE OF ROMAN WALLS.         |                            |
| - - - - | SUPPOSED LINE OF CASTLE WALLS.        |                            |
| .....   | CATHEDRAL & COLLEGE WALLS.            |                            |
| ☒       | SITE OF GATES.                        | A. ALVINGATE. S. SOUTHGATE |
|         |                                       | B. BLINDGATE. W. WESTGATE  |
|         |                                       | E. EASTGATE.               |
|         | G. GREYFRIARS.                        | L. LOWER NORTHGATE.        |
|         | P. PLACKFRIARS                        | N. UPPER NORTHGATE.        |

Gloucester by land or by water the following customs: from each horse-load of corn for sale, whatsoever kind it may be, or of malt,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d; of each horse and mare, ox and cow,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d; of each dole of wine, 2d; of each pipe of wine, 1d; ...." etc.

Again we find in Patent Rolls 8th March 1359:-  
Grant, at the request of Thomas de Bradeston, to the bailiffs and goodmen of Gloucester of murage for 10 years (12).

In 1377 the burgesses cleansed and enlarged the ditch under the wall of the Friars Preachers (Black Friars) to the quantity of 12 feet, so that several elms and ashes in the banks and in the churchyard of St. Kyneburg (Kimbrose) were cut down (13).

A petition to King Henry VII in 1487-8 from the Mayor and Burgesses of Gloucester mentions the "great costs and charges that they have to bear in keeping and maintaining the walls gates and towers of the town and in repairing and maintaining the great bridge over the Severn which bridge, walls and towers are now very ruinous and likely to fall unless your grace be shown to us for aid and succor whereof we made petition at your last being in Gloucester"(14). There appears to be no record of whether the king granted their request for help but by the reign of Henry VIII the Westgate was obviously very ruinous as it was rebuilt again along the style of the Norman one (15). The town about this time however was said to be "strongly defended by its walls and so continued to the seige".

#### The Civil War and After

In 1641 the country was confronted by Civil War, and Gloucester realising the desirability of ensuring the defences of the town were in order, engaged in extensive maintenance to the fortifications costing £93. Os. 11d. (A) during the ensuing year (see Table 1) and a further sum of £105 1s. 6d towards arms and ammunition. The Council on the "11th October 1642 Ordered. That the two gilt bowls four old maces and one old seal of Mayoralty be sold towards the charge of the fortifications of the city".(16)

At the time of the seige the walls were described as follows: "from the Southgate to the North Port or Posterngate, was an ancient wall well lined with earth to a considerable height. Thence to the Northgate was a slender work raised upon a low ground. From the North to the Westgate was no ancient defence, but a small work newly raised, with the advantage of marshy grounds without, and the same within from the inner Northgate to the Priory of St. Oswald. From the west towards the Southgate, along the river-side, was no wall; but from the castle to the South Port was a firm and lofty work, to command the high ground in the suburbs. The ditches or moats narrow, but filled with water". (17)

Reference to Speed's panoramic view of Gloucester and the attached street plan will give some indication of the position of the gates and walls. The height of the walls in medieval times were said in Archdeacon Furney's MS to be as high "as a two storey house. The walls had battlements and

on the top were walks, probably like those at Chester". "There were eight great drawbridges for carts and waggons, and two horse bridges at as many entrances". At the four principle gates the gate porter hung a lantern over each to enable carriages and passengers to cross the bridges safely at night (18).

Gloucester at this time was also described as being, "A place guarded on one side by the Severne and situated on a fine eminence rising on one side from a watery, miry, destestable vale, where a shower of rain would at any time incomode the soldiers to the last degree, and trenches could not be run without their suffering great hardship" (19).

During the seige the walls were lined with earth as were some of the houses adjacent to the walls, a breast work and trench was built across Eastgate Street and earth was piled up against some of the drawbridges. There were sconces (B) at the Eastgate, Northgate, Southgate, Alvingate, the Blind Gate, Rigney Stile and Friars Orchard (Site of the Technical College).

The seige had lasted a month when the town was relieved on the 5th September by the arrival of the Parliamentary forces. The Royalists, who had suffered severe losses, retreated.

Following the seige, the Southgate, in consequence of the damage done to it, was extensively rebuilt in 1643/4 costing £95. 4s. 4d that year (20). On one side of the arch was inscribed, A CITY ASSAULTED BY MAN, BUT SAVED BY GOD, and above it, "there was fixed in stone the arms of the Dukes of York and Gloster, over them his Majesty's arms encircled with the Garter without supporters".(21). On the other side next to the city, EVER REMEMBER THE FIFTH OF SEPTEMBER 1643. GIVE GOD THE GLORY (22).

The Mayor and Corporation ordered this day to be observed annually as a day of thanksgiving, which was called "The Gloucester holiday", and this was continued until the Restoration (23). Rudder also mentions the Royal Arms being erected here. It seems strange however that the insignia of the Royal Family should have been put above the gate as they were the enemy who had besieged the city and lost the battle.

Further substantial amounts of money were spent over the next few years, about £100 on the Westgate and Lower Northgate in 1645/6 and £61 17s. 5d. in 1646/7 on the Town walls (Table 1). On July 22nd 1650 the Commons agreed to a loan of £600 at 8% interest to Sir Wm. Constable towards repairs of the fortifications (24).

By July 1651 the Royalist threat was more serious and on August 23rd a letter from the mayor to the Speaker reports of ceaseless work on the defences, as they were very ruinous, also that they had exceeded their income by £1,000 and yet other emergencies and making new drawbridges had been added to this, and therefore required £200 towards these charges (25).

- (A) A workmans wage for a day at this time was ninepence to one shilling.
- (B) Sconce - A small earthwork used for defence and mounting guns.

TABLE 2.

Year (Michaelmas to Michaelmas)	1653/54	1654/6	1655/7	1657/8	1658/9	1659/60	1661/2
Upper Northgate		8.13.3	9.1.8	2.10.0	13.8.8		22.15.4
Lower Northgate		1.19.7					
Southgate		29.4.8	10.9.9	7.10.9	3.17.9		
Eastgate	A	4.8.8	6.11.8	5.8.4	6.16.10		2.11.3
Alvingate	4.15.8			6.18.10			
Westgate Bridge	56.11.6		2.4.10	7.2.8			
Town Walls	14.9.5			18.5.0			42.18.2
The Fortifications						4.10.0	
Totals	80.14.1	44.6.2	28.7.11	47.15.7	24.3.3	4.10.0	68.4.9

CHARGES IN £. s. d.

Also includes charges for

- (A. The Fostern Gate
- (C. The Town Wall
- (D. Work at "Rigny Stile Sconce"
- (E. Foreign Bridge
- (F. New Inn Lane & Bellmans Lane
- (G. Kimbroes
- (H. Bridswell
- (J. Dockham
- B. The Townwall at Southgate

NOTE: No charges were recorded for 1660/61 and 1662/63

TABLE 1.

Charges For The Upkeep of Gloucester's Gates & Defences

Year. (Michaelmas to Michaelmas)	1641/2	1642/3	1643/4	1644/5	1645/6	1646/7	1647/9	1649/50	1650/51	1651/53
Upper Northgate	7.4.6 <sup>A</sup>	15.6.9 <sup>C</sup>	1.11.10	6.3.8	17.1.4	2.6.1	29.8.4	1.5.8	5.2.2	15.3.8 <sup>J</sup>
Lower Northgate		0.17.11 <sup>C</sup>			62.12.1	0.14.8 <sup>D</sup>	1.11.11	1.8.9		4.3.2
Southgate	1.8.5 <sup>B</sup>	0.6.5.	95.4.4		1.6.10	2.1.4			3.1.2	
Eastgate	2.15.0	3.9.3	10.12.1		4.9.11	5.0.1	4.5.3	3.4.10 <sup>F</sup>	2.15.10	16.6.3
Westgate		1.12.11	0.4.0	50.12.3	38.5.0			9.2.10	4.2.2	
Alyngate			1.4.11	1.5.8		3.8.8		2.3.11	1.15.3	10.1.9
Sally Port & Postern Gate			12.13.1							
Westgate Bridge			6.11.4				16.7.3		108.13.11 <sup>G</sup>	
Town Walls		14.4.0	8.3.9			61.17.5 <sup>E</sup>				3.0.0 <sup>K</sup>
The Fortifications, Repairing City Gates & Drawbridges	93.0.11						4.9.9		99.8.10 <sup>H</sup>	3.12.8
Levelling the Sconces										34.10.10
TOTALS	104.8.10	35.17.8	136.5.4	58.12.7	123.15.2	75.8.3	56.2.6	17.6.0	225.4.4	86.18.4

Also includes charges for

- ( A. Heare lane
- ( B. Barton
- ( C. Alyngate
- ( D. Westgate
- ( E. £29.10.1 at Friars Wall.
- ( F. Drawbridges.
- G. Making the Drawbridge Only.
- H. Mainly North & Southgate Drawbridges making them new.
- J. Northgate Bridge and Walls Each Side
- K. Eastgate Wall only



On 25th August the town crier proclaimed, "All burgess(es) and inhabitants of Gloucester, who are not listed, are to muster themselves, servants or workmen tomorrow morning by six-o'clock, with spades, shovels and mattocks and little baskets at the south gate, to work at the fortifications all that day upon pain of 5s apiece" (26).

On the same day President Bradshaw replied to the mayor's letter of the 23rd saying that they could draw bills upon the Council of State, for the cost of the drawbridges, the money not exceeding £200, and to send up the account of the charges for them. On the 30th August in reply the mayor made thanks for the £200 and said that the drawbridges which were made of "elme" had "become soe rotten and ruinous that going to drawe one of them it fell into the river, and was like to have drowned and spoiled severall persons" (27).

The accounts for the charges were given in great detail and covered the following:

Rebuilding the outward drawbridge at the Northgate £34. 17s. 4d., the drawbridge at the Westgate £60. 13s. 4d., the outward drawbridge at the Eastgate £43. 3s. and the five other bridges £200. Total £338. 13s. 8d. (28).

The Chamberlain's Accounts (Table 1) however for 1650/51 do not agree with the above figures as they show £108. 18s. 11d. for Westgate drawbridge and £99. 8s. 10d mainly on drawbridges for the other gates, total being £208. 7s. 9d. One wonders whether the figures were being misrepresented to the Council of State in order to help with the expenses incurred.

After the defeat of Charles II at Worcester and his subsequent exile it became possible to reduce the military occupation of Gloucester (the citizens themselves, at their own desire having obtained an order from Parliament to dismantle the place)(29) and the sconces at the Eastgate, Southgate, Northgate, St. Oswalds and Friars Orchard were levelled, costing £34. 10s. 10d for 1652/3 (Table 1). We know that there were sconces at Alvingate as John Dorney wrote, "Friday 18th August" (1643), that the enemy had "drawn four peices of ordinance to the Kingsholme, one whereof they planted against the Awyngate, and the sconces thereunto adjoining"(30), but these were not mentioned in the accounts.

Neither is the sconce at Rigney Stile (Rikenel) mentioned when the others were levelled, but perhaps these were built by the Royalists as they were outside the city walls. However we find in 1656/7 that 13s. 9d. was paid to three workmen for work done at Rigney Stile Sconce (31), this would suggest it was still standing at this time.

On 7th December 1657 the council agreed "For the better defence of this City, Mr Alderman Nourse and others appointed to view all the decay of the walls, gates and fences of this city" (32). However we find only a modest sum of money was expended on the defences for that year and even less during the three following years.

Following the crowning of Charles II at Westminster in April 1661 and election riots in Gloucester the following month, with the continuing presence of Roundhead troops, the citizens were changing their sympathies in favour of the Royalists such that on May 15th the King was proclaimed in the city. However even though the corporation sent its loyal greetings (33) the king had not forgotten the Royalist defeat during the seige and the following measures (reported in Heath's "Chronical of the Late intense War"), were ordered.

"There was mention made before the commissioners for Regulating Corporations, for the securing of the peace of the Kingdome by these Gentlemen named for each County, City and Borrough, it was ordered, besides the displacing Officers, that the Walls of the respective Cities and Towns of Gloucester and Coventry, Northampton, Taunton and Leicester, and other places which had Bulwarks and Garrisons, and maintained them throughout the War against the King and were the Reception and maintenance of the Rebellion, should be demolished, as Examples and Security to successive times" (34).

The city accounts for 1661/2 show that £42. 18s. 2d was charged to the town walls of which £40. 17s was "Payd to Augustin Loggins Jun. for hauling of stone from the Town walls and digging them up" (35).

Only part of the walls at this time could have been taken down because the city minutes for 1673 show that it was agreed to make a survey of part of the city wall at the Southgate prior to demolition. Also a subsequent account by Rudder in 1779 says "Part of the city wall tho' reduced to the height of eight or nine feet runs eastward of this gate (Southgate) and is a boundary to the lands of the late friary of Franciscans or Grey Friars. On the west side of the said city gate a small part of the wall remains" (36)

The doors belonging to the gates were ordered to be pulled down shortly after the Restoration, and most of them were given to the city of Worcester (37). About the same time the inscription that was put above the Southgate after the seige was defaced, the Kings arms were set up in the old place with "DISSIPI INIMICI" (Scatter his enemies) above the arms. Below the arms the following inscription "INSIGNIA HAEC REGIA A NVPERIS REBELLIBUS CRVENTIS SVMMO SCELERE DEMOLITA HENRICUS FOWLER ARMIGER HVJVS CIVITATIS EX SPECIALI MANDATO REGIO MAJOR RESTITVENDA CVRAVIT. A.D.MDCLXXI" (38). This roughly translates, "Henry Fowler, Gentlemen, Mayor of this city by special command ordered this Royal insignia to be restored after its bloody desecration in the recent rebellions 1671".

Underneath the above was the motto "PLACITO REGALI SACRVM" (39) (Sacred to the Royal wishes).

In the city minutes for 1676 a covenant was discussed, receiving stones from the city wall for the erection of a pest house in case of contagion.

During the next century the city gates became more and more a nuisance in that they restricted the free flow of traffic and in 1777 the council discussed a Parliamentary Bill which included amongst other measures "altering Westgate Bridge, removing nuisances from the streets etc." (40).

The Council agreed on 27th May 1778 to the taking down of the Eastgate according to the proposals made by Mr John Ricketts (41). On 15th March 1779 the council discussed whether compensation should be allowed to one of the porters of the city who as a result of Eastgate having been pulled down was deprived of the annual sum arising from the Rent of the Lodge (42).

The city rent roll of the North Ward for the period 1781/2 shows that Ja's Lovett paid 10s. Od. for "Pt Lower Northgate,  $\frac{1}{2}$  yr to the day at which time it was pulled down" (43).

The remaining gates except Westgate would seem to have been pulled down probably not later than 1783, although Northgate probably remained until 1786 when a new prison was built to house the prisoners from the Northgate.

The Westgate and bridge, which was said to be both interesting and picturesque (confirmed by various prints) were both destroyed about 1809 (44) to allow a wider bridge to be built in accordance with the parliamentary bill.

Referring to the city wall again, Howitt writing in 1812 says, the length of wall from Constitution Walk around Friars Orchard up to the back of the old Southgate was sold for £120, but it was stipulated that no part of the wall was to be interfered with. Also that "at all reasonable times on the request of the Mayor, any person was to be permitted, named by him, to inspect the wall".

A further section of the wall adjacent to Constitution Walk was destroyed when the foundations for the Art School were dug. Some of the stones removed were used for building the monument at Barbers Bridge (45).

### The Present Day

Today to all appearances the walls and gates have gone, but recently money and much time and labour have been spent by enthusiastic archaeologists uncovering the remains. In 1974 a portion of the North Gate and city wall adjoining St. Johns Lane were excavated and some of the stones from this have been set at ground level inside the new building there. Also at the Eastgate on the old site of the Co-operative Society, the walls and part of the gate tower were unearthed. If we are fortunate these remains will be preserved on view when the new building is erected over it.

The wall is also preserved below ground level in other buildings in the city. The writer's old school (J.T.S.) woodwork shop under the city library was alongside the wall, also the city wall in the basement at the opposite end of this building, adjacent to and now part of the museum, is being opened to view as part of a Roman period exhibit.

Part of that section of wall unearthed by John Bellows, alongside Kings Walk, is now on public view for certain periods during the year. Another section of wall is also preserved below the M.E.B. showrooms in Kings Walk.

The most interesting section can be seen however in the Gloucester Furniture Exhibition Centre at 73 Southgate Street, and reaches 5 ft above ground over a length of about 20 ft. Also exposed below ground level is the bevelled base which identifies the wall in other parts of the city. This section of wall seems to be in what was once called Sweep or Soot Alley.

Finally, a pair of doors from the Southgate, measuring approximately 10 ft high by 12 ft wide (total) are preserved in the Folk Museum, these having had their arched heads cut off when adapted for the prison at the Southgate.

It would seem appropriate to end by remembering the citizens working at the gates in 1651 and seeing that history repeats itself more peacefully inasmuch that today we have seen, "the citizens (archaeologists) muster in the morning with spades, shovels, haversacks and little brushes to work at the gates".

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