

Town Defences and the Making of Urban Landscapes

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While this paper is concerned with medieval town defences, it will not focus, as many archaeological studies have done, on the physical fabric of walls, gates and related structures. Rather than examining these fortifications as discrete features in abstraction from their historic urban contexts, it seeks to explore some of the ways in which town defences were not only intimately bound up with the form of townscapes, but also closely linked to the creation of urban identities. This last point is important: town walls fundamentally served to exclude as well as to embrace sectors of populations and could be socially divisive features within townscapes – a fact still glaringly apparent in modern-day cities as far removed as (London)Derry and Jerusalem. More specifically, this paper seeks to address several aspects of a common assumption about the relationship between towns and their defences: namely, that walls and gates were *defining features* of urban settlements (see, for example, Astill 2000, 478). This assumption works at two levels. First, it is commonly presumed that possession of defences was an important – indeed even a defining – characteristic of what constituted a settlement of ‘urban’ status in the medieval period. Secondly, it might reasonably be supposed that defences acted to demarcate townscapes physically – the walls constituting an unambiguous boundary that marked where the countryside stopped and the townscape started. In both cases it is argued that these assumptions deserve greater critical treatment than is, perhaps, normally afforded. The first of these two points – the connection between the possession of defences and definition of urban status – is dealt with fairly briefly, prior to more detailed analysis of the physical relationships between walls and townscapes and the implications of this for our understanding of medieval urban identities.

Town walls and urban status

In the period between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, England and Wales had something in the region of 230 towns that possessed defences, whether earthwork or masonry circuits or gates alone; Scotland had perhaps twenty-five more (Bond 1987; Creighton and Higham 2005, 253–75). These fortifications

had an extremely diverse range of origins, including circuits of Roman date surviving in both unchanged and expanded forms into the Middle Ages, the defences of new *burh*-type settlements laid out in the ninth and tenth centuries and which continued in use after the Norman Conquest, and a wide variety of planted towns and boroughs that acquired circuits in the later medieval period. Yet, while from one point of view the possession of surrounding defences might be thought of as a characteristic quality of medieval towns, given the overall level of urbanisation in later medieval Britain and the distribution of these settlements across the landscape, it is clear that those towns possessing defences were actually in the minority (Palliser 1995, 106). Historians and archaeologists have always found it hard to agree on a workable definition of a medieval town, yet no matter where the urban threshold is drawn, it is clear that no more than one third of towns in Wales and one quarter of those in England were defended, and the proportion is lower still in Scotland.

On the wider European stage the defences of British towns seem particularly limited in scale, ambition and in their overall imprint on urban form. For example, the larger British medieval towns generally lacked the successive concentric defensive rings that shaped the growth of great medieval cities such as Bruges, Cologne and Paris; in sharp contrast, medieval London remained encircled within its ancient Roman *enceinte* (see below). In Germany the proportion of walled medieval towns is estimated at 53 per cent (of a total of 1,083), a figure that excludes those with earthworks or palisades (Tracy 2000, 82). In comparison to Germany, a regional study of the generally open medieval urban settlements of East Anglia has characterised these places as 'towns without walls' (Brodt 1997). While the reasons for these contrasts are complex and deep-rooted, strong royal government and relative internal peace in later medieval Britain, combined, crucially, with the generally smaller scale of urbanism and the lower levels of independence attained by these communities would seem to be the principal factors (Palliser 1995, 117).

Significantly, the number of defended towns as a proportion of the whole was far higher before the Norman Conquest than at the peak of urbanisation around c.1300. The proportion of post-Conquest planted towns possessing primary defences is particularly low: provision for enclosing defences is remarkably rare in foundation charters, for instance, and in many cases defensive circuits were clearly secondary additions to composite town plans rather than features present from a settlement's plantation and deemed essential for its functioning. For instance, in a recent study of the townscapes of three Norman plantations, Alnwick (Northumb.), Bridgnorth (Salop) and Ludlow (Salop), in no case was the town wall an 'original' feature of urban planning, with the circuit forming an original morphological frame for an arrangement of streets and burgage plots (Lilley 1999). Instead, walls were frequently later additions, and it was exceptionally rare for *enceinte* and town plan to be conceived in unison. Even in the case of Edward I's so-called 'bastides' in north Wales – representing, perhaps, the 'apogee' of new town foundation in Britain – a planted town was not necessarily a defended town (Beresford 1967, 35–51). Of this famous group

of ten towns, whose plantation represented part and parcel of a campaign of military conquest and consolidation, only four possessed primary defences: Flint and Rhuddlan (Flint) were embraced by unusual double earthworks that seemed to have served to demarcate rather than to defend, while Conwy (Caernarvon) and Caernarfon had masonry circuits (although a new survey of the latter has raised the intriguing possibility that the walls and town plan were conceived separately: Lilley *et al.* 2005c). This argument can usefully be extended to embrace the numerous English bastides founded in Aquitaine in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, only a small minority of which possessed primary defences (Creighton forthcoming).

Furthermore, in those cases where medieval towns were defended, walls were not always the monumental structures we might assume. Previous studies of urban defences have, perhaps understandably, focused predominantly on masonry fortifications, and murage grants (representing a royal grant of permission enabling a town to levy a tax for the explicit purpose of wall-building) have been used as the key documentary source for their study (Turner 1970). While such sources provide us with a relatively full record of the intent to build walls after the middle of the thirteenth century, in numerous cases this investment did not result in the construction of full circuits. An instructive example is that of Bridgwater (Somerset), which was granted the right to levy murage for a period of five years in 1269. Here, John Leland observed in the sixteenth century that, while the town possessed four gates, its 'wall' was made up of joined-together sections of stone houses (Toulmin Smith 1907, 162). Moreover, we remain remarkably ignorant about those towns encircled not by stone but with earth and timber perimeters, or which were defended in more piecemeal and partial fashion. On currently available evidence, the number of towns provided with defences of these sorts exceeded those with masonry walls. The enormous range of settlements defended in the post-Conquest period with earth and timber ranged in status from shire towns such as Bedford and Ipswich (Suffolk) and major ecclesiastical boroughs such as Lichfield (Staffs.) and Salisbury (Wilts.) to more modest seigniorial plantations such as Bolsover (Derbys.), Devizes (Wilts.) and New Buckenham (Norfolk). Numerous medieval market towns such as Banbury (Oxon), Halesowen (Worcs.) and Oakham (Rutland), meanwhile, had stone gates over their main thoroughfares, rather than full circuits. This tendency towards the partial defence of towns was more marked still in Scotland, where the piecemeal 'back-dyking' of plots to produce irregular and often partial circuits and the provision of freestanding masonry 'ports' over major roads was far more commonplace than the provision of formal walls (Wallace *et al.* 2004). Here, urban wall-building schemes were exceptional and mostly the result of royal initiative (Edinburgh, Midloth.) and/or English influence (Berwick (Northumb.), Stirling and perhaps Perth); far more characteristic of the Scottish burgh, however, are places such as Aberdeen, Glasgow (Lanarks.) and St Andrews (Fife), where freestanding gates were used to control commerce and did not represent vestiges of more ambitious defensive schemes.

It is also interesting to consider the broader positioning of defended towns within the full spectrum of medieval urban settlements. The way in which walled towns are distributed unevenly within this overall urban hierarchy is particularly striking. At the upper end of the spectrum, it is instructive to assess the defences of Britain's twenty-five most important and populous towns at the end of the fourteenth century, as defined by the *Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Kermode 2000a, 442–3). Within this elite group of towns, places of the status of Beverley (Yorks.) and Boston (Lincs.) were embraced not within walls but by ditches or earthworks of little or no defensive value, while at others, such as Bury St Edmunds (Suffolk), Cambridge, (King's) Lynn (Norfolk) and Salisbury (Wilts.), wall-building projects were left half-complete or never got off the ground. At the opposite end of the urban hierarchy, meanwhile, it is clear that there was no 'cut-off' point of population level, wealth or size beneath which towns were not provided with defences. Indeed, it is striking how far down the hierarchy we find fortified towns, to the extent that a great many fall into the notoriously 'grey area' between urban and rural settlement, a large number of these being castle-dependent and seigniorially dominated nucleations of the type common on the Anglo-Welsh border – places such as Caus (Shropshire), Kilpeck (Herefordshire) and Richard's Castle (Herefordshire) (Creighton 2005, 167–72).

Nonetheless, even if enclosed towns are not spread evenly within the overall urban hierarchy, there is little question that walls featured heavily in medieval society's own image of the city. Walls and gates were powerful and evocative landmarks in urban cosmologies. To some extent walls were always symbolic of towns: one of their first representations is the Egyptian hieroglyph depicting a cross within a circle, representing the unity of street plan and circuit, and the tradition is perpetuated in Roman and early medieval coinage and ultimately in later medieval art, picture-maps and seals. The point is illustrated particularly well by the image of Oxford's first seal (Figure 10; Davis 1968). In use in 1191 and apparently the earliest municipal seal in Britain, this flaunts the powerful image of a crenellated wall that both defines the city physically and represents its independence (other symbols represent the 'Ox' of Oxford and cylindrical towered structures signifying the castle and/or churches). Rather less obviously, it is far from certain that Oxford actually possessed a freestanding masonry wall at this date. The masonry *enceinte* was built in the period c.1226–40, to replace an earthen circuit supplemented in places with a partial revetment wall, as revealed by excavation (Dodd 2003, 21–5, 135–200). The Oxford seal thus represents an imagined townscape showing the place of the city wall in the community's self image and, arguably, in medieval urban ideology.

A number of other seals similarly depict town walls as civic symbols that proclaimed status and independence and were clearly integral to the construction of collective identities: those of Barnstaple (Devon), London and York are instructive examples (Steane 2001, 226–32). Whatever its origins, this link between the medieval urban image and the town wall was enduring, and was



FIGURE 10.
The late twelfth-century municipal seal of Oxford, showing an idealised image of a city wall, along with an ox and a symbol probably representing the royal castle and/or churches (after Davis 1968, plate VI).

propagated in other ways. In local memory walls might be strongly associated with figures in foundation myths. The late fourteenth-century civic annals of Colchester (Essex), for example, credited the foundation of the city's ancient *enceinte* to King Cole (Rosser 2000, 339, 345). The 'show fronts' of town gates, meanwhile, sometimes displayed representations of the heroes of foundation myths alongside more conventional symbols such as the royal arms, the city arms and those of ecclesiastical authorities. Above Bristol's St John's Gate, for example, were displayed statuettes of the city's mythical founders, Brennus and Belinus; the portal of Southampton's (Hants.) north gate was flanked by Sir Bevis and the giant, Ascupart; and London's legendary king is remembered in the name 'Lud'gate, over which the mythical king sat with his two sons, following a sixteenth-century refurbishment (Rosser 1996, 14; Creighton and Higham 2005, 166–73).

Walls and the townscape

Besides being strongly linked to the urban image as perceived by contemporaries, walls clearly played important roles in the delineation of urban space. In simple terms, walls made physical the definition of the 'non feudal islands in the feudal sea' famously described by Postan (1975, 212). A growing body of archaeological and historical work is, however, now beginning to challenge over-simplistic urban/rural dichotomies to examine lines of contact and zones of interface between town and country (see, for instance, Epstein 2001; Perring 2002; Giles and Dyer 2005). It is now more clearly understood

that in a physical sense the 'outer face' of the medieval city was not always as rigidly defined as we might imagine; for instance, immediately beyond the urban limits commonly lay a belt of essentially rural resources to which urban populations had access (Dyer 2005, 314). Here we might ask how urban defences fitted into this pattern? Did walls really mark such a sharp dividing line between towns and their hinterlands?

Defences certainly exerted an enduring influence on urban form, yet they did not bound townscapes in simple linear fashion. Rather, they were rather part and parcel of a far more complex layering of features, defensive and otherwise, that created a 'zone of transition' on the urban fringe. The zoning of activities, ranging from industrial processing to prostitution, displays a consistent relationship with the immediately extra-mural area. In addition, the location of market places outside gates is well known in larger earlier centres such as Canterbury (Kent) and Hereford, while other townscapes display a 'funnelling' of intra-mural development in towards the gates, as at Winchester (Hants.). Intra-mural routes were other characteristic features of urban planning closely related to defensive topographies, while less widely acknowledged is the maintenance of thin girdles of land immediately within defences as open spaces: this was a characteristic of burghal-period foundations, such as Wallingford (Oxon), and was maintained well into the post-Conquest centuries in Exeter (Devon) and London.

It is, however, crucial to note that the area under the jurisdiction of a town and the zone physically embraced within defences were very often not the same thing. Frequently, the medieval traveller would know he or she had reached the urban limits not because of formal walls and gates, but because of movable bars, chains or turnstiles that marked toll-collection points, often well in advance of the walls. While archaeologically invisible, their construction and maintenance is recorded in civic records and they are sometimes remembered in street-names: Whirligig Lane in Taunton (Somerset) is a little-known example. Alternatively, at Gloucester, Chester and elsewhere, freestanding stone gates marked the limits well in advance of formal town walls.

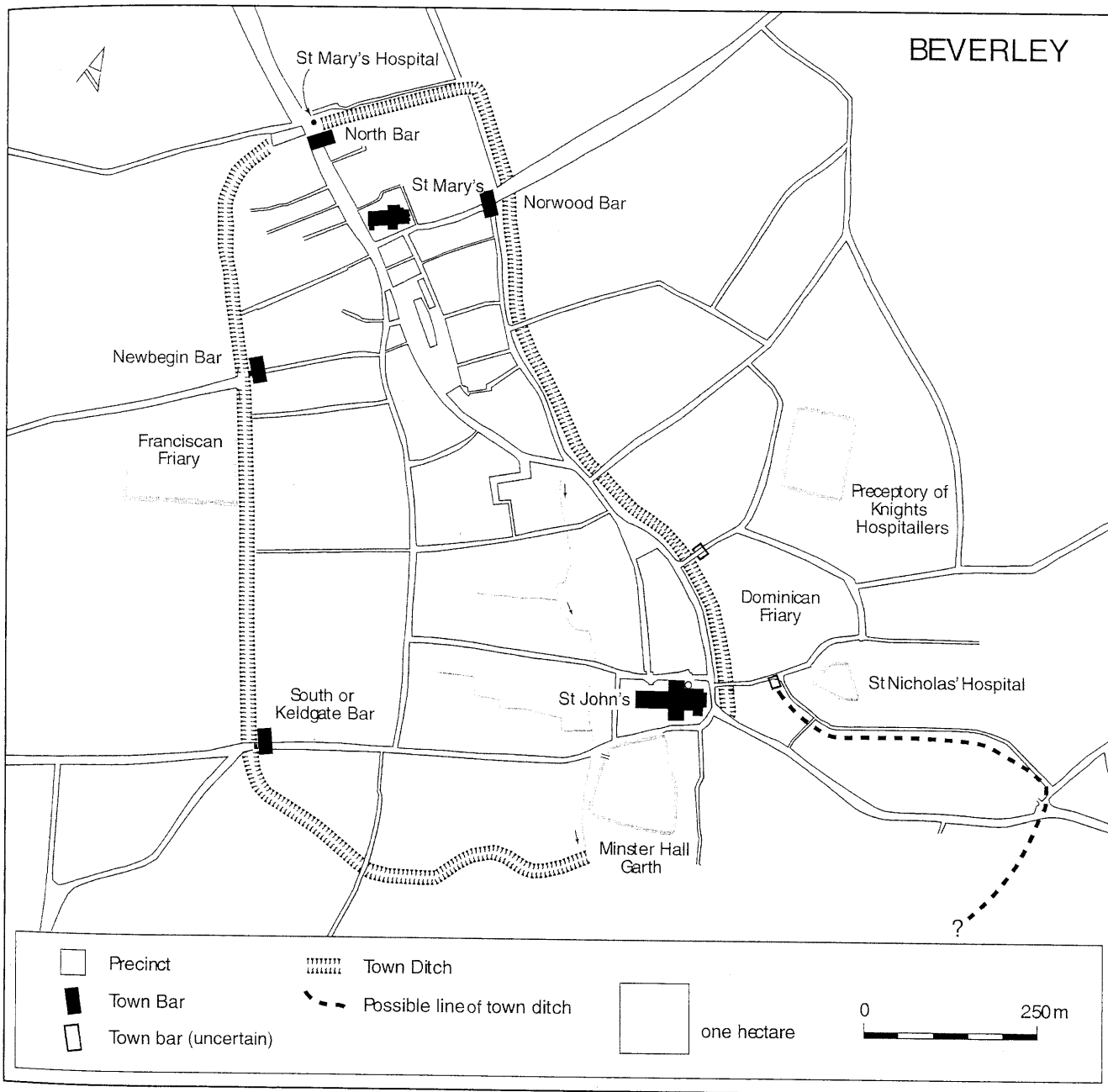
The example of Beverley (Figure 11) brings many of these issues into focus. Growing up around an important minster church, this large and wealthy borough – by the late fourteenth century the eleventh most populous in England – was embraced not within a masonry circuit but a humble earthwork, known as the Bar Dyke. Despite agitations in the 1320s from the burgesses to build a wall, a combination of restrictive ecclesiastical lordship and royal favour towards Kingston-upon-Hull (Yorks.), which received murage grants, resulting in the construction of new brick circuit, ensured that a more piecemeal approach to enclosure and defence continued. Sections excavated across the Bar Dyke in 1985 and 2003 demonstrate that it was not primarily defensive: comprising a broad low bank and a shallow flat-bottomed ditch built in the twelfth century, it was, at best, sporadically maintained and virtually derelict before the four main bars or gates (including the famous surviving North Bar) were rebuilt at great cost in brick in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth

FIGURE 11.
The medieval topography of Beverley, showing the line of the Bar Dyke, or town ditch, and the town 'bars' (after Miller *et al.* 1982, folding map 1, with additions).

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centuries (Miller 1984b; Youngs *et al.* 1986; Tibbles 2003). Also notable is that to the east, where the town outgrew its confines, rather than a formal extension to what was essentially a jurisdictional earthwork being constructed, more temporary barriers were erected: the Town Keepers' accounts record expenditure on features such as chains, timber bars, turnstiles and lengths of earthwork in outlying positions on the approach roads in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Miller *et al.* 1982, 39–45; Miller 1984a).

Town defences therefore comprised far more than linear obstacles; rather, they consisted of complex and a multi-layered 'belts' of features that might stretch from outer ditches through walls and/or ramparts and ditches to intra-mural banks, roads and open strips, and were used as resources by urban populations in a multitude of ways. The earthwork berms between walls and



ditches (and sometimes the ditches themselves) were valued grazing areas, for instance: the city wall of Oxford contained a postern recorded from the mid sixteenth century as the 'Turl', after the wooden turnstile that kept cattle out of the town (Elrington 1979, 303). At Exeter, Stafford and elsewhere these spaces were used for stretching out manufactured cloth. City ditches were also fishponds, mill-races and (unofficially) municipal dumps; walls were perambulations, playgrounds and sources for stone, while their gates might house guildhalls or gaols, or were let out both as prestige dwellings and as tenements for the poor. It comes as no surprise that medieval civic records (especially in the form of bye-laws) show that urban authorities could be in more or less constant conflict over the regulation of activities such as building, grazing, gardening and dumping in the vicinity of defensive zones – a typical example being the ordinance of 1366 in London that prohibited the construction of gardens, houses and other structures against the wall (Barron 2004, 244).

Religious buildings were another important element in the structuring of the urban fringe and have important relationships with defences – gate chapels and churches especially so. Canterbury had at least five, Bristol and Winchester had four and Warwick two; other lesser-known examples include the 'Hanging Chapel' at Langport (Somerset) and St Peter's, Wallingford (Berks.) (Morris 1989, 201–2, 214–17). This characteristic pattern may have arisen, in part, for pragmatic reasons: prominent churches by gates naturally attracted donations from travellers. Some church-gates at London were of minster status and served to 'anchor' the wards, while at Oxford and perhaps elsewhere late Saxon church towers by gates may have originally stood next to, or formed parts of, the residences of noblemen (Haslam 1988; Renn 2003, 85–9). Yet the phenomenon of gate-churches and chapels also, inescapably, lent something of a spiritual dimension to a town's defence. Charitable institutions in general, and *leprosaria* in particular, were further markers of the fringe, forming rings around larger towns and clustering at gates – at Yarmouth (Norfolk), for instance, the buildings of the leper hospital of St Mary Magdalen flanked both sides of the town's east gate (Rawcliffe 2005, 261). These institutions were landmark features in the mental geography of a town's fringe, as were those hermitages located in gates, mural towers and in the corners of town walls, and the many nunneries and friaries built immediately against circuits (as at Beverley: Figure 11). As well as frequently resulting in uncertainty and occasionally disputes over ownership and access rights, such activities contributed further to the creation of distinctive 'city fringe' zones that were liminal socially as well as physically (Gilchrist 1995, 116, 173–5).

Town walls by no means always provided protection for urban populations at large. As the only British urban centre in any way reaching the status of a front-rank medieval city by European standards, London (Figure 12) is remarkable in that the line of its Roman defences was never extended to embrace any of its massive suburbs (and nor did it by any means represent the largest defended area in Britain). The only extension to London's ancient circuit, circumscribing some 132 ha, was out to the Fleet on the west side of the

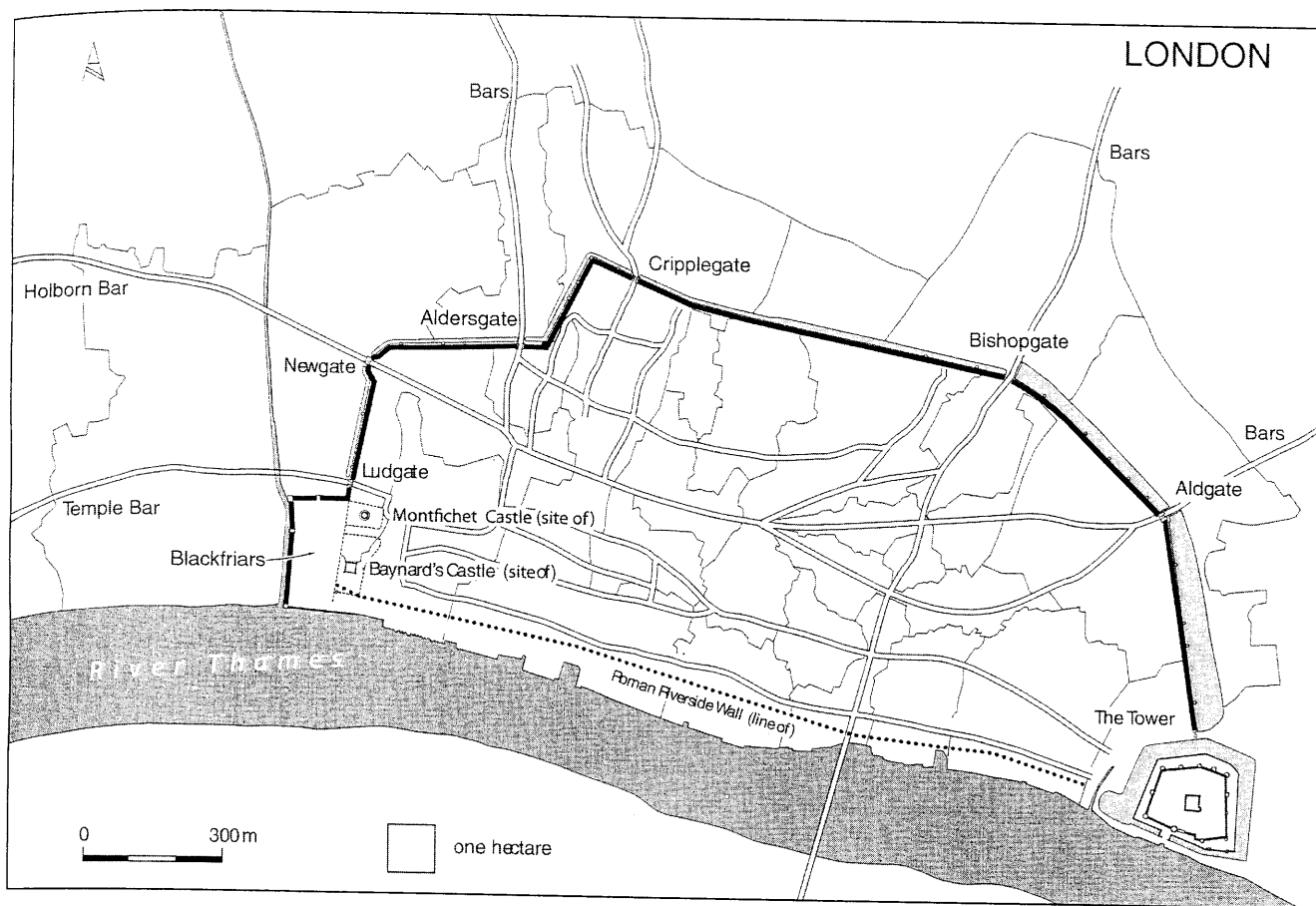


FIGURE 12.
The medieval defences and wards of London. Note the disappearance of the Roman riverside wall (dotted line), as well as the westward expansion of the *enceinte* around Blackfriars (after Sheppard 1998, fig. 15, with additions).

city in the 1270s, to include a monastic precinct, although in the same period the Tower's expansion on the opposite (south-east) side of the city took in a large area (Barron 2004, 242–3). Piecemeal reclamation on the north bank of the Thames, following systematic demolition of the riverside wall, meanwhile, saw a small net increase in the enclosed zone, but at the expense of making the city arguably less defensible than before the Conquest. Thus, despite the high levels of independence attained by the growing city, its growth in status and size was never reflected in an extension to the defences, the true urban limits being marked in the later medieval period by outlying bars and barriers. It is also notable that here, as in most other major British towns, the wards (or units around which the manning and watch of walls was organised, presumably from the burghal period) extended to embrace large areas of extra-mural space. That London's wards were referred to in later medieval documents as the *patria*e (or 'homelands') of their inhabitants provides a tantalising glimpse of a deep-rooted network of local loyalties both inside and outside the walls, quite at odds with the superficial unity of the walled *enceinte* (Rosser 2000, 344). Winchester, where the ancient walls embraced a minority of its inhabitants at the city's peak around c.1100, provides another clear example. Its sprawling suburbs took up at least two and perhaps as much as three times as much space as the 58-ha walled zone; as at Canterbury and Lincoln, partial earthworks well beyond the circuit enclosed portions of these suburbs, though in no case were defences formally extended (Barlow *et al.* 1976, 184).



We should therefore recognise that as well as embracing certain sectors of urban populations, town walls excluded others and were not necessarily symbols of universal commercial advantage. At London, for instance, restrictions on access through designated gates ensured that some streets within the city that terminated at the wall were 'commercial backwaters' (Schofield 2000, 227). In settlements which gained defences late in the day, the construction of fresh defensive lines might cut across built-up areas or infringe on property rights. At Southampton, for instance, the fourteenth-century wall was built across a series of merchant's houses on the south-west side of the town (Figure 13), helping to reverse permanently the fortunes of a once prosperous area (Platt 1973, 123–7, 269). A combination of royal initiative and civic endeavour, this wall-building scheme played a major role in the recasting of the town's economic geography: by cutting across the network of lanes around the town's mercantile waterfront zone, the new wall ensured a concentration of trade away from the complex of private wharfs towards the two public quays (Hughes 1994, 126–36). At Coventry (Warks.), which became a walled community only in the late fourteenth century, the wall similarly 'amputated' certain zones of development and embraced the assets of the privileged. On the north side of the city, for instance, a prominent 'dog-leg' in the circuit marked where the wall line deviated to include the prior's fish stews and the pond known as St Osburg's Pool, while elsewhere it cut across gardens and through houses (Gooder *et al.* 1966, 94–5; Pugh 1969, 21–3). Other clear

FIGURE 13.
Southampton town wall in the south-west part of the medieval city, showing an earlier merchant's house cut across by the new fourteenth-century curtain wall.
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examples of the severing of settlements from redefined urban cores by new town walls are provided by the late-thirteenth-century circuit of Norwich (Norfolk) and Edinburgh's fifteenth-century King's Wall.

It follows that the enclosure of a town might not have necessarily enhanced economic opportunities for all. Indeed, while a wall might outwardly appear to encourage security, with its gates acting as a filter system facilitating the ready collection of tolls, there seems to have been a long-standing tension between the needs for defence and commerce. This was particularly acute in port towns. For instance, it was the temporary nature of Southampton's waterfront defences in the first half of the fourteenth century that led to the town's devastation in a French raid in 1338: the defensive 'wall' flanked only the town's northern and eastern sides, the quaysides being provided only with gated streets (Platt and Coleman-Smith 1975, 37–8). Similarly, at Kingston-upon-Hull the magnificent new brick wall of the fourteenth century left the waterfront from the mouth of the Hull to the haven undefended. In contrast, London's Roman riverside wall was toppled into the mud within a couple of generations of the Norman Conquest, presumably in the face of commercial pressure, and never replaced; in the later medieval period only water gates and impermanent timber breaching defended the waterfront (Turner 1970, 157). On occasion, burgesses might even directly oppose wall-building enterprises: quite exceptionally, the murage grant to Portsmouth (Hants.) in 1342 was reversed two years later following vociferous complaints from the townsmen that the levying of tax was adversely affecting trade (Page 1908, 187).

A surprising number of wall-building projects, meanwhile, were only partially realised. Civic aspirations might be thwarted by the restricting influence of lordship (especially in ecclesiastically dominated towns) or fizzle out due to economic downturn or inefficiencies in the murage system. For instance, it has been calculated that only one sixth of the money raised through murage to finance the maintenance of London's wall in the 1330s was used for this purpose (Barron 2004, 243). At Ipswich (Suffolk), (King's) Lynn (Norfolk), Scarborough (Yorks.) and Stafford, wall-building projects were left half-completed or never got off the ground, with stretches of earth and timber plugging the missing gaps. The planted town of New Winchelsea (E. Sussex) is a famous and extreme example of grand ambition left unrealised: development never filled the circuit as envisaged in the late thirteenth century, leaving the gates as isolated outlying features, and when attempts were made to rebuild the defences on a contracted line in the early fifteenth century, this, too, was left incomplete (Martin and Martin 2004).

A related point of broader significance here is that walls might not always mark 'urban' densities of development, and this holds true not only of those towns that in some way or other failed to live up to their potential or that fell into decline, such as the numerous seigniorial boroughs in Wales where open zones within defences were never filled. For example, Norwich's town wall (built from the 1290s) embraced the largest defended area in Britain – a massive 388 ha – but always enclosed gardens, fields and other unoccupied

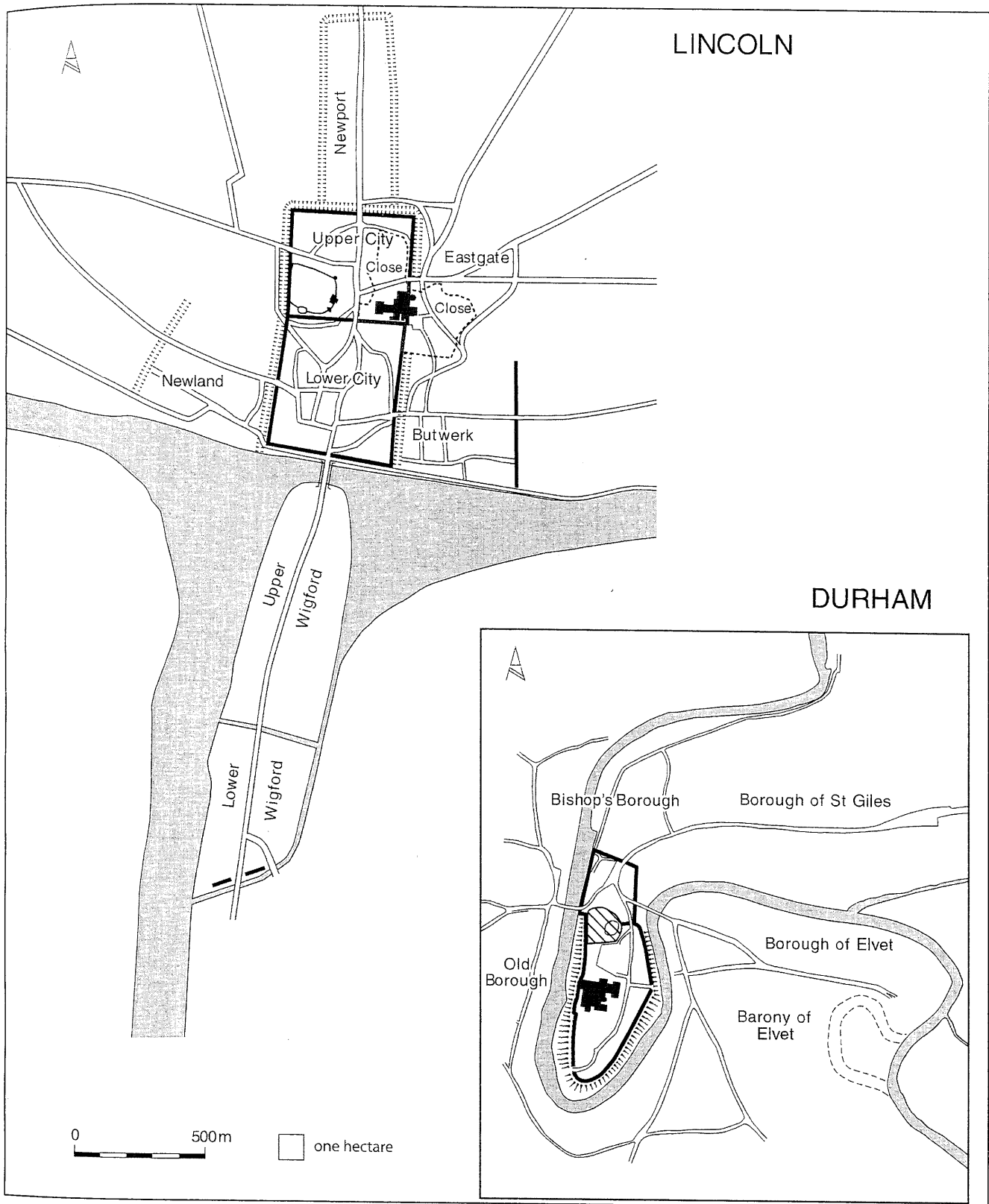
spaces. Even in those towns where development spilled beyond the confines of a walled area, vast areas of intra-mural space might be taken up by open areas: even the walled city of medieval London at its peak was still 'a city of gardens and open spaces' (Barron 2004, 252). Monastic and other ecclesiastical precincts similarly ate up huge chunks of intra-mural space. At Chester, for instance, friary and nunnery precincts took up almost all of the additional area embraced by the twelfth-century expansion to the Roman *enceinte* (Thacker 2000, 22–6).

Indeed, the image of the city wall as a unifying emblem of communal defence was frequently at odds with the reality of walled topographies, which were often confused and whose ownership was actively contested between interest groups. The three brief concluding examples of Lincoln, Durham and Bristol illuminate further how town defences, rather than necessarily unifying communities, could accentuate the development of separate identities.

In later medieval Lincoln (Figure 14), the city limits were marked by an irregular and visually unimpressive arrangement of ditches, banks and 'enhanced' property boundaries, with only short discontinuous stretches of walling and inconspicuous gates (Stocker 2005; see also Jones *et al.* 2003). Here, the 'walls' defined a more privileged zone dominated by the Roman Upper City, elevated above its surroundings and embracing the castle and cathedral within its ancient masonry defences. In sharp contrast, the city's convoluted outer perimeter was constructed piecemeal in the post-Conquest period to mark the limits of what was a loose amalgamation of suburbs rather than a unified urban entity (Stocker 2005). At Durham (Figure 14) the 'city' wall was clearly nothing of the sort. It was established by Bishop Flambard in the late eleventh century and again encircled a complex of high-status buildings and precincts rather than a densely settled urban area; it was also built at the same time that the peninsula was reorganised through the clearance of Palace Green in front of the new cathedral (Leyland 1994, 416–17). Indeed, the walled zone was less densely settled after construction of the defences than before, and archaeological evidence suggests that this scheme of urban development may have also included the replanning of displaced tenements beyond the wall, on the northern edge of the peninsula (Lowther *et al.* 1993, 108). Not until the fourteenth century was Durham's commercial heart, represented by the market place of the Bishop's Borough, enclosed, and most of the population was always extra-mural. Despite the superficial appearance of the iconic walled city, the physical reality of medieval Durham was of a 'polyfocal' community of fragmented identities based around a collection of quasi-independent boroughs that were mostly undefended and at least two of which had separate charters (Bonney 1990, 41–9).

Finally, Bristol's thirteenth-century 'Portwall' was a walled extension to the south of the city's early medieval core. Built in a huge arc across a loop of the Avon and fronted with a wide ditch, the wall's construction was a massive engineering operation that entailed the damming and diversion of waterways and went hand in hand with an ambitious scheme of reclamation. A series of

FIGURE 14.
The walled
topographies of
Lincoln and Durham
(after Jones *et al.*
2003, fig. 9.72, with
additions, and Lowther
et al. 1993, figs 39 and
42, with additions).



developer-funded excavations between 1994 and 2000 have revealed for the first time the remarkable form of the eastern stretch of this lost wall: in this section only, it was pierced by internal 'casemates', twenty-two in all, providing access to loops regularly placed at intervals of 5.75 m and amounting

to a multi-tier 'battery' (BaRAS 1995; 2000). This appearance of immense defensive strength and sophistication – quite unlike most town walls – was enhanced further by loops in the 'spines' of the imposing Tower Hartz that marked the wall's terminus against the river. Crucially, the wall in this part of the city marked the boundary of the Temple Fee of the Knights Templar. While ostensibly a 'city wall', this stretch of the circuit was, it seems, explicitly designed as the symbol and substance of the Templars' authority and was seemingly influenced by their Middle Eastern castles, while the very deliberate blocking of the casemates may relate to the Templars' suppression in the early fourteenth century.

Conclusions

Many of the examples explored in this paper have presented an image of town defences sharply at odds with the familiar view of walled heritage proudly displayed by medieval 'gem' towns such as Conwy and York. To a contemporary medieval visitor, a town's defences – if indeed it possessed any – may not have been visually impressive symbols of communal pride at all but scappily built features obscured by other activities and encumbered by development. Moreover, the point at which a traveller entered the urban area might not be clear-cut but marked by a broader zone of transition comprising different component parts of defensive systems as well as a range of other characteristic features and activities.

Overall, we can find compelling evidence that, far from being 'communal' defences in the true sense, many town walls embodied the ambitions of elite sectors and other minority stakeholders in urban society. Many circuits not mentioned in this paper started life as enclosures attached to castles – vast outer baileys, even – and were always seigniorial in character. Several instances have been cited of larger cities where vast stretches of circuits marked the boundaries of high-status precincts and were managed and maintained essentially as 'privatised' resources, while huge tracts of populations lived outside the walls. As such, defences served to divide as well as to unite, potentially creating or exacerbating fragmented identities in a manner quite at odds with the enduring image of the walled city as a cohesive entity. These matters, in addition to the 'secret history' of walls and gates as the focus for discontent and as arenas for conflict between competing interest groups, require careful consideration in the future.

Acknowledgements

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