

Fig. 1: Agas' map c.1558: to the north (left) of Aldgate the first tower on the wall is Bastion 6 and beside it is outlined the main area of excavation at Dukes Place. Similarly, the Houndsditch site is indicated immediately north of the fourth bastion (9) from Aldgate. Holy Trinity Priory (marked *Crychar* on the map) formerly occupied the triangular plot which extended from Aldgate to just north of Bastion 8. Bishopsgate can be seen north of Bastion 9, and between Bastion 7 and Bishopsgate, beyond the ditch, the frames on the tenter grounds are shown.

Dukes Place and Houndsditch : The Medieval Defences

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Photography by John Bailey

THE EXCAVATIONS AT DUKES PLACE provided information about the City defences from 2nd-17th century¹ but yielded only limited evidence of the medieval ditches. Subsequently, the opportunity was taken to record these ditches on a site 200 metres further west at Houndsditch. Both sites are located between Bishopsgate and Aldgate (Fig. 1).

As is so often the case there was no discernible evidence of Dark Age or Saxon activity in the

defensive sequence on either site. An entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 886 states that "The same year King Alfred occupied London and all the English—those of them who were free from the Danish bondage — turned to him, and he then entrusted the burgh (fortified place) to the keeping of

¹ The first part of this interim report, "Excavations at Dukes Place: The Roman Defences" appeared in *London Archaeol* 3 No. 11 (1979) 292-7.

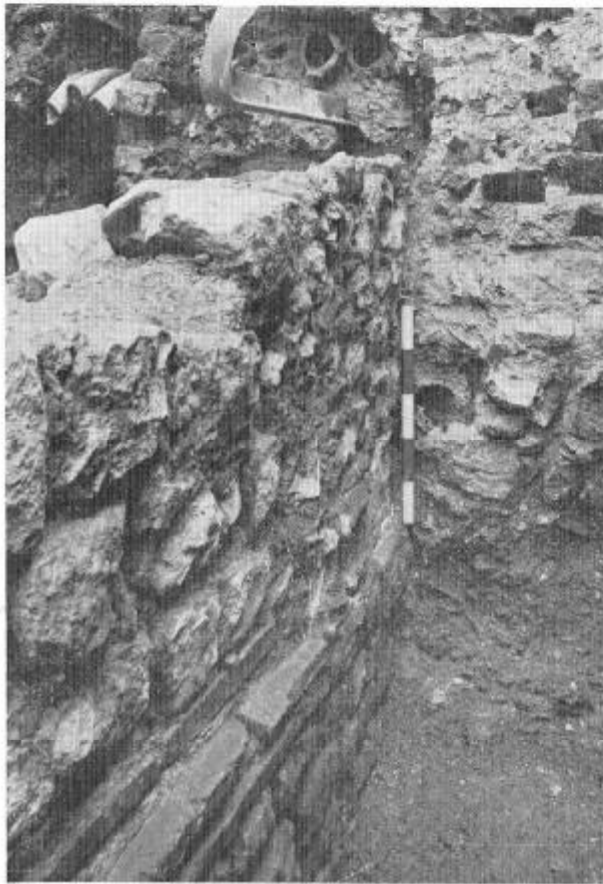


Fig. 2: The internal face of the wall: the difference in size between the Roman masonry in the foreground and the smaller stonework of medieval date (up to the photographic scale), can be seen. Just beyond the point where the top row of tiles can no longer be seen, a vertical line of plaster is discernible.

the ealdorman Ethelred"². There are differing opinions as to whether Alfred "restored" the Roman wall³; archaeology has yet to reveal activity connected with the City defences that can be assigned with confidence to the Saxon period⁴.

The Medieval Postern

At Dukes Place a localised change in the construction of the City wall was evident: on the internal face the courses of ragstone characteristic of the

2 G. N. Garmonsway, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (1954) 80.

3 Bell (W. G. Bell, F. Cottrill, C. Spon, *London Wall through Eighteen Centuries*, 1937, 42) and Biddle (M. Biddle and D. Hill, "Late Saxon Planned Towns", *The Antiquaries Journal* 51 (1971) 83) take this to be the implication, but the repair of the Roman wall is not specifically mentioned.

Roman work abruptly ceased and were replaced by much smaller stonework and there was the suspicion of a vertical line of plaster (Fig. 2). The longitudinal section through the core of the wall clearly confirmed the presence of a rendered face within the wall and also highlighted the difference between the Roman mortar and that associated with the smaller stone-work (Fig. 3). In addition, there

4 A late Saxon recutting of a ? Late Roman ditch has been postulated at Ludgate (B. Hobley and J. Schofield, "Excavation in the City of London First Interim Report, 1974-75", *The Antiquaries Journal* 57 (1977) 45); and it has been suggested that a rough grid of pointed stakes at New Fresh Wharf may have been a Saxon anti-landing device (*ibid.*, 37).

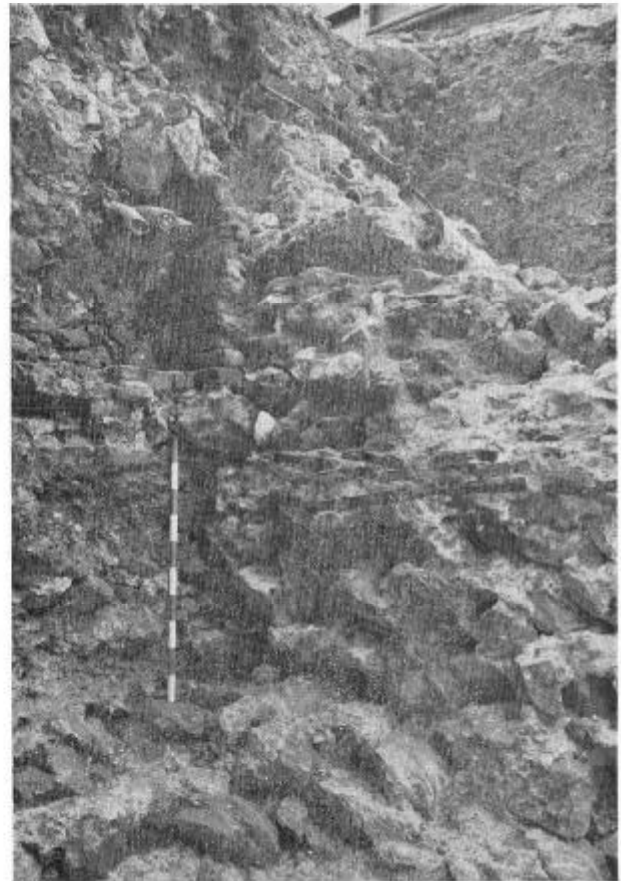


Fig. 3: The longitudinal section through the core of the wall: to the right of the brick feature is the medieval work (the lumps of chalk are particularly noticeable) used to block up the postern. In the bottom right hand corner of the blocking a vertical face is visible, which proved to be the rendering on the western side of the passageway in the postern. To the right of this, the difference in colour between the medieval and Roman mortars can be clearly seen.

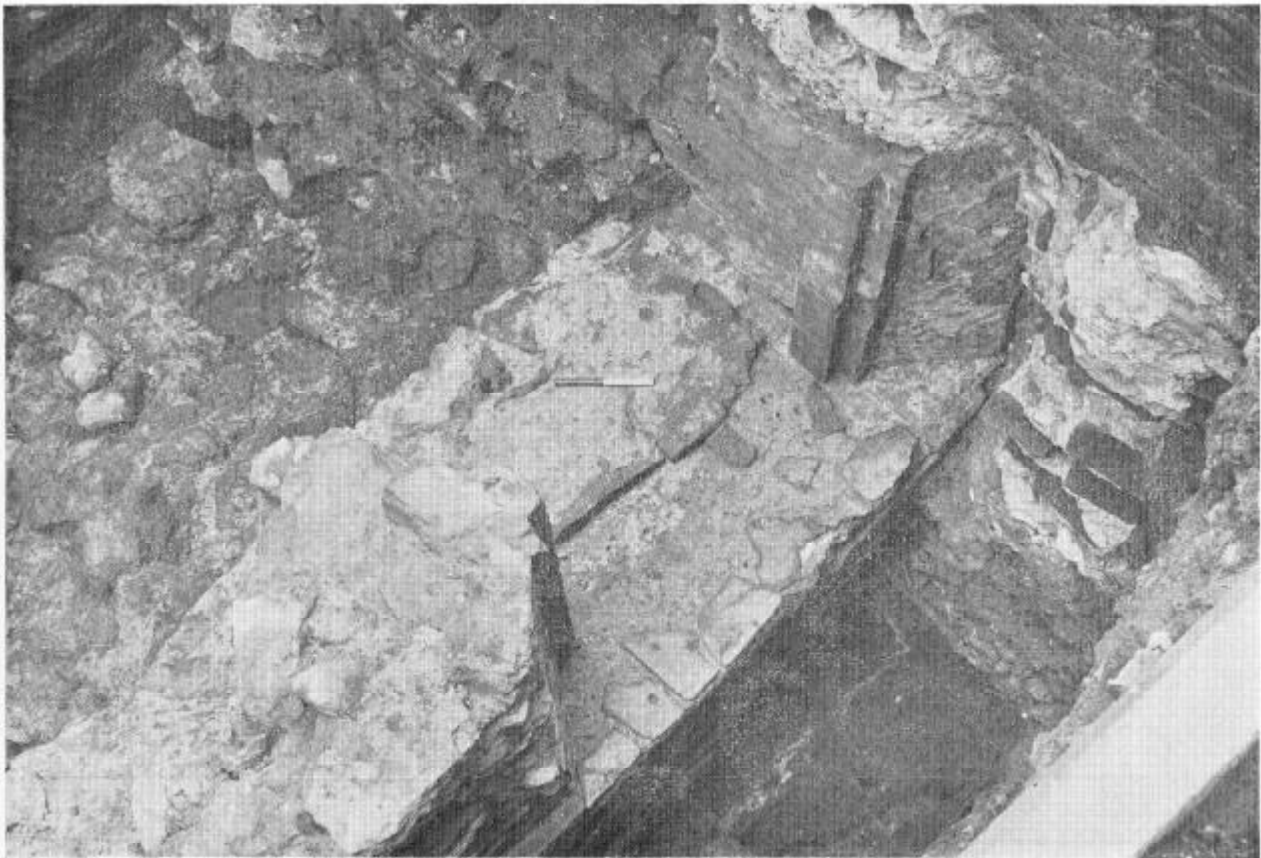


Fig 4: The internal face of the wall showing the splayed entrance to the postern doorway, the rebated door jambs and the rendered face of the passageway through the wall. To the right of the postern is a pier from the brick arches built flush against the internal face. The foundation of the pier can be seen resting on top of the Roman bank.

were lumps of chalk present which are alien to the construction of the Roman wall. When the blocking was carefully removed a doorway made of moulded greensand jambs was revealed, in which were found the remains of iron hinges (Fig. 4). The top row of tiles of the triple tile course above the level of the plinth was utilized as the threshold (Fig. 5), but this row is offset and two of the tiles had been displaced and so the gap was made good by the insertion of roofing tiles (Fig. 4)⁵. The wall at this point would have been 2.25m (7ft 5ins) wide and the construction of the doorway and passageway between must have been a considerable undertaking. A sherd of pottery from the Saintonge workshops (south-west France) was found embedded in the mortar of the doorway

⁵ Most unfortunately, the Roman wall and medieval postern were not preserved but the Corporation of London (Engineers Department) are keen to represent these features in the subway which was the cause of their destruction and a scheme has been submitted

and indicates a date for its construction after the mid 13th century. The date of the blocking is similarly imprecise but it certainly occurred before c. 1558⁶ and probably before 1477⁷.

The Priory of Holy Trinity, Aldgate, endowed by royal patronage in 1108, occupied a large property inside the wall until 1531 (marked *Crychur* on Fig. 1), and also owned much land outside the wall on either side of Aldgate. It is therefore most likely that the doorway was a postern constructed for the priory as a private thoroughfare through the City wall, in spite of the fact that Aldgate lay immediately to the south-east of the precinct and was in the Priory's charge⁸.

by the author.

⁶ Agas' map of this date does not show it.

⁷ Discussed under the heading, "The City wall in the Medieval period".

DUKES PLACE 1977
THE CITY DEFENCES (COMPOSITE SECTION)

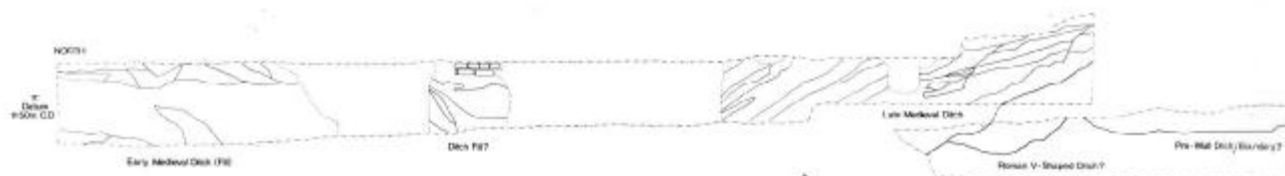


Fig. 5.

To the south of the postern another door-jamb was discovered (Fig. 5) set in a wall the bottom of which was 1.9m (6ft 3in) below its threshold. The position of this second doorway appears to coincide with that in the north wall of the dorter of Holy Trinity Priory, shown on a plan of 1592⁹, and the dorter is recorded as having vaults. The postern and the dorter doorway are in a line perpendicular to the wall but there is a discrepancy in the respective levels of their thresholds: the former is 0.65m (2ft 2in) above the latter. Although it is not possible to prove archaeologically that the postern and the doorway were in use contemporaneously, the circumstantial evidence suggests that this was the case.

The internal face of the Roman wall on either side of the postern was rendered with plaster and mortar which was very similar to that used in construction. Whilst it is tempting to speculate that the postern and the dorter doorway may have been incorporated within a structure that bridged the gap between the Priory and the City wall, the explanation may be quite simply that it indicates a localised repair¹⁰. However, the Priory was granted permission in 1122¹¹ to cut off access to the public right of way which lay between it and the City wall and this certainly happened c. 1265¹². The latter date may be of significance with regard to the date of construction of the postern.

The Medieval Ditches

John Stow, writing at the end of the 16th century, reports that the medieval ditch was "finished in the year 1213 the 15 of king John, this Ditch. . . caused no small hinderance to the Canons of the holy Trinitie, whose Church stood neare unto Aldgate, for that saide ditch passed through their ground, from the Tower of London, unto Bishops-gate. This Ditch being originally made for the defence of the Citie, was also long together, carefully clenched and maintained as neede required, but now of late neglected and forced either to a verie narrow, and the same a filthie chanell, or altogether stopped up for Gardens planted and houses builded thereon, even to the verie wall"¹³. In this passage Stow gives the impression that there was one ditch continuously in use until the 17th century. However, excavations at Dukes Place and Houndsditch have indicated the presence of two ditches of medieval date. At 47-56 Houndsditch (on the alignment of St Mary Axe) the early ditch was observed within some 12m (40ft) of the external face of the wall, but at this point was cut away by the later ditch (Fig. 6). The early ditch was cut into the natural brickearth and gravels and extended for 8.5m (28ft) to the northern limit of the area of excavation. Its greatest recorded depth was 1.5m (5ft) — at the opposite (east) end of the site — and its

8 W. R. Lethaby, "The Priory of Holy Trinity or Christchurch, Aldgate", *Home Counties Magazine*, 2 (1900) 47. Presumably provision was made for crossing the ditch—Stow records that at Moorgate there was a "wharf of tumber from the head of the Posterne into the towne ditch", John Stow, *A Survey of London*, C. L. Kingsford (ed.), 1908, Vol. 1, 20. See also W. F. Grimes, *The Excavation of Roman and Medieval London*, 1968, 85.

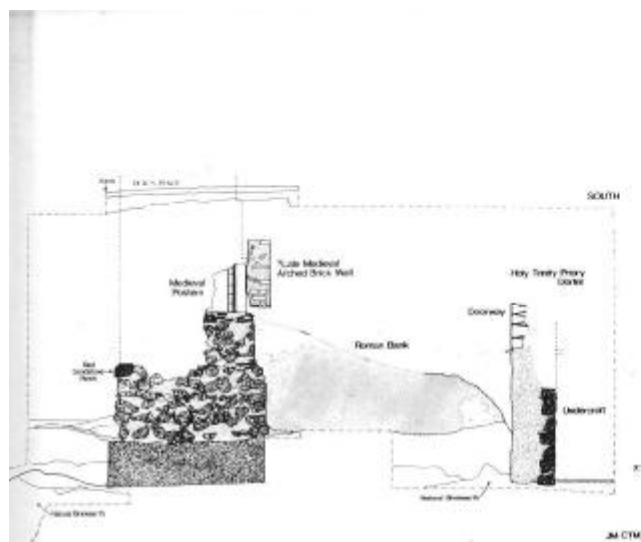
9 By J. Symons; *ibid.*, Fig. opposite 46.

10 The evidence is ambiguous: whilst part of the plaster

rendering clearly covered a repair to the wall, the facing under the mortar rendering appeared to be original and intact. However, there was clearly no building over the lane in c. 1558 (Agas' map) (1900) 47.

11 C. Johnson and H. Cronne (eds.) *Regesta Regnum Anglo-Normannorum*, 1956, Vol. 2, No. 1315-6.

12 It is also recorded that "Eustace (prior 1264, 1280) took advantage of the disgrace into which the City fell after (the battle of) Evesham, to inclose within



alignment would appear to be approximately parallel to the line of the wall. The profile resembled that of a platter and the fills consisted of a fairly homogeneous deposit of dark clays with bands of sand and silt, which at the east end contained more organic material. To the south, the upper edge of the ditch was covered by a layer of sand/silt. The only finds from the fill of the ditch were a Romano-British rim sherd and a piece of medieval roof tile shaped into a gaming counter. Examination of the samples taken indicated a freshwater (slow-moving and unpolluted) environment in the lower levels of the ditch, with a more stagnant environment in the upper levels where discolourations in the clay represented decayed vegetable matter. Stow does record, along with his comments on the filthy nature of the ditch, that at some period there were fish in it¹⁵. The fills at the bottom were irregularly laid/accumulated presumably because they had been disturbed by periodic cleaning-out operations, as also mentioned by Stow¹⁶. The sandy deposit on the upper edge of the ditch to the south and those in the fill along the southern edge may have been caused by flooding.

At Dukes Place the excavations revealed an homogeneous deposit very similar to that in the early ditch at Houndsditch, and from it was recovered a single sherd of 13th century date. This deposit was seen in isolation at the north end of the

the priory bounds a piece of the high road running from Aldgate to Bishopsgate" (*Rot. Hund.—Rec. Com.—i*, 407, 412, 428).

13 John Stow, *op. cit.*, 19. Stow gets his information confused at the beginning of this passage, however, the earliest reference to the digging of the City ditch occurs in 1213 in *Annals Monastici* (H. R. Ward, ed., 1866, III, 34). Apparently, the Canons were inconvenienced because the ditch went through their vineyards!

14 During previous excavations at Dukes Place, what

site (Fig. 5), 18.45m (60ft) from the wall and extending 4.8m (15ft 9in) to the limit of the area of excavation. Its distance from the wall and the nature of the upper fills also bear comparison with the early ditch at Houndsditch.

At Houndsditch the upper fills had been consolidated and levelled off with a series of bands of clean sand and gravel (Fig. 6) existing to a height of 0.75m (2ft 6in). These may have been the surfaces of the tenter grounds which are known to have been in existence on the site by c. 1558 and in London generally from at least the 13th century¹⁷. Tentering was a stage in the manufacture of cloth, which after it had been woven was washed, stretched over frames and left to dry (Fig. 1)¹⁸. The need to protect the cloth may have ensured that the surfaces on which the frames were placed were kept clean and frequently relaid. In time of war they could be quickly removed and would not therefore impede the defence of the City. Lack of dating evidence has meant that it was not possible, archaeologically, to determine either the date at which the early ditch was covered over or the period of use of the (?) tenter grounds. Both these features were cut through by the later ditch (Fig. 6), which survived to a depth of 1.35m (4ft 5in). The outer edge of the ditch was approximately 17m (56ft) from the wall and the profile indicated is that of a flat-bottomed ditch with straight sides sloping at a 30° angle to the horizontal. The fills consisted of fairly clean silts and sands along the sides and bottom, and the central fills were mainly contaminated silts, with bands of humus, sand, and silt with molluscs. Environmental evidence suggests that the ditch was open for some time but was basically dry. The fills at the bottom and sides were relatively clean, lacking the filth and debris which was often recorded as choking the City ditch. Stow reports that it was full again in his time, constituting a grave danger to health¹⁹. The fills yielded a reasonable quantity of pottery of the late 15th-16th century, the latest find (provisionally) being a mid-late 16th century stoneware sherd. The level of the bands of mollusca indicate that the ditch was half-filled by the early 16th century and that this was being gradually achieved by both rain-washed silting and the dumping of refuse.

may be another ditch of medieval date was recorded. P. Marsden, "Archaeological Finds in the City of London 1966-8", *Trans. Lon. Middx. Arch. Soc.* 22, Pt. 2 (1969) 22-26. See also fn. 25.

15 Stow, *op. cit.*, 19-20.

16 *Ibid.*, 19-20.

17 H. A. Harben, *A Dictionary of London* (1918).

18 *Ibid.*

19 Stow, *op. cit.*, 164.

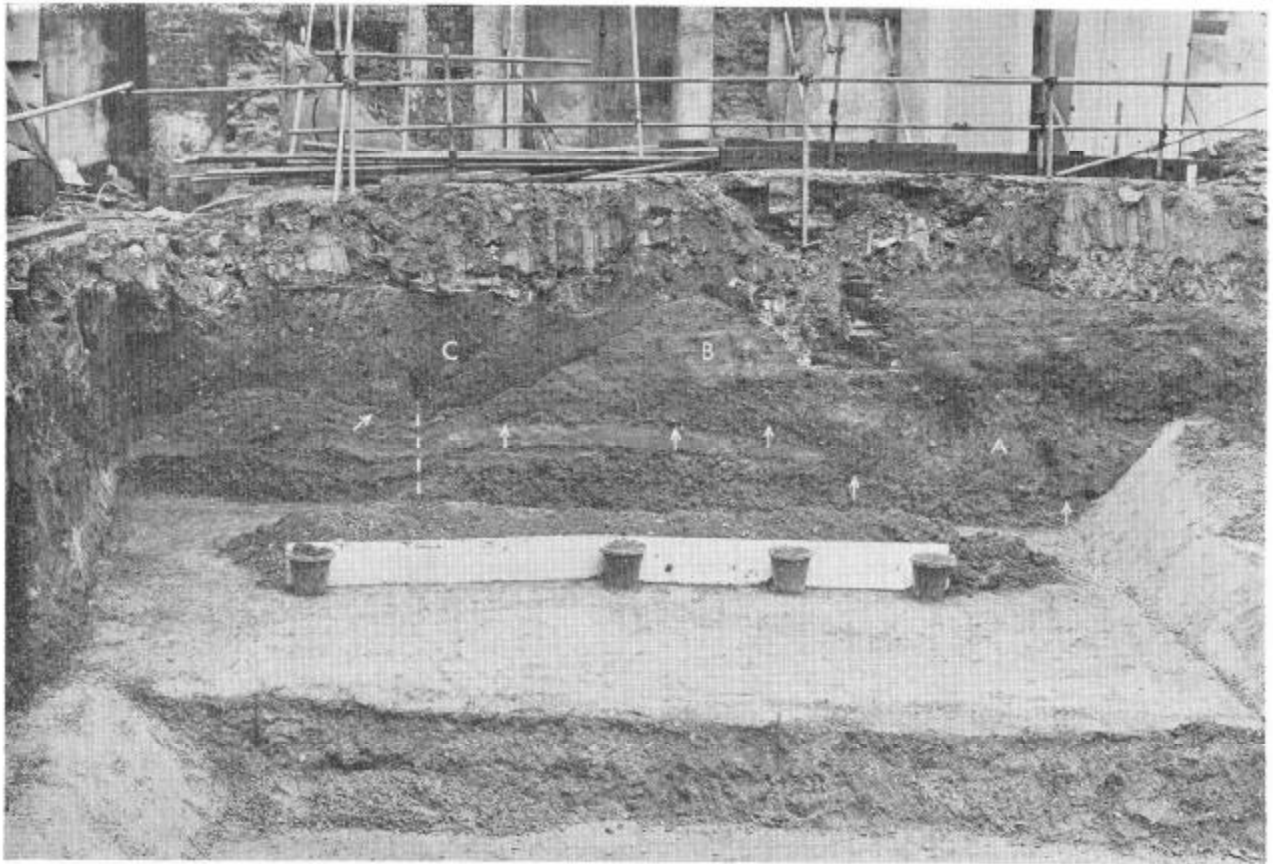


Fig. 6: The section at Houndsditch looking west:

- A: early medieval ditch—the arrows indicate its profile**
- B: the tenter ground surfaces which extend north**
- C: the fill of the later ditch**

A ditch similar in character to the later ditch at Houndsditch was recorded on Dukes Place surviving to a depth of 2.3m (7ft 6ins), with its inner edge less than 5.8m (19ft) from the wall (Fig. 5). In terms of its profile, the nature of the fills, and the date of the pottery recovered, it equates well with the flat-bottomed ditch at Houndsditch. It was in use at least by the late 15th century but it is not possible to be any more precise from the archaeological evidence. However, with regard to its disuse, a pit dug through the backfill (not featuring in Fig 5) yielded six whole pots of late 16th-early 17th century date and a stoneware sherd stamped 1591 (Fig. 7).

20 Grimes, *op. cit.*, 82-84.

21 Stow, *op. cit.*, 10.

The City Wall in the Medieval Period

Other than the postern and the minor repair to the internal face of the wall nearby (see footnote 10), no other trace of a repair/ modification to the wall itself was found. Abutting the internal face of the wall there were however three brick arches, part of a series which continued beyond the sides of the trench (Figs. 4 and 8). The relationship of this feature to the Roman bank is interesting: a trench was dug down to the Roman bank and the arches were constructed with their ends resting on the top of the bank (Fig. 4). One of the upper layers through which the trench was cut con-

22 D. Whipp, I.L.A.U. (*pers. comm.*)

23 Bell etc., *op. cit.*, 47.

tained pottery of 15th century date. Between Aldermanbury and Coleman Street, Professor Grimes recorded a similar series of arches (extending over 61m — 200ft)²⁰ in exactly the same relationship to the wall and bank as those at Dukes Place. He contended that this arched wall had been inserted to reinforce the City wall and carry some considerable superstructure. Grimes concluded that it was of medieval date, and possibly the work of Major Joceline who in 1477 persuaded various guilds to undertake repairs to the wall between Aldgate and Aldersgate²¹, which is the only section of wall where these arches have been found. If it was part of Joceline's refurbishment of the defences it would mean that the postern was certainly not in use after 1477 (Fig. 5).

Discussion

During the medieval period posterns are known to have existed at Tower Hill and Moorgate (the former was recently located by excavation²²), but the postern at Dukes Place is the first apparently in private hands to be discovered. That a monastery was given permission in one instance to pull down the City wall²³, and in this case to enclose the common land inside the wall, and breach the defences with posterns — during a period when kings issued instructions concerning the maintenance of the wall and numerous grants of murage were made²⁴ — is a testimony to their powerful influence.

From Dukes Place and Houndsditch evidence has been presented of two major ditches of medieval date. The one which has been referred to as the early ditch is probably the principal ditch of the medieval period which Stow (quoting a much earlier source) tells us was completed in 1213²⁵. At Dukes Place and Houndsditch it was recorded at a distance of 23m (75ft) and 21m (68ft) respectively from the wall, with no sign of an external edge. At St. Alphage²⁶, what appears to be the same ditch was seen 28m (94ft) from the wall and therefore it is possible that the 1213 ditch extended over 30m (100ft) from the wall throughout much of its length.

"Houndsditch" was first mentioned in a document of 1282 and refers to the whole length of the City ditch. From the 16th century until the present day it has only referred to the extra-mural street

between Aldgate and Bishopsgate which formerly bounded the outer edge of the ditch. Stow ascribes its origin to the filth and dead dogs which were thrown into the ditch²⁷, and there may be some truth in this²⁸.

The later ditch clearly did not extend as far from the wall as that of 1213. The evidence from Dukes Place and Houndsditch suggests that it was at least 12m (40ft) wide but probably no more than 18m (60ft), which agrees well with the later ditch recorded at St. Alphage. For the later ditch we are in the fortunate position of having cartographic evidence as well as documentary references. In particular, there is Agas' map of c. 1558 (Fig. 1) which shows a ditch that is not very wide, and near to the wall, beyond which are the tenter grounds bordering on Houndsditch. This accords well with the conclusions drawn from the evidence on the Houndsditch site, where the ditch of 1213 was sealed by the tenter ground surfaces which were cut through near to the wall by the later ditch. Obviously, the tenter grounds continued in use over a diminished area.

The later ditch must have been dug sometime after the early 14th century — a pottery sherd of this date

26 Grimes, *op. cit.*, 86 and Fig. 21.

27 Stow, *op. cit.*, 128.

28 P. Marsden, *op. cit.* (Vol. 22), 26.



Fig. 7: The stoneware sherd stamped 1591.

24 *Ibid.*, 47-49.

25 On two of his sites Peter Marsden seems to have found evidence of a medieval ditch dug prior to that of 1213 (P. Marsden, *op. cit.* and "Archaeological Finds in the City of London, 1966-69", *Trans. Lon. Mdx. Arch. Soc.* 22, Pt. 3 (1970) 6 and Fig. 5).

was found in the tenuous ground layers at Houndsditch — and before the late 15th century, which is the date of pottery found in the ditch fills. A suggested historical context consistent with the archaeological evidence²⁹ is during the Wars of the Roses, when in 1477 the mayor, Ralph Joceline, organised a large-scale repair of the wall between Aldgate and Aldersgate³⁰. Stow also revealed that “Ralf Joceline Maior 1477 caused the whole ditch to be cast and censed . . .”³¹, the significance of which depends on the use of “cast”. Stow lists years in which the ditch was censed from 1354 down to 1569 but it is only in the entry for 1477 that he specifies that the ditch was “cast and censed”. He uses “cast” in another context — “In the yeare 1016 . . . Canute the Dane cast a trench about the Citie of London . . .”³² — and, if he employed the word according to the common usage of his day, on both occasions he must have been referring to the digging of a ditch. If this was the case, it would appear that Ralph Joceline instituted a major programme for the restoration of the defences in 1477. Further, he may have been responsible for a modification which necessitated the construction of an arched brick foundation wall flush against the internal face of the City wall³³.

Military developments in the late 16th century, such as the widespread use of gunpowder, meant that ditches were no longer adequate protection for town walls. Plans for filling up the City ditch and levelling it off for gardens, etc., were discussed in 1595 and from Stow's evidence it seems that this was accomplished c. 1600³⁴ — which is supported by the archaeological evidence from Dukes Place. Dankert's map of 1633 shows houses built on the south side of Houndsditch and does not indicate the presence of the ditch. At Dukes Place an isolated group of deposits between the early and later medieval ditch fills contained pottery of c. 1630, and set in the uppermost deposit were the bottom courses of a brick sewer — all of which is remarkably similar to a sequence recorded by Grimes at St. Alphage. Grimes pointed out that a ditch open in the early



Fig. 8: The arched brick wall constructed up against the internal face of the City wall.

part of the 17th century suggested a connection with the Civil War. However, almost the entire length of the City ditch was by this time built over or in use as gardens according to the cartographic evidence and there would have been little point in re-cutting small sections. The fortifications of London in the Civil War period were in a much wider radius around the City³⁵ and in all the ordinances dealing with the defences of London in 1642 and 1643 nowhere is the City ditch mentioned³⁶. By 1707 the wall itself was being pulled down³⁷.

Acknowledgements

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29 Suggested by Derek Gadd.

30 Six years before Aldgate had been taken by Thomas “the bastard” Fauconbridge before he and his followers were put to flight.

31 Stow, *op. cit.*, 20.

32 *Ibid.*, 8.

33 Symons' ground plan of Holy Trinity Priory represents the City wall as being 12 feet wide instead of the usual 8½ feet—perhaps the extra width is connected with the addition of the arched brick wall? It

also appears to show the internal edge of the City ditch (Lethaby, *op. cit.*, 47).

34 Harben, *op. cit.*, 311.

35 D. Sturdy, “The Civil War Defences of London”, *London Archaeol* 2, No. 13 (1975) 335.

36 Bell etc., *op. cit.*, 73.

37 *Ibid.*, 103. It should be stressed here that this is an interim statement, and that the documentary research to date has by no means been exhaustive.