The reconstruction of the city's defences begun in 1397

The starting-point for this paper is the copy of an outgoing letter entered on the patent roll for 1396--7 (PRO C 66/346, m 15).* The letter is dated at Westminster, 6 Mar 1397. I have not seen the Latin text, but the gist of it is reported as follows in the printed Calendar:

> Writ of aid for William Arundell, knight, constable of the castle of Roucestre, John, prior of Roucestre, Robert Rowe of Euylisford, Geoffrey atte Downe, Laurence atte Wode, Simon Halle and John Westcote, masons of Maideston, appointed to repair the walls, gates and turrets of the city of Rochester, and for the said William, the said prior and Robert Rowe to arrest masons, carpenters and labourers, except in the fee of the church and those workmen elsewhere employed on the king's service and in the college of Maydeston, and also to provide stone, timber, lead &c. and carriage for the same. (*Calendar of patent rolls, 1396--9,* p 137)

Who are these people, and what are they supposed to do?

* Harrison and Flight (1969) and Harrison (1973) were unaware of this evidence. Eventually I found it cited by Turner (1970:158), and hence it is referred to briefly in Flight and Harrison (1987:9--10).

William Arundel was a younger son of a younger brother of the earl of Arundel.* He is first heard of in Feb 1390, when he and two friends were given permission to travel abroad, "to visit and see the world in divers places" (*CPR, 1388--92,* p 188). In Sep 1392 he was taken into the king's service, with a retainer of 100 marks a year (*CPR, 1391--6,* p 178); a few years later he was made a knight of the garter. In Feb 1394, on the death of Sir John de Newenton, he was appointed for life to the custody of the city and castle of Rochester (*CPR, 1391--6,* p 367). A fixed share of the proceeds (£23 6s 8d) had to be paid into the exchequer;† the remainder was his to keep. The position was not an honorary one: there were duties to be performed and work to be done. In Apr 1395 he was told "to repair all defects in the new tower by the bridge ... at an expense not exceeding 40 marks" (*CPR, 1391--6,* p 559); in July the same year he was told "to repair all defects of the 'dongeon,' gate and other buildings within the castle, ... and to build a new house for covering the well" (*CPR, 1391--6,* p 609).‡ And in Mar 1397, as we see from this letter, he was under orders "to repair the walls, gates and turrets of the city of Rochester".

* This branch of the family is mapped out in detail by Young (1840). As a knight of the garter, William qualifies for an entry in Beltz's history of the order; but the entry is only a short one (Beltz 1841:352--3).

† Theoretically so. In fact this payment had been granted for life to one of the king's serjeants-at-arms, Richard Hembrigge, in lieu of the arrears of

his salary (*CPR, 1391--6,* p 194). That grant was made in Oct 1392; it was confirmed by the new king in October 1399 (*CPR, 1399--1401,* p 63). I do not know when Hembrigge died.

‡ The funds were released to Arundel's agent Elias Reyner on 20 Apr 1395 (Devon 1837:258). Arundel received three payments in all, adding up to 110 marks (£73 6 8); the sum that he spent, between Jul 1395 and Jul 1397, was £91 12 11 plus a farthing (Brown 1963:813). I have not traced the letter of 22 Apr 1395, printed in translation by Rye (1880:142--3) from BL Add 15664, instructing Arundel to see to it that Rochester high street was mended.

John of Sheppey, prior of Rochester since 1380, is not a man whom much is known about.* He had been associated with the previous keeper in an (abortive?) attempt by government to get the defences of the city repaired at the expense of the citizens;† he had also been appointed to act as controller for the work carried out by Arundel in the castle in 1395--7. (That is, he had been ordered to keep a record of all receipts and expenses, parallel with but independent from the record kept by Arundel. Both rolls were eventually submitted to the exchequer.) On this occasion, he had more than an adjunct role: he was one of the three commissioners who were jointly responsible for carrying out the work.

* He continued prior till his death in 1419. An accidentally surviving register (BL Cott Faustina C v) is the principal record of his time in office. I have not seen it.

† In Sep 1386 the prior of Rochester, Sir John de Newenton (the keeper of the city), and two other men (presumably the city's bailiffs) were instructed "to take order for the fortification of Rochester and to compel all men of that city according to their estate and means to repair the walls, turrets, gates and dykes" (*CPR, 1385--9,* p 215). I think this was the chancery's way of asking whether there was any legal pretext for making the men of the city carry the cost; and the answer, I suppose, was no. It does not appear that the inhabitants of the city were collectively or individually responsible for maintaining its defences. As far as the evidence goes, nothing was ever done unless the king was prepared to pay for it.

The third member of the panel, Robert Rowe of Aylesford, was a local man, locally well thought of (Britnell 1994:58), but not the sort of person who would normally be found sitting at the same table as a knight of the garter. More than Arundel or prior Sheppey, however, Rowe had experience in the management of large-scale building projects. As one of the wardens of Rochester bridge, he had been involved in the reparation of the old bridge in 1383--7, and then in the construction of the new bridge in 1388--91. That experience, no doubt, was the reason for his being chosen as one of the commissioners responsible for fortifying the city. I take it that the day-to-day supervision of the work was largely left to him.

The four men whose names are mentioned next -- Geoffrey atte Downe, Laurence atte Wode, Simon Halle and John Westcote -- are the masons who were being contracted to do the work. All of them appear in other records as well, as builders or as suppliers of

building materials. Two of them -- Laurence atte Wode (occ 1382--97) and John Westcote (occ 1386--97) -- make enough of a mark to be included in Harvey's dictionary (Harvey 1984:342, 330).

The purpose of the king's letter was to empower the committee of three to requisition the labour and materials that they would need. Arundel, prior Sheppey and Rowe are authorized "to arrest masons, carpenters and labourers, ... and also to provide stone, timber, lead &c. and carriage for the same". The workmen would be paid a fair wage, but could not refuse the offer of employment;* the owners of the stone and timber would be paid a fair price, but could not refuse to sell.

* Unless they could prove that they were already employed on the king's works, or on the college which archbishop Chicheley was building at Maidstone. In two other writs of the same type, issued shortly after this one, the proviso is extended to cover the work now under way at Rochester *(CPR, 1396--9,* pp 92, 148--9): "provided that masons, carpenters &c. on the king's works and on the works of the college of Maydeston and city of Rochester be not taken".

It is not obvious why the king and his council would suddenly decide to spend large sums of money refortifying the city of Rochester.* One negative point should perhaps be given some stress. Except for the participation of Robert Rowe, there is nothing to connect this project with the construction of the new bridge, just a few years before. The two men who had created the new bridge, Sir Robert Knolles and Sir John de Cobham, were both still alive, but they did not become involved in this work on the defences of the city. Conversely Sir William Arundel, as keeper of the city and castle, had no authority over the new bridge, no responsibility for it.†

* Apparently the king did not supply all the funds: the duke of Lancaster and "certain other lords" are said to have contributed as well *(CPR, 1399--1401,* p 379). The citizens paid nothing. (On the contrary, they are sure to have profited from the influx of craftsmen and labourers.)

† In 1395--8, when a drawbridge was installed in one span of the bridge, at the king's expense, the job was dealt with by the clerk of the king's works (Brown 1963:814): Arundel had nothing to do with it

From the archaeological evidence -- to be discussed more fully in the following section -- we know, with tolerable certainty, what Arundel and his associates were able to accomplish. At the eastern entrance to the city, they built a fine new gate, consisting of two round towers with a narrow arched opening between them. To the north of the gate, they built a new stretch of wall, with a rampart of earth against it on the inside.* At the north-east angle they built a new circular tower. To the west of the tower, they built another piece of new wall -- but that is the point at which Arundel's masons stopped work, never to start again.

* This rampart was there, I suppose, to strengthen the wall against
bombardment by artillery. (The time was not far off when up-to-date siege
artillery, expertly handled, could punch holes in a stone wall. I hope to
come back to this point in a subsequent paper.)

The gate has gone, but its plan has been partly recovered by
excavation (see below). The wall is nearly all still there, with
some of the original parapet still in place; there is a raised
strip of ground inside the wall, where the rampart was thrown up
against it. The tower has lost its parapet and uppermost storey,
but even in this truncated state is still an impressively solid
piece of work. Until 1970, the wall and the tower were largely
obscured from the outside by modern buildings; now the wall is
hidden by a line of trees (which ought not to have been planted so
close to it), but the tower is in plain view.

This new piece of work made the rest of the city's defences look
puny by comparison. No doubt it was intended to continue the
work, on the same massive scale, all around the city, on the
southward side (as the prior's involvement would seem to suggest)
as well as on the northward. If that plan had been completed,
Rochester would have a ring of medieval fortifications which
tourists would come from across the world to see. (Even the East
Kent Railway Company might have thought twice before smashing
through them.) Sadly, however, like many other medieval (and
modern) undertakings, the project never got beyond phase one.

It is not hard to see why the work might have been interrupted in
1398--9, as one political crisis followed another.* In October
1399, just one month after the accession of Henry IV, Arundel had
the custody of the city and castle of Rochester confirmed to him,
together with all the other gifts which he owed to the generosity
of the former king (*CPR, 1399--1401,* pp 265--6); within a year he
was dead.† Within a month after that, on 4 Sep 1400, custody of
the city and castle was granted for life to his brother, Sir
Richard Arundel (*CPR, 1399--1401,* p 357).‡ Sir Richard continued
in office for nineteen years,§ but in all that time nothing
further is heard of any work on the defences of the city.

* In the dying days of the old regime, an order was issued which seems to
imply that Arundel's loyalty was already suspect (*CPR, 1396--9,* p 591, 7 Jul
1399). If the order took effect, he lost possession of the castle for a
while.

† Sir William Arundel died in August 1400 and was buried in Rochester
cathedral, behind the high altar; his wife Agnes died not much more than
thirteen months later and was buried next to her husband (Hawkins 1877:3--5,
Rye 1880:141--3, Hope 1898:309--10). When Arundel made his will (Nicolas
1826:150), just a week or two before he died, he was worried about a debt of
£80 -- a debt which king Richard had promised to cover -- and hoped that
archbishop Arundel (his uncle) would arrange for it to be settled. This, I
take it, is the same debt as "the payment of 88l. in which the said William
bound himself to Laurence atte Wode, Geoffrey Dune and John Westecote of
Maideston, stone cutters, for the making of a parcel of a wall around the
town of Rochester" (*CPR, 1399--1401,* p 379). To set things (nearly)

straight, the new king wrote off a (slightly smaller) debt which Arundel had owed to him. (This letter does not mean that Arundel had invested some of his own money in the project, as I mistakenly supposed (Flight and Harrison 1987:9). He put his name to the contract; but he expected the king to pay.)

‡ The abstract given in the calendar is inadequate: it needs to be read alongside the abstract of a letter of Henry V, 23 Aug 1412 (*CPR, 1408--13,* pp 425--6), in which the king renewed his father's grant. (In fact he improved on it, by remitting the payment of £23 6s 8d that had been required till then.)

§ Sir Richard Arundel died in June 1419. He also asked to be buried in Rochester cathedral, in St Mary's chapel (Nicolas 1826:196, Young 1840:18, Hope 1898:295).

<p align="center">*</p>

The new east gate built at Rochester in 1397 resembled (and may have been modelled on) the new west gate built at Canterbury twenty years before. That gate survives, in almost as good a shape as when it was first built; of the Rochester gate very little is left, and nothing at all that is visible. From incidental evidence, we know that the gate was still largely intact in the 1530s, when John Leland made a note of it ("the most part of a mervelus strong gate", ed Hearne 1710--12 8:27),* and in the 1580s, when the herald William Smith drew his sketch of Rochester (BL Sloane 2596, reproduced in colour by Wheatley and Ashbee 1879, pl 19, in greyscale by Rye 1866, opp p 54, and Marsh 1974, pl 9). It appears again, seemingly complete, in the bird's-eye view of the city which forms part of a map of the Medway drawn for the lords of the admiralty in May 1633 by a surveyor named James Smith.† The approach to the gate was by a bridge across the ditch -- still recognizably a bridge, it seems, in the late seventeenth century.‡ Presumably there was a drawbridge in the span closest to the gate.

* If I catch his meaning correctly, Leland is saying that this gate was kept shut at night.

† Not "Seath", as the name is mistakenly reported by Hull (1992:74). My thanks to Stephen Nye for snaps of a photomontage of the map in the Guildhall Museum; my thanks also to Alan Ward, who first alerted me to its existence. The original is at Alnwick Castle.

‡ "In one of the title-deeds of Miss Spong's property her house is styled 'the Mount House next the Bridge.' The 'mount' doubtless referring to the rampart, and the 'bridge' to the drawbridge which once spanned the city moat at Eastgate" (Payne 1895:4). "The drawbridge is mentioned in the title-deeds of Miss Spong's property, dated at the end of the seventeenth century" (Livett 1895:52). The property consisted of a pair of (mid nineteenth-century) houses (116--118 High Street) which stood immediately inside the line of the wall, on the south side of the street. Ellen Spong owned them both and occupied one of them herself (No 118). (Here and elsewhere, the numbering I quote is the numbering introduced in 1894--5, still current though much disrupted by redevelopment.)

No later than 1708, the gate was mostly demolished, and the
roadway was widened towards the north, so as to cover the site of
the north tower; the approach to the bridge was levelled off and
widened correspondingly. The new frontage was certainly in place
by 1708: that is when a building was erected here,* just outside
the wall, for the newly-founded free school -- Sir Joseph
Williamson's Mathematical School, as it came to be called.†
(Unfortunately, as Fisher's *History* reports, "a great part of the
foundation of the building being laid in rubbish that filled up
the moat which surrounded the wall, ... the fabric from time to
time has given way, and been attended with great expence to the
charity" (Fisher 1772:229).) On the opposite side of the street,
where the frontage was not set back, part of the south tower
survived for rather longer. It was reported to be "yet remaining"
in the 1770s (Fisher 1772:4), but disappeared soon afterwards.‡
By 1790, a large house -- with, sadly, a large cellar underneath
it -- had been built on this site.§ After that, whatever was left
of the gate and bridge was buried, and no one has ever had more
than an occasional, partial glimpse of it.

* Before this could happen, the corporation had to call in the existing
leases which covered the site. "20th February 1708. Mrs Mary Thurston
sealed and executed a surrender to the Mayor and Citizens dated 18th Feby of
part of a piece of the Town Ditch heretofore demised to Richard Holmes, to
enable them to grant the fee to the Trustees for the building of a school
house for Sir J. Williamson's Charity, ... also Dr William Belcher
surrendered and delivered up to the Mayor and Citizens the lease made to him
of a piece of the Town Ditch to enable them to grant the fee thereof to the
Trustees for the purpose aforesaid" (Smith 1928:100).

† An inscription placed over the main door of the original building (as shown
in Badeslade's drawing) was printed by Rawlinson (1717, part 2, pp 35-6),
Wildash (1817:236) and Smith (1928:88). Since it seems to have gone missing
in 1970, I print it again, at the end of this paper.

‡ In Wildash's edition of Fisher's *History,* "is yet remaining" is replaced by
"was standing in the memory of several persons now living" (1817:4).

§ "A part of it was remaining till the late erection of the houses opposite
to the free school" (Gillman 1790:173). "The foundations of the Bastion
Tower, at the East Gate, were laid open a few years ago, in digging for the
purpose of erecting some houses on that spot" (Brayley 1806:664). Just one
house did the damage -- 120 High Street, as it later became. In the 1890s
this was "Mr Leonard's shop" (Payne 1895:4).

In 1892, when a grandiose new building was being erected for the
Mathematical School,* part of the north tower was exposed. At the
request of the mayor, the site was excavated "to a considerable
extent" by George Payne (who had moved to Rochester in 1888).† It
was Payne's hope that the tower might be kept "permanently
exposed, by means of a subway" (*Archaeologia Cantiana,* 20 (1893),
xlii--iii), but that plan soon fell through.‡ All that remained
visible was a thin segment of masonry projecting into the sunk
area at the front of the school (Livett 1895, opp p 52, Harrison
1973, pl VI), and that ceased to be visible after 1970, when the

Mathematical School was totally demolished.§

* The building, designed by the firm of Nash and Bond, was completed in 1894 (Flower 1951:63--4). It was pulled down in 1970 (to nobody's regret, as far as I am aware), after the school had completed its migration to a new site, away from the centre of town. Of the school as I knew it, nothing survives except a pretty little eighteenth-century house (115 High Street), which was where the headmaster had his study.

† I am not sure what Payne meant by a "considerable extent". He reports elsewhere that the tower extended "under the present roadway a distance of 22 feet 9 inches from the inner edge of the pavement in front of the Mathematical School" (Payne 1895:9). But it is hard to believe that he would have been allowed to dig up that much of the High Street.

‡ "I saw what there was to be seen, but thinking that the foundations were to be left open permanently I did not examine them closely. A short time afterwards they were covered up, or nearly so" (Livett 1895:52).

§ The position of this tower is now marked by a ring of brickwork set into the surface of the street. Since most people will need more help than that before they can form any mental picture of the gate, at the end of this paper I reproduce a view of the similar gate at Canterbury, as it was in 1806.

In 1905, when a trench for electric cables was being dug along the High Street, some discoveries were made here which are only very vaguely described.* "At Eastgate the remains of massive masonry connected with the drawbridge over the moat were met with. In front of Leonard's shop rock-like masonry occurred on the site of the Roman gate" (Payne 1909:lxxxviii).

* An earlier report is vaguer still. "In the street nearly facing these houses [120--122 High Street], as the workmen were employed a few years since in relaying some gas-pipes, they came upon the foundations of the ancient walls: and in the present summer [1861] a similar discovery was made whilst laying water-pipes. In each instance, unfortunately, the stones forming the foundation of the gateway were broken and the ground closed before there was time for investigation" (Phippen 1862:138). The same discoveries are referred to, with a little more detail, in the *South Eastern Gazaette*, 4 Jun 1861, p 6.

In 1969, after Leonards department store had gone out of business,* a long stretch of the southern side of the street was cleared of buildings (108-122 High Street), and Arthur Harrison had the opportunity to carry out some excavation here, in advance of redevelopment. On the site of 120 High Street,† beneath the floor of the cellar, the foundations of the south tower of the gate were discovered, in almost exactly the position predicted by Livett (1895). So the plan of the gate, at foundation level, is more or less definitely known (Harrison 1973, figs 1 and 5).

* At its zenith, Leonards extended all the way from 104 to 122 High Street. Two of those buildings were allowed to survive (Nos 104 and 106); the rest were all swept away. (Two at least (Nos 108--110) deserved to be recorded in some fashion, but were not.)

† Not that it matters much any more, but the addresses given on the plan (Harrison 1973, fig 1) and cited in the text are wrong. The cellar marked "No 110" was the cellar of No 112 (opposite the Two Brewers), and the cellar marked "No 122" was the cellar of No 120.

I interject two words of warning. First, though I think it fair to assume (in the absence of any indication to the contrary) that the new gate was of the same build as the new stretch of wall to the north of it, there is no proof of that. If the proof still exists, as perhaps it does, it is buried under the High Street. Until someone tears up a large portion of the tarmac, we are never going to see it. Second, I rather suspect that Arundel's builders went to work on the wall to the south of the gate, as well as on the wall to the north of it. But I avoid this aspect of the question here, preferring to postpone it until I get round (as I hope I shall) to a reassessment of the southern defences.

To the north of the gate, the new wall reproduced the line of the Roman wall: it incorporated as much of that wall as was solid enough to be worth keeping, but was made thicker and much higher. The section of this wall which adjoined the gate was torn down together with the gate; another short section was demolished in 1861 (see below), so that an extension to the Mathematical School could be built on a site just inside the wall. For the rest, the wall survives in remarkably good condition. This is Harrison's description:

> The medieval wall is 7 ft wide and 20 ft high to the foot-walk, with the external facing of coursed ragstone and dressed flint intact. The put-log holes are well preserved at intervals of 12 ft horizontally and 4 ft vertically. The internal facing, however, is destroyed or modern. A considerable length of the crenellated parapet remains with seven of the original embrasures and one side and the sill of an eighth. The parapet is 5 ft 6 in high and 2 ft thick, with a triangular-sectioned coping 1 ft 6 in high of two courses of ragstone ashlar; the embrasures, spaced at intervals of 12 ft, are 2 ft wide with ashlar quoins and ashlar sills, chamfered on both edges, 3 ft above the foot-walk. (Harrison 1973:128)

The first part of that description applies equally well to the short stretch of the north wall which was rebuilt at the same time.

Inside the wall was a rampart, which would have incorporated whatever was left of the Roman rampart in the same position. The top of the rampart was about 10 ft below the top of the wall. There is still a raised strip of ground here -- the playground behind the Mathematical School, as it used to be, and "Mr Henslow's garden" before that -- and the level of this is roughly the same as the level of the top of the rampart.* That is proved by the existence, at this level, of a doorway giving access to the north-east tower (Harrison 1973:128, pl VIII).† Apparently there was a path along the top of the rampart, sheltered by the wall,

communicating between the east gate and this tower.

* "The interior of the small tower situated in the same [north-east] angle,
does not appear to have suffered much from the ravages of time; the entrance
to it is from Mr Henslow's garden, through an arched door-way, to the right
of which is a stone flight of steps, but little decayed, leading to the top:
it has a fire place, and several loop holes" (Wildash 1817:3).

† Since that photograph was taken, the surrounding area has been transformed.
This strip of ground inside the wall was taken over by the French Hospital
(the charity which bought Theobald Square in the 1950s and turned it into "La
Providence"). Some of the land has been used for new buildings, the rest
laid out as gardens. The buildings are regrettable, but the gardens are a
definite improvement. (By the way, a plaque put up by the French Hospital
has caused some mystification. Though the charity was founded in 1718, it
had no connection whatever with Rochester until the 1950s. Theobald Square
was built, circ 1855, by the brewer Sir Henry Meux, partly on the site of a
disused brewery. (Perhaps it was meant to be "Theobalds Square" -- Theobalds
being the country estate in Hertfordshire bought by Meux's father -- but
"Theobald Square" it became.) I do not know much about it; but I see that it
was still a "proposed new square" in 1854 (*South Eastern Gazette,* 3 Oct 1854,
p 3).)

As it exists, the tower consists of two stages. The first stage
is circular inside as well as outside; it has no windows or
openings of any kind. The second stage is octagonal on the
inside; it has windows and also a fireplace and a toilet.* A
turret containing a staircase, grafted into the angle between the
tower and the east wall, leads upwards (only upwards) from this
stage. There was originally a third stage, which probably
resembled the second stage in most respects,† but was carried up
clear of the wall. The staircase turret was presumably carried up
still further, to give access to the roof of the tower, which had,
no doubt, an embattled foot-walk around it. (At this level, where
it rose clear of the tower, the turret would have revealed itself
to be hexagonal in plan.) As things stand now, however,
everything above the second stage has been removed, and the top of
the tower has been roughly patched up, so as to make it flush with
the top of the wall.

* The shaft from this descended to a vent at the foot of the wall, on the
outside. There is another vent to the left of it, for the shaft from the
toilet on the third stage (Harrison 1973:129).

† If there was intended to be a passage through the tower, communicating
between the east wall and the north wall, the toilet in the third stage would
have had to be differently planned.

This is Harrison's description of the tower:

  The drum-tower at the north-east angle is of one build with
  the wall and, in its present state, of the same height, the
  foot-walk being continued around the top of the tower;
  originally, it was at least one storey higher (Fig. 8, and Pl.
  VII). Entry into the tower was by a doorway on the south-

western side and the fact that this doorway is only a few inches below the present ground level suggests that there was an internal wall-bank. The doorway has a two-centred arch, rebated internally and with a double chamfer externally (Pl. VIII). The left-hand jamb is original, but the right-hand has been patched. To the right of the doorway is a small square-headed window, blocked within the last few years. Through the doorway is a small vaulted vestibule built into the thickness of the wall. On the left, a narrow vaulted passage leads to a garderobe, lit by a square-headed window. The supports for the wooden seat remain but the shaft has been filled in. To the right of the vestibule another passage leads to the foot of a newel staircase giving access to the east wall and to the upper stage of the tower and lit by a third square-headed window. Finally, in the north-east side of the vestibule is a much-restored doorway leading into the well of the tower.

The existing upper stage of the tower, 11 ft high, is octagonal internally, with sides 6 ft long. It was lit by three two-centred windows with trefoil-cusping, rebated internally for shutters. In the north-west side is a fireplace, restored in brick. It would appear that the floor-joists were supported on the ledges formed where the octagonal upper storey meets the circular lower one as there are no holes or corbels at floor level. Externally, the whole tower is circular with a chamfered string-course 13 ft above present ground-level running just below the sills of the windows in the upper stage, above which the face is set back 6 in. This string-course continues around the projecting sides of the staircase-turret between the south side of the tower and the east wall, but is absent from the broad pilaster-like strip of masonry carrying the shafts from the two garderobes (one already described and the other presumed to have been in the destroyed upper storey), which discharged into the ditch through two square openings under a relieving arch. (Harrison 1973:128--9)

There is only one point here that I would take issue with. The idea that the second stage had a wooden floor, with joists wedged into the angles of the octagon, never seemed convincing to me, and I am satisfied now that it was wrong.

The second stage did not have a wooden floor at all. It had a dirt floor. The base of the tower was packed with earth, to the same height as the rampart inside the wall -- to such a height that no part of the first (circular) stage was visible.

The tower was still in this state in 1853. In July of that year, the British Archaeological Association held its annual meeting in Rochester. The meeting was rather sparsely attended, but there was no lack on enthusiasm: "the members availed themselves of every possible opportunity to visit the most remarkable places" in and around the city. On 30 July a party led by the president,

Ralph Bernal, took a look at the north-east tower, and the results of their inspection were reported in the Association's journal.

  The ancient walls of the city of Rochester have been described somewhat in detail, in the fourth volume of the Journal of the Association for 1848, pp. 30--37;* and on occasion of the present Congress, the President and many members of the Association particularly examined the north-east tower, and expressed themselves much pleased with its state of preservation, and the traces of the ancient arrangements of the interior of it still remaining. It is approached from the High-street by a door-way adjoining the Free School. Thence passing through a narrow passage for a short distance the original eastern wall of the city is ascended,† and proceeding along the top, by a species of banquette, for about 60 yards, with the battlements at places still perfect on the right hand, the tower is reached; and the interior is entered by a flight of stone steps descending into an arched passage, and small vestibule communicating with it. In this part a fire-place is still remaining, and also three embrasures, or loopholes, represented in Plate 33. (For the general arrangements of the interior, see the accompanying plan). Its walls, at this height from the ground, are about 6 feet thick; and besides the approach from the city walls, there was another entrance to it on the south side, as shewn by the plan, through an exterior door-way and the small vestibule before mentioned. From this another vaulted passage, 3 feet wide, and 14 feet 3 inches long, extends to the left. The door-way just noted communicates at present on the level with a piece of garden ground, but the soil here seems to have been raised about seven or eight feet since ancient times.

  On the outside of the tower, towards the river, its present height is about 25 or 26 feet; and here two flank walls unite it to the main city walls, filling up the angle of junction. The space so gained is applied, on one side, to give room for the circular stone steps, and on the other it appears to contain a latima,‡ or sewer. The tower is at present unroofed, and without its battlements; but a slightly built modern wall, about three feet high, surrounds it at this part. (*Journal of the British Archaeological Association,* 9:424--5 (Jan 1854))

The report is illustrated with a plan, and also with a view of the interior of the tower which (as I have only recently realized) shows the dirt floor still there.§

* The paper referred to is Poste (1848).

† By a ladder put there for the purpose?

‡ A misprint for *latrina,* I suppose.

§ The drawing is unsigned. (The Association's draughtsman at the time was

Henry Clark Pidgeon (1807-1880), but I cannot say whether this drawing is recognizably one of his.)

This description of the tower was overlooked by Livett (1895), Harrison (1973), and Flight and Harrison (1987); I did not come across it till long after that paper was written.

About six years later, the tower was visited by James Phippen and an unnamed "antiquarian friend".* They found it "unfortunately occupied as a piggery, not over cleanly kept, and rendering further researches in that quarter by no means a pleasant pursuit" (Phippen 1862:135--6).

* James Phippen was a journalist and author of guidebooks. He was living in Tunbridge Wells in the 1830s; from there he moved to Maidstone in the 1840s, and to Rochester in the 1850s; he died there in 1862 (Goulden 2014:481). The preface to this book of his is dated Rochester, Nov 1861. In general he is very unreliable; but he does have some useful things to say about things that he has seen for himself.

The tower remained in the same state till 1861. What happened then is known from another overlooked source -- a letter written by a scandalized citizen to the editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine* and published in the issue for October 1861, under the headline VANDALISM AT ROCHESTER.* The letter is signed ROFFENSIS, and this is what it says:

* Reprinted, minus most of the last paragraph, by Gomme (1895:189-90).

  You no doubt have heard of the havoc that is being made with what remains of the city wall of Rochester, and that much irremediable mischief has been done; but there is one more barbarism, as yet only projected, which may possibly be prevented, if public attention is called to the matter.

  For the purpose of enlarging Williamson's Mathematical School, large portions of the town wall, near the former Eastgate have been destroyed. They were of medieval origin, but the core of the Roman wall, denuded of its facing-stones, was also laid open,* and it was so impervious that the engineers from Chatham were employed to blast it with gunpowder.†

  Such destruction of antiquities has been seen before now in Rochester, particularly a few years ago, when, in making the railway through the heart of the town, the city wall was cut through, but it was reserved for the present day to outdo all former atrocities. The excavations have laid bare the lower part of a tower at the eastern angle of the city wall, the masonry of which is of two dates, and which is quite worthy of preservation. The civic authorities evidently think so, as they are having it cleared out and adapted to use. But this projected use you will hardly guess -- it is by them designed for a *cess-pool*!

That such a piece of Vandalism should be contemplated affords
a proof that love for antiquity has not as yet been developed
in the Rochester corporation by the archaeological gatherings
that yearly take place in Kent, one of which was held not very
long ago in their own city.‡ A body constituted as municipal
corporations either were, or are, seems totally unfit to be
entrusted with power over even the humblest monument of our
national history. The former Conservative corporation
suffered the railway company to sweep away as much as they
pleased of the city walls, but, to do them justice, they were
not guilty of such a barbarous insult as the present Liberal
destructives offer to all who have any regard for the past.
The disgrace of its proposal must ever attach to them, and
they are probably too obtuse to care much about that, but I
trust that the voice of public indignation will be heard, and
will be effectual in preventing the execution of their notable
project. (*Gentleman's Magazine,* Oct 1861, pp 423--4)

* The *South Eastern Gazette* (perhaps quoting from some other local paper) has
this from Charles Roach Smith: "You may now see at Eastgate what appears to
be the Roman wall of Durobrivis laid open to daylight. You will observe,
however, only the core or interior of the wall. The facing stones are gone.
Upon this wall, which was evidently much injured in early times, the middle
age portion was erected. If the corporation could be induced to clear away
the modern work at the bottom, we should probably see the facing stones, and
be better able at once to pronounce upon the masonry. At the depth of,
perhaps, some four or five feet from the present street level, the Roman wall
would be found with its facing stones perfect, presenting the same appearance
as the fragment above the esplanade" (10 Sep 1861, p 6).

† The Royal Engineers had shown off their skills a few years before by
blowing up the medieval bridge: blowing up this section of the city wall was
just a small encore. As Phippen reports it, "some Royal Engineers from the
barracks were employed at the works for some months, who were obliged to
resort to blasting operations before they could accomplish their
task" (Phippen 1862:259). (Though Phippen did use the word "vandalism", he
did not believe that any of the masonry was Roman; so he was not the author
of the letter in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.)

‡ The KAS met at Rochester in Aug 1859. (At that time the city had a
Conservative council; the Liberals gained control in Nov 1859.)

So that is how the first (circular) stage of the tower came to be
visible again, for the first time since it was packed with earth
in the 1390s. The letter seems to have achieved its purpose: the
earth was only partially dug out, and the tower was not converted
into a cesspool. The excrement generated by the Mathematical
School was, one assumes, disposed of in some other way.‡

‡ Rochester had no sewerage system until the 1920s. Before that, there were
"thousands of cesspools ... all over the City" (Marsh 1974:66).

Whoever he was, this observer had the advantage of seeing the
evidence when it was freshly exposed, and it is notable,
therefore, that in his opinion "the masonry ... is of two dates".

Is that so? I would not be unwilling to believe that the fourteenth-century builders had wrapped their tower around the stump of an earlier (possibly thirteenth-century) tower. In my opinion, this is a possibility worth bearing in mind -- but I cannot say anything more definite than that.

An epigraphical appendix

This is the inscription which was set into the facade of the Free School, over the principal entrance. It is shown, schematically, in Badeslade's drawing of the school. When the original building was demolished, in the 1890s, the inscription was rescued and preserved: it was set into the rear wall of the basement of the new building, just inside the entrance from Free School Lane. That is where I remember seeing it in the 1950s. The no-longer-new building was demolished in 1970, and this time around (as far as I know) the inscription did <u>not</u> get rescued. For the record I print it again -- as it was printed by Rawlinson (1717:35--6), except that I have corrected one word (*disciplinis* for *discipulis* in line 3) and added a couple of commas.

Dnus Josephus Williamson, Eq. Aurat.
Hanc Scholam,
Mathematicis Disciplinis dicatam,
Classi Britannicae
Juvenum subinde pullulantium seminarium,
Civitati Roffensi
Benevolentiae suae Monumentum
Futuram,
Sumptu proprio extrui,
Ac annuo salario dotari,
Testamento jussit.
Johannes Boys, Thomas Addison,
Josephus Hornsby, Armigeri,
Peragendum curavere
A. Ch. MDCCVIII.

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C.F. Apr 2014 -- last revised Feb 2022
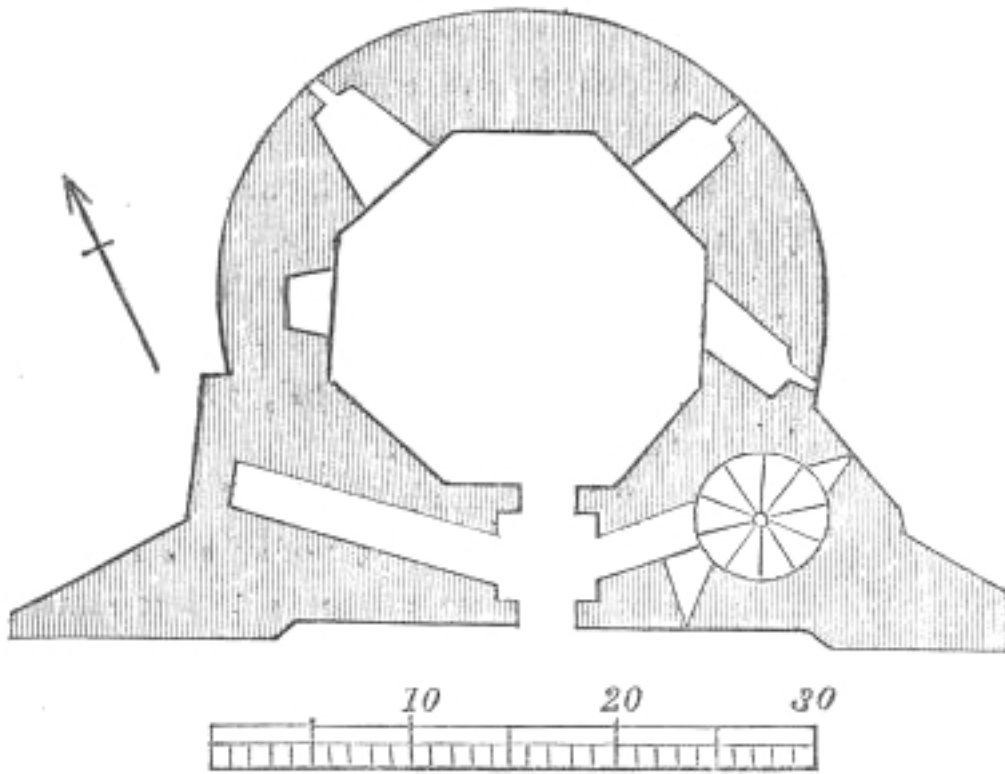
Plan of the tower at the north-east angle -- from *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* (Jan 1854)
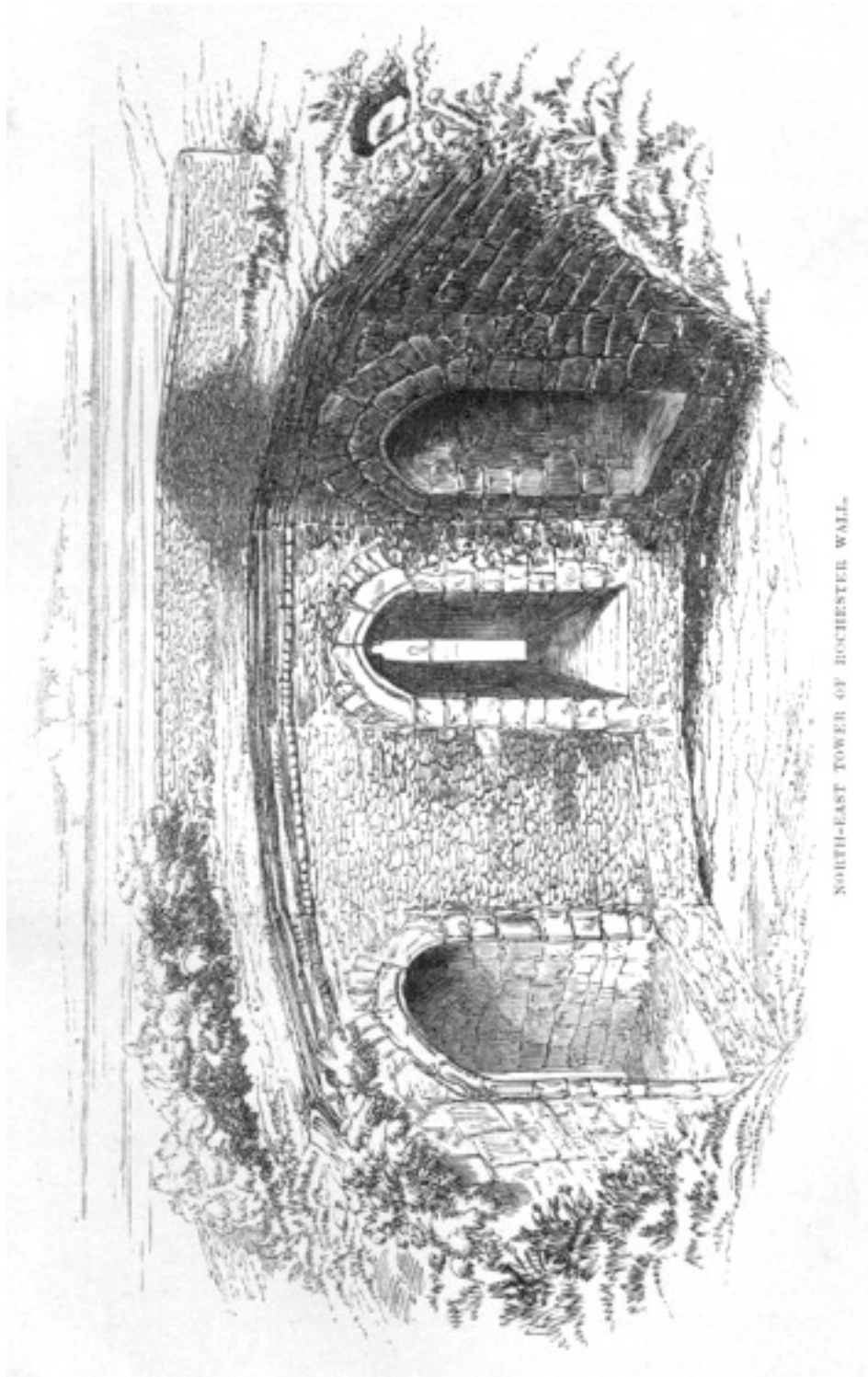
NORTH-EAST TOWER OF ROCHESTER WALL.

View of the tower at the north-east angle -- from *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* (Jan 1854)

The west gate of Canterbury, drawn by George Cooke
in November 1806 -- from Brayley (1806--8).