

THE DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

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No documentary evidence has been found bearing directly upon the history of the Ipswich rampart and ditch before 1204. It is however clear from the pottery evidence and from the existence of a mint in Ipswich during the tenth century that the town must have been a place of some importance throughout Saxon times. It is also of some importance that the evidence of Domesday Book suggests that the church of St. Peter's near the Quay in Ipswich was at one time a minster church. These minsters were usually set up in important administrative centres, and though it is not possible to say definitely when this one was founded, such foundations are usually early, and it may very well date from the seventh century.²⁹

The first recorded evidence of the existence of the ramparts and their ditches is an entry in the Ipswich Domesday, concerning their reconstruction with the assistance of local people and of the County of Cambridge.³⁰

The term 'fossata' meaning 'ditches' rather than walls or ramparts survived for many decades after 1204. The first recorded entry using the term for a wall is to be found in 1280 when Rogier Godescalk paid 2/- for a piece of ground in St. Mary Key 'prope mur' Gyp'.³¹ Some time after this, in 1299, the town obtained a grant of murage from the Crown for five years, and that they intended to build a stone wall is indicated by a grant to Robert Jolyff of a piece of ground in the common ditches of the town for the purpose of erecting a dye-works 'unless it shall happen that a stone wall shall be erected there to enclose the town'.³² There is however no evidence that any effort was made to undertake this project and the proceeds of the grant may have been used to recut the ditch.

With specific regard to the stretch of rampart actually excavated, this formed part of the boundary wall of the house of the Friars Preachers (the Blackfriars). As early as 1275, they had been considering the possibility of encroaching on the ramparts in the vicinity of the excavation, as a Commissioner was appointed by the Crown in that year to enquire whether it would be detrimental to the interests of both the King and the town if the Friars were

²⁹ W. Page, F.S.A., 'Some remarks on the Churches of the Domesday Survey', *Archaeologia*, vol. LXVI, p. 85.

³⁰ 'Predicta anno quinto facta fuerint Magna fossata predicte ville Gippi per prefatum Rege et per auxilium totius patrie et comit' Cantabrigg', Ipswich Borough Records: Little Domesday.

³¹ Ipswich Borough Records: Great Plea Roll, 8-9 Edward I.

³² Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1292-1301, p. 421. Ipswich Borough Records: Great Plea Rolls 31-33 Edward I.

allowed to construct an external chamber extending from their dormitory to the dyke of the town. There is however no evidence that this was ever constructed unless it had something to do with the east gate of the Friary and the causeway across the ditch which certainly existed in the fifteenth century.³³ In 1346 a pardon was granted to the Friars for acquiring a 'void place in the dike' 100 ft. square from John Harnes provided that the Bailiffs and Commonalty were allowed free ingress to repair the walls for defence in time of war, or whenever necessary,³⁴ and three years later, in 1349 the Corporation granted them a piece of land 123 ft. long abutting 'super medium fonce muri nostri communis' provided that the Friars should maintain the walls and also the two gates at the north and south of the priory to allow free passage for the Townspeople with their horses and carts in time of trouble.³⁵ On 22 July 1352, a licence was obtained from the Crown to strengthen and crenellate the town with a stone wall, though this licence was surrendered on 1 November 1354.³⁶ It would therefore appear that the small vertically sided ditch cut in Phase 5 was in fact dug for the foundation of this projected wall. The fact that it was filled in again soon afterwards marks the abandonment of the project. The recutting of the ditch in Phase 6 was presumably undertaken as an alternative method of strengthening the rampart. The flint wall with which this section of the rampart is reinforced was probably erected by the Prior, after the foundation trench had been filled in, possibly to mark the boundary of the house, as it overlaps the foundation trench.

The town records provide no evidence that the walls and ditches were reconstructed during the latter part of the fourteenth century, nor during the whole of the fifteenth century. In fact the very reverse appears to be the case, for the Common Soil Deeds amongst the Borough Records show that the Corporation were deliberately extending their policy of leasing off extensive tracts of both the wall and the ditch to private individuals. A Rental dated 1499 shows that the whole of the ramparts in the parish of St. Mary Key had by that time been leased in this way and it also establishes the existence of the 'Wash' or brook which ran down the street presumably in front of the ramparts. In one place a latrine for the grammar school boys had been erected over this brook.

According to the town records the wall was not repaired again until 1554,³⁷ and it was further repaired in 1603, some 50 years

³³ Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1272-1281, p. 18.

³⁴ Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1345-1348, p. 91.

³⁵ Ipswich Borough Records: Common Soil Deed 1/3.

³⁶ Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1350-1354, p. 314; 1354-1358, p. 44.

³⁷ Bacon, *Annals of Ipswich*, p. 241.

later, when it was ordered in the Great Court that the ramparts should be 'metered with palles (pales) and the gates at the end thereof' and that 'the ditches shall be cast up and gravelled above'.³⁸ It is unlikely that the rampart would need pallsading in the vicinity of the excavations, because of the flint facing, but the second rubble layer associated with Phase 8 may represent repairs carried out at this time.

The wall and ditches were repaired for the last time during the Civil War. A letter from William Cage to the Bailiffs, dated 13 July 1643, states that 'the ditches about town are much decayed and trodden down, and horse ways made to ride up and down upon them and I feare they are much digged down where men have private yards against them'.³⁹ The repairs that followed were extensive, costing £326 plus a further £10 for ten iron sakar (cannon) which were specially imported from London for the defence of the town.

The burials noted in Phase 9 may very well have taken place from the Bridewell, which, together with the Tooley and Smart Foundations and Christs Hospital, occupied the old Blackfriars monastery after 1569. It was established there in about 1600 and remained until the early nineteenth century when it was transferred to a new Borough Gaol. Alternatively they may have been made from the workhouse belonging to St. Mary Key Parish, the yard of which was, for an unknown period extending into the early nineteenth century, within the precincts of the old Friary.

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³⁸ Ipswich Borough Records: Great Court Book 15 Nov. 1 James.

³⁹ Ipswich Borough Records: Town Correspondence Acc. 2781/28.