

= Southampton town walls =

Southampton 's town walls are a sequence of defensive structures built around the town in southern England . Although earlier Roman and Anglo @-@ Saxon settlements around Southampton had been fortified with walls or ditches , the later walls originate with the move of the town to the current site in the 10th century . This new town was defended by banks , ditches and the natural curve of the river and coastline . The Normans built a castle in Southampton but made no attempts to improve the wider defences of the town until the early 13th century , when Southampton 's growing prosperity as a trading centre and conflict with France encouraged the construction of a number of gatehouses and stone walls to the north and east sides of the settlement .

In 1338 Southampton was raided by French forces ; the town 's defences proved inadequate , particularly along the quays on the west and south of the city . Edward III ordered some immediate improvements to Southampton 's town walls but it was not until the 1360s that substantial work began . Over the coming decades the town was entirely enclosed by a 2 km (1 @. @ 25 @-@ mile) long stone wall , with 29 towers and eight gates . With the advent of gunpowder weapons in the 1360s and 1370s , Southampton was one of the first towns in England to install the new technology to existing fortifications and to build new towers specifically to house cannon .

Southampton 's town walls remained an important defensive feature during the 15th century , the gatehouses sometimes being used as important civic facilities , including acting as the town 's guildhall and housing the town 's gaol . From the end of the 17th century their importance steadily declined and the walls were slowly demolished or adapted for other uses throughout the 18th and 19th centuries . This process continued into the early 20th century until , in the post @-@ war years , the walls were recognised as an important historical feature of Southampton . Conservation projects have since occurred and the walls are now promoted as a tourist attraction .

= = History = =

= = = 1st ? 10th centuries = = =

Several earlier settlements were built near modern Southampton featuring protective town walls . Following the Roman conquest of Britain in AD 43 the fortress settlement of Clausentum was established . It was an important trading port and a defensive outpost for the town of Winchester , located on the site of Bitterne Manor , today a suburb of modern Southampton . Clausentum was defended on its eastern , landwards side by a flint stone wall and two ditches . After the fall of the Roman Empire , in the 7th and 8th centuries the Anglo @-@ Saxons built a planned settlement called Hamwic , close to the current location of Southampton , approximately on the location of the later St Mary 's church . At least some parts of this burh town had a ditch dug around it , 3 m (10 feet) wide and 1 @. @ 5 m (5 feet) deep , and possibly was defended by a bank of earth . In the 10th century , Viking raids prompted the settlement of Southampton to move to its current location .

= = = 11th ? 13th centuries = = =

By the time that the Normans conquered England in 1066 , the town of Southampton occupied a rectangular area overlooking the mouth of the River Test , an important medieval waterway . It was protected by water on most sides and by protective ditches and banks to the north and east . Southampton at this time was a relatively large town , but not as significant as in the later medieval period . The Normans built a castle within the town on the site of a probable large English hall , and considerable damage was caused to the surrounding local buildings as space was opened up for the new fortification .

During the years of the Anarchy , in which the Empress Matilda and Stephen fought for control of England , Southampton was held by William le Gros , the Bishop of Winchester and a supporter of Stephen . When Henry II came to the throne in 1153 , he took back Southampton and carried out

improvements to the castle , as part of his attempt to improve the general standard of security in the south . By the second half of the 12th century , Southampton was increasingly important for coastal defence and as a base for operations on the continent . Following the threat of French invasion in the 1170s , Henry II invested modest additional resources in the castle , but no efforts were undertaken to improve the town 's ditches and banks .

By the 12th century , Southampton was an important trading port with trade routes to Normandy , the Levant and Gascony . Both the town and castle played an important role in this trade , in part forming a warehouse for the king 's imports , this process being managed by a Crown Bailiff . The former castle hall was turned into a subterranean vault in the 13th century , probably for storing wine . Stone houses , often combining accommodation and storage facilities , began to be built in Southampton by the wealthiest merchants , particularly in the prosperous western and southern parts of the town , but these properties could not be easily defended against attack .

The English Channel was contested militarily between England and France during the 13th century , and Southampton was both an important base for naval operations and a tempting target for raiders . At the start of the 13th century additional work was therefore conducted to improve the town 's defences ; the king granted £ 100 in 1202 and again in 1203 to help develop the earth banks around the town . By 1217 East Gate had been built , probably of stone . In 1260 a murage grant was given to Southampton by Edward I , allowing the town to tax selected imports to build and maintain new stone walls ; these initial murage grants ran from 1260 to 1275 and were then renewed between 1282 and 1285 and from 1286 to 1291 . By the end of this work , many of the earth banks in the north and east of the town had been converted to stone . There appears to have been little interest in defending the west and south quays , however , probably because doing so would have hampered Southampton 's merchants when they moved their trading goods in and out of the town .

= = = 14th century = = =

By 1300 , Southampton was a major port and a large provincial town , with a population of around 5 @, @ 000 . The raising of money through murage grants began again in 1321 , possibly paying for the stone towers of the Bargate and some of the semi @-@ circular wall towers . Work also appears to have begun on some stone walling to the south and west of the town , construction may have begun at the South Gate and a wooden barbican was constructed near the western docks . Later investigations by the Crown would suggest that some of the monies raised in these murage grants had been misspent , however , contributing to the poor standard of town defences , which included large gaps in the walled circuit .

In 1338 there was a successful French attack on Southampton : the town 's defences , particularly in the west , proved quite inadequate and the French succeeded in burning numerous buildings down , particularly along the western quays , and damaging the castle . Edward III responded to the raid by taking immediate steps to shore up Southampton 's defences and ordering the town to be fully enclosed by stone walls . In 1339 the sheriff conscripted workmen and specialists to improve the defences , and money to pay for the building materials was raised by commuting the prison sentence of a senior official in Southampton to a fine . Murage grants were reinstated in 1345 , but the economy of Southampton had been temporarily devastated by the raids and indeed never fully recovered . The king 's instructions to fully enclose the town with walls could not be carried out . Nonetheless , by the 1350s , Southampton had mounted mangonel and springald siege engines on the existing walls .

In 1360 the king conducted an inquiry into Southampton 's defences and in 1363 he established a wider commission to examine how best to improve them . The commission came to a number of conclusions : the town walls should be better maintained and kept clear of housing and other obstructions ; the number of gateways in the walls should be reduced ; and a water @-@ filled ditch should be built to further reinforce the walls on the west . The enquiry also concluded that the outer doors and ground floor windows of properties facing the sea should be filled in to form a more defensible line .

The resulting work on Southampton 's defences resulted in considerable improvements : by the late 14th century , the town was completely encircled by 2 km (1 @. @ 25 miles) of stone walls . Some existing buildings , including a dovecote , were reinforced and pressed into service as part of the defences . South Gate was built to protect the southern quays , with a wide archway , complete with parapets and machicolations . The building work proved very expensive , however , and despite the mayor and bailiffs enforcing contributions and assistance from the citizens , Parliament had to be asked several times in the 1370s to assist by remitting arrears of taxes owed by Southampton .

In 1370 the French made a successful attack on Portsmouth , commencing a new sequence of raids along the English coast . In due course first Edward , then Richard II , responded by improving the defences in the south of England . Part of this involved improving the condition of Southampton Castle , where , owing in part to the theft of building materials , including stone and lead , by the citizens of the town , the defences were in a poor condition . Henry Yevele , who oversaw the improvements to the castle , probably also constructed the Arcades along the western walls in 1380 : this involved adopting the 1360 proposal to block up the properties along the western quay to form a solid wall , and adding three towers and gunports . Sir John Sondes and John Polymond were appointed by the king in 1386 to further improve the town walls , working with Sir John Arundel , the castle governor ? Polymond and Arundel Towers were probably named after these men around this time .

One of the major changes from the 1370s onwards was the adaptation of the town walls to mount gunpowder weapons . At this time cannon were still unreliable , only capable of reaching relatively short ranges and required the construction of specialist gunports . Cannons fired stone cannonballs , which did relatively little damage to stronger stone walls , and so were primarily used in defence of fortifications rather than as an offensive weapon by besiegers . The first gunports in Britain were installed in the 1360s on the Isle of Wight , but Southampton was not far behind . Around 1378 to 1379 the ongoing French threat led to gunports for handguns being built into the western Arcade wall , and by 1382 the town bought its own gun . God 's House Tower was built to defend the southern quays around 1417 and the sluices that controlled the level of the town 's moats , and equipped with numerous gunports rooftop firing points , and by 1439 Catchcold tower had also been constructed , again designed to accommodate gunpowder weapons .

Another change in the 1370s was the formalisation of the process of guarding and maintaining the walls . During the invasion scare of 1377 , Edward instructed the mayor to review these processes ; it appears that the four wards of the town were surveyed , and each property was assigned a piece of the wall to maintain , varying according to the size of the property . For these purposes , the walls were measured out in units called loupes , or embrasures . The four wards were also responsible for the security and policing of the town .

= = = 15th ? 16th centuries = = =

The threat of French attack continued throughout the 15th century . Instead of relying on murage grants , more funds for the town walls were directly granted by the king in 1400 , including an ongoing annual grant of £ 100 . Concerns increased significantly after the invasion scare of 1457 , when French troops successfully attacked the town of Sandwich on the south coast . Indeed , the guns on Southampton 's walls were fired at French raiding ships the same year . The walls continued to be maintained for the rest of the century , with £ 40 being allocated annually between 1478 and 1485 for this purpose . By contrast , the castle fell into a rapid decline and its inner bailey became used first as a rubbish tip , then for small @-@ scale agriculture .

Nonetheless , a report on the quality of the walls around 1460 noted that on the north and east sides of Southampton , the walls were still too thin to block a cannon shot or for a man to stand on them ; a wood and earth wall @-@ walk had been built behind the walls , but this was proving very expensive to maintain . This contemporary assessment of the weakness of the eastern walls has been confirmed by modern archaeological excavation ? in places it was only 0 @. @ 76 m (2 @. @ 49 feet) thick , compared to a typical thickness in other English town walls of around 1 m (3 @. @ 28 feet) .

A survey in 1454 , undertaken against the background of another French invasion scare , shows that the 1377 system for maintaining the walls was still in operation . A town gunner had also been appointed by the 15th century , earning the highest salary of any local official and was responsible for maintaining the guns and manufacturing gunpowder . As late as the mid @-@ 16th century , additional improved rectangular gunports , similar to those on the Device Forts along the Channel , were added to the West Gate by the quays .

Several of the gatehouses played an important part in the administration of the town in the 15th century . South Gate formed the main administrative centre for the port during the period , housing the Clerk of the King 's Ships and collecting customs revenue . It was expanded in the 1430s and 1440s , but was in poor condition again by the 1480s , resulting in fresh construction work around the site . Bargate was partially used as a prison from the 15th century , in a similar fashion to many other towns . The first floor of the building had been used as the town 's guildhall from at least 1441 onwards , and the treasury was kept in one of the towers . Elaborate feasts were served there on special occasions .

= = = 17th ? 20th centuries = = =

The town walls became less important for defence in the 17th century , although in 1633 , a footpath was built around the inside of the wall to help the watch and other law officers better pursue vagrants and criminals . The walls fared better than Southampton Castle , which was sold off to property speculators in 1618 , but they played no part in the English Civil War . Some of the masonry from the castle was reused to strengthen the town walls in 1650 during the Third English Civil War .

In the 18th century onwards the town walls were often adapted for new uses or simply demolished . As early as 1641 , the chapel above East Gate had been leased out to private tenants . By 1707 , part of God 's House tower was being used as a prison ; from 1786 it became the official town gaol . As the century progressed , East Gate was demolished in 1774 , South Gate was mostly demolished in 1803 and Biddles Gate shortly afterwards , along with large sections of adjacent wall .

As the 19th century progressed , the destruction and remodelling of the town walls continued . The upper stories of Polymond Tower were demolished in the 1820s , to be rebuilt by 1846 as a shorter , two @-@ storey tower . The remains of the South Gate were turned into a hotel . God 's House tower continued to be used as a gaol , but was criticised by inspectors . An 1823 report described it as an " old and very awkward " facility , containing around a dozen prisoners in damp conditions , and where it was hard to separate the male and female prisoners in an appropriate fashion . In 1855 its role as a gaol was concluded , and the building fell into disuse .

In other areas , civic improvements were attempted . In 1853 the " Forty Steps " were built down the side of the west walls to make access to the town easier . Parts of the Arcades were blocked up to prevent homeless people from sleeping under the arches and disturbing the neighbourhood . The Bargate ceased to be used as the guildhall in 1888 and was heavily restored by the town in what was felt to be a more consistent medieval style .

The urban growth of Southampton , as in many English walled towns and cities , put considerable pressure on the older fortifications . In 1898 to 1899 , for example , parts of the wall west of Biddles Gate , including a square tower , were demolished to create the Western Esplanade road . By the second half of the century , the Bargate and the surrounding walls were creating serious traffic congestion ; various options were considered to relieve this including demolition , but it was not until the 1930s that the decision was made to retain the gatehouse , but to destroy the walls on either side .

Some parts of the Southampton walls were used to mount searchlights and machineguns on during the Second World War ; the walls escaped damage , unlike many other areas of the medieval city . In the post @-@ war period the historic importance of the town walls was recognised and considerable conservation work has been conducted on the walls , including reversing the Victorian alterations to the Arcades . The town walls became seen as an important part of Southampton 's

tourist industry ; health and safety concerns , however , prohibit tourists walking along most of the circuit . God 's House tower reopened in 1961 opened as Southampton 's Museum of Archaeology . Today the walls are protected as grade I listed buildings and as a scheduled monument .

= = Architecture = =

Around half the length of the 2 km (1 @. @ 25 @- @ mile) long medieval town walls still survives in the 21st century , mainly on the north and west sides of Southampton , together with 13 of the 29 defensive towers and six out of the eight gates . The towers are a combination of circular and square designs , with many showing an " open @- @ gorged " design , similar to those built in North Wales , that could be isolated from the rest of the walls by removing small wooden bridges . In general the town walls at Southampton were poorly built in a somewhat chaotic fashion over several years . By contrast , the surviving gatehouses are sophisticated and well designed , probably as a result of their civic importance . Historians Oliver Creighton and Robert Higham describe the surviving walls as " extremely well preserved " and containing " unique survivals in a British context "

In the south @- @ east corner of the walls is God 's House tower . This is architecturally important as it was one of the first urban buildings to be built to hold gunpowder artillery ? in this respect , it closely resembles Cow Tower in Norwich . The tower was built alongside God 's House Gate and is three storeys high . The gunports designed for handcannon can be seen on the outside , and the roof was designed to hold larger cannon . Adjacent to the tower is God 's House Gate , a two @- @ storey building also equipped with a gun @- @ port .

Little remains of the eastern walls , but in the north @- @ east corner several towers still remain largely intact , including Polymond tower , a powerful drum tower largely reconstructed during the Victorian period . Further west is the Bargate ; this was originally a simple archway but was expanded with drum towers and arrow slits in the early 14th century , and then expanded again in the early 15th century with battlements and parapets , before being heavily restored in the 19th century . The Bargate remains an elaborate building , taking military symbolism and combining it with rich civic heraldry and decoration above the gateway .

At the north @- @ west corner of the walls stands Arundel tower , another large drum tower that originally overlooked a small cliff . South of this is Catchcold tower . Catchcold tower was designed to be defended with guns and has three gunports ; the need to support cannon leaves it much heavier in appearance than the other circular towers on the walls . The remains of machine gun mountings fitted to the tower in 1941 can still be seen . The Arcades form part of the surviving west walls and are a unique feature in England ; their closest architectural equivalent are in Rouen , France . The West Gate still stands three storeys high and was originally defended by two portcullises ; the windows on the west side of the gate are the original medieval designs . Along the south side of the walls one of the twin towers protecting the South Gate still stands , largely intact .