

Walk around Southampton 2 with Andy Russel 26th April



Once again members headed for Southampton to meet up with Andy Russell to be guided around the medieval city walls. A much smaller group of us than last year met at Bargates in the bright sunshine. Thankfully we had not taken too much notice of the weather forecast.

Andy began by telling us that the Saxon city was larger than the medieval city and that Bargate was the northern entrance to the medieval city. The bells which were housed in Bargate may have been cast at an itinerant foundry found recently at West Quay.

Figure 1 shows the medieval wall coming from the eastern side of Bargate. The line of the wall has been marked in the paving of the pedestrianised area around the gate.

Bargate also housed a formidable piece of weaponry which had a range of about 200yds, to help defend the city from attack. The weapon was known as a Springald, a late 12th/13th century mechanical artillery device designed to throw large bolts, or more rarely, stones, at attacking forces. It had inward swinging arms and was based on the design of a crossbow and a Greek ballista. The device was about the size of a double bed.



Figure 2 shows the large slit used when firing the Springald from inside the gate tower.

Andy also told us that most of the guns used to defend the city were made of iron but Bargate had a more expensive bronze one.

We left the gate and headed east, following the wall through an alley between the shops, and beyond the alley there is a section of the wall standing with a tower at either end. This section had been repaired and remodelled at various times during its history.

At the end of this section is Polymond Tower which was named after John Polymond, one of the leading Burgesses of the town. He was Mayor several times. The tower has a large gunport and was built around 1386. The tower was turned into a house at a later date.



Figure 3 shows the domestic features built into the tower.

After inspecting Polymond Tower we went through York Gate into the modern shopping centre, passing the site of the York Brewery. We then made our way along the line of the eastern walls and the site of the old East Gate which was demolished in 18th century. Illustrations show it looking like a mini-Bargate and it had a keyhole gunport on top of the wall.

The town walls had been strengthened after the city was sacked by the French in 1338. However there had been a reluctance of the Burgesses to complete the defences despite money from the king and lean-to buildings and gardens had been built outside the walls, undermining the defensive capabilities of the walls. In about 1360 the Burgesses were told to remove the buildings and gardens as they were obstructing the view of the defenders. This paved the way for work on the walls to continue and by 1385 the main circuit was completed.

Andy explained that there had been orchards running along the entire length of the eastern walls. Beyond the East Gate car park we took a detour to the Dolphin Hotel and admired the timber framed buildings which made up the old hostelry.



A new frontage was added to the medieval buildings in the 18th century and that is the view most people have had of the Dolphin ever since.

The buildings behind the facade can be seen in figure 4.

We headed back to the line of the walls and found more of them standing.

This section was very impressive and we saw evidence of an earlier house built into the wall shown by holes for joists and a return for a wall. Beyond that we were shown the remains of the Friary Reredorter (toilet)

built in 1373, which was in a tall square tower. The tower also housed the Friary dormitory and had two guns. The drains would have discharged into the town ditch. Next to the reredorter were Friars Gate and a small round tower which had started life as a dovecote. Some features of the dovecote can still be seen. We made our way along the wall to the Gods House Tower which houses the Archaeology Museum; unfortunately it was closed due to industrial action.



Figure 5 shows the east wall, Friars Gate and the dovecote tower on the way to Gods House Tower.

The gate in the tower had a double portcullis and the arches for the water ditches could be seen in the walls of the outside. Andy told us that the town gunner had been resident in the tower and it had many other uses over the centuries, including the town gaol, since it was built in the 15th century.

We then passed Gods House Hospital which had been an alms house and our final destination was inside a merchants' vault. This was quite a large space below street level and leaning against one of the walls was a gravestone. The stone was inscribed with the name of a George Gollop who died on 25th May 1650 aged 69.



Figure 6 shows the interior of the vault.

We all thoroughly enjoyed the walk and Andy's descriptions of the things we saw and would like to thank him on behalf of EDAS.

Written and illustrated by Bryan Popple.