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'KING JOHN'S PALACE', GRAVESEND: SOME NOTES ON A RIVERSIDE EDWARDIAN ROYAL MANOR HOUSE

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Facing page 6 of the late Alex J. Philip's *History of Gravesend* is a Plate II entitled 'The Remains of King John's Palace' reproduced here as Fig. 1. In his introduction Mr Philip refers to the discovery of this wall and continues 'The date of the original buildings judging by their remaining portions was probably 12th or 13th century. A study of King John's accounts when he visited the town shows that not only was there a hospital in existence long before the beginning of the 14th century but that the King's well known avarice lends colour to the legend that he had or acquired one of his numerous palaces here'.¹ Mr Philip does not give any authority for this statement or the nature of the accounts referred to, and I have not been able to trace these.²

This length of wall came to light in 1948 and I think I was the first person to draw Mr Philip's attention to it. He was then and had been since 1903 Borough Librarian. He was also Secretary of the

¹ Alex J. Philip, *A History of Gravesend and its Surroundings from Prehistoric Times*, (undated but published 1954). See Preface, pp. 6-10.

² The household accounts for John's reign are published in (Ed.) H. Cole, *Documents illustrative of English History in the 13th and 14th Centuries*, Records Commission, 1844. The only reference I have found to Gravesend is in (Ed.) T. Duffus Hardy, *Rotuli de Libertate ac de Misis et Praestitis Regnante Johanne* (Record Commission, 1844) of expenses when he stayed on his way to Dover on 3rd May, 1210. An itinerary of King John compiled by T. Duffus Hardy appears in the introduction to *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium*, Volume I (Record Commission, 1835). This also appears in Robert Furley's *History of the Weald of Kent*, Volume I (1871), 369. The only reference to Gravesend is again the 3rd May, 1210, he being in London on the 2nd and Dover on the 4th. As Furley points out, John appears to have been in Kent on other occasions, but there are no references to Gravesend. There are regular references to the 'Hospitali de Gravesend' in the Fine Rolls between 1199 and 1214, although it is described as being 'interri datis in Essex'.

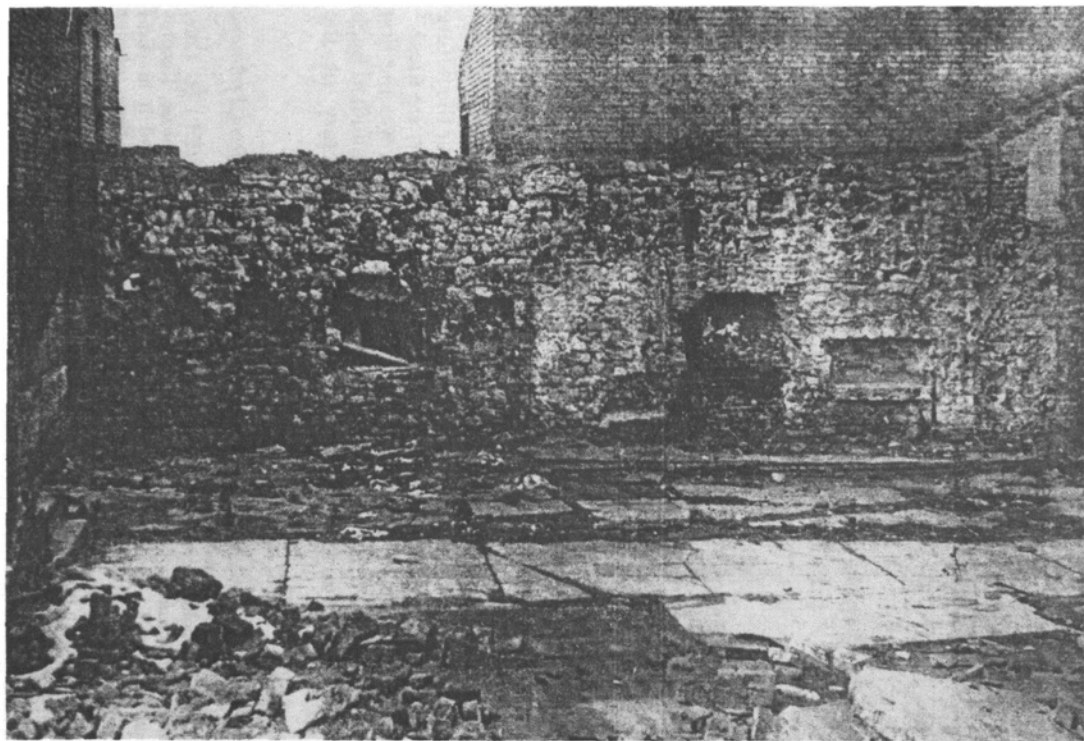


Fig. 1. East side of the wall as illustrated in Philip, *loc. cit.*

Gravesend Historical Society and had been since it was founded in 1924 as the Gravesend and District Scientific and Archaeological Society. A small group of members visited the site and a number of photographs were taken by the late Mr Walter Gouge copies of which are in my possession. A series of photographs were also taken by the late Mr A.L. Wraight, a local dentist and a well known amateur photographer, which are now in the collection at the local library, including the one reproduced in Philip's *History*.

In 1951, just before the wall was demolished by the Corporation, Miss Priscilla Baily (now Mrs. Phipps), a member of the Gravesend Historical Society, made a drawing of the east side of the wall with measurements, which is reproduced here (Fig. 2).

Mr Philip arranged for someone from the Ministry of Works to visit the site but does not refer to this in his *History* and there is no record of the visit in the library now. In spite of efforts by Mr Philip and the Gravesend Historical Society, the Council insisted on demolishing the wall and clearing the site. No record seems to have been made at the time of the materials of which the wall was constructed, but my recollection is that it was of a mixture of Kentish rag and chalk with some blocks of Reigate stone intermingled. The lower part of the wall was of roughly squared, coursed blocks, but the upper part was of a more irregular and rubble construction, which is apparent from the surviving photographs. There was no attempt at galleting and, unlike most rubble walls in the area, no flints appear to have been used. The mortar was soft and powdery. There did not appear to be any worked stone. As can be seen from Plates I and II there were certain irregular holes which might have contained joists, and in addition, as shown in Fig. 2, there were two recesses at 'B' and 'D', an opening at 'A' and some evidence of a flat-headed or four-centred arch at 'C'. It was clear, however, that the recesses at 'B' and 'C' had been part of the structure which had been built against the wall and the slabs which can be seen in Fig. 1 and Plate II were concrete and probably formed part of a bakery which at one time occupied part of the site. The brick wall visible on the left in Fig. 1 and Plate II was the north or rear wall of the Gravesend Ragged School built in 1862 and which fronted Church Street at its junction with Princess Street. It was demolished in 1955 when the area was redeveloped. The grid reference for the wall is TQ 647744.

In addition to this discovery a short length of return wall of 'chalk blocks' was reported to have been discovered in the cellar of a demolished shop fronting West Street to the north of this site, but was apparently filled in and lost before record was made of it.

In 1976, the Gravesend Historical Society obtained access to nos. 81, 82 and 83 High Street which were due for demolition. They

PLATE I



A close-up of the west side of the wall (*Author's collection*).

PLATE II



Members of the Gravesend Historical Society examining the wall (*Photo.: W. Gouge. Author's collection*).

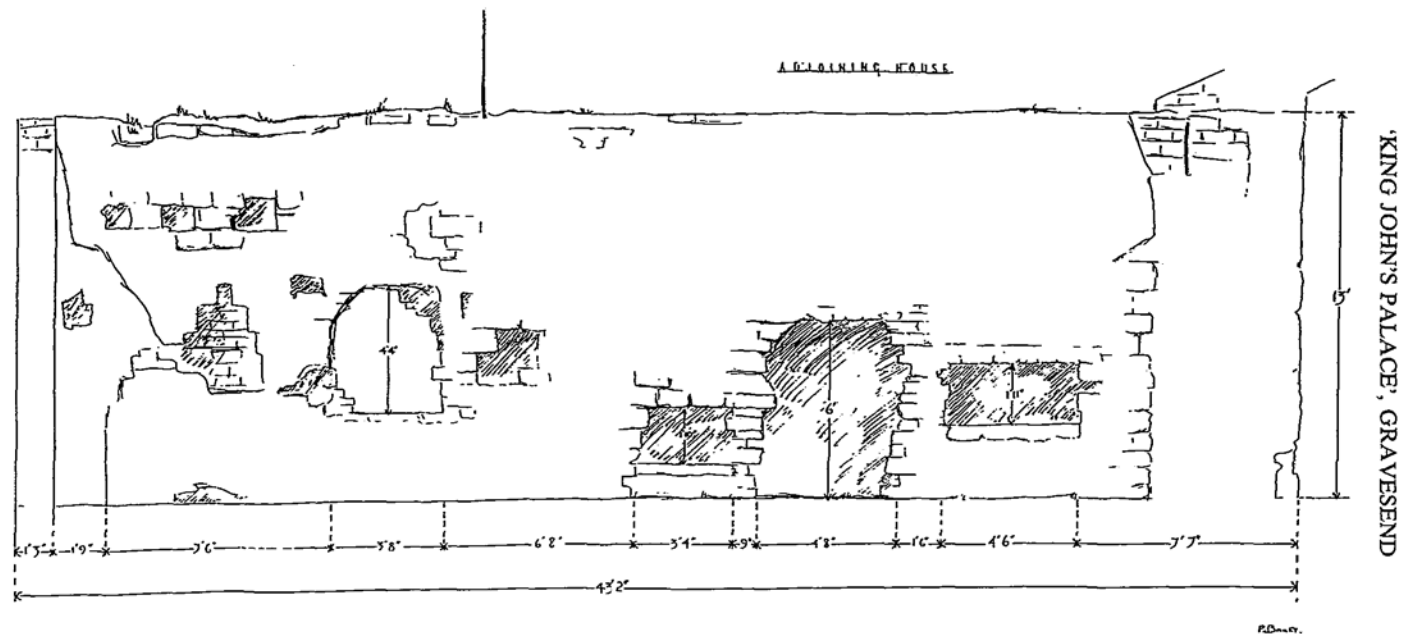


Fig. 2. Plan of the east side of the wall with measurements (*Gravesend Historical Society*).

occupied a site on the west side of High Street at its junction with West Street. A limited excavation was carried out in the basement and later when the site was cleared some ragstone was found, but there was no definite evidence of walling.³

In 1984, Mr B.M. Starbuck was having work carried out in the cellar of 74 High Street when a quantity of stone, some of it worked, which had been used as infilling was found. Most of this is now in his garden at Dale House, Southfleet. From the mouldings which are quite elaborate, it would appear to be late Perpendicular period and to correspond with the moulded column bases found at St. George's Church.⁴ There was lath and plaster attached to some of this stone with iron nails. 74 High Street was destroyed in the 1827 fire which also destroyed St. George's Church and these stones probably came from the church and not the manor house (see Plate III). None of Gravesend's earlier historians have any direct reference to this wall but Robert Pocock⁵ has a footnote referring to St. George's Church '... In a lane leading thereto [i.e. to St. George's] (and still retaining the name of Chapel Lane) is to be seen the most ancient building in the Parish of Gravesend, the upper part of the door of the building is shown Plate 1, p. 64, representing in one corner a Rose and in the other an antique Key or some distinguishable Mark or a Merchant' (see Fig. 3). In the Gravesend Library there is an interleaved copy of Pocock's History containing what are believed to be his notes for a second edition (never published) and I have in my possession a similar interleaved copy extensively annotated by William Crafter, Father and Son, who were contemporaries of Pocock, but neither of these enlarge on this footnote. Chapel Lane ran from Church Street opposite the north gates of St. George's Church to West Street about 40 ft. (13.33 m.) to the west of the 1948 wall and parallel with it. A number of photographs of Chapel Lane survive, but none show anything which might be the building described by Pocock.

In Buck's long view of Gravesend,⁶ published in 1739, a short tower is shown to the west or north west of St. George's Church. This appears to be three storeys in height, the windows of the upper two

³ *Gravesend Historical Transactions*, 22 (1976), 5. There is no further written report.

⁴ *Gravesend Historical Transactions*, 27 (1981), 9.

⁵ Robert Pocock, *The History of the Incorporated Towns and Parishes of Gravesend and Milton in the County of Kent*, 1797, 62.

⁶ 'The North prospect of Gravesend in the County of Kent', by Sam.1 and Nath.1. Buck, March 25, 1739.



Worked stone from the cellar of 74 High Street, Gravesend, now at Dale House, Southfleet.

storeys being visible and having angle turrets and a quadripartite roof with a small pinnacle in the centre (see Fig. 4). I am not aware of any reference to this tower in any of the local histories or other published sources, but a tower in a similar position appears in a print of Corrington Bowles of which a copy appears in Philip's *History* (p. 100), but reversed (although the same print appears the right way round on the original dust jacket) and appears in both forms in his earlier volume.⁷ So far as one can judge from Buck's view this tower might well have been the gate-house referred to below. Dr Margaret Wood in her book *The English Medieval House* has a chapter on 'The Gatehouse' and states that these were particularly popular in the fourteenth century with corner turrets and room over.⁸

⁷ Alex J. Philip, *History of Gravesend and its Surroundings from Prehistoric Times to the Opening of the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1, 1914, 138 and 142. This print has recently been reproduced by the County Library, also the wrong way round! I have traced an original copy which is dated 2nd March, 1773. The drawing is very inaccurate so far as St. George's Church and other buildings are concerned, but it does show the second tower in the same position as Buck.

⁸ Margaret Wood *The English Medieval House*, 1965, 155-8.

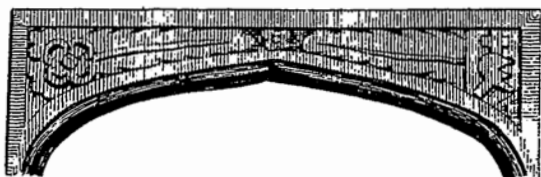


Fig. 3. The door lintel from Pocock's *History*, *loc. cit.*

Dr Margaret Wood also mentions in her book the frequent popular attribution of medieval buildings to King John,⁹ and it would seem that there must have been a local tradition of which Mr Philip was aware.

The wall lay between New Court on the east and Chapel Lane on the west. (The east side of the Ragged School abutted on New Court). To the east of New Court and parallel with it was St. John's Place.¹⁰ In 1371, there is a reference to the Master of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist, Gravesend.¹¹ This is the only reference I know of to this hospital which is not mentioned in any of the local histories (but see footnote 2). It is just possible that this wall had some connection with this hospital, if the name of St. John's Place perpetuated its site, but I think it is more likely that this wall was part of the remains of the Gravesend Manor House of Edward III of which there is ample documentary evidence. This was also the view of the late Mr James Benson.¹²

W.H. Hart in his *Records of Gravesend*¹³ records the death of Joan, formerly wife of Henry de Crammaville, who had the Manor of Gravesend for life, and that the Sheriff was enjoined to retain the manor in the King's (Edward III) hands until other directions were given (May 6th, 1315). On the 1st October, 1315, Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, was granted custody of the manor and on the 26th April, 1320, Humphrey de Waleden was appointed steward. Further appointments of stewards follow, but it was not until the manor came into the possession of Edward III that any work seems to

⁹ Wood, *op. cit.*, 11.

¹⁰ For the sites of these courts and alleys, see large scale ordnance Survey Sheets 1865 Edition.

¹¹ *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1370-1374*, Vol. XV, 130.

¹² See his articles in *The Gravesend and Dartford Reporter*, 10th and 17th January 1964, 'The King's House at Gravesend'.

¹³ W.H. Hart, *Records of Gravesend*, Milton, Denton, Chalk, Northfleet and Ifield, Part I (there is no Part II), 1878, 22-3.



Fig. 4. Extract from Buck's long view showing tower to the north-west of St. George's Church.

have been done. Hart records the appointment of William de Basynges, Master of St. Mary's Hospital, Strood,¹⁴ to be chief Master and Clerk of the Works at (*inter alia*) the Manor of Gravesend, 4th April, 1373, and there were appointments of him as Receiver of Rents and Clerk of the Works on the 2nd and 28th November, 1375.¹⁵ On 18th June, 1376, there was a Royal Mandate to John of Rochester, Chief Master of the works at Rochester Castle and the Manor of Gravesend, directing him to deliver over to William Basynges, who had been appointed Chief Master and Clerk of the Works in the castle and manor aforesaid, all things necessary to the performance of this office.

It was the publication of Vol.II of the *History of the King's Works*¹⁶ in 1963 that first brought to my notice the importance of this manor house and on which Mr Benson later based his article in the 'Gravesend Reporter'.¹² It appears that as soon as Edward III recovered this manor on the 3rd July, 1362, he embarked on substantial works there, which were to make it a favourite residence of his later years. The works apparently began in November 1362 and were in the main completed by August 1368 by which time a total of about £1350 had been spent on them. Bernard Cook was Clerk of the Works. No details of these works are available, but it does relate to 'new' work. A distinction is made between the 'old' Manor of Gravesend and the 'new' Manor of Gravesend.¹⁷

More details are available from Bernard Cook's second account for the period November 1363 to May 1366 during which £500 was spent at Gravesend. Reigate stone and (rag)stone from Maidstone were bought together with flint, chalk and considerable quantities of timber; 61400 tiles were supplied for roofing. The hall and King's chamber are mentioned and glass for the windows of the chapel. Timber was provided for the kitchen together with 12000 wall tiles or bricks, 7000 specifically for fire places. There are also references to three houses, two ovens and latrines. An interesting item having

¹⁴ For a short biography of Wm. de Basynges (William of Basing), see A.C. Harrison, 'Excavations at the Site of St. Mary's Hospital, Strood', *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiv (1969), 156-8.

¹⁵ Hart, *op. cit.*, 32.

¹⁶ R. Allen Brown, H.M. Colvin and A.J. Taylor, *The History of the King's Works*, Vol.II, 1963, 946-8.

¹⁷ In April 1370, John Trop was to receive 3d. a day from the issues of 'the old Manor of Gravesend' for his wages as custodian of the Park (*Calendar of Patent Rolls 1367-70*, 391). In April 1372, John Trop was given custody of the King's Old Manor of Gravesend for ten years and was to maintain all the houses and buildings of it. These last were presumably the residence of Robert de Ufford (*Calendar of Fine Rolls 1368-77*, 168). Footnote, *History of the King's Works*, *op. cit.*, 947.

regard to the 'Buck' print (see above) are references to 'the great gate' and 'the chamber above the gate'. There are also references to the 'park' and its 'palings'. John Page received 60s. 'for making the bridge of the town of Gravesend'. This was the landing place for the long ferry at the bottom of the High Street for which the Manor of Gravesend was responsible for half the cost of maintenance and the village of Milton the other part.¹⁸

By autumn 1368, the work seems to have been complete, although monies were spent on the enclosure of the park which extended to at least 50 acres.¹⁹ Various works were carried out by William of Basing.

In Bernard Cook's second account for the period November 1363 to May 1366, 89 feet of glass were bought for the windows of the chapel,²⁰ and in 1370 John Stanton was appointed chaplain.²¹

On the 5th October, 1376, the manor was granted to trustees to form part of the endowments of the convent of St. Mary Graces on Tower Hill.²² King Edward III died on 2nd January, 1377, and on the 24th August, 1383, Richard II confirmed the said grant.²³ This

¹⁸ R.P. Cruden, see *The History of the Town of Gravesend and the Port of London*, 1843, 56 and 67.

¹⁹ 'Grant in mortmain to Roger Giddyng parson of the church of Gravesende of 5 acres of land in Gravesende where of 2 acres "lie in the field called Cherchelond" and 3 acres in the filed called "atte Lee" in compensation for the tithes of 50 acres of land in the parish of that Church which the King has enclosed in his park of Gravesende and the conies in the said 50 acres.' *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1374-77*, October 15, 1375, vol. XVI, 179. Roger Giddyng was presented to the Church of Gravesend on the 1st June, 1368, on exchange of his then living of 'Aldermarc Cherche London' with Deodatus, the parson of Gravesend, *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1367-70*, 121. Neither Roger Giddyng nor Deodatus are mentioned by C.H. Fielding in his list of Rectors of Gravesend in *Records of Rochester Diocese*, 1910.

²⁰ *History of the King's Works*, *op. cit.*, 497.

²¹ 'Grant for life to John de Staton Chaplain of 10 marks yearly at the Exchequer to celebrate divine service during his lifetime in the chapel within the King's new manor of Gravesende for the safe estate of the King and for his soul when he shall have departed this life and for the souls of his mother Isabel and the late Queen Philippa.' *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1367-70*, 14 April, 1370, 394.

²² Hart, *op. cit.*, 33. *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1374-77*, Vol. XVI, 5 October, 1376, 247.

²³ '24 August 1383. Confirmation in honour of Saint Anne whose head is in the Abbey herinafter named at the supplication of Queen Anne in favour of the Abbot and Convent of Saint Mary Graces by the Tower of London of the letters patent whereby John Duke of Lancaster, John Bishop of Worcester, Robert de Assheton and John Dypres Knights and Nicholas Carrea feoffees and executors of the Will of the late King granted to them all the houses within the manor of Gravesende for making a dormitory refectory cloister and other needful buildings.' *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1381-85*, 306. See also Hart, *op. cit.*, 36 and 37, for further confirmation of this gift in 1386 and 1388 and 57 and 58 for confirmation in 1398. See also Edward Hasted, *History of Kent*, 1797, Vol. III, 327 and 328.

included 'all houses within the Manor of Gravesend for making a dormitory refectory cloister and other needful buildings'. It appears, however, that the gatehouse and some of the other buildings survived at Gravesend.

The name 'Chapel Lane' is reputed to have arisen from the fact that it led to the old main gate (the north gate) and door of St. George's Church, which was built at the end of the fifteenth century as a chapel of ease to the parish church of St. Mary and was licensed for mass in 1492.²⁴ There is, however, an earlier reference to this chapel in the Court Rolls 1475-78 in connection with the will of Thomas Thorpe (?) of Gravesend²⁵ who left certain monies to '... the overseers of the new work of Gravesend which is edified and builded in the honour of our Lady and of Saint George the which by the Grace of God in time to come shall be a Parish Church of the Town of Gravesend . . .'. These 'new works' were to constitute the church which was burnt down in 1727. This church may well have taken the place of the manorial chapel which was, no doubt, far more convenient for the townsfolk than the old parish church of St. Mary some mile or so distant from the waterside.

The manor remained with the Convent of St. Mary Graces until the Reformation when the manor came into the hands of the Crown.²⁶ The memory of the convent, however, persisted locally until the nineteenth century when it is still referred to in legal documents. I have in my possession a release of premises on the west side of High Street known as the 'Boars Head' now number 76,²⁷ dated 1789 (the day and month are not filled in), made between Roger Man of Milton-next-Gravesend of the one part and Martha Woolley of Gravesend of the other part which describes the premises as bounded '... towards the east side to the lands sometimes part of the possessions of the late dissolved Monastery or Abbey of the Blessed Lady of Graces with (in) the Tower of London . . .'. This description is repeated exactly in a lease of the same premises for a year (i.e. part of a lease and release to convey the freehold) dated the 11th July, 1827, and made between Thomas Mackay of the one part and John Harriss of the other part. I have in the past come across other

²⁴ Pocock, *op. cit.*, 62; G.M. Arnold, *A Few Remarks about Gravesend in Olden Days*, 1876, 14, and his article in *Arch. Cant.*, xli (1877), p. xlviii.

²⁵ Thomas Thorpe appears as Rector in 1455 and John Thorpe in 1464; Fielding, *op. cit.* 118, and Pocock, *op. cit.*, 86. Sir John Thorpe Rector of Gravesend and son of William and Agness T. Thorpe, *d.* 1473. *Index of Wills proved in the Rochester Consistory Court 1440-1561*, K.A.S. Records Series, Vol. IX.

²⁶ Hasted, *op. cit.*, iii, 328.

²⁷ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxv (1970), 169.

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century deeds of properties on the west side of High Street which refer to the former convent.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In compiling these brief notes my thanks are due to our late member Mr A.F. Allen, for the deeds relating to the 'Boars Head', and our member Mr E.R. Green, for drawing my attention to the petition relating to St. George's Church. Also to Messrs. P. Willis and C. Bull, of the Gravesend Public Library, and to Mr and Mrs. B.M. Starbuck, for the information relating to the worked stone found at 74 High Street.

