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## Editorial

Although FORT 37 was supposed to be the last edition that I would be involved with matters did not turn out that way. However, FORT 38 will definitely be my last as a new Editor has been found. He is already well known to FSG members for he is John Harris. His work should already be very familiar to all readers of past issues of FORT and *Casemate*, demonstrating that his knowledge and architectural expertise makes him well qualified to guide FORT through the future. I wish him every success in his new responsibility.

Editing three issues of FORT has been an interesting and educational experience, one quite different from my past activities in the commercial defence sphere. Throughout it all I have been most impressed by the sheer scope of knowledge that FSG members possess. Also noticeable is the great enthusiasm that contributors display in their methods of presentation of their written material. Visitors to FSG Conferences and Members Days cannot fail to take note of the latter point when listening to the various visual and verbal presentations, but may I as outgoing editor repeat past entreaties to keep the material coming. FORT is very much the result of the efforts of

FSG members and it is them and their inputs that have made FORT the respected publication that it has become. Looking back through past issues of FORT one might think that there is little regarding fortifications that has not already been covered but one thing I have learned during my years as an FSG member is that we have, to date, only scratched the surface of what there is to learn and record. Even close to the United Kingdom, the home base of the FSG, there are still many topics to cover in nearby Europe and further afield, and, let it be said, in the UK itself. Please keep the material coming.

Finally, a word of thanks. Throughout my short tenure as editor I have been given a great deal of encouragement and support by the Committee of the FSG. My remote location has meant that I have had to lean on the production team a great deal and special thanks are due to Steve Dent and Charles Blackwood for their continued assistance and good works during the production stages of FORT.

I am now looking forward to devoting more time to the forts, pubs and Island of Alderney.

**Terry Gander**

# A Tale of Two Forts – London's Hyde Park and St. George's Fields Forts

David Flintham

The fortifications built around London in 1643 in an 18km circuit were the largest urban defence system to be constructed anywhere in Europe at the time and were the most ambitious system completed during the entire period of the English Civil Wars. Despite vanishing from the London landscape (with one notable exception that this article will consider in due course) many years ago, thanks mainly to George Vertue's 1739 map (Figure 1), their obscurity is not as complete as it might be. The defences have been studied as a whole from archaeological, military engineering, political, social and topographical perspectives, whilst several sites have been studied individually. This article looks at two forts; one which was located in what was to become a well-known south London landmark, and the other, notwithstanding the fact that it is located in a historic London park (or perhaps because of that) is the only part of the defences whose remains can still be seen today.

Prior to the 1630s, Hyde Park was a Crown hunting ground (the name 'Hyde Park' dates from the reign of Henry VIII, before which time the area was known as 'the Manor of Hyde'), but during the reign of Charles I areas of the park were made available for public use and soon became a fashionable society rendezvous. As the largest open space close to the Capital, it was also used for the mustering, drilling and parading of troops, from at least as early as 1569 when Queen Elizabeth's pensioners were mustered before her.<sup>1</sup> By the 1640s, Hyde Park was used for the mustering of London's Trained Bands and, later, for other of Parliament's troops. It would have almost certainly seen the mustering of troops in readiness for the defence of London in November 1642 and again for the relief of Gloucester in August 1643.

It is documented that the initial or 1642 phase of fortifying the capital was limited to the construction of guard posts, barricades and small earthworks (Figure 2). On 7th November 1642 the Venetian Ambassador reported, 'At the approaches to London they are putting up

trenches and small forts of earthwork'.<sup>2</sup> The southeastern corner of Hyde Park overlooked the main route into London from the Thames Valley and in consequence was strategically critical to the defence of London. Therefore, it is little surprise to learn that accounts of Hyde Park's first fort imply a structure that was significantly more substantial than the small earthworks that are typical of the 1642 phase. Two histories mention a large fort with four bastions being built in 1642. But where exactly was this first fort? In *Hyde Park: Its History and Romance*, Alec Tweedie says that this fort was known as 'Oliver's Mount' and it was from this feature that Mount Street took its name. But whilst an earthwork was later built at this location, it was built in 1643 and not 1642, and anyway this location is some 750m north of what is now Hyde Park Corner and so would be in no position to guard this particular route into London. Edward Walford, on the other hand, locates this fort at Hyde Park Corner, a more likely location but then he goes on to rather spoil things by saying that Oliver's Mount (and, therefore, modern Mount Street) lay to the south.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the fort, three guard-houses (courts of guard) were constructed at Hyde Park Corner.<sup>4</sup>

Given that the primary purpose of this fort was to control this particular approach into London, it must have been located close to what is now Hyde Park Corner. But since there are no contemporary accounts of the construction or location of the 1642 fort it is not possible to say for certain. But regardless of its actual location, it was certainly a key position and its garrison was kept busy. *The Perfect Diurnal* of 04 January 1643 reports

Collonell Browne the Scotchmann, upon some Complaints made against him by Souldiers, for detaining their pay, was apprehended this day by the Court of Guard at Hide Park, by an order from the Close Committee, and Committed to the safe custody to answer the same.<sup>5</sup>

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The next day, the *Perfect Diurnal* reported

Sir Edward Wardner, Doctor Castle of Westminster, Doctor Fuller of the Savoy, Mr. Dinckson of Saint Clements, and some others this day set forward towards Oxford with a Petition to his Majesty for an accommodation (as is pretended); and being examined upon the way by the Courts of Guard at Hide Parke, they produced a Warrant from the Lords in Parliament for the free Passage with their Petition to His Majesty without interception. Whereupon the Captaine of the Guard told them that though he was commanded by their Warrant to give them free Passage with their Petition, yet he would search them, that they should carry nothing else to His Majesty, which he did accordingly, and found divers Letters about them, especially Doctor Dinckson.

The papers were passed to the Commons, and the party allowed to continue only to be brought back by a troop of Dragoons who were subsequently sent after them.<sup>6</sup>

The halting of the Royalist approach on London at Turnham Green on 12 November 1642 brought breathing space although there could have been few who didn't fear that the Royalists would return in the spring. There was considerable nervousness of a pending Royalist attack – there is one account of guards at Hyde Park firing on a small group of rowdy drunks.<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, during the winter of 1642-43, there was considerable activity in relation to London's defences. Already, in addition to the measures outlined above, the existing medieval walls had been renovated. But in early 1643, a full survey of the existing state of the defences was undertaken. In February 1643, the Common Council of the City of London 'was informed that the walls and fortifications of the City of London in this time of imminent danger are very weake' and on 23 February 1643 Colonel (Alderman) Randall Mainwaring presented his proposals 'for the better defence and the security of this citty' to the Court of Common Council. He specified the type and location of a circuit of forts and breastworks around the Capital on the north side of the Thames, and in addition, he also proposed other defensive measures including the blocking of 'all the passages into the suburbs on the north side the river except five.'<sup>8</sup> Mainwaring's recommendations were approved by the Common Council and were subsequently presented to Parliament who, on 7

March 1643, ordered

That the Lord Mayor and Citizens of the City of *London*, for the better Securing and Safety of the said City, Suburbs, Parliament, City of *Westm.* and Borough of *Southwarke*, shall have Power to trench and stop all such Highways and By-ways, leading into the said City, as well within as without the Liberties, as they shall see Cause; and shall also have full Power and Authority, according to their Discretion, to fortify and intrench the Places aforesaid, with such Outworks, and in such Places, as they shall think meet.<sup>9</sup>

The re-use of the medieval walls, renovation of the ditch, and the removal of property immediately outside the walls to improve fields of fire (although there are no reports of properties within the walls being demolished to enable earth to be packed against the walls as reinforcement against artillery fire), all point to London having defence in depth.

An anonymous pamphleteer from 1643 described Lord Mayor Isaac Pennington as 'the chiefest raiser and promoter of the workes and fortifications.'<sup>10</sup> However, not only did Mainwaring specify the defences to be built, he also recommended that a committee of twenty-one Common Councilmen, presumably under his own leadership, be set up to co-ordinate the construction.<sup>11</sup> It was this Committee of Fortification that provided the necessary leadership that enabled this task to be achieved, with the construction of each fort being supervised by named individuals. In the case of Hyde Park fort, the construction and that of the neighbouring forts was directed by Richard Delamain.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst Mainwaring outlined the location of the forts north of the Thames (the Parliamentary Order was subsequently expanded to include the area south of the Thames as well), their actual design was probably beyond the expertise of Mainwaring and his advisors. Recent studies suggest that Sergeant-major-general Phillip Skippon designed the defences as he had experience of siege warfare during the Eighty Years' War between Spain and the United Provinces, having been present at the sieges of Breda (at its loss to Spain in 1625 and again at its recapture in 1637) and of Maastricht (in 1632). Alternatively, the forts may have been designed by Dutch engineers, a possibility suggested by the Venetian



## A TALE OF TWO FORTS – LONDON’S HYDE PARK AND ST. GEORGE’S FIELDS FORTS

Ambassador, Gerolamo Agostini, who, on 13 March noted that ‘they have sent to Holland for engineers.’<sup>13</sup> It was the Dutch school of military engineering which was the most readily understood and practised throughout the Civil War. Perhaps most importantly considering London’s

topography and circumstances, the dominant characteristics of the Dutch fortifications were the use of the earthen rampart and ditch which could be thrown up at relatively low cost.<sup>14</sup> Illustrations of the Breda and Maastricht sieges show lines and small forts very similar in

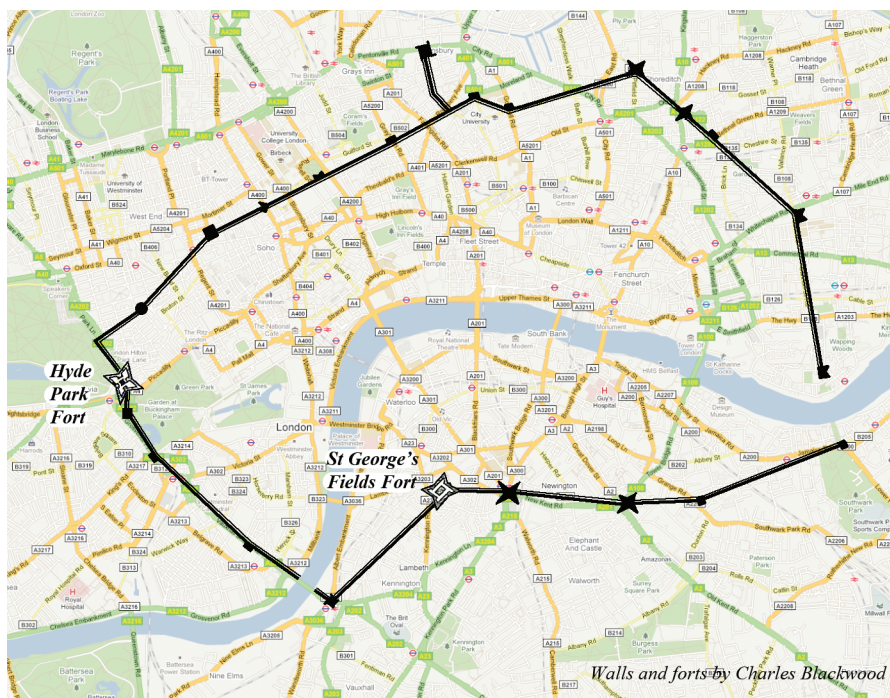
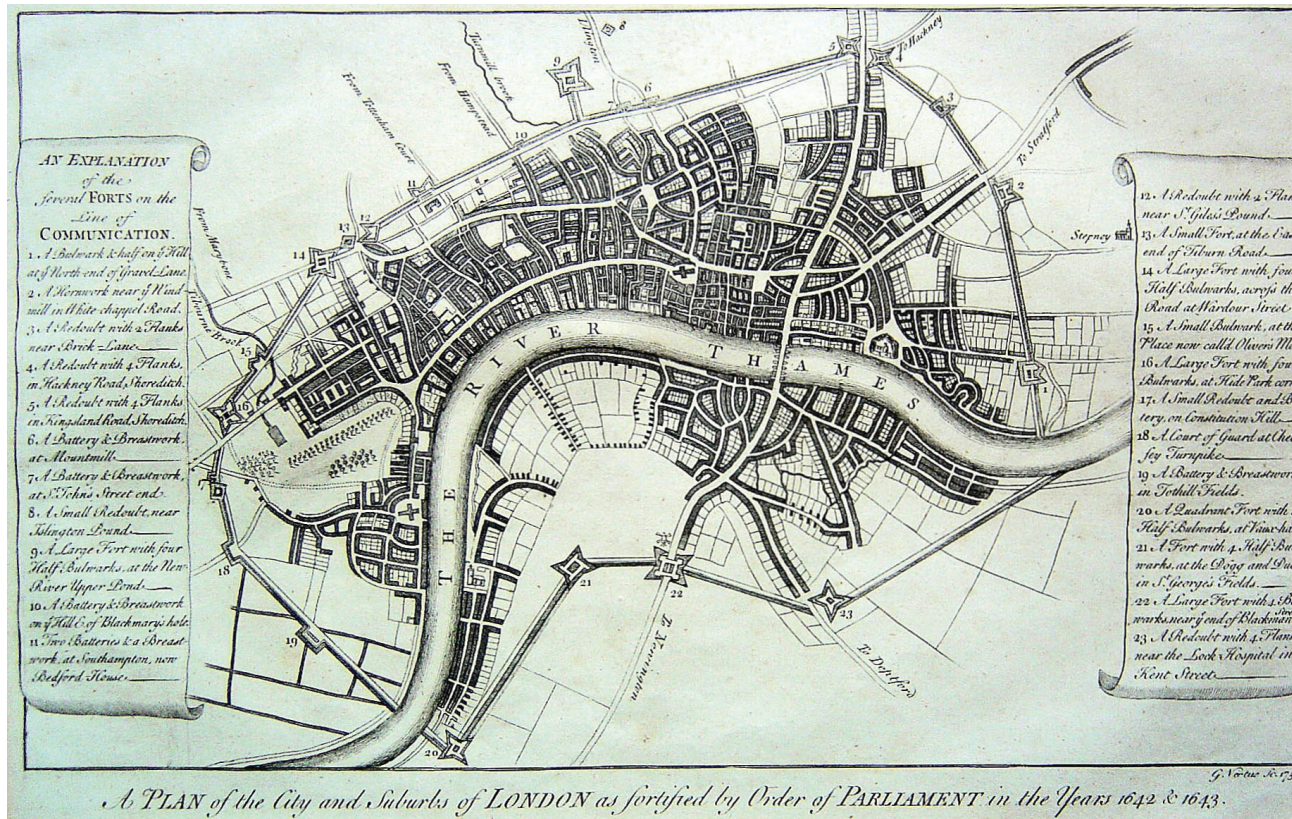


Figure 1. George Vertue's 1738 plan of the defences. Hyde Park fort is number 16 and the fort in St. George's Fields is number 21. (Steve Millar)

Figure 1a. Vertue Map superimposed on a map of modern London. (Charles Blackwood)



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layout and plan to those on plans of the London defences.

Regardless of the designer, work on the defences quickly commenced, progressing on a wave of popular enthusiasm, with men, women and sometimes children labouring upon them. This was satirised by Samuel Butler in *Hudibras*:

What have they done, or left undone,  
That might advance the Cause at London?  
March'd rank and file, with drum and ensign,  
T'entrench the city for defence in;  
Rais'd rampires with their own soft hands,  
To put the enemy to stands;  
From ladies down to oyster-wenches  
Labour'd like pioneers in trenches,  
Fell to their pick-axes and tools,  
And help'd the men to dig like moles?<sup>15</sup>

In May 1643, a Lanarkshire tailor, William Lithgow, walked the entire length of London's defences and described what he saw in *The present surveigh of London and England's state*. Concerning the forts at Hyde Park, he wrote:

I shortly encroached upon Head Park Corner Fort, which is a maine great strength, having one fort above and within another, and the third fort closing the roadway standeth breasting the other two. The utmost invellopped fort, overtopping the other two, is garnished with eight cannon reall, and on the inferiour bulwark northward, being a second part of the fort's maine body, there bee intrusted there five brazen half-cannons more, and before it towards the fields a breasting countercarp. The third defendant fort standeth enstald with six demi-culverines; amounting to 19 of all. This great fortification is but only pallosaded and single ditched, yet wonderfull strong and of great bounds. All the three having 17 angles. And this is the westmost fortification enclosing the park, the fields, the large mansion, and other enlargements belonging to S. James, his liberty.<sup>16</sup>

But what Lithgow does not make clear is the relationship to the 1642 fort. Would the earlier fort have been replaced by, or incorporated in the 1643 defences? One explanation is that the 1642 fort is actually the one that Lithgow describes as 'the third fort closing the roadway' and, according to Vertue, subsequently known as 'Goring House

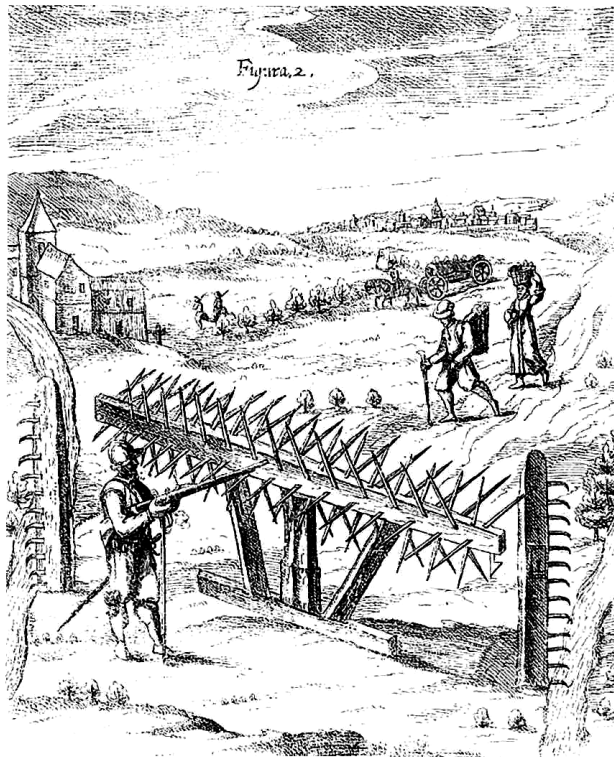


Figure 2. A contemporary sketch of a turnpike. (From Harrington: English Civil War Fortifications 2003)

Fort'. In his plan of the Lines of Communication, Vertue describes this position as 'A small Redoubt and Battery on Constitution Hill.'<sup>17</sup> Perhaps this particular fort was located on a site within the modern Hyde Park Corner roundabout.

Returning to the main fort itself, whilst Vertue locates it to the east of Tyburn Lane, this is neither supported by John Rocque's well known 1745 map (Figure 3) nor the ground disturbance which can still be seen today running parallel to Park Lane (and is the only part of the entire circuit of defences that is still visible). This would suggest that the fort was located some 400 metres to the north of what is now Hyde Park Corner, its flank parallel to Tyburn Lane and was, according to the Rocque map, at least 300m in length. This location has become generally accepted.<sup>18</sup>

All the evidence points to a large bastioned fort, a *sconce* would be the contemporary term (Figure 4), armed with 8 cannon-royal, 5 half-cannons and 6 demi-culverins. Lithgow described the defences as 'erected of turffe, sand, watles, and earthen work', and that the 'trench dyke was three yards thick and on the trench side twice as high'. Masonry was used in the construction of the gateways, and in 1644, repairs were undertaken to the defences 'at the breach near Tyburn-road'.<sup>19</sup>

Contemporary illustrations of the defences are virtually

unknown – what do exist either date from after the defences were slighted, or have been proven to be forgeries (the Eyre drawings) or are impressions or representations. So you can imagine this author's excitement to be presented, during the course of writing this paper, two sketches of Hyde Park fort drawn by the 17th Century artist and etcher Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-1677).

The sketches, drawn in 1644 (Figure 5), are two slightly different views of the fort from inside the circuit of the defences themselves, looking roughly westwards from a view point of somewhere within or near to modern Green Park (Figure 6). Both show the Tyburn River and what is now Piccadilly in the foreground. Hollar draws the fort that Lithgow describes, with one fort within another.

However, Hollar's drawing differs from what has become generally accepted in as much as the fort is around 125m in length and is positioned close to the main road. No other forts, either to the north or to the south are shown - there is no 'third fort' as described by Lithgow. Of course, the third fort could have been just out of view or perhaps, however unlikely, ignored altogether given it was small. But if Lithgow's description is interpreted as Hyde Park fort being more or less three forts in one, is Hollar's drawing of the fort in its entirety? The notion of 'three forts within one' is not fanciful. The well-known illustration of Mount Mill Fort (situated on the northern sector of the defences, guarding the road from Islington and the north) indicates three interlinked defensive structures (Figure 7).

Where does this leave the fort located on Constitution Hill? Was this actually the 1642 fort that became redundant with the construction of the 1643 fort and still visible to Lithgow in 1643 but not a year later? But there again, the 1642 fort may well have been incorporated with the 1643 fort. As for the ground disturbance shown on the Rocque and still visible today (Figure 8), this could simply

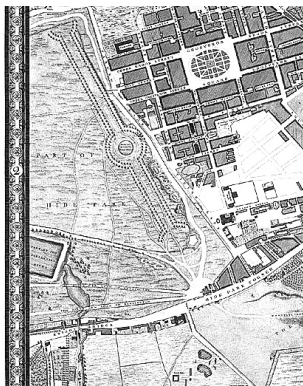


Figure 3. A extract from John Rocque's 1746 map showing the remains of the defences in Hyde Park. The remains run south-eastwards, parallel to Tiburn Lane, from opposite South Street.

*The manner of framing a Quadrangle Skonfe.*  
 This Four-square Skonfe, is of greater strength than your Triangle, and if it be favoured with a strong Situation, as great Rivers, or upon a Rocke, or where it may be flanked from the Bulworks of a Fort, it will stand in great stead; otherwise it is not to be taken for a strength of any moment: The Bulworks and Cartways are to be made very high, thick, and strong, that it may endure the battering of the Enemies Ordnance.

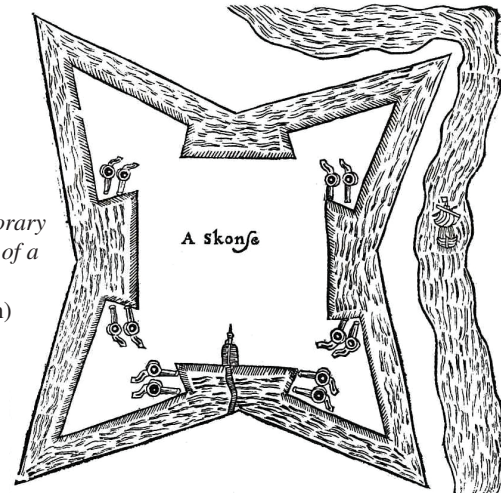


Figure 4.  
 A contemporary impression of a skonfe.  
 (Harrington)

be the line of the defences running away to the north (and shown on the Hollar drawings.)

Demolition of the defences followed very closely the end of the First Civil War and the Army's occupation of London in 1647.<sup>20</sup> But despite the demolition, traces of the defences have lasted up to the present day. This was not the end of Hyde Park's military connections, as in addition to the forts and the parade/drill ground, Hyde Park was also the location of an encampment. When Oliver Cromwell returned to London following his Irish campaign it was reported 'when passing the old camp where he had reviewed his Ironsides years before, multitude of citizens came out to greet him. The soldiers stationed there discharged a volley.'<sup>21</sup>

During the time of the Commonwealth, on 1 December 1652, Parliament resolved 'That Hyde Park be sold for ready money.' The sale of the Park (at the time comprising about 621 acres) realised £17,068 2s 8d and the purchasers of the three lots were Richard Wilson, John Lacey, and Anthony Deane. At the Restoration, the sale of the Park to private individuals was treated as null and void and Hyde Park became Royal property once more and was reopened to the public.

The tradition of reviewing troops in Hyde Park was maintained into the Restoration and for nearly 200 years thereafter. Ten years after Cromwell's return from Ireland, General Monck, in April 1660, mustered the Trained Bands, numbering some 18,600 and a few months later Charles II reviewed the now 'new-modelled City forces, numbering some 20,000 infantry and 800 cavalry.'<sup>22</sup>



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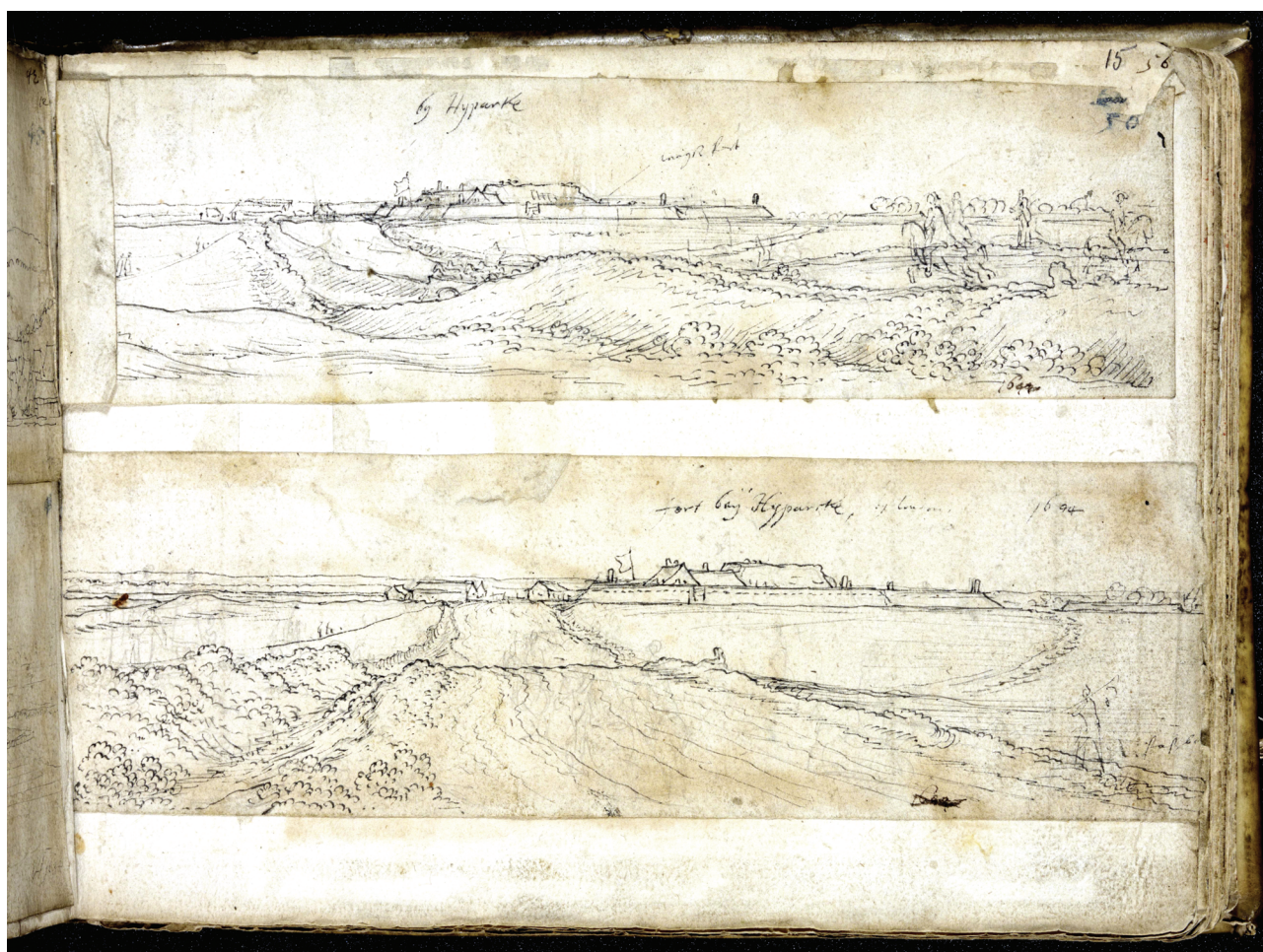


Figure 5. Wenceslaus Hollar's sketches of the fort at Hyde Park, c.1644. The view-point is to the east of the Tyburn from what is now Picadilly. (Courtesy of the Director and University Librarian, The John Rylands University Library, The University of Manchester. With special thanks to Simon Turner.)



Figure 6. The view from Hollar's view-point, as seen today. (Photo: David Flintham)