From the 1690s to the 1730s, thick walls of brick and of earth enclosed roughly sixty acres of high ground on an otherwise marsh-riddled peninsula. The professionally engineered walls and outworks encircled roughly 60 acres of high ground to provide protection to the inhabitants of Charles Town from the French, Spanish and hostile Native Americans. This was the only English walled city built in North America.

Small, four-sided forts or bastions were located at each of the four corners of the walled city. These were named for some of the Lords Proprietors of Carolina: Granville, Craven, Colleton and Carteret. A drawbridge guarded the land entrance to the town at the present day Meeting and Broad Streets. The rounded Half Moon Battery, providing the formal entrance to the town from the water was located at the halfway point along the water side between the two easternmost bastions, Granville and Craven.

“ANATOMY” OF THE WALLED CITY

A variety of materials and building techniques were utilized in these early fortifications. It is most likely that the three landward walls and outworks were of earthen construction with wooden components, all surrounded by a moat. These sides were more temporary in nature and would have been sufficient against a land assault. The defenses that fronted the Cooper River waterfront were instead built solidly of brick to provide the best protection against a sea assault with cannon fired from enemy ships. Granville’s Bastion, the Half Moon Battery and Craven’s Bastion were connected by a brick wall, called a curtain line, which also served the town as a sea wall. This wall was further punctuated with three intermediary redans. These redans were triangular projections that worked in concert with the corner bastions and Half Moon Battery to fully “cover” the lines of fire from the town to the water. Within most of the bastions and redans were located a number of cannons and small buildings ranging in function from armories and barracks to governmental structures.

THE MAYOR’S WALLED CITY TASK FORCE

The Mayor’s Walled City Task Force was appointed by Major Joseph P. Riley, Jr. in 2005 to further the study, identification, protection, and interpretation of the walled city of Charleston. Since its inception, this group of interested professionals has engaged in a number of educational and research activities; including several lecture series, a living history program and encampment, and “Walk the Walls” events. To date, more than 8,000 Walk the Walls brochures have been distributed, encouraging the public to take a self-guided tour of the Walled City boundaries and places of interest. Task Force members also continue to research the colonial records to learn more about the fortifications. An exciting mapping project was begun in 2006 with the City of Charleston GIS office to overlay historic maps and plans onto the current street grid to better identify the boundaries of the original walled city. Eventually, the group hopes to mark the outline of the fortifications in the streets and sidewalks so that the public can have a heightened sense of the size and scope of the colonial walled city.

REMOVAL AND REDISCOVERY

Because of development pressures to expand the town, in combination with a reduced threat of attack, the earthen north, west and south walls of the walled city were mostly dismantled by the 1730s. The more substantial harbor side fortifications, however, remained largely intact until after the American Revolution was concluded in the 1780s. In fact, it was not until 1784 that several of the bastions and redans along the Cooper River waterfront were advertised to be sold at auction, out of public ownership and into private hands. After the fortifications were sold, the above-ground remains of the works were cleared away, leaving no evidence on the landscape that they existed. However, some key traces of the brick fortifications were located below ground in the 1920s and 1960s. Archaeological investigations from the late 1950s to the present continue to shed light on the colonial walled city of Charles Town.