

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

adjacent to

35 CASTLEGATE, SCARBOROUGH

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Rec'd	1992



Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society

INTERIM REPORT 18

1992

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION ADJACENT TO
35 CASTLEGATE, SCARBOROUGH

by TREVOR PEARSON



Frontispiece; The excavation open day,
Easter Sunday 1991

SCARBOROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological excavation which took place on land earmarked for building adjacent to 35 Castlegate, during weekends between December 1990 and April 1991. The excavation was conducted by the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society at the request of the site owner, Mr Alan Richmond, following a recommendation by the North Yorkshire County Archaeology Office that the site should be investigated prior to its development.

THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

The site borders the east side of Castlegate (Fig 1) one of the steepest streets in the old town which climbs from East Sandgate on the south to Paradise on the north. To the south, the site is bordered by No 35 Castlegate (Fig 2), a property dating from the 18th century whilst to the north runs a footpath curving in front of the early Victorian terrace called Castle Crescent. Small private gardens lie to the east of the site whilst beyond rises the steep scarp slope of castle hill topped by its medieval fortifications

The site rises in two levels from Castlegate. Next to the street the ground level was up to two metres above the pavement at the start of the dig, whilst the eastern part of the site was 0.7m higher and divided from the rest of the site by a north-south brick retaining wall. The higher eastern area was not included in the development proposals consequently excavation was confined to the lower area adjacent to the street.

Archaeological interest in the site stemmed from the results of a small trial excavation undertaken by the Society in September 1989 which established that medieval deposits survived about a metre from the surface[1]. There was insufficient time to investigate these deposits further although it was concluded they were part of a medieval building since stone wall foundations were uncovered along the street frontage. The trial excavation also confirmed the evidence of Wood's 1828 plan of Scarborough and the 1852 OS map of the town, that the site has been open ground for at least 150 years. Indeed the dig found no evidence for a building on the site since the middle ages.

Unfortunately medieval documentary evidence which might have assisted with the interpretation of the 1989 discoveries is rather sparse, there being just three deeds transcribed in the Corporations White Vellum Book which describe this part of the town in the middle ages [2]. None of the three refer to Castlegate by name, rather they mention properties between the castle ditch to the east and an unnamed road to the west, described in one of the two undated, but probably 14th century, documents as "the road by which one goes to the quay."

Turning to past archaeological investigations in the area, a small trench was dug at the junction of Castlegate and Paradise in 1988 as part of the Paradise Estate archaeology project which disclosed that medieval remains had been all but destroyed by later buildings on the site [3]. Later that same year an excavation further along Paradise uncovered the remains of a backfilled

medieval clay quarry but found no indication that the site had ever been built upon [4].

Despite the dearth of archaeological and documentary evidence for the street in the middle ages it is reasonable to suppose Castlegate dates back some 800 years since it is an integral part of the rectilinear street pattern of the old town. It is the easternmost of the north-south aligned streets, which together with east-west aligned thoroughfares such as Longwestgate and Paradise, form the grid of streets laid out in the 12th century. As one of the routes between the harbour and castle one can envisage the street being reasonably busy with traffic in the middle ages and it has probably been lined with houses for much of its 800 year history. Several of the 18th and 19th century houses which border the street today incorporate stone walls in their fabric (including No 35 Castlegate), which might conceivably be survivals from medieval buildings.

Modern Castlegate has become so built up that few opportunities remain to excavate a site along the street which has not been substantially damaged or destroyed by standing buildings. As the 1989 trial excavation demonstrated, the present site may therefore be exceptional along Castlegate for apparently being open ground since the middle ages. For this reason a further excavation was initiated with the consent and encouragement of the site owner to insure the site was fully investigated before development began.

THE EXCAVATION (Fig 3)

The 1989 trial excavation measured 1.9m by 1m and was positioned immediately behind the brick retaining wall bordering the street about 3m north of No 35 Castlegate. The present excavation began by emptying the backfilled 1989 trench and extending

it eastwards as far as the brick wall marking the limits of the development area. This established that medieval deposits, including a hearth, extended as far as the eastern limit of the site although buried by up to two metres of post-medieval overburden.

The decision was then taken in consultation with the site owner to remove all the overburden between the trench and no 35 Castlegate before investigating the medieval deposits further. However it was deemed unwise to remove the equivalent overburden in the opposite direction up to the northern boundary of the site for fear of the instability this might have introduced to land further up the hill, including Castle Crescent itself. The north of the site was therefore not touched but was used to dump some of the ten cubic metres of overburden which was removed by hand to expose the medieval remains over the south of the site. The remainder of the overburden was dumped into a succession of skips (Plate 1).



Plate 1 Removing the overburden from the site

In the event, the medieval remains proved not to be quite as well preserved as was anticipated nor so clearly associated with a building as the 1989 excavation suggested. Nevertheless a considerable amount of information was recovered about the development of the property during and after the middle ages as described in detail below.

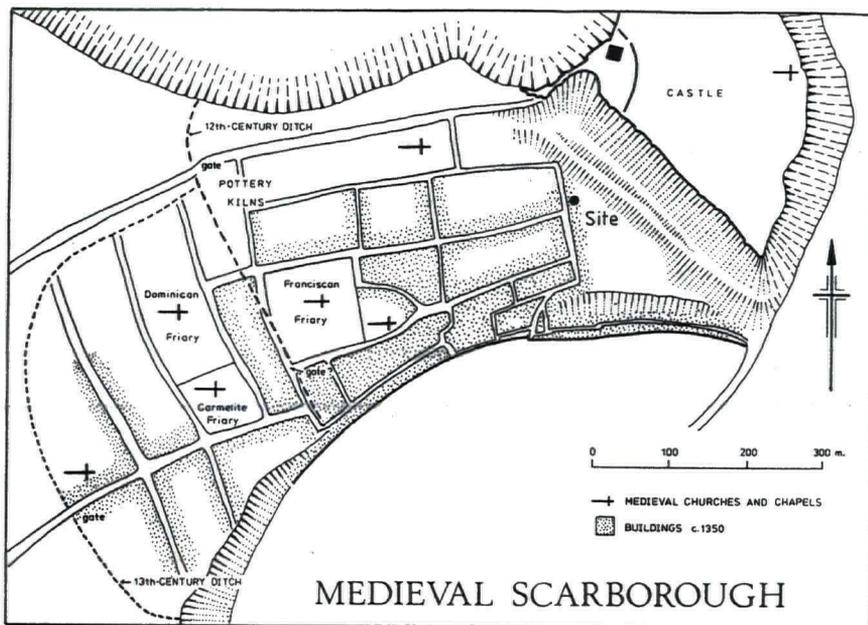


Fig 1
Medieval
Scarborough
 showing
 location of the
 excavation

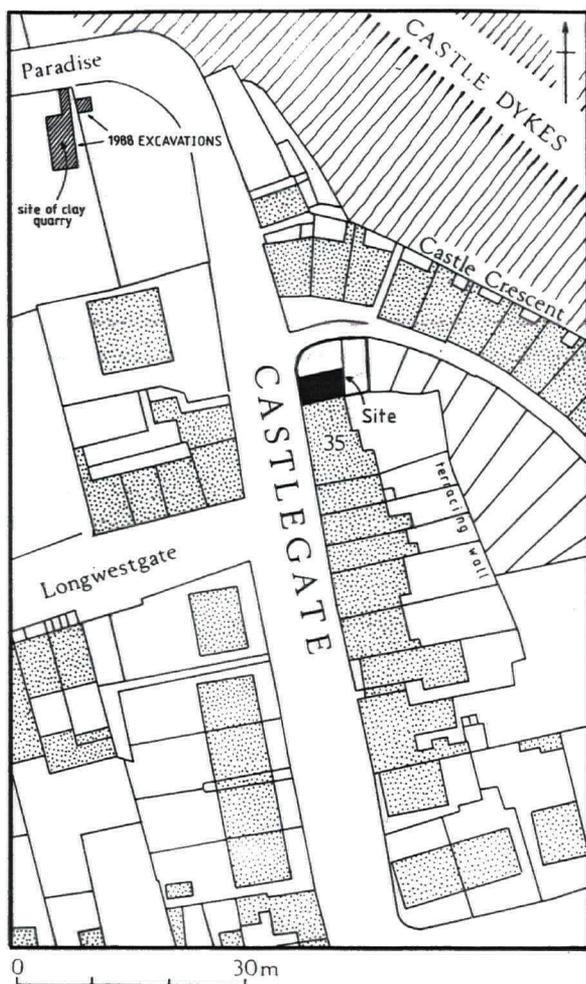
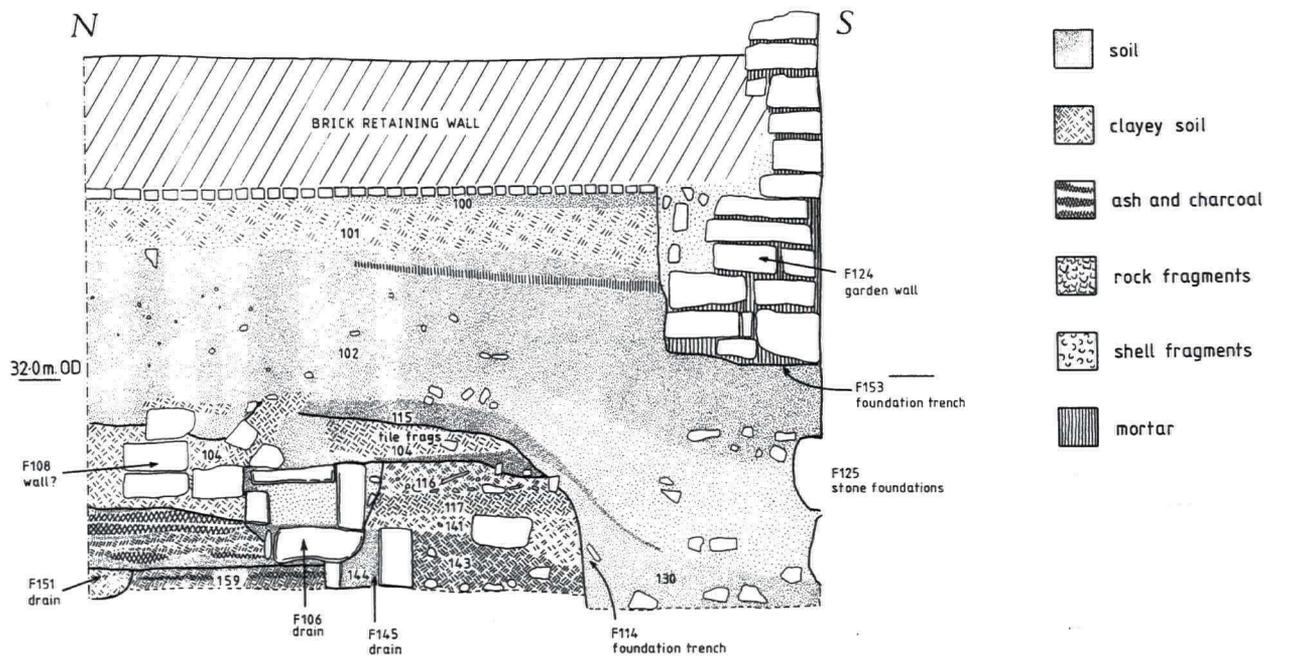
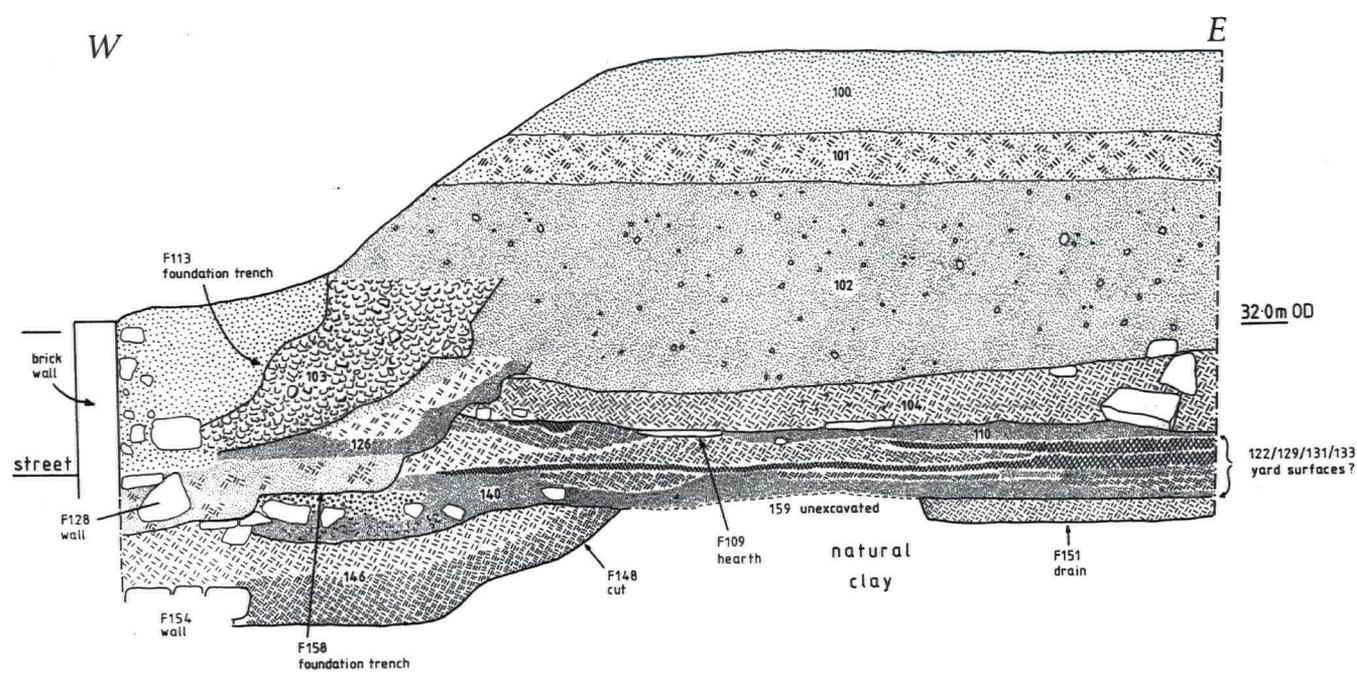


Fig 2 Castlegate showing the
 position of the trench



WEST FACING SECTION



SOUTH FACING SECTION

Fig 3 West and south facing sections of the trench

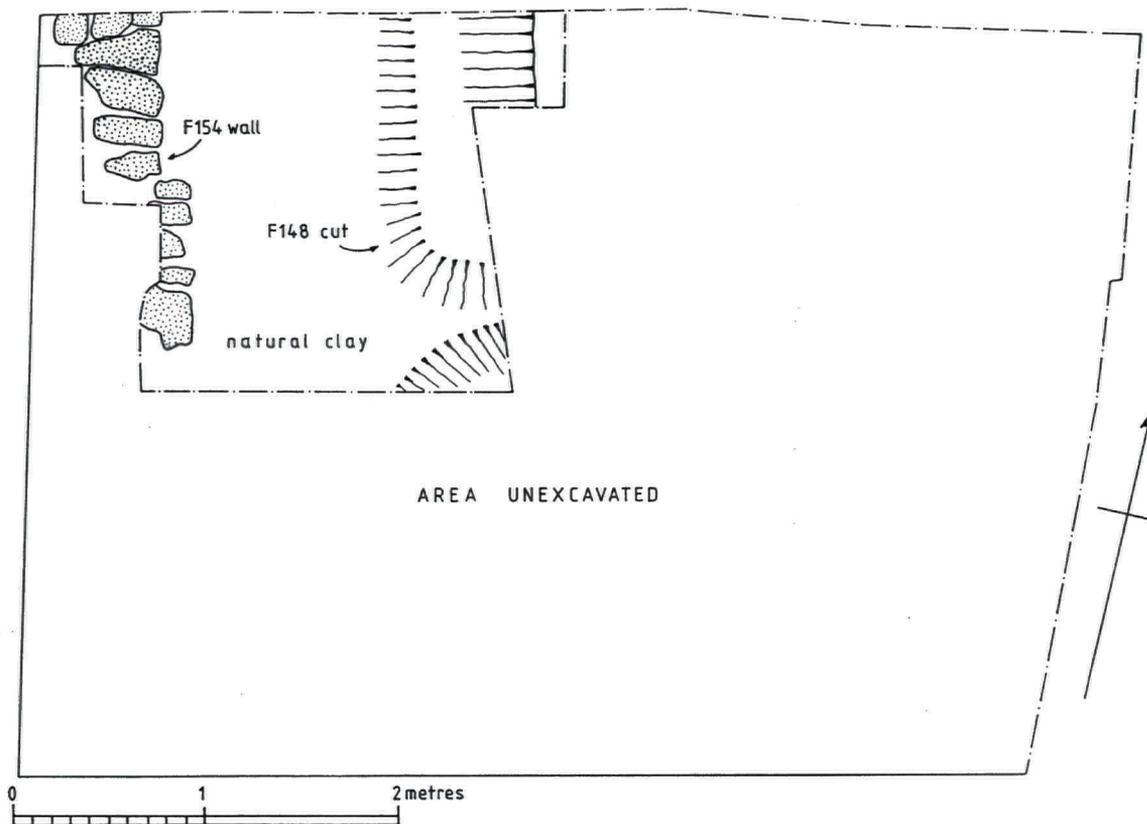


Fig 4 Plan of phase one features

**PHASE ONE: THE EARLIEST FEATURES
(Fig 4)**

Natural, undisturbed glacial clay was revealed only in the north-west corner of the trench. Elsewhere on the site, excavation was suspended before the natural surface was uncovered so as not to unnecessarily lower the site below the level required by the developer. Cutting the natural surface in the north-west corner of the trench was a shallow sided cut (F148) at the base of which was a wall (F154) along the street frontage of which only one course survived bedded into natural clay. The cut was backfilled with layers of brown and greeney brown clayey soil (146).

The wall F154 and the cut F148 were the earliest two features discovered on the site but due to the restricted area within which they were found, they defie easy explanation. The cut

F148 appeared to turn through 90 degrees, possibly to accommodate a second wall at right angles to the road, which could point to their having been a building on the site at this period. However no floor levels or other signs of a building were found associated with the wall and in the following phase the site was demonstrably open ground with surface drains crossing it. The wall F154 may have simply been a property boundary marking the street frontage with the shallow sided cut, F148, perhaps a relic of the quarrying that initially must have taken place to carve this level plot out of a steeply sloping hillside. If so, then this phase could date to the 12th century although insufficient dateable artefacts, such as pottery, were recovered to confirm this.

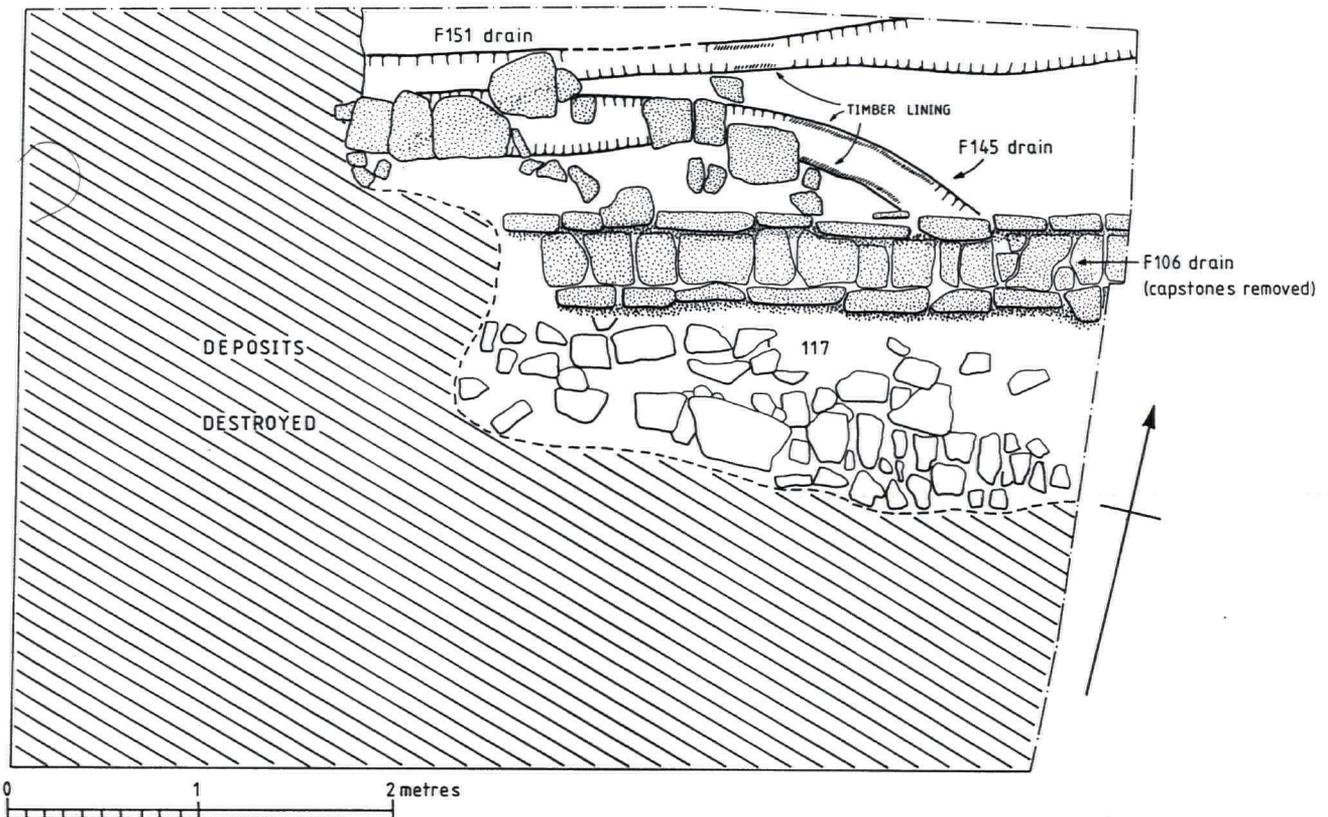


Fig 5 Plan of phase two features

PHASE TWO: SURFACE DRAINS
(Fig 5)

Across the levelled surface of the site ran a sequence of three drains of increasing size and sophistication. The earliest (F151) was little more than a shallow linear scoop cut through the thin soil layer (159) which naturally accumulated on the site after it had been carved out of the hillside. Traces of timber staining indicated that the sides of the drain were lined with wood and the drain probably flowed into the street although this junction had been destroyed when a later foundation trench (F158) was cut along the street frontage (see phase 5 below).

The drain F151 was twice replaced, firstly by one of comparable construction (F145) comprising a

shallow u shaped gully with remnants of a timber lining and stone capping and filled, like F151 before it, with a clayey soil hardly distinguishable from the layers through which it cut. The third drain in the sequence, F106, was by far the most massively constructed with a base of stone slabs, sides of stone blocks, (levelled in places with re-used limestone roof tiles), and capped by substantial limestone slabs (Plate 2). The drain was filled with a thin layer of grey sand at its base with a thicker deposit of soil on top right up to the base of the capstones. Like the first drain F151, the two later drains probably discharged into the street but their junction with Castlegate had been destroyed by the



**Plate 2 Drain F106 looking east
with capping stones removed**

later cut F158. To consolidate the ground immediately to the south of the drains and to prevent slippage down the slope, successive layers of stones mixed with clayey soil had been dumped (layers 143, 141, 117 and 116). How far south these stone dumps once extended could not be ascertained due to the intrusion of the later foundation trench for No 35 Castlegate (F114, see phase 5 below).

Taken together the three drains and associated dumps of stone rubble testify to increasing use being made of the vicinity. For example, the provision of surface drains implies a local residential population unwilling to tolerate ground water flowing uncontrollably over their properties. Equally, the fact that all three drains are aligned east-west at right angles to the street when the direction of natural drainage would

have been from north-east to south-west indicates respect for existing property boundaries at 90 degrees to the street. Unfortunately, beyond establishing the medieval date of all three drains, insufficient dating evidence was recovered to establish their age more precisely. The stone built drain F106 was evidently intended for prolonged use, so massively had it been constructed and could have lasted at least for several decades.

PHASE THREE: YARD SURFACES? (Fig 6)

Aside from the sequence of drains, other evidence for occupation on the site was confined to a series of damaged clay and ash surfaces overlaid by a hearth immediately to the north of the last of the drains, F106. The lenses of clay and ash (dug in four 5cm spits 122, 129, 131, and 133) accumulated against the drain and were in turn buried by a layer of dark soil (110) so that by the time that hearth F109 was constructed only the capping stones of the drain were still visible. The hearth itself was crudely constructed of stone roof tiles and bricks laid on a bed of clay.

The clay and ash surfaces continued northwards and eastwards beyond the confines of the trench whilst towards Castlegate they had been destroyed by the later foundation trench F158. Consequently it is impossible to say if these surfaces and the hearth were internal or external to a building. Four squared stones projecting into the trench from the eastern section might conceivably be the face of a wall at right angles to the drain (F108) and the drain itself might have doubled as the foundation for a building. There are several local examples where stone lined and capped drains have been incorporated in medieval house foundations. Two of the buildings excavated at the deserted village of Hatterboard possessed stone

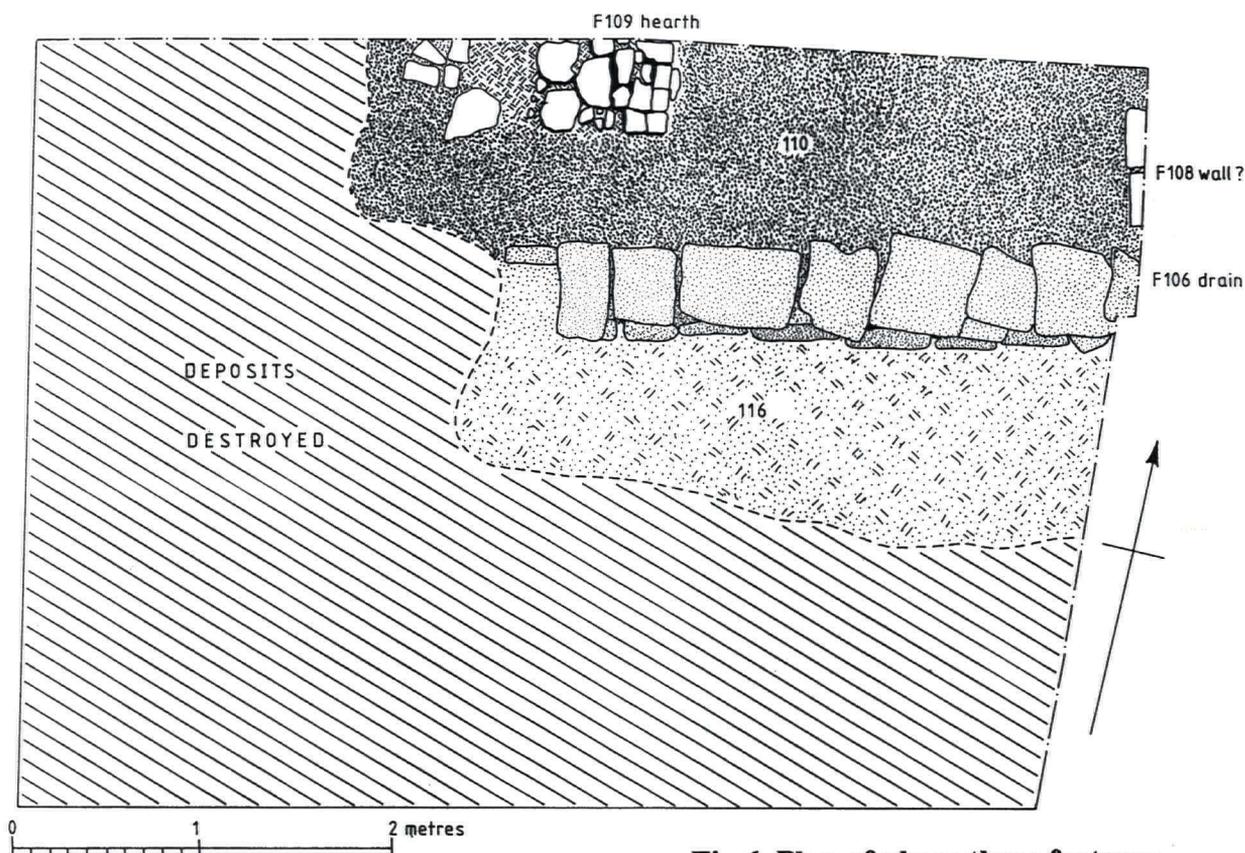


Fig 6 Plan of phase three features

lined and capped wall drains to provide dry foundations on a wet clay site (Houses 4 and 5) [5]. Similarly a medieval building excavated at Tollergate between 1969 and 1975 incorporated a drain at the base of one of its internal walls [6]. However some care seems to have been taken with drain F106 to find flat capping stones to give the drain a level top which would not have been necessary had a wall been raised above it. More likely is that the site was still open ground in this phase, perhaps the yard of a house, across which flowed the drain F106 and where successive surfaces of ash and clay accumulated overlain by the rudimentary hearth F109. Pottery recovered from the ash and clay layers established the medieval date of these deposits.

PHASE FOUR: ABANDONMENT OF THE SITE

The hearth F109 and drain F106 mark the end of occupation on the site. They were both buried by a layer containing broken stone roof tiles and lenses of mortar suggesting a building had been demolished or abandoned in the vicinity and the debris scattered over the site. Again the full extent of this demolition deposit was not established, partially because it continued to the east and north outside the confines of the trench and partially because to the south and west it had been destroyed by later features.

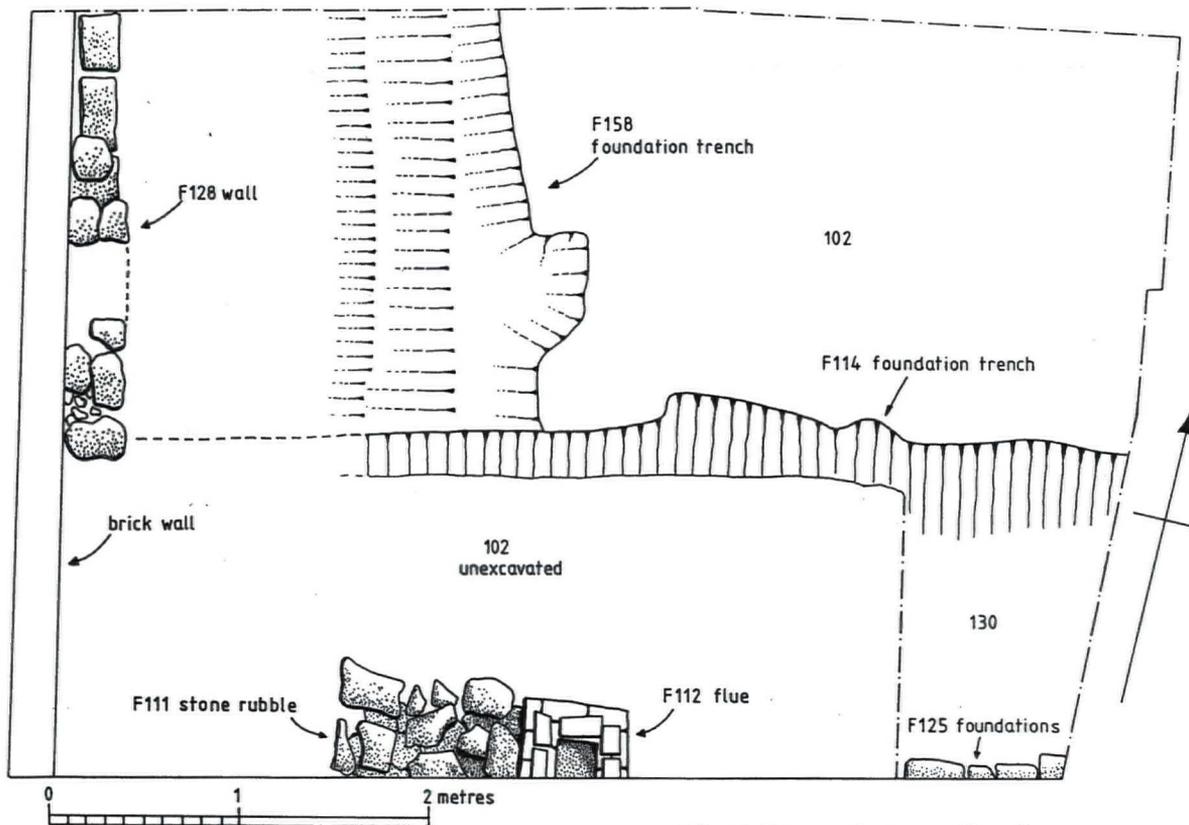


Fig 7 Plan of phase five features

**PHASE FIVE: OPEN GROUND
(Fig 7)**

Following the spread of debris across the site from the demolition of a nearby building discussed above, the site has been unoccupied, open ground right up to the present day as is clearly indicated by the 1-2m thickness of featureless stratigraphy which seals the medieval level. For the most part this stratigraphy consists of garden soil, gradually built up over the centuries (layer 102) interleaved with occasional tips of material. Most distinctive of these was the deposit of stone rubble and clay along the western edge of the site (layer 103), most likely natural rock excavated and thrown onto the site during the construction of Castle Crescent. Also along the western edge of the site, two foundation cuts were

identified for successive boundary walls along the Castlegate frontage. The earliest, F158, cut through medieval deposits adjacent to the street to accommodate the rubble footings for a stone boundary wall (F128) whilst the later cut (F113) was made for the existing brick boundary wall.

Far larger than either of the cuts along the street frontage and far more destructive to the underlying medieval deposits was the foundation trench for No 35 Castlegate along the southern side of the site F114. Considerations of safety adjacent to a standing building meant investigation of this feature was confined to a sondage in the south-east corner of the site, the

excavation of which was terminated before the base of the foundation trench was revealed. The brick outer wall of No 35 Castlegate was found to rest on a wall of rough stone blocks (F125) which, judging by the 17th and 18th century pottery contained in the lower fill of the foundation trench (layers 127,130 and 115) cannot be medieval in date and is probably contemporary with the brick wall above. It would have made sense in the 18th century not to squander expensive bricks on house foundations when stone rubble, perhaps re-used from an earlier building, was available as a cheaper alternative. The upper fill of the foundation trench was loose soil of the same consistency as covered the rest of the site (layer 102) although slightly sandier and lighter in appearance.

At some later date a second, shallower trench was excavated next to the wall of No 35 Castlegate (F153), perhaps to remedy problems with its stability as in one area a length of stone rubble was packed against the outer face of the foundations (F111 and Plate 3). At the same time the opportunity was taken to insert a brick lined flue through the wall into the cellar below the house (F112) and to key a stone retaining wall at the rear of the property into the north-east corner of the building (F124). The spreading of a layer of clay and rock fragments (layer 101) topped by more garden soil (layer 100) across the site brings its development up to the present day.

SUMMARY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 1990-91 excavation has confirmed the overall picture first glimpsed in the trial dig of 1989, that this site has been open ground since the middle ages. The same was found to be true of the area around Paradise House in the 1988-90 excavations and it appears that generally the north of the town became increasingly deserted throughout the late medieval period.

Even in the middle ages there is no firm evidence that a building stood on the site except for the slender possibility that the stone drain F106 is a "wall drain" and served as the foundations for a structure. More likely is that the area was open ground, all be it close to a building, as is indicated by the spread of roof tile debris across the site in phase four, presumably derived from the decay or demolition of a house nearby. One can both speculate that a building might have stood to the east of the site since the drains flow from this direction and anticipate a substantial terracing wall in this direction similar to the massive stone wall which retains the rear gardens of No 35 Castlegate and its neighbours lower down the hill. In view of the questions still to be answered about

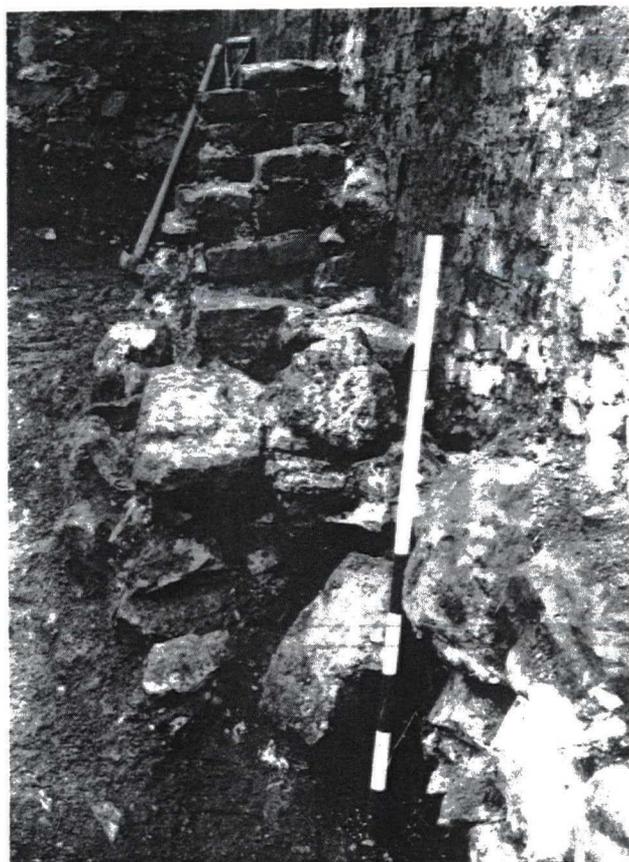


Plate 3 Stone rubble F111 and flue F112 adjacent to wall of 35 Castlegate

the disposition of buildings on this site and the dating of the various phases of activity it is imperative that the unexcavated northern part of the development site up to the footpath in front of Castle Crescent is examined before building work begins.

The success of the excavation owed much to the encouragement of the site owner Mr Alan Richmond and his endless supply of skips and to the hard work

of the following members and friends of the Society who freely gave of their time:- Patrick Argent, Bill Broadmore, Dorothy Chaplin, Ron Davies, Kay Dunderdale, Chris Hall, Sarah Hardy, Gary Marshall, John Petty, Adam Russell and Richard Ward. Norman Murphy kindly loaned the scaffolding. The excavation concluded with a very successful open day on Easter Sunday 1991 which attracted over 300 visitors.

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