

Excavations in Three Burgage Plots in the Medieval Town of Newport, Dyfed, 1991

By KENNETH MURPHY

Dyfed Archaeological Trust

THREE BURGAGE PLOTS within a deserted area of the medieval new town of Newport were excavated. Buildings were established on the burgage plots following the town's foundation in the late 12th century, but these were short-lived and the plots were soon given over to agriculture. Evidence for buildings was slight. It is argued that the excavated dwellings were earth-built and thatched and possibly conformed to a standard plan. Boundaries between individual burgage plots and between blocks of plots were investigated, thus examining the means by which the town was laid out.

Newport is a small town on the south side of the sheltered Nevern estuary in the Preseli Pembrokeshire District of Dyfed, formerly the County of Pembroke (SN 05 39). Apart from small housing estates and ribbon development between Newport and the village of Parrog (Fig. 1) there has been very little modern development and the town still retains much of its original topography dating from its foundation in the late 12th century. The present town is centred on the A487 coastal trunk road, but originally the settlement was larger with burgage plots extending from this road down to the estuary. It was on part of this now undeveloped land that the excavations took place.

The narrow, fertile coastal belt on which Newport is located is now given over to pastoralism, though strip fields, some with ridge and furrow, attest former arable activity. Immediately beyond the town to the S. the land rises rapidly and the large fields of improved grassland with earth and stone banks and hedges give way to small, irregular enclosures of rough pasture surrounded by stone walls. At higher levels these fade into the stone strewn bracken and heather moorland of Carningli Common.

The geology of the town and surrounding area is complex. In the town, the underlying Ordovician sedimentary bedrock can be seen outcropping at many locations, but it is generally overlain by fluvio-glacial deposits.¹ These are varied and change rapidly over short distances. In the excavated area this drift geology

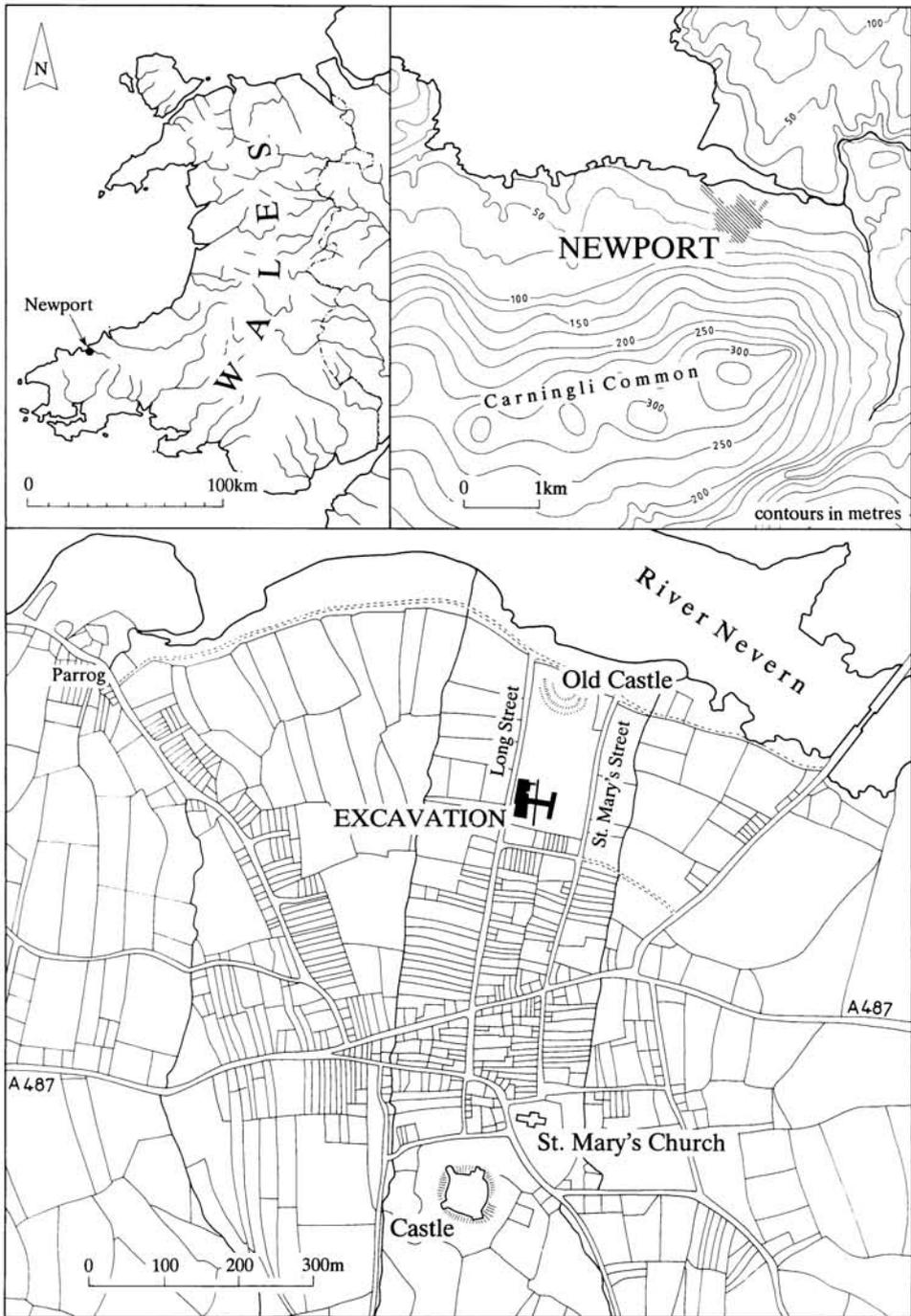


FIG. 1
Location plan.

comprised between one and two metres of orange-yellow clay over a compact, fine gravel of unknown depth. These deposits cause severe drainage problems during the winter months. Less than 100 m to the N. of the excavations bedrock outcrops. Elsewhere in the town bands of soft glacial sand and coarse gravels were observed during the construction of a gas pipeline in the spring of 1991.

The excavations were carried out in response to plans to build a new school on the sports field in Long Street, in an area of the town recognized by many authorities² to have contained burgage plots in the medieval period. The archaeological potential of the Long Street area was demonstrated during construction of the dwelling 'Ystrad Fflur' in the mid 1980s. Here, on the opposite side of the street from the excavations and about 30 m to the N. more than one phase of stone-walled buildings associated with medieval pottery was recorded under salvage conditions.³

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To understand the origin and purpose of Newport's foundation it is necessary to examine the prevailing political situation in west Wales during the 12th and early 13th centuries. According to tradition the ancient Welsh cantref of Cemais was conquered by the rather shadowy figure of Martin of Tours. There seems little to support this legend, though by 1115, following the Anglo-Norman conquest of South Wales, the district was in the hands of his son, Robert Fitzmartin.⁴ The Welsh cantref became the Norman Barony of Cemais, part of the Earldom of Pembroke, although the Martins continually disputed their subservience and claimed rights of Lords Marcher to themselves. They established their stronghold at the pre-Norman ecclesiastical centre of Nevern (2 km E. of Newport), building a strong motte and bailey castle⁵ on a hill above the church. Although the Fitzmartin's hold on Cemais was challenged during the course of the 12th century no serious opposition confronted them until the rise of Rhys ap Gruffudd, the Lord Rhys. William Fitzmartin, the son, or perhaps grandson, of Robert, had apparently strengthened his hold on Cemais by marrying Angharad, the daughter of Lord Rhys. This did not prevent Lord Rhys taking the castle from William Fitzmartin and handing it over to one of his natural sons, Gruffudd, when he reconquered most of S. Wales in 1191.⁶ However, relations between Rhys and his family were hardly cordial. In 1194 he was imprisoned in Nevern castle by two other sons, Hywel Sais and Maelgwn, the latter then in control of the castle having dispossessed his brother Gruffudd. Hywel then deceived Maelgwn, released his father and gained control of Nevern.⁷ The following year, in 1195, Hywel became so alarmed at Norman gains in the S. of Dyfed that he dismantled the castle at Nevern to hinder attempts at the reconquest of Cemais by the Normans.⁸ This tactic was not successful for by 1197 William Fitzmartin was once again in possession of the castle as he borrowed 20 marks for its repair.⁹ Between 1176 and 1198 he granted a burgage plot in the town of Newport to the Order of St John's Commandery at Slebech.¹⁰

Meanwhile, the political situation remained turbulent. Lord Rhys died in 1197, and Gruffudd recaptured much of the territory taken by Maelgwn. In return, Maelgwn handed over Cardigan Castle to King John in order to strengthen his

position and curry favour.¹¹ This tactic seems to have been moderately successful as Maelgwn soon recovered some of his former holdings including Dinefwr in 1201 and Llandovery and Llangadog in 1203. He was, however, soon dispossessed of these latter two by his cousins. In 1204 the *Brut y Tywysogyon*¹² relates that in the territory of Cemais, Hywel Sais was killed by men of his brother, Maelgwn. In the same year, the appearance of William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, in S. Wales spelt the end of this short period of Welsh supremacy. He began his campaign of reconquest of much of S. Wales by a successful raid on Cilgerran castle and thus restored Emlyn, the cantref immediately to the E. of Cemais, to English control.

Internecine squabbling in the family of Lord Rhys, political manoeuvring within and between Welsh and English, and military gains first by one side and then the other formed the historical backdrop against which the castle and town of Newport was established. The exact date of foundation really depends upon the status and whereabouts of William Fitzmartin after his dispossession of Nevern castle in 1191. That William, son-in-law of Lord Rhys, was the founder of the town is confirmed by a charter granted by his son, Nicholas Fitzmartin, in c. 1241, confirming the privileges bestowed by his father.¹³ It is possible that William started construction of a castle at Newport immediately after his loss of Nevern castle in 1191, but this would have posed a direct threat to Nevern castle and to Welsh control of Cemais and so is unlikely. It is more probable that Hywel's dismantling of Nevern castle in 1195 was in response to a very real threat of invasion and it was at this date that the Fitzmartins regained control of Cemais. The razing of Nevern castle providing the stimulus to found a new castle with a town at Newport. Mr R. Turvey¹⁴ notes that the 20 marks borrowed by William Fitzmartin in 1197 may not have been used on repairs at Nevern, but were put towards making a start on Newport castle. Certainly Nevern castle is no longer documented from this date. However, D. J. Cathcart King and J. Clifford Perks writing in 1951¹⁵ suggested that the Fitzmartins did not regain control of Cemais until William Marshall's campaign of 1204.

On balance, it seems probable that the castle and town of Newport was founded in about 1197. Whatever the exact date, William Fitzmartin's planting of non-Welsh settlers seems to have been successful for when in 1213 Maelgwn, son of Lord Rhys, and his cousin, Rhys, invaded Dyfed they were well received in Emlyn and Elfed but met with resistance in Cemais.¹⁶ Two years later, however, Newport castle was destroyed by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth and the men of Cemais paid homage to him.¹⁷ The Fitzmartin family regained control of Cemais in about 1230, but in 1257 the castle was again razed to the ground, this time by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.¹⁸ Edward I's campaigns beginning in 1276–77 marked Llywelyn's loss of power. From this period the castle returned to and remained in the hands of those loyal to the English King.

TOPOGRAPHY

by V. M. Evans and K. Murphy¹⁹

A 1434 rental of the town published by B. G. Charles provides the most important source for the study of the medieval topography of Newport.²⁰ However,

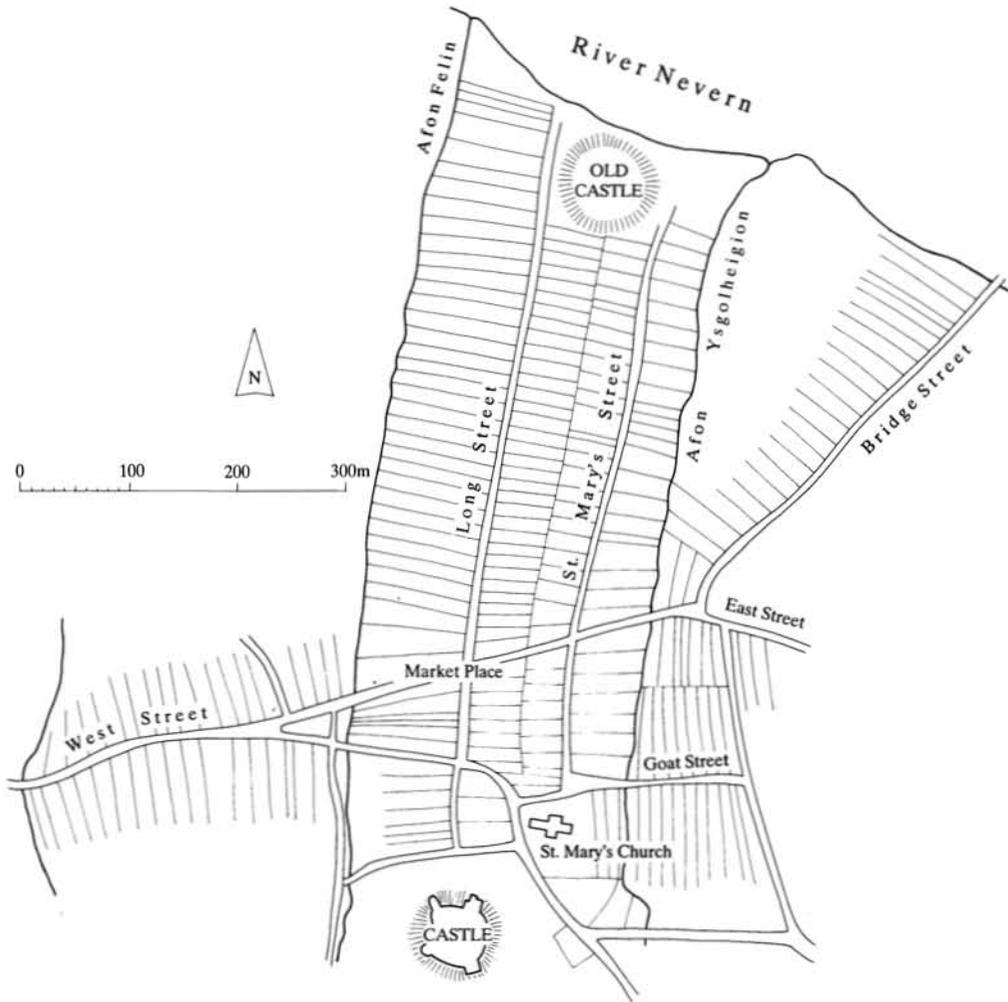


FIG. 2

Semi-schematic plan of Newport based on a rental of 1434.

the layout of the burgage plots on can only be shown schematically (Fig. 2) as it is difficult to relate the position of the 1434 plots to the modern property boundaries (as shown on Fig. 1). There has been much sub-division of the original plots at the S. end of the town and at the N. end only a few, possibly original burgage boundaries are still in existence. On the rental for the E. side of St Mary's Street 24 full plots, one plot of one-and-a-half burgages and five half plots were recorded; these are shown with an average width of about 17 to 18 m per plot (the area of each plot being about 780 sq m²). The 30 and a half plots on the W. side of St Mary's Street have an average width of 14 to 15 m (area 580 sq m²), the 43 on the E. side of Long Street have an average width of 12 to 13 m (area 625 sq m²) and the 46 and a third on the W. side of

Long Street an average width of 14 to 15 m (area 1380 sq m²). In 1434 there were 233 burgages in the town. It is clear from the topography that by this date more than one phase of development had occurred; this is discussed below. From an analysis of the 1434 rental and one of 1594 it would also seem that not all the burgages were occupied at the same time; expansion in the S. part of the town seems to have caused desertion in the N. area.

The status of the much eroded earthwork at the N. end of Long Street and St Mary's Street (Figs. 1 and 2) is the first major problem to be addressed when discussing the origin of the town. On purely morphological grounds this earthwork is registered on the Dyfed Archaeological Trust's Sites and Monuments Record²¹ as an iron age defended site. It is of a shape and size comparable with known iron age enclosures in south-west Wales, such as the one excavated in the 1980s at Drim.²² But the fact that it is known as Old Castle in 1434²³ and that it sits squarely in the town's street plan surely indicates medieval occupation (Pl. VI). If this inference is correct then it must be the castle founded in about 1197 by William Fitzmartin after the slighting of Nevern castle. The advantages of Newport over Nevern for the establishment of a town were manifold; the new castle at Newport was located on the bank on a sheltered yet navigable estuary on gently sloping fertile land. Nevern, though a superb naturally defended site, offered little scope for development amongst its steep-sided hills and narrow valleys.

It is clear from the plan (Fig. 2) that Long Street and St Mary's Street were laid out on either side of Old Castle. These two parallel streets ran to the S. for *c.* 500 m before crossing an ancient route²⁴ (the present West Street — East Street — Bridge Street) and continued for another *c.* 100 m. The burgage plots of these two streets were bounded on the W. by the stream Afon Felin and on the E. by the stream Afon Ysgolhegion. These two streams seem to have been canalized to form straight rear boundaries to the burgage plots. The first phase of development of the town thus seems to be centred on Old Castle and the estuary, with burgage plots on Long Street and St Mary's Street. The topographical evidence seems to indicate that the town was never defended. The burgage plots are packaged into a neat rectangle by the two streams mentioned above, but these are no more than shallow ditches and could never have performed a defensive function.

If the above hypothesis concerning the original layout of the town is correct then the establishment of the castle on its present dominating site, possibly after destructive Welsh attacks of 1215 or 1257, must have had a profound effect on the plan of the town. The authors of a recent structural survey favour a date after 1257 for the castle's relocation.²⁵ It is also possible that the confirmation in *c.* 1241 of the privileges granted in the original charter signalled a refounding and replanning of the town. Certainly by 1594 all the appurtenances of a medieval borough — the church, market cross and shire hall — were located in the S. part of the town and it is clear that by 1434 a considerable amount of expansion had taken place in this area.²⁶ Burgage plots had spread along West Street, East Street and Goat Street and had also developed around the church; this gives the appearance of a planned grid pattern to the town. Subsequent to this development, but before 1434, burgage plots were established down Bridge Street.

In 1434, 76 burgage holders are listed for the 233 plots with four burgesses holding 97 plots between them. 21 individuals are named as having just a single plot. One plot was held by the Knights of St John. Only burgesses are recorded on the rental, but many more people — dependants of burgesses, servants, and men who worked the land — would have lived and worked in the town and had their rent paid for them. Thus the 1434 population and its distribution within the town is uncertain. Information contained in the rental of 1594²⁷ is more precise. Then, out of a total of 211 burgage plots only 44 were occupied; these all clustered in the S. part of the town with some of the former plots near Old Castle consolidated into small fields. Clearly by this date not only had the change of focus away from the Old Castle been completed but the new centre at the S. end of the town was in an advanced state of decay.

Superimposed over the data on expansion and contraction within the town is the record of general depopulation experienced by all areas of Wales in the 14th and early 15th centuries.²⁸ That the town was in an advanced state of decay in 1594 is not in doubt, but whether depopulation is recorded in 1434 is not certain. The population seemed to reach its lowest point at the end of the 18th century for when Fenton²⁹ visited Newport at the beginning of the 19th century he noted: 'the chasms in its depopulated streets are filling up fast with buildings'.

THE EXCAVATIONS

After anomalies were detected in a geophysical survey, and interpreted as burgage plot boundaries,³⁰ several machine-dug trial trenches were opened to examine if medieval stratigraphy survived. Of these, Trial Trenches 1 and 3 (TT 1 and 3), the latter a reopening of the main sewer-pipe trench through the town, demonstrated the existence of *in situ* medieval deposits alongside Long Street (Figs. 3 and 4). Another trial trench (TT 2) sampled the burgage plot boundaries located by the geophysical survey to the E. and established that away from the street frontage only those archaeological features cut into the clay subsoil could be expected to survive beneath the deep (up to 0.80 m) topsoil.

The basic stratigraphy of the site is illustrated by the section of TT 1 (Fig. 4). Close to Long Street and parallel to it lay a series of gravel-filled drainage ditches. The largest of these (33), one of the last in the sequence, was cut from just 0.2 m below the surface of the modern turf. It was sealed by a coarse sandy layer that contained pottery and glass of 19th-century date. The earliest ditches were of medieval date. Immediately to the E. of the ditches and parallel to them lay an indistinct soil bank (9); this merged with topsoil deposits to the E. A c. 5m wide band of this topsoil immediately E. of the bank (9) seemed to contain separable horizons and possibly *in situ* medieval layers, but this was found not to be the case on full excavation. The topsoil had instead been formed by a process of continuous cultivation; over time, as its depth increased, the lower horizons were progressively left undisturbed resulting in very little downward migration of artefacts and other

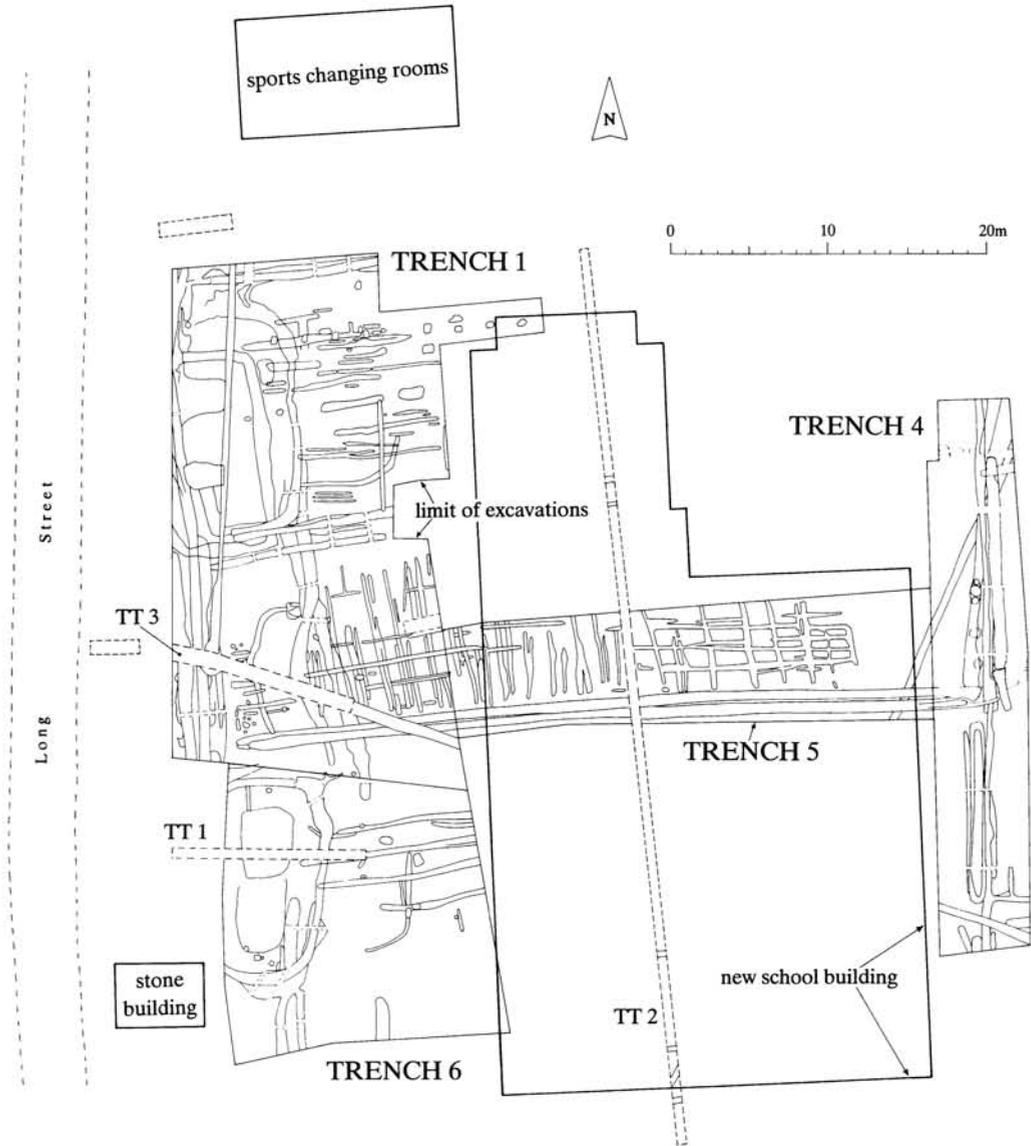


FIG. 3
Plan of all excavated features.

material from higher levels. This soil was excavated in spits enabling the finds from different levels to be separated.

The topsoil in the main excavation was stripped by machine. In Trench 1 only *c.* 0.2 m of soil was removed over the roadside ditches, the bank 9 and the soil horizons to the E. of this bank. Elsewhere everything was removed by machine down to the top of the subsoil.

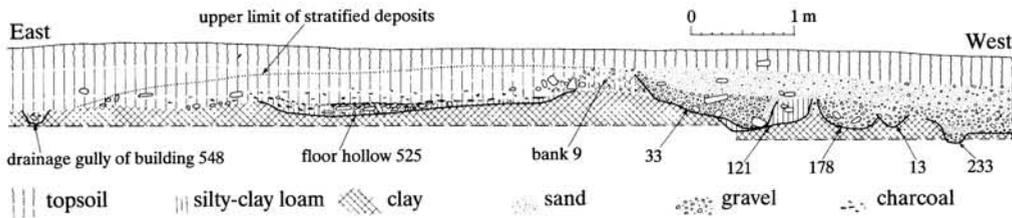


FIG. 4
North facing section of Trial Trench 1.

In addition to the medieval structures and artefacts described below a small assemblage of flints, including mesolithic microliths, and a stone tranchet axe, was discovered during the excavation. These will be published elsewhere.³¹

THE BURGAGE PLOTS AND BURGAGE PLOT BOUNDARIES

The street frontage of three burgage plots, A, B and C, was excavated. In addition the rear, eastern boundaries of plots B and C were examined in Trench 4 (Figs. 3, 6). In their developed phase the boundaries of the burgage plots consisted of ditches cut into the clay subsoil. It is probable that earth banks accompanied these ditches. It is interesting to note that none of these boundary ditches would have assisted the drainage of the burgage plots.

The earliest recognized burgage boundary ditches occurred in Trench 4 (Figs. 5, 8) on the central N.-S. division between the plots that faced St Mary's Street and those that fronted onto Long Street. In its primary phase this central division consisted of a segmented ditch (462, 412, 403, 501). Each segment, where fully excavated, was *c.* 1.4 m long and corresponded in length to the width of a burgage plot. Once established this boundary deviated only marginally from its original course although the ditches were re-dug many times, at first maintaining their segmented nature, but eventually merging into a virtually continuous feature (398, 402). During the re-digging of the central dividing boundary burgage boundary ditches aligned E.-W. were established. These met, ran up to and crossed the central division; none of them was contemporaneous with the primary N.-S. ditch (462, 412, 403, 501). It is not necessary to describe in detail the complex redefining of the burgage plot boundaries as exposed in Trench 4, as much of the relevant information can be gained by a careful examination of Fig. 5 and by reference to Fig. 8. It should be noted that the only direct stratigraphic links between the central dividing boundary ditches in Trench 4 and the ditches and other features in Trenches 1 and 6 occur in Phases VI and VII (Fig. 8). It is assumed that earth banks would have accompanied the ditches. If this were so, the ditch fills gave no hint as to which side of the boundary these may have been located.

In Trenches 1 and 6 along the street frontage (Figs. 7, 8), no burgage boundary ditches were contemporaneous with the excavated medieval buildings in plots A and C (see below). However, later burgage boundary ditches on the N. side of plots B and C were cut through a soil deposit or lynchet — a deposit that seems to have formed

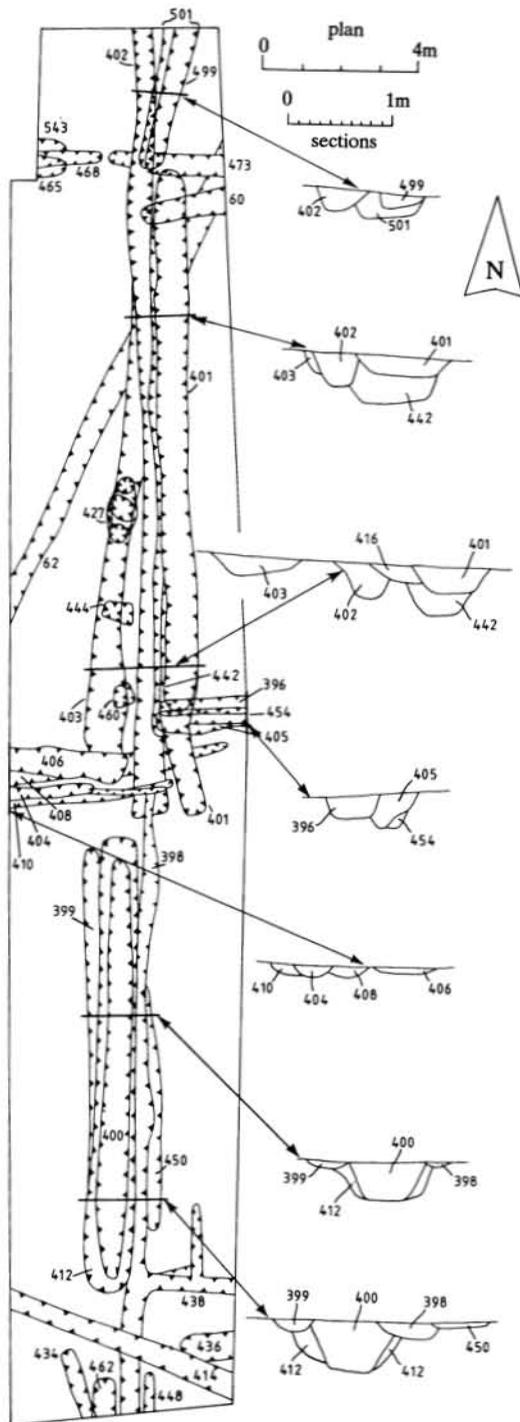


FIG. 5
Plan of all excavated features in Trench 4.

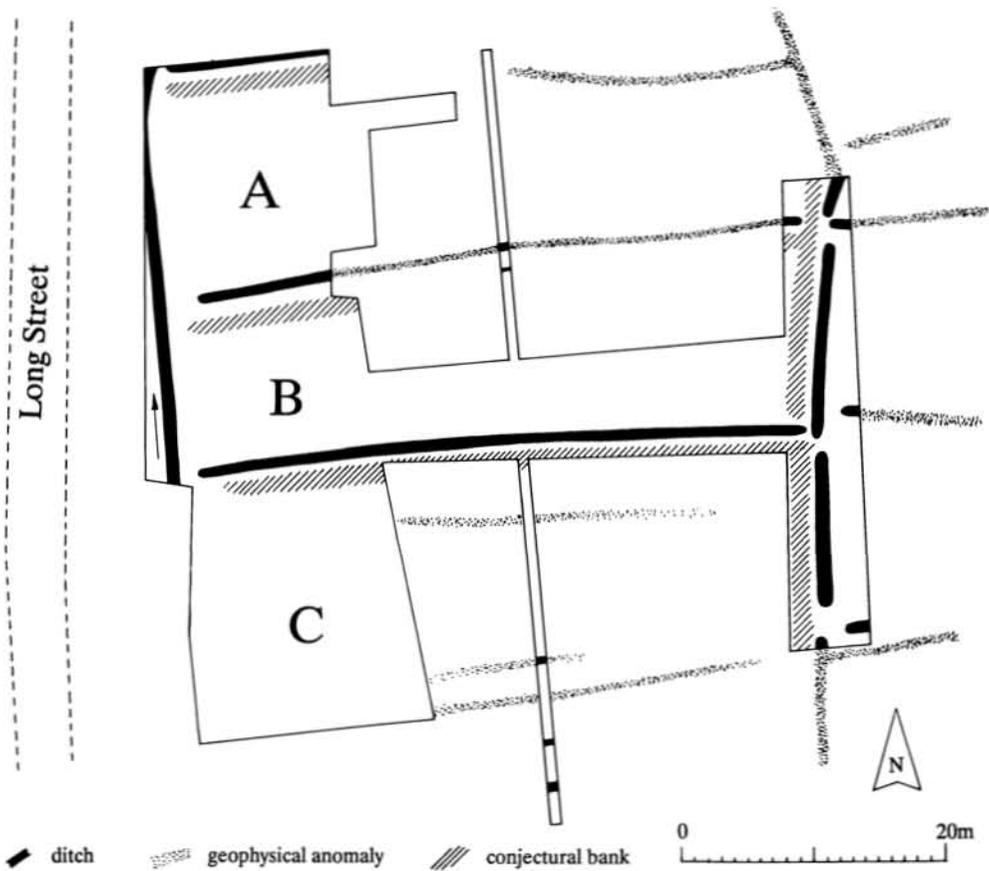


FIG. 6
Layout of burgage plots A, B and C.

against a barrier that has left no archaeological trace and yet was located on the site of these later ditches.

After the construction of the buildings in plots A and C on the street frontage, the burgage plots were clearly defined by E.-W. ditches, with three phases identified for each boundary. The paucity of archaeological features immediately to the S. of all the E.-W. boundary ditches strongly suggests that earth banks were located in these positions (Figs. 3, 6) though no direct evidence for these banks survived.

No primary boundary to the burgage plots was discovered alongside Long Street, although after the construction of the buildings an open ditch was dug as a drain. This was re-dug many times, the final occasion as late as the 19th century.

The length of the three excavated burgages is constant at *c.* 55 m. Their width varies between and within plots. Plot A has a maximum width of 18 m, and minimum of 14 m; plot B is 14 m and 11 m and Plot C is 18 m and 14 m. This gives an average burgage plot area of *c.* 815 sq m². On the 1434 survey discussed above, the

average width of plots on the E. side of Long Street was *c.* 12 m, giving an area of *c.* 660 sq m².

Interpretation

The primary segmented ditch in Trench 4 provides important evidence when considering the methods and means by which the town was planned and physically laid out. The consistent shape and size of each 14 m long ditch segment suggests centralized planning and a design that had to be adhered to for boundary construction. It was along this N.–S. central division that the position of the individual plots was pegged out. As individual plots were occupied it would be the duty of the new tenant to form his own boundary between his plot and those to the N. and S. Initially this may have taken the form of a turf baulk or insubstantial fence, but it was eventually translated into a ditch and bank. Regulations must have governed the nature of these boundaries between plots as they are consistently similar.

The width of the plots at their E. end was governed by the segmented ditch on the central division, but no such control existed at the street frontage. As the plots began to be taken up it was thus possible for the first occupiers to enclose a larger area in their new burgage than was originally intended. This seems to have been the case with plots A and C which expanded at the expense of plot B, and possibly also to the detriment of those to the N. and S. Certainly, no buildings existed in the primary phases of occupation in plot B. When, finally, the plot was taken up and a house constructed, it was discovered that the burgage was too narrow to accommodate a structure side on to the street, as in plots A and B. The house in plot B was therefore either built end on to the street or was quite short (see below).

THE BUILDINGS

The excavated remains of buildings comprised drainage gullies and floor hollows cut into the clay subsoil, except for a possible demolition deposit and a wall associated with the last phase of building 2 in plot A (Figs. 7, 9). All three excavated burgages contained evidence of structures. The building remains in plot A were the most complex and consisted of at least two but probably three phases. Plot C held the most complete information of a single structure. In plots A and C the buildings were the earliest recognizable features on the street frontage, predating the burgage plot boundary ditches. The structure in plot B post-dated the digging of these ditches.

Plot C: building 1

The building in this plot was defined by a sub-rectangular drainage trench (548) surrounding a rectangular floor hollow (525) which measured 9.2 m by 3.2 m and was filled with mixed soil and charcoal. Two samples of this material were examined with the aim of determining information about the contemporary agricultural economy (see report below). Overall the remains represent waste material which could be attributed to crop processing, bedding for animals and animal fodder or fuel. The floor hollow was divided into two roughly equal halves — probably

Long Street

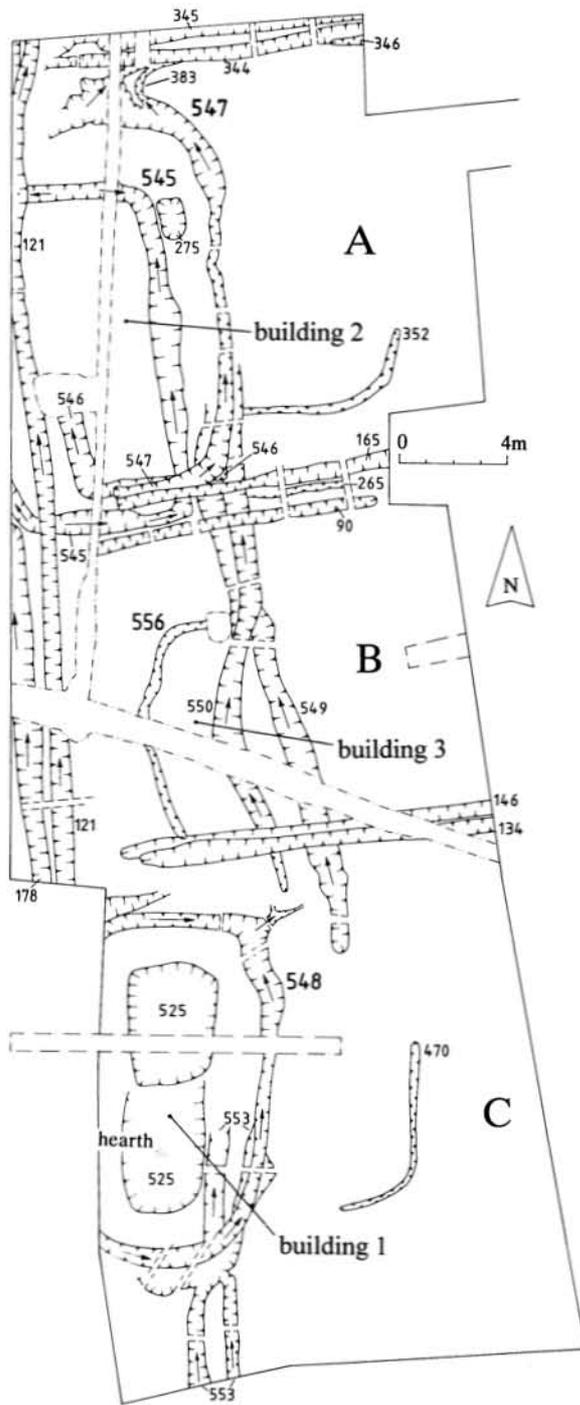


FIG. 7
Plan of all excavated features in Trenches 1 and 6.

representing two rooms. A hearth, from which the charcoal may have been derived, lay in the centre of the S. half. The drainage trench (548) surrounding the building enclosed an area 12 m by *c.* 6m. Fragments of perforated shale, possibly used as roofing tiles and probably of local origin, were found in this trench. An outflow sprang from the N.E. corner of the trench — its lowest point — and fed a drainage gully (550). Another gully (549) also helped drain burgage plot C. Both of these gullies meandered across plot B before emptying into a building drainage trench in plot A. They predate the burgage plot boundary ditches.

A drainage gully (553) flowed into the trench (548) surrounding building 1 from the plot to the S. of plot C. This gully is of more than one phase, and the earliest is before the construction of the trench around the house. To the E. of the building a short, curving length of trench (470) may indicate the line of a bank or fence surrounding a small yard.

Plot A: buildings 2a, 2b and 2c (Pl. VII, A)

The earliest phase of building (2a) in this plot is represented by a drainage trench (545) which defined a rectangular area 11.5 m by 6 m. It is possible that this first phase was replaced by another building (2c) which may have been defined by a shallow U-shaped length of drainage trench (546).

Evidence for a later phase of construction (2c) was the most complete and comprised a drainage trench (547) which defined a sub-rectangular area 13.5 m by *c.* 6m. A possible floor deposit (256 — not illustrated) lay in a slight hollow, and over this lay a demolition layer of perforated but broken shale slabs of probable local origin; these were probably roofing tiles. Sealing these layers was a curved length of bank (39, Fig. 9). If this were the remains of a clay or earth wall then it had been massively disturbed as not only did it spread across the demolition layer described above, but also across a length of drain (121, Fig. 7), a feature that post-dated the building. Traces of a break in the bank, corresponding to the centre of the W. wall of the building, may indicate the original position of a door. Two small pieces of perforated shale were found in the drainage trench of this building.

As with the building in plot C, a short, curving length of trench (352) to the E. of the buildings in plot A may indicate the line of a bank or fence around a yard.

The two drains (549, 550) from plot C emptied into the trench (547) of building 2c from the S., and from the lowest point of this trench, on its NE. corner, an outflow gully (383) led off to the N. All these drainage gullies were cut through by the later, E.-W. burgage boundary ditches.

Plot B: building 3

The construction of building 3 in plot B was not coeval with the erection of the structures in plots A and C as the only evidence for a house in this plot, a curving drainage trench (556), post-dates the silted up burgage boundary ditch 146. Also, the building must have lain across the by now redundant drainage gullies (549, 550) associated with building 1 in plot C. By this period the roadside ditch (178) had probably come into existence and served to drain water away from the buildings on

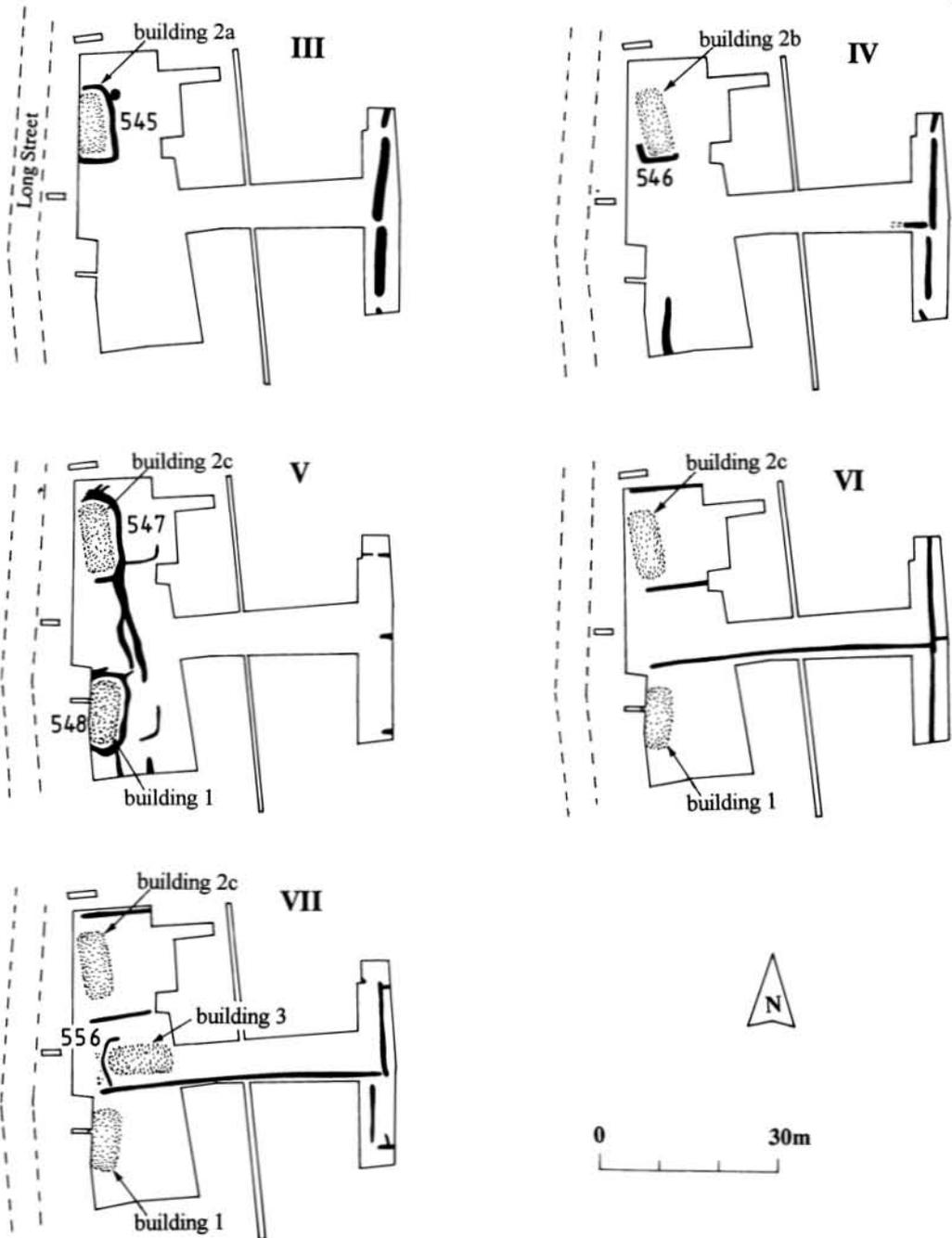


FIG. 8
Plan of Phases III-VII.

the E. side of Long Street. Because of the narrowness of burgage plot B building 3 was either quite short, less than 7.5 m, or was built end on to the street. It is shown end on to the street in Fig. 8.

Interpretation

Important evidence concerning the nature of the structures was obtained from the buildings in plot A. Here the curving bank (39) possibly represents the decayed and disturbed remains of a earth or clay wall. Because of the complete lack of other structural features associated with the buildings it is considered that they were all constructed from earth or clay with no supporting timbers. Tile fragments from a demolition layer (256 — not shown on plan) of building 2c and from the drainage trench (548) surrounding building 1 indicate these structures were at least partially roofed with local shale. The floor deposit within building 1 indicates that its internal dimensions were 9.2 m by 3.2 m; other excavated structures were probably of a similar size. These measurements allow *c.* 1.5 m between the floor and the drainage trench to accommodate the wall. There is nothing to indicate that these buildings were anything other than dwellings.

Fig. 8 shows the sequence of buildings and burgage plot boundaries in a graphic form from Phases III to VII. These phases relate to the stratified pottery assemblage (Table 1). Phase I consists of pre-medieval features and Phase II of a few ill-defined pits and gullies of probable medieval date. The first building (2a) was constructed in plot A during phase III. This building may have been later replaced by a similar structure (building 2b). By phase V buildings (1 and 2c) stood in plots A and C. The later history of these two buildings is unclear. The building (3) in plot B was clearly built at a later date than them. However, there is no reason to suppose that buildings 1 and 2c two were not still standing when building 3 was constructed, although by then the drains surrounding them were redundant. This suggested sequence is shown on Fig. 8. Analysis of the pottery indicates that the buildings were in use throughout the 13th century, perhaps being abandoned towards the end of the century.

LATER USE OF BURGAGE PLOTS

After the buildings went out of use the burgage plots were turned over to agriculture. Sufficient differences of farming practice are evidenced from this early phase of agricultural use to indicate that the plots were still separated, although no new burgage boundary ditches were dug subsequent to the abandonment of the buildings (Fig. 9). Evidence for this early agricultural use overlay the site of the former buildings and underlay a bank (9, Figs. 4, 9) parallel to Long Street. It is highly probable that this bank is a headland, the result of a yet later phase of ploughing.

Narrowly spaced, N.-S. spade-dug trenches — the remains of lazy beds — were the first phase of agricultural activity to be recognized in plot B. They were overlain by plough furrows similar to those in plots A and C described below (Pl. VII, B). A

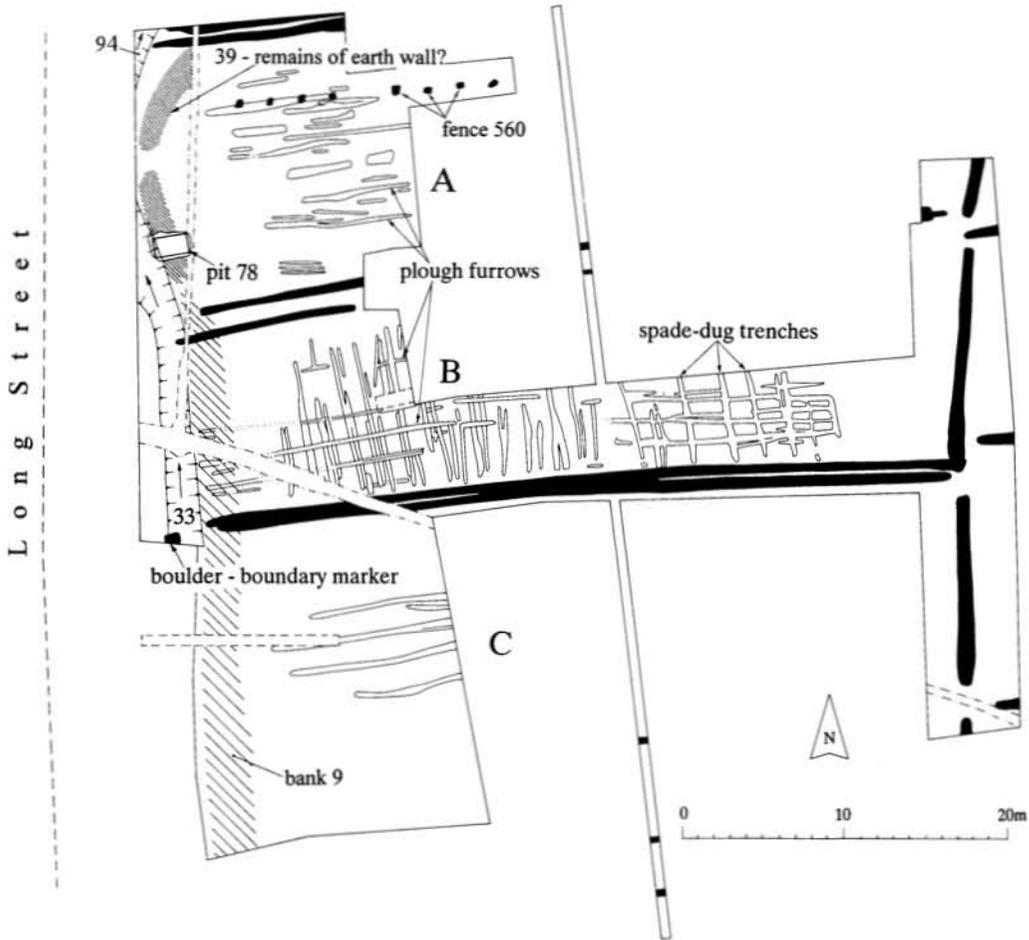


FIG. 9

Plan showing features assigned to the post-building use of the burgage plots.

silver penny dating to *c.* 1306–14 was found in the base of the topsoil overlying these trenches and furrows.³²

The former existence of plough-created, narrow ridge and furrow in plot C was attested by four parallel gullies spaced *c.* 2 m apart. Similar gullies were discovered in plot A, but here it was also possible to detect the marks of individual passes of the plough where it had cut into the subsoil. At a date later than this ploughing a substantial post-built fence (560) was constructed in this plot *c.* 4 m S. of the original boundary ditch.

Continued agricultural use of the burgage plots after the initial phase of cultivation is attested by the depth of the ploughsoil, up to 0.8 m deep. As this soil developed and deepened there was very little downward migration of artefacts. At some point in this soil development the residual burgage plot boundaries were

obliterated and the plots farmed as one. The date of this process is unknown although a massive boulder, probably of post-medieval date, set on the edge of a roadside ditch at the junction of plots B and C suggests that the boundaries were no longer visible when it was placed there though a knowledge of them for administrative or practical purposes was still desirable.

Alongside and parallel to Long Street drains continued to be dug. A silver cut halfpenny dating to *c.* 1190–1204 was found in the roadside drain (94 — Fig. 9) that immediately post-dated the abandonment of the buildings. The largest, and one of the latest of the drains (33) is also shown on Fig. 9. A large slate-lined pit, probably a water cistern, was cut through the bank 39 and predated this drain.

DATING EVIDENCE

The only useful archaeological dating evidence comes from the pottery: the coins were all in residual contexts. Pottery groups were assigned to phases of the stratigraphic sequence up to when the buildings went out of use and the burgrave plots were turned over to agriculture (Phases III–VII, Fig. 8). There is some variation between the phases, with the greatest number of sherds and the widest range of fabrics in Phase V. The assemblage from Phases III–VII seems to have accumulated over a period of *c.* 75 years ending in the last quarter of the 13th century. It would seem that after the end of the 13th century no new buildings were constructed or burgrave boundary ditches dug. The dating of the agricultural use of the burgrave plots — the spade-dug trenches and plough furrows — is more problematical as few artefacts were recovered from these shallow features. The absence of post-medieval finds from them, however, suggests that they were created in the medieval period.

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BUILDINGS

The evidence for the buildings comprised drainage gullies and floor hollows. The exact nature of the house-walls is not known; there were no post-holes, pad stones or wall foundations. Only the bank (39) provides a clue to the character of the walls. From this, and from the lack of other structural remains, it is suggested that the walls were of clay or earth, of turf, or perhaps the more sophisticated form employing clay puddled with chopped straw. This latter method could comprise either walls raised in courses (clom as it is called in Pembrokeshire and western Carmarthenshire) or those made from blocks.³³

Turf is often cited as having been in common use in western Britain but for which very little archaeological evidence survives. An exception to this was at Hound Tor and other sites on Dartmoor, Devon, where turf houses with wattle inner walls were replaced at the end of the 13th century by stone buildings. The evidence from these sites has been recently discussed by G. Beresford and D. Austin.³⁴ A reconstruction of a turf building in Scotland required the stripping of an acre of ground.³⁵ This fact alone would seem to preclude turf as a building material in a newly founded town where land for grazing and hay making would be in great demand. The reconstructions suggested here therefore assume the use of clom walls.

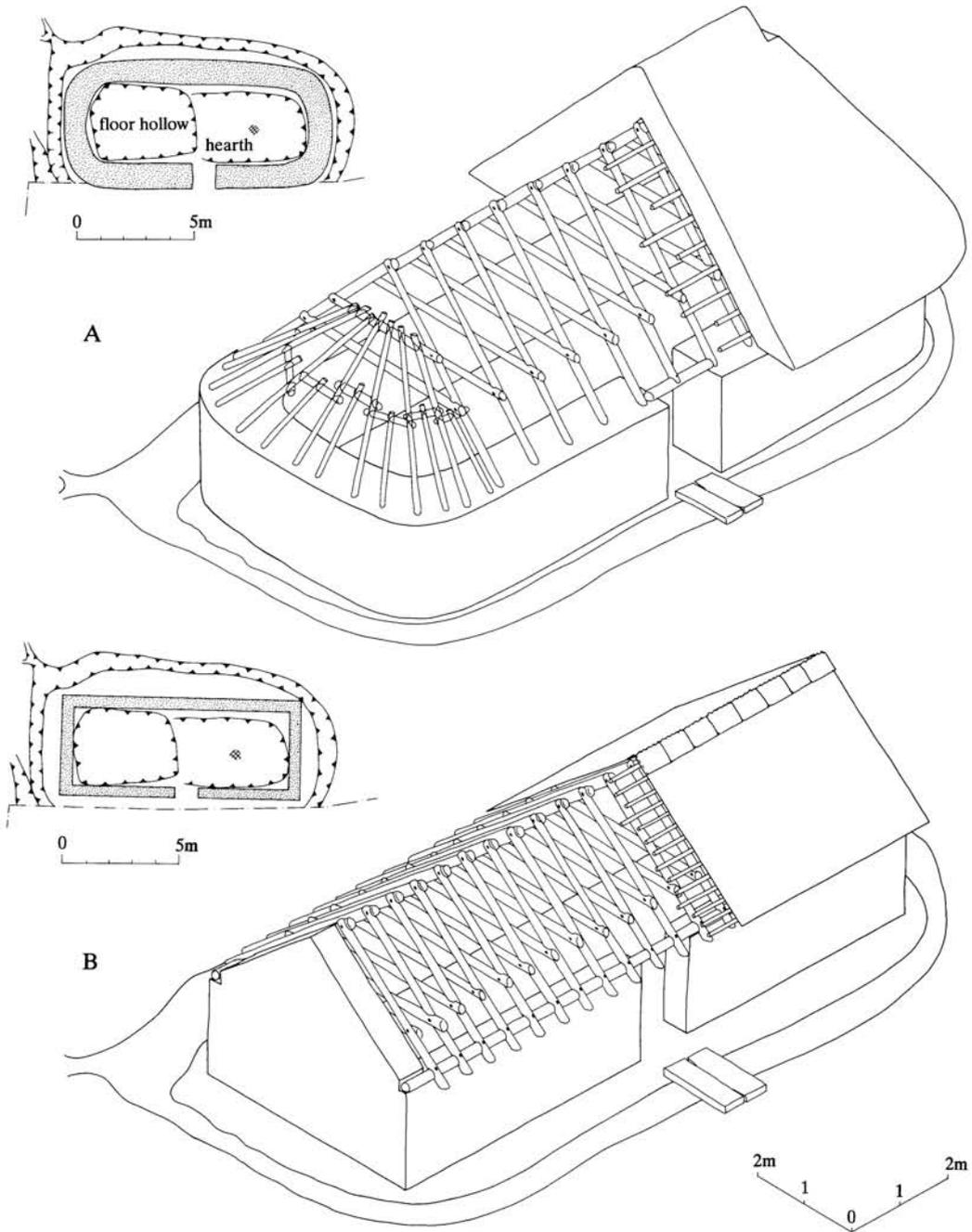


FIG. 10

Two reconstructions based upon the ground-plan of building 1.

The two suggested reconstructions are both based on the ground plan of building 1. In the first the earth wall has been reconstructed as a massive structure, up to 1 m thick (Fig. 10A) Walls of this size are unusual in extant earth buildings but not unknown. A late 17th-century farmhouse in Cardiganshire (now N. Dyfed) was found to have clom walls up to 0.9 m thick at the base³⁶ and in Ireland a turf house inhabited down to 1940 had walls *c.* 3 ft thick.³⁷ At Newport a thick wall would sit neatly between the drainage trench and internal floor hollow allowing a berm of 0.2–0.5 m between its base and the drain. To accommodate such a wall the corners of the building must be rounded; this precludes the use of gables. This design sits more comfortably within the surviving archaeological features than the alternative reconstruction with a more angular plan (Fig. 10B), though requiring over twice the amount of walling material.

The clom walls in the second reconstruction (Fig. 10B) are of a thickness (*c.* 0.5 m) comparable with excavated medieval examples such as the 13th-century examples found at Wimborne, Dorset.³⁸ Beresford³⁹ has suggested that at Goltho, Lincolnshire, and Barton Blount, Derbyshire, timber studs would have been encased within the clay walls for additional strength. This was found not to be the case at Wimborne, though here the walls were probably not load bearing: the weight of the roof was carried on timbers bedded into the ground. In the reconstruction drawing B the walls are shown with squared corners and gable ends; these sit less comfortably within the drainage trench than reconstruction A.

Useful attributes of clom construction include ready availabilities of raw materials, low costs, ease and speed of construction, and suitability for communal and periodic working. All these are important considerations when large numbers of dwellings would have been required in a very short period during the initial settlement of the town. It is generally thought that building in clom requires quite a large labour force⁴⁰ and that a few days' break are required between courses for the work to dry.⁴¹ Earlier this century, it was demonstrated that it was possible for eight men working intermittently to raise the walls of a substantial two-storey building in three months.⁴² Thus the technique is ideal for where many houses needed to be built simultaneously.

The roof on the reconstruction A is shown thatched. Local stone roofing tiles were found associated with the buildings, but in small quantities, and perhaps only sufficient to have protected smoke holes in a thatched roof. Reconstruction B is shown with a tiled roof. The nature of the wall determines the roofing material in reconstruction A. Here the curved corners imply a hipped roof and consequently thatch; tiles in this situation would lead to rapid failure. The thatch may have been of straw, reeds — available nowadays in the Nevern estuary — or heather and bracken which grows on Carningli common S. of the town. Alternatively turf may have been used as a roofing material. A paired-rafter roof construction is shown, made from unsquared poles and simply notched and pegged. These rafters are bedded directly into the top of the wall.

In the second reconstruction a slightly more sophisticated, but still crude structure is shown. In this case the rafters are notched and pegged onto a wall plate. The rectangular plan allows for gabled ends, which could have supported a shale or

tile roof. The roofing material may, however, have been thatch. Indeed, thatch has always been considered the ideal roofing material to protect clom from erosion by rain water because of its deep eaves overhang.

Of these two alternative reconstructions, A seems the most likely for building 1, and indeed also for the buildings in plot C and the later building (3) in plot B.

THE FINDS

MEDIEVAL POTTERY *By* D.F.M. BRENNAN

A total of 7337 sherds of pottery (80,287g) was recovered from the excavations. Of this 1845 sherds came from the stratified deposits of Phases III–VII. No pottery was found in the deposits associated with Phases I and II. This short report concentrates on the pottery from Phases III–VII. A fuller pottery report appears elsewhere.⁴³

The 1845 sherds from Phases II–VII are divided into nine fabric groups (Table 1) which fall into three main types: local, English and continental.

The assemblage is dated by the presence of imports, mainly Ham Green wares and other wares from the west of England, rather than the Dyfed gravel-tempered ware for which no chronological type series is yet available and for which a date range from the 12th to the 16th century has been suggested.⁴⁴ Ham Green wares from Bristol form the highest proportion of non-local pottery in the assemblage. C. Papazian and E. Campbell⁴⁵ have demonstrated that these wares were generally not imported into Wales until the second half of the 12th century and are uncommon on Welsh sites by the third quarter of the 13th century. Minety wares are also considered to date to the late 12th or 13th century in Wales.⁴⁶ Saintonge and Herefordshire micaceous ware are considered to have a slightly later date range than

TABLE 1.
RANGE OF FABRICS AND NUMBERS OF SHERDS PRESENT IN PHASES III–VII

Phase	<i>local</i>		<i>English</i>					<i>Continental</i>		
	unglazed	glazed	Ham Green cooking pots	Ham Green glazed wares	Minety-type ware	N. Wiltshire ware	Uncertain Irish/Cornish wares	Hereford micaceous ware	Saintonge ware	
III	118	42	1	6	—	—	—	—	—	167
IV	205	18	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	225
V	554	52	10	27	3	4	1	—	1	652
VI	281	67	11	4	—	—	1	1	1	367
VII	318	50	41	16	1	—	—	2	6	434
TOTAL:	1476	229	63	53	4	5	2	3	9	1845
	80%	12.4%	3.4%	2.9%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	0.5%	100%

the above. M. Ponsford⁴⁷ suggested that c. 1250–1350 was the main period of importation of Saintonge ware into Bristol. A similar date range is accepted by Papazian and Campbell⁴⁸ for the importation of this ware into Wales, though they also point out that there may be a late continuation into the 14th and 15th century. Hereford micaceous wares originated in the mid/late 13th century but are more common in the 14th. Their distribution is usually limited to the Welsh Marches.⁴⁹

Forty-six fragments of ridge tile were found on the site. All apart from one uncertain fragment are from unstratified contexts. The uncertain fragment was from Phase IV and is of a fabric similar to the locally produced cooking pots.

CHARRED PLANT REMAINS *By* A. E. CASELDINE

The two samples taken from different parts of the deposit filling the floor hollow (525) in building 1 were found to be essentially the same, differing only in the density of the remains. Two litre subsamples were processed from each sample using a simple wash-over technique. The flots and residues were retained in sieves with 2 mm, 1 mm, 500 micron and 250 micron meshes. The remains were identified by comparison with modern reference material and standard reference texts.⁵⁰

The assemblage includes a small amount of grain including barley (*Hordeum* — 1 grain) and several of oat (*Avena* — 15 grains). Most of the remainder comprises weed seeds, many of which are weeds of cultivation including corn marigold (*Chrysanthemum segetum* — 35 seeds), corn spurrey (*Spergula arvensis* — 15 seeds), parsley piert (*Aphanes arvensis* — 1 seed), scentless mayweed (*Tripleurospermum inodorum* — 1 seed) and stinking mayweed (*Anthemis cotula* — 2 seeds). The mayweeds along with fat hen (*Chenopodium album* — 13 seeds), which is also a weed of cultivation, could indicate waste ground but their origin as weeds of cultivation may be more likely given the overall assemblage. The same may apply to other seeds such as sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella* — 74 seeds) which can occur in other habitats as well as cultivated land and, along with the grass seeds (Gramineae — 76 seeds) and seed of ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata* — 1 seed), could indicate grassland. The seeds of black mustard (*Brassica nigra* — 5 seeds) could owe their presence to deliberate cultivation but it grows wild on cliffs by the sea so they could have been collected either accidentally or deliberately. Evidence for areas of damp ground is provided by the occurrence of rush (*Juncus* sp. — 16 seeds) and spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris/uniglumis* — 2 seeds).

The evidence that the assemblage may be derived from burnt thatch is slight (only a culm node and occasional culm fragments), though such evidence is less likely to survive charring and therefore be under-represented. Overall the remains represent waste material some of which is probably attributable to crop processing. However, fragments of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum* — 8 fragments) could represent bedding for animals while gorse (*Ulex* sp. — 31 spines) could be from animal fodder or fuel.

Finally, some charred fibrous material in the form of a small knot was also recovered.

DISCUSSION

Virtually every pre-industrial Welsh town was founded between the last quarter of the 11th century and the first quarter of the 14th century. These towns are the most permanent physical legacy of the Anglo-Norman and English conquest of Wales. At the time of their foundation they represented the deliberate plantation of an alien urban culture into the predominantly rural economy and society of the native Welsh. Their overall success is due not only to the foresight of the founders and to the early settlers for carving out a living in a hostile environment but also to the indigenous population who were quick to realize the economic and social benefits of town dwelling.

Early towns grew in the shadow of the string of castles established by the Anglo-Normans along the coast of S. Wales and in the borders in the late 11th and early 12th centuries. These towns, the primary function of which was to serve the garrison, were small and defended, often situated in the outer bailey of a castle as at Brecon⁵¹ and Kidwelly⁵² or surrounded by a bank and ditch as recent excavations at Monmouth seem have demonstrated.⁵³ By the mid 12th century the framework of the urban map of conquered S. Wales was almost complete with 25 of the 84 medieval Welsh new towns having been founded by this time.⁵⁴ The majority of the rest were to come into being following Edward I's offensive against Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in N. Wales beginning in 1276–77. The intervening period witnessed a gradual infilling of the landscape with new towns and the expansion of existing towns outside the constricts of their original defensive circuits as at Carmarthen⁵⁵ and Haverfordwest,⁵⁶ both in Dyfed. This period saw a change of function away from towns purely intended to serve a garrison to a greater emphasis on economic exploitation and development of the countryside. It was in this period that Newport, Dyfed, was founded.

Broadly contemporaneous with the foundation of Newport were Montgomery and New Radnor in Powys, Newport and Trelech in Gwent, and Cowbridge in Glamorgan.⁵⁷ All these towns apart from Newport, Dyfed, were defended. Indeed, according to Beresford⁵⁸ 86% (72 out of 84) of medieval new towns in Wales were surrounded by either an earthen bank and ditch or a stone wall. This figure may be even higher if one considers the possibility that towns now without an apparent defensive circuit like Wiston and New Moat, both in Dyfed, may originally have been sited within the large baileys of their respective castles. Newport was not defended, and the topography suggests that no provision was ever made for a defensive circuit. The reasons for this, when defences were a standard feature of other planned towns, are unclear. R. R. Davies⁵⁹ has noted that an atmosphere of respectful co-existence may have characterized the relationships between English and Welsh in Cemais (the lordship in which Newport was founded) rather than one of hatred and mutual fear which seemed to prevail in most of late 12th-century Wales. Perhaps William Fitzmartin foresaw a period of peace and prosperity for his new town. The failure to provide Newport with defences must have proven disastrous during the Welsh attacks of 1215 and 1257.

Many authorities have noted that from the second quarter of the 14th century the town went into decline not only in Wales and Britain but right across western

Europe.⁶⁰ What has not always been appreciated is that in Wales during the 12th and 13th centuries every town was a frontier town, and thus fortunes may have varied considerably from place to place. A period of rapid growth was experienced at Carmarthen between 1230 and 1280 simply because it acted as the supply centre for the English royal war machine.⁶¹ In contrast, in 1301, only 23 km away from Carmarthen at Dinewr only eleven burgages were recorded and these were soon to disappear under competition from the nearby, newly-formed borough of Newtown and from the small town of Llandeilo Fawr.⁶² The fortunes of Newport in the 13th and early 14th centuries are less clearly defined. A rental of 1324 records that 46 burgages were occupied.⁶³ There are reasons to suggest that this was an underestimation, but not perhaps a dramatic one for in 1434 only 76 burgage holders were named.⁶⁴

The archaeological evidence is clearly not sufficiently precise to accurately pinpoint when the N. area of the town of Newport became deserted. A quite short-lived period of occupation is indicated, but whether this was of less than one generation or up to a century in duration is unclear. When the rental of 1434 was compiled the focus of the town was at the current centre — immediately N. of the castle and church. New burgage plots had been laid out in this area, and it would seem that much of the N. end of the town — around the area of the excavations — was vacant. The relocation of the castle from its original position on the banks of the Nevern estuary to its present site at the southern end of the town was the stimulus for the creation of this new focus. This may have occurred following the English recapture of Cemais in 1230 or in the 1270s after the razing of the castle by the Welsh in 1215 and 1257. Certainly the turbulent political situation would hardly have encouraged new settlers to come to Newport and may even have led to the deaths of established burgesses. It is likely then that the burgage plots which form a grid pattern around the S. part of the town were not established until the period of relative political calm following Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's death in 1282. Local physical factors must also be taken into account when the causes for the desertion of the N. part of the town are discussed. From the area of the excavations down to the estuary is a fairly gentle slope over clay subsoil subject to water-logging in the winter months. To the S. a slightly steeper slope and different geology offers better ground for building. During a period of decline there would be a population shift from the poorer quality land near the estuary to the better land to the S.

The earth-built structures suggested by the excavation seem to have been designed to be more than just temporary dwellings as they are of a size comparable with peasant housing found elsewhere in Britain.⁶⁵ However, the very limited range of pottery associated with them does suggest a relatively short lifespan. It may be that these houses were abandoned for some or more of the reasons outlined above. The excavations demonstrated that after early occupation the burgages were never again built upon. This is in contrast to the evidence from 'Ystrad Fflur' on the opposite side of Long Street which showed that at least one burgage plot had been occupied in the later medieval period. It is not certain whether this represented continuous usage or reoccupation.

An examination of boundary ditches allowed an insight into how the burgage plots were laid out. The plots were pegged or staked out along the central boundary between Long Street and St Mary's Street. Individuals were then responsible for defining the extent of their own burgages. Similarities between the excavated ditches indicates that the form of boundary was governed by some form of specification. The digging of ditches and the construction of banks ceased when the dwellings were abandoned. It is clear that individual plots could still be recognized as late as 1594 when a rental was compiled, but it is not certain when the banks and ditches between the plots no longer functioned as boundaries. A burgage plot marker stone found during the excavations demonstrates that a knowledge of the boundaries' position was important up into the post-medieval period.

Archaeological excavation within Welsh towns has usually been in advance of development, small in scale, and often confined to a single property. Because sites have usually been chosen for their potential to provide a good stratigraphic sequence it has rarely been possible, before the excavation at Newport, to examine the earliest stratigraphy of any medieval Welsh town in detail. And since it has been demonstrated by excavation that once established property boundaries deviate only slightly from their original line,⁶⁶ the opportunity to investigate the nature of boundaries between burgage plots seldom arises. It is worth noting that investigations carried out in 1991–2 in an area 21 by 23 m in New Radnor, Powys, are the only reasonably-sized open-area excavation to date in any town in mid-Wales.⁶⁷

It is probable that because of rapid redevelopment in the 1980s Monmouth, Gwent, has experienced the most intensive archaeological investigation of any medieval town in Wales. Here, though, periodic flooding in the 13th and 14th centuries resulted in a rapid build-up of deposits; a phenomenon that has created superb separation of finds but made it very difficult to examine open-areas within the relatively small development sites available.⁶⁸ In other Welsh towns the archaeological horizons are of a more conventional character. At Conway, Gwynedd, an excavated building was identified as the lodging of the Master of the King's Works dating to the early years of the town.⁶⁹ Subsequent excavations in the town discovered much post-medieval disturbance.⁷⁰ At Quay Street, Cardiff, a late 13th- or early 14th-century timber building was erected in an open area of the town.⁷¹ This building was translated into stone in the early post-medieval period. At Pool Road, Montgomery, Powys,⁷² a post-built structure was later replaced by a building resting on sill-beams; this later building was abandoned and occupation on the plot ceased in the early 15th century. More recent excavations in Montgomery have been of a smaller scale. At one, Bunner's Yard,⁷³ a line of *in situ* stakes was interpreted as a fence between burgage plots or a subdivision of a single plot. At New Radnor an excavation on a vacant plot adjacent to the W. gate of the town produced evidence of occupation provisionally dated to the 13th and 14th centuries. Two separate burgage plots seem to have been uncovered, with timber buildings replaced by ones at least partly constructed in stone. They are interpreted as having been for an agricultural or industrial purpose.⁷⁴ At Rhuddlan, Clwyd, extensive excavations have concentrated on the site of the supposed Saxon burh of Cledemutha, though there has been some work on the later medieval town.⁷⁵ Wiston in Dyfed and Trelech

in Gwent are two towns which have experienced archaeological investigations from which the results are broadly comparable with those from Newport. Trial excavations in several deserted burgage plots in the borough of Wiston⁷⁶ revealed evidence for timber buildings replaced in stone. Some boundaries between the plots were also examined; the plots seem to have been laid out in the 12th century and abandoned by the end of the 14th century. Trelech, a decayed borough, has witnessed several seasons of excavation with the most recent work concentrating on a burgage plot.⁷⁷ Here, a timber building was found to have been burnt down before 1240, with the plot subsequently used for iron smelting; occupation continued intermittently into the mid 17th century. Although the archaeological stratigraphy is far more complex at Trelech than at Newport there is a clear possibility that deposits associated with the earliest decades of the town may survive.

Deserted areas of other Welsh towns may thus contain evidence of their planning and laying out as well as information from the earliest years of their existence. However, only Newport has experienced large-scale archaeological excavation with the specific aim of examining this evidence. It is hoped that the results from the investigations at Newport will assist in the interpretation of information gathered from other urban excavations and help advance our knowledge of town development.

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- ⁶⁵ Beresford op. cit. in note 39, 19-35.
- ⁶⁶ For example at King's Lynn a wattle fence between tenements was replaced several times in the middle ages. The boundary was later translated into stone the line of which persisted down to the 20th century: H. Clarke and A. Carter, *Excavations in King's Lynn 1963-1970* (London, 1977), 7-30. At Uxbridge it was considered that a burgage plot was initially marked out by shallow gullies, *Med. Arch.*, 24 (1985), 176-77.
- ⁶⁷ N. W. Jones, 'New Radnor — The Porth, Powys', unpublished interim report by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust 1992, report No. 39.
- ⁶⁸ For interim reports and notes on the excavations in Monmouth see *Archaeology in Wales*, 27 (1987), 30-31; 29 (1989), 61, 67; 30 (1990), 25; 31 (1991), 7-9; 32 (1992), 81.
- ⁶⁹ L. A. S. Butler, 'The Old Vicarage, Conway: Excavations, 1963-64', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 128 (1979), 40-103.
- ⁷⁰ R. S. Kelly, 'Excavation on two sites in Conway, 1975', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 128 (1979), 104-18.
- ⁷¹ P. V. Webster, 'Excavations in Quay Street, Cardiff 1973-4', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 126 (1977), 88-115.
- ⁷² J. Britnell and N. Jones, 'Pool Road, Montgomery: excavations within the medieval town', *Montgomeryshire Collect.*, 77 (1989), 41-72.
- ⁷³ A. Gibson, 'Montgomery', *Archaeology in Wales*, 31 (1991), 49-50.
- ⁷⁴ Jones, op. cit. in note 67.
- ⁷⁵ J. Manley *et al.*, 'Early medieval radiocarbon dates and plant remains from Rhuddlan, Clwyd', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 134 (1985), 106-119; J. Manley, 'Salvage excavations at Lon Hylas, Rhuddlan, Clwyd: ditches of the Roman and Medieval Period', *Archaeol. Cambrensis*, 134 (1985), 230-35; J. Manley, 'Clethamutha: a late Saxon burh in North Wales', *Medieval Archaeol.*, 31 (1987), 13-46; H. Quinnell and M. Blockley, *Excavations at Rhuddlan 1969-73*, C.B.A. Research Report 95 (London, 1994).
- ⁷⁶ K. Murphy, 'Trial excavations at Church Field in the medieval borough of Wiston, Dyfed, 1990' forthcoming.
- ⁷⁷ R. Howell, 'Trelech' *Archaeology in Wales*, 30 (1990) 68; 31 (1991) 48; 32 (1992) 82-83.