

## Medieval burgage plots

The earliest evidence for human activity from the site came in the form of a series of ditches, part of a long-lived rectilinear system of boundaries, cut into the peat formation (Fig. 12). Such ditches would have defined the boundaries of the backlots of medieval burgage plots – which remain fossilised in the present day property boundaries in the historic core of the town – as well as sub-dividing the plots.

Ditch 1, towards the north-eastern limit of the excavation area, ran NW-SE and was up to 1.80m wide and 0.93m deep, with a consistent profile in the excavated portions (Figs. 6, 13 and 14). Various silty deposits, up to 0.30m thick, infilled the ditch, indicating gradual silt-ing-up rather than deliberate backfilling. Ditch 2 ran parallel to Ditch 1, c. 20m to the south-west, and was up to 0.90m wide and 0.73m deep, and of similar profile (Figs. 15 and 16). Again, organic silts and clays within the feature indicated gradual silt-ing-up. Ditch 2 bifurcated at right angles close to the limit of excavation, with the NE-SW aligned element probably representing the boundary between two distinct and long-lived plots within the site, as indicated by 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century cartographic evidence (Figs 3 and 4). The NW-SE aligned element of Ditch 2, along with Ditch 1, represent sub-divisions within the northernmost of these plots, with the area thus defined (Plot B) being c. 20m wide (Fig. 17). A single sherd of pottery, dating from the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century, was recovered from Ditch 2. Ditches 1 and 2 yielded a small assemblage of faunal remains, with cattle, sheep/goat, horse, dog and goose being the species represented.

Assessment of bulk samples of the fills of medieval Ditches 1 and 2 (Samples 5 and 6 in Carrott et al. 2004) identified a wide variety of biological remains indicating that the features occupied damp ground and held standing water, although little evidence of human activity was forthcoming. The bulk of the biological remains in Sample 5 (Context 38) consisted of woody and herbaceous plant detritus, but identifiable botanical macrofossils, preserved by anoxic waterlogging, were also present and in very good condition. The assemblage was dominated by crowfoot (*Ranunculus* subgenus *Batrachium*) and celery-leaved buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus* L.) typical of the damp conditions associated with wet ditches, and there were some other species of this environment (e.g. fool's-water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum* (L.) Lag.)). Smaller numbers of remains of taxa of waysides and waste places (e.g. dock (*Rumex*) and common nettle (*Urtica dioica* L.)) were also present; these plants often indicate significant human or animal disturbance and, usually, a nitrogen-rich soil. More substantial 'woody' vegetation was represented by records of elder (*Sambucus nigra* L.) and silver/downy birch (*Betula pendula* Roth/*B. pubescens* Ehrh.). The invertebrate remains clearly showed that the ditch held water, perhaps rather stagnant (as indicated by the aquatic beetle fauna) and subject to drying out (cladoceran ephippia, including *Daphnia*, and *Planorbis planorbis* (L.) snails). There were also hints of animals grazing from dung beetles (*Geotrupes* and *Aphodius* species) and the grassland chafer *Hoplia philanthus* (Fuessly). Dead wood

was indicated by *Ptilinus pectinicomis* (Linnaeus) and *Grynobius planus* (Fabricius), both of which can occur in structural as well as natural timber.

The assessment sub-sample from the second of the ditch fills, Context 139 (Sample 6), had given some flax (*Linum usitatissimum* L.) seeds which suggested the possibility that the feature had been used for flax retting. However, the larger analysis sample recovered only a single additional flax seed. The bulk of the recovered biological remains were, again, mainly waterlogged plant remains including wood (notably small twigs and bark fragments) and tiny plant fibres, with identifiable botanical macrofossils preserved in very good condition; some showed sulphide blackening and pyritisation. The more frequent remains, muskgrass (*Chara*), crowfoot (*Ranunculus* subgenus *Batrachium*) and celery-leaved buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*), once again pointed to damp ground and standing water, with other wetland species, such as compact/soft/hard rush (*Juncus conglomeratus* L./*J. effusus* L./*J. inflexus* L.), sedge (*Carex*), tasteless water-pepper (*Persicaria mitis* (Schrank) Opiz ex Assenov), present too, but in relatively small numbers. There were also some indicators of disturbed habitats (e.g. rough and waste ground, waysides) in the form of chickweed (*Stellaria media* (L.) Vill.), henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger* L.), nipplewort (*Lapsana communis* L.) and prickly sow-thistle (*Sonchus asper* (L.) Hill), providing hints of possible human or animal activity. Aquatic invertebrates, including abundant ostracods and numerous ephippia (of *Daphnia* and at least one other cladoceran) showed that this ditch also held water. The latter and the snails present (some were the dwarf pond snail, *Lymnaea truncatula* (Müller), but most of the remains were unidentified shell fragments) suggesting that the ditch was subject to drying out. There was also a rather modest range of insects, some of which were additional aquatics, including an Elminthid (suggesting flowing water, probably from an inflow not located at the point of deposition). There were some waterside and terrestrial insects, the latter indicating herbaceous vegetation and, somewhere in the vicinity, dung.

No other remains which might provide further insight into human activities in the vicinity of these features were recorded (there were no crop plants present, for example) and the full analysis was halted prior to the detailed recording of the invertebrate assemblages. However, the plant remains were recorded in more detail as this data has value in terms of reconstructing the local environment in the medieval period and the results are presented in Table A2 of the appendix to the technical report (Gearey et al. 2006).

#### Medieval alluvial inundation

A layer of soft bluish grey clay, Context 150, was observed across the north-eastern part of the excavation area, and was recorded in section overlying Ditch 1 (Fig. 14). Surviving to a maximum thickness of 0.20m, the material was almost certainly deposited during an episode of flooding. It produced two sherds of pottery, broadly dateable to the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century and a relatively large assemblage of faunal remains, with cattle the dominant species, but sheep/goat, horse and dog also represented.

### **Medieval plot boundary redefinition**

Ditch 2 had been reinstated on a number of occasions. Ditch 3 closely followed the alignment of Ditch 2, also turning at right angles to run to the south-west, but not bifurcating (Fig. 12). The NW-SE aligned element was recorded for 8.0m. The NE-SW aligned element, representing the plot boundary, was recorded for 16.0m and was up to 1.50m wide and 0.80m deep. A vertical sided slot in the base of this portion of Ditch 3 may have been to facilitate cleaning out (Fig. 16). The composition of its fills indicated that the ditch had silted-up naturally and a single sherd of pottery, broadly dateable to the medieval period, was recovered from the feature.

The subsequent reinstatement, Ditch 4, closely followed the alignment of Ditch 3, but was positioned to the south of the NE-SW aligned element. It was traced for 12m and at only 0.20m deep it was much less substantial than the earlier versions of the boundary (Fig. 14).

The final recorded ditch reinstatement, Ditch 5, also recut the NE-SW element of Ditch 3 but terminated to the north-east in a rounded butt-end and also probably truncated to the south-west as it did not extend beyond a modern truncation (Fig. 12). This was also much less substantial than the earlier ditches, being only 7.70m long by 0.56m wide and 0.25m deep. A similar feature, Ditch 6, truncated the upper portion of Ditch 1 (Figs. 12 and 13). Extending 6.0m in length and terminally-defined at each end, it was 0.35m wide and 0.12m deep. The irregular, slight form of Ditches 5 and 6 suggest that they represent subsidiary boundary features such as fencelines rather than actual boundary ditches.

### **Medieval developed soil**

In the central portion of evaluation Trench 1, the peat formation was overlain by a silty developed soil, Context 11. Only exposed in plan and not excavated during the evaluation phase of work, this deposit nevertheless produced, during cleaning, a relatively large assemblage of medieval pottery, including fifteen sherds of Tees Valley ware of 13<sup>th</sup>–early 15<sup>th</sup> century date. The abraded condition of the material was consistent with the interpretation of the layer as a developed and worked soil, broadly indicating that the backlot area was given over to cultivation for some considerable time during the medieval period.

### Medieval structure

The south-western corner of a probable structure, Structure 1, was recorded in the south end of evaluation Trench 1, cutting through the developed soil (Figs. 17 and 18). Orientated NNW-SSE, with a right-angled return in the south, it was up to 1.40m wide and 0.52m deep. With a concave, uneven base and mostly filled with medium and large cobbles in a sandy silt matrix, it is likely to have been the footing for a cobble or masonry dwarf wall, built to support a timber baseplate beam. Pottery sherds dating from the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century were recovered from the silty primary fill of the construction cut. The assemblage was dominated by Tees Valley wares, with a sherd of Reduced Sandy Ware, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century, also present. A silty occupation deposit, Context 48, up to 0.17m thick was recorded internal to Structure 1. Rim sherds from the same Tees Valley ware cooking pot were recovered from this deposit and the wall construction trench, demonstrating that they were contemporary. The precise form and extent of Structure 1 is uncertain, since it was located within Plot C, more than 60m behind the street frontage (Fig. 17), it may have been an outbuilding.

### Late medieval yard surface

A probable yard surface, Context 24, formed by a gritty sand, up to 0.15m thick, with sub-angular to sub-rounded cobbles throughout, was recorded in evaluation Trench 2 overlying the peat deposit (Fig. 17). Like Structure 1, this lay within Plot C and produced sherd of pottery dated to the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century along with earlier medieval material.

### Late medieval and post-medieval remains

Developed soils up to 0.50m thick and of late medieval and post-medieval date underlay modern surfaces in evaluation Trench 1. The form and thickness of the deposits suggests that portions of the backlots immediately to the rear of the frontage properties were utilised for cultivation for some time, probably well into the late post-medieval period.

In evaluation Trenches 2, 3 and 4, peat formations were overlain by post-medieval dump deposits up to 0.35m thick. These layers represent ground raising and consolidation of the lower-lying area occupied by the prehistoric pond, prior to the construction of post-medieval buildings.

Various structural remains of post-medieval date, some of which can be related to buildings shown on 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century mapping, were recorded in the excavation area. Residual medieval pottery was recovered from two of these structures, Structures 2 and 3. At the time of the evaluation phase of work various standing buildings of stone construction and of probable early 19<sup>th</sup> century date were present on the site.

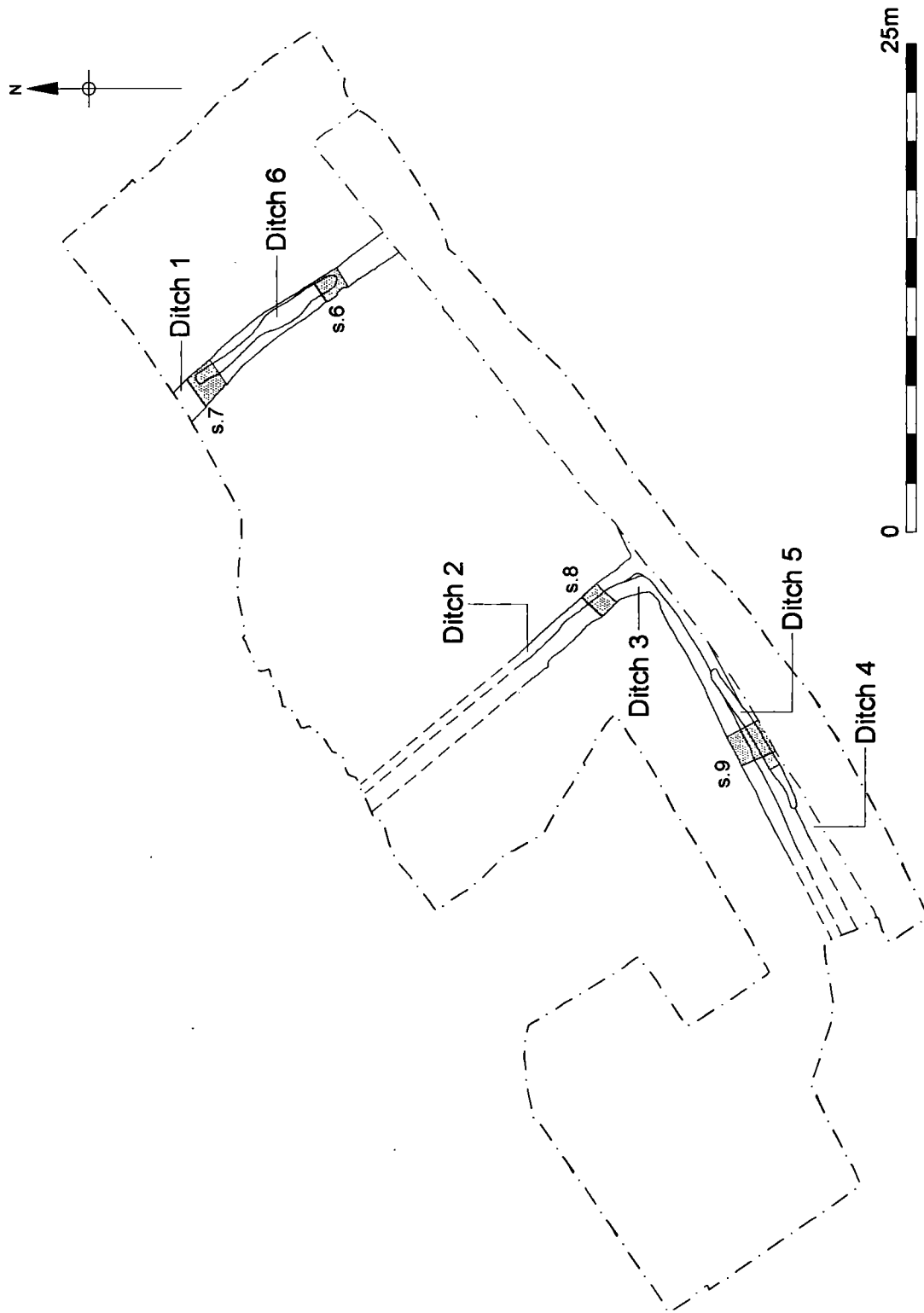


Figure 12.

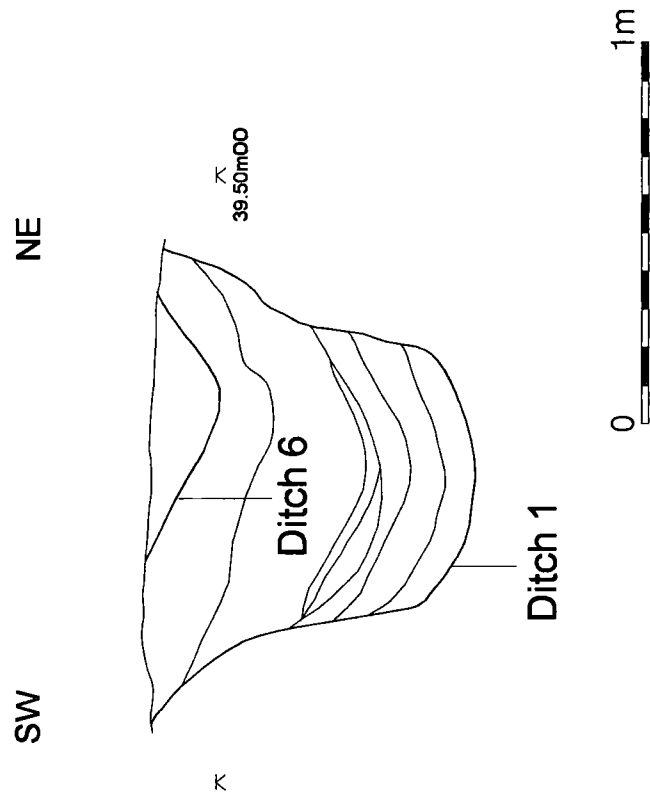


Figure 13.

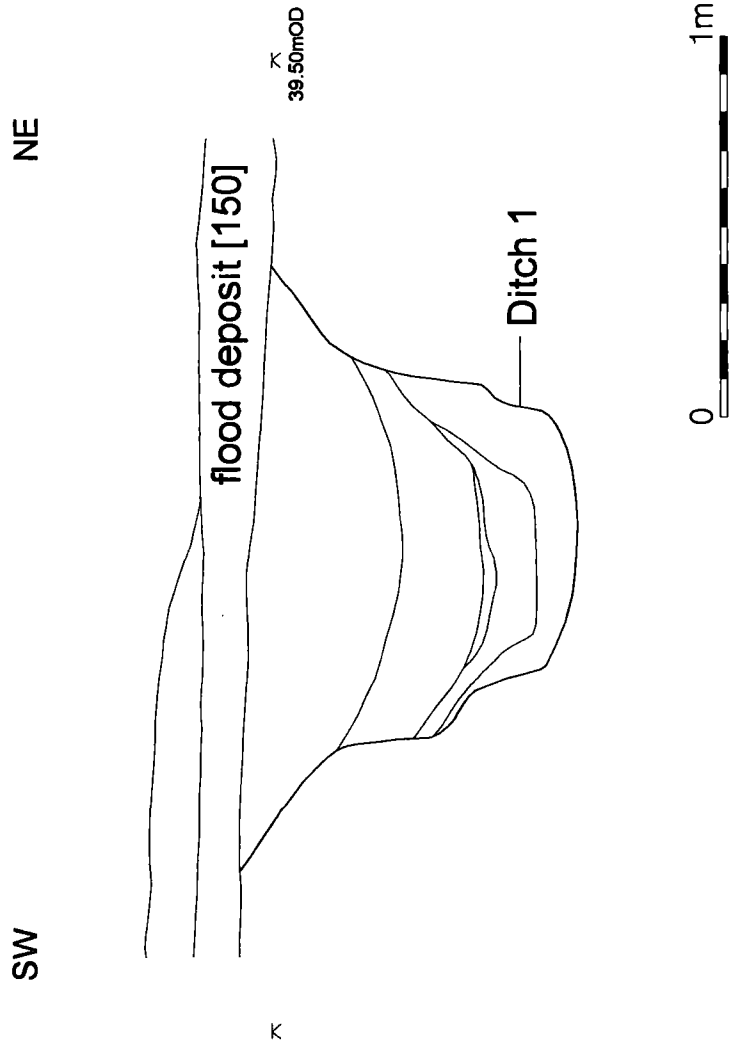


Figure 14.

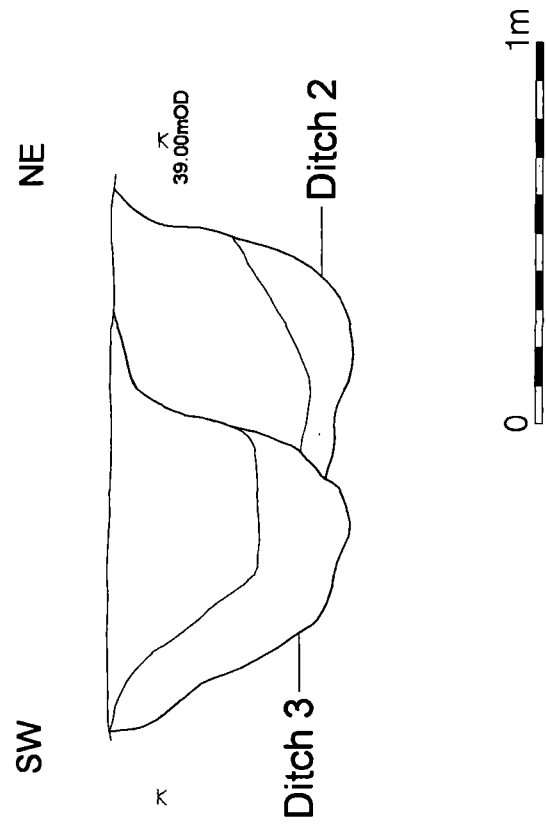


Figure 15.



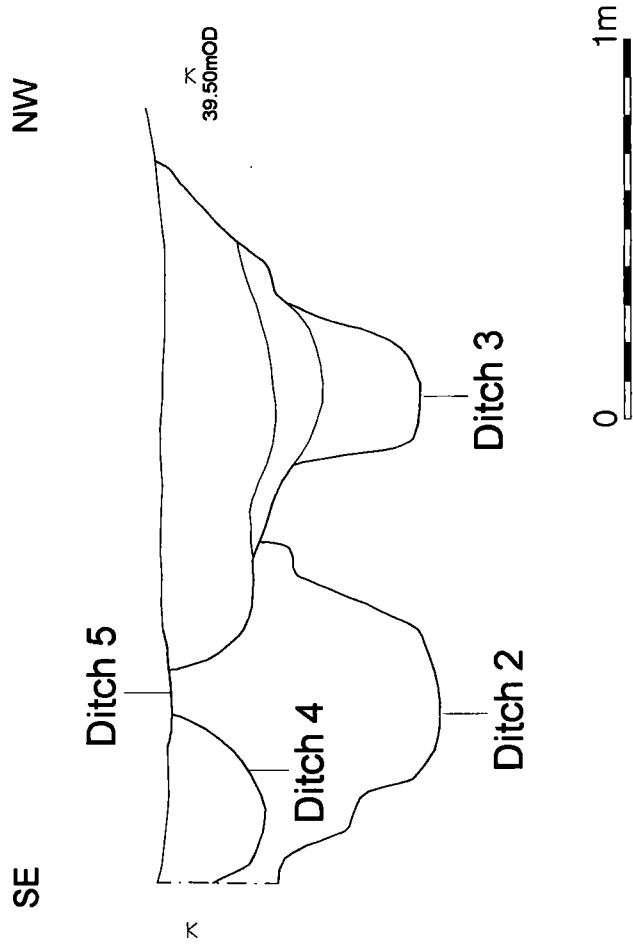


Figure 16.

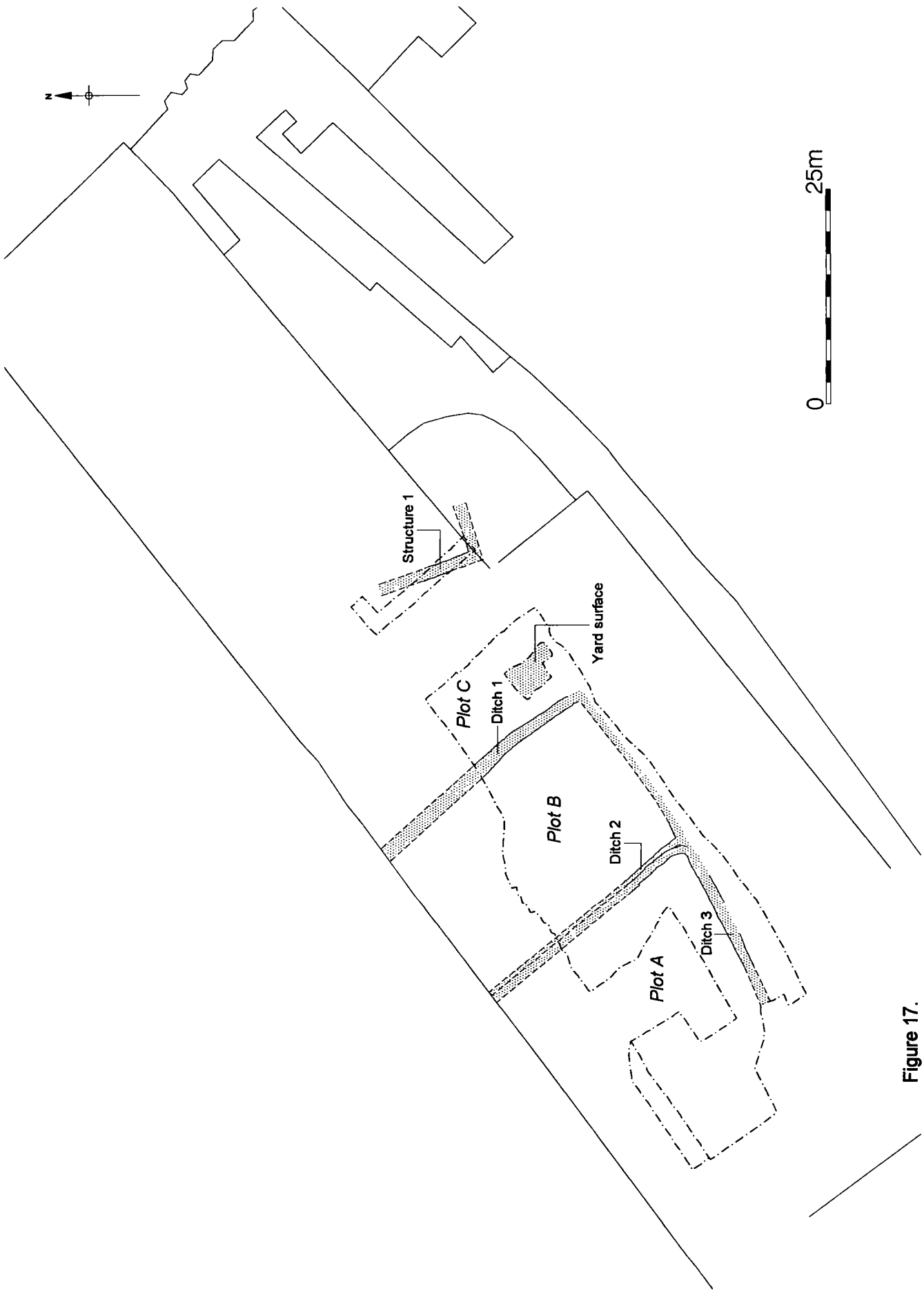


Figure 17.

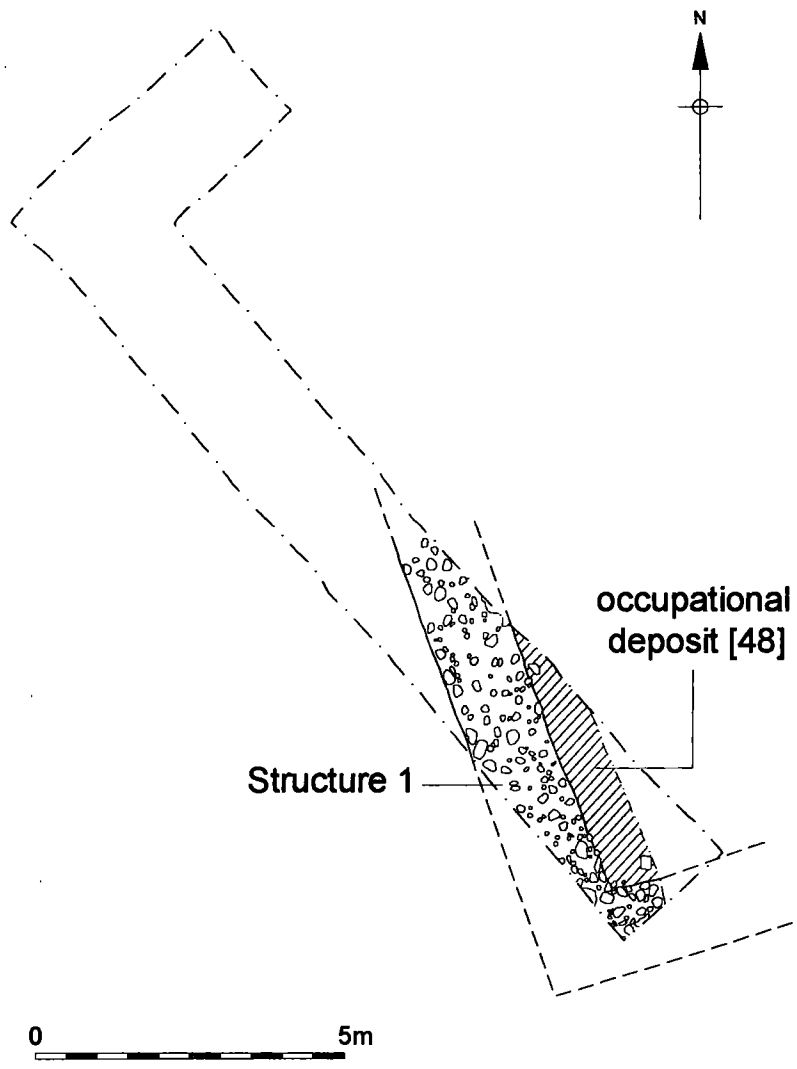


Figure 18.

## CERAMICS

### Introduction

The pottery assemblages from the phased investigations gave a total of 132 sherds weighing 2,344g representing a maximum of 119 vessels. The pottery was examined in two groups and two separate interim reports were produced (Cumberpatch 2002, 2003). These formed the basis of this combined report. The data pertaining to the pottery has been summarised in Table 6.

### Type series

The assemblage was too small to warrant the construction of a site-specific type series and the majority of the sherds were assigned to previously defined categories. A considerable part of the assemblage consisted of Tees Valley wares, as defined by Wrathmell (1987, 1990) and Patterson (1985) while other wares were of local types and showed a considerable degree of variation within the broader categories of Gritty ware and Sandy ware (Cumberpatch 1997). The fact that a number of distinctive wares could not be ascribed to named types is an indication of the lack of integrated or synthetic work on medieval pottery in North Yorkshire (in spite of the existence of useful reports on individual assemblages) and in particular the lack of a type series for the county or the wider region.

### Tees Valley wares

Examples of all three types of Tees Valley ware (A, B and C) were identified within the assemblage with the earlier type A present in only small quantities and invariably accompanied by the later B and C types.

Tees Valley ware A ware has been described by Wrathmell as a hard, wheel-thrown gritty ware which, when fired, has a uniform buff to white colour (1990, 379). He ascribes the common tendency for sherds from a single site to exhibit a degree of variation in the density and types of inclusion to the existence of a number of manufacturing centres. Such an explanation is entirely credible and a similar situation appears to exist throughout much of North and West Yorkshire, particularly with respect to Gritty wares. It seems probable that potters were seeking to produce pots with similar physical characteristics using clays that were available locally. Some possible reasons for this have been discussed elsewhere (Cumberpatch 1997).

Wrathmell has defined Tees Valley ware B as hard and gritty in texture and fired to a uniform red colour (1990, 379). The principal points of his definition conform closely to the characteristics of a considerable part of the Bedale assemblage, although the texture of the wares might be better described as 'coarse sandy' as the quartz inclusions are rarely over 1mm in size, with the normal size range being between 0.5mm and 0.8mm. The type seems to be close to that defined as Tees Valley ware 1 by Patterson (1985) and the thin walled character of the vessels is particularly marked. Tees Valley ware C is pinker in colour than type B and is somewhat finer and softer in texture (Wrathmell 1990, 379-380). It is also, on the evidence from Hartlepool, somewhat later in date. These distinctions, particularly those based on colour, seem less clear cut amongst the Bedale assemblage than is implied in the description provided by Wrathmell, and, as in the case of type A, the possibility that similar types were being manufactured by potters working independently must be considered as an explanation for this variability. This may have implications for the dating of the material, but, in the absence of other evidence, the date ranges derived from the Hartlepool assemblages have been retained in this report.

A group of sherds from Context 32, the primary fill of the construction trench of Structure 1, bore a close general resemblance to Tees Valley wares in terms of their overall appearance and composition but were sufficiently different to the types defined above to prevent them being assigned to the categories defined by Wrathmell. They have been termed Tees Valley type wares.

#### Other types

A considerable variety of medieval wares were identified in the assemblage. Few of these can be related to established 'named wares' and their salient characteristics have been noted in Table 6 and should be read alongside the following discussion.

A variety of Sandy wares were identified amongst the assemblage with the principal distinctions between them being in the density of the quartz inclusions, the presence or absence of mica and the colour, the latter relating to the firing atmosphere. Both oxidised and reduced variants were noted, but whether the distinctions are due to chronological factors or the source of the material is unclear. This is particularly true of the Oxidised and Buff Sandy wares where the varying colours appear to reflect similar distinctions to those noted in the case of the Tees Valley wares. They may be presumed to relate to variations in the composition of the clay (particularly the iron content) and in the firing atmosphere.

One large sherd of Splash Glazed Sandy ware was recovered from Context 11, a developed soil, and a possible second from another context, 94. These sherds were probably amongst the earliest from the site although some of the Gritty ware sherds showed typological characteristics which suggested an early (later 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century) date. The association of the splash glazed sherds with later material implies that the sherds are residual in character.

In general terms, Reduced Sandy wares appeared to be part of a later medieval tradition in North Yorkshire and the north-east generally. While the examples from Bedale could not be linked directly with the types defined elsewhere (e.g. Wrathmell 1987, 1990, Cumberpatch 2001), they are part of the same tradition and have been ascribed a date accordingly. As with the oxidised wares, the minor variations in fabric are presumably related to different raw material sources and places of manufacture.

The Gritty wares generally appeared to be of an earlier medieval type, but in those cases where they occurred alongside more closely datable sherds, the proposed date ranges generally overlapped, so it is unnecessary to suggest that one element is residual. Gritty wares are generally distinguished by their coarsely tempered bodies (although there is some overlap with Coarse Sandy wares) but the typical wide-bodied jar with a square or diamond shaped rim is an important regional type and the commonly seen sooting on such vessels (e.g. Context 48, Structure 1) suggests that cooking was amongst their principal functions.

#### Later medieval and post-medieval wares

Late medieval and early post-medieval pottery was present in only small quantities and was limited to Late Medieval Sandy ware and Late Medieval Green Glazed Sandy ware (Context 24, yard surface). The absence of common types such as Cistercian ware was notable and cannot be easily explained.

#### European wares

Only one sherd of pottery was identified as of definite European origin. This was part of a handle or rim from a Rhenish stoneware bottle or jug dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century. A second sherd, the rim of a white-slipped dish, from the same context may be of European origin although this is less certain than is the case with the stoneware sherd.

### **Early modern and recent pottery**

A small quantity of 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery was present amongst the assemblage. With the exception of part of a stoneware bottle bearing part of the name of a local retailer or wholesaler, the wares were unmarked. Utilitarian vernacular kitchenwares were absent, an unusual occurrence on sites with evidence for activity of this date, and the principal type represented were vernacular tablewares (Slipware and Mottied ware) and formal tablewares (Peariware, transfer printed and plain Whiteware), although it is possible that some of the sherds of Whiteware were from kitchen wares.

### **Conclusions**

Although small in size, the pottery assemblage from Bedale is of interest in that it draws attention to the regionally important pottery industry of the Tees Valley which has received relatively little attention in comparison with better known industries from East and South Yorkshire. There is clearly a need for a programme of physical and chemical analysis that will resolve the issues surrounding the location and organisation of manufacture. At present the locations of manufacture are unknown and it might be suggested that the investigation of this issue is one which should feature in any regional research initiative relating to medieval craft production.

## DISCUSSION

Strata representing a localised body of water, which has been described herein as a lake, and a former wetland area, were recorded in the backlots of properties on Market Place, Bedale. Lake-bed sediment accumulation – represented by laminated organic silts – began in the early Holocene, dated to 8770 +/- 40 BP, the Mesolithic period in archaeological terms. Pollen evidence indicates that the area around the site was a hazel-dominated wood/scrub land, probably with a dense woodland canopy, with other trees, such as birch and elm, also present in drier areas of the wider landscape. This evidence correlates with existing knowledge of the rapid environmental modification at the beginning of the Holocene interglacial period – from 10,000 BP – across lowland areas of the region. Climatic improvement following the retreat of the ice sheet resulted in the open plant cover, principally grasses and sedges with some shrubs, that typified the start of the Holocene period, being rapidly replaced with birch-dominated woodland, in turn superseded by birch woodland, with a dense woodland canopy resulting in the suppression of herbs and smaller shrubs (Simmons *et al.* 1993, 19).

The next phase of sediment deposition in the Bedale lake began 8190 +/- 50 BP, this being a marked transition from silt deposition to peat formation, indicative of an infilling water body with sedges and ferns spreading across a peat surface to create a swampy sedge fen. The pollen record thus becomes biased in favour of local plants in the swamp environment, being less representative of terrestrial woodland in the wider landscape. A rise in pine in the pollen record reflects the ability of this tree to expand onto damper/poorer soils in the vicinity of the site, while the previously dominant hazel and, to a lesser extent, elm and birch, fell into decline.

In peat dated to 7960 +/- 50 BP, the pollen record at Bedale continues to be dominated by plants representing a sedge fen wetland. There was some evidence for slight changes in the arboreal populations, with oak showing a small increase, apparently at the expense of pine. Concentrations of pollen after a date of 7490 +/- 60BP were much diminished, possibly the result of a dry mire surface, with marked peaks in pine, and then birch, indicating that water tables had fallen sufficiently to allow colonisation of the peat surface by these trees. A drier local environment is also evidenced by a reduction in sedges in the pollen record.

By the close of the peat sequence, shortly after 7290 +/- 40 BP, pine, hazel and alder all appear to be expanding and a further decline in sedges is again strongly indicative of a drier local environment. Previous studies have demonstrated that colonisation of lowland forests in the region by taller deciduous trees, like elm and oak, began about 7,000 years BP, leading to a mixed deciduous forest environment in which oak, elm and alder were the dominant species (*ibid.*).



Although no evidence of human activity during the Mesolithic period was found at Bedale, the recovered data provides an important insight into environment and diverse ecotypes available in the Vale of Mowbray in the period. The density and extent of Mesolithic settlement in the region remain unclear, mainly a result of the limited amount of archaeological research that has been undertaken, and evidence for general activity of the period is restricted to a relatively small number of flint scatters. One example comes from fieldwalking around the Thornborough area, c. 8km south-east of Bedale, where a small but significant quantity of Mesolithic flint recovered probably represents small scale episodic activity in keeping with a general Mesolithic hunter-gatherer model of mobile family groups (Harding 2003). Such groups would have used the ice-free landscape to exploit a wide range of resources and the subsistence economy was based on hunting wild animals and birds, fishing, and collecting a wide range of wild foods such as fruits, berries, nuts and roots. Any localised variation in habitat, such as the freshwater lake at Bedale, would have been utilised as a resource base in the subsistence pattern of the culture.

Early Mesolithic sites fall broadly into two main types: upland and lowland. The environment of the uplands at this time comprised birch and hazel scrub, likely to have supported a greater density of animal populations than the closed forest of the lowlands (Spratt 1993, 57). Open uplands would have been exploited seasonally since conditions would have been too harsh for much of the year, with upland camps occupied from June to September while lowland sites may have been occupied throughout the year (*ibid.*). Within this broad picture of a seasonal settlement pattern in the region, there is some evidence to suggest that Mesolithic populations cleared landscapes through the use of fire, possibly to promote an increase in animal populations. Archaeological investigations at Seamer Carr, near Scarborough in the Vale of Pickering, have revealed important information about Mesolithic exploitation of a lowland area in North Yorkshire, as well as the environmental conditions prevalent at the time. In similar fashion to the Bedale evidence, peat deposits demonstrated a wide range of environments with open water, reed-bed, saw sedge, fen carr and small islands occupied by ferns and birch woodland (Simmons et al. 1993, 20). The peat deposits at Seamer Carr contain a thick band of charcoal at the transition to the Atlantic period of the Holocene, a period when the margins of Lake Pickering were beginning to dry out. The pollen diagram at this time shows an increase in alder pollen, as well as an atypical increase in grasses and open habitat (*ibid.*, 21). The quantity of the charcoal, along with the presence of Mesolithic artefacts along the former lake margins, argue for an interpretation of the charcoal layer as a result of human impact rather than natural fire (*ibid.*).

The early Mesolithic lowland site of Starr Carr, also in the Vale of Pickering, has produced well-preserved biological remains. This site lies on a muddy gravel slope rising out of Lake Pickering, where a platform was constructed out of birch timber, brushwood, stones, clay and moss to provide a stable area in the reed swamp at the edge of the water (Megaw and Simpson 1979, 51). Pollen analysis suggests that land in the vicinity of the site was cleared of birch trees, with an open clearing being established, and large quantities of occupation debris have informed greatly on subsistence patterns. The original interpretation of the Starr Carr site as being seasonally occupied in the winter and spring has been reassessed in recent years and it is now acknowledged that the site may best be interpreted as a hunting camp, possibly utilised throughout the year, with the base camp located elsewhere (Spratt 1993, 53).

While documentary evidence indicates that Bedale originated before the Norman Conquest, no archaeological evidence for occupation prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> century was recorded at the site. This suggests that the settlement nucleus lay to the north of the site, in the area of the church.

The medieval boundary ditches in the excavation area are indicative of a system of burgage plots in place by at least the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century. Burgage tenure evolved in English towns in the Saxon period and was associated with places that had the status of boroughs with fixed annual rents paid to the overlord of the borough (Lloyd 1992, 38). In Durham, fences were constructed in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century to the rear of late Saxon properties, delimiting the backlot area which had previously been common land utilised for rubbish disposal (Carver 1979, 71). Broad studies of medieval English towns have shown that by the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries property boundaries gradually became solidified, both along the street and to the rear (Schofield and Vince 1994, 69). The long, narrow parcels of land with a frontage to a street or market place, like those fossilised in the existing layout of Bedale, are characteristic of burgage plots of the period and the format is evident in the other market towns of the region, such as Ripon and Richmond. Excavations in Northallerton (PCA 2005) have revealed a similar layout of backlot boundary ditches of medieval date to that seen at Bedale, where parts of two linear plots, with internal subdivisions, were revealed, each plot being up to 30m wide.

The evidence from Bedale indicates that the plot boundaries silted-up, necessitating repeated reinstatement. The ditches here certainly held water, this a direct result of the relatively low-lying situation of the site and the nature of the underlying strata. A typical finding in English towns is for plot boundaries, delineated initially by ditches and then by fences and later walls, to vary very little in position and that, even after long periods of abandonment, boundaries are reinstated close to their original line; a boundary first set out in the 10<sup>th</sup> century can survive into the modern era (Carver 1987, 70). At Bedale, even sub-plot boundaries had been reinstated on several occasions.

Backlot areas would have been utilised for a variety of purposes in the medieval period. Vegetable plots, herb gardens and animal pens would have been set out and specific areas would have been used for disposal of waste from whatever trade or craft was practised by the plot holder. General domestic rubbish would also have been disposed of in these areas, with middens being the norm in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries and, from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, rubbish being increasingly buried in pits due to a growth in the quantity of waste from craft industries (Carver 1987, 69). The 14<sup>th</sup> century largely saw a cessation in the use of rubbish pits, possibly as a response to the spread of the Black Death, which led to refuse being disposed of in town tips, with rubbish pits reappearing in the backlot areas only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (*ibid.*). Latrines were also built in these areas, although inside facilities were introduced as early the 13<sup>th</sup> century (*ibid.*).

There are only tentative indications of medieval backlot activities from the excavated material at Bedale. In the north-east of England, the production of linen cloth from flax had become a widespread and regionally important industry by the medieval period (Higham 1989). Flax retting, soaking of flax to release fibres, may have been undertaken at the site and, given that flax stems can be soaked either in stagnant or moving water, the water-logged boundary ditches that were identified could have been utilised for this purpose. It is perhaps more likely that the plants were brought in from the surrounding area to be retted on site, rather than being grown in the town (Schofield and Vince 1994, 109).

Later medieval activity was represented by the footing of a cobble or masonry dwarf wall, presumably for a timber-framed structure, and a possible yard surface. Given its location, some 60m back from the street frontage, the wall - dated to the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century - probably represents a small outbuilding within the backlot area. The building could have spanned the boundary between the two identified plots, suggesting that the divisions were not strictly adhered to during the late medieval period. However, cartographic evidence suggests that the original line of the boundary had been reinstated by the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when much of Bedale was rebuilt. Developed soils recorded at the site indicate that backlot areas may have been used solely as gardens from the late medieval period until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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