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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
AT 33-34 FORESHORE ROAD,
SCARBOROUGH**

by
Trevor Pearson

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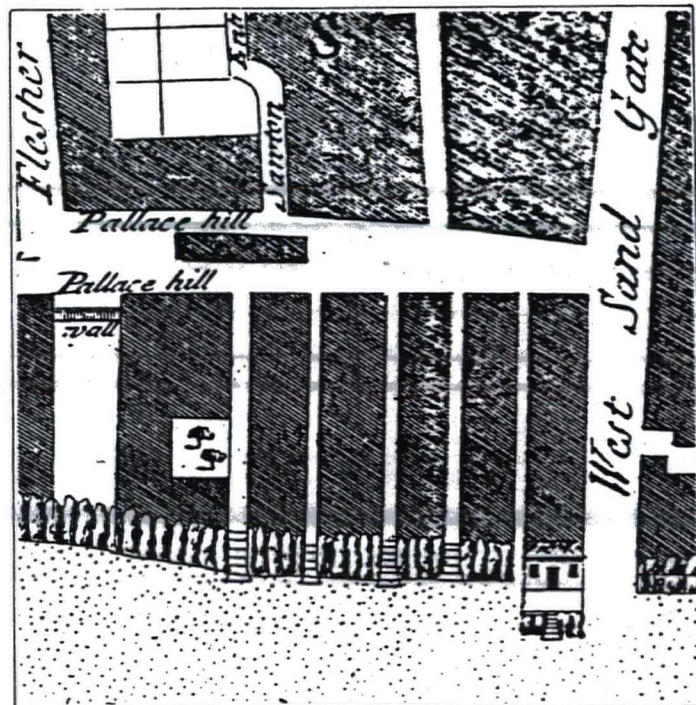
SCARBOROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Frontispiece: The site as depicted on the first
town plan published in 1725

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INTRODUCTION

From December 1995 to February 1996 the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society monitored the extension and alteration of a group of buildings to the rear of the Silver Dollar Arcade (33-34 Foreshore Road TA 0468 8875) at the request of the site owner, Mrs Shaw. The work was conducted to the specification of the County Archaeology Office. The building work principally involved lowering the ground level within the area shown on Figure 2 to that of the existing arcade on the seaward frontage preparatory to the arcade's expansion, and the erection of a link extension over the narrow passage known as The Staithe.

The arcade and the properties to its rear lie within the area of the medieval town [Figure 1]. To the south the arcade faces on to Foreshore Road and the seafront whilst to the north the ground level rises with the natural slope of the cliff bordering the South Bay.

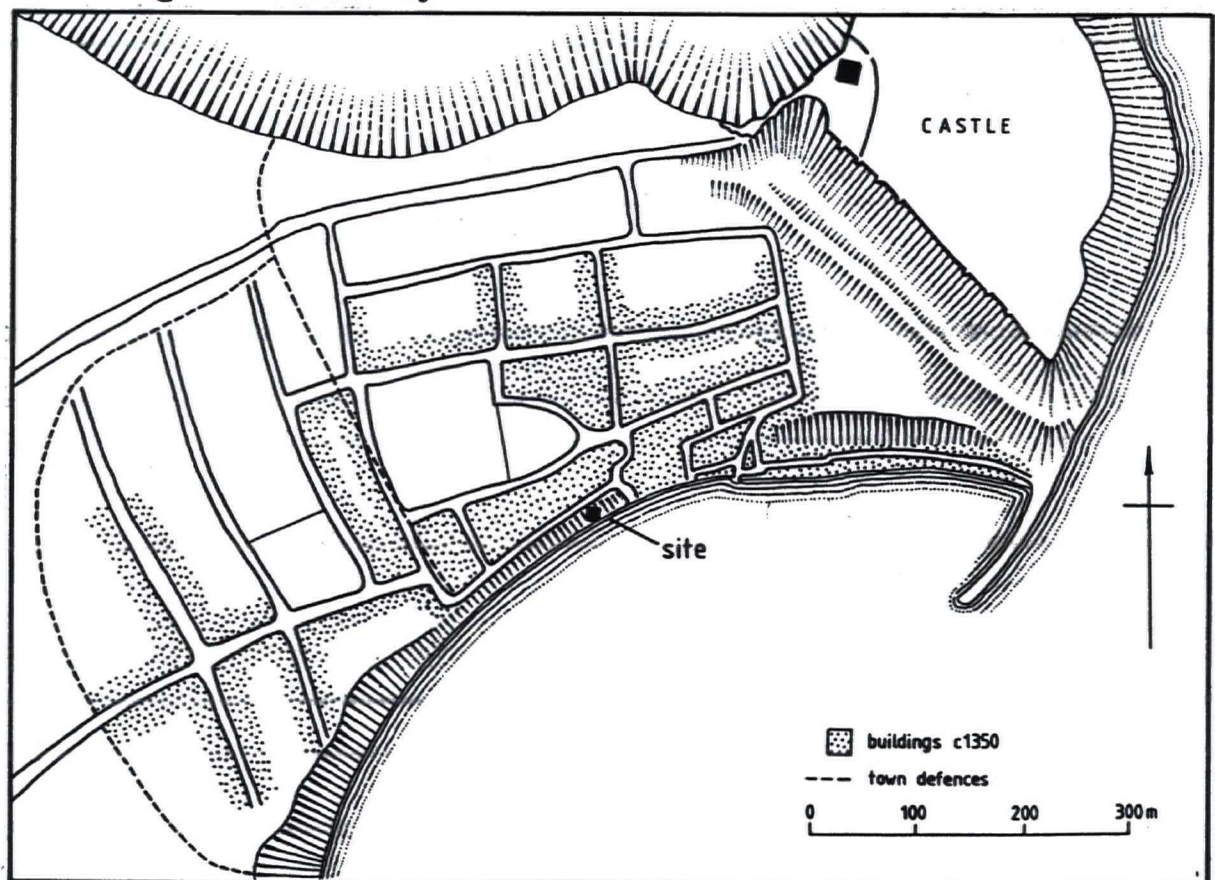


Figure 1: Medieval Scarborough showing location of the site

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The archaeological picture of this part of the foreshore is dominated by the discoveries made in 1976 at the junction of Eastborough and West Sandgate [Figure 2]. Excavations conducted by Mr. P. Farmer to a depth of 12 feet reportedly¹ encountered the foundations of a Roman wall and overlying deposits of Viking and Medieval date. The wall was interpreted as part of a waterfront building, perhaps contemporary with the construction of the signal station on the castle headland in the late 4th century. Although the precise nature of the 1976 discoveries are open to dispute, it is nevertheless conceivable that pre-medieval settlement was attracted to this part of the foreshore because of the Damyet stream which flowed into the South Bay at about the point where modern Eastborough meets the Foreshore Road. The stream provided a supply of freshwater and its valley made a natural routeway from the beach to the cliff top. This speculation is relevant to the present site because it is less than 55 metres from the presumed course of the Damyet stream and a stratigraphic sequence comparable to that discovered in 1976 may be anticipated. However a watching brief during building works in 1989 to No. 34 Foreshore Road, next door to the present works [Figure. 2], revealed only modern backfill.²

In the middle ages the present site was within the area of the medieval harbour, though from documentary evidence it seems that the main area of settlement was to the east of modern day West Sandgate following the line of the Bolts and Quay St to the foot of the castle hill. There is both archaeological and documentary evidence for the existence of a routeway at the base of the cliff from West Sandgate west to at least as far as Blands Cliff.³ The line of this route may be perpetuated in the alley called The Staithe which still survives in places to the rear of modern properties fronting Foreshore Road and which originally crossed the present site.

The alley marks an important division in the later development of the site. From the evidence of the first town map of 1725 [See frontispiece] it appears that the alleyway marked the line of the seafront and that what is today the arcade was then open beach.⁴ This sea front appears to be perpetuated in the name of this alleyway, The Staithe. Settrington's engraving of 1735 confirms this picture, depicting a short timber jetty at about the location of the site.⁵ In 1745 a battery of two guns is shown by Vincent at this part of the seafront.⁶ The battery was part of the measures taken by the townsfolk of Scarborough to defend the town from the threat of invasion by the forces of Bonnie Prince Charlie. By the time of Chapman's first survey of the harbour in 1800⁷ buildings had appeared on the seaward side of the alleyway and from then on the alleyway became less significant as a routeway especially after the construction of Foreshore Road in 1879.

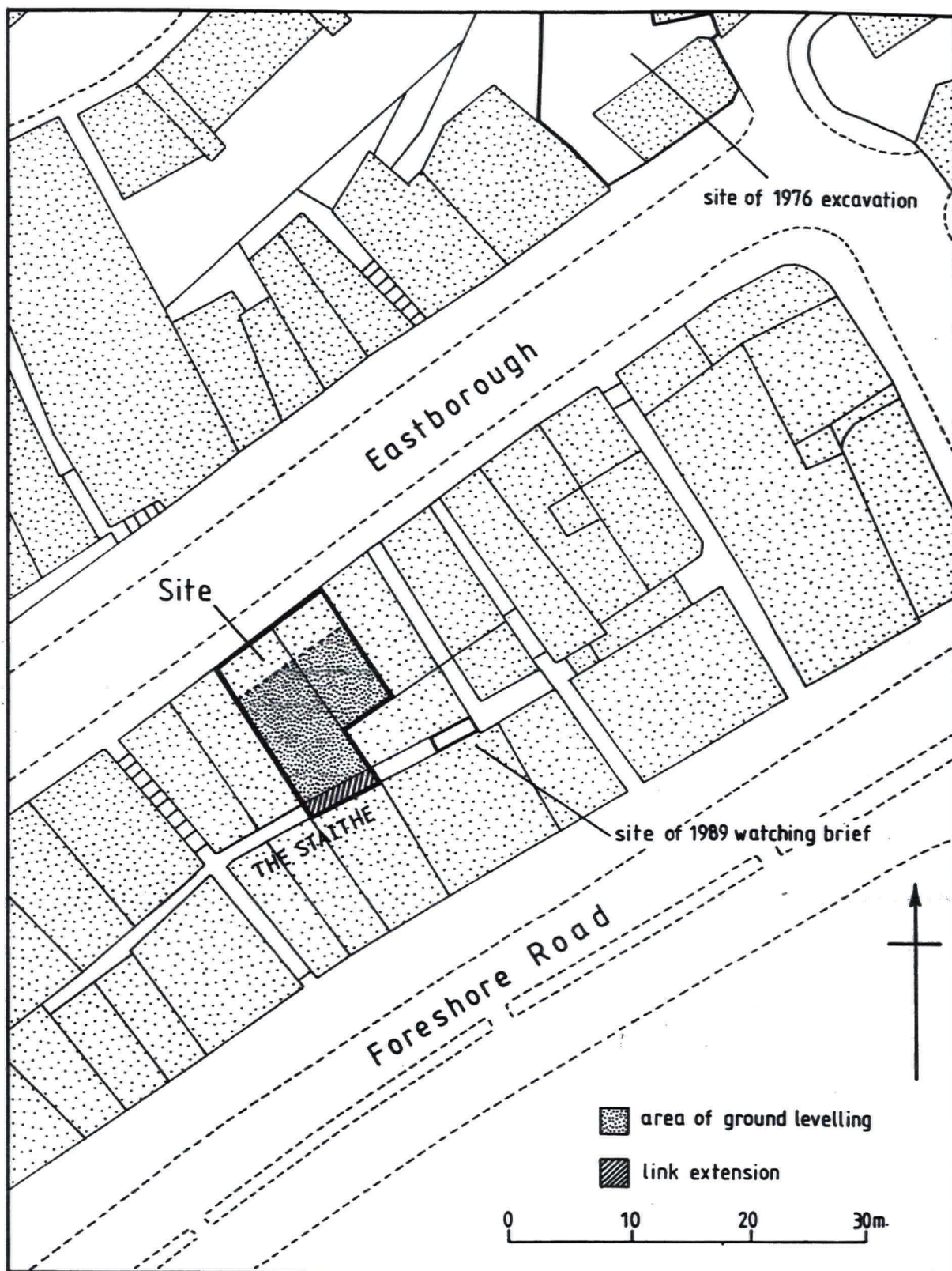


Figure 2: The site and its environs

THE WATCHING BRIEF [FIGURE 3]

Building works commenced by the demolition of the rear wall to 33 (A on plan) down to ground level within the arcade. This revealed a 150 mm sewer pipe running through the passage known as The Staithe (B) at about 200 mm above ground level. Removal of the fill around the pipe indicated that this area had been seriously disturbed by the insertion of the sewer pipe and by the erection of the relatively recent rear cellar wall (C on plan) which was deeply founded. This area of disturbance was seen to extend below the area of maximum excavation for the present works.

The removal of wall 'C' and subsequent excavation of the floor of room 'D' revealed that this was a relatively recently infilled cellar, the floor of which was not disturbed. It was revealed, however, that the party wall 'E' was composed of large squared and dressed stone blocks. This wall was more deeply founded than the proposed excavation so that it was not possible to examine its foundations and therefore no dating evidence was available. However, the documentary evidence referred to above suggests an 18th century date.

Excavation of the side passage 'F' again revealed the presence of 150 mm sewer pipe and other service pipes leading to serious disturbance compounded by the presence of steel stanchions and deeply founded walls.

Removal of the rear wall 'G' indicated that this cellar wall was acting as a retaining wall and that the area behind was composed entirely of natural boulder clay. This proved to be the case on excavation of this area, and the inference was drawn that the cellar 'D' had been cut into the cliff. It was not possible to draw any conclusions about the seaward extent of the original cliff face or its angle of slope at this point.

Finally excavation of the side cellar area 'H' showed this area to comprise 19th century fill onto natural clay.

CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent that this area has suffered serious disturbance during the 19th and 20th centuries and accordingly our knowledge of the medieval quay alignment, the nature of the passage known as the Staithe or the original cliff alignment have not been advanced. It is equally true to say, however, that the excavation works associated with this building project have not resulted in the loss of archaeological evidence.

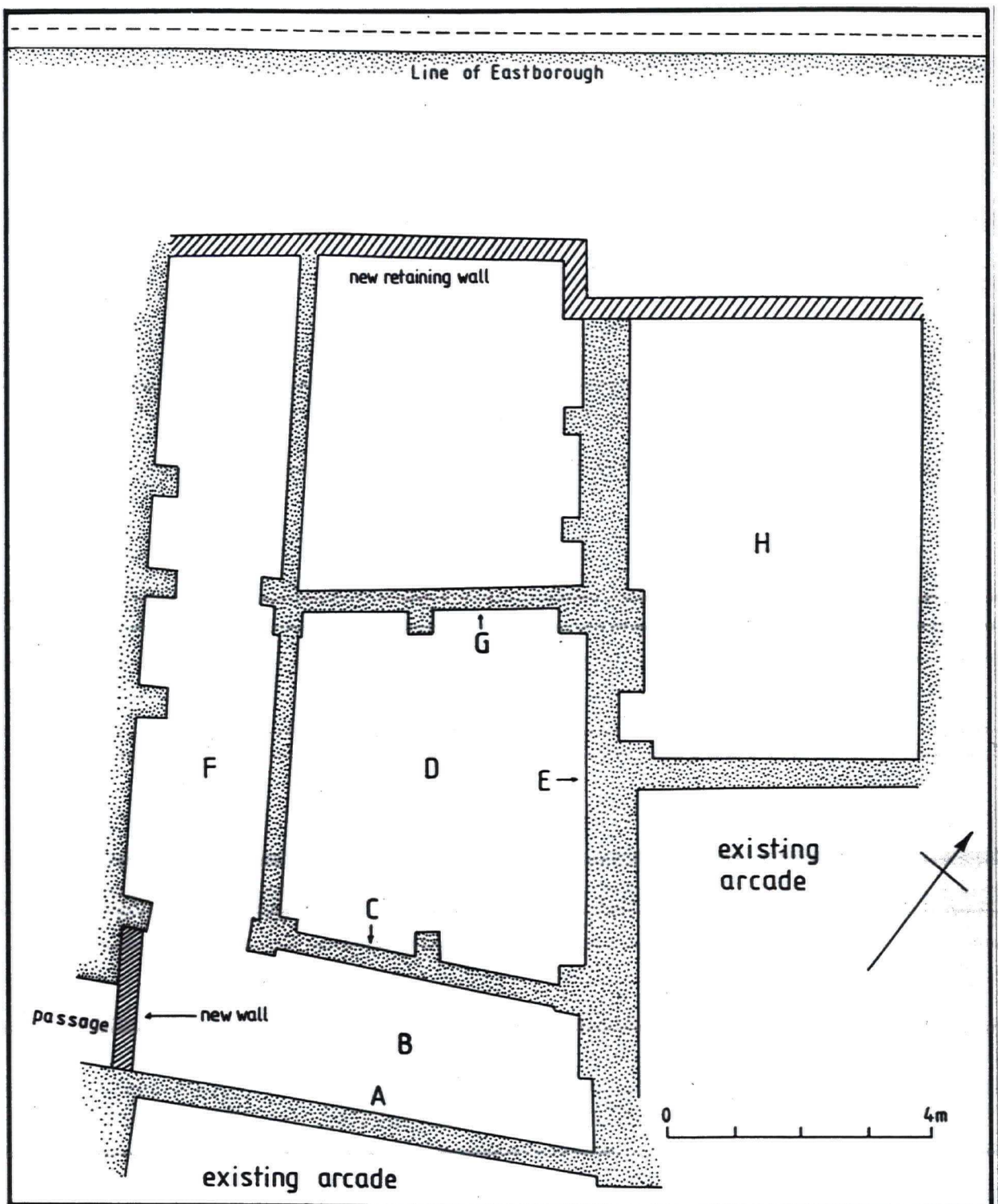


Figure 3: The site showing the progression of building works

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- 4 Cossins, J. (1725) A New and Exact Plan of the Town of Scarbrough
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