

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF 119 LONGWESTGATE SCARBOROUGH

by Trevor Pearson

NYCC HER	
SNY	19142
ENY	6380
CNY	
Parish	4899
Rec'd	1990



16th century view of Longwestgate

SCARBOROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Interim Report 11: 1990

EXCAVATION AT 119 LONGWESTGATE, SCARBOROUGH.

INTRODUCTION (FIG. 1).

Between August 25th and 27th, 1990, the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society undertook an excavation at 119 Longwestgate, at the request of the owner, to assess the archaeological implications of the proposed construction of a swimming pool. The trench, measuring 5 metres by 1.5 metres was sited towards the pool's south-west corner. The remainder of the development area was inaccessible due to the presence of small trees and bushes and a brick-built conservatory.

Longwestgate was one of the major thoroughfares in the medieval town and clearly stands out on a 16th century view of Scarborough. Although both sides of the street are shown lined with houses, there are few surviving documentary references to properties in Longwestgate in the middle ages. Consequently, little is known about the development of the street. It probably dates back to the 12th century when the rectilinear street pattern of the old town was established. An archaeological excavation at 113 Longwestgate in 1975 revealed a terracing wall dating from the 12th century surmounted by the remains of a medieval building. Earlier features discovered included a 5 metre wide cambered road thought by the excavator to date from Roman times. It was aligned from north-east to south-west, obliquely to the medieval street pattern, and may have run from the harbour to the castle headland. A second trench to the south excavated in 1977 encountered up to 4 metres of backfilled earth and rubble from landscaping operations of unknown date. Because neither excavation has been published their use in discussing the present site is limited.

THE EXCAVATION (FIG 2).

The trench was excavated to a depth of 2.5 metres, the maximum threatened by the proposed pool, and encountered entirely post-medieval deposits in three distinct layers.

The lowest deposit 1002 was a dark brown clayey soil containing fragments of limestone up to 10cms across and numerous flecks of charcoal. This layer was only excavated in a sondage at the northern end of the trench, though sufficient pottery was recovered to establish its post-medieval date. It was overlain by 1001, an homogeneous clayey soil, orange-brown in colour, containing few inclusions apart from the occasional charcoal fleck and fragment of limestone. At the northern end of the trench a layer of crushed limestone fragments rested on top of 1001 and to the south several small scoops and a straight-sided, flat-bottomed gully (F104) cut into the layer.

Fig 1: Location of Excavation

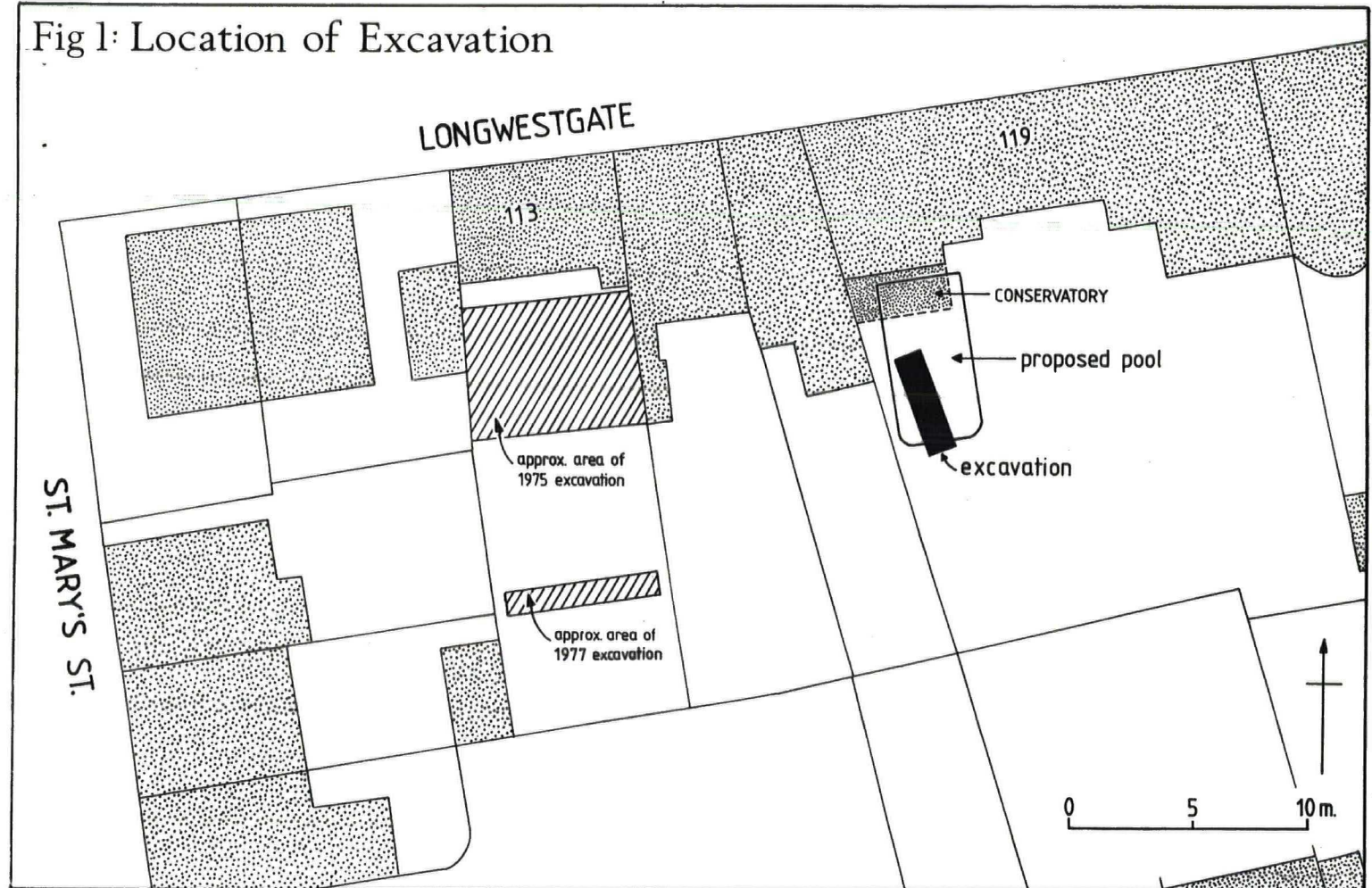
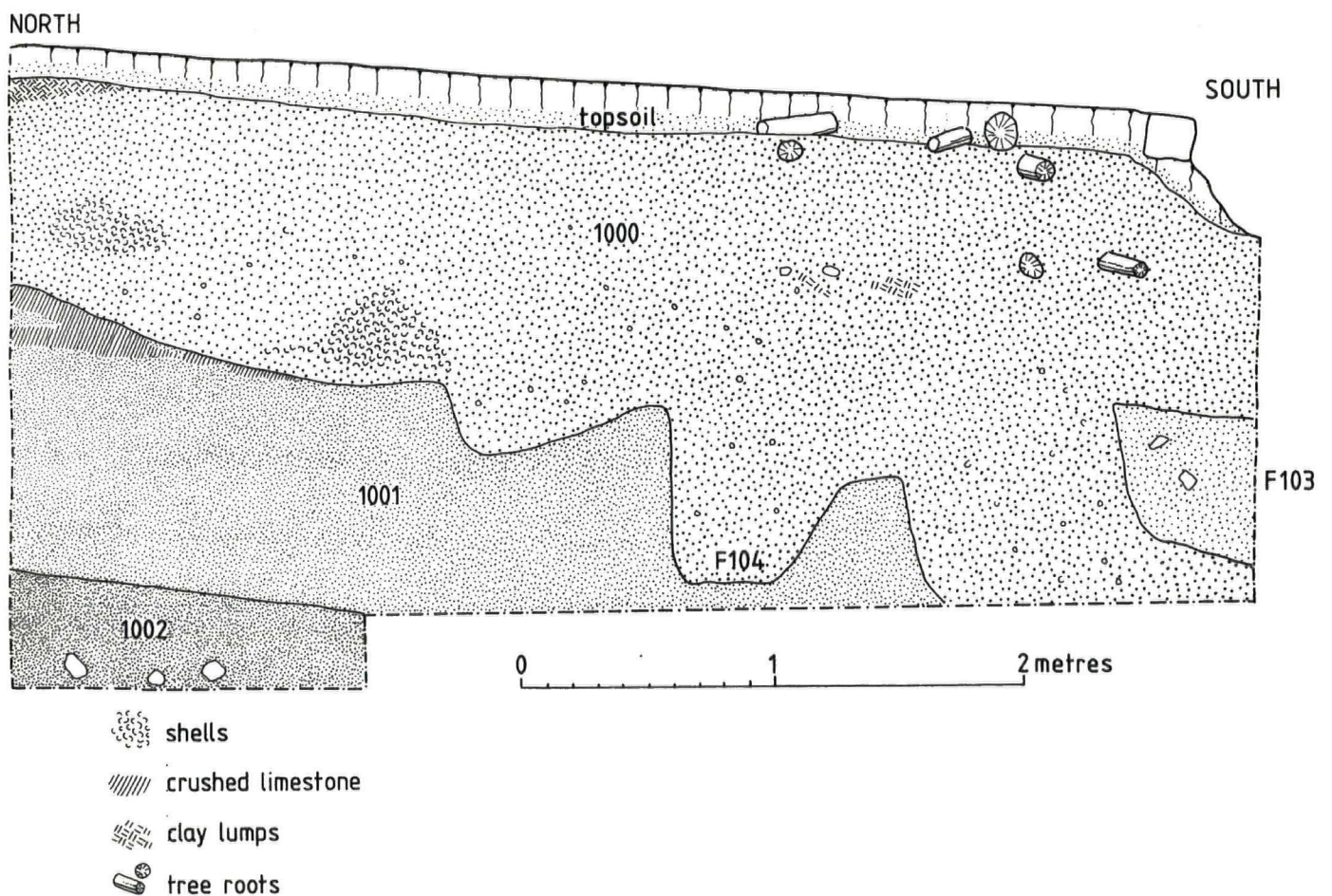


Fig 2: West facing section



The backfill of F104 contained several large stones, suggesting that the feature may mark the line of a robbed wall.

The overlying layer 1000 consisted of a dark grey loose soil flecked with numerous shell and stone fragments and pockets of clay. It contained two distinct dumps of limpet shells and a second wall trench (F103) backfilled with a light sandy soil and brick fragments. Towards the surface substantial tree root disturbance was apparent.

DISCUSSION.

The excavation encountered 2.5 metres of made ground. A cursory examination of the pottery it contained indicates a post-medieval date. The deposit was tipped from the north, judging by the angle at which the level of crushed limestone came to rest, and was probably not dumped in one continuous operation. The wall, marked by robber trench F104, was constructed after the deposition of layer 1001 and indicates a lapse of time before it was robbed and buried beneath layer 1000. It may have provided a temporary barrier to prevent spoil from tipping uncontrollably down the slope.

These layers will be more extensive than the immediate area of the excavation and it can be argued that similar deposits must underlie a large part of the area behind 119 Longwestgate. The original ground surface would have sloped steeply southwards at something like the gradient of present day St. Mary's Street and would have been of little use as either yard or garden. In contrast, the existing garden slopes much less markedly than the natural gradient which therefore indicates that a considerable thickness of soil has been dumped across the entire site to level it.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

From the above discussion it would appear that the construction of the pool will only encounter post-medieval backfill deposits of little archaeological significance. However, the thickness of made ground will gradually decrease towards the north of the site because the natural ground level rises in this direction. Consequently, if any deposits exist beneath the post-medieval backfill layers, they could well be exposed during the construction of the northern part of the pool. It is therefore imperative that work on the pool is monitored by an archaeologist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

The site owner, Mr. A. Ayckbourn, is thanked for permission to excavate and Ms H. Stoney for making the arrangements. The excavation was undertaken by Dorothy Chaplin, Ron Davies, Kay Dunderdale, Chris and Frances Hall, Sarah Hardy and Gary Marshall, who are thanked for their hard work. Frances Hall edited and typed the report.