11. Excavations at the Bridge Hotel, 1995–6

Roger Oram

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY
(FIGS. 1.3–5, 11.1 AND 11.2)

In 1996, following trial trenching in 1995, Tyne and Wear Museums Archaeology Department carried out excavations in the cellars of the Bridge Hotel, Castle Garth, prior to alterations to the building.

The Bridge Hotel lies to the south-east of the medieval castle keep. The position of the excavation trenches is shown on figs. 1.3–5. Two long trenches, A and B, were dug along the north-east and south-west sides of the cellar; watching briefs were held during work on pipe trenches and manholes in the area between them (figs. 11.1 and 11.2). The permitted depth of excavation below the modern floor was 300mm in the two main trenches and 410mm in the minor ones. The natural subsoil was not reached, so there may have been unexplored archaeological deposits beneath the lowest Roman levels encountered.

The excavation revealed a metalled street of at least four phases which is interpreted as the southern intervallum street of the fort (figs. 1.3–5). The presence of timber buildings to the north of this street is indicated by robber trenches, beam slots, possible floors and layers of occupation material. All of these features indicated buildings aligned north-east/south-west. Too little of the buildings survived to make interpretation possible. However, an interesting find was the remains of a pot, which had been buried complete and upright in the later phases of occupation material in the north-east corner of the excavation area (fig. 15.8, no 76). This parallels the examples found buried in the floors of barracks at South Shields.

The Roman ground surface must have been considerably lower in this area than in the rest of the fort. The lowest recorded deposits were at a height of *c.* 24.5m OD, in contrast to an average level of almost 27m OD on the Roman ground surface over the excavated areas within the interior of the fort. Furthermore the deepest deposits in the Bridge Hotel trenches were seen to follow a natural slope to the south (figs 11.1 and 11.2). This slope was of about ten degrees in the northern half of the excavation area, dropping away more steeply at about forty-five degrees at the southern end, approaching the brink of the scarp above the river Tyne.

No trace of the southern fort wall was found. However, its possible position can be suggested, as described below.

EARLIEST EXCAVATED FEATURES
(FIG. 11.1)

Street metalling

The 1995 trial trench lay at the southern corner of the excavated area, on the steep break of slope to the south. More layers of metalling were found here than elsewhere, because the trial trench was dug to a depth of 1m, while Trenches A and B were only 300mm in depth.

The lowest layer (215*), exposed but not removed, consisted of rectangular blocks of yellow sandstone; it was not very worn, so was possibly a make up layer. It was overlain by a very worn surface of yellow sandstone fragments (212*). Above this was a make up layer (210*) and a compact surface of cobbles and pebbles (208).

Part of this surface and a metalling overlying it were left *in situ*, so it was possible to relate these later surfaces to the surfaces found in excavation in 1996; a worn metalling of yellow sandstone blocks and cobbles (103), found in Trench A, was thought to be equivalent to the

compact surface (208) found in the 1995 trial trench. In the pipe trenches there were large, heavily worn sandstone blocks (302), and in Trench B a surface of cobbles and angular sandstone (48). It is difficult to be precise about the alignment and width of the street represented by these surviving deposits, since in many cases their edges were damaged and unclear. However, features to the north-west and south-east provide helpful indications.

Remains of buildings

At the north-west end of Trench A a compact layer of pebbles (104) was truncated on its northern edge by a cut (117), filled with a stony layer (118). This was interpreted as the construction cut and spread of construction material for a feature running north-east/south-west. In Trench B there was a spread of crushed sandstone (409), interpreted as construction debris or a floor. Between this and the street metalling (48) was a probable sill beam for a timber wall; this had later been robbed, leaving a slot filled with pink clay (407). To the north-west of the position of the probable sill beam and parallel to it was another cut (fig. 11.1), 0.10m deep, which may indicate the robbing of another wall or partition. If so, these walls would have been only *c.* 1.60m apart, and so may represent a narrow room or a corridor in a building.

Possible position of fort wall

At the south-eastern end of the excavation was the remains of a stone wall, which was traced for a length of 7.80m. At 1.10m in width it was substantially narrower in width than the northern fort wall; it ran north-east/south-west, on the same alignment as the south curtain wall of the medieval castle, which was 10m to the south. It was therefore interpreted as part of a medieval building abutting or just within the south curtain. Because of the shallowness of the excavation trench and the steep slope of the ground at this end of the excavation, it was not possible to examine the foundations of the wall or the underlying deposits; it is possible however that it was built on top of the remains of the south wall of the Roman fort, which were re-used as a foundation. If this were the case, a layout could be proposed of fort wall and intervallum street with timber buildings along the inner edge. A rampart would not be expected here, as none was found at the northern defences (see Part 10). As shown on fig. 11.1, the width of the southern intervallum street would be within the range 5.50–7.50m, which is similar to the width of the intervallum street between the northern fort wall and Building 1 (fig. 1.3).

Finds

Dating evidence – pottery

A make up layer in the 1995 trial trench (210*) contained Nene Valley colour coated ware, BB2 and SENK, and a sherd of Gillam type 42 rouletted beaker, all dated to the third century. The quantity and range of material suggest a mid- rather than early third-century date

SECOND EXCAVATED PHASE – LATE THIRD CENTURY OR LATER *(FIG. 11.2)*

Remetalling of street

The street surface seen in Trench A was remetalled with cobbles and some sandstone blocks (102). The equivalent remetalling in the pipe trenches consisted of a worn surface of large yellow sandstone fragments (301*). In Trench B there was a well worn surface of cobbles and pebbles (47*), which had been truncated by modern pipe trenches.

Second phase of occupation of buildings

In the north-western end of Trench A there was an occupation material of soft ash containing coal and charcoal (27*), overlain by a similar layer (22); surviving within the latter layer was the base of a BB2 cooking pot which had been buried upright (fig. 15.8, no 76). In the difficult excavation conditions it was not possible to

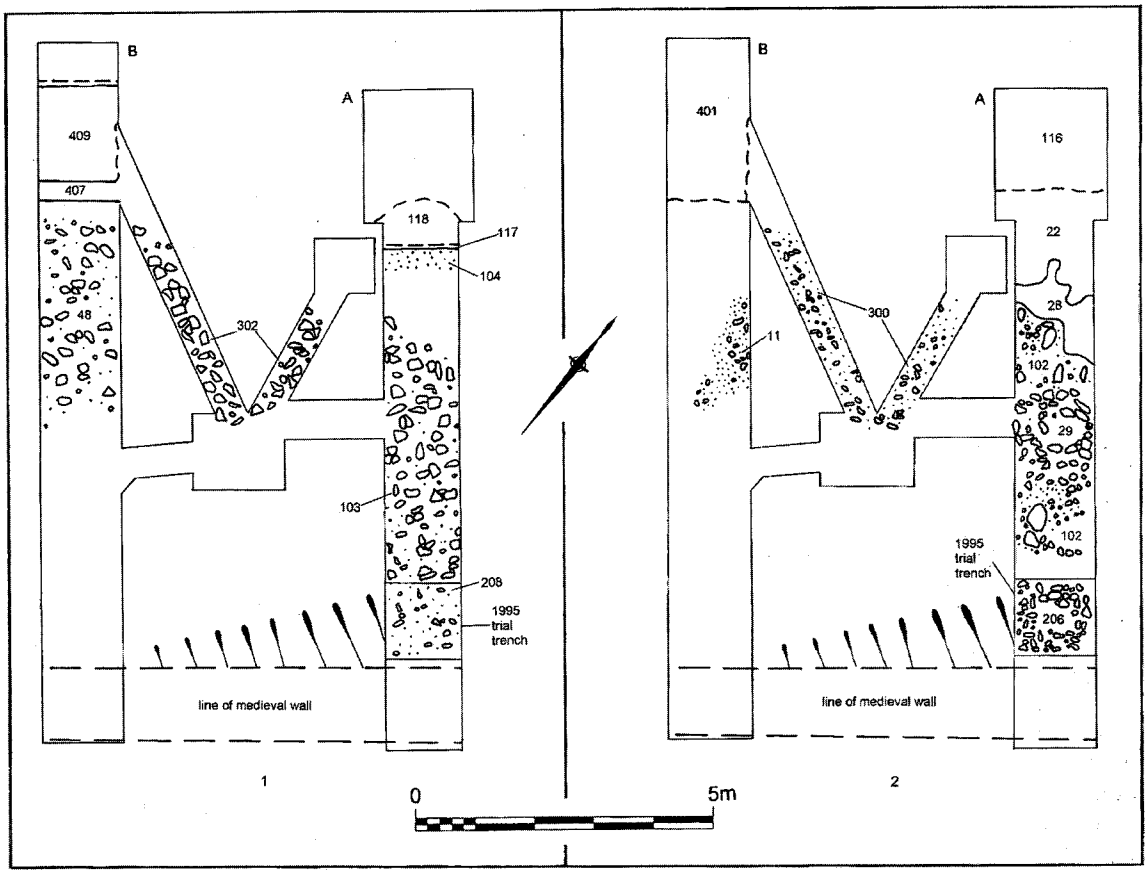

Fig. 11.1 Left hand plan, Bridge Hotel excavations, 1995–6, earliest excavated features, comprising southern intervallum street with remains of buildings to the north-west. Scale 1:125.

Fig. 11.2 Right hand plan, Bridge Hotel excavations, second and third phases of the intervallum street and buildings. Scale 1:125.

determine the north-western extent of the layer, where it was covered by demolition material described below. However, its south-eastern edge had been bounded by the wall of a building. It is not clear whether the wall had been of timber or stone; all that remained was an irregularly shaped robber trench (28).

At the north-western end of Trench B the earlier floor (409) and the fill of the robber trench for the sill beam (407) were overlain by a floor of mixed clays, many containing sandstone fragments (404*). Above this were two other floor surfaces (403* overlain by 401). It was not possible to determine how far this building had extended to the south-east. All possible evidence of a south-eastern wall had been removed by a modern pipe trench which cut through this edge of all the floor layers and extended as far as the edge of the street metalling, which it also truncated.

Finds

Dating evidence – pottery

The second phase of metalling of the intervallum street (102) contained Nene Valley ware with overslip decoration and East Yorkshire grey ware of the late third century or later (fig. 15.8, no. 71). The

occupation layers within the building in Trench A contained BB2 and SENK of the third century.

THIRD PHASE OF MODIFICATIONS
(FIG. 11.2)

Second remetalling of street

In Trench A all that survived of this remetalling was a patch of worn yellow sandstone blocks (29). The latest surface found in the 1995 trial trench, which consisted of similar blocks (206), may be contemporary with this, or it may have been deposited in the previous phase and remained in use. In the pipe trenches there was a surface of cobbles and gravel (300), and in Trench B there was a patch of worn cobbles (11), heavily truncated by modern pipe trenches.

Demolition of buildings

In Trench A the north-eastern edge of the intervallum street (102, 29) was damaged by the robbing of the south-east wall of the building. Some of the occupation material within the building (27*, 22) was disturbed and slumped into the robber trench for the wall (28), and also spilled out over the street surface. A layer of dark loam containing many stone slabs (8*) overlay the occupation layers and extended far enough to the south-east to lap over the remains of the street metalling (29). In the north-western extension of Trench A was another dark loam and sandstone rubble (116), overlain by a layer (121*) containing many large fragments of sandstone, including a large socket stone.

There was no surviving evidence for the demolition of the building seen in Trench B; the latest floor (401) was overlain by modern deposits.

Finds

Dating evidence – pottery and coin

The metalling found in the 1995 trial trench (206) produced a slightly worn coin of Constantine II, Caesar, dated to 320 (see p. 185). The pottery from this layer and the other metalling found in Trench A (29) included residual BB2 and SENK, as did the pottery from the fill of the robber trench (28). The demolition material produced a Nene Valley ware plain rimmed dish of fourth-century date (121*) and a few body sherds of almond-rimmed (Italian) amphora dating later than the mid-third century (8*).

FOURTH PHASE OF MODIFICATIONS

Final remetalling of street

In Trench A there was a patch of worn, uneven cobbles and sandstone blocks (13*), and a similar metalling (107*) was found in the pipe trenches. In Trench B there was a make up layer (40*) overlain by a patch of cobbles (20*). The latest metalling in the 1995 trial trench (206) was covered by a deposit of grey loam (205*).

Finds

Dating evidence – pottery

The make up layer in Trench B contained two BB2 flanged bowls of the third quarter of the third century or later (fig. 15.8, nos 79–80). The final phase of metalling produced only residual third-century pottery, but the latest metalling in the 1995 trial trench (206) contained a slightly worn coin of Constantine II, Caesar, dated 320. The loam layer (205*) above this metalling contained late third- or fourth-century East Yorkshire grey ware and a Huntcliff type rim dated 360 or later.