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Burgage patterns in Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Cockermouth

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SUMMARY

The burgage patterns in three north of England boroughs, Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Cockermouth, have been examined. Plot widths and the positions of the access paths to the plot backlands were studied cartographically, using early Ordnance Survey Town Plans. The plots at a particular location varied in width by quarters of a unit width, while the unit widths themselves were found to change from location to location. There was no evidence that the plots and their unit widths conformed to a length standard such as the perch. Access path positions were more consistent in Berwick than in the other two boroughs. The north of England patterns were found to have a great deal in common with those in a number of Scottish burghs. Potentially significant common connections existed between the two regions during the years when plot layout was under way, with parts of northern England under Scottish control for periods of time, while much of the legal framework under which the new foundations on both sides of the Border were governed are to be found in the Customs of Newcastle. Similarities are reviewed and discussed. Plot patterns in the north of England exhibit characteristics differing significantly from those in the Midlands and farther south.

INTRODUCTION

MODERN URBAN MORPHOLOGY STUDIES can provide a significant contribution to the understanding of how our cities, towns and villages developed. Such studies have recently been made of the five Scottish burghs of Edinburgh, Canongate, St Andrews, Perth and Elgin (Tait 2008a; Tait 2010). A similar cartographic methodology has now been applied to three boroughs in the north of England. The boroughs selected were Berwick-upon-Tweed, Alnwick and Cockermouth.

The studies of Berwick and Alnwick concentrate mainly on the configuration and dimensions of the burgages in the central areas of the boroughs. In Cockermouth, a more extensive area of the town is included. In all three cases, account is taken of evidence from early charters and associated archaeology in the process of interpretation.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Much of northern England alternated between English and Scottish control during the period when the towns were being awarded their early charters. David I of Scotland (1124–53) played an important part in proceedings. As a young man, he spent formative years at the court of England's Henry I (1068–1135), where his elder sister, Edith, was Henry's queen. From his position within the court he will doubtless have gained an understanding of English legal and administrative matters. He returned to Scotland during the reign of his brother

Alexander I (1106/7–24), and received extensive lands in southern Scotland, later expanding his influence into the north of England. Later, during his reign, he controlled at varying periods much of Northumberland, Cumberland and, for a time, parts of Lancashire and north Yorkshire (Oram 2004, 59–73, 122–69). He rebuilt the castle at Carlisle, where he died in 1153 (Oram 2004, 202).

David was keen to develop the economy of Scotland. To do this, he granted burgh status to a number of communities. The process was rapid and many of the principal burghs including Berwick, Roxburgh, Edinburgh and Stirling received royal grants between 1124 and 1128 (Oram 2004, 81). To stimulate trade, foreigners with suitable skills were encouraged to settle within the new burghs. Many were from other countries, including England and Flanders (Dennison and Simpson 2000, 721–2).

The legislation that defined and controlled the conduct of the Scottish burghs began to be developed during the reign of David I, and the Burgh Laws of Scotland were introduced in later years (Thomson and Innes 1814, 178; Innes 1868, 105). These, particularly in their early versions, have much in common with the Customs of Newcastle which may possibly have been produced at David's behest (Johnson 1925; Thomson and Innes 1814, 39–41; MacQueen and Windrum 1988, 208–10). The later versions contained material not included in the Newcastle documents, however. In particular, there was a requirement for each burgh to have at least four official Liners (*lineatores*) to set out and maintain plot boundaries (MacQueen and Windrum 1988, 210; Ewan 1990, 49). Their presence may well account for the high degree of stability and clarity observed in the Scottish plot boundary patterns.

The Customs of Newcastle are also known to have influenced the contents of a number of north of England borough charters. Johnson (1925) drew attention to the similarities (and differences) between the early Customs of Newcastle, a Wearmouth charter of c. 1180 and an Alnwick charter of 1377. Specific reference is made to the Customs in some cases as at Alnwick, where confirmation charters dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries laid down that the burgesses should hold their properties 'freely and quietly as the burgesses of Newcastle hold of the lord king ...' (Tate 1866, 96–8). A similar statement is made in a Gateshead charter of 1183 (Greenwell 1852, xl).

A common feature within Scotland and north Northumberland is the tolbooth, a building which in Scottish burghs served a range of functions, including toll house, Council meeting house, law court, prison and weigh house. In some locations the tolbooth also contained shops and market stalls (RCAHMS 1996). Reference to the Berwick tolbooth is first found in a proclamation made in the second half of the thirteenth century 'in tolbotha de Suthbervyc' (RCAHMS 1996, 1; Innes 1837, 143). At Alnwick, an account written in 1822 describes the early Town Hall 'or tolbooth as it was called' being demolished and replaced (Davison 1973, 216). An account roll of 1437–8 refers to the 'tolbothe' at Cockermonth (Winchester 1986, 119). Scotland and the north of England clearly had much in common during the period of formal town development, and this makes comparison between the plot patterns in the two regions particularly interesting.

QUARTER PLOTS AND THE METHOD OF ANALYSIS

A cartographic approach was taken in studying the Scottish burghs, exploiting the powerful facilities provided by digitised versions of the early Ordnance Survey (OS) Town Plans. This approach contains the fundamental assumption that the mid nineteenth-century OS Town

Plans gives a fair representation of conditions in the early days of the settlement. The persistence and consistency that is to be found in the patterns from different locations in Scotland strongly supports this proposition.

In general, other than modifications of obviously later date, the layout of the burgages in the Scottish burghs was found to be easy to identify. There was usually good correspondence between the sides of the buildings fronting the street and the long boundaries defining the plot sides. This correspondence in most cases makes determination of plot widths using the digitised Town Plans relatively straight forward and unambiguous.

The studies show that the plot widths go in quarter sizes as first reported by Conzen (1960, 32–4). Thus, for example, if some plots are 8 m wide (termed here the unit width) others may be 6 m (three quarters), 10 m (one and a quarter) and so on. It is fair to point out, however, that if in this example, 6 m is taken as the unit width, the other plots vary by one thirds — 8 m (one and a third), 10m (one and two thirds); similarly by fifths if 10 m is taken as the unit. Changing the unit width simply provides alternative descriptions of the same pattern. For consistency, the present study continues to employ the quarter plot description.

A useful aid to the understanding of these quarter plot patterns is to display the observations using a histogram, such that each plot width is represented by a square, these being plotted in half metre intervals. Fig. 1 is an example from Elgin in Moray (Tait 2010). The squares representing individual plots provide ‘peaks’ on the histogram which are located close to 8.1, 10.1, 12.2, 14.2 and 16.2 m. There are no three quarter plots in this particular case. Having identified the equally spaced quarter peaks, all the measured plot widths can be used to calculate the unit width which is 8.1 m in this example.

The individual quarter peaks contain a spread of plot widths, typically half a metre on each side of the centre. The spread will have resulted from a number of factors, including errors in setting out the plots, movement of the boundaries over the centuries and inaccuracies in the Town Plans.

The unit plot width varies from one part of a burgh to another, and from one burgh or another, and has been measured to range in Scotland from 12.8 m down to 5.6 m. These widths are relatively evenly spread through the range, providing no evidence that a unit such as the Scottish fall or the English perch had been employed during plot layout (Tait 2008a, 232–3).

In order to gain access throughout the backland of a plot, a path, alley, or in Scotland, a close, is frequently encountered. The line of the close, relative to the plot boundaries, follows strict patterns in Scotland. The three quarters, unit and one and a quarter plots normally have closes passing along one side boundary. In Edinburgh, Canongate and Elgin, with their east-west main streets, they are almost invariably on the east. The larger plots have a close located approximately centrally, systematically dividing the plot in two. Thus a one and three quarters plot would be divided into a unit plot and a three quarters plot. With the two plots

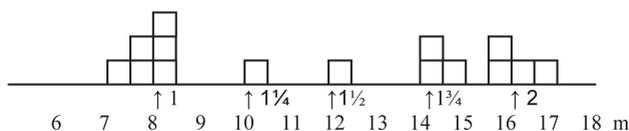
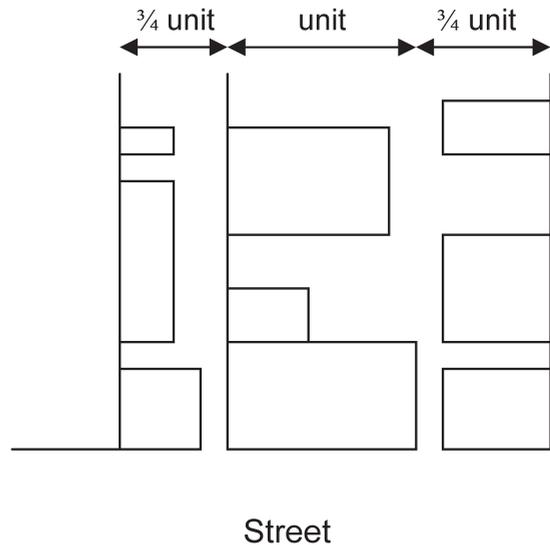


Fig. 1 Histogram of plot widths for Elgin sector 2. There are no three quarter plots in this example which has a unit plot width of 8.1 m.

Fig. 2 Plots with their own and with shared access path. To the left is a single plot, a three quarter unit plot having its own access along the right-hand boundary. To the right is a larger plot of one and three quarter units, divided in two as unit and three quarter plots provided with shared access. The situation assumes backland buildings are present.



sharing a close in this way there is no defined boundary between them, so the complete width of the two is recorded. Schematic layouts illustrating access patterns are shown in fig. 2. The pairs might well have originally constituted a single holding, but if this was so, the subdivision has been performed with care to conform to the quarter plot scheme.

It is the purpose in this study to examine the degree to which the burgages in the three boroughs under consideration exhibit similar patterns to those in Scotland. The results are first set out and analysed for each borough in turn.

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED

Berwick was in Scotland at the time that it received a royal grant of burgh status from David I. The grant was made as soon as he ascended the throne of Scotland in 1124, or perhaps even slightly earlier (Dennison 2005, 253). The history of the burgh has been reviewed several times over the last few decades (Ellison 1976; Hunter 1982; Heawood and Howard-Davis 2004). The burgh expanded rapidly in the early years, probably starting from the area close to the water front and reaching a maximum size in the second half of the thirteenth century, having by then extended well outside the area being examined in the present study (fig. 3). The process is well illustrated by noting the locations and dates of the many properties in Berwick granted by charter to Scottish abbies during the period (Scott 1888, 433).

Two archaeological excavations have taken place near the outer limits of this central area, at Oil Mill Lane which is south of and parallel to Silver Street (Hunter 1982, 78–81) and the other, close to the junction of Walkergate and Coxon's Lane (Hunter 1982, 73–75), see fig. 3. At both these locations stratified material was excavated dating from the thirteenth or early fourteenth century. (To simplify descriptions roads are assumed here to be aligned north-south or east-west).

A more recent investigation has taken place on a site on the north side of Marygate somewhat east of the Walkergate intersection. Of particular note was evidence of post holes

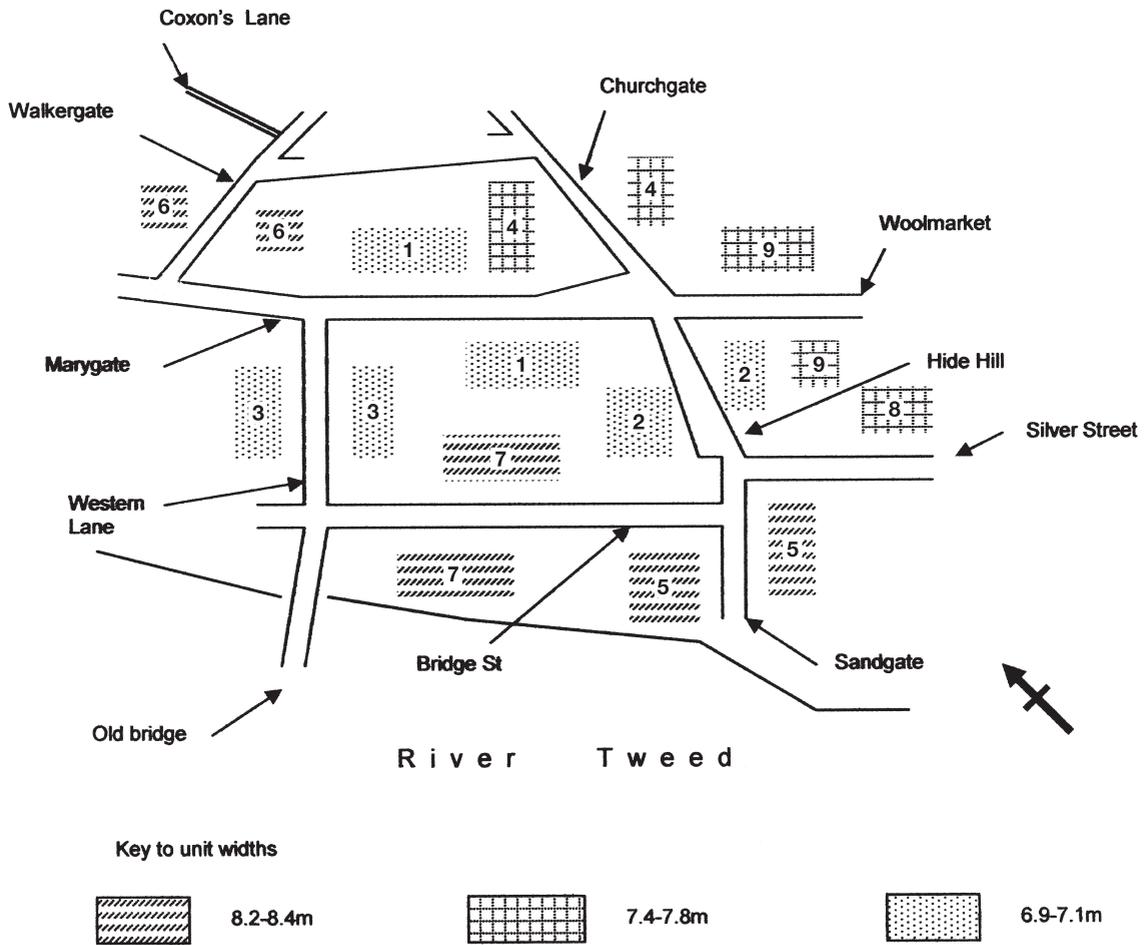


Fig. 3 The central portion of Berwick examined in the present study.

thought to be associated with a timber frame structure dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century (Heawood and Howard-Davis 2004, 155). The OS Town Plan indicates that, proceeding eastwards along Marygate, the northern street line is displaced northwards by about 8 m just to the east of the excavation site. The south corners of the timber frame structure are located close to this line, suggesting that this was a foreland building and that the street line displacement is of early origin. Similar features, apparently designed to increase the available space within the market area, are to be found in Elgin and St Andrews (Tait 2010).

In conducting the cartographic survey, the plot boundaries were in general straightforward to identify. There is an exception in Hide Hill, where in some sections there is a lack of agreement between foreland and backland boundaries with the latter not always well defined. In the circumstances an additional degree of judgement was required in selecting plot boundary positions. A similar situation was encountered in the older, west section of the street in Edinburgh (Tait 2008b, 45–6). This may suggest, as in Edinburgh, that settlement was previously

Table 1 Unit plot widths in Berwick

STREET NUMBER	LOCATION	UNIT WIDTH M
1	Marygate	7.0
2	Hide Hill	7.0
3	Western Lane	7.0
4	Church Gate	7.4
8	Silver Street	7.7
9	Woolmarket	7.7
5	Sandgate	8.2
6	Walkergate	8.2
7	Bridge Street	8.4

established in this part of Berwick and was incorporated into the new arrangements when plot layout was undertaken.

The quarter plot scheme is clearly present in Berwick, and the spread in widths within the quarter plot groups is found to be comparable to that from burghs farther north, suggesting that similar care was taken in setting out and maintaining the boundary positions. The narrower plots are accessed with similar consistency as well, but the access positions to the broader ones are somewhat more variable. The widest plots are two and a half units in width as in Scotland.

The results of the plot width measurements are set out in Table 1. The unit width was found to be the same on the two sides of each street suggesting that layout had taken place street by street rather than street block by street block. The unit widths fall naturally into three groups which in their turn tend to involve neighbouring roads (fig. 3). In Edinburgh where only two unit lengths were used to lay out the whole burgh, these appear to represent successive layout phases (Tait 2008a, 227–8). It is not necessarily so in Berwick, but the waterside streets 5 and 7 might well have been early, followed by streets 1–3, then streets 4, 8 and 9. It is obvious that Walkergate, street 6, does not fit the pattern, although it might possibly be part of a separate layout phase not otherwise included in this study.

ALNWICK

Alnwick was the subject of Conzen's pioneering town plan analysis (Conzen 1960). The study runs to 122 pages and provides a review of the historical development of the settlement from Anglian to modern times. In the analysis, Conzen made use of valuable information provided by early charters and by a nineteenth-century study of Alnwick (Tate 1866).

The castle at Alnwick was built in about 1100 and is considered to have pre-dated the formal foundation of the borough (Conzen 1960, 21). A settlement occupied by those servicing the castle may well have developed close to the castle entrance, but Conzen suggested that the Anglian settlement, pre-dating both borough and castle, is likely to have been located around the triangular area now bounded by Clayport Street, Finkle Street and Bondgate. The earliest borough charter that survives is the grant by the first William de Vesci, Lord of the

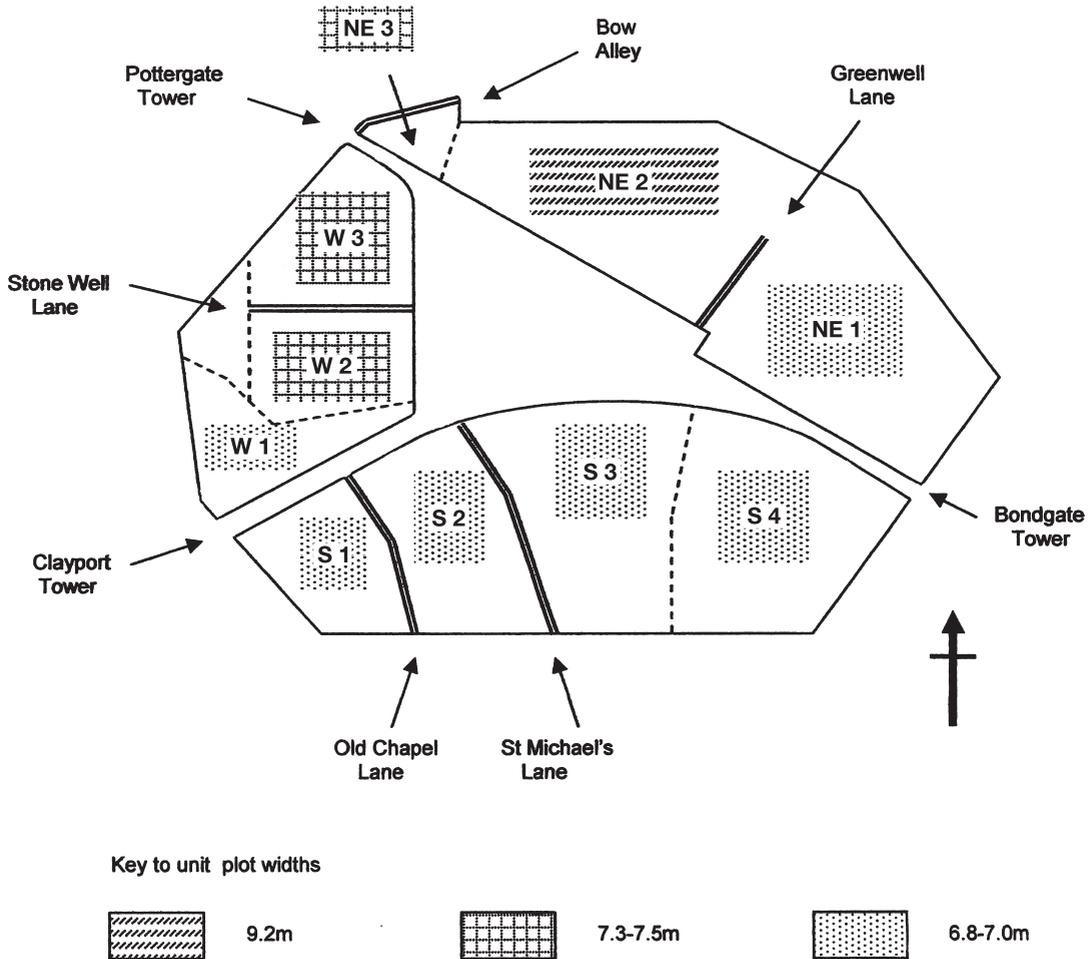


Fig. 4 The area around the triangular market place in Alnwick.

Barony of Alnwick, dated between 1157 and 1185 (Tate 1866, 96-7). The first burgages are thought to have been set out around the periphery of the triangular area, facing into what became the market place (Conzen 1960, 17-18, 23). It is this part of Alnwick which has been the main subject of the present study (fig. 4).

The study concentrates on clearly recognisable boundary lines. These reveal that a quarter plot scheme is present, but the overall consistency of the pattern is reduced relative to Berwick. The proportion of the narrower plots accessed in a systematic way is lower. Plots providing shared access frequently conform to the scheme of fig. 2, but a significant number have more complex internal layout patterns. These frequently contain quarter subdivisions, particularly between the foreland buildings, suggesting perhaps a more informal sharing of the backland. Widths extend up to three and a quarter or three and a half units, compared with two and a half in Berwick and Scotland, see fig. 5 for example. The wide plots are mainly concentrated in street blocks South 4 and North East 1.

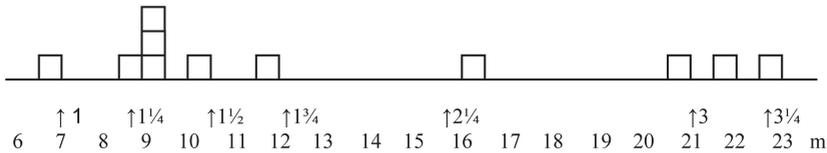


Fig. 5 Histogram of plot widths for Alnwick street block NE 1. The unit plot width is 7.0 m and plots up to three and a quarter units width are present.

The unit plot widths are displayed in Table 2. Three clearly separate bands of unit width are seen, and where a street has plots on both sides, the unit widths appear in the same group. As at Berwick there is a possibility that the groups represent different layout phases. Conzen suggested that the West 1 plots were accommodated by occupying plots already in position in West 2. The differing unit plot width between West 1 and West 2 might support this, with the initial layout phase perhaps taking place in West 2 and West 3 (fig. 4).

On the other hand, Conzen also suggested that the plots in Bailiffgate, a broad short street outside the west-facing Castle entrance, might pre-date the main layout (Conzen 1960, 22, 29). This seems unlikely as the plots there have unit widths of 6.8 m on the north side and 6.7 m on the south side of the street, very close to the unit widths of the south part of the central triangle. Bailiffgate is not shown in fig. 4 nor are the unit widths included in Table 2.

COCKERMOUTH

The study of Cockermouth is greatly aided by the availability of a thorough history of the borough (Winchester 1986), combined with the results of an archaeological investigation of a central location (Leech and Gregory, forthcoming).

The first documentary reference to the borough of Cockermouth is a borough charter of about 1210. The wording of the document implies that foundation was at an earlier date, probably in the mid to late twelfth century (Hall 1977, 76). Winchester points out that Main Street, with a bowed frontage line, gives the appearance of deliberate planning, see fig. 6. By

Table 2 Unit plot widths in Alnwick

STREET BLOCK	UNIT WIDTH M
South 3	6.8
South 1	6.8
South 2	6.8
South 4	6.9
West 1	6.9
North East 1	7.0
West 3	7.3
West 2	7.3
North East 3	7.5
North East 2	9.2

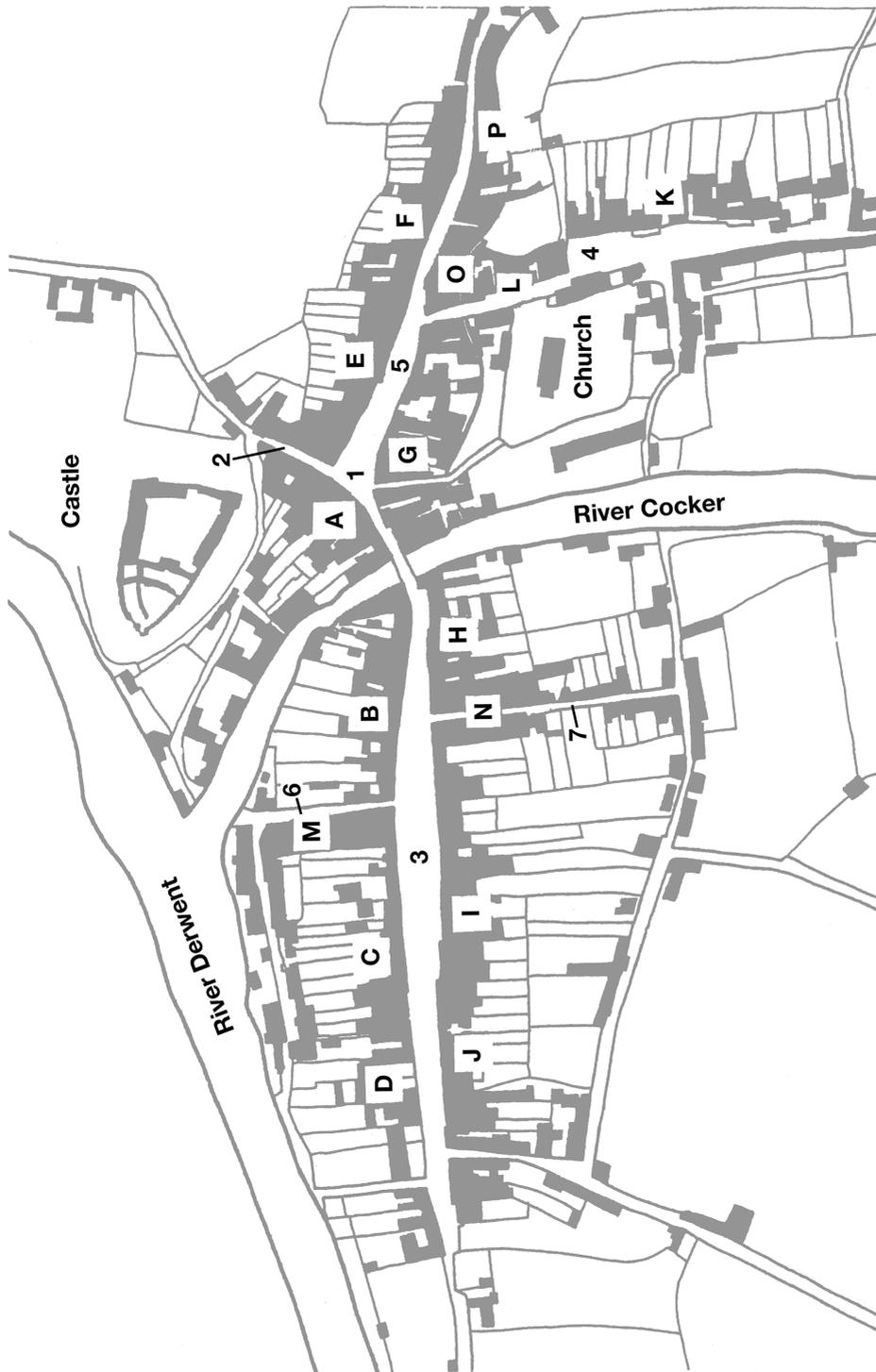


Fig. 6 Cockermouth in 1832. The main streets are 1, Market Street, 2, Castlegate, 3, Main Street, 4, Kirkgate, 5, St Helens Street, 6, High Sand Street and 7, Challoner Street. (Based on John Wood's plan of 1832).

contrast, the area to the south of the castle, including Market Street, Castlegate and Kirkgate has an informal appearance, and may well have been the location of the settlement prior to foundation. (Winchester 1986, 110–11). It is notable that Wood's plan of 1832, upon which fig. 6 is based, indicates that the town by that date had scarcely spread beyond the area covered by the medieval burgages. The present study includes the majority of the plots shown in Wood's plan.

The results of the archaeological investigation of a foreland and backland site in Cocker-mouth are shortly to be published (Leech and Gregory forthcoming). The site extends across three plots on the south side of Main Street, close to its junction with Sullart Street. The central plot has a width of two and a quarter units, the other two, of two units.

Attention is focussed here on Phase 1 of the area excavated, dated to the late twelfth, the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. The west plot proved relatively unproductive due to later activities, but on the central plot, evidence was found of a timber-framed foreland building occupying approximately 6 m of frontage to the east side of the plot. On the backland, six post-holes delineating a section of the east boundary of the site were encountered. Other backland features included a well, refuse pits, several boundary ditches, and to the south, an area containing what was thought to be garden soil. On the east plot there were indications of a foreland building which was both modified and rebuilt during Phase 1. Again this was located at the east of the plot frontage.

The sides of the Phase 1 buildings, as indicated by excavated post holes, were found to have been laid out parallel to the plot boundaries within a few degrees, while on the central plot the excavated boundary fence is located within a few tenths of a metre of the plot boundary of the OS Town Plan. The frontage of the building on the central plot was close to the OS building line, but on the east plot the position at the frontage could not be clearly

Table 3 Unit plot widths in Cocker-mouth

STREET OR STREET BLOCK	UNIT WIDTH M
M	5.1
A	5.3
L	5.3
G	5.4
H	5.4
J	5.5
I	5.5
K	5.5
C	5.6
B	5.7
O	5.7
D	5.8
E	5.8
F	5.8
N	6.1
P	6.3

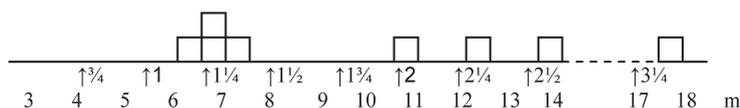


Fig. 7 Histogram of plot widths for Cockermonth street block A. The unit width is 5.3 m although there are no three quarter or unit plots present.

discerned. Considerable care appears to have been taken in setting out the buildings and in maintaining the integrity of the plot boundary. There was no indication in Phase 1 or later of formal subdivision of any of the plots, nor of a boundary shift on the east side of the central plot to provide an increase from a unit width to its present width of one and a quarter units.

A brief report concerning the same site describes the later investigation of a well shaft found to contain much organic and other material, dated to the end of the twelfth century but filled in by 1400 (Youngs and Clark 1982, 176).

The clarity of plot boundaries and the degree of consistency of patterns in Cockermonth were similar to those in Alnwick, although boundaries in street blocks A and G, facing Market Street, exhibited inconsistencies and interruptions as encountered in Hide Hill in Berwick, and the Lawnmarket in Edinburgh, again perhaps an indication of previous settlement. The results are summarised in Table 3, with locations indicated in fig. 6. The quarter plot scheme is again present, with extended plot width range as at Alnwick. Street block A (fig. 7) provides a good example. About half of the larger plots have been systematically subdivided, although those subject to the excavation by Leech and Gregory are good examples of where this did not happen.

The unit widths for Cockermonth have a relatively uniform spread rather than falling into obvious groups. Such a spread was also encountered for example in St Andrews and Perth (Tait 2008, 235–6). The employment of a standard measurement unit such as the ell appears in these circumstances to be unlikely.

BURGAGE RENTALS

Winchester discussed the contents of several thirteenth-century extents of the borough and manorial accounts of Cockermonth (Winchester 1986, 111–2). These provide valuable information about the nature of the borough at that time. One, dated 1270, was found helpful in providing a fuller understanding of Cockermonth burgage patterns. It concerns the borough ground rents, and specifies the burgage rentals as being 'for each complete toft four pence'. It then lists the returns from each of the 161 burgesses, which at four pence per 'complete toft' corresponds to a total of 176.25 complete tofts (Hall 1977, 76–80).

Table 4 summarises the returns. It is notable that one burgess had by 1270 amassed 12¼ burgages, but most had smaller property holdings. Indeed ownership of only a quarter or half a burgage is seen to have been very frequent. These small fractions cannot be conventional land plots as a quarter plot would be less than a metre and a half wide. They might perhaps be from parts of the full sized plots, or alternatively, for properties in streets L to O in fig. 6 and Table 3, foreland locations having little or no associated backland and therefore attracting reduced rents. The latter seems the more likely explanation, and removing their rental contribution to the 1270 list leaves 145.25 complete tofts.

Table 4 Widths of the Cockermouth plots showing Burgesses' holdings in 1270, totalling 145.25 burgages, and the number having each width from this study, totalling 152.00 units (see text)

PLOT WIDTHS IN BURGAGES OR UNITS	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{3}{4}$	1	$1\frac{1}{4}$	$1\frac{1}{2}$	$1\frac{3}{4}$	2	$2\frac{1}{4}$	$2\frac{1}{2}$	$2\frac{3}{4}$	3	$3\frac{1}{4}$	$3\frac{1}{2}$	$3\frac{3}{4}$	4
BURGESSES' HOLDINGS OF BURGAGES IN 1270	44	40	17	18	6	9	2	8	1	4	2	1	2	0	1	3
NUMBER OF UNITS IN SECTORS A TO K, BUT EXCLUDING D, E AND F			1	8	7	5	11	17	9	9	3	2	3	2	0	0

In addition — one burgess held $5\frac{1}{2}$, two held $6\frac{1}{4}$ and one held $12\frac{1}{4}$ burgages. Total 176.25 burgages
No of burgesses = 161

The burgages measured in the present study in street blocks A to K (fig. 6), add up to 202.5 units, but some of these may not yet have been set out in 1270 or might have been unoccupied. Removal of D, E and F, for example, reduces the total to 152.0 units, close to the number of complete tofts. Their widths are shown together with the burgesses' holdings in Table 4. The quarter pattern is obviously present in both cases and in all probability, in Cockermouth, the 'complete plot', with an annual rental of 4d is, in fact, of unit width.

At Alnwick, Conzen studied sixteenth-century plot rentals as listed in Clarkson's survey (Clarkson 1567). Conzen was mainly interested in tracing the market colonisation of the central triangle but he notes that the ancient burgages were generating rents in the range 7d to 12d, mostly 8d or 9d. Rents of 21 of the 54 holdings in the central triangle were also in that range despite being for properties having little associated land, but the remainder were paying less, 2d and 4d, or in a few cases, no rent (Conzen 1960, 34–37). The scheme appears to be somewhat similar to that of Cockermouth, still in use three centuries later.

Burgage rental charges were 4d for a complete toft in Cockermouth and possibly in Alnwick. In Cockermouth, a complete toft of unit width results conveniently in a rent of 1d per quarter plot. Rents have a range of values elsewhere in the north of England however, including 6d in Kendal and 3d in Ulverston (Munby 1985, 99). A summary of plot rentals in a number of English boroughs is provided by Hemmeon (1914, 65–70). In Scotland rents were frequently 5d or 6d (Ewan 1990, 93). It might perhaps be that in burghs having 3d, 5d and 6d rents, burgages were assessed relative to a 'complete toft' of three quarters, one and a quarter and one and a half unit widths respectively, rather than a unit width, thus maintaining a simple 1d rent per quarter of a plot. Further research of this topic could prove illuminating.

PLOT AMALGAMATION AND SUBDIVISION

The question arises as to whether or not the quarter plots that are so consistently encountered in the north of England and in Scotland were originally set out to these variable widths. If in fact they started as sets of plots of uniform width, transfer of land between plot owners must

Table 5 Plot width sequences at three locations

CANONGATE NORTH	2	1	$\frac{3}{4}$	1	1	$\frac{3}{4}$	$\frac{3}{4}$	1	1
ST ANDREWS 8	2	1	1	$1\frac{1}{4}$	1	1	$1\frac{1}{4}$	1	1
COCKERMOUTH H		1	$1\frac{3}{4}$	1	2	$1\frac{1}{4}$	1	$1\frac{1}{4}$	

have followed. A quarter plot transfer between neighbours would lead to their mutual boundary being displaced by a quarter of a unit and almost any observed sequence of plot widths could be reproduced in this way, given a sufficient number of such transfers.

Archaeology has the potential to supply evidence of such transfers. A recent comprehensive and detailed survey of the archaeology of burgages in Scotland reviewed plot widths, boundary markers and access paths in a number of burghs. One case was mentioned of plots in Perth being moved approximately 1 m sideways shortly after their establishment, but this was thought to be in order to make room for a vennel. Another concerned twelfth-century plots which were replaced by plots of more regular size in the fourteenth century. No evidence was reported of other boundary displacements in this survey however (Coleman 2004, 284–292, 297).

By contrast, actual plot sequences can be found in which transfer appears most unlikely, due to the nature of the patterns. Examples are to be found in Canongate North and St Andrews 8 (Tait 2008a) and in Cockermouth H (this paper) respectively, Table 5.

The most likely scenario appears to be that the plots were set out to the observed patterns. Such an arrangement would allow potential skilled and experienced incomers to be attracted and rewarded by allocation of a large plot. Allocating more than one plot in such circumstances would serve a similar purpose, though with coarser gradation of plot holdings.

Subsequent plot modification may have taken place however in one respect, which is in the subdivision of large plots. In Scotland and Berwick, the broad plots of one and a half units width or more would normally be systematically subdivided. In Alnwick and Cockermouth this also happened, though with less consistency. At Cockermouth, the number of narrow plots of one and a quarter units width or less in the bottom row of Table 4 is 16, far too few to provide for the Burgess' holdings of 41 (excluding quarter and half plots) listed in the row above. On the other hand, 29 of the 61 broad plots were found in the Town Plan to be systematically subdivided, more than enough to fill this deficit. This indicates that much subdivision had taken place in Cockermouth by 1270, as already suggested (Winchester 1986, 111–2). The internal consistency contained in this interpretation of Table 4 provides strong support for the scheme of layout and subdivision proposed and for the majority at least of the clearly identifiable plot boundaries being those set in place at layout.

CONCLUSIONS

The burgage patterns in Scotland and the North of England are seen on present evidence to have much in common, with plot widths based on a unit width and quarter variations. The unit widths too are variable and spread fairly evenly over a broad range and providing no indication that the perch or other formal measure had been employed during plot layout. The

positioning of plot access paths or closes also follows similar patterns north and south of the Border, though with less consistency in Alnwick and Cockermouth.

It is suggested that plots of variable width, both north and south of the Border, may well have been an integral part of the original layout, in Scotland and Berwick the larger plots being later divided to produce pairs of plots, themselves conforming to the quarter width scheme and having shared access. In Alnwick and Cockermouth subdivision was more varied, but again quarter subdivisions are encountered, particularly between foreland buildings. Cockermouth provides clear evidence that significant subdivision had taken place there at an early stage of borough development.

The 4d plot rental in Cockermouth is based on a plot of unit width, thus resulting in a rent of 1d per quarter plot. This simple rate would have been maintained in other Boroughs that have 3d, 5d and 6d rents, if these were based respectively on three quarter, one and a quarter and one and a half width plots. Further research along the lines taken in Cockermouth might elucidate this possibility.

Much published evidence concerning burgage patterns in the Midlands and the southern English boroughs has been available for several decades (Slater 1981; Slater 1990). Clear differences are apparent. It is demonstrated that plots were laid out to widths based on the perch (Bond 1990, 94–102). Reconstruction techniques suggest that it was plot subdivision and amalgamation of initially uniform width plots that resulted in the observed plot patterns (Slater 1990, 71–3).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Roger Leech and Richard Gregory for providing access to their draft paper on Cockermouth and for helpful discussions. The OS Town Plans were made available in digitised form by the National Library of Scotland (NLS), Berwick 1:528, 1852, Alnwick 1:528, 1864 and Cockermouth 1:500, 1864.

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