1 INTRODUCTION J C MURRAY

The development of a permanent archaeological presence in Aberdeen must be regarded as the fine achievement of a group of interested local people, in particular Dr G G Simpson and Mr J Colvin Greig. Prior to 1976 the major excavations of St Nicholas church (Hunter 1974), Queen Street Midden Area (J C Greig), Queen Street frontage (C Brooks), Broad Street (J Dent) and Shore Brae (C Brooks), and other minor trial excavations were carried out under the direction of local part-time archaeologists and some archaeologists brought in from outside, helped by enthusiastic local volunteers. The results illustrated the richness of archaeological deposits in the city and emphasized the fact that, in the face of increasing development, full time monitoring and observation of sites were needed, as weil as excavation.

Consequently, due to the efforts of those already involved in Aberdeen, two full-time achaeologists, Charles Murray and Judith Stones, were appointed in 1976 by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for a term of three years, financed by the Scottish Development Department (Ancient Monuments) and housed by the City of Aberdeen District Council.

Between December 1976 and June 1977 four small excavations and one site observation were carried out assisted by local volunteers. During this period the Archaeological Unit was planning ahead for a major excavation at 42 St Paul Street. Through utilization of a Manpower Services Commission Job Creation Programme, the workforce was expanded to excavate this large site for six months. The vast amount of material excavated showed the need for the continued employment of additional personnel to cover post-excavation and future excavation work.

In 1979, the City of Aberdeen District Council took the decision that, when the contracts of the two original archaeologists terminated, the City would continue their employment, within the Art Gallery and Museums Department, the money for excavation and post-excavation work still coming from the Scottish Development Department (Ancient Monuments). Finally, in 1981, the City of Aberdeen District Council also undertook to become the employers of the other four members of the Unit: Jan Dunbar, Hilary Murray, Stewart Thain and Richard White.

So, these last eight years have seen the development of a full-time Archaeological Unit employed by the Aberdeen City District in the Art Gallery and Museums Department, a situation that is unique in Scotland and which is a compliment not only to the original interested bodies but also to the City Council who have so fully realised the importance of the archaeological heritage of the burgh.

In this volume, all the excavations from 1973-1978 are published in full and all the major sites excavated from 1978-81 in summary form (Ill 1). Short accounts of all site observations up to December 1981 are also included. Each excavation has been written up individually by its director, with the post-excavation work co-ordinated by the Archaeological Unit.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND H BOOTON

The surviving documentary evidence concerning 12th and 13th- century Aberdeen presents only a basic outline of the town's status and activities. Its development appears to be typical of that taking place elsewhere in 12th-century Scotland, where a growing import trade was financed by an increasing

surplus from home production, the result of a more efficient agrarian economy. Aberdeen's position as a port on the edge of a hinterland rich in tradeable commodities such as wool and skins, as well as the food and raw materials required to supply a growing domestic market, allowed exploitation of both overseas trade and thriving local commerce. This local commerce had its focus in a weekly market given royal assent in 1222 by Alexander II (Anderson, 1890, 5, charter 3).

The strength of the town's foreign trading position was aided by its confirmation as a royal burgh. Although no document survives to provide details, royal burgh status appears to have been first conferred in David I's reign (1124-53) as the earliest surviving charter dating from 1179 and granted by David's grandson William I (1165-1214) confirms the burgh in the privileges enjoyed in his grandfather's reign. The right to engage in the lucrative overseas trade was reserved for the royal burghs alone, a right confirmed in a charter of David II in 1364. Royal burgh status also gave Aberdeen a certain amount of autonomy; the town authorities exercised complete control over all matters relating to commercial transactions and ran their own court with the use of burgh laws formulated to cover the specific needs of the community. A burgh seal appeared c 1250, indicating Aberdeen's status as to some degree a self-governing community; this seal was affixed to the 1296 treaty between Scotland and France, an indication of the burgh's political importance.

Scotland had been part of the European expansion in trade from the 11th century onwards; the growth of Aberdeen's part of the market in the 12th and 13th centuries was largely based on wool exports to the Flemish cloth industry. A record survives from 1273 of a ship load of the exports of three Aberdeen merchants which consisted principally of wool, ox-hides and salmon (Bain 1883, ii, 2, no 9). Trading was concentrated on Bruges and later Middelburg with the imports being mainly of luxury and manufactured goods such as wines, books, drugs and spices, clothing, gold and silverwork and weapons. Also an important aspect was the trade with the Baltic, in particular Danzig, for such commodities as timber, lint, wax, grain and iron. This Hanse factor was jealously guarded by the burgh; in 1487 a commission of Aberdeen magistrates deplored the fact that ships from Danzig then sailed to Dundee and Leith 'the more remote parts of Scotland' (Stewart 1844, i, 415).

Trading prosperity meant the rise of a wealthy and powerful merchant class. Alexander II (1214-49) granted Aberdeen a charter in 1222 which confirmed the existence of a merchant guild (Anderson 1890, 5, charter 3) whose powers under the charter included the monopoly of the making of cloth within the burgh. Such monopolies helped build up the wealth and consequently the power of the merchant group to the point that they dominated the burgh council and the lesser groups such as the craftsmen; the latter were positively discriminated against in James I's reign being deprived of any powers to fix their own prices or even to hold 'their accustomed meetings'.

A further influential factor in medieval Aberdeen was the religious life of the town. A burgh church existed by 1157 when the first mention of the Kirk of St Nicholas was made in a papal bull. Medieval piety ensured its upkeep with rebuilding taking place from 1385 to 1426 and the continual granting of gifts including some 31 chantries between 1277 and 1524 (Kennedy 1818, ii, 13). Trinitarian, Carmelite and Dominican friaries were all established by the late 13th century; the Franciscan friars came to Aberdeen in the 1460s and gained property in the Gallowgate from a burgess named Richard Vaus (Kennedy 1818, ii, 76). The ecclesiastical foundation of St Machar's in the 12th century together with the subsequent establishment of King's College formed the nucleus for the centre of learning at Old Aberdeen, a separate community 1½ miles distant which was not part of the burgh of Aberdeen and was outwith its burgh laws.

Some assessment of the population of medieval Aberdeen can be made from two tax rolls dating from 1408 and 1451 (Anderson 1890, 312, writ 10). The former contains 350 names; if all held burgage tenements this would suggest a population in the early 15th century of over 2,000, a large number for a Scottish town at this date possibly implying a comparatively sizeable population in the 13th and 14th centuries.

The picture of medieval Aberdeen that emerges from the documentary evidence is one therefore of a prosperous and sizeable burgh, supported in its development by royal approval and maintained in its growth by the supply of commercial products from its environs. The evidence derived from the archaeological excavations detailed below adds a further dimension to this view of the burgh, revealing new aspects of the domestic life of the inhabitants, the layout of their town, the objects they made and traded and even the food they ate.