A MEDIEVAL UNDERCROFT, TENEMENTS AND ASSOCIATED BUILDINGS AT 9 ST NICHOLAS PLACE AND RELATED SITES, LEICESTER

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Examination of the results of recent archaeological excavations at 9 St Nicholas Place in Leicester, along with data from unpublished sites in the same locality, has yielded important information regarding the origins and development of burghal properties from the early medieval period onwards. It appears likely that these land divisions, with their probable late Anglo-Saxon origins, were initially laid out in an arrangement of substantial, regularly-sized plots prior to early sub-division during the medieval period, stemming from increasing pressure on urban space and driven by speculative commercial exploitation of street frontages along the principal commercial streets.

The crowded nature of these plots is evident from the cramped character of the buildings found, with repeated rebuilds of structures, despite frequent evidence of subsidence into earlier features. This underlines the economic attractiveness of a site in close proximity to the urban core. The influence – albeit indirect – of earlier buildings on the pattern of medieval land division is clear, with certain walls of the Roman Forum influencing the position and arrangement of the burgage plots, and hence the subsequent setting out of lines of parish boundaries.

The presence of a substantial masonry undercroft structure on a street frontage and a possible second example close by serves to underline the commercial and social pre-eminence of this central area of medieval Leicester.

INTRODUCTION

The 9 St Nicholas Place excavation of 2003 (Site 1), directed by the author, was undertaken in advance of the construction of the BBC Radio Leicester building. It was located at the intersection of the medieval High Street (now Highcross Street, St Nicholas Place and Applegate) and Holyrood Lane (now Guildhall Lane) at the core of the historic town. During the Roman period, the site lay at the junction of the principal east–west route through *Ratae Corieltavorum* (the line of the Fosse Way), and a second, lesser north–south road. This urban block – *insula XXII* – lay directly opposite the south-east corner of the Forum and basilica – the largest Roman municipal building in Leicester. The sizeable excavation area of *c.* 416m² allowed detailed investigation of a probable high-status twelfth-century undercroft on the Guildhall Lane frontage, together with several burgage plots containing a complex sequence of structures and extensive backyard activity including evidence

for industrial features. The undercroft had been the subject of a detailed archaeological survey in 1990 by Leicester Archaeological Unit, under the direction of Richard Buckley and Jules Hagar, so the 2003 excavation presented an opportunity to reassess the building and to investigate its archaeological context.

The Roman levels were not excavated as they lay beneath the proposed formation levels for the new building. Post-excavation analysis has been completed for this project and a report prepared on the results (Kipling 2010).

Excavations undertaken by Jean Mellor and Terry Pearce a short distance to the west of Site 1 in 1971 (Leicester City Museums Accession No. A302.1971, available at the Leicester City Council Historic Environment Record); Site 2, targeted medieval tenements fronting the medieval High Street and Thornton Lane. Intermittent pitting activity dating from the tenth century onwards cut the accumulated post-Roman garden soils overlying the Forum, whilst the thirteenth century saw the establishment of stone-founded buildings, boundary walls, and possible industrial features. At the time of writing (2010) the draft stratigraphic and specialist reports for this project exist in archive, although none is fully complete (Buckley 2000). An evaluative excavation along the eastern edge of Site 2 in 2000 (Site 3; Meek 2000) provided supplementary information with further walls relating to the rears of properties, including a possible cellar or undercroft, formerly fronting Highcross Street, in addition to a medieval parish boundary wall previously observed in the 1971 excavations.

This article draws on the unpublished results of the excavations at Sites 1–3 in order to examine building and burgage plot development during the medieval and post-medieval periods. Accordingly, this article incorporates the work of previous excavators, namely Jean Mellor and Terry Pearce (Site 2), Julian Hagar (Site 2 and 1990 investigations on Site 1) and James Meek (Site 3), and aims to place the complex medieval developmental sequence within its wider local and regional contexts.

For reasons of clarity, street names used in the following text will be limited to those current on all Ordnance Survey editions up to and including the 1:2,500 map of 1955, before the construction of the inner relief road, namely:

- Highcross Street (medieval High Street; modern St Nicholas Place)
- Guildhall Lane (medieval Holyrood Lane)
- High Street (medieval Swinesmarket)

Archaeological background

THE ROMAN PERIOD

Iron Age occupation in Leicester consisted of a late first century BC proto-urban settlement of *c.* 8ha, centred on the east bank of the River Soar. Subsequently a small fortlet was built following the Roman Conquest in order to control the river crossing point close to the present West Bridge (Clay and Pollard 1994, 46). Later, first-century timber buildings probably represent expansion of the Roman town

Fig. 1. Sites 1–3 overlaid over road plan, with street names as they were 1887–1955.

east from the river, whilst ditches from the Little Lane excavation suggest the presence of outlying field systems (Clay and Mellor 1985; Clay and Pollard 1994). Following its probable acquisition of *civitas* capital status in the early second century, the town appears to have undergone rapid expansion, involving construction of a range of public structures including the Forum and basilica complex, the Jewry Wall public baths, and a range of commercial, industrial and domestic premises (Clay and Mellor 1985; Clay and Pollard 1994).

The town acquired a defensive rampart and ditch by the late second or early third century, supplemented by a wall possibly later in the century (Buckley and Lucas 1987). To the west, across the Soar, excavations at Great Holme Street suggest the existence of an industrial suburb, with evidence of pottery kilns and an abattoir (Lucas forthcoming), and a series of cemeteries ringing the town. Consequently, by the height of the Roman period, the town appears to have comprised a series of monumental structures, including a Forum, basilica, public baths, temples and sizeable private residences set within a walled defensive circuit. A number of these structures are likely to have exerted an influence upon the post-Roman development of Leicester.

THE ANGLO-SAXON AND MEDIEVAL PERIODS
Although the sub-Roman and earlier Anglo-Saxon sequence in Leicester remains poorly understood, recent archaeological interventions undertaken in 2005–06
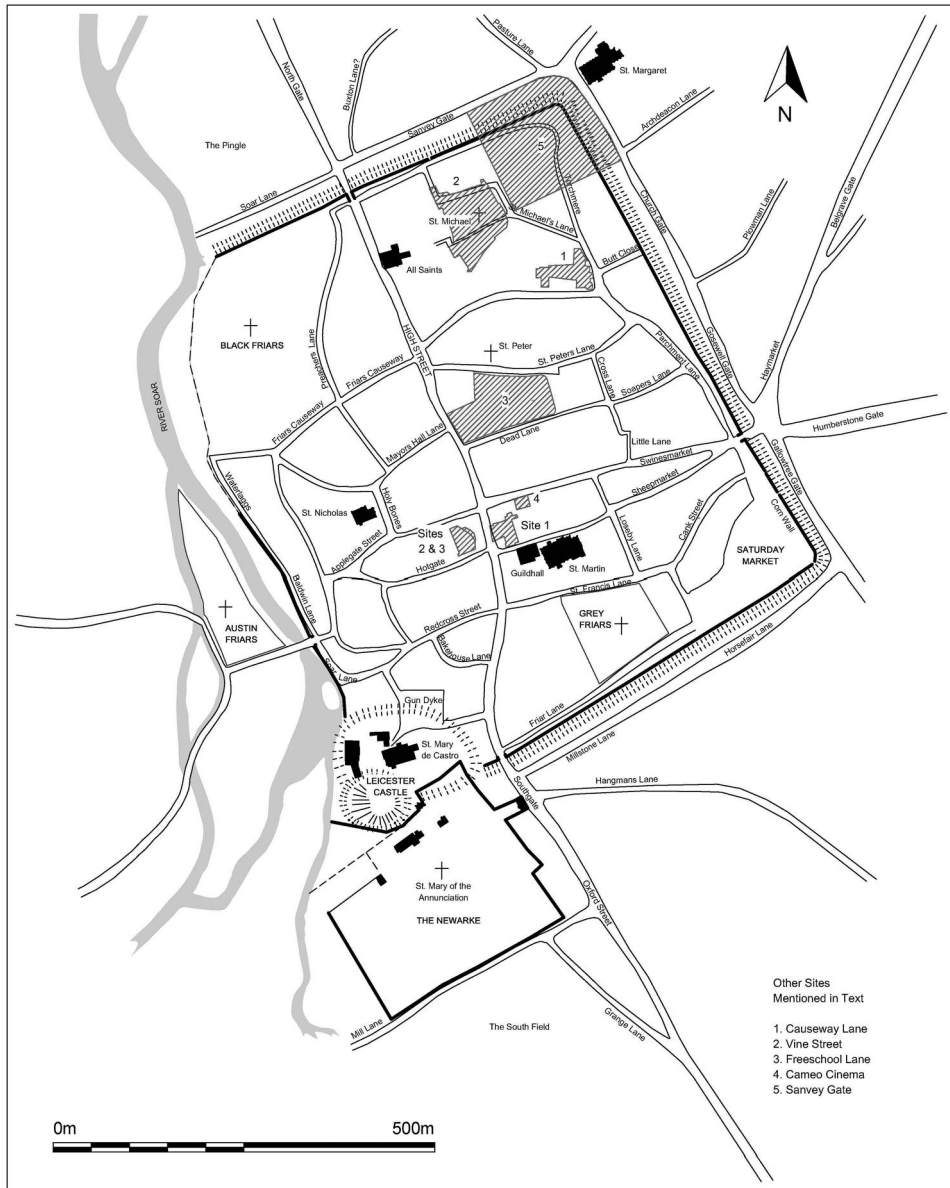
Fig. 2. Medieval Leicester showing location of sites under discussion.

under the aegis of the Highcross Leicester project have produced tangible evidence for a focus of settlement n the northern intramural area. Notably excavations at Freeschool Lane revealed a sunken-featured Anglo-Saxon structure set into the fabric of the fallen gable wall of the Roman *macellum* (Finn 2004, 19). Earlier excavations in this area had produced quantities of pottery and other finds, but

little firm structural evidence (Coward 2007, 184). Two further Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured buildings were identified south of the Roman and medieval defences in the 1990s at Oxford Street and Bonners Lane (Finn 2004).

Leicester became a Mercian bishopric soon after AD 670, but there is only slight archaeological evidence for later Anglo-Saxon occupation, with only the church of St Nicholas, sited alongside the old Roman urban core, containing fabric of this period.

By AD 877, Leicester had become one of the five Boroughs of the Danelaw, but, despite its strategic military importance, it is unclear as to whether it had an urban character by the tenth century (Courtney, 2008). Patterns of finds deposition suggest that the principal Saxo-Norman thoroughfare was the north–south axial road (subsequently the medieval High Street, Highcross Street and Southgate Street). This road, which constituted the shortest route between the north and south gates, appeared to respect the Roman Forum (Buckley and Lucas 1987, 56). As the widest thoroughfare in the town, it may initially also have served as the primary market place as well as offering a possible focal point for pre-Conquest occupation. Sites 1–3 lay on this main north–south route.

The other principal medieval focus consisted of the earth and timber motte and bailey castle that from *c.* 1068 occupied the south-west corner of the Roman defences that by the early twelfth century had acquired a church – St Mary de Castro. The castle and several other Leicester churches were re-built in stone during this period, and after 1139 work began on the construction of the Abbey of St Mary de Pratis beyond the north suburb. Archaeological indications of domestic occupation from this period remain scarce, but with the notable exceptions of the St Nicholas Place stone undercroft (see below), and the intensive twelfth-century backyard activity at Causeway Lane and Sanvey Gate (Finn 1993), suggesting population expansion. Archaeological excavation has also identified wide-scale robbing of Roman buildings during this period, linked most probably to a marked increase in construction of significant ecclesiastical and secular structures.

By the fourteenth century, the medieval town consisted of an intramural core defined by the old Roman wall circuit and dominated by the castle, the Dominican and Franciscan friaries, the Saturday market and a number of churches, with suburbs beyond the gates. In 1997 the southern precinct wall of the Blackfriars' foundation was traced at Bath Lane running at right angles to the River Soar (Kipling 2008), and the Austin Friars, established outside the west gate in the mid-thirteenth century, was excavated in 1973–78 (Mellor and Pearce 1981, 1). The street pattern, effectively complete by this time, survived relatively intact until modern times, whilst domestic property boundaries and street frontages seem to have been rapidly subdivided and infilled subsequent to their likely initial establishment during the late Anglo-Saxon or Saxo-Norman period. Notable sites include Freeschool Lane/Highcross Street (Coward 2007) and St Nicholas Place (Kipling 2010).
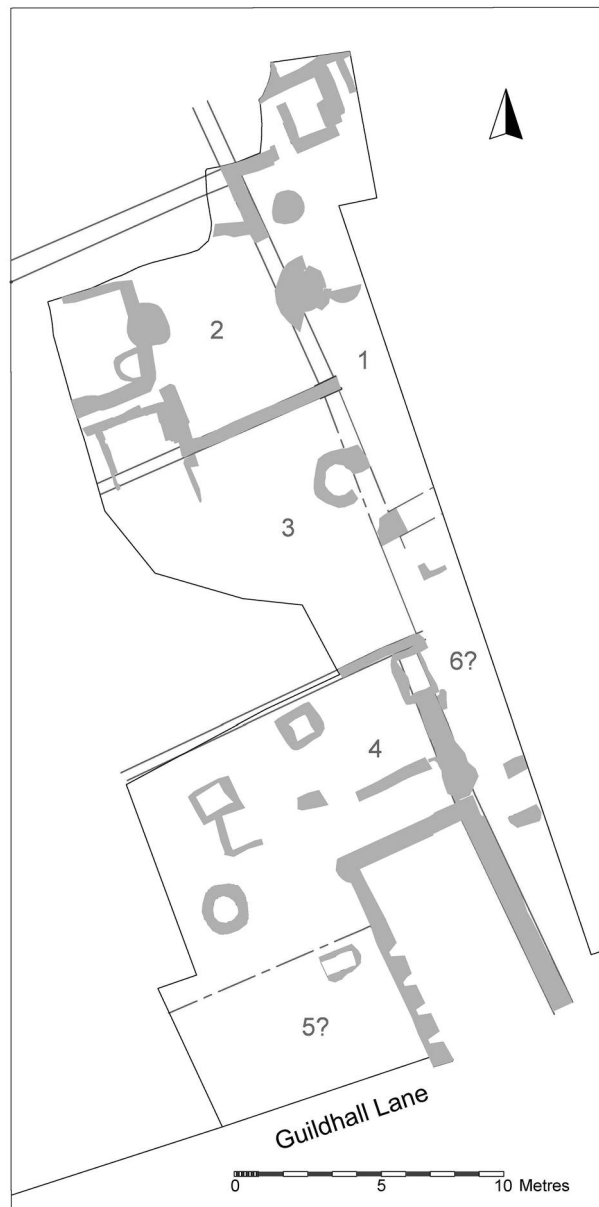
Fig. 3. Site 1: postulated plot divisions.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Site 1

Following demolition of nineteenth-century buildings, investigations at 9 St Nicholas Place were undertaken on the Guildhall Lane frontage and the associated backyard area, where archaeological deposits had been largely undisturbed by deep modern cellars. The excavation revealed up to five plots, most defined by stone boundary walls (which had been subject to multiple rebuilds) relating to the High Street (medieval Swinesmarket) and Highcross Street (medieval High Street) (Fig. 3). Some of these approximate to boundaries shown on the 1887 1:500 First Edition Ordnance Survey map. The southern part of the site was occupied by a high-status twelfth-century stone undercroft first recorded in the nineteenth century (see below). A land-use diagram (Fig. 4) summarises the site developmental sequence, detailed as follows.

Plot 1

The most northerly plot, Plot 1, appears to represent the rear of 100 High Street (starting at a point about 18m to the south of the 1887 street frontage) and contains a late twelfth- to late fourteenth-century structure, Building 1 probably relating to this property (Figure 5). The clay-bonded granite south wall housed a partially-surviving window and door opening, the latter defined by dressed Dane

| PERIOD	PLOT 1	PLOT 2	PLOT 3	PLOT 4	PLOT 5	PLOT 6
1750–1900		warehouse constucted		demolition of building over undercroft (1861)		
1550–1775	Building 1 demolished	Building 2 robbed	wells [934] & [1002]	timber-framed building constructed over undercroft		
1450–1550	Building 1 rebuilt/ extended (1400–1550)			stone-lined pits [667, 677, 877 & 1284] (1450–1550)	pit/soakaway [695]	yard (related to Building 1?) & well [503/818]
1300–1500	Building 1 constucted (1275/1300)	Building 2 demolition Building 3 constructed (1275/1300)		undercroft door threshold blocking/raising ?stock pens within undercroft		kilns/ovens [922, 924, 927]
1200–1300		Building 2 & yard constructed (1275/1300)		undercroft alterations (west wall rebuild - west doorway robbing - plinth feature - internal pitting		tank bases [793, 1487]
1100–1200			wells [932] (1075–1299)	undercroft constructed (1150–1250)		
400–700				dark earths		

Fig. 4. Site 1: land-use diagram.
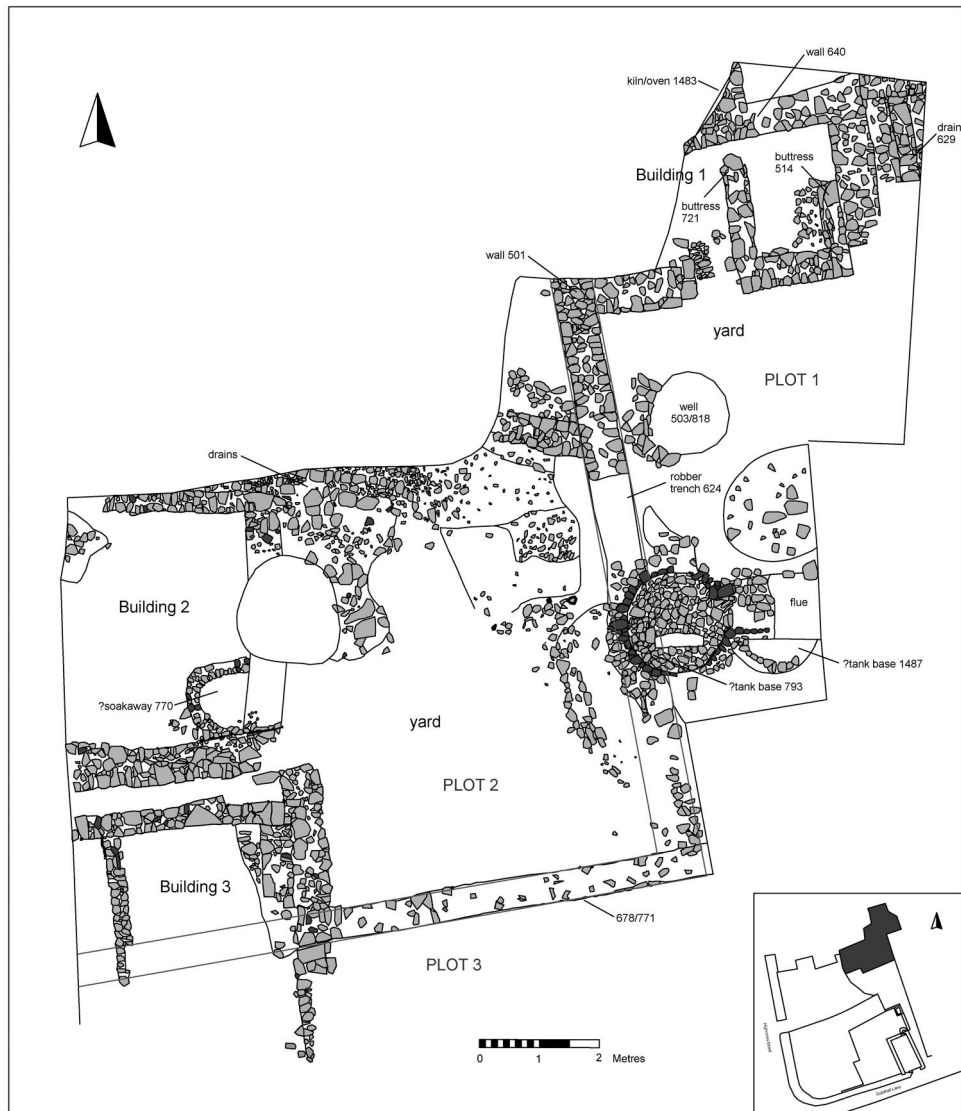
Fig. 5. Site 1: Plots 1 (northern sector) and 2 (all phases), showing Buildings 1 and 2 and yard area with industrial features.

Hills sandstone blocks. Subsequent rebuilds included the insertion of two buttresses (514 and 721) against the internal wall-face, perhaps to counteract subsidence. The latter was sufficiently intrusive as to hinder access to the eastern part of the room, possibly implying that the room functioned as a porch or lobby to a building to the north. The building was sealed subsequently beneath a deep accumulation of fifteenth- to sixteenth-century demolition material.

To the east, a probable narrow alleyway with a drain (629) provided access to the High Street to the north. Immediately to the north of wall 640, the curved foundation of a large circular structure measuring *c*. 4m in diameter (1483) possibly represents a commercial bread-oven, comparable in size to an oven in Church Street, Melton Mowbray (Nichols 1795, 249; R. Buckley pers. comm.).

Two circular masonry features (793 and 1487) occupied a yard area immediately to the south of Building 1. Heavy scorching and crazing to the granite lining and base of the larger and better preserved example (793) indicated prolonged exposure to high temperatures. The features may represent masonry hearths for heating raised water tanks supported on side walls, suggestive of brewing, cloth-dyeing or similar processes, requiring heated water and probably operating on a domestic scale. A communal aspect to such activity was implied by the yard and attendant tank bases occupying a shared space between a minimum of two tenements, prior to the construction of a major boundary wall (624; subsequently robbed) which bisected the open yard area. It may be significant that further industrial features were identified to the south, again to the east of this boundary wall, and may relate to the tail of Plot 1 rather than to Plot 3 (where they are described) or Plot 6. Certainly, it is not uncommon for plots on both High Street and Highcross Street to be between 40m and 50m in length, and it is noteworthy that the southern edge of hearth 927 was located 40.2m (eight rods) from the High Street frontage. Hence the hearths may all relate to specialised intensive commercial or industrial activity in the backyard of Plot 1.

The southern area of Plot 1, bounded to the west by Plot 3 and to the south by Plot 6, was occupied by a sequence of small intercutting circular masonry hearths (922, 924 and 927) dating from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries (Fig. 6). All measured *c*. 1m in diameter, and consisted of heat-reddened clay-bonded granite bases containing ash- and charcoal-rich fills. No flues or stoke holes were observed and there were no clear indications of function, but these may represent water-heating hearths – as suggested for Plot 1 – or else were intended for another purpose that has left no trace in the archaeological record.

Plot 2

The tail of Plot 2 backed onto the same yard area, equating very approximately to 5–7 Highcross Street, and possibly constituting two 5m-wide plots (2a/2b) separated by an extremely narrow alley, both backed on to a yard shared with 100 High Street. A number of re-built walls appeared to represent attempts to counteract subsidence. The rear section of a building, Building 2, dated to the mid- to late thirteenth century, consisted of three walls defining a minimum area of *c*. 11.5m; the room was floored with a single dense clay surface that had suffered considerable slumping into underlying earlier features. A probable soakaway feature of unbonded masonry construction (770) was positioned at the south-east corner of the room. The yard area to the east, perhaps originally shared with Plot 1, had a minimum of three phases of well-constructed cobbled surfaces, traversed by three inset drains, lined and capped with stone. Building 2 was demolished in the fourteenth century.
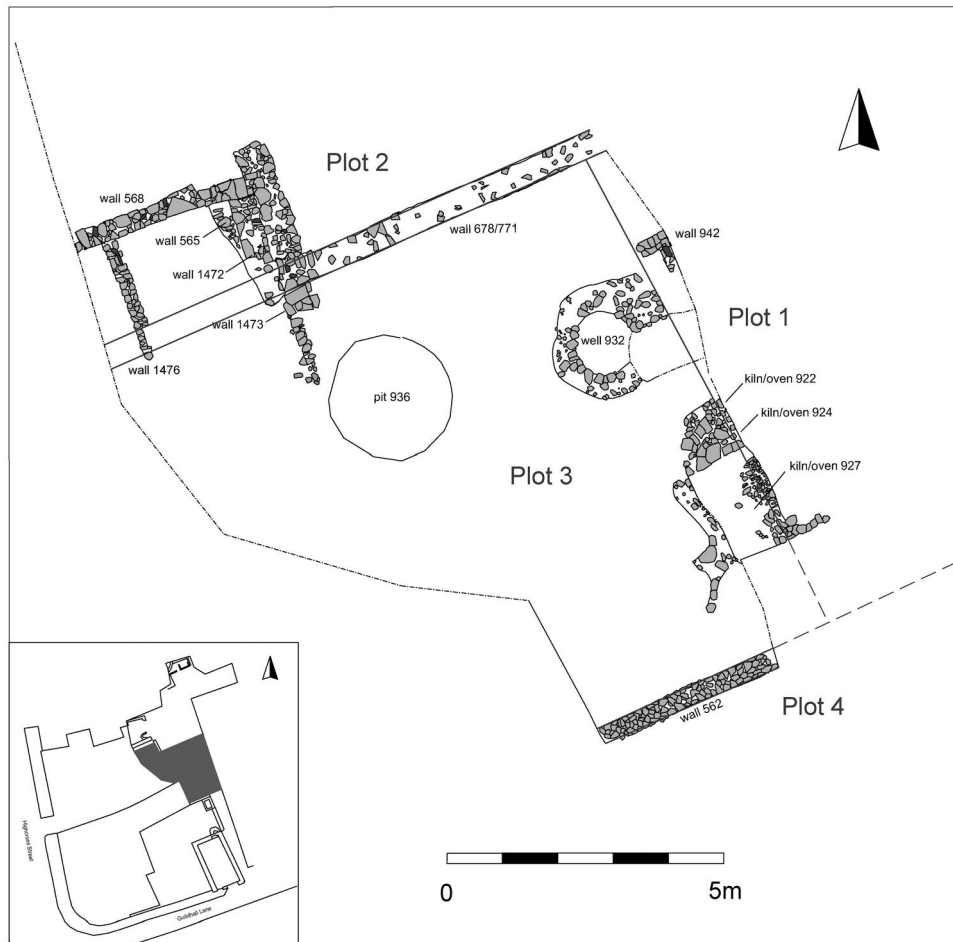
Fig. 6. Site 1: Plot 3 and Plot 1 (southern sector) – principal features.

A third structure, Building 3, lay to the south of Building 2 and comprised a complex sequence of walls and fragmentary floor surfaces, representing a building measuring a minimum of 3m east–west and 3.5m north–south. A succession of wall-builds formed the probable northern and eastern sides of the building, the former running flush with the southern boundary of the adjoining Building 2. The earliest wall-phase produced pottery of mid-fifteenth- to mid-sixteenth-century date.

Plot 3

Plot 3 was defined by walls 678/771 (north) and 562 (south), 10.87m apart, suggesting a double-width property extending west from Highcross Street, although two separate plots are also a possibility, the dividing boundary having been removed at a later date. The southern wall equates to a boundary on the 1887 Ordnance Survey map. This area of the site appeared to represent a further

open area unoccupied by structural features, with the exception of its northern and southern boundary walls (678 and 562). An undetected third wall may have formed a division between the plot and its eastern neighbour (1 or 6). Neither the southern or northern walls appeared to have accommodated windows or doors, suggesting their having functioned as secure property boundaries against which buildings could be built. The white mortar-rendered inner face of 562 suggests an attempt to maximise light to the plot interior. A single thirteenth-century granite-lined well (932) occupied the eastern plot edge.

Plot 4

Plot 4, defined by walls 562 and 752 to the north and east respectively, and dominated by the undercroft building, may have initially represented a single substantial property occupying the corner plot between Highcross Street and Guildhall Lane prior to its suggested later subdivision (Fig. 7), in which case the property would have originally measured *c.* 9.81m east–west and *c.* 16.25m north–south. The plot appears to have subsequently been divided at an unknown date prior to, or contemporary with, construction of the undercroft.

The substantial wall 752 seems to be a continuation north of the property boundary line defined by the principal east wall of the undercroft, and accompanied at its junction with the undercroft with a 1.4m long, 0.4m wide length of mortar-bonded granite walling (821). The former produced fifteenth-century pottery.

A series of mid-fifteenth- to mid-sixteenth-century stone-lined cesspits were ranged along the northern plot boundary. Pit F877 was of rectangular plan. Walling on the two longer sides showed distinct inward bulging or bowing, the western side markedly so, producing narrow and constricted corners with the north and south wall faces. A slightly flared square opening (1061), presumably some form of drain, pierced the west face (871). The pit produced a range of usually perishable finds, including cloth fragments and food remains of fish-bone, strawberry, apple, pea and bean remains. The pit also contained five sherds of Green-Glazed Lincoln ware from St Marks's kilns, Lincoln, made in imitation of either prunted glass beaker or, possibly, a German flagon, and may represent a link to the nearby Guild of Corpus Christi, built around 1400. Two other stone-lined pits in the vicinity (667 and 1284) demonstrated a similar form, the latter containing abundant fig seeds and fish-bone.

A D-shaped unbonded masonry feature was positioned at the outer north-east corner of the undercroft (1501), abutting but not physically attached to the building. The function of the structure is unclear, but it may be tentatively interpreted as the foundation for a water butt or a staircase, in either case probably directly linked to the undercroft. Finds-dating indicate that the plinth represents a later addition to the undercroft.

Plot 5

Located west of the undercroft, Plot 5 was occupied by a number of rubbish pits, including a single stone-lined example (1502) cutting the dark-earths and the
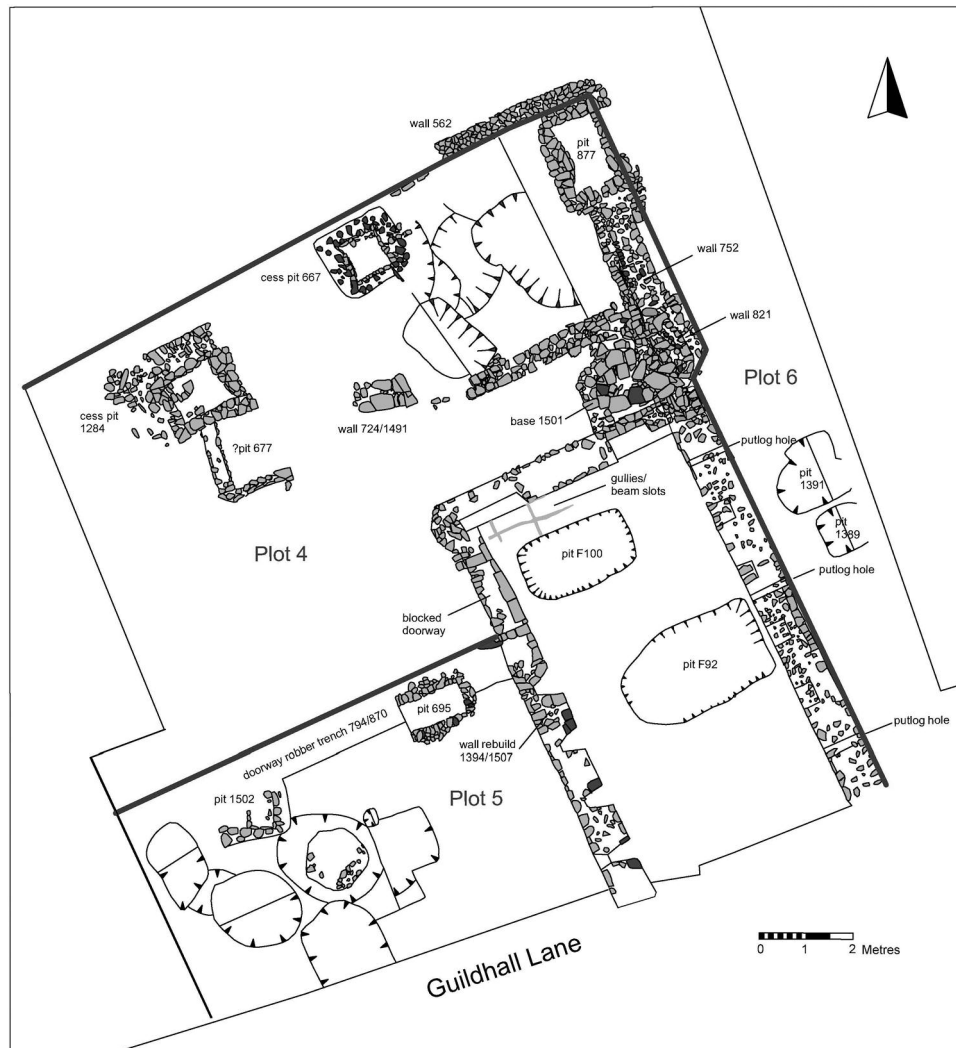
Fig. 7. Site 1: Plots 4 and 5, including undercroft building.

eleventh- to thirteenth-century occupation layers (Fig. 7). A second granite-lined pit or soakaway feature (695), positioned adjacent to the west door of the undercroft, produced substantial quantities of pottery dating to between the early fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries.

The undercroft

The St Nicholas Place (Site 1) undercroft, first documented in 1844, lay for several hundred years beneath an Elizabethan timber-framed house until it was demolished in 1861. A contemporary photograph shows that the west wall of the

now-exposed undercroft, with its four round-headed windows, was largely intact prior to the redevelopment of the site. The construction of a brick-vaulted building over the structure resulted in considerable damage to its west wall. Following unsuccessful attempts in 1956 to schedule the cellar, its location was subsequently lost until its re-discovery by the Leicestershire Museums Survey Team in 1989. The recording of the fabric and a limited archaeological investigation of the interior was undertaken subsequently by Leicestershire Archaeological Unit in 1990, access being made via a small manhole (Hagar and Buckley 1990, 99). In 2003 the nineteenth-century buildings on the site were demolished and the brick vaults over the undercroft removed (Figs 9 and 10).

The undercroft – now preserved beneath the BBC building – measures *c.* 8.5m by 4.5m internally and is 2.5m deep. It is of mostly granite build, but with some green sandstone and reused Roman brick and tile. The remains of four windows with sloping sills and splayed jambs survive in the west wall, whilst the west and north walls contain square niches lined with Roman tile, probably used for housing candles or lamps. The partially-sunken structure was accessed via a substantial doorway at its north-east corner.

The construction of this building dates to between the first quarter of the twelfth and the mid-thirteenth centuries, and initially involved the excavation of a rectangular cut through an accumulation of Roman street metallings and silts, and

Fig. 8. The undercroft photographed in 1861.

Fig. 9. The undercroft: western internal wall elevation.

Fig. 10. The undercroft during excavation: view north.

overlying 'dark-earth' deposits, as observed on the northern, western and eastern sides of the building. The heavily-compacted gravels also formed the internal floor, providing a sound foundation for wall-footings and foundations. Those observed beneath the western external wall-face comprised a single course of loosely arranged granite blocks. If the footings are indicative of external ground level at the time of construction, then this appears to have been some 1.12m higher on the eastern side of the building.

A line of three putlog holes, spaced evenly at 1.5m intervals along the interior face of the eastern wall, corresponded with a probable beam slot cut into the external wall fabric at ground level, suggesting the use of scaffolding during construction, as did a small circular post-hole at the north-east corner of the building. The absence of facing masonry on the eastern wall and indications of bowing suggests its having been the subject of robbing and/or structural collapse.

The unfaced and roughly-coursed external face of the northern wall suggests its having been largely below ground level originally, implying that the external ground level was markedly higher at the northern end of the building. The total length of the north wall was 4.55m, surviving to a maximum height of 2.01m, albeit with serious damage stemming from the 1861 rebuild. A possible door or window, observed in 1844 and 1854, may have been located at the western end of the wall. The wall accommodated two contemporary niches, one of which (F82) survived with its Roman tile edging intact.

The western wall measured 8.70m in length (9.80m prior to the 1861 refurbishment) and stood to a maximum height of 2.80m (Fig. 11). As the single surviving external façade of the building, the wall contained the bulk of the building's architectural detail. A row of four arched and splayed windows with Dane Hills sandstone jambs and Roman brick arches was spaced regularly along the wall, only one of which (F87) survived to its full height. The north end of the western wall accommodated a wide doorway measuring 1.56m wide and surviving to a height of 2.1m, as defined by dressed ashlar Dane Hills sandstone blocks. Stubs of masonry projecting from the doorway jambs may have formed the remnants of a subsequently robbed porch and/or building or wing projecting west from the undercroft. The western doorway appeared to have been accessed via a substantial access ramp or flight of steps, represented by a substantial robber trench. Partially destroyed by nineteenth-century cellaring, the feature originally extended further west of its surviving 5m length.

A length of the west wall adjacent to the doorway and including the most northerly window (F90) appeared to be of a later build, stylistic similarities with the main structure suggesting a re-build date close to that of the initial building construction, possibly arising from structural collapse. The west door was heavily robbed during the late twelfth or late thirteenth centuries, along with a probable associated external porch and/or access ramp or flight of steps, as evidenced by a substantial robber trench (794/870) extending southwest from the building (Fig. 7). This arrangement may have formed part of a projecting wing running parallel to Guildhall Lane, and hence a longitudinal subdivision of the tenement in order to form Plots 4 and 5. During the fourteenth century the same doorway was
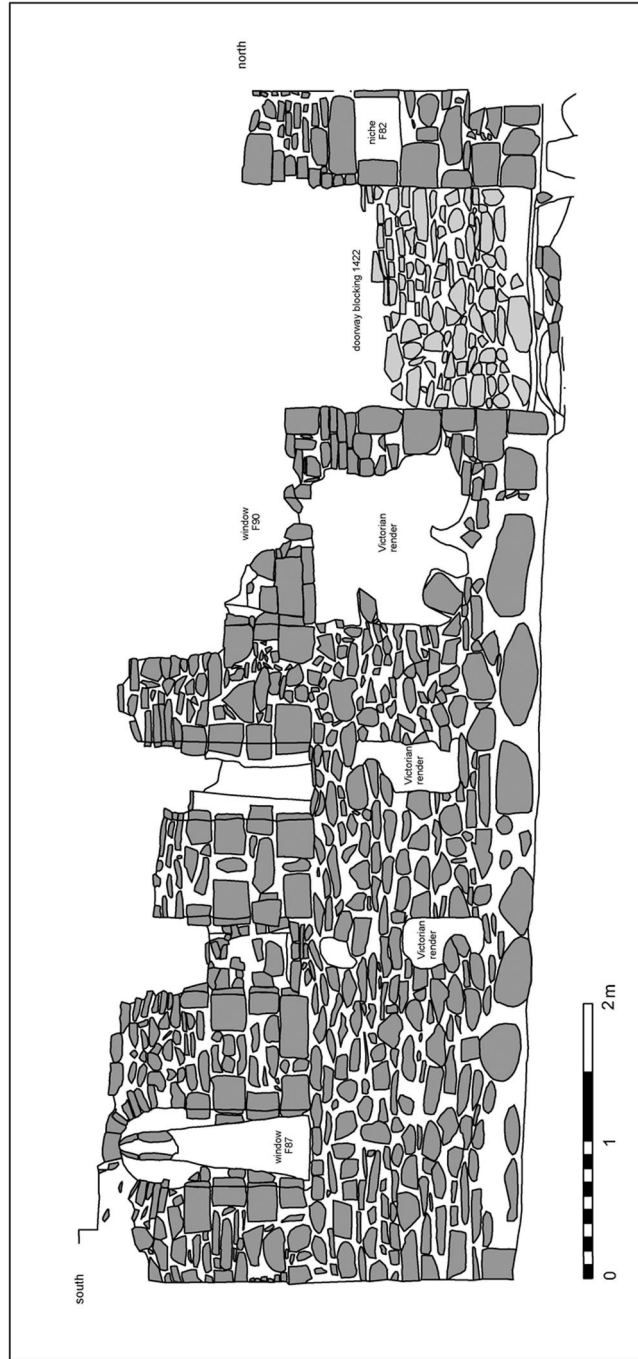
Fig. 11. Internal elevation of western wall of undercroft.

partially infilled with keyed stonework (1422), raising the door threshold by around 1m. Hagar has suggested either that this represents a response to raised external ground levels or to else involving a functional change to the building (Hagar, in archive).

The eastern wall measured 8.7m in length and stood to a maximum 2.65m height, its internal face containing four square recesses or niches defined by Roman tile, probably designed to house candles or lamps. The southern wall survived to a height of 1.8m and length of 4.56m, and appeared to comprise two phases of build. A doorway visible in the 1861 photograph at the western end of the wall providing access to Guildhall Lane survived as a doorway reveal. The slight projection of the west wall beyond its southern counterpart suggested a porch arrangement, as at the other, western door. The remnant of a single 0.5m high-dressed sandstone block-built window splay was visible to the east in the same wall.

Excavation revealed a substantial robbed feature running west from the undercroft, and likely representing the remains of a substantial access ramp or flight of steps leading to the wide doorway located at the north-west corner of the building. Partially destroyed by nineteenth-century cellaring, the feature clearly appeared to have originally continued further west than its surviving 5m length. Potentially, it represents a connecting wing projecting west from the undercroft parallel to Guildhall Lane, and hence a longitudinal subdivision of the tenement in order to create Plots 4 and 5.

The undercroft interior appears to have undergone a sequence of alterations and remodelling throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, notably involving the opening of rubbish or cesspits and the possible construction of livestock pens, all suggestive of a pronounced decline in the building's status in its later life. Pits contained substantial quantities of bird bone, eggshell, and sheep or goat bone. Mineralised human waste was recovered from the two internal pits (F92 and F100), along with evidence for cereal processing in the form of charred wheat and oats, possibly indicative of brewing waste. As the building is likely to have retained an upper storey throughout its life (N. Finn pers. comm.), the pits appear to have functioned as cesspits for the residents of the structure above the undercroft. The identification of a possible thirteenth-century water butt or staircase base adjacent to the building provided further evidence for the continued use of the building.

The character of the Plots 4 and 5 was strongly domestic, with a preponderance of rubbish or cesspits, and an absence of craft- or industrial-related features. A line of three stone-lined pits ranged along the northern wall was presumably associated with the undercroft and its possible adjoining building range fronting Guildhall Lane.

Plot 6

Located between the undercroft and the eastern excavation boundary, Plot 6 represented a property running south from Plot 1 to Guildhall Lane. The 2m-wide strip was occupied by pits ranging in date from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.

Sites 2 and 3

The earliest medieval levels encountered on these sites consist of a series of twelfth-century pits which respect the lines of the walls of the Roman Forum, suggesting that the latter survived sufficiently well to exert a topographical influence on subsequent activity (Fig. 12). The robbing of the walls in the late twelfth–early thirteenth centuries was followed by a period of cultivation, resulting in the accumulation of garden soil deposits which sealed the earlier pits and robber trenches. Intensive occupation followed, and the arrangement of property boundary-walls, coupled with cartographic evidence, including the late nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps, indicates an arrangement of three or possibly four tenements (C–F) relating to Highcross Street (Figs 13 and 14). The southern boundary wall of Plot C appeared to mark the northern limit of a further two tenements (A, B) extending back from Thornton Lane (on the line of the Roman Fosse Way) at right angles to those fronting Highcross Street. The properties again seemed to be of uniform *c.* 5m width, with the possible exception of the double-width (*c.* 10–11m) Plot D, defined to the north by wall F29 (Site 2)/313 (Site 3). If so, this may represent an instance of a double-width tenement, which was never subject to later subdivision, as has been postulated for the undercroft tenement at Site 1.

The north wall of Plot D marked the boundary between St Martins and St Nicholas parishes, and appears also to follow the line of a Forum wall. Whilst not perpendicular to Highcross Street, the wall does appear to have influenced the boundaries in its vicinity. It is likely that the boundary reflected the line of a

PERIOD	PLOT A	PLOT B	PLOT C	PLOT D	PLOT E	PLOT F
1700+	Overburden					
		Pits	Pit; well		Cellar	
Mid-16th – late 17th C	Levelling					
	Cess pits; pits		Building 3 modifications; north–south wall; floor; oven	Demolition deposits relating to Building 4		
Late 15th – late 16th C	Cobbled surface in Building 6; hearth	Demolition and robbing of Building 2	Modifications to Building 3, including floors, cross wall and oven. Bone working		Parish boundary wall rebuilt	
						Accumulation of garden soils; pits
		Building 2 modified with partition wall and cesspit/latrine				Robber trench; pits
Late 14th – late 15th C	Building 1 demolition; robbing; pits

Building 6; extension of tenement to the rear? | Pit, Building 2 - undercroft?; cess pit | Cobbled surface

Building 3; hearth | Building 4; drain Undercroft? | | Furnace/oven; lime pit; robber trench |
Late 13th – late 14th C	Building 1; robbing, pits, latrine, channel	Pits	Pits and hearth			Cess pit, hearth
12th – early 13th C	Garden soils					
	Pits	Pit	Pit, hearth, cobbles	Pit	Pit	Pit, robbing

Fig. 12. Sites 2 and 3: land-use diagram.
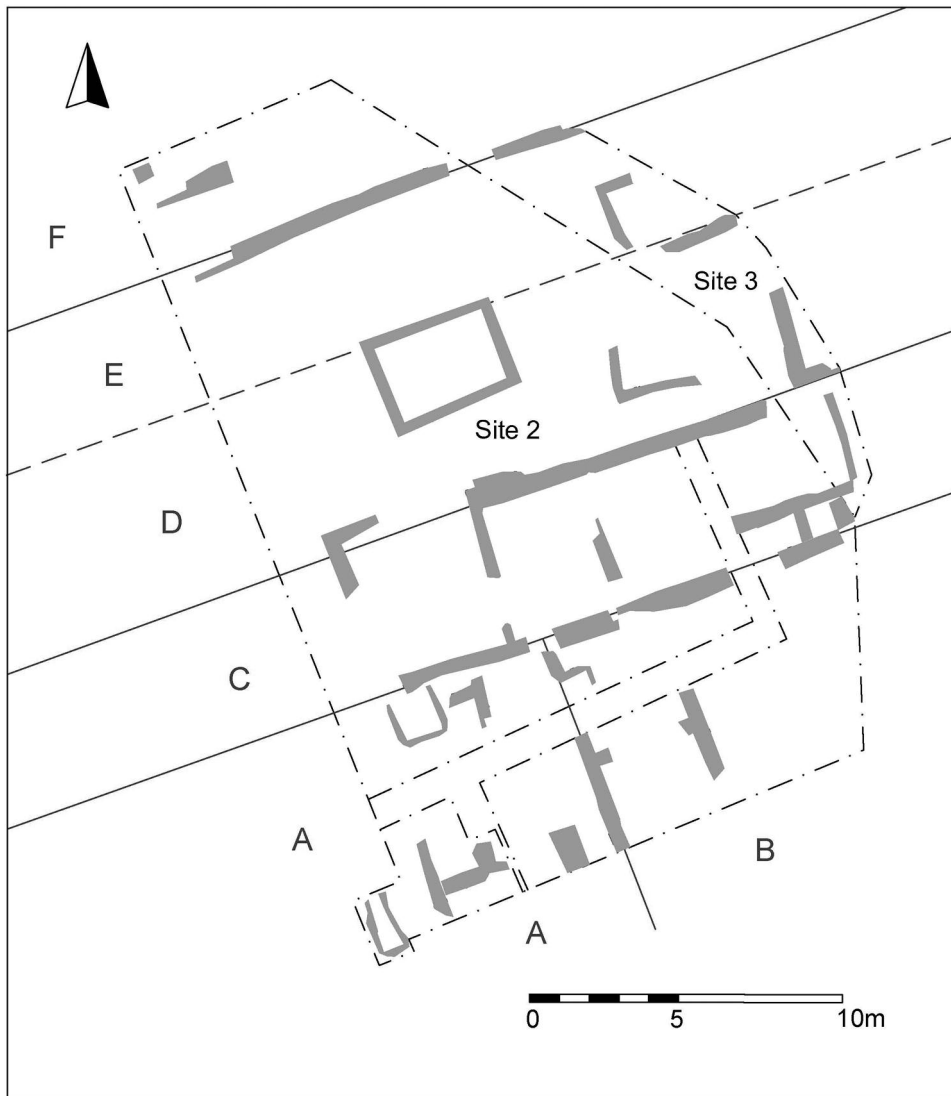
Fig. 13. Sites 2 and 3: suggested plot divisions.

still-extant Forum wall, which had remained a substantial wall until its demolition in the 1960s. Investigation of the eastern end of this wall on Site 3 (wall 313) revealed an associated sequence of probable floor and occupation deposits, indicating that earlier buildings had utilised the wall.

Plots A and B
Plots A and B seem to represent the rear of tenements fronting on to Thornton Lane to the south, and contained evidence for further structures, Buildings 1 and 7 (Plot

Fig. 14. Sites 2 and 3: plots and principal features.

A) and Building 2 (Plot B), consisting of walls and fragmentary floor sequences dating to the late fourteenth to late fifteenth centuries. The former was associated with a stone-lined latrine F39, and the latter acquired one (F102) prior to demolition of both buildings in the late fifteenth or late sixteenth centuries. The position of these structures at the back of tenement plots implies an ancillary function.

The earliest structural evidence in Plot A was represented by a possible building (1) located in the south-west corner of the excavation within property Plot A and dating to the late thirteenth to late fourteenth centuries. Wall F21, aligned north–south and faced on its western side, abutted wall F22 on its eastern side. The walls were associated with two latrines or cesspits, the first of which,

F31, was a substantial stone-lined feature. A second, smaller trapezoidal pit (F39) was associated with a stone-lined drainage channel (F126) running from a quoined opening on its north side. The absence of floor layers or of structural features, coupled with similarities to evidence from Site 1, suggests that these cesspits were located within an open yard area.

Plot C
Plot C was dominated by a single structure, Building 3, the structural walls of which doubled as boundary walls to the property. A series of alterations and rebuilds to the building involved extensions to and/or rebuilds of the property boundary walls, including construction of a hearth (F55) against the southern wall. The recovery of worked animal bone and debris point to bone working activity within or close to the building during the fifteenth and/or sixteenth centuries, and the insertion of a circular oven (F114) into the north wall during the mid-sixteenth or early seventeenth century suggest a service/productive function for the structure(s). The discovery on Site 3 of a possible second oven (F353) to the east within the same tenement supports this theory, in which case these activities were being undertaken to the rear of the building fronting Highcross Street.

To the east of Building 3, wall (305) abutted an east–west wall (338) with later brick additions and repairs. The western end of wall (338) was of brick construction and bonded with a second, north–south aligned brick wall (360). Brick floors (354) had been placed between wall (338) and the return at the western end. A brick-built modern cellar, likely associated with the Golden Lion public house, was observed along the eastern half of the southern part of the trench from wall (338).

Animal bone and craft debris recovered from the plot suggest bone-working activity within or close to Building 3 during the fifteenth and/or sixteenth centuries.

Plots D and E
The central area of the site was occupied by a double width (*c*. 10m) tenement or, alternatively, an amalgamation of two equal sized plots (D and E). Access to Highcross Street to the east was provided by a passageway running between Nos 30 and 32, and subsequently identified in Trench 3 of Site 3 on the eastern flank of the Site 2 excavation.

Plot D was defined to the north and south by stone walls 317 and 336, the corner angle of two clay-bonded granite walls (F78 and F79) in the south-east corner of which formed a structure of unknown function (Building 4). A closely-set rectangular cobbled surface occupied the 1.5m-wide space between this and the Plots C/D dividing wall (F149), constructed over a contemporary stone-lined drain (F80). Two stones flanking the cobbling to the west possibly represented foundation pads for posts or hurdling serving to cordon off the narrow passageway.

The eastern sector of Plot D was occupied by a stone-built cellar, Victorian additions to which included a flight of blue brick steps and a brick lining. Towards the Highcross Street frontage itself, the property boundary on the Ordnance Survey maps correspond with the southern cellar wall, which projects slightly into

the boundary of No. 30. Photographic, cartographic and archaeological evidence suggest that the frontages of both buildings may have contained substantial elements of undated timber framing prior to rebuilding of the façades after 1867. Removal of brickwork from the internal cellar face revealed a sooted arch built of re-used Roman brick, possibly a candle niche. The scale and build of the southern cellar wall suggests a medieval date, whilst limited excavation suggested that the other walls date to at least as early as the fourteenth century. Consequently it is possible that the cellar represented an adapted early medieval cellar or undercroft structure, as identified at Site 1.

Plot E was defined along its northern side by wall F29, which survived to a height of 1.5m on its faced and partially rendered southern elevation, and formed a parish boundary. The excavated area was bounded to the south by a later brick built wall (1405) associated with cellar activity, and to the east by a masonry wall (1409) with subsequent brick additions and rebuilds. Wall (1409) continued to the south, with two further stone walls running eastwards – (1410) and (1411).

The northernmost plot, F, lay north of boundary wall F29, and contained a rectangular hearth (F43) associated with a rectangular sandstone and granite oven (F44) and possible lime-slaking pit (F61), suggesting industrial or productive activity. A post-hole and fragmentary floors suggested the presence of a protective structure.

DISCUSSION

The study of tenement origins and growth in Leicester and other medieval towns has served to emphasise the varied character and developmental sequences of land division across individual towns. Accordingly, certain areas demonstrate early and rapid growth and subdivision, with others remaining comparatively undeveloped and uncrowded. Such inconsistencies of patterning mean modelling of patterns of land use across wider areas is extremely problematic, and this article will accordingly concentrate on modelling burgage plot patterns across this particular, limited area of Leicester.

The location and definition of properties

In the case of the revived former Roman towns, the issue of the degree to which robbed or extant classical plan elements such as streets, as well as certain buildings, influenced medieval property patterning is key. In the case of Leicester, monumental Roman public buildings including the public baths, the Forum and *macellum* seem to have survived, albeit as relict structures, into the second millennium AD. Notably, the line of the medieval High Street appears to respect that of the Forum (Buckley and Lucas, 1987). Nonetheless, the buildings and plan elements that did endure from the Roman period do not seem to have exerted significant topographical influence across the intramural area, with the notable exceptions of the constraints imposed by relict defensive wall circuits and gates. Accordingly, there is the possibility in Leicester of a situation comparable to

London, whereby the Anglo-Saxon settlement was seemingly set out over largely open areas of accumulated cultivation soils (Horsman, Milne and Milne 1988, 111). Indeed, excavations at the Cameo Cinema on Leicester's High Street in 1993 provided indications of eleventh- to thirteenth-century plough truncation of pre-tenth-century deposits (Cooper 1993, 19).

Philip Crummy has demonstrated that parts of Colchester's medieval High Street tallies with the Roman plan, suggesting the re-use of certain earlier walls (Crummy 1981, 50). Similarly, excavations at Vine Street in Leicester (2004–06) offered the suggestion that the lines of medieval Vine Street and Elbow Lane respect the boundaries of a substantial Roman courtyard house (T. Higgins pers. comm.). However, the majority of Roman buildings (presumably the more substantially built public structures) that survived into the medieval period appear not to have constrained or hindered continued development, but rather functioned as quarries for building materials. Indeed, in certain cases these structures appear to have been subject to imaginative re-use or adaptation, as in the rare instance of the construction of an Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured building in the fabric of the collapsed gable wall of the presumed Roman *macellum* in Leicester (Cooper 2007, 184). Similarly, construction of a structure within the cemetery of the 'lost' chapel or church of St Michael in the northern intramural area appears to have incorporated a third-century Roman public building (Higgins 2007, 203). There are also indications of the medieval re-use of Roman walls, as at Causeway Lane, whereby a late thirteenth-century timber building was constructed within a Roman masonry structure (Connor and Buckley 1999, 86).

In contrast, Roman roads and streets appear to have continued in use, and thus exerted direct topographical influence on Anglo-Saxon and medieval urban plans. In Gloucester, minor Roman streets defined Anglo-Saxon estate boundaries, notably the example associated with the minster of St Peter's and the tenth-century parish of St Aldgate, which may have its origins in such an estate or *haga* (Heighway 1984, 362). Heighway is also of the opinion that Roman features and streets were the framework around which *hagae* formed.

In the case of Leicester, excavations north of Site 1 at Freeschool Lane in 2006 identified a series of burgage plots extending back from the Highcross Street frontage. Frontages here appear to have been formalised by the mid-thirteenth century, a pattern maintained until the nineteenth century (Coward 2007, 187). It is, however, evident that the process whereby properties were established and subsequently developed demonstrate considerable variance across the intramural area in comparison to Leicester's medieval suburbs.

Evidence from Leicester seems to suggest that the pole (5½ yards or 5.03m) or two poles (11 yards or 10.06m) was used as a standard unit of property measurement within the medieval town (Connor and Buckley 1999, 80). The rural sites of West Stow (Suffolk), Mucking (Essex) and Raunds (Northamptonshire) demonstrate the use of two pole or rod lengths as standard land-measurement units during the early Anglo-Saxon period.

As regards the three excavations under discussion, property boundary walls on Site 1 appear to have defined a minimum of five and possibly six tenement plots,

measuring between 9.8m and 12m (Fig. 3). On Sites 2 and 3, a minimum of four or possibly five 5m-wide burgage plots were identified, running back from the Highcross Street frontage (Fig. 13), defined by boundary walls. Although it was not possible to allocate secure dates to the walls, a number appear to have thirteenth-century origins and remarkably were in use into the 1960s.

Plot development

Plots 4 and 5 on Site 1 were jointly occupied by the undercroft, and appeared to have been the result of the subdivision of a single, double-sized tenement with shared frontages on Guildhall Lane to the south and Highcross Street to the west (Fig. 1). There were few indications that the plots had been altered subsequent to their presumed late Saxon or early medieval setting-out. With very few exceptions, buildings appear to have been constructed, altered and rebuilt within the unchanging confines of boundary walls. This also appears to have been the case to the north at Highcross Street, where the 2006 Freeschool Lane excavation (Fig. 4) revealed a number of Saxo-Norman timber structures, whose building lines perpetuated into the twentieth century in property boundaries (Coward 2007, 185). The impression at this urban core location is of dense domestic occupation within regularly-maintained buildings, despite incidences of subsidence and possible structural collapse.

Certain boundaries were, however, subject to rebuilds and alterations, as was evident at Site 1, where the dividing wall between Plots 6 and 4, linking the north-east corner of the undercroft with the boundary wall between Plots 3 and 4, was the subject of several re-builds. In addition, construction of the substantial fifteenth-century stone-lined pit 877 in Plot 4 (Fig. 5) involved the removal of a section of the same wall, although without altering the general wall line. Only in the area immediately west of the undercroft were there hints of plot subdivision, as implied by the use of its access steps or ramp as a division between Plots 4 and 5. The positioning of the undercroft at the end of, and aligned with, a major property wall line suggests that the building was influencing the layout of property divisions. In turn, the positioning of the undercroft at the junction of two Roman streets may indicate that its alignment was itself dictated by the configuration of the remnant Roman grid.

Similarly, there were strong indications at Site 3 of property boundary continuity, with repeated wall rebuilds on the same line from the thirteenth century through to the modern period (Fig. 9). A number of walls with successive rebuilds occupied the northern end of Trench 3, virtually all of which were of stone construction in the earliest visible phases, with subsequent brick additions and repairs. Walls (1409) and (1411), corresponding with tenement walls still identifiable on the first edition (1886) Ordnance Survey maps, demonstrate boundary continuity from the medieval period through to the final occupational phases of the site prior to its demolition in the 1960s.

The fact that the property boundary-wall/parish boundary-wall dividing Plots 3 and 4 at Site 1 was of eighteenth-century build offers additional evidence of the

longevity of these properties. Coupled with the cartographic evidence, this suggests that properties had been established at an early date, possibly explained by their proximity to the principal medieval axial roads of Highcross Street and Swinesmarket in the commercial core of the town.

Evidence for residential zoning

None of the excavations under discussion provided clear indications of specific zoning in terms of housing typology and/or status in this particular area of medieval Leicester. Whilst this may in part be explained by the limited nature of the archaeological investigations, exacerbating inherent difficulties in terms of defining individual buildings and properties, the overriding impression is one of high-status occupation within well-built masonry structures. Frontage buildings were associated with trade, with associated ancillary structures including kitchens, bread ovens and wells in rear-yard areas. The regularity of the arrangement of plots does not point to disparities in terms of wealth; rather, this and the crowded character of their constituent buildings and yards demonstrates the vibrancy of the commercial heart of the medieval town. Only the high-status Site 1 undercroft building, positioned on a double-width plot, offers hints of earlier, possibly more complex and irregular Anglo-Saxon or early medieval property arrangements.

These centrally placed tenements also show indications of having been subject to major adaptive change. Hence, the undercroft at Site 1 appears to have undergone significant alteration involving the partial blocking of its principal doorway, and removal of the attendant porch and access ramp and/or steps. Coupled with indications of the demolition of a possible adjoining wing and adaptation of the undercroft interior, these surely imply significant functional change, and, by implication, an abrupt change in the fortunes of the property's owner or, alternatively, an actual change of ownership. With the provision in the sixteenth century of a new superstructure, the building presumably entered a newly high(er) status period of use. Similarly, the deep post-medieval accumulation of demolition rubble and domestic refuse over the former yard area of Plot 2 signals a marked change in land use. The implied abandonment of this area suggests a decline in prosperity comparable to that demonstrated archaeologically at Lincoln from the early sixteenth century (Jones 1980, 54), or else stem from the known movement of commercial activity in the town eastwards towards Swinesmarket (Courtney 1998, 134).

The undercroft and its property

The undercroft dominated the southernmost and largest of the identified tenements. The substantial north-west doorway appears to have been associated with an approach ramp or flight of stairs for the probable passage of goods in and out of the building. The location of the building in relation to the distribution of other features, notably pits, suggests that the undercroft initially occupied a single substantial tenement which was subsequently sub-divided into two smaller parcels

of land. Dense pitting activity in this area of the site testifies to the intensive character of domestic occupation throughout the medieval period.

The undercroft indicates the presence of a high-status individual, probably a merchant, trading from and most probably resident in the urban core. The building appears to have been situated at the rear of a sizeable tenement plot extending west to Highcross Street, and hence indicative of its separation into domestic residential and commercial zones. The domestic accommodation may have fronted Highcross Street, whilst direct access to the commercial premises – the undercroft – lay to the rear via the lower-status Guildhall Lane. Alternatively, the owner may have occupied a first-floor timber hall over the undercroft and/or in an adjoining wing. Evidence for the latter could be the insubstantial traces of walling to the west, in addition to the robbed remains of an access ramp or flight of steps to the north-west corner doorway. This structure may have formed part of a residential wing extending west of the undercroft. Alternatively, the windows piercing the west wall of the undercroft may have opened onto a private courtyard. The splayed windows set high in the west wall of the undercroft appeared designed for maximum security whilst letting in maximum light suggesting that the proposed courtyard may have been open to and accessible from the street.

The building appears initially to have occupied a single large plot of land, possibly one of the late Anglo-Saxon *hagae* identified at the nearby Cameo Cinema excavation (Cooper 1993). Subsequently, sub-division of the plot produced twin tenements running parallel to Guildhall Lane in a process identified elsewhere in Leicester and in other towns during the medieval period (Courtney 1998). However, as the northern end of the building does not tally with the division between the plots, it may be that the building pre-dated subsequent plot sub-division. It is possible that the line of the junction of the two Roman streets on which the building lay dictated the alignment of the undercroft.

The undercroft appears to have undergone structural and possibly even functional change early in its working life, firstly involving the partial infilling of its north-west doorway and the robbing of its porch and access ramp (or steps) during the late twelfth or late thirteenth centuries. The removal of these features suggests that by this period the building was no longer operating as a store for bulky goods requiring a substantial doorway. In addition, the destruction of a possible adjoining wing may imply a certain retrenchment on the part of its owner. A complex sequence of stake and post-holes indicates the sub-division of the interior of the building for a range of presumably domestic functions, possibly including the stalling of domesticated animals. The presence of internal cesspits, probably linked to chutes or funnels from room(s) above (paralleled elsewhere, including London) (Schofield 1994, 86), does, however, suggest the continued presence of an occupied superstructure during this period.

The open area west of the undercroft was cut by a sequence of late eleventh- to late thirteenth-century pits broadly contemporary with the construction and early use of the undercroft. This would argue against the presence of a projecting wing or other associated building of the same date, but rather it being an open

yard or courtyard area. The arrangement of nineteenth-century industrial buildings that stood on the site prior to its development may fossilise the medieval property boundaries, notably those in the centre of the area. The building which projected into the rear yard was long and narrow, with the walkway between this building and that to the north being of similar size and shape, which may represent the preservation of medieval tenements projecting to the east from Highcross Street. The boundaries also show a noticeable kink in their alignment to the east of the street frontage, possibly having its origins in the Roman period as it aligns with the Roman street grid, and may suggest the survival of standing Roman masonry.

It is possible that entry to the undercroft was from a still-extant street representing a continuation of the line of the Roman Fosse Way, which ran east–west between the two Roman gates. Furthermore, it appeared to have been placed upon, or cut into, the intersection of this and a second (north–south) street, effectively cutting off access along the latter. If the latter had still been functional at this stage this would have constituted a clear appropriation of public space for private use. It also suggests that the east–west Roman street, or a successor thereof, continued as the principal east–west route through the town right into the medieval period. Until the replacement of Highcross Street by High Street as the principal commercial street in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, along with the presumed resultant demotion of Guildhall Lane, the closeness of this major, possibly commercial building would have made economic sense.

Mercantile activity and undercrofts

The Site 1 undercroft represents the first firmly identified example from Leicester of a domestic structural type, long recognised in a number of medieval towns including Lincoln, London, Norwich and Southampton. The emergence of undercrofts from *c.* 1100 and notably from the mid-twelfth century formed part of a major phase of building in stone in core urban commercial areas, and represented the first major episode of stone construction since the Roman period. In certain instances, undercrofts replaced Saxo-Norman timber-cellared buildings, for the first time offering secure mercantile storage combined with direct access to street frontages (Schofield 1995, 31). Southampton has a corpus of around 30 surviving medieval houses dating to between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, amongst which several date to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and appear to have functioned as combined warehouse and domestic accommodation (Faulkner 1975a, 78). In London, stone houses appeared for the first time during the twelfth century in central commercial areas such as Cheapside and Gracechurch Street, and the central waterfront (Schofield 1995, 32).

Whilst undercrofts demonstrate considerable variation in terms of size, structure and internal arrangements, parallels to the Leicester example are readily identifiable. As regards overall physical form and certain internal features, the Leicester undercroft resembles closely examples from Southampton and London. The former, at Simnel Street, was positioned on a long plot at right angles to the

street. The stone-vaulted rectangular structure was, as with the Leicester example, accessed by twin doorways: the first, in the western wall, providing direct street access; and the second, wider southern opening presumably providing goods access via a flight of steps. It had a row of three windows piercing the south wall: two of twin lights; and the third, as at Leicester, a single light (Faulkner 1975a, 78). The inclusion of a fireplace in the eastern wall suggests a particularly high-status building (Faulkner 1975, 129).

The stone-vaulted twelfth-century town house of the Earl of Warenne in Tooley Street, Southwark, was another property which was accessible directly from the street, not from within the property, as was the case with pre-twelfth-century timber examples (Schofield 1995, 31). The Southwark example is notable for the presence of a secondary structure or connecting wing, as has been proposed for the Leicester example. The fact that buildings such as the Southampton example were directly accessed from the street and rarely from the building above led Faulkner to suggest that these were self-contained, possibly speculative developments on the part of landowners, to be rented out to retail traders (Faulkner 1975, 122). Both the London and Southampton vaulted examples probably pre-date the probably timber-ceilinged Leicester undercroft, the latter being more common during the Norman period (Schofield 1995, 75).

There is no indication that the Leicester example was as high-status as the London or Southampton examples, it probably having had a simple timber-beamed roof rather than stone vault, and with no indications of internal sophistication in the form of a fireplace, internal bays or a masonry upper storey. It is likely, however, that the undercroft, with its simple rectangular plan positioned at right angles to the street and accessed from either the street or within its tenement, was constructed for the purpose of storage for a merchant's goods and possibly the trading thereof, with domestic accommodation above in the form of a timber hall accessed from an external staircase.

The emergence of these substantial stone structures is associated with a period of economic prosperity dating from the twelfth century, and culminating in the thirteenth century and the emergence of a new capitalist mercantile class (Platt 1975, 41). In some instances masonry housing has been associated with the Jews, communities of whom emerged in English towns during the immediate post-Conquest period, and who featured prominently in money lending and trade activities. Although there is some documentary or anecdotal evidence which links individuals from urban Jewish communities to this type of building as in Lincoln (Birch 2003), it would be inaccurate to associate trade activity solely with Jewish individuals.

In certain cases direct links existed between socio-religious guilds, the undercrofts and their attendant merchants' houses. Hence, in the Wigford quarter in Lincoln, St Mary's Guild formed the headquarters of the organisation associated with the church of Our Lady, situated directly opposite the hall and stylistically dated to *c.* 1180–90 (Wood 1965, 7). In Leicester, the location of the Site 1 undercroft directly opposite the guildhall, the latter linked to the Corpus Christi Guild and positioned adjacent to St Martin's church, could suggest a

similar guild connection. The recovery from the 2003 excavation of the undercroft of fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Green Glazed Lincoln ware, of a vessel probably designed for public display as tableware, lends weight to this possibility (Sawday forthcoming).

The high-status and generally mercantile associations of such buildings suggests that its owner may have occupied a building fronting the High Street, whilst the undercroft was part of their commercial premises, accessed directly from the lower-status Guildhall Lane. The undercroft appears to have undergone substantial alterations, possibly involving the accommodation of livestock holding and brewing activity, during the later thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. However, the presence of substantial stone-lined cess or latrine pits in the northern part of the property into the fifteenth century, producing high-status finds such as fine ceramic ware from Lincoln, points to the continued elite character of this area into the post-medieval period, and suggests that the building above the semi-basement may have continued in use as a higher-status residence. The probable identification of a second undercroft of comparable size and construction at Site 3 further underlines the fact that the Highcross Street/High Street area was both the commercial and social core of the medieval town.

Stone hearths and industrial structures

The Site 1 undercroft represents the sole example from the excavations under discussion of a structure with a clear commercial association, although all three excavations produced clear evidence for industrial and foodstuff production, as represented by furnaces or hearths and a number of features linked to brewing or cloth processing, all located in closely confined yard areas with possible ancillary workshop structures to the rear of tenement plots. Production appears to have been at household subsistence level, with the single exception of the sizeable, possibly communal, oven identified at Site 1. All these features occupied rear yards, areas seemingly employed for a range of activities but lacking in formal zoning. In some cases post-holes and wall fragments suggest that certain craft/industrial tasks were undertaken under cover. Whether this was in the form of lean-to structures against tenement walls or as freestanding buildings is unknown. The likelihood is that the majority of rear-property areas contained a combination of structures and open-air yards crossed by covered drains. The small number and scale of these features indicate domestic provisioning rather than commercial production, which would have been severely constrained in such densely occupied spaces. The more noxious production processes, such as the preparation of animal skins, would have been restricted to peripheral, low-population areas of the town. The excavation in 2007 of stone-lined tanks, probably associated with fellmongering at Bath Lane on the eastern edge of the town, is a case in point (Kipling 2008). The only evidence for production on a non-domestic scale from the excavations under discussion was the sizeable, possibly communal, oven identified at Site 1. The circular masonry feature paralleled a similar structure at Site 2 in Worcester and may represent an example

of a feature serving households which lacked an oven, and which may in addition have supplied bread and other baked goods (Dalwood and Edwards 2004, 65).

Site 1 was also characterised by the distinctive circular granite masonry features which, although of uncertain function, may have functioned as bases for heated water tanks, supported on a non-extant superstructure. As such they are likely to have been linked to a range of industrial processes including brewing, metalworking or cloth-processing. The recovery of possible brewing waste in the form of charred wheat from one of the pits within the undercroft provided tantalising hints at a possible function for these structures, but otherwise the purpose(s) of these features remains open to speculation.

CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological interventions conducted within the commercial core of medieval Leicester since the 1970s have demonstrated distinct commonalities and consistencies in terms of both the size, form and arrangement of medieval tenement patterning, and in the structures and activities occupying and undertaken within their boundaries.

Evidence drawn from the three excavations under discussion points to the early formalisation and rapid and dense infill of properties, ranged along two of the most prominent medieval street frontages seemingly maintained into the modern period until disruption by nineteenth-century industrial development and twentieth-century urban remodelling. Whilst frontage structures, with the single notable exception of an undercroft building, were beyond the limits of these excavations, the rear-yard areas, with their attendant drains, wells (possibly communal), bread ovens and/or features associated with textile manufacture or brewing activity, indicate the economic vitality of this central area of the medieval town. Plots appear to have been infilled rapidly with new structures, remaining densely occupied into the post-medieval period and with some property lines enduring into the twentieth century. There were no clear indications of the zoning of activities, rather that a range of processes were undertaken in the yard areas and probably in structures within the same open areas.

The Site 1 undercroft is a rare regional survival of an early medieval masonry building most likely associated with mercantile activity, confirming the economic and social pre-eminence of this area of the medieval town. The indications of its positioning on a double-width site hints at earlier property arrangements pre-dating the likely formalisation of plots in the thirteenth century.

The underlying Roman town appears to have had only a small influence on the medieval urban topography, although instances such as construction of the undercroft building on the intersection of two Roman streets or the perpetuation of a forum wall-line in a property boundary show an awareness of relict structures on the part of the post-Roman urban population of Leicester. They appear, however, not to have constituted constraining factors in terms of the development of the urban fabric, but rather aids to the setting out of buildings and streets.

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