

EXCAVATION OF MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL BUILDINGS AT NOTTINGHAM SHIRE HALL, 1994

by

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SUMMARY

The site lies close to Nottingham city centre, bounded to the south by the cliff forming the south side of the Lace Market area, and to the north by High Pavement, probably originally the intramural road of the Anglo-Scandinavian burh. It contains the Shire Hall, built in 1770, and the County Gaol, of slightly later date. Both buildings have a long history of extension and modification into the present century. During their recent conversion to the 'Galleries of Justice' by the Lace Market Heritage Trust, excavations and recording were carried out by Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust. Documentary sources record that the King's Hall and County Gaol were located in 'the pavement' in the medieval period; these were probably the stone-built 'Countrey Hall' shown in an 18th century plan and engravings, along with a second stone building and an apparent jettied timber building of two storeys. The archaeological work revealed details of the 1770 Shire Hall and its later extensions, together with an intermittently-preserved sequence of earlier stone buildings and rock-cut pits extending back to the medieval period. Despite the site's location within the Anglo-Scandinavian burh, no contemporary features were identified.

INTRODUCTION

Excavations and recording of parts of the standing building were carried out by Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust funded by The Lace Market Heritage Trust, during the conversion of the Nottingham Shire Hall and County Gaol to the 'Galleries of Justice'. The work took place during the period January-May 1994, according to terms laid down in a brief written

by the City Archaeologist (the City Council's curatorial archaeologist), and consisted of the monitoring of all ground disturbances, with archaeological excavation and recording of any deposits pre-dating the standing buildings of 1770/1800. In addition, the fabric of the standing building was recorded where new openings were to be made.

The work was not on a sufficient scale to merit detailed publication, and consequently only a summary of the site's development prior to 1770 is presented here. A full archive of the work, including a detailed account of the excavations and the building fabric record, is currently intended for deposition at Brewhouse Yard Museum, with a copy at the National Monuments Record and the Lace Market Heritage Trust.

SITE LOCATION

The Shire Hall site undergoing development in 1994 is centred on National Grid Reference SK 576 396 (Fig. 1). It lies on the southern edge of Nottingham's Lace Market area, the core of the historic borough, and is bounded to the north by High Pavement, probably originally the intramural street of the Anglo-Scandinavian burh (Young 1986), and to the south by the high cliff formed in the sandstone rock on which the Lace Market area stands. It contains the Shire Hall at the front, with the County Gaol to the rear, with a narrow alley between. Behind the gaol a high brick wall retains the natural sandstone cliff where it drops down to Cliff Road. The ground level at street frontage slopes moderately down from east to west, and slopes steeply down from High Pavement to the cliff overlooking Cliff Road.

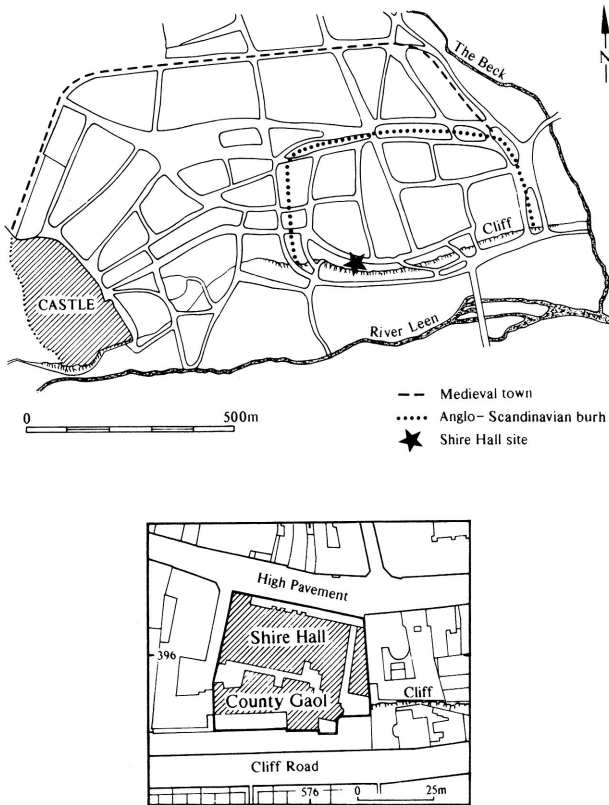


FIGURE 1: Site location in relation to the early 17th century street plan, showing the location of the cliff and the Anglo-Scandinavian and medieval defences (after Young 1981); detail shows present site layout.

DOCUMENTARY AND MAP EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence relating to the site has been covered in some detail by Brand (Brand undated, 1-16), and a summary is presented here. A detailed survey of the site was made in 1710 (Fig. 2), and sketches and an engraving also survive showing the north and south elevations of the site in the mid-18th century (Figs. 3 & 4). All three documents have a high level of agreement in detail, and show that, prior to 1770, the present Shire Hall site was divided into three separate properties (from east to west, labelled A, B and C in Figs. 2-4).

A hall of the King in 'the Pavement' is recorded

from 1375-6, and was probably the site of the gaol for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire recorded in 1449. This property is probably the 'Country Hall', 'Goale Court' and 'Goale House' shown in the 1710 plan (property A). The north elevation shows a building, then described as 'ancient', with a stone gable fronting the street, containing an original central doorway then blocked, while the south elevation shows the rear gable with a large arched window.

About 1618 the house immediately west of the King's Hall, formerly occupied by John Boun (property B) was given to the County Magistrates to be used as a court room. By 1622 it had received a colonnaded front (seen in the survey and northern elevation), but was disused by 1741.

In 1709 a large mansion was purchased for the County from Julius Hutchinson (property C). The northern elevation shows the east end of the frontage of this building, which appears to have been jettied and of two storeys. The 1710 plan shows a building with a central courtyard; the side and rear ranges are wider than the front, and may well be a secondary extension of the original building on the street frontage. The southern elevation shows that the rear range terminated in a three-or-four-storey flat-fronted gable.

The present Shire Hall was constructed in 1770-2, built to a design by J. Gandon, and the gaol was begun c 1800. Much of the 1770 Shire Hall still stands, including the colonnaded front. The later history of the buildings is one of gradual piecemeal extension. In 1876 fire destroyed much of Gandon's building to ground level, with the exception of the facade. Rebuilding was immediate, to a design by T. C. Hine. In 1878 the County Gaol closed as a prison, and was later used first as police cells and for prisoners during trial, and from 1888 as offices for the newly-established County Council. In 1937 construction of new County Offices at Trent Bridge led to a decline in use of the Gaol buildings, and in 1988 the site was sold and vacated by the County Council. In 1995, following the refurbishment which created the need for these excavations, the site was re-opened as 'The Galleries of Justice'.

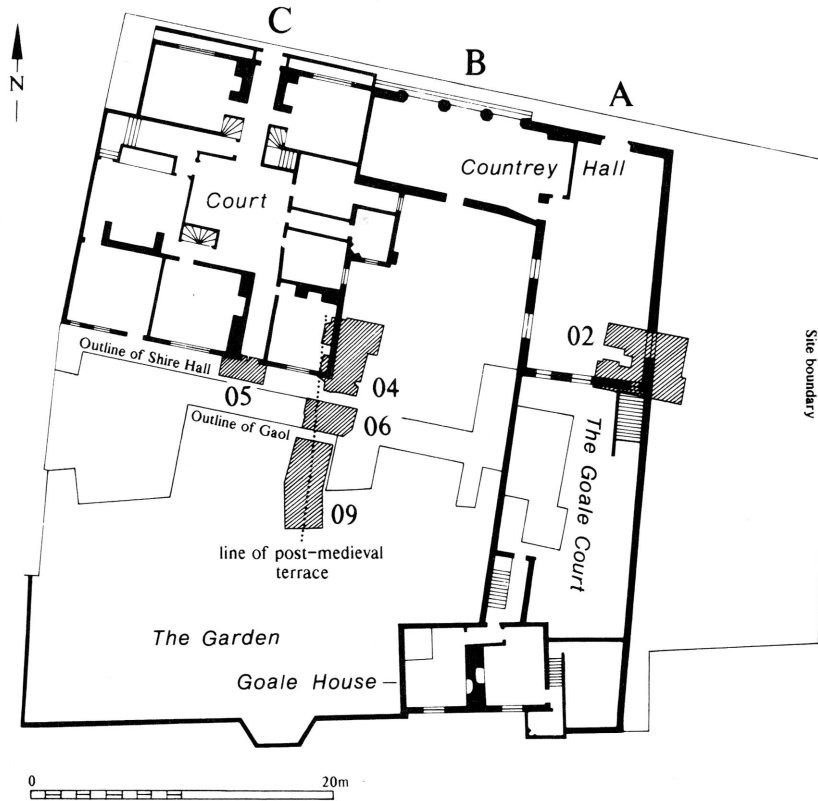
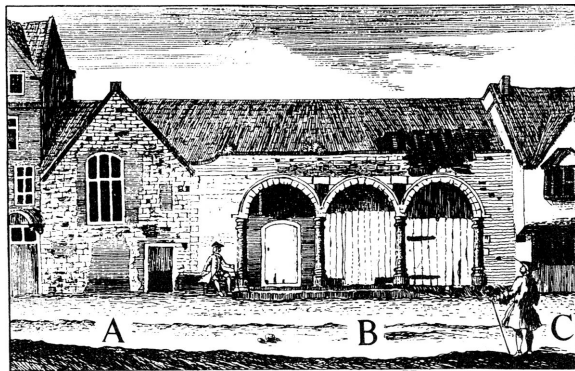


FIGURE 2: Survey of 1710 in relation to the present site layout, showing excavation areas mentioned in text.



A Prospect of y COUNTY HALL as it appear'd on the Year 1750.

FIGURE 3: North elevation of the site, 1750.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

During the development of the site, twelve areas (numbered 01-12) involved ground disturbance; those producing pre-1770 features are shown in relation to the pre-1770 site layout in Fig. 2, and detailed plans and sections of areas 04, 06 and 09 are shown in Figs.

5-7. Medieval pottery was identified by R. Leary and post-medieval pottery by the author, with assistance from C. S. B. Young and A. G. MacCormick respectively. Other artefacts did not produce dating evidence and are catalogued with the pottery in the archive.

AREA 02

Despite extensive disturbance from the 1770 and later buildings and a limited requirement for excavation, some lengths of wall survived which were identified by the location as the south-east corner of the 'Countrey Hall' shown in the 1710 survey; most contained brick and therefore were probably not as early as the medieval hall recorded in the documents; it is possible that the front end of the stone-built medieval hall had been retained, but the back wall had been rebuilt in brick. A short length of stone foundation which survived might have been earlier, but there were no stratified finds to provide dating evidence.

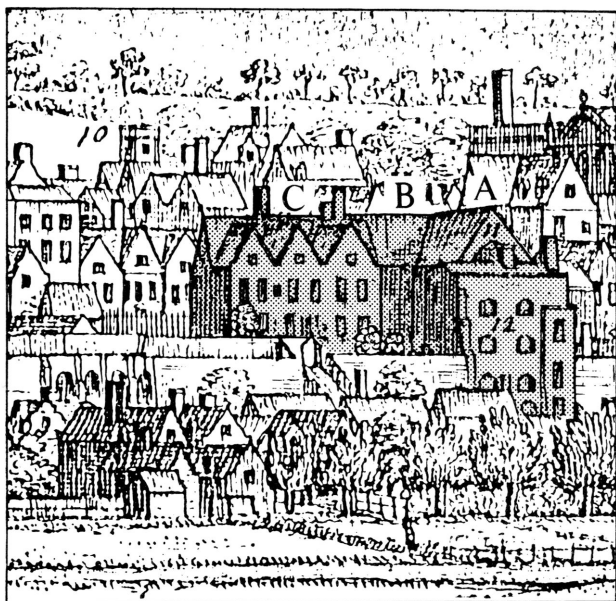


FIGURE 4: South elevation of the site, 1742, part of a prospect of Nottingham from the South by Sandby.

AREAS 04, 06 AND 09

04 lay within the Shire Hall, 09 within the Gaol, and 06 in a yard between, and in consequence there was no stratigraphic link between any of the areas. There was again much damage to the pre-1770 deposits from later building, and the deepest features in 04 and 06 were not fully excavated. 09 utilised an existing Victorian under-floor duct, and archaeological work there was limited to cleaning and recording of the floor levels.

Phase 1: medieval pits and gulleys

Features consisted of steep-sided pits F11 and F19, F20 and F55 (incompletely excavated), a gully F18 (cut by three stake-holes), two small pits or post-holes F15 and F16, and a large unexcavated feature, F10, either merging with the north side of F11, or forming an extension of it. Almost all had been truncated by the insertion of later walls, and there was no clear stratigraphic relationship between them. The pits F11, F19 and F55 were not fully excavated, but the lowest excavated fills of F11 produced quantities of pottery, of which the latest was late Nottingham Splashed Ware (c 1180-1250), and F19 produced a sherd of Stamford Ware (c 1075-1150). Addition-

ally, analysis of a sample of the fill of F11 suggested that it had been used as a cess pit (see below).

Phase 2a: medieval stone walls

A substantial stone foundation was erected in this phase: 0328 lay across the area from east to west, dug into the top of F11, and this appeared to have been later extended 2m to the south (0360, 0350). 0360 or its successor 0324 continued to the south where it survived as fragment 0407. No contemporary floor surfaces were identified.

One sherd of Nottingham Reduced Green Glazed Ware (c late 13th century to 1430) came from within the fabric of 0360.

Phase 2b: medieval stone wall and timber structure

A second substantial stone wall (0324), directly overlay 0360 on the same north/south alignment. It was bedded in a different sand matrix, and could have been either a rebuild of that wall, or a change in building materials in the same wall; a lack of mortar suggests that it was still at foundation level. As noted above fragment 0407 may represent a continuation of this wall to the south.

A group of post-holes, F5-F9, lay on, and east of, the east face of 0324. F5 preserved the stones used to pack the post. F6 had been cut into the stonework of the wall 0324; it might have been a fixing in the wall such as a door-jamb; otherwise it indicates that 0324 had been demolished to ground level prior to the fixing of the post. It seems likely that these post holes were contemporary, and the group may represent an internal feature such as a partition or timber stair base.

The foundation trench of 0324 cut a deposit containing Nottingham Coarse Orange/Pink Sandy Wares and Nottingham Reduced Green Glazed Ware of late-13th to mid-15th century date.

Phase 2a or b: stone walled pit

East of the Victorian duct in 06 lay a rectilinear stone-lined pit (F54), revetted at the top by stone walls which survived on the north and south sides

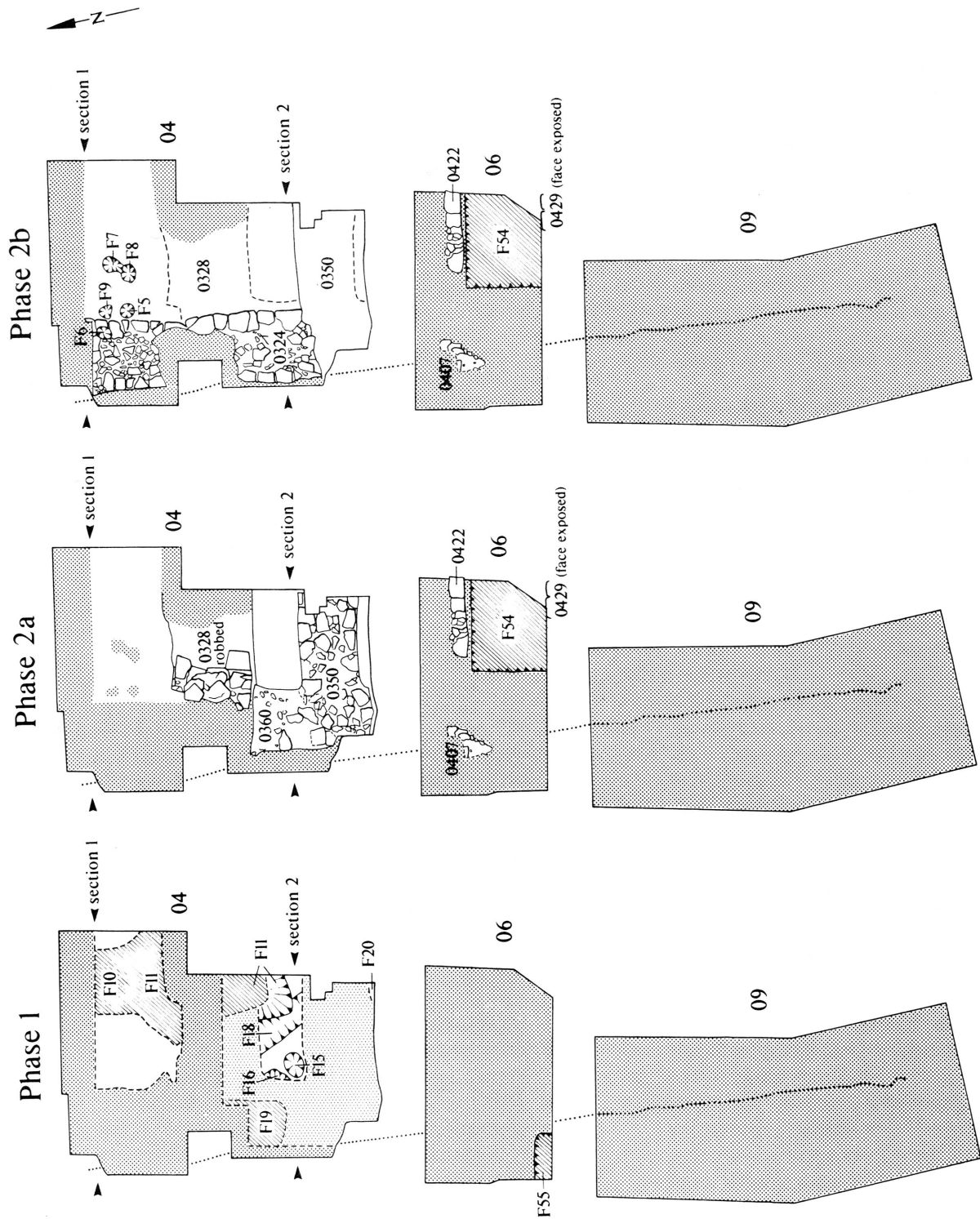


FIGURE 5: Plan of excavation areas 04, 06 and 09, showing features of phases 1, 2a and 2b.

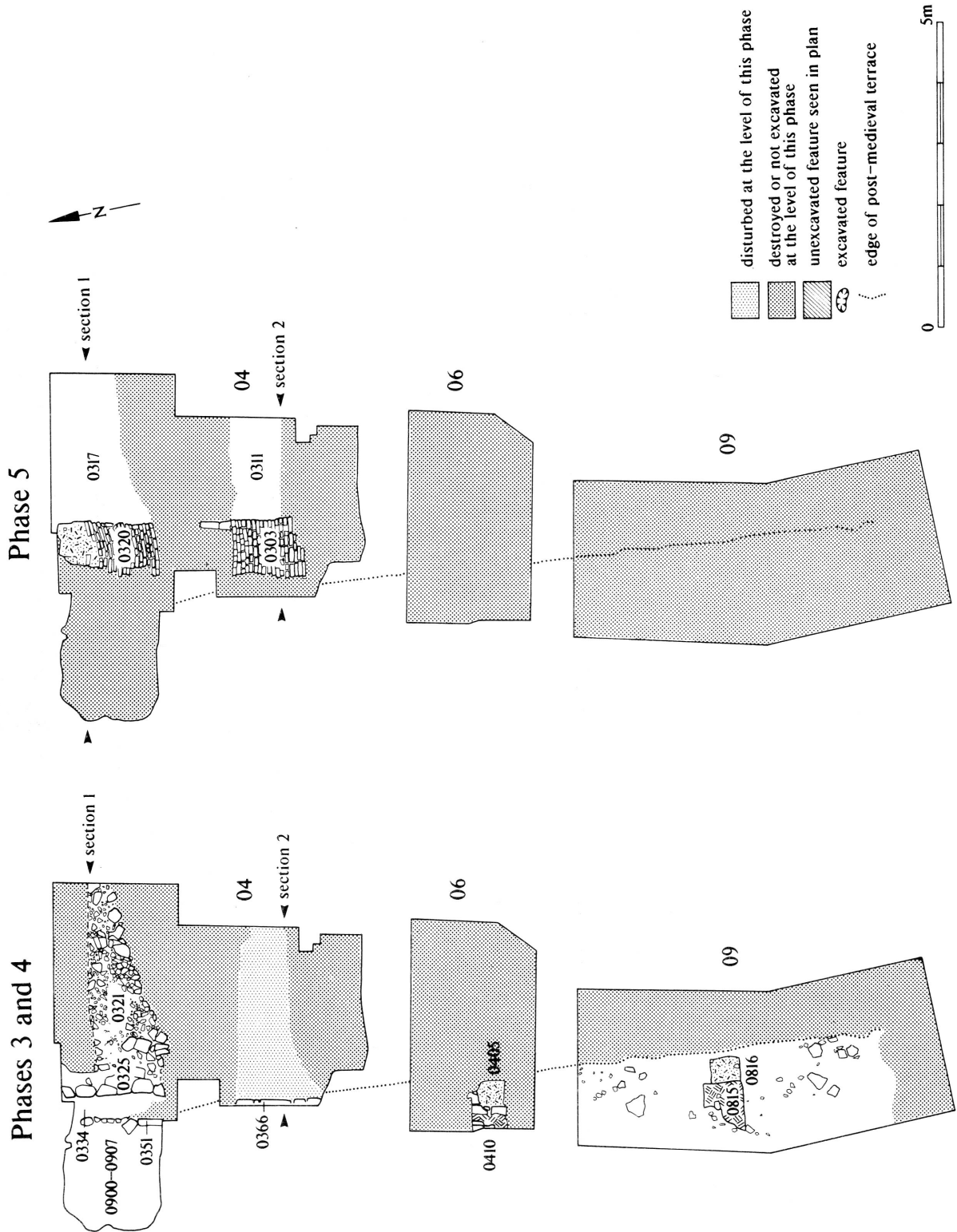


FIGURE 6: Plan of excavation areas 04, 06 and 09, showing features of phases 3, 4 and 5.

(0422, 0429). The west side could have been lined by the continuation of 0360 or 0324. The retaining walls had been dug through the softer rockhead to firm sandstone; below this the walls of the pit were slightly undercut into unlined rock. Late Nottingham Splashed Ware (c 1180-1250) and Nottingham Light-bodied Green Glazed Ware (c 1230-1300) came from the lowest excavated fills of F54, and Nottingham Coarse Orange/Pink Sandy Ware (c 1250-1430) from a later fill, suggesting a 13th-century or earlier date for the construction of the pit.

Phase 3: late-medieval retaining wall and rubble

The stone building represented by the walls of phases 2a and 2b was demolished in phase 3, and, at the north end of the area, covered by a cobbled surface (0321) with a retaining wall of larger stones and battered west face (0325) to the west. 0321 and 0325 were cut to the south by 1770 features, and no matching cobbling was found in the southern part of the area. The use of a retaining wall suggests that the ground dropped away to the west at this time, and certainly deeper strata were recorded (0907-0908) west of 0325, though they were undated (Fig. 7, section 1). Dumped material beneath the cobbled surface included residual Nottingham Splashed Wares and Nottingham Green Glazed Wares, and two sherds, one Midland Purple (c 1350-1600) and one German

Stone Ware (early/mid-16th century), indicating a late medieval date, at the earliest, for the cobbles and retaining wall.

Phase 4: early post-medieval stone walls

Just within the west edge of 04 were two lengths of stone wall on parallel north/south alignments (0351, 0366). Both were formed of weathered and unweathered sandstone bedded in dark red clay, and contained much tile, while 0351 contained a brick. 0351 had been built adjacent to the Phase 3 retaining wall 0325, and the south length (0366) undercut the west face of the foundations of the medieval wall 0324 (Fig. 7, sections 1 and 2 respectively); the gap between the adjacent wall faces was in both cases plugged with red clay and tile, including some large pieces set on edge (0334, 0365). The clay in these plugs matched the clay used in the fabric of the walls 0351 and 0366, suggesting that the plug and the walls were of the same build, and later than the sand-bedded stone walls to the east (0325, 0324, 0360). Additionally, two further lengths of wall, orientated east/west in 06 and 09, were formed of clay-bedded sandstone (0410, 0815 respectively), each terminating in a mortared end (0405, 0816); the similarity of construction and orientation of the two suggests that they were contemporary, while a surviving fragment

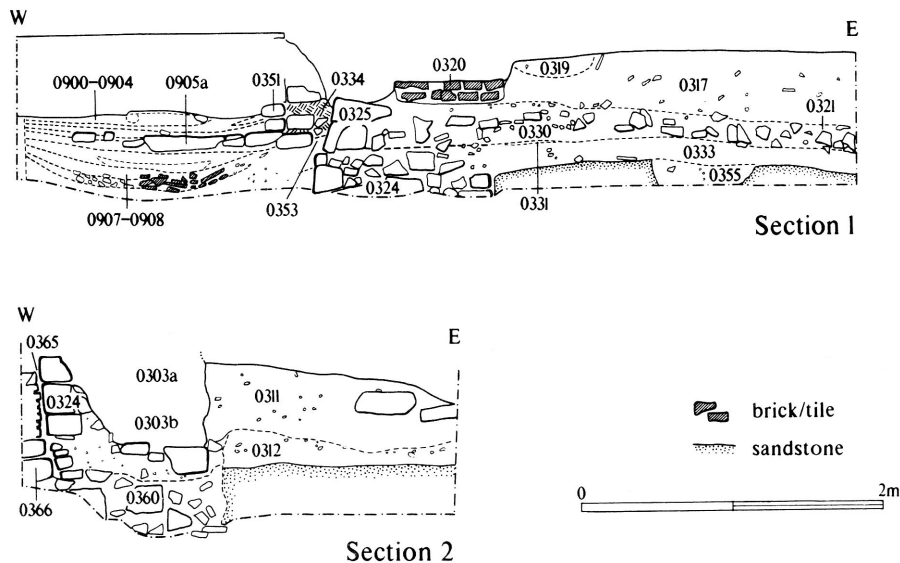


FIGURE 7: Sections 1 and 2 (locations are marked on Figures 5 & 6).

of a clay-and-tile plug on the east face of 0405 resembles those used against 0351 and 0366, suggesting further contemporaneity. 09 was divided in two by an approximately north/south cut: stratified deposits including the wall 0815/0816 were preserved to the west, but bedrock lay at the same level to the east, the overlying strata and possibly some of the rock having been removed by the Victorian duct.

West of 0351, spreads including intensely-heated sand and stones (0900-0904) overlay a flagged floor (0905a), seen only in section (section 1, Fig. 7); the wall and floor stones were also affected by this heat. A charcoal-rich layer containing evidence for smithing (0317) was dumped on 0321, prior to phase 5, and therefore attributed to this phase.

Four Cistercian Ware sherds (*c* 1525-1650) came from the burnt deposits over the flagged floor 0905a, while a single Nottingham Green Glazed Ware sherd came from beneath it; two sherds of Nottingham Light-bodied Green Glazed Ware and Nottingham Reduced Green Glazed Ware (*c* 13th to 15th centuries) came from 0334 and 0365, the clay-and-tile plugs, and from 0325, the retaining wall to the cobbles. The walls also lay within the pre-1710 building described next; they seem too close to be a part of a room partition, and are therefore probably of earlier date. Midland Purple (*c* 1350-1600), Midland Yellow (*c* 1550-1725) and Midland Red Wares (late 17th to 20th centuries) came from layers overlying the top of 0406/0410, but no dating for its construction was found.

Phase 5: brick wall of ante 1710

East of, and parallel to, the stone walls described immediately above, lay a further wall represented by two lengths of brick footings, both formed entirely of broken brick and mortar (0303, 0320). No other features could confidently be associated with this wall, but it was dug into 0317 attributed to phase 4, and into 0311, a similar layer to the south.

This wall was the last archaeologically-represented building phase in this area prior to the 1770 structure, and its position and alignment match that of the east wall of Hutchinson's House shown on the survey of 1710.

AREA 05

A pit about 2m² was excavated in this area by contractors, under archaeological supervision, to provide space for machinery beneath a lift. The 1770 wall foundations extended down to bedrock, some 3.5m, where they followed the profile of a rectilinear rock-cut pit in order to be continuously founded on sandstone; consequently no fill of the pit survived. Probing of the sandstone revealed a void beneath, and further investigative excavations revealed a cave. Its top fill, which contained much Victorian brick, extended up almost to the roof, and brick walls had been inserted to support the roof. Further parts of the cave lay beyond these walls, and its full extent is currently unknown. The original construction date of the cave is also unknown, although a series of caves, cut into the cliff face, was recorded in 1836, some of which are currently accessible from the Gaol House (Fig. 2, Brand undated, figure inside back cover).

OTHER AREAS

Further excavations and fabric alterations were carried out by labourers monitored by archaeological staff. These works revealed 1770, Victorian and later building fabric and associated deposits, but nothing which pre-dated the 1770 building. Results generally confirmed the accuracy of the plan of 1770, and that at basement level Gandon's 1770 Shire Hall building survives largely intact (though much altered by later blockings), despite the fire of 1876 which destroyed much of the ground and upper floors. Detailed records are deposited in the archive.

ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLES

by James Rackham

Six samples were taken from contexts pre-dating 1770. All the samples were passed through a tank with a flotation sieve with a 0.5mm mesh and an internal wet-sieve of 1mm mesh for the residue. The wet-sieved residue was sorted by eye and the float of each sample was studied under a low-power binocular microscope. The purpose of sampling was to permit an assessment of the potential value of further sampling should other parts of the site require excavation in the future, and only the main conclusions

are given here (full details are given in the archive). All animal bone seen in pre-1770 contexts during the excavation was also collected and studied.

Carbonised plant remains were present in all samples and were dominated by cereals, with few other seeds present and no evidence of chaff. This would suggest a domestic food origin with no evidence for stabling or animal fodder.

The mammal and bird remains indicate the consumption of domestic species and rabbit. Although very few fish bones were collected by hand during excavation, eel and herring were present in significant quantities in the samples, together with much lesser quantities of freshwater fish and one or two of larger marine species: future work should therefore ensure the collection of samples for the extraction of this material.

The majority of the animal bone recovered from the site was identified by eye during excavation. The small volume of excavation (much of which was construction material) limits conclusions, but the assemblages are characteristic of domestic waste with no evidence of primary butchery. Juvenile, immature and adult animals were present, but the only evidence for very young animals was a pig femur from an animal only a few weeks old, possibly indicating animals being reared in town.

The shell fragments present in some of the samples and hand-collected material were mainly oysters, with mussels and cockles also present.

In general, the waste products represented in the samples and hand-collected bones were mainly small pieces, suggesting that the larger food waste was disposed of elsewhere on the site, or carted away.

Two observations were of particular note. In 0317 (phase 4), 22g of spheroidal and flake hammerscale were recovered, together with small pieces of secondary smithing slag and hearth lining (Jane Cowgill pers. comm.), all indicative of smithing; coal was also present in small quantities, and there were considerable quantities of comminuted charcoal possibly associated with the smithing evidence. No certain evidence of hearth linings *in situ* was recovered, and

it is probable that the material was derived from elsewhere, although all samples produced a few grammes of hammerscale, suggesting that smithing may have taken place nearby in both the medieval and post-medieval periods. Some of the contents of the sample from 0370, a lower fill of F11, suggested that the pit had been used as a cess-pit: mineralised seeds and wood, quantities of pale grey concretions (apparently calcium phosphate deposits), and over 50 bones of eel and herring, some of which were compressed and misshapen, indicating that they had passed through a digestive system.

DISCUSSION

General conclusions are limited by the small scale of the work, and the small volume of finds, partly due to the nature of the deposits excavated, has made dating very tentative. The earliest pits had been dug by at least the early 13th century, but there was an absence of Saxo-Norman features, and an almost complete absence of Saxo-Norman pottery. This result supports Young's findings from excavations at Fisher Gate, where the area between the intra-mural road and the defences of the Anglo-Scandinavian burh was kept clear of building before the 12th century (Young 1986). The antiquity of the cliff overlooking Cliff Road is not established and it may be of post-medieval origin; consequently the defences on the south side of the Anglo-Scandinavian burh may have been sited at the top of what was then a steep slope (C. S. B. Young, pers. comm.). The widths of the stone footings of phases 2 and 3 (1-1.25m) suggest that the buildings were walled in stone, at least to the first floor. Such an indicator of relatively high status accords well with the location adjacent to a property owned by the King.

The excavations revealed a sequence of walls continually re-built on approximately the same line, evidently a property boundary. These were the stone walls of phase 2a and b (0324, 0360, 0407), the cobbles and retaining wall of phase 3 (0321, 0325), the stone walls with clay plugs of phase 4 (0351, 0366, 0410/0405 and 0815/0816), and the brick wall of phase 5 (0303, 0320). This line corresponds with the projected position of the east wall of Hutchinson's house in the 1710 plan (Fig. 2), and as no major rebuild between 1710 and 1770 is documented, the

southern elevation of 1742 must show the same building. This has a form and proportion consistent with brick walls and sash windows (compare the houses at Brewhouse Yard, c 1700; Pevsner 236), and the phase 5 walls, being the last in the archaeological sequence, and built solely of brick, may be identified as those of Hutchinson's house.

The 0351/0366 wall-line of phase 4 lay just within the floor area of Hutchinson's brick house, yet too close to the east wall to be an internal division; the implied earlier date of the wall-line is supported by the few datable finds from beneath and above the floor associated with 0351 which were of later medieval date. Although brick did not become the common building material in Nottingham until c 1600 (Young 1981), the presence of a single brick in 0351 does not preclude a late-medieval date (A. MacCormick, pers. comm.). Too little of the struc-

ture of this building was excavated to define its character, but it is tempting to relate the intense burning associated with 0351 to the dump containing smithing debris (0371), although the two areas apparently lay to either side of the boundary.

The property boundary had been followed from at least phase 2 indicating its establishment earlier in the medieval period (Fig. 2). It might be supposed to have extended as far south as the cliff edge, and the significant west-to-east drop in the height of the top of the rock noted across this boundary in 04 (section 1), and in 09 suggests that the general slope of the ground down to the west had apparently been counteracted by terracing. It is possible that the east/west walls of phase 4 (0410/0405 and 0815/0816) were not parts of buildings, but retaining walls for garden terraces laid out across the north/south slope down to the cliff edge.

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