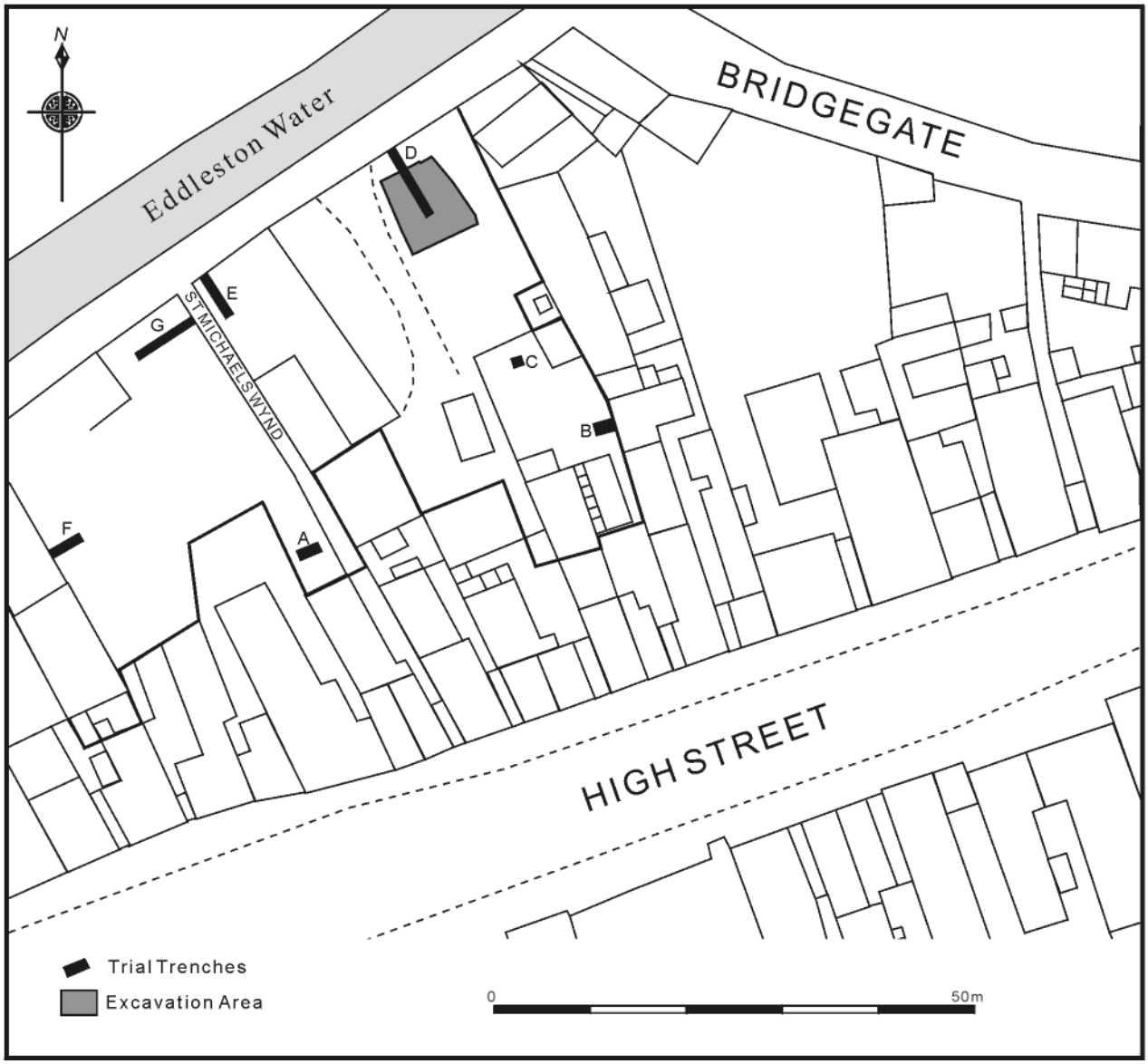
5 Cuddyside, Peebles 1993–94 *by J R Mackenzie*

Introduction (illus 43)

The development site at Cuddyside comprised the backlands of Nos 36–64 High Street, leading down to the Eddleston Water, and divided roughly in half by St Michael's Wynd. The ground surface dropped steeply downwards by approximately 8 m over the 70 m from High Street to Cuddyside.

When taken alongside the evidence recovered from the nearby tolbooth site (Dixon and Perry, above), this development at Cuddyside provided an opportunity to further study a large part of the early burgh. Trial trenching was carried out in November 1992 to assess the archaeological potential of the proposed development site (Cachart 1992). This evaluation established that the construction of a cinema, which had been demolished in 1992, had destroyed all possible archaeological remains on the western side of St Michael's Wynd. On the eastern side of the Wynd, modern landscaping layers were identified in the area immediately to the rear of the High Street properties. One area of particular interest, however, was identified in the north-east corner of



Illus 43 Peebles, Cuddyside, Trial Trenches and Excavations

the development area, on flat ground at the foot of the ridge, close to the Eddleston Water (NGR NT 2057 4051). A small portion of a stone wall was uncovered, which might relate to the line of the 16th-century defensive wall that was thought to have stood on, or close to, this part of Cuddyside. Excavation was undertaken to investigate this feature and the surrounding area before it was destroyed by the proposed housing development.

The main objectives were:

1. To obtain more information on the wall fragment uncovered during the evaluation and determine whether it related to the 16th-century defensive wall or may have been part of a domestic or industrial building. Such information would provide an interesting insight into the distribution and type of development within the early burgh.
2. To examine the surrounding area for possible further remains relating to building structures and, or, property boundaries.
3. To establish which building materials and methods of construction had been used and recover any material possessions. In addition, archaeobotanical analysis would be carried out if any suitable deposits were encountered which could provide an insight into the diet and lifestyle of the townsfolk.
4. To retrieve datable evidence which would provide information towards establishing a sequence for any identified activity on the site.

The excavation of an area 7 m by 4 m, under the supervision of James Mackenzie, began in February 1993 for a period of two weeks and was carried out under the threat of imminent development. Because development was postponed, a second phase of excavation took place in February 1994, again for a period of two weeks, and again under threat of imminent development. The area excavated in 1993 was extended to the south and east to form a total area of 8 m by 11 m. Unfortunately, the eastern extent of the excavation was limited by the proximity of a high voltage electricity line that supplied a nearby substation.

After the removal of topsoil by machine, the site was hand excavated, reducing the soil profile from c 160.5 m OD to the undisturbed subsoil horizon at c 159.2 m OD. The undisturbed subsoil on the site comprised alluvial deposits typical of a gravel river terrace. Contained within the gravel deposits were frequent weathered boulders and rich patches of organic matter.

The archaeological sequence

The archaeological sequence has been divided into seven separate phases of activity spanning some 600–800 years. Each phase represents a distinct change of activity on the site.

Phase 1 – Dumping, flooding and hillwash (not illustrated)

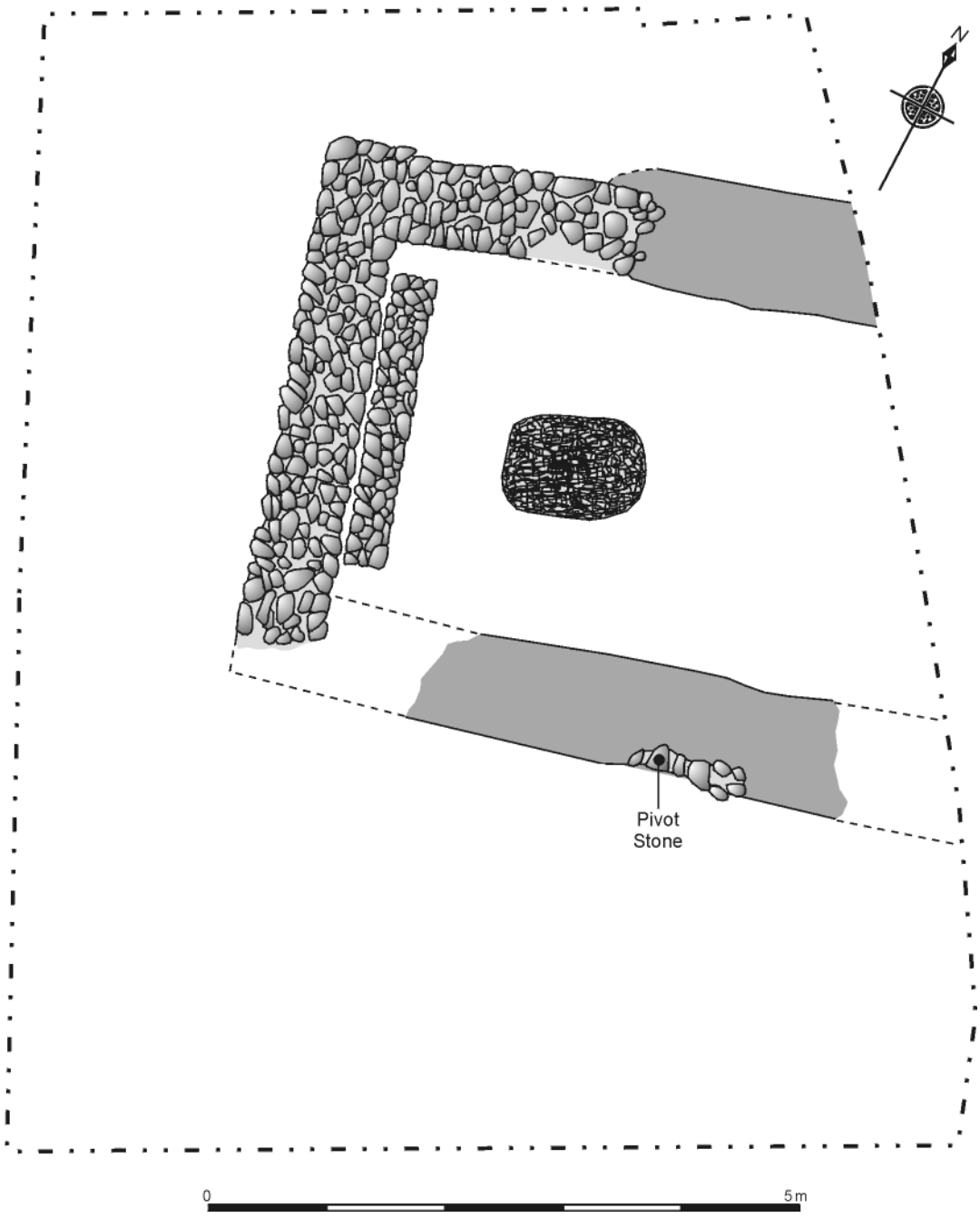
Evidence of the earliest phase of activity on the site is defined by a series of silty clay and gravel flood deposits, from which small quantities of White Gritty pottery sherds were recovered. White Gritty pottery is thought to have been made in Scotland over some two to three centuries, and so this deposition may date from anywhere between the 12th and 15th centuries (see Hall, below). These deposits were all found in the northern half of the excavation area, closest to the Eddleston Water. In addition, a layer of silty sand was found overlying the undisturbed alluvial gravels at the southern extremity of the site, which also contained early medieval pottery sherds. This deposit most likely represented the base of a hillwash layer at the foot of the steep slope. The presence of pottery sherds within these flood and hillwash deposits confirms occupation in the vicinity of the site, if not on the site itself, and it is likely that this area of the riverside was used to tip rubbish which subsequently became mixed with flood and hillwash deposits.

Phase 2 – Medieval development (illus 44)

Structure 1 (illus 44 and 45)

The first evidence of direct occupation on the site marks the beginning of this phase. The stone foundation remains of a substantial building were found (Structure 1) overlying, and cut into, the flood deposits of Phase 1. Unfortunately, the eastern portion of the building could not be excavated due to the close proximity of the live electricity line and so the full dimensions could not be ascertained. The northern and southern walls had been almost entirely robbed out, leaving only the base of the original foundation cut visible in the underlying gravels. The western extent of the building was clearly visible and comprised a single course of split and complete whinstone boulders, bonded in a yellow sandy clay matrix. This wall had a uniform width of 0.9 m and a maximum depth of 0.2 m within a foundation cut. From the remains visible, the building had an internal width of 3.6 m and was at least 4 m in length. This is comparable with the size of the earliest structures found at nearby Bridgegate (Dixon and Perry, above). Eight *in situ* bonded whinstone cobbles were also uncovered representing all that was left of the southern return. A rounded socket had been carved into one of these stones, indicating either a doorpost pivot hole or a re-used stone incorporated into the foundation wall.

Within Structure 1 was the foundation of a second, smaller wall. This wall lay on the immediate internal face of the western return of the building. It comprised a single course of sandy clay-bonded, split and complete whinstone boulders. The wall was 2.8 m in length, and 0.4 m in width, and lay within a



Illus 44 Peebles, Cuddyside, Phase 2

foundation cut 0.2 m in depth. Two butt-ends of the wall were clearly identified 0.25 m short of the main external wall. No other feature was found in association with this internal wall. This wall appears contemporary with the western gable, and remains enigmatic. If it is contemporary, as the evidence implies, then it may be a constructional detail for a floor surface or it may have served a similar function to the plinths found in Buildings 2 and 4 at nearby Bridgegate (Dixon and Perry, above).

Also within Structure 1 was an oval hearth which measured 1.2 m by 0.9 m and was situated midway between the north and south walls. The hearth was cut into the underlying gravels, with a maximum surviving depth of 0.2 m, probably truncated as this seems very shallow. The edges of the cut were lined with clay and contained a single fill of burnt sandy clay material. The surrounding gravels also showed signs of discoloration due to heat.

A layer of concentrated burnt material and blackened sandy clay sealed the hearth, and was spread throughout the internal area of the building. The majority of the pottery sherds recovered from this layer were of a White Gritty Reduced fabric, which indicates a date of deposition of around the 15th/16th centuries (see Hall, below). As this layer actually

Illus 45 Peebles, Cuddyside, view of Structure 1 (before extension of excavation) from south-east

seals the apparently truncated hearth, it seems likely that the blackened sandy clay was deposited during the demolition of Structure 1. It was during this demolition that most of the northern and southern walls were robbed. A robber cut was identified over the northern return but no cut was detected over the southern return due to its heavily truncated state.

Overlying and outside the southern wall return were layers of yellow-brown and grey-brown sandy clay, which contained small fragments of whinstone. These layers undoubtedly represent construction/demolition layers associated with Structure 1.

Phase 3 – Drainage (illus 46)

By the beginning of this phase Structure 1 must have already been demolished. This can be ascertained as two cut features were found overlying the southern wall of the building. Both features were cut into the construction/demolition layers of the previous phase.

A curvilinear gully had a maximum width of 1 m and a maximum depth of 0.4 m. The base of the feature fell slightly from the south-east to the north-west. This may be a robbed out drainage feature.

Adjacent to its north side was an oval pit, 0.15 m deep. The function of this feature is unknown. A single primary fill was found at the base of both features.

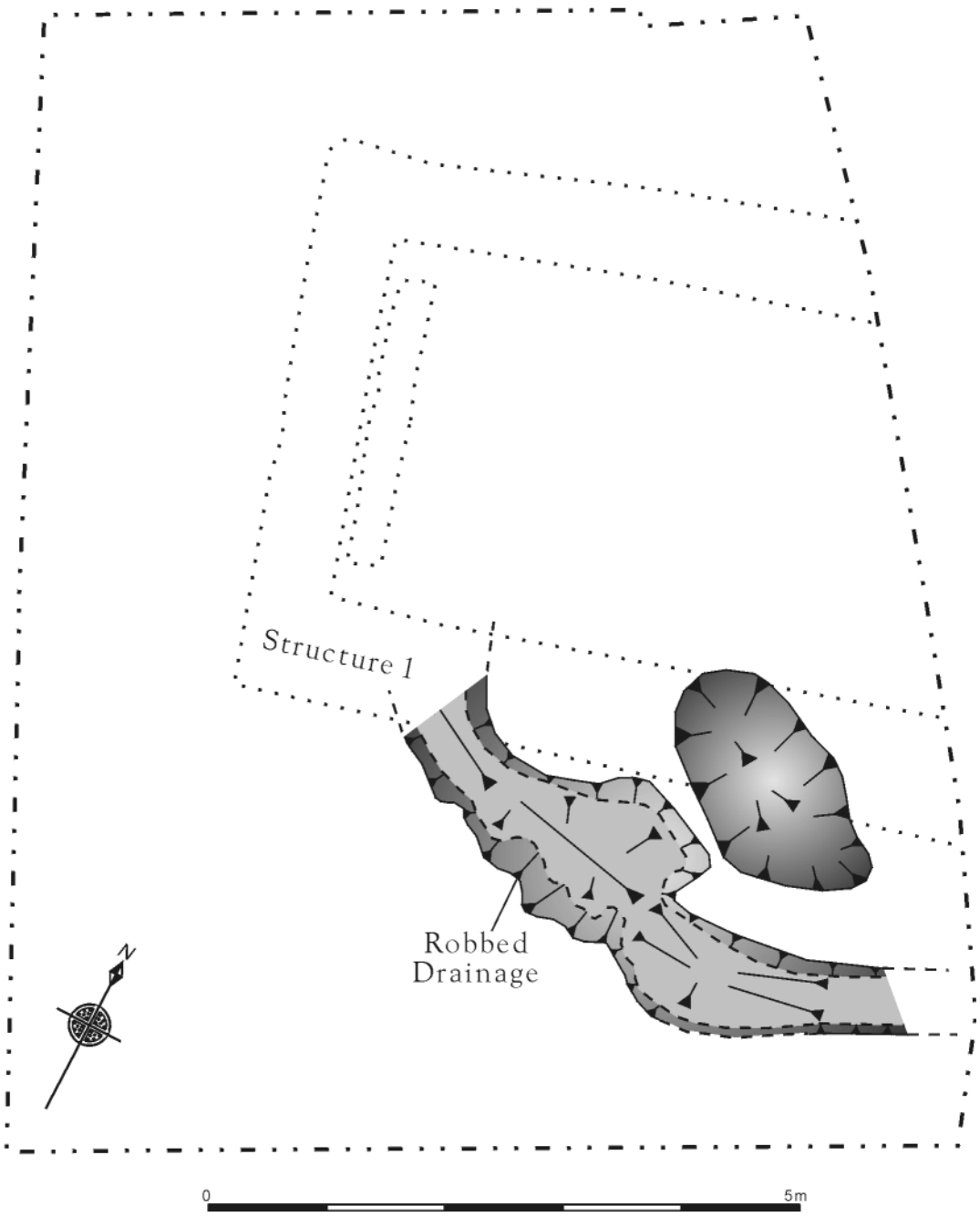
Phase 4 – Imported Soils (not illustrated)

The possible drainage feature was removed and several sandy clay imported soils were deposited across the site. The deposition of these layers resulted in the ground surface rising by a uniform height of at least 0.4 m. Datable objects retrieved from these layers imply a date of around the 15th/16th centuries.

Phase 5 – Late medieval development (illus 47)

Structure 2 (illus 47 and 48)

Sometime during the 15th or 16th centuries the site was comprehensively redeveloped. Two stone-built structures (2 and 3) were erected on the raised ground surface of Phase 4. These structures did not respect the property division of Structure 1 but did appear to have been built on a similar axial alignment. The western extent of Structure 2 was fully exposed but unfortunately, as with Structure 1, the eastern extent could not be investigated because of the proximity of the electricity line. The exposed



Illus 46 Peebles, Cuddyside, Phase 3

portion of Structure 2 comprised rounded and split water-washed cobbles and whinstone, randomly coursed and bonded with yellow sandy clay. The foundation walls were trench-built with a maximum width of 0.75 m, and an irregular depth of between 0.4 m and 0.6 m. The exposed portion indicates that Structure 2 was 3.9 m wide internally and at least 4.8 m long. No other structural features, which might have indicated the function of this building, were found.

Structure 3 (illus 47 and 48)

The foundation remains of another building (Structure 3) were found 3.4 m to the north of Structure 2. Again, only a small portion of this building could be exposed as the limit of the excavation was bounded by the electricity line to the east and by the excavation limit to the north. The exposed portion of the foundation wall of Structure 3 indicated that it was built in a similar fashion to Structure 2, with foundations of similar width and depth. Little more can be said about the dimensions or function of this building.

Between Structures 2 and 3 was the disturbed remnant of a cobbled surface. This surface abutted Structure 3 and clearly respected the northern wall of Structure 2, although it had been extensively disturbed at this point. The surface comprised rounded, complete and split water-washed cobbles, set in a grey-brown sandy clay matrix. It had a total

Illus 47 Peebles, Cuddyside, Phase 5

depth of 0.2 m, and rested on a bedding layer of grey-brown silty clay, also 0.2 m in thickness. The area of cobbling was heavily disturbed on its western extent and, therefore, it was unclear whether it continued beyond the western gable of Structures 2 and 3 or whether it respected the gable line.

To the west of Structure 2 was the single course remains of a linear foundation wall. This wall comprised water-washed cobbles and split whinstone blocks, loosely bonded with yellow sandy clay. The wall had a maximum width of 0.75 m and continued beyond the western limit of the excavation area (constrained by a modern surfaced driveway). With so little evidence it is difficult to interpret this wall, but it may have been a garden wall related to Structure 2.

After Structures 2 and 3 had become redundant the whole area was subjected to severe truncation. The buildings and the cobbled surface were truncated to the same level, resulting in an even horizon across the site at 159.90 m OD.

Phase 6 – 18th/19th-Century Landscaping (not illustrated)

Sealing the demolition spread of Phase 5 was a layer of brown sandy clay loam. This layer was 0.4 m thick

Illus 48 Peebles, Cuddyside, view of Structures 2 (background) and 3 (foreground) from north-west

at the northern extent of the excavation. As the ground surface rose sharply beyond the southern limit of the excavation area, a machine cut sondage was opened 4 m to the south to investigate the possibility of the area being landscaped. The brown sandy clay layer was found to thicken to over 1.2 m, creating a deliberately raised terrace. Evidence recovered from this layer indicated that it dated to the late 18th or 19th centuries.

Overlying the layer of brown sandy clay was a topsoil layer of black sandy clay. The topsoil had a uniform thickness of 0.4 m across the excavation area, and in the machine-cut sondage 4 m to the south.

Phase 7 – 20th century (not illustrated)

Cutting into the topsoil were three modern features comprising a drainage pipe, a garden feature, and an engineers' bore-hole.

Discussion

The presence of flood deposits on the site, possibly dating from as early as the 12th century, shows that flooding from the nearby Eddleston has been a long-term problem in this part of the town, as it is today. It is most likely that in the early years of the

burgh the land close to the Eddleston was used simply for dumping rubbish. Tip deposits pre-dating occupation were also identified at the nearby Bridgegate excavation (see Dixon and Perry, above) and dumping activity on the flood ground of a river, in an urban medieval context, is not uncommon. The dumping ceased with the subsequent development of Structure 1 (Phase 2) on the site.

The date of the construction of Structure 1 is not certain. There is reference to the early industry of the town, when in 1327 a sum of 4s was allowed for the privilege of cutting a mill lade through the land of James Spottis (Renwick 1903a, 33). This mill is believed to have been located on the northern side of the Eddleston, slightly upstream from the Cuddyside site. The construction of the lade may have altered the flow of the river making the site of Structure 1 less likely to flood; if this was so, then the date for the development of Structure 1 may be narrowed to between 1327 and the 15th century.

The function of Structure 1 is uncertain due to the heavily truncated nature of the remains and the scarcity of material objects. The little evidence that does exist provides one interesting clue. The medieval pottery assemblage in the demolition layers of Structure 1 is dominated by jug fragments, whereas cooking pots are normally the dominant vessel form in this period, and there was no evidence of non-ceramic cooking vessels from this site. This may imply that the building was not used for domestic purposes. It is possible that the building represented a storehouse but, given the substantial size of the foundations, this is unlikely. The presence of molten lead waste and a possible lead ingot may imply semi-industrial use. Lead waste is sometimes found in association with precious metal-working but other metals such as copper, bronze and brass, could also be expected (Spearman 1988). A semi-industrial use for the function of Structure 1 seems most likely, considering the combined evidence of substantial foundation remains, the building's location close to a river (a common site for smithing activities), the presence of a hearth, the unusual situation of the internal wall, the lack of cooking pots, and the presence of some industrial waste. Unfortunately the industrial waste is not in sufficient quantities to confirm semi-industrial use.

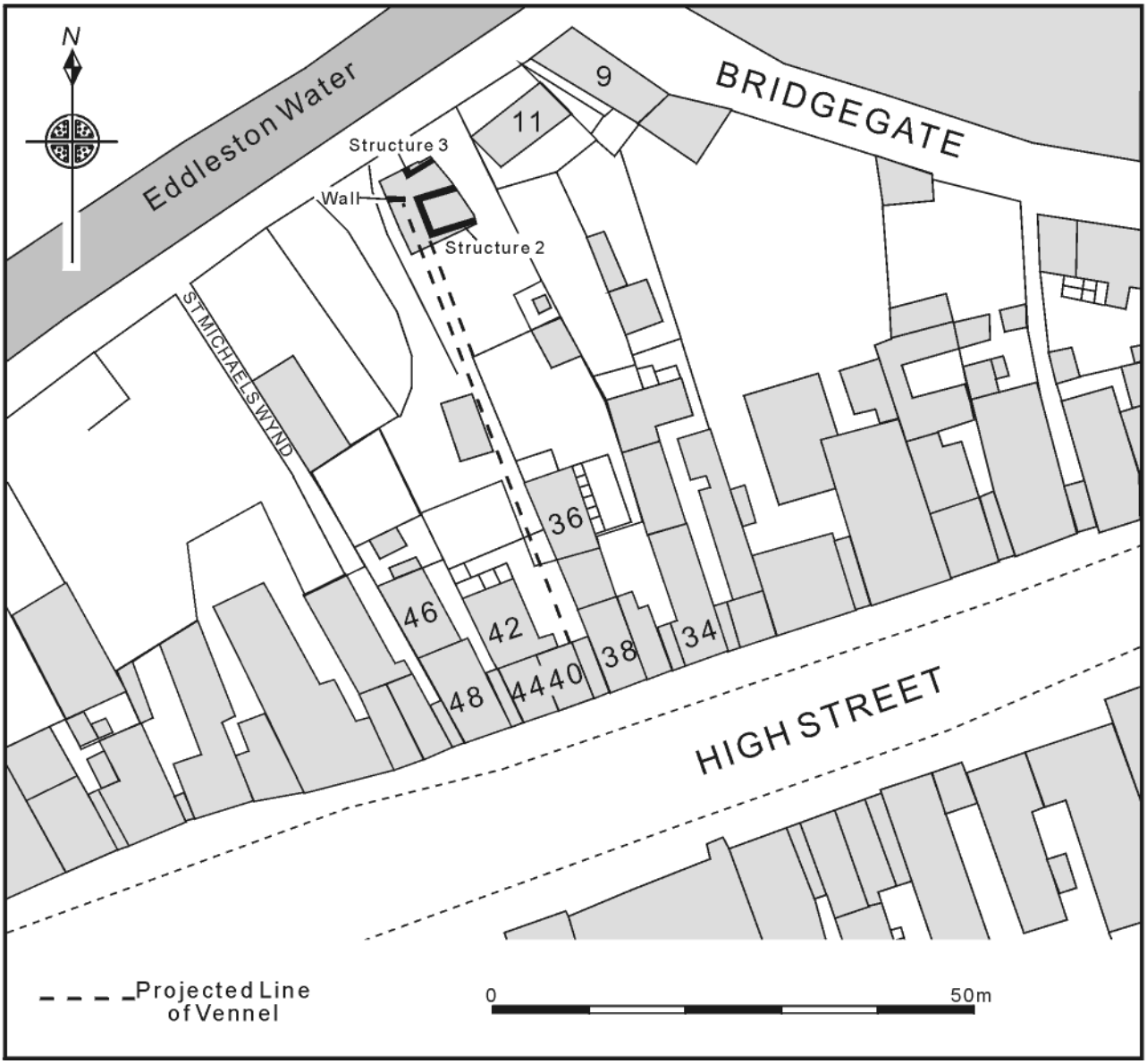
The locations of Structure 1 and of the earliest buildings on the tolbooth site, which also pre-date the burgh extension, is interesting as they lie close to one of the earliest crossing points on the Eddleston. They also lie to the south-west of the Old Kirk Road which led to the Cross Kirk. In the reign of Alexander III (1249–1286) a Trinitarian House was established at the Cross Kirk, to the north-east of the early settlement (Cowan and Easson 1976, 107). The establishment of the Cross Kirk may have influenced the location of an early bridge here, so far to the east of the early settlement. The bridge must be in turn a factor in the development of this area of the burgh before the main period of burgh extension. The position of the bridge and localised development, pre-dating this expansion, would help to explain the oblique alignment of Bridgegate compared with the later Northgate, and the deviation from a more familiar grid system typical of many urban medieval burgh new towns (Ottaway 1992, 171).

Most of the excavated examples of backland medieval buildings, of either timber or stone, tend to have been 7–8 m in length and 3–4 m in width and run axially along the narrow backland plots (Yeoman 1995, 56). The axial alignment of Structure 1 implies that it relates more to Bridgegate than to the High Street. An entrance to the building may have been on the southern side at the point where the possible pivot hole for a doorpost was found. The datable pottery recovered from the demolition debris of Structure 1 indicates that it was demolished sometime in the 15th century.

The site clearly remained vacant for a short period afterwards as evidenced by the probable drainage feature of Phase 3. There was no evidence of flooding on the site during Phase 3 but for some reason the drainage was removed and followed by a concerted attempt to raise the ground surface by importing soils. The imported soils may also have been deposited to improve the land for horticultural purposes, but this use can have lasted only for a comparatively short period, as extensive redevelopment probably occurred before the end of the 15th century. For this reason it seems more likely that the soil was imported to raise the ground surface immediately prior to the development of Structures 2 and 3.

The substantial development represented by Structures 2 and 3 in Phase 5 coincides with the documented extension of the burgh. These buildings indicate a clear change in the property layout as they overlap the earlier phase of building. They do, however, closely respect the axial alignment of Structure 1 and therefore also appear to relate more to the Bridgegate than the High Street. On the other hand, the western gables of both Structures 2 and 3 lie on the projected line of an existing pend, between Nos 38 and 40 High Street (illus 49). It is, therefore, very likely that this pend represents a vennel that extended down to the lower portion of the backlands in the 15th and 16th centuries. The cobbled surface may have extended from this vennel, forming either an access for Structures 2 and 3 or a small courtyard area. The continuity of the pend line may indicate a similar continuity of High Street burgage plots generally in this area, and raises questions for future study of the early development of this part of the burgh.

The position of Structure 3 is important as it conflicts with the supposed location of the later 16th century defensive wall, of which there was no trace on the site. This indicates that, if the wall did stand on the southern bank of the Eddleston, it may still lie beneath the public highway of Cuddyside. Similarly, no evidence for the defensive wall was found at the nearby tolbooth site, and this supports the view that if the wall existed in this part of the town it lay to the north, either beneath the road or on ground now



Illus 49 Peebles, Cuddyside, Projected Property Boundary

covered by the Eddleston Water. It does appear that the Eddleston Water may have moved to the south slightly, leaving the low, open, grassy ground known as the Cuddy Green between the water and the rear of the properties on the north bank.

Structures 2 and 3 may well have fallen out of use towards the end of the 17th century, coinciding with the beginning of the economic decline of the burgh. The land then became vacant and was landscaped sometime in the 18th century, probably for gardens. A terrace was created which was still very evident at the time of the excavations.