

---

## 5 THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE BURGH

---

The current layout of the town can be described broadly as having two main axes, one running east–west (comprising the High Street and Westgate), and one running south from the harbour, which also includes Victoria Street and Quality Street (illus 3). There are additional streets that developed to the north and south of the High Street axis, and further development to the east of Quality Street. One of the most interesting questions about the growth and layout of North Berwick relates to which of these two streets emerged first.

A study of the early maps of North Berwick goes some way to giving an understanding of how the town grew. The earliest known map from 1630 (credited to Pont, and published by Hondius) shows the nunnery to the west of the town, surrounded by a wall of some kind. What appears to be a single line of buildings runs to the east of this. At the east end of this is a larger building (either the tron or a church) although no specific indication is given of the ferry port at the harbour. Blaeu’s map from 1654, which is a more formal version of Pont’s information, also shows the same layout, with no greater degree of detail. This is clearly the present High Street. The fact that it appears to run all the way up to the boundary of the nunnery is of some interest, suggesting the two elements were closely linked.

The first map to show the town in any degree of detail is Adair’s map from 1682 (illus 4). This also shows the nunnery to the west of the town, although

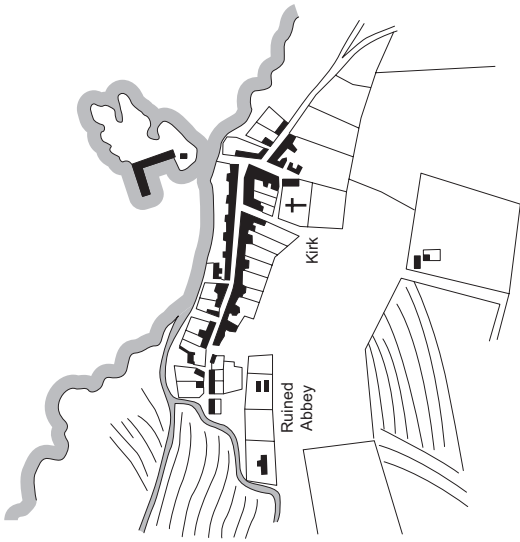
it does not seem to be so dominant in comparison to the town as it does in Pont’s map. There are then buildings lining the north and south side of a single road, with a slightly larger open area at the east end, also surrounded by buildings. A cross is marked at the centre of this area, and is likely to be the market cross, or possibly the tron. Roughly halfway along the main street on the north side the church is marked, sitting on what appears to be a small island or peninsula, partially joined to the mainland. Immediately to the west of this island, an anchorage or harbour is noted. This arrangement implies that the main original street was on an east–west axis. However, the open space at the east end and presence of a market cross here (the supposed location of which has survived into modern memory) suggests that the focus of town life – the market cross, tollbooth and tron (Hall & Bowler 1997, 667) – was very definitely at the east end of that axis. In fact Quality Street was known as Market Place and Crossgate until relatively recently (Turner Simpson & Stevenson 1981, 4).

Adair’s map also suggests that the north–south street (such as it exists on this early manuscript version) does not line up with the harbour and church. The layout is repeated in the more formalised printed version published in 1736. None of the later maps of North Berwick show this arrangement, and it is more than likely that it is merely a schematic representation.



*Illus 4 Adair’s map – Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland*

A



c.1750

B



1802

C



1820

D



1844

*Illus 5 Map regression*

The next key map is Roy's Military Survey (*illus 5a*) of the mid 18th century which shows the plan of the town in great detail, with the High Street aligned east–west and Quality Street crossing this at the east end, running north–south towards the island harbour. This map indicates clearly the narrow plots running back from the main street, and also shows that the plots on the north side of the street extend right down to the beach, although a small lane is apparent at the west end of the beach (presumably the forerunner of the present Beach Road). The church on the island harbour is no longer marked, and a new one is shown to the south of the main street. Documentary evidence indicates that the church at the harbour had become ruined by 1656 (Ferrier 1991, 49) and a new one was built in the following decades. The new location was such that the church may have been built on land that was previously occupied by backland plots running south from the main road. The plots to the north can be seen to have been truncated, and the southern wall of the churchyard appears to line up with the southern wall of the plots to the west. Another new insertion is the north–south road immediately to the west of the church (the future Law Road), presumably constructed to allow access to the new church.

Roy's map also shows a reasonable level of settlement at the western end of the town, reaching almost as far as the old nunnery. There are certainly fewer buildings at this end of the town, but some degree of activity is taking place.

There are a number of maps from the early 19th century that show a few changes to the town, although no substantial differences take place in the general layout. The main differences relate to the harbour and to the development of the back lanes such as Forth Street and St Andrew Street. The existence of Forth Street is first suggested in Forrest's map of 1802 (*illus 5b*), where the dotted outline of it can be seen. Thomson's map of 1820 (*illus 5c*) shows a more formalised road layout and Sharp, Greenwood & Fowler's map of 1844 (*illus 5d*) shows the presence of buildings along the north side of the road, although not the road itself. A similar thing happens later in the 19th century with the emergence of St Andrew Street and the realignment of Kirk Ports. Roy's map from the mid 18th century shows a narrow lane to the north of the new church – this is Kirk Ports. To the west of this, however, the burgage plots extend in line with the back wall of the churchyard. This

continues to be the case until the second half of the 19th century, with St Andrew Street shown for the first time on the second edition Ordnance Survey map from 1894. The improved harbour complex appears for the first time on the parliamentary boundary map from 1832. The deepened harbour was built in 1804 (Ferrier 1991, 64), and work also involved building up the road from the harbour 'island' (which had been joined to the town for some time) to Quality Street. The built-up part of the road was named Victoria Street later in the century.

The map evidence would seem to suggest it is more likely that the High Street is the original main street of the burgh, although the east end of it was where the 'burgh activity' took place. Presumably this layout emerged as a result of the presence of the ferry at the harbour, along with the influence of the nunnery to the west of the town.

The medieval core can be roughly defined as a result of the documentary and map evidence. The extents roughly follow Melbourne Place, through the current car park to the south of this, then running behind the lodge at the end of Quality Street, along the southern wall of the 17th-century church, continuing this line on the south side of St Andrew Street and then turning north at around Church Road, then running down to the beach (*illus 6*). Previously, St Andrew Street itself was thought to mark the southern boundary, but the long plots to the south of the High Street appear to extend as far as the church boundary, or certainly further to the east (*illus 5a*).

In addition to the main issue of establishing the primacy of the High Street or Quality Street in the origin of the town, the other main issue is that of the town walls. All towns of Scotland on the east coast were required by an Act of Parliament of 1503 to build stone walls. Evidence of these walls has never been found in North Berwick, nor any further documentary references to such structures. Blaeu's map of 1654 shows an enclosing structure to the west of the town (probably around the grounds of the nunnery), and Roy's map of the mid 18th century depicts the plot divisions to the east of Quality Street, but there is nothing that could be described as a town wall. If such walls did exist, the map evidence suggests that it is likely that they would be located in the vicinity of Church Rd and Melbourne Place – to the west and east respectively and along St Andrew St to the south.