
7 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF (Illus 7)

7.1 Introduction

The replacement of the entire mains water system afforded the opportunity to get an insight into the survival, depth and characteristics of typical deposits throughout the core of North Berwick. Due to the condition and nature of the existing water pipes, a range of methods was used by the engineers, which then had an effect on the extent of deposits observed (illus 1 shows the different methods of excavation used on each street). For example, for much of Forth Street, the new pipes were inserted through existing cast-iron pipes, meaning that a series of small holes was excavated directly over 19th-century pipes. Therefore these trenches largely encountered only 19th-century backfill. It is interesting to note that even in these cases the survival of narrow sections of in situ deposits was higher than expected. The effect of this on the potential for further similar watching briefs is discussed in more detail below.

7.2 Sediment depth and character

Where continuous deposits were identified, sections were drawn (either sample sections every few metres or continuous sections, depending on the complexity of deposit). In general, the trenches were between 1m and 1.4m in depth, and natural subsoil was largely not encountered at these depths. The exceptions to this were in trenches on Law Road, where bedrock was encountered at a depth of 0.9m, rising to 0.3m below the surface in places, and on East Road, where an outcrop of bedrock was seen at 0.6m, at the far west end of Westgate and on Melbourne Place, where beach sand was encountered at the base of a trench. However, in almost all cases where stratified material survived, it was over 1m in depth. This has also been seen in other excavations in North Berwick, on a SUAT excavation on Forth Street (Cromwell 1993, 56), and CFA's site on Forth Street proving a particularly rich example (Mitchell 2004, 11), with at least 2m of deposit and six definable phases of activity.

7.2.1 High Street, Quality Street, Market Place (medieval core)

Deposits resulting from general occupation debris were identified over much of the medieval core, seen most clearly in the open cut trenches on the High Street, Market Place and East Road. In all cases, a series of compacted occupation deposits, more mixed occupation deposits and layers of sand were

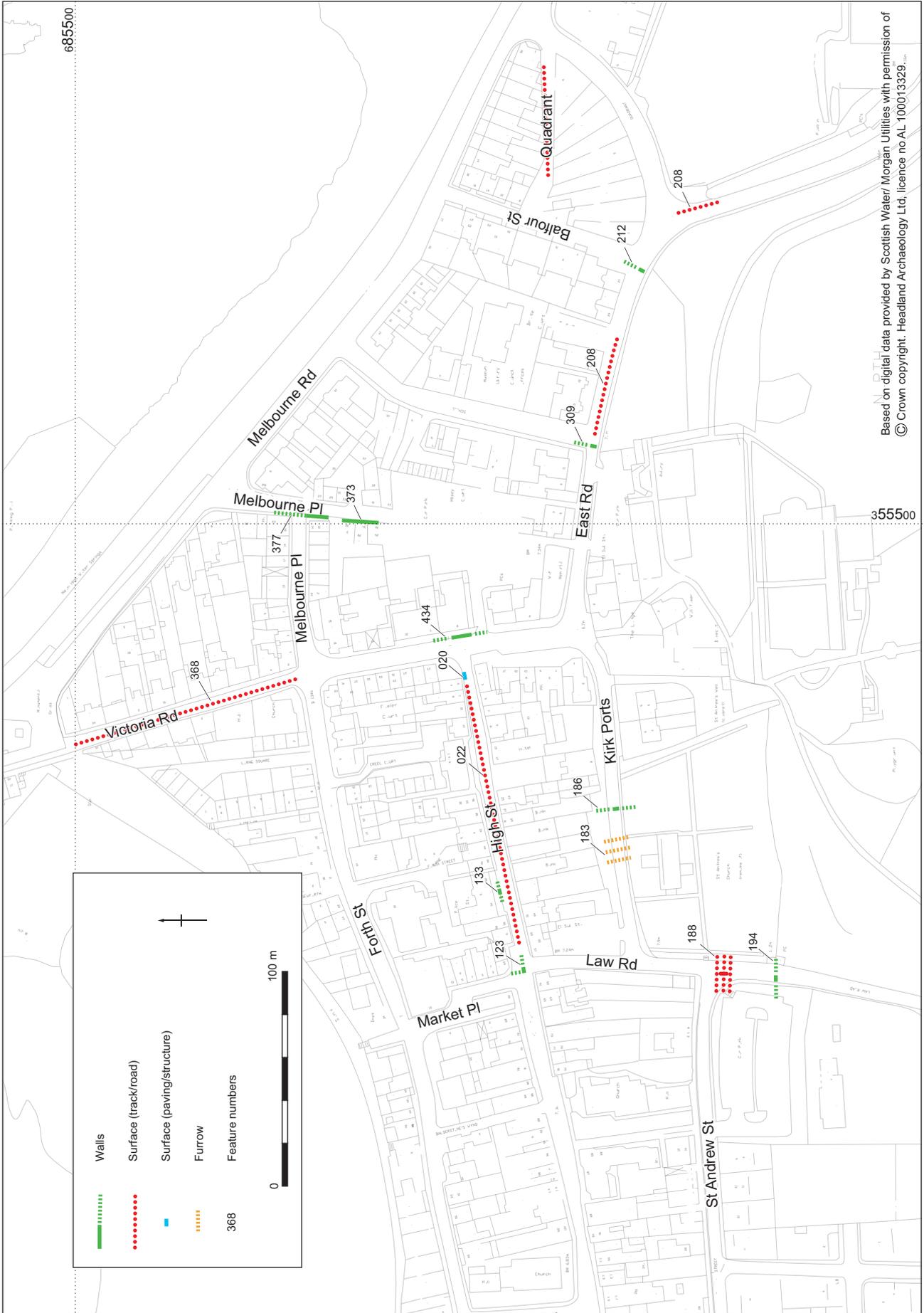
seen. A typical sequence of deposits was modern tarmac, cobbles or chippings, over a series of layers of sand, then rich silty material with charcoal, shell, pottery and bone, usually quite compact, then sand, then a more mixed occupation deposit, then thin layers of interleaving sand and midden material over a further deep occupation deposit (illus 8). From this it can be seen that there appear to be a limited number of 'types' of deposit, although their individual make-up is somewhat different. The richest of these is the 'midden' material (although this material is unlikely to originate from an actual midden, it is similar in make-up) marked as midden deposit in illus 8 and 9, which tends to be rich in charcoal and organic material, dark in colour and somewhat soft and greasy in texture. The layers of sand appear to have two origins; thin bands of wind-blown sand, and thicker deposits of probably deliberately dumped material. This thicker deposit often appears to be redeposited beach sand. The remaining general 'occupation deposit', marked as occupation deposit in illus 8 and 9, tends to be far less rich in organic material than the 'midden', and much sandier in make-up. It is thought that the occupation deposits originate in the mixing of the richer compacted material with large amounts of sand.

In general, the thinner 'midden' deposits extend across large parts of the trenches, often appearing for several metres or more. They also tend to be of uniform thickness, suggesting that the deposits were deliberately spread out over time. The heavily compacted nature of some of these deposits is likely to be a result of their location along the line of roads or tracks within the burgh, as they would be trampled into rough surfaces, and this also partly explains the thinner nature of the deposits. It contrasts with the thicker mixed deposits, which must have a different origin, possibly as a result of attempting to level out uneven areas of road.

7.2.2 Westgate

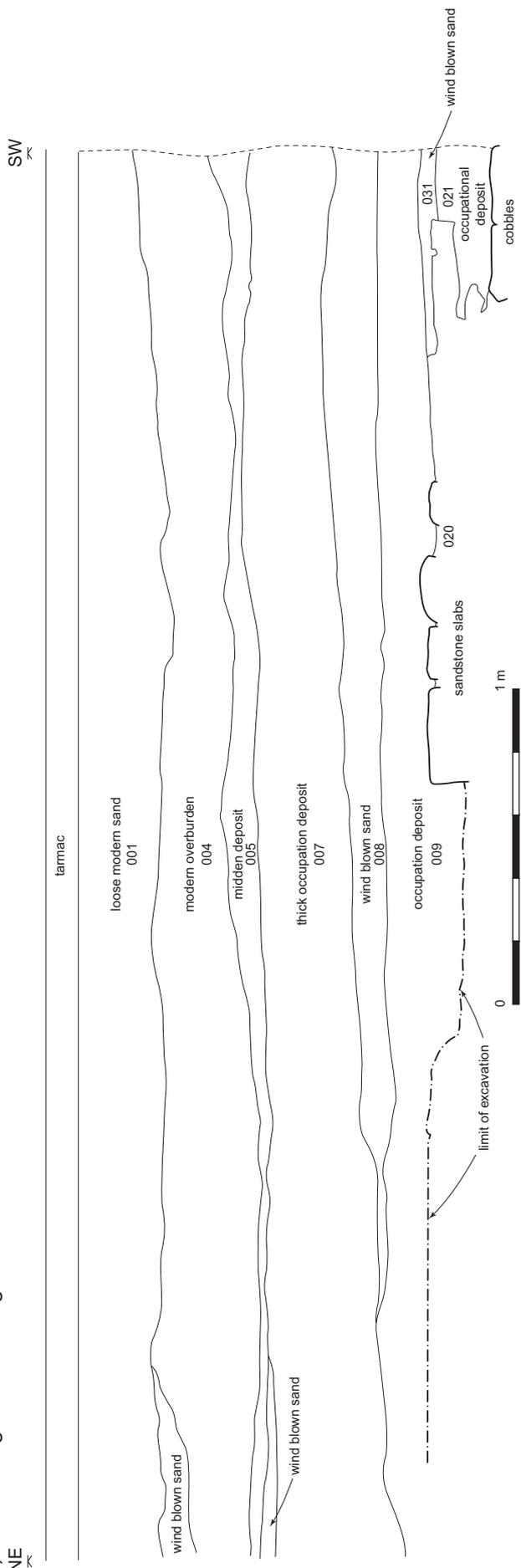
Along Westgate, the midden deposits seen were usually only in small surviving sections, often only 0.1–0.2m wide, making it difficult to identify the same continuous deposits seen further to the east. However, it is clear that the midden material that was identified in trenches immediately to the west of the junction with Church Road is far less rich and contains less organic material in comparison.

Something of a comparison can also be made with the amount of pottery present. Table 2 shows the number and types of sherds of pottery collected

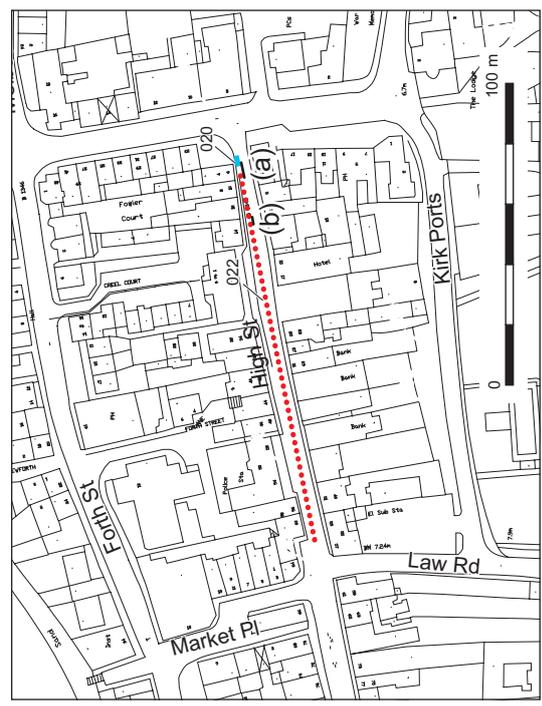
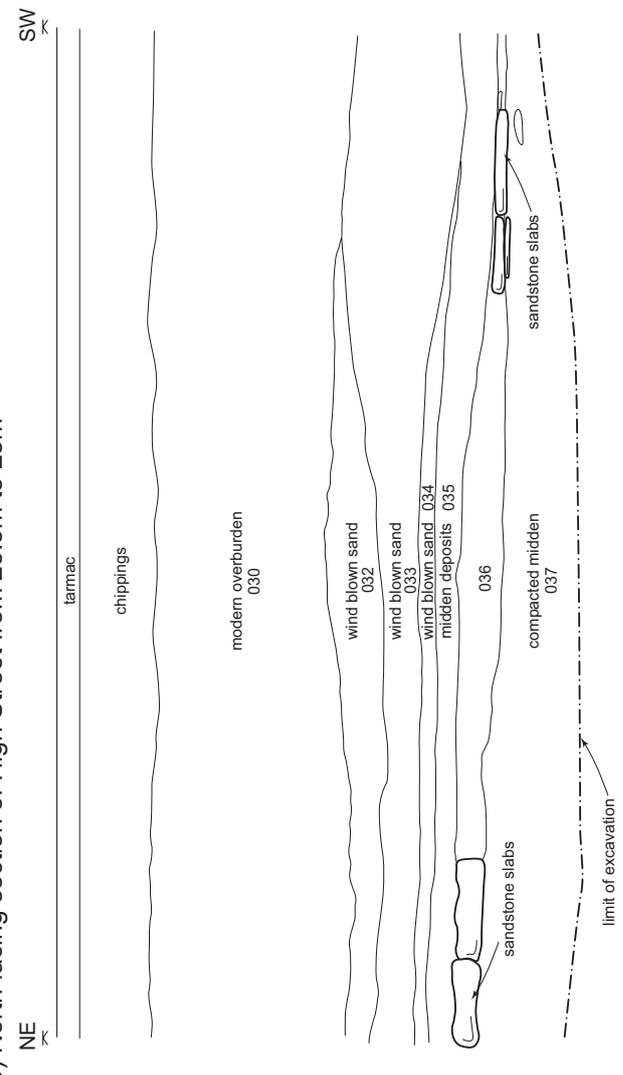


Illus 7 Selected features

(a) North-facing section of High Street from 9 to 13 m



(b) North-facing section of High Street from 25.5m to 28m



Illus 8 Sample section High St

from each trench. Although some allowance must be made for the fact that the High Street trenches were open cut whilst those on Westgate were over old services, there is a stark difference between the two areas, with nearly 200 medieval sherds being recovered from the High Street and only 5 of similar date from Westgate.

7.2.3 East Road

A similar state of affairs was also evident to the east of the town, where extensive ‘midden’ deposits were also found. This was another area of open-cut trenching and the deposits seen here were clearly less rich than those in the core of the town. The sequence of deposits here is relatively similar to the High Street, with several layers of compacted material rich in charcoal and shell, wind-blown sand and deeper occupation deposits. However, the deposits are highly compacted, and a number of them appear to form a fragmented trackway lying between 0.75m and 0.9m below the current road surface, leading east from the burgh. The fragmentary nature of the deposit may indicate areas of heavier wear, for example where there has been wheel rutting (Dingwall 2004, 42). The highly compacted nature of the deposits both above and below this level indicates that it is likely that the material spread out along this route was routinely roughly trampled into a surface, and this more sophisticated attempt at a track (formed of compacted midden, burnt sand and small stones) may represent a more ‘official’ attempt.

7.2.4 Kirk Ports

The trenches were generally located within the extent of the carriageway of the roads, which in turn often have a long history. On Kirk Ports (a relatively recent creation) there was an opportunity to examine activities in the backlands at the rear of the High Street burgh plots. Unfortunately, the trench ran along the line of the road-widening scheme undertaken in 1994 (Hall & Bowler 1997, 664) and cut through an upper deposit of modern road make-up material. However, at the base of the trench, three cultivation furrows (183) aligned roughly north–south were identified. These were cut into a clean redeposited sand (184), which appeared at the same level (although separated by later disturbance) as a loose garden soil (185) of probable post-medieval date. To the east of this, there are the remains of a lime-mortared wall foundation (186), which may be slightly earlier in date. It is hardly surprising that evidence of cultivation was identified in the backlands, and the wall is probably a north–south-aligned rig wall. Unfortunately, the surrounding garden soil gave no indication of types of activities taking place beyond general cultivation.

7.2.5 Quadrant Lane

To the east of the medieval core, trenches on Quadrant Lane identified post-medieval occupation material, again with layers of wind-blown sand and redeposited beach sand. The deposit contained large quantities of slag, and provided evidence of the foundry that stood in this area in the 19th century.

7.2.6 Wind-blown sand

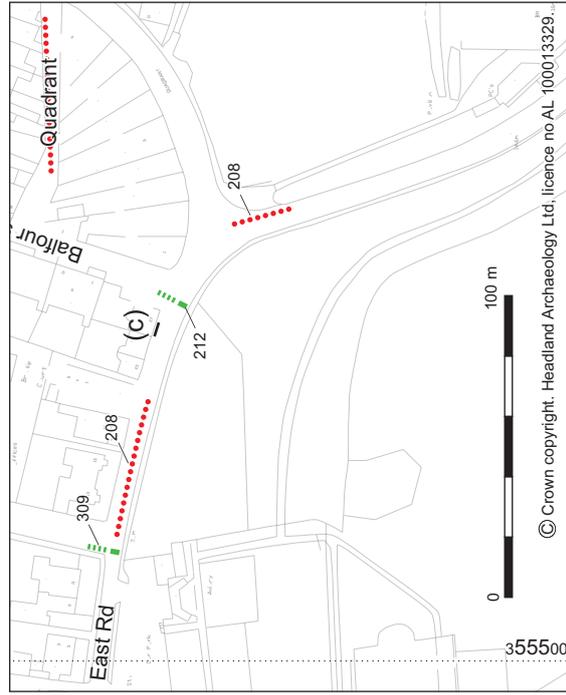
The importance of the wind-blown sand deposits in understanding the history of the burgh should not be underestimated. The 1997 study of North Berwick (Hall & Bowler 1997, 671) recognised the impact it had on the town, with it being likely that each winter large parts of the town would be inundated with potentially deep deposits of wind-blown sand, which may have required an amount of work to bring the ground back to cultivable quality each year. This would have been even more frequent as there were no buildings along the line of Forth Street until the early 19th century, implying there was little protection from the onshore sandstorms. It is suggested that the thicker layers of occupation material seen during the course of the watching brief could be a result of the ‘working-in’ of excess amounts of sand into midden material. These thicker deposits are clearly distinct from the series of thin layers of rich occupation material and wind-blown sand. Although they contain pottery and charcoal, it is in smaller amounts, and they also tend to be slightly drier and far sandier.

7.3 *Archaeological structures and features*

7.3.1 Town walls

In addition to the sequence of deposits, there were a number of structures identified that can be coherently related to the development of the town. Potentially the most important of these was the wall (373) seen on Melbourne Place (plate 1). This ran north–south, was 0.9m wide and survived to six courses in place (all below current ground level). It was lime mortared and rendered in lime on its east face. At its southern extent, it appeared to curve to the west, towards Quality Street. A fragment of 12th–14th-century pottery was recovered from the core of the wall. The narrow nature of the trench made it difficult to identify deposits in relation to the wall, however, on its eastern side, a deep deposit of relatively clean yellow sand was identified (374), which appeared to abut it. This sand was only seen in section, so the relationship between it and the wall cannot be conclusively proven. However, it seems likely that this is a natural build-up of wind-blown sand against the external face of a substantial wall of probable late medieval or post-medieval date. This structure certainly appears to be the easternmost

(c) South-facing section of East Road from 64 to 67 m.



Illus 9 Sample section East Rd



Plate 1 Wall 373

structure in the town, with nothing else between it and the sandy expanses of the east bay, and is situated within the area where such walls had previously been expected. The build of the wall would certainly be in keeping with a date before the mid 18th century, and the position fits with that shown on Roy's map of that date. This may be an indication that the official town walls referred to in the 1503 Act of Parliament were simply never built at North Berwick and that this is the 'town wall', in that it is the wall that marks the boundary of the town, rather than a specifically defensive structure.

To the south of the burgh, another wall (194) was identified on Law Road (*illus 10*), which again may relate to the 'town wall'. This wall was only seen in section and was of sandstone and lime mortar construction. It lined up with the southern wall of the churchyard, and may be the back wall of one of the plots to the south of the High Street, as shown on Roy's map of the mid 18th century. Again, this is not a town wall in a defensive sense, but it does appear to mark the southern extent of activity in the town.

7.3.2 Road surfaces

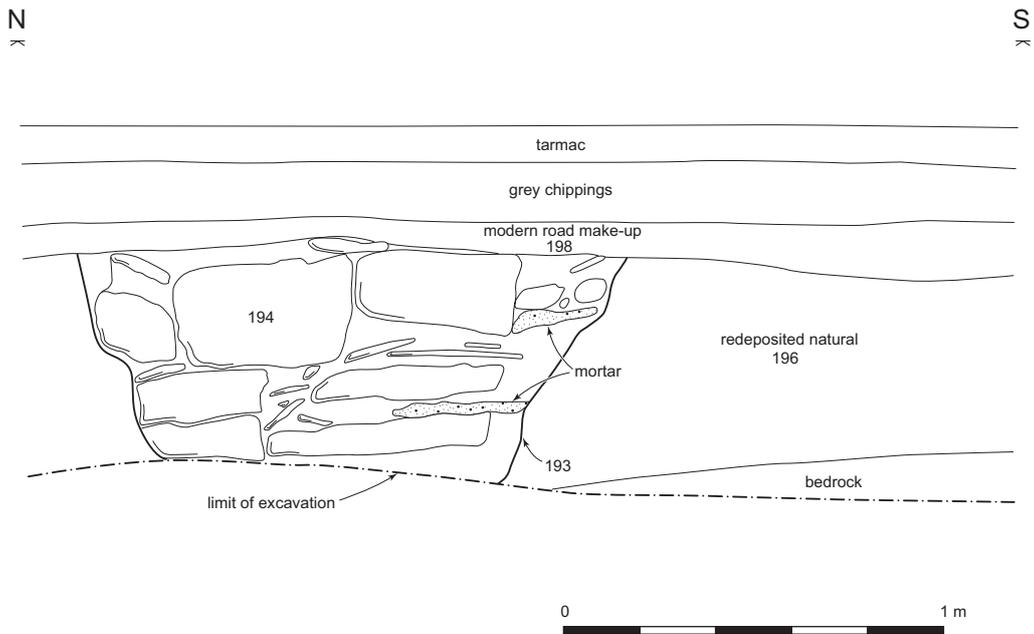
At the eastern end of the High Street, at the junction with Quality Street, a layer of red sandstone slabs

(020) was found below a series of alternating layers of midden material and wind-blown sand, at a depth of 1.2m below current ground surface (*illus 8*). Where a small portion of the sandstone slab had been removed during excavation, a further layer of cobbles could be seen (022) underneath. Fragments of pottery dating from the 12th to 15th centuries were recovered from the material the slabs were set into, along with a single sherd that could be dated more specifically to the 13th or 14th centuries (*table 2*). The layer of sandstone slabs appears to be an area of yard associated with a building at the end of the High Street, with evidence of at least two phases of use or repair.

Immediately adjacent to the slabs and along the length of the High Street, a number of further deposits were identified at a similar depth (036 in *illus 8*), which while not the same material, were similarly compact, occasionally having cobbles set in them or other concentrations of compacted stones. These are interpreted as being part of a fragmented road surface, dating to the medieval period. There are further examples of compacted material, often much like decayed red sandstone in nature, in a number of the trenches further along the High Street, on Market Street and on Forth Street, all of which represent the remains of street surfaces. It is too difficult (given the fragmented nature of these deposits along with the fact that they were only seen in a series of discrete trenches) to say that they belong to the same feature or level, but they certainly represent a surface or series of surfaces dating to roughly the same period, which was used over a broad period of time and subject to damage and subsequent repair. This can be compared with the deposits seen on East Road, where there was a road surface, but formed from compacted occupation deposits rather than laid of stone. It was not until later on in the burgh's development that there was a more concerted effort to improve East Road, and the formation of a metalled surface.

The deposits on Victoria Road and leading towards the harbour also indicate the presence of a street surface. For almost the entire length of Victoria Road there was a compacted surface (368) of sandstone chips and clay, generally at a depth of 0.3m to 0.4m below ground level, lying over a sequence of clean and dirty wind-blown sand, and lying under a layer of mixed occupation deposit (365, 378, 380). In the area of the harbour, deep deposits of make-up material were identified, which had previously been seen in other excavations in this area (*Addyman 2000*, 28). These are thought to date to the early 19th century, when the western side of the natural rocky harbour was built up. The surface may also date to this period.

An area of rough cobbling (188) was found on Law Road at the junction with St Andrew Street. The deposits on Law Road were substantially shallower than those elsewhere in the burgh, due to the rising natural bedrock to the south. The cobbling overlay a



Illus 10 Wall 194

thin layer of clay material that contained charcoal, and is thought to be aligned east to west, although again it was only seen in section in a very narrow

trench. The cobbling is presumed to be a surface of some sort, and to be indicative of a previous layout of the corner of St Andrew Street and Law Road.