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## 3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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The Medieval burgh of Canongate has its origins in charters (1128 × 1153) granted to the Augustinian Abbey of Holyrood by David I, allowing the right to establish and enclose (*herbergate quoddam burgum*) a burgh between the Abbey and Edinburgh (Pryde 1965, 37; Barrow 1999, 122–125). In the 12th century only one other religious house, Arbroath, was granted the foundation of an associated burgh (Dennison 2005, 5). The rank of regality, giving the power of criminal jurisdiction in Abbey lands to the Abbey, was conferred in 1343 (RCAHMS 1951, liii). Despite Canongate being erected into a burgh of regality in 1587, its longstanding rivalry with Edinburgh ended with the purchase of superiority by Edinburgh in 1636 (Pryde 1965, 60).

The burgh possessed the same boundaries from its formation until its incorporation with Edinburgh. Domestic structures would have fronted a main road extending from Edinburgh's Netherbow Port to Holyrood. 'Backlands', literally the thin strips of land to the rear of the measured burgage plots' frontage houses or workshops, stretched northwards to the North Back of the Canongate (now Calton Road) and southwards to the South Back of the Canongate (now Holyrood Road). Its 'herring bone' morphology was therefore typical of that of many other Scottish burghs such as Elgin, Forres, Haddington, Linlithgow and Montrose (Coleman 2004, 283).

There is little historical documentation relating to the early burgh. The absence of a strong defensive wall rendered the largely timber buildings of the Medieval period vulnerable to burning by marauding English armies, as well as to the assaults of various factions involved in Scotland's 16th-century civil wars (MacKay 1879, 18).

Nevertheless, the burgh enjoyed substantial benefits from the proximity of the Court. Periodic episodes of royal accommodation at Holyrood Abbey had led, by the 15th century, to the building of discrete secularised apartments, and this royal association with the Abbey ultimately led to James IV's plan (1501) for Holyrood Palace, situated next

to the monastic cloister (Gallagher 1998). By the 16th century, overcrowding in Edinburgh was juxtaposed with fine private residences lining the main Canongate thoroughfare or 'calsy', first paved in 1535 (Grant 1882, ii, 3). Many of these would have been the homes of the nobility, officials and retainers of the royal court recently established at Holyrood Palace.

Despite the court moving to London in 1603 and protestations of the resultant poverty, many master craftsmen still resided in the Canongate in the mid 17th century (Wood 1956, 10–16, 34). Even in the late 18th century, members of the nobility still had homes in the Canongate. Nevertheless, the 'braw flittings' (the upper classes moving home) noted by Chambers (1996, 296) only served to illustrate the burgh's accelerating 18th-century decline deriving from the cumulative effects of the move of Parliament to London (Simpson et al 1981, 49); the opening of new routes into Edinburgh (Bonar 1856, 21; Withrington & Grant 1975, ii, 7) and the migration of the upper classes to the fashionable New Town.

Early cartographic evidence shows buildings beginning to spread very gradually into the backlands from the Canongate frontage in the late 17th century; many of these structures were probably timber-built. A century later, in 1799, a warrant submitted to the Dean of Guild Court to erect a stone-built, three-storey tenement in Old Tolbooth Wynd required the demolition of an old tenement 'which was built with lath and plaster'. This was one of four warrants submitted for building consent in Old Tolbooth Wynd between 1771 and the turn of the century (McDougall petition dated 26th April 1799, *Edinburgh Dean of Guild Court Warrants 1762–1863*). Nonetheless, it was not until the 19th century that building in the backlands really took hold. Eventually, late 18th- and 19th-century industrialisation resulted in much of the Canongate backlands becoming a mix of tenemented slums and factories (Simpson et al 1981, 49).