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## 4 HOLYROOD DEVELOPMENT NORTH SITE, PLOT N, HOLYROOD ROAD

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### 4.1 Location

The excavation was located on the northern side of Holyrood Road and to the west of Reid's Close, Canongate, Edinburgh (NGR: NT 2665 7377) at 36.1m OD. Other than the adjacent 17th-century 'Haddington House' to the west, early cartographic evidence shows the immediate area of the trench to have remained free of any buildings until the late 18th century. By the mid 19th century, a brass foundry occupied the northern part of the site, while a brewery was established on the site by the end of the 1890s.

### 4.2 Earlier archaeological investigations

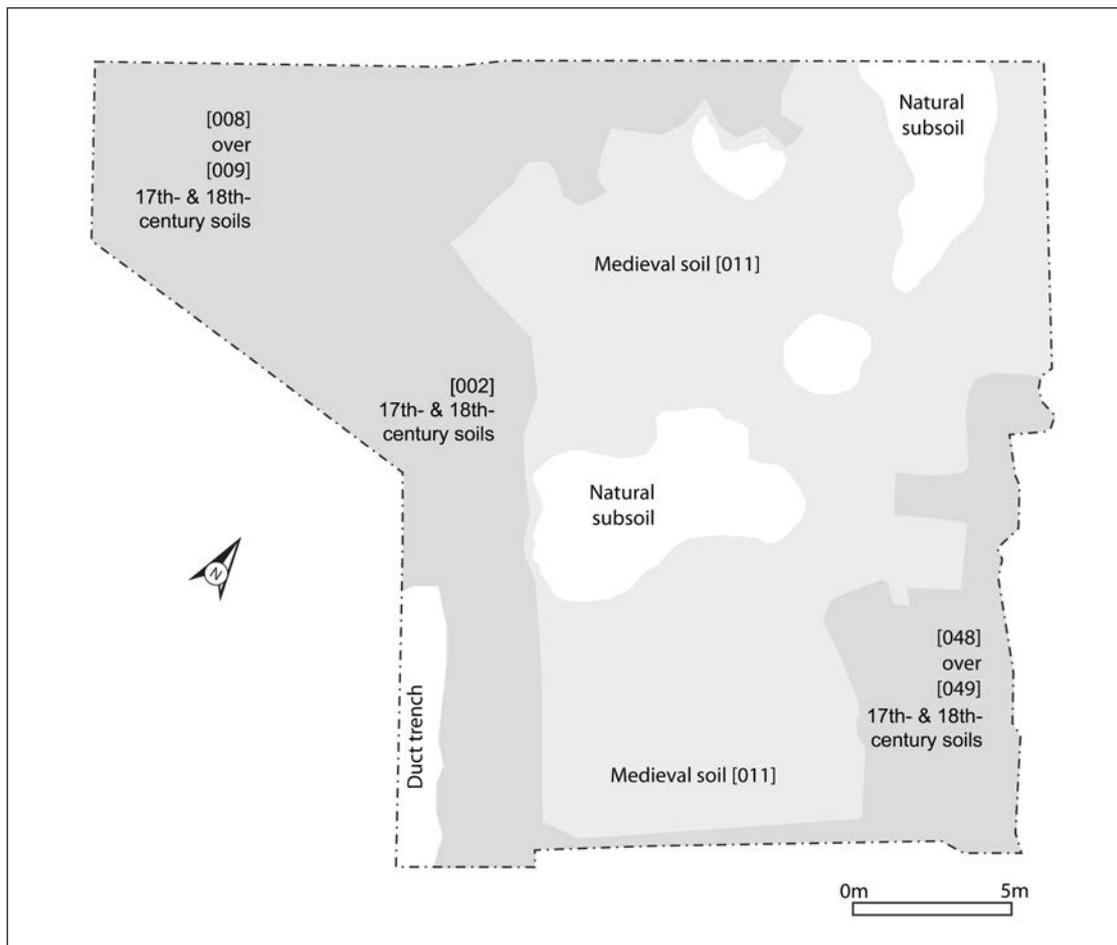
In 1991 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on the site of the former Holyrood Brewery. Part of this assessment encompassed the Holyrood

Road site. One trench found three soil horizons, containing heavily abraded pottery. The pottery from the earliest soil was entirely of White Gritty Ware dating from the 13th century to the 15th century (CECAS 1991, 4).

The excavation of the site for the Parliament building, lying to the immediate east of the present site, revealed five broad phases of Medieval and Post-Medieval activity. An important early feature was a large ditch over 3m wide and 2m deep in the south of the site, running parallel to Holyrood Road. Later Medieval features included Medieval street frontages, property boundaries and typical backland features replaced by 16th- and 17th-century cultivation slots and the remains of formal gardens (HAPT 2008).

### 4.3 Excavation results

The Plot N excavation area covered approxi-



Illus 2 Holyrood Road: the extent of soil truncation

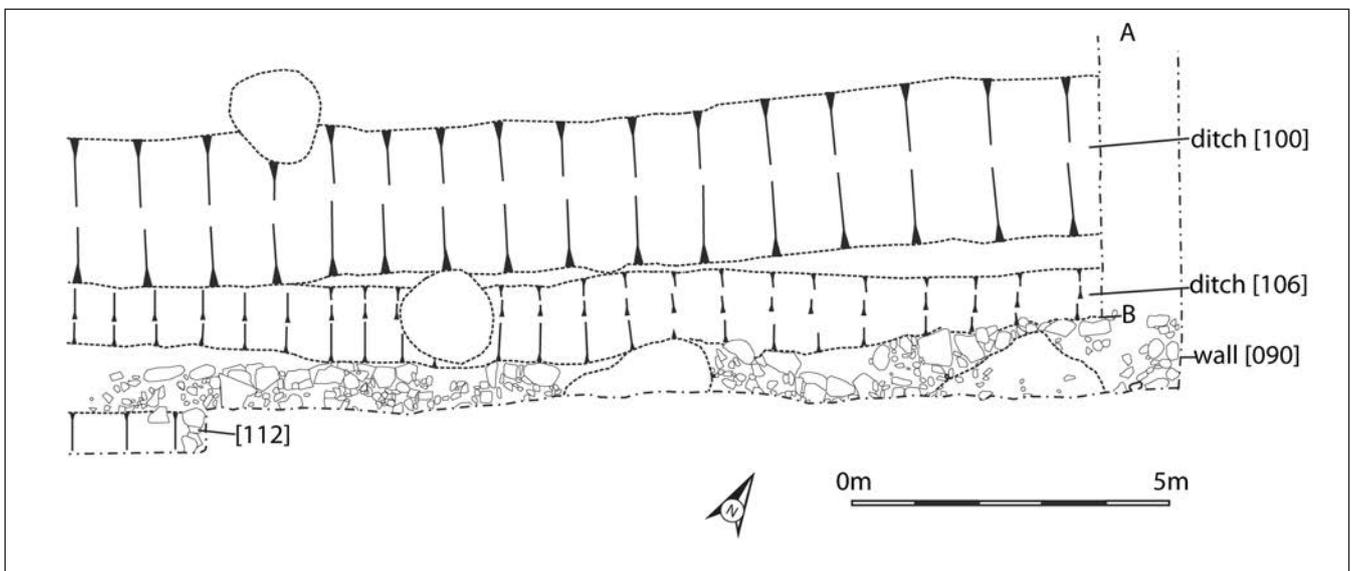
mately 600m<sup>2</sup> and was covered by up to 1.3m of demolition debris from a 19th/20th-century brewery building. Its removal revealed a massive intrusion which reached the glacial till at a depth of approximately 3m in places and truncated the greater part of the soil profile in the central part of the site. There remained areas of *in situ* soil layers in the western and south-eastern parts of the site (illus 2). Five broad phases of activity were identified.

#### 4.3.1 Phase 1

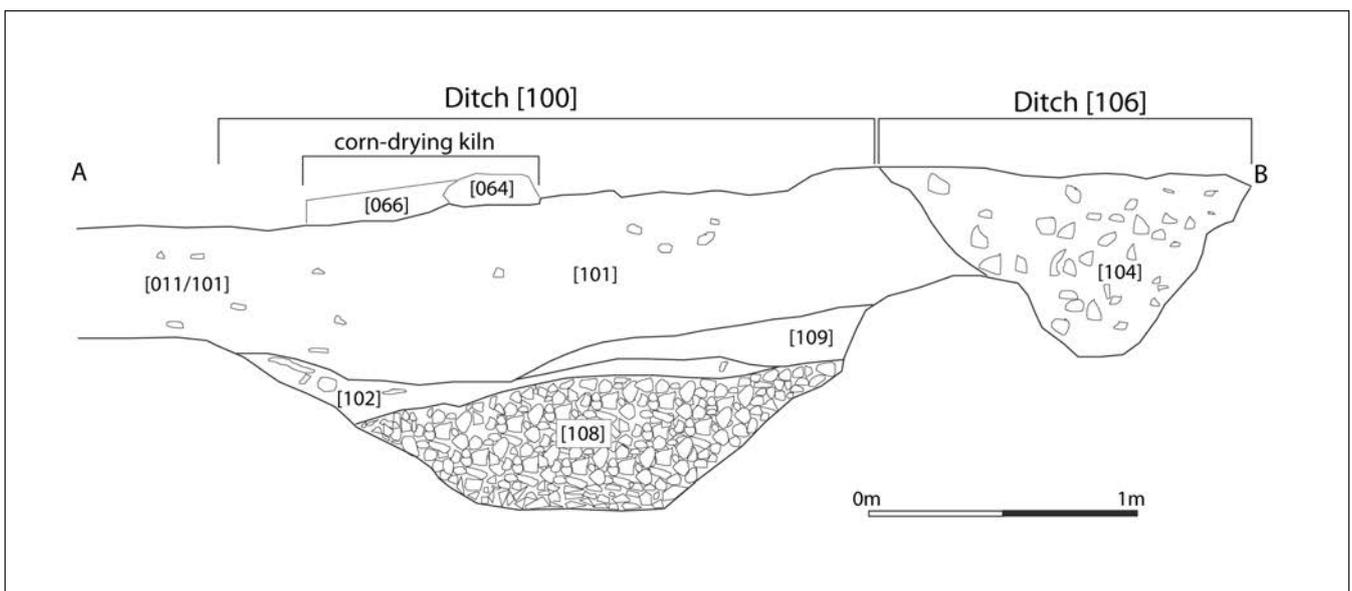
Till was met at approximately 34m OD. Residual 12th-century ceramic shards were present in a number of later contexts.

#### 4.3.2 Phase 2a: large boundary ditch (possibly 12th century)

Given the findings on the Parliament site (HAPT 2008) the continuation of a substantial ditch feature had been anticipated. A ditch feature was recognised in section during the removal of a duct which ran below Holyrood Road. Variation in sub-surface strata had also been observed when excavating overlying features. Orientated east to west along the southern part of the excavation area, ditch [100] had inwardly sloping sides to a flat base at an average depth of 1.25m. Width varied from an average of 2.6m on the surface, narrowing to roughly 1.7m at the base (illus 3, 4 & 5). The ditch could represent either the early enclosure of the grounds of Holyrood Abbey (the precinct limits of early religious institutions



Illus 3 Holyrood Road: the sequence of burgh boundaries



Illus 4 Holyrood Road: section A-B through ditches [100] & [106]



*Illus 5 Holyrood Road: ditches [100] & [106] from the west*

could be quite extensive – Yeoman 1995, 19) or the enclosure of the burgh referred to in its 12th-century charter. As the alignment of later boundary features (see wall [090] below) fossilised the course of this ditch until the 16th century, when the burgh was well established, the identification of this feature with the burgh ditch is credible.

#### 4.3.3 Phase 2b: backfilling of ditch [100] (13th century)

Ditch [100] was filled by the following sequence of deposits: the upper ditch fill [101] was interpreted as a slumped continuation of the principal Medieval soil [011]. This was underlain by intermittent deposits of yellow clay, which in turn overlay dumped sand and stone deposits. The basal ditch fill comprised approximately 80% stones in a thin matrix of mid-brown silty soil [105]. As the overlying clay deposits were usually little more than lenses of material tilting down to the north, these perhaps denote a period of erosion of the southern edge of the ditch after the deposition of stones at its base but before infilling was completed. The stones were angular to sub-rounded and varied in size along the length of the ditch, with occasional voids and varying degrees of compaction. At the eastern end, the basal fill [108] became entirely clast supported, with no discernible matrix (illus 4). It appears that,

as the ditch became redundant, it was deliberately back-filled with stones dumped at its base. In dating the back-filling event, ceramic evidence (Haggarty below) provided a tight 13th-century assemblage from the basal fills [105] and [108] of the ditch.

Three samples of animal bone from ditch fills [105] and [108] underwent dating by accelerator mass spectrometry (Table 1). The radiocarbon dates were calibrated using the University of Washington Quaternary Isotope Laboratory Radiocarbon Dating program, Rev. 4.0 1998. AA-44591 encompassed the late 11th to early 13th centuries, while AA-44593 ranged between the later 12th and mid 13th centuries (both at 1 sigma ( $\sigma$ ) level). AA-44592 is interpreted as providing a rogue date due to taphonomic movement through the upper slumped fill [101] of the ditch.

#### 4.3.4 Phase 2c: small boundary ditch (13th/14th century)

A smaller ditch feature [106], lying slightly to the south, paralleled the course of the earlier ditch [100] and was cut into Medieval soil [011] (illus 3, 4 & 5). In places the ditch profile's northern edge sloped more gradually than the southern edge, becoming a stepped side, especially in the east. The average depth was roughly 0.7m with a surface width of 1.3m, narrowing to 0.4m at the base. Its fill was a

**Table 1 Holyrood Road: radiocarbon dates from ditch [100]**

Lab code	Sample material	Context	Yrs BP	$\delta^{13}C$	Calibrated dates	
					1 sigma	2 sigma
AA-44591 (GU-9516)	Bone: cattle femur	Fill [105]	870 ± 40	-22.4‰	AD 1070–1219	AD 1036–1261
AA-44592 (GU-9517)	Bone: cattle radius	Fill [108]	575 ± 40	-21.8‰	AD 1318–1412	AD 1299–1430
AA-44593 (GU-9518)	Bone: cattle metapodial	Fill [108]	850 ± 40	-22.5‰	AD 1161–1242	AD 1042–1276

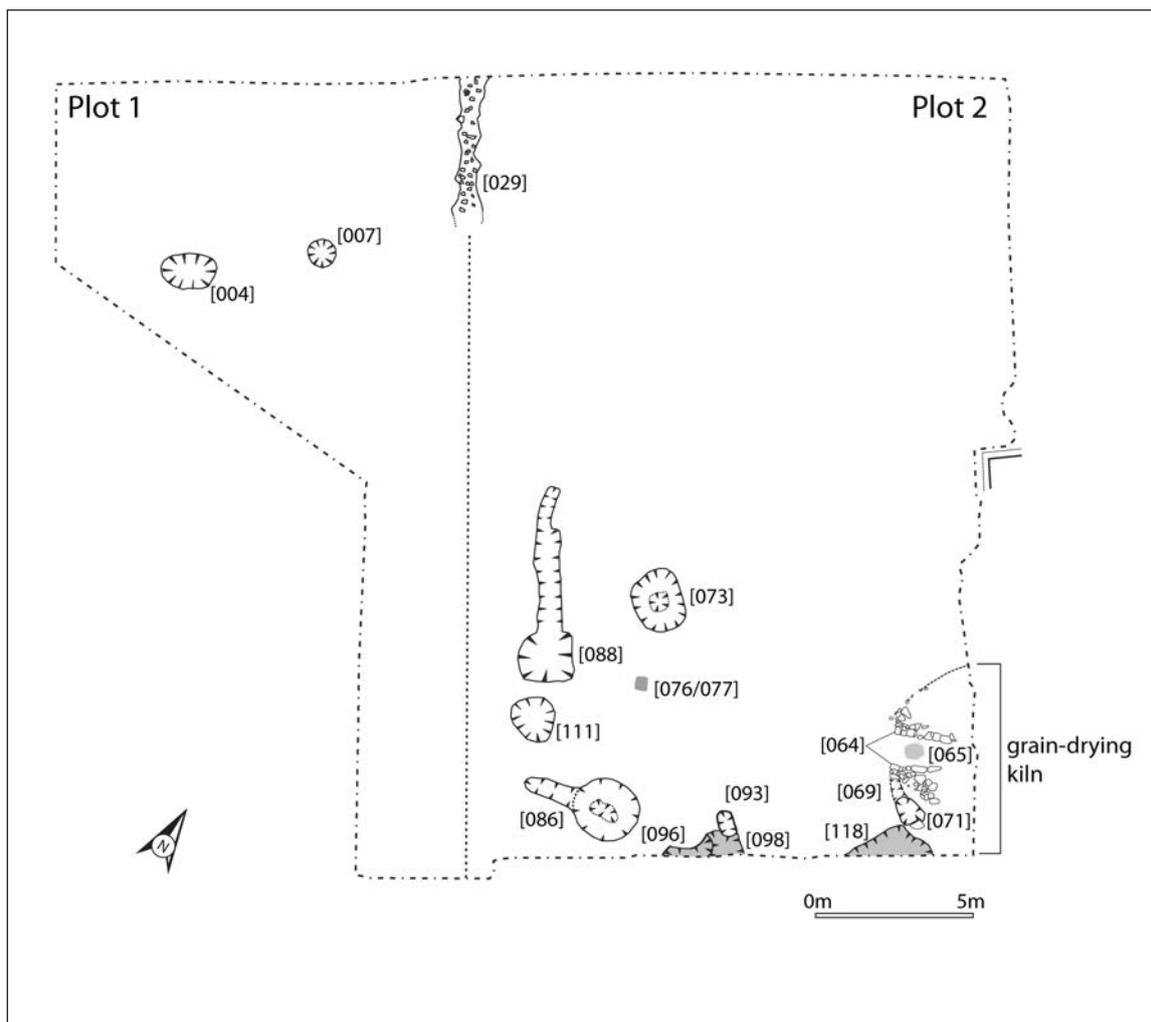
mid-brown silty sand. The feature is interpreted as a foundation trench for a timber palisade, which may have been contemporary with some of the Phase 3 domestic features.

#### 4.3.5 Phase 3: 14th–16th century

Underlying the upper soil horizons was a weakly acid to neutral humic mineral soil [011]. This Medieval

soil horizon appears to have been less disturbed by cultivation and manuring than the Post-Medieval Phase 4 and 5 soils (see below), although a high phosphate content suggests the incorporation of material such as bone, faeces and urine. Soil [011] was cut by features representing several discrete episodes of activity.

Evidence of backland division was limited to a 0.6m wide stone-filled drain [029] which emerged from the northern section and ran towards the south for a



*Illus 6 Holyrood Road: Phase 3*



*Illus 7 Holyrood Road: wall [090] from the east*

distance of approximately 4m before fading (illus 6). To the south, a linear gully on the same alignment, but slightly to the east, extended northwards from square pit [088]. Approximately 6.25m long, the cut maintained a width of roughly 0.7m over most of this distance, with a maximum depth of 0.55m. The minimum width of Plot 1, to the west, was 13.5m, with Plot 2 being at least 17.5m wide. Only two features, 14th-century refuse pits [004] and [007] were recorded within Plot 1, although excavation in this area did not extend to the end of the plot.

Plot 2, to the east, contained several large pits and a grain-drying kiln (illus 6). The vestigial remains of this feature post-dated both boundary features [100] and [106] and pre-dated an early 16th-century burgh wall [090] (see below). Two lines of stonework [064] survived to a maximum of two courses in height. These stone lines had opposing dressed faces, formed of flat, sub-rectangular stones, forming an entrance or passage into an area defined by soil change and intermittent stonework. The passage narrowed to the east and a discrete charred, organic-rich, deposit [065] lay between the stone lines. An arc of mildly compacted dark grey/brown clayey silt with black mottling, contained within a shallow hollow

[069], defined the southern extent of the feature and resulted from this part of the structure being robbed out. The hollow was truncated by a 16th-century post-hole [071]. A compact, heat-affected, orange/yellow clayey silt [066] was contained by the northern edge of the feature. The location of a grain-drying kiln on the periphery of the plot probably reflects a common precautionary strategy in attempting to minimise any spread of accidental fire.

Pit [086] was 2m in diameter. In profile, its sides sloped inwards to a flat base at a depth of 0.8m. An extension, probably the trench for a flue, located at a level above the base of the pit, continued westwards for a distance of 1.7m. The U-shaped profile of this arm measured 0.6m in width, with an average depth of 0.3m, and terminated in a butt end. Filled with a homogeneous silty sand [087], its structured keyhole shape indicates some form of heat-related processing activity. Perhaps robbed of internal stone furnishings, it may have been the groundwork for an oven or kiln. To the north lay a small scoop [077], measuring 0.46m × 0.4m × 0.06m deep and filled with burnt soil [076] which was rich in slag. Refuse pit [111] also lay immediately adjacent, to the north.

A large pit [073] occupied a central location. Sub-rectangular in plan, it measured 2m by 1.6m with a U-shaped profile to a step at a depth of 0.8m. A small, centrally located, sub-rectangular hollow was cut to an additional depth of 0.2m. The uppermost [072] and basal [079] of the pit's three fills included clayey deposits surviving along the pit's sides. Assuming these deposits represent the remnants of a clay membrane or lining, either a storage or processing function for the pit can be inferred.

After the grain-drying kiln went out of use, wall [090] was built over the area of its southern arc (illus 3 and 7). The wall was aligned east to west along the southern limit of the site, parallel to Holyrood Road, and survived to a maximum height of 0.5m. Approximately 0.9m wide, the wall comprised up to two courses of undressed facing stones with rubble infill.

In a small southern extension to the excavation area, wall [090] was found to overlies a break of slope, with Medieval soil [011] being confined to the north of the wall (illus 3). A short stretch of crude walling [112] ran to the south of wall [090]. At a maximum of two courses in height (0.4m) and with a width of 0.38m, its northern end appeared to overhang the larger wall. This, and the truncation of the wall by refuse pits, illustrates that backland activity continued to the south beyond the excavation area.

Wall [090] probably represents the remains of a wall referred to by Mackay (1879, 16), built to enclose the Canongate in 1513. The scale of the wall implies that it was never intended as a serious defence against a concerted assault, despite its alleged construction date being contemporary with the battle of Flodden. An enemy attacking Edinburgh generally forced access by the Water-Yett (Water Gate), took possession of the Canongate, and then attempted

the assault on Edinburgh through the Netherbow Port (ibid, 16–17).

If wall [090] is the 1513 wall, it was apparently short-lived. The ‘English spy’s plan’ (Cowan & Inglis 1919, pl A) of Hereford’s attack on Edinburgh in 1544 shows parts of the northern burgh wall as missing, either having been slighted by the English or fallen into a state of disrepair. The excavation found that wall [090], interpreted as the corresponding southern burgh wall, was truncated by three inter-cutting refuse pits [093], [096] and [098], which yielded either late 15th- or 16th-century ceramics, indicating that the southern burgh wall may also have been ruinous at the time of the 1544 attack.

The three rubbish pits [093], [096] and [098] were centrally situated on the southern edge of the site (illus 6). The pits were of varying sizes and only one pit was fully exposed; [096] had also suffered from truncation from above by cesspit [085/094]. The fills were particularly rich in marine shell (oyster), animal bone and charcoal, with pit [098] containing a Robert III (1390–1403) silver billon (see Holmes below). A further refuse pit [118], containing residual 14th-century pottery, truncated wall [090] in the south-east.

#### 4.3.6 Phase 4: 17th century

This phase saw the deposition and subsequent use for cultivation of various mechanically sorted soils [002 lower], [009] and [049] (illus 2).

The cultivation soils [002] and [009] fall into the category of anthropic humic mineral to organic soils (Avery 1980). The high organic content, neutral pH and high phosphate content of the soil is likely to be a product of heavy manuring, as evidenced by the finds assemblage. A lack of calcium carbonate indicates relative rarity of oyster shell and other marine shell and that the shell present had not been well mixed into the soil matrix. In the southern, eastern and western portions of the site soil [049] has been equated to the upper part of soil [002]; this too was anthropic humic soil that was subjected to heavy manuring.

The last agricultural or horticultural use of these soils is represented by a series of ten closely spaced linear cultivation slots, aligned east to west, entering the south-eastern part of the excavation area (illus 8a). Hand dug, all shared a similar profile, although there was some variation in dimensions. Width varied from 0.62m to 1.5m (average 0.97m) while depth ranged from 0.17m to 0.41m (average 0.23m). There was some disparity in the nature of the fills, although most were found to contain crushed mortar particles and oyster shell. Finds provide a date range encompassing the second half of the 17th century. Similar 17th-century cultivation slots have been recorded at Market Street (Hall 1997a, 28) and Cinema House, St Andrews (Ross & Clark 1997, 25) and Forfar (Spearman 1982).

Gordon’s map (1647) shows the Canongate

backlands, including the excavation area, as fine formal gardens in the mid 17th century. These slots illustrate that a change to small cultivation plots evident on the north side of the Canongate in the *Prospect of Edinburgh* (c 1690), also occurred on the southern side.

A rubble-built property boundary wall [003], approximately 0.75m wide, and aligned roughly north to south, traversed the north-western part of the site. The mortar pointing contained oyster pinnings, which were especially prevalent on the eastern side. Its four to five courses survived to a height of 0.76m and separated Post-Medieval manured garden soils to the east and west. No foundation cut was observed. This wall appears as a property boundary represented on Gordon’s (1647) map.

Well A was probably constructed and back-filled during the 17th century (illus 8a and 9). A clay capping of re-deposited sub-soil [019] overlay the stonework of the well and the rubble fill of the well’s construction pit. This served a mechanical function in capping the construction pit rubble and consolidating the stonework lining. This stone lining was a drystone build of undressed, angular blocks with supporting wedges. Roughly circular in plan, with an internal diameter of approximately 1m, the well narrowed towards the base at a depth of 2.05m. The construction pit was roughly circular in plan and U-shaped in profile, narrowing towards the base from a maximum diameter of 3m. The stone fill of the construction pit was angular rubble; this formed an integral component of the well’s technology, as it permitted water seepage into the construction pit, which subsequently acted as a reservoir. Once redundant, the well was back-filled with a loose black organic clayey loam. A small shallow scoop [025] measuring 0.95m by 0.56m by 0.2m deep lay immediately to the south of the well.

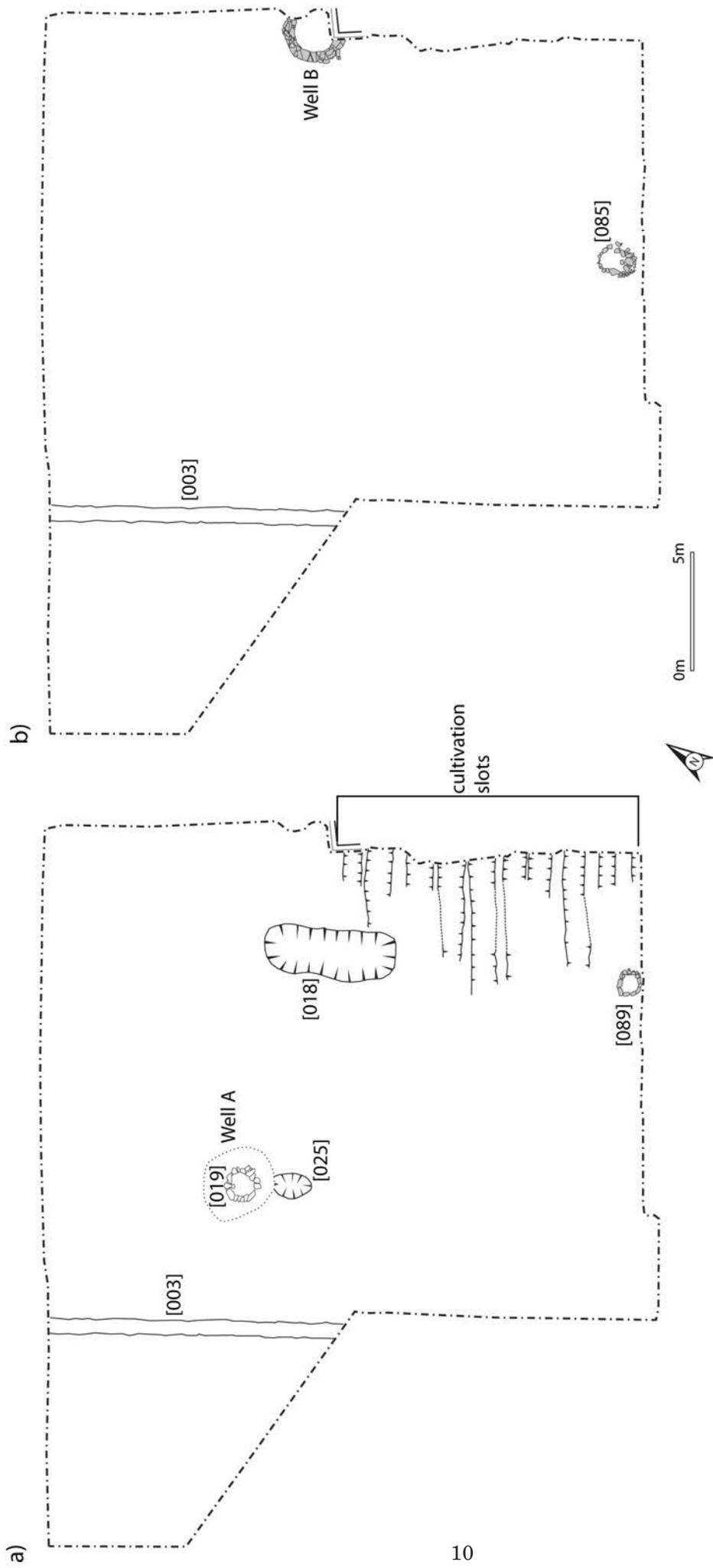
An oval drystone-built structure [089], probably a cesspit, was found in the extreme south of the site. A few handmade bricks attributable to the 17th century (N. Crowley pers comm) were incorporated within this structure. It survived to three or four courses, 0.3m high, and was laid over a stone floor. Internally it measured 0.8m by 0.75m.

Pit [018], measuring 5m by 2m by 0.5m deep, was filled by dumps of loose angular stones and was interpreted as a sump. Although it underlay soil [049], pottery finds suggest that it was probably dug through this horizon with its cut obscured by later cultivation.

#### 4.3.7 Phase 5: 18th/19th century

This phase consisted of mechanically sorted humic soil layers [002 upper], [008] and [048] demonstrating that the excavation area was under cultivation in the late 17th and 18th centuries (illus 3).

The neutral humic soil [008], lying to the west of wall [003], had a lower organic content than its



*Illus 8 Holyrood Road: a) Phase 4 (17th century); b) Phase 5 (late 18th / 19th century)*



*Illus 9 Holyrood Road: well A from the west*

equivalent soil [002 upper], situated to the east, indicating a less intensive manuring regime. The uppermost soil [048] in the southern part of the site, which overlay the 17th-century cultivation slots, was slightly more organic than that of the underlying horizon [049], probably reflecting the surface application of manure.

An early 19th-century oval cess-pit [085], with edging stones set around its rim, lay near the southern trench edge. Well B, a stone-built well infilled with builder's rubble, probably in the 19th century, lay in the eastern/central part of the site.