
5 CALTON ROAD

5.1 Location

Located near the Medieval boundary of the North Back, this excavation presented another opportunity to investigate activities in the peripheral backlands zone in a situation that was a near mirror image to that of the Holyrood Road excavation. The excavation was located immediately to the south of Calton Road and to the west of Old Tolbooth Wynd, Canongate, Edinburgh (NGR: NT 2635 7381) at 42.5m OD.

The Canongate Charity Workhouse, founded in 1761 (MacKay 1879, 133), lay on the opposite side of Old Tolbooth Wynd adjoining the graveyard of Canongate Parish Church (built 1688–91) (RCAHMS 1951, 153–6, no. 89). The North Back was a route favoured by royalty in travelling from Holyrood Palace to the City. An Act by James VI called for it to be rendered and maintained as a thoroughfare suitable for royal passage (MacKay 1879, 115–116). Gordon's 1647 map shows a rectangular building adjoining the Old Tolbooth Wynd gate and fronting the North Back to the north-east of the excavation area. The excavation area may have encompassed, or lain directly to the west of, a backland associated with 167–169 Canongate, a rubble-built tenement of three storeys and an attic, pre-dating 1647 (RCAHMS 1951, 174, no. 106).

Early cartographic evidence shows the immediate area of the excavation trench to have remained free of any buildings until the 19th century; the burn running along the North Back is no longer present on maps after 1780. During the early 19th century the area was open ground, probably gardens, associated with the Magdalene Asylum (NSA 1845, 158). By the mid 19th century, Canongate Foundry had been established to the east, while to the west Edinburgh Gas Works was established in 1817. The Gas Works' continued expansion throughout the 19th century resulted in its coal shed covering the excavation area. Continuity of use by this industry was maintained until recently, with the area being occupied by a Scottish Gas office and storage premises.

5.2 Earlier archaeological investigations

Following the discovery of human remains near Calton Road in January 1997, an evaluation investigated two areas immediately adjacent to the Calton Road site. On the northern side of Calton Road only features related to buildings of post-1750 date were unearthed. To the east, two walls of the Canongate Poorhouse (established *c* 1760) were located, their foundation trenches cutting a series of accumu-

lated deposits of manured garden or cultivation soils dating from the 12th century onwards (CECAS 1997,14). The Canongate Tolbooth, built in 1591 (RCAHMS 1951, 173–74, no.105), stands at the head of the Old Tolbooth Wynd. Excavation of its cellar revealed superimposed floor levels and cut features with finds including Post-Medieval green-glazed pottery and clay pipe fragments (Holmes 1988).

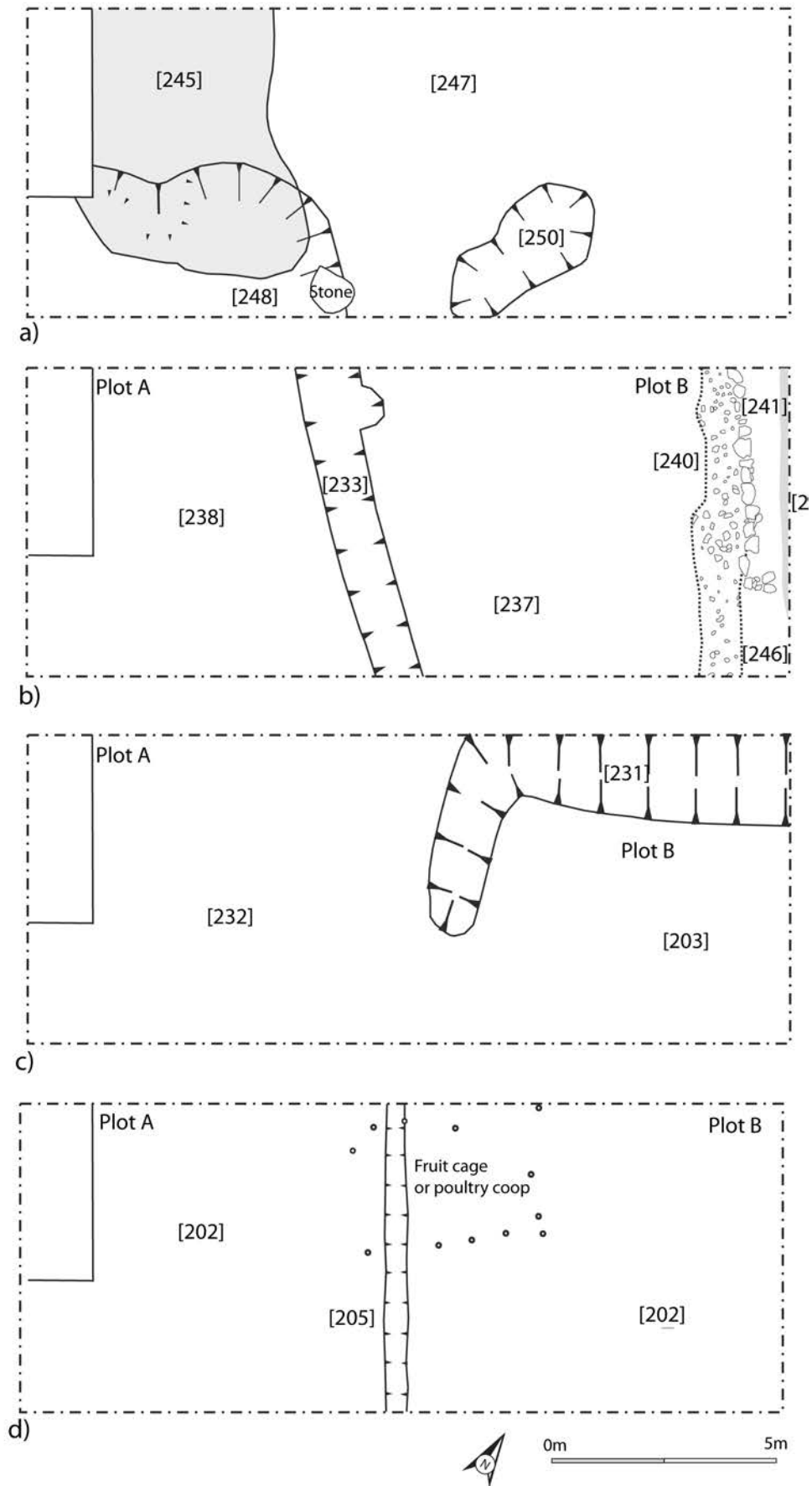
In October 2000, an evaluation was carried out on the Calton Road site. Trenching of a 0.4ha land parcel found the southern two-thirds of the proposed residential development area to be completely truncated to drift or solid geology by 19th- and 20th-century development. The two northernmost trenches contained buried soils, up to 2m thick, containing Medieval ceramic shards and mammal bone, below 2–2.5m of 19th/20th-century building debris (Gooder 2000).

5.3 Excavation results

The excavation was carried out in November 2000. It consisted of a single trench measuring 17m × 7m with its long axis aligned east to west (illus 10). The major physical features unearthed were four soil horizons analogous to the 'garden soils' found at a number of Medieval urban excavations such as in St Andrews (Coleman 2004, 303). Soil chemistry analysis showed all to be naturally mildly acidic, with no artificial liming having occurred. The organic content and phosphate levels of the soils were relatively high, typical of garden soils. The uppermost soil layers [202], [203] and [232] had been exposed to more intensive vegetation growth and had midden material added. The presence of shell, animal bone and mortar also explained the high calcium carbonate level throughout the deposits generally. The excavation revealed five broad phases of activity within parts of two burgrave plots.

5.3.1 Phase 1: 14th–15th centuries

No plot division was apparent within this first phase of activity (illus 10a). The basal soil layer [247] was composed of saturated, grey/brown sandy clay with only rare stone, oyster shell and charcoal fleck inclusions. It was cut by two pit features [248] and [250]. Pit [248] was irregular in plan, with maximum recorded measurements of 1.7m by 3.5m. As it extended beyond the trench sections, its full dimensions remain unknown. The profile, as far as could be observed, was of inwardly sloping sides to a maximum depth of 0.65m. It cut the clay



Illus 10 Calton Road: a) Phase 1 (14th–15th century); b) Phase 2 (15th–16th century); c) Phase 3 (17th century); d) Phase 4 (18th century)

subsoil, which was rising in the south-western part of the trench. Pit [250] was also irregular in plan, measuring 3.6m by 1.7m with a maximum depth of 0.39m. Both of these features are interpreted as quarry pits.

A surface [245], composed of a thin layer (0.05–0.08m thick) of angular gravel in a pink clayey matrix, was laid over the northern edge of quarry pit [248] once it had been backfilled. It perhaps formed a floor surface or yard for specialist craft activities.

5.3.2 Phase 2: 15th–16th centuries

Land division is first apparent during this phase (illus 10b). Plot B was defined by a small ditch/drain [233] in the west and a stony path [240/241] in the east, lying on either side of brown clayey sand soil [237]. Both boundary features were aligned broadly north-west to south-east albeit with some suggestion, given the limited extent of the excavation area, of convergence to the south. The path was approximately 1m wide and up to 0.15m thick, with ceramic shards and animal bone pressed into its surface of small angular and rounded stones [240]. A single line of undressed, angular stones [241] created a crude revetment on its eastern edge. Immediately to the east, gravel deposit [242] extended a short distance into the trench from the eastern section. With a maximum thickness of 0.18m, it represents a hardened surface, possibly a yard, in the adjoining plot. Ditch/drain [233] measured 1.2m wide by 0.4m deep, and defined the limits of two soils [237] (Plot B) and [238] (Plot A). The composition of its fill [234] was similar to that of overlying soil [232].

5.3.3 Phase 3: 17th century

Garden soil [203] was an organic silty sand similar to the overlying garden soil [202] but lighter in colour. It occupied the eastern half of the trench, broadly Plot B, to the east of a robbed-out wall trench [205], which had been cut from above (illus 10c and d). An analogous garden soil [232] in the western part of the trench contained occasional deposits of rubble and mortar. Ditch [231] occupied the north-eastern quadrant of the trench. Aligned east to west along

the northern trench section after emerging from the eastern section, the feature then turned south at its western end where the ditch base rose; the feature terminated in mid trench. Its maximum dimensions were 1.9m wide by 0.78m deep. Its upper fill was a speckled, dirty pink mixed clayey deposit, overlying a primary fill of a very dark brown/black gritty matrix with gravel, coal and charcoal inclusions. A boundary function can be ascribed to this feature, an interpretation supported by the relatively higher organic content of its lower fill. As a boundary ditch it would be expected to fill with detritus from plots to either side. Significantly, whereas its north to south component follows the approximate course of the earlier and later boundaries between Plots A and B, its abrupt turn to the east indicates some change in land division through the sub-division of Plot B across its north–south axis and by enlargement beyond its former eastern boundary. In the mid 17th century Gordon’s map (1647) shows large, elaborate formal gardens extending to the North and South Backs. It could therefore date to either the earlier or later 17th century.

5.3.4 Phase 4: 18th century

The uppermost garden soil [202] was a manured, dark-brown/black, slightly clayey soil with occasional oyster and rare mussel shell. Robbed-out wall trench [205] re-established the 15th/16th-century plot boundary (illus 10d). It was cut by one of 13 timber stakes (average diameter 0.1m) forming a roughly rectilinear arrangement (3.8m by 2.5m). The stakes were of unsquared pine (*Pinus* sp.) with their sharpened points driven into the ground. Given the documented history of the site, it seems plausible to ascribe a horticultural function, possibly a fruit cage, or a structure such as a poultry coop.

5.3.5 Phase 5 (19th/20th centuries)

Up to 2.5m of 19th- and 20th-century building rubble covered the entire area of the trench. A dump of several thousand stoneware bottle shards (from the Caledonian Pottery, Glasgow c 1825–50) was encountered in the trench’s eastern section.