
Peebles

Location and topography (illus 1) by D R Perry

The former royal burgh of Peebles is situated in the Tweed Valley, at the confluence of the River Tweed and the Eddleston Water, where two major routes converged at the lowest crossing point of the Eddleston Water and the lowest bridging point of the Tweed before Berwick. The valleys of these two rivers provided access north to Edinburgh (21 miles), west to Glasgow (54 miles) and east to Berwick (71 miles). Within the acute angle formed by the confluence the ground rises abruptly to form a promontory (164.59 m above sea-level). This ridge, by deflecting the Eddleston Water from its direct course, has resulted in the unusual effect of the two rivers flowing in opposite directions a short distance from each other (illus 29).

Old Town (known as such since at least the 15th and 16th centuries [Renwick 1903a, 22, 78]), the traditional site of the earliest settlement at Peebles and the location of the parish church, occupies a low, undulating ridge (rising westwards from 161.24 m to 167.64 m above sea-level) on the north side of the Tweed, to the west of the Eddleston Water. The promontory at the confluence of these rivers was occupied by the royal castle, in front of which developed the medieval burgh along the narrow ridged peninsula occupied by High Street. This formed an excellent defensive position, between the Eddleston Water and the River Tweed.

Two crossings over the Eddleston Water link the old and the new towns: at Cuddy Bridge into High Street and at Trie or Tree Bridge into Bridgegate. High Street occupies the crest of the ridge with property backlands sloping down on either side to the Eddleston Water on the north and to the flood plain of the Tweed on the south. Northgate leads north to Edinburgh and Eastgate, formerly Crossgate, eastwards. At the west end of the High Street the Tweed is crossed by a 15th-century stone bridge on the route along the south side of the Tweed to the early royal centres at Traquair and Selkirk.

Historical background by D R Perry

Although settlement in the area around Peebles dates to prehistoric times, it is not known when it began at Peebles itself. An Early Christian stone, possibly dating to the late 7th or early 8th century, incised with a cross and inscribed *NEITANO SACERDOS* (Neitan the priest or bishop), was found built into a garden wall in Old Town in 1932 (Steer 1969). Another stone, found in 1261 on the site of the

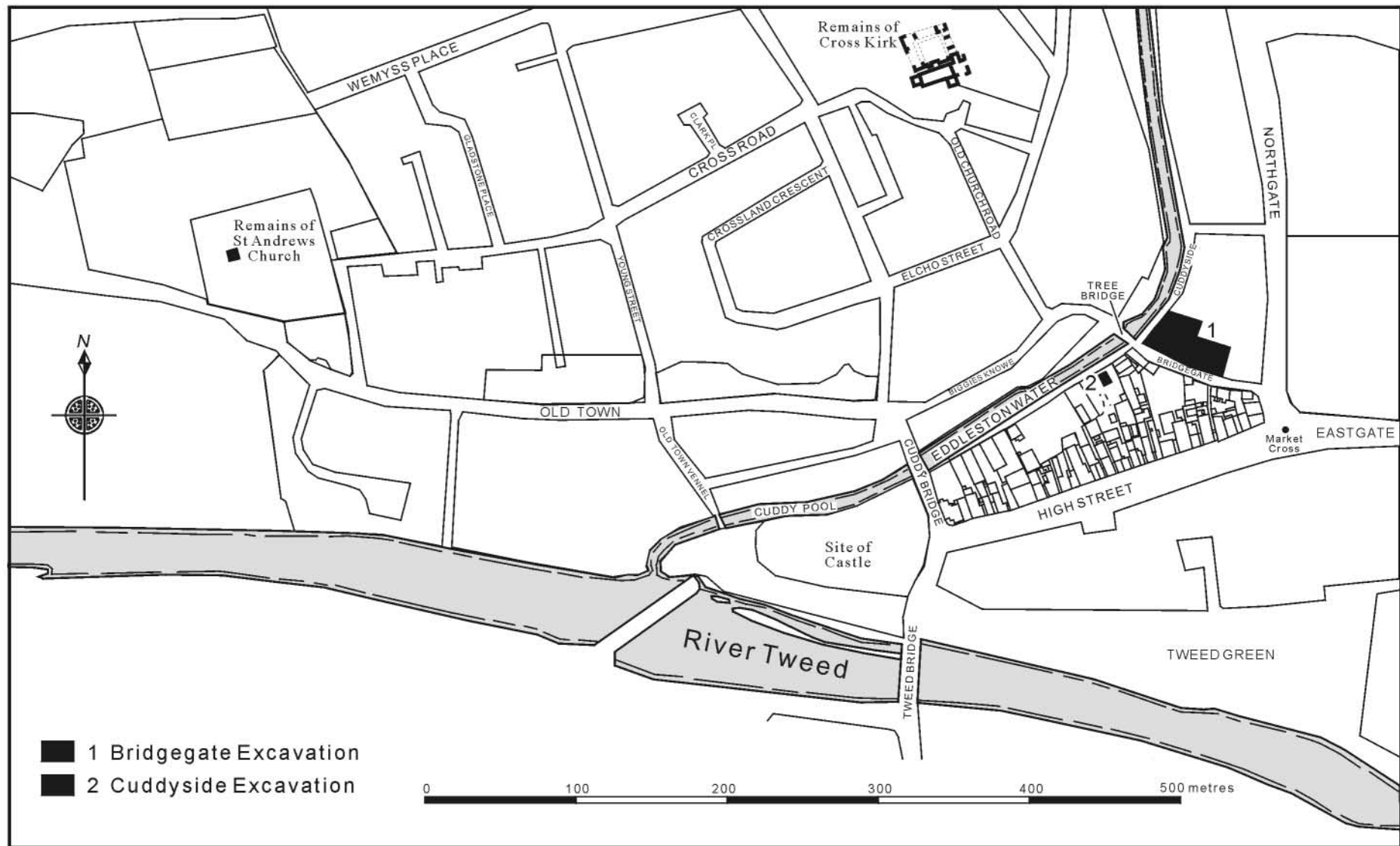
Cross Kirk, was said to have been inscribed *LOCUS SANCTI NICOLAI EPISCOPI* (place of holy Nicholas, bishop). Certainly the first stone, and possibly the latter as well if it is genuine, could indicate that Peebles was an early centre of Christianity, even the site of a bishopric, before the 12th century. The parish church, St Andrew's, along with a carucate of land, was confirmed as an ancient possession of Glasgow Cathedral by David I (1124–53) before he became king (Barrow 1999, no 15).

However Peebles owes its foundation as a royal burgh to David I (1124–1153), in whose reign it is first recorded as a burgh. Between 1152 and 1153 he assigned 10 shillings from the burgh fermes to the chapel of the castle of Peebles for the perpetual celebration of masses in memory of his son, Earl Henry, who may have died in Peebles (RRS, i, 24 and no 172). The royal castle was situated on the promontory at the confluence of the Eddleston Water and the River Tweed, and Peebles became an important royal centre where David I, Malcolm IV (1153–65) and William the Lion (1165–1214) issued charters. The town no doubt owes its initial prosperity to the emergence of the castle as a royal centre.

The creation of the royal castle on the promontory was the probable cause for the town to shift its focus across the Eddleston Water to the more defensible position on the ridge between the Eddleston Water and the Tweed. In 1466 the burgh was divided into four quarters, High Street, Crossgate, Northgate and Bridgegate, with 'beyond the Watter' (ie, Old Town) a separate area (Buchan 1925, 16). The two parts of the town were linked by two bridges. High Street became the main market street with Eastgate (formerly Crossgate) leading to the east, Northgate leading towards Edinburgh, and Bridgegate descending to one of the two bridges across the Eddleston.

Being so close to the border with England, the town suffered several times from invading armies, one of the last being in 1549. However it was not until 1570 that a defensive wall was ordered to be constructed around the east and north sides of the town, 'contenand four elnis heich half ane elne ground and all thre fute half of brede, with block houssis as efferis in places convenient' (Chambers 1872, 321). In 1572 the wall was ordered to be extended along the north-west and south sides of the town, with possible flood defences against the Eddleston and Tweed (ibid, 337 and 350). The wall stood until the mid 18th century when it fell into disrepair, coinciding with a period of economic decline in the burgh.

At the end of the 17th century the burgh entered into a period of economic decline which continued into the first half of the 18th century when the town



Illus 29 Trenches location, Peebles

council sold off some of the town's common lands to pay debts. The second half of the 18th century saw a rise in population and the start of a period of economic expansion in the textile industry which continued into the 19th century.

Bridgegate

This street derives its name from the Tree Bridge, originally a timber structure: in 1488 two trees were given 'to the brig at the tolboith end' (Renwick 1912, 18 n1). The present excavation covered three properties, of which the central one, on 13 January 1487/8, was described as the 'land of umquill Symon Patrikson, lyand in the Briggait of Peblis, on the north syd of the samyn, betuix the land of David Dinwidy on the est part and the tolboith on the west' (ibid, 316). Ownership of the properties has been traced in research in published and unpublished burgh records of the mid 16th century and from the late 17th century to the present day by members of the MSC scheme.

Of the three properties, the western one was occupied by the tolbooth from the mid 15th century till the late 17th or early 18th century. The eastern one seems to have been occupied by an almshouse in the mid 16th century. In 1545 a property,

belonging to John Kirkwood and Helen Forthit his spouse, was defined as lying 'betwix the lande pertenand to the chapellon of Sanct Martyne alter, callit the halmieshous, on the este pairt and the tolbutth on the west' (Renwick 1903b, 11). On 16 April 1550 the property lying on the north side of Bridgegate, to the west of the 'Almoushous' was described as 'thon beand byrnt be our auld inimies of Ynglond' (ibid, 33). In 1823 (Wood 1823b) the former almshouse was occupied by the Post Office. From cartographic evidence this building, dating from medieval times (see Excavation Report, below), remained in use throughout the 19th century until it was replaced by a cinema in this present century. The adjoining property to the west was occupied by a building from the late 18th century to the early 20th century (Armstrong 1775; Wood 1823b; OS 1856, 1897, 1906). The building was still standing in 1949 but had been demolished by 1964 (OS 1949, 1965a).

Previous work

In 1977 a small excavation was carried out on the site of the castle (Ewart and Murray 1980). No excavation has been carried out in Old Town, although an Early Christian stone was found there.