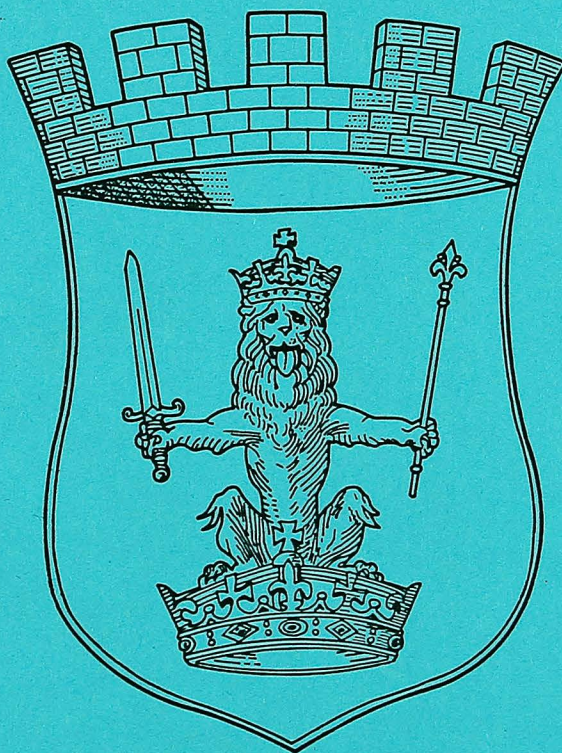


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the archaeological implications
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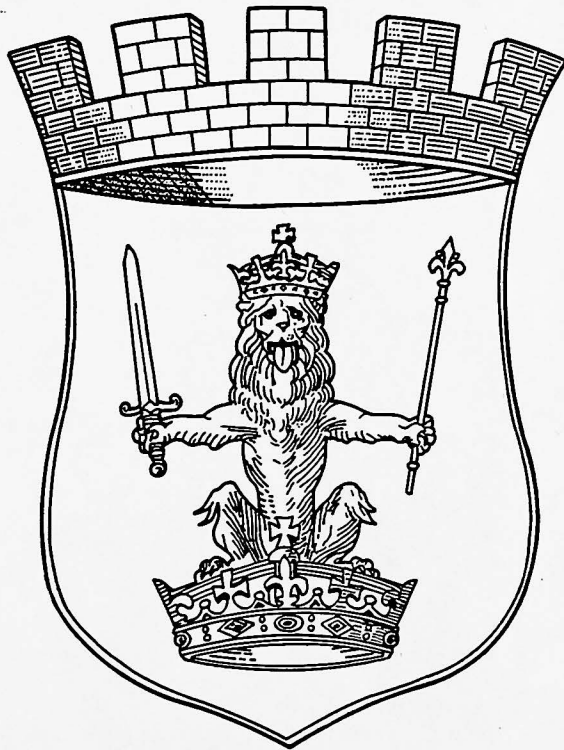


Anne Turner Simpson
Sylvia Stevenson

Scottish Burgh Survey
1980

Historic
IRVINE

the archaeological implications
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PREFACE

This report of the history and archaeology of the former burgh of Irvine is one of a series of such reports on the historic towns of Scotland. The reports have been commissioned by the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Scottish Development Department with a view to providing the necessary background information upon which to base a policy for urban research in the future. They are also aimed at providing local authority planning departments with the historical and archaeological information necessary to enable them to assess the archaeological implications of any planning applications.

Each report contains an historical report compiled by Anne Turner Simpson with an archaeological report and a series of illustrative plans compiled by Sylvia Stevenson and drawn by Derek Shaw. The reports attempt to identify those areas within the burghs which were developed at various periods of their history up to approximately 1800, and to locate within those areas sites which are of particular historical importance. Areas of 19th century growth and modern suburbs have not been examined.

The survey team would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. J. Billingham, Chief Architect and Planner of the Irvine Development Corporation and members of his staff especially Mr. G. Ballantine, Mr. Orr and Mr. G. Hearn. The staff of the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey, Edinburgh: Members of the Cunninghame Historical Society, especially Mr. Alastair Weir; Mr. S.K. Gaw, and Miss I. Wilson and Professor Leslie Alcock and Mr. Eric Talbot who supervised the project at Glasgow University.

The views expressed herein are those of the survey team, freely given, and do not necessarily represent official policy.

Cover:- The Coat of Arms of the burgh of Irvine as depicted in Bute, MacPhail and Lonsdale, 1897, 359.

History

'This neat, compact and well conserved ancient burgh enjoys a handsome independent revenue, arising from landed estate and its entire population would seem to be easy, quiet and satisfied - a very beau ideal of aristocratic fixidity - that without the occurrence of some revolutionary convulsion it is difficult to conceive how the spirit of 'go-ahead' may ever become localised in Irvine.'

(James Dobie of Beith,
c.1850).

INTRODUCTION

Site: Irvine was the caput of the barony of Cunninghame, one of the three divisions of medieval Ayrshire. It lay principally on the right bank of the River Irvine, on rising ground about half-a-mile (0.8km) distant from the harbour. A small suburb, Fullarton, or Halfway, developed on the opposite bank. The River Irvine was fordable slightly upstream from where a bridge was built linking the two communities together. Roads to Stevenston, Kilwinning, Glasgow and Kilmarnock, led from Irvine's main street, while routes from Troon and Ayr met at Fullarton.

Place Name: One theory maintains that the meaning of the place name Irvine is 'green river' as in the Welsh River Irfron - ir, yr, 'fresh, green', and afon, 'river' (McJannet, 1938, 24). Nicolaisen agrees that the word is Celtic and similar to the name Irfron, but does not commit himself on a meaning (Nicolaisen, et al, 1970, 113). A wide variety of spellings for the name can be noted: Irwyn (1322), Irewin (1429-30), Irrvin (1528), Irwin (1537) (Dobie, 1890, 9, 23, 163, 40).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Burgh Status: Irvine did not become a royal burgh until 1372. Before that date it was recognised as a baronial burgh dependent on the Stewarts (Pryde, 1965, 23). In 1322, Robert I had granted to the burgesses of Irvine relief from the tolls and customs on their burgh goods throughout the kingdom, thus confirming a charter of Alexander II and giving them freedom from paying toll in Ayr (McJannet, 1938, 57). The charter of Robert II which granted royal burgh status to Irvine settled a quarrel between Irvine and Ayr as to their respective rights of traffic within the baronies of Cunninghame and

Largs. Irvine was recognised as holding from the crown in liberum burgum...sicut aliquae burgus infra regnum nostrum... tenetur (Dobie, 1890, 11-12). A charter of the same year, 14 February 1372/3, included the phrase burgi nostri de Irvyne, per antiquas evidencias (Dobie, 1890, 13). Irvine's first recorded appearance in Parliament is in the roll of 1469 (Pryde, 1965, 23).

Medieval: The town of Irvine enters written history in 1205 when Brice de Eglunstone received from the burgesses and community of the villa de Irving some land in feu ferm in Kilwinning Parish (Dobie, 1890, 1). Only a copy of that agreement survives, the original is not extant. A second notice of the town is during a 1222 dispute between the abbacies of Dryburgh and Kilwinning when judgement is given at 'Ervyne' (McJannet, 1938, 65). A third reference to Irvine occurs in a 1230 charter, confirming certain endowments of Walter the Steward in which is included the grant of one half of Walter's fishings inter castrum de Are et villam de Yrewin (Pais.Reg., 1832, 48).

Irvine was the setting for one engagement during the Wars of Independence. In 1297 the English army marched north from Ayr towards Irvine where the Scottish host was camped. Battle was never joined due to dissension amongst the Scots leaders and on 7th and 9th of July, Bruce, the Bishop of Glasgow, the Steward and a number of other Scots came into King Edward's peace. After the so-called capitulation at Knadgerhill, Irvine did not play any great role in the conflict, although Edward I is reputed to have camped there for eight days in 1300 (McJannet, 1938, 88).

Wool, hides and the other staple goods were among Irvine's principal exports in the middle ages, although with the rise of the herring industry in the late fifteenth century, Irvine found herself the principal dealer on the west coast. In 1458, exporting just hides and cloth, she had a total custom receipt of £19 12s 8d (ER, vi, 394). Her export total in 1476 netted £26 5s 4d compared with £18 10s 8d for Ayr, £271 for Dundee and £688 for Aberdeen (ER, viii, 383, 381, 387). Herring alone brought customs totalling £9 18s in 1479, a year in which Ayr did not export any fish (ER, viii, 621). The following year Ayr shipped 27s worth of herring overseas, Irvine £16 16s (ER, ix, 65, 64). 1481 was to be a peak year for Irvine's

export trade in herring. In that year she exported £45 worth of fish, while Ayr presented a customs receipt of £6 5s 6d (ER, viii, 145, 144).

Early Modern: Irvine never entered the mainstream of Scottish affairs; however, early in the sixteenth century she was involved in several Ayrshire feuds. The first Earl of Eglinton invaded the burgh several times, slaughtering a number of the inhabitants. The town council in an effort to counteract this activity obtained letters of lawburrows (a surety) against him in 1529 (McJannet, 1938, 46). Perhaps the Earl's unlawful activity led directly to Irvine's absence from the King's host at Solway in the same year; an absence which led to a heavy fine for the burgh (McJannet, 1938, 47). War with England, which greatly strained Irvine's budget (Sanderson, 1972, 113) did, however, temporarily end the feuding amongst the Ayrshire nobility who united together against a common enemy.

It is very difficult to graph Irvine's economic state in this very unstable period. Trade was still in the staple products as well as herring and salmon. An import of 1535 found Irvine out of a total of 5000 merks paying £45, with Edinburgh paying £833, Aberdeen £315, Glasgow £67 10s and Ayr £78 15s (RCRB, i, 514). A tax stent of 1578 found Irvine paying 27s, Glasgow 44s 6d, Ayr £3 7s 3d and Aberdeen £9 9s. Nine years later Aberdeen was stented for £8 4s, Glasgow 53s 4d, Ayr 50s 4d, and Irvine only 12s, (RCRB, i, 73, 247). At the end of the century Irvine paid 24s in tax and stood twentieth on the list (RCRB, ii, 10). Bishop Lesley, writing in the second half of the sixteenth century, notes that Irvine 'in peple, in riches and commodiousness of the sey port is nocht mekle inferior to Air' and notes that Ayr harbour was 'decayit and fallin doun' (McJannet, 1938, 246).

Thomas Tucker, a cromwellian government official, presents this view of Irvine:

'Irvine is a small burghetown...pretty small port but at present clogged and chocked up with sand, which the western sea beats into it, soe as it wrestles for life to maintain a small trade with France, Norway and Ireland with herring and other goods, brought on horseback from Glasgow for the purchasing of timber, wine, etc...' (Paterson, 1866, 257).

Timothy Pont, writing half a century earlier, noted 'the port and harbry' were much 'decayed from quhat it was anciently being stopt

with shelwes of sand wich hinders the neir approch of shipping' (Fullarton, 1858, 19). While Irvine was suffering from the potentially fatal disease of a silting harbour, the burgh similarly suffered two ravaging fires within fifty years of each other in 1599 and 1649. In both instances appeals were launched for aid. In the 1691 report to the Convention of Royal Burghs, it was reported that Irvine had a common good of £1791 18s Scots, one yearly fair on 8-13 August, and maintained two weekly markets. The burgh owned eight boats and had commercial links with Norway and France, importing tar from the former and brandy and salt from the latter. Irvine noted an export trade in wool, but her inland trade was very inconsiderable (RCRB, iv, 613).

Eighteenth Century: In the first half of the eighteenth century herring continued to be a principal export, although coal was to be the success story. Coal was first recorded as being exported from Irvine in 1541-2, but as a lucrative undertaking it remained fairly dormant until the seventeenth century when seams were opened near the burgh. An Englishman travelling in Scotland in 1723 noted that Irvine had a 'face of good business, especially in the coal trade to Dublin', and noted, truthfully, that Irvine was 'a town of more business than Ayr' (McJannet, 1938, 251). Another traveller, Bishop Pococke, also remarked on the coal trade, as did a third English gentleman in 1773 who observed that most of the coal was shipped to Ireland and that there was plenty in the area (McJannet, 1938, 258). An indication of how successful the trade was can be found in the profit margin for a seam near Kilwinning: in a six month period in 1762 that working, netted a profit of £92 13s 3d (McJannet, 1938, 258).

Irvine's changing fortunes in the eighteenth century can be further elucidated through her position on the stent rolls. In 1705 she stood at twentieth, while Ayr was at fourteenth place. A revision in 1718 brought Irvine to twelfth place and Ayr slumped to fifteenth. In 1730, Irvine remained at twelfth place while Ayr declined further to seventeenth (Dodd, 1972, 336).

In 1760 Irvine ranked third in Scotland in the number of vessels belonging to her - 77 - behind Leith and Port Glasgow (McJannet, 1938, 253) Her population rose from 4,025 in 1755, to 4,391 in 1781.

The contributor to the Statistical Account notes a wide variety of craftsmen living within the burgh: weavers, shoemakers, tailors, smiths, saddlers, malsters, cooper-smiths, and 150 coal hewers (Sinclair, 1793, vii, 173). The same observer made these remarks about the inhabitants of Irvine.

'Perhaps in no other sea-port town of the same extent are the inhabitants more sober than this. They are social and cheerful, but seldom riotous, it being unusual for any persons to be seen upon the street after twelve o'clock at night...they are humane and generous, though these qualities may not, in every instance be exerted with necessary prudence; that is perhaps one reason of the streets being so littered with vagrant poor.'

(Sinclair, 1793, 176).

BURGH MORPHOLOGY

Street Layout: Basically the street layout of Irvine is a single market street with back lanes and herringbone burgh pattern. That market street, High Street, formed the nucleus of the medieval settlement. In the early nineteenth century, High Street ran for three-quarters of a mile (1.2km) and was eighty feet (24.4m) at its widest point and nowhere less than twenty-four (7.3m) (Robertson, 1820, 411). High Street first receives mention in a grant of 1323/4 where it is called vico fori or Marketgate (Dobie, 1890, 124, 125).

High Street was distinguished by a large number of small lanes and roads which led off from it. Seagate slopes westward from the north end of the main street to where it joins Castle Street and where in medieval times it led to the old harbour. By the early seventeenth century, Seagate was substantially settled (MacLeod, 1894, 1895, passim). It was first mentioned in a document of 1418/19 (Dobie, 1890, 128). Bridgegate, as its name implies, sloped downwards from High Street until it met the bridge connecting Irvine with its suburb, Fullarton. Kirkgate, which also ran south from the main street at a perpendicular angle, received its first mention in the 1323/4 grant and was, as its name indicates, the way to and from the parish church. Rottenrow, 'le Gryp', Townhead, Kirk Vennel, Glasgow Vennel were all minor burghal thoroughfares. 'Le Gryp' or the Gruipe, was a narrow twisted vennel which connected High Street with Rottenrow. Rottenrow in its turn provided access to the ford. Townhead in the southern

end of Irvine provided access to the slate mill and Kilmarnock. Kirk Vennel receives early mention in the 1323 /4 grant and must have provided a secondary passage to the church. Glasgow Vennel, lying just outside the Townhead Port, was the road to Glasgow. Bank Street is comparatively modern. It was so-called because the Ayr bank opened its office there in 1786 (McJannet, 1938, 279).

Market Area: The area of the market was centrally located. Reference to the 'Marketgate' in the 1323/4 grant indicates a fairly early existence for a market at Irvine. The meal and flesh markets were both latterly located on the north side of High Street to the east of the tolbooth, or near the site of the present town hall. The meal market was built of stone taken from the market cross which was removed in 1694, dubbed as being of an 'old fashion' (Paterson, 1866, 255). Both the tron and flesh market were standing in 1860.

Ports: Irvine boasted two ports. The Townhead Port ran across the High Street at the west end of Glasgow Vennel and Eglinton Port lay south of No.25 Eglinton Street (McJannet, 1938, 114). The Ordnance Survey tentatively sited the ports at NS 3201 3924 and NS 3220 3887 (Ordnance Survey Record Cards, Reference NS 33 NW 8). The ports were removed as encumbrances in 1756.

Bridge: The first mention of a stone bridge across the river is in August 1533 (McJannet, 1938, 267), although the existence of Bridgegate at least by 1506 (Dobie, 1890, 161) implies the existence of an earlier timber structure. In 1748, the bailies of the burgh ordered a new bridge to be built 'in the place where the old one stands of the same number of arches and pillars' (Dobie, 1891, 137). That work was finished in 1753 and received alterations in 1827 and 1889.

Harbour: Irvine harbour was anciently located at the foot of Seagate. In 1596 a commission had been established to look into the possibility of re-establishing the harbour at Little Cumbræ; however, a century later the King and Parliament granted an impost for repair of the old harbour and bridge (Dobie, 1890, 84, 85, 117). Wind blowing sand from several quarters hindered the 'incomeing and outgoing of ships' (Dobie, 1891, 128) and Defoe, writing early in the eighteenth century, notes that the harbour was choked with sand and 'ships of a very small burden were frequently shut up on that

account for several months in the river before they could sail out to sea' (McJannet, 1938, 253). By Defoe's time, Irvine harbour was at its present location. Despite the ever-present problem of silting, Irvine still maintained a healthy trade throughout the eighteenth century.

BUILDINGS

Castle: Benedict of Peterborough, writing of June 1184, mentions a castle of 'Hirun' which McJannet took to mean Irvine (1938, 91). Today at Irvine there are the ruins of a late sixteenth century fortified townhouse, the so-called Seagate Castle. 'The Seagate Castle', in the words of the editor of the burgh muniments, 'is the only remnant of the ancient civil and ecclesiastical buildings in the burgh which has survived the march of so-called modern improvement, all the others having been entirely cleared away' (Dobie, 1890, xxxii). Little is known of the history of Seagate Castle although it certainly belonged to the Earl of Eglintoun - the arms of the third earl, who died in 1585, have been embedded in the structure (MacGibbon and Ross, 1892, v, 240). Pococke in 1760 described the structure as ruinous (Kemp, 1887, 57) and it is not clear when the castle was abandoned. The walls of the northern portion are in fairly good condition as is the ground storey of the south end of the building, the gables and chimneys. It could possibly be on the site of an earlier work, but there is no evidence for this (Ordnance Survey, Record Cards, Reference NS 33 NW 3).

Church: The first mention of the parish church of Irvine is in the 1205 grant of Brice de Eglunstone (Dobie, 1890, 4) and another followed in 1233 (Pais. Reg. 1832, 166). Dedicated to the Virgin, Irvine parish church belonged to Kilwinning Abbey, although the date of its transferral to the abbey is unknown. Pococke noted that the church 'seems to be very old' and shortly after his observation a new parish church was in fact built in 1771/2, partly on the site of the older structure (McJannet, 1938, 135). A chapel in honour of St. Mary stood near the parish church to the southwest in a field adjoining St. Mary's Well. After 1761, that field was joined to the churchyard (McJannet, 1938, 136).

Friary: There is now no trace of the friary of the Carmelite Order raised in Fullarton sometime in the thirteenth century. The author of the New Statistical Account mentioned that 'when the grounds some years ago were faced out for building, the convent walls were discovered about fifty yards west from the old place of Fullarton' (NSA, 1845, v, 677). Whether these walls were actually Carmelite property is conjectural. The Ordnance Survey gave a tentative site location for the friary at NS 3170 3876 (Ordnance Survey, Record Cards, Reference NS 33 NW 7). On the 14th August, 1399, a grant was made by Reginald Fullarton to the order for repairs to their conventual buildings while thirteen years later the patronage of the friary was adjudged to belong to Rankin Fullarton, whose forbears were described as 'founderis and patronis till our house or Irrwyn' (Cowan and Easson, 1976, 137). After the Reformation, its property was granted by James VI to the Royal School of Irvine (RMS, iv, no. 2071).

Tolbooth: By a charter of 22nd October 1386, King Robert II granted to the burgesses and community of Irvine, land measuring forty feet (12m) in length and thirty feet (9m) in breadth in the market place 'on which they may build a decent and fair house, in which they may hold their public and private Councils' (Dobie, 1890, 16). Rent for the tolbooth was to be one penny of silver to be paid annually. In 1745 the tolbooth was repaired at a cost of £450 (McJannet, 1938, 119). The tolbooth, which stood as an island in the main street was taken down in 1860 since it obstructed traffic and the site now lies buried under tarmac on the roadway. Another townhouse was built along the line of the street close to the site of the former.

Houses: One of the first references to a slated house in Irvine is in a grant of 1418/19 when mention is made of a tenement 'commonly called the Sklate Hall', while another reference of the following century mentions a house in Seagate 'now roofed with tiles' (Dobie, 1890, 128, 196). One of the more splendid Irvine tenements was said to be the Roxburgh tenement on the west side of Kirkgate (McJannet, 1938, 274). A Templar tenement bounded it on the south (McJannet, 1938, 274).

Well: The site of St. Mary's Well located near the parish church

was placed by Ordnance Survey at NS 3227 3851 at the foot of Chapel Brae (Ordnance Survey Record Cards, Reference NS 33 NW 8).

Mill: The first mention of a mill at Irvine occurs in 1391 and by 1600 there were reputedly several mills connected with, or belonging to the burgh (McJannet, 1938, 305). Among them was the so-called Slate Mill, located at the end of Mill Road, a name McJannet took to be a corruption of the Dutch word schlut, a lead or open watercourse, 'and so named from its water being supplied by a lead, or schlut, from the Annick' (McJannet, 1938, 305).

Archaeology

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The creation of the Irvine Development Corporation in the late 1960s initiated a new phase in the development of the old burgh. The policies set out in an advisory document drawn up by the new corporation and Irvine Burgh, were basically orientated towards the establishment of new industry, the provision of housing to accommodate the expanding population resulting from this, and the improvement and expansion of existing communications and leisure areas. The development programme was initiated in 1969, and is now successfully established. The burgh, with which this report is concerned, is the focus of these developments. The corporation recognised the desirability of preserving the existing town centre, and the improvements and developments put forward for the historic core have been orientated towards conservation, so far as the condition of the existing properties and modern requirements will allow. Three conservation areas have been put forward, Glasgow Vennel, Hill Street and Seagate. These areas contain some of the earliest buildings in the burgh, and are scheduled for improvement. The High Street, Bank Street and Bridge Street will also retain their present frontages, and gap sites on these frontages will be infilled with sympathetic developments. Rebuilding and renovation will provide opportunities to examine underlying deposits, and it is possible that some information can be recovered which will contribute to the reconstruction of the historical and archaeological record

Future Investigation

The policies outlined below are not listed in order of importance, but are intended as guide lines for future research, as opportunities arise through renovation and redevelopment (see page 17.) for full discussion.

1. To determine the date and origin of the earliest settlement, and details of the social and economic development of the burgh.
2. To confirm the site and initial date of the town ports, the

extent and direction of the ditch beyond, and its relationship, if any, with the port.

3. To determine any variation in street alignment and width not already identified, and any other alteration in plan since its first inception.
4. To establish the physical nature of the pre-eighteenth century town buildings, their disposition along the street frontages, their usage other than as dwelling houses, and, in conjunction with 3 above, to use them as an indicator of the pace of the burgh development within the established street system.
5. In the event of work being carried out within the present church, it would be useful to examine the underlying deposits in the hope of identifying any surviving structural traces of the early church, which might contribute to better understanding of its plan and date.
6. To recover the plan of St. Mary's Chapel, and attempt to establish a chronology in relation to the parish church and the town.
7. To determine the environment and earliest date of the Seagate Castle.
8. To confirm the site of, and if possible, recover the plan of, the Carmelite Friary.

Areas of Archaeological Priority

Bearing in mind the quite extensive redevelopment which has already been carried out in the burgh, it is a matter of urgency to recover what information is available from hitherto undisturbed sites in advance of redevelopment. The material evidence recovered from the burgh is largely unprovenanced, and though interesting in itself, contributes little in real terms to the present study. What is needed is extensive corroborative evidence, in material and structural terms, for the documentary records already available. The following areas are suggested in the probable order of archaeological importance, though in the absence of concrete evidence, it is difficult

to make value judgements on the value of one site over another.

1. The area enclosed by East Road, Bank Street, Bridgagate, the river Irvine, Kirk Vennel and Glasgow Vennel, contains the sites of some of the earliest known town buildings. Considerable re-development has already taken place in this area (see map 2), particularly along the High Street frontages, though some sites still await infill development. Two which deserve attention are the site by the town hall (NS 3221 3888.) and the site of a recently demolished eighteenth century building on the south side of the High Street (NS 3214 3889.). The former site is approximately that of the seventeenth-century meal market (1694). The latter site, although interference is likely as the previous building possessed a basement, is in the heart of the Medieval burgh and as such is worthy of investigation. Between these two areas and beneath the present street, is the site of the tolbooth (NS 3220 3887.). The initial proposals for the pedestrianisation of this part of the town indicate an area of unspecified infill development at approximately this point. Should disturbance take place here, examination of the underlying deposits would probably prove valuable and may enable the recovery of the plan of the tolbooth.

The seventeenth-century flesh and fish markets stood approximately on the site now occupied by the town hall. Extension of street fronting property into the backlots was established by the early seventeenth century. A back tenement near the fish market is described in 1616 as "comprehending therein a back hall together with two chambers called the chamber of dice and the turnpike chamber and kitchen, together with the stable" (McJannet, 1938, 276). It seems possible, therefore, that early backland property still survives beneath the car park to the rear of the town hall. Most of the present backland infill dates from the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Elsewhere in this block, the burgage plot divisions have largely been destroyed, the land is undeveloped, and secondary nineteenth century development along the foot of the plots facing East Road demolished (NS 323 389.). Opportunities are available here to spot test selected areas of backland for traces of early industrial and commercial use. Geophysical techniques could be desirable in identifying the areas most likely to be profitable archaeologically.

Much of the Glasgow Vennel street frontage is at present composed

of vacant properties. Any renovation projects intended here, especially involving structural work below ground level, would be of interest. From charter evidence, it is known that a Templar tenement existed on the east side of Glasgow Vennel in the mid-sixteenth century (McJannet, 1938, 208), and it would be useful to locate this building. Similarly, a malt barn, or kiln, existed at the corner of East Road and Glasgow Vennel circa 1809, and a smithy at the junction with the High Street. It would be useful to place both these features in context. The site of the east port at the foot of the vennel is reasonably certain, but observation of any roadworks could be useful in confirming this supposition, and exploring the nature and extent of the ditch (see page 19).

The south side of the High Street has undergone considerable twentieth-century redevelopment (see map 2). Early frontages may be preserved, as the Kirkgate housing scheme is stepped back from the road. Wholesale backland development has, however, destroyed the old property boundaries. Two particularly fine tenements reputedly occupied the west side of Kirkgate in 1618 (McJannet, 1938, 274). Later building has mostly been cleared from this area, and it would be useful to establish the site of these buildings and any earlier structures. The Hill Street frontage is almost intact, and a gap site at NS 3208 3885 could provide information on early building. However, the properties are dug into the upward slope on this street, and those facing north-east are also cut back into a rear slope (NS 320 388.) and it is not clear what affect this may have had on the survival of early structural traces.

2. Any development in the area enclosed by Castle Street, West Road, Chapel Lane and properties fronting High Street and Eglinton Street, would be of interest. Property divisions in the northern part of this area remain intact apart from some nineteenth-century development along the foot of the High Street and Seagate burgage plots. In the seventeenth century, Pont describes the sea reaching almost to the edge of the 'palace' at the foot of Seagate (NS 318 391.). The medieval harbour was reputedly at the foot of this street. The shore at the foot of Seagate was marshy for many years, and later built up with urban rubbish. Any opportunity to examine this area, therefore, would be of interest in the hope of recovering possible

structural traces of the early harbour. Prevailing damp conditions could have preserved structural timbers. There are documentary references to tenements in the Seagate in the early fifteenth century. Any development on the frontages and backlands of the existing street would be useful in establishing the nature, extent and usage of these early properties, and at a later date, their relationship to the castle.

3. The north side of Eglinton Street, the High Street, East Road and Bank Street define area 3. A sasine document records accurately the position of the west port to the south of 25 Eglinton Street (NS 3203 3918.). Any road works in this area, or work on the adjacent street frontages, would be useful in determining the relationship of the port with the town buildings, and could, possibly, provide dating evidence for the building of the port.

McJannet (1938, 113) claimed the possibility of a port at the Bridgegate. If this existed, it is difficult to identify the site, but either the junction of Hill Street and Bridgegate, or the junction of High Street and Bridgegate are possibilities. Infill of the burgage plots has proceeded apace, and many of the property boundaries have now disappeared (see map 2.).

In the seventeenth century the draining of the North Loch (circa NS 322 392.) resulted in two deep ditches draining to the river. One ran behind the property of what is now 66, Bank Street, into Bank Street, and down 'the Gruip' to the river. Its course is traceable in structural settlement damage to later property which overlies it (ex. inf. S. Gaw). There is an almost complete lack of cellarage on the High Street frontage as a whole. The rising ground northwards has meant that buildings on both sides of the street are cut into the slope. This may have had a detrimental effect on the survival of archaeological deposits.

4. Area 4 lies outwith the east port of the town, and is of interest essentially as an indicator of the date and nature of urban expansion. Sasine documents describe substantial tenements outside the port in 1750 (McJannet, 1938, 276), although the street frontages with one or two exceptions remain consistent. Back lot boundaries are no longer clear, especially on the south side of the street. There is no apparent cellarage, and the survival value of archaeological deposits could be good.

Outwith these four designated areas, the Parish church (NS 3220 3866.) the site of the Chapel (NS 3226 3583.) and the probable site of the Carmelite monastery (NS 3187 3876.) are worthy of observation, as they represent three of the oldest known sites in the town (see map 3).

Recommendations

As the development plan proceeds, opportunities will arise of which the archaeologist can take advantage, to examine early deposits beneath existing buildings. As a rule, cellarage is absent in Irvine, although 'Brandy holes', associated with the running of contraband with France and Ireland from the seventeenth century onwards, are discovered from time to time. These deep pits occur beneath houses and are sometimes of considerable size. They obviously interrupt the stratigraphy in some cases. Cellars apart, the sandy nature of the soil probably means that house foundations are substantial, however, the survival rate of archaeological deposits seems likely to be high.

The following recommendations are made in the hope that the maximum amount of information can be extracted from the opportunities offered for investigation.

- a. The programme of property renovation could be usefully monitored on two counts. Firstly, in the hope of recovering early structural traces where work is being carried out beneath existing houses and secondly, there is a possibility that the structural remains of earlier buildings survive beneath a later facade.
- b. Trial trenching on gap sites adjacent to the street frontage would be valuable in determining pre-existing street alignment, and the extent and nature of street frontage and backland development.
- c. Geophysical examination of cleared backland areas in advance of redevelopment may provide a guide to possible sites of interest.
- d. Any proposed road improvements, repairs to, and the extension of, existing services, which involve soil disturbance, could be profitably monitored.

PREVIOUS WORK

No recorded archaeological investigation has taken place in Irvine. Archaeological finds in the town are mainly unprovenanced, and contribute little to the reconstruction of the early history of the burgh.

1. A 'middle brass' of Constans I, dug up in a garden in Irvine. No recorded associations, and no exact locality given. The present whereabouts of this coin is unknown. (MacDonald, 1938-39, 243).
2. A worn denarius of Antoninus Pius, believed to have been found on a housing estate in Irvine. Present whereabouts unknown (Robertson 1960-61, 138).
3. A worn Dupondius or As of Faustina I, and a worn Sestertius of Gallienus, found in a garden in Irvine. No specific find spot. Now in the North Ayrshire Museum, Saltcoats (Robertson, 1960-61, 139).
4. Roman coins found in the High Street approximately (NS 3206 3903.) before 1855. Present whereabouts unknown (O.S. 25" sheet XVII, 9, 1855).
5. A bronze coin of Constantine I found in sand hills (approximately NS 3037 3784) with no recorded associations in 1930. Present whereabouts unknown (Robertson, 1949-50, 42-3).
6. Fragments of glass and several seventeenth century (?) coins were found in 1895 while cutting a drain on the 'High Back Way' (East Street). Find spot and present whereabouts unknown (Smith, 1895, 126.).
7. Four complete silver spoons and the bowl of a fifth were recovered circa 1865 during the demolition of an old house in Townhead. The precise locality of this discovery is not known. The spoons were considered to be most probably of late sixteenth or early seventeenth date, and were closely similar to those in another hoard recovered in the High Street (see below). They are now in the National Museum in Edinburgh (Callander, 1924-25, 126).

8. A hoard consisting of coins of Edward VI, Mary of England, Philip and Mary, Elizabeth, James VI and I, Charles I and some Irish coins, (a total of 351), were found with two spoons and a silver cane top at 172 High Street (NS 3207 3909. in 1923. The hoard was concealed 1' (0.31m) below the surface in the angle of two walls and recovered during the demolition of the aforementioned property. The spoons possessed Edinburgh hall marks, and were made between 1621 and 1640. This date, together with the coins, suggested that the hoard was deposited between 1635 and 1640. The coins were returned to the finders and their present whereabouts is unknown. The spoons and cane top were retained by the National Museum (Callander, 1924-25, 122).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Early Settlement

The geological conditions in the immediate vicinity of Irvine were extremely favourable to prehistoric inhabitation. The coal measures of the Carboniferous Limestone series are overlain by a 40' (12.20m) raised beach. These deposits, further complicated by overlying accumulations of aeolian sand, cut by the rivers Irvine and Garnock, provided suitable conditions for human settlement. Finds from Shewalton Moor, Preen Hull, Bartonholm and Ardeer Sands, of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age date, all testify to early occupation, transient or otherwise, on these deposits. Roman occupation is evident in the locality, and a number of chance finds have been recovered of this date from the town. There is, however, no concrete evidence for prehistoric or Roman occupation on the site of the present burgh. The earliest mention of Irvine occurs in 1184, (see page 7.). What provided the stimulus for settlement is unknown. The presence of a motte in the locality, coupled with the physical advantages of the position of the town, near the mouth of an estuary, at a point where the river was fordable, probably led to the establishment of a small trading settlement. Further impetus may have been provided by the foundation of the Carmelite Friary at the close of the thirteenth century. Although there is some documentary evidence to outline the development of Irvine from the fourteenth century onwards regarding trade and other aspects of life, little is known of the early years of settlement. This can

only be investigated by the examination of archaeological deposits.

The Ports

"Thair townes, be sydis St. Johnstown, ar unwalled which is to be ascryved to thair animositie and hardines, fixing all thair succouris and help in the valencie of thair bodies" (Lindsay of Pitscottie, 1814, xxiv). More Scottish towns than this statement would suggest, were walled at some time in their history. The fortunes of Irvine fluctuated economically, but Ayrshire apparently suffered less than other parts of Southern Scotland in terms of sudden and violent raids from over the border. The burgh seems never to have been walled or fortified in the conventional sense. The ports were therefore chiefly to allow the collection of burgh customs, and to control or prevent the entry of persons in time of plague.

The town defences in the fifteenth century consisted of walls built across the High Street at the entrances to the town. These walls were furnished with hanging gates with "yettis or windicks (wickets) therin", (McJannet, 1938, 113). There were reputedly two main ports; the Townhead Port (NS 3201 3924), which lay across the High Street at the west end of Glasgow Vennel & Eglinton Port (NS 3220 3887) which lay a little to the south of 25 Eglinton Street, and possibly a third port at the Bridge or Bridgegate (NS 320 388.) (McJannet, 1938, 113). At some time before 1499, the community referred to an honest sworn inquest to decide the location and situation of the gates and walls (McJannet, 1938,113). It is not known however, at what date the ports were built. McJannet (1938, 114) suggests that the late fifteenth century reference refers to rebuilding due to decay, and that the town had outgrown the primary enclosure. We have, however, no evidence for this.

To prevent persons from entering the town other than by the ports, back vennels were closed with gates, and open areas of the back-sides closed with walls or fences. In 1617, a dyke of divots (turf wall) was to be built in Irvine for conserving a hedge until it came to maturity, (for the defence of a yard), after which the dyke was to be destroyed. It is possible that this method was also used

to seal the rear of the burgage plots and prevent illegal entry to the burgh. McJannet (1938, 114) also records the presence of a shallow ditch, which previously lay across the street, about 25' (7.62m) beyond the line of the Townhead (West Port). This ditch, laid with large, smooth cobbles, was known as the Tailor's Straun. No trace survives today, and there is no evidence of its extent, direction, or its relationship, if any, to the port.

The gates and associated walls were demolished in 1756 having outlived their usefulness.

Town Plan

By the eighteenth century, Irvine had achieved to a greater or lesser degree, its present appearance. The wide market street remains virtually unchanged. The old tolbooth was removed in the mid-nineteenth century, but otherwise the frontages have largely remained consistent for two hundred years. In the early nineteenth century, there was no direct exit from the High Street to the Back Way. Bank Street therefore represents an intrusion into the medieval plan which took place at some time between 1819 (Wood 1819 and 1855 O.S. 25" Sheet XVII, 9, 1855). More recently a new road has been put through between the High Street and East Road, breaking the line of the High Street frontage, and cutting through pre-existing property boundaries (NS 323 389.). To provide access to relatively recent housing estates, the nineteenth-century frontage on the south side of Townhead has been broken at NS3248 3875. and NS 3260 3872.. These represent the only major alterations, so far as is known, to the medieval plan.

Property development of frontages and backland areas on the south east side of Kirkgate (NS 321 387.), Glasgow Vennel (NS 324 388.), East Road (NS 324 388.), and Bridgagate (NS 320 388.), (see map 2), have all altered the line of the original street frontage. For the most part, the new frontages have been stepped back from the old, and it is possible that earlier foundations survive beneath the present road and garden area.

Early Buildings and Materials

Until recently, the majority of buildings in Irvine were the result of eighteenth and nineteenth century development. Recent plans for the burgh have, however, resulted in some building replacement and

infilling of backland in the historic core (see map 2). It is intended here to identify, briefly, the site and distribution of known early buildings, where, should redevelopment take place, the ground plan and function of such structures might be usefully examined.

Depending upon the economic and political stability of the burgh, houses before the sixteenth century in Scotland appear to have been relatively insubstantial structures. Indeed, in the eyes of the law at that time, they were considered as moveables, and it was not until the later sixteenth century that stone building became common (McJannet, 1938, 113). There is virtually no evidence regarding the nature of pre-sixteenth century building. Seagate Castle is the oldest recognisable surviving structure, dating from the late sixteenth century. This street appears to have been built up at an early date as there are references to tenements here as early as 1418-19 (McJannet, 1938, 281). The present buildings are of eighteenth and nineteenth century date. Kirkgate also shows signs of early development. It is first recorded in a grant of 1323-24, and by the early seventeenth century, contained several impressive buildings, including some Templar property. The west side of this street has recently been developed (see map 2) and a useful opportunity to examine pre-existing structures lost. The High Street fronting properties had in some cases by the eighteenth century, developed considerable backland development. The title deeds of one, which was replaced by the Union Bank of Scotland in 1858 (NS 3205 3904.), describes the tenement of land to the rear as containing 'backhouses, brewhouses, offices, houses and yeard' (McJannet, 1938, 225). The majority of these early buildings appear to have been dwelling houses. In the eighteenth century, this function may have been extended to include cottage industry. Although there is more information available than usual to assist in the identification of sites of potential interest, there is still little known as to the plan, physical nature and commercial of industrial usage of town buildings prior to the eighteenth century.

The Church (NS 3220 3866).

It has been claimed (Reid, 1919,1) that the ninth century saint, Inan, was active in Irvine, circa 839. There is, however, no evidence to support this presence which, if true, could suggest an

early origin for either the church, or the chapel by the River Irvine. The earliest known documentary reference to the church of St. Mary. occurs in an agreement between the burgesses of Irvine and Brice of Eglinton in 1205.

Little is known of the appearance of the thirteenth-century church. Bishop Pococke, travelling through Cunningham in 1760, described it as seeming to be very old, with narrow lancet windows with two arches (Pococke, 1887, 57). It also appears to have had a steeple. This part of the structure became unsafe in 1721 and was taken down. At that time, stones were needed to cradle a well dug on the W. side of Bridgegate nearly opposite Hill Street, and those from the steeple were utilized for this purpose. The re-opening of this well, in the nineteenth century, confirmed that the structure was lined with large freestone ashlar, providing an insight into the building material used on the church (McJannet, 1938, 141).

The church seems to have been cruciform in plan, but also quite small. Between 1771 and 1772, the present church was built partly on the same site. The ground plan of the new building was larger than that of the old, six grave lairs being included from the churchyard beneath the new church.

Documentary evidence implies some alteration to the structure of the pre-eighteenth century church. In 1446, Dame Alicia Cambell of 'Loudown Hyll' made grants for the support of a chaplain at the altar of St. Michael in the new aisle of the church of St. Mary. Corroboration of this is found in the confirmation of Lady Alicia's grant by James II in 1451-52 (McJannet, 1938, 138). With the exception of a stone dated 1506, on the S.W. wall of the present church, there are no clear examples of early masonry in re-use in either the church, or the churchyard walls. Similarly, the oldest gravestone dates back only as far as 1596.

As a church frequently proves to have been one of the earliest permanent buildings in a community, it can reflect the likely date of initial settlement, and is therefore important as a chronological indicator. The information available with regard to the Irvine church is limited. Later over building encloses the early plan and improvement to the heating apparatus in 1866 (Reid, 1919, 44). required the excavation of pipe trenches beneath the floor of

the church. The ground had been previously disturbed by the re-interment of earlier burials from the surroundings of the former church beneath the passages of the new church. In 1911, further disturbance took place when an hydraulic engine for the organ was installed in a pit below floor level (Reid, 1911, 45). It seems very likely therefore, that the surviving remains of the earlier church will be severely limited. Should any further work be carried out beneath the church, or in the immediate vicinity externally, it would prove worthwhile to carry out a short survey in the hope of identifying any early structural traces.

St. Mary's Chapel (NS 3226 3583).

This building and the associated St. Mary's Well, are situated on the banks of the River Irvine at the foot of St. Mary's Well Brae near the Parish Church (see map 3). The chapel is of unknown date, and it is possible that it pre-dates the early church. The two certainly existed side by side in the fifteenth century, as the foundation received financial support from the same endowment made to the parish church by Dame Alicia Cambell in 1446 (McJannet, 1938, 137). Should further opportunities arise, however, it would be useful to examine the site of the chapel, to recover the plan, and attempt to establish a chronology in relation to the parish church and the town. It is possible that disturbance of the immediate area has already occurred as a result of the laying of new drains associated with the recent housing development at NS

The Castle

McJannet identified Benedict of Peterborough's reference to 'Hirun' as Irvine. Few castles were of stone before 1184, and there is no concrete evidence to confirm the presence of an earth and timber castle in the town at this early date. There are two possible sites, first the Seagate Castle (NS 319 391.). The present building dates from the late sixteenth century, but parts of the existing structure perhaps could be earlier, replacing a still earlier structure. The second possibility is Fullarton Castle (approx. NS 319 386.) across the river Irvine. The opportunity of examining this site is past, as the south side of the river, and specifically the area at the foot of the old bridge, has been extensively re-developed. There is little evidence concerning the date of this latter site,

but the Fullarton family were in Irvine at an early date and were responsible for the foundation of the Carmelite Friary in the thirteenth century. The property reverted to the family in 1558, and it is possible that the later castle was then built. Simpson and Webster (1972, 181) identify the twelfth century reference with a motte at Kidsneuk, Bogside (NS 309 409). The earliest pottery from this site was tentatively identified as thirteenth century, but dating of ceramic types from early periods is not secure, and some types could be earlier (Watson, 1917-18, 69). With the lack of any evidence to the contrary, Kidsneuk can be tentatively accepted as the motte of 'Hirun'. However, any future development on the Seagate, peripheral to the guardianship site of the castle, could provide information relating to the initial development of this site.

The Carmelite Friary, Fullarton (NS 3187 3876).

The foundation of the Friary at Fullarton probably took place at some time before 1293 (Cowan and Easson, 1976, 136). The Friary appears in the documentary record from time to time, as in 1399, when Reginald Fullarton made a grant to the Friars for the repair of the conventual buildings (Cowan and Easson 1976, 137). The last Prior of the Convent, foreseeing the inevitable destruction of the House at Irvine in the turmoil of the Reformation, alienated in 1558, to John Fullarton of Dreghorn, the lands of Friars Croft and Dyets Temple. Finally, in 1572, James VI granted the convent property to the royal school of Irvine (Cowan and Easson, 1976, 137). The house was apparently demolished at the Reformation. It is thought to have occupied a site on the edge of the river at the south-west end of the old bridge where now stands the Wilson Fullarton Church. Wall foundations are said to have been found when the ground was prepared for the building of the church mentioned above in 1844 (NSA, 1845, 676-7). The demesne lands of the Friary (Freris Croftis) consisted in 1558 of a Place (convent), mansions, yards and orchards, together covering eight acres. Additionally, there were the lands of Dyets Temple which contained a malt kiln. These lands are described in title deeds as being bounded to the east by the road leading to St. Mary's Well, and a ford in the river.

The Friary and its lands appear therefore to have occupied quite a considerable part of the south bank of the river. Eighteenth and nineteenth century development has now been cleared, and redevelopment has taken place close to the supposed site of the Friary (see map 2). The Wilson Fullarton Church, however, remains, and any proposed future work in this area could be profitably monitored.

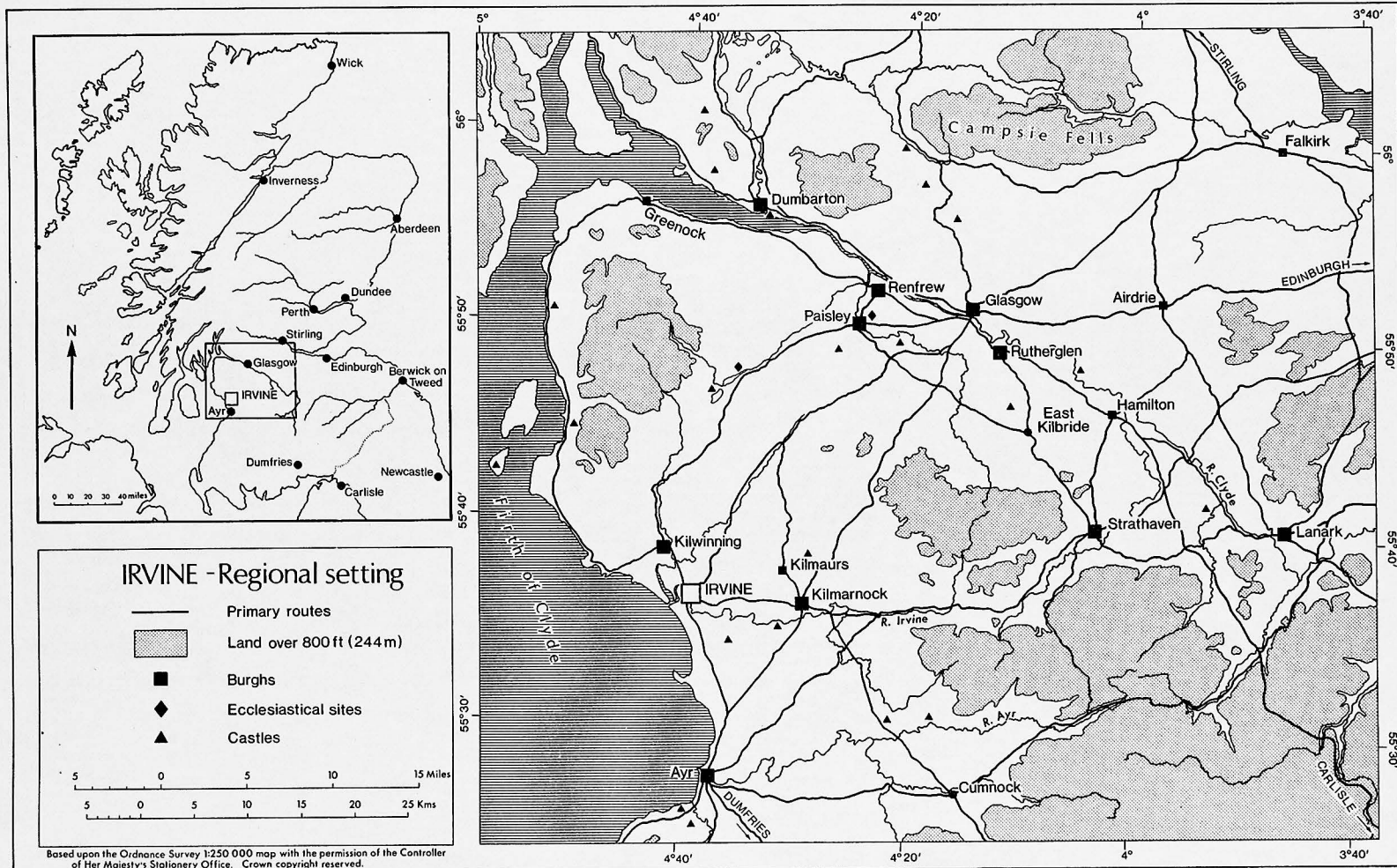
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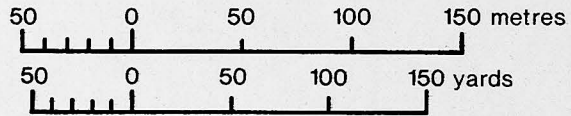
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Map 1

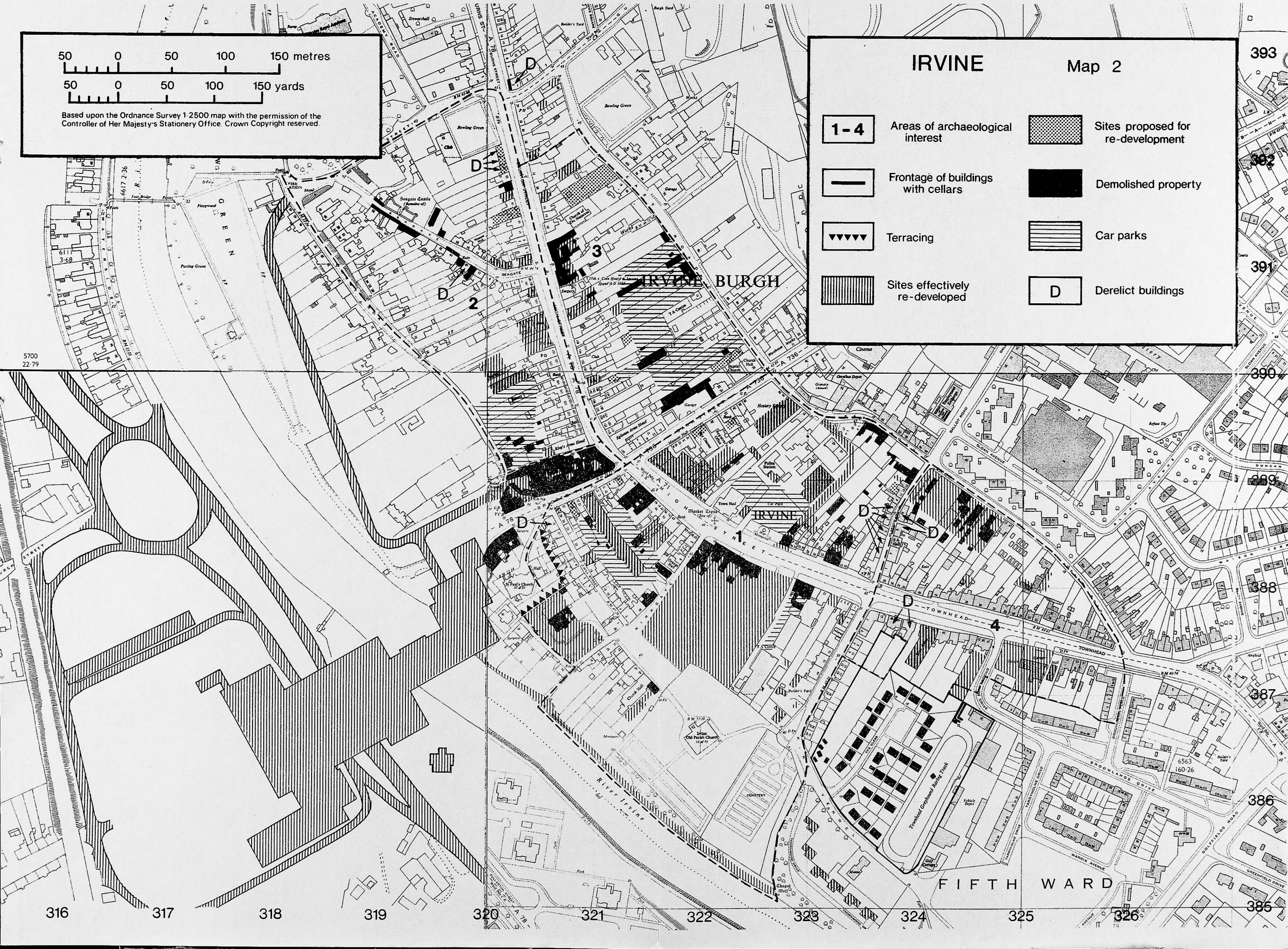


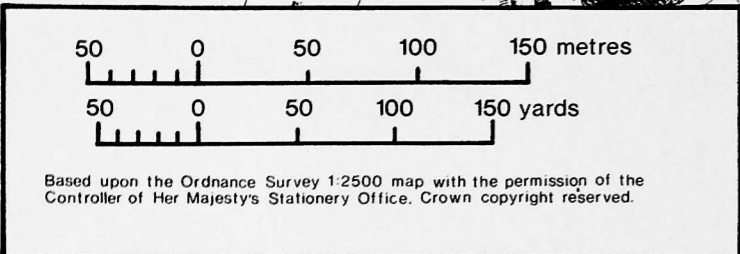
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IRVINE

Map 2

- | | | | |
|------------|------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|
| 1-4 | Areas of archaeological interest | | Sites proposed for re-development |
| | Frontage of buildings with cellars | | Demolished property |
| | Terracing | | Car parks |
| | Sites effectively re-developed | D | Derelict buildings |





IRVINE

Map 3

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boundary of Conservation Area Listed buildings, all categories Site of well, 19th century or earlier Archaeological find spots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site of port Site of early church Site of St. Mary's Chapel Possible site of early harbour (foot of Seagate)
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